

InfoSheet

Immigrant Parents and their LGBT Children

According to recent findings, immigrant parents who live in Canada or in the United States, or have children who moved to either one of these countries, have shown an overwhelming disapproval of their children's sexual orientation if it is anything but heterosexual. According to the literature reviewed, several themes have emerged to provide background for the reasoning behind the immigrant parents' rejection of homosexuality. Three of the main themes are; lack of education, religion and importance of family. There are several other themes that have emerged but none have been as prominent as the three previously mentioned. It is important to note that not all immigrant parents have disapproved of their children's sexual orientation. Many parents have conquered their prejudices about homosexuality; however, the overwhelming statistic according to the literature, reveals that the majority of these immigrant parents disapprove of any sexual orientation outside of being a heterosexual.

Key Points from the Literature

- Many immigrant parents are severely uneducated about LGBT issues. One prominent theme is that many parents believed that their children were going to start acting like members from the opposite sex. A young man from Latin America had this to say,
 - *"I told, a few years ago, I told my mother I was gay. And who would believe it? She said, "You are joking." I said, "No." And she said, "Are you going to start dressing like a woman?" And I said, "No." And she said, "Do you abuse children?" And I said, "No." (Guarnero, 2007, p. 15).*
- Another man, whose parents immigrated to the United States from the Philippines said that his parents characterized gay men as "*Bakla's*" meaning have man, half woman in Tagalog (Ocampo, 2013, pg. 161)
- Other parents worried that their sons would begin to take on female characteristics. Some parents attempted to "correct" female characteristics at an early age in their sons if they noticed it. A man from Mexico said his Father would scold him for doing women's work such as washing dishes, saying it was a job for "*Maricon's*" translated to fag in English (Cantu, 2002).
- Other immigrant parents associated homosexuality with disease. Many parents believed that their children were more susceptible to AIDS because of their sexual orientation; one mother was shocked to find out that her son's friends (who were gay) did not have AIDS. When asked about how she developed these ideologies, her son replied, "media, obviously." (Ocampo, 2014, 164)
- The Media has a strong impact on the way many immigrant parents perceive homosexuality. For example, a popular song in Honduras titled "*El Gran Varón*" is about a young man who immigrates to Honduras, becomes a transgendered individual and then later dies of AIDS (Garsd, 2014). Thus, due to the songs popularity, this message of homosexuality connected to disease is passed through

the media and to millions of people across the country. This same phenomenon goes for movies and TV shows that portray LGBT people in stereotypical ways.

- Thus, parents must receive the proper education that is needed to put an end to stereotypes and the stigmatizing of LGBT people.
- According to the literature, religion is a strong factor contributing to immigrant parents' perspectives on homosexuality. Below is a young Latino man's perspective on religion and homosexuality.
 - "Religion has a great influence over whether homosexuality is accepted or rejected. Our cultures base themselves on religion, and much of religion has been influencing ideology for years ... for centuries. And I think that religion is the rock that crushes homosexuality" (Guarnero, 2007, p. 16)
- According to one immigrant who migrated from Togo to Harlem, "While homophobia in West Africa has become a separate phenomenon... it is often born of religion" The young man went on to say that his family referred to him as "devilish" (Thomas, 2014).
- A study conducted in the United States found that African Americans who attended church at least once monthly felt more negative about gay men.
- One woman, who is of the Islamic faith, was ostracized from her mother for coming out as a lesbian (Wyckoff Williams, 2014).
- Another theme which emerged from the literature was family tradition.
- In many cultures it is very important to carry on the family name. "My mom was crying when I told her I had a boyfriend. My dad yelled at me about who was gonna pass along our family name" (Ocampo, 2013, 169). One way to pass on the family name is through bearing children. Thus, many lesbians have been scolded from family members because of their choice not to bear biological children. According to the literature, this is a very serious concern in Latin American and Asian countries (Espin, 1996) (Nadeem & Kouyoumdjian, 2010) (Wong & Poon, 2013).
- Traditional gender roles are also challenged, which has posed serious problems for immigrant parents. Several articles state that the men are to act manly and masculine; this has been expressed in Italian and especially Latin American cultures, where the women are supposed to take on the caregiver role. Parents believe that homosexuality would cause some sort of role reversal or confusion in the family (Baldo, 2014) (Espin, 1996) (Nadeem & Kouyoumdjian, 2010) (Guadner, 2007).
- Immigrant parents have also worried about what others would think of their family if their children were non-heterosexual. Some of the parents expressed concerns that people in the community may think that they instilled improper morals into their children and caused them to turn gay or lesbian. While other parents were worried that they may be rejected by other family members for potentially having gay or lesbian children. Some children of immigrant parents were also worried to dishonour the family name (Wong & Poon, 2013) (Nadeem & Kouyoumdjian, 2010) (Baldo, 2014).
- According to (Wong & Poon 2013) storytelling can help immigrant parents understand LGBT issues in a much greater way by challenging assumptions and previous beliefs.

- According to (Baldo, 2014, pg. 168) “To help integrate gayness are the “use of rituals and the adaptation of ethnic schemata to new realities in order to cope with the unfamiliar, and the ability to envision family as an evolving and changeable reality.”
- As one immigrant parent summarizes it, if change is to happen, "Parents also have to come out of the closet and be openly supportive of their gay children." (Garsd, 2014).
- Immigrants who are born in Canada or the United States or who have lived in North America the majority of their lives are less likely to discriminate LGBT people (Battle & Lamelle, 2002) (Ocampo, 2013).

Recommendations

- Canadian literature is lacking, and more research on how immigrant parents in Canada react to LGBT children is needed.
- The literature focuses primarily on the perspectives of gay males. More literature on the lives of lesbian women and their immigrant parents are needed.
- The literature focuses on immigrants in the city or the bigger metropolitan areas. More research is needed to see any differences of perspectives between immigrants living rurally and in the suburbs.
- There has predominantly been a focus on Latin American and African American immigrant parents and their children. It would be beneficial to find more research on other immigrant perspectives.
- It would be helpful to have statistics on age range for parents to see if any correlations can be found.

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- **Compiled and written by Domenic Bruni (2014)**