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# **Latino, Immigrant, and Gay: A Qualitative Study About Their Adaptation and Transitions**

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*The purpose of this study was to identify the individual and contextual factors affecting the adaptation and transition of Latino immigrant gay men. Eleven self-identified Latino immigrant gay men volunteered to participate in individual face-to-face semistructured interviews. Through thematic analysis, four major themes emerged from the data. The themes included reasons for immigrating, cultural values regarding sexual orientation, access to health care, and discrimination and coping. Themes are interpreted within an ecological theoretical framework. Implications for theory development, practice, and future research are discussed.*

**KEYWORDS** *immigration, Latino gay men, qualitative research*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Immigration is a social issue affecting countries worldwide. Whereas heterosexual men and women migrate in hope for a better life (Santiago-Rivera, Arredondo, & Gallardo-Cooper, 2002; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Yakushko, Backhaus, Watson, Ngaruiya, & Gonzales, 2008; Yakushko, Watson, & Thompson, 2008), immigrant sexual minorities are often forced to leave their home countries, away from traditional male-dominated societies where they are targets of sexual violence, physical aggression,

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and discrimination (Cantu, 2002; Diaz, 1998; Espin, 1994). Once settled, sexual minorities deal simultaneously with their adjustment as immigrants and sexual minorities (Greene, 1994; Ritter & Terndrup, 2002). For example, immigrant gay men may experience internalized homophobia, coming out, and cultural gender norms making their transition and adaptation more challenging. Scholarship on immigration and sexual orientation is scarce and a relevant area to study given the current sociopolitical agenda, drastic changes in demographics due to immigration, and limited access to health care for undocumented individuals (Carrillo, Fontdevila, Brown, & Gomez, 2008). Research with immigrant sexual minorities is an enigma as they are difficult participants to recruit while also being a high-risk population compared to other sexual minorities of color. Similarly, research on the sociocultural transitions and adaptations among immigrant sexual minorities remains a gap in the existing literature. Hence, the purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the individual and contextual factors that affect the transitions and adaptation of Latino immigrant gay men.

### Immigration and Sexual Orientation

Reports from the Census Bureau and the Department of Homeland Security indicate that there are currently 11 million (3.7% of the total population) undocumented immigrants living in the United States (Hoefer, Rytina, & Baker, 2011). This figure does not include tourists, students or family visitors, or those who cross the U.S. borders without forms of proper documentation. To date, there are no accurate statistics on the number of sexual minorities migrating to the United States or other countries with and without legal documentation (Ritter & Terndrup, 2002). Recent immigrants to the United States come mainly from Latin American (e.g., Mexico) and Asian countries (e.g., China) (Ritter & Terndrup, 2002). Additionally, of the sexual minorities who are undocumented, little information is known, although the extant knowledge is driven from human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and the National Immigrant Justice Center. Organizations such as these have reported on the atrocities that sexual minorities experience in their attempt to cross the border as well as advocates for comprehensive immigration legislation that protects individuals because of their sexual orientation and gender identity. Scholars have speculated that sexual minorities leave their homeland to be able to express their sexuality away from their families (Carrillo, 2009), pursue economic mobility, or escape from the torment they experience in their home countries or communities. Although those who decide to migrate do so in mind for freedom to express who they are and hope to find a haven outside their country (Amnesty International, 2011). For example, in the United States there is a growing number of asylum cases from Mexico based on gender identity or sexual orientation (National Immigrant Justice Center, 2012).

Sexual minorities cross physical and psychological borders. The experience of crossing the border is often parallel with the coming-out process. Scholars argue that immigration facilitates the coming-out process (Espin, 1997, 1999). The honeymoon stage of being in a liberal and progressive country fades early as individuals start dealing simultaneously with processes related to their acculturation and sexual identity development. Issues related to job placement, housing, documentation, sexual health, and limited support systems are just few examples of what this particular group encounters (Center for Disease Control, 2008). Similarly, this particular group of individuals faces within-group prejudices due to their sexual identity status from those who share their cultural background, mainstream society's anti-immigrant sentiment, and potential rejection from the larger lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ) community (Carballo-Diequez, 1989; Greene, 1994). If specific supports and resources are not in place, the individual is at risk of experiencing high levels of psychological distress (Berry, 1997). As an example, a monolingual gay-identified individual with no family or friends in the United States would struggle significantly due to the loss of family support.

### Latino Immigrant Gay Men

Gay and bisexual men face specific challenges regarding violence and negative sexual health outcomes that require attention. These include rates of HIV that are more than 20 times higher than their heterosexual peers, as well as higher rates of hate-motivated violence and family rejection when compared to lesbian and bisexual women (Carballo-Diequez, 1989; Ryan, 2009). Recent statistics report that Latino immigrants are the largest group of people who settle in the United States (Hoefler et al., 2011). Similarly, Latinos as a group are the largest ethnic minority according to the 2010 Census (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert, 2011). Latino gay men are an important group to study, especially regarding their transitioning and adaptation to this country, to develop interventions that will prevent them from engaging in risky behaviors due to their maladjustment. Practicing unsafe sex such as not using condoms, dental dams, having intercourse with multiple partners, not getting tested for HIV, or not staying informed are common behaviors among immigrant gay men (Carrier, 1995; Carrillo et al., 2008). Often they may feel immune to contracting sexually transmitted infections (STIs) (e.g., HIV/AIDS) because of their lack of knowledge or resources available, cultural health beliefs about, and internalized homophobia. For example, men who have sex with other men (MSM) from ethnic minority backgrounds often identify as heterosexual due to their dominant role during sexual intercourse. When coming to the United States, this cultural sexual belief remains salient, disregarding the implications in terms of HIV

infection (Gregorio et al., 2011; Rhodes et al., 2012). Hence, understanding the personal and contextual factors of Latino immigrant gay men is key in understanding their transition and adaptation to this country.

Previous research has focused specifically on the sexual experiences of Latino immigrant gay men living in metropolitan areas with high concentrations of sexual minorities (e.g., Bianchi et al., 2007). This qualitative study builds from Bianchi and colleagues (2007) by understanding in more depth the internal and external factors that affect the transitions and adaptations of Latino immigrant gay men to the United States, focusing on their life experiences as ethnic and sexual minorities from immigrant status and not on their sexual practices, *per se*. More specifically, we were interested in gaining a deeper perspective on the specific factors (e.g., individual, contextual) affecting Latino immigrant gay men and identifying what participants considered protective factors during their transition and adaptation. Immigrant sexual minorities are ignored in the literature, as they are reluctant to participate in research due to fear of deportation. Furthermore, immigrant sexual minorities from Latin America are a group who struggle significantly in adjusting to mainstream heterosexual society while transitioning as members of the sexual minority community. These two processes take place simultaneously, and the general understanding of their impact on the individual lacks empirical support.

### Ecological Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (1979), due to its focus in the environment and the factors that influence the life of Latino immigrant gay men (Cerezo, 2009). Ecological theory contains four major systems. The microsystem is the immediate environment of the individual, including acculturation, migration stressors, social support in home and host environments, and racial as well as the ethnic composition of home and host environments. The mesosystem is the quality of interpersonal relationships that the individual has with those in the microsystem and include relationships within immigrant gay men and other immigrant groups in different contexts. The exosystem refers to the environment and processes that affect immigrant gay men's immediate and basic needs that are directly out of their control. For example, access to employment, medical benefits, and immigration laws. Lastly, the macrosystem deals with the overarching societal values, such as societal attitudes toward immigrant groups and sexual minorities (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Morales, Yakushko, & Morales, 2011; Yakushko & Chronister, 2005). A unique quality of this theory is the bidirectionality, which is the mutual influence between environment and individual. The ecological model emphasizes the relevance of multiple identities as Latino immigrant gay men adapt and transition across different contexts (e.g.,

mainstream and gay culture) as well as mainstream cultural views on immigration and sexual minorities (Cook, Heppner, & O'Brien, 2001).

## METHOD

### Participants

A total of 11 gay-identified Latino immigrant men from a large midwestern city were part of the study. Snowball sampling was used to recruit participants. Other strategies included posting flyers at the local community LGBT center, passing flyers at clubs, and at other settings where Latinos tend to socially gather. The flyers provided a brief synopsis of the project, selection criteria, and contact information. To take part in the study, participants had to be self-identified as gay, bisexual or questioning, age 18 or older, born in Latin America, and living in the United States for at least 2 years. Participants varied in age ranging from 21 to 48. A length of residency was established so that issues related to adjustment could be addressed. In our sample, the length of residence in the country varied widely, from 3 to 44 years. All but two of the participants were born in Mexico. Nine of the men had a negative status based on the results of their last HIV test. The 11 participants had a high school education or higher. Annual income ranged from \$0 to \$75,000. See Table 1 for detailed description of the participants. A gatekeeper assisted with data collection. Gatekeepers are the bridge between researchers and underserved communities whose purpose is to help develop trust between the two parties (Hatch, 2002). The gatekeeper was a Latino, gay-identified man in his early thirties who works at a local LGBT community center providing social services to Latino and immigrant gay, bisexual, and transgender men.

**TABLE 1** Description of Participants in Study

Name <sup>a</sup>	Age	Years in United States	Nationality	HIV Status	Annual Income (\$)	Education
Frank	47	22	Mexican	Negative	0	High school
Nando	43	13	Mexican	Positive	55,000	4-year college
Angel	23	12	Mexican	Positive	0	High school
Ricardo	36	19	Guatemalan	Unknown	0	High school
Coque	37	3	Mexican	Negative	14,000	4-year college
Monchis	42	14	Mexican	Negative	32,000	4-year college
Mateo	25	22	Mexican	Negative	55,000	4-year college
George	44	44	Puerto Rican	Negative	0	Community college
Mattiel	43	11	Mexican	Negative	75,000	Doctorate
Jose	32	26	Mexican	Negative	37,000	High school
Carlos	25	9	Mexican	Negative	16,800	High school

<sup>a</sup>These are the not the participants' real names, but the pseudonyms they chose.

## Data Collection

*Semi-structured interviews.* An interview protocol was constructed based on the literature related to immigrant sexual minorities and their adaptation during cultural transition. The interview addressed five major areas: pre- and postmigration histories, cultural values, experience with oppression, access to services, and coping. Each section consisted of three to five open-ended questions. Participants provided a pseudonym to protect their identity. Interviews were conducted in the language of the participants' choice. Some of the participants opted to have their interviews conducted in Spanish whereas others were in combination of English and Spanish. Interviews took place in a private office that the gatekeeper provided at the community LGBT center. No one had access to this space while the interviews took place to ensure confidentiality to participants. Interviews lasted 90 to 240 minutes. In addition, a questionnaire was created to get demographic information about the participants. Questions included age, nationality, length in the United States, HIV status, annual income, and type of employment.

As part of ensuring that individuals were able to give informed consent to participate, they had the option to review their interview transcript or receive a copy of the study findings. Participants were compensated with a \$25 gift card for their participation. The audio-recorded interviews were conducted by the first and second authors, both bilingual, and bicultural gay-identified men, a 1.5-generation Mexican immigrant and a second-generation Mexican American. Interviews were conducted in the participants' language of choice.

## Data Analyses

A bilingual Latina graduate student in counseling psychology with expertise in qualitative data analysis transcribed all of the interviews. The first and second authors reviewed the transcriptions. Interviews were transcribed in the language they were conducted to ensure that the true voice of the participants stayed intact. The data were coded for meaning and description, thus codes could contain two or more sentences (Creswell, 2012). Data were analyzed through thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) step-by-step guidelines: familiarizing yourself with your data, generating initial codes, the researcher read throughout each transcript to immerse in the data, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Thematic analysis is widely used across different fields because of its flexibility to "provide rich and detailed yet complex account of the data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78).

## Validation Strategies

Trustworthiness is important in qualitative research in demonstrating the credibility and rigor of the findings (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). In

this study, validation strategies were used and included peer debriefing (i.e., external check of the research process), thick rich description (i.e., detailed description of participants and representation of various participants' voices), and researchers flexibility (i.e., keeping record of the research process). These validation strategies have been recommended by Creswell and Miller (2000). The first two authors and the peer debriefer coded the data independently. The peer debriefer was an Asian American female graduate student fluent in Spanish. After the data were analyzed, all members reviewed and discussed the codes and themes. When there was disagreement, members dialogued until consensus was reached to assure that the participants' voices were represented. The first and second author engaged in discussions during data collection and throughout the research process. Also, they wrote a series of journal entries to reflect on their biases regarding data collection and analyses, especially when any of them were having reactions about the content of the interviews. This process kept them aware of how their multiple identities intersected with the participants' multiple identities. Member checking (i.e., participants are solicited about the credibility of findings) provides stronger support to the findings. The interviewers explained to participants the option of reviewing their interview transcript or receiving a copy of the study findings. Unfortunately, none of participants were interested.

## FINDINGS

The thematic analyses revealed four overarching themes: reasons for immigrating, cultural values regarding sexual orientation, access to health care, and discrimination and coping. Themes are described as experienced by the participants. Examples are given to provide explanation and context. Because of the nature of the study, quotes were translated from Spanish to English. A series of steps were taken (translation from Spanish to English and followed by back-translation) to ensure that the participants' voices and cultural nuances were kept intact with the quotes used in the findings (Morales & Green, 2007; Temple & Young, 2004). We recognize the challenges of translating cultural nuances and folk sayings when doing qualitative research.

### Reasons for Immigrating

Individuals immigrate due to a variety of reasons (e.g., financial, better lifestyle, following partner). In this study, participants came to the United States during different phases of life and for a number of reasons. For example, Mateo was age 3 when his parents decided to bring the family from Mexico looking for a better future. He stated, "My dad worked in the US and one day he sent for my mom, my brother and me. He brought us to the US since we had family living here." Coque arrived in his early thirties



from Mexico, following his romantic partner. He said, “I came to the U.S. because of my partner.” Matt also shared, “My partner decided one moment to come over here and because he is US citizen. We came to this country, he brought me here.” Those who left their countries of origin as adults also left behind job security, family, friends, and other forms of support to join their significant other. Nando explained this type of experience:

I came here because of my partner. I had graduated from college in Mexico the year before. I had a very good job. I had a very good life. It was a good life. It was a good life. I did not have any reasons to leave Mexico.

What often separates immigrant gay men from those who are heterosexual is the longing for a safe haven where they can freely express their identities and access affirming forms of support. Participants recounted stories in their home country where gay men were targets of ridicule, violence, and other forms of oppression. To survive, participants said that they had to stay in the closet. Carlos said that while growing up in Mexico, he witnessed how older men in his family would make fun of gay men and classify them as “deviant, sexual predators, and less than human” and used derogatory language (e.g., *maricón*, *puñal*) when encountering gay men in the streets. Angel described how his father would tell him and his brother to stay away from a kid in the neighborhood because he was “too flamboyant.” His father would tell his mother, “I don’t want my kids next to this extremely flamboyant kid. I don’t want our kids to think that it’s ok for them to act like that.” He further explained how because of these messages, he started bullying kids he suspected were gay:

When I was growing, you could not be gay because then people throw you rocks, books. They’ll pick on you, they’ll pick fights on you. I remember this because I used to be part of these fights because I didn’t want other people to think that I was gay so I just jumped in and threw shit at the most flamboyant boy there was.

For many of these men, the messages from their parents regarding gender conformity shaped their own value system regarding sexual minorities and defined their belonging in their place of origin. As in the case of Angel, conducting acts of bullying became a mechanism he used to reiterate his belonging in the family unit. Many of the participants described a heightened awareness of gender policing norms and would link them to their need to expunge themselves from the context of their family to express their sexuality.

## Cultural Values Regarding Sexual Orientation

The men reminisced of events they heard or observed from their fathers and other male role models of what it means to be a man. Participants mentioned internal struggles due to conflicts between traditional gender roles and expectations from family, friends, native culture and perceived U.S. freedom of sexual expression. Jose remembered that, in his family, it was clear what men and women had to do:

The man was the breadwinner, the dominant person, or you know with females. I guess those are the rules that I learned; usually the men in Mexico are the providers . . . the females provide the male with food, cooking, clothing, and things in that nature.

Carlos further explained that when he was growing up, “They would tell me and I saw how you [men] had to give orders in your house, that others [women and children] had to do as you tell them, they had to follow your orders and everything else.” These expectations influenced whether some participants chose to not disclose their sexual orientation to their family back in their home country. The common reason for not disclosing was not wanting to disrupt their family’s dynamic. In this regard, manhood can be understood mainly in the relationship to other roles in the family unit. For Carlos and Coque, being able to be the breadwinner enabled them to retain their status as men.

A hierarchy based on gender expression and sexual behaviors was highlighted where, according to the participants, men who appeared more “masculine” and dominant were desired romantic partners whereas those who seemed feminine, flamboyant, and passive were unwanted and targets of discrimination. For example, Mateo described preferring masculine men over effeminate men:

I’m definitely more comfortable and find it sexier for a guy to be masculine. I want a guy to look like a lumberjack masculine but at the same time be sensitive and be able to talk about art and music. Yeah like I said before I don’t have anything wrong with effeminate guys, a lot of my friends are very effeminate, like super, super effeminate, and I think it’s fun I like it but it’s not something I find sexually attractive. Yeah I’m definitely more into a more masculine man.

Displaying effeminate behaviors was also classified as unattractive because of fear being associated with someone gay. Here is an example from Mattiel describing how expressions of femininity among gay men make them easy targets of different forms of discrimination:

A lot of effeminate gay men are not educated and they don't have the respect of others. That's why they are discriminated and exposed to homophobia. Because they all think that we are like them, that all of us are like them.

### Access to Health Care

Health care is important for a person's well-being and survival in a new culture. For immigrants, having access to health care is difficult and often becomes impossible when they do not have proper documentation. The men in this study varied in their access to health care, including home remedies, free clinics, personal connections with medical providers, and usage of the hospital's emergency room when feeling extremely sick. The majority of them did not have health insurance. For example, Ricardo described asking his mother for home remedies when he gets sick, instead of seeing a medical doctor:

Home remedies or alternative medicine. They work. It takes a while to feel better, but they help you heal. Alternative medicine is really good, that's what my mother practiced [in Guatemala]. Instead of taking a prescription, I prefer to make a mixture of fruits, vegetables, and herbs. It tastes good and it helps your body heal.

George further explained the importance of prevention of illnesses by taking vitamins or other over the counter medication, "I'm taking vitamin C every morning preventing from trying to get even a simple cold. I do things differently now."

The topic of STIs was highlighted in the interviews with the participants. The men identified resources they could use such as HIV testing. Their knowledge regarding STIs and where to obtain information varied with some of them getting information from the Internet, friends, community clinics, and health care providers. Six of the participants felt comfortable sharing their sexual orientation with their health care provider. Ten of the 11 participants knew of their HIV status and were tested every 6 months to a year. They found it important in taking responsibility in using condoms and other methods to prevent STIs (e.g., getting tested, disclosing HIV status). For example, Monchis shared his experience of wanting to have oral sex with someone he met:

The other day, I had a very ugly experience because I wanted to have oral sex and we only had regular [condoms]. So, I told him that we had to use condoms with flavors such as mint or banana and not with lubricant. I was worried of having oral sex using a condom with lubricant. I always use protection because sometimes when you have contact [unsafe sex]

with someone who has it [HIV] you can get infected. For example when having oral sex, your gums can be bleeding, you can get bitten and start to bleed. I think no matter what you have to be careful. There is always a risk when you have sex with someone you do not know his sexual history.

Nando and Angel, the two participants who had an HIV-positive diagnosis discussed getting infected due to unsafe sex practices while they were experiencing difficult times in their lives. Both of them were under medical care and had access to different services (e.g., psychotherapy) to deal with the disease, while also engaging in safe sexual encounters and letting their partners know about their HIV status.

### Discrimination and Coping

Immigrant gay men are often easy targets of discrimination in different contexts because of their ethnic/racial background and sexual orientation. All of the participants disclosed situations in which they experienced prejudice or saw others being discriminated against. Some of them also disclosed how Latino gay men are often perceived as exotic and stereotyped as the “Latin lover” particularly in social settings. Here Mateo described homophobic remarks he was exposed to at work:

At work I have not seen it as much because I think that they're more conscious of it [discrimination to sexual minorities] because if they were to say anything racist then I would to report them, there's that legal aspect of it so I haven't seen much of that there but you do always hear homophobic remarks like even right now I work with this one guy who whenever he says “oh today is going to be a hard day,” he always says “you're gonna get your shit pushed in.” And I don't know if he knows like you know that that's a homophobic comment.

Coque shared a similar situation in which his coworkers used derogatory remarks toward gay men:

I've witnessed discrimination towards gay men. On these occasions, I would pretend I was not gay, I do not act feminine anyway. But I saw how they [coworkers] would behave towards gay men. If they say a gay man coming into the restaurant, they would say the faggot this, the slut, and the making fun did not stop in the restaurant. Those were the worst experiences I had working at this restaurant.

Some of the men of the study were direct targets of discrimination because of their sexual orientation, immigration status, and even because of their

physical attributes. Monchis remembered a coworker making fun of him because of his intersecting identities.

Yes, one of my co-workers said to me, “you are gay and an immigrant.” He followed up with, “you are gay, immigrant, and ugly.” I was like . . . people don’t care if their comments are going to hurt you, make you cry, or make you laugh. I have heard famous people making similar comments. You know homophobia and that it [being gay] is the cancer of society. Why don’t people let the wounds of these hateful comments heal, to get cured of the social problems we have.

Despite their encounters with discrimination, the participants formed supports to cope with the daily challenges of being an immigrant, a sexual minority, and member of an ethnic minority group. Strategies included accessing friends and family when necessary, attending English as Second Language (ESL) classes, exercising, attending social gatherings, the gym, and recognizing their personal strengths as immigrants and gay men. For example, Mateo shared that one of his coping skills is to ignore people’s comments or behaviors:

I have chosen not care about them or not make a big deal out of it because you can’t really prove that someone is racist unless they do something in an email or do something that you have proof for, you can’t do something if someone gives you like a bad look. So I choose to just not going to dig deeper and start a fight, I’m just going to forget about it because I’m not going praise to them that Hispanics are good or, its not my job I don’t think.

Ricardo mentioned that to cope with the stressors of immigration he is actively engaging in proactive behaviors. He kept moving forward and looking for alternatives as events in his life kept changing. Here is an example,

So, I have in one way or the other keep moving forward, like saving, spend less and cut down expenses. Then, so I see hope in that aspect. I know I am not working right now, but I can do practical solutions while I find a job. I am for example going back to school. Even if I don’t have a job, I can still go to school. After two years of studying, I can probably get a better job.

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to identify the individual and contextual factors affecting the adaptation and transition of Latino immigrant gay men. Eleven Latino immigrant gay men participated through semistructured interviews. Using thematic analysis, four major themes emerged from the data. The

findings highlighted that Latino immigrant men migrate to the United States for a variety of reasons. Some migrated because they felt unsafe in their home country, whereas others left to follow their partners. These findings expand upon existing literature, which has focused on coming out as a major factor among immigrant sexual minorities (Cantu, 2002; Diaz, 1998; Espin, 1994, 1997, 1999).

From an ecological perspective, the men in this study were exposed at an early age to situations with definite gender norms and expectations from their male role models that affected their gender, sexual, and ethnic identity formation. Messages such as what it means to be a man within their cultural context were traditional and homophobic. As adults these early experiences influenced a number of them to come out to people they identify as safe (e.g., friends), and not others (e.g., parents). This finding is consistent with existing literature that describes how immigrant sexual minorities often negotiate their coming out process (Greene, 1994; Ritter & Terndrup, 2002). Similarly, the participants were aware of a hierarchy in which gay men with more masculine traits are ideal partners whereas effeminate men are considered as less desirable and stereotyped as having multiple partners and uneducated.

Contrary to popular beliefs that Latino gay men engage in risky behaviors such as not using condoms and having multiple sexual encounters with different individuals (Carballo-Diequez, 1989; Carrier, 1995), this study found the opposite. Our findings report that Latino immigrant gay men stayed informed about sexual health and identified resources where they could access health care providers and information about STIs. Similarly, the participants reported relying on close networks such as friends and family.

Latino immigrant gay men are resourceful when it comes to accessing health care (Center for Disease Control, 2008). Participants were well aware of the resources they could access if they ever felt ill or had an emergency. Some participants reported taking vitamins, dietary supplements, and homeopathic medicine as means to prevent illness and to not have to use emergency rooms. In regards to information about STIs, the men were well informed of how they could get infected and engaged in safe sexual behaviors, contradicting previous studies with similar samples (e.g., Carrillo et al., 2008; Gregorio et al., 2011; Rhodes et al., 2012).

In their day-to-day interactions, participants confronted prejudices because of their sexual orientation, ethnic background, and their immigration status. Despite these challenges, this group of gay men possessed traits that acted as buffers. For example, participants had a positive outlook on life. They witnessed and experienced discrimination and homophobia, yet they still kept a positive stance on their future. Understanding these findings from an ecological lens, the better the quality of relationship between the individual and his/her/his environment, the better the individual will adapt and transition to stressful situations. This is a new finding, as the literature has

focused mainly on the risk factors of immigrant sexual minorities infected with HIV and not the personal strengths of those with a negative diagnosis (Moradi, DeBlaere, & Huang, 2010).

### Implications for Theory

Contributing to theory development is key in understanding psychological phenomena. This study expands how external factors such as discrimination, limited access to health care, and immigration stressors can positively or negatively affect the adaptation and transition of Latino immigrant gay men. Personal coping skills played a key role in how participants made sense of their experiences as immigrants, gay, and Latinos. Thus, despite the challenges or shortcomings faced by immigrant sexual minorities, they were active players in their adaptation and transition to mainstream society and sexual minority communities by forming networks and relying on their personal strengths.

### Implications for Counseling

The findings of this study provide relevant information to practitioners working with Latino immigrant gay men. Clinicians may want to explore with their clients topics related to access to health care, especially if the individual is undocumented. Counselors and their clients can develop a network that includes various resources as a preventive measure for illnesses. This intervention can reinforce the individual's view on the importance of staying healthy to avoid using health care services. Similarly, practitioners working with this particular group are encouraged to assess the individual and the contextual factors affecting their well-being to obtain a better understanding of presenting concerns. Often in counseling, external factors are not of focus of treatment, thereby limiting the understanding of the client's presenting concerns. A more ecological assessment of client's causes for coming to counseling may provide a more holistic understanding and a better conceptualization of Latino immigrant gay male clients.

A strength-based approach is key in counseling individuals from historically oppressed groups. This method allows the counselor to focus on the strengths of the client, and to use them to help the individual feel empowered to make significant changes in their lives. Thus, in the case of Latino immigrant gay men, counselors may want to focus on exploring and highlighting the coping skills they use when confronting adversities. This strategy would help Latino immigrant male clients feel empowered that they have control over their lives within a system that oppresses their multiple identities. It is also important to distinguish between sexual orientation, gender expressiveness, and gender. Based on participants' experiences, they experienced discrimination and oppression by virtue of being more "feminine" and

not complying with the societal norms of being more masculine. Thus, psychoeducation is needed not only for sexual minorities, but also the majority population.

### Implication for Future Research

Studies such as ours are just the beginning of an important yet scarce area of research. Scholars may want to continue exploring and identifying the sociocultural factors affecting the adaptation and transition of immigrant gay men from diverse backgrounds using larger samples from across the country. Future research is needed in developing interventions that will break cultural misconceptions about safe sex and how to identify resources that are culturally congruent with Latino immigrant gay men. Finally, studies are desperately needed in understanding how other intersecting identities (e.g., socioeconomic status, educational background) besides ethnicity, sexual orientation, and immigration impact the lives of sexual minority men who come to the United States from other parts of the world in hopes of a better life.

### Limitations

This study had limitations as no study is perfect. First the participants' years of residence in the United States varied. Perhaps, focusing on those individuals with 1 to 5 years of living in in the United States would have provided richer information about their immigration experience. Similarly, the range of participants' socioeconomic status was also broad, and provided for a breadth of understanding, rather than the depth of their experiences based on a specific class experience. Third, an additional form of data, such as asking the men to keep journals about their daily lives or using pictures to describe places where they feel safe as immigrants, sexual minorities, and Latino could provide depth about the contextual factors impacting their multiple and intersecting identities. Our sample consisted of mainly Mexican immigrant gay men, whereas the voices of other Latin men were not included. Finally, including the perspective of the romantic partners could have explained how immigration has an impact on same-sex binational couples.

## CONCLUSION

Latino immigrant gay men experience different forms of discrimination while also trying to adapt to two mainstream cultures, thus making these processes challenging. They face a myriad of stressors as well as personal strengths, and their experiences as gendered, sexual orientation, and immigrant beings highlight the resiliency of their spirits as warriors for equality.



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