

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

By

Zelma L. Oyarvide

May, 2014

NEGOTIATING RELIGIOSITY AND SEXUAL IDENTITY AMONG HISPANIC LESBIAN
MOTHERS

An Abstract of a Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department

of Sociology

University of Houston

ABSTRACT

Religion might serve as an adaptive tool for Hispanic lesbian mothers in order to maintain a more tolerated identity as a mother, or it could produce heightened conflict given their potential incompatibility with the role of a “good mother.” In particular, there is a potential for conflict between the definition of a “good mother” set forth in Catholicism and the sexual orientation of Hispanic lesbians. I conducted a qualitative study to examine how Hispanic lesbian mothers negotiate their Catholic religious identity with aspects of their sexual identity. More specifically, I inquired about the strategies that Hispanic lesbian mothers utilize to reconcile or navigate perceived conflict between their roles as a Catholic and as a lesbian. For this study, I interviewed fifteen women in different cities across Texas, including Houston, San Antonio, Austin and the Dallas-Fort Worth area. Through semi-structured interviews, I examined several aspects of their identities as a Catholic Hispanic lesbian mother. Specifically, I asked questions regarding parenting, religion, identity and stigma. This study seeks to examine how Hispanic lesbian mothers perceive the available religious scripts as tools for integration or exclusion from the Catholic community.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My special thanks go to the Center for Mexican American Studies for providing me with the funding to pursue this study. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Tatcho Mindiola and Dr. Maria Gonzalez for their suggestions and expert contribution. I would also like to thank Dr. Baumle for her contribution to this study as the committee chair and a mentor. Finally, I would like to thank Captain and my fiancé Elliott for their unconditional support and encouragement throughout this process.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Much of the research on sexual orientation has been focused on the negative effects that the gay or lesbian identity has on family members, children and the mental health of individuals (Allen and Demo 1995; Berkowitz 2009; Morales 1989). In studying LGBT families, “research has rarely addressed how cultural variations influence the context of family life for gay father or lesbian mother families” (Tasker and Patterson, 2008:11). In the United States, however, same-sex couple parents and their children are more likely to be racial and ethnic minorities (Gates, 2013). Given that sexuality oppression can be complicated by its intersection with other oppressions (B. Smith, 2000), then it is important to consider the manner in which parenting experiences might differ across racial and ethnic groups. Hispanic lesbian mothers must “simultaneously confront and learn to manage their triple oppression of sexism, heterosexism and racism that exists both within the dominant culture and within their own racial/ethnic communities” (Parks Hughes and Mathews 2004: 243). Accordingly, Hispanic lesbian mothers face bicultural oppression that stigmatizes and could influence their roles as mothers.

Religion might serve as an adaptive tool for Hispanic lesbian mothers in order to maintain a more tolerated identity as a mother, or it could produce heightened conflict given their potential incompatibility with the role of a “good mother.” In particular, there is a potential for conflict between the definition of a “good mother” set forth in Catholicism and the sexual orientation of Hispanic lesbians. I conducted a qualitative study to examine how Hispanic lesbian mothers negotiate their Catholic religious identity with aspects of their sexual identity. More specifically, I inquired about the strategies that Hispanic lesbian mothers utilize to reconcile or navigate perceived conflict between their roles as a Catholic and as a lesbian.

For this study, I interviewed fifteen women in different cities across Texas, including Houston, San Antonio, Austin and the Dallas-Fort Worth area. Through semi-structured interviews, I examined several aspects of their identities as a Catholic Hispanic lesbian mother. Specifically, I asked questions regarding parenting, religion, identity and stigma.

Theoretical Framework

Identity creation for Hispanic lesbians involves the negotiation of their sexual identity with their roles as minorities, mothers and religious adherents. Identities are shaped by macro discourses and structures (Omni and Winant 1986; Nagel 1996) and therefore different groups of people can “do” identity differently. Identity creation includes social scripts which instruct members of a society as to appropriate behavior and the meanings to attach to certain behavior; people learn certain scripts as a function of being raised in a particular culture (Wiederman, 2005).

Within these social scripts are sexual scripts, which are “the strategies involved in doing sex;” these “sociocultural processes play a fundamental role in determining what we perceive as sexual” and how we construct sexual meanings and attach them to sexual acts (Gagnon, and Simon 1973: 16). Sexual scripts are created through cultural scenarios (instructions for sexual and other conduct that are embedded in the cultural narrative that are provided as guides or instructions for all conduct), interpersonal scripts (structured patterns of interaction in which individuals as actors engage in everyday interpersonal conduct) and intrapsychic scripts (plans and fantasies by which individuals guide and reflect on their past, current, or future conduct) (Foucault 1980). Individuals attach certain meanings to sexual behavior depending on the “individual’s personal experience and social learning” (Wiederman, 2005:497). For Hispanic

lesbians, sexual meanings from the dominant United States culture and Hispanic ethnic subculture must be negotiated into a bicultural understanding of sexual identity and behavior.

Similarly religious scripts include the patterns of interactions, cultural narratives and guides of conduct that individuals utilize to “do religion.” Individuals will follow the teachings of their religion when determining their own sexual behaviors and attitudes by avoiding certain sexual behaviors because of the teachings of their religion (Lefkowitz et al., 2004). According to a report on the 2000 Census, approximately 90 percent of Hispanics identify with a Christian religion (Cianciotto, 2005). However, religious scripts may exclude Hispanic lesbians from participation in the Christian religion because Hispanics hold “more conservative social views on homosexuality than other Americans” (Cianciotto, 2005: 17).

Significance of Study

Hispanic lesbians also must contend with intersectionality of oppression as part of their experiences as mothers. Intersectionality is defined by Nash (2008:2) as “the notion that subjectivity is constituted by mutually reinforcing vectors of race, gender, class, and sexuality.” Racial minority women who come to identify as lesbians must confront the norms and expectations of both the majority and minority cultures in which they live (Parks, Hughes and Matthews, 2004). As an ethnic group, Hispanic women are a “historically disadvantaged and underserved community” and studies that emphasize problems within this population are needed (Kim and Fredriksen-Goldsen, 2012: 9). For this reason, this study focuses exclusively on the experiences of Hispanic women.

There is currently a lack of available research on religious beliefs and motherhood of Hispanic lesbians. Asencio (2009) stated that in the past 30 years there have been few studies focused on the experience of Hispanic lesbians; this limits our understanding of multiple

identities and oppression. Additionally, people with “multiple subordinate identities” such as Hispanic lesbians experience ‘intersectional invisibility’ as a result of remaining closeted in their respective subordinate groups (Purdi-Vaughns and Eibach, 2008: 378).

Other work, however, has explored the manner in which race, sexuality, and religion intersect to influence experiences for lesbian mothers. In her study of African-American lesbian mothers, Moore (2011:126), found that women developed strategies for identity fluidity to navigate their ethnic, sexual and mother identity. Moore (2011:126) found that “existing discourses about homosexuality and lesbian motherhood not only affect a person’s decision to take on a public identity as gay but also significantly impact their approach to parenting.” Moore found that the religious institution was an important aspect of the Black community that influenced behavior outside of church, including “how people who live in Black communities go about expressing their sexuality” (2011: 9). Thus the experiences of the women in the church influenced how they portrayed their sexual identity. This study seeks to examine how Hispanic lesbian mothers perceive the available religious scripts as tools for integration or exclusion from the Catholic community.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Although the literature on Hispanic lesbian mothers is scarce, this section summarizes some of the key themes that emerge from research about sexual minorities and ethnic sexual minorities in the United States with regards to parenting and religion. The literature reveals that there are strategies utilized by minority lesbian and gay individuals in order to create an acceptable identity in the various social groups of which they are members (McQueeney, 2009). Prior research has also examined how ethnic sexual minorities face an intersectionality of invisibility and oppression and how religious institutions influence the way in which sexual minorities present their sexuality and create new sexual moral discourses (Dandridge, 1985). In addition, prior research has examined the influence of sexual orientation on motherhood and the marginal-mainstream dichotomous identity it creates (Hequembourg and Farrell, 1999). Thus intersectionality of oppression, lesbian motherhood and religious discourse influence the way that Hispanic lesbian mothers negotiate their Catholic religious identity with aspects of their sexual identity.

Intersectionality of Oppression

In the Hispanic community, the importance of several feminine characteristics such as virginity, marriage, motherhood and domesticity is highlighted for young girls and women (Asencio, 2009:3). Therefore, Hispanic lesbians are challenging many of the socialized teachings of the Latino culture, and their presence represents a threat to the patriarchal way of community organization and life (Rincon and Lam, 2011: 336). As a result, Hispanic lesbians are stigmatized in both communities and face rejection while trying to negotiate between their Latina cultural roots and the dominant Anglo culture, which share a heterosexist and patriarchal dominance (Romo-Carmona, 1995). In choosing to come out and claim a lesbian sexual identity,

Hispanic lesbians must face the potential rejection of two social groups of which they are members.

According to Morales (1989), ethnic minorities deny the existence of gay and lesbian individuals and claim homosexuality to be a “white people’s problem.” McQueeney stated that many blacks regard black gay men and lesbians as “selling out” to white gay culture and “shaming the race” (2009:158). Moore (2011: 3) similarly observed that gay people of color have to deal with the perception by some racial group members that their sexual identity challenges the “race consciousness” of the individual. Thus, sexual minorities must deal with the oppression of being a sexual minority and being a sexual minority within a racial minority. For example, Moore (2011: 11) found that Black lesbian mothers had to think about how their presentation of their sexuality might influence their employment and educational opportunities as well as their acceptance into their racial community. The women faced possible rejection on the basis of being ‘bad’ role models. In their study of Hispanic gay individuals, Chea and Ayala (2010) found that the non-White population in the United States may be less likely to identify as a sexual minority. Thus, racial and cultural differences alter the lesbian experience in terms of one’s self-presentation and visibility as a sexual minority.

Research indicates that the Hispanic lesbian experience differs from that of the dominant white-middle class lesbian and a “unitary analysis of gender or sexuality can imply a false universalism rooted in white middle class experience” (McQueeney, 2009: 153). Asencio (2009) found that the socioeconomic status of the Hispanic women in her study affected the choices that they made and found that many women overcompensated in other areas of their lives such as education in order to demonstrate that being gay was not problematic. This means that the lifestyle choices that Hispanic lesbians make are influenced by who they want to be perceived to

be in their community. According to Green (1994: 245), a powerful form of heterosexist oppression takes place within Hispanic cultures, leaving many gay and lesbian members feeling a pressure to “remain closeted [...] because it may be experienced as an act of treason against the culture and family.” It is not surprising to find that Hispanic lesbians were more likely than non-Hispanic lesbians to report depressive symptoms and show elevated risks and higher prevalence of obesity, smoking and drinking. These poorer outcomes may result from Hispanic lesbians experiencing additional stressors if they violate conventional feminine norms in the Hispanic community (Kim and Fredriksen-Goldsen, 2012).

Another trend among Hispanic lesbians is that they were most likely to have been married and have children within their marriage prior to coming out, reflecting the traditional Catholic culture of the Latino community (Morris, Balsam and Rothblum, 2002). In addition, Hispanic same-sex couple households are disadvantaged compared to non-white Hispanic same-sex couple households in terms of income, home ownership and disability (Cianciotto, 2005). These findings indicate that cultural elements of Hispanic identity can produce differential outcomes for Hispanic lesbians.

Lesbian Identity and Religion

Prior research has examined the manner in which religiosity can interact with sexual identity for gay men and lesbians. According to the 2000 Census data, 90 percent of Hispanics identify with a Christian religion (Cianciotto, 2005); accordingly, this study focuses on the experiences of Hispanic lesbians who are Catholic. The Catholic Church labels homosexuality as an “objective and intrinsic disorder” due to its inability to “transmit life” and states that homosexuality “prevents one’s own fulfillment and happiness by acting contrary to the creative wisdom of God” (Yip, 1997:169). The Biblical interpretation of homosexuality as sin “further

consolidates the belief in heterosexual marriage as the only proper context for sexual activity” and places lesbians and gays “on lesser ground than their straight counterparts” (Mcqueeny, 2009:151). Lesbians who express a personal or ideological conflict between their sexuality and their religious beliefs tend to have been raised in conservative faiths where negative attitudes towards the enactment of sexual desire produce feelings of guilt and shame (Moore, 2011:210).

Prior research indicates that women who believe that they have more agency can negotiate their religious and non-religious identities without having to leave the church (Ecklund, 2005). According to Ecklund (2005:136), Catholic women are situated within a patriarchal organization that “marginalizes women theologically and sociologically” through actions such as refusing to open the priesthood to women. In her study, she analyzed how different feminist Catholic women created and maintained a religious identity within an institution that marginalizes them. Ecklund (2005:143) found that the women in her study negotiated their religious identity by compartmentalizing their religious and non-religious ideals, as well as acknowledging that their religious identities are not “ascribed or fixed” and can become “negotiated to fit [their] life.”

Similarly, Moore (2011:212) surmises that the process of searching for God can lead to self-acceptance of a gay sexuality even if individuals do not receive support or acceptance from religious institutions. A study by Mahaffy (1996) on lesbian Christians found that there were certain strategies that lesbian Christians utilized to resolve the tension between their sexuality and the teachings of the church. These strategies include altering religious beliefs, leaving the church, and living with dissonance. Distinguishing between spirituality and religiosity was one strategy utilized by some Christian lesbians in order to negotiate their religious and sexual identity (Mahaffy, 1996). Similarly, Morris, Balsam and Rothblum (2002) found that most

lesbians in their study reported a Christian religious upbringing if they had children prior to coming out, but they reported currently having a more spiritual belief system.

The emerging straight-but-affirming Protestant church congregations engage in “oppositional identity” work that challenges the homosexual stigma and replaces it with ‘good’ Christian identities by minimizing, normalizing and moralizing the sexual-Christian identity (McQueeney, 2009). McQueen found that individuals minimize their sexual identity by treating it as a secondary identity and emphasizing their Christian identity, normalize it by enacting accepted behaviors such as monogamy and motherhood or fatherhood, and moralize it by altering traditional religious discourses. Similarly, Yip (1997) found that some gay and lesbian Catholics follow the “ethic of monogamy” which allows for same-sex relationships as long as they are monogamous in accordance with the teachings of the church. These findings support the research of intersectionality scholars who have shown that when groups challenge one boundary (sexuality) they may reinforce others (Wilkins, 2007).

Hispanic Lesbian Mothers as Honorary Heterosexuals

Motherhood might be an important mechanism for reconciling sexuality and religion for Hispanic women. According to Morales (1989:233), some “minority families hold traditional values that are reinforced with their religious beliefs” and therefore “family members are expected to marry and to continue the traditional family system” comprised of a mother and a father raising their children. In U.S culture, as in Christianity, according to McMahon (1995) being a mother is tied to a moral identity and invoking and enacting ‘good mother’ identities allow individuals to accommodate to the “Christian family” while resisting its heterosexual exclusivity (Lewin, 1993).

A report of the 2000 Census found that Hispanic same-sex couples are raising children under the age of 18 at over three times the rate of Hispanic married opposite-sex couples (Cianciotto, 2005). Marginalized women “narrate themselves according to dominant culture models of good and bad mothers, ironically finding support in and complicating a value structure that degrades them” (Castillo, Gomez and Delgado 1999: 406). Through this narrative, Hispanic lesbians actively express themselves and strategize the method in which they present themselves (Sala and Benitez, 2009). Thus, Hispanic lesbians with families face role strain within the accepted roles of the hetero-normative community of what a “traditional” nuclear family looks like and face tensions trying to fulfill either the role of a lesbian or the role of the mother. In the Hispanic community, "women are expected to be naive and ignorant about sexual matters, whereas men are expected to be experienced and knowledgeable" and family is "regarded as the primary social unit and source of support with well-established gender roles" (Greene, 1994:244). Hequembourg and Farell (1999) stated that society expects mothers to behave in a certain way and be self-sacrificing, nurturing, and feminine, and lesbians are not associated with these traits which can them to struggle to achieve the identity of a “good mother.”

According to a study by Parks, Hughes and Matthews on 450 lesbian women, Hispanic lesbians are more likely to have higher education, report being somewhat religious, have children in their home and report low levels of disclosure to non-family groups. Thus, the Hispanic lesbian has the role of a mother and a prior role of a wife in a heterosexual marriage. Therefore for lesbians that ‘come out’ after having children in a heterosexual relationship, “transitioning from heterosexual to lesbian parenting meant that a lesbian relationship was added on to parenting and the implications for disclosure for relationships are more complex” (Tasker and Patterson, 2008; 18). Hispanic lesbians are most likely to maintain some form of religious

adherence and obtain their social support from friends rather than from the nuclear family system who may find a gay sexual orientation unacceptable (Zea, Reisen and Poppen, 1999). Since Hispanic lesbians are most likely to be somewhat religious and mothers, this study seeks to identify the strategies by which Hispanic lesbians navigate their different roles to negotiate an acceptable identity.

Coming out as a lesbian after having children requires Hispanic lesbians to reframe their role as a mother and how they parent. However, Hispanic lesbians transition from different sexual identities and lifestyles after having children and "expand the meaning of motherhood" by participating in the "structures and ideologies such as the nuclear family, legal definitions of marriage or monogamy because they appear to represent truths" in the norms of the dominant society (Hequembourg, 2008: 156). Moore (2011:117) stated that race, class, social context and the timing of motherhood and accepting a lesbian sexuality matter for the experience of lesbian parenting. Hequembourg (2008:168) studied a lesbian couple with three children and discovered that they believed that they "were successful parents because they were able to dissociate their lesbianism from their motherhood to create and sustain outward appearances of normality."

According to Mann (2007:151) the "lesbian" in lesbian mother fades and recodes as lesbian mothers enter the institution of motherhood which "has already been established long before with terms already set." Motherhood has been established as a hetero-normative institution and thus being a lesbian mother challenges the 'established scripts' for motherhood (Hequembourg and Farrell, 1999). Lesbian mothers therefore become "honorary heterosexuals" by attempting to assimilate to the "typical" feminine role of a mother (Dunne, 2000). Similarly Mann (2007:160) contends that a woman who becomes a mother fulfills the ultimate condition

for a meaningful heterosexual. For lesbian mothers, there is a dichotomy between being a lesbian mother and a mother who is a lesbian.

Lesbian mothers are likely to be “concerned about taking on a status that is perceived to be shameful by family members and communities, particularly because this shift disrupts the definition of “good mother” and “respectable behavior” they currently have” (Moore, 2011:130). This is particularly true for Hispanic lesbians who have been socialized by the male dominant Latino culture that a good woman is a good mother. Dune (2000) stated that lesbian mothers are ‘redefining” motherhood by dividing activities between two women that are usually dichotomized as mother and father activities and including extended families supported by “elaborate networks of friends and kin.” For Hispanic lesbians, they are redefining the family unit as composed of two women replacing the Latino ideal of a male-dominated family unit.

Catholic Motherhood for Hispanic Lesbian: The Madonna Propaganda

With regards to Catholicism, the research available on lesbian and gay parents is almost non-existent. In addition, the limited available research on Catholic gay and lesbian individuals focuses on white, middle class individuals. Existing research on Catholicism and homosexuality indicates that the Catholic community is tolerant of the LGBT community but ultimately views homosexual actions as immoral and focuses more on behaviors versus identities. Even though the Catholic Church condemns violent acts against homosexuals, it sees “homosexual activities as wrong and immoral because they are a violation to human integrity” (Litton, 2001: 195). The Catholic Church recognizes that homosexual desires exist but “must be regulated and directed into proper channels and cannot be given the same space that heterosexual desires suitable for marriage and procreation deserve” (Roden, 2001: 254). The official stance of the Catholic Church in regards to homosexuality is that “we must reject sin, including homosexual

behavior—that is, acts intended to arouse or stimulate a sexual response regarding a person of the same sex. The Catholic Church teaches that homosexual desires, however, are not in themselves sinful but engaging in such acts are always violations of divine and natural law” (Brom,2004). In a survey of 1,000 self-identified American Catholics, 59.3% of the participants agreed that a gay or lesbian person can serve as a positive role model but only 42% of the respondents agreed that gay and lesbian couples should be able to legally adopt children (Kirby and Michaelson, 2008). This is significant in terms of how Catholics might view parenthood as falling outside of the scope of sexual minorities. To some degree, this might be explained by the manner in which motherhood is framed within Catholicism. Motherhood, framed religiously, emphasizes the ‘good’ traits of a ‘good mother’ which include the mantra to “be fruitful and multiply,” see the church as “an extended form of family” and reify that women are “beautiful being mothers” (Dandridge, 1985). Dandridge (1985) refers to this as ‘Madonna propaganda,’ which glorifies motherhood and ‘oppresses’ the ethnic woman by creating a motherhood myth that demands biblical motherhood keep women inferior to men and asserts that women should only be mothers. Conflicts between a lesbian identity or orientation, and the hierarchical gendered construction of motherhood within Catholicism, could produce identity tensions for Hispanic lesbian mothers.

In terms of the central role of the Virgin Mary to the Church, she serves as a model of “a godly virgin and mother” that is described by Potter (1922) as a sensitive, maternal and exemplary mother to her child. In addition, John Paul II stated that “virginity and motherhood are two particular dimensions of the fulfillment of the female personality” and thus motherhood is linked with being a Catholic woman (Fastiggi, 2009; 344). The expectations of Catholic motherhood are embedded in the religious narrative and reified through the Virgin Mary. Such

tensions are likely to lead to strategies to manage and negotiate identity. For example, Litton (2001) noted that Catholics in the LGBT community who worked as teachers in Catholic schools focused on certain aspects of the gospel, such as loving one another, and picked parts of the Catholic doctrine that they liked and excluded parts with which they disagreed. One of the participants in Litton's study stated that she did not have a problem "disagreeing with certain tenants of the Church and still staying with it. I guess my devotion is more to Christ and the Church is just a human instrument that is certainly fallible" (2001:200).

Within ethnic enclaves, religious structures provide standards and guides for language, rituals, and behaviors which, if violated, can threaten to put the individual outside the religious or racial community (Moore, 2011:205). Moore (2011) stated that, as a result, religious institutions can act as a source of condemnation and strength. This study seeks to identify the strategies that Hispanic women use to navigate their religious and sexual identities and to analyze their perception of the Catholic Church as either a source of condemnation or strength.

Chapter 3: Methodology

I conducted a qualitative study to examine how Hispanic lesbian mothers negotiate their Catholic religious identity with aspects of their sexual identity. More specifically, I examined the strategies that Hispanic lesbian mothers utilize to reconcile or navigate perceived conflict between their roles as a Catholic and as a lesbian. The research questions to be answered were: How do Hispanic lesbian mothers negotiate a Catholic religious and a sexual identity? How do Hispanic lesbian mothers create and maintain a religious narrative? How do Hispanic lesbian mothers redefine religion and spirituality?

In this chapter, I describe my sample criteria and recruitment. Next, I discuss the data collection process and review the interview questions asked. Then, I review the data analysis process and conclude with some validity issues.

Sample Criteria and Recruitment

I conducted this qualitative study through in-depth interviews with 15 Hispanic lesbian mothers located in metropolitan areas of Texas, including Houston, Austin, San Antonio and Dallas-Fort Worth. This study utilized a non-probability purposive sample since the target group is comprised of a small, often hidden subpopulation, i.e. Hispanic Catholic lesbian mothers (Patton, 2001). To qualify, a woman must have been 18 years or older with a child of any age. There was not a minimum or maximum number of children required to be included in the study. There was not a maximum age limit because I did not want to exclude any possible participants.

Women participating in the study were from a Catholic religious background and were asked screening questions to determine with which religion they identify, as well as their degree of religiosity (see Appendix C). The women must have identified as a lesbian at the time of the

interview and be of the Hispanic ethnic minority. Women could have been legally married to a man as long as they self-identified as a lesbian.

The participants targeted for this study are part of a marginalized subculture that is difficult to contact as an outsider. Due to the sensitivity of the topic, referrals were an important method of obtaining participants for this study. The sample was recruited through snowballing, utilizing different methods including obtaining a “gatekeeper,” and recruiting via social work community programs, open and affirming churches, and LGBT activist and support groups. I advertised for participation in open and affirming churches, social networking websites and LGBT centers around the city, including the University of Houston. The challenge in locating subjects of a small, hidden population contributed to an overall smaller sample size. However, my Hispanic insider status helped to mitigate my outsider status regarding sexuality

Table 1 (see appendix A) shows the range in ages of the participants, as well as their occupation, household income, number of children and relationship status. The median household income for the sample was \$60-69,000 and the average age was 38.9. The ages range from 28-53 years old and there was a variety of different types of family structures including stepfamily, adopted family, single families and the use of artificial insemination. Although all the women identified as lesbian, the amount of time that they have self-identified as a lesbian varied. Additionally four women identified as presenting a more masculine appearance while eleven mothers identified as presenting a more feminine appearance. The women shared their coming out stories and many explained that they had engaged in heterosexual relationships in the past that had resulted in children. As a result, most women were living in step-family situations where their partner adopted a parenting role with their children. One family also chose to conceive together through the use of a donor and artificial insemination. Fourteen of the fifteen women

were currently involved in a long-term relationship at the time of the interview and were living with their partner while sharing parenting roles. Only one mother indicated that she was not currently in a relationship, but lived with a female lesbian roommate who helped her with household tasks. Between all the mothers interviewed, there were 16 biological children, 2 stepchildren and 2 adopted. However, this did not include the children in the household from partners that were not interviewed.

Data Collection

Interviews were semi-structured, following a schedule of interview questions but deviating in order to ask probing, follow-up questions. The in-depth interviews ranged from one to one and a half hours and addressed questions related to spirituality/religiosity, motherhood, and sexuality. The question content is detailed more fully in the section titled Interview Questions, below, and specific questions are contained in the attached schedule of interview questions (see Appendix D). Since I am a Mexican immigrant woman myself, I was able to establish some rapport due to my insider status, sharing common ethnic and cultural characteristics. However the emotional nature of the interviews and questions led several mothers to request to omit materials regarding the age of their children and certain negative experiences of rejection in their community due to their sexual identity.

I obtained written consent from the participants and ensured that their identity will remain confidential by not revealing details of their true identity, including by using pseudonyms rather than actual names. Since the participants may not be completely “out” to everyone in their network, participants were assured via the informed consent that their identities will be confidential. The consent form set forth the purpose of the study, specifying that this study

focuses on religious and spiritual attitudes and behaviors of Hispanic lesbian mothers. The consent form is located in appendix F.

The interviews were tape-recorded with permission from the participants and were transcribed and translated as necessary. I am fluent in both English and Spanish and have previously been certified by the state of Texas to act as a Spanish interpreter. I was able to conduct and translate the interviews in Spanish as accurately as possible. Resources to support groups and community services for the LGBT community were provided to participants upon request (see Appendix G).

Interview Questions

The schedule of interview questions for the semi-structured interviews is contained in the attached appendix. The interview guide is composed of four sections: demographics, stigma, identification, motherhood, and religion/spirituality. In the demographics section, basic data are collected for background information including age, religious affiliation, education, income, number of children, age at coming out, place of origin, and marital status.

In the stigma section, participants were asked about their attitudes of stigma towards their population. Participants were asked about their experience of negative attitudes from the Catholic and Hispanic community based on their sexual orientation. Questions about negative attitudes towards their intersecting roles as a mother and a lesbian were included in this section.

In the identification section, participants were asked about their sexuality and ethnic ties. This section included questions about the way that the women present their sexual orientation as well as the type of relationship their family members maintain within the ethnic community. Some of the questions in regard to identification are adapted from Moore's (2011) study on African-American lesbian mothers.

In the motherhood section, participants were asked about the status of relationship between partners, family and children. This section included questions regarding the experience as a mother within the Hispanic and Catholic community.

In the final section of religion and spirituality, participants were asked about religious/spiritual attitudes, affiliation and rituals and behaviors. Spirituality was obtained through self-identification during the interview process. For the purpose of this study, spirituality is defined as “the feelings, acts and experiences of the individuals in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine” (James, 1961:42). Spiritual beliefs are those that are defined by the participants as not affiliated with a religious institution but are “that vast realm of human potential dealing with ultimate purposes, with higher entities with love, with compassion and with purpose” (Tart 1983:4). Spiritual behaviors or rituals are defined as those actions that the participant engages in “subjective experiences of the sacred” (Vaughan, 1991:105). For this study, spirituality will be measured through self-identification.

Religiosity was also obtained through two different measures during the interview process. Participants were asked about religious beliefs and rituals or behaviors in which they engage. For the purpose of this study, religiosity will be defined as a “system of beliefs in a divine or superhuman power and practices of worship or other rituals directed towards such a power,” which is affiliated with an established religious institution (Argyle and Belt-Hallahmi 1975:1). Religious behaviors or rituals are defined as those actions that the participant engages in to maintain their system of beliefs in accordance with the guidelines established by their affiliated religious institution. Religious behaviors and rituals include measures utilized by

Whitley (2009) in his study, which measures frequency of attendance at religious services, endorsement of Christian orthodoxy and self-rating of religiosity.

The religious and spirituality questions also focus on the intersectionality between religion, ethnicity and sexual orientation. This section included questions regarding the influence of the participants' religious beliefs on their relationship with their partner and children, as well as in the way in which they identify as a lesbian.

Data Analysis

This study utilized the grounded theory approach for data collection and analysis through constant comparative analysis from the in-depth interviews (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). A qualitative approach was utilized to gather data because it highlights the context of lesbian parenting through analysis of their own insight and experiences (Tasker and Patterson, 2007). Coding categories were created throughout the data collection process that identified emerging patterns regarding the strategies utilized by Catholic Hispanic lesbians in their experience of motherhood. Intersectionality of religious beliefs and sexual orientation were coded as well as any emerging conflict. Information gathered from the interviews, along with the background information gathered from reading literature on Hispanic lesbians, was utilized to identify emergent themes and concepts (Charmaz, 2001). I attempt to understand how the women reconcile what they have been taught in religious socialization with their current identities and behaviors. Recurring themes were coded as categories of strategies utilized by the women to create and maintain their sexual identity. Data collected from the interviews were analyzed as potential indicators of the studied phenomena, which were given conceptual labels (Corbin & Straus, 1990). I also inquired about what extent each woman considers herself "religious" or

“spiritual” by inquiring about rituals and self-identification of religious or spiritual affiliation and coded explanations for religious choices.

Validity Issues

Throughout the data collection and analysis processes, I attempted to reduce potential biases that could be caused by any assumptions I may have about the population. I avoided leading questions and was aware of the power dynamic that is present throughout the interview process. I verified that what I understood is what the interviewee was trying to tell me by checking my interpretation with them through a follow-up session when needed.

Chapter 4: Navigating Identities: Intersecting Catholic, Lesbian and Hispanic Identities with Motherhood

In this chapter, I examine the manner in which participants negotiated their identities as mothers, lesbians, Hispanics, and Catholics. Identity negotiation for the mothers requires the use of several social and religious scripts in order to effectively perform motherhood. Similar to Moore's (2011:126) study on African American lesbian mothers, I found that the women interviewed developed strategies for identity fluidity to navigate their ethnic, sexual, religious and mother identity. The data revealed that motherhood was considered the most important identity. Therefore, the strategies allowed for an intersection of different identities within motherhood with reduced tension. The identity as a mother was supplemented with their identity as Hispanic and a lesbian.

All mothers insisted that they considered their priority to be their role as a mother, regardless of their process in identifying as a lesbian. For example, Alma (52), a mother of one, has identified as a lesbian since she was a teenager. She currently lives with her partner of 14 years who is also a Hispanic woman. Alma ranked her ethnic and sexual identities in terms of importance and explained that her "role as a mother comes first. My heritage is who I am and being a lesbian comes last."

For participants, reconciling their sexual identity with their role as a mother was considered an important task. The fluidity between being a lesbian and a mother was facilitated by utilizing social scripts which allowed them to maintain a more heteronormative identity. Kimberly (28), a mother of two from a previous relationship, has identified as a lesbian for three years and is now married to her current partner. She explained that:

Being a parent is so difficult and new that being in a lesbian relationship and being a parent-that doesn't even factor into anything in the family. We are too busy being parents. I don't view myself as a lesbian and parenting-I am just being a mom. When there is a straight parent, they don't say: "Oh I am straight and parenting." No, you are just being a mom. It's what you are supposed to do, you parent. When it comes to our family and our house, it's always about the kids.

Similarly, Daniela (40), a mother of two has identified as a lesbian for seven years and is engaged to her current partner with whom she lives. She repeatedly stated her priority was being a mother and that she didn't "know any other way to identify myself but as a mom. There is no me without being a mother."

In the intersection between their ethnic identity and their identity as a mother, their parent role was also perceived as more important. Noemi (29), a mother of one through artificial insemination who has identified as a lesbian all her life, explained: "I don't single myself out as just, you know, a Hispanic girl; like at work, I am a mom. Whichever way you look at it, I'm a mom and I want to be identified as that. Being a mom is a big role in your life. It's everything."

In the remainder of this chapter, I examine each of these identities separately and analyze the ways in which motherhood is closely intertwined with the manner in which the women constructed their ethnic, sexual and religious identities.

Pervasiveness of Motherhood

The significance of the motherhood identity was pervasive throughout the interviews. All fifteen mothers stated that they believed that they were good mothers and most had always planned to have children. All mothers also believed that their identity as a lesbian did not influence their role as a mother. However, several mothers admitted to concerns that they faced in regards to lesbian parenting issues, such as reproducing male gender roles for their sons, sharing motherhood with another woman and concerns in raising a gay or lesbian child.

Reproducing gender roles

Several mothers stated that they felt that they were forced to try harder to raise a good Hispanic man compared to a good Hispanic woman because of their doubts in raising a man without a male father figure in the home. They expressed concerns that they had in attempting not to raise an effeminate man or macho man. Thus, in regards to male children, the mothers try to socialize them to be good men by replicating traditional male activities in their home. Several strategies were utilized in order to teach their male sons how to be adequately masculine. Among the strategies utilized by the mothers was to have the male son spend more time with the more masculine butch partner, engaging in traditionally male chores and have their children interact with male family members. Male family members substituted as male role models for their children, especially the males. Kimberly mentioned that her brother was an active male figure in her son's life and Daniela explained that her son in law would engage in traditional male activities with her son. For example, Daniela explained that in regards to her step-son, she and her partner:

want him to be opening doors for women and the elderly, being a gentleman. Please, thank you, excuse me. Old school values are what we want. I think we have been successful. Everyone at his school tells us how well-mannered he is. We are raising a man. So we don't want to raise a macho man and we don't want to raise a feminine man.

Sydney, who co-parents her adopted son with her partner, stated that "our son is being raised by two women so I try to get him to do masculine things like working the grass." Irma, a mother of a nine year old boy, explained that, "I think I do a lot of the girl stuff. Anytime my son needs something, he goes to my partner first. I tend to do more of the girl stuff."

Although the mothers described encouraging their sons to engage in masculine activities, many also modified these messages by encouraging more egalitarian or gender neutral activities. For example, a common desire that was repeatedly brought up was that their male sons develop an egalitarian perspective on the division of household labor. This was perceived to be the

quality of a good man. Similarly, Alma, a mother of a 14 year old boy, explained that she tries to “have a balance of both masculine and feminine activities for her son.” Alma said that her son both plays baseball and likes to bake and dance.

Other mothers mentioned that they wanted to avoid teaching their male child negative habits that they felt many Hispanic men possessed. The traditional Hispanic man was considered to be very macho, lazy and selfish. Ezperanza, a mother of two boys, pointed out that:

I don't want the boys to think that because they are men, they are entitled to be served on. I want them to share equally in the chores and learn how to take care of themselves because there is not always going to be a woman to do it. My partner is very butch, she will build stuff. She feels that because they are boys, they should not be lazy. They are boys and need to learn how to work.

Concerns in raising a gay or lesbian child

All mothers shared their concern in raising a gay or lesbian child due to the negative experiences that their child may have to face when coming out. Several mothers had already established whether they believed that their child was gay or straight. The mothers did not fear that they would socialize their child to be gay or lesbian, but were afraid that the child would have a negative coming out experience if they were gay, especially concerning males. Alma shared that in regards to her 14 year old son, she was confused as to his sexual orientation. She explained that her son was on the baseball team as well as in drama and show choir, but she thought he might even be bisexual because he had male and female friends. However, Alma insisted that she did not “press the issue because he is kind of young,” but that she was concerned that he would get the “crap beat out of him.” She was concerned of negative retaliation in the form of violence towards her son, especially because he was on the baseball team, which was embedded with a traditionally heteronormative perspective.

Similarly, other mothers indicated that they questioned their child's sexuality due

primarily to what they perceived as gender norm violations. Sydney and Daniela shared their concern about the sexuality of their son:

I was a little concerned because he got into high school musical and he was like dancing around. We could not get upset with him if he was gay because we would be hypocrites-because a man's gay lifestyle, is different than a woman's gay lifestyle because it is more promiscuous I think for men. We don't mind who he falls in love with. We are worried about the journey to get there. We are worried about the lifestyle.

Ezperanza, a mother of two boys also shared her concern about the sexuality of her sons. She stated that:

I fully think that my youngest son is going to be gay. I have said that since birth. He is very feminine. He would pick girl toys over boy toys any day. It's hard enough being a lesbian but being a lesbian is much more accepted because guys think it's hot, but to be a gay man is a sin. I don't want him to go through that discrimination.

Mothers with female children also worried about the coming out experience of their daughters if they were to identify as lesbian. Judy (28) shared that she "wouldn't treat my daughter like my mom did [to me], but privately it would be hard if she identified as lesbian. I wouldn't want her to go through the same thing I did, having to hear what people say." Although the women repeatedly emphasized the rare negative experiences they faced in coming out, they mentioned the continued fear they had in their daughter facing harsh social rejection. For example, Noemi shared her concern about her daughter:

I don't want my daughter to grow up to be a lesbian. If I had the choice, I would be like no, don't do it, you are going to go through so many different things that you are not going to know how to explain. But at the same time I'm like if you decide that's the path you want to follow then go ahead because it's different for everyone.

Irma also shared her experience with her 14 year old daughter:

My 14 year old is gay. At least she thinks she's gay. She looks gay. She has been having trouble. The kids call her dyke but the teachers are very supportive. She has a lot of friends but they make fun of the way she dresses. I think a dyke girl has it much harder than a femme girl. She has always preferred boy toys. She didn't want to play with dolls. Since she was very little, I knew that she would probably be gay. I tell her that [femme girls] might use you for money. Just focus

in school and be careful. You might get your heart broken. But then again if she was straight that would be the same too.

Overall, the women were concerned about the possible social rejection that their children may face in their coming out journey, especially for the male sons. Additionally, several mothers expressed concern over teasing and bullying of their children who had already identified as gay or lesbian. Almost all mothers admitted to having had a discussion with their child about sexual orientation and expressed their support for any type of relationship that their child wishes to pursue. However, all mothers admitted that they hoped that their child would be heterosexual to avoid further complications in their lives.

Sharing motherhood

All the women in relationships shared the happiness and relief they had in finding a partner with whom they could share the parenting role. Sharing parenting roles was also made easier because each woman cohabited with their partner. Most mothers were raising their children in newly created stepfamilies with their partners. However, the mothers also described that there were issues they experienced in sharing the motherhood role. One common experience in sharing the parenting role with a non-biological parent, was their mixed feelings in having their child call another woman “mom.” For example, Kimberly was recently married and had to adjust to sharing the “mom” identity with another woman:

My wife loves my children like they are her own. I flinched the first time they called her mommy. It takes a little bit of strength to not have the reaction no, that’s me. It’s difficult because all these mommy things my wife does too, but then I have to make sure and remind myself this isn’t just me in this relationship raising them-it’s us together.

Similarly, Ezperanza described her experience in having her children call her fiancé “mom”:

We both looked at each other like, whoa, because they had never called my fiancé mom before. It was weird at first having my stepson call me mom because I know that I only have two biological children. It was a little strange but, I don’t know, you get used to it. My fiancé and I delegate

chores. The only thing she doesn't do is when it comes to my kid is spanking because she feels like she doesn't have the authority. We don't touch each other's children.

Both of these women described their adjustment to sharing the "mom" identity, but also noted how they managed to share the motherhood role while maintaining certain parental boundaries with their biological children (e.g. limitations on spanking).

An additional relationship that some of the women described navigating with was with the biological father of their children. Alma explained how she purposefully had one night stands in order to conceive and "could not even tell you what the guy's name is. I don't even think he knows. It was a few dates. I just wanted to make sure." Shortly after Alma got pregnant, she met her partner of 14 years. Her son does not maintain any contact with his biological father.

However, other mothers indicated that they maintained some contact with the father of their children and explained the added complexity that it brings to their family structure. Some fathers shared custody with the women but most children were in the custody of their mothers.

Ezperanza described the complexity involved in her family structure which includes her partner, her child's father and his girlfriend. She described how she felt when her son called her father's girlfriend "mom":

What offended me was when my oldest son wanted to refer to his father's girlfriend as mom, but at the same time I really couldn't say anything because he was referring to my partner as mom as well. So if he feels comfortable enough to call her mom and he feels comfortable enough to call his father's girlfriend mom, well I couldn't really say anything about it. I had a little mixed feelings about it but I let it go.

The family structure of same sex families is similar to many heterosexual couples. There are stepfamilies, adopted families and biological families. However, with lesbian couples two women are responsible for the socialization of both females and males in a predominately

heteronormative culture. Additionally, lesbian mothers – like many heterosexual stepfamilies -- adapt to sharing their motherhood role with their partners. Despite the complexities of a two female household, all mothers enjoyed having the support from their additional partner.

Being a good mother

Utilizing certain social scripts in regards to motherhood, the women were able to participate in the normalcy and routine of the family life, which was perceived as more easily accepted than the single lesbian life for the women. It was repeatedly brought up that the lifestyle of the lesbian single was perceived as negative, while the lifestyle of a lesbian mother was more accepted. Daniela added that in her experience, “It is more accepting if you are a lesbian and if you have kids. Then you are more family oriented and you are not as wild.” All mothers believed themselves to be good mothers and cited as proof the positive feedback that they received from their child’s school, other parents and their family members in regards to their parenting role.

Every mother also agreed that their child would consider them to be good mothers. The mothers expressed the acceptance they have received from the Hispanic and heterosexual community as a family unit. Noemi shared her experience in achieving acceptance from her family:

I don’t know when my dad started accepting it, um I would say definitely more recently he has been more open to it, he accepts me and my daughter now. They accept my daughter the most. I don’t think there is anyone in my family that doesn’t accept us—definitely more now that we are a family. My family is much more accepting—it’s like oh I think they are normal then.

As a social institution, motherhood is embedded with heteronormative norms and expectations that Hispanic lesbians must navigate through. As a result, ethnic mothers attempt to replicate the motherhood norms of the dominant non-ethnic majority as well as their ethnic

communities. Additionally, Hispanic lesbian mothers who identify as religious must also navigate through the complexities of sharing motherhood, replicating gender roles and attempting to attain the label of a good mother from their ethnic, religious and heterosexual community.

Maintaining a Lesbian Identity

Strategies were utilized to integrate the lesbian identity with motherhood. There was a recurring emphasis on the normalcy of motherhood, the increased acceptance that comes with settling down and perceived similarities between same-sex and heterosexual mothers. Sydney explained that she “used to have a lot of friends when I was single, I used to be out all the time,” but “now that we are a family, I want to stay at home.” Her partner, Daniela, added that:

We are pretty boring, normal here. We have routines. If he has homework that needs to be done, then there is no cell phone and no television until that’s done. We eat dinner at a certain time and bed by a certain time. To us, it’s kind of bland, but for us that is our normal and it’s what a lot of normal heterosexual couples have. It’s just that we are two women. I find that we are doing family stuff. We do just about anything that a man and dad will do.

Noemi similarly added her experience with starting a family:

The main people that I am seeing that have kept up to date with my daughter’s life is either straight guys or some lesbian girls or more of the families. So any families that I know-like they already have their own kids, we try to meet up, I try to do things as families and you know get together.

By being a mother, the women reflected a more heteronormative lifestyle. Ana emphasized that she and her partner are “just like a regular family-we are just two women.” Irma explained during her interview that she felt that lesbian motherhood was similar to straight motherhood. She reasoned that “motherhood is always going to be there. They are your kids, you had them. Why would it be different?” During her interview, Ezperanza expressed her feeling towards the similarities between lesbian mothers and heterosexual mothers:

There are no values that are different just because you are a lesbian. You are still the same type of person. You want to be there for your kids. You still want to love your kids and protect them and keep them safe-teach them to be big, strong individuals and adults. The only thing that might be taught differently is tolerance and acceptance because of who their mother is and what their mother is.

Integrating a lesbian identity with the role of a mother for Hispanic lesbians is, thus, accomplished by utilizing different strategies that highlight the role of a mother. The normalcy and stability of family life aligns the lifestyle of lesbian women with the heteronormativity.

Gratitude and optimistic

There was also a perception of optimistic progression of tolerance and acceptance in society for lesbians, especially lesbian mothers, and most women provided examples of acceptance from family, schools and friends as proof. There was also a belief that they faced fewer negative experiences of discrimination and rejection from their family and community compared to women who came out in a different time period. Many of the women expressed hope for the increased acceptance of LGBT families among the Hispanic and religious community. Daniela stated that she finds it:

more accepted. You are not going to see just gay people. You are going to see gay families. I don't think it's as looked down upon as much as it used to be. I see a lot more women out there that have small children that are in a relationship with women. I don't see people frowning down on us in plain view. Maybe we are going to places that are more accepting but we go to regular places. I think it's just more accepting now. I don't think it is as much an issue as it used to be.

Her partner Sydney added that, "there are a lot of gay people [where we live] and it's pretty much all Mexican. They don't look down." Even women that did not live in ethnic neighborhoods felt more accepted. Kimberly also added that she has "yet to come across a lot of judgmental people," and Noemi stated that she "gets looks certain times-it's going to happen, but for the most part it is small." When asked if they felt that society was more accepting now than it

had been in the past, all mothers stated that they felt people were more accepting. Many mothers could not recall the last time they faced discrimination. Ana spoke about how she “couldn’t really recall any particular incidents when it has happened. I’ve been pretty blessed because the people that I came across have all been pretty much supportive.”

In addition, some women reported varying levels of acceptance across generations within their own families. For example, Claudia stated: “When you get to the grandma and grandpa category, they are more accepting. When you get to the older uncles then no and the younger generation is definitely more accepting.”

Fluidity of identity

The women also spoke of a fluid lesbian identity that was private and easier to hide if they had a femme appearance. Several mothers had engaged in sexual relationships with men in the past while identifying as a lesbian and many explained that their current partner was the only woman with whom they had ever been in a relationship. A couple of mothers admitted that they had relationships with men solely to conceive a child (which they did). The fluidity of the lesbian identity allows women to identify themselves as they want, and the mothers that identified as femme mentioned that they had the ability of passing as a heterosexual woman in some instances by utilizing feminine scripts. Traditionally feminine-appearing mothers were able to hide their sexual orientation and experienced the luxury of privacy. For example, Ezperanza observed that “in some places I am out, and in some places I am not. If they don’t ask me, I will not say.” Daniela explained that “a lot of people are surprised that I am in a relationship with a woman” because “with feminine girls it is different because you don’t really know, you can’t really call it out as much as someone who is butch.” Kimberly, another femme mother, stated that “a lot of

times when people meet me, they don't know I am a lesbian unless my wife [who is butch] and I are together.”

In addition to appearing traditionally feminine, femme lesbians are able to gain acceptance easier than more masculine-appearing lesbians. Irma explained that she believes “it is easier for a lesbian couple than a two man couple, but whenever we walk inside the school, they weren't concerned-they were supportive. They see that we are trying to be very involved. We still haven't gotten one bad eye at us-not yet. And I'm so happy.” Isabel also talked about her experience in the different treatment between Butch mothers and Femme mothers:

You feel more rejection dressed up as a butch or a dyke, especially in the Hispanic community. So I am feminine but my girlfriend is not. I know when I'm out with her-I feel the rejection of guys or people because they see more who we are but when I am out with myself, with my child-I'm just a normal person.

The mothers who identified as butch expressed a different experience as more visible sexual minorities. Claudia, a self-identified butch stepmother, stated that she faces uncomfortable situations in the bathroom where she faces looks from other women. Butch mothers also explained how they were constantly accused of wanting to be men. Judy, a self-identified butch mother, stated that:

The lesbian girly kind, people are like, oh that's hot, not such a big deal but when it is a girl dressing like a dude, it is like oh she wants to be a man so let's treat her like one. I'm not trying to be a man. I love my woman body. I don't want to play the role of the man. My daughter tried to call me dad once and I was like, no I'm your mom. She was confused. I don't think motherhood and your sexuality orientation-nothing about your sexual orientation gets in the way of being a mom. You are going to be a good mom regardless of who you are in love with.

Maintaining a lesbian identity is highly influenced by the way that the women presented their gender. Women with a feminine gender presentation experienced more privacy about their sexual orientation compared to women who present a more masculine gender presentation.

Traditionally feminine women experience more fluidity in their sexual identity because they

appear as a heterosexual woman, which allows their sexual orientation to remain undisclosed. In contrast, masculine appearing women draw attention to their sexuality and experience more conflict performing the traditional motherhood role. However, both feminine and masculine appearing Hispanic lesbians express an overly appreciative attitude of any form of acceptance in their ethnic and religious communities. Experiencing motherhood as a sexual minority is easier if they more closely adapt to heteronormativity.

Maintaining an ethnic identity

The importance of maintaining an ethnic identity among participants varied depending on age and whether the mother was foreign born or not. Three out of twelve women were born in Mexico and raised in the United States. All twelve mothers stated that their children also self-identified as Hispanic, even if their father was not Hispanic. Only one mother stated that she had never planned to have children, and another stated that her biological clock did not tick until she was in her late 30s. All other mothers expressed that they knew they wanted kids since a young age. Many mothers expressed that they did not feel that their Hispanic culture influenced their desire to be mothers, but nearly all stated that it would have been difficult for them to not be mothers. The expectation of grandchildren was cited as the reason for conceiving children when they did by almost half the respondents; the emphasis on large families and children was evident.

In regards to their Hispanic identity, mothers mentioned the importance of following the cultural script of respect for elders, violating the traditional Mexican mother role, violating traditional Hispanic gender roles and challenges faced in gaining acceptance within their family and within the Hispanic community. I found that all mothers expected their child to identify as Hispanic and maintain some Hispanic social networks. However, only few families communicated with their children in Spanish. All mothers mentioned that they cooked Hispanic

foods in their home and celebrated Hispanic festivities such as Cinco de Mayo. However, only a few mothers claimed that they felt a need to maintain a closer tie with the Hispanic community outside of their family members.

Acceptance in the Hispanic family

In terms of acceptance, almost all mothers talked about the fear of rejection from their family as a result of their sexual orientation and the importance of obtaining and maintaining acceptance from their families. However they also described the tension lingering in their family, stating that many of their family members still did not agree, or were uncomfortable, with their lifestyle choice. Irma explained, “After having kids and me saying that I’m a lesbian, people would say, oh you’re bi, you don’t know what you want.” Kimberly stated that, “my father was very straight forward and said that he did not agree with it but I am his daughter and he was going to be there for me no matter what” and now “everyone tells me that they are happy I found my wife.”

Violating the heterosexual norm in Hispanic families was described as scary and confusing. Most women expressed the fear they felt in contemplating coming out to their family. Ana mentioned that she texted her mother to tell her when she came out because “I couldn’t bring myself to tell her in person.” She continued to explain that her mother “told me that she loved me and if that was what my choice was, then she would accept me. She didn’t have to agree with it but she would accept me.” Marisol stated that she never told her mother that she was a lesbian and kept that secret from her to the day she died. Marisol now regrets not overcoming her fear and telling her mother.

Secrecy among the Hispanic family was constantly brought up by several women. Many women proudly stated that they were one of the first people ever to come out of the closet in

their families even though there were other family members that were suspected to be gay. The secrecy was also replicated in the relationship with their children. Additionally, they did not have “the talk” with their children in terms of coming out and did not directly or extensively disclose their sexual identity to their children. Due to the young age of most of the children, they did not demand more of an explanation. For example, Noemi who is the first person in her family to identify as gay or lesbian explained that:

Being raised in a Hispanic family is very different-it is very close-minded. You don't talk about things-it very hush-hush. Even if you are gay, you don't talk about it. I think [the Hispanic community] is much more accepting now I think as time passes. I think it is definitely more accepted. Being a lesbian and being in the Hispanic culture is very hard and so to have even just a little bit of acceptance, it's like oh I'm going to take what I can and try to definitely embrace that because it feels good. It feels good to be able to be yourself and be open and do whatever you want and things like that.

Similarly, Ezperanza stated that:

I'm sure with the older Hispanic community it is difficult to understand. I mean, that's partly why I didn't tell my family so much until I did. I was afraid of telling my grandfather, I pretty much stayed in the closet. The older Hispanic community has an issue with lesbians because they don't understand it. They think I am *mañosa*, I'm dirty and lord knows what else they think.

Acceptance within the families varied. Acceptance meant different things for some women. Isabel pointed out that her parents would claim that they were accepting of her same-sex relationships but would secretly pray for her to marry a man. Ana talked about how her family “didn't reject me-they accepted me, but once I brought my partner around like my uncles were the ones that had a hard time.” Judy explained that “aside from my mom, my siblings don't say anything. My mom, she doesn't accept it she just lives with it. She is friendly with my partner but she has always told me pretty much that if I was with a guy I wouldn't have these problems.” The family unit is an integral structure of support for Hispanic women. The Hispanic family serves as a socialization center that replicates aspects of the Hispanic heritage for their children such as celebration of holidays, education of the Spanish language and familiarization with

certain ethnic foods. As a result, acceptance provides much needed support that aids the mothers in cultural replication for their children.

Conveying respect for elders

The mothers also spoke of gaining acceptance from the Hispanic community, making a distinction between acceptance from their family and acceptance from their ethnic community. Judy, who was born in Mexico, shared that “I won’t do any PDA. The older generation, the ones from Mexico, they are really stuck into what they believe. The young people, people who are raised here, they are kind of more accepting.” Several mothers stated that they refrain from engaging in public displays of affection around older Hispanic individuals out of respect for their traditional beliefs and did not perceived it as an inconvenience but as a way to negotiate acceptance. Daniela described how she “finds that a lot of traditional Mexican people are very modest and reserved in some ways; it’s a respect thing.” Noemi described her experience living in her parent’s household, “I didn’t act on anything until I was out of the house and that’s when I felt that if I don’t live under their household, I can respect them but at the same time I’m not disrespecting them by throwing [my sexuality] up in the air type thing.” Kimberly also added that “when we are around my wife’s mother we don’t hold hands, I hate to say out of respect but you know-I never want to offend anybody.”

Navigating relationships in the Hispanic community also involved decisions related to the church. Irma stated that she hasn’t “been to a Catholic church in a while but we know if we go we won’t get judged or anything. In a Christian church, we barely walk in and you can feel the eyes of everyone just looking at you, specially the Christian Hispanic Catholic ones. They don’t like that at all.”

Gender Presentation and Hispanic Identity

In the Hispanic community, feminine appearing lesbian mothers appear to have an easier

experience blending in public spaces because they look like the traditional Hispanic mother. Feminine appearing lesbian women were also accepted among Hispanic men because they were perceived as nonthreatening sexual objects. On the other hand, butch lesbian mothers faced criticism by Hispanic women and men for threatening the gender hierarchy and not fitting the feminine norm of a Hispanic mother. The butch mothers in this study explained that they had a difficult time explaining to others that they did not want to be a male, even though they appeared more masculine. Hispanic men were uncomfortable with butch women appearing as male because their sexual orientation was more apparent and they were not perceived as sexual objects. However, the butch mothers stated that they were attracted to more feminine appearing women and would take on more of the traditionally male roles in the household. However Judy expressed her irritation when her daughter attempted to refer to her as her father instead of her mother. She insisted that she wanted to be a mother and not a father, a woman and not a man.

Unlike butch mothers, feminine appearing mothers never reported any confrontations with their family members about their appearance. Isabel, a feminine appearing lesbian mother explained that she changed her appearance from butch to feminine because her mother asked her to. Her mother was uncomfortable with the masculine appearance that she had adopted which included a very short haircut. Judy also stated that as her child got older, if she requested that she change her appearance to more feminine she would do so in order to avoid any issues. The way that the women present their gender affects the experiences they will have as lesbians and as mothers.

Other mothers indicated that they faced challenges navigating traditional expectations regarding gendered parenting roles within the Hispanic community. Most mothers described the traditional Hispanic mother as being overly involved in the lives of their children, being overly

domesticated and putting her husband and children before anything. For example, Noemi stated that Hispanic mothers are very domestic and overly involved in the lives of their children. She used her own mother as an example, stating that she felt her mother was too opinionated about how she thinks that her daughter should be raised. As a result, Noemi stated that she often has many discussions with her mother regarding differences in parenting styles. She also jokingly added that Hispanic mothers “try to fatten up” the children. Several other mothers also brought up how important cooking and food is for a traditional Hispanic mother.

For lesbian mothers, they violated the traditional mother role by excluding the male father figure in their lives. This is due to the very women-centered community among lesbian households, where the fathers are absent both due to lack of knowledge of paternity, or starting other families. For example, Ana stated that she believed that the Hispanic community:

feels like the child needs a father figure. For me with my son and my partner, she has been around since he was 7 years old. There was a time when his father wasn't really involved and she was the one that was going with me to football games or soccer games that he was involved in. I guess they saw that it doesn't really matter if it's a man or a woman.

Maintaining an ethnic identity is attempted by following cultural scripts of respectability and gender roles that are expected in the Hispanic community for women. As a result, Hispanic lesbian mothers do not engage in any openly romantic acts of affection towards their partner in public spaces within the Hispanic community in order to reduce any inter-generational conflict. In addition, maintaining a traditional gender presentation enables mothers to reduce tension.

Maintaining a Catholic Identity

The mothers expressed the importance that their children maintain some type of religious narrative. There was an emphasis on participation in religious activities for their children. By

embedding the child's routine with religious activities, the mothers hoped to maintain a religious identity for their families and for themselves. The religious activities helped the women in constructing their Catholic identities that are deeply embedded in their motherhood role. Nearly all mothers prayed with their children on a daily basis regardless of church attendance, and all mothers have attended church with their children.

There was not a single mother, however, who reported regular church attendance within the past month of the interview. Participants explained that one can maintain a Catholic identity without regular church attendance. In other words, a Catholic does not have to go to weekly mass to maintain their identity. Dania (45) and Claudia (41) are married mothers of one that sent their daughter to a private Catholic school. Dania stated that they do not feel that they have to "attend a church to go with our beliefs." However prayer was considered a sacred and important religious routine. Sydney (42), a mother of one adopted son and partner of Daniela, mentioned: "I feel that I can pray at home. I have my religious figures; you can tell that this is a Catholic home." Ezperanza (32), a mother of two biological sons from a previous relationship and one stepson from her current relationship, stated that, "I have a Bible. I have some crosses. I pray nightly, we pray nightly with our kids before bed, even the dog joins in." Another participant, Isabel (44) a mother of one from a previous relationship who is currently married to her partner, explained that, "I pray. We do. Actually, my daughter does herself-she gets her little rosary and starts praying." Praying as a family was a religious activity that was rated as very important for the mothers. It was most common for the family to pray together as part of a bedtime routine.

Teaching Morality

Pertaining to the Catholic identity, I found a common desire for moral replication of their children by the mothers interviewed. It was common for many mothers to send their children to

church without them so that they could learn the religious narrative from church leaders as they had been raised to do. Often, the children attended church services with family members without their mothers. Several children even attended traditional Catholic services and some even attended a Catholic private school. Noemi shared that she was raised in a very Catholic home and her extended family continues to be very involved in the Catholic Church. She mentioned that an important aspect of motherhood for her was “guiding them towards the right path, showing them the difference between right and wrong. [...] I’m trying to raise my daughter the right way.” Kimberly shared during her interview that she is not currently attending church services but has a father who is heavily involved in the Catholic Church. She explained that she wanted her children to “know how to make good decisions and the right choices and hopefully bring them up the right way-I don’t even know what the right way is.”

In addition, some women identified specific rituals or traditions that they wished to pass along to their children. For example, Ana (28) a mother of one from a previous relationship stated that:

I buy those Catholic candles and I pray but I have a lot of faith. I believe in positive vibes and negativity. I would prefer to go to a Catholic church because that is how I was raised. I want my son to continue with the Catholic traditions; you get set into the traditions of things-that is just how I was raised but I don’t think I would have a problem going to another type of church.

Maintaining a religious future for their children

Although there was an expressed desire for their children to follow the Catholic religion, there was also a strong tendency for the women to want their children to develop individual religious opinions, even if they would conflict with their own. Since most women had young children in their home, they mentioned that they have not yet faced much religious opposition from their children. Sydney explained that, “I want my son to be raised Catholic. But if he gets

older and says that he doesn't want to be Catholic anymore or any religion-I would probably hate it but I don't want to not let him exercise his own mind."

It was repeatedly expressed throughout the interviews that it was important for the mothers to ensure that their child maintain a religious narrative in the future. However, the mothers also expressed that they wanted to give their child religious freedom to choose which beliefs and doctrine to follow. Even if the mothers expressed desire for their children to remain Catholic, they emphasized the importance that the children make that decision on their own. Ezperanza explained that she would want her children to continue to maintain some sort of religious experience: "Whatever religion my kids choose to be a part of when they grow up-that is on them but I would definitely want them to have a relationship with God, to seek him out in prayer and everything." Isabel said that she would like for her child to maintain a religious narrative: "I want my child to have a respect of one god- if it exists. I don't want her to be a barbarian because I think God-if it's true- I mean, how would the world be if there was no God or respect for others."

Ana shared that she tells her son that "he can go to any church that he wants. He can have his own opinions and he tells me that he thinks that people judging is wrong-period. He doesn't think that it is wrong for people of the same sex to be in a relationship and love each other."

Veronica (40), a mother of one, stated that she currently attends a non-denominational church with her son that was more accepting than the Catholic Church. Irma also expressed the importance of religion in her children's life when she stated that "it is important for them to believe that there is a light out there. I want them to know there is something out there. If it's called god-there is a greater force. I don't know which one is the correct one, but I want them to know it is out there."

By following a religious narrative similar to heterosexual mothers the mothers were able to

obtain some acceptance from their ethnic and religious communities. Noemi stated that although she currently does not attend church because her daughter is too young, “we do want to be involved with the church. We want to be, I guess, looked up to as a parent and a person doing the right thing.”

Conclusion

During the interviews, the women reflected on their experiences in balancing their lesbian, Hispanic and Catholic identity with being a mother. I found that there were common elements in the way that the women maintained their ethnic, sexual and religious identities. Overall, the women emphasized their priority as a mother and described their identity as a mother as their central identity.

Chapter 5: Negotiating a Catholic Religious and a Sexual Identity

In this chapter, I address my primary research questions by examining the manner in which a Catholic identity is constructed for Hispanic lesbian mothers. First, I examine the strategies that mothers utilized in balancing their religious and lesbian identity. These strategies include analyzing the hypocrisy in the Catholic Church, identifying as spiritual, redefining religious meanings and separating the Catholic Church from the Catholic religion. Next, I evaluate the process in which the mothers create and maintain a religious narrative that fits with their identities through moral replication, redefinition of religious meanings and adhering to a more spiritual ideology. I conclude by assessing the ways in which mothers redefined religious meanings to integrate their lesbian identity with their religious identity.

Strategies for Negotiating Catholic and Lesbian Identities

This study sought to examine how Hispanic lesbian mothers perceive the available religious scripts as tools for integration or exclusion from the Catholic community. Focusing on my research question about the ways in which Hispanic lesbian mothers negotiate their Catholic and lesbian identities, I found that the mothers utilized various strategies that included analyzing hypocrisy within the Catholic Church identifying as spiritual, redefining religious meanings, and separating the Catholic Church from the Catholic religion to utilize religious scripts that were more aligned within the hetero-normative motherhood narrative. By utilizing these scripts, the mothers were able to integrate themselves within the Catholic community and establish a religious identity that did not conflict with their lesbian identity.

Identifying hypocrisy within the Catholic Church

A few women mentioned that they felt that the Catholic Church could not point an immoral finger at them due to the sexual scandals found among some Catholic priests and other

morally questionable practices described in the Bible; “let he who is without sin cast the first stone” (John 8:7). Irma observed: “I think the Catholic Church doesn’t really care as much as a Christian church might care. You go, you barely understand the priest because he is so old and then that’s it. You turn 15 you have to pay. You get married you have to pay. But it is such a good tradition.” Sydney, who mentioned that she sends her son to catechism classes, stated that:

[A]mong the priesthood there is a lot of things that they probably shouldn’t be doing to small children, to little boys. I don’t want people pointing fingers at me when you got stuff going on in your own house. Just because you join the priesthood doesn’t mean that all your gay feelings or something are going to be cleansed. The only thing you end up doing is hurting and committing a real sin, which is touching little boys. I love the Catholic religion, even if some of it is not in favor for me but it is also not in favor of the priests who are molesting children

Other mothers, like Ana, pointed out:

I know according to the Catholic Church it’s wrong but I feel that it is just people trying to paraphrase the Bible into what they want it to say. The Bible says a lot of things but they don’t take every single thing literally. It talks about slavery, having multiple wives-you can’t take everything literally. That was a book that was written thousands of years ago but honestly I don’t believe I will be punished for loving somebody of the same sex. That’s what God is-love.

Several mothers also explained that the scriptures on homosexuality reflected the context of the historical and cultural period that the Bible was written in and was not meant to be condemning in modern times. Thus, the hypocrisy found in the Catholic Church allowed the women to discredit the clergy but not the doctrine.

Other women used the context of the culture as evidence that the Biblical scriptures were outdated and irrelevant. The women did not dispute whether the scriptures existed but explained that they were no longer relevant. Judy indicated that she:

likes what the new pope has been saying and doing. If there were more like him, things would be great but they are all still the same. The Catholic Church says that they don’t like homosexuality but they are really on the down low with everything; they are pretty much hypocrites.

Isabel explained how “Sodom and Gomorrah was in the past” and Ezperanza indicated that:

times aren't like that anymore and that is what people need to try to understand. Times aren't like that anymore. I mean if that was the case, half of the women in the world would be stoned to death because they weren't virgins when they married. If they excommunicated people for being sinners there would be no priests.

Ezperanza also expressed her doubts about the Catholic clergy. She stated:

I know the pope has said some very positive things about homosexuality-not necessarily condemning us or anything, pretty much accepting it, which I thought was pretty awesome but it is the Catholic Church. I seriously doubt anything is going to change. Nothing has changed in how many years?

Similarly, Veronica explained that she felt that permanent change in the way the Catholic Church perceives gay and lesbian individuals must be done from the top of the hierarchy. Dania expressed her concern that it would most likely take a "long time" for the Catholic clergy to become as accepting to the LGBT community as the current Pope. Ana explained how she felt about the clergy:

I think especially with this new pope, he is addressing the fact that the church is losing a lot of people due to how the Catholic Church sees homosexuality. I think now, especially with people being more open minded that the church has to evolve on their belief on it. I hope the Catholic Church will be more open minded. Being a homosexual is not like it was years ago- it is more common now and people are more accepting of it. They are more tolerant of it now. Even the more traditional Mexican families now have family members that are out of the closet-they are becoming more accepting of it.

Identifying as spiritual

The importance of church attendance for their children, daily prayer and the use of religious symbols such as crosses in their home as a reflection of their religious identity was noted by the majority of participants. The mothers were able to maintain a loose tie to their childhood religion of Catholicism by engaging in Catholic traditions and activities such as prayer, church attendance for the children and ownership of religious symbols such as crosses, pictures and candles. Almost all women identified themselves as spiritual and "God fearing" as opposed to religious.

Even though almost all of the mothers failed to attend a church service in the past month,

they mentioned engaging in other types of spiritual activities such as admiring the Catholic art and architecture. Engaging in less religious activities such as church attendance discouraged women from identifying as religious and instead focusing on other activities they engaged in. Many of the activities that the women engaged in were claimed to be spiritual and therefore they identified more as spiritual. For example, Noemi claimed that she would identify as “probably more spiritual now because just being in massage therapy is definitely much more spiritual than any aspect ever.” A religious person was perceived as a person who attended church services at a regular basis as opposed to a spiritual person who did not have to attend church services. For example, Claudia said that she identified as spiritual because:

I can't say that I'm religious because I don't go to church a lot and we don't read the Bible verbatim. We find ways to have spirituality under our roof. We go to spirituality classes and being in touch with ethics and morality. We try to keep a positive outlook on life with God in mind.

Although more women identified as spiritual and claimed to not attend church regularly, almost all mothers sent their children to regular church services. Judy explained that although she personally did not think it was important for her to attend church, she wanted her daughter to go to church and considered it an important activity to integrate in her daughter's routine. Judy explained that her daughter attends a church and that she encourages her daughter to attend.

Although the mothers identified more as spiritual, their children were never identified as spiritual and were embedded in many church activities, including Catechism and a couple families even sent their children to private Catholic schools to learn about Catholic rituals and traditions.

Identifying as spiritual released some of the women from having to solely identify as Catholic. Other women were not sure if the Catholic community would consider them Catholic and chose to identify as spiritual instead. Several women engaged in Catholic practices but chose to identify as spiritual due to the perceived negative relationship between the Catholic

Church and gay and lesbian individuals. Other women chose to identify as spiritual because they did not think they should be considered religious due to their poor church attendance. However, most women emphasized the influence of Catholicism on their lives and their beliefs but preferred to identify as spiritual. A factor in the women identifying as spiritual as opposed to Catholic was influenced by their lack of membership to a Catholic Church. Many mothers only attended Catholic Mass for major holidays or special occasions. Sydney stated that although she did not attend mass regularly, she didn't "know if I am more religious or spiritual. I mean I pray every day and am thankful for what I have. I don't know what you would call that-religious or spiritual. I know the commandments."

Redefining religious meanings

There was also a recurrence of redefining religious meanings such as the concept of sin. All the women interviewed stated that they did not believe that engaging in a lesbian relationship equated as sin and refused to identify their lifestyle as a "real" sin. There was a distinction between thinking that you are committing a sinful act and not thinking that you are. Knowingly committing a sinful act was considered wrong and likely to produce condemnation and reprimand by the religious community. However, for the women that did not think that same-sex relationships were sinful, they believed that they were not condemned. An example of this is provided by Noemi who stated that, "I believe that if you believe you are sinning –you know you are sinning, then it is a sin. I don't think I am because that is what I believe." Ezperanza also believed that "I never felt anything I did was wrong. I never felt I was going to hell because of it."

When asked if it was possible to be a lesbian and a Catholic, all women stated they believed it was. Although they face internal conflict with several of the beliefs held by religious

institutions, they managed to redefine their beliefs to maintain both religious and sexual identity. For example, Sydney stated that sometimes she “feels in conflict with my Catholic beliefs and sometimes I have to go with what I think. God made me, God loves me. I try to be a good person. I don’t think I’m going to be damned or anything. I just have to fall back on what I truly believe.”

Several women expressed frustration that their relationships were considered immoral and therefore wrong. All fifteen women did not consider their relationships as being sexually immoral and wrong. Ezperanza claimed that she “never thought that what I did was wrong. I mean it feels right to be straight for people. It feels right to be gay for others. I mean they can’t excommunicate you for being a lesbian, I don’t think.”

Women also redefined what was wrong and immoral by updating biblical scriptures in modern contexts. Several women expanded on their frustration about the unwillingness for people to understand the homophobic culture in which the Bible was written influenced scripture. They believed that the scripture should be updated to fit modern norms and emphasized the hypocrisy that heterosexuals also violated sexual norms in scriptures. For example, Ezperanza believed that the majority of women currently engage in fornication which is condemned in Biblical scripture. Ezperanza concluded that “times aren’t like that anymore and that is what people need to try to understand.”

The power and authority of Catholic clergy was questioned and several women redefined the Catholic tradition of viewing clergy as God on earth. Several women stated that they questioned why the Catholic Church was claiming authority of giving eternal condemnation. The Pope was not viewed as a religious symbol for almost all women but as a person that had little, if any, authority in their religious life. For example, Marisol was raised in a heavily Catholic

community and stated that she was disappointed in the way that the clergy would have an “I love you, but I don’t think that you are going to heaven” mentality. Even though Marisol no longer attends a Catholic church and has chosen to attend a non-denominational Christian church, she acknowledged that she still has a “little Catholic” in her. She considered herself a little Catholic because she did not attend regular mass services or agree with the head of the church, but retained some of the traditions such as prayer, church attendance and obedience to God.

There were other women similar to Marisol that redefined what it meant to be Catholic. A couple of women had considered themselves Catholic even though they had not been baptized in the Church. Although almost all women had attended Catechisms classes in their childhood, only three families currently had their children attending Catechism classes. Most mothers instead sent their children to church with family members that were Protestant Christian. The closest family member in many mothers’ support system was Protestant Christian and emphasized church attendance for the children. These mothers tended to be in an interracial relationship with a white woman who was Protestant Christian. As a result the children would engage in Catholic prayer and rituals but attend Christian Sunday school classes. Being Catholic was not rigidly defined. Most mothers mentioned that the Catholic rituals and prayers were embedded in their childhood and brought a sense of nostalgia and comfort for them. They enjoyed engaging in these activities and rituals with their children. Being Catholic was a part of their identity and thus, engaging in the prayers and traditions remained a part of their religious lifestyle even if their beliefs changed.

Religious Distance

Several women also revealed a religious distance from the Catholic Church because they no longer identified the Catholic Church as holding absolute authority over their beliefs and

choices. Therefore, they were able to redefine religious meanings that were not condemning of their sexual orientation. Thus, even if the Catholic Church was not accepting of their sexual relationship, it did not mean that they would stop being Catholic. This also allowed them to feel comfortable being identified as Catholic without an affiliation to the Church. For other mothers, religious distance from the church allowed them to customize their beliefs. For example, Sydney admitted, “I am religious but-I don’t know. You can pick and choose what you want to believe in the Bible and who knows who wrote the Bible anyway. I just go.” Additionally, Dania shared that:

We are Catholic and we understand that the Catholic religion doesn’t approve of the lifestyle. Coming out the hardest part of it was like you know I went to Sunday School and went to church every Sunday and then to Catechism classes. After coming out, it was more about how I believe in God, this is what I think is right and this is what I was taught

Religious distance from the authority of the Catholic Church also influenced church membership and whether the mothers identified as religious or spiritual. The women did not believe that the Catholic Church should have authority over whether they are eternally condemned or not. Two women commented that they did not believe that the Church even had the power to excommunicate them for disagreeing with their stance. Additionally, disagreeing with the stances of the Catholic Church on same-sex relationships did not impede women from identifying as religious or spiritual.

However, a lack of a close relationship with a Catholic Church prompted women to feel more comfortable self identifying as spiritual. For example, even though Sydney admitted to having weak ties with a Catholic Church she self identifies as Catholic and her son is currently taking Catechism classes. Her partner Daniela also identifies as Catholic but has yet to be baptized. However, Daniela has currently decided to become baptized so that she can be with

Sydney in the afterlife. Weak ties with a Catholic Church did not impede Sydney and Daniela from engaging in Catholic rituals and traditions.

Creating and Maintaining a Religious Narrative

A religious narrative is the accumulation of the religious beliefs and rituals to which an individual adheres. My second research question focused on the methods by which Catholic lesbian mothers create and maintain a religious narrative. Data reflected that through moral replication, redefinition of religious meanings and adhering to a more spiritual ideology, the women created and maintained their religious narrative for themselves and their families.

Women emphasized a more spiritual and relaxed narrative for themselves and a more traditional and structured narrative for their children. Thus, the importance of maintaining some sort of religious narrative was apparent from the data.

Nearly all of the women stated the importance that their children attend some sort of religious service and also emphasized the importance that their children know the difference between what is right and wrong. Almost all mothers desired their child to have their fundamental moral education from a religious institution. I found that the women updated the traditional Catholic narrative for themselves into a more accepting spiritual one that did not focus on condemnation but unconditional love and acceptance. For example, Ezperanza stated that:

I've looked at several different types of religions and I can grasp some of the concepts from one and [another from another] but I still haven't found that one that just 'yes I agree completely' and I don't think I ever will. But I need somehow to have that connection- I guess that's why I don't really believe in church. I like to go because I like the fellowship and the boys love it. My connection with God- we have our own. I can't do the church thing really. I'm more of a spiritual [person]. I don't really do religion. I have my own relationship with God and Jesus Christ and I'm good-I'm happy.

Many of the women also stated that they considered themselves to be spiritual.

Spirituality was rarely attributed to children but highly emphasized by the mothers to describe

their religious narrative. As stated earlier, there existed a tendency to redefine traditional religious meanings such as sin, sexual morality and condemnation in the mother's narrative. Women explained that same-sex relationships were not immoral or sinful but were an expression of God which is seen as pure. Several women engaged in activities such as spirituality classes, prayer and aesthetic admiration that they felt focused on their spirituality. Several women also emphasized the importance of adhering to a religious narrative that emphasized acceptance for everyone. All women stated that they make an effort to teach their children that God is accepting of everyone regardless of their sexual orientation. Acceptance and unconditional love were important beliefs that the mothers wanted to include in their child's religious narrative.

Redefining Religion and Spirituality

The third research question is concentrated on the ways in which Hispanic lesbian mothers redefine religion and spirituality. The most common method by which participants redefine religion and spirituality was by adhering to beliefs and rituals that were spiritual and accepting. As mentioned earlier, many women self-identified as spiritual even if they maintained their Catholic religious identity. A part of a more individualized religious experience includes the ability to choose one that is more accommodating and accepting. Several women stated they have found churches that were more accepting than others. Church membership was influenced by whether the church made them feel welcome or uncomfortable. Ezperanza stated that "there is a church here that I go to [...] it makes [me] feel like you can be a part of God and you can seek him out because at other churches they tell you what you are doing is a sin and you shouldn't be here and you are going straight to hell and they judge you." Isabel shared that, "I'm going to church where they welcome anyone."

Although none of the women currently were members of an open and affirming church

that emphasized their acceptance of the LGBT community, several mothers shared many positive experiences that they had at open and affirming churches. For example, Irma explained that they had found an open and affirming Catholic Church but the mass was in the evening and they lived an hour away.

Conclusion

Utilizing several strategies such as redefining religious meanings, identifying as spiritual, analyzing hypocrisy in the church and questioning the authority of the Catholic Church, Hispanic lesbian mothers are able to integrate and maintain a balance between their religious identity and their sexual identity. Almost all mothers claimed that they maintained a less rigid and more accepting religious narrative. However, they encouraged their children to participate in regular church attendance and traditional religious practices and rituals in order to develop a religious narrative.

Chapter 6: Discussion

American motherhood is saturated in heterosexual, feminine and nurturing social scripts that enable women to perform the role of a good mother. In Hispanic cultures, motherhood is a sacred and traditionally feminine role. Motherhood is deeply embedded in the heteronormative narrative and has been established as a social institution. Motherhood in both the American and Hispanic culture has been highly influenced by religion and patriarchy. Motherhood is a sacred institution and all mothers are expected to behave in certain ways. As a result, there are certain established, taken-for-granted expectations that are required of mothers.

A high percentage of Hispanic individuals are raised in the Catholic Church. For Hispanic mothers, their expectations are influenced by the Catholic religion. In the Catholic narrative, mothers are expected to be nurturing and feminine. Hispanic lesbian mothers violate the gendered and heteronormative assumptions of “motherhood,” and thus face conflict and tension in incorporating their sexual identity with motherhood. However, I found that all fifteen mothers stated that their sexual identity never interfered with their motherhood. In fact, all mothers stated minimal if any differences between lesbian and heterosexual mothering because lesbian motherhood was so similar. In her book about *Gay Dads*, Goldberg (2012: 97) points out that many of the dads stated that they appeared more heterosexual with their new status as a father because they are “probable heterosexual” and “because people assume parenthood equals heterosexuality.” In much the same manner, Hispanic lesbian mothers might experience less conflict with their sexual identity than do non-mothers due to these assumptions of normativity.

Although they primarily articulated compatibility between their sexual identity and motherhood, my findings nonetheless demonstrate that Hispanic lesbian mothers constantly navigate through multiple social identities. Their identities as Hispanic women, lesbians and

religious adherents are integrated into their role as a mother. After interviewing fifteen Hispanic lesbian mothers, I found that by prioritizing their role as a mother and utilizing other strategies, they were able to negotiate and reconcile their sexual identity with their religious identity. The role of motherhood created a meaning of purpose and a new identity that has aligned their lifestyle closer to heteronormativity. The Hispanic women who were raised in the Catholic community found methods by which to minimize their sexual identity through their role as a religious adherent and a mother. By highlighting their role as a mother, they were able to more closely align to the hetero-religious narrative.

Nonetheless, more masculine-appearing mothers stated that they experienced a more hostile transition in their community. The three self-identified butch women stated that they believed that their appearance influenced the way that they were treated by the members of the Hispanic and religious community.

In this chapter I will provide an overview of key findings, including the intersectionality of the different marginalized identities, the religious strategies utilized to integrate the religious and sexual identity and the way in which Hispanic lesbians are considered honorary lesbians if they have a feminine gender presentation. I also review similar findings in other works that support my results, and conclude with a discussion of findings of other same-sex sample populations that differ from those of Hispanic Catholic lesbians.

Intersectionality of Marginalized Identities for Hispanic Lesbians

Similar to Moore (2011)'s study of African American lesbian mothers, I found that all fifteen Hispanic lesbian mothers maintained an ethnic, sexual, and religious identity. In her study, Moore focused on the intersectionality of multiple oppression for ethnic minority lesbian

women. Moore found that the African American women in her study were influenced by the way they perceived their race and gender. Moore also identified the church as a social space that influences the attitudes and behaviors of its adherents while also “infiltrating and influencing non religious components of life, including how people who live in [ethnic] communities go about expressing their sexuality” (2011:9). Similarly, identity creation for Hispanic lesbian mothers is also influenced by the heteronormative macro structure they reside in and the ethnic, religious and sexual minority micro discourse they navigate through. I also found that Hispanic lesbian mothers utilized religious strategies to balance their sexual identity with their religious identity, including redefining religious symbols and meanings, identifying as spiritual rather than religious and analyzing hypocrisy in the Catholic Church.

Religious Strategies for Integrating Religion with Multiple Identities

Motherhood is a heteronormative presentation of self and those with feminine appearance are able to do so the most successfully. Dunne (2000) concluded that lesbian mothers are perceived as honorary heterosexuals because they appear as heterosexual with their children and maintain a very heteronormative role as a mother. Dunne also explained that lesbian mothers redefine motherhood by dividing traditional male parenting roles between two women. I similarly found that the masculine appearing partners took more responsibility for replicating male activities and chores. However, all mothers asserted that the parenting roles were split equally between both partners. Hequembourg and Farrell (1999) emphasize that motherhood reflects gendered heteronormativity, which I also found evidence to support. I observed ways in which presentation of a feminine, heterosexual appearing mother allowed lesbians to align closer to the heteronormative narrative. On the other hand, I also noted that lesbian mothers that had a more masculine appearing gender presentation faced harder times adjusting to the

heteronormative motherhood structure. They faced conflict due to the contrast between their non-traditional appearance and the traditional expectations of mothers.

Prioritizing the motherhood identity permits less conflict because motherhood is considered a sacred and respectful role in the Catholic religion as well as in the Hispanic community. For women who receive their religious education in the Catholic Church, motherhood is perceived as a role that is expected and praised. Motherhood is also presented as a visual representation of morality. Thus, a mother is a representation of a good person in both the Catholic and the Hispanic community. For example, I found that all fifteen mothers claimed that their primary status was that of a mother and they viewed themselves as good mothers. By highlighting their role as a mother, Hispanic lesbian Catholics can minimize their sexual identity and emphasize their acceptable role as a mother.

McQueeney (2009:165) found that being a mother is tied with morality and that “enacting good motherhood identities allows individuals to accommodate to the Christian family while resisting its heterosexual exclusivity.” I also found that the motherhood role allowed Hispanic lesbians to reflect a morally acceptable role that allowed them to blend easily within public settings and appear more heterosexual as long as they presented a feminine appearance. I found that butch-appearing women, however, experienced a difficult time presenting themselves as mothers and therefore a good woman (see Moore 2011 for similar findings regarding gender presentation and motherhood).

Social scripts allow individuals to reproduce acceptable norms by the dominant members of society (Wiederman, 2005). The heteronormative reality that Hispanic lesbian mothers reside within influences the manner in which they choose to present their ethnic, religious and sexual identity. For Hispanic mothers who are socialized in a traditionally masculine and rigid Catholic

community, they must negotiate their multiple identities to align with the heteronormative expectations of motherhood. By utilizing the scripts of heterosexual motherhood, Hispanic lesbians obtain privacy about their sexual orientation and accelerated acceptance from their religious and ethnic community. These scripts include ways to replicate traditional feminine gender presentations, being a mother and maintaining a religious routine for their family.

Litton (2001) noted that religious gay and lesbian individuals utilize religious strategies to pacify any conflict between their religious and sexual identity, including focusing on certain aspects of the gospel such as loving one another and picking parts of the doctrine they liked and excluding parts with which they disagreed. Similarly, many Hispanic lesbians that were raised in the Catholic religion but no longer attended a regular church service, illustrated religious pluralism by picking and choosing which religious beliefs to embrace and which to reject. By rejecting certain beliefs regarding sexual immorality, Catholic adherents are able to pacify religious tension between their sexual and religious identity. Rejecting the notion that same-sex relationships are immoral allowed Hispanic lesbian Catholics to avoid self-identifying as sinful and to reject eternal condemnation as a punishment. By redefining the meaning of sin, lesbian Catholics identify their relationships as un-sinful because they follow the principal of monogamy and consider themselves to be good people.

In addition, by identifying as spiritual, women are able to distance themselves from the rigidity of traditional Catholicism and embrace a more personalized religious narrative. This religious narrative embraces acceptance and love and allows women to choose to identify with some aspects of Catholicism and not with others. For example, all mothers stated that they believed that a lesbian could be a Catholic even if they disagreed with the stance of the Church on same sex relationships.

In her study of African American lesbian mothers, Moore (2011) found that the church served as a central location for the families. Unlike Moore, I did not find that the church served as a central social institution for the mothers but I did find that it served as a central location for their children. Although only one mother currently attended regular church services, fourteen women stated that their children engaged in regular church activities. Unlike Moore's study on African American lesbian mothers, I found that Hispanic lesbian Catholics rejected the authority of the Catholic Church in their personal and home decisions. I identified a religious distance from the Catholic Church as a source of religious authority in the personal lives of lesbian mothers. The religious distance was further propelled by the hypocrisy that they analyzed within the Catholic Church. Several women pointed to the deviant sexual behavior of many clergy members as well as heterosexual Catholics, showing the irony of the condemnation. This further resulted in a reduction of tension between their religious and sexual identity.

Mc Queeney (2009) concluded that gay or lesbian members of gay-affirming churches emphasized their religious identity. I found few mothers who sought to become members of gay affirming churches, but most were aware of at least one in their community. However, I found that all mothers in my study emphasized their motherhood identity or their Hispanic and lesbian identity. Many women identified as Catholic even if they were not currently a member of a Catholic church or failed to maintain regular church attendance. However, they described the Catholic traditions and activities as embedded in their lifestyle and as a mother mentioned, a "part of who I am." Additionally, Catholicism is linked with their ethnic identity. The Catholic Church was considered a location to receive ethnic and familial social interaction for Hispanic families. As the social networks of the mothers expanded, most mothers did not maintain the Catholic Church as a central location for interaction until they started a family and desired a

moral education for their children. As a result, being a Catholic is associated more with rituals and traditions as well as familial activities compared to adhering to certain religious beliefs for many mothers. This also helped minimize any religious conflict between sexual and religious identity because being Catholic was considered more a part of their ethnic identity.

Conclusion

Hispanic lesbian mothers navigate through their ethnic, sexual and religious identities within a heavily heteronormative environment. As a result, they develop strategies to pacify conflict between their multiple identities and portray a heteronormative appearing lifestyle.

Chapter 7: Looking Forward

This study analyzes the religious identity construction of Hispanic lesbian Catholic mothers and its intersectionality with ethnicity and sexuality. Research on same-sex families that focuses on navigating identities is lacking, particularly research focused on the intersection of sexual identities with race and ethnic identities within the family. In this concluding chapter, I provide an overview of my contributions to the literature and to policy; discuss the limitations of my research; and address the manner in which this research might be extended in future studies.

Contributions

Studying the multiple identities that ethnic sexual minorities maintain provides a more accurate account of their experience navigating through the white-dominated heterosexual narrative. Religious studies of sexual minorities have provided insight into how they negotiate their sexual identity with conflicting religious beliefs. This study specifically explores the manner in which Hispanic lesbian mothers navigate their multiple identities in order to utilize strategies that allow them to align closer to heteronormativity. By analyzing the experiences of several Catholic Hispanic lesbian mothers, I found the normalcy and stability that they attempt to create for their family unit. I also identified ways in which they were able to pacify the tension between their ethnic and sexual identity and their religious identity. These findings provide insight into the manner in which many sexual minority adherents might attempt to cope with religious tension.

Limitations of this Study

The small sample size is the greatest weakness that this study faces in terms of generalizability. This should be taken into account when reviewing the analysis. The specific population that this study analyzed was difficult to locate in large numbers. Probing into the

family unit of sexual minorities required invasive questions about their beliefs and routines. I experienced difficulty in obtaining contact with sexual minorities in the Hispanic community with children. Hispanic lesbian mothers valued their privacy and most were not actively seeking support from community groups. As a result, it was difficult to access a population that spent the majority of their time in familial interactions or activities involving their children.

One of the most common questions I was asked by the participants is why I was interested in studying lesbian mothers since I am heterosexual. I was aware that my sexual orientation might cast doubt on my ability to accurately depict the lesbian experience. I was also aware of the bias that may arise from my heteronormative perspective. However, the shared identity as Hispanic women provided several avenues of comparison we could connect through. Thus, my Hispanic insider status helped to mitigate my outsider status regarding sexuality. I shared my academic interest in the multiple identities that sexual minorities maintain and addressed any concerns or questions at the end of the interviews.

The fact that I have an English-speaking sample could have implications for whether individuals come out and how they navigate sexuality. The class dynamic of this sample may influence the outcome in terms of different access to legal protections, such as second parent adoption or legally recognized marriages. This sample has a median household income of 60-69,000 a year with the majority of the women from working class backgrounds which may also influence how they negotiate their sexuality. In addition, this study was geographically limited because this study focused only on women in Texas from Mexican descent and therefore their experience may differ from women in other parts of the country. The lesbian experience for Hispanic mothers may be different in other states in which the Hispanic population is not as large as in Texas and where the majority of the Hispanic is not from Mexican descent. Almost all

women from San Antonio mentioned that they felt that they experienced fewer instances of social rejection due to the large presence of the Hispanic population in their city. Daniela and Sydney, for example, explained that they often saw many ethnic gay and lesbian individuals and felt comfortable in their largely ethnic community. Noemi also shared the easy access to Hispanic individuals that she was surrounded in which allowed her to feel comfortable that her daughter would form social networks within the ethnic community. This level of comfort with the composition of their city in terms of both the ethnic and sexual identity potentially contributed to their overall positive experiences regarding navigating multiple identities.

In addition to the composition of the city, the experience for same-sex families may also be influenced by the policies and regulations of the state in which they reside. Several women were engaged or had participated in a wedding ceremony of some sort. Many women expressed their frustration and the legal issues that they encountered in attempting second parent adoptions. Other women also mentioned the complexities in their finances that arose from being unable to file taxes together and obtain marital benefits with their partner. Given these findings, it would appear that more sympathetic regulation for same-sex families that are attempting to obtain legal recognition of guardianship would reduce many areas of tension for lesbian mothers.

Future Studies

Most of the existing research on lesbian women has focused on the white middle class urban lesbian experience (Moore 1989; Chae and Ayala 2010; Cianciatto 2005). Studies that focus on minorities are few and those that focus on minority mothers are even fewer. Research on lesbian sexuality and religion focuses primarily on the ways that religion influences the lives of women (Asencio 2009; Carbado 2013; Greene 1994; Rincon 2011; Romo Carmona 1995; Yip 2007). Studies on Hispanic lesbians and Catholicism are lacking. Many sexual studies on

intersectionality of gay minorities focus on the multiple levels of social oppression. Few studies analyze the intersectionality of other aspects of their multiple identities. Future studies in this area would be beneficial to understand the minority experience. More research on Hispanic lesbians and Catholicism would be important to assess the influence of religious beliefs in families as children grow older. It would also be interesting to analyze the changing perspective on same-sex families among the Catholic clergy and community and how it influences the way that Hispanic lesbians perform their religious narrative. Additionally more studies on gay families can provide insight into new family structure and the ways that they replicate religious beliefs and routines. I draw attention to the emphasis on rejecting the condemnation from the Catholic Church and embracing the autonomy and acceptance of developing a more spiritual and accepting religious ideology.

Conclusion

Through semi-structured in-depth interviews with fifteen Hispanic lesbian mothers, I was able to document and analyze the ways in which they maintained a Catholic religious identity while navigated their sexual identity and ethnic identity within the heteronormative motherhood structure. I found although they desired the church to be a central location for the religious narrative of their children, they experienced religious distance from the Catholic Church and adopted an individualized spiritual ideology that focused on love and acceptance.

Additionally, I found that maintaining a traditional gender presentation of femininity allowed lesbian mothers to achieve privacy, the appearance of normalcy and acceptance. I found similar themes to prior research in regards to gender presentation, shifting social networks of support, and utilizing certain strategies to reduce religious conflict among gay and lesbian individuals. However, I also noted a difference among Hispanic lesbians I interviewed in respect

to the way that they redefine Catholic religious figures and symbols such as the clergy, the authority of the Catholic Church and the meaning of sin and condemnation.

Appendix A

Name*	Age	Occupation	Household Income	Relationship Status
Sydney Lopez	42	Chef	60-69,000	Engaged
Daniela Salazar	40	Clerk	60-69,000	Engaged
Noemi Rodriguez	29	Massage therapist	70-79,000	Cohabiting
Kimberly Salas	28	Property Tax	70,0000	Married
Ezperanza Garcia	32	Operator	20-29,000	Engaged
Isabel Rodriguez	44	Stay at home mother	<29,000	Married
Ana Resendez	28	Dental Asst.	70-79,000	Cohabiting
Judy Torres	28	Office worker	<29,000	Cohabiting
Irma Bonilla	30	Office Worker	50-59,000	Cohabiting
Alma Salinas	52	Teacher	30-40,000	Cohabiting
Claudia Castro	45	Web designer	80,000	Married
Dania Cruz	41	Loan Officer	80,000	Married
Veronica Arache	40	Social Worker	30-39,000	Single
Marisol Amaya	53	Psychotherapist	80-89,000	Cohabiting
Gisela M.	50	Data Specialist	<29,000	Married

*names have been changed to ensure confidentiality

Appendix B

Name	Appearance	Identified as a lesbian	Children
Sydney L.	Butch	All her life	1 Male (adopted)
Daniela S.	Femme	7 years	1 Female (biological)
Noemi R.	Femme	10 years	1 Female (biological through AI)
Kimberly S.	Femme	3 years	2 Male and 1 Female (biological)
Ezperanza G.	Femme	25 years	3 Males (2 biological and 1 stepson)
Isabel R.	Femme	All her life	1 Female (biological)
Ana R.	Femme	7 years	1 Male (biological)
Judy T.	Butch	13 years	1 Female (biological)
Irma B.	Femme	9 years	1 Female and 1 Male (biological)
Alma S.	Femme	Since she was a teenager	1 Female (biological)
Claudia C.	Butch	27 years	1 Female (step-child)
Dania C.	Femme	20 years	1 Female (biological)
Veronica A.	Femme	18 years	1 male (biological)
Marisol A.	Femme	31 years	1 female (biological)
Gisela M.	Butch	20 years	1 male (adopted)

APPENDIX C

SCREENING QUESTIONS

- 1.) Are you Hispanic or non-Hispanic?
- 2.) Do you identify as Catholic?
- 3.) How do you identify your sexual orientation?
- 4.) Do you have children?

Appendix D

DEMOGRAPHICS

- 1.) Where were you born?
- 2.) How old are you?
- 3.) How long have you been in the United States?
- 4.) What is the highest level of education that you have had?
- 5.) How many children do you have?
- 6.) Are you currently or have ever been married?
- 7.) Who lives in your household?
- 8.) What is your sexual orientation?
- 10.) How long have you been out?
- 11.) What is your yearly income?

less than \$29,999	\$30,000-\$49,000	\$50,000-\$69,000
\$60,000-\$79,000	\$80,000-\$99,000	more than \$100,000

IDENTIFICATION

- 1.) What is your sexual orientation?
- 2.) In regards to your identity, do you feel a stronger affiliation to your ethnicity or your sexuality? Why?
- 3.) What activities do you partake in that are part of Hispanic culture?
- 4.) What is your relationship with the Hispanic community like?
- 5.) What is your children's relationship to the Hispanic community like?
- 6.) Are you "out" in the Hispanic community?
- 7.) Are you 'out' in the Catholic community/to your church?
- 8.) Does your sexual orientation influence your relationship to the Hispanic

community? If so, how?

- 9.) How do you feel about what some people say in regards to homosexuality being a “white people’s problem?”
10. Does your religious identification influence your relationship with the Hispanic community? If so, how?
11. Are your friends mostly Hispanic or non-Hispanic?
12. Are your friends mostly gay and lesbian or heterosexual?
13. Are your friends mostly mothers?

STIGMA

- 1.) Does your family know about your sexual orientation?
- 2.) Have you come out to anyone? Who?
- 3.) Do you feel that negative views about your sexual orientation affect the way you present yourself? How?
- 4.) How do you feel that the Hispanic community feels towards lesbians?
- 5.) Do you think that people view you as a ‘good mother’ in the Hispanic community?
- 6.) How do you feel that the Hispanic community feels towards lesbian mothers?
- 7.) How do you think that the Catholic community feels towards lesbians?

MOTHERHOOD

- 1.) Was it always important for you to have children? Why or Why not?
- 2.) What is your relationship like with your family and your children?
- 3.) What is your relationship like with the father of your children?
- 4.) Did your Hispanic ethnicity factor into your decision to have children? If so how?
- 5.) Did Catholicism factor into your decision to have children? If so how?

- 6.) What does it mean to you to be a good mother?
- 7.) Does being a mother influence the way that you disclose your sexuality? If so, how?
- 8.) What do you think the Catholic Church says about being a good mother?
- 9.) What do you think the Hispanic community says about being a good mother?
10. Does your role as a mother influence the way in which you choose to present your sexual orientation? If so, how?
- 11.) Do you think that your children consider you to be a good mother? Why or why not?
- 12.) Would you consider your role as a mother to be more important than your role as a Hispanic woman or a lesbian?

RELIGIOSITY AND SPIRITUALITY

1. Would you consider yourself a religious or spiritual person?
2. How would you describe your religious upbringing?
3. What rituals do you engage in that are affiliated with your religion or spirituality?
4. Walk me through one of these rituals that you engage in.
5. In the past month, how many times have you attended church?
6. Do your religious or spiritual beliefs influence the way you think about sex? How?
7. Do your religious or spiritual beliefs influence your identity as a lesbian? How?
8. Do your religious or spiritual beliefs influence the way you raise your children? How?
9. Do your religious or spiritual beliefs influence your relationship with your partner? How?
10. Is it possible to be a lesbian and to be Catholic?
11. How do you feel about the Catholic Church stating that homosexuality is an inherent disorder?

12. Do you ever feel like there is a conflict between your lesbian identity and the Catholic Church? If so how?
13. Have you ever had a negative experience with the church related to your sexual identity?
14. Have you ever had a positive experience with the church related to your sexual identity?
15. Have you ever had an experience with a 'straight but affirming' church?
16. Have you ever considered joining a 'straight but affirming' church? Why or why not?
17. Is there anything else that you would like to talk about that we have not discussed?

Appendix E



****SUBJECTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH STUDY ON HISPANIC LESBIAN MOTHERS****

Research Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to examine how Hispanic lesbian mothers negotiate a Catholic religious identity with aspects of their sexual identity. This study examines the strategies that Hispanic lesbian mothers utilize to reconcile or navigate perceived conflict between their role as a Catholic and as a lesbian.

Research Process: If you agree to be a part of this study, you will be interviewed by the principal investigator. Following the main interview, there might be a follow-up contact to clarify any interview content.

Eligibility Criteria: You are eligible to participate in this study if you (1) identify as a lesbian, or are in a same-sex partnership, and (2) have at least one child (3) identify as Hispanic and (4) identify as Catholic.

Risks: I believe there to be minimal risk associated with participation in this study. I will keep the identities of all subjects **confidential** and thus address any potential concerns regarding disclosure of sexual identity.

Benefits: While you will not directly benefit from participation, your participation may help investigators better understand the experience of Hispanic lesbian mothers. This knowledge could inform public opinion on lesbian motherhood.

Principal Investigator:

Zelma Oyarvide
Department of Sociology
University of Houston
oyarvidezl@gmail.co
(713) 885-8377

Faculty Sponsor:

Amanda K. Baumle
Department of Sociology
University of Houston
akbaumle@uh.edu
(713) 743-3944

This project has been reviewed by the University of Houston Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (713) 743-9204.

Appendix F

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

PROJECT TITLE: Negotiating Religiosity and Sexual Identity Among Hispanic Lesbian Mothers

You are being invited to participate in a research project conducted by Zelma Oyarvide from the Department of Sociology at the University of Houston.

NON-PARTICIPATION STATEMENT

Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any question.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to examine how Hispanic lesbian mothers negotiate a Catholic religious identity with aspects of their sexual identity. This study examines the strategies that Hispanic lesbian mothers utilize to reconcile or navigate perceived conflict between their role as a Catholic and as a lesbian.

PROCEDURES

Approximately 20 subjects located in metropolitan areas of Texas, including Houston, Austin, San Antonio and Dallas will be asked to participate in this project. You will be one of approximately 20 subjects asked to participate.

If you agree to participate in this study, I will interview you in a location of your choice. The interview will last approximately one to two hours, depending on your level of interest and your desire to continue the interview. The interview will cover basic demographic information (sex, race, education, etc.), perceived stigma towards sexual identification, identification (ethnic and sexuality ties), motherhood (relationship between your sexual identification and your family) and religion/spirituality (attitudes and behaviors). I will use a digital voice recorder to record your voice during the interview and will also take handwritten notes.

After the completion of the interview, your part in the study comes to an end, unless you agree to be contacted later for clarification of any issues discussed. If you agree to be contacted for follow-up questions, then I might contact you by phone to ask you to clarify any issue raised in your interview; follow-up should last thirty minutes or less.

As a participant in this study, your total time commitment will likely be 2.5 hours or less, including the main interview and any follow up.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of your participation in this project. Each subject's name will be paired with a code number by the principal investigator. This code

number will appear on all written materials and voice recordings. The list pairing the subject's name to the assigned code number will be kept separate from all research materials and will be available only to the principal investigator. Confidentiality will be maintained within legal limits.

RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

I believe there to be minimal risk associated with participation in this study. I will keep the identities of all subjects confidential and thus address any potential concerns regarding disclosure of sexual identity.

BENEFITS

While you will not directly benefit from participation, your participation may help investigators better understand experiences of Hispanic lesbian mothers. This knowledge could inform public opinion regarding this marginalized group.

ALTERNATIVES

Participation in this project is voluntary and the only alternative to this project is non-participation.

PUBLICATION STATEMENT

The results of this study may be published in professional and/or scientific journals. The results may also be used for educational purposes or for professional presentations. However, no individual subject will be identified.

AGREEMENT FOR THE USE OF AUDIO TAPES *(to be used only if applicable)*

If you consent to participate in this study, please indicate whether you agree to be audio taped during the study by checking the appropriate box below. If you agree, please also indicate whether the audio tapes can be used for publication/presentations.

- I agree to be audio taped during the interview.
 - I agree that the audio tape(s) can be used in publication/presentations.
 - I do not agree that the audio tape(s) can be used in publication/presentations.
- I do not agree to be audio taped during the interview.

SUBJECT RIGHTS

1. I understand that informed consent is required of all persons participating in this project.
2. All procedures have been explained to me and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
3. Any risks and/or discomforts have been explained to me.
4. Any benefits have been explained to me.

5. I understand that, if I have any questions, I may contact Zelma Oyarvide at (713) 885-8377 and the faculty sponsor Amanda K. Baumle at (713) 743-3944.
6. I have been told that I may refuse to participate or to stop my participation in this project at any time before or during the project. I may also refuse to answer any question.
7. ANY QUESTIONS REGARDING MY RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT MAY BE ADDRESSED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS (713-743-9204). ALL RESEARCH PROJECTS THAT ARE CARRIED OUT BY INVESTIGATORS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON ARE GOVERNED BY REQUIREMENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.
8. All information that is obtained in connection with this project and that can be identified with me will remain confidential as far as possible within legal limits. Information gained from this study that can be identified with me may be released to no one other than the principal investigators. The results may be published in scientific journals, professional publications, or educational presentations without identifying me by name.

I HAVE READ (OR HAVE HAD READ TO ME) THE CONTENTS OF THIS CONSENT FORM AND HAVE BEEN ENCOURAGED TO ASK QUESTIONS. I HAVE RECEIVED ANSWERS TO MY QUESTIONS. I GIVE MY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY. I HAVE RECEIVED (OR WILL RECEIVE) A COPY OF THIS FORM FOR MY RECORDS AND FUTURE REFERENCE.

Study Subject (print name): _____

Signature of Study Subject: _____

Date: _____

I HAVE READ THIS FORM TO THE SUBJECT AND/OR THE SUBJECT HAS READ THIS FORM. AN EXPLANATION OF THE RESEARCH WAS GIVEN AND QUESTIONS FROM THE SUBJECT WERE SOLICITED AND ANSWERED TO THE SUBJECT'S SATISFACTION. IN MY JUDGMENT, THE SUBJECT HAS DEMONSTRATED COMPREHENSION OF THE INFORMATION.

Principal Investigator (print name and title): _____

Signature of Principal Investigator: _____

Date: _____

Appendix G
RESOURCES

HOUSTON

- LGBT Switchboard 24-Hour Helpline — **713-529-3211**
- Foundation for Family and Marriage Equality-www.familymarriageequality.org
- Lesbian Health Initiative of Houston-www.lhihouston.org
- Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays- www.pflaghouston.org

DALLAS

- Resource Center Dallas-www.rcdallas.org
- North Texas GLBT-glbtchamber.com
- Dallas Voice-dallasvoice.com
- The Dallas Way-thedallasway.org

SAN ANTONIO

- San Antonio LGBT-sagaychamber.com
- Q san Antonio-qsanantonio.com
- San Antonio Gay Community-glyp.com
- Pride Center SA-pridecentersa.com

AUSTIN

- Austin Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce-AGLCC
- PFLAG Austin-pflagaustin.org
- Austin Latino Lesbian Gay Organization-allgo.org
- Equality Texas-equalitytexas.org

NATIONAL

- Human Rights Campaign-hrc.org
- National GLBT national help line at **888-843-4564**.
- **Latino Justice-latinojustice.org**
- **National Center For Lesbian Rights-nclrights.org**

REFERENCES

- Allen, Katherine R. and David H. Demo. 1995. "The families of Lesbians and Gay Men: A New Frontier in Family Research." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 57(1):111-127.
- Asencio, Marysol. 2009. "Migrant Puerto Rican Lesbians Negotiating Gender, Sexuality, and Ethnonationality." *NWSA Journal* 21(3): 1-23.
- Berkowitz, Dana. 2009, "Theorizing Lesbian and Gay Parenting: Past, Present, and Future Scholarship." *Journal of Family Theory & Review* 1:117-132.
- Carbado, Devon W., 2013. "Colorblind Intersectionality: Theorizing Power, Emporing Theory." *Signs* 38(4): 811-845.
- Castillo, Debra A., Maria G. Gomez and Bonnie Delgado. 1999. "Border Lives: Prostitute Women in Tijuana." *Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 24(2): 387-422.
- Chae, David H. and George Ayala. 2010. "Sexual Orientation and sexual behavior among Latino and Asian Americans: Implications for Unfair Treatment and Psychological Distress." *Journal of Sex Research* 47(5): 451-459.
- Charmaz, K. (2001). Grounded theory. In R. M. Emerson (Ed.), *Contemporary field research: perspectives and formulations*, (pp. 335-52). Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland.
- Cianciotto, Jason. 2005. *Hispanic and Latino Same-Sex Couple Households in the United States: A Report from the 2000 Census*. New York: National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute and the National Latino/a Coalition for Justice.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (1990). Grounded theory research: Procedures, canons, and evaluative criteria. *Qualitative Sociology*, 13, 3-21.
- Dandridge, Rita B., 1985. "The Motherhood Myth: Black Women and Christianity in the Diety Nodded" *MELUS* 12(3): 13-22.

- Dunne, Gillian A., 2000. "Opting into Motherhood: Lesbian Blurring the Boundaries and Transforming the Meaning of Parenthood and Kinship." *Gender and Society* 14(1): 11-35.
- Ecklund, Elaine H. 2005. "Different Identity Accounts for Catholic Women." *Review of Religious Research* 47(2): 135-149.
- Foucault, Michel. 1980. *History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*. New York, NY: Vintage, 3-35
- Gagnon, John and William Simon. 1973. "The Social Origins of Sexual Development." Pp. 1-19 in *Sexual Conduct: The Social Sources of Human Sexuality*. New York, NY: Aldine de Gruyter. (Overview)
- Goldberg, Abbie E. 2012. *Gay Dads*. New York. New University Press.
- Greene, Beverly. 1994. "Ethnic-Minority Lesbians and Gay Men: Mental Health and Treatment Issues." *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 62(2): 243-251.
- Hadaway, Kirk C., Penny L. Marler and Mark Chaves. 1993. "What the Polls Don't Show: A Closer Look at the U.S. Church Attendance." *American Sociological Review* 58: 741-752.
- Hagan, Jacqueline and Helen R. Ebaugh. 2003. "Calling Upon the Sacred: Migrants' Use of Religion in the Migration Process." *International Migration Review* 37(4): 1145-1162.
- Hequembourg, Amy L. 2008. "Becoming Lesbian Mothers." *Journal of Homosexuality* 53(3):153-180.
- Hequembourg, Amy L. and Michael P. Farrell. 1999. "Lesbian Motherhood: Negotiating Marginal-Mainstream Identities." *Gender & Society* 13:540-557.
- Kim, Hyun-Jun and Karen I. Fredriksen-Goldsen. "Hispanic Lesbians and Bisexual

- Women at Heightened Risk or Health Disparities.” *American Journal of Public Health* 102(1): e9-e15.
- Kirby, Brenda J. and Christina Michaelson. 2008. “Educating about homosexuality: What do American Catholics think?” *Sex Education* 8(2): 225-235.
- Lefkowitz, Eva S., Meghan M. Gillen, Cindy L. Shearer and Tanya I. Boone. 2004. “Religiosity, Sexual Behaviors, and Sexual Attitudes during Emerging Adulthood.” *The Journal of Sex Research* 41(2): 150-159.
- Litton, Edmundo F. 2001. “Voices of Courage and Hope: Gay and Lesbian Catholic Elementary School Teachers.” *International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies* 6(3):193-205.
- Mahaffy, Kimberly A. 1996. “Cognitive Dissonance and Its Resolution: A study of Lesbian Christians.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 35(4): 392-402.
- Mann, Bonnie. 2007. “The Lesbian June Cleaver: Heterosexism and Lesbian Mothering.” *Hypatia* 22(1): 150-165.
- McQueeney, Krista. 2009. “We are God’s Children. Y’All: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Lesbian-and Gay Affirming Congregations.” *Social Problems* 56(1): 151-173.
- Moore, Mignon R. 2011. *Invisible Families*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Morales, Edward S. 1989. “Ethnic Minority Families and Minority Gays and Lesbians.” *Marriage and Family Review* 14(3): 217-239.
- Morris, Jessica F., Kimberly F. Balsam and Esther D. Rothblum. 2002. “Lesbian and Bisexual Mothers and Nonmothers: Demographics and the Coming-Out Process.” *Journal of Family Psychology* 16(2): 144-156.
- Parks, Cheryl A., Tonda L. Hughes and Alicia K. Matthews. 2004. “Race/Ethnicity and

- Sexual Orientation: Intersecting Identities.” *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 10(3): 241-254.
- Patton, M.Q. 2001. *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods* (2nd Edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Rincon, Maria and Brian Trung Lam. 2011. “The Perspectives of Latina Mothers on Latina Lesbian Families.” *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 21: 334-349.
- Roden, Frederick S. 2001. “Queer Christian: The Catholic Homosexual Apologia and Lesbian/Gay Practice.” *International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies* 6(4): 251-265.
- Romo-Carmona, Mariana. 1995. “Lesbian Latinas: Organizational efforts to End Oppression.” *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services* 3(2): 85-93.
- Sala, Arianna and Manuel L. De la Mata Benitez. 2009. “Developing Lesbian Identity: A Sociohistorical Approach.” *Journal of Homosexuality* 56: 819-838.
- Stacey, Judith and Timothy J. Biblarz. 2001. “(How) Does the Sexual Orientation of Parents Matter? *American Sociological Review* 66: 159-183.
- Tasker, Fiona and Charlotte J. Patterson. 2007. “Research on Gay and Lesbian Parenting” *Journal of GLBT Family Studies* 3:2-34.
- Whitley, Bernard E. 2009. “Religiosity and Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men: A Meta-Analysis.” *The international Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 19: 21-38.
- Wiederman, Michael. 2005. “The Gendered Nature of Sexual Scripts.” *The Family Journal* 13: 496-502.
- Wilcox, Melissa M. 2002. “When Sheila’s a Lesbian: Religious Individualism among

- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Christians.” *Sociology of Religion* 63(4): 497-513.
- Weisstein, Naomi. 2006. “An Introduction to the Hite Reports: Theory and Importance.” Pp.457-465 in *The Shere Hite Reader*, by Shere Hite. New York, NY: Seven Stories Press.
- Yip, Andrew K.T. 1997. “Dare to Differ: Gay and Lesbian Catholics’ Assessment of Official Positions on Sexuality.” *Sociology of Religion* 58(2): 165-180.
- Zea, Maria Cecilia, Carol A. Reisen and Paul J. Poppen. 1999. “Psychological Well-Being Among Latino Lesbians and Gay Men.” *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 5(4): 371-379.