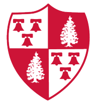

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Exploring LGBTQ Latino/a/x Stories of Chosen Families

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty of

Montclair State University in partial fulfillment

of the requirements

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

Carlos A. Flores

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Montclair, NJ

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MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

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Exploring LGBTQ Latino/a/x Stories of Chosen Families

of

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Graduate Program:
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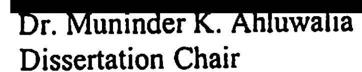

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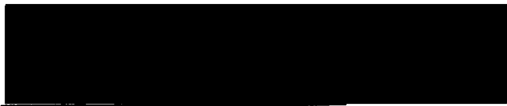

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Abstract

EXPLORING LGBTQ LATINO/A/X STORIES OF CHOSEN FAMILIES

by Carlos A. Flores

Latino/a/x Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) people may face rejection from their families upon coming out (Hailey et al. 2020; McConnell et al. 2018). In response to this rejection, some Latino/a/x LGBTQ people become part of chosen families that provide them with the support that would otherwise be provided by their family of origin (Carpineto et al., 2008; Horne et al., 2015; Hwahng et al., 2018; Kubicek, Beyer, et al., 2013; Kubicek, McNeeley, et al., 2013; Levitt et al., 2015; Muraco, 2006). Research exploring the experiences of LGBTQ Latino/a/x individuals experiencing rejection from their family of origin and becoming part of a chosen family is limited. Thus, the goal of this dissertation was to understand these stories. To achieve this aim, semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven participants who identified themselves as both Latino/a/x and LGBTQ and who experienced rejection from their family of origin and joined a chosen family. The study was informed by Latin Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality. Findings demonstrated that early messages received by participants from their families and communities set the stage for family rejection. Participants shared that there were several reasons for rejection informed by cultural and religious values. Finally, findings indicated the various benefits that participants gained by being part of a chosen family. Implications for counseling practice, supervision, counselor education, and future research were presented.

Keywords: LGBTQ, Latino/a/x, family rejection, chosen families

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother. Although she is not here to read this work or to see me earn my doctoral degree, I am certain that she would have been my biggest supporter and cheerleader as I cross this finish line. Thank you, mom, for giving me all I needed to reach this goal and for inspiring me every day to listen intently, to care deeply, and to cherish each moment fully.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

> *"Blood does not family make...Those are relatives…Family are those with whom you share your good, bad, and ugly, and still love one another in the end...These are the ones you select."*
>
> *Hector Xtravaganza (as cited in Bernstein, 2019)*

The quote above referenced in a New York Times article (Bernstein, 2019), spoken words by a prominent member of the Latinx Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) community in New York City and a member of the legendary Xtravaganza family, embodies the central premise of this dissertation – the notion that family is a socially constructed concept that can extend the boundaries of biology and genetics (Levitt et al. 2015). Through his words, Hector Xtravaganza conveyed that individuals can choose their own families consisting of individuals who share an intimate and loving bond (Bernstein, 2019). His words exemplify the significance of such families on the lives of its members, for many of whom these families provide the most salient and meaningful connections in their lives. These types of families, also known as chosen families, refer to socially constructed bonds that serve a similar role of family of origin, but consist of members who are not necessarily related to each other biologically (Blair & Pukall, 2015; Levitt et al. 2015).

Language is ever-changing and is integral to the exploration of chosen families in this dissertation study. Scholars across disciplines in the social sciences have studied families that extend beyond biological connectedness, assigning names for these family structures such as alternative families (Muraco, 2006), fictive kin (Hwahng et al. 2018), and chosen families (Blair & Pukall, 2015; Dewaele, et al. 2011). In this dissertation study, I used the label "chosen families" for any family-like structure where people are not biologically related, and yet serve the roles commonly found in a family of origin. Using the term "chosen families" emphasizes

that being a member of these families is an active choice that demonstrates individual agency and empowerment in identifying and joining a supportive family system.

Similarly, language is constantly changing with regard to understanding the experiences of LGBTQ and Latinx individuals. The acronym LGBTQ is an umbrella term for people who have a non-dominant gender or sexuality (Safe Zone Project, n.d.). There are other versions of the acronym that researchers may use in the literature, such as LGBT, and LGBTQIA+. For the purposes of this dissertation study, I chose to use the acronym LGBTQ to be inclusive of the many identities within the umbrella.

Latino, Latina and Latinx identity is also complex and nuanced. The terms Latino and Latina are commonly used designations for individuals who identify as having origins in Latin America and the term used depends on the gender of the individual (Latino used to identify men and Latina used to identify women). The term Latinx is a gender-neutral term that has been adopted in activist and academic circles as a way to be inclusive of individuals who may not identify with male or female genders (Salinas & Lozano, 2019). For the purposes of this dissertation study, I chose to use the term Latino/a/x to be all-encompassing of the varying identities within this community, recognizing that some individuals may not identify with either male or female gender, but others may associate strongly with one of those identities.

The Latino/a/x community is not monolithic. With approximately 60 million people in the United States identifying as Latino, Latina, or Latinx (Noe-Bustamante & Flores, 2019), and with a variety of experiences of emigration, immigration, and acculturation, it is impossible to boil down the experiences of all these individuals into one consistent and cohesive narrative. However, there are key commonalities shared across the majority of Latino/a/x people in the United States. Latino/a/x cultures share a collectivist worldview in which family is central to

individual sense of self and to a sense of community (Miranda et al. 2006). This core value is known as familismo or familialism, and consists of three core aspects: family obligations, perceived mutual support, and family members as role models (Miranda et al. 2006). These cultural values result in a variety of responses from family members towards those in the family who identify as LGBTQ (Przeworski & Piedra, 2020).

Family rejection can be a common experience for many LGBTQ people, including those that identify as Latino/a/x (McConnell et al. 2018). Although family rejection is not unique among LGBTQ Latino/a/x people, certain Latino/a/x cultural values shape how family rejection may play out within the Latino/a/x community. Latino/a/x cultural norms (e.g., religious conservatism, traditional gender norms, and the valuing of the community over the individual) can influence negative responses towards the disclosure of LGBTQ identity among Latino/a/x community members (Przeworski & Piedra, 2020). On the other hand, a strong sense of familismo can lead Latino/a/x families to accept LGBTQ family members due to the cultural value of supporting family (Przeworski & Piedra, 2020). This complex interplay of cultural values lends itself to a variety of coming out experiences for LGBTQ Latino/a/x people, and unfortunately, family rejection is a possibility for LGBTQ Latino/a/x individuals.

While family rejection has been documented among LGBTQ Latino/a/x people and African Americans (Hailey et al. 2020), there are currently no statistics in the literature that describe the extent of this issue (Levitt et al. 2015). For LGBTQ Latino/a/x people who may draw significant support from their families and may hold familismo as a core value, chosen families can provide the support and security they are missing when rejected from family of origin (Levitt et al. 2015). Given the significance of family in the Latino/a/x community and the prevalence of family rejection among those who identify as LGBTQ, chosen families are

important to the stories of LGBTQ Latino/a/x people in the United States. From a counseling perspective, understanding the role of chosen families in the lives of LGBTQ Latino/a/x clients can be useful in exploring potential sources of support and connection in clients' lives.

Limited research exists on families of choice and its implications for counseling individuals who might be a part of these family systems. Within the counseling literature in particular, there are currently very limited empirical studies that explore the role of chosen families on the experiences of LGBTQ Latino/a/x people. The objective of this dissertation was to fill this gap in the counseling literature in order to better inform the members of the counseling profession about the role of chosen families in the lives of LGBTQ Latino/a/x clients.

In this chapter, I provide a statement of the problem and state the research question for this dissertation study. Additionally, I detail the significance of this study for the counseling profession and for LGBTQ Latino/a/x individuals who are members of chosen families. I discuss the theoretical frameworks that guided the research study. Finally, I provide a list of definitions of terminology that I used throughout the dissertation.

Statement of the Problem

Counselors have an ethical responsibility to provide culturally competent services to clients from diverse cultural backgrounds (American Counseling Association, [ACA], 2014). This ethical responsibility extends to work with clients from the LGBTQ community, including individuals from Latino/a/x cultural backgrounds (ALGBTIC LGBQQIA Competencies Taskforce, 2013; Ratts et al. 2016; Sue et al. 1992). The ethical standards are further codified in a series of counseling competencies that counselors are encouraged to uphold through their counseling work with marginalized individuals. The Multicultural and Social Justice Competencies (Ratts et al. 2016), for example, emphasized the role of counselors in advocacy

and social justice efforts to address issues faced by marginalized clients. The Society for Sexual, Affectional, Intersex, and Gender Expansive Identities (SAIGE, formerly ALGBTIC) offers competencies specific to working with LGBQ clients (ALGBTIC LGBQQIA Competencies Taskforce et al. 2013) and another set geared towards working with transgender clients (ALGBTIC, 2010). Although these competencies serve as guides for counselors working with diverse clients and students, empirical research that informs the counseling profession on best practices for working with LGBTQ Latino/a/x clients is limited. Furthermore, many counselors remain underprepared and lack competence with regards to providing counseling for LGBTQ clients (Bidell, 2013, 2017).

Given their marginalized status in our society, LGBTQ Latino/a/x clients face a host of potential barriers to well-being and counselors have an ethical duty to address these barriers in counseling sessions (Hays, 2016; Ratts et al. 2016). One major obstacle faced by many LGBTQ Latino/a/x people is family rejection (Carpineto, et al. 2008). Although perceptions of LGBTQ people have been steadily growing more positive in the United States over the last decade (Brown, 2017), some parents and family members react negatively to individuals in their families who identify as LGBTQ. Latino/a/x parents and family members are no different in this regard, with cultural values of familismo, gender norms, and collectivist worldview playing a complex role in the ways in which family rejection can occur.

Family rejection refers to behaviors exhibited by family members towards another member characterized by anger, hostility, and/or indifference (Kostić, et al. 2014; Pariseau, et al. 2019). Examples of family rejection specific to the LGBTQ community include the end of family relationships, incidents of family violence, being kicked out of the house, and being sent away to try to change their identity (e.g., conversion camps; James, et al. 2016). Family rejection

among LGBTQ adults in the US is common. One nationally representative sample found 39% of those surveyed reported being rejected by their families (Pew Research, 2013). For LGBTQ youth, approximately 26% have reported that their biggest problem is not being accepted by family (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.a). It is important to note that these percentages are likely underreported due to the continued stigmatization of LGBTQ individuals that can lead to fear and shame that may arise from disclosure of one's sexual identity (Cabaj, n.d.). Additionally, these statistics do not explicate how rejection is defined in these instances and could vary dramatically. For instance, family rejection can range from indifference to outright hostility against fellow family members (Kostić, et al. 2014; Pariseau et al. 2019). In addition to the rejection itself, LGBTQ people who have been rejected by their families are likely to experience financial hardships, food insecurity, and homelessness due to rejection (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.a). LGBTQ youth are particularly susceptible to homelessness due to family rejection, comprising up to 40% of homeless youth in the US (Dashow, 2017). Consequently, family rejection can present as a significant roadblock to wellbeing and safety for many LGBTQ people.

Family rejection can lead to serious negative mental health outcomes, while family acceptance can lead to positive mental health outcomes (Pearson & Wilkinson, 2013). LGBTQ youth, for example, who have strained parental relationships due to coming out as LGBTQ, are more likely to experience decreased well-being compared to LGBTQ youth who have strong, close relationships with their parents post-coming out (Pearson & Wilkinson, 2013). By contrast, family acceptance correlates with positive mental health outcomes among LGBTQ youth (Ryan, et al. 2010). Willoughby et al. (2010) found that family rejection influenced negative self-perceptions of LGBTQ identity among LGBTQ youth, which may lead to internalization of

negative emotions. Yadegarfard et al. (2014) found that family rejection predicted depressive symptoms among Thai transgender adolescents. Family rejection has been linked to higher rates of suicide and substance misuse among LGBTQ youth compared to those not rejected by their families (Klein & Gloub, 2016; Ryan et al. 2010). Experiences of family rejection can also lead to negative self-perception which can result in depression, anxiety, and feeling of inadequacy (Willoughby et al. 2010).

Given what is known about the effects of family rejection on the well-being of LGBTQ individuals and the importance of social support towards buffering these negative effects, it becomes imperative for counselors to understand the kinds of social support systems that can play similar roles to families of origin, particularly for those clients who have been rejected by their families of origin. Much of the preliminary research on the effects of family rejection on LGBTQ well-being has focused on the experiences of LGBTQ youth, with limited empirical literature on the experiences of adults. Similarly, research on family rejection among LGBTQ people has not explicitly focused on the intersection of race and ethnicity with sexual and gender identity.

Even in the face of challenges such as family rejection, LGBTQ Latino/a/x people are resilient and find ways to overcome difficult situations that arise from an oppressive system (Asakura & Craig, 2014). When faced with rejection by family of origin, for example, many LGBTQ Latino/a/x people seek out alternatives that can serve a similar role of providing family support. Studies of chosen families have demonstrated that these families tend to consist of other LGBTQ individuals who are not biologically related to each other (Levitt et al. 2015). These chosen families have been documented and portrayed in documentaries such as *Paris is Burning* and *My House*, as well as popular television shows such as *Pose*. Chosen families have received

little attention in the scholarly literature to date. Moreover, the stories of LGBTQ Latino/a/x people who have faced rejection from their families of origin are not typically documented in the research literature (Ryan et al., 2010) and there is a possibility for these stories to go unshared in clinical and educational settings. These stories are vital sources of information and a means for LGBTQ Latino/a/x people to build solidarity and have their voices heard. The research question at the core of this dissertation study aimed at uncovering these unique stories and presenting them to the counseling profession as a testament to the lived experiences of LGBTQ Latino/a/x people and to inform counseling practices that will directly impact the well-being of LGBTQ Latino/a/x clients. Additionally, unveiling stories of chosen families can be beneficial to clients who do not have a chosen family but who may benefit from this system of social support that they may have never considered.

Research Question

The research question guiding this study was, "What are the stories of LGBTQ Latinx people who have been rejected from their families of origin and become a part of a chosen family?

Significance of the Study

The number of people in the US who identify as Latino/a/x and LGBTQ has grown substantially over the past decade (LGBT Demographic Data Interactive, 2019), and that growth is expected to continue in the near future. The Latino/a/x population is the second-largest racial/ethnic group in the US, making up 18% of the total US population, and the second-fastest growing population in the country (Flores, 2017). Similarly, the number of people in the US who identify as part of the LGBTQ community has risen from 3.5% in 2012 to 4.8% in 2018 (Newport, 2018). Interestingly, the greatest increase in the number of LGBTQ-identified

individuals has been within the Latino/a/x population (Newport, 2018). In 2018, Latino/a/x individuals became the racial/ethnic group most likely to identify as part of the LGBTQ community at 6.1% of the total Latino/a/x population (Newport, 2018). As discussed earlier, this number is likely underreported. This dissertation study can inform a richer understanding of one element of the experiences of the growing population of LGBTQ Latino/a/x people in the US. Additionally, as the LGBTQ Latino/a/x population continues to grow (and "come out"), counselors are more likely to work with clients who identify as part of this community. This study can inform counselors on how to address issues of family rejection and chosen family with these clients.

Historically, homosexuality was categorized as a mental health disorder within the first and second iterations of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-I, DSM-II; Drescher, 2015). Activists succeeded in urging the American Psychological Association (APA) to remove homosexuality from the DSM in 1973 (Drescher, 2015). Ultimately, other leading medical institutions similarly changed their views on homosexuality as pathological, such as The World Health Organization (WHO; Drescher, 2015). Given this history of pathologizing same-sex and same-gender experiences within the mental health professions, it is imperative that research that humanizes the experiences of LGBTQ people becomes more commonplace within the counseling literature. In this way, counselors and other mental health practitioners can be equipped to provide more culturally competent counseling.

In addition to pathologizing that has occurred within the mental health professions, many LGBTQ people, particularly people of color, experience discrimination and oppression that can lead to negative mental health outcomes (Sutter & Perrin, 2016). More specifically, LGBTQ people of color who have experienced rejection from significant people in their lives as a result

of their LGBTQ identity are at increased risk of these negative outcomes including suicidal ideation, anxiety, and depression (Sutter & Perrin, 2016). LGBTQ youth and young adults can be especially vulnerable to negative mental health outcomes due to rejection from their families (Ryan et al., 2009). For example, Ryan et al. (2009) found that "…lesbian, gay, and bisexual young adults who reported higher levels of family rejection during adolescence were 8.4 times more likely to report having attempted suicide…" (pg. 346) compared to LGB young adults who did not experience family rejection. Given the serious negative implications of family rejection on LGBTQ people, it is crucial that counselors and other mental health professionals are knowledgeable and prepared to competently address these issues with their clients.

Advocacy and social justice are core aspects of the counseling profession, evident by counseling competencies that emphasize the role of counselors in working towards systemic change with and for marginalized groups (ACA, 2014; Ratts et al, 2016; Toporek et al. 2009). Many of the counseling issues faced by LGBTQ Latino/a/x people are a result of systemic issues of marginalization and oppression, and counselors have an ethical imperative to address these issues. Given demographic trends, counselors are more likely than ever to encounter LGBTQ Latino/a/x clients in their daily counseling practice while simultaneously lacking adequate preparation to competently work with LGBTQ clients in general (Bidell, 2013, 2017). It is important for counselors to gain knowledge of salient aspects of LGBTQ Latino/a/x clients' experiences, including those of family rejection and chosen families.

To assist counselors in meeting ethical standards and to promote the delivery of competent and socially just counseling services for the well-being of LGBTQ Latino/a/x clients, research that explores the experiences of people who are at the intersection of these two

identities is critical. This study can inform counselors on ways they can effectively advocate with and for LGBTQ Latino/a/x clients to address both individual and systemic issues.

Counselor educators play a pivotal role in educating the next generation of counselors. The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) set standards for the effective practice of counselor education, including those specific to multicultural competency (2016). Efforts to train counselors-in-training on multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills when working competently with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds and identities have taken the form of multicultural classes embedded into counseling curriculum. Despite these efforts, most curricula provide for limited course offerings on the topic of multicultural competence (Bidell, 2013). Even more scant is the provision of coursework specific to the counseling needs of LGBTQ and Latino/a/x clients (Bidell, 2013). This study can provide counselor educators with information that can be used to enhance multicultural competence by infusing such content related to LGBTQ Latino/a/x chosen families into curriculum across courses (e.g., multicultural counseling, family counseling).

Supervision is the "signature pedagogy" of the counseling profession (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019, p. 2). Supervisors work to promote supervisee counseling competence and, by extension, to promote the safety and well-being of the clients served by their supervisees (Bernard & Goodyear, 2019). Supervisor ethical standards dictate that supervisors initiate conversations with their supervisees about cultural considerations relevant to client cases and to supervision itself (Association for Counselor Education and Supervision, 2011). This study can support supervisors in their exploration of multicultural considerations relevant to counselors' work with LGBTQ Latino/a/x clients, specifically issues of family rejection and chosen families.

Theoretical Lens

Social categories of identity are salient to the ways in which individuals experience their daily lives. Critical Race Theory (CRT) acknowledges how race and racism are central to the experiences of all people, but especially in the lives of people of color (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Within a research context, CRT allows for an active interrogation of the role of race and racism throughout the entire research process (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Additionally, CRT challenges researchers to view race, gender, and class as intertwined in shaping the experiences of people of color, while upholding these experiences as sources of strength (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Ultimately, CRT is dedicated to social justice, with the hope of eliminating racism in our society and empowering marginalized groups (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit) falls under the umbrella of Critical Race Theory and shares many its foundational principles, while focusing on the unique ways that race, ethnicity, racism, and ethnocentrism impact the lives of Latino/a/xs (Villalpando, 2004). LatCrit serves as a complement to CRT while sharpening its focus on experiences particular to the Latino/a/x experience (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Villalpando, 2004).

Testimonio is both a theoretical lens and a research methodology derived from the oral traditions common in Latinx culture and in the human rights struggles of Latin America (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). Testimonios, as a methodological tool, has been used in the field of education to disrupt dominant narratives and challenge the objectivity espoused by other research paradigms (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). At the heart of the testimonio theoretical framework is a movement towards social justice and liberation for marginalized and oppressed groups, in addition to a commitment to understanding how marginalized communities respond to oppressive forces (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). Using a testimonios theoretical framework allows the researcher to focus on the collective experiences of oppression of a marginalized

group and how that group uses agency to resist oppression (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). From a testimonios framework, research should be aimed at not only uncovering knowledge, but also liberating people and communities from oppression and marginalization. In this way, a testimonio theoretical framework is grounded in social justice and consistent with the aims of this dissertation study.

Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) refers to the framework that analyzes how multiple social identity statuses intersect to shape experiences and outcomes (Cole, 2009). Intersectionality is not merely an examination of individual identities taken together, but rather a critical analysis of the overarching social systems that perpetuate the oppression of people with marginalized identities and uniquely impact people with multiple marginalized identities. Intersectionality encourages researchers to acknowledge that examining several social identities separately (e.g., race and sexual orientation) is limited, and that an analysis of intersecting marginalization is key to understanding the full picture of people at the intersections of identities (Cole, 2009).

CRT, LatCrit, Testimonio, and Intersectionality allow for an exploration of race, ethnicity, and sexual/gender identity to be equally prioritized, along with other salient identities that might play a role in the stories of chosen families for LGBTQ Latino/a/x people. All of these theoretical frameworks fall within a critical paradigm that serves to challenge dominant systems and discourse that can intentionally and unintentionally result in the oppression of marginalized people. Using these frameworks, the stories of LGBTQ Latinx are honored, documented, and analyzed through a social justice lens.

Definitions

Language is ever-evolving, particularly within the context of LGBTQ experiences. For the purpose of clarity and consistency, below is a list of definitions for commonly used terminology throughout this dissertation. It is important to note that many of the terms included in the subsequent list may hold differing meanings for different people, and thus the list is not meant to be exhaustive nor ubiquitous in nature.

Chosen families refer to networks of non-biologically related individuals who fill the roles normally fulfilled by family members. These networks can compensate for lack of supportive family connections and serve as surrogates that can provide support in place of family members who are missing due to distance, abandonment, or death (Blair & Pukall, 2015; Dewaele, et al. 2011).

House Families are a specific type of chosen family that exist within a subculture within the LGBTQ community. These social networks, primarily consisting of LGBTQ people of color, act as surrogate families for those who may have been rejected from their families of origin. House families compete together in underground competitions known as balls focused around dance, fashion, athletics, and gender expression (Kubicek, Beyer, et al. 2013).

Gay Families are a specific type of chosen family that consist of "…support networks that gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals of color form, often in response to societal marginalization and rejection from biological families" (Horne et al. 2015, p. 808). Members of gay families oftentimes take the roles of biological family members, such as a parent or sibling, and provide support to their fellow members (Horne et al. 2015). Unlike house families, gay families are not necessarily tied to the underground competition scene of balls.

Latino/a are terms that have been used to identify people of Latin American descent. In the 1970s, the term *Hispanic* was introduced by the Nixon Administration and the US Census to

categorize people from Latin American descent, overtly linking people in this category with Spanish cultural, racial, and ethnic origins (Morales, 2018). The term *Latino* arose from activists asserting that Latin American migrants were not simply "hyphenated Europeans" (Morales 2018, p. 3). The term *Latino* (and its feminine equivalent *Latina*) is now commonly used, especially by individuals who identify as multiracial (Morales, 2018). The term acknowledges that people of Latin American descent are "products of mixed-raced societies and cultures…" (Morales, 2018, p. 3) and serves as unifying term amongst people from such varied communities that share common values.

Latinx is a term designated as a gender-neutral alternative for *Latino/a*. First usage of the term can be traced to the early 2000s from collective action when politically left-leaning and LGBTQ communities began using the term as a gender inclusive alternative to the binary terms of *Latino/a* (Salinas & Lozano, 2019). *Latinx* began to receive more widespread recognition in the mid-2010s through online communities and the increased utilization of social media Salinas & Lozano, 2019). While this term may be more inclusive, some contend that the term deviates from Spanish grammar and promotes imperialism by imposing a dominant US term on Latin American cultures (Vidal-Ortiz & Martínez, 2018). In an effort to be inclusive, I use the terms Latino/a/x to encompass the diversity of the experiences of people who identify as part of the community.

LGBTQ serves as an umbrella term for people who have a non-normative gender or sexuality and is an acronym whose letters stand for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (Safe Zone Project, n.d.). There are many variations of the acronym and many other terms that serve as an umbrella term for those who identify with a non-normative gender or sexual

identity; for the purposes of this study, however, LGBTQ is used to encompass all possible identities within this spectrum.

Family rejection includes a collection of behaviors characterized by anger, hostility, and/or indifference towards family members (Kostić, et al. 2014; Pariseau et al. 2019). Examples of family rejection specific to the LGBTQ community include the end of family relationships, incidents of family violence, being kicked out of the house, and being sent to seek out professional help to change identity (e.g. conversion therapy; James et al. 2016).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In the previous chapter, I introduced the concept of chosen families, including their implications for LGBTQ Latino/a/x people who have been rejected from their families of origin. In this chapter, I provide a review of relevant literature. First, I will outline the theoretical frameworks that form the grounding for this study. Second, I will review the cultural values that can inform the coming out process for LGBTQ Latino/a/x people and subsequent family rejection on the basis of sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Finally, I will review the research literature that is germane to understanding the stories of LGBTQ Latino/a/x family rejection and chosen families.

Theoretical Lens

Researchers consider theoretical frameworks that make most sense based on their research questions and study purposes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A theoretical framework informs the study design and interpretation of findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation play critical roles in the exploration of Latino/a/x LGBTQ experiences of chosen families. As such, theoretical frameworks that promote the examination of these dimensions of identity were used in this study. In this study, I used Latin Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) and Intersectionality as complementary frameworks.

Stemming from Critical Race Theory (CRT), LatCrit offers a lens by which both an examination of the unique experiences of Latino/a/x people, and the experiences of racism unique to Latino/a/x people, can be understood (Pérez Huber, 2010). Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) allows for an examination of the intersection of multiple identities, such as Latino/a/x and LGBTQ identity (Cole, 2009). These two theoretical frameworks combined allowed for an interrogation of the ways in which race and ethnicity, along with sexual

orientation and gender identity, informed the experiences of the participants in this study. Additionally, both LatCrit and Intersectionality uphold social justice as a key aspect of the research process (Hankivsky, 2014; Pérez Huber, 2009) which is consistent with the aims of this research study.

Latin Critical Race Theory (LatCrit)

LatCrit stems from CRT, which itself stems from broader Critical Theory (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). Critical Theory originated in the disciplines of philosophy and social theory (Bohman, 2021). Specifically, critical theory was influenced by social theory tenets which stressed freedom and liberation from oppression as central to a just and equitable society (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Critical theorists, thus, focus on the empowerment of people and strive to "understand and challenge power relations" between social forces and individuals (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 59). Critical theorists define power relations as forces that dominate and oppress people (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Further, these power relations are the core of critical frameworks (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), including LatCrit. Critical theorists assume that unequal power structures embedded in society lead to marginalization and oppression for individuals and groups with little or no power (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The overarching goal of Critical Theory is to critique, challenge, and transform these power relations through the research process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

CRT is a particular type of critical theory that emphasizes the role race plays in affecting the lives of individuals in a society (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). More specifically, CRT scholars stressed race as a major factor in the subordination of certain groups in the United States (U.S.) and racism as the main source of inequities in our society (Ladson-Billings & Tate IV, 1995). Race is influential in shaping the experiences of all people in our society, including Latino/a/xs

(Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). As such, CRT can be an essential lens by which to hear their stories in a meaningful way. Additionally, according to CRT, an exploration of race, racism, and power is integral to the study of oppression and marginalization in the U.S. (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). Using LatCrit specifically as a framework will allow me to challenge dominant power structures that oppress and marginalize LGBTQ Latino/a/x people. As this study focuses on the experiences of a particular marginalized group, LGBTQ Latino/a/x people, LatCrit would be a useful lens to employ.

LatCrit theorists espoused many of the same central tenets found in CRT (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). The first tenet of both LatCrit and CRT involves the centrality of race and racism in people's lives and the intersection of racism with other forms of oppression (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). LatCrit allows for an examination of the effects of race and racism on individuals of Latino/a/x descent with attention to other oppressed identities that some Latino/a/x people in the U.S. face today (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). An examination of experiences of rejection and chosen family for LGBTQ Latino/a/x people must also attend to issues of racism, ethnocentrism, and other forms of oppression.

A second core tenet of CRT and LatCrit is the challenge of dominant ideologies that serve to oppress marginalized groups (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). These dominant ideologies can include the notions of meritocracy and color-blindness (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). According to CRT and LatCrit theorists, meritocracy refers to opportunities granted to individuals solely based on merit, without considering the effects of other factors such as racism or discrimination (Haskins & Singh, 2015). Color-blindness refers to the insignificant role of race in an individual's or group's lived experience or position within society (Gallagher, 2003).

In this dissertation study, the challenge to dominant ideologies came from having participants share their stories and honoring the participants as the authors of their own narratives. Participants were viewed as the experts in the research process, challenging dominant notions of researchers as knowledge creators and participants as passive conveyors of information. This challenge to dominant ideologies was central to the aims of this study: to empower participants to share their stories and take agency within the research process.

The third core tenet involves a commitment to social justice as an integral part of CRT and LatCrit (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). This commitment is two-fold, 1) seeking to eliminate racism and all forms of oppression, and 2) seeking to empower marginalized groups (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). Social justice was core to this research study. It is important that injustice is not recreated or perpetuated within the research process, thus a LatCrit framework helped to guard against this re-marginalization. Participants were not only viewed as experts of their own stories, but were invited to participate in the data analysis process through member checks of interviews and a review of preliminary themes. In keeping with the social justice aims of the study, participant narratives will be brought outside of the study to influence change in our society.

CRT and LatCrit theorists acknowledged the importance of experiential knowledge in understanding the experiences of marginalized people (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). Through a LatCrit lens, experiential knowledge is valued and viewed as a strength (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). In this study, experiential knowledge was drawn from participants through the use of semi-structured interviews. Participants were able to share their stories and be involved in the data analysis to ensure that their experiential knowledge was understood accurately and presented authentically.

The final core tenet of CRT and LatCrit is its interdisciplinary nature (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). CRT and LatCrit utilize the knowledge base from various disciplines including Chicano/a studies, women's studies, education, and history (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). This study was informed by literature that spans a variety of disciplines (e.g. education, legal) and incorporated knowledge from interdisciplinary sources (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). CRT has been predominantly employed in the fields of education and law (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). Recognizing that empirical research using CRT and LatCrit in the mental health literature (e.g. psychology, social work, counseling.) is nascent, it became imperative to draw from these other disciplines (e.g. education research, law) to inform the theoretical framework of this study.

LatCrit adds elements to CRT that are relevant to the exploration of issues relating to Latino/a/x communities such as immigration, ethnocentrism, acculturation, and assimilation (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Pérez Huber, 2010; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). LatCrit scholars center the experiential knowledge of Latino/a/x people and strive to empower them through the research process (Pérez Huber, 2009). One of the LatCrit tenets includes the viewpoint of Latino/a/x people as multidimensional and the necessity to address issues at the intersections of racism, sexism, ethnocentrism, and other forms of oppression relevant to Latino/a/xs (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001). LatCrit is useful as applied to this study because the experiences of LGBTQ Latino/a/x people are complex and nuanced. LatCrit focuses on such complexity and embraces it, rather than reducing people to a set of labels or identities (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001).

In summary, LatCrit is reflected in this study in several ways. First, an explicit focus was placed on the racialized experiences of Latino/a/x LGBT people. Second, participant voices were honored and uplifted with the goal of empowering the participants to share their stories. Third, participants were involved throughout the research process in a collaborative manner, including

reviewing preliminary themes and providing feedback to inform the interpretation of findings. Finally, a major aim of this study was to promote the liberation of marginalized people, particularly Latino/a/x LGBTQ people, and so the goals were consistent with the philosophical underpinnings of LatCrit (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Pérez Huber, 2009; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001).

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a theoretical framework that emphasizes how individuals are shaped by the interactions of various social factors such as their race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexuality, and ability (Cho et al., 2013; Hankivsky, 2014). Intersectionality has its roots in black and feminist scholarship and stresses the importance of understanding the interlocking systems of oppression that impact the marginalization of people with multiple marginalized identities (Cooper, 2015, Cho et al., 2013, Crenshaw, 1991). Central to the theory of intersectionality is that individuals are situated within existing systems of power and privilege which intersect to shape their daily lives (Hankivsky, 2014). Additionally, an understanding of humans cannot be achieved through an exploration of single categories of identity, but rather through a multi-layered analysis of all social factors and interlocking systems within which an individual is located (Hankivsky, 2014). Intersectionality promotes social justice through its focus on individuals as nuanced, complex beings and its emphasis on the ways in which systems work to maintain inequities within our society (Hankivsky, 2014).

Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) can be a useful framework for understanding the experiences of multiply marginalized individuals by exploring identity categories, as well as accompanying levels of privilege/marginalization, as mutually inclusive (Cole, 2009; Ratts, 2017). According to Cole (2009), “Intersectionality…describe[s] analytic approaches that consider the meaning and consequences of multiple categories of social group membership” (p.

170). Cole (2009) further highlighted three questions that were integral to the integration of an intersectionality lens in psychology: a) who is included (and excluded) in research?; b) what is the role of inequality in the lives of individuals and communities?; and c) what are similarities/differences between groups of differing levels of privilege and oppression?

For communities whose voices and stories tend to be untold in research, intersectionality becomes a means of correcting this erasure in literature (Cole, 2009). For LGBTQ Latino/a/x people living in a heterosexist world, this omission manifests in several ways. Historically, research exploring the lives of LGBTQ people have excluded people of color and centered White gay men. The majority of identity development models for sexual and gender identity development, for example, do not address issues of culture and its influence on identity development (Cass, 1979; D'Augelli, 1994; McCarn-Fassinger, 1996). For example, Cass's Model of Sexual Orientation Identity Development (1979) makes no mention of race or ethnicity. Similarly, the McCarn-Fassinger Model of Lesbian Identity Development (1996) does not account for racial/ethnic identity. One identity development model that does take into account social aspects of identity development is D'Augelli's (1994) LGB Identity Development Model. In his model D'Augelli (1994) stressed the lifespan aspect of identity development and emphasized social factors that can influence this process. However, this model does not explicitly mention racial/ethnic cultural influences on identity development. As is illustrative in D'Augelli's model, intersectionality is necessary to address these critical gaps in understanding of the experiences of LGBTQ Latino/a/x people. To address such gaps, qualitative researchers have employed intersectionality to understand the experiences of individuals at the intersections of minoritized racial/ethnic and LGBTQ identities, such as transgender youth of color (Singh, 2013) as well as gay and bisexual Black men (Bowleg, 2012).

In this study, an intentional focus was placed on who was included and excluded from the study. For example, the participant criteria were broad enough to include participation from all groups within the Latino/a/x LGBTQ community (e.g., gay men, transgender women, non-binary people, those whose primary language is Spanish, immigrants and those born in the U.S.). Consistent with the Intersectionality approach and recognizing that neither LGBTQ nor Latino/a/x communities are monolithic, this study design was inclusive of the diversity within these groups. The role of inequality was explored in the study through interview questions related to rejection and marginalization. The similarities and differences between groups was explored through a comparison of individual narratives between participants, highlighting the ways in which each participant's stories were unique, and yet similar, to others' experience.

By conducting research through an intersectional lens, researchers can facilitate the dissemination of knowledge that derives directly from the individuals that researchers seek to understand. This rich, nuanced knowledge can inform counseling practices that are grounded in the stories of the individuals for which these practices are to serve. In this study, the participants were empowered to share the relevant information that relates to their stories, giving the participants agency in the research process. Additionally, Intersectionality was reflected in this study through the explicit exploration of how participants' social location as Latino/a/x and LGBTQ people shape their lived experiences. In the telling of their narratives, participants were encouraged to discuss any salient identities that they felt influenced their stories. Participants were viewed within the context of their identities and larger social systems, including the racial/ethnic communities and the sociopolitical environment within which they lived. Consistent with an Intersectionality framework, participant narratives were examined within these systems of interlocking systems of privilege and oppression. For example, political rhetoric regarding

Latino/a/x immigrants can serve to dehumanize these individuals and lead to their oppression within the larger society. Similarly, legislative efforts to ban transgender athletes from participating in sports teams that align with their gender identity can lead to the marginalization of transgender individuals. Finally, the liberation aims of this study (e.g., how participants will be empowered to share in the knowledge creation process) were consistent with the social justice aims of intersectionality.

Intersectionality complements LatCrit as a theoretical framework in its intentionality around not viewing people through the singular lens of race, but rather through multiple lenses that interrogate racism and the intersection of other forms of oppression, such as heterosexism and transphobia (Cole, 2009). LatCrit acknowledges the importance of examining racism alongside other forms of oppression (Solorzano & Bernal, 2001), while intersectionality reminds us that oppression can occur at the intersection of multiple identities (Crenshaw, 1991). Moreover, while LatCrit centers Latino/a/x identity in its framework, Intersectionality allows for a co-centering of LGBTQ identity, ensuring that neither identity is prioritized over the other. Combined, LatCrit and Intersectionality shed light on the unique positionality of individuals who identify as both Latino/a/x and LGBTQ -- uplifting the voices of those oftentimes reduced to single identity categories within research (Cole, 2009).

Literature Review

The purpose of this dissertation study was to understand the stories of LGBTQ Latino/a/x people who have been rejected by their families of origin and become a part of a chosen family. This concept of chosen families, however, has only recently emerged in the counseling literature. In this section, I will provide an overview of the literature germane to the factors that may influence LGBTQ Latino/a/x family rejection and the process of creating or joining a chosen

family. Specifically, I will provide an overview of the cultural values that can inform the coming out process for LGBTQ Latino/a/x people and subsequent family rejection on the basis of sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Then, I will provide an overview of the literature relevant to the coming out experiences of LGBTQ Latino/a/x people, family rejection, and their experiences of becoming a part of a chosen family.

LGBTQ Latinx Identities

In order to understand the stories of LGBTQ Latino/a/x people who have been rejected by their families of origin and become a part of chosen families, it is imperative to understand who Latino/a/x LGBTQ people are and the factors that influence their coming out experiences and the subsequent responses they receive from their families of origin to coming out. In this section, I will review demographic information about Latino/a/x LGBTQ people in the U.S., the identity labels that Latino/a/x LGBTQ people may use to describe themselves, and the unique experiences of individuals who identify at the intersection of these two identities.

Demographics

Hispanic and/or Latino/a/x people make up 18% of the U.S. population (Noe-Bustamante et al., 2020) and consist of people from multiple national origins and various emigration and immigration histories. Slightly more than 60% of all Latino/a/x people in the U.S. are of Mexican origin, while the remainder has origins from one or more of 33 countries across the Caribbean, Mexico, and Central and South America (Krogstad & Noe-Bustamante, 2020). About 80% of U.S. Latino/a/x people are U.S. citizens who were either born in the mainland U.S. or Puerto Rico, or were born to immigrant parents (Krogstad & Noe-Bustamante, 2020).

The percentage of surveyed individuals in the U.S. self-identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ), or other non-dominant sexual or gender identity has been

steadily increasing over the past decade (Jones, 2021; Newport, 2018). Between 2012 and 2018, the number of Americans who identified as LGBT increased from 3.5% to 4.8% (Newport, 2018). In 2021, 5.6% of those surveyed in a Gallup poll indicated their identification as LGBT (Jones, 2021). Younger individuals were more likely to self-identify as LGBT than older individuals, and women were more likely to self-identify as LGBT than men (Jones, 2021). Although LGBT self-identification has risen among all racial and ethnic groups in the U.S., Hispanic or Latino/a/x individuals demonstrated the greatest increase in identification as LGBT (6.1%) compared to other racial and ethnic groups between 2012-2018 (Newport, 2018). These demographics highlight the importance of understanding stories that are most salient to LGBTQ Latino/a/x people in the U.S., as more Latino/a/x people identify as LGBTQ.

Identity Labels

Various identity labels exist for individuals of Spanish and Latin American descent. The most common of such labels include terms such as Hispanic, Latino/a, and Latinx. Hispanic refers to the individuals descended from countries where Spanish is the primary language (Salinas & Lozano, 2019), while Latino/a is used as a way to categorize descendants of Latin American cultures with mixed heritage, such as those identifying with a mix of White, Black, and Native American ancestry (Salinas & Lozano, 2019). Importantly, terms such as Hispanic and Latino/a refer to cultural and ethnic identities, but not race. For example, an individual may identify ethnically and culturally as Latino but identify racially as Black or White. In addition to terms such as Hispanic and Latino/a, many individuals of Latin American descent refer to themselves by their specific country of origin (e.g. Mexican-American, Ecuadorian, etc.). Interestingly, research suggested that a majority of individuals of Latin American descent prefer

to refer to themselves using this country-specific designation (Salinas & Lozano, 2019; Taylor et al., 2012).

The term Latinx arose in the early 2000s as a way to promote inclusivity in the Spanish language (Salinas & Lozano, 2019). The Spanish language is inherently gendered in that all nouns have a prescribed binary gender (e.g., the word *chair* in Spanish is *la silla*, denoting the noun as feminine). Such gendered language poses a challenge for individuals who identify outside the gender binary, such as those identifying as non-binary or gender non-conforming. The term Latinx was born out of a movement to ensure that the Spanish language, and by extension the community itself, provided space for those for whom gendered language did not accurately reflect their lived experiences (Salinas & Lozano, 2019). By 2015, the term Latinx expanded beyond LGBTQ communities and into mainstream dialogue via social media (Salinas & Lozano, 2019). While there has been greater adoption of the term Latinx in academic and scholarly circles, in addition to activist and social justice groups, adoption of the term by members of the community itself has not been as widespread (Noe-Bustamante et al., 2020) and not without its own controversy and challenges. While about 76% of Latino/a/x adults have heard of the term Latinx, only about 3% use the term to describe themselves (Noe-Bustamante et al., 2020).

Many people who self-identify as LGBTQ use labels to express themselves (It Gets Better Project, 2020; Pinto, 2018). These labels can be useful to help others understand how LGBTQ people view themselves and how they want others to perceive them (Pinto, 2018). Many identity labels exist for individuals who do not identify with dominant sexual or gender identities. Some common examples include terms such as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer (It Gets Better Project, 2020). Oftentimes, these labels are referred to collectively

through umbrella terms that intend to describe the diversity of individuals who identify outside the dominant sexual and gender identity groups. Examples of these umbrella terms include LGBTQ, queer, and sexual/gender minorities (It Gets Better Project, 2020). In research on LGBTQ individuals, researchers may use varying terms to refer to the population. Examples of these terms include "sexual and gender minorities" or "LGBT individuals," to name a few (Lee et al., 2016).

While researchers may use different labels to describe LGBTQ populations, it is important to recognize that individuals in these studies may self-identify in a myriad of ways. Specifically, LGBTQ people of color (including those from the Latino/a/x community) may not use labels at all to describe their identities and/or experiences. For example, many men of color who have sex with men (MSM) do not necessarily describe themselves as "gay" even though they might engage in same-sex/same-gender relationships and behaviors (Hunter, 2010). For LGBTQ Latino/a/x people, the concept of identity labels may be especially nuanced given the fact that there are no direct translations in Spanish for terms such as "gay" or "LGBTQ". As such, it is important to recognize how LGBTQ identity labels may not always be salient for all LGBTQ Latino/a/x people, which has implications for how language is used in studies involving this population. Despite these nuances, researchers continue to employ LGBTQ identity labels in their studies as a way to ask individuals how they identify. As such, the literature reviewed in this chapter will reference these specific identity labels with the understanding that adhering to these identity labels presents a limitation when seeking to understand the breadth of experiences and stories of LGBTQ Latino/a/x people.

Intersection of Identities

Individuals who identify as both LGBTQ and Latino/a/x are at the intersection of two marginalized identities in the U.S., and therefore may have experiences that are different from those who are not at this particular intersection (Meyer, 2010). For example, a Latino gay man experiences oppression on the basis of his non-dominant ethnic identity and that of his non-dominant sexual orientation. Oftentimes, this double marginalization results in individuals dealing with multiple types of oppression at the same time (Meyer, 2010). In the case of LGBTQ Latino/a/x people, they may face issues of racism and homophobia/transphobia simultaneously from both within and outside their communities. As such, it is important to keep intersectionality in mind when seeking to understand the complexity of the stories of individuals who are both LGBTQ-identifying and Latino/a/x.

One framework that can be useful in understanding the experiences of individuals with multiple marginalized identities, such as LGBTQ Latino/a/x people, is multiple minority stress theory (Meyer, 2010). Minority stress theorists posited that individuals of marginalized identities experience heightened psychological distress and negative mental health outcomes due to stigmatization (Meyer, 1995). Moreover, multiple minority stress theorists posited that individuals at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities can experience compounding effects of marginalization. For example, McConnell et al. (2018) found that Black LGBTQ individuals reported higher levels of racial/ethnic stigma within LGBTQ spaces compared to White LGBTQ individuals. Moreover, racial/ethnic stigma within LGBTQ spaces combined with LGBTQ stigma within one's racial/ethnic community resulted in increased stress among all the LGBTQ people of color within the same study (McConnell et al., 2018).

Researchers suggested both challenges and strengths faced by individuals of multiple marginalities. Two competing theories about multiple minority stress are 1) the risk hypothesis

and 2) the resilience hypothesis (Meyer, 2010). Advocates of the risk hypothesis propose that LGB people of color experience more stress and corresponding psychological distress compared to white LGB people due to multiple experiences of marginalization (Cyrus, 2017; Meyer, 2010). For example, Bowleg and colleagues (2003) explored the experiences of Black lesbians and found that many of the women experienced racism, heterosexism, and sexism due to their multiple minority identities. On the other hand, those supporting the resilience hypothesis believe LGB people of color are more experienced in dealing with instances of racism due to growing up in a racist society and thus are better able to cope with experiences of homophobia or heteronormativity (Meyer, 2010). Studies tend to support the resilience hypothesis more often than the risk hypothesis (Meyer, 2010). For example, Bowleg et al. (2003) found that self-identified Black lesbian women demonstrated resilience even in the face of challenges associated with racism, sexism, and heterosexism. Additionally, in studies of Black and Latino LGB people, researchers found that while these individuals may lack resources and social support compared to White LGB people, the LGB people of color do not experience greater prevalence of mental health disorders compared to White LGB individuals (Meyer, 2010). This paradox may be due to increased resiliency among LGBTQ people of color, as well as the support received by informal and formal networks of support. A major limitation of the research supporting multiple minority stress theory is the lack of studies that include transgender participants and/or LGBTQ Latino/a/x participants. Despite these limitations, multiple minority stress theory provides a spotlight on the unique challenges and resilience associated with identifying at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities.

Latino/a/x Cultural Values

Cultural values inform how members of the Latino/a/x community "view relationships,

time, nature, and self-expression" (Carter et al., 2008, p. 6). Given the centrality of how these cultural values inform relationships among members of the Latino/a/x community, an examination of these values is integral to understanding LGBTQ Latino/a/x stories of coming out to family, family rejection, and the chosen family experience. Examples of such values that particularly influence the coming out process and experiences of family rejection and chosen families for LGBTQ Latino/a/xs include familismo, gender role expectations, and religiosity (Miranda et al., 2006; Rinderle & Montoya, 2008).

Familismo

Family relationships are central to Latino/a/x culture and sense of self (Miranda et al., 2006). Many Latino/a/x people place a heightened focus on group identity and solidarity, especially as it relates to family (Shokodriani & Gibbons, 1995). This commitment and loyalty to family and valuing of family relationships over other forms of relationships is oftentimes referred to as familism or familismo (Miranda et al., 2006). Familism or familismo is a cultural value that emphasizes the importance of warm and supportive family relationships and strong, close bonds with family members and extended family (Campos et al., 2014). Key aspects of familismo include "(a) a sense of obligation to family, (b) regarding family as a first source of emotional support, (c) valuing interconnectedness among family members, (d) taking family into account when making important decisions, (e) managing behavior to maintain family honor, and (f) willingly subordinating individual preferences for the benefit of family" (Campos et al. 2014, p. 192). Familismo usually goes hand-in-hand with the value of respeto, or respect, within Latino/a/x culture, where elders are respected and that private matters are not discussed in public (Delucio et al., 2020).

For LGBTQ Latino/a/x people, familismo plays a key role in influencing their identity

(Garcia, 1998) and can serve as both a protective force and as a barrier in disclosing and living authentically as an LGBTQ person within the Latino/a/x community (Przeworski & Piedra, 2020). For example, familismo has been associated with lack of disclosure of their sexual or gender identities to family members for fear that family members would feel betrayed by the disclosure (Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018; Przeworski & Piedra, 2020). This feeling of betrayal can stem from family members feeling they have been lied to or deceived. Family members may also experience the coming out process for a relative as a form of betrayal of their expectations (e.g. having a child grow up to be in a heterosexual marriage and have children). Whereas an individual may normally feel comfortable to turn to their family members as a primary source of support, in coming out the LGBTQ individual may not feel comfortable to disclose to their family members for fear of being rejected. LGBTQ individuals may also fear that coming out to their family members may disrupt the interconnectedness of their family ties (Fiddian-Green et al., 2017). Additionally, some LGBTQ Latino/a/x people may worry about negative perceptions from non-family members onto their families as a result of their LGBTQ identity (Merighi & Grimes, 2000). This fear of negative consequences on the family is consistent with the importance placed on upholding the family honor within Latino/a/x families. Due to the high value placed on family cohesion and connectedness, LGBTQ Latino/a/x people may especially fear the potential loss of family relationships as a result of coming out (Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018).

On the other hand, familismo has been associated with perceived family support and greater willingness to come out among LGBTQ Latino/a/xs (Merighi & Grimes, 2000; Przeworski & Piedra, 2020; Swendener & Woodell, 2017). For some LGBTQ Latino/a/xs, knowing that their families highly value family cohesion and solidarity can provide hope that

their family members will not reject them even if they do not accept their identities (Potoczniak et al., 2009). Indeed, it is possible that familismo on its own may influence family members to be accepting of their LGBTQ Latino/a/x members; however, family responses to LGBTQ members coming out can become complicated by other Latino/a/x cultural values such as those of machismo, marianismo, and the religious values embedded in the Latino/a/x culture.

Gender Norms: Machismo & Marianismo

Within the Latino/a/x community, certain behaviors and expectations are prescribed based on cis-gender (Edwards et al., 2008; Englander et al., 2012; Kulis et al., 2003). These socio-cultural gender scripts applied to men and women within Latino/a/x culture are known as machismo and marianismo, respectively (Edwards et al., 2008; Englander et al., 2012; Kulis et al., 2003; Nunez et al., 2016). Machismo refers to a set of expectations regarding the role of men in society. Machismo encompasses expectations of masculinity and can be broken down into two main aspects: traditional machismo and caballerismo (Nunez et al., 2016). Traditional machismo is characterized by dominance, toughness, and risk taking (Nunez et al., 2016). Caballerismo encompasses qualities such as chivalry, respect, honor, and courage (Nunez et al., 2016). Marianismo applies to expectations of women in Latino/a/x society and includes such characteristics as passivity, chastity, family-orientation, caregiving, nurturing, and self-sacrifice (Nunez et al., 2016). While these gender scripts can provide Latino/a/xs with a sense of positive responsibility and provide family members with specific and important roles to play within the family structure, these gender scripts can also serve to uphold a patriarchal power structure within the Latino/a/x community (Nunez et al., 2016).

For individuals who may identify outside of the gender binary and associated gender expectations, such as many LGBTQ Latino/a/x people, these gender expectations can complicate

their coming out experiences and shape their family responses to their coming out. For example, Latino/a/x gay men have been more likely than white gay men to report that it is important for them and their partners to not be perceived as being gay by strangers (Sanchez et al., 2016). For Latino/a/x lesbian women, expectations around marrying a man and being a mother can lead to uncertainty about whether their families would accept them (Przeworski & Piedra, 2020). For Latino/a/x transgender and non-binary individuals, the rigid, binary expectations around gender may present challenges in coming out and being accepted by their families. Currently, there is no literature to date exploring the specific influence of machismo and marianismo on gender identity disclosure for trans and gender non-binary individuals.

Religious Values

Religion plays a significant influence within Latino/a/x families and communities, serving as another key cultural value that may influence the coming out process and subsequent reactions from Latino/a/x family members. The Hispanic Churches in American Public Life National Survey (HCAPL) research project (1999-2002) found that 93% of Latinos surveyed reported identifying as Christian, specifically 70% identified as Roman Catholic, and 23% identified as Protestant (Espinosa, 2008).

For LGBTQ Latino/a/x people, the high level of religiosity within the Latino/a/x family can serve as a protective factor but can also present challenges when it comes to coming out and being accepted within their families. For example, many Latino/a/x people find religion to be a source of strength in coping with life's challenges (Campesino & Schwartz, 2006). However, the Catholic Church's official position on homosexuality is that being gay is acceptable but "acting upon it" (i.e., engaging in behaviors associated with homosexuality) is considered wrong and sinful (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.b). Despite this distinction between self-identification and

behaviors, and maybe even because of it, many LGBTQ Latino/a/x people hear a more generalized message that "being gay is wrong" (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.b). For LGBTQ Latino/a/x people whose families are highly religious, particularly those that identify with Catholicism or Protestant Evangelicalism, coming out can be fraught with uncertainty and fears about whether they will be accepted by their family members.

LGBTQ Latino/a/x Coming Out Experiences

For LGBTQ Latino/a/x people, coming out experiences can be influenced by the aforementioned factors unique to the intersection of LGBTQ and Latino/a/x identity (Eaton & Rios, 2017; Fiddian-Green et al., 2017; Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018; Potoczniak et al., 2009). These factors can lead to fear and uncertainty about whether family members will accept them when disclosing their LGBTQ identity (Eaton & Rios, 2017; Fiddian-Green et al., 2017; Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018; Potoczniak et al., 2009). These factors can also influence if and how LGBTQ Latino/a/x people choose to come out to their family members (Decena, 2008; Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018; Przeworski & Piedra, 2020). Family reactions to an individual's coming out are varied, although dynamics common to Latino/a/x families can complicate such responses. Possible outcomes of coming out within a Latino/a/x family include negative reactions to coming out, such as potential family rejection (Eaton & Rios, 2017; Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018). Herein, I review the pertinent literature regarding the experiences of Latino/a/x LGBTQ people with the coming out process and with family rejection as a result of coming out as LGBTQ.

Fears and Uncertainty

For many LGBTQ Latino/a/x individuals there can be much uncertainty and fear around disclosing their identities to family members. These feelings include fears of losing significant

relationships with their family members, of being outed to extended family members, of not living up to family expectations, and of bringing shame or embarrassment to the family (Fiddian-Green et al., 2017; Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018; Potoczniak et al., 2009). Additionally, LGBTQ Latino/a/x people have expressed concerns about being financially cut off or kicked out of one's home as a result of possible rejection from their families (Fiddian-Green et al., 2017; Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018; Potoczniak et al., 2009). For example, Gattamorta and Quidley-Rodriguez (2018) conducted a seminal qualitative study examining the coming out experiences of Hispanic sexual minority youth and young adults in South Florida (n=20). The researchers explored the reasons participants shared or did not share their identities with others and the perceived consequences of these actions (Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018). Their sample was 60% cisgender men (n=12) and 40% cisgender women (n=8, Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018). The majority of participants identified as gay (65%), with smaller percentages identifying as lesbian (25%), bisexual (5%), and queer (5%; Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018). Participants ranged from age 19-28 with 65% of participants being born in the U.S and 35% of participants were born outside the U.S Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018). The researchers asked the participants semi-structured interview questions designed to encourage participants to share their coming out experiences (Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018). Findings indicated that many of the participants struggled reconciling conflicting aspects of their identities, such as religion or gender expectations, and thus hid their identities from others (Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018). Several of the participants expressed hesitation at disclosing their identities with their family members, many fearing judgment, disappointment, financial repercussions, or being kicked out of the house (Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018). Some of the participants chose not to come out to their families

because they believed their families' biases against LGBTQ people would bring about negative reactions to their own experience of coming out (Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018).

These findings are consistent with similar studies that found that Latino/a/x LGBTQ people were concerned that coming out would damage their relationships with significant others and that fear and uncertainty was a common experience for LGBTQ Latino/a/x people as they contemplated coming out to their family members (Fiddian-Green et al., 2017; Potoczniak et al., 2009; Merighi & Grimes, 2000). For example, Potoczniak et al. conducted a qualitative study to understand the experiences of LGBTQ adolescents when coming out to their parents. The study was based on data collected through focus groups of LGBTQ adolescents (ages 14-18), 53% of whom identified as Hispanic or Latino/a, 35% identified as Black/African American, 11% Caucasian/White, and 1% South Asian (Potoczniak et al., 2009). Many of the participants indicated fear of disclosing their sexual identity due to potential damage of their relationships with their parents (Potoczniak et al., 2009). Similarly, Fiddian-Green et al. (2017) found that fear of losing familial and social relationships was core to the experiences of Puerto Rican Latino youth in New York City. The authors presented findings from their digital storytelling project that consisted of 30 Puerto Rican Latinas aged 15-21 (Fiddian-Green et al., 2017). Using a multimodal ethnographic approach, the researchers conducted observations and semi-structured interviews with participants, as well as recorded field notes (Fiddian-Green et al., 2017). Ultimately, 29 digital stories were collected from participants through the project (Fiddian-Green et al., 2017). Themes central to these stories included a fear of losing connection to family and friends, as well as fear of physical harm and being kicked out of the home (Fiddian-Green, et al., 2017).

Merighi and Grimes (2000) had similar findings through their exploratory qualitative study of young gay men ages 18-24 from various racial and ethnic backgrounds and their experiences with coming out. The researchers used in-depth interviews to collect data from 57 young gay men in the San Francisco area (Merighi and Grimes, 2000). Of the participants, 18 were African American, 8 were Mexican American, 25 European American, and 6 Vietnamese American (Merighi and Grimes, 2000). Findings indicated that for the African American, Mexican American, and Vietnamese American gay men, cultural norms around the importance of family influenced their coming out (Merighi and Grimes, 2000). For example, participants shared that they feared coming out to family would negatively impact the perception of their family from those outside the family (Merighi and Grimes, 2000). On the other hand, participants also shared that the importance of unity within their families made it easier for them to come out to their families (Merighi and Grimes, 2000). This finding was unique to this study and demonstrates how familismo can serve as a protective factor against the possible negative reactions experienced in the coming out process. Overall, these studies underscore the complex nature of values such as familismo, where on the one hand individuals fear losing such important familial connections, while also drawing hope from the strong and cohesive bonds within their families of origin.

Nonverbal (Tacit) Disclosure

Given the potential risks and uncertainty surrounding coming out, some Latino/a/x LGBTQ people choose alternative, non-verbal strategies for sharing their identities with family in order to minimize these negative consequences (Decena, 2008; Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018; Przeworski & Piedra, 2020). Additionally, these non-verbal ways of coming out, also known as tacit disclosure (Decena 2008, 2011), can be more consistent with the concept

of respeto in Latino/a/x culture, where individuals can display their identity without openly discussing a traditionally taboo subject directly with their family members (Delucio et al., 2020). This notion is reminiscent of the former “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy in effect from 1994 - 2011 employed by the U.S. Armed Forces, in which LGBTQ service members were allowed to serve as long as they kept their LGBTQ identities hidden (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020). Unlike military personnel, individuals employing tacit disclosure may demonstrate nonverbal expressions of LGBTQ identity (e.g. bringing one’s romantic partner to a family gathering without overtly announcing they are romantically involved).

Researchers have begun to explore the varied ways Latino/a/x LGBTQ individuals may disclose their identities through indirect, non-verbal ways. Delucio et al. (2020), in their work on the topic, explored the concept of nonverbal disclosure of gay identity in a sample of six Mexican American cisgender gay men ages 35-50. The researchers conducted interviews that consisted of questions regarding family relationships, coming out, and experiences of being Latino/a/x and LGBTQ (Delucio et al., 2020). All participants in the study shared that they engaged in nonverbal or contextual ways of disclosing their identity with their families (Delucio et al., 2020). For example, one participant in the study came out to his father via a letter instead of verbally coming out (Delucio et al., 2020). Other participants shared using social media to express their gay identities without directly coming out to their family members (Delucio et al., 2020). Other strategies employed by the gay men in the study included introducing romantic partners to their family members and gauging reactions as a way to determine how their family members may react to their gay identity (Delucio et al., 2020). In this way, participants could avoid uncomfortable and cultural incongruent conversations around asking for permission to engage in gay behaviors or relationships (Delucio et al., 2020). These findings further emphasize

how cultural values such as valuing and respecting elders can influence the coming out experiences of LGBTQ Latino/a/x people.

Latino/a/x Family Reactions to Coming Out

Given the complex set of cultural values at play within the Latino family, LGBTQ Latino/a/x people can experience a variety of different coming out stories. However, studies on the experiences of LGBTQ Latino/a/x adults have shown common reactions faced by LGBTQ Latino/a/x individuals when coming out to their families (Eaton & Rios, 2017; Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018; Gattamorta et al., 2019). For example, Gattamorta and Quidley-Rodriguez found that many Hispanic/Latino LGBQ participants aged 19-28 experienced negative reactions from their families upon coming out, including reactions based on misconceptions about sexual orientation. Some participants shared that their families believed being gay was a choice and that the participants could "fight" being gay (Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018). Participants also shared that their family members used religion as a means to emphasize that God did not approve of being gay (Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018). For some participants' families, beliefs influenced by religious views of homosexuality amounted to outright hostility about the participant's sexual identity, with some family members even becoming physically and emotionally violent towards the participants (Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018). These findings highlight the role of religious values in shaping family perceptions of homosexuality and their reactions to LGBTQ family members.

Eaton and Rios (2017) found similar findings regarding negative family reactions after coming out to their families in their qualitative study of queer Latino college men and their coming out experiences as emerging adults. The researchers interviewed 22 college men aged 18-29, all of whom identified as "Latino" (Eaton & Rios, 2017). Of the 22 men, 18 identified as

gay or homosexual, three identified as "other," and one identified as bisexual (Eaton & Rios, 2017). A majority of the participants (68%) shared that they had encountered negative responses when coming out (Eaton & Rios, 2017). These responses included the dissolution of relationships with significant others such as family members and friends, physical and emotional aggression from female members of the family, self-serving responses (e.g., how the disclosure will affect family members while ignoring how the experience impacts the person coming out), and pathologizing (Eaton & Rios, 2017).

Studies on the coming out process tend to focus on the experiences of LGBTQ Latino/a/x individuals. Gattamorta and colleagues (2019) were the first to study the experiences from the biological parents' perspective. In their qualitative study, Gattamorta et al. interviewed 10 self-identified Roman Catholic Hispanic parents whose children identified as LGBTQ. Most of the participants were women (n=9), with only one father participating in the study (Gattamorta et al., 2019). Participants included six parents born in Cuba, two parents born in the U.S., one parent born in Colombia, and one parent born in Nicaragua (Gattamorta et al., 2019). Parent ages ranged from 38 to 73, while the age of their children ranged from 21 to 43 at the time of the study (Gattamorta et al., 2019). The children were 14 to 33 years old when they disclosed this to their parents (Gattamorta et al., 2019).

The study investigated the influence of cultural values on the parent's reactions to their children's coming out (Gattamorta et al., 2019). Many of the participants (80%) expressed that their child came out to them directly (Gattamorta et al., 2019). Of the cultural values explored, parents cited "...religion (80%), *familismo* (80%), traditional gender roles (60%), and *machismo* (50%)" (Gattamorta et al. 2019, p. 156) as all influencing how they reacted to their child's coming out. For example, one parent expressed concern that their child would go to hell due to

being LGBTQ and, moreover, was concerned that she was the parent who allowed her child to go to hell (Gattamorta et al., 2019). Another parent shared that family is very important and that decisions should be made as a family, contrasting with the notion that coming out is a personal decision (Gattamorta et al., 2019). Half the parents in the study indicated that they initially had negative reactions to their child's coming out, including feelings of "...disappointment, fear, shock, sadness, disillusionment, and feeling hurt" (Gattamorta et al. 2019, p. 156). Other participants, particularly those who knew of the child's identity prior to them coming out, expressed relief when their child came out to them (Gattamorta et al. 2019).

Fear was a common reaction from the parents in the study, including fears affiliated with the loss of parental expectations (e.g., children would marry someone of the opposite sex). Additionally, parents feared negative perceptions from those outside the family due to their child's LGBTQ identity (Gattamorta et al. 2019). These results echoed Merighi and Grimes' research findings (2000). Others expressed fear that their children would be prone to suicide or drug abuse as a result of their LGBTQ identity (Gattamorta et al. 2019). Despite these initial negative reactions, 80% of the parents in the study had accepted their child's LGBTQ identity to some degree (Gattamorta et al. 2019). Some parents shared that they put their children over themselves (30%) in the process of acceptance, while others shared that the importance of family support (20%) compelled them to move towards acceptance (Gattamorta et al. 2019). These findings underscore the nuanced experiences of Hispanic/Latino/a/x parents in learning of their child's LGBTQ identity, and the influence of Latino/a/x cultural factors in shaping their reactions. More specifically, these findings reinforce the notion that the cultural value of familismo can be a motivating factor for parents to accept their children's LGBTQ identity,

where the importance of providing family support outweighs the potential inclination to reject an LGBTQ child.

Based on the aforementioned studies, the cultural value of familismo can add a layer of complexity to the coming out stories of LGBTQ Latino/a/x people. Specifically, familismo can serve as both a protective buffer against the potential negative outcomes of coming out to family and a barrier to family members accepting a relative's LGBTQ identity. While familismo may motivate Latino/a/x people to support their family members in the face of coming out, expectations about family roles can also create issues for LGBTQ Latino/a/x people coming out to their families.

Family Rejection. While family rejection is a possible, and highly consequential, outcome of the coming out process for LGBTQ Latino/a/x people, there are a lack of empirical studies in the literature that explore this experience for LGBTQ Latino/a/x people specifically. Ryan et al. (2010) conducted the only empirical studies to date to explore family rejection within this population, though the researchers only focused on LGB young adults. Ryan et al. (2009) conducted two studies to assess the relationship between family rejection and health outcomes. The first study developed a measure of family rejection, the Family Rejection Scale (Ryan et al. 2009), while the second study tested the relationship between the scale and health outcomes (Ryan et al., 2010). The researchers surveyed 49 families in the first study including 53 Latino and non-Latino white LGB adolescents (aged 13-19). The Family Rejection Scale consisted of 51 items and assessed for varying levels of family rejection using data from semi-structured interviews conducted in Spanish and English over a 2 year period (Ryan et al., 2009). In their second study, Ryan et al. (2010) assessed for three mental health outcomes in relation to family rejection: "current depression, suicidal ideation in the last 6 months, and lifetime suicide

attempts" (pp. 247-248). Participants in this second study included an equal number of LGBT young non-Latino and Latino adults (n = 245), although outcomes were only reported for 224 LGB participants due to the small number of transgender participants (n=21, Ryan et al., 2010). Findings indicated that more prevalent instances of family rejection correlated with poorer health outcomes (Ryan et al., 2010). More specifically, participants who reported higher levels of family rejection were more likely to report suicide attempts, depression, substance use, and unprotected sexual intercourse compared to those with low or no family rejection (Ryan et al., 2010). These findings highlight the negative impacts of family rejection on the well-being of LGBTQ Latino/a/xs. A major limitation of this study is the small number of transgender participants represented in the study and the lack of reporting on the findings pertinent to transgender experiences of family rejection and health outcomes. These studies taken together highlight the experiences of coming out and potential family rejection salient to LGBTQ Latino/a/x people.

Phillips et al. (2011) conducted a comprehensive literature review in which they found that many young men of color who experienced family rejection were forced out of their homes. Although the review was not exclusively focused on the LGBTQ Latino/a/x community, the findings reinforce the notion that family rejection can result in negative outcomes for LGBTQ people of color. Given the lack of research on the LGBTQ Latino/a/x population, it is helpful to explore the experiences of LGBTQ populations in general. The Pew Research Center conducted a survey of a nationally representative sample of self-identified LGBT adults (n=1,197) that yielded information useful to understand the landscape of coming out and family rejection in the U.S. (Pew Research, 2013). Respondent self-reported race/ethnicity included White non-

Hispanic (66%), Black non-Hispanic (10%), Hispanic (17%), and other non-Hispanic identities (7%, Pew Research, 2013).

According to the results of the Pew Research survey, 56% of respondents reported coming out to their mothers, 39% came out to their fathers, 59% came out to a brother, and 65% came out to a sister (Pew Research, 2013). The survey did not indicate the percentage of transgender respondents who shared their identity with their parents or siblings. A majority of respondents shared that coming out to their parents was difficult (59% difficult coming out to their mother, 65% difficult coming out to their father, Pew Research 2013). Some respondents (14%) shared that disclosing their identity to their parents weakened their relationship with them, while the majority of respondents (39%) reported no change in their relationship (46%) or an enhanced relationship with their parents (39%; Pew Research 2013). On the other hand, 39% of respondents shared experiences of rejection from their families or a close friend at some point in their lives (Pew Research, 2013). These survey findings reinforce findings that LGBTQ Latino/a/x individuals may receive negative reactions from their family members upon coming out, including hostility (Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018), dissolution of family relationships (Eaton & Rios, 2017), and being kicked out of their homes (Phillips et al., 2011).

While the findings from the survey are useful at understanding the overall coming out experiences of LGBTQ people in the U.S., two major limitations exist for generalizing the findings to the LGBTQ Latino/a/x population. First, although the survey included transgender people in their sample, findings were not reported for transgender participants on questions related to coming out to family. Secondly, the findings were not differentiated by racial or ethnic identity. As such, further survey research examining the coming out experiences for transgender

and gender non-binary individuals will be useful, as well as findings which disaggregate results by race/ethnicity and other intersecting identities.

Chosen Families

Despite the lack of empirical studies on family rejection specific to LGBTQ Latino/a/x people, there is burgeoning research on how LGBTQ people, particularly LGBTQ people of color and including those who identify as Latino/a/x, may respond to family rejection. One possible response is to form strong bonds with individuals who are not members of the family of origin, oftentimes mimicking the structure of a family of origin (Carpineto et al., 2008; Horne et al., 2015; Hwahng et al., 2018; Kubicek, Beyer, et al., 2013; Kubicek, McNeeley, et al., 2013; Levitt et al., 2015; Muraco, 2006). LGBTQ individuals often rely on their friends for support, especially when support is lacking from their families of origin (Dewaele et al., 2011). These friendship networks, oftentimes termed families of choice or chosen families, can provide LGBTQ individuals with emotional support, role models, and a sense of community (Dewaele et al., 2011). Additionally, chosen families can provide a space for LGBTQ individuals to develop their own sense of their LGBTQ identity (Dewaele et al., 2011). Finally, chosen families can also serve as a political statement that challenges heteronormative norms around family (Dewaele et al., 2011). The most common family-like structures include gay families and house families (Levitt et al., 2015), although chosen families are not limited to these aforementioned communities (Knauer, 2016; Muraco, 2006). For example, groups of close friends or LGBTQ elders who depend on each other for care can form chosen families without a nuclear family structure (e.g. individuals taking on the role of mother or father, Knauer, 2016; Muraco, 2006).

House and Gay Families

Gay families refer to social networks comprised primarily of African American LGBTQ adolescents in the southern region of the U.S. (Levitt et al., 2015). House families are social networks of LGBTQ people, primarily Black and Latino/a/x, who compete together in competitions known as balls (Kubicek, Beyer, et al., 2013; Phillips, II et al., 2011). Balls are a series of competitions, parties, and social events established and frequented by LGBTQ people of color that serve as spaces of community connection and make up a ballroom community (Wong et al., 2014). Gay and house families tend to resemble the structure of a family of origin and provide their members with varying levels of support, recognition, and creative expression.

Family-Like Structure. Gay families and house families are structured in similar ways to traditional notions of family. For example, Phillips II and colleagues (2011) conducted a comprehensive review of literature pertinent to house families and the ball scene, specifically focusing on transgender individuals and people of color within these communities, finding that common to all house families was a “father” or “mother” of the house that served as leaders of their respective house families. While neither parent role within house families is gender-specific, those assuming the mother role tend to focus on nurturing and caring while those assuming the father role tend to focus on being protective (Phillips II et al., 2011). These findings demonstrate how roles within house families mirror those of traditional notions of family, particularly as it relates to gender norms and expectations.

Additional studies confirm the typical structure of house families. For example, Kubicek, Beyer, and colleagues (2013) conducted a qualitative study of house families that included participant observations and semi-structured interviews with house leaders. The researchers conducted 153 hours of observation at 37 events associated with the ball scene, as well as interviews with at least one parent of each of 15 houses in the Los Angeles area (Kubicek, Beyer,

et al., 2013). Interview participants were 90% African American and 10% Latino, while 36% of participants identified as transgender (Kubicek, Beyer, et al., 2013). Findings indicated that each of the house families was led by a house mother, father, or both (Kubicek, Beyer, et al., 2013). The responsibilities of the house parents include recruiting new members to join the family, setting the direction of the family's activities, mentoring younger or newer members of the family, and liaising with other house families (Kubicek, Beyer, et al., 2013). House parents referred to a "sense of family" in their interviews when speaking about their house families (Kubicek, Beyer, et al., 2013, p. 182). This sense of being in charge of family also carried a sense of responsibility for the house parents in the study (Kubicek, Beyer, et al., 2013). Participants shared that the family structure offered by the house family was one of the main benefits of being part of the family (Kubicek, Beyer, et al., 2013). More specifically, house parents shared that being part of a house family offered its members a "...form of love, a place to stay when needed, and financial assistance" (Kubicek, Beyer, et al., 2013, p. 183).

Kubicek, McNeeley, et al. (2013) conducted a mixed methods study of house families in the Los Angeles area that included a survey, focus groups, and semi-structured interviews. The researchers analyzed 263 survey responses assessing various dimensions including motivations for joining a ball or house family (Kubicek, McNeeley, et al., 2013). The demographic breakdown of the survey respondents was as follows: American Indian/Native American (3%), Asian/Asian American/Pacific Islander (1%), Black/African American (83%), Latino/Hispanic (7%), White/Caucasian (1%), and 6% identified as another ethnicity (Kubicek, McNeeley, et al., 2013). One third of participants identified with more than one ethnic category (Kubicek, McNeeley, et al., 2013). An overwhelming majority of participants identified as male (89%), while 7% of respondents identifying as female and 4% identified as transgender and 1% as

another gender category (Kubicek, McNeeley, et al., 2013). In terms of sexual orientation, respondents identified as gay or another same-sex attraction (66%), straight (10%), bisexual (24%) and one respondent selected “Do not know” for their sexual orientation (Kubicek, McNeeley, et al., 2013).

The researchers also conducted eight focus groups with 45 house members and interviewed 24 individuals who attended balls but chose not to become part of a house family (Kubicek, McNeeley, et al., 2013). Participants for the interviews were selected from the survey respondents and included exclusively male participants (Kubicek, McNeeley, et al., 2013). Participants in both the focus groups and the interviews indicated that there were two types of house families: those that were more family-like and those that were more focused on the competition aspect of balls, with participants indicating greater benefits of being part of the family-like houses (Kubicek, McNeeley, et al., 2013).

The roles played by house parents were similar to those played by parents of gay families. For example, Levitt et al. (2015) conducted a qualitative study of 10 members of gay families, all of whom identified as African American or Black gay men and five of which also identified with female gender roles (Levitt et al., 2015). Similar to dynamics found in house families, the role of mother and father were not limited to members of a specific gender identity, however the roles themselves were highly gendered (Levitt et al., 2015). Mothers of gay families tended to serve in more nurturing roles alongside fathers embodying more protective roles which mirror traditional gender norms within families (Levitt et al., 2015). Similarly, Phillips II et al. (2011) found house parents to fall into these same gendered family roles. Other roles within the families, such as son or daughter, were assumed based on a member's gender expression and were either assigned by the parents or taken on by the member themselves (Levitt et al., 2015).

Social, Emotional, and Financial Support. Gay families and house families provide their members acceptance in the face of a family and/or society that is oftentimes not accepting of LGBTQ people (Kubicek, Beyer, et al., 2013; Levitt et al., 2015; Phillips II, et al., 2011). More specifically, researchers have found that gay families and house families provide their members with varying types of support, such as emotional, housing, and/or financial support, that members may be missing due to rejection from their families of origin. For example, in their qualitative study of Black and Latino house parents, Kubicek, Beyer and colleagues (2013) found that house families and the ballroom scene provided members of house families with a sense of support, acceptance, and validation in the face of discrimination and stigma from the "outside" world. Similarly, Kubicek, McNeeley and colleagues (2013), in their mixed method study of house families, found that these families provided their members with support that was viewed as bidirectional, offering members a chance to receive and provide support to each other (Kubicek, McNeeley et al., 2013). They also found that house members valued the support they received from their house families as equally important as the competition aspect of the ball scene (Kubicek, McNeeley, et al., 2013). These findings echo Phillips et al.'s (2011) result regarding many young men of color being forced out of their homes due to their sexual and/or gender identity. As a result, these men joined house families as a means of survival and for support as a result of their family rejection (Phillips et al., 2011).

Gay families similarly provide their members with support in the face of discrimination and stigma faced in everyday society. Levitt et al. (2015) found that gay, Black and African American families provided their members with love and acceptance that was lacking from the members' families of origin. Participants expressed experiencing rejection from family, friends, and their broader community (Levitt et al., 2015). As a result, many of the participants kept their

gay families separate from their families of origin (Levitt et al., 2015). Relatedly, participants shared that the members of their gay families could understand their experiences of rejection better than their families of origin (Levitt et al., 2015).

Self-Expression, Creativity, & Recognition. In addition to serving as a source of social, emotional, and financial support for members, house and gay families also offered members a chance to explore their sexual and gender identities freely and provided a chance for them to express themselves creatively. For example, Kubicek, Beyer, and colleagues (2013) found that house members viewed their discovery of house families as, "...fortuitous, as these communities were welcoming of many different types of people, making young gay, bisexual, and transgender men and women feel accepted and at home" (p. 183). Additionally, house parents spoke of the recognition that competing in the ball scene brought to house members who may otherwise not be recognized for their skills or talents outside of the ball scene (Kubicek, Beyer, et al., 2013). Similarly, Kubicek, McNeeley, and colleagues (2013) found that members of house families felt free to express themselves and their identities within the house families. These findings indicate how house and gay families mirror the structure and support typically provided by families of origin but that may be lacking for those who are rejected from their families of origin.

Other Chosen Families

Minimal literature to date explores chosen families outside of house or gay families. Muraco (2006) conducted an empirical study on the experiences of cross-gender and cross-sexual orientation friends who formed chosen families. The researcher conducted interviews with dyads consisting of gay men/heterosexual women and lesbians/heterosexual men, totaling 46 interviewees in 23 friendship pairs (Muraco, 2006). Exactly 50% of the participants self-identified as male and 50% as female (Muraco, 2006). Participants self-identified as heterosexual

(n=23), gay (n= 12), and lesbian (n=11, Muraco 2006). No participants identified as transgender (Muraco, 2006). Muraco (2006) interviewed each participant separately from their dyad partner to assess for how the relationship formed and was maintained. Muraco's findings indicated that a majority of the participants considered their close friends as family. About a third of the participants indicated they were alienated from their families of origin, which may have influenced the family-like connections they formed with their friends (Muraco, 2006). Interestingly, the gay or lesbian participants were no more likely than their heterosexual friends to seek out and form chosen families (Muraco, 2006). Participants shared that a key benefit of being in family-like relationships with their friends was the financial and emotional support that these relationships provided (Muraco, 2006). These findings are consistent with the findings of the benefits of being part of a house or gay family (Kubicek, Beyer, et al., 2013; Levitt et al., 2015; Phillips II, et al., 2011). These findings also highlight how the concept of chosen families is not limited to those experienced within the house or gay family scenes.

Knauer (2016) recognized that the concept of chosen families may be especially salient for LGBT older adults, many of whom tend to care for each other rather than rely on biological relatives for support. For example, only 11% of LGBT older adults receive care from a relative (Knauer, 2016) compared to 86% of non-LGBT older adults who receive care from a relative (Knauer, 2016). Given the history of LGBTQ stigma, many LGBT older adults have to rely on chosen families for support that would otherwise be provided by a multigenerational family (Knauer, 2016). Many LGBT older adults care for each other, with members of their chosen families being of a similar generation compared to the non-LGBT older adults who are more often cared for by younger relatives (Knauer, 2016). Although the chosen families may provide care that is lacking from their family of origin for many LGBT older adults, it is important to

note that these chosen families are not usually legally recognized, which can complicate the support provided by chosen family members. For example, while federal regulations grant hospitalized patients the right to decide who is allowed visitation rights, some hospital staff remain confused or outright refuse visitation rights to individuals not deemed to be biological or adopted family members (Family Caregiving Alliance, n.d.). Complications also arise with determinations about who is allowed to make health care decisions, with LGBTQ seniors and their caregivers encouraged to create legal documents demonstrating the caregiving relationship (Family Caregiving Alliance, n.d.). Similar legal issues may arise with respect to wills, trusts, and powers of attorney (Family Caregiving Alliance, n.d.). These legal complications with regard to the relationship between LGBTQ seniors and their caregivers shed light on the potential issues faced by other groups of individuals in a chosen family. These issues also emphasize the privilege inherent for individuals who can and choose to rely on members of their families of origin for support and care, since most legal and financial systems in the U.S. rely on specific and narrow definitions of family.

Chapter Summary

In this literature review, I provided an overview of the literature germane to the concept of family rejection and chosen families for LGBTQ Latino/a/x people. As is evident from the review, cultural factors play a critical role in the examination of experiences of coming out for LGBTQ Latino/a/x people. Moreover, there is a lack of empirical research on the experiences of family rejection for LGBTQ Latino/a/x people. Research on chosen families tends to be limited to those concerning house and gay families, two subcultures where LGBTQ Latino/a/x people are represented but ones that are not applicable to all LGBTQ Latino/a/x people. As such, a major gap in the literature is the exploration of family rejection and chosen family that can be

applicable to a broader swath of the LGBTQ Latino/a/x population, specifically those who are not members of a house or gay family. This study aimed to fill this gap in the literature to understand the stories of family rejection and chosen family members of LGBTQ Latino/a/x people. In the following chapter, I provide an overview of the research design that was utilized to achieve this goal.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In the previous chapter, I provided a review of the literature on LGBTQ Latinx chosen families. As evident from the literature review, research examining these chosen families is limited. To inform the counseling profession on how to better serve the mental health needs of individuals who are members of these families, additional research is necessary. The aim of this qualitative dissertation study was to explore the stories of LGBTQ Latinx chosen families. My proposed study was informed by a narrative inquiry lens as well as LatCrit and Intersectionality theoretical frameworks. In qualitative research, it is not possible to separate the researcher from the study itself (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As such, it is critical to the integrity of the study for the researcher to reflect on potential influences of their positionality on every aspect of the study design. In this chapter, I will share my researcher stance, provide an overview of the research design, and discuss how trustworthiness was upheld in the study.

Researcher Stance

Researcher reflexivity involves qualitative researchers interrogating their own assumptions, biases, and worldviews that might influence the research design, data analysis, and interpretation of results (Berger, 2015). Engaging in this level of reflection can enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of a study by being transparent about potential influences on findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). My researcher stance serves as a way to lay bare all of my own assumptions and experiences that may influence the research study, to understand my relationship to the study, and to unpack the possible impact of my own positionality on the interpretations that will arise from the study findings.

Mi Testimonio (My Testimonio)

I am an openly gay, cisgender Puerto Rican man. My parents were deeply religious, adhering to the Roman Catholic tradition as their parents, grandparents, and generations of ancestors did before them. My unique positionality within my family of origin and our religious and cultural traditions influenced my coming out experience and the reactions of my family members to my gay identity. For example, growing up I attended church every Sunday with my family. Oftentimes, I would receive the message that "being gay was wrong." At the same time, I realized early on that I was attracted to people of the same gender as me. This attraction created a dissonance within me, in which I believed that something I was feeling inside was "not normal" and "wrong." Thus, I attempted to hide that part of myself and to try to change it. It was not until I was 19 years old that I started to accept that I may be gay and that it might be okay.

The first person I came out to was neither a family member nor a friend, but rather an acquaintance who shared with me their bisexual identity. I sensed this person knew I was not heterosexual despite not fully accepting this fact for myself at the time. By having someone else come out to me, I felt slightly safer in coming out myself. While I felt safe with this person, I still was very anxious to share my identity for the first time. For so long growing up, I felt that my gay identity was wrong and something to change or keep hidden. I was afraid of the reactions that I would receive from others when sharing this part of myself. Ultimately, I felt an immense relief at finally telling another person this secret about my identity. It felt like a weight had been lifted from my shoulders. Simultaneously, it felt like the flood gates had opened and I wanted to share my identity with more people. As a result, I started to seek out more people who I could feel safe coming out to. This search led me to come out next to my cousin. I was living in Florida at the time and he was living in New Jersey, so I came out virtually via Skype. I was even more nervous to come out to a family member, but I did feel a sense of safety that made the process a

bit easier than coming out the very first time. My cousin reacted positively towards my coming out, saying he accepted me and would be there to support me no matter the situation. This experience provided me with another wave of relief and motivation to tell others. However, I knew the most challenging people to come out to would be my immediate family members.

Coming out to my mother was one of the most challenging moments of my life. I was terrified to come out to my family, especially my mother. I knew she was the most religious person in my immediate family and I was afraid that her reaction would be negative. I was unsure what she would say or how she would treat me after coming out to her. Unfortunately, she was not receptive to my coming out. I still remember the words she uttered in response, "*That is an abomination*" referring to my gay identity. I was not entirely surprised at her reaction, but I was heartbroken. I felt incredibly sad, disappointed, and alone. I remember keeping myself distant from my mother for a few days after this interaction -- mostly staying in my room and not talking to her much. I felt I could not connect in the same way with my family members as I did prior to coming out and I felt incredibly sad about this situation. Fortunately, my mother was not physically hostile, nor did she force me to leave the house as some parents do in reaction to their children coming out, however I still felt like our relationship would not be the same moving forward. In the same conversation as she condemned my identity, my mother emphasized her love for me. Such is the irony for LGBTQ people, the notion that your loved ones may still love you, but may not accept parts of you.

Shortly after coming out to my mother, I came out to my father who was somewhat more receptive or at least not as outwardly reactionary to the news. He seemed more confused than hostile. This coming out experience with my father felt like an uneasy relief; I was glad my father did not react with the same harshness as my mother but I also felt an uneasy tension with

regards to talking to him about my identity. I chose to keep my distance from him as well, until I could be more certain that I was safe around him.

Given the reactions from my immediate family to my coming out, I chose to distance myself from them. I was confused as to how to interact with family members who I knew had issues with my identity. Now that I was “out”, I felt like I had to hide parts of my authentic self when being around my family, and that was something I did not want to do anymore. While part of me felt sadness, I was also feeling free after coming out. I could finally be me and I found happiness in finding out who I was outside of the constraints of hiding my identity. In many ways, I felt the happiest I had felt in a long time, even given my distance from my family.

I was attending college at the time of my coming out and living on campus, which made the distancing from my family easier from a physical sense, though I still felt sad at the emotional distance between us. Fortunately, I had also come out to some friends at school and I spent most of my time with them, while avoiding spending time with my family. Coming out to my friends in college held similar feelings of anticipatory fear and anxiety, and ultimately relief when they reacted positively to my coming out.

Looking back, I wish I could have been my authentic self while maintaining my relationship with my family but I understand my distancing as a normal reaction to the pain of feeling rejected by my family. I also realized the immense privilege I had at the time to be able to spend my time away at school and be surrounded by supportive friends. I recognize that many others do not have these privileges and opportunities available to them.

Through this painful time of distance and separation from my family, I formed what I now consider a “chosen family.” I had a circle of close friends who I lived and shared my life with; shared experiences included the everyday casual dinners to celebrating birthdays and other

personal milestones. I felt safe within this group of friends; I felt like I could be my authentic self and share that self with others and not fear rejection or hostility. Because of these friends who became like family members to me, I felt supported and loved during a time where otherwise I may have felt completely isolated and alone. I still recall moments where I would cry on the shoulders of these individuals, moments when I would share my deepest insecurities and fears, and moments where I would laugh to the point of tears. Although my mom represented my biological family, when she rejected me, I created my own family composed of my friends who came to fill that void of support and helped me to get through one of the toughest times in my life.

My coming out experiences influenced my career aspirations, research interests, and current positionality as a higher education professional, counselor educator, and researcher. In an effort to support other LGBTQ Latinx people, I pursued a graduate degree in counseling with the aim of ensuring that LGBTQ Latinx people have access to quality and competent counseling services. In my current role as a career advisor, I attune to the various multicultural considerations that can impact college student career choice and development. As a counselor educator, I infuse a multicultural lens into my work, training the next generation of counselors on best practices for working with LGBTQ Latinx clients. As a researcher, I am informed by my own experiences with chosen families to explore the stories of others who have stories to share about their chosen family.

Research Design

Qualitative research involves the use of interpretative frameworks in studying the meanings that people ascribe to their lives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), "qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their

experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 6). Thus, in this study I employed a qualitative research methodology to explore the subjective experiences of LGBTQ Latinx people who have been rejected by their families of origin and become part of a chosen family. Moreover, I chose to use a qualitative approach because I sought to understand how participants interpreted, made sense of, and/or made meaning of their subjective experiences. Specifically, my approach was informed by narrative inquiry broadly and *testimonios* as a specific form of narrative inquiry.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is an approach to understanding people's lived experiences through the stories people live and tell (Clandinin, 2013). Narrative inquiry's philosophical underpinnings stem from John Dewey's (1938) theory of experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Dewey (1938) posited that experiences were a result of an individual interacting with their environment, that individuals could learn and grow through these experiences, and that experiences were continuous – one experience leading into and preceding other experiences. Narrative inquiry is grounded in a notion that, to understand experiences is to attend to the three facets of experience as defined in Dewey's theory: temporality, place, and sociality (Clandinin 2013).

Clandinin (2013) described the three core tenets of narrative inquiry: 1) experiences are relational -- situated in relationships and community, 2) experiences are continuous -- growing out of existing experiences and leading to new experiences, and 3) experiences are influenced by social factors -- social forces influence a person's individual experiences, history, and stories. These core tenets were reflected in this study through each step of the research process, with an emphasis on the lived experiences of LGBTQ Latinx people with key areas of focus: 1) relationships with others (family of origin and chosen family), 2) the events that preceded and

followed after coming out and being rejected by their family of origin, and 3) the social and cultural forces that shaped all of these experiences.

Narrative inquiry requires collaboration between researchers and participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative inquirers understand experience as a "narratively composed phenomenon" (Clandinin 2013, p. 16). Narrative researchers are interested in the first-hand accounts of experiences told by participants and, oftentimes, the meaning that these stories hold for the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Oftentimes, the stories of multiply marginalized communities are left untold or unreported within counseling literature (Ratts, 2017). The stories that LGBTQ Latinx people have to share about their chosen families is one such story. Researchers utilizing narrative inquiry analyze participant narratives within the context of broader social, cultural, and political stories (Creswell & Poth 2018). This kind of analysis-in-context allows researchers to understand all possible forces that help to shape and define an individual's story. The approach values the individual stories participants share, as well as the broader social, cultural, familial, and communal stories that shape and influence the individual's story (Clandinin 2013). Furthermore, situating participant stories within a broader social and historical context can serve the purpose of revealing power structures influencing personal narratives. Given the current sociopolitical climate and the challenges facing LGBTQ Latinx people in the United States, it is imperative to understand and retell the stories of this community from the perspective of those whose stories are influenced by broader societal dynamics. I employed a narrative lens in the research study towards this aim. This narrative approach focused on the unique perceptions, interpretations and understandings that participants form of their experiences through their recollection and retelling of the stories of their lives.

Narrative researchers examine both individual and collective stories (Clandinin, 2013). Through a process of analyzing themes and patterns across multiple individual narratives, researchers can understand broader narratives that may be common to members of a community (Blake, 2017). Through a process known as restorying, narrative researchers "merge data collected from multiple sources or multiple encounters with a research participant" (Blake 2017, p. 244). This process typically begins after initial data collection and coding has begun (Blake, 2017). I followed this process of restorying to identify the salient themes that span the narratives of multiple participants. Ultimately, the restorying process allowed me to arrive at a meta-narrative within which each of the individual narratives are situated.

Testimonios

Testimonios have origins in the human rights struggles in Latin America, specifically deriving from the oral traditions of marginalized and oppressed communities (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). Scholars, particularly critical researchers within the area of Chicano/a studies and education, have increasingly used *testimonios* as a methodological tool towards understanding the experiences of marginalized groups and promoting social justice through research (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). Unlike oral histories or autobiographies, *testimonios* ask participants to critically reflect on their experiences while the researchers serve as a witness and ally who "bring attention to the conditions of a particular group of Latino/as" (Delgado Bernal et al. 2012, p. 365).

As a methodological tool, scholars have used *testimonios* in ways consistent with their theoretical approaches. Pérez Huber (2009) identified key tenets of *testimonios* that aligned particularly well with a LatCrit theoretical lens, which is the lens I employed in this study. These tenets include: 1) "revealing injustices caused by oppression…; 2) challenging eurocentric

ideologies…; 3) validating experiential knowledge…; 4) acknowledging the power of human collectivity…; 5) commitment to racial and social justice" (Pérez Huber 2009, p. 645). As applied to this study, the tenets of *testimonios* are best reflected in the research question and interview protocol. The research question reflected an attempt to reveal potential injustices specific to LGBTQ Latinx people who have been rejected by their families of origin. The interview protocol and interview questions aimed at challenging eurocentric ideologies of knowledge by validating the knowledge that participants hold through their lived experiences. Through the data analysis process, human collectivity was acknowledged as both individual and collective *testimonios* were assessed. Finally, the commitment to racial and social justice was evident throughout the research design and upheld by a focus on the ways in which race, sexual orientation, and gender influenced the experiences participants shared with the researcher. Involving participants in a collaborative data analysis process aligned with the social justice aims of *testimonio*s and the specific goals of this study.

Testimonio as a methodological tool is "both a product and a process" (Delgado Bernal et al. 2012, p. 365). The process of soliciting the *testimonios* is equally as important as the *testimonios* produced through the data collection process themselves. The stories people share through *testimonios* allow researchers to gain insight into the experiences of a community, not just the individual (El Ashmawi, 2016). The sharing of *testimonios* is also a political act in that participant narratives allow participants to share their knowledge as legitimate and as a challenge to dominant narratives (El Ashmawi, 2016). Through sharing of participant *testimonios*, researchers listen for participant stories of resilience and resistance to oppression and identify the overarching themes that arise both in the individual and collective stories (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012). *Testimonios* are not just the retelling of stories, rather they are tools of collective

empowerment in which participants have the opportunity to reflect critically on their experiences and share them with the researcher (El Ashmawi, 2016).

With no prescribed or pre-determined methods associated with *testimonios*, there are common approaches for researchers to collect and analyze data within this framework (Murillo, 2018). Typically, researchers use semi-structured interviews and open-ended interview questions to solicit stories from participants (Murillo, 2018). Oftentimes, researchers will share their own *testimonios* with participants to build rapport and promote a space of affirmation and safety (Murillo, 2018). Researchers tend to seek out rich narratives from the participants that can be analyzed individually and collectively with the narratives of other participants.

In this study, I followed these general guidelines based on prior research using a *testimonio* framework. First, I built rapport with participants by sharing my aim to give voice to their unique stories and sharing a little bit about my own story. Next, I prompted participants to share their own *testimonios* using open-ended questions that solicited stories of family rejection and chosen family (Murillo, 2018). After each interview, I analyzed the participants' stories for individual and collective themes, paying close attention to the ways in which their stories affirmed and challenged dominant narratives around race, gender, sexual orientation, and other identity categories.

Since *testimonios* are designed to empower participants through the storytelling process (El Ashmawi, 2016), I involved participants as co-creators of knowledge throughout the research process. This process involved checking in with participants after initial interviews regarding emerging themes and getting their insights into the narratives that arose from the data collection process. Member checking occurred during a second interview dedicated to reviewing the themes and soliciting feedback, corrections, and modifications to their narratives. Any

discrepancy between researcher and participant interpretations of the data were resolved by prioritizing the participant interpretation. Through this process, participants were the owners of their narratives and shared their critical knowledge of their own lived experiences and life stories. This level of involvement by the participants was consistent with the social justice aims of the *testimonio* framework and honored the key premise of narrative inquiry by centering participants as the keepers of their stories.

Participant Criteria

My aim was to be inclusive in my participant recruitment procedures such that all members of the LGBTQ Latinx community (e.g., gay men, transgender individuals, bisexual women, individuals born in the U.S, immigrants, Spanish-speakers and non-Spanish speakers, individuals of multiple races) had equal access and opportunity to participate in this study. Inclusion criteria for participation in the study included the following: being 18 years or older, self-identifying as part of both the LGBTQ and Hispanic/Latinx communities, experienced/currently experiencing rejection from their biological and/or adopted families due to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, and considering themselves part of a chosen family. The term "chosen family" can have varying meanings to different people, hence an operational definition was provided within recruitment materials. For the purposes of determining selection criteria, I defined chosen family as a group consisting of non-biologically related individuals who fill the roles normally fulfilled by biological and/or adopted family members (Blair & Pukall, 2015; Dewaele et al. 2011). As rejection can be experienced in different ways, I also provided a definition of rejection on recruitment materials. For the purposes of this study, family rejection included being on the receiving end of actual or

perceived anger, hostility, and/or indifference from members of a family of origin (Kostić, et al. 2014; Pariseau et al. 2019).

Participant Recruitment

In narrative studies, researchers are intentional in whom they sample, considering such aspects as convenience (i.e., access to the participants), the kinds of stories participants may have to share (i.e., relevant to the research questions), and personal characteristics that may be directly relevant to the purpose of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018, Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The Latinx and LGBTQ communities are not monolithic, such that there is much diversity within these communities. In order to have a sample representative of the population of interest and reflective of the kinds of stories I sought in this study, I used purposeful, criterion, and snowball sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I recruited members of the Latinx LGBTQ community who had a story to tell about being rejected by their family or origin and becoming part of a chosen family.

Narrative studies tend to have smaller sample sizes compared to other qualitative methodologies, oftentimes having one to two participants, unless a larger number of individuals are sampled to draw on a collective story (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Within counseling research, sample sizes have ranged from five to 15 participants (Hinojosa & Carney, 2016; Johns, 2017; Patsiopoulos & Buchanan, 2011; Robertson & Black, 2017). In this study, I interviewed seven participants, which is consistent with accepted sampling sizes in narrative counseling research and will allow me to explore both individual and collective stories.

To ensure that the study met all applicable ethical guidelines, prior to initiating participant recruitment, I submitted an IRB proposal to Montclair State University and received approval. Consent and confidentiality were paramount to ensure the safety and privacy of

participants. All applicable ethical guidelines required by the IRB were adhered to and followed accordingly.

Participant recruitment took place in several ways. Recruitment materials were sent via email to professional contacts who forwarded the materials to individuals who may have qualified to participate in the study. Recruitment materials were also posted on social media platforms, particularly LinkedIn. Once participants were identified for the study, I asked them to recommend other potential participants for the study, consistent with accepted snowball sampling practices (Remler & Van Ryzin, 2011).

I contacted prospective participants who expressed interest in the study via email to confirm their eligibility to participate in the study and to set up an initial interview time. Prior to the initial interview time, I provided participants with the informed consent form by email consistent with IRB guidelines that outlined the study purpose, procedures, and protocol. Participants were informed at the outset of the first interview that they could participate in either English or Spanish, whichever language they felt most comfortable using. All participants chose to participate in English. Some participants had questions about their eligibility, and I reiterated the definition of the terms "family rejection" and "chosen family" within the context of this study to help them understand whether they met the criteria or not.

Ultimately, I interviewed seven participants ranging in age from 21-63. Four of the participants identified as Latino, one participant identified as Afro-Latino, one participant identified as Latina/Latine, and one participant identified at Latinx. When participants were asked to identify their ethnic identity, participants responded as follows: Dominican (n=1), Indigenous and Ecuadorian (n=1), Mexican American (n=1), Latinx (n=1), Columbian-American (n=1), Mixed (n=1), and half Ecuadorian and half Dominican (n=1). Five of the participants

identified as Gay, one participant identified as being attracted to male presenting individuals, and one participant identified as Pansexual and Queer. Five participants identified as cisgender men, one participant identified as a cisgender woman, and one participant identified as male without specifying whether they identified as transgender, cisgender, or gender non-binary. Importantly, one participant who identified as a cisgender man and one participant who identified as a cisgender woman both stated that while they used these labels to describe themselves, they did not feel that existing labels were expansive enough to adequately capture how they viewed themselves.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews, consistent with narrative inquiry research designs (Creswell & Poth, 2018, Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and narrative designs within the counseling field (Hinojosa & Carney, 2016; Johns, 2017; Patsiopoulos & Buchanan, 2011; Robertson & Black, 2017). Given the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom. Each participant had own designated Zoom interview room with a waiting room enabled so only I could admit them to the room. I conducted two, 60-90-minute individual interviews per participant. If a participant could not return for a second interview, data from the first interview was used as the sole source of data for that participant. This situation applied to one of the participants who did not return for a second interview.

Prior to initiating the interview, I provided an informed consent form to participants to review prior to the first interview. At the beginning of the first interview, I reviewed the consent form with participants and offered them the opportunity to ask questions and reviewed how confidentiality would be upheld. Upon agreeing to participate in the study, I verbally asked the

participants demographic questions. Participants had the opportunity to opt-out of the interview process at any time.

The first interview was the main interview where I asked participants semi-structured questions designed to solicit stories about their experiences with the experience under investigation (Blake, 2017; Johnson & Christensen, 2014). The second interview served as a follow-up and member-checking interview where participants had the opportunity to share additional information, and to correct or clarify details from the first interview. All interviews were recorded via Zoom and only the audio-recording was automatically saved in the cloud. The audio recordings were transcribed by a transcription service, Rev, and then kept according to IRB guidelines. I reviewed these transcriptions to ensure their accuracy. All audio recordings and transcriptions were saved in a Dropbox folder and I was the only person with access to the data. The transcripts were reviewed and analyzed using a coding procedure to identify themes within and among the interviews.

Data Analysis

Consistent with similar studies grounded in a *testimonio* methodological approach, data analysis took place in three main phases: preliminary thematic analysis, collaborative analysis, and final data analysis (Pérez Huber, 2009). For the preliminary analysis, I analyzed the interview transcripts and audio recordings to identify themes within each interview. Using LatCrit and intersectionality theoretical lenses, I explored the ways in which race, gender, sexual orientation, and other salient social identities informed each participant's story (Pérez Huber, 2009). Thematic analysis took place through a coding process, specifically "coding for patterns" (Saldaña, 2016, p.5). In qualitative research, a code is a word or short phrase that symbolizes a certain attribute in language-based or visual data (Saldaña, 2016). In other words, codes are

symbolic representations of data under investigation. The coding process is characterized by the researcher seeking "repetitive patterns of actions" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 6). Throughout the data analysis, I identified such codes and patterns of codes within and across data points, in this case, transcripts. From these initial codes, I identified patterns that then led to broader categories through a process of synthesis (Saldaña, 2016). Finally, I recoded and re-categorized categories to arrive at broader themes salient to each individual narrative and a broader narrative across all transcripts.

A second, simultaneous phase, the collaborative phase, involved sharing emerging themes from the initial phase with the participants. The researcher and participants engaged in a dialogue through a second interview around the emerging themes with the goal of achieving consensus in understanding the data (Pérez Huber, 2009). This collaborative analysis concluded after the second round interviews with the participants.

The final stage of the data analysis consisted of comparing and contrasting themes from the initial phase of analysis with those of the collaborative phase and finding consensus between the two sets of analyses. The final stage of analysis entailed finalizing the overarching themes and re-examining them through the theoretical lenses of LatCrit and Intersectionality. Consistent with a narrative inquiry and *testimonio* approach, collective narratives were examined based on common themes across interviews. This process, also known as re-storying, allowed the researcher to reorganize participant stories into a master narrative that reflected both the individual participant stories and collective stories (Blake, 2017).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is linked to the rigor, quality, and credibility of a study, which are all essential to ensure that consumers of research trust research findings and subsequently are

inclined to use the information garnered from such studies. Establishing rigor, quality, and credibility is particularly important for qualitative researchers (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative researchers seek to establish trustworthiness through several processes, including engaging in reflexivity (including examining one's researcher stance), using critical friends, member checking, and generating rich, thick description (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Each of these processes helps ensure that findings are trustworthy and boosts the credibility of the study.

Reflective Journaling

One major way that qualitative researchers can enhance the rigor, quality, and credibility of their studies is through a process of self-reflexivity (Darawsheh & Stanley, 2014). Qualitative researchers are encouraged to keep a journal to record and monitor one's feelings and behaviors towards study subject matter (Darawsheh & Stanley, 2014). This process of self-reflexivity in research enhances qualitative research rigor and promotes transparency about how the researcher's subjective experiences may influence the research study (Darawsheh & Stanley, 2014). Through the journaling process, researchers can clarify their biases, assumptions, and values and so the reader can understand the position from which the researcher is coming from as they engage in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Once researcher awareness and transparency are enhanced, researchers are more aptly able to make changes to their study approaches to mitigate any undue influence caused by researcher biases and assumptions (Darawsheh & Stanley, 2014).

In this research study, I tracked my own feelings and reactions to the stories that participants shared. I engaged in reflection continuously through the research process, beginning prior to data collection. I kept track of my reactions to each individual interview with

participants, as well as the end of the data collection and throughout the data analysis process. This reflective practice helped me bracket my experiences, making clear my own emotions and reactions to stories in the moment and reflecting on what these reactions may mean for data analysis and interpretations.

Critical Friends

The term "critical friend" refers to an individual who supports the researcher in their study by providing critique, asking critical questions, and presenting new ideas (Appleton, 2011). The use of critical friends is a technique that can enhance a qualitative researcher's reflexivity and integrity (Appleton, 2011). In qualitative research, the researcher also serves as a tool of the study, thus the researcher is not a purely objective and neutral party in the study (Appleton, 2011). As such, critical friends can be useful towards achieving greater integrity to the study. In this study, I relied on one critical friend who was a fellow doctoral student. The critical friend was in their own dissertation process and identified as a gay White male who speaks English and Spanish.

I communicated with my critical friend throughout each part of the dissertation study. I discussed my reflections and reactions, as well as emerging codes and themes. My critical friend reviewed initial codes and emerging themes and provide their perspective on the data analysis process. My critical friend read my dissertation chapters to offer critique and provide their perspective into their observations of the dissertation process.

Member Checking

Soliciting feedback from participants is critical to establishing credibility in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Specifically known as member checking, the process of seeking feedback from participants involves sharing "data, analyses, interpretations, and

conclusions" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 261) with participants to seek their feedback on whether the process is truly reflecting their experiences. This process helps elucidate whether the researcher's interpretations are accurate, and provides participants the opportunity to fill in any missing data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Using a *testimonio* framework that emphasizes social justice and liberation, member checking becomes even more important to ensuring that participants have control over their own narratives and can help minimize the influence of researcher biases and assumptions on the interpretations of these stories. Member checking took place primarily through the collaborative phase of data analysis during second round interviews.

During second round interviews, participants had the opportunity to correct any misinterpretations and fill in any gaps that were missing in the collection of their stories from the first round of interviews. Additionally, these member checking interviews allowed participants to become more active members of the study, rather than passive conveyors of information, which is in line with critical paradigms of research, and *testimonios,* in particular (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Generating Rich and Thick Description

A major validation consideration in qualitative research involves the transferability of findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the absence of generalizability, rich and thick description promotes transferability of study findings, allowing readers to more fully consider how the findings can be applied to other settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Providing detailed descriptions of the participant stories and the context in which these stories take place, the reader can more easily understand the full breadth of the experience. Generating rich, thick description involved steps throughout the research process.

In the data collection phase, I used interview questions that solicited descriptive information from participants, including "physical description, movement description, and activity description" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 263). I took notes and made comments in interview transcripts to keep track of any details that particularly stood out to me from the participant stories. In the data analysis stage, I revisited the raw data, or interview transcripts, to add further descriptions that might be useful, such as details from my own reflections or questions that arose for me during the data collection process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the reporting of findings, I used detailed descriptions and direct quotes from participants to provide as much rich and thick description for readers.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of my researcher stance and an overview of the research design for this study. Additionally, I described how I ensured trustworthiness of the study and subsequent credibility. In the following chapter, I will present the findings from the study, including the major themes identified and specific quotes from participant stories.

Chapter 4: Findings

A consistent narrative arc emerged from the participant interviews that provides a framework for understanding stories of LGBTQ Latinx individuals who have experienced rejection from their family of origin and become part of a chosen family. The arc can be organized into four major themes: (a) Direct and Indirect Messaging Set the Stage; (b) The Coming Out Journey was Challenging; (c) Why did they reject me?; and (d) My chosen family gave me what I needed. Within each theme are several sub-themes.

Findings are organized thematically and chronologically. That is, each theme precipitates from the events that occurred within the preceding theme. Hence, themes are presented in the order in which they were experienced by participants, not necessarily in order of prevalence. Throughout this chapter, I will refer to members of the participants' families of origins as "family members" and members of the participants' chosen families as "chosen family members" for clarity, though participants themselves may have used these terms interchangeably. For reference, participant demographic information is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

Study Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Age	Latino/a/x Identity	Ethnicity	Sexual/Affectional Orientation	Gender Identity	Pronouns
Chris	21	Afro-Latino	Dominican	Gay	Male	he/him
Elena	29	Latina/e	Indigenous, American, Ecuadorian	Queer/Pansexual	Cisgender female	She/her
Alejandro	27	Latino	Mexican American	Attracted to male presenting people	Cisgender male	he/him
Pedro	26	Latinx	Latinx	Gay	Cisgender male	he/him
Enrique	46	Latino	Columbian American	Gay	Cisgender male	he/him
Lorenzo	63	Latino	Mixed	Gay	Cisgender male	he/him

Miguel	27	Latino	Half Ecuadorian/ Half Dominican	Gay	Cisgender male	He/him

Theme 1: Direct and Indirect Messaging Set the Stage

All participants shared that they received indirect and direct messages about LGBTQ people and about who and how the participants should be in terms of their gender identity and sexual orientation. These messages came from various sources, including members of their immediate family, extended family, friends, acquaintances, school peers, and members of their religious communities. Religious and cultural beliefs regarding gender, machismo, and sexuality influenced the messages the participants received. Some participants internalized these messages that they experienced as damaging, while others rejected them.

For most participants, the messages sent by their family members and religious communities contradicted their own understanding of their authentic selves, defined as their holistic selves incorporating all of their identities, particularly their LGBTQ and ethnic identities. The messages created internal conflict between their perceived authentic selves and the expectations of those around them. The early messages from their families set the stage for experiences of rejection that participants encountered later in life. Three sub themes emerged from this initial theme: (a) Expectations to conform to gender expectations; (b) Family conflated gender with sexuality; and (c) Negative comments about LGBTQ people were pervasive.

Expectations to conform to gender expectations

Many of the messages received by participants involved specific expectations their loved ones had of them based on the participant's gender. According to these messages, individuals who identified as men were expected to act and behave in specific ways aligned with the concept

of machismo, while individuals who identified as women were expected to act and behave in ways consistent with stereotypical notions of femininity. All participants in the study shared that their families held these notions of gender and machismo that the participants did not align with, and that this dissonance caused internal and external conflict for participants. For example, Elena explained the kinds of expectations placed on her as the middle daughter in her large Latino family and ways she did not conform to these expectations. Elena said,

> I feel like from a young age, my parents always saw that I was a little bit more progressive in terms of identity and not adhering to a lot of norms. My mom always used to say, like, "Ay caramba" whenever I would sit down because I would never cross my legs… I never used to wear makeup, I barely wear makeup now … and one time I did it and she was like, "See, you can look beautiful." And I remember being like, "Damn mom..." So there were a lot of expectations about looking, dressing. My dad would always, after I came out, whenever I wore a dress, he was like, "Oh, it just makes my heart so happy that you're still feminine." And I'm like, "What are you trying to say?"

The men in the study received messages that centered around the concept of machismo. These messages involved ideas about how men “should” behave and what they should “like”. One key example is the notion that men should enjoy sports. Pedro spoke extensively about the expectations placed on him by family members who equated liking sports with being a man. Pedro explained,

> My dad really, really, really was excited to have a second son. He had so many plans in his mind. "Oh, we're just going to take you as we did with your brother so that you can play soccer and we're also going to give you all the balloons for all the sports that you want. We're going to put you in every single class of every single sport that you would

> like to so that you can try them all and pick which one you want to do. We will give you bicycles. We will give you all of the things that kids my age were doing. We will give you action figures." And I'll be like, "No. No. No. No."

Machismo was also prevalent in stories participants shared about emotions and emotional expression. All male participants shared that, for men, displaying emotions was frowned upon by their families and communities, and emotional expression was viewed as weakness.
Some of these men internalized messages around gender expectations and changed their public behavior to avoid being called out by people around them. For example, Enrique stated,

> I bring [this experience] up only because I feel like that was like a really specific example of where I remember thinking that if you emote, if you show emotion, if you show like acts of kindness, that does not align with being a heterosexual man or with a man period. So in face of that, I remember at a very early age, flipping the script and recognizing that I needed to be non emotive. I needed to be serious and not laugh and watch my mannerisms because I would be called out."

Family conflated gender with sexuality

Family beliefs translated into messaging that gender expression was equated to sexuality. For female-identifying participants, stereotypically masculine behaviors or mannerisms were regarded by family members as signs that the participant was either lesbian or seeking to transition to living as a man. For male-identifying participants, family members associated stereotypically feminine behaviors or mannerisms with participants being gay or wanting to transition to being a woman. This conflation led to family members making assumptions of participant identities, even before participants had a chance to come out to them. For example,

Chris explained that one of his cousins assumed he was gay because of his feminine qualities. Chris stated,

> I have this one cousin who's really down to earth. She's about in her 20s, late 20s. And I remember she asked me about my orientation. And I told her, I was like, "Oh, I'm gay" And then she was like, "It's okay. You could be who you are." And then she said a comment. She was like, "Oh, I already knew you were gay because," she was like, "Basically you have feminine tendencies."

Other participants shared how their family members associated coming out as gay with coming out as transgender, and that this conflation made it difficult for those family members to understand the participants' identities. Half of the participants shared their frustration at their family members either misunderstanding them or expecting them to identify in specific ways that were inconsistent with their authentic selves. Elena, for example, stated,

> My dad thinks to be gay is to also be trans… I went to the Women's March, and he sent me this super long message about how, no matter what, I'm a woman. And I was like, "I think that you are not understanding the things that I'm saying." I was like, "Also, I do identify as a woman. And if I didn't, this wouldn't be a conversation we're having. You don't get to tell me how I identify."

Family members viewed participants displaying behaviors and mannerisms of a different gender, and thus potentially being LGBTQ, as a bad thing. For example, Pedro said,

> My mom's first reaction was, "Do you want to be a woman? Do you want to become a woman?" And I said, "No. I have no interest in becoming a woman. I do not want to be a woman. I don't feel like I am a woman…So I think what changed for my mom was the fact that she had a lot of preconceived notions of what it meant to be gay, which meant

> first you want to be a woman and you want to make like shows and dress in women's clothes and start using makeup and like in her eyes make a fool of yourself.

Negative comments about LGBTQ people were pervasive

The final subtheme that characterized participants' direct and indirect messages involves all participants frequently hearing negative comments about LGBTQ people from their families, churches, and communities. These messages ranged from indirect comments to outright slurs or attacks on gay people. For example, Pedro heard direct comments that his mother would say around him that associated gay people with being promiscuous and HIV positive. Pedro shared,

> [My mom] would say really homophobic things. For example, there was one time…, and I remember all of these things so clearly, not because I have the perfect memory, but because these things marked me in very deep ways… she said, "I don't want a gay man talking to me about … health when all that they do is get HIV."

Miguel similarly heard negative comments about LGBTQ people in his household. These comments were judgmental and portrayed LGBTQ people as predators. Miguel shared,

> [My family made] homophobic comments towards my friends. The first friend I told [that I was gay] was actually my roommate when I was an undergrad. And [my dad] would say things like, "Oh, make sure [your roommate] doesn't do anything to you." And I'm like, "What do you mean do anything to me?" [They said], "You know, he's gay, you know what he wants." I'm like, "Just because I'm a guy doesn't mean he wants to do anything with me. Why would you think that?"

Family religious values oftentimes informed the negative messages participants received. The common thread among these kinds of messages was that being LGBTQ was a sin and an act against God. Miguel explained,

> So I know talking earlier about religion, my grandmother is not exactly the most progressive in thinking, given her religion. And it was a constant barrage of messages about, "Oh, how gay people are sinners and they're going to hell and it's disgusting and it's not how God made them."

All participants shared that these negative comments made them realize that being gay would not be received well within their families. Thus, these early messages laid the groundwork for an environment in which participants felt that identifying as LGBTQ was unwelcome. Six out of seven participants internalized these messages and began to believe themselves that being LGBTQ was something to hide or push away. At least one participant actively challenged these messages from the start, while many others did so as they became more comfortable in their identities. Regardless, all participants shared that these messages sent by their families served as a roadblock to participants accepting and embodying their authentic selves. Many participants also shared that negative messages made it challenging for participants to feel they could become close to certain family members and feel they could share openly with them. Additionally, participants shared that these negative messages prompted them to look outside the family for a way to be their authentic selves around others.

Theme 2: The Coming Out Journey was Challenging

After sharing details of early messages received from family members, all participants shared stories of navigating their sexual and affectional orientations in a culture and society that is oppressive. These stories were characterized by an initial period of hiding or trying to suppress their identities from their families and communities, followed by a challenging period of coming out to others. The theme is broken down into two sub-themes: (a) I felt like I had to hide/suppress my identity, and (b) Coming out was challenging.

I felt like I had to hide/suppress my identity

Six out of seven participants shared that they initially hid or attempted to suppress their LGBTQ identity due to negative messages they had received from family and loved ones about being LGBTQ. The general view in their families was that being LGBTQ was something bad that had to be denied or changed. Thus, most participants attempted to conceal their identities from their family members for fear of receiving negative reactions from them. Miguel, for example, stated,

> Once I got to college, I started feeling like something was there, but I don't think I had the vocabulary to kind of pinpoint what it was. I don't know if I necessarily have an exact moment [of realizing I was gay]. But there was a time I think in junior year that I can think of, just going to the gym and sort of lingering in the locker rooms, kind of looking and being like, "I don't think I've ever looked at women like this before. I've never really felt this way about women before." So it was sort of in my mind… but from all the things that I was told growing up in my family, my reaction was shut this down, deny it. This can't be a thing.

Religion played a key role for all participants in the way they initially navigated their identities. For some participants, their religious communities relayed messages that being LGBTQ was not only wrong, but that one could and should “pray away” the gay. At least three participants internalized these messages that being LGBTQ meant there was something fundamentally wrong with them. Enrique stated,

> I used to pray [the gay] away. You know, I remember being really active in a Christian non-denominational church when I was in, I guess it might have been late high school. And I then found [that the lead vocalist of the church] was gay. I remember thinking like,

> shit, if God doesn't fix him and he like worships him on a weekly basis using his gift, then I'm fucked. Because if you can't be fixed, then I'm at a loss. In hindsight, is really sad to think about that.

In addition to suppressing or "praying the gay away," six out of seven participants initially tried to keep their identities hidden from their families and loved ones. These participants used different ways to keep this information private, such as setting up two social media accounts, one for family and one where they could express their LGBTQ identity more freely. Participants shared the reason for wanting to suppress or hide their identities was because they feared how their families would react. Elena explained fears around safety and stability that came up when she thought about her family finding out about her identity. She stated,

> I don't know that I felt safe to come out living in my dad's house…I feel like my brain was like in survival mode until I left my house. So, I didn't really talk about [being gay]. … And I remember being scared at first because my dad helped me with like Parent PLUS loans for college. And I started to get scared, like if I tell him, will he cut me off? What will happen? And I didn't really have the confidence to come out to my family, like my mom, my dad, and everybody.

Coming out was challenging

Despite the fears about how their families may react, all participants eventually came out, or were outed, to family members. Although their experiences varied, there were commonalities in coming out stories. For example, all participants shared that coming out to family members was challenging. All participants feared negative reactions or backlash from their family members. Thus, participants came out to people outside of their families first, before coming out to family members. Several participants decided to come out first through social media, with

people who were not connected to their families in any way. Participants shared that they felt safer coming out via social media and that they were able to find community amongst other LGBTQ people through these channels. For example, Elena shared,

> God bless Tumblr…. it opened so many doors for me to connect with people. And back then I feel like there were no books or things about people writing their own fanfictions. And it was just such a beautiful and safe space for me that I just latched on to.

Coming out to those outside of the family and those who were thought to be more supportive first provided participants with the courage and confidence to come out to family members. When participants did come out to family members or loved ones, participants tended to come out to individuals who they sensed would be most accepting of their LGBTQ identities first and hesitated to come out to those who they sensed would be least accepting. There was no clear pattern in the people that participants came out to, some came out to close friends first and others to close relatives first. In this way, participants navigated their coming out in a way that felt most safe to them, and yet the coming out process was still filled with uncertainty and fear of possible rejection.

Not all participants had the chance to come out on their own terms. Pedro, for example, shared that he was outed to family members by a family friend who spotted him kissing another man while on a date. When participants were outed to their family members, they felt robbed of the opportunity to come out on their own terms. Participants in these scenarios especially feared for their safety since they had not had a chance to plan for the potential repercussions of coming out to family. Pedro shared how this experience of being outed was especially scary for him. He stated,

> …And that's how I was outed out of the closet before I was able even to like understand that I was gay, come to terms that I was gay. Like I was raped out of the opportunity to discover my own sexual orientation and to like decide who I wanted to invite into my world, not to come out the closet but to invite into my world as a new realized gay man that was going to start his own process of understanding and acceptance. So I think that it was very scary, coming out was very, very scary in that sense.

Theme 3: Why did they reject me?

Once participants came out to their family members, they were met with varying responses and reactions. Although some family members were supportive or accepting of participant identities, all participants shared that there were family members who were not accepting and that they faced some form of rejection from them. This family rejection was characterized by three sub-themes: (a) Family believed being LGBTQ was against God, (b) “You are going to make us look bad,” and (c) Family members worried about participant health and safety.

Family believed being LGBTQ was against God

All participants shared that some of their family members rejected their LGBTQ identity due to their religious beliefs. These family members all identified as Christian. Many family members expressed that being LGBTQ went against God and was a sin. Many family members felt that participants should change their identity by going to church or imploring God to change them. For example, Chris shared his father’s reactions to his coming out in the following way,

> And then I think the next day [my mom] told my father and then my father invited me that weekend. And then his confrontation was just like, "Oh, your mom told me that you've been having these thoughts and these behaviors. And then all he said was, "I think

> you need to talk to God." And I remember specifically, he was like, "You need to start going to church more." And then there was a whole side of [my dad] that I was like, "Oh my God, you really just threw the Bible at my face. What is this?" And then after that, I was just like, I told him, "This is not a phase. This is who I am."

Religious beliefs served as a barrier for many family members to accept the participants' LGBTQ identity. For many family members, participants coming out directly contradicted their expectations that participants would adhere to their religious values and beliefs. Oftentimes, family members expressed disappointment that participants were "straying" from the religious values taught in the family. Elena's father, for example, shared how Elena coming out caused him to lose hope in her future. Elena stated,

> So I look at my email, and he has sent me this whole long rants about how if I think that God loves me being gay, I must be reading the wrong Bible. I have just let the devil into my life... And I'm not the girl who he used to know, and how have I lost so much hope. I was like, "This has nothing to do hope. Like, if anything, I'm more hopeful now than I've ever been." And I was just floored.

"You're going to make us look bad"

For half of participants, family members reacted to their coming out with concern about what people outside the family would think. Specifically, family members believed that those outside the family would view participants and their families in a negative way because being LGBTQ was wrong and something to be ashamed of. In Latinx cultures, children are oftentimes viewed as a reflection of their family and if a child does something that is perceived as wrong, it makes the whole family look bad. Many family members in the study were concerned that the participants being openly LGBTQ would reflect poorly on the family as a whole. For example,

Chris explained how his mother was upset that he kissed his boyfriend in public and that people on their "block" would see. Chris shared,

> So, then I'm in college. It was my freshman year. And then I met someone. And then we started dating. Pandemic happened. So obviously we couldn't see each other but then during that summer I started seeing him more. So, we just started going on dates. And then my mom saw me getting into his car because he picked me up. And then I remember that day when I came home, she was just like, "I cannot believe this. You're just showing yourself off to everyone, especially the whole block. How dare you kiss him in his car." And I'm like "Mom, what the hell? Why are you blowing this out of proportion? Obviously, I know you still don't accept me from who I am, but it's his car. You're acting like we're making out in front of everyone outside, which even if it did happen, it's no one's business."

Similarly, public displays of affection were a cause for concern for Elena's loved ones. For these individuals, showing affection to members of the same gender in public was not only embarrassing, but also disrespectful. Elena recounted,

> And my cousin had this one friend, she was so cool. And I would flirt with her all the time. I had a crush on her for a long time…we went to…my cousin's quinceañera and she came with us…and we were walking around the thing holding hands. And my cousin's grandma, she's not my blood cousin, she's just my family friend. Her grandma was like, "This is so embarrassing and disrespectful. How dare you hold hands like this in public? You're going to make us look so bad."

Family was concerned about safety and health

Upon coming out to family members, half of participants were met with concerns related to their safety and health. Many family members were concerned that, because they identified as LGBTQ, participants would be increasingly susceptible to health issues such as HIV and mental health problems. Family members also worried that participants would be targeted by homophobic attacks and violence. Despite some participants believing that these concerns were coming from a place of care, they were also frustrated by the focus on the potential negative repercussions of coming out as LGBTQ. Participants explained that, while they appreciated their family members' concerns for their health and safety, they did not want them to assume that, because of these potential issues, identifying as LGBTQ was a bad thing. For example, Chris shared,

> [My dad] basically told me he was like, "I don't want you to get basically into depression and basically kill yourself," and I was like, "That's honestly really good that you're thinking like that, but at the same time, that shouldn't be the only reason why you're accepting me for who I am or supporting me."

Other participants believed that the concerns were informed by misinformation and only made it more difficult for their family members to accept that being LGBTQ was not a negative thing. Oftentimes, concerns about health were conflated with assumptions about promiscuity within the LGBTQ community. Elena shared the frustration she faced when her father assumed that having sex with women would lead to negative health impacts. Elena stated,

> And every time he would try to bring up something [about me liking women], he would say, “you should be careful when you're having sex with women. I've read this article that you can get throat cancer from going down on women.” I was like, "So what about men? Are all these men getting throat cancer from going down on women? Or do you just think

> only women go down on women?" And I was like, you must have real stale sex. But I was just like, "This is ridiculous."

In addition to health concerns, many family members expressed worries over participants' physical safety, especially when displaying their affection towards same-gender others in public. Sometimes these concerns about safety were conflated with what was discussed in the subtheme above (i.e., *"You're going to make us look bad").*

Chris shared,

> My dad was just like, "Oh, you can obviously date whoever you want, a man or whatnot." But he was like, "You should definitely be careful about PDA or holding hands because you never know who's around." And although he's thinking about safety, I also know it's because he doesn't want me to be displaying it.

Theme 4: My chosen family gave me what I needed

After experiencing rejection from their families of origin, participants expressed their relief and happiness at finding people who they could lean on for support and acceptance. Participants shared their experiences finding, and being part of, a chosen family. For all participants, their chosen families provided them with benefits that were lacking from their families of origin. This theme includes five sub-themes: (a) Receiving support, (b) No judgment, (c) Spending quality time and special occasions together, (d) "I am seen (and loved) for who I am", and (e) Reciprocity.

Receiving Support

The most common benefit all participants shared about being part of a chosen family was the support they received. The type of support participants received from their chosen family members varied. One of the key forms of support involved chosen family members staying by

their side and helping participants feel supported in their identities. Participants shared how grateful they were that their chosen family members were there to help them navigate difficult situations in their lives (e.g., financial hardships, romantic breakups, disagreements with family members). For many participants, support from chosen families was invaluable. For example, Elena shared,

> …These people just held me up when so much was going on and reminded me that I was loved and valued and contributed to this earth when I felt ashamed of who I was as much as I hate to admit it. I did. I used to feel like there was something wrong with me. I'm like, if my dad can't accept me, why would the world accept me? So yeah, there are people who I've just been so, so fortunate to be around and to love and grow with.

Participants also shared that they could count on their chosen family members to relate to their struggles and to support their personal goals. Chosen family members were invested in participants doing well in life and offered support that helped participants feel motivated to continue pursuing their goals. Chris explained how his chosen family members helped him navigate being a Latinx man in a predominantly-White university by motivating him to push past challenges,

> I feel like my family, yeah, they do motivate me. But I feel like my brothers over here, they obviously understand what college is like and what I go through being in a PWI as a Latinx male. And it's just being seen in that lens. It's not easy. So, just having them there for me makes me feel like I actually have people who are investing in me and understand what I'm going through. When I talk to my parents about school, they're always like, "Oh, just do it. Just do it." But they don't understand how hard it is.

Chosen family members also encouraged participants to seek out support from outside the chosen family when needed. For example, chosen family members often encouraged participants to seek out therapy or other resources that they felt the participant could benefit from. In some cases, this kind of support provided by chosen families was truly lifesaving. Miguel shared how his chosen family members helped him navigate a time of suicidal ideation,

> And if I'm being completely honest, it got to the point that I was feeling so low about myself and feeling this mix of shame and guilt and frustration and sadness, that I didn't want to live, if I'm going to be honest. And my friends had to come over and say, "We want to be here for you because we're worried about your wellbeing, because we're afraid you're going to do something to yourself.

No Judgment

Five out of seven participants shared that they received no judgment from their chosen family members and felt they could be their authentic selves around them. This spirit of "no judgment" was in direct contrast to the feelings of judgment participants felt from their families of origin. Many participants felt they had to hide or distort parts of their authentic selves around their families of origin. Thus, chosen families offered participants an opportunity to express their identities freely and openly without fear of judgment. This atmosphere of "no judgment" encouraged participants to feel comfortable around their chosen family members and to build relationships grounded in positivity and trust. Chris shared how this feeling of comfort brought him to a good place,

> [My chosen family] just provide that reassurance of, it's okay to be who I am and they just don't judge me, and that also just comes with me being comfortable... but there's just

> a lot of positivity surrounding me when I'm with them, and honestly, it brings me to a good place.

In addition to providing participants with a comfortable space to express themselves authentically, having a sense that chosen family members would not judge them helped participants build mutual trust within their chosen families. Participants shared that trust was paramount because trust had been severed in their families of origin when their family members rejected them. Thus, participants had the opportunity to establish new trusting relationships through their chosen families. Trust reinforced for participants the feeling of being supported and safe within their chosen families, which was in stark contrast to the feeling that their trust in their families of origin was betrayed. This trust ultimately led participants to be supportive and non-judgmental to their fellow chosen family members in return. Miguel shared,

> I feel like it's a judgment free zone whenever I talk to them. There's a lot of trust there. I think it's also important to have reciprocity in any type of friendship, and I also want to know about them too. Because something that I come to realize is being gay is only one part of me. It's not all of me. So I don't always want to talk about that stuff.

Quality time & Special Occasions

Five out of seven participants valued spending quality time with their chosen family members. Even more so, participants shared how meaningful it was for them to have chosen family members who they could share important moments with throughout their lives. Sharing in these holidays and special occasions with chosen family members promoted unity and a sense of community amongst the chosen family members. Participants explained that it was not the mere spending of time that was significant to them, but rather the emotional connections and bonds

they formed with their chosen family members during those special times. Chris explained this bonding he experienced with his chosen family members he knew since high school,

> I remember we just had these traditions of having dinner and just celebrating each other's birthdays and celebrating Christmas together. So, I really felt like at an early age, although we met when we were in high school, we were basically like our own family. It was really nice seeing that and just having that sense of unity in my life. So at that time, [what I got most out of my chosen family] was the sense of unity, traditions, just the emotional aspect of it. I just felt like I couldn't be as open with my mom or my brother. So, obviously it's like for a minute I actually felt like I had siblings that wanted to invest in me and be there for me.

For participants who experienced family rejection, their chosen families provided them with a safe space to spend holidays and special occasions. Many participants shared that they felt uncomfortable spending these times of year with their families of origin, because they felt they could not be their authentic selves around them. When participants were faced with the prospect of spending the holidays alone, their chosen families stepped in and invited the participants to their homes. Participants explained that these gestures were so impactful for them. Elena shared how important it was for her to have chosen family members who included her in this way,

> And I remember just feeling like my community feels like a family in some ways, right. And I remember, in college, when I started to not feel comfortable going home for things like Thanksgiving, like the friends who would invite me home and include me in their family. That was such a big deal to me.

"I am seen (and loved) for who I am"

Five out of seven participants shared that their chosen family made them feel seen, accepted, and loved for their authentic selves. For many participants, it was this sense of belonging and acceptance that served as a key feature of their chosen family. Being seen, accepted, and loved by their chosen families meant that they were allowed to have both strengths and limitations in their relationships. It was meaningful to participants to know that their family members would accept and support them as they are. Enrique shared,

> Yeah, I would define chosen family as people that I can be completely authentically raw with. People that have seen me in my lowest of lows and highest of highs. People that I feel that love me, despite my shortcomings, people that I know are in my corner and vice versa.

Many participants shared that being part of their chosen family was the first time in their entire lives that they felt they could let down their guard and not put on a facade to feel accepted by loved ones. With their families of origin, participants explained that their love felt conditional. Participants felt pressure to conform to certain religious and cultural expectations in order to feel valued and accepted within their families of origin. Thus, being part of a chosen family provided an escape from these oppressive expectations and allowed participants to feel valued just for being themselves. Pedro shared,

> It felt like for the first time I didn't have to be anything else or prove anything. My whole life I felt like I used… It's not that I would make myself more smart, but I used the fact that I was a smart kid in every room to navigate gaining acceptance and respect and like earning my place. That was my way of earning my place….When I met [my chosen family], it was the first time in my life in which I did not use credentials or titles or awards or honors to gain [someone's] respect. They just respected me for being me. They

> didn't expect me to be anything else. They didn't need me to be anything else….They just saw me as who I was that day in front of their eyes and they thought that I was valuable. They thought that I was worth being with and I've never gained that from anyone else in my life.

Reciprocity

Half of the participants reciprocated the support and acceptance they felt from their chosen family members. Being part of a chosen family offered participants the opportunity to be there for others who may also need support. Participants explained that they typically served some sort of role within the chosen family, such as being the voice of reason or the person people would turn to for advice or a non-judgmental perspective. In this way, participants contributed to the overall supportive and affirming environment of their chosen family while also benefiting from it. Miguel, for example, shared that his chosen family members turned to him when they were facing challenges. He said,

> I try to be non-judgmental whatever [my chosen family members] are going through. I have compassion and empathy because, who wants a friend that isn't compassionate? In a way it's kind of interesting given the grad program I went into, but kind of funny because some people joke that I'm kind of like the group's therapist sometimes. Because I'm the one they go to when they have problems, even if I don't understand anything about it.

The support offered by participants to their chosen family members includes socioemotional and financial support. Pedro shared that, within his chosen family, it was not unusual for members to help each other out during financial hard times. His chosen family members would work together to help any individual member within the family. Participants

shared that contributing to the chosen family in this way solidified the trust within the chosen family unit. Pedro shared an example,

> [A chosen family member] was having a hard time financially. And [my chosen family] told me, "Oh, do you know that this person is going through this and she's going to lose her apartment?" And then, I navigated with another friend to help her pay for her rent without letting her know that it was me. I think that was one of the moments in which like all of them collectively understood that I was somebody that was worthy of being part of their family. Because a lot of our families was based on the trust, not only of trusting each other, like trusting our best, like our intentions to help our community.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I outlined the findings of this dissertation study, including four overarching themes and their sub-themes. The first theme, *Direct and Indirect Messaging Set the Stage,* described messages that participants experienced growing up that set the stage for their coming out experiences and family rejection of their identity. The second theme, *The Coming out Journey was Challenging,* explored participants' stories of navigating their LGBTQ identities, including initially hiding or suppressing their identity and then eventually coming out (or being outed) to their loved ones. The third theme, *Why did they reject me?,* explored why family members rejected participants. Finally, the fourth theme, *My chosen family gave me what I needed,* described the benefits that participants received from their chosen families and what they offered their chosen family members in return. Collectively, these findings illuminate the stories of Latino/a/x LGBTQ individuals who have experienced rejection from their families of origins and become part of a chosen family. In the next chapter, I discuss these findings in the context of

existing literature and theory. I will also present the strengths and limitations of this study and implications for practice.

Chapter 5: Discussion

In the previous chapter, I shared the findings of this study. There were four themes, each including sub-themes. I presented excerpts from participants gathered through interviews to support the themes and sub-themes. In this chapter, I will discuss the findings in context within existing literature and provide an interpretation of the findings. I will outline the strengths and limitations of this study. I will discuss the implications of the findings to counseling practice, counselor education, counselor supervision, and present recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

The goal of this study was to understand the stories of family rejection and chosen family among LGBTQ Latino/a/x individuals. The findings of this study can be organized into four themes and 13 sub-themes. The first theme, Direct and Indirect Messaging Set the Stage, consisted of three sub-themes: (a) Expectations to conform to gender expectations; (b) Family conflated gender with sexuality; and (c) Negative comments about LGBTQ people were pervasive. The second theme, The Coming Out Journey was Challenging, consisted of two sub-themes: (a) I felt like I had to hide/suppress my identity and (b) Coming out was challenging. The third theme, Why did they reject me?, consisted of three sub-themes: (a) Family believed being LGBTQ was against God; (b) “You’re going to make us look bad”; and (c) Family was concerned about safety and health. The final theme, My chosen family gave me what I needed, consisted of five sub-themes, (a) Receiving Support; (b) No Judgment; (c) Quality time & Special Occasions; (d) “I am seen (and loved) for who I am”; and (e) Reciprocity.

Through semi-structured interviews, participants shared messages they received from their families of origin about gender, sexuality, and LGBTQ people that led to challenging coming out experiences and ultimately rejection from some of their family members based on

participant LGBTQ identity. Next, participants shared the reasons that some of their family members rejected them, including: family members believed being LGBTQ was a sin and against God, that participants identifying openly as LGBTQ would be a negative reflection of the family to outsiders, and that identifying as LGBTQ would increase the chances that participants would experience health issues and violence. Finally, participants shared their stories of becoming part of a chosen family. Participants defined chosen family as people who they could turn to for support and would have their back. The chosen family provided many benefits that participants did not receive from their families of origin that rejected them. The benefits of being part of a chosen family included receiving support, experiencing no judgment, having quality time, being accepted and loved for their authentic selves, and engaging in reciprocity within their relationships. In the next section, I will describe how these findings are situated within the existing literature on this topic.

Cultural and Religious Values

This study provides a unique exploration of the connection between cultural and religious values and chosen family which adds to the existing literature. Through the first theme, *Direct and Indirect Messaging Set the Stage,* participants in this study described how the indirect and direct messages they received from their families of origin about gender, sexuality, and LGBTQ people set the stage for family rejection. These messages were influenced by cultural and religious values within the family of origin. Specifically, participants shared that values common amongst Latinx families, such as machismo and Christian/Roman Catholic religious values, set up an environment where participants felt expected to conform to rigid notions about gender and sexuality. Participants felt that these familial expectations did not align with who they are, causing internal dissonance and conflict within the family. This dissonance and conflict created

an environment where participants felt they had to hide or change their gender and sexual identities in order to be accepted by their family members. These findings are consistent with earlier studies examining how cultural and religious values inform how Latinx families navigate LGBTQ identities. Specifically, several scholars have pointed to familismo, gender expectations (including machismo and marianismo), and religious values as playing a significant influence on the coming out process for LGBTQ Latino/a/x/ individuals (Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018; Gattamorta et al., 2019). This study highlighted the stories of individuals from multiple ethnic and geographic communities across the U.S., expanding on the work of previous scholars who primarily studied individuals within the context of one geographical region (southeast Florida).

In this study, participants identified gender expectations as being especially problematic for them. Many participants singled out machismo as oppressive, whereby participants, particularly gay men, had to hide or change aspects of their authentic selves in order to conform to their families' expectations. This finding is consistent with earlier studies demonstrating that machismo can be challenging for Latino gay men navigating their LGBTQ identities within their families of origin (Edwards et al., 2008; Englander et al., 2012; Kulis et al., 2003; Nunez et al., 2016; Sanchez et al., 2016). The one female participant in the study shared that it was challenging for her to navigate gender expectations from her family of origin as well. The expectations that her behavior would align with the concept of marianismo caused conflict between her and her family and caused her to question whether her family of origin would accept her LGBTQ identity. This finding is consistent with prior studies where LGBTQ women experienced uncertainty around coming out to their families of origin because participants did

not conform to their expectations, specifically that women in the family would marry men and have children (Przeworski & Piedra, 2020).

Scholars have found that religion influences the coming out experiences of LGBTQ Latinx individuals within their family systems (Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018; Gattamorta et al., 2019). Religious values also played a significant role in why participants in this study felt their families would not accept their LGBTQ identities. All participants in the study shared that their families of origin were religious, either Christian or Roman Catholic. All participants grew up hearing pervasive negative messages about LGBTQ people within their religious communities, specifically that being LGBTQ was a sin and against God. Since their families of origin ascribed to the values and beliefs of their religious communities, participants anticipated rejection from their families of origin if they came out as LGBTQ. Anticipating this negative reaction, participants either tried to change their LGBTQ identities through prayer or hide them from their family of origin. These findings are consistent with studies that demonstrated the central role religion plays in many Latinx families (Campesino & Schwartz, 2006).

There is much in the literature that focuses on how familismo plays a role in LGBTQ Latino/a/x individuals experiences of coming out within their families of origin. For example, familismo has been shown to be both a protective factor and a barrier to disclosing LGBTQ identity to family members (Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018; Przeworski & Piedra, 2020). Because of familismo, LGBTQ Latino/a/x individuals may find that their family members may be supportive of their coming out in order to preserve family relationships (Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018; Przeworski & Piedra, 2020). On the other hand, familismo can create pressure for LGBTQ Latino/a/x people who may fear disrupting family relationships by coming

out (Fiddian-Green et al., 2017). Interestingly, in this study, participants did not speak about familismo explicitly in their stories. Indirectly, participants alluded to the importance of maintaining their relationships within their families of origin. Many participants shared that they feared losing relationships with their family members if they came out, thus motivating some participants to hide their LGBTQ identities from their family members. Thus, though not stated literally by participants, familismo was at play in their experiences. On the other hand, no participants stated that the strength or importance of their family relationships within the family of origin led them to believe that their family members would accept their LGBTQ identity. It seemed that the negative messages families related to participants about LGBTQ people outweighed any sense of reassurance that could have come from familismo. This finding is partly inconsistent with the literature on familismo, which tends to show that LGBTQ Latino/a/x people oftentimes hold out hope that their family members will accept them given the importance of family within Latinx culture (Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018; Przeworski & Piedra, 2020). In a sense, when cultural values that may work together in mainstream Latinx culture (i.e., religious values, machismo, familismo), they may end up in opposition for marginalized groups within the culture (e.g., LGBTQ), making the outcome unclear.

Coming Out Experiences

Through the second theme, *The Coming Out Journey was Challenging*, participants shared their coming out stories that were marred with challenges and obstacles. Central to each of these coming out stories was a sense of uncertainty and fear about whether participants' families would reject them if they came out as LGBTQ. This uncertainty led most participants to initially hide or suppress their LGBTQ identities. This finding is consistent with earlier studies demonstrating that LGBTQ Latino/a/x people may initially struggle to reconcile conflicting

aspects of their identities, such as religion or gender expectations, and thus may attempt to hide or suppress their LGBTQ identities (Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018). Some participants in this study expressed fears of the financial repercussions of being rejected by their families of origin, consistent with similar findings from previous studies (Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018).

Participants in this study were also concerned about damaging relationships with their family members if they came out. Participants shared that given the early negative messages they heard from their family members about LGBTQ people, they assumed their family members would reject them for coming out as LGBTQ. This finding is consistent with numerous studies' finding that uncertainty and fear of losing relationships with significant others was a common experience among LGBTQ Latino/a/x people (Fiddian-Green et al., 2017; Merighi & Grimes, 2000; Potoczniak et al., 2009).

Fear and uncertainty about coming out led many participants to keep their LGBTQ identities hidden from their families of origin. As a result, some participants turned to other means of disclosing their identities with others, including sharing their identities on social media and with close friends outside the family. When they decided to come out to their families of origin, some participants chose to come out indirectly, such as through text messages or social media posts. These findings are consistent with studies on tacit disclosure (Delucio et al. (2020) in which LGBTQ Latino/a/x people come out in contextual or nonverbal ways as a way to avoid uncomfortable or potentially dangerous coming out scenarios.

Family Rejection

Through the third theme, *Why did they reject me?,* participants shared the reasons why, they believed, their family members rejected them. It is important to note that participants had

different experiences and definitions of rejection. For example, for some participants rejection played out as a family member giving them the cold shoulder or avoiding having discussions about their LGBTQ identity. For others, rejection involved family members outright telling them negative comments about being LGBTQ. While participants had differing experiences of rejection, all participants shared their perceptions of why their family members rejected them. Their reasons for the rejection included beliefs that being LGBTQ was a sin and against God, that participants identifying as LGBTQ would reflect poorly on the family, and that participants would be susceptible to health issues and violence if they came out as LGBTQ. These reasons are broadly consistent with existing literature on LGBTQ Latino/a/x coming out and family rejection (Eaton & Rios, 2017; Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018; Gattamorta et al., 2019

All participants in this study shared that family members used religion as the reason for their rejection of the participants. Each of these participants shared that the rejecting family members stated the view that being LGBTQ was against God and was a sin. This response is consistent with existing literature where LGBTQ Latinx people shared that religion was a major factor influencing their family's rejection (Eaton & Rios, 2017; Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018; Gattamorta et al., 2019). For example, studies of both LGBTQ Latinx individuals and parents of LGBTQ Latinx individuals concurrently found that religion was one of the top cultural factors influencing the coming out experiences within Latinx families (Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018; Gattamorta et al., 2019). Gattamorta and colleagues (2019), for example, found that 80% of parents in their study listed religion as a factor that shaped their response to their LGBTQ child's coming out. These findings reinforce the notion that religion is embedded in many of the experiences faced by LGBTQ Latino/a/x people when coming out within their families.

Half of the participants in this study shared that their family members were concerned that those outside the family would perceive the family in a negative way if participants came out as LGBTQ. These participants shared that their family members were especially wary of public displays of affection that would draw attention from those outside the family about the participants' LGBTQ identity. Moreover, several participants in this study shared that their parents believed those outside of the family would view them as "bad parents" because their children were LGBTQ. These concerns are consistent with existing literature that found that one of the reactions Hispanic/Latinx parents had towards their child's coming out was fear of what others would think (Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018). These findings also support the notion that Latino/a/x individuals are considered to be representatives of their families, and thus family members are concerned that negative perceptions of one family member will be a poor reflection of the family as a whole and call into question the family's honor (Merighi & Grimes, 2000).

In this study, participants shared that family members expressed concerns that their LGBTQ identities would be susceptible to health issues such as HIV, and they would be targeted by homophobic violence. Participants shared that these concerns oftentimes stemmed from stereotypes or myths that family members held about LGBTQ people. While some participants appreciated that their family members were concerned about their wellbeing, many participants viewed these concerns as further barriers to their family members accepting them. Similarly, previous studies point to fears that Hispanic/Latinx parents may have about what it would mean for their children to identify as LGBTQ, including misconceptions that being gay meant their child would commit suicide or use drugs (Gattamorta et al., 2019) or that their children would be promiscuous (Eaton & Rios, 2017). These misconceptions were similar to those expressed by

family members in this study (e.g., concerns that participants would be at risk of suicide or HIV). Unlike previous studies, participants in this study shared that family members specifically mentioned fears that participants would be the target of violence due to their LGBTQ identity.

Chosen Family

Through the fourth theme, *My chosen family gave me what I needed,* participants shared their experiences of being part of a chosen family. Participants highlighted the benefits of being part of a chosen family including receiving support, not being judged, spending quality time and special occasions together, being seen and loved for who they were, and reciprocity. Frequently, participants shared that their families of origins did not provide them with these experiences, thus chosen family members stepped in and provided them with this support. These findings are consistent with existing literature that has examined the strong bonds formed by people within chosen families, especially for those who lacked support from their families of origin (Carpineto et al., 2008; Dewaele et al., 2011; Horne et al., 2015; Hwahng et al., 2018; Kubicek, Beyer, et al., 2013; Kubicek, McNeeley, et al., 2013; Levitt et al., 2015; Muraco, 2006).

Studies on chosen families have focused primarily on house families and gay families, two sub-communities within the broader LGBTQ community. These studies have found that members of these chosen families often have distinct, designated roles and corresponding responsibilities (Kubicek, Beyer, et al., 2013; Phillips II et al., 2011). Unlike house families and gay families, the chosen families described in this study were not organized in a consistent, structured way. In other words, participants did not share that there were roles such as "mother" or "father" within their chosen families. However, some participants did describe that they fulfilled certain roles within their chosen families, such as being the "voice of reason" or a "counselor" of the group. In this way, it could be interpreted that outside of house and gay

families, chosen families are not necessarily highly structured (though they can be) and members are not necessarily bound to specific roles, but family members may come to embody certain roles based on the individuals own characteristics and qualities.

All participants in this study shared that their families of origin provided them with social, emotional, and financial support. These findings are consistent with existing literature on the benefits of being part of a chosen family (Kubicek, Beyer, et al., 2013; Levitt et al., 2015; Phillips II, et al., 2011). Additionally, participants shared that they felt seen and loved for their authentic selves, consistent with findings from prior studies where participants similarly described how their chosen families provided them a safe space in the face of discrimination and rejection they faced in everyday life as LGBTQ people of color (Levitt et al., 2015).

Participants in this study shared additional benefits they received from being part of a chosen family that was not explicitly shared in prior studies. For example, participants shared the significance of being able to spend quality time and special occasions with their chosen family members. Participants shared examples of these occasions, such as holidays, where having chosen family around was important to them. Additionally, participants in this study found it important to reciprocate the support they received from their chosen family members. This notion of reciprocity is not found elsewhere in the literature. Perhaps Latinx cultural values such as familismo play a role in the participants' desires to give back to their chosen family members and to establish strong familiar bonds with them grounded in mutual support. This hypothesis would be consistent with existing literature on familismo (Miranda et al., 2006; Shokodriani & Gibbons, 1995) and warrants further exploration.

Strengths and Limitations

There are several strengths and limitations to this study. One of the main strengths of this study is that it adds to the burgeoning literature on LGBTQ and Latinx experiences and the concept of chosen families. While several studies explore the experience of LGBTQ Latino/a/x individuals in coming out to their family members, limited studies to date have explored the connection between Latinx cultural values and the experience of family rejection (Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018; Gattamorta et al., 2019). Oftentimes in the literature, studies of Latinx cultural values are separate from discussions of LGBTQ Latino/a/x people; thus, this study is one of the few studies that bridge these two areas of the literature together.

Moreover, this study is one of few studies to explore how LGBTQ Latino/a/x individuals experience chosen families outside of gay families or ballroom culture. The findings from this study, while not generalizable due to the small sample size, does expand our understanding of chosen families beyond the ballroom scene or gay families (Horne et al., 2015; Hwahng et al., 2018; Kubicek, Beyer, et al., 2013; Kubicek, McNeeley, et al., 2013; Levitt et al., 2015). As the ballroom scene and gay families are a subgroup within the LGBTQ community, this study expands the understanding to include the experiences of a broader swath of the LGBTQ community.

Another strength of this study is that through virtual interviews, the researcher was able to reach participants from various regions of the United States, including New Jersey, Texas, and Florida. This geographical diversity, albeit limited, provided an understanding of how the experiences of LGBTQ Latino/a/x individuals can vary based on the sociopolitical features of their communities. For example, one participant who lives in south Texas shared how his family immigrated across the U.S./Mexico border and how this influenced his relationships with his family members growing up. Another participant from southeast Florida shared how growing up

in a predominantly Cuban-American neighborhood informed how her community perceived her queerness. Similarly, participants had varied ethnicities within the broader Latinx community, including Dominican, Mexican, Columbian, and bi-ethnic identities, allowing for multiple voices from within the Latinx community to be represented.

A third strength of this study is the use of member checking interviews to confirm emerging themes with participants and to offer them the opportunity to provide additional context or corrections after the initial interviews. Member checking is one tool that can enhance trustworthiness in the findings of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As part of the member checking process, participants were interviewed a second time and asked to provide their feedback on emerging themes and to clarify or add more detail to their original stories that could enhance the narratives shared in this study. Several participants welcomed this opportunity to provide feedback and clarification, and oftentimes added even more details that further contributed to a thick, rich description of their narratives. Engaging participants in member checking also helped the researcher guard against any assumptions that may have come up from being an "insider", and that can influence the analysis, as the researcher also identifies as LGBTQ and Latinx. Finally, engaging participants in this way helped elevate participants from passive participants to co-producers of knowledge, consistent with the overarching aims of this study and consistent with the critical theoretical frameworks of this study.

A fourth strength of this study is that the researcher is a part of the community researched and is trained in counseling. This identification with the community and counseling training allowed for the researcher to approach interviews with participants from a place of patience and empathy. Oftentimes, participants shared their stories in non-linear ways. The researcher allowed

participants to share their stories in a way that made most sense to the participants which empowered participants to be the owners of their own stories.

In addition to strengths, there are limitations of this study. One of the main limitations is that the sample size was not diverse in terms of gender identity. Six out of seven participants identified as male or male-presenting, while one participant identified as female. Interestingly, at least two participants mentioned they did not comfortably fit into any one gender category; thus, the gender makeup of the participants does not tell the full story of the gender diversity within this study. Similarly, the majority of participants (4/7) identified as gay, though again, several participants mentioned that restrictive labels could not adequately describe their sexual identities. Since traditional gender and affectional labels did not accurately reflect the experiences of some participants, the findings of this study are not neatly generalizable to specific gender and affectional identity groups. Rather, the findings add depth and nuance to our understanding of the diverse tapestry of human affectional and sexual experience.

Another potential limitation of this study is that I shared similar experiences of family rejection and chosen family with the participants. As such, I could be seen in many ways as an "insider" to the study, which could encourage over-identification with the participants. Similarly, participants could assume that I understood their "unspoken" cultural experiences and thus may not have explained or described their experience in full detail. To guard against this over-identification from both researcher and participants, I engaged in reflective practice throughout the study to challenge any assumptions or preconceived notions that came from identifying with the participants. Relatedly, I asked follow-up questions of participants to encourage them to explain their experiences more thoroughly.

Implications

This study is one of few that examined the concept of chosen families outside of the ballroom scene and gay families. Moreover, this study is the only study to explore the stories of LGBTQ Latino/a/x people who have experienced rejection from their families of origin and become part of a chosen family. As such, the findings of this study offer several implications to counseling practice, counselor education and supervision, and future research.

Recommendations for Counseling Practice

Counselors have an ethical responsibility to provide culturally competent counseling services to clients from all backgrounds and experiences, including those who may identify as LGBTQ and Latino/a/x (ACA, 2014). Moreover, counselors are encouraged to embody advocacy and social justice principles, especially when working with clients from multiply-marginalized backgrounds (ALGBTIC LGBQQIA Competencies Taskforce, 2013; Ratts et al. 2016; Sue et al. 1992). The findings of this study can be useful in informing culturally competent and socially just counseling practice. The findings can inform social justice work by allowing LGBTQ Latino/a/x clients to have agency in sharing their stories with counselors. Counselors can then use their learning from client stories to inform their advocacy with and on behalf of those clients. The narratives shared by participants illuminated the experiences of LGBTQ Latino/a/x people who have experienced rejection from their families of origin and become part of a chosen family. These narratives can help inform counselors of the ways LGBTQ Latino/a/x clients may experience and navigate relationships with their families of origin and chosen families. Increased understanding of these experiences may help counselors be more effective in supporting clients going through these experiences. Specifically, counselors can expand their conceptualization of family within counseling sessions, acknowledge that Latinx cultural values can affect the coming out process for LGBTQ Latino/a/x clients, and encourage clients to seek out and build

meaningful relationships that could become a chosen family for those clients. One approach to foster this dialogue in the therapeutic context is the use of probing questions. For example, asking clients questions such as, “What does family mean to you?’ or “Tell me about the relationships that are most meaningful to you?” can help establish an environment where clients feel free to share their unique experiences.

Expand the conceptualization of “family” and significant relationships in client lives

Findings from this study, in conjunction with existing literature on chosen families, demonstrate that for many people the notion of “family” is not limited to biological families of origin (Carpineto et al., 2008; Dewaele et al., 2011; Horne et al., 2015; Hwahng et al., 2018; Kubicek, Beyer, et al., 2013; Kubicek, McNeeley, et al., 2013; Levitt et al., 2015; Muraco, 2006). Counselors would do well to keep expansive definitions of family in mind when working with all clients, especially those who identify as LGBTQ and Latino/a/x. Given the cultural importance of family within Latinx communities (Campos et al. 2014; Miranda et al., 2006; Shokodriani & Gibbons, 1995), it is imperative that counselors dedicate appropriate attention to exploring the family relationships and dynamics Latino/a/x LGBTQ clients may encounter in their lives, including those of chosen family. Counselors can normalize the concept of chosen families by asking clients directly about them. For example, counselors could ask clients, “are there people in your life that you consider to be your family, but you are not biologically related to them?” This kind of question allows the counselor to acknowledge that chosen families exist and empowers the client to name the individuals that they consider chosen family. Additionally, counselors should keep in mind that chosen families can take many different forms, and not rely solely on depictions of chosen families in popular culture or media as a reference point for understanding chosen families. Chosen family depictions in popular culture tend to showcase

specific kinds of chosen families, such as house families, that may not be representative of chosen families that most people may be a part of. As such, keeping an expansive definition of chosen family in mind can be useful for counselors in guarding against assumptions.

Counselors should also be mindful of the importance they place on family of origin during counseling sessions. Counselors should not place greater importance on involvement with a client's family of origin when compared to a chosen family. For example, instead of prioritizing questions related to the clients' relationship with their biological mother, father, or siblings, a counselor could invite clients to identify key individuals in their lives who they turn to for support. In this way, clients have the agency to name individuals whose relationships are most salient to them, but may not be part of their family of origin. Moreover, allowing clients to self-identify the relationships that are most salient can help counselors guard against assuming which individuals would be most warranted to ask about. In turn, counselors should be receptive to the value clients place on their unique constellation of individuals who serve in the role of family for that client. Additionally, the findings from this study demonstrate that chosen family relationships can provide clients with many benefits that clients could use as they navigate life's challenges. Thus, clients may find useful an exploration of how these benefits can be utilized to achieve their own personal and counseling goals.

Acknowledge how cultural values can affect the coming out process for LGBTQ Latino/a/x clients

Counselors have an ethical responsibility to recognize that culture plays a role in how clients experience their lives (ACA, 2014). Cultural considerations are embedded into how counselors are expected to approach the counseling relationship, including counselors' approach to assessment and diagnosis (ACA, 2014). Therefore, it is imperative for counselors to recognize

how cultural values can affect the experiences of LGBTQ Latino/a/x clients. Counselors can begin an exploration of cultural values by broaching the conversation about Latino/a/x culture directly with clients. Counselors can ask probing questions that can enable clients to open about their cultural background. For example, counselors could ask clients, "How would you describe your cultural background?" and "How do you think your cultural background has impacted [presenting concern]?" Broaching the topic of culture at the outset of the counseling relationship can help establish an expectation that culture will be addressed in counseling sessions and can encourage clients to share more openly aspects of their cultural background that may be playing a role in their presenting concerns.

Findings from this study can inform counselors of unique ways Latinx cultural values can shape the coming out process and subsequent consequences of coming out. This understanding can be useful in multiple ways. First, counselors can adequately assist LGBTQ Latino/a/x clients who may be struggling to reconcile elements of their cultural values and LGBTQ identity. One strategy involves asking clients to pinpoint aspects of their culture that have served as strengths towards navigating life's challenges and then brainstorming how to apply these strengths to challenges related to their LGBTQ experience. For example, if a client shares that growing up in a religious community provided them with a sense of grounding and shared values with others, the counselor could explore how the client could recreate a similar sense of shared community with others who identify as LGBTQ. Second, counselors can assist LGBTQ Latino/a/x clients determine if, how, and when they could come out to family members and brainstorm ways to do so in culturally congruent ways. Third, counselors can help clients prepare for possible repercussions of coming out to their families of origin, including the potential for acceptance, ambivalence, and rejection from their families of origin. It is important for counselors to keep in

mind that clients can have varying definitions of rejection and that rejection can play out differently for different clients. Thus, it is useful for counselors to keep a broad definition of rejection in mind when working with clients and provide clients the space to define rejection as they experience it. Counselors can ask clients questions such as, "Tell me what rejection means to you" or "Can you share what your family members did that made you feel rejected?" Counselors should anticipate varying kinds of responses from their clients. Keeping these possibilities in mind can be useful as counselors support clients in making determinations about self-disclosure of their LGBTQ identities. Finally, counselors can talk with clients about how chosen families can provide a culturally-congruent alternative or supplement for their biological family.

Empower clients to seek out, build, and enhance affirming relationships

Given the myriad benefits that participants in this study received from being part of a chosen family, counselors are encouraged to empower their clients to seek out, build, and enhance relationships that could develop into chosen families. Seeking out supportive, mutually beneficial relationships can be especially helpful for LGBTQ Latino/a/x clients with strained or distant relationships with their families of origin (Kubicek, Beyer, et al., 2013; Levitt et al., 2015; Phillips II, et al., 2011). Counselors can help clients take stock of their loved ones beyond their family of origin. Counselors can also help facilitate connections between clients and community resources and spaces, such as a local LGBTQ center or virtual meet-and-greet events, where clients can begin to meet new people and potentially foster relationships that could form the basis for strong support or even a chosen family. For child or adolescent clients, counselors can explore ways the clients could seek out relationships with peers within their schools. One strategy could involve joining or starting a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) club. For

students attending schools where being visibly out as LGBTQ could be potentially unsafe, counselors can explore ways students could build connections with supportive peers on an individual basis.

Counselors would do well to keep in mind that chosen families can provide multiple kinds of support, including social, emotional, and financial (Kubicek, Beyer, et al., 2013; Levitt et al., 2015; Phillips II, et al., 2011). This reminder can be especially useful when working with clients who have been financially cut off from their families of origin and/or may be experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity due to being kicked out of the house. For these clients, it is important to examine who in their lives may be able to provide financial and housing support and to connect these clients to community resources that may be able to assist them.

Counselors should also bear in mind that holidays and other times of the year where being together with loved ones is emphasized could be especially challenging for LGBTQ Latino/a/x individuals who have experienced rejection from their families of origin. During these times of year, it may be especially useful to ask clients who in their lives they can turn to for support and with whom they can spend their time. Additionally, counselors could refer clients to community events that are designed to bring individuals together during holidays. Counselors could also explore with clients how they may seek out opportunities to bring people together in their own ways.

Recommendations for Counselor Education & Supervision

This study provides several implications for counselor educators and supervisors. CACREP-accredited counseling programs are required to offer a multicultural counseling course as part of their core program (CACREP, 2016). These multicultural courses offer opportunities to explore aspects of Latinx culture that may be most relevant to counseling practice, however,

these courses are typically limited to one semester and offer only limited time to delve into concepts and topics focused on the Latinx community. As such, counselor educators can enhance their existing multicultural counseling courses by embedding research and discussion about Latinx cultural values and their intersections with other marginalized identities, such as LGBTQ identity, into their classes and department programming. Counselor educators could also incorporate case studies and real-world examples of LGBTQ Latino/a/x clients who have experienced family rejection and chosen family into classroom discussions. Keeping this intersectional lens can be useful to expose counselors-in-training to the experiences of this community and the complexity and richness of working with intersectionality. Similarly, counselor educators teaching family counseling-related courses can incorporate diverse representations of family in their existing lessons. In school counseling courses, counselor educators can challenge students to brainstorm ways to support students experiencing rejection at home. School counselors could strategize, for example, creating safe spaces in schools for LGBTQ Latino/a/x students to meet one another and be in community. This intervention could take the form of starting a group for LGBTQ Latino/a/x students specifically, or more broadly, starting a group for LGBTQ students of color. In these courses, counselor educators can introduce students to the concept of chosen families and challenge students to think about how they would work with members of these families.

Many counselors-in-training have expressed feelings of being unprepared to provide competent counseling services to LGBTQ clients (Bidell, 2013, 2017). To address this issue, some counseling programs have begun to offer courses specific to working with LGBTQ clients (Bidell, 2013, 2017). These courses, oftentimes optional elective courses, are a great opportunity to introduce counselors-in-training to the issues most salient to working with LGBTQ clients,

including those of chosen family. It is important that counselor educators keep an intersectional lens in mind when teaching this course, as to avoid erasing or ignoring the stories of LGBTQ people with multiple marginalized identities, including LGBTQ Latino/a/x individuals. Counselor educators, regardless of the specific courses they teach, should consider inviting speakers from the communities discussed in classes to share their stories and insights directly with students. Bringing in individuals with direct experience with family rejection and chosen family to speak in classes can help students fully appreciate the experiences they are learning about in the classroom.

Counselor supervisors aim to ensure that counselors provide competent and ethical counseling practice, including multicultural competence (ACES, 2011). As such, supervisors play a critical role in supporting counselors in the implementation of the aforementioned implications. Several scholars have emphasized the importance of supervisors attending to the multiple marginalized identities in their supervision practice (Falender et al., 2013; Moradi et al., 2010). The findings from this study lend credence to this notion. Counselor supervisors are encouraged to examine supervisee assumptions when working with LGBTQ Latino/a/x clients. Counselor supervisors can attend to their supervisees' assumptions around Latinx cultural values, coming out, and chosen family. Research has indicated that supervisors' multicultural competence leads to increased self-efficacy on the part of the supervisee (Crockett & Hays, 2015). Thus, supervisors are encouraged to become familiar and comfortable exploring issues pertinent to LGBTQ Latino/a/x clients in order to promote greater confidence and competence in their supervisees working with LGBTQ Latino/a/x clients.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study serves as a foundation for future research on LGBTQ Latino/a/x stories of family rejection and chosen family. As one of the few studies to explore this topic, there is much room to expand upon the initial findings of this study. Areas of future research to consider include exploring the experiences of transgender and Latina individuals in particular, exploring the differences across ethnic and geographical communities, and expanding studies of chosen families to groups outside the LGBTQ community.

One of the limitations of this study was the lack of gender diversity among the participants. Specifically, there were no individuals in this study who identified as transgender. A potential reason for the lack of transgender participants could be from the use of snowball sampling and recruitment through social media channels, which assume that participants will actively choose to participate in a study without knowing much about the researcher (Narui et al, 2015). To better reach trans (and other diverse) communities for participation in research, a different recruitment approach is required. Due to the history of exclusion and deception in research with marginalized groups, trust must first be established between the researcher and potential participants to encourage participation in studies (Narui et al, 2015). Thus, more intentional focus on establishing trust from the outset of the recruitment process can be helpful at encouraging participation from transgender individuals. Additionally, only one participant identified as a woman. As a result, future research focusing on the experiences of transgender Latino/a/xs and Latinas in particular is warranted. Few studies have explored the experiences of transgender Latinas (Hwahng et al. 2018) and yet transgender women of color, including Latinas, are among the most marginalized within the LGBTQ community and are particularly susceptible to rejection, violence, housing insecurity, and poverty (Jefferson et al., 2013). Thus, future

research should focus on the stories of transgender individuals within the Latinx community so that their voices may be heard and their needs better addressed by counselors.

Participants in this study represented several geographical areas of the United States, such as the NY/NJ metropolitan area, south Texas, and southeast Florida. Participants shared how aspects of their local communities influenced their experiences coming out. Similarly, participants came from various ethnic groups from within the Latinx community. Several participants pointed out that elements of their particular ethnic group or geographic region shaped how their family viewed their coming out and subsequently influenced how and if participants chose to come out to family members. As Latinx communities in the United States are not monolithic, it is worthwhile to explore the variation in experiences of cultural values, coming out, family rejection, and chosen family across different ethnic communities and geographic regions. Moreover, future research can examine how local and regional socio-political contexts may play a role in the experiences of LGBTQ Latino/a/x individuals living in those communities.

This study builds on existing research on the concept of chosen families. This study expands on prior studies that solely focused on individuals who were members of gay families or house families (Carpineto et al., 2008; Dewaele et al., 2011; Horne et al., 2015; Hwahng et al., 2018; Kubicek, Beyer, et al., 2013; Kubicek, McNeeley, et al., 2013; Levitt et al., 2015) and focuses on the broader LGBTQ Latino/a/x community. Future research is warranted to explore chosen families outside the context of the LGBTQ Latino/a/x community. Some scholars have already begun to explore how chosen families play out for individuals not a part of this community (Muraco, 2006), but those studies are few and far between. Future research should focus on other communities where chosen families may be particularly salient.

Chosen families may be especially salient for LGBTQ older adults who rely on people outside the family of origin for assistance (Knauer, 2016). Many LGBTQ older adults care for their peers instead of receiving care from a biological relative (Knauer, 2016). Unfortunately, many non-relative caregivers of LGBTQ older adults are not recognized as such from a legal perspective in the U.S., causing barriers for many LGBTQ older adults and their caregivers as they seek out medical and legal resources (Family Caregiving Alliance, n.d.). Few studies to date have examined the experiences for these individuals and their caregivers. Research in this area could be especially useful to counselors working with this population. Research in this area can also inform advocacy and social justice efforts to expand legal recognitions of non-biological caregivers and families.

Many individuals choose to, or are forced to, leave their families of origin for a variety of reasons. For example, according to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), 89.3 million people have been forcibly displaced worldwide due to conflict, violence, and persecution as of 2021 (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, n.d.). In the process of being displaced, many families may be disrupted and individuals may come to rely on new relationships who can provide financial, housing, and emotional support (Nicholson, 2018). Even when not forcibly displaced, many people choose to immigrate to other countries due to financial hardship or violence. According to the Pew Research Center, more than one million immigrants arrive in the U.S. each year (Budiman, 2022). Many of these individuals may be separated from their families of origin and come to rely on individuals in their new communities for support. An examination of how these individuals navigate creating new bonds in their new country is warranted.

Summary

In this chapter, I provided a summary of the findings of this study and discussed these findings within the context of the extant literature. I discussed the strengths and limitations of this study and implications for counseling practice, counselor education, and counselor supervision. Finally, I concluded this chapter with recommendations for future research.

This dissertation study served as an exploration of the stories of LGBTQ Latino/a/x people who have experienced family rejection and have become part of a chosen family. The findings contribute to a growing understanding of family rejection and chosen families relevant to the counseling profession. The study provides a foundation upon which future research on these topics will build and expand. Importantly, this study offered LGBTQ Latino/a/x people an opportunity to share their stories and an opportunity for those within the counseling profession to learn more about how these stories shape LGBTQ Latino/a/x peoples' lives.

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Appendix A: Demographic Questionnaire

Demographic questions will be asked verbally at the start of the first interview and will be recorded here by the researcher.

Participant # _________

1. **Do you identify as Hispanic, Latino, Latina, or Latinx (Circle one)**
2. **What is your ethnicity:___________________________________ (i.e. Puerto Rican, Mexican-American, etc.)**
3. **What is your sexual/affectional identity:__________________________ (i.e. gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, queer, asexual etc.)**
4. **What is your gender identity:_________________________ (i.e. transgender, gender-nonbinary, queer etc.)**

What are your pronouns (e.g. he, she, they, per, ze, use one's name, etc.)? _______________

How old are you? _________________

Appendix B: Recruitment Materials

College of Education and Human Services
Department of Counseling
Voice: 973-655-7216

EXPLORING LGBTQ LATINO/A/X STORIES OF CHOSEN FAMILIES

Share your Story!

- Do you identify as **Hispanic or Latino/Latina/Latinx** AND **Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Queer***?

  **Or any non-dominant sexual or gender identity*

- Have you experienced **rejection from a family (i.e. biological or adopted) member** as a result of coming out as LGBTQ?
- Are you part of a **chosen family** (e.g. a group of people who are like family but are not biologically related nor adopted)?
- This study will involve two virtual interviews (approximately 60-90 minutes each).
- You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study.

Carlos A. Flores, Doctoral Candidate in the Counseling and Educational Leadership Department is conducting this study. If you are interested in participating or have more questions, please contact him at floresc5@montclair.edu.

Social Media Post

Hello! I am seeking participants for a research study about the LGBTQ Latino/a/x stories of chosen family. This study will involve two virtual 60-90 minute, semi-structured interviews hosted on Zoom. Interviews will be video and audio recorded. The video recording will be deleted immediately after each interview while the audio recording will be transcribed by a transcription service after the interview and then deleted. Transcripts will then be analyzed for themes. Confidentiality will be kept to the degree permitted by the technology used. Please see the recruitment flyer below for eligibility criteria and do not hesitate to reach out to me with any questions. This study has been approved by the Montclair State University Institutional Review Board, Study no. #.

*Will attach recruitment flyer to social media post

Dear _______________

I am writing to let you know about an opportunity to participate in a research study about the LGBTQ Latino/a/x stories of chosen family. This study is being conducted by Carlos Flores, Doctoral Candidate from the Counseling Department at Montclair State University. This study will involve two virtual 60-90 minute, semi-structured interviews hosted via Zoom to take place at a time convenient for the participants. During the study, I will be video and audio recording the interviews. The video recording will be deleted immediately after each interview while the audio recording will be transcribed by a transcription service after the interview and then deleted. Transcripts will then be analyzed for themes. Confidentiality will be kept to the degree permitted by the technology used.

You may be eligible to participate if you:

- You identify as Hispanic or Latino/Latina/Latinx AND Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Queer*?
  *Or any non-dominant sexual or gender identity
- Have experienced rejection from a family (i.e. biological or adopted) member as a result of coming out as LGBTQ?
- Are part of a chosen family (e.g. a group of people who are like family but are not biologically related nor adopted)?

You must be 18 years of age or older to participate.

If you have any questions, please contact Carlos Flores at 813-484-2102 or floresc5@montclair.edu or Dr. Muninder K. Ahluwalia at 973-655-7622 or ahluwaliam@montclair.edu.

Thank you for considering participation in this study. This study has been approved by the Montclair State University Institutional Review Board, Study no. #

Sincerely,

Carlos Flores, Doctoral Candidate
Counseling Department, Montclair State University

Appendix C: IRB Approval Letter

School of Nursing & Graduate School Building
Room 333
Office: 973-655-7583
Fax: 973-655-3022

Aug 23, 2021 3:26:42 PM EDT

Mr. Carlos Flores
Dr. Muninder Ahluwalia
Montclair State University
Department of Counseling
1 Normal Ave.
Montclair, NJ 07043

Re: IRB Number: IRB-FY21-22-2281
Project Title: SS Exploring LGBTQ Latino/a/x Stories of Chosen Families

Dear Mr. Flores,

After a review to federal regulations, 45CFR46, category:

- 6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.
  7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Montclair State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this protocol on **August 23, 2021**. Your study will require an Administrative Check In, every two years, updating our office with the status of your research project. Your check in date is August 23, 2023. We will send you a reminder prior to that date.

This study has been approved under the conditions set forth by current state regulations due to COVID-19 and Montclair State University Restart Plan's Research guidance. You are required to follow the approved plan for face-to-face research interactions. If you have any questions about the impact of COVID-19 with regards to the methods proposed in your study, please do not hesitate to contact us.

All active study documents, such as consent forms, surveys, case histories, etc. , should be generated from the approved Cayuse IRB submission.

When making changes to your research team, you will no longer be required to submit a Modification, unless you are changing the PI. As Principal Investigator, you are required to make sure all of your Research Team members have appropriate Human Subjects Protections training, prior to working on the study. For more clarification on appropriate training contact the IRB office.

If you are changing your study protocol, study sites or data collection instruments, you will need to submit a Modification.

When you complete your research project you must submit a Project Closure through the Cayuse IRB electronic system.

If you have any questions regarding the IRB requirements, please contact me at 973-655-2097, cayuseIRB@montclair.edu, or the Institutional Review Board.

Sincerely yours,

Dana Levitt
IRB Chair

cc: Ms. Caren Ferrante, Graduate Student Assistance Coordinator, Graduate School

Appendix D: Adult Consent Form

College of Education and Human Services
Department of Counseling
Voice: 973-655-7216

ADULT CONSENT FORM

Please read below with care. You can ask questions at any time, now or later. You can talk to other people before you sign this form.

Title: Exploring LGBTQ Latino/a/x Stories of Chosen Families
Study Number: MSU IRB #FY21-22-2281.

Why is this study being done?
The purpose of this study is to hear the stories of LGBTQ Latino/a/x people who have been rejected by their family of origin and become part of a chosen family.

What will happen while you are in the study?
Prospective participants can expect:

- To participate in an initial interview on Zoom. The interview will take about 60-90 minutes. Interviews will be audio recorded. Audio recordings will be transcribed by a transcription service. I will review the transcripts for themes.
- At the beginning of the initial interview, I will ask you demographic questions.
- During the initial interview, I will ask you questions about being rejected by your family of origin. I will also ask you questions about being part of a chosen family.
- To participate in a second interview on Zoom. The interview will take about 60-90 minutes. Interviews will be audio recorded. Audio recordings will be transcribed by a transcription service. I will review the transcripts for themes.
- During the second interview, I will share with you initial themes that I have noticed from your initial interview and ask for your feedback and thoughts on the themes. I may ask follow up questions for additional information.

Time: This study will take about 120-180 minutes total (two, 60-90 minute interviews)

Risks: You may feel discomfort talking about life events that are upsetting.

Data will be collected on Zoom; we anticipate that your participation in this presents no greater risk than everyday use of Zoom. Please note that email communication is neither private nor secure. Though we are taking precautions to protect your privacy, you should be aware that information sent through email or Zoom could be read by a third party. Please do not use a work device, laptop, phone or WIFI to participate in the interviews. Many employers check use of all devices.

Benefits: There are no benefits from being part of this study. Others may benefit from this study by learning more about family rejection and chosen families. Data from the study can inform practices in counseling and counselor education.

Compensation There is no compensation for being part of this study.

Who will know that you are in this study? Your interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed by a transcription service. To help maintain confidentiality, I ask that you use pseudonyms when referring to family

College of Education and Human Services
Department of Counseling
Voice: 973-655-7216

members or others throughout the interview. I will not refer to you by your first name during the interview. Finally, I ask that you update your name in Zoom to "Participant # ___".

Your identity will not be directly linked to any presentations or publications related to this research. I will keep who you are confidential. However, specific quotes you share may be used publicly after all identifying information has been removed.

You should know that New Jersey requires that any person having reasonable cause to believe that a child has been subjected to child abuse or acts of child abuse shall report the same immediately to the Division of Child Protection and Permanency.

Do you have to be in the study?
You do not have to be in this study. You are a volunteer! It is okay if you want to stop at any time and not be included in the study. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. You can leave the study at any time.

Do you have any questions about this study? Phone or email Carlos Flores, 813-484-2102 or floresc5@montclair.edu, or Dr. Muninder K. Ahluwalia at 973-655-7622 or ahluwaliam@montclair.edu.

Do you have any questions about your rights as a research participant? Phone or email the IRB Chair, Dr. Dana Levitt, at 973-655-2097 or reviewboard@montclair.edu.

As part of this study, it is okay to audio record me:
Please initial: ______ Yes ______ No

One copy of this consent form is for you to keep.

Statement of Consent
I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement, and possible risks and inconveniences have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time. My signature also indicates that I am 18 years of age or older and have received a copy of this consent form.

______________________	______________________	__________
Print your name here	Sign your name here	Date
______________________	______________________	__________
Name of Principal Investigator	Signature	Date

Appendix E: Interview Protocols

Interview #1 Protocol:

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. This interview will take between 60-90 minutes. I have prepared 10 overarching questions to guide our discussion. Feel free to provide as much or as little detail as you feel comfortable for each of these questions. I may ask additional follow up questions as we go along. You can answer in either English or Spanish, whichever you feel most comfortable answering in.

If you would like to stop recording or would like to not answer a particular question at any time, please let me know and we can do so. If you cannot complete the 2nd interview, the information provided in this interview will serve as the sole source of information for your participation.

Before we begin, do I have permission to video and audio record this interview? Do you have any questions before we begin? I would like to begin by asking you some demographic questions (will verbally ask demographic questions – see Appendix A)

1. What are some identities that are important to you?
2. Describe the makeup of the family you grew up with.
    1. What was your experience like growing up?
3. What was your relationship like with each of your core family members prior to coming out?
4. Please discuss your coming out experience in general, and specifically as it relates to coming out to your family.
5. Please discuss the rejection you have experienced from your family of origin as a result of coming out.
6. In your own words, how do you define the term chosen family?
7. Please describe your chosen family.
    1. Composition
    2. Roles
    3. Dynamics
    4. How long have you been in the chosen family?
8. Please discuss how you became part of your chosen family.
9. Please discuss your current experiences with your family of origin and chosen family.
10. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Interview #2 Protocol:

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me again. This interview will take between 60-90 minutes. The purpose of today's interview is to review the emerging themes from our first interview and to provide you with an opportunity to clarify or add details to the information you provided. Feel free to provide as much or as little detail as you feel comfortable for each of these questions. I may ask additional follow up questions as we go along. You can answer in either English or Spanish, whichever you feel most comfortable answering in. If you would like to stop recording or would like to not answer a particular question at any time, please let me know and we can do so. To confirm, do I have permission to video and audio record this interview? Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. Is there anything you wanted to share since the last time we spoke?
2. Review emerging themes and solicit feedback