

## **Better Gay than Dead: Positive Identity in Latino Gay Males**

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The literature suggests that developing a positive gay identity is a difficult task to accomplish, as there are many barriers along the way. Being a gay male in a Latin American ‘machista’ culture remains relatively unexplored. As such, research regarding the interrelation of various identities such as sexual orientation and Latino culture in Canadian society remains unknown. The purpose of this research is three-fold: a) to provide knowledge of experiences to inform the development of emerging counselling interventions regarding ethnic and sexual minority populations, b) to investigate the lived experiences, narratives, and perceptions of gay Latino young adult males, and c) to qualitatively contribute voices to the literature.

Researchers suggest that narration has become a primary embodiment of our understanding of the world, of experience, and ultimately of ourselves as it appears to yield a form of understanding of the human experience, both individual and collective, that is not directly amenable to other forms of exposition or analysis. Furthermore, it is generally acknowledged that our understanding of other cultures and persons is primarily gained from, and in the form of, narratives and stories about and by those people. As such, the data for this narrative inquiry was collected through audio-recorded, semi-structured interviews of three Latino young adult gay males living in Canadian cities. Participants are foreign-born and each indicated having a positive gay identity, which can be defined as: being fully out to his family and friends; as being able to deal and cope with homophobia well; and with seeing himself in a positive manner more often than not. The interview questions were designed to consider each participant’s life through various stages, including feeling different, coming out, and establishing a positive identity.

Through these conversations, a synthesis of the literature is presented where gender, socialization or socially sanctioned roles, and patriarchy set the foundation for understanding how males must meet the “male standard” by other men, not just women. In Latin American societies, it appears that there is a belief that male dominant behaviour and social scripts are for the benefit of women, which feeds directly into the assumption that heterosexuality is the preferred sexual orientation. Critical issues emerged regarding family views on homosexuality, the developmental identity formation of adolescence, peer acceptance, education, role models, victimization/bullying, medical concerns, and mental health issues. In particular, an examination of the “Latino Lover” or Latino male stereotypes, as well as religious expectations and adherence, give context as to why it is important to understand this unique population. By considering Collins & Arthur’s (2010) multicultural counselling competencies, links between one’s own cultural awareness and sexual orientation are explored.