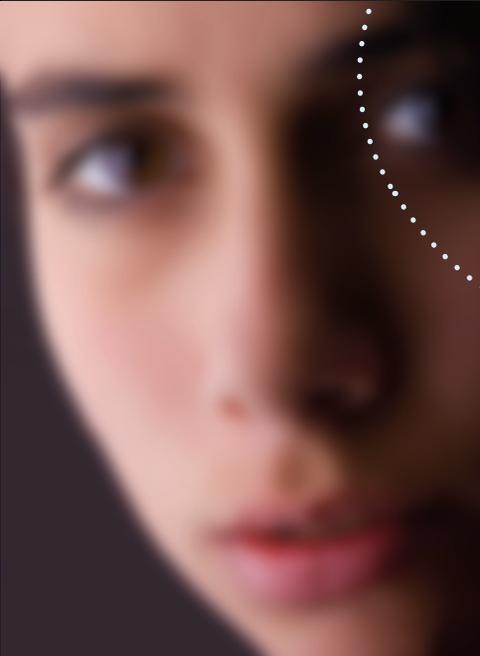


THE LATINO/LATINA  
ROUNDTABLE PROJECT

of the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry



Mom, Dad:  
I Have  
Something  
To Tell You



# Mom, Dad: I Have Something To Tell You

Parents entertain all sorts of dreams for their children, but they don't usually imagine their children coming out as lesbian or gay.



Watching their children grow up, mothers and grandmothers dream about bridal gowns and college degrees for their girls. Fathers envision sons growing up to be engineers or football players. Having a homosexual daughter or son is not usually part of those dreams. But the fact remains that many Latino/a families do have gay and lesbian children.

During their childhood, boys and girls share in their families' dreams and some of them will come true: both girls and boys can graduate from college, both can play football, and all of them at some point will experience sexual attraction. For roughly ten percent of them, that attraction will be toward members of their own gender. That kind of attraction, desire, and romance may also cause fear, confusion, and guilt.

Many people grow up hearing false and misleading information about homosexuality. Gay men are often treated with disdain and mockery while hardly anyone talks about lesbians at all. Too often both are condemned by churches and the wider society.

Given that message of condemnation, too many homosexual persons think of themselves as deviant or immoral. They may have heard of well-known singers who are gay or of famous actresses rumored to be lesbians. Sadly, few people have ever told them that they themselves are beloved and accepted by God just as they are. And hardly anyone has told them that their own families can love them and accept them as gay and lesbian people.

Churches have been—and continue to be—slow in accepting that homosexuality is simply something different rather than a sickness or immoral. While many main-line Protestant churches have come to accept homosexuality and now welcome and embrace gay and lesbian people, Roman Catholic and Evangelical churches, among others, continue to judge homosexuality as sinful. Those churches have yet to un-

derstand that a loving God would not condemn people for being exactly who God created them to be. They also don't realize that homosexuality is as natural to gay and lesbian people as the color of their skin.

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The family is at the center of the Latino/a community. Our families are capable of accepting, supporting, and loving each and every one of its members. How each family deals with the news that one of its members is lesbian or gay will determine the health and happiness of the entire family. And a loving, supporting family is also capable of transforming society.

To accept and love a lesbian or gay family member, it is crucial that everyone in the family have good and reliable information about homosexuality, both scientific and religious information.

First, a family coming to terms with a gay or lesbian member needs to know that homosexuality is not an illness. In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) the largest and most prestigious mental health organization in the United States—determined that homosexuality is not a form of mental illness. Gay and lesbian persons can be just as healthy as any other member of their families.

In addition, there is no scientific evidence for the cause of homosexuality, which has been evident throughout human history from the beginning. The acceptance of homosexuality as a natural part of human life has been evident in some cultures for centuries. In recent years, civil marriage between persons of the same gender is widely accepted in Europe, in some Latin American countries and, increasingly, in many parts of the United States.

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Second, concerning religion, Catholic and Evangelical churches exercise a great deal of influence in the Latino/a community. This helps to explain why some of our families worry about the morality of gay and lesbian relationships. Many of those churches preach a message of condemnation towards lesbian and gay people and their relationships.

But this is not the only Christian moral perspective on the subject. The vast majority of the most respected biblical scholars recognize that the Bible does not condemn homosexuality as we understand it today. Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life of all Christians, never condemned same-sex love even though it certainly existed in his society. Sexual relationships between consenting adults who love each other in committed, ethically appropriate relationships are not, in fact, condemned anywhere in the Bible. And since the United Church of Christ first endorsed same-gender marriage in 2005, other Protestant denominations have done so as well.

More than science and religion, parents, sons, and daughters who are dealing with homosexuality can take comfort in remembering that they are joined together by the bonds of familial love. That love overcomes everything, including the prejudice found in some churches and societies.



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Today, nearly everyone has heard something about homosexuality. The topic of gay marriage, of course, is frequently discussed on television and, thanks to celebrities like Ellen DeGeneres and Ricky Martin, nobody can say that they don't know a gay or lesbian person.

Still, many gays and lesbians find it difficult to “come out of the closet” and discuss their homosexuality with their families. At times, some gay and lesbian people pretend to be in heterosexual relationships or talk about imaginary opposite-sex partners. They might bring along a willing friend to family celebrations, pretending that the friend is a romantic interest. This type of behavior only widens the distance between family members.

Gay men and lesbians might choose, for example, to come out to their parents and seek support when they're grieving over a broken relationship. While Mom and Dad may or may not be happy that their child is gay, they might assume that their child's pain at that moment is simply a result of a homosexual “lifestyle.” That assumption is based mostly on social and religious prejudice. Will those parents be able to comfort and support their child through the pain of a break-up without falling into recrimination or rejecting that “lifestyle” entirely? Which is more important: social/religious prejudice or the love of a child?

When and how lesbian and gay people choose to come out to their parents can reduce the sense of crisis or drama. This is an important moment of intimate

conversation, and it can also be risky; the possibility of rejection or misunderstanding is always painful.

Gay and lesbian people should think carefully about when to have this conversation. Ensure that there is both time and space for interacting with each other and listening carefully to every member of the family. For religious families, it's also important to have good resources available on the Bible and positive church teachings on human sexuality before the conversation begins.

Even with careful planning, someone will likely cry and feelings will be hurt when people come out. At that moment, gay and lesbian children should remember that their parents love them. Their parents will continue to love them and accept them, even though it might take some time.



When you do come out to your parents, be patient and pay attention to them, and to your own feelings. Seek the support of good friends. Search out a faith community or a church that will embrace you as a beloved child of God. And remember always that God loves you just as you are, unconditionally, without limitations or exceptions.

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