



*Coming Out*

**LIVING AUTHENTICALLY**

as **LGBTQ Latinx Americans**



**To access this resource online  
and in Spanish, please visit:**

**Para ver este recurso en español  
y en línea, por favor visite:**

**[hrc.im/LatinxComingOut](http://hrc.im/LatinxComingOut)**

<b>5</b>	<b>Introduction</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>Coming Out for Latinx Americans</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>Coming Out to Family</b>
<b>17</b>	<b>Reactions Family Members May Have</b>
<b>20</b>	<b>Supporting Family Members in Their Process</b>
<b>25</b>	<b>LGBTQ Latinx Immigrants</b>
<b>31</b>	<b>Undocumented LGBTQ Immigrants</b>
<b>35</b>	<b>Living in a Bicultural World</b>
<b>41</b>	<b>Reconciling Religion &amp; Faith</b>
<b>45</b>	<b>Other Coming Out Considerations</b>
<b>51</b>	<b>At the Intersections of Race and the LGBTQ Community</b>
<b>53</b>	<b>LGBTQ Latinx History and Culture</b>
<b>56</b>	<b>LGBTQ Progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century</b>
<b>59</b>	<b>Contemporary LGBTQ Latinx American Leaders</b>
<b>61</b>	<b>LGBTQ Stories in Film and Television</b>
<b>64</b>	<b>Additional Resources</b>
<b>66</b>	<b>Acknowledgments</b>



# Introduction



No matter who we are  
or whom we love, we all  
deserve the right to live  
out our lives genuinely,  
completely and honestly.

**COMING  
OUT IS A  
PERSONAL  
CHOICE**



Our race, ethnicity, language, religion, cultural dress, sexual orientation or gender identity should never be barriers to us living our full lives. For lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people, coming out as our true selves is often a significant part of reclaiming this right and living authentically.

**Coming out is a personal choice, and the lifelong coming out experience is different for everyone.** For those of us who identify as LGBTQ and as Latinx Americans, the coming out process can be even more complex to navigate. Often, it requires a unique approach that can cut across multiple languages, cultures, nationalities, religious identities and family generations.

### **A note on the use of Latinx**

Throughout this document, we use **Latinx** as a gender-inclusive term to refer to those who hold Latin American and/or Hispanic cultural or racial identities, including Latinos and Latinas but also individuals with non-binary or gender-expansive identities.

This resource is designed for those who may be embarking on their own coming out journey at the intersections of LGBTQ and Latinx identities. We hope that it can provide you with ideas and advice during this process. This resource and its [accompanying Spanish-language translation](#) can also be shared among your close family and friends, some of whom may still be learning how they can best support you during your journey.

Before coming out, it is important to create a safe space for yourself and evaluate your unique circumstances. Look for supportive people you can turn to during times of need, especially if you believe you may face disapproval or rejection from your family, friends or community. Depending on your individual situation, pick a place and time to come out that makes you feel the most comfortable and safe.

In too many places, LGBTQ people who live openly can face discrimination and even violence. If you fear this mistreatment, it is important to remember that there is nothing wrong with you.

**The problem is not you, but rather the prejudice and discrimination that many of us learn from our society and cultures.**

Stay patient, persistent and positive. Throughout your journey, seek out resources and support from those who affirm your identity.

## **Remember, you are not alone:**

**Across the United States and Latin America, the strong community of LGBTQ Latinxs, family members and allies supports you and loves you exactly as you are.**

**Both in United States and abroad, countless LGBTQ Latinxs live proudly and openly, with myriad contributions in social justice, government, sports, the arts and entertainment.**

We hope that the stories of courage shared in this resource can inspire you and provide strength and perseverance should you face roadblocks during your journey. Refer to our special section on [LGBTQ Latinx History and Culture](#) to learn more about our community's proud heritage.

# Coming Out for Latinx Americans



Although Latinx Americans come from various cultural and ethnic backgrounds, those of us who come out as LGBTQ often share similar experiences and challenges.



Some who were raised in religious communities must reconcile themselves with traditions and teachings that may condemn or reject LGBTQ identities. Others, especially immigrants or those raised in immigrant families, must grapple with multicultural identities and experiences. Language and cultural differences with loved ones can make it difficult to convey LGBTQ identities or access resources. Meanwhile, a lack of LGBTQ Latinx representation in media, entertainment and politics perpetuates invisibility.

**Many LGBTQ people report that after coming out, they are able to better communicate with their family and friends, leading to stronger relationships and greater mutual understanding.**

Although there is no singular LGBTQ Latinx experience, the following sections discuss common issues that arise during the coming out process for those in our community.

**“During those days, I learned so much about my mother and the true meaning of unconditional love. ‘Boy, girl, it doesn’t matter at the end of the day. I birthed you and I’m going to love you, no matter what,’ she affirmed. Thousands of thoughts and emotions would flood my mind in those days. We often forget that just how we have a journey to self-acceptance, our friends and family also have a journey to take. Theirs is also one that can often be filled with many fears and worries. Through this journey, Mami and I have been able to develop a deeper love and understanding for one another. Today, my mother is a fierce advocate for the LGBTQ community, not despite her faith pero because of it.”**

– Transgender advocate **Joanna Maria Cifredo**, recounting her own story of familial acceptance after transitioning

# Coming Out to Family



Coming out to family is difficult for many LGBTQ people, but it can pose additional challenges for those with Latinx heritage.

**Approximately one in three Latinx Americans is an immigrant**, and many Latinx youth grow up feeling indebted to parents or other family members who have made sacrifices to ensure later generations can have brighter futures and greater access to opportunities. Meanwhile, the Latinx concept of *familismo*, which involves dedication, commitment and strong loyalty to family, can put further pressure on Latinxs to fulfill the hopes and dreams their families have for them – which may seem to exclude LGBTQ identities.

The initial coming out announcement can be uncomfortable and even scary for all parties involved. Before bringing this news to relatives more widely, you may consider identifying a trusted family member to help you navigate these difficult conversations. Though many non-Latinx LGBTQ people first come out to only one or two family members at a time, the closeness of many typical Latinx families can make sensitive news more difficult to contain.

Though LGBTQ acceptance and legal recognition have seen encouraging developments throughout Central and South America, LGBTQ people still face stigma, discrimination and even violence in many countries and cultures. Regardless of your own personal circumstances, **it's important to know that your LGBTQ identity should not be a cause of shame or pain. Pain comes from the prejudices around you, not from who you are or whom you love.**

**“I shudder to think of where my sons might be today if I hadn’t realized that I had to change ... to let go of the internalized homophobia that I was prisoner of for almost three decades because of my Mexican-American, Catholic upbringing. By learning to accept my sons, I eventually came to accept myself. Despite all that is wrong in this country and in this world, I am absolutely happy and am ready to stand up to any so-called religious task force.”**

– **Roland Gutierrez**, a Tejano, veteran, activist, singer, Nichiren Buddhist and proud gay father of 24-year-old LGBTQ triplet sons



# Reactions Family Members May Have



Some family members may embrace the news immediately, while others may require time to work through concerns or fears they have regarding the unfamiliar or unknown.

**Unfortunately, the absence of comprehensive education and exposure to LGBTQ people may lead some family members to mistakenly believe that being LGBTQ is a choice, preference or temporary phase.** This process can be especially challenging for immigrant parents who were raised in places where information about LGBTQ identities was less widely available. It can be further exacerbated by language barriers that make it challenging to directly translate LGBTQ terminology or make it impossible to find equivalent words to describe LGBTQ identities and experiences.

Finally, another common reaction that family members may have is fear. They may be afraid that you will suffer and be mistreated as a result of your LGBTQ identity. In these instances, remind your family members that supporting you and providing a safe haven is the greatest gift they can give in the face of prejudice and challenges.

**When evaluating if, when or how to come out to your family members, consider the full range of reactions that could arise from your LGBTQ identity being disclosed, especially if you are financially dependent on any of them.**

**Your safety and security always come first.**

## **Some facts:**

---

**Parents cannot and do not “turn” their children LGBTQ because of some parenting mistake. Parents and their LGBTQ child have done nothing wrong; in fact, there is nothing wrong.**

---

**There are no known environmental factors that “cause” a person to be LGBTQ.**

---

**LGBTQ people generally do not choose their sexual orientation or gender identity. Many LGBTQ people become aware that they are different at an early age.**

---

**The vast majority of LGBTQ people go on to live successful, happy and healthy lives – especially when they are embraced for who they are and whom they love.**

# Supporting Family Members in Their Process



Recognize that just as you are on a coming out journey, your family members are taking their own journey as well.

**“When I came out as a transgender woman, my father felt I was going against his religion, *machismo* and family legacy, so he disowned me for five years. Eventually, my older sisters told my father that they would no longer attend Christmas gatherings if I wasn’t invited. They used the idea of *familismo* to unite the family again, reminding my dad that family means nobody should get left behind. ”**

– Laya Monarez, DC trans artist and LGBTQ activist



You can help loved ones through this process by directing them to [resources](#) available to educate parents and other family members about LGBTQ identities, including sources that help with overcoming myths and misconceptions.

Some LGBTQ Latinx organizations have found that making a connection to *familismo* is an effective way to build acceptance among family members. “Being honest with your family is an important step in getting all parts of your life to fit together, but it’s also very important to give them time to process the information,” says Nila Marrone, a Bolivian American professor and LGBTQ ally.

Many LGBTQ Latinx Americans, whether first generation or beyond, find it necessary to explain to family members that their LGBTQ identity does not mean that the sacrifices made by previous generations were wasted. Rather, it’s important to thoroughly explain how living authentically can help you reach the “American dream” – and it is intertwined with your happiness and success as an individual. Help them understand how living openly will help you reach your own personal and professional goals.

During this sensitive time, stay strong and acknowledge their feelings. But also remember to honor and assert your own feelings. Over time, it is quite common for individuals to move from feelings of disappointment and confusion, to simple tolerance, to understanding and finally to acceptance.

**Many Latinx parents move beyond acceptance to fully embrace and celebrate their LGBTQ children, both in public and private.**

---

## The Coming Out Continuum



**“When I was 24, I was set up with my partner of 20 years. Through his encouragement, I came out to my parents seven months later, which was a complete catastrophe. By the way that my father wailed you would have thought that someone had died. And, perhaps from his perspective, that was the case. Still, I was shocked at how the majority of non-immediate family – including the Mexican-American, devout Roman Catholic relatives – were accepting and welcoming.**

**I easily went over five years without stepping foot in my parents’ home. I will be the first to admit that I was not the best partner, son or brother throughout all of this. Unfortunately, there is not a manual that comes with handling family drama post coming out.**

**My mom passed away many years later, and she and I never had the opportunity to clear the air about me being gay. My partner did come to my mom’s funeral, and to the shock of everyone, my father hugged him at the cemetery. After all these years, we now regularly visit my father and check in with him.”**

**– Rene Garcia, Houston, TX**

# **LGBTQ Latinx Immigrants**



The immigrant experience is intricately tied to the lived experiences of many LGBTQ Latinx Americans.

Approximately

# 60 million Latinxs

live in the United States.

Roughly

**1 in 3**  
is foreign born.

**11.3 million**  
are undocumented.

There are more than  
**1 million**  
**LGBTQ immigrants**  
**in the U.S.,**

including 190,000 who are LGBTQ Latinx undocumented immigrants.<sup>1</sup>

Of them, approximately **75,000** are LGBTQ DREAMers, including **36,000** who have participated in the **Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program**, created by the Obama administration to allow DREAMers to stay in the United States to complete their studies, work and continue contributing to American society. **Approximately nine in 10 DACA recipients were born in Latin America**, and the program has provided both greater economic security and educational opportunities.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law.

## **All LGBTQ immigrants seek the opportunity to better their lives in the United States, to be safe from discrimination and to be free to live their full lives as LGBTQ people.**

Many LGBTQ Latinx immigrants come from countries that may be less accepting or even intolerant of LGBTQ people. In some countries, LGBTQ identities are still criminalized. In too many places, LGBTQ people are censored, jailed, tortured and even put to death. Other immigrants come from places where LGBTQ people lack relationship recognition or face other forms of government-sanctioned discrimination.

Unfortunately, the Trump-Pence administration's inflammatory rhetoric, rescission of DACA in September 2017 and other anti-immigrant actions attack the well-being and dignity of thousands of LGBTQ immigrants, regardless of their immigration status or country of birth. During these difficult times, remember that **no one can make you any less American, Latinx, LGBTQ or any other identity you may hold. More importantly, no one can ever make you any less deserving of love and respect.** We support you and love you, and there are millions of Latinx Americans and our allies who will continue fighting with you in these trying times.

## **For LGBTQ Latinx immigrants in the United States:**

**Coming out as LGBTQ does not affect one's chances of facing deportation or visa revocation.**

---

**It may be possible to obtain political asylum if LGBTQ people are persecuted in a person's country of origin (consult with an attorney).**

---

**LGBTQ immigrants, whether undocumented or documented, who fall in love with American citizens can legally marry, and U.S. citizens can petition for their spouses to remain in the U.S. and become citizens themselves (consult with an attorney).**



# Undocumented LGBTQ Immigrants



While every story is different, many undocumented LGBTQ immigrants have spoken out about their shared experiences.

Some have identified and reclaimed their dual identities as “undocuqueer,” which expresses how both of these intersecting identities are equally important to who they are. Especially in today’s fraught political environment, living with these identities can mean dealing with an uneven landscape of social acceptance and political control over decisions within your daily life.

**“As immigrants, we all have different journeys. This is our home. We must recognize the human component of all of this. We are here to stay and fight to achieve our dreams. All we ask is to live a normal life, where we can prosper and succeed beyond the barriers of legal status, race, sexual orientation, gender identity and any other issues that divide us as a country. We must do what is right and move forward together. Rescinding DACA is not the way to do so.”**

– **Sheridan Aguirre**, a queer DREAMer who grew up in Texas, on the Trump-Pence administration's rescission of the DACA program

Despite the added pressures undocumented people may face in the coming out process, many find that living authentically allows them to lead fuller, happier lives. However, only you can determine your own level of safety and comfort when it comes to disclosing your LGBTQ identity.

Unfortunately, the risk of deportation for undocumented people may be particularly dangerous for those who could be sent to countries that are hostile or discriminatory toward LGBTQ people.

**As you weigh your own personal circumstances, you may wish to seek community and support from others who have been or are going through similar experiences:**

- [Immigrant Legal Resource Center: LGBT Immigrant Rights](#)
- [Immigration Equality\\*](#)
- [Informed Immigrant\\*](#)
- [LGBTQ Freedom and Asylum Network](#)
- [Mariposas Sin Fronteras\\*](#)
- [National Immigrant Justice Center: Legal Services for LGBTQ Immigrants\\*](#)
- [Oasis Legal Services\\*](#)
- [Queer Detainee Empowerment Project \(QDEP\)](#)
- [United We Dream: Queer Undocumented Immigrant Project \(QUIP\)](#)

\*En Español



# Living in a Bicultural World



Like many Latinx Americans, especially those who are immigrants or the children of immigrants, you may feel like you are living in a bicultural world, grappling with the norms and expectations of both American and Latinx cultures.

Determining when, if and how to work through these overlapping realities – especially if they conflict – may first require identifying what is important to you personally. Indeed, the role your LGBTQ identity plays in relation to your Latinx identity may vary depending on the context and your current situation.

For instance, some individuals may grapple with reconciling their own gender identity or expression with the Latinx value of *machismo*, which dictates strict gender roles for men and women, often without any room for other gender identities or expression. When we as a culture enforce these beliefs, we legitimize whatever abuses, whether physical or emotional, occur against the LGBTQ community and everyone else who falls short of the expectations of *machismo*.

It's important to remember that how you live should not be limited or hindered by others' beliefs about how you "should" or "should not" behave based on your gender identity or sexual orientation. Depending on your situation, this may be difficult to manage if such beliefs are reinforced by your family, peers or community. However, you will likely find that it gets easier to navigate these interactions over time, especially as you gain a greater sense of self and better understand what values are truly important to you.

**Another aspect of biculturalism often means speaking multiple languages and engaging in cross-cultural communication.**

It is already difficult for many people to express their sexual orientation or gender identity in their native language, especially when they are first coming out. Conveying these complex feelings and emotions across language or cultural barriers can be even more challenging, especially for Latinx youth who speak a primary language different from their parents. Moreover, in some languages, effective translations for LGBTQ terminology and concepts may not exist.

**A note on terminology**

Although *gay* has the same meaning in Spanish as in English, the word *lesbiana* is still fraught with negative connotations. Many Latinx women who love women, however, now purposely use the word to reclaim it from those who would use it against them – similar to how queer people in English-speaking countries are reclaiming that word for themselves. Some terms including *queer* and *genderqueer* do not have direct translations.

Other words describing LGBTQ people in one language may be deemed offensive when directly translated to the other, including several terms proudly used among Spanish-speaking transgender and gender-expansive communities. Ultimately, it is up to you to decide how you choose to describe your own identities in any language or context.

## **When confronted with bicultural or bilingual challenges, you might consider the following suggestions:**

**Seek out LGBTQ-affirming resources specific to your native language or the language of your family members.**

---

**Get assistance from supportive loved ones who can help translate or facilitate difficult conversations across languages.**

---

**Look for LGBTQ-affirming stories and media specific to your native language or country of heritage or origin; international and culturally specific movies, TV shows, online videos and other media featuring LGBTQ people are increasingly accessible in the digital era.**

---

**Read the stories of LGBTQ Latinx people and other LGBTQ people of color who learned how to navigate their own bicultural identities.**

---

**Find community with others of a similar background who are also LGBTQ or allies through in-person support groups, organizations like the ones listed in the end of this resource and online communities.**

**“The fact that I’m queer seemed to have been conveyed without my using any words to describe my orientation. I’ve spent every summer in Mexico with my mom’s family since I was born, and one summer I took my partner with me for the first time. My aunt made it a point to take me aside and tell me that my partner seemed very nice. She never said the words, but didn’t need them to show me her acceptance.”**

– **Sandra Telep**, Mexican American, activist and parent of two



Just as there is no singular American or Latinx experience, there is no single way to live out your own ethnic or racial identity. Especially in the absence of prominent LGBTQ figures in Latin America, it can sometimes feel like your LGBTQ identity is not compatible with your Latinx identity. Even within LGBTQ Latinx communities, there is much work to be done to embrace the wide diversity of Latinx people, including addressing the colorism that impacts Afro-Latinx individuals and indigenous people.

Above all, know that there is no specific Latinx “mold” you have to fit, even as you may feel pressure from your family or community. Being LGBTQ does not make you any “less” Latinx or any other national heritage or ethnic or racial identity you may hold.

**Your *Latinidad* cannot be earned or diminished – it will always be part of you, no matter what language you speak, who you are or whom you love.**

# Reconciling Religion & Faith



Around the world, more and more faith traditions are openly embracing LGBTQ people both in places of worship and in the larger community.

**Religion plays an important role for many Latinx Americans,** with over 70 percent attending religious services regularly.<sup>2</sup> This includes the 57 percent of adult Latinxs who identify as Catholic,<sup>3</sup> but also many others who identify with Evangelical, Protestant, Mormon, Jewish or other religious traditions that have varying levels of LGBTQ acceptance and affirmation both in the United States and abroad.

Sometimes, it may feel difficult to reconcile your religious beliefs or those of your family with your LGBTQ identity. However, millions of LGBTQ people are people of faith, including many who are learning to bridge their own identities with the religious traditions of their families and communities.

**Many religious communities and denominations that were once non-affirming now recognize that embracing LGBTQ people is in line with the strong religious and spiritual values of compassion, love and the commitment to treat others how they would like to be treated.**

Today, countless congregations openly welcome and affirm their LGBTQ members, including blessing their weddings and welcoming their full participation in worship and religious activities.

---

<sup>2</sup> Pew Research Center.

<sup>3</sup> The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, Georgetown University.

## A Shift in Doctrine

Across the United States, there is a growing acceptance of the LGBTQ community in Latinx Catholic communities. Statements from Pope Francis regarding the church's view on LGBTQ people have provoked ongoing discussion around the world and signal a potential shift in doctrine. In 2017, 67 percent of Latinx Catholics supported same-sex marriage, a figure that has continued to grow as LGBTQ people gain increasing acceptance nationwide.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Pew Research Center.

Just like any group of people, religious communities vary greatly in their attitudes and level of inclusion of LGBTQ people, even within the same denomination or sect. Moreover, the number of LGBTQ-affirming religious communities across the country is steadily increasing, and that is true among Latinx religious communities as well.

**Remember, only you can decide the degree to which faith plays a role in your life and how you choose to integrate it with living an authentic life.**

However, it is important to recognize despite your ability to reconcile your faith and LGBTQ identity, your family may have difficulty accepting your sexual orientation or gender identity because of their own religious beliefs or traditions.

## **As you approach this topic individually or come out to your family and friends of faith, consider the following suggestions:**

Identify supportive and allied members in your existing religious community who may be able to provide assistance should you decide to come out.

---

Read the stories or writings of other LGBTQ Latinx people and allies from your same denomination or ethnic heritage to learn from their faith journeys.

---

Explore LGBTQ-affirming places of worship and congregations.

---

Seek support from LGBTQ Latinx religious organizations that may be able to direct you to others who have had similar experiences.

**For more information on this topic, please refer to [HRC's Religion & Faith resources](#), including our bilingual project [A La Familia](#).**

# **Other Coming Out Considerations**



**Coming Out at School**

**Coming Out at Work**

**Being an Ally**

# Coming Out at School

**Coming out at school can be a significant decision for many young people**, especially in communities or on campuses where LGBTQ people are not yet fully embraced. At the same time, many school districts, colleges and universities actively and openly support their LGBTQ students, faculty and staff.

## **Before deciding to come out at school, you may first consider:**

- Does your city, state, school district or university have non-discrimination and anti-bullying policies to protect LGBTQ students, faculty and staff?
- If you are not fully out in your community or to your family, can your physical safety and privacy be guaranteed if you are out at school? For some college students who rely on their parents for financial support, you may need to carefully weigh your specific circumstances when coming out.
- Can you seek out classmates, teachers, counselors and other adults at school whom you can trust and go to for support during your coming out process?
- Does your school have a dedicated safe space or LGBTQ-affirming organizations, including a Queer Straight Alliance, LGBTQ resource center or LGBTQ Latinx organizations?

For more information about this topic, please refer to Lamda Legal's [\*Know Your Rights\*](#) for LGBTQ teens and young adults in school.

# Coming Out at Work

**Just as in other facets of life, being open at work can be a daunting challenge.** No one wants to put their job security or opportunity for advancement in jeopardy. However, coming out can also relieve the daily stress of hiding who you are, making you more productive and comfortable at work.

**Before choosing to come out at work, you may first consider:**

- Does your employer have a formal non-discrimination policy that specifically covers sexual orientation, gender identity and/or gender expression? Check the official Equal Employment Opportunity statement (usually found on company websites and in employee handbooks).
- Does your state or locality have a non-discrimination law including sexual orientation, gender identity and/or gender expression?
- Is your company ranked on the HRC *Corporate Equality Index*? If so, what rating has it earned?
- Are your employer's health benefits fully LGBTQ-inclusive, including covering transition-related health care and domestic partner benefits?
- Does your employer have an LGBTQ employee network or resource group? If so, this may be a good place to get support.
- What is the overall climate in your workplace, including whether other LGBTQ people are out in the office and whether co-workers make derogatory or supportive comments about LGBTQ people?

For more information about this topic, please refer to HRC's *Coming Out at Work* and *Workplace Equality* resources.



## Being an Ally

If you have a friend, family member or co-worker who is coming out, you can help them by being a supportive ally. **However, be aware that they are the only person who can make the decision about how and when to come out about their LGBTQ identity.**

You can help by researching and sharing culturally competent, linguistically appropriate resources, making introductions to others who are LGBTQ and allies and speaking up when others make anti-LGBTQ jokes and gender assumptions. You can be an advocate for LGBTQ equality and fairness. You can speak out, share information and educate others, especially those for whom LGBTQ identities may be unfamiliar. We must all work together to build a better world that embraces diversity and personal freedom. To learn more about how you can get involved, visit HRC's [ally](#) resources.

**“Rigo is still my baby – he may be almost 30 years old, but that’s how I see him! So I like to speak out about this issue, because what I want is for every child or every adult who goes through this transition to know that there is a cushion there, or a support system. What makes our family so very proud of Rigo is that he’s so happy living an authentic life, being honest about who he is – and it brings a lot of joy in our lives.”**

– **Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen** (R-FL), sharing her family’s experience embracing her transgender son Rodrigo. In 1989, Ros-Lehtinen became the first Cuban American and first Latina elected to Congress.



# **At the Intersections of Race and the LGBTQ Community**



Racial discrimination continues to be a pervasive issue in our society, and LGBTQ people of color often must face heightened challenges in many facets of daily life.

Unfortunately, just as it is in any community, the LGBTQ community is not untouched by racism and other forms of discrimination — and as you seek love and acceptance, there may be times where you have to confront that reality.

As you choose to come out and live authentically in your own way, you may find it helpful to surround yourself with others who recognize and affirm who you are — including both your Latinx and LGBTQ identities. Many LGBTQ people, including those who may not find full support among our families or communities of heritage, find love and support from “chosen family” who fully embrace us for who we are.

## **Most importantly, know that you are not alone.**

Far beyond the proud community of LGBTQ Latinx Americans, there are many who stand with you and who will accept you for who you are.

# **LGBTQ Latinx History and Culture**



A Historical Appreciation  
of Sexual and Gender  
Diversity in Latin America



LGBTQ Latinx heritage and can be traced back to pre-Columbian times. Many indigenous cultures in the Americas have long had traditions of two-spirit people, or those sometimes considered to be a third gender or otherwise gender-expansive.

In **Mexico**, the Zapote people have a long history of recognizing *muxe* people, young people assigned male at birth who embrace identities as women or non-binary people. Muxe individuals are often celebrated as cornerstones of the community, especially in rural areas in the state of Oaxaca.

Same-sex relations are well documented in the **Maya** civilization, encompassing what today includes portions of Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras and El Salvador, especially in rituals and other ceremonies.

In **Peru**, archaeological discoveries of several erotic ceramics led scholars to study the role of sexuality in the Moche community, a pre-Inca civilization. In addition, Spanish missionaries noted that same-sex relationships were “widely accepted in several regions of the country” among indigenous communities.

# LGBTQ Progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century



LGBTQ equality has seen encouraging momentum in recent years in Latin America, led by the courage and persistence of local activists and allies, even in many countries where LGBTQ people are still ostracized or persecuted.

## In some countries, LGBTQ rights and acceptance have progressed even further, or more quickly, than in the United States.

### Several Latin American countries have ushered in marriage equality in the last decade:

- Argentina (2010)
- Brazil (2013)
- Uruguay (2013)
- Mexico (2015; with additional steps required of same-sex couples in several states)
- Colombia (2016)

A January 2018 [advisory opinion](#) issued to Costa Rica by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights states that same-sex couples are legally entitled to civil marriages and that member states must make the process of changing gender markers on state-issued identification streamlined, inexpensive and simple. While the opinion is not legally binding, all 33 member states in the Americas are required to abide by the American Convention.

The World Health Organization has called Argentina “an exemplary country,” especially in regards to transgender equality. In 2012, the country passed the *Ley de Género* (Gender Law) which ensures coverage for transition-related health care under private and public health care plans. Under the law, Argentina also became the first country in the world to protect the rights of transgender and gender-expansive people to change their gender identity, name or image on official documents without the approval of a judge or doctor.

# Dozens of elected officials and other leaders provide hope and strength for LGBTQ communities in Latin American countries, including:



# **Contemporary LGBTQ Latinx American Leaders**



Today, we celebrate the myriad of stories and contributions of LGBTQ Latinx Americans who continue to provide leadership, visibility and pride to our diverse community.

In 1989, three-term Madison Common Council alderperson **Ricardo Gonzalez** became the nation's first openly gay Latino elected official. In Puerto Rico, Justice **Maite Oronoz Rodríguez**, the fifth woman to serve on Puerto Rico's Supreme Court, also became the first openly LGBTQ chief justice in U.S. history when she assumed that position in 2016. **Mary Edna González** became the nation's first openly pansexual lawmaker when she was elected to the Texas House of Representatives in 2012. Similarly, **Carlos Guillermo Smith** became Florida's first openly gay Latino state lawmaker in 2016. **Nitza Quiñones Alejandro** became the first openly gay Latina to become a federal judge in 2013. In 2005, openly lesbian former Dallas County Sheriff **Lupe Valdez** became the only Latina sheriff in the country. Valdez, an Army veteran, also became Texas's first Latina and first openly LGBTQ nominee for governor when she won the Democratic primary in May 2018.

In local communities and across the nation, we celebrate the work of advocates like **Arturo Vargas, Bamby Salcedo, José Gutiérrez, Ruben Gonzales, Anthony Romero, Jorge Gutierrez, Isa Noyola, Ezak Perez, Ruby Corado, Drago Renteria, Jennicet Gutierrez** and **Diego Sanchez**, who have challenged us to question the bias, discrimination and prejudice that disproportionately affect LGBTQ people of color in America.

We also look to artists and writers like **Frida Kahlo, Alex Sanchez, Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, Rose Troche, Denice Frohman, Julio Salgado** and **Ricky Martin**, who have shared their stories and intersectional perspectives through their work. Meanwhile, U.S. and international athletes like **Orlando Cruz, Rudy Galindo, Bianca Sierra** and **Stephany Mayor** have broken boundaries in the fight for equality both inside and outside the sports arena.

# **LGBTQ Stories in Film and Television**



Although LGBTQ Latinx Americans are often underrepresented in mass media and entertainment, trailblazing artists continue to pave the way to share our stories.

**“I’m always going to support the LGBTQ community and equal rights for the LGBTQ community. That’s going to be with me till the day I die and beyond.”**

– Artist and bisexual activist **Sara Ramirez**

Celebrities including **Michelle Rodriguez, Sara Ramirez, Mark Indelicato, Stephanie Beatriz, Demi Lovato, Emily Rios, Wilson Cruz** and **Natalie Morales** live openly and authentically, inspiring others to live their truth and serving as role models for Latinx youth. Meanwhile, LGBTQ cinema and television are on the rise in Latin America and other Spanish-speaking areas of the world, bolstered by the wider accessibility provided by digital platforms.

In 1993, *Strawberry and Chocolate* became the first Cuban picture to be nominated for the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. Alfonso Cuarón's *Y Tu Mamá También* was nominated for Best Original Screenplay at the Academy Awards and Best Foreign Language Film at the Golden Globe Awards in 2003. In 2016, openly gay filmmaker Dante Alencastre's documentary *Raising Zoey* followed the story of HRC Youth Ambassador **Zoey Luna** and her family as she fought for her right to self-identify in school. Chile's *A Fantastic Woman*, featuring openly transgender actress **Daniela Vega**, received international acclaim and won the 2017 Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film.

In the past decade, more and more television shows are featuring LGBTQ Latinx characters and storylines. In 2009, *Grey's Anatomy* debuted network television's longest-running relationship between a same-sex couple that included bisexual Latina Callie Torres. On *Ugly Betty*, openly gay writer and producer Silvio Horta introduced America to Justin Suarez. In 2017, the reboot of *One Day at a Time* followed the coming out story of Latina lesbian teenager Elena Alvarez. Set in East Los Angeles, the 2018 series *Vida* provides an intersectional lens on LGBTQ Latinx culture across class, race, culture, sexuality and generations.

Other prominent LGBTQ Latinx stories in media include *My So-Called Life's* Enrique Vasquez, *The Office's* Oscar Martinez, *Broad City's* Jaime Castro, *Glee's* Santana Lopez, *Jane the Virgin's* Dr. Luisa Alver, *Brooklyn 99's* Rosa Diaz, *Looking* characters Agustín Lanuez and Richie Ventura, *Sense8's* Hernando, *True Blood's* Jesús Velásquez, *Telenovela's* Gael Garnica, and reality TV stars Carmen Carrera, Mondo Guerra and Valentina, among others.

# Additional Resources

---

Educate yourself and others.  
Support and resources are readily available.

---

## Northern California

---

### AGUILAS\*

San Francisco

---

### Brown Boi Project

East Bay

---

### El/La Para TransLatinas\*

San Francisco

---

### Somos Familia\*

San Francisco

---

### Colectivo Acción Latina de

#### Ambiente\*

San Jose

---

## Southern California

---

### Bienestar\*

Los Angeles

---

### Latino Equality Alliance\*

Los Angeles

---

### TransLatin@ Coalition

Los Angeles

---

### San Diego LGBT Community Center:

#### Latin@ Services\*

San Diego

---

### Somos Familia Valle\*

San Fernando Valley

---

## West

---

### Entre Hermanos\*

Seattle, Washington

---

### Mariposas Sin Fronteras\*

Tucson, Arizona

---

## Texas

---

### aligo

Austin

---

### LULAC Dallas Rainbow Council #4871

Dallas

---

### Fundacion Latino Americana de Accion Social\*

Houston

---

### LULAC 22198: Orgullo de San Antonio

San Antonio

---

## Midwest

---

### Association of Latinos/as Motivating Action

Chicago, Illinois

---

### UnitedLatinxPride

Chicago, Illinois

---

## Northeast

---

[Hispanic Black Gay Coalition](#)  
Boston, Massachusetts

---

[Audre Lorde Project](#)  
New York City

---

[GLOBE, The LGBTQ Justice Project of Make the Road New York](#)  
New York City

---

[Latino Pride Center](#)  
New York City

---

[TransLatina Network](#)  
New York City

---

[Galaei](#)  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

---

## Metro DC Area

---

[Casa Ruby\\*](#)

---

[Center Latinx at the DC Center\\*](#)

---

[La Clínica del Pueblo / ¡Empodérate!\\*](#)

---

[Latino GLBT History Project](#)

---

## South

---

[Latino LinQ\\*](#)  
Atlanta, Georgia

---

[Charlotte Latin Pride](#)  
Charlotte, North Carolina

---

[QLatinx](#)  
Orlando, Florida

---

## Puerto Rico

---

[Centro Comunitario LGBTT de Puerto Rico](#)

---

[La Alianza Ciudadana en Pro de la Salud Lesbiana, Gay, Bisexual, Transgénero, Transexual y sus Aliados \(ACPS-LGBTTA\)\\*](#)

---

## National

---

[Familia Es Familia](#)

---

[Familia: Trans Queer Liberation Movement](#)

---

[Immigration Equality\\*](#)

---

[Latin American Center on Sexuality and Human Rights \(CLAM\)\\*](#)

---

[Latino Commission on AIDS\\*](#)

---

[The Gran Varones](#)

---

[The Wall-Las Memorias Project](#)

---

[TransYouth Family Allies\\*](#)

---

[Unión=Fuerza Latinx Institute\\*](#)

---

[Unity Coalition\\*](#)

---

\*En Español

# Acknowledgments



The HRC Foundation is committed to developing and prioritizing resources that celebrate and support the full diversity of the LGBTQ community. Special thanks to Public Education & Research Senior Content Manager **Mark Lee**, Bilingual Media Manager **Milagros Chirinos**, and **HRC's Coming Out Resource Working Group** members Alejandro Avilés, Nicole Cozier, Sarah McBride and Robert Villaflor for their extensive efforts in the development of this and other similar resources. Thank you to HRC Senior Research Manager Liam Miranda for providing additional public education and research support.

Additional thanks to HRC current and former team members John Baez, Beck Bailey, Nathan Barrera-Bunch, Jay Brown, Ty Cobb, Ana Flores, Jean Freedberg, Noël Gordon, Jr., Elizabeth Halloran, Ashland Johnson, Jeremy Kadden, Ellen Kahn, Jake Mazeitis, Hayley Miller, Helen Parshall, Lisbeth Meléndez Rivera, Laya Monarez, Emily Roberts, Silvana Scott, Saurav Thapa, Michael Toumayan, Allison Turner, Sarah Warbelow, Gabrielle Winger and Mary Wood for their contributions throughout the creation and release of this critical resource.

Thank you to the many LGBTQ Latinx advocates and allies who shared their stories and expertise in this resource. Thank you to Zoe Grotophorst and Shaun Gholston for copy editing and proofreading services. Thank you to Marta Donayre for Spanish language translation services. Special thanks to Dialectic for their design support.

## **About the HRC Foundation's Public Education & Research Program**

The HRC Foundation's Public Education & Research Program spearheads a wide variety of LGBTQ advocacy and outreach campaigns, working to ensure that the HRC Foundation's resources and programs are timely, impactful and inclusive. In addition to publishing resource guides, informational materials and reports, the team conducts original quantitative and qualitative research exploring the lived experiences of LGBTQ people. The program also collaborates with academic researchers and provides guidance to other HRC initiatives in support of efforts to advance LGBTQ equality and well-being.

## **About the Human Rights Campaign Foundation**

The Human Rights Campaign Foundation improves the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) people by working to increase understanding and encourage the adoption of LGBTQ-inclusive policies and practices. We build support for LGBTQ people among families and friends, co-workers and employers, pastors and parishioners, doctors and teachers, neighbors, and the general public. Through our programs and projects, we are enhancing the lived experiences of LGBTQ people and their families, as we change hearts and minds across America and around the globe. The HRC Foundation is a nonprofit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization.



### **Hispanic Federation**

The mission of the Hispanic Federation is to empower and advance the Hispanic community. The Hispanic Federation provides grants and services to a broad network of Latino non-profit agencies serving the most vulnerable members of the Hispanic community and advocates nationally with respect to the vital issues of education, health, immigration, economic empowerment, civic engagement and the environment. For more information, please visit [www.hispanicfederation.org](http://www.hispanicfederation.org).



### **LULAC**

The League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) is the nation's largest and oldest civil rights volunteer-based organization that empowers Hispanic Americans and builds strong Latino communities. Headquartered in Washington, DC, with 1,000 councils around the United States and Puerto Rico, LULAC's programs, services and advocacy address the most important issues for Latinos, meeting critical needs of today and the future. For more information, visit [www.LULAC.org](http://www.LULAC.org).



STRONGER COMMUNITIES. STRONGER AMERICA.

### **UnidosUS**

UnidosUS, previously known as NCLR (National Council of La Raza), is the nation's largest Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization. Through its unique combination of expert research, advocacy, programs, and an [Affiliate Network](#) of nearly 300 community-based organizations across the United States and Puerto Rico, UnidosUS simultaneously challenges the social, economic, and political barriers that affect Latinos at the national and local levels. For 50 years, UnidosUS has united communities and different groups seeking common ground through collaboration, and that share a desire to make our country stronger. For more information on UnidosUS, visit [www.unidosus.org](http://www.unidosus.org) or follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).



**To access this resource online  
and in Spanish, please visit:**

**Para ver este recurso en español  
y en línea, por favor visite:**

**[hrc.im/LatinxComingOut](http://hrc.im/LatinxComingOut)**