

Coming Out in Rural America: The Case of Emilio Hernandez

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This is the author's manuscript of the chapter published in final edited form as:

Brandon-Friedman, R. A., & Folaron, G. (2018). Coming out in rural America: The case of Emilio Hernandez. In J. Riebschleger & B. J. Pierce (Eds.), *Rural child welfare practice: Stories from the field* (pp. 151-166). Oxford University Press.

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### Learning Objectives:

By the end of this chapter the student will be able to:

- List the possible risks and benefits to “coming out” as an LGBTQ+ person
- Identify two or more possible complications of coming out in a small, rural community
- Explore various cultural perspectives that challenge the integrity of the family including rural social networks, the impact of religion, and the role of ethnic heritage.
- Give an example of a time that a client’s presenting concerns are different from those that initially appear

### **Introduction**

Sexual minority youth experience victimization at significantly higher rates than their heterosexual peers. Within the school environment, 74% of sexual minority youth reported being harassed due to their sexual orientation and 56% felt unsafe attending school (Kosciw, Greytak, Palmer, & Boesen, 2014). These youth are also more likely to be physically abused by their parents and to be sexually abused (Friedman et al., 2011). Further, sexual minority Latina/o and Asian American youth experience higher levels of physical abuse than their White sexual minority peers, while Latina/o and African American youth are more likely to experience sexual abuse (Balsam, Lehavot, Beadnell, & Circo, 2010). Perhaps as a result of this history of abuse, sexual minority youth experience higher rates of mental health and substance use disorders,

suicide ideation and attempts, and deliberate self-harm than their heterosexual peers (King et al., 2008). Another significant concern is homelessness and child welfare system involvement, as sexual minority youth are heavily overrepresented in both populations (Courtney, Maes Nino, & Peters, 2014). In fact sexual minority youth make up as much as 40% of the homeless youth population and as many as 55% of sexual minority youth that were homeless reported the primary reason for their homelessness was being forced out or running away because of their sexual orientation (Choi, Wilson, Shelton, & Gates, 2015).

To fully understand the experience of sexual minority youth, it is important to recognize the process through which they develop their sexual identity. The two most prominent models of homosexual (note: the early models of identity development only referenced “homosexuals”) identity development and coming out were presented by Cass (1979) and Troiden (1988). Cass (1979) theorized six stages, *Identity Confusion*, in which the individual recognizes that his or her sexual feelings may be homosexual; *Identity Comparison*, in which the individual compares himself or herself to heterosexual others and begins to realize that he or she probably is homosexual; *Identity Tolerance*, in which the individual seeks out others that identify as homosexual but retains a public presentation of heterosexuality; *Identity Acceptance*, in which the individual begins to incorporate a positive image of himself or herself as a homosexual and may begin to disclose this to others; *Identity Pride*, whereby one feels a sense of loyalty and pride toward other homosexuals and is comfortable disclosing his or her sexuality to others; and finally, *Identity Synthesis*, in which the individual maintains his or her homosexual identity but no longer places it at the forefront of his or her sense of self.

Troiden (1988) developed a slightly different model detailing four stages: *Sensitization*, a time prior to puberty in which pre-homosexual feelings or experiences lead to feelings of being different but lack interpretation at the time; *Identity Confusion*, during which time the individual

begins to personalize the concept of homosexuality and feels intense turmoil and uncertainty as the emerging identity is at odds with societal norms and preconceived ideas of the individual's future; *Identity Assumption*, the time in which the individual comes to tolerate and then accept his or her identification as a homosexual and to present this self to trusted others; and finally, *Commitment*, the time in which the individual fully accepts and commits to an identity as a homosexual and fully integrates this identification into a positive sense of self. This model highlighted the sense of confusion and turmoil that may be present in an individual as he or she struggles with the acceptance of an identity that is often stigmatized and has many negative associations. It also emphasizes how societal expectations and events can influence this process by either aiding its progression or hindering it.

As can be seen from these models, the process of forming a sexual minority identity and revealing that identity to others relies on an interaction between intra- and interpersonal factors. Internal factors that have negative effects on the process include internalized homonegativity (the internalization of negative societal attitudes to homosexuality), moral conflicts that arise based on religious or moralistic teachings that homosexuality is wrong, and confusion or fear about what it means to be a sexual minority and what that means for a person's future. Even though these are internal factors, they are heavily influenced by the social environment in which the people live and the thoughts and behaviors of those around them.

For sexual minority youth, it is important that they receive a variety of social and familial supports, as each contributes to positive sexual minority identity formation in a different manner. In terms of community supports, research has indicated that gay-straight alliances, sexual minority community centers, supportive youth groups, and even a small network of supportive peers can significantly reduce the intrapersonal and social difficulties many sexual minority youth experience and increase their progress toward the development of a positive sexual

identity (Asakura, 2010; Brandon-Friedman & Kim, 2016; Walls, Wisneski, & Kane, 2013). Regarding families, research has shown that familial supports are protective factors against internalization of negative societal messaging regarding sexual minorities and suicidality as well as a willingness for youth to disclose their sexual identity to others, while familial rejection contributes to reductions in psychosocial functioning (Bregman, Malik, Page, Makynen, & Lindahl, 2013; Eisenberg & Resnick, 2006; Shilo & Savaya, 2011). These difficulties are especially problematic among Latino men, who report higher levels of negative familial reactions to their coming out during adolescence (Connally, Wedemeyer, & Smith, 2013; Ryan, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2009).

The support of family members and close peers is highly important for sexual minorities who live in rural areas, as they lack access to the community-based supports often available to youth in larger urban areas. The increased interactions between familial social circles among families in rural areas can also contribute to difficulties, as individuals in smaller communities are much more aware of occurrences in other's homes than in larger communities. Finally, rural communities tend to be more conservative and even the professionals in social service agencies may harbor negative attitudes toward sexual minority individuals. As a result of all of these factors, sexual minorities in rural communities report harsher social climates, increased stigma, higher levels of discrimination (Cohn & Hastings, 2010; Sandman, Fye, Hof, & Dinsmore, 2014; Swank, Frost, & Fahs, 2012).

The following case vignette will take the reader into a rural, Hispanic, Catholic home in which both Emilio, a 17-year-old high school student, and his family are struggling with his sexual orientation, experimentation, and coming out process. As the case progresses, the school social worker and the Department of Child Services become involved and the word of family troubles spreads throughout the rural community. The challenges faced by Emilio and his family

are explored, the importance of social capital (see Chapter 2 for a discussion of social capital) in a rural community is demonstrated, and the efforts of professionals to intervene become evident.

### **Emilio's Story**

After getting into a fight on the way into school, Emilio Hernandez, a 17-year-old student of Hispanic ethnicity, was sent to the office of Tracy Rodriguez, the school social worker at a small middle school / high school in a rural Southern town. Emilio was no stranger to Tracy. He was always willing to volunteer when she needed assistance and was active in the drama club. This was the first time he had been sent into her office for negative behaviors.

When Emilio arrived at her office, Tracy immediately became concerned due to Emilio's disheveled appearance and dress. He was wearing long sleeves and his collar pulled up, an odd choice of clothing for a hot April day. Tracy noticed that Emilio had bruises and abrasions; it appeared that he was trying to use clothing to cover up injuries.

Because Tracy had a history with Emilio and there appeared to be a crisis, she did not engage in small talk or work to establish rapport. Rather, she jumped into the incident that brought him into her office. Tracy asked what happened but Emilio looked puzzled and did not say anything. Tracy, who had been trained in trauma-informed care, wondered if Emilio was reliving a painful event. She decided to slow down and explore what happened. First, she asked Emilio what was going on before the fight. Then she asked about his actions once the fight commenced. In response to the first question, Emilio shrugged. He said he really was not sure what happened, but he noted that as he was coming into school, someone called him a fag, and he just "lost it." He added, "I don't really remember what happened next. What I do remember is lying on the ground with blood coming out of my nose. The principal was standing over me."

Tracy asked about his other bruises that were obviously older than the recent fight. Emilio said that he had gotten into a fight a couple of days before with someone in the neighborhood. Since she knew that Emilio seemed to be well-adjusted with many friends, she was surprised to see that he had gotten into a physical fight that resulted in bruises.

When Emilio was telling his story, Tracy noticed that he kept glancing at a poster she had on her wall that read, “This is a safe and inclusive place for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and allied youth.” After Emilio finished his story of the fight, she said, “You said this fight started after someone called you a fag. You know Emilio, I’m not here to judge you. I’m here to support you in whatever situation you may be facing right now.” He nodded and looked down. Tearfully, Emilio told Tracy that things have not been going well at home lately and a couple of nights ago he and his father had gotten into a fight.

He then recounted the events escalated after his father overheard him talking about wanting to date a male classmate. Realizing that he had just “come out” to Tracy, Emilio initially looked terrified and began to backtrack, saying that it was all a misunderstanding. He mumbled something and then said, “No offense but I am old enough to protect myself so I don’t really need any help. Thank you.” Tracy acknowledged the difficulty that Emilio was likely having in dealing with questions about his sexual identity and reassured him that her office was a safe space.

After a few minutes of silence, Emilio described what had happened with his father. He had been discussing a crush on a male classmate with his “girlfriend” over the phone when his father, Mario Martinez, overheard him and became very angry. His father took the phone away from Emilio and hit him across the face. Mario reportedly told Emilio that what he was thinking was immoral and dirty. He allegedly told him that if he acted on these feelings he would be an

embarrassment to the family and “ruin the family’s reputation” in the town and church. He then ordered Emilio to go to his room.

Over the next two hours Emilio could hear Mario pacing and screaming at his mother, blaming her for being too soft with Emilio. Mario was also ranting about teaching Emilio a lesson he would not forget, saying his past actions had clearly not been enough. Remembering the previous times he had been hit for doing things he did that his father thought were “maricón” (sissy), and fearing what would come next, Emilio thought about running away. Before he could put his plan into action, however, Mario returned to try to “talk reason.” He demanded that Emilio state that he was straight. Emilio said that when he refused to do so, “my father hit me in the face with my phone.”

When asked about his girlfriend, Emilio explained that Amy was really his best friend and that, after he came out to her a year ago, they devised a plan that she would act as his girlfriend; that way his father and classmates would think he was heterosexual. Emilio noted that this strategy appeared to be working with his friends and family until now. His father now knew he was lying. Emilio then told Tracy he had spent the last couple of nights camped out in Amy’s backyard shed, saying he was afraid of what would happen if he returned home. Emilio then looked down again and mumbled that he just wanted all of this to be over, that he could not deal with his life anymore.

Faced with the realization that Emilio had been physically abused by his father and was possibly suicidal, Tracy faced the dilemma of reporting the situation to Child Protective Services (CPS). She regretted not starting her meeting with Emilio with a discussion of the limits of confidentiality rather than assuming the problem was only a fight with a classmate. She also reflected on her statement that her office was a safe place. Living in such a small community, Tracy knew there were few places that people would feel comfortable discussing their sexuality.



Tracy was aware of a recent survey of adults in the county about their attitudes toward homosexuality. The newspaper reported that fewer than 35% of the population claimed to know a gay, lesbian, or bisexual person. She was also aware that the values in the county were very conservative with strong support for gun rights, pro-life positions, and marriage between a man and a woman. In this rural environment, it was as hard to be different as it was to keep a secret. Even though Emilio had grown up with the majority of the students in the school, bullying did happen and people were ostracized. Tracy felt that given Emilio's previous social position he would eventually become accepted within the school and community again, but in the meantime it might be very difficult for him. Similarly, reporting the abuse to CPS could lead to shunning of Emilio's whole family as students, teachers, family members, and others might hear about the incident and ask questions about what happened. If this occurred, Emilio's sexuality might be revealed before he was ready to disclose it. Tracy, however, was legally responsible for reporting the abuse.

Expressing her concern for his safety, Tracy informed Emilio that due to his bruises, the lack of a place to sleep, and his hints of suicide, she would need to contact CPS. She gave him a choice of making the call himself from her office or being there while she called. Emilio begged Tracy not to call, saying that if she did everyone would know there were problems in his family, that people would figure out he was gay, and that it would ruin his life and that of his family. Tracy acknowledged his fears but noted her responsibility to help protect him. After much discussion, Emilio resigned himself to the fact that CPS would be involved and told Tracy to make the call. After the phone call, Tracy allowed Emilio to stay in her office until the CPS assessment worker arrived.

When recounting his story to the CPS worker, Emilio stated that while his father was "beating me," he was using gay slurs and lecturing him on the evils of sin and on his

responsibilities as the only male to set an example for his two sisters. His father said he was going to make him a man and, if he had to, “to beat the gay out him.” After he had beaten Emilio, Mario left the room and told Emilio that he would give him until morning to “rethink” things. Emilio reported that his father had hit him hard enough in the past to leave bruises, but “never to this extent.”

Emilio admitted that he was sometimes fearful of his father. Even while relating the story, Emilio made reference to his family’s status in the community and about not wanting to harm his father’s reputation by letting people know what happened at home. He also acknowledged that his sisters had been present throughout the incident and that they seemed frightened by it. His sister tried to intervene but was forced to leave the room.

Since it was the end of the school day and evident to the CPS worker that Emilio needed substitute housing for at least the night, the worker transported Emilio to the Family Support Center, which was housed in a small house near the center of town. While walking to the door of the Center, a friend saw Emilio and called out to him. Recognizing the awkwardness of the situation, the CPS worker loudly stated her appreciation for Emilio “helping her out with work on the house.” Once inside, Emilio became argumentative, mumbling about how this situation was going to destroy his family and asked the CPS worker to just take him home and forget the whole situation. The CPS worker assured Emilio that she had worked in small communities her whole career and that efforts would be made to protect his family’s privacy.

After Emilio was settled in, the CPS worker went to Emilio’s home to meet with his parents. During the interview, she was informed that Emilio’s parents immigrated to the United States 20 years ago and both are now citizens. “It was quite a struggle,” Mr. Hernandez said. “We took odd jobs and worked long hours. We sent money back home to support our parents. We finally settled in this community and joined the local Catholic Church. The Church is

everything.” Mr. Hernandez added, “We both volunteer down at the church. It has been a great support for us. We get so much more than we give.”

The CPS worker recognized Mr. Hernandez as the supervisor of a local contracting company and Emilio’s mother, Rosa, as a server at a local restaurant. Mr. Hernandez told her that he was concerned because it took a lot of hard work to be accepted as an American citizen, to build a future and establish close ties within the community. Referring to the incident, Mario said he had lost his temper and felt bad about what happened, but that homosexuality was sinful and could not be accepted in his family.

The next day the CPS worker met with Emilio at the shelter. She found that he was having a hard time adjusting to it and that he was feeling alone and depressed. Throughout the interview he stated he was sure that he had lost his family for good and that he was never going to be able to have a relationship with them again. He noted the shame that his father felt and how much his mother had cried through the whole ordeal. Emilio expressed feelings of having let down his family and having betrayed them. He refused to discuss the physical altercation with his father, denying anything had happened and returning to his story of a fight in the neighborhood. When pressed about the incident and his relationship with his father, he became upset and seemed to “check out” mentally. The CPS worker arranged to get Emilio back to school the next day to relieve some of Emilio’s preoccupations and normalize his routines.

During the interview, Emilio stated that his sisters called to say his parents have decided to obtain counseling services for the family at their church. Emilio expressed anxiety about obtaining mental health services within the church saying that he did not want to talk with anyone about his family anymore or about his sexuality. He would rather be left alone. Emilio was also concerned about his reputation in school. The news of his having entered the shelter had

spread quickly, and Amy had called to tell him there were rumors circulating that he was kicked out of his home and that he was a “fag.”

Recognizing the importance of Amy in Emilio’s life, the CPS worker obtained the necessary permissions and releases to schedule a meeting with her. Amy reported that she and Emilio had been friends since grade school and that their parents were close. Early in high school Emilio had disclosed to her that he thought he had a crush on a male friend and that he was finding himself attracted to other males. Amy said that Emilio was very confused and upset about these feelings and had been trying to change them. When discussing Emilio’s family, Amy said she had concerns about Emilio because his family was so religious and his father put a lot of pressure on him to be a “man.” She stated Emilio had told her that his father had threatened to kick him out if he refused to change his sinful thinking.

Amy reported that early in his junior year Emilio had tried having sex with a female classmate. She said Emilio felt humiliated by the experience and found it was not enjoyable. She noted that Emilio has been bullied at school in the past few months, with some calling him gay and taunting him. Concerned about the amount of gossip in the town and the difficult relationship between Emilio and his father, she and Emilio had agreed to “date” until he could move out.

Amy and Emilio had tried to find some support groups for gay teens online but, in the end, Emilio felt somewhat hopeless, as the people he met online seemed so different from him. He had told her that many of the other teens lived in larger cities and were unable to understand what a small community was like. She also stated that she and Emilio had found a youth group for gay teens, but they were not able to drive the two hours it would take to get there.

The next afternoon the CPS worker met with Emilio’s parents to discuss the incident in more detail. Emilio’s father was angry when she arrived at the house, questioning her position

and why she and her agency felt they could judge him and his family. He told her that his father had whipped him when he was a kid and that he turned out fine. Agencies like CPS, he argued, say they are “protecting” kids but are really just making them weak. He said Emilio was a perfect example – he needed to be taught to be a man, but instead people were questioning his role as a father. He also said that he was not about to let CPS destroy his reputation in the community.

Over the course of the meeting, the CPS worker was able to calm Mario down and focus him on Emilio’s needs. Once he was calmer, Mario began to speak of the shame that Emilio was bringing upon the family. He stated that despite what he saw in the media, being gay is not natural and is a sin. He explained that in Hispanic culture and in his church homosexuality is not okay and that his family would be shunned from their community, church, and friends. He kept saying that Emilio needs to recognize the shame he would bring on his family and to get his act together. He then said that if Emilio would not stop acting gay, he was not sure that Emilio could come home. The CPS worker noted that Mario’s demeanor varied between angry and somewhat sorrowful. She could tell that Mario deeply loved his family and that he was doing what he felt best for them.

When asked about her views, Rosa, Emilio’s mother, began by defending Mario, saying how much he loved Emilio and his family and how good of a father he is. She explained that she had tried to talk to Emilio before and that Mario had tried so many things, but Emilio just would not listen. She stated that she did not think Mario was dangerous, just “a little hotheaded sometimes.” When prompted about her feelings regarding Emilio’s sexuality, Rosa began to cry softly. She said that she could not think about Emilio doing such unnatural things and she did not think she would be able to handle his sickness. She then began to talk about how “people like that” get ill and die of AIDS and that she did not want that for her son. She stated that she and Mario had had such high hopes for Emilio. He would soon be off to college and eventually get

married. She said that she knew Mario loved his family very much and that he had hoped his son would carry on the family name and give them grandkids. She expressed regret that this would never happen now. Then she also began to question aloud how the family could possibly remain in the town once people knew about Emilio.

At that point, Mario began to get angry. He gestured to his wife to stop talking and asked the CPS worker what she would do if her son put her family through this. He stated that he could not accept that his son was hurting his wife this much. He then stated that Emilio's sisters had been mocked at school that day, with peers talking about Emilio being gay. Mario stated that Emilio's youngest sister had even tried to come home early because of it. He stated that he had always loved Emilio, but that it was crazy that Emilio would do this to all of them. He then ruefully remarked that perhaps if he had done more, earlier, Emilio would not be like this.

The CPS worker explained that she could see that both parents loved Emilio very much and that she was going to work with them to be able to get him home. The CPS worker explained that the goal of the Department was to work with the family to ensure Emilio's safety and to return him to the family's home as soon as it was possible. For the time being, however, she was going to recommend that Emilio stay in the shelter. She then scheduled a time for a family team meeting (FTM). She suggested that the family consider anyone who might help them with their struggles and bring those people to the meeting. Rosa suggested that it might help to have Amy and her family there, but Mario shook his head. He said, "This is very personal—we don't want to air our dirty laundry out in the community. Besides, hasn't Amy done enough? She lied to my face as much as my own son did. And who knows what her parents already know."

The interview with Emilio's sister, Gina, was brief but private. The CPS worker sat with her in her bedroom while Gina explained that Emilio and her father have had a somewhat troubled past. "I think it is because in some ways they are so much alike," she said. They tend to

get on each other's nerves. She said this was not the first time there were confrontations between the two. She added, "My father believes strongly in family, Catholicism, and machismo. The worst confrontations come when he sees Emilio acting like a sissy." She also stated that she felt her father might have felt deceived by what had gone on between Emilio and Amy, which was hard for him since he liked Amy's family so much.

On the day of the team meeting, Mario arrived early with his wife and the local priest, Father Gregory. Emilio began the FTM by apologizing to his mother and father "for everything." He stated that he wanted to come home and then he would try to do better and be what his father and mother wanted him to be. Emilio's father nodded approvingly throughout this part of the interview. At this point, Emilio's mother spoke up, saying that she just wanted Emilio home and that they would find a way to make things work. Mario suggested that Emilio go to counseling with Father Gregory. Emilio started to cry and stated that as much as he wanted to be back with his family, he wanted them to know that he could not change from being gay.

Emilio said he would not go to Father Gregory for counseling because he did not feel comfortable with him. Emilio had seen Father Gregory once before at his father's insistence. During that meeting, the priest told Emilio that it was okay to be gay but not okay to act upon it. He reminded Emilio that if he acted upon his urges he would be sinning against God and would no longer be welcome to receive the sacraments of the Church.

Mario scolded Emilio for disrespecting Father Gregory and demanded he apologize to him. The CPS worker noticed that Emilio's whole demeanor had changed during this exchange and that he had flinched as Mario yelled and seemed to shrink back in his chair. The CPS worker felt it was time to take a break and took Emilio to another room to talk to him. Emilio refused to talk to her and only repeated that he "never wanted all this to happen." Emilio then sat down in a

corner and refused to go back into the room with his family. The CPS worker could hear Mario and Rosa arguing as Father Gregory attempted to talk to them.

The CPS worker returned to the meeting room, stating that Emilio would be returning when he was ready. Mario was still agitated and told the CPS worker that this was exactly why she should stay out of their family's business—how were they supposed to raise a “good son” when she was letting Emilio get away with disrespecting Father Gregory. Father Gregory then spoke up. He said that he had been doing some reflection, and that he thought it might be best for Emilio to remain out of the home for some time more. The CPS worker noted that Mario gave significant weight to what Father Gregory said, so she asked Father Gregory about individual and family counseling. She noted that the CPS could work with the family to get Emilio counseling elsewhere, which she thought might be best for the time being. Mario began to object, saying he did not want people in the town talking about Emilio going to a therapist, but Father Gregory stated that he agreed it might be best if he continued to meet with Mario and Rosa while Emilio saw someone with whom he felt more comfortable. With this approval from Father Gregory, Mario relaxed and consented to that arrangement.

It was determined that Mario and Rosa would meet twice weekly with Father Gregory and that Emilio would remain at the shelter. The CPS worker then provided the family with a list of resources that a coworker had compiled regarding local agencies, websites, and books that might be helpful for a family dealing with a child's sexual orientation. She also agreed to speak with the social workers at both Emilio's school and the school Emilio's sisters attend to address the bullying. Another FTM was set for two weeks later.

At the beginning of the next FTM, the CPS worker stated that Emilio was approaching the limit of his time at the shelter and a decision on his placement was required. Mario volunteered that he wanted to apologize for some of his actions in the last meeting. He noted that



he had gotten too agitated and would control himself better this time. He then said that he and Rosa had been meeting with Father Gregory as planned and that they had also met twice with Emilio's therapist, Shane Brannon. He noted that despite his initial hesitation, he had found the meetings with Shane to be beneficial.

When prompted about Emilio's returning home, Mario stated that he and Rosa had discussed it and that they wanted him back. He said that he had been doing a lot of thinking and that he wanted to make things work out. Emilio would be starting college in a few months and both Rosa and he wanted to share the last few months together before he left as a family. There would be a few ground rules, however. Mario said there would be no "gay talk," that he did not want to see Amy, and he would monitor Emilio's friends.

When asked if he was okay with returning home, Emilio expressed some concerns, saying he did not want to feel trapped in his own home, but that he would try it. He stated that he was beginning to understand that things would not return to the way they were, but that he should be with his family. He repeated that he could not change who he was, but that he wanted to try to help his family understand. He also noted he only had a one more month of school and, after summer, he would move out.

The CPS worker suggested that a safety plan be created for any issues that might arise upon Emilio's return to home. Shane suggested that the family should not talk about his being gay, that that should be reserved for therapy; everyone agreed. Shane noted that he had some continuing concerns about Emilio's interactions with Mario and Emilio's stress level when the two were together and that he felt there needed to be an agreement about how to deal with conflict. A plan was arranged whereby Emilio could go to his room and be alone when needed and that Mario would not follow or harass him. The CPS worker noted that there continued to be

some clear tension between Emilio and his family, but that there at least seemed to be an agreement as to how Emilio could return to the home safely.

### **Practice Application**

In this case, Emilio and his family confront the coming out process. While this process is developmental, it involves many deeply held cultural and religious beliefs that can rock the stability of youth and families and can put youth in danger of being physically or emotionally abused or bullied. In this case, Emilio's family needed the help of the priest who had cultural capital and the school and mental health social workers to help them to at least partially alleviate a crisis. LGBTQ youth need to be able to receive support and empowerment, as many times they cannot get it from their families. In small towns and rural communities where the private can become public so easily, youth need to know that they will be safe with their disclosures and be able to receive competent assistance from the professional community.

### Learning Activities

1. **Safety Planning Exercise:** Write a safety plan for the family that addresses the needs of all family members. Include activities to be considered or avoided, resources or supports to be included, and time lines for completion. What is the backup plan if the safety plan does not work as expected?
2. **Assessment Outreach Decisions:** Do you agree with Tracy's activities in engaging and intervening with Emilio, including her usage of Emilio's relationship with Amy? What would you have done the same? What would you have done differently?
3. **Family Team Meeting Video Exercise:** Review the video, Child and Family Team meeting at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GEEEdzhel50> to learn about family engagement and teaming.
4. **Conduct a Family Team Meeting Role Play:** Role play a child and family team meeting with the goals of ensuring Emilio's safety, determining a good permanency plan for Emilio, and enhancing the wellbeing of the both Emilio and the family. If Emilio cannot stay at home, develop a plan to keep the family connected in a positive way.

### Discussion Questions

1. In addition to being struck and yelled at by his father, Emilio was facing rejection from his Church, peers, and community. How might this type of isolation compound the impact of the trauma experienced in the home?
2. How might Emilio's history of abuse affect his feeling of self and relationships with others?
3. How might Emilio be progressing in moving through the stages of minority sexual identify as proposed by (a) Cass (1979) and (b) Troiden (1988)?
4. How might the rural context matter in addressing this immediate crisis? the long-term situation? What are positive and negative possibilities of rural cultural context that may apply?
5. What supports could be put into place to help Emilio and his family?
6. Who has the most social capital that can be used to improve the situation for Emilio and his family?
7. How has the CPS utilized the social capital of members of the family and community already and how might she continue to use it in the future?
8. What protective factors could be built into the safety plan to ensure that Emilio is safe during the summer months before he leaves for college?
9. How might the trauma Emilio has experienced affect his psychosocial development?
10. What are your hunches about the impact of Emilio's religious and ethnic culture on his experiences of trauma?
11. How might Emilio's trauma be differently experienced if he lived in a large city

- rather than a rural environment?
12. While much of the focus in this situation is necessarily on the needs of Emilio, others in this scenario have also experienced loss. Who are they and how might those losses affect their relationships moving forward?
  13. How may this case vignette demonstrate cultural intersectionality? What factors may be considered intersectional for Emilio?

### Suggested Readings

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