

2018

# Latino Parents with Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Children and the Catholic Doctrine Towards Homosexuality

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*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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2018

Abstract

Latino Parents with Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Children and the Catholic Doctrine

Towards Homosexuality

by

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MPH, University of Puerto Rico, 1997

BS, University of Puerto Rico, 1994

Dissertation Submitted in Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Clinical Psychology

Walden University

August 2018

## Abstract

Parents who experience their children's coming out encounter emotional reactions that could compromise their ability to function, particularly when challenged by the Catholic doctrine towards homosexuality. It is not well known how Latino parents experience their children's coming out and how they mediate their Catholic identity. The purpose of this research was to explore the experiences of these parents considering phenomenology as the method of inquiry. The theoretical lens was based on the parental acceptance–rejection theory. The research questions addressed how Latinos experienced the coming out of their children and how they mediated their identities as Catholics and as parents of a lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) child. The data for this study consisted of 12 interviews with parents using an open-ended, and a semistructured format. A total of 6 themes (disclosure of an LGB identity, conflicts, help towards conflict resolution, church support, acceptance, and identity consolidation) and 10 subthemes (suspicion of an LGB identity, unexpected disclosure, internal, family, cultural and church conflicts, God's love, unconditional love, parenting pride, and Catholic pride) emerged from the analysis. The results indicated that Latino parents underscored the positive qualities of their LGB children while other Latino parents criticize the Catholic doctrine towards homosexuality. In conclusion, the notion of an all-loving and all-accepting God prompted Latinos to consolidate their identities as Catholic and as parents of a LGB child. Implications for positive social change include the education of behavioral health professionals and the Catholic clergy to enhance their professional competencies to assist Latino parents seeking counseling services or seeking spiritual care within the Roman Catholic Church.

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all parents and caregivers of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer individuals. Your strength and tenacity has challenged social and religious norms to fulfill a moral mandate to unconditionally love and support your child, irrespective of their sexual orientation. I also dedicate this work to those brave children, adolescents, and adults whose resilience allowed them to disclose their true self regardless of the consequences.

A special dedication goes to my mother, who sacrificed a lot and worked very hard to provide me the opportunity to pursue my dreams and advance my academic goals. For all your love, guidance, and unconditional support I will always be very grateful Mamá Merry. Thanks also to my dad, my sister Blanca and my brothers Angel and Miguel for their love and encouragement.

I also want to recognize the support of many friends and colleagues including Adamina, Shaymey, Todd and Johnpa. A special thank you goes to Thomas for all his editorial guidance and support. I will always be very grateful for all the love, advice and the encouragement you all provided me during this journey.

Ronnie Antonio Paris, you will always be in my heart little angel. Lastly, I want to dedicate this to Kika...you were always there for me and for that I must say thank you. I love you little one!

## Acknowledgments

Many individuals contributed towards the development and culmination of this dissertation. First, I would like to acknowledge the parents of lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals who shared with me their experience and thoughts that shaped this investigation. Your kindness and generosity were instrumental in the culmination of this work. Equally important is to acknowledge the guidance and expertise provided by my dissertation chair Dr. Susana Verdinelli. Your professionalism, patience, and support were truly inspiring and I thank you for your assertive feedback and for motivating me throughout this journey. You are exceptional Dr. Verdinelli. Dr. Lara Stepleman also deserves recognition for providing me with ideas, suggestions, and many corrections to enhance the scholarly content of this work. Thank you so much for sharing your expertise and for all your guidance Dr. Stepleman.

I am also grateful to all the faculty and staff from Walden University. Each one of you helped me complete the many requirements pertaining to this degree. To all of you many many thanks.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study**

### **Introduction**

The civil and human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals constitutes one of the most significant social movements in the United States (Ellison, Acevedo, & Ramos-Wada, 2011). Equality advocates have made progress in terms of civil rights and legal protections for members of these communities. However, the lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) movement has also encountered significant challenges from conservative religious groups whose anti-LGB discourse have generated division in our society. The opinions and experiences of parents of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals have not been explored in-depth. In particular, little research exists on Latino parent experiences who are members of the Roman Catholic Church. The focus of this investigation considered the parenting experiences of Latinos with LGB children and the Roman Catholic doctrine towards homosexuality.

The experiences of parents from Latino communities with LGB children are less visible in scholarly circles, creating an empirical gap that according to Trahan and Goodrich (2015) undermines the experiences of LGBT persons of color and their families. Researchers have revealed that parents of LGBT individuals encounter many challenges that are not adequately addressed in the scientific literature (Campbell, 2016; Maslowe, 2012; Phillips & Ancis, 2008; Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz, & Sánchez, 2010). There has been little research taking into consideration the parent's experience after their children disclose their LGBT identity (Grafsky, 2014). However, Latino parents are often underrepresented. Gonzalez, Rostosky, Odom and Riggle (2013) found

that 89.4% of the 142 interviewed parents of LGBT children were European American/White vs. 2.1% that were Hispanic/Latino/Chicano American. This research addressed this important gap to enhance the empirical scholarship necessary to develop interventions that account for the psychosocial development of Latino LGB as well as to account for their experiences as a Latino parent with a LGB adolescent/young adult.

In this study I focused on exploring the unique experiences of Roman Catholic Latino parents of LGB children. Allowing the Latino parents to express their experiences, challenges, and emotional reactions to the disclosure of the child's sexual orientation as well as their views regarding the influence of the Roman Catholic doctrine towards homosexuality was an essential component of this investigation. To do so, I used a theoretical lens that accounted for the acceptance and/or rejection phenomenon experienced by these parents. The selected theoretical lens for this research is known as the parental acceptance-rejection theory (PARTheory). PARTheory is a theoretical framework that accounts for the complexities associated with parenting and its dynamics (Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, 2012). As a theoretical lens, PARTheory considers factors based on socialization and lifestyle development of interpersonal relationships that include the influence of long-term rejection, resiliency and coping strategies. PARTheory was developed from rigorous empirical research accounting for the parental acceptance/rejection considerations that are comprehensive, culturally appropriate, and scientifically validated (Rohner et al., 2012).

This research contributed to positive social change by filling an existing gap in the scientific literature (Campbell, 2016; Maslowe, 2012; Phillips & Ancis, 2008; Ryan,

et al., 2010). In doing so, mental health professionals can access information that would enhance their professional competencies in the delivery of culturally appropriate and affirmative interventions tailored to assist families that struggle with the prevailing views of the Roman Catholic Church towards homosexuality because they have a LGB children. Behavioral health professionals can benefit from information that can assist them gain knowledge and skills to mediate potential conflicts and to articulate a therapeutic response that considers the culture, religion, and unique characteristics of Latino parents with an LGB children.

Chapter 1 provided the necessary description of the study that incorporated the statement of the problem and the purpose of the investigation. The chapter described the research questions, a description of the nature of the study as well as a thorough overview of the research assumptions, the scope and limitations, and the significance of the investigation.

### **Problem Statement**

It was not well known how Latino Roman Catholic parents experience their children's disclosure of their LGB identity. Studies addressing parental reactions after their LGBT children revealed their sexual orientation are limited (Campbell, 2016; Ellison, Acevedo, & Ramos-Wada, 2011; Phillips & Ancis, 2008). Researchers documenting these phenomena showed significant gaps in the literature among Roman Catholic parents from Latino communities experiencing their children's disclosure. Besides the negative emotions stated before, parents also experience despair, loss of expectations, grief, and fear for the safety of their child (Freedman, 2008). Depression is

also a common behavioral health concern (Goodrich, 2009; Saltzburg, 2004). Parents may also hold fears of being judged; they questioned their parental skills, and reported hostility and disapproval (LaSala, 2000). Maslowe (2012) found that parents also expressed a state of shock, anger, and feel ashamed after their son/daughter disclosed being LGBT. Parents reported being concerned about the marginalization, victimization and stigma that their children will likely confront after disclosing their sexual orientation (Diamond & Shpigel, 2014). LGB youth are also impacted by their parents' reaction to the disclosure of their sexual orientation since the parent's attitudes and behaviors have a strong influence in their lives. Campbell (2016) recognized that the reaction of a parent influences the youth's identity development, family dynamics and can contribute to mental health problems. For instance, family rejection has been associated with health-related problems including higher levels of HIV risk behaviors, heavy alcohol drinking, and higher prevalence of sexually transmitted infections when LGBT individuals reach adulthood when compared with their straight counterparts (Ryan, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2009). Latino LGBT young adults who reported experiencing higher levels of family rejection were 8.4 times more likely to have attempted suicide, 3.4 times more likely to engage in unprotected sexual activities and illegal drug use, and 5.9 times more likely to be diagnosed with depression, when compared with other Latino LGB with less or no family rejection (Ryan et al.2009). Higher levels of suicide attempts, the adoption of riskier sexual practices (Marín, 2003) and other mental health concerns that prevail among Latino gay and bisexual males are indicative of the long-term effects that can

result from parental rejection among this ethnic group (Diaz, Ayala, Bein, Henne & Marín, 2001; Ryan et al., 2009).

Besides the established concerns of parents regarding the coming out of their LGB children, an additional stressor can be associated with the parent's religious affiliation. Religion often plays an important role in the lives of many individuals (Ellison, Acevedo, & Ramos-Wada, 2011) and it is considered an important tool towards human development, meaning, and cultural practice (Etengoff & Daiute, 2014). In fact, religious perspectives can inform public debate about the biblical interpretation of homosexuality from either a homopositive or homonegative interpretation (Moon, 2014). Research has documented how religious faith can improve psychological functioning by enhancing self-esteem, lessening symptoms of depression, increasing life satisfaction and longevity as well as reducing emotional distress (Lease & Shulman, 2003). In contrast, Herek and González-Rivera's (2006) research revealed that those individuals who self-identified as highly religious expressed significantly more negative attitudes toward lesbians and gay men when compared with their less religious counterparts. Ford, Brignal, Van Valey and Macaluso (2009) have documented the opposition of some Christian denominations towards lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals as a moral issue. Ellison, Acevedo and Ramos-Wada (2011) revealed how the internalization of religious teachings continues to influence the adoption of conservative views on sexual ethics and traditional marriages among Latinos, signaling a strong endorsement of the Catholic teachings that suggest labeling LGB individuals as intrinsically disorder.

The Roman Catholic Church has also adopted as part of their doctrinal documents a similar position and has opposed antidiscriminatory legislation that could safeguard civil rights for LGBT individuals (Tatalovich, 1998). Other Christian denominations have also promoted the use of conversion therapy for LGBT individuals in order to alter their sexual orientation, although as revealed by Shidlo and Schroeder (2002) such treatment modality causes more harm than good. The American Psychological Association (APA) created a taskforce to investigate the claims suggesting that Sexual Orientation Change Efforts (SOCE) was a safe and efficacious intervention capable of changing someone's sexual orientation. The APA's Taskforce on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses conducted a thorough analysis of existing research on SOCE and concluded that such efforts are ineffective and not scientifically supported since the findings of scientifically validated research indicated that it is unlikely that individuals will be able to: "reduce same sex attractions or increase other sexual attractions through SOCE." The task force found some evidence that individuals experienced harm (loss of sexual feelings, increased suicidality, anxiety, depressive symptoms, and high dropout rates) as a result of the SOCE (APA, 2009). According to Anton (2010) the evidence to sustain the claim of a psychological treatment capable of changing someone's sexual orientation had been simply insufficient.

In contrast with the existing empirical evidence, in their pastoral documents, the Roman Catholic Church has disseminated their explicit condemnation of homosexuals and bisexual individuals citing homosexuality as being against the social and natural order (Lynch, 2005). From a doctrinal point of view, the Roman Catholic Church

continues to firmly condemn homosexual activity but also expect parents to accept and love their children as instructed in their pastoral letter *Always Our Children: Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers*. The letter distributed by the U.S. National Conference of Roman Catholic Bishop's Committee on Marriage and Family was created with the intention of minimizing the prevailing tension between parents of LGBT individuals and the Church's doctrine on homosexuality in the United States (Lynch, 2005). Some conservative Bishops demanded the Vatican to explicitly condemn homosexuality and to label it as a disorder. The U.S. Bishop's went even further in their demands to promote discrimination against LGB individuals in the employment and housing sectors particularly if dealing with children was a requirement of the job (Lynch, 2005). This caused confusion with parents of LGB individuals because although the letter was an attempt to consolidate loving their LGB offspring with their Roman Catholic identity, the content of the letter constituted a rhetorical attack to the sexuality of LGB individuals as well as a mechanism to reinforce discriminatory practices and perpetuate violence (Lynch, 2005). According to Lynch (2005):

Violence against homosexuals is wrong, but this violence is caused by the claim that homosexuality is not disorder: when such a claim is made and when homosexual activity is consequently condoned, or when civil legislation is introduced to protect behavior to which no one has any conceivable right, neither the church nor society at large should be surprised when other distorted notions and practices gain ground, and irrational and violent reactions increase. (p. 10)

Other arguments introduced in the letter suggest the acceptance of discriminatory practices when placing children for adoption or foster care services, in employment practices for LGB teachers, and in the selection of military personnel. Furthermore, the letter instructed bishops to firmly oppose legislative initiatives that promote civil rights. Interestingly, the letter invited parents to develop a loving attitude towards their children and also underscore that all sexualities are a gift from God (Lynch, 2005).

As a result of the prevailing doctrinal postures it's not surprising that anti-religion sentiments have influenced some LGB opinions about organized religions. Some LGB individuals struggle with the notion of a dual identity in which a strong connection to the Christian faith and a strong identity as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender seems to be incompatible (Rodriguez, 2010). However, not all lesbians and gay males who are Christians experience a conflict between their religious beliefs and their sexual orientation since at times, they are capable of integrating both identities. Rodriguez and Ouellette (2000) documented that the emergence of gay positive churches that ministers to the spiritual needs of members of the lesbian and gay community is a relevant factor that contributed to the successful integration of a gay/lesbian identity and a Christian identity.

Although the historic position of the Roman Catholic Church prevails in society, a more reconciliatory attitude has slowly emerged since the election of Pope Francis. In October 2014, the Vatican sponsored a Synod of Bishops on the Family and in its first report included language indicating the need for pastoral outreach to LGB Catholics. The Synod's intention was not to change church teachings, but the document included

language stating that: “homosexuals have gifts and qualities to offer the Christian community: are we capable of welcoming these people guaranteeing to them a further space in our communities?” Such language is indicative of a more conciliatory tone towards lesbian, gays, bisexuals and transgender individuals adopted by Pope Francis (Ring, 2014).

Even though the doctrinal documents of the Roman Catholic Church remained unchanged in regards to its tenet that considers homosexuality as “objectively disordered,” Pope Francis’ tone on the topic signaled a less judgmental approach towards lesbians and gays: “if a person is gay and seeks the Lord and has good will, who am I to judge that person?” (Gibson & Speciale, 2013).

The scarcity of research that explore the experiences of Latino parents who are Catholic and have a LGB adolescent/young adult provided an opportunity to document these phenomena within this ethnic group.

## **Background**

When an adolescent or young adult disclose their non-heterosexual orientation, parents often experience a series of events that can generate significant distress. Studies revealed that these parents experience strong emotional reactions that include anger, sadness, despair, feelings of guiltiness, and even depression (Campbell, 2016; Maslowe, 2012; Phillips & Ancis, 2008). Even after significant changes in legislation and civil rights that advanced the principles of equality and justice towards members of the LGB community, the reality is that homosexuality is still a highly controversial topic that has exacerbated strong arguments from conservative religious groups. For some,

homosexuality is considered a pathology. Some believe it is a sinful act, a disorder against the natural order established by God or simply an immoral behavior. In contrast, other individuals and institutions consider homosexuality as a normal expression of human sexuality and do not stigmatize or discriminate against members of sexual minorities.

Research documenting parental reactions is not abundant in scholarly circles (Campbell, 2016). Parents of an LGB children struggle when facing these opposing views and controversies on the topic of homosexuality. For that reason, LGB Latinos are less open to the idea of coming out (Sánchez, 2015) and are extremely cautious and selective when deciding to disclose their LGBT identity in order to avoid the rejection from their immediate family (Connally, Wedemeyer & Smith, 2013). Parents who endorse religious congregations with conservative tenets that condemn homosexuality face even more challenges, particularly within the Latino community. The internalization of religious teachings and doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church has influenced the mobilization of conservative religious organizations like Roman Catholics as well as Evangelicals to denounce a gay agenda with the intention of influencing politicians and communities to not endorse legislative initiatives that will grant civil rights (like same-sex marriages) and protections (antidiscrimination laws) to members of sexual minorities in Latin America (Gray, Mendelsohn, & Omoto, 2015). Members of conservative denominations have a tendency to adopt more negative attitudes towards those who identify as non-heterosexual (Ellison, Acevedo & Ramos-Wada, 2011; Ford, Brignal, Van Valey, & Macaluso, 2009). Campbell (2016) documented that both the quality and the emotional

connections between the parent and the LGBT child becomes negative immediately after the disclosure. Research findings revealed that Latinos are less supportive of the idea of extending civil rights and civil liberties to LGBT individuals particularly in regards to same-sex marriage or civil unions (Ellison, Acevedo, & Ramos-Wada, 2011). When exploring the literature that is specific to racial/ethnic minorities, research shows that U.S. residents of Mexican descent who self-identified as highly religious expressed more negative attitudes towards lesbians and gays when contrasted with those considered less religious (Herek & Gonzalez-Rivera, 2006). These authors found that 75% of the respondents in the sample were affiliated to the Roman Catholic Church and that the best predictor for the adoption of negative attitudes among this population was related to their strong endorsement of traditional gender roles.

This background information prompted us to recognize the need to further explore one of the core questions associated with the research problem: How Latino parents experience the coming out of their adolescent/young adult while mediating the doctrinal teachings of the Roman Catholic Church towards homosexuality?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative research was to explore the parenting experiences of Latinos with LGB adolescents/young adults and the Roman Catholic doctrine towards homosexuality. The unique experiences and realities of Latino parents with LGB children and the potential challenges that result from the current doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church in regards to homosexuality were the focus of this investigation.

This phenomenological study aimed to explore the subjective meaning and the essence of the parenting experiences of Roman Catholics within the Latino community after their children disclose their LGB sexual orientation. Also significant in this investigation was the need to explore how these parents mediate, experience, and interpret the doctrinal teachings of the Roman Catholic Church towards homosexuality. Phenomenology is the philosophical method of inquiry best suited to explore such phenomenon. As a method, phenomenology underscored the essence of the parenting experiences considering the subjective meaning ascribed to the disclosure event as experienced by parents from the Latino community. Ultimately, this research provided an opportunity to document in a scholarly manner the interpretation, views, meanings, dynamics, potential obstacles, benefits, and overall subjective meaning that result from having a LGB child while being a member of the Roman Catholic Church.

### **Research Questions**

Research Question 1: How do Latino parents experience the coming out of their adolescent/young adult while mediating the doctrinal teachings of the Roman Catholic Church towards homosexuality?

Research Question 2: How do Latino parents mediate their identities as Roman Catholic and as parents of a LGB adolescent/young adult?

### **Subquestions**

Subquestion1: What are the parent's beliefs about a LGB person?

Subquestion 2: What, if any, are potential conflicts that you experience from having a LGB daughter/son?

Subquestion 3: How do parents negotiate their religious beliefs with the relationship they experience with their children?

Subquestion 4: What, if any, are the potential sources of conflict with the Roman Catholic Church and their position towards homosexuality?

Subquestion 5: What changes, if any, have you experienced as a parent of a LGB child and as a member of the Roman Catholic Church?

### **Theoretical Framework**

In attempting to provide a theoretical framework to illustrate the unique experiences of parents with LGB children some researchers have provided models that suggest a series of developmental stages that mirror the coming out process of LGBT (Saltzburg, 2004). However, there was no theory that provided a lens to illustrate the phenomena experienced by Latino parents who are members of the Roman Catholic Church and have a LGB child. A theoretical perspective that can assist in this task is the PARTheory.

PARTheory is considered an evidence-based theory that accounts for both the socialization and the lifespan development of interpersonal relationships, particularly the parental acceptance or parental rejection across cultures (Rohner, Khaleque, Cournoyer, 2005). PARTheory's foundation attempts to explore if children's responses to their perception of rejection from parents are universal. A second task of PARTheory is closely aligned with a developmental consideration that seeks to determine if the acceptance or rejection experienced as a child extends into later stages of life.

PARTheory is divided into three distinct sub-theories: the personality subtheory, the coping subtheory, and the sociocultural system subtheory (Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, 2012). The personality sub-theory aimed to answer if children across cultures and from diverse ethnic/racial groups and gender shared a universal response to their perceptions of parental acceptance or parental rejection. The personality subtheory explored the potential long-term impact of childhood rejection considering a developmental dimension. The coping subtheory explored aspects associated with resiliency in children or adults to determine how they cope emotionally after experiencing rejection from parents. Lastly, the socio-cultural sub-theory explored why some parental figures are warm and caring and others are neglecting, cold, and reject their children. Within this area, the socio-cultural sub-theory asked if the parent's religious beliefs, artistic expression and other socio-cultural behaviors were somehow connected with their own experiences of parental love or parental rejection (Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, 2012).

The postulations associated with PARTheory are the result of a multi-method and cross-cultural investigation representing a diverse group of individuals. PARTheory has integrated a robust empirical research that considered the dimensions of parental acceptance and parental rejection since the nineteenth century. PARTheory's ultimate goal is to articulate a theoretical lens for the study of parenting acceptance and rejection considering a lifespan developmental lens (Rohner, Khaleque, Cournoyer, 2005). PARTheory's inclusion of a multicultural dimension that accounts for racial, ethnic and

gender diversity and its scholarly foundation make this theoretical model the optimal lens to investigate the parenting experiences of Roman Catholic Latinos with LGB children.

### **Nature of the Study**

The proposed research was qualitative in nature. Qualitative methods emphasized an understanding of the subjective experiences of participants in order to assess phenomena from the perspective of the people (Patton, 2001). This research qualitatively explored how Latino parents of lesbian, gay or bisexual adolescent/young adults experienced the LGB disclosure of their offspring considering the parent's affiliation to the Roman Catholic Church. Qualitative methods placed an emphasis of such experiences by using an inductive process to analyze data. A qualitative design procures a systematic analysis of data based on the obtained information that accounts for the experiences of these parents. Qualitative research considers a validation process that enable the investigator to adopt rigid steps of coding procedures (open, axial, and selective coding) to analyze and interpret the results based on the obtained data to help articulate a deeper and meaningful understanding of the subjective phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenology was the philosophical foundation of the study with the purpose of exploring how parents managed their children's disclosure of their LGB identity and how they processed and integrated such experience into their religious beliefs and their relationships with their children.

## **Definitions of Key Terms**

The following set of definitions provided the conceptual framework to understand key terms pertaining to the research on the parenting experiences of Latinos with LGB adolescents/young adults and the Roman Catholic doctrine towards homosexuality.

*Latino(a)*: A person whose origin is traced to the Latin American region. (Bermúdez, Kirkpatrick, Hecker, & Torres-Robles, 2010).

*Parenting*: The combined actions associated with the raising of offspring (VandenBos, 2006).

*Lesbian*: A woman whose romantic and sexual attractions are directed towards another woman (Rosenthal, 2013).

*Gay man*: A man whose sexual and romantic attractions are directed to another man (Rosenthal, 2013).

*Bisexual*: A person that is sexually and romantically attracted to both women and men (Bates, 2010).

*Transgender*: An individual whose gender identity or behavior differs from their biological sex or culturally determined gender roles (Kopala, 2003).

*Queer*: A term that encompasses the multiple identities pertaining to the expression of sexualities including gender non-conforming, lesbian, gay, bisexual, genderqueer, pansexual, etc. (Smallwood, 2015).

*Questioning*: A term used to describe people who are in the process of exploring their sexual orientation, gender identity or their gender expression (PFLAG, 2018).

*Doctrine:* A system of belief that incorporates a tenet, dogma or a teaching (VandenBos, 2006).

*Sexual orientation:* Considered the perseverance and stability of sexual attraction over time among people attracted to the opposite, same or both sexes (Yarhouse, 2005). Sexual orientation also includes the individual's emotions, sexual, romantic desires, and erotic attractiveness towards other individuals of the same, opposite or both sexes (Sánchez, 2015).

*Gender identity:* The gender that a person claims (Yarhouse, 2005).

*Disclosure:* The act of revealing to others your identity as lesbian, gay or bisexual (Bates, 2010). Also defined as awareness of same sex attraction (or attraction to both sexes if bisexual) that culminates with the acceptance of self and the adoption of a public identity as lesbian, gay or bisexual (Cass, 1996; LaSala, 2000; Saltzburg, 2004).

### **Assumptions**

The first assumption associated with this research was that Latino parents who are members of the Roman Catholic Church experienced a distinct series of events after their children disclose their LGB identity. Such assumption was based on the Roman Catholic position regarding homosexuality and their exclusive endorsement of heterosexuality. The influential force of the Catholic religion within the Latino community has been recognized in previous research suggesting that life events and life's purpose are conceived from the lens of a Catholic doctrine that recognize heterosexuality as the only acceptable manifestation of human sexuality. Anything that deviates from such expected

norm will then create a conflict, leaving families questioning their role as a parent of a LGB son/daughter in light of their affiliation to the Roman Catholic Church.

If traditional gender roles are so clearly emphasized by Latinos then the traditional teachings of the Catholic Church regarding gender, family, marriage and the conception of other hetero-normative events will likely influence in these parents a sense of inadequacy while creating uncertainty in Latino parents with LGB youth because their offspring will never comply with such expectations. The researcher further assumes that Roman Catholic Latino parents with LGB adolescents/young adults will be forthcoming in discussing their experience in details and will be honest in answering the interview questions associated with the investigation.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The focus of this investigation explored the experiences of Latino parents with an LGB adolescents/young adults and how they mediated the challenges (if any) that resulted from their membership to the Roman Catholic Church. To be considered a participant, the individual met the following criteria: be the parent of an LGB adolescent/young adult; self-identified as Roman Catholic and considered himself/herself as involved or very involved with the Church, identified as Latino(a), and experienced the disclosure of the LGB identity of their children. If an individual did not meet the described criteria, the person was excluded from the investigation. Any parent previously known by the researcher was also ineligible to participate to prevent any potential conflict of interest. Individuals considered mentally unstable, experiencing a crisis or with a disability that limits their verbal capacity and ability to effectively communicate

were also ineligible for the study. Another delimitation included interviewing only individuals who self-identified as Roman Catholic at the moment of the initial screening with the researcher. Family members of a parent or any other relatives did not meet the research criteria for participation so they were not eligible to participate.

This investigation explored a phenomenon and the findings were not used to extrapolate or apply to other populations or racial/ethnic groups who do not represent the population and context described by the researcher. However, there is the possibility of transferability. For that reason, a thorough description of the content, assumptions, and the methods that guided the investigation are included. If transferability is feasible, then other investigators can employ their scholarly judgment in applying the findings to other research settings.

### **Limitations**

A potential limitation associated with this investigation is based on the fact that the data in any study solely depends on the narrated voices and experiences of a group of individuals who shared the same phenomenon. To distill the essence of the experience of a parent with a LGB adolescent/young adult the data was based on the subjective and conscious recollection of such experiences during the interview. The researcher relied on the accuracy of the self-reporting structure that characterizes the interview. The parents were able to remember and also verbalize those accounts in a coherent manner. Participants were capable of engaging in such narrative and willingly provided rich details as they were guided by the open-ended and semi structured format of the interviewing process. Originally, concerns about privacy and confidentiality were

considered potential limitations. However, none of the participants expressed discomfort while sharing their experience because of the sensitive nature of the topic of the interview. None of the participants were reluctant to share the intimate details associated with their experiences as a parent of an LGB adolescent/young adult because of the prevailing stigma in our society. For such reasons, it was imperative to inform all participants prior to the interview about the strict adherence to ethical standards and the IRB protocols endorsed by the researcher and by the dissertation committee.

Another potential limitation was the researcher's limited experience conducting one-on-one interviews. Such limited experience did not affect the necessary rapport and the dynamics of the interview. To counteract for that limitation, the researcher recorded a practice interview that was reviewed by the dissertation committee chair prior to conducting the research interviews. Also, during the research interviews the researcher asked for clarification to the provided responses and/or ask additional questions if the information obtained by the participant was not clear. Throughout the interview process the researcher maintained objectivity and avoided imposing personal biases, ideas and opinions that negatively impacted the outcome of the interview.

### **Significance**

The significance of this investigation relied in its potential to expand a paucity of research that explored the unique experiences of Roman Catholic Latino families with LGB youth. This research contributes to the understanding of this phenomenon from a scientific perspective as well as increase awareness in mental health professionals of the impact that disclosure has on parents from this ethnic group. The research generates

information that can be utilized in the design of future interventions tailored to this population. The research also helps expand the existing scientific literature on sexual minorities. Furthermore, the research expands the scientific exploration of complex and emerging issues, patterns and/or domains described by people's experiences of the phenomena associated with themes of LGB sexual orientation, religiosity, Latino families, family dynamics, disclosure issues, coming out, acceptance/rejection, and identity development as Latino parents of lesbian, gay or bisexual adolescents/young adults.

### **Summary**

Chapter 1 consists of a brief introduction of the study; followed by some background information to help framed the investigation and its context considering the problem, purpose of the investigation and the research questions. The chapter also includes a description of the theoretical framework that guided the study. Also included were relevant definitions, assumptions, limitations, the scope and delimitations associated with the research. Lastly, a description of the significance of the investigation has been presented to underscore the importance of this research.

Chapter 2 consists of a thorough description of the prevailing literature containing information on several areas including sexual orientation development, the coming out process, parental reactions to the disclosure of their offspring sexual orientation and an analysis of the existing documents and letters of the Roman Catholic Church surrounding the topic of homosexuality. Also, alternative biblical interpretations are discussed. Lastly, the chapter includes some considerations to promote positive social change in order to

assist parents, behavioral health professionals and the clergy to effectively mediate potential family and religious conflicts impacting these Latino communities.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

This chapter depicts the literature that accounts for the topics associated with the parenting experiences of Latinos with LGB adolescents/young adults and the Roman Catholic doctrine towards homosexuality. The different sections within the chapter include information associated with the theoretical orientation of the investigation considering the parental acceptance-rejection theory, the developmental models of LGB identity formation, the coming out experience, the impact of victimization towards sexual minorities, research on LGB Latinos, civil rights, religious considerations, the biblical interpretation surrounding homosexuality, and current sociopolitical developments linked to the LGB movement in the U.S.

### **Literature Review Related to Key Concepts**

In order to explore the literature pertaining to the parenting experiences of Latinos with LGB adolescents and young adults several databases from Walden University's electronic library were used to conduct a comprehensive literature review process. Some of these aggregated electronic sources were explored using the Elton B. Stephens Company (EBSCO) system, which facilitated the use of databases like the Academic Search Premier, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, SocIndex, Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Life, as well as the Sage Journals Online. Another search strategy was the use of Proquest UMI, which allows access to a vast amount of published doctoral dissertations. Google Scholar also assisted in the literature review strategy by facilitating the location of peer-reviewed

articles as well as the identification of authors and their respective publications. A keyword search using these electronic databases included the terms: lesbian, gay, bisexual, Hispanic/Latino parents, Hispanic/Latino youth, Roman Catholic doctrine, homosexuality, parent, sexual minority, coming out, disclosure, same sex, gender, gender identity development, stigma, LGB victimization, homosexual doctrine, Hispanic/Latino families, internalized homophobia, family systems, and Hispanic/Latino sexuality.

### **The Parental Acceptance-Rejection Theory**

The PARTheory is a useful evidence-based theory that provides the framework to explore parental acceptance as well as parental rejection. The trajectory of the PARTheory has been largely shaped considering cross-cultural evidence enriched by the participation of the majority of ethnic groups who prevail in the United States. PARTheory has also been shaped by the accumulated historical knowledge of more than 2,000 empirically supported investigations in support of the theory's conceptual framework surrounding issues of acceptance-rejection in other cultural contexts (Rohner, 2004).

Cross-cultural research conducted over a period of 45 years reveal that rejection on behalf of a parent or caregiver can be experienced by children and by adults [with a previous experience of rejection by their parents] as a psychological maladjustment with many potential negative manifestations. Some of these manifestations include aggression and hostility, dependence or a sense of defensive independence, problems with self-esteem, impaired sense of self-advocacy, lack of emotional responsiveness, emotional instability, and a negative worldview. Also, research in support of the theory has

documented that when individuals perceive rejection on behalf of parents/caregivers or intimate partners in their adult life they are more likely to internalize feelings of insecurity, anxiety and distorted mental representations of themselves and others around them including significant others.

PARTheory has been described as a theory that accounts for developmental considerations and the socialization that contributes to the understanding and causes of interpersonal dynamics pertaining to either parental rejection or parental acceptance (Rohner & Britner, 2002; Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, 2012; Rohner & Rohner, 1980). PARTheory was developed by Rohner, Khaleque, and Cournoyer (2012) who considered more than 400 studies that demonstrated how children and adults organize their perceived notions of parental acceptance and rejection considering behaviors associated with warmth-affection/lack of affection; hostility-aggression; indifference-neglect as well as behaviors associated with what the theory refers to “undifferentiated rejection” (Khaleque & Rohner, 2002).

PARTheory also emphasizes that rejection on behalf of the parent is not necessarily a defined action because it depends on the child’s perception of rejection. For such reason the interpretation of rejection [or acceptance] is symbolic. PARTheory places an emphasis on ethnicity and culture since a universal experience of parental acceptance-rejection has the capacity to shape the behavior and symbolic meaning ascribed to the acceptance-rejection phenomena including the four dimensions of warmth-affection, hostility-aggression, indifference-neglect, and undifferentiated rejection, commonly observe in individuals from every culture.

The warmth dimension within the PARTheory operates as a continuum in which all individuals can position themselves because of their prior experiences in their childhood with their notions of love on behalf of their caregivers. The warmth dimension explores the quality of the relationship based on their own experiences of affection that includes the symbolic behaviors adopted by parents/caregivers as well as the verbal and physical gestures used or perceived by children from their parents or caregivers. Based on the provided description of this theoretical conceptualization we can ascertain that one side of the continuum accounts for acceptance from parents/caregivers as demonstrated by the manifestation of caring and affective behaviors, comfort, warmth, and a nurturing and supportive quality of the relationship. On the opposite end of the continuum, the theory conceptualizes aspects of rejection from parental figures or caregivers. The theory also accounts for the psychological and physical behaviors that produce a sense of rejection, withdrawal and the manifestation of hurtful behaviors endorsed by parents and caregivers towards their children.

Originally, PARTheory only accounted for the acceptance-rejection experiences but eventually incorporated elements of interpersonal dimensions associated with acceptance-rejection dynamics. PARTheory accounts for what Rohner (2004) described as the personality dispositions that the acceptance-rejection phenomenon entails when describing the theory. The theory is comprised of three sub-theories that include a personality sub-theory, a coping sub-theory, and a sociocultural systems sub-theory. Each sub-theory attempts to provide answers to specific questions surrounding the experience of either acceptance and/or rejection.

### **Personality Sub-theory**

The personality sub-theory within PARTheory posits that humanity has developed a biological and emotional need for a positive response coming from those that the individual considers important to them. That affective dimension is understood as an intrinsic emotional and biological desire for support, nurturance and a caring attitude. Positive regard is of significant value in adults particularly with those in which there is a shared affectional bond. These needs are perhaps more salient in parental figures towards their children but can also include significant others with lasting emotional connections. Depending on the quality of the relationship, some children experience the necessary emotional security and comfort as a result of the quality of the parental relationship. Such sense of well-being and caring consideration is accounted for the warmth dimension of PARTheory because acceptance can greatly influence and contribute to the children's psychological well-being. In the absence of the optimal emotional and affective displayed of warmth, children and adults are predisposed to respond behaviorally and emotionally with insecurity, impaired self-esteem, anxiety, and feelings of rejection. Hence the need for PARTheory to predict and explain the consequences of the interpersonal acceptance-rejection as perceived by the individual.

The personality sub-theory underscores some of the characteristics that potentially emerge in rejected individuals (children or adults) including lack of emotional response or emotional instability, dependence, aggression, hostility, and low self-esteem among others. According to these theorists, rejected individuals have a tendency to adopt a negative representation of themselves and of their significant others. They also perceive

the world as a negative and hostile place that oftentimes push them to be more reactive or avoidant of certain scenarios or certain people regardless of the real or perceived rejection experience (Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, 2012).

### **Coping Sub-theory**

The coping sub-theory underscores the issues that enable children and adults to effectively deal emotionally with their rejecting experience. The focus of the coping sub-theory is to examine how rejected individuals avoid the negative behaviors and representations as a result of the adoption of successful coping strategies. Coping with rejection is possible when the child or adult person has the capacity to depersonalize from the rejecting experience and when having a strong sense of self that facilitates healthy mechanisms for coping (Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, 2012).

### **Socio-cultural System Sub-theory**

The socio-cultural system sub-theory aims to explain why some parents neglect, reject and/or behave aggressively towards their children and why other parents [or caregivers] love their children and are warm towards them. It is relevant for this research to acknowledge that the sociocultural system sub-theory attempts to explore if beliefs and behaviors commonly accepted in our society are affected depending on whether parents reject and/or accept their children. Here, the sub-theory considers the antecedents and consequences of the parental figure in the context of the society (Rohner et al., 2012).

The theoretical framework offered by PARTheory can be applied to the parenting experiences of Latinos with LGB adolescents/young adults who are members of the Roman Catholic Church. Moreover, the core consideration of the acceptance and

rejection component associated with the theory can assist in framing an investigation to explore this phenomenon thanks to the empirical research that accounted for ethnic and cultural components that contributed to the conceptualization of the theory. Such considerations can assist in the understanding of the dynamics of the Latino families with LGB adolescents/young adults precisely because of the inclusiveness of the ethnic and cultural considerations that accounts for a significant segment of the diverse ethnic groups in the present demographic composition of the U.S. society.

### **Sexual Orientation Development**

The expression of human sexuality has been the focus of scientific curiosity and debate that persist in our society. Science has made prominent contributions towards the objective study of sexual behavior in humans including research on the possible influences that shape the formation of an individual's sexual orientation (Sánchez, 2015). Sexual orientation has been conceptualized considering the individual's emotions, sexual and romantic desires or the erotic attractiveness towards either a man, a woman, or to both males and females (Sánchez, 2015). Sexual orientation accounts for factors that include emotional and sexual attraction, sexual fantasies, sexual behavior, social attraction, social behavior and self-identity (Yarhouse, 2005). In instances in which there is male-female gender attraction the individual is considered heterosexual. If the attraction is towards both males and females the individual is considered bisexual. In contrast, when there is attraction among members of the same gender such individuals are considered gay males or lesbian females. When describing the attraction between individuals of the same gender it is nowadays acceptable to refer to that individual as a

lesbian woman or as a gay man. The term homosexual has been historically characterized as indicative of pathology until 1973, when the American Psychiatric Association adopted a resolution to remove homosexuality as a psychiatric disorder. It was in 1975 when the American Psychological Association adopted a similar resolution un-labeling homosexuality as a psychological disorder (Bringaze & White, 2001; Peterson & Gerrity, 2006; Rosenberg, 1994). The investigation conducted by Evelyn Hooker on “normal homosexuals” demonstrated the lack of association between a psychological maladjustment and being homosexual, demystifying the prevailing scientific notions that considered homosexuality a psychiatric disorder (Milar, 2011). Although such are important milestones in changing the perception of a LGB person, social institutions and the general society continue to engage in discriminatory acts against a non-heterosexual person or group.

### **Developmental Models of Identity Formation**

Before the consolidation of a lesbian, gay or bisexual identity, an individual experienced a series of developmental milestones that culminate with a personal sense of self that fuses with their public identity. In 1979, the research conducted by Vivienne Cass aimed to address an area ignored by researchers by focusing on how individuals adopt a homosexual identity. Her work considered the idea of self-concept and identity as cognitive constructs that account for self-images that are the foundation of an individual's self-concept (Cass, 1984). For gays and lesbians those self-images manifest as internal pictures based on the subjective perceptions associated to their sexual preference (Cass, 1984). Cass (1984) established that a self-image is a unit required for the identity to be

constructed. Such process requires some identity change from a previous image of a heterosexual orientation to one of a lesbian or gay image. The model developed by Cass (1979) is conceptualized in six stages in which identity formation can develop considering a behavioral dimension as well as cognitive and affective components.

The first stage in Cass's Model is described as identity confusion. In this stage, individuals question their heterosexual orientation because their thoughts, feelings and actions have the potential of challenging their apparent heterosexuality and the person is likely to consider a homosexual identity. There is an apparent incongruence that generates a sense of confusion for being socialized as heterosexual while considering the possibility of a homosexual self (Peterson & Gerrity, 2006).

Identity comparison is considered the second stage of Cass's model. In this stage an individual encounters potential feelings of alienation when comparing themselves with heterosexuals. The potential of establishing contact with gays, lesbians, or bisexuals has buffering effects that counteract or minimize the potential alienation that is characteristic of this stage. The next stage is identity tolerance. This stage enables individuals to make meaningful connections with other LGB's in order to satisfy emotional, social, and sexual needs by selectively relating with peers that facilitate a more tolerant interaction with themselves and with others. During this stage, disclosure to non-homosexuals, and keeping a separate image in public and another in private that continues to influence a heterosexual role are common paths within this stage. In contrast with the previous stages, stage four allows the individual to have more exposure to the LGB subculture. The person develops a LGB network of friends that contributes to a more positive

perception of a LGB lifestyle that allows him/her to “fit” into the societal structures although at times it might be necessary to pretend a heterosexual orientation in order to avoid any potential adverse reactions from others. In this stage, the individual has the option of selectively disclosing his/her LGB identity. The next step in Cass’s stage model is identity pride. Identity pride is characterized by a sense of pride and loyal belonging to the LGB subculture. The individual consolidates not only the validity of his persona but also the equality of the homosexual lifestyle. Disclosing their LGB identity is necessary in order to counteract society’s negative perceptions and prevailing stigma of sexual minorities. Identity synthesis is the last stage, in which a LGB person recognizes that his/her sexual orientation is only one aspect of their identity or character. The previous perception that lesbianism, bisexuality or homosexuality is the only positive orientation is shifted as a result of a positive interaction with heterosexual or “straight” individuals. In this stage there is no need to hide their LGB sexual identity and disclosure to others is no longer an issue. The views that LGB individuals has of themselves and the views believed to be held by other members of society are, according to Cass (1984), “synthesized” and as a result “integrated.” The individual and public aspect of the “self” is fully integrated and consolidated into their identity producing feelings of stability and peace that contribute to solidify the process of identity formation (Cass, 1984).

Troiden (1989) introduced another model of homosexual identity formation. Troiden identified a series of milestone events in which the person ideally integrates the formation of their sexual orientation. Sensitization is the first stage in which the person gains awareness of their attraction to same sex individuals and questions their

heterosexuality. The next stage is identity confusion. In this stage the individual faces turmoil and overall confusion about her/his sexuality. Typically, this stage begins during early to middle adolescence. During the stage of identity confusion individuals often engage in same gender sexual experiences that could potentially generate an awakening that serves to confirm their sexual identity. Following identity confusion, the individual often experience the stage of identity assumption, in which the individual embraces a self-proclaimed definition as a lesbian, gay or bisexual and selectively discloses her/his sexual orientation primarily to other lesbian, gay or bisexual friends. The last stage is commitment, in which the sexual orientation of the person becomes her/his way of life. Oftentimes people in this stage disclose her/his sexual orientation to others. People in this stage also establish a romantic relationship with a partner (Troiden, 1989).

Another proposed model that attempts to account for the development of a homosexual identity was based on Coleman's work. Coleman's Model of homosexual identity formation includes a pre coming out stage, a coming out stage, an exploration stage, a first relationship stage, and lastly an integration stage (Coleman, 1982). Other models of sexual expression have considered not only the variability of expression in terms of sexual behavior but have also acknowledged sexual attraction, fantasies, social and emotional preferences, the concept of self-identity as well as preferences in terms of lifestyles that can change throughout life since an individual's sexual behavior may not be completely aligned with the individual's sex identity (Klein, Sepekoff, & Wolf, 1985). Orne (2011) introduced the idea of "strategic outness" since according to this author, disclosing as a LGB is more than just an aspect related to the development of the identity.

The coming out experience is not static but a more complex system of managing an LGB identity that considers motivations, strategies and goals in an attempt to shape an LGB identity (Orne, 2011).

### **Lesbian Identity Formation**

An important consideration to highlight from Troiden's Model is that it was conceptualized based on the experiences of gay men. Because women's experiences are different in terms of their identity development, this model is not able to fully account for the development of a lesbian identity. In contrast, Cass's model of identity formation accounted for the developmental experiences of both gay men and lesbian women (Peterson & Gerrity, 2006), but no assumption should be established that suggest that the development of a lesbian or gay identity follows an identical developmental path.

In response to the stage models that accounted for the gay male identity formation experience, Sophie (1987) elaborated a four-stage model for the development of a lesbian identity. Sophie's Model of identity development considered the following stages: awareness, exploration and testing, identity acceptance and lastly, identity integration. Like other models, Sophie's Model also follows a sequential order of development for a lesbian woman but a distinctive difference in her research is the notion that women experience sexual intimacy with a same-gender individual later in life than gay men (Bringaze & White, 2001). Gonsiorek (1988) established that lesbians are more emotional than gay men and rely more in the use of reflection in their identity formation. According to Diamond (2007) because it is possible for women to shift their identity, it is not accurate to suggest that their identity development follows a fixed or linear path since

transitions over time are possible. Butland (2015) affirmed that the transitions from a heterosexual path to a same-gender trajectory are genuine, validating the notion of a more fluid expression of sexuality.

### **Bisexual Identity Formation**

To some extent, the coming out experiences of bisexuals is not that different from the coming out experience of gays and lesbians but bisexual individuals encounter additional challenges (Scherrer, Kazyak, & Schmitz, 2015). Oftentimes in the scholarly literature bisexuals are excluded or grouped with other sexual minorities (Moore & Stambolis-Ruhstorfer, 2013). Fields (2001) underscored the additional challenges faced by parents in their understanding of a bisexual orientation mostly because of the negative representation ascribed by our culture to that sexual orientation. For instance, bisexuals are often considered as experiencing a temporary “phase” towards either a lesbian/gay or straight orientation (Diamond, 2008). Such perceptions have implications that often impact the relationships bisexuals establish with their families since family members might feel no need to integrate or need to understand the bisexual orientation of their relative. Oftentimes these families continue to hope for the bisexual person to enter a heterosexual relationship (Scherrer, Kazyak, & Schmitz, 2015). Furthermore, the concept of deviant sexual behavior, promiscuity, and being non-monogamous is oftentimes applied to a bisexual person without any legitimate reason for such label(s) (Israel & Mohr, 2004) making disclosure to family members even more challenging (Elliot, 2012). In terms of gender, Eliason (2000) affirmed that a bisexual man is perceived more negatively than a bisexual woman. When considering these obstacles, it is no surprise

that bisexual individuals disclose their orientation later in life than gay men and lesbian women (Rust, 1993). If a bisexual person does come out they may choose not to disclose to family members (or only to a select group of family members). Even if a bisexual does come out to their parents, some parents may choose to ignore their children's bisexual orientation (Watson, 2014). Victimization is particularly challenging for bisexuals since they often experience double discrimination based on their sexual identity on behalf of lesbians and gays and also from their straight counterparts (Israel & Mohr, 2004).

### **Limitations of Identity Development Models**

Identity development models have been criticized mostly because of methodological limitations in the way research is conducted. Critics have emphasized their heavy reliance on retrospective data, their small samples, the underrepresentation of lesbian women and bisexual individuals, and the lack of inclusion of ethnic/racial minorities (Diamond, 2005). Current research also supports the notion of a more individualized and fluid expression of an individual's sexuality. The process associated with the development of a LGB identity also requires the recognition of socio-cultural considerations as well as factors pertaining to ethno-cultural contexts in order to consolidate a LGB identity (Gallor & Fassinger, 2010).

### **Coming Out Experiences**

Disclosure often refers to as the "coming out" experience. The coming out process is a unique enterprise in the formation of a lesbian, gay or bisexual identity (Floyd & Stein, 2002). There is no such process or applicability to heterosexuals "or straight" individuals. However, the coming out is a phenomenon that varies significantly

from one LGB individual to another. For sexual minorities, self-disclosure is likely to happen before high school graduation (Savin-Williams & Daimond, 2000). Disclosing a LGB identity is also influenced by political activism and advocacy that enabled LGB people to come out at an earlier age (Saltzburg, 2004). Although the disclosure of a lesbian, gay and/or bisexual identity is not a stress free endeavor (Mallon, 1998) the coming out process is considered a good experience for lesbians, gays, and bisexual individuals in order to achieve a solid integration of their identity (LaSala, 2000). Such consolidation of a lesbian, gay or bisexual orientation is the result of an accepting self as well as the public manifestation (or disclosure) of their identity (Floyd & Stein, 2002).

The coming out process requires adjustments that normally start with a sense of awareness of same-sex attraction that eventually progresses through a series of milestones that facilitates the recognition of a LGB identity. According to Cass (1996) the coming out process usually culminates when the individual embrace a personal sense of itself and a public identity as a lesbian, gay and bisexual person.

Researchers have focused on the development of several models describing the steps associated with the acquisition of a sexual identity. Although these models differ in terms of the number of phases or stages, a closer look shows significant similarities in regards to the themes and ordered steps underlined in the development of a LGB identity (Cass, 1984). It should be acknowledged that other models of sexual expression have considered not only the variability of expressions in terms of sexual behavior but have also accounted for other important factors to consolidate identity. Among them, sexual attraction, fantasies, social and emotional preferences, self-identity and a lifestyle that

allows a more fluid expression of the individual's sexual behavior and sexual identity are subject to change overtime (Klein, Sepekoff & Wolf, 1985). The idea of disclosure or coming out as a one-time event has been challenged because of its linear implications associated with the developmental perspectives. For instance, Orne (2011) defines coming out as a continual, contextual, social identity management instead of assuming it is an ending point in which coming out to everyone is the final requirement to articulate someone's LGB identity. For that reason, it is no surprise that some researchers acknowledge that identity development can be a life-long process (Bates, 2010; Galatzer-Levy & Cohler, 2002).

When considering the timing of these stages, individuals frequently become aware of their attraction towards same sex individuals during their childhood. Identifying as LGB often occurs several years after reaching puberty. Disclosure events are more frequent at the later stages of adolescence or young adulthood, particularly when the individual is in their early 20's (Floyd & Stein, 2002). Although empirical research does support the stage theory as well as the timing of the milestone events, the coming out experiences of LGB individuals are characterized by the vast variability of the sequence of such milestones, the age of the individual (Herdt, 1989) and by environmental and biological considerations (Savin-Williams, 1998).

It was Kinsey's research that demonstrated that the expression of human sexuality occurs on a continuum, for which his research team developed a scale with numerical values that fluctuate between an exclusively heterosexual expression (considered a 0 in the scale) and an exclusively homosexual expression (considered a six) in the scale in

which the middle signifies a combination of both homosexual and heterosexual expression (Diamond, 2008). For the most part, it is in the developmental stage of young adulthood that disclosing a lesbian, gay or bisexual identity mostly occurs. Armstrong (2002) framed the coming out process as an important tool to generate public awareness of LGB in our society as part of a social movement. In contrast, Shepard's (2009) definition of coming out suggests a personal transformation from a passive stand to one of political activism in order to promote political change. As observed, several debates in the literature permeate in regards to the coming out process but the idea of coming out as a continual process is becoming more appealing and deserves inclusion in the scientific efforts to document such phenomena accurately.

### **Victimization of Sexual Minorities**

Although significant efforts to restore a more positive image for LGB prevail, victimization, violence and discrimination still persist in society (Costa, Pereira, & Leal, 2013). It is no surprise that LGB individuals have internalized a sense of discomfort and less positive feelings about themselves that significantly contributes to the concept of internalized homonegativity (Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 2009); a phenomenon that has been associated with psychological disturbances, diminished self-esteem, riskier sexual practices, suicide ideation and the use of illegal substances (Lehavot & Simoni, 2011). These facts have implications for optimal mental health outcomes and well-being for the LGB individual but also has implications for mental health professionals since maintaining a positive LGB identity is an issue that the individual might struggle with (Costa, Pereira, & Leal, 2013). Furthermore, if parents react negatively to the child's

LGB disclosure the consequences for the individual can be more pervasive because of the risk of victimization associated with coming out (Savin-Williams, 1994).

Multiple factors and considerations can influence the decision to come out or not. For instance, some LGB individuals consider relocating to other region or to an international destination to avoid an intolerant or homophobic community (Lewis, 2012). For many lesbians and gay men, consolidating a more positive identity can be overshadowed by the detrimental connotations associated with being a sexual minority (Bates, 2010). Cultural and social constructions can interact with other issues that can make the coming out experience more challenging for sexual minorities (Bates, 2010). Victimization of sexual minorities is often manifested in violence and discrimination but also as a result of the prevailing heterosexist structures that invalidate any non-heterosexual lifestyle (Costa, Pereira & Leal, 2013). As confirmed by Goldfried and Goldfried (2001) regardless of the promising advances in society towards LGBT individuals they continue to experience the lingering stigmatization that prevails towards their status as a sexual minority group. Research findings suggest that such disparities are prevalent regardless of gender, age groups, and racial/ethnic backgrounds (Almeida, Johnson, Corliss, Molnar, & Azrael, 2009) and are the immediate effect of an oppressive society that often discriminate, harass, and reject a non-heterosexual person (Harper & Schneider, 2003). But disparities can be exacerbated when considering issues pertaining to the intersectionality of identities. LGB sexual minorities also belong to racial/ethnic groups who often experience victimization. For instance, the intersecting realities of a “minority within a minority” status can detrimentally impact the ability of African

American women who identify as lesbian, to adequately function and adapt to the realities of the heterosexist culture that rate African American lesbians as inferior in such context (Greene, 2000).

Similar challenges emerge when we take into account the legal status of Latino/a LGB's who are undocumented immigrants. The research conducted by Gray, Mendelsohn and Omoto (2015) recognized some of the challenges encountered by sexual minority Latino immigrants as a result of their sexual minority status, their Latino ethnic background, as well as their undocumented or immigration status. These intersecting identities generated feelings of marginalization that resulted from the experience of being a minority within a minority (Gray, Mendelsohn & Omoto, 2015). Latino gay immigrants often experience discrimination, racism, segregation, anxiety, and struggle with the cultural values endorsed by the Latino community as well as the pressures of a predominantly White LGB community. Latino gay immigrants have to navigate the pressures to "fit in" within the American culture as well as to preserve their Latin heritage, factors that are not so easy to confront considering the traditional gender role norms and expectations that promote the adoption of *machismo* attitudes and behaviors endorsed by Latino families. Alienation from either the Latino or the LGB community is common in gay Latino immigrants. Gray, Mendelsohn and Omoto's (2015) research described how participants often alienate from the predominately White and mainstream LGB community and other times also alienate from the highly religious Latino society that promote the adoption of traditional gender role values that exclude them for being a member of a sexual minority. Interestingly, Morales, Corloin-Gutierrez and Wang's

(2013) research revealed that although challenges prevail, Latino gay immigrants have unique sources of support that promote a sense of resiliency to overcome adversity. Similar findings were illustrated by Gray, Mendelsohn and Omoto (2015) whose participants with intersecting identities (gay, Latino, immigrant) overcame difficulties and negative events that allowed them to become more empowered and to have better coping skills that helped them navigate their intersecting identities.

Multiple factors can contribute to the successful integration of a LGB identity. For instance, the individual's ego strength as well as a strong social support network has the ability to assist LGB Latinos overcome their internalized homophobia. Grafsky (2014) asserts that disclosure has benefits for the LGBT person and to their families if the family environment allows a sense of "connectedness" and if "openness" is endorsed as part of the family dynamics. If the LGBT child delays disclosing to their parents his/her LGBT identity it is because of the significance of the event in the child's life (Phillips, 2007). Research reveals that the benefits of coming out include higher levels of self-esteem and less substance abuse if the LGBT child experience more parental acceptance post disclosure (Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz, & Sánchez, 2010). To successfully reach a stage in which the individual self-identifies as a lesbian woman, a gay man, or bisexual, the person should optimally adjust to their LGBT identity (Bates, 2010). Unfortunately, for some LGB Latinos such successful integration of their LGB identity is challenged by their immigration/undocumented status, the shame and stigma that prevails in the Latino community towards LGB individuals and the strong endorsement of traditional gender roles, the conservative stance of the Roman Catholic doctrine towards homosexuality as

well as the pressures of being a minority within the predominantly White and privileged U.S. LGB community.

### **Acculturation Concerns**

Latinos are currently the largest minority group in the U. S. (US Census, 2010) so it is important for behavioral health providers to become aware of the challenges and multiple needs of this growing population that is often times bilingual and with significant cultural differences among their various ethnic groups (Sager, Schlimmer, & Hellmann, 2001). As stated by Connally, Wedemeyer and Smith (2013) Latinos are not a homogenous group. Instead of utilizing the label “Latino(a) or Hispanic,” members of this community often times use the country of origin to describe their ethnic identity (Taylor, Lopez, Martínez & Velasco, 2012). According to Chandra, Mosher, Copen, and Sionean (2011) it is estimated that in the U.S. approximately .9% of Latina women between the ages of 18 to 44 years are lesbian, 2.2% are bisexual, 1.2% of Latino men among the same age group are gay, and .9% is bisexual. In contrast, Gates (2011) reported that among adults who identify as LGBT in the U.S. approximately 1.7% of the population is lesbian, 1.8% is bisexual, 1.7 are gay males and nearly 700,000 are transgender individuals. The number of studies that account for the experiences of Latinos and the topic of homosexuality are scarce. The available investigations provide a frame of reference denoting the experiences of some Latino groups but not for all of the diverse ethnic groups that comprised the Latino population. For instance, research considering the experiences of LGB Mexican Americans shows that as a result of the prevailing stigma among Latinos regarding homosexuality, LGB Mexican Americans

reflect on the pros and cons of disclosure and often times decide not to reveal their true identity to avoid the rejection and further conflicts with their families (Connally, Wedemeyer & Smith, 2013). The integration of the Latino ethnicity and their identification with their sexual orientation adds another layer of complexity to the development of a LGB identity because of the values ascribed to the ideals of *familismo*, *machismo*, and the importance of *respeto* that characterize the Latino culture (Falicov, 2010). Often, Latino LGB individuals feel the need to put their families first and protect them from the shame and psychological harm that could result from disclosing their LGB identity. For such reasons, Latino LGB's often deny their sexual orientation and take precautions to conceal their sexual activity and avoid being seen in LGB places or with LGB individuals (Connally, Wedemeyer & Smith, 2013). Such concerns are very legitimate since studies with LGB Latino youth show that 41% of the sample reported attempts to commit suicide as the result of violent incidents that involved peers, their family, and from strangers (Hunter, 2007).

Acculturation and assimilation are relevant considerations among Latinos. LGB individuals in the U.S. are a byproduct of the mainstream culture that their first generation parents may not fully embrace. Those parents also endorse the values associated with a hetero-normative tradition and that can generate further complications for LGB Latino youth. Latino LGB's often experience double discrimination for being part of a sexual minority and for being part of an ethnic minority (Sager, Schlimmer, & Hellmann, 2001). Although the process of assimilation to the U.S. society and its culture provides the opportunity for more flexibility in terms of gender norms (Lescano, Brown,

Raffaelli, & Lima, 2009) Latino LGB youth will be challenged to conform to the demands imposed by their Latino culture, parental figures, and their family. The contributing factors that emerge from the disapproving reactions on behalf of parents are the consequence of the adoption of traditional attitudes about sexuality and gender norms as well as the traditional values promoted within the Latino culture. When LGB Latinos do not comply with such parenting demands and obligations towards the family they feel a strong sense of guilt (Connally, Wedemeyer & Smith, 2013). When youth are marginalized due to their race/ethnicity, gender identity, and because of their sexual expression they are particularly vulnerable to homelessness (Reck, 2009).

### **Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Latinos**

From a socio-demographic point of view, Latinos are now considered the largest minority group in the United States (US Census, 2010). As a growing community it is imperative to secure their representation in scientific research (Sánchez, 2015). Within the context of this research it is important to acknowledge the limited investigations that are both current and inclusive of the sexual orientation development of Latinos and their LGB experience. When looking at the existing studies on Latinos in general, what prevails in the scientific literature are studies that focus mostly on topics associated with substance abuse, sexually transmitted infections, and on high risk behaviors adopted by members of the Latino community. It is not uncommon for researchers to extrapolate findings from investigations considering non-Latinos and attribute them to this ethnic group (Sánchez, 2015).

It is important to highlight that the cultural context of the LGB person can generate complications in any attempt to conduct research and assess sexual minorities within the Latino community. To begin with, there is considerable diversity within each Latin American community (Connally, Wedemeyer & Smith, 2013; Santiago-Rivera, Arredondo, Gallardo-Cooper, 2002). A LGB person from Puerto Rico has a different experience than a LGB person from the Dominican Republic, Cuba or Argentina. Each country of origin has the potential of influencing a different set of values and challenges that contribute differently to the LGB experience of Latinos. Researchers must be aware of these cultural differences in order to holistically account for the LGB experiences within the Latino community.

The research conducted by Ryan, Huebner, Diaz, and Sánchez (2009) revealed that in contrast with Caucasian families, members of Latino families hold more negative attitudes towards lesbians and gays because of their endorsement of traditional gender roles closely associated with a heterosexist society. Latino gay men are also exposed to discrimination even within the LGB community. Ibañez, Van Oss Marin, Flores, Millet, and Diaz (2009) found in their research that 58% of Latino gay men were rejected sexually for being Latino. Within the same study, Latino gay men also reported that in a club with mostly White gay men they were made to feel uncomfortable because of their ethnicity. Such findings have implications for gay individuals from the Latino culture, particularly regarding self-esteem, internalized homophobia, and their ability to self-disclose their sexual orientation (Sánchez, 2015). It is not surprising that Latinos are less open to the idea of disclosing their sexual orientation (Sánchez, 2015). The negative

messages within their Latino culture combined with the prevailing stigma of a heterosexist society is also likely to impact the mental health outcomes of LGB Latinos. We know that when homophobia is internalized, the individual engages in a self-directed prejudice as the result of the negative perceptions and attitudes for not endorsing a straight lifestyle (Herek, 2009). Kappler, Hancock, and Plante (2013) established that some aspects of the individual's identity as well as their circumstances are associated with the presence and degree of internalized homophobia. Barnes and Meyer (2012) acknowledged that the internalized homophobia experienced by LGB Latinos detrimentally impact this ethnic group. These authors recognized that the personal set of values, attitudes, and religion of LGB Latinos are additional stressors that increase their vulnerability and prevalence of mental health disorders.

### **Parental Reactions**

Lesbian, gay and bisexual adolescents are disclosing their sexual orientation to parents at an earlier age than previous generations (Campbell, 2016; Saltzburg, 2009). Savin-Williams and Ream's (2003) research described that disclosure to parents happens approximately when the children reached the age of 19 years and disclose in a face-to-face encounter with the parent. Current research on LGBT disclosure reveals that the coming out experience is a stressful and life altering event for parents (Diamond & Shpigel, 2014). There is a paucity of research documenting how disclosing such identity unfolds for parents from the Latino communities. Saltzburg's (2004) research explored how parents of LGBT individuals ascribe meaning as well as how their parenting is constructed after learning that their children are lesbian, gay or bisexual. Saltzburg (2004)

suggested that some parents experience similar stages as that of their LGBT offspring in terms of their own identity development as parents of LGBT adolescents/young adults. However, Strommen (1989) concluded that a parent might also experience a series of stages when confronted with the news about their children's disclosure. For instance, a vague suspicion when a child does not behave in ways considered gender appropriate generates the stage of subliminal awareness. The following stage involves discovering the child's new identity and that stage is known as impact. The next stage is called adjustment, in which the parent deals with the crisis and keeps the new identity as a secret to maintain a sense of respect and to avoid challenging their professional, social or religious status. During the stage of resolution parents start a process of dealing with the idea of a non-heterosexual child; mourns the plans and dreams of having grandchildren and a traditional marriage for their children. In this stage parents learn more about homosexuality and revisit stereotypes associated with being lesbian, gay or bisexual. The last stage is considered integration, in which parents mourn their ideas and fantasies of a heterosexual child and learned about what constitutes being gay or bisexual while integrating all these factors in order to move towards acceptance of their child's new identity.

In addition to homophobia, stereotypes based on gender role expectations are considered salient concerns when parents learn that their offspring are LGBT (Holtzen & Agresti, 1990). Family dynamics are likely to experience changes. Parents often need to mourn their own plans about the future of their children and deal with the initial shock and grief. In describing their experience in advocating for LGBT rights and support for

parents of LGBT children and to educate the public, the organization Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbian and Gays (PFLAG) found that when a LGB person experienced their “coming out” their parents often go into the closet. Parents often experience secondary minority stress, and often struggle with the distress that resulted from anti-LGBT initiatives in their communities (Arm, Horne, & Levitt, 2009). Others experience fear of being criticized by other members of their families, a sense of sadness, guilt, and mood disorders like depression because of their perceived notions and stigma associated with homosexuality (Goodrich, 2009). Some parents even questioned their parental skills for not knowing how to provide physical and emotional support to their LGBT children (Goodrich, 2009). The experience of coming out for parents requires courage and a very personal decision to evaluate their attitudes as a result of the prevailing stereotypes and stigma traditionally associated with being LGB. In their efforts to support parents facing the coming out of their son or daughter, PFLAG created a series of educational materials to educate parents who struggle with disclosure issues. In one of their documents, “*Our daughters, and sons*” the organization underscores the importance of assessing the parent’s reactions to the disclosure paying particular attention to their feelings and the relationship with their children, their families, and also their friends because often times these parents lack the necessary coping skills to manage the news (PFLAG.org). For the most part, the initial post disclosure reaction generates a conflict between the parent’s existing views and biases towards homosexuality and the contrasting feelings of love and acceptance towards their children. Research also suggests that parents often fear for the

personal, social and physical well being of their offspring and the uncertainty of what might come their way (Goldfried & Goldfried, 2001).

A published article written by a psychologist and a clinical social worker revealed that when one of their sons was 7 years old they suspected that he was gay and both gained a sense of awareness that their child was different (Goldfried & Goldfried, 2001). Both parents were able to explore their fears, their feelings of guilt and the loss of their expectations of a marriage and children for their gay son (Goldfried & Goldfried, 2001). Nevertheless, they were very supportive of their son and were able to find the support they needed by getting involved in PFLAG. A contrasting perspective on parental reactions is presented in the following case. In Tampa, Florida a 3-year-old boy died after his father beat and slammed his son in an effort to prevent him from growing up gay (Rondeaux, 2005). According to the testimony provided in court by Nysheerah Paris, the victim's mother; the boy entered a state of coma that lasted a week. Eventually, doctors took the three year-old off life support and he died on January 28, 2005 as a direct consequence of the physical abuse he endured on the hands of his now convicted father Mr. Ronnie B. Paris Jr. (Rondeaux, 2005).

As observed, LGB adolescents/young adults face the prevailing challenges of a heterosexist and stigmatizing society but also the additional threat of being outcast by their own families. Of significance, is the notion that LGB individuals are considered a marginalized group whose minority status is not shared by their parents. Even after some progress and strides in terms of a more positive visibility in the media, advances in civil rights and legislative protections, LGB youth are often faced with parental rejection and

disapproval, physical assault, degradation, humiliation, and in extreme circumstances even death (Goldfried & Goldfried, 2001). However, if gay and bisexual youth experience more support than rejection from their parents they are more likely to sustain and affirm their LGB identity and also have lower levels of internalized homophobia. Furthermore, parental acceptance can buffer the lack of acceptance from others since gay/bisexual youth are less concerned about being accepted by others as a result of their sexual identity (Bregman, Malik, Page, Makynen, & Lindahl, 2013). D'Amico and Julien (2012) found that greater parental support towards the sexual orientation of their LGB offspring generates greater satisfaction and comfort, lower levels of suicide ideation, as well as less psychological turmoil in LGB youth.

It is reasonable to suggest that parents also experience some concerns when confronted with the coming out of his/her LGB adolescent/young adult. The reality is that serious disparities and discrimination prevails against LGB and transgender individuals particularly in regards to institutional discrimination. In the U.S. many laws prohibit the adoption of children, offer no workplace protections against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, no provisions to ensure employment opportunities and job security, civil rights are still limited, and LGBT individuals are oftentimes victims of harassment and bullying (Nadal, 2013).

### **Oppression against the LGB Rights Movement**

The LGB community has made significant efforts to be recognized as a sexual minority. However, such movement has ignited heated debates and controversies in different segments of our society since heterosexuality is the sexual orientation most

valued and reinforced in most contexts of the American society (Peterson & Gerrity, 2006).

The polarization of the religious perspectives pertaining to homosexuality has influenced the emergence of research in several important disciplines including human rights, LGBT studies, sexual ethics, and theology among others (Van den Berg, Bos, Derks, Ganzevoort, Jovanovic, Korte, & Sremac, 2014). These two oppositional forces have generated intense public debates but also a crisis within and between religious organizations in regards to their approaches to LGBT issues (Van den Berg, et al., 2014) in the U.S and in other parts of the world. The documented realities of the clash between religious groups and sexual minorities have also impacted national and cultural interpretations surrounding the issue. For instance, Hurenkamp, Tonkens, and Duyvendak (2012) revealed how right wing nationalists reject sexual diversity in the Western Balkans because of the lack of compatibility with their national identity. In contrast, the Netherlands has a more accepting stance in which they feel the need to defend and accept sexual diversity and a responsibility to defend LGBT individuals against fundamentalist Christian groups by declaring that an essential requirement for Dutch citizenship is the acceptance of sexual diversity. In North America, Canadian Catholic schools are subjected to the authority of their respective provincial government as established in their Constitution (Callaghan, 2014). However, the Roman Catholic Canons should not clash with the Canadian legal system and more specifically, with their Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms established in 1982. Interestingly, Catholic leaders in those schools have a tendency to dismiss and penalized lesbian and gay Catholic teachers in same sex

marriages by enforcing the Roman Catholic principles when they attempt to raise children with their same sex partners (Callaghan, 2014).

### **Civil Rights in the USA**

In pursuing equal rights and equal protections, the LGB as well as the Transgender community in the United States have encountered obstacles that have ignited divisions between social institutions. Some segments of the civil society consider the LGB equal rights movement as a legitimate attempt to ensure equal rights for every LGB individual. For other segments, it is considered a threat to the social stability and moral expectations of society. A rich discussion about moral values, politics, religion and sexuality are central elements of the debate that has resulted from the LGBT equal rights movement (Lemmer, 2005).

According to Barnes and Meyer (2012) in the U.S. many Christian groups have censored the claims for equality endorsed by members of the LGBT community. Among those religious institutions the Roman Catholic Church, the United Methodist Church and the Southern Baptist Convention have assumed a non-affirming stance towards LGB individuals because of their perceived sinfulness of their sexual orientation. In light of these divisions between those seeking the extension of civil protections for LGB individuals and those who oppose them based on their moralistic interpretation of the issue of homosexuality, it is reasonable to explore not only the foundation of such religious interpretations and the religious doctrine but also their teachings, and the impact on members of the congregation including LGB individuals and their families. In this

research I limited my analysis on the issue of homosexuality considering the tradition and doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church.

### **The Benefits of a Religious Affiliation**

According to Ellison and Flannelly (2009) individuals who practice a form of religion have better health related outcomes confirming a salutary effect that minimize the prevalence of depression and other forms of psychological distress. Individuals who are active members of a religious organization self-report improvements in their life satisfaction, wellbeing, and also personal happiness (Krause, 2004). In other words, those who belong to a religious organization have better health related outcomes when compared to individuals that do not practice any form of religion (Barnes & Meyer, 2012). Similarly, Bergin, and Jensen (1990) confirmed that among the benefits that result from such affiliation individuals have reported greater life satisfaction, longevity, a sense of purpose, more self-esteem and lower rates of distress and depression. Graham and Haidt (2010) confirmed that religious institutions endorse in their teachings to their followers the importance of practicing tolerance, acceptance, and a sense of fairness, love and to avoid harming others. Approximately, 72% of residents of the United States reported that their religious beliefs and their faith are significant components of their identity (Lease & Shulman's, 2003) and the foundation of their moral development (Lemmer, 2005).

Research has documented that 85 percent of citizens around the globe are affiliated to a religious institution that facilitated the formation of groups with common moral beliefs suggesting the strong endorsement of religions in every culture. In the

United States, approximately 70 percent of Latinos self-identify as a member of the Roman Catholic Church (Espinoza, Elizondo, & Miranda, 2005). The research conducted by Ellison, Acevedo and Ramos-Wada (2011) suggests that the strong endorsement of Christian values among Latinos has influenced the adoption of traditional views in regards to sex, family, and marriage in this ethnic group. However, other research has challenged the idea that all Catholics are equally conservative since non-Latino Catholics are more open to the idea of extending marriage rights to same-sex couples (Ellison, Acevedo, & Ramos-Wada, 2011).

### **Homosexuality and the Bible**

As a result of the universal presence of religious organizations in almost every cultural group and its influence to cultivate and promote the moral and spiritual well being of members of their congregations, it is important to ask why homosexuality and bisexuality is a divisive aspect among non-LGB affirming congregations. Historically, the Bible has been used as a point of reference for scholars and religious leaders. To explore such scriptures, it is imperative to investigate which Bible meets the scholarly standards and criteria to properly explore the specific passages that make reference to homosexuality considering the optimal translation of these texts. For this research we will use The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) because of its accuracy in translation and faithfulness to both the Hebrew manuscripts as well as the Greek New Testament. The NRSV is widely quoted by biblical scholars in most academic publications and it is considered the best available historical and objective biblical translation to engage in a scholarly exploration of these sources (Given, 2013).

### **Biblical References to Homosexuality**

According to Michels (2015) the Bible contains six specific passages that provide some references about homosexuality that apparently provide a narrative that justifies the oppression that historically has been perpetuated to LGB individuals that do not conform to the heterosexist expectations of most Christian organizations. For Michels (2015) the specific text of Romans 1: 26-27 has been used to clobber members of the “LGBT” community on the basis of a literal interpretation of such texts and the lack of responsible consideration of historical context. An important claim that points to the labeling of homogenital sex as “unnatural” is based on the Letters from Paul to the Romans in the statement on homosexual and lesbian sex that facilitates its study in rich detail:

Therefore, God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason, God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error (Romans 1: 24-28).

Helminiak’s (2000) argument revealed that what Paul meant by using the word “unnatural” referred more to social customs and not necessarily in accordance with a universal law. So, if something is characteristic, expected, consistent, ordinary, and if people act accordingly to such socially accepted standards that means that such person is acting in a context considered “natural.” The “unnatural” refers to women and men that had sexual practices out of the ordinary or simply behave differently from what was

generally accepted in such society. In other words, instead of suggesting that homogenital sex is unnatural a better interpretation suggests that the intention was to describe such sexual act as atypical. Furthermore, the term “para-physin” or “unnatural” was a term frequently used in the Roman Empire as part of the Stoic philosophy (Helminiak, 2000). Such philosophical outlook was also applicable to sexual acts that considered sex as a vehicle for procreation, so any other expression of sex violates such “natural” laws that apparently govern the universe (Helminiak, 2000). As a result of the prevailing ideas, worldviews and context, sex for pleasure, sex with a woman during her menstrual cycle, or sex with an uncircumcised man was considered “unnatural”. Natural in this case refers to what is socially and culturally prevalent so it is not inadequate to suggest that the word “customary” and the word “natural” had the same meaning (Helminiak, 2000, p. 85).

An alternative to the literal interpretation of the Bible was introduced with a concise analysis of Helminiak’s accounts of Leviticus in the Old Testament and the letter to the Romans authored by Paul in the New Testament. When considering the traditional interpretation associated with Paul’s Letter to the Romans, Michels (2015) directs his criticism to those that sustain their interpretation without any rigorous analysis but somehow continues to endorse a clobber condemnation towards LGB people by reinforcing false ideologies that do not represent the true context that prevailed in the Roman society. For instance, the modern conceptualization of gender is not “transferable” to the current notions of sex and body schema that characterize the Greco-Roman gender standards (Michels, 2015). According to Swancutt (2007) the Roman schemas pertaining to sexual or gender identity were not conceived as our present notions

of two-sexes (male and female) and were not egalitarian in nature. Such notions were conceived as following a hierarchical order and ultimately based on the privileges of one-sex; in which the masculine attributes were perceived as perfection and female bodies as imperfect “male-bodies.” Interestingly, a middle category of androgynous characterized as “less perfect” feminine attributes combined with perfect male attributes was also accepted.

For Romans, an individual’s gender was constituted by the sexual act in which that individual engages. In other words, the sex act for the Romans constituted a gender-identification act and was never conceived as a sexual orientation (Swancutt, 2007; Michels, 2015). Considering the above argument, it is important to decipher the target audience in Paul’s denunciation and its intended message to the Roman society.

Paul’s letter to the Romans was an attempt to decry the prevailing “immorality” that resulted from idolatry of false gods/goddess and the vices sponsored by the Gentiles (Michels, 2015). Apparently, Paul was specifically referencing the ritualistic cults of androgynous priests devoted to the mother goddess (Cybele, Attis) that prevailed in the Greco-Roman culture and times. Townsley’s (2011) research illustrates in graphic detail how these rituals transpired. Young males who aspire to become priests of Cybele’s and Artemis castrated themselves in order to be initiated into the order of the Galli. As stated by Townsley (2011) on the day of the Festivals associated with the Day of the Blood honoring Cybele’s and Artemis, the celebration was characterized as “bloody, cathartic, wild and orgiastic” in order to become an official priest of the order of the Galli. The male candidates got rid of their clothes and ran into the crowds and grabbed a sword

prepared for the castration act. When the castration occurs they will run through the city with their organ in hand and casts it into the house of his preference in which females will receive him and provided him with female ornaments. Such act will concretize his new androgyny identity as a Galli and as no longer a male. Townsley's research provides a provocative interpretation suggesting the possibility of Paul's intentions to decry these rituals and the cult to the Magna Mater precisely because of the worship of false idols, the wickedness of the Gentiles and by linking idolatry and the "unnatural" together.

### **Same Sex Relationship in the Bible**

Until recently some scholars endorsed the idea that Jesus never pronounced anything regarding same sex relationships (Zeichmann, 2015). Nowadays, scholars have successfully argued that Jesus might have encountered and even approved a same sex relationship between a Roman Centurion and his slave. According to the New Testament in Mathew 8: 5-13 as well as in Luke 7:1-10 these two apostles narrate the story of a Centurion living in Capernaum who requested Jesus aid to heal a slave that became ill. According to the Biblical passages Jesus healed the ill slave and commended the Centurion for his faith. The utilization of some specific words by these apostles suggest that the slave was considered a junior partner that was "precious" or "honored" to the Centurion for what some scholars suggest the implication of a strong emotional bond (Zeichmann, 2015).

After Jesus had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. A centurion there had a slave whom he valued highly, and who was ill and close to death. When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to him, asking him to come and heal his slave. When they came to Jesus, they appealed to him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy

of having you do this for him, for he loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us. And Jesus went with them, but when he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to say to him, Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; therefore, I did not presume to come to you. But only speak the word, and let my servant be healed (Luke 7:1-7). When Jesus heard this he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, he said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health (Luke: 7:9-10).

In the context of the Roman Empire it was acceptable for Roman soldiers to have sex with their slaves. Scholars contend that such encounter and healing event implies Jesus acceptance of same sex relationships and see the figure represented by the Centurion as a role model to emulate (Zeichmann, 2015).

### **Shaping Attitudes and Perceptions about LGB's**

Social institutions, including religious groups have the ability to influence public opinion in considerable ways. Furthermore, public opinion impacts the way societies establish the laws that either shape liberal or conservative policies around sexual minorities and sexual practices (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009).

The internalization that results from the information contained in the scriptures prompts the adoption of not only negative attitudes towards any non-heterosexual group but also a label that considers homosexuality as immoral and also abnormal (Herek & Capitanio, 1996). In fact, incorporating a set of conventional values and church attendance frequently results in the adoption of not so favorable attitudes toward LGBT individuals (Herek, 2000). For instance, fundamentalists religious groups usually would not provide help or spiritual support to individuals that endorse pre-marital sex; have a

non-heterosexual orientation, or have different views of God that differ from those adopted by the congregation until adjustments to their lifestyle or changes in their views have been adopted (Jackson & Esses, 1997).

As observed, some religious congregations use venues like the scriptures and doctrinal documents to influence anti-LGB attitudes and also use biblical passages to instill fear, a message of condemnation and intolerance as well as disapproving remarks to judge individuals based on their non-heterosexual orientation (Scheitle & Adamczyk, 2009). It is not surprising that attempts to modify the sexual orientation of LGB individuals have been endorsed by some religious groups by promoting conversion therapies (Rosenberg, 1994). Research has shown that such therapeutic modalities are not effective, that they further damage the LGB person (Shidlo & Schroeder, 2002) and are ethically questionable and unaccepted (American Psychological Association Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation, 2009). The prevalence of sexual prejudice and the resulting hostility against the LGBT person is according to Herek (2000) very prevalent in the U.S. Such form of prejudice is manifested oftentimes in its boldest form when LGBT individuals are victims of hate crimes (Arm, Horne & Levitt, 2009), or in more subtle forms of microaggressions (Nadal, Griffin, Wong, Hamit, & Rasmus, 2014) or by the lack of recognition of same sex relationships as well as in federal and state legislation that perpetuate discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation (Arm, Horne, & Levitt, 2009).

### **Intrinsically Disordered**

As an institution, the Roman Catholic Church is no different than other non-affirming religious congregations since the Catholic Church still considers homosexuality as “intrinsically disordered” (Congregation for the Catholic Education, 2005). Ingrained in society is the moral as well as theological notion that accounts for the expression of sexuality as sustained by the authority of religious organizations (Rohy, 2012). In the U.S, approximately 73 million individuals confirmed their membership as Roman Catholic (Pew Research Center-Religion and Public Life, 2015). However, the changing landscape of the U.S. society is moving towards the recognition and validation of civil rights for LGB individuals and communities. Such rapid changes in the recognition of equal protections for sexual minorities has intensified the pressure in conservative groups to oppose such protections based on the moral and doctrinal stands of religious leaders that represent non-gay affirmative Christian denominations. For instance, Ellison, Acevedo, and Ramos-Wada (2011) documented the Roman Catholic opposition to any antidiscrimination law or regulation that attempts to guarantee equal treatment and equal rights to a LGB person proposed by social institutions including government. The Roman Catholic Church has enacted discriminatory policies that negatively impact LGBT’s by prohibiting the recruitment of openly LGBT teachers or sport coaches in their schools and has vocally opposed the acceptance of LGBT in the military (Ellison, Acevedo & Ramos-Wada, 2011). Such policies suggest that being LGBT and working with children is somehow incompatible from a moral perspective. Interestingly, a contrasting perspective was revealed to the public in 2002 when an investigative team of journalist

working for the Boston Globe exposed the widespread sexual abuse perpetrated by Roman Catholic clergy in the U.S. against minors (Plante & McChesney, 2011). Many individuals blamed homosexuality as the root of the sexual abuse scandal within the Catholic Church. Tarcisio Bertone, the Secretary of the Vatican State at that time, emphatically established the gay-pedophile connection (Gibson, 2010). However, a direct link suggesting that being homosexual and being a pedophile has no validity from a scientific stand (Kappler, Hancock, & Plante, 2013). In fact, a report on this issue completed by a group of scientists at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in NYC determined that the majority of the priests who were prosecuted by the authorities for child molestation charges declared that they were heterosexual. Ms. Margaret Smith, an independent researcher from John Jay College conducting an investigation commissioned by the U.S Conference of Catholic Bishops concluded that based on the available evidence “we do not find a connection between homosexual identity and the increased likelihood of subsequent abuse from the data that we have right now.” (Martin, 2011). Furthermore, researchers pointed out that the incidence of sexual abuse has decreased although more gay priests have joined the Roman Catholic Church since the late 1970’s (Martin, 2011).

In their official documents and pastoral letters, Roman Catholic officials have disseminated an explicit condemnation of homosexuality by declaring that homosexuality opposes God’s natural order (Lynch, 2005). The Pastoral Letter: “*Always our Children: Pastoral Message to Parents of Homosexual Children and Suggestions for Pastoral Ministers*” is an example of such document. Always Our Children was commissioned by

the Committee on Marriage and Family for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in the U.S. The document was released in 1997 with the intention of reducing the latent tension and frustration of parents of LGB individuals and the prevailing doctrine of the Catholic Church in regards to the issue of homosexuality. According to Lynch (2005) the document exacerbated the animosity of all involved parties because some U.S. Bishops demanded that the letter explicitly considered homosexuality a disorder. The Bishop's reaction went further in suggesting that discrimination in the work place is justifiable for LGBT individuals if the job responsibilities of the person require them to interact with children (Lynch, 2005).

Violence against homosexuals is wrong, but this violence is caused by the claim that homosexuality is not disorder. When such a claim is made and when homosexual activity is consequently condoned, or when civil legislation is introduced to protect behavior to which no one has any conceivable right, neither the Church nor society at large should be surprised when other distorted notions and practices gain ground, and irrational and violent reactions increase.

Furthermore, the letter instructs Bishops to reject any legislation that has the intent of prohibiting discrimination and hate related violations on the basis of a gay, lesbian, and bisexual orientation.

### **Recent Socio-political and Religious Developments**

The expansion of civil rights across the United States of America now includes the opportunity for same-sex couples to seek marriage licenses. Based on the landmark ruling in the case of Obergefell v. Hodges, the United States Supreme Court ruled that laws prohibiting same-sex marriages violated the United States Constitution, specifically the protective clause of the Constitution's 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment (Southall, 2015).

Justice Anthony Kennedy explained that: “the right to marry is a fundamental right inherent in the liberty of the person. Couples of the same-sex may not be deprived of that right and liberty.” Justice Kennedy went further in underscoring that: “without the recognition, stability, and predictability marriage offers the children of these couples suffer the stigma of knowing their families are somehow lesser.”

Immediately after the Supreme Court ruling, lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender individuals and their allies celebrated the historic decision that ensured the security, stability and legal protections that until this point in U.S history were reserved to heterosexual couples. Before the ruling, the attitudes of most Americans in regards to same-sex marriage had slowly evolved. Until the landmark ruling in the case of *Obergefell v. Hodges* in 2015, same-sex marriage was legal in the District of Columbia and in only 36 States of the nation. Same-sex marriage is now legal in 20 different countries throughout the world (Editorial Board-New York Times, June 2015).

Ironically, after the court ruling some conservative groups raised their concerns and called for stronger legal protections on the basis of their religion to avoid discrimination laws and tax penalties for the religious affiliated business if they choose not to endorse anything associated with same-sex marriages (Eckholm, 2015). For instance, the president of Focus on Family, a conservative Christian group based in Colorado expressed their concerns by indicating that they were worried that Christians would be subjected to “prejudice and persecution” if they do not agree with the new constitutional ruling (Eckholm, 2015).

After the Supreme Court ruling, some civilians challenged the historic constitutional ruling based on their religious beliefs. Such was the case with Kim Davis, a Kentucky clerk from the Rowan County Courthouse that was refusing to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples in that state on the basis of her religious views and suggesting that she was acting “under God’s authority” because “same-sex marriage violates her Christian beliefs” (Blinder & Pérez-Peña, 2015). As a result of her refusal in the issuing of marriage licenses to same-sex couples that qualified for them David Bunning, a federal judge, ordered Ms. Davis to jail. Judge Bunning statements ratified the Supreme Court decision by indicating: “the court cannot condone the willful disobedience of its lawfully issued order... If you give people the opportunity to choose which orders they follow, that is what potentially causes problems” (Blinder & Lewin, 2015).

Irrespective of the support or the opposition to the Supreme Court ruling towards same-sex marriage the issue continues to generate challenges and debate. “Love Wins” emerged as the phrase that symbolized the end to decades of struggles and obstacles that the LGB movement endured on their path towards equality. Social media outlets captured the colorful expressions associated with the historic victory as well as the reactions from conservative groups throughout the nation. But the reality is that changes in attitudes and sentiments of the nation are somehow influencing changes in the laws and policies that are more accepting and tolerant to members of our society including LGB individuals, even outside of the United States.

The LGB community has made substantial progress in gaining civil rights in the Latin American region. Remarkable progress in terms of the extension of same-sex marriages rights has been adopted in Brazil, Uruguay, and Argentina. Also, cities like Santiago (Chile), Bogotá (Colombia), Mexico City and Cancún (Mexico) have enacted legislation allowing civil unions, anti-discrimination, hate crime laws, and court systems that protect LGB individuals from civil rights violations. Unfortunately, other countries within the region have experienced a period of stagnation (Corrales, 2015). For instance, Central America and the Caribbean are regions with underdeveloped mechanisms to extend and protect the civil rights of LGB individuals. These differences in civil rights landscapes across Latin America are the direct result of faith-based organizations that have embarked in a politically organized movement that vigorously opposes the advancement of civil and human rights for the LGB community. In describing the LGB political landscape, Corrales (2015) asserted that: “the politics of LGBT rights is not just the civil rights issue of our time but also probably the State-Church issue of our time.” With the intention to condemn and argue against the extension of civil rights in Latin America and the Caribbean, faith based organizations like Evangelicals and Roman Catholics have established alliances with conservative parties to limit the extension of civil rights to LGBT communities (Corrales, 2015). However, not all conservative political groups have adopted such conservative principles and in some instances, are more tolerant and accepting of LGBT demands like in the case of Argentina, Chile and Colombia (Corrales, 2015). Although some progress has been made in terms of the extension and recognition of LGB rights in Latin America and the Caribbean (like in the

case of Puerto Rico) the progress has been uneven in the region, leaving some LGB individuals without the protections secured in the more politically progressive countries in Latin America. Such context prompts us to underscore that even in countries with strong conservative religious institutions like the Roman Catholic Church, the state and church can reach some common ground to recognize the rights and dignity of Latino/a sexual minorities in that region.

It is relevant for this research to ask what other segments of our society are being influenced by the recent socio-political developments. What about religious institutions? The election of Pope Francis by the Roman Catholic Church bring the opportunity to explore the stands of the Church in regards to issues surrounding the LGB movement or perhaps the LGB person from a moral or spiritual dimension. After all, pastoral care is not a privilege limited to the heterosexual person. Is there a response in the horizon from the Roman Curia to members of the LGB community? The divisions and challenges in terms of civil rights have received the valid attention and perhaps the necessary resolutions from the perspective of the legal system. But how about the spiritual and religious needs of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender person? The Roman Catholic teachings and pastoral practices towards lesbians and gays, bisexuals and transgender individuals has been described as an enormous pastoral crisis that promotes institutionalized discrimination, alienation, and violence and discrimination not only to the LGBT person but also to their families (Dignity USA, 2015). Such lack of support from the Roman Catholic leaders and community does have an impact and detrimental consequences because of the lack of love and acceptance as well as the inadequate

pastoral care and support that non-heterosexuals deserve. LGBT Catholics continue to pay the stigmatizing price for not being heterosexual and continued to feel unwelcome in the Catholic Church, continue to experience fear and the threat of condemnation for themselves and their loved ones (Dignity USA, 2015).

Pope Francis has provided a sense of hope for those who would like a church that is more inclusive, accepting, and merciful. Nonetheless, the doctrine still considers homosexuality as “intrinsically disordered.” The Roman Catholic bishops are actively involved in generating a document on family issues as a result of a Synod that requires the participation of all bishops. The document created in consensus makes recommendations to Pope Francis on issues pertaining to the family and specifically to divorced and re-married Catholics and for those living together without being married. No argument has been made regarding the issue of same-sex marriage, although the document indicates that gay people deserve respect (Goodstein & Povoledo, 2015). Such effort on behalf of the Pope to endorse the meeting for all Bishops reveal that the church leader is assessing the church’s ideas of family and marriage or it is perhaps an indication that the church is losing track and also losing members who do not fit the nuclear family ideals endorsed by the Roman Catholic Church (Goodstein & Povoledo, 2015).

As observed, the dramatic changes in social ideas, civil rights, and policies and the controversies and debates that result from them, are likely to impact the families of LGB individuals including the Latino families. Latinos in the U.S. are now living in a society that recognized equality for all LGB individuals. Still, Roman Catholic parents of LGB adolescents and young adults continue to face the dissonance and non-inclusive

message that prevails in the Roman Catholic doctrine and pastoral care. For such reasons, this research aimed at expanding our knowledge and understanding of the experiences, behaviors, thoughts, worldview and opinions of Latino parents with LGB adolescents and young adults who are also active members of the Catholic Church and adhere to their teachings and doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The literature review captured important considerations associated with the parenting dynamics that resulted from the coming out of LGB individuals to parents and their families. A thorough review of the prevailing scholarly articles associated with the experiences of parents with LGB children captured the many issues regarding LGB rights in the context of the United States and particularly the existing divisions in society, based on the moral interpretation on the topic of homosexuality.

A comprehensive description of the sexual orientation developmental models of the gay, lesbian and bisexual sexual orientation were also introduced. Also, cultural considerations impacting LGB Latinos and the characteristics of Latino parents were contrasted using scholarly articles. The chapter also considered the Roman Catholic doctrine towards homosexuality and the biblical references used to illustrate the Catholic Church postures regarding homosexuality. A contrasting perspective was also introduced to underscore the prevailing debates in favor and against the Church's doctrine considering several sources that signal to a different interpretation of the scriptures regarding homosexuality. The literature also captured the recent socio-political

developments, conflicts and the impact of the victimization encountered by LGB individuals and their families.

The following chapter presents a thorough description of the research design and the rationale for the study as part of the overall research methods that characterize phenomenological research. A description of the qualitative tradition known as phenomenology is presented. The chapter also depicts the participant's selection criteria, instrumentation, a comprehensive description of the recruitment strategies and the rationale for recruitment, the step-by-step data collection and data analysis process. Lastly, the chapter ends with a description of relevant issues of trustworthiness including credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, as well as ethical considerations pertaining to this investigation.

## **Chapter 3: Research Method**

### **Introduction**

The literature review presented in Chapter 2 provided the opportunity to introduce the documented experiences of parents with LGB adolescents/young adults that prevail in the scientific literature. Although limited, the existing research presented some of the challenges encountered by parents with LGB children. The documented experience of Latino parents with LGB children has been scarce and not fully accounted for in the scholarly literature. For that reason, there was a need to fill the gap and explore this phenomenon in order to assess the experiences of Latino parents with LGB children, particularly those parents affiliated to the Roman Catholic Church.

In this chapter we provide a comprehensive description of the qualitative research method to be used to account for the parenting experiences of Roman Catholic parents with LGB children. A thorough description of phenomenology and its characteristics is presented considering the research design and the research questions that assisted the investigator in exploring this phenomenon. Other sections incorporated in Chapter 3 include the definition of terms, the rationale for the study, the researcher's role, a comprehensive description of the participants and the selection criteria followed by an explanation of the instrumentation, the recruitment strategies, the data collection procedures and lastly, a description of ethical considerations pertaining to this research.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

One of the theoretical traditions associated with the qualitative inquiry is phenomenology. With its roots in philosophy, phenomenology is a qualitative method

that allowed the investigator to explore a phenomenon and its meaning considering the views and perspectives of the participant's lived experience (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002). Phenomenology has its roots in the philosophical and pioneering work of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and Martin Heidegger. Husserl's conceptualized phenomenology based on the idea of subjective openness without undermining the methodology as a rigorous form of scientific inquiry. The term phenomenology has been employed in philosophical circles since 1765. However, it was Hegel who defined it in technical terms. Hegel's references to phenomenology is nowadays understood as "knowledge as it appears to consciousness." (Kockelmans, 1967). Such knowledge includes our senses, perceptions as well as awareness and experience (Kockelmans, 1967). Husserl's work included the development of the term "Epoque" a concept that makes reference to the elimination of suppositions and the pursue of knowledge above any potential doubt (Moustakas, 1994). A core value in phenomenology adopted by Heguel and Husserl underscores the importance of returning to the self in order to explore the nature and the meaning of things and their essence. Such rationale provides the foundation for the conceptualization of phenomena as a "building block of human science and the basis for all knowledge" (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenology research is a method of inquiry that emphasizes the wholeness of a phenomenon by underscoring the meaning, structure, and the essence of the lived experience. As a strategy, phenomenology aims to explore how humans experience a phenomenon considering the subjective descriptions of participants. Phenomenology is not invested in pursuing a prejudgment or presuppositions. Phenomenology promotes a

sense of openness to phenomena that is not limited by customs, beliefs, prejudice, habits or knowledge that would not account for the everyday experience (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology emphasizes subjectivity and the pursue of the essence of experience based on the individual consciousness (Husserl, 1965). Moustakas (1994) revealed that procedures associated with this tradition are characterized by the use of small amount of subjects and extensive interviews that could accurately capture the essence of the participant's experience. Such reasons provide the rationale for selecting the qualitative tradition of phenomenology to account for the parenting experiences of Latinos with LGB children instead of other qualitative methods. The source of data consistent with a qualitative tradition is based on semistructured open-ended questions that guide and facilitate the interviewing process in a semi-structure format to explore phenomena. In this case, the open-ended questions captured the experiences of Roman Catholic Latino parents with LGB youth by exploring how Latino parents mediate their identities as Roman Catholics and parents of LGB adolescents/young adults as well as how Latino parents experienced the coming out of their adolescents/young adults while mediating the doctrinal teachings of the Roman Catholic Church towards homosexuality.

Phenomenology requires the researcher to set aside any personal biases in order to only seize the experience of participants. For that reason, the researcher has included as part of this chapter an acknowledgment of the investigator's role, and any potential biases, described the rationale for using a qualitative method, and provided a comprehensive description of the sample, selection criteria, data collection and data

analysis, data validation methods, ethical standards and any limitations associated with the study.

### **Research Questions**

The focus of this research was to explore the parenting experiences of Latinos with LGB children and the Roman Catholic doctrine towards homosexuality. To adequately explore the depth of such phenomenon a series of questions were necessary to document the experiences of Latino parents with LGB children who are also members of the Roman Catholic Church. To accomplish such task, the study posed the following research questions to guide the exploration of the phenomenon experienced by Latino parents:

- RQ.1 How do Latino parents experience the coming out of their adolescent/young adult while mediating the doctrinal teachings of the Roman Catholic Church towards homosexuality?
- SQ. 1 What are the parent's beliefs about a LGB person?
- SQ. 2 What, if any, are potential conflicts that you experience from having a LGB daughter/son?
- RQ.2 How do Latino parents mediate their identities as Roman Catholics and as parents of LGB adolescents/young adults?
- SQ. 3 How do parents negotiate their religious beliefs with the relationship they experience with their children?
- SQ.4 What, if any, are the potential sources of conflict with the Roman Catholic Church and their position towards homosexuality?

SQ.5 What changes, if any, have you experience as a parent of a LGB child and as a member of the Roman Catholic Church?

### **Methodology**

Within the qualitative research tradition, phenomenology is a strategy that generates a comprehensive description that guides the reflective analysis of phenomena based on the essence and structure of the human experience (Moustakas, 1994). The scientist's role is to analyze such underlying structure of what is being experience by individuals and interpret the descriptions provided by the individual according to their subjective notions or situations. Qualitative research requires a dialogue driven by open-ended question to capture the participant's accounts of their stories (Giorgi, 1985). Phenomenology's aim is to determine the meaning of the experience for the individual who had such experience based on his or her own accounts (Moustakas, 1994). An important characteristic of phenomenology is associated with its emphasis on the very subjective interpretation of personal life events (Lary, 2015). The data is essentially the narrated account of the experience. Moustakas (1994) underscores that the fundamental goal resulting from the phenomenological tradition is the understanding of meaning considering the context of the situation ascribed to the individual's experience. As such, the researcher sought the very subjective experience of Latino parents with LGB children who are active members of the Roman Catholic Church to elicit the essence of their experience and capture, record, code and provide conclusions derived from the accounts of these parenting experiences. The resulting analysis generated some themes that captured the unique experiences of Latino parents with LGB youth.

Phenomenology was considered the optimal qualitative approach for this research because of its capacity to capture the wholeness of the perceived life experience of Latino Roman Catholic parents with LGB children. Another advantage of phenomenology was the flexibility it provided to reframe questions during the interview process by facilitating the re-wording and the possibility of expanding the questions during the interviewing process. Such flexibility enhanced the researcher's ability to capture the fresh perceptions of their experiences (Creswell, 2007). The intent was to elicit data that would allow the researcher to have a deeper understanding of the phenomenon to describe it and report it to fill the existing gaps in the scientific literature on this topic.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In order to distil the lived experiences of Roman Catholic Latino parents with LGB children it is relevant to understand the role and expectations of the researcher in conducting this study. A phenomenological approach prompted the researcher to be cognizant of the need to gain awareness of any prejudgment, beliefs, perceptions, biases and prevailing knowledge of the phenomenon. The researcher is an active member of the Roman Catholic Church, a gay man, an advocate for LGB and women's rights, and considers himself a social and fiscal liberal in the political context of the United States of America. Professionally, the researcher is an advocate and promoter of public health services for all individuals irrespective of their sex, gender or gender identity, religious or spiritual background, worldviews, philosophy, marital status, ability and/or disability, citizenship or immigration status, educational level and/or socio-economic status. Such characteristics have the ability to shape the researcher's way of life and thinking, but that

did not interfere with the researcher's ability to remain neutral and with a judgment free attitude throughout the course of the investigation. As a promoter of a qualitative method it was important to remain open and receptive to the individual's accounts of their experience when listening to their stories during the interviewing process (Moustakas, 1994).

The researcher's goal was to conduct a phenomenological study after Walden's University Internal Review Board (IRB) provided the approval to screen and recruit participants willing to be part in the study, collect the data, transcribe the data obtained from interviews, provide a thorough data analysis, and report the findings. The data collection for the study was based on in-depth interviews conducted in-person or by phone depending on the location of participants.

The purpose of an in-depth interview was to assist the researcher understand not only the experience but the meaning behind such experience as described by a participant (Seidman, 2006). Furthermore, the interviewing process allows the individual to reflect on their experience at a conscious level and express the symbolic meaning of their experience by relying on the use of language (Seidman, 2006).

### **Selection of Participants**

Participants for this research were Roman Catholic Latino parents of a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender adolescent/young adult who had previously disclosed his/her sexual orientation to the parent prior to the research interview. The parent was a member of the Latino community and considered himself/herself as "very involved" or "involved" as a member of the Roman Catholic Church. Involvement was defined as frequency of

attendance to Mass/worship, devotional/prayer groups, or an active participation to events organized by the Catholic Church. Participants were screened in order to ensure they meet all the established criteria (Appendix C). A comprehensive description of the research intent was provided in Spanish and/or English based on the participants preferred language. Recruitment notices were placed on the researcher's Facebook page and were also sent to the national organization known as PFLAG. The third recruitment method was sending the recruitment notice to the Church of Saint Francis of Assisi; a Roman Catholic Church located in NYC who has an LGB ministry. The Recruitment Section within this research provides a comprehensive description of the recruitment strategy considering all these venues.

To meet all ethical considerations and to avoid any potential conflict of interest or power relationships that risked jeopardizing the researcher's neutrality, no known participants were invited to participate. However, a warm and welcoming approach was endorsed in order for participants to feel comfortable and open to a dialogue conducive to a thorough exploration of the phenomenon under investigation. Participants were made aware of the sensitivity of the guiding open-ended questions. The researcher underscored the confidentiality and privacy of the information they shared in order to make these parents feel safe to openly express their thoughts, feelings and ideas throughout the data collection process.

As a result of the researcher's investment with this investigation awareness of any potential biases were examined during the screening, recruitment, interviewing, and data analysis pertaining to this research. The researcher's opinions, ideas and personal

worldview did not influence the development of the research. Rapport and strict adherence to the confidentiality protocols endorsed by Walden University's IRB and the APA ethical guidelines were maintained.

### **Instrumentation**

The questions pertaining to the interviewing protocol were developed by the researcher and reviewed by all members of the dissertation committee (Appendix A). To ensure its validity, the interview protocol was based on the theoretical framework of PARTheory (Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, 2005) and the literature review accounting for the experiences of parents with LGB children.

PARTheory introduces the parental acceptance-rejection phenomenon as an evidence based theory of socialization as well as lifespan development intended to understand the causes and consequences of a parents' accepting or rejecting behaviors (Rohner et al., 2012). PARTheory postulates that specific psychological, societal, community and familial factors are associated with the parent's ability to accept or reject their children (Rohner et al., 2012). Furthermore, the theory posits that the parent's religious beliefs and other related expressive beliefs and behaviors have a universal association with their own experiences of either parental love or parental rejection. PARTheory provided the framework to integrate empirical investigations on issues pertaining to parental acceptance and rejection. An important consideration in PARTheory is its attempts to understand the quality of the affectional bond between the parent-child as well as the symbolic behaviors pertaining to the expression of feelings including the physical, verbal and symbolic behaviors used to expressed either the

accepting or rejecting feelings. Such theoretical framework provided the context that facilitated the exploration of the phenomenon experienced by Latino Roman Catholic parents with LGB children.

The scientific literature has shown the importance of family acceptance and the associated health benefits in LGBT young adults (Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz, & Sánchez, 2010). In contrast, the perceived notions of rejection on behalf of parents towards their LGBT children were reported to predict an increased risk and use of illegal substances (Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2009) more depression symptoms, the adoption of riskier sexual behaviors, and more suicide attempts in LGBT youth (Ryan, Huebner, Diaz, & Sánchez, 2009). However, the experience of Latino parents after their children disclose their LGB identity has not been well understood in this ethnic community. For such reason, it was important to frame the interview protocol considering how Latino parents experience the coming out of their children. Also important was to explore how Latino parents mediate the influence of the Roman Catholic Church towards homosexuality. Their beliefs about sexual minorities, their response to the disclosure, challenges (if any) and how they will define their role as a parent with a LGB children in the context of the Latino family are necessary sources of data to assess the relevant constructs pertaining to the acceptance or rejection considerations introduced by PARTheory.

As a method of inquiry, phenomenology takes into account the meaning, structure and the essence of the lived experience of a person or group (Patton, 2002). To explore what a person or group is experiencing it is important to develop or utilized validated

instruments that can capture the essence and meaning of the phenomenon under investigation. The scientific literature provided examples of instruments and protocols with similar questions that were open-ended, semi-structured and conducted in an interview protocol developed for African American parents with LGBT children (Trahan & Goodrich, 2015). Such protocol served as a validated instrument to explore how African American parents experienced the disclosure of their LGB children. Some of the items asked specific questions about the parents' thoughts, beliefs, and feelings about the coming out of their children as well as the challenges, reactions and the impact it has in their identity as a parent and as a heterosexual person. Furthermore, the utilized interview protocol from these authors considered questions about the utilization of resources and how effective or ineffective those resources were for the parent experienced the phenomenon (Trahan & Goodrich, 2015). Trahan and Goodrich (2015) interview protocol served as guidance for the development of the interview protocol that guided the exploration of the phenomenon experience by Roman Catholic Latino parents with LGB children.

### **Recruitment**

The original recruitment strategy for this investigation consisted on placing several recruitment notices on Craigslist in both Spanish and English to elicit participants representing the diverse Latino population in the U.S. The recruitment notices on Craigslist were intended to target the capital cities with the highest concentration of Latinos (states with at least one million Latino residents) and also the states that experienced the highest population growth of Latinos in the U.S. by the year 2014 based

on the Pew Research Center (Pew Research Center, 2016). The use of Craigslist was considered in addition to the use of the LGBTQ Ministry of the Church of Saint Francis, an LGBTQ Ministry providing support for LGBTQ Roman Catholics in New York City. However, the Dissertation Committee requested the elimination of Craigslist as a recruitment venue and suggested the use of 3 venues: Facebook, the organization known as Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) and also the LGBTQ Ministry of the Church of Saint Francis of Assisi in New York City. The suggested changes were incorporated in the proposal and all pertinent information associated with the recruitment was described in details in Walden University's IRB application prior to their approval.

Before any screening or recruitment of participants began, Walden University requires the approval of the Internal Review Board (IRB). After the IRB approval notification was received, the researcher started the recruitment process. To recruit Roman Catholic Latino parents with LGB adolescents/young adults, the researcher considered the following recruitment methods as suggested by the dissertation committee.

The first recruitment method was to post the recruitment information using the researcher's Facebook page to make individuals aware of the research as well as to promote the recruitment and identification of potential participants. This recruitment method allowed Facebook friends, family members, and other acquaintances to know and share the recruitment notification among their social media networks in order to successfully recruit Roman Catholic Latino parents of LGB children using Facebook as a

recruitment venue. Approximately 650 Facebook friends who might know suitable candidates that fit the eligibility criteria were exposed to the recruitment advertisement.

The second recruitment method was to promote the recruitment of participants by sharing the recruitment advertisement with a service organization that provides assistance to parents of LGB individuals. The organization known as Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) is a national organization with chapters throughout the U.S. committed to assist parents and friends of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals. The recruitment letter to PFLAG was sent to their main office in Washington D.C. to promote the research among PFLAG members. The recruitment notice had the researcher's contact information in case they had further questions about the research.

The third recruitment method for this study was contacting the leaders of the Church of Saint Francis of Assisi; a New York City based Roman Catholic Church with an LGB ministry. The intent was for the leaders of the LGB ministry to disseminate the recruitment notice among the ministry members and make them aware of the research targeting Roman Catholic Latino parents of LGB children.

Finally, to facilitate the recruitment, the researcher utilized the technique known as snowball sampling. Snowball sampling or chain sampling is a recruitment strategy that facilitates the identification of potential participants by other research participants who might know individuals that fit the research eligibility criteria because they shared the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2013).

For every recruitment venue, the recruitment notice was made available in English and Spanish to ensure that potential candidates were aware of the research

investigation considering the linguistic needs and preferred language of the participants. The recruitment notice included the researcher's contact information and instructions on how to reach the researcher. After a potential participant contacted the researcher, several steps were conducted in order to screen and verify the eligibility criteria.

All potential candidates that emerged from these recruitment venues were screened to ensure they met all the participation criteria for the study (Appendix C). The screening process determined if a candidate was a good fit for the research. If the researcher determined that a parent was a good candidate for the study, the initial contact with a participant consisted of an introduction of the researcher and an explanation of the intent to complete an academic requirement towards a doctoral degree. The researcher assessed which form of communication the participant preferred and also underscored the importance of confidentiality and the need to safeguard and protect the information obtained from all participants in accordance with ethical and IRB standards.

The researcher communicated face-to-face, by phone or by email the intent of the investigation as well as providing a thorough explanation of the purpose and nature of the study. Participants were made aware of the estimated time necessary to complete the interview. The prospective participant eventually received by email or in person the Explanation of Study Form containing a formal introduction, an explanation of details and parameters of the investigation, general instructions, details regarding the compensation for their time and effort, and the contact information of the principal investigator and the sponsor institution in case the participant has any questions associated with the research. If the subject was interested in participating in the study

they notified the researcher by phone, in person or by email. This served as an acknowledgement that the participant understood the overall intent of the investigation.

Next, the researcher provided the participant with the Informed Consent Form and a socio-demographic survey via email, regular mail or in person as previously negotiated. The Informed Consent Form included further details about the study, the criteria for participation, the approximate duration of the interview and details about confidentiality. The letter underscored that their participation is voluntary and included language describing any foreseeable risk(s) associated with the investigation. The socio-demographic survey contains basic questions regarding the characteristics of these parents that assisted the research in describing the most prominent characteristics of the participants. Participants were encouraged to contact the researcher if they need additional information about the Informed Consent Form. Participants were instructed to sign and return (electronic signatures are valid) the Informed Consent Form. Once the researcher received the Informed Consent, the next step was to coordinate and schedule the time, date and the place for the interview. All interviews (by phone or in person) occurred in a private setting. For interviews conducted face-to-face, the researcher used his private office in Manhattan. For interviews over the phone, the researcher conducted the interview in his private home. In both venues (face-to-face in the private office or by phone) the researcher was able to ensure privacy and confidentiality in order to safeguard the protection of the data obtained from the interviews.

Before starting the interview, the researcher ensured that all participants had a clear understanding of what they consented to and were also provide the opportunity for

the parent to get clarification of any question he/she might have prior to the interview. At the end of the interview the researcher debriefed the completed interview and proceeded to provide the \$20.00 gift card. In instances in which the interview was conducted via phone, the \$20.00 gift card was sent via mail. The researcher then proceeded to thank each participant for his or her time and contribution towards this investigation.

Although qualitative studies do not require a large number of participants, to ensure sufficient representation of Latinos, the researcher aimed to recruit and interview approximately 10-15 Roman Catholic Latino parents with LGB children. The number of participants could be less than 15 participants if the data analysis shows that the researcher reached saturation.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

The collection of data for the study was based on the interview questions (Appendix A). Such data collection technique was accomplished based on the recording of the semi-structured open ended interview conducted with an individual parent. In qualitative inquiry, the unstructured interview is the optimal data collection tool because it provides the opportunity for having an open and conversational dialogue with the participant (Vagle, 2014). The recording and transcription of the semi-structure interviews allowed the researcher to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon at hand based on the answers provided to the guiding questions (Creswell, 2013; Seidman, 2006). In phenomenology all interviews are considered learning opportunities irrespective of the similarities or differences of each interview (Vagle, 2014). Although flexible, the length of the interview fluctuated between 40 minutes and 1 hour long

depending on each individual case and the willingness of participants to enrich the interview with details based on their unique experience. All interviews were conducted in a private setting and without any interruption that compromised the interviewing process. Creswell (2013) suggests the development and use of an interview protocol. For each separate interview, 2 different digital audio recorders were utilized to ensure the entire interview was successfully recorded. The interviews were conducted considering the participant's preferred language.

The data collection procedures suggest the need to establish clear boundaries associated with information gathering and mechanisms for recording information (Creswell, 2009). After such protocols were in place, the researcher needed to purposefully select participants that contributed to the understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. For this study, the mechanism that was used for the data collection was based on face-to-face interviews or phone interviews with individual parents who meet all the established selection criteria. The interviews were semi-structured and with open-ended questions (Appendix A) intended to elicit the recollection of events, opinions and perspectives of the Roman Catholic Latino parents with LGB children. When feasible, other qualitative documents (e.g., letters, e-mails, journal entries) were incorporated as part of the data collection strategy if parents' consent to the use of such materials.

All interviews were recorded using digital audio recording devices. One of the devices served as a backup in case the other recording device failed. The data collection process was done in private to ensure confidentiality and in an environment that

facilitated the participant's comfort in sharing their experience without making them feel uncomfortable or restricted to share their experiences because of the interview location. The interviews ranged from 40 minutes to 1 hour of duration. All recorded material including documents, tapes and the devices were secured in a locked file cabinet in the private residence of the researcher to ensure strict security and to minimize any potential breach of confidentiality in the management of the collected data. All participants that successfully completed the interview received the \$20.00 gift card incentive. The researcher verified that the contact information and pseudonym (Participant 1) assigned to the collected data was accurate during the exit interview. The researcher reached out to all participants by phone, mail or email depending on the preferred mechanism of communication indicated by the participant, to do a member checking. To avoid an unnecessary burden on participants, the researcher shared the initial interpretations of the interview responses to ensure the accuracy of the content and to reflect on the statements meant by each participant during the interview. If changes were suggested, the researcher edited the content and sought the approval of the participant to ensure accuracy. All participants who complete the interview participated in a debriefing procedure (exit interview) with the researcher. The debriefing session provided the opportunity for participants to ask questions and understand any additional procedures including the possibility of a follow up interview. Participants had the option to provide input or obtain clarification regarding any aspect of the interview. Participants were informed that upon their request they could receive a paper copy of the transcribed interview. Participants

were given the option to request an electronic copy of the final research project at the end of the investigation.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

In phenomenology several components are involved in the process of data analysis. According to Creswell (2013) the data analysis requires not only the ongoing reflection of the collected data but also the need to ask questions that facilitate the interpretation of the data while documenting our observations during and after the interviews. Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) suggest that the data analysis should not be a separate activity from data collection. These authors emphasized the idea of a qualitative research in which data collection and data analysis is conducted concurrently. Such dual task enabled the researcher to review the collected data and strategize to seek new or more detail data that contributes to fill any gaps or perhaps, enrich with details the existing data.

Next, the researcher completed an analysis of the context, emerging themes or significant statements or meaning units (Creswell, 2009). The search for meaningful statements is closely associated with the research questions that enabled the investigator to gain an understanding of the participant's experience as they relate to the phenomenon under investigation.

The collected raw data generated from the in-depth interviews to Roman Catholic Latino parents with LGB adolescents/young adults was organized and carefully transcribed by the principal investigator before conducting any analysis as suggested by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). A specific identifying label was assigned to each

participant file to safeguard the collected data. Each transcribed interview was thoroughly evaluated by the researcher. Additionally, notes were written in the margins of the transcriptions to facilitate the description and analysis of the interviews. Eventually, the focus of the data analysis was based on the captured words from the participant's accounts of their respective experiences. Essentially, the narrated words served as the necessary medium for the analysis.

The next step in the data analysis task consisted on the selection and assignation of codes. Such codes are considered a label whose purpose was to facilitate a concise description of the collected information. A code is used to concisely summarize what Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014) described as a “chunk of information” based on the collected data. A codebook is frequently utilized to guide the analysis that results from the interviews. A codebook (also known as a code list) consists of a record of the emerging codes to facilitate the organization or re-organization of data into categories (Saldaña, 2015). Using a codebook was an important step because the data obtained from interviews accumulates fast and also changes as the data analysis progresses. The researcher identified the emerging codes and provided a description of the code's content manually using paper and pencil on the hard copies of the transcribed data. The researcher utilized In Vivo coding, also known as “literal coding” in which a word or a brief phrase shared by the participant was utilized for the analysis of the data. The manual coding analysis facilitated the organization of such codes enabling the interpretation of the essence of the ideas shared by Latino parents during the interviews. A core component of the coding enterprise is the condensation of data that enables the researcher

to extract the most relevant and meaningful information. Often times the emerging codes reveal similarities in these codes. In such instances, the salient codes can be reduced in order to capture unduplicated themes, a step identified by Creswell (2013) as classification. When a code is assigned to a data chunk the purpose is to screen for reoccurring patterns of information (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Pertinent to this process is the acknowledgement that coding requires some flexibility. Codes can change and can further develop during the data analysis (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

The insight and guidance of the dissertation committee assigned to this research also added another layer of unbiased analysis to the coding process since capturing the “bigger picture” or the meaning of each participant’s story is at the core of the data analysis. During the exploration of these codes and the essence of the described experience, the researcher reflected on the events, their context, and the specific milestones that emerge from the participant’s in-depth interviews in order to distill how each participant experienced the phenomenon. The analysis of these statements prompted the researcher to detect clusters of meanings that were summarized as short sentences serving the purpose of creating or revisiting specific themes. The study findings and reporting were based on the emerging themes that result from the data collection and data analysis of the phenomenon.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

Qualitative research has a distinctive set of validation techniques that characterize and separate this type of research inquiry from quantitative strategies (Creswell, 2013, p.

245). Although there is no specific standardize framework to assess the validity in qualitative research (Vagle, 2014, p. 66), various terms are commonly used to assess the validity of a qualitative investigation. The work of Lincoln and Guba (1985) introduced the concepts of accuracy, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to ensure the validity and trustworthiness in research. Lincoln and Guba's concepts are the ones that the investigator used to formulate the validity within this research.

### **Accuracy**

The concept of accuracy makes reference to the notion that the collected data relates to the findings. The verbatim transcriptions of the recorded interviews as well as the utilization of the digital recording enabled the researcher to ensure the accuracy of the collected data. Every interview was carefully transcribed (typed using Microsoft Word) and hard copies were printed. The printed pages were proofread while the digital audio recording device plays on the background each interview to make certain that the typed data reflects the verbatim content of the interviews. This step provided the opportunity to detect any errors and also to prepare the data for further analysis and coding. An important tenant of phenomenology was to describe with precision and accuracy how participants are experiencing the phenomenon under study. For that reason, it was important to carefully evaluate the content of the transcribed interviews.

### **Credibility**

Credibility means that the results of a qualitative investigation are considered believable or credible considering the participant's point of view (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The value of the experience of Latino parents with LGB children was accounted

by the narrated lived experience as perceived by each research participant. Such accounts contributed to the credibility of this research, particularly if others with a similar experience recognized the descriptions and interpretations provided by the research participants. The credibility was then the result of an accurate description of the lived experience of participants if the reader can relate with a sense of familiarity to the provided details of the narrated experience.

### **Transferability**

The term transferability means that the findings and results of a qualitative investigation can be applied to other settings, populations, and circumstances (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability refers to the possibility that the findings associated with the research have a degree of similarities in other studies even outside of the context of my investigation. For this study, the researcher presented comprehensive details that allowed the data to be contrasted and optimally described as a response to the need for transferability. According to Creswell (2013) the use of “thick descriptions” enable readers to extrapolate information from the presented findings to other settings and contexts based on the similarities of the findings or the characteristics of the research. A “thick description” refers to the researcher’s task of describing and interpreting the experienced behavior and context associated with a phenomenon. Thick description requires the accurate description of the thoughts, ideas and feelings of the participants as well as the relationship among these thoughts, ideas and feelings (Ponterotto, 2006). When the reported findings show similarities considering the nature and context of the investigation, transferability can be feasibly attained (Patton, 2001).

It is important to underscore that the concept of transferability should not be confused with the concept of generalizability. The capacity to generalize findings to the general population is not so relevant in many qualitative studies. The findings pertaining to this research helped to describe the phenomenon as experienced by Roman Catholic Latino parents with LGB children but not necessarily to generalize these findings to the general population.

### **Dependability**

The term dependability suggests that the results of a qualitative research will be subject to change and instability (Creswell, 2013). The researcher had to account for the constant changes of the context in which an investigation occurred and how these changes affected the approach of the study. To achieve a reliable study, the focus was on the value of the recorded accounts of Latino Roman Catholic parents with LGB children. Dependability considerations included the optimal recording of the in-depth interviews by using a digital recording device that produced unedited data. Another consideration to ensure dependability required the correct transcription of the data based on the verbatim responses of the participants. The possibility of asking the same questions throughout the interview process prompted participants to answer all questions or enrich the answers with further details of their lived experience. During the data collection, data management and data analysis, the content of the narrated experiences were carefully reviewed to ensure dependability in each interview. Dependability is also substantiated when similar answers or statements are provided to the questions presented to the participants. Furthermore, the researcher described the steps involved in conducting the

investigation by utilizing a technique known as an audit trial as revealed by Shenton (2004).

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results could be corroborated or confirmed by other investigators (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The most common strategy to attain confirmability is known as audit strategy. The audit strategy requires the data examination of what Guba (1981) refers to as an external auditor. The task of an external auditor is to assess the process of the investigation by carefully reviewing all the data, the findings, and the researcher's interpretation to enhance the objectivity and diminish the researcher's bias. The researcher described his biases as well as the role as an investigator with the purpose of minimizing any biases, and keeping all personal ideas and connections with the topic at bay in order to achieve the recommended objectivity and neutrality expected throughout the investigation.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The American Psychological Association emphasizes the use of a written informed consent prior to the initiation of any research. Walden University's IRB also required the use of an informed consent. An informed consent form takes into account the selection criteria, the research purpose, the benefits and level of involvement of participants, potential risks, names and contact information in case a participant has any questions, a guarantee of confidentiality and the identification of both the principal investigator and the institution that sponsors the research (Sarantakos, 2005). All potential participants were informed on the nature and purpose of the study and were able

to read, ask questions or get clarification regarding any component associated with the consent form or the research. The consent form was available for their review and signature (electronically or in paper), depending on the location of the interview. The written information contained in the form was sensitive to the literacy levels of participants. Once signed by the participant and received by the principal investigator, the informed consent document was treated as confidential and a specific pseudonym was assigned to identify the participant's file. Any other documentation pertaining to that participant used the same pseudonym. All documents, recording devices, interviews and transcribed materials were secured in a locked file cabinet at the researcher's residency when not in use to minimize any risk that could compromise the confidentiality of the information. After 5 years of the culmination of the research all dissertation materials will be securely disposed of or shredded without compromising the participant's identity and following strict protocols of confidentiality.

### **Findings Dissemination**

Besides the contribution to enhance the scholarly information associated with the experiences of Roman Catholic Latino parents with LGB adolescents/young adults that is lacking in the scientific circles, this research also attempted to provide a space for Latino parents with LGB children to share their experience and their voices as an ethnic group and as members of the Roman Catholic Church. The scholarly findings associated with this investigation will also assist professionals within the field of psychology and other behavioral health areas to enhance their understanding as well as their competencies in working with Latinos experiencing the phenomena. The goal of this work is to serve as

reference to professionals seeking a better understanding of the family dynamics of Latino parents with LGB children. This research can also serve religious leaders, mental health professionals, policy makers and stakeholders to help foster positive social changes that promote the dignity, wellbeing and overall development of Latino parents as well as social justice and a more tolerant and inclusive society for sexual minorities.

### **Summary**

Chapter 3 provided a comprehensive description of the methodology pertaining to the research conducted to explore the experience of Roman Catholic Latino parents with LGB adolescents/young adults. The information presented in the chapter conveyed a thorough explanation of the elements that comprised the methodology associated with qualitative research and more specifically, the methods traditionally conceived within the phenomenology approach. The chapter takes into account the researcher's role and also presents the questions that guided the in-depth interviews that contributed to the analysis of the data. The chapter also outlines the strategies associated with the selection of participants, data collection, data analysis and a description of validity considerations and trustworthiness as well as the dissemination of the research findings. Lastly, issues pertaining to ethical considerations including the protection of both participants and the data as well as the informed consent were also included as part of the chapter.

## Chapter 4

### Introduction

The purpose of this research was to explore the parenting experiences of Roman Catholic Latinos with LGB adolescents/young adults. The limited number of studies in the scientific literature accounting for this phenomenon did not take into consideration the ideas, thoughts, reactions and overall experiences of parents from the Latino community. The lack of research prompted the investigator to examine the experiences of parents within this ethnic group in order to account for the unique experiences of Latino parents with LGB children who are also members of the Roman Catholic Church.

To understand the lived experiences of the Roman Catholic Latino parents with LGB children, the researcher considered phenomenology as the method of inquiry for this investigation. Phenomenology allowed the researcher to capture the essence of the lived experience of Roman Catholic Latino parents with LGB children by conducting semi-structured interviews to explore how these parents experienced the disclosure of the LGB identity of their children considering their affiliation to the Roman Catholic Church. The intent was also to understand how these parents process and integrate such experiences into their beliefs and relationships with their LGB children.

The interviews focused on two main research questions.

RQ.1 How do Latino parents experience the coming out of their adolescent/young adult while mediating the doctrinal teachings of the Roman Catholic Church towards homosexuality?

RQ.2 How do Latino parents mediate their identities as Roman Catholic and as parents of a LGB adolescent/young adult?

Chapter 4 provides an explanation of the relevant components that guided the data collection, data analysis and the study results including a comprehensive description of the participants, the setting, the codes, themes and the subthemes that emerged from the participant's accounts of their experiences as Roman Catholic Latino parents with LGB children.

### **Setting**

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) from Walden University authorized the principal investigator to proceed with the data collection after receiving the IRB approval notification (Approval Number 05-02-17-0137879) with the expiration date of May 1, 2018. The first step was to initiate the recruitment stage of the investigation by posting the Recruitment Notification on the researcher's Facebook page and by sending letters to PFLAG's Headquarters in Washington, D.C. and to the Director of the LGBTQ Ministry at the Church of Saint Francis of Assisi in New York City. After the recruitment notification was posted, potential participants communicated their interest in participating in the study via texts, via Facebook Messenger or by calling the researcher via cell phone. The investigator approached all potential candidates that were referred for the study. After a brief introduction, the researcher provided an overview of the investigation, informed participants about the interview protocol and also provided information about the incentive. At that time, information about the purpose of the investigation, participation criteria and all pertinent information regarding the Consent Form were

provided. A total of 19 participants expressed interest in the interviews. However, seven potential participants were disqualified because they were not Roman Catholic or because they were no longer actively involved with the Roman Catholic Church. A total of 12 participants qualified, provided the consent, and completed the interviews. All questions regarding the length of the interview, or the language used during the interview was discussed with the qualifying subjects as well as any relevant questions regarding the Consent Form, Participant's Screening Tool (Appendix C), the Socio-Demographic Questionnaire (Appendix B), and the Debriefing Statement prior to conducting any interview. None of the participants that were interviewed resided in New York, so the obtained consent was provided verbally and that consent was captured using the digital audio recorder in order to satisfy ethical protocols and IRB requirements. All interviews were conducted over the phone and in a private setting. To ensure confidentiality and to safeguard the privacy of the provided information the researcher made reference to the subjects by assigning a pseudonym (i.e. Participant 3 or Participant 11) during the audio recording. No names were included in the recording.

The length of the interviews varied depending on the amount of information and the details provided by the participants. The shortest interview lasted 26 minutes and the longest interviewed lasted 54 minutes.

### **Translation of Interviews**

As expected, a significant number of Latino parents with LGB children preferred to answer the interview questions in Spanish. A total of 8 parents responded in Spanish to the interview questions and 4 parents preferred to respond in English. According to the

translation guidelines recommended by Brislin (1986) an important consideration for researchers is to avoid missing important aspects of the phenomenon under investigation experienced by individuals from other cultures. For such reason, the investigator consulted with an independent medical interpreter/translator in order to avoid the imposition of terminology and conclusions based on concepts and/or colloquialisms that were foreign to the investigator.

To prevent the challenges of cross-language comparisons, the researcher and the consultant discussed thoroughly all the transcribed content of the interviews, including the metaphoric and colloquial language shared by participants in their respective interviews. When necessary, the researcher used brackets for clarification of language and to consider the context that helped grasp the expressed ideas and thoughts of the participants. As suggested by Brislin (1986) the search for a “cultural equivalent” guided the translation of the interviews considering the content, the intent, and the context. Such strategy facilitated and guided the adoption of the English language equivalent translation during the discussions with the consultant. For instance, one participant stated: “Mi hijo está fuera de liga” when responding to the open ended question regarding what are their thoughts about their LGB child. The literal translation of the Spanish phrase translated into English is “My son is out of the league” As observed; the word-by-word translation in this case can be confusing. It is relevant to indicate that this is a colloquial expression many Puerto Ricans use. As a result of the search for the English equivalent, the phrase “out of this world” was used because when considering the context, the meaning of the phrase used by the participant made clear reference to the positive qualities and the

values displayed by her gay son as perceived by his mother. Such was an example of the use of the English equivalent and the use of the necessary context recommended by Brislin (1986) and endorsed by the researcher and the consultant. It is important to mention that the researcher is a native Spanish speaker who completed his bachelor and master's degree in Puerto Rico and was formally educated in Spanish.

The expertise of the consultant also facilitated the verification of the translation of the interviews because of her familiarity with some of the expressions used by some of these parents and because of her prior professional interpretation and translation services provided to members of different Latin American countries. The researcher met with the consultant on five different occasions to go over the interview data. The researcher completed the transcripts and conducted a Spanish to English translation of 8 interviews conducted with Spanish speaking participants. The consultant used the translated interviews and conducted an English to Spanish translation of the same interviews. Any discrepancies were thoroughly analyzed and carefully discussed until the researcher and the consultant were in agreement with the translation. In some instances, the colloquial language used by some of the parents required further discussion between the researcher and the consultant. However, the translation exercise was carefully done to ensure the integrity of the language used and the content participants expressed.

### **Demographics**

A total of 12 Roman Catholic Latino parents with an LGB identified son or daughter participated in the interviews for the study. The ages of the participants ranged from 37 to 75 years old. The average age was 62 years old ( $SD = 10.79$ ). The names and

other potentially identifying information were removed to ensure confidentiality. To make reference to the parents' accounts of their experiences, their respective names were replaced with a participant number (i.e. Participant 5; Participant 9). Every participant in the study self-identified as Latino or Latina. A total of 11 parents were the biological parent of a LGB identified son or daughter. One participant was the adoptive parent of someone identified as a member of the LGB community. Since this investigation aimed to explore how Latino parents mediated their identities as Roman Catholic and as parents of an LGB adolescent/young adult it was important to assess the parent's level of involvement with the Church. In terms of frequency of Church attendance, 7 participants indicated that they attended Church very frequently and 5 participants mentioned that they attended Church frequently. In terms of the level of Church involvement, 8 participants indicated that they were very involved in Church activities and 4 participants responded that they were involved in Church activities. Because the investigation was intended for individuals identified as Latino, assessing the preferred language of the participant was an important consideration. A total of 8 participants indicated that they prefer to communicate in Spanish and 4 participants revealed that they preferred to communicate in English.

It is important to acknowledge that during the planning stages of this investigation, the researcher considered the possibility of interviewing Latino parents with a gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) identified son or daughter. However, none of the interviewed parents disclosed having a transgender identified son or daughter. For that reason, and at the request of the dissertation committee the "T" previously

included in the acronym LGBT was removed and the LGB acronym was adopted to accurately reflect the characteristics of the participants of the study. It is important to note that in many instances, other authors make reference to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning individuals in their respective research. In those instances, in which their work is being cited it is common to see the acronym LGBTQ throughout this investigation. All other relevant socio-demographic information of all participants is described in Table I and Table II.

Table 1

*Study Demographics*

| Age                |                 |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| Mean               | 62 (SD = 10.79) |
| Medium             | 65              |
| Mode               | 68              |
| Range              | 37-75           |
| Gender             |                 |
| Female             | 10              |
| Male               | 2               |
| Sexual Orientation |                 |
| Heterosexual       | 11              |
| Bisexual           | 1               |
| Educational Level  |                 |
| High School        | 3               |
| Some College       | 1               |
| Associate Degree   | 2               |
| Bachelor's Degree  | 6               |
| Country of Origin  |                 |
| Argentina          | 1               |
| Mexico             | 1               |
| El Salvador        | 1               |
| Nicaragua          | 1               |
| Puerto Rico        | 7               |
| Honduras           | 1               |
| Civil Status       |                 |
| Single             | 1               |
| Married            | 6               |
| Divorced           | 4               |
| Widow              | 1               |

Table 2

*Other Characteristics of the Participants*

| Participants   | Years in USA | Number of Children | Number of LGB Identified Children | Number of Years since Disclosure |
|----------------|--------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Participant 1  | 75           | 5                  | 1 Gay                             | 10                               |
| Participant 2  | 64           | 3                  | 1 Gay                             | 25                               |
| Participant 3  | 70           | 3                  | 1 Lesbian                         | 30                               |
| Participant 4  | 66           | 3                  | 1 Gay                             | 15                               |
| Participant 5  | 37           | 3                  | 1 Gay                             | 1                                |
| Participant 6  | 3            | 3                  | 1 Gay                             | 21                               |
| Participant 7  | 23           | 2                  | 1 Bisexual                        | 1                                |
| Participant 8  | 69           | 5                  | 1 Gay                             | 15                               |
| Participant 9  | 28           | 3                  | 1 Gay                             | 15                               |
| Participant 10 | 36           | 1                  | 1 Lesbian                         | 12                               |
| Participant 11 | 30           | 2                  | 1 Gay                             | 9                                |
| Participant 12 | 64           | 2                  | 1 Gay                             | 22                               |

**Data Collection**

The data collection process for this investigation started by posting a flyer with the recruitment information on Facebook, and by contacting the Director of PFLAG's headquarters in Washington, D.C. and the Director of the LGBTQ Ministry at the Church of Saint Francis of Assisi in Manhattan, NY. The intent was to connect with key staff

within these organizations, so they could promote the recruitment advertisement among their members.

The use of snowball sampling was utilized to promote the recruitment via social media networks of friends, family and acquaintances, who communicated with the principal investigator to refer potential candidates for the study while providing the contact information of all potential participants. All participants were thoroughly screened to ensure they met all the established participation criteria (Appendix C). Before the interview was conducted all participants received the explanation of the study. Participants were given the opportunity to ask any questions pertaining to the study. All documents and protocols were developed in English. However, all documents and protocols were also translated to Spanish in consideration of the linguistic needs of the non-English speaking participants.

After coordinating the time and date of the interviews, the researcher provided a comprehensive explanation of the content of the consent form to all participants and also described in details the explanation of the study. All participants provided an oral consent to conduct the interviews, to answer the socio-demographic questionnaire and to have the interview audiotaped. At the end of the interview the recording device and the backup device were stopped and the researcher requested the mailing address of the participant in order to send them their incentive with a “thank you” note. At the end of the interview a debriefing statement was also shared with all participants.

All interviews were conducted in private and over the phone using two digital recording devices. The interviews took place between the months of May 2017 and July

2017. The interviews were semi-structured and all questions used an open-ended format to enable the participant to share their thoughts and ideas related to their experiences. The data generated from the interviews was transcribed verbatim and typed using Microsoft Word as the word processor. The data was stored on a password-protected computer and a password protected document. The collected information from each subject did not indicate any identifying information. A description of all questions associated with this investigation is included in Appendix A.

### **Data Analysis**

The process of data analysis requires an active process of checking and reading the collected information prior to the coding stage. A code is a researcher generated construct that provides a symbolic meaning to the collected data that fundamentally summarize or condense such data (Vogt, Vogt, Gardner & Haeffele, 2014).

The coding of the data generated 105 codes. Appendix D provides a description of the 105 first cycle codes generated from the 12 interviews. The answers provided by each participant for each question is described as data driven codes. According to Saldaña (2013) coding is a subjective enterprise that allows a researcher some flexibility in the interpretation of the content of the data. After assigning the first set of codes, the researcher thoroughly analyzed the content of the interviews and started noticing some repetitive themes that helped evaluate the initial codes. The ongoing data analysis and assigned codes for each of the interviews prompted the researcher to dismiss some of the irrelevant data contained in the interviews. An example of irrelevant data within the interviews is “I was selected to receive an excellence award for teaching.” The

description of such event did not describe anything significant that enhances the understanding of the experiences of Latino parents with LGB children or their membership to the Roman Catholic Church. For such reason the code assigned to such event was dismissed by the researcher because of the lack of relevance to the purpose of the study.

The 105 original codes were further evaluated as part of the second round of coding, which generated a total of 25 codes. The 25 codes emerged as a result of a process that considered the similarity of the content of the data from the interviews. For instance, many parents provided in their narratives responses regarding how they learned about the LGB identity of their son or daughter indicating the following: “noticeable gay tendencies; always knew he was gay; suspicious about her daughter being lesbian; aware that he was different.” Such descriptions prompted the researcher to describe these experiences using the code “suspicion.” A similar process was utilized as a result of the data analysis that considered the immediate reactions of Latinos after their children disclosed their LGB identity. Latino parents described that they experienced: “confrontation among brothers; arguments among family members; and also difficulties accepting their gay son.” In this case, the researcher used the code “conflicts” as the code that best describes the overall experience of these parents during the second cycle coding process. Table 3 provides a description of all the first and second cycle assigned codes as well as their respective definitions. The further analysis of the 25 codes resulted in the adoption of 6 themes and 10 sub-themes that provides a comprehensive description associated with the narrated experiences of Latino parents. For instance, using the code

“conflicts” to describe the negative reactions of parents of this ethnic group allowed the researcher to understand that parents described different types of conflicts depending on their experience. Although the term “conflict” truly captures the essence of the experience of Latino parents, some described only a series of internal conflicts while others described conflicts that emerged in the context of the family. Other Latino parents described a series of conflicts with the Church or conflicts associated with the Latino culture. For that reason, the main theme “conflict” was adopted and a series of related but independent sub-themes were also adopted like: internal conflicts; family conflicts; conflicts with the Church and lastly, cultural conflicts. Table 4 provides a thorough description of how the second cycle codes were condensed in order to formulate the 6 main themes and 10 sub-themes that emerged from the participant’s data analysis.

Table 3

*First and Second Cycle Codes and Definitions*

| First Cycle Codes (105)  | Second Cycle Codes (25) | Definitions   |
|--|-------------------------|---|
| Acceptance in the family; respect for son; gays are loving people; same sex relationships are natural; parents should accept their children as they are; being gay is not wrong; never rejected her gay son; mother very accepting; having gay son is no reason for rejection; tolerance and full acceptance; acceptance helped me grow as parent. | Acceptance              | The development of a favorable attitude, respect and regard for having a LGB child.   |
| Noticeable gay tendencies; always knowing he was gay; suspicious about her being lesbian; aware that he was different.   | Suspicion               | A feeling or thought of the possibility of having a LGB child.  |
| Disclosure; disclosure to mother; disclosing made things easier; self-disclosure; coming out was unexpected.   | Self-disclosure         | When a person reveals information about himself/herself. In this context self-disclosure means revealing to a parent that the child is LGB. |
| Love without reservations; parents underscored the virtues and strengths of their LGB children; no changes in family dynamics; being gay is prevalent in families; perceptions of others not so important for the mother   | Love and acceptance     | Strong feelings of affection, warmth, respect and a favorable attitude towards someone who is LGB.  |

*(table continues)*

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <p>Conflict with sibling; family conflicts; brother not accepting; homophobia from godfather; confrontation among brothers; difficulties accepting gay son; mother worried about her husband's reaction; father was distant and overtly critical; coming out disruptive of family dynamics; arguments among family members; conflicts; internal conflicts.</p> | <p>Conflicts</p>                          | <p>Problems faced by the parent or the family as a system impacting interpersonal dynamics associated with the disclosure of an LGB identity.</p>                |
| <p>Institutionalized homophobia; homophobic people can harm LGB individuals.</p>   | <p>Homophobia</p>                         | <p>Hatred and fear of gay, lesbian and bisexuals associated with prejudice and discrimination.</p>   |
| <p>Mediation; conflict mediation.</p>  | <p>Conflict mediation</p>                 | <p>Conflict resolution through negotiation among all involved parties</p>  |
| <p>Hide information from husband; parent kept things inside her; mother remained silent.</p>   | <p>Secrecy</p>                            | <p>The practice of hiding information from certain individuals or groups associated with being LGB.</p>  |
| <p>Proud to have a gay son; No changes in parenting style; having a gay son is a blessing.</p>   | <p>Parental Pride</p>                     | <p>A content sense of attachment towards an LGB child's choices and actions for which the parents praise and celebrates with a fulfilled sense of belonging.</p> |
| <p>Pope is more accepting; Pope is supportive; family participates in Church; search for a more</p>  | <p>Endorsement of an accepting Church</p> | <p>The act of giving the approval or support to a Church with affirmative and progressive views towards</p>  |

*(table continues)*

progressive Church; Priest influenced the mother's decision to accept gay son; Pope perceived as an agent of change; lack of acceptance forced parents to search for another Catholic Church.

sexual minorities.

Rejecting a gay son is a sin; Christians should love not judge anyone; Church should be more open and accepting of gays; Church should be more progressive.

Church support

The ability of the Church representatives to provide comfort and emotional help to parents in distress.

More emphasis on God's authority than the authority of the Church; God is the only one that can judge people; God has the ultimate capacity to judge; respect for God's creation.

God's authority prevails

The notion adopted by parents that underscore the sovereignty of God beyond any other source of authority or power

Lack of agreement with the doctrine; Church needs to change; disagreement with Church persists; sexual orientation does not matter to God.

Disagreement with doctrine

The lack of consensus or approval of the current doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church towards homosexuality

Son advocated for what is right; jokes or people making fun of gays bothers me; my role is to support and protect him from any harm; mom advocated for gay son.

Advocacy

To speak or act on behalf of an individual or group in order to uphold their rights considering their point of view.

*(table continues)*

|  |                   |  |
|--|-------------------|--|
| Church is conservative; the Church has a history of child molestation; opposition from Bishops towards gays; Church is a source of division.     | Church rejection  | Dismissing or refusing an idea or proposal pertaining to the advancement or acceptance of sexual minorities within the Church.   |
| God is love and his creation is diverse; God is love and perfection; emphasis on God's Love.   | God's Love        | The sense of being loved unconditionally by God  |
| Lack of acceptance; negative reactions after disclosure; gay conversion not effective; LGB victimization.  | LGB victimization | The act of perpetuating an act of cruelty or unjust treatment for being lesbian, gay or bisexual.  |
| Mother felt like a failure; mother experienced strong emotional reactions; mother was constantly crying.   | Self-blame        | To find fault with or censure yourself for being the parent of an LGB child  |
| Mother accepted professional help; support; he was having a hard time so we all needed professional help; help is a function of being Christian. | Help              | To offer assistance, to promote the growth, development or improved functioning of others.   |
| Disapproval if Priest talks bad about gays; some Priests are resistant to change.  | Church resistance | The refusal to accept; the attempt to prevent something by action or argument. In the context of this research is to deny the inclusion of sexual minorities or adopt changes regarding the doctrine towards homosexuality |

*(table continues)*

|  |                              |  |
|--|------------------------------|--|
| Ashamed of my reaction; telling people about gay son was challenging and embarrassing.   | Self-shame                   | Feelings characterized by regret, self-hate, and dishonor.   |
| Proud of being Catholic and proud of having a gay son; proud to be Catholic.   | Consolidation of identities  | To reinforce or to make stronger all elements that constitutes your identity or identities.  |
| Avoidance of people and situations that judge or criticize gays; concern about what others might say; rejection has negative consequences like suicide.  | Parental Concerns            | A set of worries that parents may have as a result of having an LGB child.   |
| We expected him to have a traditional family as expected by the Catholic Church; homosexuality is socially wrong.  | Institutionalized homophobia | The systemic discrimination against LGB people perpetuated by social institutions.   |
| Father's rejection because of machismo; stigma prevails in Latino culture; homosexuality is taboo in our society; our culture only values heterosexuality; in the Latino culture being gay is considered an abomination. | Machismo                     | The strong emphasis on attributes that value respect, aggressiveness, a strong sense of honor, and the expectation of sexual prowess by males. |

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Table 4

*Emerging Themes and Sub-themes From Second Cycle Coding With Participants Data*

| Second Cycle Codes (25) | Themes (6)                    | Sub-themes (10)              | Themes and Sub-themes' Sample Participant Data  |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| Self-disclosure         | Disclosure of an LGB Identity |                              | <i>Participant 4.</i> He told us he was gay in his senior year in high school.  |
| Suspicion               |                               | Suspicion of an LGB Identity | <i>Participant 1.</i> I always noticed that my son had some gay tendencies and at that time I never questioned him, but I certainly noticed his behavior.   |
|                         |                               | Unexpected Disclosure        | <i>Participant 4.</i> One day he just came out and told us. He was seeing a young man from [location removed], and the news came out of nowhere.            |
| Conflicts               | Conflicts                     |                              | <i>Participant 3.</i> The whole situation was very challenging for me. It was very difficult. I could not wrap my mind around the fact that my son was gay. |
| Self-blame              |                               | Internal Conflicts           | <i>Participant 4.</i> So, you know it did hurt inside. It was a disappointment but that is also his life and I just had to learn to deal with it.           |
| Self-shame              |                               |                              |   |

*(table continues)*

Parental Concerns

Family Conflicts

*Participant 2.* It was very hard! It was problematic particularly for my husband. He was very distant, he was always criticizing him and at one point I had to intervene and tell my husband that his behavior needed to stop. But it never stopped.

Secrecy

Machismo

Cultural Conflicts

*Participant 4.* You know folks in our old culture (the Latino culture) deny it [homosexuality]. So, there was always a part of me that regrets it because he was my only son...and I expected him to have the life with the wife and children and you know... having the loving family.

Homophobia

Disagreement with doctrine

Church Conflicts

*Participant 3.* I think that the new Pope is so grounded and firm and I loved when he said: Who am I to judge others? However, there are many people within the Roman Catholic Church that are not in agreement with the expressions of the Pope. I think that the Church has created more conflicts instead of being an entity that solves problems. Instead of unifying people, they separate people.

*(table continues)*

Institutionalized  
homophobia

Church resistance

Church rejection

LGB victimization

Help Towards  
Conflict  
Resolution

*Participant 4.* Of course, I went to counseling as well ... just to learn how to accept that. I knew I needed to do so in my mind and in my heart...but still I needed someone to talk to. The experience of seeking help was a bit difficult in the beginning because it was embarrassing, but it was something helpful to talk with someone, and to learn to deal with it so in case someone asked or simply came out in a conversation, or if someone joked about a gay or lesbian, I needed to learn how to deal with those kind of people and the things they will say because it was my child the one they were joking about and they did not know.

Help

Conflict mediation

Advocacy

*(table continues)*

|                                    |                     |   |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|---|
| Church support                     | Church Support      | <p><i>Participant 9.</i> At my Church the priest knows about my situation but he has never said anything bad about my son. He used to say that [named removed] would get God's salvation because he is a very good person.</p>  |
| Endorsement of an accepting Church |                     |   |
| God's Love                         | God's Love Prevails | <p><i>Participant 11.</i> That the faith and the love that they [parents] have for God should not change because they have a gay son or a lesbian daughter. The love that they feel for God should not be determined by the opinion of homophobic people or what the Roman Catholic Church says about gays.</p>   |
| God's authority prevails           |                     |   |
| Acceptance                         | Acceptance          | <p><i>Participant 3.</i> I changed. I grew as a person after that. Both taught me to accept them unconditionally. It is their right to live their life the way they want to live their lives. I am talking about someone who is a really good person. They are both really good people. They help others without expecting anything in return. They are givers. It was not so difficult to accept them.</p> |

(table continues)

|                             |                        |   |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|---|
| Love and acceptance         | Unconditional Love     | <p><i>Participant 2.</i> The message I will give a parent is about acceptance... to not reject them. I even know about cases in which the gay person has committed suicide or attempted a suicide. We must accept them... period. That acceptance means that we must love them unconditionally, so they can really understand that we love them.</p>    |
| Consolidation of Identities | Identity Consolidation | <p><i>Participant 2.</i> I believe that God does not make mistakes. God's work is perfection. I respect his life [gay son's life] and the partners that he has brought to my house, and I must say that I do not have any problems with that. I see them as adopted sons. God is so wonderful, and I am no one to judge his decisions and creation.</p> |
| Parental Pride              | Parenting Pride        | <p><i>Participant 12.</i> Well, I can tell you that my son is wonderful. I think that if God grants me the opportunity of becoming a mother again, I really would like to have the same gay son that I have. I love him with all my heart. He is a marvelous human being.</p>   |
|                             | Catholic Pride         | <p><i>Participant 2.</i> Being Catholic is everything to me.</p>  |

Table 5

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*Emerging Themes and Sub-themes From the Interviews*

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1. Disclosure of an LGB Identity
    - Suspicion of an LGB Identity
    - Unexpected Disclosure
  2. Conflicts
    - Internal Conflicts
    - Family Conflicts
    - Cultural Conflicts
    - Conflicts with the Church
  3. Help Towards Conflict Resolution
  4. Church Support
    - God's Love Prevails
  5. Acceptance
    - Unconditional Love
  6. Identity Consolidation
    - Parenting Pride
    - Catholic Pride
- 

### **Trustworthiness**

To ensure trustworthiness, the researcher used the concepts introduced by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to assess the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability within this research. In conjunction with the guidance of a thorough literature review and the adoption of a conceptual framework, the researcher developed a set of research questions that assisted with the data collection and data analysis.

### **Credibility**

As discussed in Chapter 3, the accuracy of the data was based on the verbatim transcriptions of the recorded interviews. Two digital recording devices were utilized for each interview to ensure the accuracy of the narrated accounts provided by each

participant during the interview process. All of the collected data was transcribed from the recording device and typed by the researcher in a Word document to ensure the integrity of the content of all provided responses. After the initial transcript was created the researcher re-played each interview to ensure that the transcribed data was accurately captured word by word based on the content of the interview. This extra step helped detect any potential omissions that could compromise the integrity of the data and the responses provided by the participants. Credibility was attained as a result of an accurate description of the lived experience of Roman Catholic Latinos with LGB children.

### **Transferability**

Transferability is the capacity to generalize findings from a research to the general population. As indicated in Chapter 3, the concept of transferability is not necessarily the focus in qualitative research as it is in quantitative research methods (Creswell, 2013). The overall goal of this research was to describe the phenomenon experienced by Roman Catholic Latino parents with LGB adolescents/young adults. The researcher presented comprehensive details based on the narrated accounts of these parents and it is feasible to suggest that in some instances the provided “thick descriptions” enabled the researcher to contrast the data considering the setting, population, and context that guided the investigation. The task of the phenomenological research was essentially to describe the subjective interpretation of the experiences, behaviors, thoughts and context associated with the phenomenon as narrated by Latinos parents, but not necessarily to extrapolate or generalize the findings associated with the investigation. However, there is still a chance

that the themes that emerged from the interviews can be similar to the experiences of other parents from a different racial or ethnic group or religious membership.

### **Dependability**

To achieve dependability, the researcher focused on the narrated accounts of Latino Roman Catholic parents with LGB identified children considering the recording of the open-ended questions that guided the individual interviews. The raw or unedited data was transcribed considering the verbatim responses provided by each participant. Furthermore, the process of data collection, the socio-demographic descriptions of the participants, the process of data management, coding cycles and the data analysis that guided the development of emergent themes/categories was thoroughly described to facilitate the replication of the research and ensure dependability.

The dissertation committee chair, Dr. Susana Verdinelli, who is considered an expert in research methods, carefully reviewed the data content associated with the lived experiences of Roman Catholic Latino parents with LGB children. Dr. Verdinelli conducted a peer review of all interview transcripts. Such thorough revision was conducted prior to any data analysis or coding development in order to address any potential biases or any other consideration that could compromise the integrity of the data.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability is commonly attained in qualitative studies by conducting an audit. Chapter 3 provided an overview of Guba's (1981) recommendations for the data examination strategy to assess the data findings and the researcher's interpretation by an

external auditor. An external auditor serves as a reviewer with the goal of enhancing the objectivity and neutrality of the data while diminishing the potential biases of the researcher. My role as a researcher was described in Chapter 3 as well as a discussion of any potential biases that resulted from the researcher's connection to the topic. During the recruitment and interviewing stage, the researcher started reflecting on the interviews and was very attentive to any thoughts and feelings that emerged in order to remain neutral during the interviewing stage.

To further enhance confirmability, an independent analysis of a peer reviewer was conducted. The peer reviewer conducted an independent review of the data obtained from the interviews, the codes, the study results, conclusions and the interpretation of these results. The peer reviewer is bilingual in Spanish-English, Latina, and has solid experience in approving research protocols and investigations in the areas of health and human services in universities and in hospital settings. At every stage of the coding cycle, the researcher presented codes to the peer reviewer in order to establish the necessary inter-rater reliability. The peer reviewer conducted an independent analysis of the codes and discussed any discrepancies observed. These data discussions contributed to the selection, refinement and adoption of codes and emerging themes that more accurately described the shared experiences of the participants until an intercoder agreement above 90% was attained. The initial intercoder analysis of the first cycle of codes revealed a 74% agreement (78 out of 105 codes). The second cycle of codes produced an intercoder agreement of 88.5% (93 out of 105 codes). Further analysis of the discrepancies in codes produced a set of themes that were presented to the peer reviewer for analysis. The new

set of themes and subthemes optimally captured the narrated experiences of these parents. After the analysis, the intercoder review revealed a 96% agreement between the researcher and peer reviewer, consolidating the confirmability of the coded data. The interview transcripts, codes, and emerging themes were also thoroughly reviewed by the dissertation chair in close collaboration with the researcher conducting the dissertation.

## **Results**

Two main research questions guided the development of this study that explored the parenting experiences of Roman Catholic Latinos with LGB children.

RQ.1 How do Latino parents experience the coming out of their adolescent/young adult while mediating the doctrinal teachings of the Roman Catholic Church towards homosexuality?

RQ.2 How do Latino parents mediate their identities as Roman Catholic and as parents of a LGB adolescent/young adult?

A total of 8 interview questions addressed the first research question regarding how do Latino parents experience the coming out of their LGB children while mediating the doctrinal teachings of the Roman Catholic Church towards homosexuality (Appendix A). Interview questions 9 to 16 were created in response to the second research question that asks about how Latino parents mediate their identities as Roman Catholic and as parents of a LGB adolescent/young adult (Appendix A). Participants responded to the open-ended questions and the answers were audio-recorded and transcribed based on the order of the interviews. To ensure confidentiality, all the names of the subjects were changed to "Participant" and a number from 1 to 12 was assigned to each participant

depending on the order in which the interviews were conducted. All described names and locations were not disclosed by the researcher to ensure privacy and confidentiality. The results of the study are presented considering 6 main themes and the respective 10 sub-themes as presented in Table 4. The emerging themes and subthemes based on the research questions are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

*Emerging Themes and Subthemes based on Research Questions*

| Research Question  | Themes                               | Subthemes   |
|--|--------------------------------------|---|
| RQ.1 How do Latino parents experience the coming out of their adolescent/young adult while mediating the doctrinal teachings of the Roman Catholic Church towards homosexuality? | Disclosure of an LGB identity        | Suspicion of an LGB identity<br>Unexpected disclosure                                     |
|  | Conflicts                            | Internal conflicts<br>Family conflicts<br>Cultural conflicts<br>Conflicts with the Church |
|  | Help towards conflict resolution     |   |
| RQ.2 How do Latino parents mediate their identities as Roman Catholic and as parents of a LGB adolescent/young adult?  | Church support                       | God's Love prevails   |
|  | Acceptance<br>Identity consolidation | Unconditional love<br>Parenting Pride<br>Catholic Pride                                   |

### **Emerging Themes and Subthemes Based on Research Questions**

RQ.1 How do Latino parents experience the coming out of their adolescent/young adult while mediating the doctrinal teachings of the Roman Catholic Church towards homosexuality?

The data that describe how Latino parents experience the coming out of their LGB identified children exemplifies the complexities of the phenomenon as lived by the parent and the family. Although the experiences described by these parents are indicative of their overall acceptance and unconditional love towards their children, parents also expressed emotional turmoil, conflicts, internal struggles, and a sense of secrecy and fear for the well being of their children.

Latino parents expressed in the interviews a series of experiences that do not necessarily manifest in a sequential order or that are equally applicable for each parent or family. However, several common themes emerged from the analysis of the data revealing events that go from suspicion of an LGB identity, acceptance and/or rejection of the LGB son/daughter; significant conflicts, as well as mediation and advocacy strategies that assisted these parents in the consolidation of their identities as members of the Roman Catholic Church and as a parent of an LGB child.

#### **Theme 1: Disclosure of an LGB Identity**

The first theme that emerged as a result of the interview questions with Latino parents was associated with the disclosure of an LGB identity. The disclosure of an LGB identity refers to the act of self-disclosing the LGB identity of a person. In this case, the son or daughter of a Latino parent self-disclosed being gay, lesbian, or bisexual. In

exploring the experiences pertaining to the disclosure of an LGB identity two sub-themes emerged as part of the analysis: the first sub-theme was *suspicion of an LGB identity* and the second sub-theme was *unexpected disclosure*.

### **Suspicion of an LGB Identity**

One of the first sub-themes that emerged when Latino parents narrated their impressions about their children and their LGB identity was suspicion. In the context of this study, suspicion of an LGB identity refers to the act of having doubts about the sexual orientation of a child. The first interview question asked parents to share with the researcher their beliefs about an LGB person, including information about the daughter or son who revealed that they were lesbian, gay or bisexual. The interview data shows that 10 out of 12 parents revealed that prior to their children self-disclosure of their respective LGB identity, they were suspicious of their son or daughter's sexual orientation.

Participant 1 stated:

I always noticed that my son had some gay tendencies and at that time I never questioned him, but I certainly noticed his behavior. One time he had a problem with a partner and he told me: "Mom I need to tell you something" and then told me that he was gay. I told him "yes... I know" At that time he also decided to tell his brothers and sisters and he told them that he was gay and they responded that they all knew about him.

*Participant 7.* I suspected for a while that something was going on. However, I never asked questions because I always let my kids ask me things. She finally revealed to me that she is bisexual.

Some parents suspected that their son or daughters were gay or lesbian because they did not conform to the traditional gender role expectations of their assigned sex at birth. One participant provided in details the kind of acts that made her suspicious about her son.

*Participant 12.* I was suspicious and had some idea that he was different. Since he was a child he already manifested certain inclinations. I noticed such behavior since he was a child. I remember telling him [name removed] boys do not walk like that. He even wore my shoes and he did not walk like typical boys do. I also noticed that with time, that kind of behavior was progressing. So, I already had an idea that he was going to be gay.

### **Unexpected Disclosure**

In contrast with the majority of accounts regarding being “suspicious of an LGB identity,” for some Latino parents the news about their gay, lesbian or bisexual son or daughter was unknown and such disclosure was unexpected. Unexpected disclosure refers to the element of surprise experienced by parents when their children decided to reveal their LGB identity. One participant revealed the following statement regarding his experience when his son disclosed being a gay male.

*Participant 4.* One day he just came out and told us. He was seeing a young man from [location removed], and the news came out of nowhere. He told us he was gay in his senior year in high school.

It is important to underscore that although most parents suspected the LGB identity, the majority of the parents in the sample acknowledged in their accounts that the

coming out was a prerogative of the child. Latino parents were both cautious and respectful allowing their children the opportunity to self-disclose their identity when they were ready to come out to their parents or to other members of the family.

One participant narrated the series of strategies she used with her adopted son to prepare him to disclose, even when the entire family was expecting him to come out as a gay man.

*Participant 5.* At the beginning we kind of suspected he was gay because of his tendencies but he never revealed that he was gay to us. When he was about 14, he told my sister that he wanted to commit suicide, so she took him to the hospital to take care of him and to be treated. At that time, we all thought that such incident happened because he was not ready to come out and he was not comfortable in his own skin. We all had our suspicions including my sister (his biological mother that passed 3 years ago). One night he was really off, and very quiet. So, I asked him "are you ok? I just asked him have you questioned yourself? That is all I said. I did not ask have you ever questioned your sexuality or sex life? And he lifts his face with a smirk and answers me "yes." So, I told him that if you ever had any questions or wanted to talk about anything I am here for you. So, we ended up talking that night and he eventually came out to me and revealed he was gay.

The scenario presented by Participant 5 shows the complexities of the coming out experience endured by many LGB children. Even in situations in which members of the immediate family are out as gay or lesbian, the gay child still struggles with his own

sexual identity, even when acceptance is almost granted considering the circumstances and the existing relationship with his gay uncle and bisexual adoptive mother as revealed by Participant 5. Nonetheless, it appears as if LGB children struggle with their decision to come out to parents and siblings, potentially generating challenging conflicts like the suicidal threat described by Participant 5.

### **Theme 2: Conflicts**

The sample of Latino Roman Catholic parents with LGB children narrated a variety of conflicts that impacted them internally as well as the series of conflicts that manifested externally in their immediate and extended families. Latino parents also described many cultural conflicts that resulted from having an LGB child as a result of socio-cultural institutions and norms that prevail in our society. The emerging theme known as conflicts is defined as a disagreement, discord or friction in any interpersonal relation as experienced by Latino parents. Other subthemes described by these parents included internal conflicts (opposing emotional or motivational forces, attitudes, impulses in the same individual) family conflicts (problems faced in the context of the family), cultural conflicts (problems resulting from the prevailing views, attitudes, norms, and values endorsed by one's culture), and conflicts with the Roman Catholic Church (conflicts associated with the prevailing doctrine of the Church in regards to homosexuality). In many instances Latino parents described the multiple conflicts and frustration they experienced that resulted from having an LGB child when responding to the interview questions addressing their emotional state after the disclosure, how easy or

how challenging was coping with the LGB disclosure, how the coming out experience shape their role as parent, as well as what happened in terms of family dynamics.

### **Internal Conflicts**

In the context of this investigation the sub-theme of internal conflicts is defined as the opposing emotional or motivational forces, attitudes, and impulses in the same individual that generates significant distress in parents. Many parents described the internal conflicts experienced after their children disclosed their LGB identity. Research shows that the coming out experience has been described as a stressful event for parents of a LGB child (Diamond & Shpigel, 2014) and the findings of this research also suggests that it is a challenging event for Latino Roman Catholic parents with a LGB adolescent/young adult.

Although many parents described in their narrated accounts that they suspected that their children were lesbian, gay or bisexual, when their children disclosed their sexual identity some of these parents experienced a series of internal struggles that were so intense that even compromised their ability to function. The conflicts experienced impacted these parents in different ways. According to several parents some of these internal conflicts were manageable but others varied in terms of the intensity and duration of the conflicts. Some parents required professional help and family interventions that resulted from the strong arguments with their respective families. In some instances, parents confirmed in their narratives that these conflicts affected them for a long period of time.

*Participant 3.* For a long period of time I knew she was different and I did not want to admit that she was different. One day, she approached me and started talking to me about a woman that she met, and at that time I felt like a demon got inside me and I told her so many bad things. You have no idea how many bad things I told her, including that her friend was not accepted in my house. Talking about this makes me very very sad because I was so cruel. I was so bad. Even today, I feel terrible about the way that I treated her. When I think about the way I treated her I feel like a roach that has been squashed. This was really challenging to me. Because I thought that homosexuality was an abomination.

For another participant the emotional turmoil generated intense reactions that even manifested physically.

*Participant 6.* When my son told me he was gay it definitely had an impact on me. I noticed because one day I went to the beauty salon and the hairdresser told me that I was going bald right on top of my head. She even asked me if I was experiencing a challenging situation, because another customer who was having some difficulties was having exactly the same problem, so the hairdresser suggested me to visit a dermatologist. I went to the dermatologist and he asked me exactly the same question. At that time, I understood that my body was fighting the situation that I was having and I guess I was not handling things well.

Parents also described in their accounts feeling disappointed with the coming out news of their children and described the challenges and reactions, the shame, fears, feeling hurt, and their concerns for the well-being of their LGB children.

*Participant 3.* The whole situation was very challenging for me. It was very difficult. I could not wrap my mind around the fact that my son was gay. At that time, I was very disappointed and I was constantly thinking about what others may think about him or about our family.

*Participant 4.* So, you know it did hurt inside. It was a disappointment but that is also his life and I just had to learn to deal with it.

*Participant 9.* It was very hard for me. I wanted a son that was what we called normal you understand. There are people that do not accept them [LGB people] and make fun of them and harass them. So, that hurts me. That makes me feel very uncomfortable. After all it is my son and it hurts me to hear such things. I also felt at that time that he was not going to be happy because he was going to be judged and probably the victim of a lot of humiliation.

### **Family Conflicts**

Family conflicts were also prevalent in the sample of parents interviewed for this investigation. Family conflicts are defined as any problem experienced by parents as a direct result of having an LGB child that interferes with optimal family dynamics. For some Latino parents, the conflicts and struggles they experienced were not so much internal struggles because the element of suspicion possibly prepared them or made them more aware that the “coming out” was imminent. However, when participants were asked about the reaction of family members, some parents described multiple family conflicts when the other parent, when siblings, or when members of the extended family were not as accepting or tolerant to the LGB children as they were.

*Participant 1.* It was OK for me to deal with my gay son, however I struggled with a family issue that emerged because another son was not so accepting. That other son did not want to accept that his brother was gay. He is homophobic and at that time I had to deal with that. My other son knew his brother was gay, however when it was in the open, something changed for this other son. I think he reacted like that because he disagreed with a relationship that his brother was having at that time with a partner. He didn't accept that partner and it was a bit challenging for me because it was a conflict between two brothers and that created a conflict in the family.

A similar scenario was described by another participant who provided details about how the family dynamics with her husband were impacted by her son's coming out.

*Participant 2.* It was very hard! It was problematic particularly for my husband. He was very distant, he was always criticizing him and at one point I had to intervene and tell my husband that his behavior needed to stop. But it never stopped. My husband seriously considered throwing him [the gay son] out of the house. When I heard that, I told him if you throw him out of the house, he leaves using one door and I leave using the other [door]. In this house we have a shared responsibility and he is my son and I am not going to reject him because he is gay. It was hell... that situation lasted like that for more than 10 years.

Another participant narrated how her contact with family members changed forcing her to reevaluate the interactions with her extended family as a result of having a gay son.

*Participant 9.* With some people I simply had to cut ties with them because I have no interest in their opinions. It is not like I don't ever talk to them or anything like that, but things are not like they used to be in the past when they were part of family gatherings. But you need to understand that a son is a son and you protect them from harm, regardless of where the harm is coming from.

Parents in this sample also described instances in which it was necessary to not disclose the coming out news to everyone in the immediate and/or extended family to avoid potential conflicts or to simply respect the child's decision to disclose the news later. For such reasons some parents kept the coming out information a secret. Another reason described by Latino parents to keep the child's sexual orientation secret to their immediate or extended family was because they fear for the well being of their children after the disclosure.

### **Cultural Conflicts**

The sub-theme of cultural conflicts is defined as problems resulting from the prevailing views, attitudes, norms, and values endorsed by one's culture. In this research all participants had in common their Latino ethnicity and heritage. Within the Latino culture, homosexuality has been defined mainly in terms of gender (Diaz, 1998).

Research has previously documented the strong support for the adoption and maintenance of traditional gender roles among Latinos. According to Herek and González-Rivera

(2006) traditional gender roles is a significant predictor of attitudes toward LGBT individuals. It is not surprising that in many instances the conflicts faced by Latino parents were with the father of a gay son or with the mother of a lesbian daughter. For instance, one parent described the struggles that his daughter's coming out produced in his wife because the daughter's behavior as a child was not gender appropriate.

*Participant 10.* She told her mother that she was attracted to another woman during her first year in college. I noticed that for a while, my wife was just not herself...kind of acting very weird and one day I asked her what was bothering her. She told me that [daughter] told her [my wife] that she was confused about her sexuality and that she was seeing a female friend who was also attending college. My wife told me that I needed to talk to her. I noticed that my wife was very affected by this. I told her that I suspected that she [lesbian daughter] was different. To be honest, I had my suspicions because as a child she was more into boy's stuff [games] and I was not surprised at all.

Research has described Latin American culture as predominately male dominated (Carballo-Dieguez, 1989) and with a strong emphasis on machismo attributes that value respect, aggressiveness, a strong sense of honor, and the expectation of sexual prowess by males (González & Espin, 1996). When Latino gay males do not conform to such social demands they can experience conflicts that interfere with their sexual orientation as well as with their ethnic identity. One example was presented in the story narrated by one of the parents.

*Participant 6.* So, that was the first time that I was confronted with the truth. So we had the talk and I asked him what was going on with him. He started crying and then told me: “Mom, you know that I had been involved with several girlfriends, but I also like men.” So, I asked him how is this possible? He said: “I had a girlfriend because I wanted to avoid causing any pain to you. I wanted to try out with girls but I prefer to be with a man more than with a woman.” So, it wasn’t easy for me, although I had my doubts. But having doubts is not the same as facing the reality.

Another important consideration in this analysis is the importance of Familism. Familism is strongly supported by Latino individuals because of the emphasis placed on the relationships among members of the immediate and extended family. The relationship among members of the family contributes to an individual’s sense of security, worth, self-confidence and identity (Sager, Schlimmer, & Hellman, 2001). When combined, familism and traditional gender role expectations are two important elements that are heavily valued by members of the Latino ethnic group. However, having a LGB son or daughter can challenge traditional social expectations producing additional pressures and conflicts to parents with Latino LGB children. Such conflicts were observed in the data that resulted from the interview with one of the parents. Participant 4 stated: “You know... him being my only son; you think he will carry on your name and our traditions.” The narrated account of this parent also describes the marital and family expectations based on the interpretation of a traditional union between two individuals in the Latino community.

*Participant 4.* You know folks in our old culture (the Latino culture) deny it [homosexuality]. So, there was always a part of me that regrets it because he was my only son...and I expected him to have the life with the wife and children and you know... having the loving family. Just the typical marital relationship and family and the traditional marriage that we were taught in the Catholic religion that you know, it was the way it was.

### **Conflicts with the Church**

The Roman Catholic Church and its doctrine towards homosexuality has the potential of generating a series of conflicts that can compromise the quality of life of Latino parents as well as the overall functioning of the family and its dynamics. Conflicts with the Roman Catholic Church refer to conflicts associated with the prevailing doctrine of the Church regarding homosexuality. The question regarding how Latino parents negotiate their religious beliefs with the relationship they experience with their children and specifically, what is said in their respective Catholic Church about LGB people provided the framework to assess the experience of Latino parents who are active members of the Catholic Church. The following vignettes reveal the diverse conflicts experienced by Latino parents in responding to how influential was the Catholic Church in their decisions to accept or reject their LGB child and their opinions regarding the potential sources of conflict with the Roman Catholic Church and its position towards homosexuality and LGB individuals.

One participant discussed the issues encountered by her son when his uncle invited him to a spiritual retreat organized by the Opus Dei, a conservative group within the Roman Catholic Church.

*Participant 1.* My son's Godfather at some point invited him to a spiritual retreat with the Opus Dei and he [the uncle] is very homophobic. During the retreat, his Godfather was trying very hard to convince my son to stop being gay...and you know that you cannot do anything to change that person. There is no treatment to change someone that is gay. So, there was some confrontation between my son and his Godfather and he ended up leaving the retreat and he returned home because my son questioned the priest and the people that were attending the retreat. He told them that it is perfectly natural for him to be with another man, if the sexual act is mutually consented. But what he thought was wrong was when a priest molests children against their will and sexually abuse them. The Opus Dei is extremely conservative in regards to the gays. But I have to say that I was very proud of the fact that my son stood up for what he thought was right. So, he simply left, but expressed his ideas.

In responding to the interview questions regarding how parents negotiate their religious beliefs with the relationship they have with their LGB children, and their thoughts about being Roman Catholic and having a gay son, one participant narrated how he had to confront and reconcile his perceptions about the doctrine and the institutional demands of the Church. This parent decided to remove himself and his wife from participating in a spiritual community that challenged his relationship as a parent of a gay

son in order to avoid further conflicts that resulted from the lack of acceptance of LGB individuals within his Church.

*Participant 4.* Being raised in the Catholic tradition it has always been the man and the woman...just like Adam and Eve and you know you married, you conceived your children, and then raised your family. Now, with the new Pope and the different beliefs that he has...He has changed a lot, but you know a lot of the old priests, they do not believe in that change. Even the younger ones [younger Priests] that we have now have caused me to leave the Church that I have been a member of for a long time. I have been baptized in that church and have been going there since I was 12 years old, so I have been a member of that Church for about 45 years. We will go to a wedding and this priest will make a statement like: the weddings are for Adam and Eve, not for Adam or Steve. When I heard that I looked at my wife and I said to her I need to leave this Church. I do not want to be with someone like this [a Priest] because one day I am going to tell him something and you know, we thought it was best to just leave the Church, and we left the Church.

In the narrated accounts of this parent we observed how the cultural expectations of society and the traditional teachings of a social institution like the Roman Catholic Church regarding marriage can influence the notions of what constitutes a family. For some, such moral demands can be incongruent with the realities associated with having a gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender son or daughter leaving parents confused, disappointed and without the needed support to successfully cope and navigate the family

dynamics that Latino parents experienced after having an LGB son or daughter. Hence, the importance of recognizing that having a Latino LGB child adds significant pressures to parents and families because their children will not conform to these social and institutional expectations.

In response to the question regarding the parent's opinion about the way Roman Catholic leaders have handled issues surrounding lesbians, gays and bisexuals, one participant described in her interview her frustration with the Roman Catholic Church in enacting changes that can promote acceptance towards LGB individuals while instilling a sense of hope for a more tolerant Church.

*Participant 3.* I think that the new Pope is so grounded and firm and I loved when he said: Who am I to judge others? However, there are many people within the Roman Catholic Church that are not in agreement with the expressions of the Pope. I think that the Church has created more conflicts instead of being an entity that solves problems. Instead of unifying people, they separate people. So, now I think that they are trying to change the tone regarding homosexuality, but some people are very resistant to the idea because that is what they learned. I think that the Catholic Church needs to embark in a drastic change. The Church should focus more on what improves our condition as a human, instead of separating us and creating division among us. Lots of people talk about being Christian but they are constantly criticizing others and judging others. This is how I feel... I learned that God doesn't have any religion. I learned that God is love and that love is not conditioned to you being White or Black. I believe that God created people to be

different. Nothing on this earth is the same. The purpose was to learn how to live one with the other and to live in harmony.

### **Theme 3. Help Towards Conflict Resolution**

Another important theme that emerged from the interviews with Latino parents with LGB children was the concept of help towards conflict resolution. Conceptually, help is defined as the act to improve the status or well being of the individual or others. Conflict resolution is defined as a mean to resolve a dispute to facilitate a peaceful ending of a conflict. In response to the question regarding their experience seeking help to deal with the coming out news, some parents recognized the importance of seeking individual help in order to solve the conflicts and challenges that resulted from having an LGB child.

Latino parents described the role they adopted in order to minimize disruptions or tension in family dynamics or with themselves when responding to the question regarding what changes, if any, they have noticed in the way they conducted their parenting duties. Many Latino parents were challenged by the coming out news of their respective children and in many instances decided to seek professional help and support from their partners, friends or family members in order to start a process of healing and conflict resolution.

One example of the type of help and assistance that a parent described during the interview was to look for other LGB members who could serve as a role model for her gay son. One parent discussed that although she identifies as bisexual, she did not have any prior experience or knowledge to effectively deal with the presenting conflicts of her

recently adopted gay identified son. This participant revealed how she was able to seek help in order to solve her conflict with her lack of experience managing the coming out.

*Participant 5.* I got help from a gay friend of mine, because with me being bisexual, as many gay friends that I have I never raised a gay boy before. So, I reached out to a gay friend of mine and I said: hey I need your help and I need you to talk with my son and give him all the ins and outs and what to do and not to do. So, I asked my son if it was ok for them to talk and he said yes.

Another participant described the strategies she used to seek help to solve the conflicts with her family and acquaintances regarding their views towards homosexuality.

*Participant 9.* Some of the members of the family had shared their opinion and have quoted the Bible on how homosexuality is condemned and things like that. My response to them is that if you are a liar or if you gossip about another person or other people that is also considered sin. But people are always like that... but I have to recognize that there are some people that make fun [of LGB people] or make irritating comments and I do not like that behavior. For the most part, my family has always been very supportive. Those who were a bit resistant were obviously more challenging scenarios but at times it is better to simply ignore some people.

One participant recognized the importance of seeking help for his gay son because of the struggles and challenges, he was experiencing after his coming out.

*Participant 4.* At the time when he came out, we were also going through a lot of things, so it was kind of hard dealing with his thing [sexuality] and what he was

going through because he was having a hard time with this thing [coming out] and we did not know anything about it. He kept a lot of feelings inside and we were trying to give him help, not really trying to change him...but to have him understand who he was and be able to feel comfortable with who he was, because a lot of times these children get depressed and they do not think that they are good enough or you know to get him to come out and talk and to be comfortable with who he was.

Participant 4 eventually described the reasons why it was important for him to seek help as well.

Of course, I went to counseling as well ... just to learn how to accept that.

I knew I needed to do so in my mind and in my heart...but still I needed someone to talk to. The experience of seeking help was a bit difficult in the beginning because it was embarrassing, but it was something helpful to talk with someone, and to learn to deal with it so in case someone asked or simply came out in a conversation, or if someone joked about a gay or lesbian, I needed to learn how to deal with those kind of people and the things they will say because it was my child the one they were joking about and they did not know.

Another parent recognized the need to get help and accepted the assistance of her daughter in getting her an appointment with a psychiatrist.

*Participant 2.* My oldest daughter decided to take me to a psychiatrist and see if I could get something to calm me down (medication) because I didn't even want to

eat sometimes. The psychiatrist told me that I was the one that was wrong. He said that my son was very clear and well defined as a gay man and the problem is that you are the one that does not want to accept the fact that he is gay. So, eventually I realized that the psychiatrist was right and that I was the one facing the problem because of my lack of acceptance.

Another parent also required professional help in order to effectively cope with the challenges generated by her daughter's coming out. However, her visit to the psychiatrist left her more confused and frustrated. In describing her experience, the parent described that the psychiatrist's advice was to essentially not accept her daughter and her partner. In this case, the information provided by the psychiatrist did not resonate with this participant. Interestingly, such visit prompted her to engage in some cognitive negotiation with herself that made the participant more aware of the need to accept her daughter. After the visit to the psychiatrist, the participant described her self-help attempts to embrace and accept her daughter.

*Participant 3.* It made me more open... I realized that we are all different. That everyone should live their life based on what they believe is the best way to live life. No one has the right to judge others. Who am I to judge others? My role as a mother changed for good! I was more accepting and tolerant... and I needed to love her, not only tolerate, but to love her. You have no idea the impact that the words from the psychiatrist had on me...they moved me towards acceptance because you have no idea... I was like: "What Am I doing?" That question open my soul and my spirit, it was something else! Those words really changed me

because those were really strong words.... I do not know how to explained it...but it really transformed me.

For other parents, there was no need for help or assistance from a professional provider, friends or relatives since they did not encounter any issues accepting their LGB son or daughter. That was the case with Participant 8 who stated: “I did not have to seek help or anything like that.” Other parent, discussed during the interviews that they were the ones providing help and support as was the case with one participant who mentioned that his wife was the one struggling with the coming out of her only daughter.

*Participant 10.* The message I have is based on my experience and I think that it is important for parents that are having a hard time with this to get the necessary help if they can, because I know how difficult it was for my wife to deal with this. We talked a lot about it, and that really helped.

As noted, Latino parents experienced challenging reactions that impacted their ability to function individually, as members of the family, or as members of the community. In many instances, these conflicts produced significant distress in the parent, the LGB child, and among members of the extended family that required them to seek help. The data analysis of the theme pertaining to *help towards conflict resolution* described how Latino parents recognized the importance of seeking professional help and other sources of support. The presented vignettes portrayed many of the parent’s efforts to counteract the negative impact that resulted from the coming out of their LGB children.

RQ.2 How do Latino parents mediate their identities as Roman Catholic and as parents of an LGB adolescent/young adult?

#### **Theme 4: Church Support**

Religion plays an important role in the lives of many Latino individuals. The Church and its representatives are in many instances a great source of support, guidance, and comfort during challenging times. This was no exception for many Latino Roman Catholic parents that comprised the sample within this investigation. Church support is defined as the ability to assist or help someone or a group with their spiritual needs. In responding to the interview question exploring what changes parents experienced as members of the Roman Catholic Church after the disclosure, many parents acknowledged during the interviews their decision to discuss with their respective priests that they were parents of someone who is gay, lesbian or bisexual. Although in some instances the Church created conflicts, many parents narrated positive experiences that included the support from Church Ministries as well as direct support from Roman Catholic priests.

*Participant 2.* I have always been very Catholic. However, about 15 years ago I decided to go to a different church in [town removed] where my daughter used to go. The priests there are Jesuits and they are very open-minded. Obviously they also criticize the practice [of homosexuality] but not the [homosexual] person. I used to think that it was wrong and that we should reject the practice and the practitioner [the person]. One day a Panamanian priest arrived to that Church and he instilled a lot of love and kindness and I decided to talk with him. During the conversations I explained to him that I have a gay son and he told me that based

on the principles of Christianity we should not reject anyone. In fact, he stated that if I rejected my son then I was committing a sin. He encouraged me to accept him [my son] and that God will do the rest. Everyone in that Church knows about my son and he [the priest] even visits my son and my house. At the beginning I used to believe that God was going to reject my son for being gay. So, the Church was very influential in that decision.

It is relevant to mention that when parents seek out the advice and guidance from Roman Catholic priests, they are also aware that not everyone at the Church is equally supportive. Many parents recognized the prevailing stigma and lack of acceptance that prevails in Church because historically the Church has portrayed LGB individuals as “disordered” and against “God’s will.” However, many parents still seek in their spiritual leaders some level of support and guidance during their journey towards the acceptance of their LGB child recognizing the divisions that might prevail within the Church and its congregation.

*Participant 9.* At my Church the priest knows about my situation but he has never said anything bad about my son. He used to say that [named removed] would get God’s salvation because he is a very good person. So, the priest was very accepting but the rest of the people at the Church, I do not know. They do not know about my son and I do not know if they have an opinion about gay people. It is not something that has ever been discussed by members of the church. I have to say that I have never heard anyone in my Catholic Church making negative comments about a gay person.

Another parent also described in her interview the support she received from her Church and her priest.

*Participant 12.* At my church gay people are welcome. The only problem is that if the priest knows that a gay person has a partner and they are in a relationship the priest does not let them take communion. But if the person is single and goes to Church frequently it is ok. If the priest knows that they are sexually active, that for him is considered a sin, so they cannot participate in the Sacrament of Communion. The same applies to me because I was not married by the Church, since I was married by a judge [civil union], so for that reason the priest does not let me take communion either.

Latino parents described with optimism the role of the Church in advocating on behalf of LGB individuals particularly when parents illustrated their perception of the Pope and how he is seen as an agent of social change that is modifying the tone of the discourse towards LGB individuals. Such message is enabling parents to expect positive changes and a more tolerant environment towards LGB individuals within the Roman Catholic Church and in society. The expressions of one participant highlighted this emerging need for change.

*Participant 7.* It has been interesting because with the new Pope that we have, he seems to be more accepting than the other Popes. So, it seems like we are going in the right direction of bringing the Church out of the dark archaic ages. To bring it up to date because there are a lot of gays, lesbians, and transgender that are

Catholic, but they do not attend the Church because they feel that they are going to be shunned away.

As noted, Latino Parents described with enthusiasm how important, timely and relevant the figure of Pope Francis is in changing the tone about homosexuality while addressing the lack of acceptance of the Roman Catholic institution and its leaders towards LGB individuals. Some parents asserted the need for changes that could promote acceptance, inclusion and respect.

*Participant 4.* It is kind of hard to say...the new Pope...he has been more accepting of gays and lesbians and is trying to change things in ways that are more accepting, and we should accept them because we believe in one God and the Father all mighty and the creator of heaven and earth, so he created the gays and lesbians as well. Now, the Church has come to realize a lot of that and I guess the Pope and what he is trying to preach to this other priests...he is trying to communicate that, but you still have others that do not accept that or that do not believe that, they would not want to change... and you need to learn to change about these things.

A similar perspective was shared by another participant regarding the supportive efforts towards LGB individuals from representatives of the Roman Catholic community.

*Participant 6.* At the beginning, maybe 15 or 18 years ago, the Church really struggled with the notion of an LGB community. I remembered some priests saying that it was an abomination to have a gay son or a lesbian daughter. But I am so happy to see that the Church is evolving, and now see gay people from a

different perspective and even Pope Francis is trying to let LGB people go back to the Church, because they are all sons and daughters of God. So, who are we as humans to say this is bad? It is God's creation we are talking about and I do not think he [God] judges anyone. I do not think it is right to impose such judgment on them.

### **God's Love Prevails**

The morality and the negative impact of a judgmental attitude towards LGB individuals is a concerning topic for many Latino parents in the sample. One important sub-theme that resulted from the data analysis has to do with God's love. The emphasis on the prevailing love of God was a key factor that prompted parents to accept, love, and respect their LGB children. Parents shared their opinions regarding their faith, their experiences of either acceptance or rejection on behalf of the Church or their leaders, and underscored how their set of values and beliefs regarding God are the main consideration in terms of their faith and their actions. To some extent, it appears as if some Latino parents somehow minimized the authority of the Church and adopted the notion of God as the one and only authority that sustained their faith and directed their lives. One mother described how her experience with the Church molded her perceptions of a loving God.

*Participant 9.* At the beginning it was a little challenging because of what is stated in the Bible about homosexuality, but I realized that the Bible says many things about everything. Who has never lied before or gossiped? The Bible says to not engage in those things. So, then I realized that we are all sinners. The fact that

he has such sexual preference does not make him bad. It might not be what the Church expects but only God is capable of making such judgment. I know God is very merciful, but I do not think that He [God] will take that [homosexuality] into consideration. I think that the only negotiation I did was directly with God, because the reality is that as humans we all commit sin. Who is really free from sin? So, my son is human. I think that God will take into account the good in people, because my son is not causing harm to anyone. God is the only one who has the right to make such judgment. I really do not care what people might say about my son. I do not like to reveal that to other people to avoid hearing people making fun of homosexuals. But if we are talking about whether it is a sin or not I can assure you that not even the Pope can make such judgment. The only one is God.

For some parents, the notion of love and their faith in God are important elements to recognize and promote among parents who are struggling with the coming out of their LGB children.

*Participant 11.* That the faith and the love that they [parents] have for God should not change because they have a gay son or a lesbian daughter. The love that they feel for God should not be determined by the opinion of homophobic people or what the Roman Catholic Church says about gays.

### **Theme 5: Acceptance**

One of the most prominent themes that emerged from the analysis demonstrates what the researcher coded as acceptance. The term acceptance can be conceptualized as the favorable reception or approval of a gay, lesbian, or bisexual son or daughter. In other words, Latino parents assent to the reality of having a LGB child.

During the interviews, all parents described in detail their initial reactions to their son or daughter's coming out and how from that point on, they embark in a process of reconciliation that moved them towards acceptance. For Latino Roman Catholic parents, accepting their LGB children also encompass a series of values that are explored as sub-themes in this analysis. This set of values can be better understood considering the shared narratives that describe the openness of these parents in their statements regarding their unconditional love towards their LGB children described in their interviews. The notion of acceptance as well as the sub-theme of unconditional love will be further described as part of the results of this research.

The majority of participants in the sample had no difficulties describing their individual journey towards acceptance. For some, acceptance was not a significant conflict because there was an initial suspicion of the possibility that the child was going to eventually identify as LGB. Perhaps that was one factor that facilitated their degree of acceptance. One participant provided in her remarks how she was more inclined to accept her gay son without significant complications.

*Participant 1.* I accepted him completely since the beginning when I noticed his tendencies. When he told me, I felt a sense of relief for him...not for me. He was

the one that probably knew about himself but felt a lot of pressure before disclosing.

*Participant 2.* The message I will give a parent is about acceptance... to not reject them. I even know about cases in which the gay person has committed suicide or attempted a suicide. We must accept them... period. That acceptance means that we must love them unconditionally, so they can really understand that we love them.

For another participant, acceptance did not happen automatically, but with time and by remaining open to learn about the life of her lesbian daughter and her partner she was able to modify her prior conceptions towards LGB people and slowly moved towards acceptance.

*Participant 3.* I changed ... I grew as a person after that. Both taught me to accept them unconditionally. It is their right to live their life the way they want to live their lives. I am talking about someone who is a really good person. They are both really good people. They help others without expecting anything in return. They are givers. It was not so difficult to accept them.

Another parent described how accepting his gay son was not so much of a challenge for him or for his wife.

*Participant 4.* They [the family] were all accepting of him. I think now that his sisters probably knew more than we did. But they just never said anything and simply waited until he said something about it. But all my brothers accepted him. My wife's family accepted him. My wife accepted him. We understand that these

are different times and they are just people, their feelings, and just who they are. I guess we just accepted him and it was probably easier for us to accept him because we also had other family members who were gay and lesbian.

For another participant, accepting her daughter increased the trust of her daughter towards her. Such a milestone in the child-parent relationship was possible thanks to the recognition of the importance of accepting her daughter for what she is. This parent mentioned that when her daughter came out as bisexual she told her daughter: “there is nothing wrong with that. You know you are still my kid...you are still my daughter and I will love you no different.” Such response enabled her daughter to be more trusting with her mother, which was facilitated thanks to her capacity to remain open and loving to her daughter, regardless of her bisexual identity.

*Participant 7.* She trusts me more. She speaks more to me. She is more open. I understand her a little more because I think she struggled to tell me for a while and I think that was tormenting her a little bit, but now she is very calm and very open and she is fine.

One parent was asked what would have happened if instead of accepting her son she decided to reject him.

*Participant 12.* The decision to accept him was my decision. On the contrary, I think that we must love our children. Sometimes I see those parents who refuse to accept their kids because they are gay and to me that is wrong. To me, that will be a sin. That is something really grave. God gave us a mandate to love one another; to reject a son goes against that mandate. That is why I think that is definitely a

sin. I think parents need to understand that a child is a gift from God and that gift must be accepted the way it is. There is no need to reject a child because he is gay. We need to accept them as they are, with their deficits and with their strengths and virtues. Gay or not gay...we must accept them.

With acceptance, parents also expressed a series of changes that somehow helped them reconfigure aspects of their character by developing a series of values that were clearly observed as part of the interviews. With acceptance, parents also experienced an increased sense of unconditional love. A description of such unconditional love is presented here as the emerging sub-theme that resulted from their acceptance.

### **Unconditional Love**

During the interviews the researcher was presented with narratives that can be described as having both a rich and genuine emotional content. Unconditional love refers to the ability to love someone without the imposition of any condition that could limit the ability to express love. Every parent described in their respective accounts their respect and love towards their children regardless of their sexual orientation. Some of the interview questions explored if having a LGB child challenged their parenting duties or if the family dynamics were contested by the non-traditional expectations of the Latino community and society. Interestingly, all parents underscored that the love for their children and the parental responsibility of providing support and care for their children was the number one priority, regardless of their sexual minority status. One of the parents described the following thoughts regarding his unconditional love towards his gay son.

*Participant 4.* You brought this child into this world, you love him, and you raised them to be the person that they want to be. No matter what, it does not matter if they are gay or lesbian...it is your child and you love your child, you respect them, you support them and that is just what you do. Because, if you do not, you will lose them. I am so proud of my son, of what he has become and what he is going to be and that has nothing to do with his lifestyle. He is not going to carry my name but that is my heritage right there. That is the person that I brought into this world and I have to be there to support him. He is not doing drugs; he is not breaking the law. He is becoming a respectable young man and one day he is going to be a doctor and a professor. And I am so proud of that.

Another parent disclosed how loving and respecting her daughter and her partner was instrumental in changing her attitudes towards those who are different.

*Participant 3.* I am more human, definitely more human. I am not here to judge anyone. I am clear about that! As I said, I feel more human, more accepting, more compassionate towards my daughter and her partner. They are really hard working people who help others. I see how they behave and how they help my two other sisters. They are really great people. If it is my son or my daughter and if I love them, I need to respect what they are and how they decide to live their life. I have no reservations because if I truly love I should not have any reservations. So, the message is to love and to accept them unconditionally. A son or a daughter is a blessing and life is a miracle.

Participant 8 also shared the importance of expressing love and acceptance towards her gay son: “In my experience the only change is that I love him more and also more closeness. More acceptance.” She went even further when stating her thoughts about the impact of rejecting a LGB son or daughter. Participant 8 disclosed: “They [parents] need to accept things the way they are because we will cause more damage if we discriminate and reject them.”

### **Theme 6: Identity Consolidation**

The theme of identity consolidation emerged as part of the research analysis. To consolidate an identity means to make the identity stronger or more solid. One of the research questions that guided this investigation aimed to explore how Latino Roman Catholic parents of an LGB adolescent/older adult mediate their identities as parents of a LGB child and as an active member of the Roman Catholic Church. The intent of such open-ended question was to better understand how Latinos mediate their parenting identities considering the standpoint of the Roman Catholic doctrine towards homosexuality. The obtained data shows different perspectives on how these parents mediate these intersecting identities. Some parents expressed having no conflicts navigating these two identities while other parents described how they disagreed with the current Catholic doctrine towards LGB individuals.

### **Parenting Pride**

During the interviews, Latino parents described in their own accounts their feelings of love and appreciation for having an LGB son or daughter. Some of them even explained how having an LGB son or daughter made them more accepting, patient, and

more tolerant towards others. Besides that loving attitude, the interviews with Latino parents with an LGB adolescent/young adult also described how proud they are of their LGB children. Parental pride refers to the feeling of satisfaction for the achievements of their LGB son or daughter. During one of the interviews, one mother described her strong sense of pride towards her son.

*Participant 12.* Well, I can tell you that my son is wonderful. I think that if God grants me the opportunity of becoming a mother again, I really would like to have the same gay son that I have. I love him with all my heart. He is a marvelous human being.

Another parent also described how proud she is and how much respect she feels for her daughter.

*Participant 3.* The one that is a lesbian is my oldest daughter. What can I say about her? She is wonderful. She is the one that best understands and comprehends life and its challenges. I have a lot of trust in her. Sometimes she advises me and gives me lots of sound advice.

One parent described what he and his wife feel for his gay son. Participant 4 stated: "You know... we are very proud of him." All parents described with enthusiasm their overall impressions and positive qualities of their LGB children. Participant 9 was no exception: "Well, he is a beautiful human being... intelligent, independent and hard working. I could not ask more of him. As a human, he is fantastic." Participant 11 also mentioned some of the salient qualities of her son: "My son is an awesome guy. He is very good. He is very intelligent and very sweet. He is a great son."

As observed, Latino parents in this sample recognized the positive attributes they believe their children have, irrespective of their sexual orientation. Parents also mentioned the love and acceptance that other members of the immediate family felt including a strong sense of pride that resulted from having an LGB brother, sister, grandchild, niece or nephew within their Latino families.

### **Catholic Pride**

Another sub-theme that emerged from the interviews to Latino Roman Catholic parents with an LGB child was Catholic pride. Catholic pride refers to the admiration towards the Roman Catholic Church and its representatives in conducting their ministry. The question regarding how Latino parents experience the coming out of the adolescent/young adult while mediating the doctrinal teachings of the Roman Catholic Church towards homosexuality provided Latino parents the opportunity to describe their respective opinions about their experience having an LGB identified child and as members of the Roman Catholic congregation. Parents shared their thoughts with the researcher regarding how proud they are of being Roman Catholic. Although some parents shared their frustration with the prevailing institutional homophobia, every parent described a strong sense of hope in the new Pope and underscored the need for substantial changes in the conservative establishment. Parents acknowledged that the new Pope has provided an important message of acceptance and inclusion for LGB individuals in the Church enabling them to be more at peace with their Roman Catholic identity. Interestingly, the reason provided by these parents has more to do with the notion of a non-judgmental God, who is all loving and all accepting. The data shows that

some parents have a tendency to rely more on the figure of a God who does not judge any human regardless of their sexual orientation. For these parents, God's creation is perfect and should be respected. Somehow, that interpretation of God has helped these parents to consolidate those intersecting identities from both a moral and rational perspective. For one participant, consolidating these identities generated no conflict at all.

*Participant 2.* Being Catholic is everything to me. It is a source of strength. I will never stop being Catholic. I believe that God does not make mistakes. God's work is perfection. I respect his life [gay son's life] and the partners that he has brought to my house, and I must say that I do not have any problems with that. I see them as adopted sons. God is so wonderful, and I am no one to judge his decisions and creation.

Other parents demonstrated similar attitudes by revealing in their remarks that they have no conflicts with those two identities.

*Participant 4.* [Being the parent of a gay son] is not something awful or bad. I am not judgmental, and it really does not affect me in ways in which I hold grudges or think that it is wrong. I have my beliefs in God and family and I think everybody has their own beliefs of what they should be or how they should be. To me, as I said... it does not affect me or make me angry or disappoint me or anything like that. People know in my Church that I have a gay son and I feel very comfortable in that church because people there are more accepting of that. Fortunately, there are a lot more people that have come out [as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender] and that is great. I am glad that they have, because

dealing with this, trying to keep it a secret for being someone that you are not, it is not good.

Other parents like Participant 8 expressed in simple terms her consolidation of identities by affirming: “I do not have a problem with that [being Roman Catholic and being the mother of a gay son].”

During the interview one mother shared her opinion about reconciling her Catholic identity with her parental responsibility.

*Participant 5.* My parents got re-married like 10 years ago and I do not know why the priest kept going on and on about marriage been between a man and a woman during the ceremony. So, when you hear things like this, it makes you not want to go to church. But I had no problems negotiating my religious beliefs while caring for someone that I love and happens to be gay.

The consolidation observed in the expressions of Latino parents seems to indicate that the intersections of those two identities do not generate significant conflicts after some time has passed for parents to fully embrace their LGB child. The data shows that they are cognizant of their responsibility as parents and also about the moral mandate to love them and care for them as Christians. It appears that the majority of these parents respectfully affirmed their Roman Catholic identity although such affirmation is not entirely free of criticism to the Catholic Church’s standpoint regarding homosexuality. This is particularly true for parents who have not received some support from their respective Church and their leaders.

## **Summary**

The purpose of this investigation was to explore the lived experiences of Roman Catholic Latino parents with LGB children. Using phenomenology as a method of inquiry allowed the researcher to capture the essence of the lived experience of Latino parents. The semi-structured interview and open-ended research questions facilitated the exploration of how these parents experienced the disclosure of the LGB identity of their children considering their involvement and their affiliation to the Roman Catholic Church. The intent was also to understand how these parents process and integrate such experiences into their beliefs, relationships, and family dynamics with their LGB children and their family. A total of 12 parents met the criteria for participation and during the interviews they provided a rich description of their experience regarding their parenting dynamics, conflicts, help towards conflict resolution, and also shared their thoughts regarding how they mediate their identity as Roman Catholic, potential conflicts with the Church doctrine, and their respective opinion regarding the figure of God and its role in their lives. The emerging themes and sub-themes were thoroughly evaluated and incorporated as part of the results presented in this chapter.

Chapter 5 will provide a comprehensive description of the research findings, a section on the implications for social change, a series of recommendations for future research and the limitations of the study.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this investigation was to examine the lived experiences of Roman Catholic Latino parents with LGB children. The researcher considered phenomenology as the method of inquiry for this investigation in order to capture the essence of the lived experience of Roman Catholic Latino parents with LGB children. The limited number of studies that addressed parental reactions after a child discloses his/her sexual orientation does not take into account the experiences of parents of this ethnic group. Hence, the need to fill a gap in the scholarly literature to capture how these parents experienced the disclosure of the LGB identity of their children, how they mediated their affiliation to the Roman Catholic Church and how these parents process and integrate such experiences into their beliefs and the relationships they have with their LGB children. A total of 12 parents who responded to the Facebook recruitment notification met the participation criteria and agreed to participate in the study. Although several attempts were made to recruit participants from PFLAG and from the LGBTQ Ministry within the Church of Saint Francis of Assisi in New York City, these venues did not generate any responses from potential participants. With the consent of all participants, all of the interviews were audiotaped with two different recording devices to ensure the accuracy of the interview content and to facilitate the transcription of the collected data. After the transcription of all the interviews and in some cases the translation from Spanish to English of several interviews conducted with Spanish speaking parents, the researcher engaged in a process

of inductive analysis of the data. Such analysis allowed the researcher to identify emerging themes that were common to study subjects throughout the coding cycle.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The results associated with this investigation provided a description of the experiences of Latino parents when they were confronted with the disclosure of a child's LGB identity, their reactions, their acceptance or rejection of the child, the conflicts and mediation strategies, as well as relevant experiences associated with their membership to the Roman Catholic Church. Latino parents also shared their perceptions regarding the prevailing Roman Catholic doctrine towards homosexuality, the figure of God, and the importance of unconditional love towards their LGB children.

### **Disclosure of a LGB Identity**

Consistent with findings in the literature on the disclosure of an LGBT identity (Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003), Latino LGB adolescents/young adults with Roman Catholic parents are also disclosing their LGB identity to their parents. Research has demonstrated that parents of LGBT children often times suspect that their child might be LGBT when their behavior deviates from the traditional gender roles expectations (Diamond & Shpigel, 2014). Similar findings were observed in the accounts of Latino Roman Catholic parents with LGB children that were part of the investigation. Out of 12 parents that comprised the sample, 10 described suspecting that their respective sons or daughters were lesbian, gay or bisexual.

When describing what made them suspicious about their identity, Latino parents mentioned that their children displayed certain mannerisms, or that their sons were

effeminate or masculine in the case of females. Such description signaled the atypical gender role behavior(s) that contributed to their suspicion. When describing the series of stages experienced by parents confronted with the news associated with the child's disclosure, Strommen (1989) conceptualized such suspicion as subliminal awareness. Despite this, two of the 12 parents described that the coming out of their LGB children came out of nowhere, so they were not suspicious of the children's sexual identity. Instead, the coming out revelation of the LGB identified son/daughter surprised these Latino parents. Based on the narrated accounts of Latino parents, it appears as if having the suspicion that a child might be lesbian, gay, or bisexual somehow prepared these parents to minimize negative reactions or a rejecting behavior towards the LGB child. However, other parents described that it is not the same thing to suspect than to confirm that the son or daughter is gay, lesbian or bisexual. This finding is consistent with research indicating that parents might have different reasons to suspect about the potential LGBT identity of their child or are completely surprised with the disclosure (Freedman, 2008; Grafsky, 2014).

### **Conflicts**

The coming out experience has been described as a stressful event for parents of a LGBT child (Diamond & Shpigel, 2014) and the findings of this research also suggests that it is a challenging event for Latino Roman Catholic parents with a LGB adolescent/young adult. Latino parents acknowledged during the interviews the impact that such disclosure had in their lives. Latino parents mentioned a myriad of conflicts

including internal conflicts (sadness, disappointment), family conflicts, cultural conflicts and conflicts with the church.

### **Internal Conflicts**

The majority of the interviewed parents who experienced conflicts that resulted from the coming out of their LGB children described how the news often compromised their ability to function, the disruption in family dynamics and also the quality of the relationship with other family members like brothers or sisters of the LGB identified son or daughter. Such findings are consistent with studies that revealed that when children disclose being gay, lesbian or bisexual their parents experience strong emotional reactions that include anger, sadness, despair, feelings of guiltiness, and even depression (Campbell, 2016; Maslowe, 2012; Phillips & Ancis, 2008). The existing literature shows that many parents fear being judged; others questioned their parental skills, and other parents reported a lot of hostility and disapproval towards the LGBT identity of their offspring (LaSala, 2000). Maslowe (2012) found that parents also expressed a state of shock, anger, and feel ashamed after their son/daughter discloses being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. Research has documented that many parents revealed significant concerns about the potential marginalization, victimization and the prevailing stigma that their children will likely encounter after disclosing their sexual minority status (Diamond & Shpigel, 2014). Similar feelings and concerns were also prevalent in the sample of Latino parents interviewed for this investigation. In many instances Latino parents required professional help from counselors or psychiatrists to regulate their emotional

reactions, minimize internal conflicts, and to acquire coping skills to manage the consequences of the disclosure and any future challenges that could potentially emerge.

Although research has documented that some parents are usually preoccupied that their parenting behavior somehow contributed to their child's LGBT identity (Phillips, 2007) only one parent in this sample described such concern. The majority of the parents in this investigation were not concerned with the question of causality and some acknowledged that being LGB was part of God's plan and creation, providing some insights into the way they construct their moral views regarding sexual minorities.

### **Family Conflicts**

Existing research indicates that parent's fear being criticized by members of the extended family and experienced guilt and depression (Goodrich, 2009). The sample of Latino parents interviewed as part of this research also described similar experiences. Parents in this sample described instances in which it was necessary to not disclose the coming out news to everyone in the immediate and/or extended family to avoid potential conflicts or to simply respect the child's decision to disclose the news later. It is not unreasonable to expect that in many of their accounts, Latino parents and their LGB son or daughter often times engaged in a process of selective disclosure, in which the identity of the LGB child was concealed to other siblings, to the other parent, to grandparents, to members of the extended family, to close friends or to spiritual leaders within the Roman Catholic community.

The literature also suggests that parents must deal with the uncertainty of the future of the LGBT child as well as revisit their own heterosexist expectations and their

dreams of a heterosexual marriage (Goodrich, 2009; Grafsky, 2014). Such finding is consistent with the data described by Latino parents. Many Latino parents decided to keep the child's sexual orientation secret because they fear for the well being of their children after the disclosure. This is also consistent with existing research that describes the disclosure effect in the parent's identity, the child's health, safety concerns and the potential rejection LGBT youth will likely experience from members of the family and from the society for being members of a sexual minority (Butcher, 2014; Grafsky, 2014).

Conflicts associated with the acceptance of the LGB child were also prevalent when parents had to mediate conflicts with the siblings of their LGB child, with members of their extended families, with leaders of the Catholic Church or with society in general. The disapproving reactions from all these segments created the need for some Latino parents to adopt the role of an advocate in order to protect their LGB child particularly when segments of society ridicule or make derogative comments about LGB individuals. For Latino parents adopting the role of an advocate was necessary in order to safeguard the optimal functioning of their families. As stated by Participant 9: "a son is a son, and you protect them from harm, regardless of where the harm is coming from." This need for advocacy and support was also documented in the literature describing how parents engage in supportive behaviors like the demonstration of unconditional love and when educating others about LGBT issues (Baptist & Allen, 2008; González et al., 2013). The literature also shows that many parents even become LGBT activists by participating in LGBT events and by standing up to defend sexual minorities including their children (Freedman, 2008; Maslowe & Yarhouse, 2015).

## **Cultural Conflicts**

The data generated by the investigation is consistent with research that has documented that many LGBT individuals will experience discrimination and the effects of a stigmatizing society that often times engage in discriminatory practices on the basis of sexual orientation (Nadal, 2013). For such reasons some parents kept the coming out information a secret.

For some Latina mothers, it was necessary to let the father know the sexual orientation of their offspring while others decided to remained silent and keep the disclosure news a secret. Latina mothers cited the prevailing machismo in the Latino culture as a significant obstacle because of the significance that gender role expectations play in the Latino culture and the machismo attitudes endorsed by this ethnic group. Many Latina mothers described the machismo attitudes and homophobia endorsed by their respective husbands. Such divided opinions triggered many negative reactions and conflicts that were challenging to mitigate from a conflict mediation perspective. However, confronting these unique challenges were necessary to keep the family dynamics functioning regardless of the prevailing cultural norms and expectations. Nonetheless, many parents described navigating these scenarios as “a living hell.” Many Latina mothers witnessed the harsh criticism and rejection perpetuated by their husbands towards their gay son because of their strong adherence to cultural expectations regarding the prevailing gender norms promoted by machismo attitudes.

Not surprisingly, many Latino parents that described the struggles that resulted from the disclosure of their child’s LGB identity decided to seek professional help

including the assistance of psychologists, counselors, and psychiatrists. This finding is also consistent with existing research that demonstrates the need in parents to seek help and reduce the stressors that resulted from the coming out news of their children (Maslowe & Yarhouse, 2015). Such help is necessary so parents can effectively mediate the conflicts that resulted from the prevailing cultural and moral interpretations ascribed to homosexuality in the Latino community. This is also consistent with research that demonstrates that Latinos hold more negative attitudes towards LGBT individuals because of their strong support of traditional gender roles and heteronormative views (Ryan, Huebner, Diaz, & Sánchez, 2009).

### **Conflicts with the Church**

The message of hope that was captured as a result of the interviews with Latino parents contrast with the explicit criticism towards the Catholic Church that was so prevalent during the interviews. Latino parents expressed deep concerns for the role of the Church in promoting the victimization of sexual minorities and for the treatment that LGB individuals received from the Church. Furthermore, Latino parents recognized the import role that acceptance plays in the lives of a LGB person. In their remarks, many parents described the negative consequences that result from discriminating someone based on their sexual orientation.

Research shows that parents often reevaluate religious beliefs, particularly in regards to how affirmative and inclusive the religion is towards LGBT individuals (González, Rostosky, Odom, & Riggle, 2013). The data analyzed in this research suggests that conflicts with the Catholic Church's doctrine towards homosexuality

created a clash of views and perspectives that impacted Latino parents within this sample. For many, the Catholic Church's posture towards homosexuality is considered shameful, discriminatory, and incompatible with the love and acceptance personified in the figure of God. Some Latino parents described that the Church is archaic in their views regarding LGB individuals and criticized Church leaders for their lack of acceptance and inclusion of LGB people in the Church and its ministries. Many parents echoed sentiments of frustration and had to come to terms with a non-LGB affirming Church. Some parents described in their narratives their disapproval of such doctrine by directly discussing with Roman Catholic priests their disagreement. Some Latino parents even abandoned their places of worship that they attended for decades as a direct result of the messages of intolerance from Church leaders and decided to search for a more progressive Roman Catholic Church and for a priest that was more affirming in his views towards LGB individuals. This finding is consistent with prior research that reveals that the parent's membership in more LGB affirming religious denominations produce a more positive reaction to the child's coming out news (Grafsky, 2014; Maslowe & Yarhouse, 2015).

Many priests from different Latin American countries differ in their views regarding homosexuality. According to Corrales (2015) faith based groups play a significant role in any attempt to advance LGB rights in the Latin American region creating divisions and confrontations perpetuated by religious and conservative groups. It is not uncommon to observe that many Latino parents acknowledged that many priests make a distinction between the homosexual person and the homosexual act. Such distinction was also prevalent in the narratives of some of the parents interviewed for this

research. For instance, a gay man who is single and celibate can easily access the Sacrament of Communion. However, a gay man who is in a committed relationship and sexually active cannot participate of the Sacrament of communion according to a parent who disclosed experiencing such prohibition. This parent also recognized that the policy pertaining to the sacrament of communion was equally enforceable by the priest regardless of the sexual orientation of the person. In her case, she was not able to benefit from communion because she was married by the State (civil union) and not by the Roman Catholic Church.

An important finding that merits attention has to do with the way in which Latino parents minimized the non-affirming stance adopted by the Roman Catholic Church towards sexual minorities. Latino parents in this sample voiced their rejection to the prevailing doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church. The data that emerged from the interviews suggest that Latino parents have developed some cognitive strategies to re-interpret their realities as parents of an LGB child as well as their membership to the Roman Catholic Church in order to consolidate what appear to be two conflictive perspectives. The literature indicates that for many parents of an LGB identified individual the development of positive life skills and personal growth is attainable after dealing with the conflicts resulting from the coming out of their children (Gonzalez, Rostosky, Odom, & Riggle, 2013). When individuals encounter life events that force them to reject a social norm they are in what Pfaffenberger (2005) describes as a path to actualization. Examples of the rejection of such socially constructed norms endorsed by the Roman Catholic Church were observed in the data. First, Latino parents have

recognized that God, and not the Church; is the main source of authority and have undermined the authority of the Church and their representatives. Parents have expressed that the Church has made many mistakes in the past that has caused a lot of suffering. Many Latinos made reference to the abuses perpetuated by the Inquisition and also denounced the sexual exploitation of children on the hands of Roman Catholic priests. Other parents opted to ignore the messages that promoted division or lack of acceptance on behalf of the Church. It is important to recognize the diverse opinions and attitudes described by Latino parents with an LGB child when narrating their personal experiences and opinions. Some parents described their frustration with Church leaders while others have emphasized the strong support and acceptance that has originated from priests, from Church ministries and from members of the Catholic Congregation towards parents and their LGB offspring. However, other parents opted to remained silent and not reveal anything pertaining to the coming out of their children in their respective places of worship in order to avoid conflicts with the Church and with their representatives.

### **Help Towards Conflict Resolution**

Many Latino parents recognized the struggles they faced as a result of the coming out of their LGB child. The collected data shows that Roman Catholic Latino parents engaged in a process of conflict resolution to avoid divisions and conflicts within their immediate or extended family and in their socio-cultural environments. Many parents described how they adopted the role of an advocate between the LGB identified son or daughter and the rest of the family. The role of mediator was perhaps more salient when only one parent (typically the mother of a gay son) learned about the LGB identity of her

child and had to mediate between her son and her husband the differences in opinions and values surrounding sexual minorities. Some of these experiences provided the context to validate the importance of seeking help towards conflict resolution when confronted with the news of their son's/daughter's LGB identity. Not only help and support is necessary for the parent but also for the LGB child, particularly because of the prevalence of stigma towards homosexuality and the anti-gay sentiments in Latino communities (Herek and González-Rivera, 2006). Latino parents recognized that often times the child has a hard time with the coming out experience. Hence the need to seek help and support in order to understand the struggles of the child, to effectively manage reactions, to cope with the news, to learn more about issues impacting LGB individuals and to further avoid causing more harm to the child. Latino parents recognized the importance of seeking help in order to embark in a process of acceptance, to deal with the discomfort they often times experience and to effectively manage and navigate social scenarios in which negative remarks, prejudice, stigma and ignorance have the potential of impacting their parent-child relationship in many social contexts.

Latino parents described that help and support originated from many venues including psychiatrists, psychologists, counselors, priests, from members of Church ministries, husbands, wives, siblings, and from members of their extended families. Pearlman (2005) described similar microsystems that include family, co-workers and friends as sources of help and support for parents. Interestingly, Latino parents also described that conflicts, distress, and discrimination also emerged from similar venues. Of significance in this investigation was the account of one parent who described that a

psychiatrist working with her in her adjustment stage recommended to this parent to not accept her lesbian daughter. This is indicative of the need to continue to educate behavioral health professionals on how to gain competencies in dealing effectively with LGB individuals and their Latino families. Latino parents also described the negative consequences that rejection creates in LGB individuals. Similar findings were described by Gonzalez, Rostosky, Odom and Riggle (2013) particularly if parents hold negative attitudes and negative stereotypes that contribute to homophobia. Latino parents strongly support the idea of seeking professional help and support if other parents experience conflicts in their attempts to accept their LGB child.

### **Church Support**

Although some parents described their frustration and negative experience as Roman Catholics, the majority of the parents described being happy and supported by the Church and its leaders. Many parents who confided to their respective Roman Catholic priests that they have a LGB son or daughter found support. A Latina mother of a gay son revealed that when she revealed to her priest that her son was gay he asked her: “Are you going to turn your back to your son? Because if you do I think that constitutes a sin.”

Data generated from the interviews revealed that Latino parents provide strong support to Pope Francis for his expressions of inclusion and for his recognition of the dignity of the LGB person. Many parents felt hopeful that Pope Francis has the ability to influence a change in attitudes and a more tolerant and inclusive environment within a Church that is capable of recognizing the spiritual needs of LGB individuals. Based on the narrated accounts we can suggest that Latino parents perceive Pope Francis as an

agent of social and institutional change and that in itself is part of an effort to include LGB individuals in the Roman Catholic Church.

A distinct finding from this research is that although Latino parents within the sample described their strong opposition to the Catholic Church position regarding LGB individuals, none of them decided to abandon the Catholic Church. Several parents narrated that they decided to go to a different Catholic Church or they mentioned that when they heard messages against LGB individuals they felt that such comments made them not to attend Mass. However, they continued to identify with and be part of the Roman Catholic establishment. Research has documented that as a result of the prevailing discrimination and lack of inclusion in many organized religions many LGB individuals experience a sense of inadequacy, depression, lower levels of self-esteem and negative feelings (Murr, 2013). Negative experiences with religion influence LGB individuals to reject their faith tradition (Hattie & Beagan, 2013). However, this finding deviates from the experiences described by Latino parents.

The data that emerged from this investigation shows that LGB children of Latino parents continue to have an active participation in Church. One parent described that the partner of her gay son decided to convert to Catholicism and was baptized and received the Sacrament of Confirmation even after the priest learned about her son and his partner's identity and same sex relationship. This finding is consonant with prior research indicating that positive experiences with affirmative religious groups produce in LGB individuals more self-acceptance and a sense of authenticity (Hattie & Beagan, 2013). Dahl and Galliher's (2012) investigation also described the multiple benefits in LGBTQ

Christian adolescents/young adults whose religious identities inspired in them positive values associated with positive family relationships, service to the community, monogamy, and abstaining from using illegal substances.

### **God's Love Prevails**

For many Latinos, the Roman Catholic Church has been a source of hope, love and faith. In the case of Latino parents with an LGB son/daughter, the Church has been an important instrument that helped them cope with the LGB identity of their children. Although not free of some criticism, for many parents the Church teachings as well as the pastoral care of many ministers has provided parents the care and spiritual support they needed after learning the LGB identity of their children. The data suggests that many parents sought the assistance of priests as a result of the coming out of their children.

In their attempts to provide guidance to parents with an LGB child and to Ministers of the Church, the U.S. Bishops' Committee on Marriage and Family created the letter *Always our Children: A pastoral message to parents of homosexual children and suggestions for pastoral ministers* (U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1997). The letter indicates that many parents experience some turmoil and explicitly recognized the potential "tension between loving your child as God's precious creation and not wanting to endorse any behavior you know the Church teaches is wrong." The letter is also intended to priests and pastoral ministers and asked them that: "our words be translated into attitudes and actions that follow the way of love, as Christ has taught."

These important distinctions are relevant because there is a recognition of the Church teachings in terms of the sexual morality of homosexuality that contrasts with the

suggestion to endorse actions and attitudes that promote Jesus's teachings of love and acceptance. Latino parents described in their narratives their strong endorsement of the "way of love as Christ has taught" as the core element to base their decision to accept and love their LGB children. Latino parents underscored the notion of an all loving and all accepting God that does not judge anyone based on their sexual orientation. Parents revealed that God is the ultimate source of authority and guidance while recognizing that the Church and their representatives are imperfect and to some extent in contradiction with God's message of love, inclusion, and acceptance. Roman Catholic Latino parents unanimously recognized that God's love and authority is what prompted them to understand, accept and unconditionally love their LGB children. Although in many instances parents described the ongoing support on behalf of the Church others described experiences of rejection. In either case, Latino parents solved what appears to be the dissonance between their parenting responsibilities and their Christian obligation to love their children while respecting the Catholic position and doctrinal teaching regarding homosexuality. Latino parents fundamentally disagreed with the Church and found a more congruent and affirming message that focuses on the Christian values of love and acceptance found in the figure of an all loving and all accepting God. This finding is consistent with prior research that also recognizes the notion of an unconditional love for God that also extends to the LGBT person (Lease & Shulman, 2003).

### **Acceptance**

Latino parents of LGB children described during the interviews how learning and reacting to the coming out of their children initiated a process of reconciliation that

moved them towards acceptance. For many parents accepting their LGB son/daughter was a significant milestone, particularly for those who suspected a LGB identity. In contrast, other Latino parents struggle with the coming out news and some even mentioned that the news took them by surprise. Besides the conflicts and the emotional reactions, they experienced, Latino parents had to navigate other conflicts that compromised family dynamics and in some instances even their marital relationship. In many instances, acceptance did not happen automatically. However, seeking help, finding support and professional help and by learning more about the lives of their LGB son/daughter, parents were able to assimilate the news, adopt their new identity as Latino parent of an LGB child and obtained information that assisted them in modifying their prior misconceptions, stereotypes and judgments regarding LGB individuals. Theoretically, Strommen (1989) describes a similar process in a developmental stage in which parents experience the impact of the news, followed by the stage of adjustment after dealing with the crisis. Eventually, parents experience the stage of resolution in which ideas and fantasies about a heterosexual child and having grandchildren are revisited. Parents are also more open to learning about LGB issues or people while revisiting prior notions and stereotypes associated with sexual minorities. Lastly, parents experience what Strommen (1989) describes as a stage of integration, a stage that move parents towards acceptance.

When exploring the theme of acceptance Latino parents also described a sense of personal growth and changes in attitudes towards the sexual identity of their LGB children. Consistent with the findings encountered by González, Rostosky, Odom, and

Riggle (2013), many Latino parents in this research recognized that learning that their son or daughter was lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender presented them with unique opportunities for personal growth. Both Goodrich (2009) and Phillips and Ancis's (2008) research concluded that the initial negative reactions experienced by parents influence their capacity to revisit their cognitive schemas and eventually moved towards a reappraisal of their previous conceptions surrounding sexual minorities.

Many Latino parents underscored the many positive attributes and qualities they admired in their children. Such recognition facilitated their acceptance as well as the recognition of the need to love their children unconditionally. When combined, all of these elements helped these parents to develop a strong sense of parental pride. Parental pride and unconditional love towards their LGBT children are two common themes also found in the research conducted by González, Rostosky, Odom, and Riggle (2013) when describing the positive emotions as well as positive aspects of parenting an LGBT child.

Latino parents also described how accepting their LGB children have the potential of buffering the negative consequences of rejection. Latino parents described that the lack of acceptance can influence a child's health and well-being. Parents in the sample described the many instances in which LGB individuals are victimized, harassed and bullied. These detrimental actions generate in parent's additional concerns about the safety of their children. Latino parents also recognized how prevalent suicide ideations and suicide attempts can place LGB individuals at an increased risk. For that reason, they mentioned the importance that acceptance and unconditional love has on the lives of LGB individuals.

The sample of Latino parents in this investigation acknowledged that acceptance was somehow facilitated by the fact that other members of their extended family were also members of the LGB community. Also significant was learning that acceptance has the potential of increasing the trust between the child and the parent; enhance communication, and contributes to a more open dynamic between the child and the parent. All Latino parents in this sample recognized that an essential component of their parental responsibility is to love their child, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

### **Unconditional Love**

The unconditional love that Latino parents endorsed for their LGB child was an important theme that emerged from the interviews to Roman Catholic parents within this ethnic group. Latino parents shared their feelings of love and respect towards their LGB identified son/daughter and underscored their parental duty to provide support. Such duty was identified as a priority. Latino parents also advice other parents to both love and accept their children without restrictions. Many Latino parents recognized the value of having children and that caring for them, providing support, and enabling the optimal functioning of the family is an essential duty for parents. The ability to provide support and a non-judgmental attitude towards their LGB offspring served to recognize that accepting the differences in others, and being compassionate are important qualities that enrich the human experience. For many, respect is essential in their ability to express such unconditional love, regardless if it is something that interferes with your belief systems or as stated by Participant 7: “Even if it goes against the beliefs that they taught

us to believe in.” Unconditional love was described as something that changed the parent because they were able to love their LGB son/daughter more while recognizing the value of acceptance in order to avoid causing more harm to the child by rejecting and discriminating them as stated by Participant 8.

The unconditional love expressed by Latino parents also has an effect in the LGB son/daughter. When Latino parents expressed their love and acceptance towards their children they experience a sense of relief. According to Participant 12, her gay son told her that she removed a huge burden from his shoulders for being so loving and accepting. This Latina mother stated: “That was the beginning of a very special friendship and a very strong relationship between us.” After learning about the sexual identity of their children many Latino parents described how that knowledge enhanced and solidify their relationship with their LGB children. Similar findings regarding the support and unconditional love demonstrated by parents exist in the literature that accounts for the positive response to a child’s coming out (González, Rostosky, Odon, & Riggle, 2013). Research also shows that a positive emotional response to the LGBT identity of a child on behalf of a parent contributes to a more positive and solid relationship (Goodrich, 2009). Such finding is also consistent with the data associated with this research.

### **Identity Consolidation**

An important goal of this research was to explore how Latino parents mediated their identities as parents of an LGB child and as members of the Roman Catholic Church considering the prevailing doctrine towards homosexuality. Exploring how Latino parents mediated their identities and their memberships to a Church that considers homosexuality

a “disorder” was pivotal in this investigation. The research questions provided the opportunity for Latino parents to discuss their perspectives and points of view regarding how they navigate their membership to the Roman Catholic Church and their identity as a parent of an LGB child. For the majority of these parents being an active member of the Roman Catholic Church and having an LGB identified son/daughter generated no conflicts that could potentially compromised these identities.

Irrespective of their country of origin, age, or educational background, Latino parents described how proud they are of their LGB children. All Latino parents described the positive qualities and attributes of their LGB children. Parents described their son/daughters as individuals with great character, professionally accomplished, grounded, loving individuals with great careers, caring individuals and hard working professionals that contribute to the society and to their community. Parents also recognized their children values, their generosity towards others, and their solidarity in helping other members of the family. Parents described their LGB adolescent/young adult as wonderful or as marvelous human beings; and considered them to be a great son or a great daughter. Parents described being very proud and grateful for having an LGB child as part of the family. Similar findings are found in research documenting positive emotional responses as a result of a child’s coming out that include the manifestation of more love and acceptance as well as admiration towards their LGB children (González, Rostosky, Odon, & Riggle, 2013). Many Latino parents even considered the LGB child as a blessing and as a gift from God. Parents also mentioned that other members of the family including

siblings, grandparents and other members of the extended family expressed similar sentiments regarding their LGB relatives.

### **Parental Pride and Catholic Pride**

Latino parents are cognizant of their parental responsibility to support and love their children as a social responsibility and as a cultural and moral demand imposed by the adoption of Christian values. Latino parents emphasized in their narratives that having a son or daughter is a blessing and a gift from God. The data analysis also suggests that for many parents, it is God's authority what prevails and they are confident that having an LGB child is no impediment to their parenting abilities or moral convictions. The not-so-affirming position of the Roman Catholic Church and their leaders is somehow undermined since according to Latino parents, God is the only one that could judge, accept or reject someone. Such findings are consistent with previous research that has documented positive emotional responses as the result of a child's coming out including the manifestation of more love, acceptance and admiration towards the LGBT child (González, Rostosky, Odon, & Riggle, 2013). For Latino parents, God is an all loving and all accepting entity that does not discriminate towards an individual based on its sexual orientation. Many parents described in their accounts their moral perspective regarding their parenting responsibilities. For instance, Participant 10 mentioned that as a practicing Catholic he sees his lesbian daughter as a "gift from God" and as "a blessing." According to this parent, his love towards his daughter always takes precedence and denying his love and support to his daughter is what according to him: "constitutes a sin." For Participant 10 accepting his daughter is his parental obligation.

For many parents, God is perfection and so is His creation and that should be respected. Such interpretation has helped parents consolidate the notion that having an LGB child is not an issue so their identity as a Latino parent and their identity as Roman Catholic is not compromised or threatened. In fact, several parents emphasized that because they are Roman Catholic they have the moral mandate to love and accept everyone irrespective of their sexual orientation precisely because they are Christians and as such, they should love and accept God's creation in all of its manifestations.

For other parents, consolidating these two identities was less challenging because parents found support from priests and within their respective Church including some of its Ministries. According to Latino parents, Roman Catholic leaders who hold more progressive and affirming perspectives towards LGB individuals believe that the Church should provide a space for LGB individuals to practice their spirituality. Those messages helped parents consolidate these two identities more easily. In contrast, conservative perspectives regarding LGB individuals with less affirming messages from Church members contributed to create divisions among Church members. As narrated by Latino parents, some messages were so divisive that even forced parents to abandon their Catholic Church and to search for other more progressive and more tolerant Catholic institutions with LGB friendly priests and congregations. The data obtained from the interviews suggests that when Latino parents are confronted with conservative ideologies within their respective Church, the tendency is to disagree with those conservative ideologies. Some parents decide to separate from the Church and from Church leaders who endorse those perspectives and actively search for other more affirming and tolerant

Catholic congregations. Other parents do not separate from their Church but discuss their disagreements with their priests. None of the Latino parents that comprised the sample indicated that they stopped being Roman Catholic. On the contrary, Latino parents shared their thoughts about being fulfilled and proud of their Roman Catholic identity and membership. Lease and Shulman's (2003) research found that finding support in LGB affirming members of the clergy was an important theme that emerged in their research. Pertinent to this discussion is the notion that Latino parents expressed a lot of hope towards Pope Francis and the recognition of the needed changes within the Church. According to Latino parents, Pope Francis has provided a message of inclusion and acceptance of LGB individuals within the Church. Many parents described that they have received a lot of support and solidarity from their local Church underscoring the importance of love, acceptance, and the endorsement of a non-judgmental God that loves every human being including LGB individuals. According to Lease and Shulman (2003) the faith of family members can be instrumental in their attempts to accept and embrace LGB individuals in their families. When exploring how religion was a factor that facilitated more acceptance of an LGB family member, the notion of an all loving and all accepting God emerged as an important theme in prior research. The research also mentioned the expectation in many members of the family to equally embrace and endorse the same unconditional acceptance expected from God but adopted by humans (Lease & Shulman, 2003). Similarly, Latino Roman Catholic parents with an LGB child have internalized the idea of this non-judgmental, all-loving and all accepting God as a consolidating agent for their Roman Catholic identity as well as their identity as a parent

of an LGB child. Latino parents affirmed the importance of embracing these two identities from both a socio-cultural and moral perspective that is a natural result of their Christian identification and Church affiliation.

### **Theoretical Framework: The Parental Acceptance-Rejection Theory**

The Parental Acceptance-Rejection Theory (PARTheory) is an evidence based theory of socialization and lifespan development that explain through a series of sub-theories the causes and potential consequences of parental acceptance and parental rejection (Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, 2012). PARTheory postulates that children from different socio-cultural, racial/ethnic groups or genders respond universally to their respective perception of acceptance or rejection on behalf of their parents or caregivers. The theory emphasize that community and societal factors generate variations in the parental acceptance-rejection phenomena by considering how the beliefs of individuals (including religious beliefs) in a society contribute to either accept or reject their children.

PARTheory's emphasis on the universal experience of parental acceptance-rejection has the ability to account for the behavior as well as the symbolic meaning ascribed by its four dimensions of warmth-affection, hostility-aggression, indifference-neglect, and undifferentiated rejection manifested cross-culturally (Rohner, 2004). Since culture and ethnicity have the ability to shape behaviors and ascribe meaning to the parenting experience, the theory is a useful framework to explore the applicability of these four dimensions considering how Latino Roman Catholic parents experience the acceptance-rejection phenomenon established by the theory.

**Parental Acceptance: The Warmth Dimension**

PARTheory's warmth dimension takes into account the qualities of the parental acceptance-rejection relationships based on the symbolic meanings and behaviors adopted by parents. The warmth dimension of parenting is divided by the parental acceptance and by the parental rejection dimension. The parental rejection is subdivided into four distinctive components: unaffectionate; hostility/aggression; indifference/neglect and undifferentiated rejection.

The warmth dimension of PARTheory describes an affectional bond within the parent-child that encompass the verbal, physical, and symbolic behaviors that convey love, a sense of support, and a caring attitude towards their children. In contrast, PARTheory describes the dimension of rejection as the absence of the warmth dimension and the prevalence of hurtful behaviors and affects that are behaviorally expressed when parents are unaffectionate, hostile or aggressive, neglecting or indifferent, or by the lack of love or a caring attitude as perceived by the child (Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, 2012). PARTheory posits that the quality of the relationship with a parent is dependent of the children's assessment of comfort as well as emotional stability.

**The Personality Sub-Theory**

The Personality Sub-Theory recognizes that humans have an emotional need for positive responses from those important to the individual. Such affective dimension is manifested when individuals recognize feeling supported and cared for. The absence of such affectional bond typically characterized by love and support can compromise the quality of the parental relationship and generates both emotional and behavioral conflicts

that manifest as rejection, impaired self-esteem, and insecurity in the child. The perceived (or actual) rejection on behalf of parental figures generates in the child instability, low self-esteem, and a negative representation of themselves with a long-lasting impact (Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, 2012).

The majority of the Latino parents in the sample described their acceptance and unconditional love towards their children and also recognized how important was to provide support to their LGB child. Such actions are aligned with the Personality Sub-Theory's recognition of the value of a genuine emotional connection, a caring attitude and the support provided to their LGB son/daughter.

### **Coping Sub-Theory**

The Coping Sub-theory explores the experiences that will enable individuals to effectively managed their emotional responses to the rejecting experience by focusing on the behaviors that could potentially assist them develop coping mechanisms. According to the Coping Sub-Theory, individuals with a strong sense of self can cope more effectively with their rejecting experiences (Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, 2012). Although the focus of the Coping Sub-Theory applies to the experiences of the child and not the parents, it is relevant to indicate that the narrated accounts of Latino parents suggests that based on the disclosed ties of love and demonstrated affection to their LGB sons/daughters it appears that these LGB children developed effective coping strategies that helped them solidify the parent-child relationship and their overall ability to function. However, caution in this interpretation is advice since this is based on the accounts of the parents and not self-disclosed by their children.

### **The Socio-Cultural System Sub-Theory**

The Socio-Cultural System Sub-Theory focuses on explaining why some parents neglect or reject their children while others love and accept their children considering a socio-cultural context that take into consideration predominant beliefs and behaviors within the society.

Based on the experiences presented by Latino parents that were interviewed, the Socio-Cultural System Sub-Theory is relevant to this investigation since elements of machismo, familismo, homophobia, and the prevailing doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church towards homosexuality are prevalent themes considered within the socio-cultural system sub-theory. Parental rejection occurs in what Rohner, Khaleque, and Cournoyer (2012) describes as an ecological context. Such context takes into consideration the society and culture, the community as well as the family dynamics that contribute to either rejection or acceptance. The socio-cultural system sub-theory suggests that any form of behavior is displayed by parents depending on the existing systems within the society that aims to ensure order and the ability of society to function (Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, 2012). Other interacting elements like personal characteristics and behavioral dispositions of a child and parent can influence the quality of the parent-child dynamic. Because social institutions also comprised this ecological context, it is important to acknowledge its influence towards the parenting dynamics pertaining to acceptance and/or rejection considering parents within the Latino ethnic group.

### **PARTheory's Applicability**

PARTheory's warmth dimension was the most endorsed of the sub-theories in this investigation since the majority of the Latino Catholic parents within the sample described their feelings of love and affection towards their LGB child. Within PARTheory's parental acceptance-rejection continuum, the many demonstrations of the warmth dimension were subjectively experienced as well as observed by parents. Latino parents recognized that neglecting and not accepting their LGB children is morally reprehensible and against their values as parents. The majority of Latino parents revealed in their accounts the value, affection, unconditional love, acceptance and the pride they feel for having an LGB child. Such description is compatible with the Warmth dimension of parenting as contemplated in PARTheory.

Although, the majority of the narrated accounts of Latino Roman Catholic parents with an LGB child described characteristics aligned with the warmth dimension other parents described what PARTheory considers aggressive behavior. Some elements of the parental rejection dimension (resentment and anger) were described by two of the 12 parents interviewed for this investigation. For instance, Participant 3 described her verbal aggression towards her lesbian daughter and to her partner. This parent felt emotionally hurt to the point that she self-described her actions as "cruel." Consistent with PARTheory's Socio-cultural system it was observed that several Latina mothers revealed during the interviews the prevailing homophobic traits that are so predominant in the Latino culture, particularly when describing their experiences with their respective husbands. Elements of aggression were present when these Latina mothers described how

Latino fathers perceived the coming out of their gay sons. Participant 2 described how her husband “became very distant, he was always criticizing him [the gay son] and he considered throwing his gay son out of the house.” According to Participant 2 that hostile environment lasted more than 10 years. Because parental acceptance-rejection can be subjectively experienced, it can be assessed from a phenomenological angle and when it is viewed by an outside observer (in this case by the mother) it can be evaluated from a behavioral perspective. In this investigation, elements of hostility were described by some mothers as perpetuated by fathers (behavioral perspective) and also subjectively experienced (phenomenological angle). The manifestation of acceptance-rejection varies across cultures, so it is important to account for such variability in experiences and idiosyncratic interpretations. In that sense, PARTheory is theoretically appropriate since Latino parents in the sample represented different Latin American countries and as an ethnic group they also manifest parental acceptance-rejection in different ways and for different reasons.

It is not surprising to learn that some Latina mothers helped their LGB child conceal their sexual identity to their fathers. In some instances, these mothers based the decision to remain silent based on respect and appreciation to their LGB son/daughter. In other instances, concealing the information helped minimize the tension, and potential conflicts and rejection towards their LGB son/daughter. This finding is consistent with prior research findings. Prior research that considered PARTheory as a theoretical framework found that when Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, and questioning youth reported concerns about acceptance as a sexual minority, their perception of rejection on behalf of

their fathers is stronger (Walker, 2015). Although the author recognized the potential limitations associated with the generalizability of these findings, Walker (2015) found that Black LGBTQ individuals tend to perceive more rejection, hostility, aggression and the need to conceal their sexual minority status to their parents as a result of their perception of rejection. When considered in its totality, the Warmth dimension of parenting was the dimension that captures the majority of the experiences narrated by Latino Roman Catholic parents with LGB children.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This research provided a safe forum for Roman Catholic Latino parents with an LGB adolescent/young adult to voice their parenting experiences, family dynamics, as well as the strengths and challenges that resulted from their membership as an ethnic group and as members of the Roman Catholic Church. However, not every culture that represents the diverse Latino community were part of the sample associated with this investigation. The research captured the experiences of a sample of Latino parents representing Latin countries from Argentina, Mexico, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Puerto Rico and Honduras. However, not every Latin American country was represented in the sample. For that reason, this lack of representation constitutes a limitation of the study.

Another limitation of the study is associated with the recruitment venues originally proposed in the investigation. All recruited participants were selected for the interviews considering the snowball sampling technique proposed by the use of Facebook. The recruitment notifications submitted to PFLAG and to the LGB Ministry

from the Church of Saint Francis of Assisi in NYC did not generate any potential candidates for this investigation.

The data collection process relied on the parent's self-reported accounts associated with their parenting experience. Since many interview questions inquired about the parent's experience retrospectively, it is possible that some parents did not recall all details pertaining to the experience because of memory decay. Another limitation was the possibility that parents did not fully disclose information because they felt uncomfortable in disclosing intimate information about their children or family.

An important limitation of the study is associated with the minimum representation of fathers in the sample. The study has a vast representation of mothers in the study but only two parents were able to provide details regarding their experience as a Latino father of a LGB son/daughter. It is possible that the prevailing machismo attitudes in the Latino community hindered the willingness of some parents to participate in this investigation.

Another limitation is associated with the lack of participation of parents that struggle with accepting their LGB child. Although the research captured the struggles experienced by Latino parents retrospectively, most parents were accepting and comfortable enough during the interviews and provided rich details regarding their experience. Latino parents in this sample were more "out" about being the parent of an LGB child. For that reason, this study is less descriptive of the experience of families not comfortable with having an LGB child.

Although, the study aimed to capture a diverse representation of parents with a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender son/daughter, the study did not collect any data associated with the experience of parents with a transgender son or daughter.

### **Self-Selected Sampling Bias**

The participation criteria specifically requested that these parents had an active involvement in the Roman Catholic Church. Involvement was conceptualized as frequency of attendance to Mass/worship services, devotional/prayer groups, or an active participation to events organized by the Roman Catholic Church. However, many parents were excluded because they did not meet such criteria. The reasons provided were diverse but most parents revealed that they were disengaged or no longer actively involved because they felt that the Catholic Church discriminated against their LGB son/daughter and decided to leave the Church. Thus, the sample of this study may represent the group of Latino parents who were able to keep their religion and negotiated different belief systems.

Additionally, while participants provided rich details about their positive as well as the negative occurrences navigating their membership as Roman Catholic and as parents of an LGB child, results of the study indicated that all participants felt proud of their LGB children. It might have taken parents sometime to accept their children's LGB identity, but they expressed feeling proud of them. It remained to be seen how these results might transfer to parents who were not accepting of their children's LGB identity.

Despite many of the listed limitations, the research findings captured the thoughts, opinions, and subjective experience of many Roman Catholic Latinos with an LGB

adolescent/young adult; and ethnic group that until now was not accounted for in many scholarly investigations.

### **Clinical Recommendations**

One of the goals of science is to produce scientific information with the intent to disseminate its findings in order to educate the public and the scientific community. Among the group of individuals that can benefit from the findings pertaining to the experiences of Latino parents with LGB children and the Roman Catholic doctrine towards homosexuality are behavioral health professionals, parents, and families from diverse ethnic groups as well as members of the religious community who conduct spiritual and pastoral care. Research addressing the experiences of Latino and Roman Catholic parents with an LGB child are limited, hence the need to fill a gap in the literature in order to facilitate access to the findings associated with this investigation considering the Latino ethnic group.

Behavioral health professionals play an important role in delivering culturally competent services to parents seeking their professional help. As such, it is important to gain competencies and become familiar with research that accounts for the experiences of Roman Catholic Latino parents with an LGB son/daughter when providing services to members of this growing ethnic population in the USA. So, enhancing their multicultural competencies with reliable and scientific findings is an important clinical consideration for these professionals.

This research also captured the experience of Latino parents with LGB children when seeking guidance and spiritual care from Roman Catholic leaders and priests. This

research found important elements of the parenting dynamics that could assist spiritual leaders and priests in their pastoral care to Church members who struggle with the coming out of their LGB children. Furthermore, the accounts of many parents are a reflection of the prevailing sentiments regarding how the Catholic Church has responded to members of the LGB community and their allies and has also described the strong sense of hope instilled by Pope Francis in advocating for a more inclusive and tolerant Church. This research enhances the understanding of the phenomenon providing a unique opportunity to behavioral health professionals to advocate on behalf of parents who are conflicted with the disclosure of the sexual minority status of the LGB children. This investigation can also assist behavioral health professionals and Church representatives to minimize or avoid biases and discrimination when engaging with Latino parents with LGB children in their practice. As noted by Plante (2014) it is important for professionals in the behavioral field to acknowledge the intersecting identities of religious or spiritual LGB individuals since they are a valuable and important source of support as well as strength that must be acknowledged by competent practitioners in psychology. Research conducted by Rosenkrantz, Rostosky, Riggle, and Cook (2016) highlights the important aspects of religious LGBTQ identities in promoting self-acceptance and more authentic and supportive ways of living for LGBTQ individuals.

As observed in some of the interviews, many Latino Roman Catholic parents may not seek or have optimal access to culturally competent clinical services. For that reason, it is an important consideration to provide sensitivity training, education and supportive services to Church leaders, ministries and leaders of the Catholic congregation in order to

promote a more welcoming environment for parents of LGB individuals and their LGB children when seeking assistance from the Church and pastoral care.

Also relevant for the professional practitioner is the understanding of the many positive outcomes described in this research since many parents underscored the strong sense of pride that resulted from the coming out of their children, including more acceptance and love towards their children, help towards conflict resolution and the many instances in which spiritual leaders from the Catholic Church provided guidance, advice and support to Latino parents and their LGB children. Such finding is also consistent with existing research accounting for the positive emotional responses described by parents who embrace feelings of love, acceptance and admiration towards their LGBT child (González, Rostosky, Odon & Riggle, 2013; Maslowe & Yarhouse, 2015).

To further disseminate these findings, the researcher will submit abstracts to professional organizations to make presentations as well as to publish the work in scholarly journals in psychology. The researcher wants to underscore that the publication and dissemination of this research can also benefit parents who might be struggling with the coming out of their LGB children. The researcher hopes that this publication assists many parents in their respective journeys towards acceptance. Latino LGB adolescents/young adults may also benefit from this investigation by gaining knowledge about the parent's reactions, their prevailing concerns, and the respective journey of the parent towards acceptance of their LGB children.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This investigation has expanded the limited scholarly research on the parenting experiences of Roman Catholic Latinos with an LGB adolescent/young adult considering the experiences of individuals from different Latin American backgrounds and different Catholic congregations throughout the USA and Puerto Rico. Future investigations may expand the audience to include members of other religious affiliations and individuals from different racial/ethnic groups. It is also possible to secure a more diverse sample with an increase number of participants that originated from other Latin American countries.

Another potential area of investigation could take into account the experiences of Latino Roman Catholic parents with LGB children who are not active members from the Catholic Church because of the prevailing doctrine towards homosexuality. Investigating what factors contributed to their decision to depart from the Church can shed light into the phenomenon and provide insightful information in this area of potential research. Future research can also explore further how Latino fathers experience the coming out of an LGB son or daughter since this study identified mostly the experiences of Latina mothers. It is also important to acknowledge that the phenomenon explored throughout this investigation did not take into account the experience of the Roman Catholic LGB child. In the future, researchers should also consider any potential changes in the Roman Catholic doctrine towards homosexuality and its impact on Roman Catholic parents as well as in Roman Catholic LGB individuals.

### **Social Change Implications**

The findings associated with this investigation have the potential of generating positive social change. First, the study contributes to the scholarly body of scientific literature that prior to this research never explored the experiences of Latino Roman Catholic parents with an LGB child. By illustrating these experiences, individuals will gain a better understanding of the parenting dynamics of members of this ethnic group and their impressions and opinions as members of the Roman Catholic Church.

The study also impacts social change by allowing behavioral health professionals to potentially augment their competencies in dealing with Roman Catholic Latinos and the impact that disclosure of an LGB identity on behalf of their offspring has on parents within this ethnic group. Behavioral health professional will also better understand the unique challenges Latino parents will encounter while navigating their identities as Roman Catholic. Undoubtedly, religiosity and spirituality are important considerations for members of the Latino community. For that reason, it is important that mental health professionals have access to unbiased scientific information on this topic in order to better understand members of this community and develop LGB affirmative therapeutic modalities to promote positive social change towards members of sexual minorities and their relatives.

Educating members of religious congregations who provide spiritual counseling and pastoral care can also contribute towards positive social change. The findings that resulted from this investigation illustrate the important role that the Roman Catholic Church plays in navigating the complex dynamics faced by Latino parents after their

children disclosed being LGB. Oftentimes, Roman Catholic leaders were approached by these parents with the intent of seeking help, support, guidance and comfort for parents and for their LGB children. Education is key to illustrate the conflicts that LGB individuals faced as a result of the prevailing homophobia and ignorance in our society. It is important to emphasize that the existing prejudice and stigma against LGB individuals impact parents and families within the Latino community who are also active members of the Roman Catholic Church.

Another important social change contribution resulting from this investigation is the potential to minimize the prevailing stigma and discrimination towards sexual minorities and particularly Latino LGB individuals. This research documented how Latino parents who are Roman Catholic navigate and consolidate such identities, particularly when there is a re-interpretation of the figure of God and His unconditional love and acceptance towards all His creation. The narratives expressed by these parents are very influential in restructuring what has been historically understood as incompatible, because of the existing arguments of the Church and the scriptures regarding homosexuality. However, for many Latino parents having an LGB child is considered a blessing and a gift from God. The findings also suggest that Latino parents understand the figure of God as the ultimate authority, minimizing the interpretation sustained by the Church in regards to LGB individuals and its moral stand on homosexuality.

Lastly, it is our hope that positive social change is attained if other parents who struggle with the coming out of the LGB children learned about the narrated accounts of

the parents within this sample and become more sensitive and more accepting of the LGB identities of their own children.

### **Conclusion**

This research considered phenomenology as the method of inquiry to explore the parenting experiences of Latinos with an LGB adolescent/young adult and the Roman Catholic doctrine towards homosexuality. All participants that comprised the sample were Latino; the biological or adoptive parent of an LGB identified son or daughter, and an active member of the Roman Catholic Church. Participants were between the ages of 37 and 75 years old; 10 participants were female and 2 participants were males.

Some parents suspected that their children were gay, lesbian or bisexual at an earlier stage of their development because the child demonstrated atypical gender behavior during their childhood. For other Latino parents the coming out was a complete surprise when revealed by the child. The data shows that many parents experienced internal conflicts while others were capable of coping with the news and were more successful in navigating the challenges presented by their socio-cultural context, their religious and spiritual foundation, and their Roman Catholic identity.

For the most part, Roman Catholic Latino parents experience a series of pathways that typically began with the element of suspicion of a non-heterosexual orientation in their children and eventually moved in a continuum that prompted the subsequent expression of unconditional love and acceptance of their children's sexual orientation.

While Roman Catholic Latino parents engage in an appraisal stage that emerge as a result of the disclosure of the LGB identity of their offspring, parents of this ethnic

group often negotiated their notions regarding homosexuality (or bisexuality) while assessing potential conflicts that could impact themselves, their LGB children, their families, and their interactions with their socio-cultural environment, including institutions like the Roman Catholic Church. This appraisal helped Latino parents explore their values, and moral convictions including their membership to a Church that is not so affirming in their doctrine towards LGB individuals. For such reasons, Latino parents in this investigation narrated their experience and the impact of the coming out of their LGB son or daughter in light of their membership and involvement with the Roman Catholic Church.

The literature shows that parents not only explore the meaning of having an LGBT child (Chrisler, 2017) but also if such acknowledgment creates conflicts with their set of values in order to assess their ability to cope with the coming out news (Lazarus, 2001). According to Chrisler (2017) the meaning attributed by parents to what constitutes an LGBT identity can shape the way parents react to the coming out news. This was also observed in the data obtained from Latino parents, particularly because Latino parents are often exposed to messages from the Catholic congregation that portrays homosexuality as a disorder. In such context, Latino parents often times explore what is at stake when attempting to navigate several systems of belief, including cultural expectations, moral, religious, and spiritual dimensions as well as their parenting expectations and demands. The data shows that some Latino parents willingly seek assistance considering several venues that include Catholic priests and leaders of Church ministries, behavioral health professionals, their spouse, or members of their immediate or extended family. For other

Latino parents the coming out news did not create many conflicts and these parents experienced a sense of relieve while welcoming a more authentic relationship with their LGB child. Often times the parents experiencing less internal conflicts adopted the role of an advocate that prompted them to mediate potential conflicts with other members of the family. Stigma regarding the LGB community is still a pervasive problem in the Latino community and for that reason, these parents expressed deep concerns about the safety of their children when interacting in a social and cultural environment that is hostile and discriminatory to them.

In their accounts, many parents described their journey in the process of accepting their LGB child considering the morality of the issue. For many Latino parents, the way in which the Roman Catholic has handle aspects pertaining to LGB issues has eroded their views towards the Roman Catholic Church. Not surprisingly, many Latino parents have revisited the role of the Church and its leaders and have reconsidered the Church's authority to emphasize the figure of an all loving and all accepting God who does not discriminate against any individual on the basis of their sexual orientation.

Latino parents re-construct the previously heterosexist system of believe to accommodate the new reality of having an LGB child. When confronted with this reality, Latino parents negotiated with different levels of difficulty, their new identity as a parent of an LGB child and their Catholic identity. In doing so, these parents challenged their own preconceived notions about the prevailing heterosexual norms established in society. In their accounts, Latino parents disclosed how with time, this process helped them develop a strong sense of pride towards their LGB children and discussed the importance

of not only recognizing the value of having a child but also the moral and Christian demand to care, support, and embrace their children regardless of their LGB identity or their Roman Catholic identity.

The study described how the experiences of acceptance, unconditional love, respect towards God's creation and adopting a non-judgmental attitude towards sexual minorities has helped Latino parents accept and consolidate their identities as Roman Catholic and as a proud parent of an LGB son or daughter.

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### **Appendix A: Interview Questions**

RQ.1 How do Latino parents experience the coming out of their adolescent/young adult while mediating the doctrinal teachings of the Roman Catholic Church towards homosexuality?

SQ.1 What are the parents' beliefs about a LGBT person?

IQ.1 Tell me about your daughter or son, the one who revealed to you that she/he is lesbian, gay or bisexual?

IQ.2 How did you find out that your daughter/son was lesbian, gay or bisexual?

IQ.3 What can you say about your emotional state after the disclosure?

IQ.4 How easy or how challenging was coping with the news?

IQ.5 How did the coming out experience shape your role as parent?

IQ.6 After the disclosure, what happened in terms of family dynamics?

SQ.2 What, if any, are potential conflicts that you experience from having a LGBT daughter/son?

IQ.7 What can you say about the reaction of other family members?

IQ.8 How did you deal with the news?

Probe: What can you say about your experience seeking help?

RQ.2 How do Latino parents mediate their identities as Roman Catholic and as parents of a LGBT adolescents/young adults?

SQ.3 How do parents negotiate their religious beliefs with the relationship they experience with their children?

- IQ.9 What is said in your Catholic Church about LGBT people?
- IQ.10 What are your thoughts about being Roman Catholic and having a LGBT son/daughter?
- IQ.11 How influential is the Catholic Church in your decision to accept or reject your LGBT child?
- SQ. 4 What, if any, were/are the potential sources of conflict with the Roman Catholic Church and their position towards homosexuality?
- IQ.12 How do you negotiate your religious beliefs with the relationship you experience with your LGBT children?
- IQ.13 What is your opinion about the way Roman Catholic leaders have handled issues surrounding lesbians, gays and bisexuals?
- SQ.5 What changes, if any, have you experience as a parent of a LGBT child and as a member of the Roman Catholic Church?
- IQ.14 What changes, if any, have you noticed in the way you conduct your parenting duties?
- IQ.15 What changes, if any have you experienced as a member of the Roman Catholic Church after the disclosure?
- IQ.16 What message, if any, can you share to other parents?

**Appendix B: Demographic Questions**

1. What is your gender?

Female

Male

Intersex

Transgender – Female to Male

Transgender – Male to Female

Gender non-conforming

Prefer not to answer

Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

2. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_

3. What is your country of origin?

Mexican or Mexican American

Puerto Rican

Cuban

Dominican

Another Latino or Hispanic origin \_\_\_\_\_

4. In which language you communicate in your daily life? \_\_\_\_\_

5. How long you have resided in the United States? \_\_\_\_\_

6. Are you single? Are you married? Divorced? Separated? \_\_\_\_\_

7. What is your sexual orientation?

\_\_\_\_\_ Heterosexual/Straight

\_\_\_\_\_ Gay

\_\_\_\_\_ Lesbian

\_\_\_\_\_ Bisexual

\_\_\_\_\_ Pansexual

\_\_\_\_\_ Queer

\_\_\_\_\_ Questioning

\_\_\_\_\_ Asexual

\_\_\_\_\_ Other, please specify

\_\_\_\_\_ Prefer not to answer

8. What is your highest educational level? \_\_\_\_\_

9. How many children do you have? \_\_\_\_\_

10. How many children have disclosed to you that they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender? \_\_\_\_\_

11. How long ago did your son or daughter disclose that they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender? \_\_\_\_\_

12. How frequently do you go to the Roman Catholic Church?

\_\_\_\_\_ Very frequently

\_\_\_\_\_ Frequently

\_\_\_\_\_ Not so frequently

\_\_\_\_\_ Never

13. How would you describe your involvement with the Roman Catholic Church?

(Involvement can be defined as frequency of attendance to Mass/worship, devotional/prayer groups, or an active participation to events organized by the Catholic Church)

\_\_\_\_\_ Very involved

\_\_\_\_\_ Involved

\_\_\_\_\_ More or less involved

\_\_\_\_\_ Little involved

\_\_\_\_\_ Not involved at all

**Appendix C: Participant's Screening Tool**

1. Are you the parent of a LGBT adolescent/young adult?
2. Did your daughter or son disclosed being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender?
3. Are you Latino(a)?
4. How would you describe your involvement with the Roman Catholic Church?  
(Involvement can be defined as frequency of attendance to Mass/worship, devotional/prayer groups, or an active participation to events organized by the Catholic Church)

\_\_\_\_\_ Very involved

\_\_\_\_\_ More or less involved

\_\_\_\_\_ Little involved

\_\_\_\_\_ Not involved at all

### **Appendix D: First Cycle Codes From the Interviews**

1. Noticeable gay tendencies
2. Disclosure to mother
3. Always knew he was gay
4. Suspicious about her being lesbian
5. Aware he was different
6. Disclosure
7. Conflict with sibling
8. Disclosing made things easier
9. Lack of acceptance
10. Negative reactions after disclosure
11. Family conflicts
12. Brother was not accepting
13. Conflicts
14. No changes in family dynamics
15. Internal Conflicts
16. Support
17. Acceptance in the family
18. Respect for son
19. Sexual orientation does not matter to God
20. Emphasis on God's Love
21. Opposition from Bishops towards gays
22. Homophobia from grandfather
23. Mediation
24. Gay conversion not effective
25. Confrontation among brothers
26. My role is to support and protect him from any harm
27. Same sex relationships are natural
28. Church is conservative
29. Church's history of child molestation
30. Son advocated for what is right
31. Pope is more accepting
32. Being gay is prevalent in families
33. Gays are loving people
34. Pope is supportive
35. Family participates in Church
36. Disapproval if Priest talks bad about gays
37. Parents should accept their children as they are
38. Confessed being gay
39. Self-disclosure
40. Mother felt like a failure
41. Mother experienced strong emotional reactions

42. Secrecy
43. Being gay is not wrong
44. Mother was constantly crying
45. Mother remained silent
46. Never rejected her gay son
47. Mother accepted professional help
48. Difficulties accepting gay son
49. Concerns about what others might say
50. Mother worried about her husband's reaction
51. Father's rejection because of machismo
52. Father was distant and overtly critical
53. Coming out disruptive of family dynamics
54. Arguments among family members
55. Mother more accepting of gay son than the father
56. Perceptions of others not so important for the mother
57. Search for a more progressive Catholic Church
58. Priest influenced the mother's decision to accept gay son
59. Homosexuality is socially wrong
60. Rejecting a gay son is a sin
61. Having gay son is no reason for rejection
62. Respect for God's creation
63. Proud to be Catholic
64. God has the ultimate capacity to judge
65. Church should be more progressive
66. Proud to have a gay son
67. Help is a function of being Christian
68. Christians should love not judge anyone
69. Rejection has negative consequences: suicide
70. Homophobic people can harm LGB individuals
71. In the Latino culture being gay is considered an abomination
72. Our culture only values heterosexuality
73. Tolerance and full acceptance
74. Acceptance helped me grow as a parent
75. Avoidance of people and situations that judge or criticize gays
76. Homosexuality is taboo in our society
77. Disagreements with Church persist
78. Church is a source of division
79. Church needs to change
80. God is love and His creation is diverse
81. Lack of agreement with doctrine
82. LGB victimization
83. God is love and perfection
84. God is the only one that can judge people

85. Parents underscored the virtues and strengths of their LGB children
86. Love without reservations
87. Having a gay son/daughter is a blessing
88. Coming out was unexpected
89. Telling people about gay son was challenging and embarrassing
90. He was having a hard time so we all needed professional help
91. Stigma prevails in Latino culture
92. Parent kept things inside
93. We expected him to have a traditional family as conceived by the Church
94. Some Priests are resistant to change
95. Pope perceived as an agent of change
96. Lack of acceptance forced parents to search for another Catholic Church
97. More emphasis on God's authority than the authority of the Church
98. Church should be more open and accepting of gays
99. Mom advocated for gay son
100. No changes in parenting style
101. Institutionalized homophobia
102. Proud of being Catholic and proud of having gay son
103. Joking or making fun of gays bothers me
104. Conflict mediation
105. Ashamed of my reaction