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# Coming Out Experiences of LGB Latinos/as

## **Cover Page Footnote**

I would like to thank Professor Esteban Cardemil (Psychology Department) and Nestor Noyola for their help and advice during the writing of this paper.

# Coming Out Experiences of LGB Latinos/as: The Role of Cultural Values

Camilo Posada Rodriguez

## ABSTRACT

The coming out process is a fundamental part of the lives of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual (LGB) individuals. Research suggests that there are several factors that might make coming out detrimental to the mental health of an individual. This study aims to better understand the coming out experiences of LGB Latinos/as and its possible relations to cultural values such as religion, *familismo*, and conservative points of view. Participants were 9 self-identified Latino/a lesbian, gay, or bisexual adults currently living in the U.S., recruited through public and online advertisements. The author engaged in thematic analysis to identify relevant patterns about the participants' coming out experiences. Two main themes emerged from the interviews. First, all the participants pointed to their family's religious norms and values as a stress factor in their coming out process. Second, most participants argued the importance of considering their family's needs before and in some cases after coming out to them. These findings show the importance of understanding how cultural values might influence the coming out experiences of double minorities. Further research should analyze the cultural values of double minorities in the U.S. in more depth, as to better understand their effects on LGB people's mental health and coming out process.

Lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) people might choose to reveal their sexual orientation to others, a process called coming out (CO).<sup>1</sup> This process has been described as an essential part of LGB identity formation and integration.<sup>2</sup> Studies have repeatedly shown that the CO process has some benefits to the mental health of LGB people, such as higher self-esteem, better well-being, lower anxiety, increased coping resources, feelings of relief and happiness, and more.<sup>3</sup> However, Legate, Ryan, and Weinstein found that in g contexts (i.e., when the individual's family is not supportive), disclosing an LGB identity was less common and had negative impacts on well-being.<sup>4</sup> LGB people might anticipate judgment and stigmatization because of their identity, which might lead to not disclosing their sexual identity.<sup>5</sup>

The CO process seems particularly important when LGB individuals come out to their parents and

family members, given that it can completely alter family relationships.<sup>6</sup> Coming out to family members is particularly stressful because LGB individuals understand that it cannot be easily taken back and because it is more common for financially-dependent adolescents to come out to their parents.<sup>7</sup> Family rejection plays a fundamental role in LGB individuals' mental health such that people who report higher family rejection are more likely to also report suicide attempts, high levels of depression, and illicit drug usage.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Pistella et al argue that coming out is a personal decision that can be accelerated or prevented by different personal *and* familial characteristics, including cultural background.<sup>9</sup> Yet, not much is known about how Latinos/as experience their CO process in relation to their cultural values. This paper will discuss how the CO experiences of LGB Latinos/as (i.e., a person of Latin American origin or descent who

identifies as gay, lesbian, or bisexual) can be affected by specific cultural values such as religion and collectivism.

Meyer conceptualized the stress that minorities (more specifically sexual minorities) go through as “the excess stress to which individuals from stigmatized social categories are exposed as a result of their social, often a minority, position.”<sup>10</sup> There are three types of minority stress that Meyers explains in his Minority Stress Model: external (i.e., objective stressful events and conditions), the expectations from those events, and the internalization of negative societal attitudes. Moreover, regarding the CO process, LGB people suffer stress from the concealment of their sexual identity (which could be categorized as a proximal, rather than distal, stressor). All of these stressors can negatively impact the mental health of LGB people, including LGB Latinos/as. However, Meyer identifies strategies, such as personal coping mechanisms, resilience, and coping through social structural factors (without any mention of family), that might reduce the risk of negative impacts on the individual’s mental health. Nonetheless, Meyer does not mention the stressors that people with a double minority status (e.g., sexual minorities that are also racial minorities in a specific country) might go through and the impact of their culture on their experiences.<sup>11</sup>

### Latino/a Cultural Values

Latino/a culture tends to adhere to traditional family values (e.g., specific roles in family hierarchies that should not be broken) and conservative views on social issues (e.g., Latinos/as tend to oppose abortion and gay marriage).<sup>12</sup> Therefore, Latinos/as might have a more difficult time accepting queer individuals than people who have liberal views on social issues. For example, Latino/a parents might be less likely to provide support to their children if they decide to come out. Moreover, Latinos/as in the U.S. and in Latin America have high rates of religious belonging, regular churchgoing, and reliance on religious support in their daily life, which might affect their views on LGB individuals.<sup>13</sup> Secular Latinos/as tend to be more accepting of same-sex marriage than regularly-attending Catholics.<sup>14</sup> Given that Latinos/as tend to adhere to conservative values, Latinos/as and their CO experiences are particularly interesting and important to analyze.

Moreover, Eaton and Rios explain that Latinos/as are more likely than White Americans to support collectivism: defining “oneself in terms of social and cultural roles.”<sup>15</sup> One cultural role that has been studied in Latinos/as is *familismo*, which is understood as putting higher importance to the family’s needs than

to the individual’s needs. *Familismo*, therefore, is an expression of collectivism among Latin Americans.<sup>16</sup> *Familismo* could, ultimately, be a source of information that shapes the behaviors and attitudes of LGB Latinos/as.<sup>17</sup> Depression, suicide, and internalizing behaviors have been associated, as well, with *familismo* among Latinos/as in general.<sup>18</sup> Studies have shown that queer Latino men tend to describe their CO process as challenging with respect to collaboration, respect for hierarchies, and the importance of social roles and duties.<sup>19</sup> *Familismo* is one conservative value that Latinos/as tend to adhere to.

Moreover, conservative religious values and norms play an important role in how family members react during the CO process of an LGB person, as well as whether an individual will come out to their family.<sup>20</sup> Studies have also shown that the CO process of LGB people to family members is especially difficult in families that identify with right-wing conservative political ideologies and that are religious.<sup>21</sup> Religious values and widespread homophobia might be connected to difficulties in LGB sexual identity among Latinos and African Americans.<sup>22</sup> In a qualitative study among Latinos/as more than half of the participants experienced a conflict between being Catholic and their sexual orientation during their adolescence.<sup>23</sup> It has been shown that the CO process can be a stressful one that might negatively impact an individual’s mental health.<sup>24</sup> Using minority stress theory to better understand how individuals experience the minority stress that is attached to the CO process, I will explore the particular cultural values that might affect this specific group of people (i.e., LGB Latinos/as) during the coming-out process.<sup>25</sup> Research has shown that Latinos/as tend to adhere to *familismo*, have conservative points of views regarding LGB individuals, and believe in conservative religious values and norms. Because of these factors, it is crucial to understand how Latinos/as experience their CO process, looking at the cultural values that might make it harder or easier for them to come out to their families and friends.

There is almost no literature regarding the CO process of Latinos/as or the influence of cultural values on it. However, we know that Latinos/as tend to adhere to traditional family values and conservative points of view on social issues. Moreover, we know about the importance of collectivism, *familismo*, and religion among Latinos/as. Therefore, the aim of this study is to better understand the CO process of LGB Latinos/as and how it relates, if at all, to family, collectivism, religion, and conservative point of view by analyzing interviews of a sample of LGB Latinos/as living in the

United States. Given that there is not much research about this particular topic, a qualitative study is an ideal method to start exploring these possible relations.

## Method

### Participants

Latinos/as with minoritized sexual identities currently living in the U.S. participated in the present study. Their ages ranged from 18 to 39, with a median age of 24 years. All participants self-identified as Latino/a. Nonetheless, there was heterogeneity in the participants' self-identified race. The interviews analyzed for this study were only of participants who self-described as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, and either male or female. The author did not include interviews from participants who self-identified as gender minorities in the present study, given that there were not enough of these participants for the author to feel confident that the results might be representative. Participant's demographics are displayed in Table 1.

### Procedure

Data for this study was collected as part of a larger qualitative project aimed at understanding the experiences of minority stress, coping, and suicide in Latinos/as with minoritized sexual identities living in the U.S. Participants were recruited through printed advertisements in public spaces, as well as with online advertisements through Latinos/as, LGBTQ, and Latinos/as LGBTQ community groups in different social media (e.g. Craigslist.com, Facebook.com, Meetup.com, and Reddit.com). Advertisements were written in English and Spanish and described the study as a one-time, confidential, phone-based study for understanding how Latinos/as who identify as sexual minorities experience stress related to racism and heterosexism, and how they cope with it. Adults (eighteen years and older) currently living in the U.S., who self-identified as both a Latina/o and as having a minoritized sexual identity were eligible to participate in the study. All participants received a U.S. \$10.00 gift card for their participation. Participants were asked to feel free to share information about the study with others who may qualify for it. The present study was approved by the Clark University Institutional Review Board (IRB).

### Measures

*Sociodemographic Questionnaire.* After providing informed consent and prior to completing a one-hour semi-structured interview, participants completed a short sociodemographic form in which they were asked

about their racial/ethnic, gender, and sexual identities, as well as basic sociodemographic information related to immigration, employment, and income. Additionally, they were presented with the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status (SSS), which was developed to capture a person's common sense of their sociodemographic standing. Participants are asked to place themselves on an imaginary 10-rung ladder that represents how people in the U.S. are distributed in terms of money, education, and jobs.<sup>26</sup>

*Semi-structured interview.* The author used a guide to conduct semi-structured interviews aimed at exploring experiences with minority stress, coping, and suicide. Interviews lasted approximately one hour each and were roughly divided into three sections (see Appendix A).

### Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed verbatim prior to data analysis. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant to protect confidentiality. The author engaged in thematic analysis to identify relevant patterns about the participants' CO experiences.<sup>27</sup> The author chose thematic analysis given that it provides an accurate account of the data without it being based on the researcher's prior assumptions.<sup>28</sup> Using an inductive approach, the author looked at the data for any relevant themes about the CO process, while also looking specifically for data on how religious values and *familismo* shaped these experiences.

Grounded in Minority Stress Theory as a framework to analyze the data, the author specifically looked at how social support, particularly family support, influences the CO process of the participants.<sup>29</sup> Minority Stress Theory is relevant to this sample given that, as Latino/a LGB people, they experience the stress of being sexual as well as racial minorities. Even though Meyer has identified double minority status (i.e., being both a racial and sexual minority) as an area for future research, there is a dearth of research regarding the CO process of LGB Latinos/as. Moreover, Meyer barely mentions the role of the family in his theory as a possible stressor and/or source of coping.<sup>30</sup> However, the theory's concept of minority stress is relevant to all minorities, including LGB Latinos/as.

Finally, the author that read and analyzed the participant interviews self-identifies as a straight, male Latino. As an immigrant, growing up in Panama, most of the author's understanding of Latinos/as, especially LGB Latinos/as, come from his experiences in a different country. As a male, the author's interpretations of Latinas, both lesbian or bisexual, come with prior

assumptions and a reduced understanding about the role of cultural values that are imposed on Latinas (e.g., marriage). Moreover, as a straight Latino, the author recognizes that he does not have any knowledge, apart from the literature and conversations with LGB friends, about the difficulties and stressors that may take place during the CO process. The author is aware that there are other important themes that could have been relevant to the experiences of these participants and acknowledges that it is impossible to completely free oneself from theoretical and previous opinions.<sup>31</sup>

## Results

Given that some participants had come out to their families and others had not, they showed some of the complexities of the CO process. Most of the participants had come out to their mothers (66.6%,  $n=6$ ) and to their fathers (55.5%,  $n=5$ ) by the time of the interview. Moreover, most of the participants had not come out to their distant family members (55%,  $n=5$ ), while all but two had come out to at least one sibling (77.7%,  $n=7$ ). Finally, almost all participants had come out to at least one friend (88.8%,  $n=8$ ). Only one participant did not mention coming out to friends. To better contextualize to whom the participants had come out to, the author presents this information in Table 2.

There were common themes that emerged from examining the participant's CO experiences and the role that family played in this process. Participants tended to relate some of the questions that were asked directly to their family and mentioned difficulties that they experienced in this process, as well as ways they coped with the stressors that had an impact on their CO experiences. The author found two significant themes: the negative impact of familial religious norms and values *and* the role that *familismo* played on the participants' CO process.

### Religious Norms & Values

Almost all participants in the sample ( $n=7$ , 78%) pointed to their family's religious norms and values as a factor that stressed them in their CO process. Without being asked directly, most participants talked about religion, specifically Catholicism, as a factor that kept them from coming out to their families earlier or at all. For example, Adrian, a 37-year-old gay Latino, after being asked why he has not come out to his family, explained, "Bueno siempre voy a ser así porque Bueno que la familia que to tengo es muy religiosa, muy católica y no, no, es que no puedo." (Well, I am always going to be like this. Well, my family is very religious,

very Catholic, and I can't, I just can't [come out]).

Moreover, some participants explained a mismatch between their own identity as sexual minorities and their family's religious views. In other words, their parents' religious opinions conflicted with their sexuality. This represents a particular stressor that people with religious families might go through. Participants in this sample were vocal about their views on religion and recognized that their family's religion played a role in how they perceived queer individuals in general and the participants themselves. For example, when asked about how her sexual identity as a lesbian might intersect with her identity as a Latina, Camila explained that "Bueno, de donde vengo yo, mi... por mi familia, pues por mi familia por sus costumbres, su religión pues no es fácil de aceptar de que sea lesbiana." (Well, where I come from... because of my family, because of my family's traditions, because of their religion, well, it is not easy for them to accept that I am a lesbian).

There were two common sub-themes that emerged inside this larger theme: (1) gender norms and marriage, and (2) perceived heterosexism from parents. Although gender norms and perceived heterosexism from parents were mentioned by almost all participants, marriage was almost only mentioned by female participants in this sample.

### Gender Norms & Marriage

*Gender Norms.* The majority of the participants ( $n=7$ ) emphasized the gender norms and expectations that their parents believed and taught to them. Some of the gender norms that were mentioned were marriage to the opposite gender, what clothes to wear depending on their gender, not accepting femininity in men, fathers allowing men to leave the house during nighttime while over-protecting women, and more. When asked about how she felt after coming out to her parents, María said she was relieved. She clarified, "Like I don't have to um, *esconderme*, like be behind of something. If I just want to wear like boy's shorts or whatever, so, en, hay connotaciones que los padres dicen, que oh, eso es de nene, y como que no, ey me gusta como me siento, ya no lo dicen como que..." (...so, there are nuanced phrases that parents say, like [shorts] are only for boys, and like I like how I feel, so they stopped saying that). In her answer, María explains that she does not want to hide her identity from her parents anymore and that she would like them to accept however she expresses that identity (including wearing clothes that they might consider masculine). She implies that her parents used to tell her what ways people should dress, making her feel stressed about the way she wanted to dress.

Moreover, some of the gender norms instilled by the participants' parents were directly tied to their family's religion. For example, Camila described that her sexual orientation was foreign to her mother since her mother believed that "Dios hizo un hombre y a una mujer para tener una familia," (God made man and woman in order to have a family). Her sexual orientation was at odds with her mother's belief that women can only love men and that there are only two genders (i.e., male and female), which are meant to procreate and have a family together. Some participants also described this idea as having been passed down from older generations, which makes it more complicated for parents to accept their children's identity.

*Marriage.* More than half of the female participants (n=4) highlighted their parents' expectations of them marrying a man *specifically* in a religious context. They even mentioned the stress of having to someday explain to their father that they will not get married to a man. Valery explained that, after she came out to her family, her father had troubles accepting her sexual orientation as a lesbian. She continued:

Yeah like, he didn't understand like how... like I think that it was a little bit of, how can a woman, how can this happen to my daughter? How can a woman like a woman? You know things like that uhm... But I think he...had a vision in his head of walking down the aisle with me and handing me off to a man. And just crushing that for him, he couldn't, he couldn't deal.

Only one male participant, Adrian, explained that his family pressured him into having relationships with women, but not in a religious context. Given that he was not out to his parents, Adrian talked about the stress of having to hear his parents' comments, not being able to give a concrete answer, while fearing coming out to them. It is important to note that participants were not directly asked questions relating to marriage or relationships.

### Religious Values Shaping Perceived Heterosexism from Parents

Participants (n=7) explained that they feared coming out to family members because of their family's heterosexist comments towards other sexual minorities and because of their family's religion. Amanda explained that, for her, in the Latinx community "there's still like still, especially from earlier generations like a *heavy* amount of like homophobia and just like sort of like emphasis on like traditional gender roles." She elaborated:

I think personally with my parents I have seen [homophobic comments] the most, and they will, uh, sort of like *deny* it, but they still sort of like make these comments that make me feel uneasy about like bringing my friends who are LGBT to meet them, and talking about it with them, talking about *my own identity* with them.

More than half of the participants (n=5) even argued that because of their parents' perceived heterosexism, they decided to strategically compartmentalize their sexual identity. This means that they decided to not talk about their sexual identity at home (or talk about it carefully), while more freely talking about it with their friends and other non-family members. Ximena explained:

I think I still haven't told my parents that like I am bisexual because they'll like they're kind of homophobic so I like never really told them so like I try to separate how I act at home away from how I act outside of my house so like for me at least my [Latina] culture and like being bisexual don't intertwine that much as much as I would like in front of family members.

Moreover, even people that had come out to their parents, or at least one person who had come out to her parents struggled with talking about her sexuality at home. Mia explained that her mother has a hard time accepting her bisexual identity since she believes that being bisexual is just a phase. Her mother believes, in other words, that bisexuals are "confused." Mia rationalized that since she is dating a man currently, her mother might think that she is not bisexual anymore and that she is out of her "phase." This, ultimately, made Mia cautious about talking to her mother with regards to her sexuality given that it is easier to avoid doing so. However, Mia talks openly about it with her friends and acquaintances, strategically dividing her identity.

### Familismo

Most participants (n=7) talked about the importance of considering their family needs before and in some cases after coming out to them. In some cases, the participants talked about their sexuality as something that ultimately affects not only them but also their families, making it more difficult to come out. Mia talked about her CO process as "drama," and when asked more about it she explained:

Well, the whole thing that you have to have like a talk about it, like a coming out, and then

you have to deal with maybe like consequences of being discriminated against, like all these things ... it's not just my drama. It becomes my family's drama. Cause that's just how it is when you have a family of... a parent... it's like a Latino thing.

Participants repeatedly talked about how their family's values and needs were important to them, and how their CO process was deeply affected because of it. As LGB Latinos/as, the participants mentioned *familismo* often without using this exact term. Among the participants that talked about *familismo*, there were two common sub-themes that emerged: (1) fear of family rejection, and (2) tension while respecting family's attitudes and beliefs.

### Fear of Family Rejection

Most participants (n=8) indicated that they were afraid of coming out to their parents and siblings because of fear of anticipated rejection and possible shunning from family. These individuals explained that their parents might consider their sexual orientations as enough reason to shun them from their homes. For example, Ximena explained, "I fear being rejected by my family because we already have so many problems at home I don't wanna cause another disturbance and I'd rather hide [my sexual identity] from them than to show them who I actually am, if that makes sense, I don't know...".

Adrian, even at the age of 37, is still scared to come out to his family because of fear of rejection. He said that he has to hide his sexuality every time he interacts with a family member. Similarly, Adrian has not come out to almost anyone he knows because he is afraid that someone will tell his family. For example, he has not come out to his coworkers "para no tener problemas," (to not have any problems), as he works with family friends. This means that Adrian fears his coworkers might tell his family members, which will ultimately result in family rejection affecting his economic stability. Adrian explained, "I am barely scraping by economically, that is why I do not talk about my sexuality with my family."

Moreover, María also explained that she does not want to stress her mother with her sexuality even after coming out to her as bisexual. María described how she needs to feel supported by her mother and that after breaking up with a girlfriend she sought advice from her mother. However, she mentioned that she did not give her mother any details about the gender of the person she just broke up with since she did not want to feel judged or critiqued. María was scared that by

talking about her relationship issues with a same-sex partner her mother would distance herself from María.

Finally, Violet also explained that even though she came out to her parents in the U.S., she was still afraid of coming out to her family in Latin America. When asked about what she felt would happen if she came out to her distant relatives she described that it would not go well and that "they're kinda the family that if someone like really messes up, you kind of get shunned and I don't want that to happen to me, so." She believed that her distant relatives will read her sexuality as a "mess up," which would be enough reason to be shunned from the family.

### Tension while Respecting Family's Attitudes and Beliefs

Last, but certainly not least, all the participants (n=9) indicated that they understand and respect their parents' opinions because they are family and those values have been passed down from generation to generation. However, the participants mentioned feeling tension regarding their own sexual orientation and their parent's opinions. This tension made the CO process more stressful and difficult to cope with. For example, Camila explained, "Yo te respeto porque eres mi mamá, hasta te cariño porque es mi mamá. La amo, la quiero, la adoro. Pero también siento desprecio hacia ella. Siento coraje hacia ella porque me hizo ver muchas cosas como mala cuando no lo son." (I respect her because she is my mother, and I even love her because she is my mom. I love her, I care for her. But I also feel contempt for her [because of her opinions about sexual minorities]. I feel angry because she made me see myself as something bad when I am not bad).

Even at the age of 39, Camila feels contempt because of her mother's attitude towards her lesbianism. She feels like her mother is not supportive of her and her sexuality, while she is still respectful of her mother's opinions. This tension has made Camila feel judged by her mother. However, she still feels that she can talk to her mother about anything besides her sexuality. Camila even mentions that her mom "tiene una mente donde ella sigue pensando que yo voy a cambiar," (she has a mentality in which she keeps thinking that I am going to change [her sexuality]). Additionally, she has not come out to her father, which adds more stress to her life since she does not want to be rejected by him.

Mia explained that she cut her biological father off from her life because she did not agree with his personality and sexist comments. She said that "he doesn't like that, he wishes that I would be like a respectful daughter or [something] like that..."



Because of her lack of respect for her father's opinion, Mia ended up cutting him off, after which he has not reached out to her. She has not come out to him as bisexual, but she explains that it is better for her this way. Here, Mia's only solution for not dealing with the tension of disagreeing with her father's opinion was to cut him off entirely from her life.

Violet, on the other hand, decided to come out to her family even after hearing them make heterosexist comments. She explained that "Only the people that I love and really care about, and the people who really love and care about me are going to be supportive, so." Her family was ultimately supportive of her. At the same time, Violet is still afraid of coming out to her distant relatives, as they make many homophobic comments. She is scared of both being disrespectful of their beliefs and being rejected by them. She decided to come out to her parents, given that she felt she needed to be honest with them about her sexuality, but not her distant family.

Camila feels judged by her mother and does not know how to handle this tension, Mia completely rejected her father to stay away from opinions she did not agree with, and Violet was able to cope with this tension by believing that love was stronger than previously held attitudes. No matter the person, the tension between respecting familial tradition while being hurt by heterosexism significantly impacted participants' decisions during their CO process. As previously mentioned, this tension is linked to the fear of being rejected by family members. Moreover, as seen in Camila's story, age does not seem to mitigate this tension.

It is important to note that all but one of the participants came out to their sibling(s). This made it easier for some participants to cope with this tension, given that all the participants said that their siblings were very supportive of them. After being asked if she feels supported by her family, Amanda explained that they have supported her academically and economically and, "yeah, I think just family in terms of having like a sister has been helpful." Having someone from their families helping them feel accepted was a good way for the participants to feel familial support.

## Discussion

The aim of this study was to better understand the possible relation between the coming out experiences of LGB Latinos/as and Latinx cultural values such as *familismo* and religion. Although there has been extensive research regarding the minority stress that LGBTQ+ individuals go through and its connection to their CO

process, there has not been a study that specifically looks at the unique experiences that LGB Latinos/as of the U.S. Indeed, Latinos/as report high rates of religious belonging and tend to adhere to conservative values and collectivism within their families, which can have negative effects in the CO process. After using thematic analysis to draw themes from the interviews of 9 LGB Latinos/as and using Minority Stress Theory as an analytic framework, several sets of findings deserve emphasis.

First, religion played a tremendous role in the CO process of this sample. Although there have been studies about the role of religion on opinions about queer individuals in the Latinx community, less has been studied about how queer Latinos/as feel about these attitudes and opinions. Even without being explicitly asked about religion, participants were quick to mention how their sexual orientation was at odds with what their family's religion teaches, making coming out sometimes impossible. Some participants talked about how the gender norms that their parents taught them made them self-conscious of their decisions and actions. Their parents' heterosexist comments and attitudes were guided by their religion, which was Catholicism for most participants. It is important to note, however, that one participant was able to find support from a church in which the priest accepted him and his sexuality, making it easier for the participant to cope with being unable to come out to his parents, mainly as a result of their religiosity.

Second, *familismo* indeed played a crucial role during the CO process for this sample of LGB Latinos/as. Participants were afraid of coming out to their parents because of family rejection and possible shunning. Given that Latinos/as tend to adhere to collectivism, it was no surprise that even after being independent from parents, participants still talked about wanting their family to accept them. Moreover, participants had to deal with a particular kind of stress: believing that they had to always respect their family's opinion even when that opinion was against their sexuality. There was a noticeable tension between having to love and respect their parents while also completely disagreeing with them, which confused the participants and made them afraid to come out to their families.

However, collectivism was generally talked about by participants as a positive aspect of being Latino/a. Many participants talked about how grateful they were for the constant support they received from their families while growing up. Moreover, all participants talked about their siblings as a great support system, which gave them a feeling of acceptance and support

from their family. It was only in the particular scenario of CO that *familismo* had a negative effect on the participants.

These findings are important since they show that cultural values make the CO process of racial minorities even more complex than previously thought. As seen in this sample, cultural values play a fundamental role in how Latinos/as not only experience their CO process but also cope with their stress. As double minorities, LGB Latinos/as experience unique stressors that other racial groups might not have to face when coming out to their families. The findings illustrate the importance of understanding the intersectionality of gender, sexual orientation, and race, and its connections to mental health (in this case of LGB Latinos/as). Future research should analyze the role of cultural values and norms of double minorities in the U.S. in more depth, as to better understand their possible effects on LGB people's mental health and CO process.

### Limitations

Although this was one of the first studies to directly analyze the CO experience of LGB Latinos/as and its connections to cultural values, there were some limitations to this study. First, most of the participants in this sample see themselves between the middle and top of the ladder when asked about their Subjective Social Status (SSS), with a median status of 6 out of 10 (10 indicating the highest position). Further directions might need to look at people scoring lower on the ladder to see potential similarities and divergences.

Most participants were living in the Northwest U.S., which might bring different challenges and stressors than those that Latinos/as in other parts of the U.S. face. Furthermore, some participants did not grow up in the U.S. and others had relatives living outside of the U.S. These factors may have shaped the ways the participants understood familial relationships and the stressors that come from being a racial and sexual minority. However, it is interesting to see how even among a diverse group of individuals, themes were largely cohesive.

This study shows important, new results, especially given the almost nonexistent literature on the role of cultural values in the CO experiences of LGB Latinos/as. However, given that only 9 participants were analyzed for this study, different themes might emerge from another or larger sample of LGB Latinos/as. Although there were many negative implications that come from this study, including religion and *familismo* playing a detrimental role in the coming out experiences of LGB Latinos/as, there are many ways

that the participants talked about coping with their stress. For example, participants talked about finding other LGB Latinos/as, talking to their siblings about their sexuality, and finding support from therapists and queer organizations at universities.

### Conclusion

The present study advances the way we understand the role of cultural values, specifically *familismo* and religious values, in the coming out (CO) process of lesbian, gay, and bisexual Latinos/as. Building on previous research that explained the importance of religion and collectivism (specifically *familismo*) in the general Latino/a population in the U.S., the findings presented here explain some of the ways these cultural values affect the CO process of these double minorities.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, these results expand on the almost nonexistent literature about double minorities and the unique minority stress they endure during their CO process. Clinicians who want to better understand why LGB Latinos/as do not want to or are afraid of coming out to their families should take their status as double minorities into account. In his Minority Stress Theory, Meyer explained the importance of internal and external factors in the CO process of queer individuals.<sup>33</sup> This study expands on those factors, arguing that family and collectivism play a fundamental role in the CO process of Latinos/as and possibly other racial minorities such as African Americans.<sup>34</sup>

Additionally, conservative religious values and heterosexism shaped by those values played a crucial role in the CO process of these individuals. This was not mentioned by Meyer in his theory, which might be problematic when trying to understand the effects on the CO process of double minorities and their mental health.<sup>35</sup> This particular finding comes as no surprise given that Latinos/as are known to adhere to conservative values about LGB people and tend to be against marriage equality, for example.<sup>36</sup> Ultimately, this study illustrates the complexities of the CO process. Double minorities might be at a double jeopardy, as Ferraro & Farmer might call it, because of their status.<sup>37</sup> Whether it is because of fearing being rejected by their families, perceived heterosexism from parents, gender norms, or the tension between having to respect their parents but not agreeing with their beliefs, LGB Latinos/as suffer greatly from their minoritized status.

Table 1

*Participant demographics*

Pseudonym	Gender identity	Sexual identity	Age	Country of Origin	Age immigrated	Highest Level of Education	Annual Personal Income	SSS	Current Geographic Area	Preferred Language
01. Ximena	Female	Bisexual	18	US	N/A	HS, College Student	Not administered	Not administered	New England	English
02. Camila	Female	Lesbian	39	Puerto Rico	35	Associate	30-34,999	6	New England	Spanish
03. Maria	Female	Lesbian	34	Dominican Republic	28	Masters	30-34,999	9	New England	English
04. Mia	Female	Bisexual	24	Mexico	7	Bachelors	15-19,999	5	New England	English
05. Amanda	Female	Bisexual	21	US	N/A	HS, College Student	<10,000	5	Midwest	English
06. Valery	Female	Lesbian	22	US	N/A	Bachelors	40-44,999	5	New England	English
07. Adrian	Male	Gay	37	Mexico	35	Bachelors	Preferred not to answer	7	Southwest	Spanish
08. Violet	Female	Bisexual	23	US	N/A	Bachelors	15-19,999	4	Midwest	English
09. Diego	Male	Gay	30	US	N/A	Some college, no degree	25-29,999	6	South	English

*Note.* SSS = Subjective Social Status. SSS ratings indicate participants' self-rated social position in a symbolic ladder that represents where people in the U.S. stand in terms of employment, income, and education. The ladder ranges from 1-10, with 1 indicating the lowest position and 10 indicating the highest position. N/A = Not applicable

Participant	Came out to Mother	Came out to Father	Came out to Sibling	Came out to Dis-tant Family	Came out to Friends
Ximena	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Camila	Yes	No	Yes	No mention	Yes
Maria	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No mention
Mia	Yes	Yes (stepfather)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Amanda	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Valery	Yes	Yes	No mention	No	Yes
Adrian	No	No	No	No	Yes
Violet	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Diego	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

## Appendix A

1. The first section focused on experiences of stress, and included questions such as: What does it mean to you to be an LGB Latino(a)? How has life been like for you as an LGB Latino(a)? Have others treated you differently for being an LGB Latino? Have there been moments in your life when you have had trouble accepting or valuing yourself because of being who you are as an LGB Latino? Have you come out to your family? If so, how was it? If not, what are your reasons? Have you come out to others outside your family? If so, how was it? If not, what are your reasons?
2. The second section focused on coping with stress, and included questions such as: Can you tell me of a time when you were able to cope effectively with the challenges of being an LGB Latino(a)? Can you tell me of a time when you found it difficult to cope with the challenges of being an LGB Latino(a)? Who or what do you turn to when you find yourself in need of support?
3. The final section focused on suicidal ideation/ suicide attempt and nonsuicidal self-harm, and including questions such as: As an LGB Latino(a), have there been moments in your life when... you have felt hopeless?... like a burden?... Like you do not belong? As an LGB Latin(a), have there been moments in your life when things got so

challenging that... you had thoughts that life was not worth living, or that you could go to sleep and not wake up, or of killing yourself? ... you had thoughts of harming yourself or that you harmed yourself, even if you did not want to die? What kinds of things were making it a stressful time for you? What kinds of things helped you get through these stressful times?

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