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# "It's in Our Nature as Daughters to Protect Our Familias… You Know?":The Privacy Rules of Concealing and Revealing Latina Child Sexual Abuse Experiences

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**ABSTRACT**

This study uses communication privacy management theory to offer an examination of the rule criteria that Latina survivors of child sexual abuse (CSA) utilize to manage disclosure and privacy. Seven Latina women told their stories of CSA through the Indigenous methodology of *testimonio*. Their stories grant insight into the matrix of domination and underlying power structures within Latinx culture that impact their CSA disclosure. Latinas' *testimonios* demonstrate the centering of the family when choosing to reveal and/or conceal their instances of CSA. Specifically, the study's results indicate that in order to protect markers of identity and to avoid feeling familial shame, survivors choose to keep silent. Moreover, findings indicate that certain patriarchal principles encourage Latinas to uphold particular gender roles such as docility and purity which also impacts disclosure.

One in three girls and one in 10 boys are victims of child sexual abuse (CSA) (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010) and fortunately, over the last two decades, issues related to CSA have received increased empirical attention (Dube et al., 2005; Ligiéro, Fassinger, McCauley, Moore, & Lyytinen, 2009). Many existing studies explain this sexual violence phenomena, specifically those surrounding the psychosocial impact, public health, and medical consequences (Banyard et al., 2001). However, this research has overlooked the Latinx[1] community, particularly Latinas, and has left a void in scholarly knowledge regarding how sexual violence affects Latina women and children as well as how Latinas manage child CSA disclosure. The Latinx community has been largely under represented in academic literature (particularly in the field of Interpersonal and Family Communication [IFC] in the United States), despite the significant number of Latinxs that live in the U.S. today. Neglecting this community in the academic literature surrounding CSA is particularly dangerous because there are numerous psychological and social consequences associated with CSA such as revictimization (Reese-Weber & Smith, 2010), mental health issues and substance abuse (Badmaeva, 2011; Dube et al., 2005), and suicide (Hornor, 2010).

To counter this dearth of research, studying CSA with and for the Latinx community provides first-hand fundamental knowledge that could, in turn, be used to produce practical resources for a community that needs and deserves support. Studying disclosure is important because silence is an added risk for a child who has been sexually abused. Revictimization research emphasizes that children who have been sexually abused once are twice as likely to report sexual revictimization (Desai, Arias, Thompson, & Basile, 2002). According to Kilpatrick et al. (1997) and Sigurvinsdottir and Ullman (2016), the biggest risk factors for revictimization are minority status, sexual orientation, former victimization, and individuals' silence. Thus, studying the dynamics that contribute to the

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decision for Latinas to disclose and/or conceal sexual abuse experiences is a productive next step for IFC scholarship.

Decisions to reveal and/or conceal private information are complex in general, but choosing to reveal and/or conceal risky, shameful instances of sexual abuse warrants additional levels of difficulty, especially if the discloser is from one or many marginalized communities. As such, this study uses Communication Privacy Management theory (CPM) and the Indigenous methodology of *testimonio* to explore the privacy rule criteria that Latinas might use when managing privacy surrounding their experience(s) of CSA. To date, only one study within Family Communication has investigated CSA disclosure (Petronio, Reeder, Hecht, & Ros-Mendoza, 1996). Using CPM, Petronio and her colleagues studied the ways sexually abused children granted access to their abuse information. Although this study was groundbreaking as it studied a sensitive issue that had not been investigated in the field, it did not provide cultural demographics and thus, does not account for the ways race, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, gender, nationality, or sexuality impact disclosure and privacy management.

This study's aim is not to generalize the experiences of *all* Latina women who were sexually abused as children, but instead, builds on Petronio et al. (1996)and showcases seven women's *testimonios*, a specific type of counter-stories, and the major themes that emerged surrounding disclosure and privacy rules within them. As I center and prioritize Latina voices in this piece, I am also answering Suter's (2016) call to produce critical IFC research that highlights dimensions of power within families, as well as Manning's (2014) call to "continue to expand inquiry into how relationships, identities, and tasks are *in the communication*" (p. 432). Ultimately, this project demonstrates the possibilities that researchers can open when traditional theory (CPM) is blended with critical research methodologies.

## Latina child sexual abuse

Due to widely disparate cultural understandings of what "counts" as sexual abuse, it is important to establish a concrete definition of CSA for this project. Despite the common belief that sexual abuse of children denotes the presence of hurtful force and penetration (Dube et al., 2005), CSA entails a wide array of behaviors that may have various degrees of impact on children (Finkelhor, 1994; Tyler, 2002). The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (1974) bestows sexual abuse as a subcategory of child abuse and neglect and further defines it as:

> the employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement, or coercion of any child to engage in, or assist any other person to engage in, any sexually explicit conduct or simulation of such conduct for the purpose of producing a visual depiction of such conduct; or the rape, molestation, prostitution, or other form of sexual exploitation of children, or incest with children. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014, para. 6)

Child sexual abuse includes two additional definitional elements. First, the targeted individual must be under the age of 18 years of age; second, the act delivers sexual gratification for an adult. For Latinx children, rates of CSA are particularly high. Newcomb, Munoz, and Carmona (2009) found that Latinos/as (44%) were significantly more likely to experience CSA compared to European Americans (27%), with Latina women (54%) showing the highest prevalence rates overall. Ten years prior, Romero et al.'s (1999) study suggested that one in three Latinas reported incidents of CSA, notwithstanding of citizenship status or acculturation. It is unclear whether these differing reports reflect genuine rates because reporting bias, cultural nuances, methodological differences, or some pattern of all these dynamics are likely to impact study results. Nonetheless, the constant fluctuation in evidence highlights the importance of studying CSA among Latinas to gain a better understanding of the scope and impact of this problem.

One factor influencing differences in reported rates of CSA amongst Latinas is shifting contexts and disclosure trends, particularly related to the prevalence of silence. Kellogg and Huston (1995) found that Latina females (52%) were less likely to report unwanted sexual abuse than their White female (80%) counterparts. With respect to lifetime reports of rape, the National Violence Against Women study found that Latinas also reported their experiences of sexual violence less (14.6%) than non-

Latina women (18.4%) (Tjaden, 2000). Compared to European American women, women of color are less likely to tell a family member or report it to authorities and are more likely to fear the negative repercussions of disclosing (Ligiéro et al., 2009). In population-represented samples, approximately one-third of women never disclosed their CSA experiences. The two thirds that did reveal their abuse did so many years after the abuse had ended, regularly eclipsing their access to services for years (Sciolla et al., 2011). To better understand the reasons for delaying reports, I turn to CPM to analyze the rule criteria dictating Latinas' CSA disclosure decision-making processes.

## Communication privacy management theory

CPM (Petronio, 2002) was developed in an effort to understand the ways in which people regulate the act of disclosing and concealing private information. CPM views disclosure as the process of revealing private information, "yet always in relation to concealing private information" (Petronio & Durham, 2015, p. 336). The constant dialectical flux between the desire to conceal and reveal relies on two core assumptions about privacy management. First, individuals believe they are rightful, primary *owners* of their information. Second, individuals believe they have the right to control and regulate the flow of their private information to others (Petronio, 2002; Petronio & Child, 2020).

CPM uses a boundary metaphor to designate borders of ownership that encircle and protect private information (Petronio, 2010, 2013). This metaphor illustrates the transactional nature of how information is managed and shared with others, something that many other disclosure or privacy theories have previously failed to acknowledge (Petronio, 2013). While boundaries can be thin and permeable so individuals are likely to disclose information, others are thick and impermeable, as in the case of stigmatized topics like CSA, making it more likely for individuals to conceal private information. Part of CPM's notion of ownership is that individuals themselves manage boundaries surrounding their disclosures. As such, individuals can decide, as they wish, when and how to control the flow of their private information. This information management is particularly important for CSA survivors, as sexual abuse is already a violation of physical boundaries and the leaking of private information surrounding abuse can increase feelings of violence and loss of control.

Sharing private information can produce anxiety, fear, risks, and vulnerability, which authenticates the reason why individuals demonstrate the need and desire to be owners – and be in control – of their information (Petronio & Child, 2020). If individuals choose to share their private information with others, those witnesses become co-owners or boundary insiders (Petronio, 2002). Although these others now share the private matter and together they create one mutual boundary that protects the information, the original owner remains as the primary owner and continues to be in charge of how the information is managed (Petronio, 2010).

Both Petronio (2010) as well as Petronio and Child (2020) argue that individuals depend on a rule-based system to control the flow of private information. CPM uses the concept of privacy rules to represent how people make decisions about retaining control or permitting access to others (Petronio & Child, 2020). Petronio (2007) postulates that privacy rules are rooted in several criteria: culture, gender, motivation, risk/benefitratio, and situations/contexts. Additionally, privacy rules can be formed and followed through the socialization of already established rules set by families and/or by societal norms. For example, Bute, Brann, and Hernandez (2019) found that preexisting societal rules regarding the discussion of miscarriage influenced how participants talked about or refrained from sharing their miscarriage experience. Similarly, when studying how undocumented youth managed disclosure regarding their citizenship status, Kam et al. (2019) learned that participants contemplated larger societal risks and rules. For the study of Latina CSA disclosure, it is important to note that societal and cultural values related to race, citizenship, and gender heavily influence decisions about privacy issues and create expectations of how people think privacy should be managed. Risk-benefit calculations are also relevant to rule establishment and application, as disclosures of CSA can lead to both increased emotional support and services, as well as familial estrangement and sociocultural isolation. With this in mind, the rule criteria that Latina women create and draw upon in relation to

the concealment and/or disclosure of their experiences of CSA are important to discover because these rules can serve as a basis for researchers, counselors, and community partners to create appropriate interventions. As such, the following research question guides this study:

> RQ: What rule criteria do Latina women use to manage privacy and disclosure surrounding their child sexual abuse experiences?

## Method

### Indigenous methodology: testimonio

To address the research question, I engaged the Indigenous methodology of *testimonio* to bear witness to participants' stories and to understand how they managed disclosures related to CSA. Indigenous methodologies are grounded in critical epistemology and pedagogy (Sandoval, 2000), representing a politics of representation that is entrenched in the rituals of Indigenous communities. Critical epistemology aims to identify dominant structures that create or uphold disadvantage, inequity, and oppression in order to point the way toward alternatives that promote more egalitarian possibilities for marginalized individuals (Conquergood & Johnson, 2013; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Huber (2008) states that when people of color are invited to reveal their experiences of oppression, it motivates them to dismantle and transform oppressive conditions to end injustice. Offering participants the opportunity to share their *testimonios* (stories) of oppression thus serves as a starting point for researchers to discover ways to begin to demolish injustice within a CSA context, as well as a potentially productive experience for the narrators themselves.

*Testimonio* is a form of storytelling that is told in the first person by a narrator who is a protagonist or witness of events, with the goal of uncoveringviolations or transgressions (Reyes & Rodríguez, 2012, p. 527). Huber (2008) defines *testimonio* as "a verbal journey of a witness who speaks to reveal the racial, classed, gendered, and nativist injustices they have suffered as a means of healing, empowerment, and advocacy for a more humane present and future" (p. 644). Telling one's story of oppression is, in and of itself, an act of resistance against the silencing and subordination that Latinxs experience (Acevedo, 2001). This resistance is particularly powerful because *testimonio* operates from a collectivist voice through which cultural andfamily dimensions adjust the delivery of political conversation and content (Holling, 2014).

Thus, using *testimonio* in the present study gives participants space to speak in such a way that invites the collective way of being and the collective way of knowing that is common in Indigenous communities. Traditional research method designs often discount collectivist points of view as the designs are typically rooted with individualistic approaches, which does not meaningfully account for Latina experiences of CSA. Because Latinas often perform collectively per Latinx cultural standards, *testimonio* invites Latinas to include their family and family cultural dynamics into the research process in an organic way.

### Participants

A purposeful, homogeneous sampling technique was used to locate women who self-identified as Latina and had experiences of sexual abuse that occurred before the age of 18. Seven participants offered their *testimonios* for the present study. Of the seven women, three self-identified as Chicanas,[2] three as Mexican, and one as Cuban-Colombian-American. Three women were born in Mexico and the three Chicanas and Cuban-Colombian women were born in the United States. Four of the women identified as heterosexual, two as lesbian, and one as queer. Five participants reported being raised in lower class homes, while two reported their socioeconomic status as working or middle class during their childhood. All were between the ages of 20–60 years old with the average age just over 37 years at the time of the *testimonio* interview. In terms of highest level of education, two participants completed elementary school, one completed high school, one completed a Bachelor's degree, one completed

a Master's degree, and two completed Doctorate degrees. All women claimed Catholicism as their dominant religion during their childhood, while one participant's family practiced both Catholicism and Santeria.

## Procedures

Per IRB guidelines at my institution, I recruited participants at different university and community events. Because I was purposefully recruiting Latinas, I attended Latinx sorority meetings and several Latinx affinity groups. Additionally, I dropped off multiple flyers at local counseling agencies that provide bilingual mental health resources to Latinx communities. One specific IRB guideline that I had to follow was to deliver a formal presentation about the benefits of the research study. IRB mandated that I distribute flyers to everybody in the room rather than potentially outing any audience member by having them individually grab a flyer. Flyers included my phone number and university e-mail address as well as a prescript that they could use to protect confidentiality. Once each participant reached out to me via e-mail or through a phone call, we set a date, time, and place for the *testimonio* interview to take place at a private room in a university library. During this point of mediated contact, the participants also asked me several questions, and all but one requested that I clarify the definition of CSA. Before committing to the study, participants wanted to verify that their abuse *counted* as sexual abuse. Once I confirmed that their abuse was indeed abuse, we scheduled the interview.

After receiving IRB approval, I recorded participants' verbal consent[3] and informed them that this was a semi-structured interview. I purposefully did not create a rigid schedule of questions to adhere to Indigenous methodology principles of letting the participant be in charge of the narrating process. This concept is much like grounded theory's approach of letting the data control the direction of research (Urquhart, 2013). As such, to guide me, I followed grounded theory's recommendations when creating the study's research question (Charmaz, 2014). The question I used to provide a springboard for their story was: *Will you share with me your story or* testimonio *of your experience(s) of CSA?* I reminded participants that they could share as much as they wanted and that if I received their permission, I would ask open-ended questions throughout the interview like those that grounded theory recommends (Charmaz, 2014). To make the research process more comfortable and accommodating to participants, I gave them the option of sharing their *testimonio* in English or Spanish. As the interviewer, I am fluent in both languages. Two women shared in Spanish, two shared in English, and the additional three *testimonios* were shared using a combination of English, Spanish, and Spanglish. The average time of *testimonios* was 93 minutes, and the interviews resulted in 89 pages of single-spaced text. Following the interviews, participants received a mental health resource list as well as a $50 USD gift card for their participation.

## Data analysis

To build relationship and reacquaint myself with the *testimonios* (Charmaz, 2014) I transcribed them myself[4] and translated the Spanish *testimonios* to English to keep coding consistent in the same language. In an effort to prioritize participants' voices the way Indigenous methodology calls for, I used grounded theory as well as a thematic analysis to analyze the *testimonios*. I wanted to make sure I applied the hyperattentive coding process that grounded theory calls for especially because I had a smaller sample. Seven *testimonios* offered ample richness given that coding started at the word and sentence level (Urquhart, 2013).

Line-by-line coding was the first step of analysis. This type of coding was beneficial because it made me account for every single emerging code and category and it prompted me to remain vigilant to small details and nuances (Charmaz, 2014). After line-by-line coding, I sorted the most significant and frequent codes into larger categories and then into general themes. Thirteen themes emerged from this process (e.g., shame, protection of the body, protection of the family). I then used CPM as a theoretical lens to identify the specific themes relating to privacy rule criteria that Latinas drew on to decide

whether to reveal or conceal their CSA experiences. Themes were created based on their saliency, their frequency within each participant's *testimonio*, as well as their emergence across all *testimonios* . Once I identified the most prominent themes related to privacy rules, I performed another constant comparison to verify that each theme was unique (Boeije, 2002; Gonzalez-López, 2004). I continued this process until each theme reached saturation.

## Results

Guided by CPM, the study's research question explored the rule criteria that Latina survivors use to determine whether they will disclose or conceal their experiences of CSA. Findings were consistent with the existing rule principles defined by CPM's framework as results demonstrate that women manage their privacy based on predominantly cultural, gendered, and risk/benefit rule criteria. Within each criterion category, multiple themes developed. In what follows, I provide the themes[5] that emerged in the larger criteria categories and provide direct examples from the *testimonios*. Additionally, during particular moments, I contextualize findings by drawing on Chicana feminism. In doing so, I connect participant's individual experiences to one another's as well as to the broader sociopolitical and historical matrixes at play that dictate the development of their privacy rules.

### *Cultural rule criteria*

Generally, culture refers to the customs, traditions, and values of a particular social group. However, the way in which Petronio (2002) describes cultural criteria in CPM's framework assumes that culture more specifically relates to customs belonging to particular societies, nations, and race. Thus, in the present study, the cultural rule criteria showcase decisions to conceal and disclose based on Latinx race and ethnicity's history, norms, and expectations. Two main themes appeared in relation to cultural rules: (1) the normalization of abuse and (2) the protection of fathers' masculinity.

### *Normalization of abuse*

Narrators revealed that CSA occurs so frequently that it is almost seen as part of daughters' and granddaughters' normative matrilineal inheritance. Several participants chose to maintain silence about their sexual abuse because their mothers indirectly and directly motivated them to do so. This theme includes the moments in the *testimonios* where Latinas share about their mothers', grandmothers', aunts', and sisters' abuse in ways that indicate that they kept silent because CSA is a common branch in their ancestral tree. Thus, if one's grandmother and mother were abused and they were able to survive it without speaking about it and acting on it, then participants were expected to do the same. Thus, the normalization of abuse often included conversations about generational abuse. When speaking to some participants about how far we could trace sexual violence in our families and in our community, we recognized that unfortunately this tradition could be traced back to hundreds of years ago because our Mexican race was essentially created through violence. We were born through the sexual violence of colonization (Castaneda, 2019).

In her *testimonio*, Rosa[6] explained how this normalization kept her from disclosing her CSA: "I would put them [experiences of abuse] away and would normalize the abuse and the compartmentalizing. I think, well I think that when you see something as normal, you do not feel like you have to talk about it, you know?" Similarly, Garabato shared:

> I learned from a very young age that this was . . . like, normal. Whoever had the right to abuse me. So honestly (crying) I don't know how many men abused me but I do remember one being a mailman. I would go to the theater and it was as if I had a huge sign on my forehead that said ABUSE ME and they did and I couldn't do a thing. I was like frozen.

In this excerpt, Garabato reveals that the normalization of sexual abuse silenced her and allowed abuse to continue because she felt that it was normal for her not to have control over her body's boundaries.

### Protection of father's masculinity

In many of the *testimonios*, women revealed that they would not disclose information about their abuse because they felt that it would emasculate their fathers. A "true" Latino man has machismo which puts the onus on fathers to protect their family, especially the daughters. In an effort to avoid their fathers getting heartbroken and feeling shame over not having been the ideal protector, the women would remain silent about their abuse. When their fathers did find out about the CSA, the women often reported performing actions to restore their fathers' masculinity.

According to Anzaldúa (2007) and Moraga (2000), selflessness is the preferred behavior for women in Latinx culture, so putting the male first – especially the father as the head of and most revered person in the family – is a daughter's main responsibility. Study participant Elena shared that her father is her pride and joy, and she loves him so much that she did not want to see him sad over what had happened to her while she was away from home. For so long she protected him with silence and when she finally disclosed about her abuse, her fear came true. She shared:

> In that moment, mija,[7] seeing my father cry, it was so sad. It was so difficult. I think at that point in my life it was more difficult . . . If I thought about the rape and seeing my father like he couldn't do nothing and crying for what had happened to me . . .. That hurt so much more than my rape, mija. So much more.

Magnolia shared similar sentiments:

> I am also very protective of my dad and I recognize that because his family is . . . really screwed up. 'Cause I know he already feels a lot of shame about his family . . . And, I know that my dad already feels inadequate like we have had a couple conversations where he has acknowledged that he knows that he is not available emotionally, he is not available, and I just don't want it [the sexual abuse] to be something else that reminds him that he is not a good dad and that he wasn't there to protect me. Because he *has* been. He has provided for my family . . . So yeah, I want to protect him in that way (crying). Like I just want to be his daughter, I am his only daughter. And I know that it is not his fault and I wouldn't want him thinking that way either.

One element of machismo is that the Latino man/father should be the ultimate protector, savior, and provider. As seen in these Latina's stories, speaking about CSA would break their fathers' hearts and, in a sense, emasculate them for their failed performance of protector machismo that Latinx culture-expects them to achieve. Because of this potential for harm, Magnolia was willing to do whatever it took to make sure her father had that. She wanted an impeccable relationship with him and ultimately, she wanted to be the daughter that her father provided for and protected. Yet the roles seemed to switch when her silence was intended to protect him. One of the main reasons Magnolia still keeps quiet about her abuse is to avoid making her father feel shame and inadequacy as a man for not adhering to the protector role that his only daughter deserved. Magnolia's plan to keep quiet ultimately favors her father and family by delivering them from feeling shame and in so doing, Magnolia does not disrupt the Latinx family homeostasis (see Isasi-Díaz, 1996). As such, Magnolia's concealment allows her to be the "good daughter," to put the male at the top of the hierarchy first.

### Gender rule criteria

Similar to cultural/racial/ethnic criteria, participants mentioned that their disclosure decisions stemmed largely from gender roles related to proper femininity. Latinas' CSA disclosures were dependent on two gender-based factors: (1) Protection against internalized shame and (2) protection of social purity (virginity).

### Silence for protection from feeling shame

Unlike the previous theme that captures Latinas keeping their abuse a secret to prevent their father from feeling shame, the theme of shame revolves around protecting the self from feelings of inadequacy, dishonor, and stigma. According to Fontes (2007), shame is the feeling of no claim to worth, "exacerbated by the lack of social acknowledgment of worth" (Fontes, 2007, p. 63). Shame is an internalized manifestation of the "perceived failure of meeting cultural expectations" (Brown, 2006, p. 45). This theme captures Latinas' decisions to stay quiet to avoid being further shamed by others outside of the initial CSA interactions.

For example, Monica explained that she did not disclose her abuse to her grandma because of anticipated disapproval, potential blaming, and shame:

> You know my Nana was very much about modesty. So I am sure there would have been something about my modesty. She probably would have told my Tata (grandpa) or maybe not because she tried to protect him. She might have believed me, but I don't think she would have said anything [to cousin who was the perpetrator]. And not because she is a bad person but because I don't think she knew how to deal with that. Maybe she would ask me questions like, what [clothes] was I sleeping in? Was I not covered correctly? What did I do wrong?

Here, Monica references the fear of victim-blaming – and resulting increased shame – as a reason not to disclose her CSA. Though Monica realizes that she did not do anything wrong, she was conditioned to feel shame for being in a sexual situation, even if it was against her will. Shame also motivated Elena to keep quiet about her CSA. She explained:

> I think that is why a lot of people do not say anything. Shame. Even though it is not our fault, we feel ashamed. And hopefully, in the future, people will learn not to be ashamed, because that is the last thing que deveriamos de tener [that we should have]. Verguenza porque [Why shame?]. We didn't do anything. We didn't provoke it. Why do we have to feel like that? I think that society is los que nos hace sentir asi [who makes us feel this way].

Elena shared that she cried every day for so many months because of the shame she felt. She said that shame surrounding her CSA was already a significant source of her pain, and she did not want others to make her feel more of it. As such, in order to protect herself from what Fontes (2007) calls "external shame," she decided to encircle her abuse with boundaries of silence.

Elena's experience with shame is common in Latinx cultures, and it is all too familiar for Latinas in particular (Fontes, 2007). As explained earlier, shame is often inherited as a socializing tool in matrilineal lines. In the words of Anzaldúa (2007): "Shame was something I internalized from my culture, from my mother and grandmothers" (p. 93).

Multiple women in this study spoke about internalized shame as a product of collective and intersectional norms for Latinas. CSA blended with intersections of Latinas' identities (such as sexuality, esthetic, gender, or religion) to produce a great amount of shame since their experiences do not align with the archetype of the ideal Latina woman who is heterosexual, pure, a wife, and a mother. With this said, shame was present in all seven *testimonios* and often co-existed with another theme: the protection of purity and virginity.

### Silence for protection of purity and virginity

Many participants' *testimonios* reveal that the women chose to remain quiet in an effort to protect their purity status. Due to its underlying Catholic and patriarchal foundation, the Latinx culture puts extreme value on a woman who makes it to the altar as a virgin. A couple of participants decided to withhold their sexual abuse experiences so that their purity grade would not lessen in the eyes of the family and future suitors. In Latinx culture, upholding one's virginity assures the continuation of an idyllic form of family tradition and social representation. As such, being silent about the abuse provided less risk to some participants as the stigma of being abused and impure could potentially lead to a life of being unwanted and underappreciated by men – and by extension, the inability to be "good" Latina wives and mothers.

Luna shared in her interview that disclosing her CSA would mean that she would not only be shamed by her mother, but she would also not reap the benefits of purity status:

> Shame. I felt it. I think letting myself, well letting her [her perpetrator] do those things to me. Like that didn't seem socially acceptable and engaging in those activities at that age. When I grew older and started developing an understanding of what that meant, I realized that it would have been … well I was tainted. I was no longer … pure.

Similarly, during her *testimonio*, Elena could not speak about her virginity and purity without getting emotional:

> I was a virgin and to me it was the biggest thing that I thought I had. My parents made me believe that if you are not a virgin that you are not good anymore and not worth a penny … The virginity to me was like something so great. You cannot imagine how important it was for me, how important. To some people being a virgin could not be nothing, but to me it was like a gold. He [CSA perpetrator] robbed me of something that I was saving. I only wanted to be touched by the person that I marry. That was my mentality. I dreamt about the white dress, being pure and everything. He destroyed my virginity, he destroyed my life, I felt like I couldn't go back to Mexico because I felt like everybody was going to find out that I was not a virgin and now I am no good anymore.

As Elena references, the ideal Latina wife is a woman who is docile, kind, compliant, pure, and a virgin (Ligiéro et al., 2009). Elena's parents made sure to instill this message in her brain, and as her story reveals, it stayed there permanently. When Elena finally decided to date men after her abuse, she said she kept silent about her CSA because she wanted to be taken seriously. She knew that since she was no longer a virgin, men would only want her for a temporary good time. She did not tell her husband-to-be because she felt she was damaged goods, and she added, "No Latino husband wants damaged goods."

Elena's story reveals connections between virginity and Latinx parenting, which ties back to the explored themes of preserving fathers' masculinity and feeling shame. According to González-López (2004), Mexican fathers often believe that virginity is essential to upholding family honor. Many of that study's participants agreed on the notion that being a virgin increased the value of their daughters for future husbands (González-López, 2004). This gender-based ideology shapes the way many Mexican families communicate their values and beliefs with regard to sex, sexuality, and sexual morality (González-López, 2004). These messages prompt Latinas to conceal their experiences of CSA because *being used goods* can bring dishonor to the family and disclosing may strip them from the privileges that virginity affords. This potential for these downsides of CSA disclosure leads to a final theme revealed in this data: risk/benefit analyses.

### Risk/benefit rule criteria

According to Petronio (2002), another criteria individuals use for privacy rule development is risk/benefit ratio. CPM suggests that individuals calculate the risks and benefits of private information disclosure, and based on the final calculation, they develop rules that help them manage their boundaries and private information. This balancing analytic process is demonstrated in many of the aforementioned themes including preserving fathers' masculinity, avoiding shame, and preserving virginity/purity. Another way this risk/benefit analysis manifested in the women's *testimonios* is through narrators' discussions around sexual identity and assumed anti-men sentiments following CSA by male perpetrators.

Three participants talked about the struggle of sharing their sexual abuse with people because it would mean they had to defend their queer identities. For example, Garabato shared:

> So when I finally spoke about it people would say: 'So you are a lesbian because you were abused.' And I would say NO! I am not a lesbian because I was abused. I discovered my homosexuality when I was four years old. I always knew I was different. I always knew. We were so Catholic and from a very small town so I didn't talk about my homosexuality with anyone.

Anzaldúa (2007) calls this delay in coming out or sharing queer identity as "the fear of going home" (p. 41). She states that queer women of color fear being abandoned by their family and their culture at-large for being tainted and damaged. "To avoid rejection, some of us conform to the values of the

culture, push the unacceptable parts to the shadows," Anzaldúa explains (2007, p. 42). For Garabato, having to explain that her sexual abuse had not caused her homosexuality was too taxing. In her own words: "Pues entonces prefiero no hablar de mi abuso. Y prefiero callar. [So then I just prefer not to talk about my abuse. I prefer to be quiet]." Even when she was presented with opportunities to talk about her CSA outside of therapy, she would choose silence over having to engage in this defense of her lesbian identity.

Rosa faced a similar struggle. In her *testimonio*, Rosa mentioned that her father was not as supportive of her being queer, and that he used her CSA to back his denial of her homosexuality:

> So my dad now, he in some weird sick way thinks I am gay because I was abused when I was a young child. And I told him no, dad. I remember before this happened to me, being attracted to like the older sisters of the little boys I was friends with. Again, this is not why I am gay. I am gay because I like women, not because . . . I don't like women because I was abused by a man.

Monica, too, shared a similar experience about the complicated nuance of being sexually abused and queer. She revealed that it was often too complicated to talk about aloud:

> I am not straight. I know I am not straight. But I know that I am not a lesbian either, but there is something going on here. And maybe I am queer because I don't just want to be with a man, and I don't want to just be with a woman but, I am queer because I have been fucked over by the patriarchy, you know what I mean? So, the queerness for me isn't necessarily about my sexuality as much as being a sense of that abject. Or being treated or experiencing abjection. Which I think a lot of it goes back to this incident [of child sexual abuse].

Anzaldúa (2007) states that for lesbians of color, the ultimate rebellion she can perform against her culture and family is through two forms of prohibited sexual behavior: sexuality and homosexuality. Sexuality is to be hidden at all costs within the consecrated walls of the familia and in the even more tightly in the "privatized walls of our bedrooms" (Alarcón et al., 1993, p. 10). Queer identity seemed to compound upon the shame induced by already-taboo experiences of CSA.

## Discussion

The findings in this study confirm that CPM's theoretical assumptions, particularly those related to privacy rule development, are relevant forunderstanding Latina CSA disclosures. The *testimonios* suggest that participants draw on cultural, gendered, and risk/benefit ratio criteria for determining their disclosure decisions. The women chose to disclose their experiences of CSA based on expectations set by Latinx cultural standards as well as roles that are expected to be performed by women specifically.

CPM proposes that a key factor in the formation of privacy rules is weighing the risks of disclosure against the benefits (Petronio, 2013). If the anticipated risks of disclosure outweigh the anticipated benefits, information is more likely to be kept private (Hammonds, 2015). In this case, participants would stay quiet to avoid feeling further shame as well as to protect their purity grade, fathers' masculinity and feelings, and/or their queer identity confirming the CPM claim relating to weighing risks. However, as I stood witness to all of these stories, they listed all the risks but never actually spoke about calculating the risks to *any* benefits. In his study, Hammonds found that the predictors of disclosure (or lack thereof) were based on relational factors between children and their parents as well as communication in general. Women in this study spoke about not knowing how to speak about anything sexually related with their parents as children because they felt that in doing so, they would be deemed as sexual beings and that was something to be ashamed about.

Further, CPM suggests that contextual factors influence the creation and adjustment of privacy rules (Petronio, 2013). This is evident in this study when participants' stories ardently display the nuanced, complicated, and nonlinear nature of CSA disclosure as they have to constantly implicitly and explicitly negotiate contextual elements in their decision to conceal. CPM and this study identifies these factors as cultural and gender norms, but as researchers who study marginalized communities' experiences, we cannot simply arrive at these contextual categories without unpacking them further.

Researchers must continue to learn to understand who put those cultural standards in place as well as why our families ardently still follow obey these norms. When asked where they believe these gender and cultural 'rules' come from, most participants agreed that it comes from religion and the amount of reverence their families give to the Catholic church. Monica and Sara both stated that if we wanted to teach families how to openly speak about stigma, shame, and healing, we have to "involve the church somehow so our families listen and have to follow through." Sara's comment suggests that we must prepare our families to communicate about sexual violence disclosure. This idea is in line with Pluretti and Chesebro's (2015) work that shows the impact and power that recipients have in the outcome of disclosure particularly surrounding sexual victimization.

Being witnesses to participants' *testimonios* and the themes within them through this study leads to two positive outcomes: (1) insight into the complicated nature of CSA and (2) allowing Latina participants to share about their past experiences in order to co-create knowledge for the present and future. Isasi-Díaz (1996) states that letting Latinas speak freely about oppressions permits them to be protagonists and agents of their histories and futures. She explains:

> If when we speak, we are not listened to, if Latinas continue to be spoken to, spoken about, or simply- supposedly- included in what is said about Hispanics in general, our humanity will continue to be diminished in the eyes of the dominant group, but also, unfortunately, in our own eyes as we internalize such objectification of ourselves. (p. 133)

### Translational section

This study reveals the critical nuances Latinx CSA experiences entail and thus, it offers several practical implications for Latina survivors. Over the course of *testimonios*, the narrators spoke about the desire for their families to communicate more directly about constructs such as shame and CSA. As I heard these narratives about their mothers and their fathers and the way they sought to protect them by being silent, I imagined a perfect therapy setting where the entire family attended and engaged in a family story-telling/*testimonio* to make sense of the family trauma and seek collective healing. This healing could stem from creating curricula from survivors' perspectives aimed at educating the entire family about CSA – including all genders and generations. Trees and Kellas (2009) identified benefits of joint storytelling, or as they call it, collaborative narration. In their study, families made sense of difficult experiences. Joint story-telling, as a collective approach, would provide a more nuanced and rich view of CSA disclosure. It would present elements that live in a blind spot that an individual narration cannot expose.

On a local level, this work can inform community workshops or educational affiliated workshops that aim to help families understand the importance of emotions – even those like anger and shame. Using a familial approach to educate Latinx families can potentially diminish the stigma of speaking and learning about sex and sexual abuse and reduce the negative social consequences as a result. As my recruiting procedures reveal, this curriculum should first educate families about what CSA entails. Some study participants did not know that they had been abused because their experiences did not match what their families conceptualized as abuse. As such, having a clear definition of what counts as sexual CSA can begin to assist with this issue.

### Limitations & future directions

Though I distributed many flyers in local communities, most of the recruiting occurred on college campuses which resulted in a higher educated sample. It could be argued that this study only captures the experiences of women who have received higher education and if I had a more general sample, the results could offer different nuances or stories. For example, a Latinx participant who has spent ample time in a westernized institution such as the academy can feel as if she has more agency and thus, will be more willing to disclose her story. An additional limitation of the study is that its sample included

multiple Latinx ethnicities (i.e., Colombian, Mexican). Though Latinx countries have similar histories and cultures due to common colonization patterns, it is important to not conflate all Latinx countries and treat them as a monolith as they are all unique in many ways. A study that solely targeted Chicana women, for example, could demonstrate specific patterns of disclosure versus a study that exclusively studied Mexican women. Put simply, since Chicanas are born and raised in the United States, their level of acculturation and citizenship affords them more power than women who are immigrants from Mexico. As such, because Chicanas do not fear deportation for themselves, they likely would be more willing to report and disclose their experiences of abuse.

Despite these limitations, these *testimonios* provide a fruitful starting point for further CSA knowledge and thus affords three future directions. First, future projects should solely center queer Latinxs. Three of the seven Latinas in this study identified as being part of the LGBTQ community, and though I used queer Chicana feminism to assist in contextualizing their experiences, they deserve their own space with theories and discussions that more meaningfully account for their intersectional identities. Second, future scholarship should explore the manner in which Latinx boys and men navigate CSA disclosure and healing all while being socialized in a culture that expects patriarchal performances. Third, this study offers a preview of how intersectionality adds to our current understanding of CPM and how CPM functions to describe disclosure patterns of collective families. Future studies should explore how CPM can be used when studying collective societies as this theory is rooted in Westernized perspectives.

## Conclusion

This study affords numerous possibilities for future research that could deepen current knowledge of both Interpersonal, Family, and Critical Cultural Communication studies, thereby bridging the gap between the sub-disciplines that has recently been critiqued by scholar-activists in the National Communication Association. Because of the liberatory and activist potential of *testimonios* and centering Latina voices in research, I position this study as one that lays groundwork for future inquiries into Latinx CSA disclosures. This study demonstrates how a western, social scientific theory can be used in acritical fashion by collaborating with critical methodology to explore Latina CSA communication. I hope this piece prompts scholars to step outside traditional academic boundaries, echoing CPM boundary-work, in ways that produce the most beneficial studies possible. In doing so, the fields of IFC have the potential to center marginalized groups that have historically been pushed to the footnotes or limitations sections of research studies. I end with the words of Anzaldúa (2015, p. 22) urging us forward in explorations of critical work: "*Do work that matters. Vale la pena.*"

## Notes

1. Latinx is a gender-neutral term used instead of Latina or Latino. Its plural form is Latinxs.
2. The word Chicana is an ethnic identity term for American women of Mexican ancestry and is used instead of Mexican-American. Chicana incorporates a politicized ethnic identity and the acknowledgment of the experiences of native-born Americans of Mexican descent.
3. Per IRB, participants were not allowed to physically sign informed consent forms with their real name in order to further protect their identity.
4. As an additional level of security, IRB recommended that I transcribe the testimonios myself.
5. Many of the themes could belong within the cultural and gendered rule criteria categories and in fact, they were incredibly difficult to pull apart from one another which speaks to the importance of inviting intersectionality into family communication research.
6. Women chose their own pseudonym at the beginning of the interview.
7. This term is slang for mi hija (my daughter). Older Latina women use this when speaking to younger Latina women. In this case, Elena kept calling me mija instead of my name. Often times, the use of this word indicates the presence of trust.

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