

When a Second Child Comes Out as LGBT: Examining Sibling Relationships and Family
Experiences

Katie M. Barrow

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Katherine R. Allen, Chair
April L. Few-Demo
Anisa Zvonkovic
Abbie E. Goldberg

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ABSTRACT

Investigation into the experiences of young adults who are the second sibling to self-identify and come out as a sexual minority in their families of origin is non-existent. In the context of evolving conceptualizations of the coming out process, the present study sought to explore the perceptions of the second sibling to come out as LGBT in the family of origin and the role of the already-out LGBT sibling on the coming out process. Guided by an integration of life course theory and symbolic interactionism, 15 young adults participated in intensive interviews involving their personal coming out experiences, self-identification processes, and family relationships. A constructivist grounded theory approach to data analysis was utilized, as deeper understandings of meaning and context was a goal of this inquiry. An iterative process of open, axial, and selective coding yielded 3 themes and 10 sub-categories that revealed the nuances of LGBT siblings and their family structures and dynamics, the coming out process of both the first and second siblings, and the construction of meaning post-coming out. The findings of this study have significant implications for the advancement of understanding when two or more siblings navigate the coming out process in their families of origin. Family scholars, practitioners, and community professionals will be able to utilize these findings in their work with LGBT individuals and their families.

DEDICATION

To my grandmother. I know you would have been so proud to see me complete this, and to see me graduate. I dedicate this dissertation to your memory and in the spirit of staying strong and never giving up.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background and Significance

Amidst the backdrop of evolving social change, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) individuals and their families are increasing in visibility and numbers. On June 26, 2013, the United States Supreme Court overturned Section Three of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), granting gay and lesbian couples access to federal marriage rights and benefits (Farmer, 2013). Statewide, New Mexico became the seventeenth state to issue marriage licenses to gay and lesbian couples on December 19, 2013. Additionally, public perception of LGBT people has shifted. In a USA Today/Gallup poll conducted November 26-29, 2012, 53% of Americans believed that same-sex marriage should be recognized as valid while receiving the same rights as opposite-sex marriage (“Gay and Lesbian Rights,” 2012). This percentage is up from 2010, in which 44% of Americans thought same-sex marriage should not be valid. Since May 2011, however, three out of four Gallup polls have revealed the majority of Americans support marriage equality for same-sex couples. Indeed, public perception is changing in the United States, but how is this affecting individuals and families who encounter these issues in their everyday lives?

There is little doubt that the wave of social change crossing the United States has led to an increase in visibility of LGBT individuals and families, and has thus influenced family life. In the same USA Today/Gallup poll mentioned earlier, individuals were asked why they were in favor of same-sex marriage, and 9% cited having LGBT family members or friends as their reason for supporting marriage equality (“Gay and Lesbian Rights,” 2012). Furthermore, a 2010 poll conducted by ABC News/Washington Post revealed that 63% of respondents reported having a family member, friend, or acquaintance who identified as gay or lesbian. Previous research has found that having an LGBT friend or family member promoted awareness and

knowledge of the LGBT community (Hilton & Syzmanski, 2011), increased empathy for LGBT people (Stotzer, 2009), and social activism (Baptist & Allen, 2008; Pearlman, 2012). Lewis (2011) examined nationally representative data on individuals who reported contact with LGB people (either as an acquaintance or coworker) and individuals who reported having an LGB friend, and found that simply knowing an LGB person increased chances of support for LGB rights.

Achieving a level of openness and acceptance does not always come easy for family members. In particular, when a young adult comes out to their family of origin, they may disrupt the family system (D'Augelli, Grossman, & Starks, 2008), as they challenge normative views of sexuality and heterosexual expectations held by family members (Rossi, 2010). Revealing a sexual orientation that is different from the majority can be a difficult and taxing process (Rossi, 2010). For the family of origin (e.g., parents and siblings), it can be viewed as a time of crisis and reorganization (Pearlman, 2005) accompanied by shock and disbelief (Hilton & Szymanski, 2011). For the young adult coming out, it can be emotionally challenging, and typically occurs after a person has already come out to same-age peers (Grierson & Smith, 2005; Rossi, 2010). When individuals eventually decide to come out to a family member, it is usually first to a mother (Mays, Chatters, Cochran, & Mackness, 1998; Savin-Williams, 1998b) or a sibling (Toomey & Richardson, 2009). Indeed, due to the presumed egalitarian nature of the sibling relationship (as opposed to the hierarchal parent-child relationship), the sibling relationship can at times serve as a test-ground for assessing reactions from other family members (Savin-Williams, 1998b).

The emergent literature, however, on the family of origin of sexual minorities is minimal, with most research accentuating the relationships of lesbian and gay parents and their children

(Biblarz & Savci, 2010; Goldberg, 2010). This attention to the nuclear family model has inadvertently sidelined family of origin studies, and adult sibling relationships in particular remain understudied (Walker, Allen, & Connidis, 2005). Only recently have LGBT adults' sibling relationships received scholarly attention, with previous research focusing on the dynamics between one LGBT sibling and one heterosexual sibling (Hilton & Syzmanski, 2011; Jenkins, 2008; Toomey & Richardson, 2009). What happens, though, when two siblings identify as LGBT? Does the second sibling's coming out experience alter the family and sibling relationship dynamics?

Whenever research has focused on sexual minority siblings, it is usually with the goal of shedding light on the relationship processes of a sibling dyad where *one* sibling is LGBT and one sibling is heterosexual (see Hilton & Syzmanski, 2011; Jenkins, 2008; Toomey & Richardson, 2009). This literature has produced valuable information on the disclosure process and the role that families of origin can play in the well-being of LGBT individuals (Greene, 2000). Furthermore, information on each individual sibling and the personal changes that can occur as a result of having a sexual minority sibling, such as being a more open and accepting person, has been briefly addressed (Hilton & Syzmanski, 2011). How a sibling perceives and is affected by another sibling coming out is important to the well-being of the sibling dyad as a whole. For example, in a qualitative study examining 14 heterosexual siblings ages 19 to 59 who had one gay or lesbian sibling, Hilton and Syzmanski (2011) found that nine of the heterosexual siblings experienced disclosure as a shockwave to the sibling relationship, while the remaining characterized disclosure as positive and accepting. Further, Hilton and Syzmanski found that while some siblings do experience anger and frustration, they also cite confusion because "gay equates to being different" (p. 300). Some siblings in this study even experienced distress

because they feared they may never truly understand this part of their sibling. The revelation of a sexual minority status can cause the severing of or renewal of family ties, with a breadth of reactions and feelings in between these extremes (Jenkins, 2008; Savin-Williams, 1998b). What if there was a previous strain in the sibling relationship, yet the sharing of an LGBT identity increased closeness and feelings of support? What if a sibling also identifying as LGBT caused pain or jealousy and a rift occurred? These are among the questions explored in the present study.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of young adults who are the second sibling in their families to come out as LGBT. Insight into the sibling relationship, and the perceived role of family of origin on the individual and their sibling relationship, was gleaned in relation to coming out processes. An in-depth perspective from the second sibling to come out was ascertained through a qualitative process influenced by a life course perspective and symbolic interactionism. Because little is known about LGBT individuals and their siblings, particularly when both siblings identify as a sexual minority, this study contributes to a substantial gap in the study of sibling relationships and LGBT family studies. There is much to be learned about the complexity of sexuality and the coming out process as understood through the experiences of LGBT young adult siblings and their families.

Research Questions

Guided by a life course perspective and symbolic interactionism, the following research questions informed the present study:

1. What is the process of coming out as experienced by the second sibling in a family to identify as LGBT?

2. How does having a sibling who identifies as LGBT and who is already out to the family of origin shape the second sibling's perception of the:
 - a. Coming out process,
 - b. Self-identification as a sexual minority,
 - c. Relationship changes with the sexual minority sibling, and
 - d. Shifts in the dynamics and structure of the family of origin?

Key Concepts

Coming Out

Coming out is a term used to designate several processes that punctuate a person's life course (Brown 1989; Morrow, 2004). These processes involve the ongoing personal exploration and identification of a sexuality and gender identity that does not conform to a heterosexual script (Bockting & Cesaretti, 2001; Connolly, 2005). It also involves the sharing of one's identity with members in personal and public networks. A person's identity is never fully fixed, and as new identities emerge, a person may find themselves coming out again, but with a new identifier. For example, a young adult may initially come out as bisexual, but after the passage of time, might discover that the identifier of lesbian is more compatible.

Sexual Identity

Sexual identity is one component of the self that encompasses aspects of sexuality such as sexual values and beliefs, behaviors and activities, and sexual orientation (Moradi, Mohr, Worthington, & Fassinger, 2009; Worthington, Savoy, Dillon, & Vernaglia, 2002). Acceptance and recognition of one's sexual identity involves claiming these aspects of identity as relevant to self (Moradi et al., 2009), as well as disclosing one's sexual identity to others (Rosario, Hunter, Maguen, Gwadz, & Smith, 2001).

Sexual Orientation

An element of sexual identity, sexual orientation refers to a person's sexual attraction to a particular sex (Morgan, 2012). Sexual orientation can be expressed through sexual and relational behaviors and attitudes on the basis of gender (Moradi et al., 2009).

Family of Origin

Research including families of origin has generally used this term to refer to parents or caregivers and siblings (Almack, 2008; Rostosky, Korfhage, Duhigg, Stern, Bennett, & Riggle, 2004). Contrary to families of choice, which are distinguished by personal choice and develop out of friendship and love (Weston, 1991), a family of origin signifies the family individuals are born into or the family in which they are reared (Dattilio, 2006). Indeed, families of origin have previously been referred to as obligatory relationships (Framo, 1992). However, this sentiment is changing, as individuals are intentionally and purposefully deciding who to *include* in their family of origin (Framo, 1992). In this research, I took a holistic approach to defining family of origin and no preference for biological or nonbiological membership constellations was given. Broadly speaking, "family of origin" can indicate a meaningful relationship between people "who share a commitment toward building long-term, sustainable, primary relationships with one another" (Morrow, 2004, p. 54). When participants were asked about their families of origin, they spoke of those people with whom they shared a bio-legal relationship and a physical space for a period of time, and/or those people who provide(d) social, emotional, spiritual, and financial support in the context of a shared living environment (Rostosky et al., 2004).

LGBT and Sexual Minority

There are benefits and challenges in using pre-determined labels to categorize the population at the center of my research. The acronym "LGBT" is a widely recognized umbrella

term encompassing those individuals who identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender. The letters “LGB” refer to sexual identity. Lesbian women and gay men share a romantic and/or sexual attraction with people of their same gender, while those who identify as bisexual share a romantic and/or sexual attraction with men *and* women. The “T” in LGBT represents transgender persons and refers to gender identity and gender expression, describing a person who identifies and/or expresses a gender different than the one they were assigned at birth. Conversely, a person who claims a gender identity and gender expression congruent with the gender they were assigned at birth is labeled “cisgender” (Levy, 2013).

Use of the LGBT acronym – in academic literature and popular culture – indicates solidarity among a group of people who share a common societal oppression and discrimination based on sexuality and gender (Moradi et al., 2009). Moreover, use of the umbrella term signifies the inherent fluidity in sexual and gender identities. At some point, gender nonconforming children may be labeled gay, lesbian, or bisexual and may eventually grow up to claim that label, a transgender identity, a queer identity, or a heterosexual identity (Thomas & Blakemore, 2013). Yet, considerations must be taken for those participants who do not feel the term “LGBT” accurately captures their experiences or how they choose to self-identify. Employing the term “sexual minority” as a single, unifying label, though, might be casting too much of a broad stroke and undermine the diverse and unique experiences of this group of people (Moradi et al., 2009). For this reason, “sexual minority” was used in conjunction with “LGBT” throughout this study in an inclusive effort to represent those who do not solely align with a heterosexual sexual identity and orientation. One final caveat about terminology should be noted. Labels used to describe the sexuality and gender experience of transgender persons remain elusive, and can vary from person to person (Kuper, Nussbaum, & Mustanski, 2012). As a family scholar working

with this population, I recognize that identities are multifaceted and represent different meanings for different people. To that end, participants in this study were asked to self-identify in addition to supplying an identifier for their sibling.

Theoretical Framework

When trying to understand the coming out process and adult sibling relationships, life course theory provided a lens from which to view the interdependent characteristics of sibling ties (Walker et al., 2005). Siblings' lives are linked, that is, they share a connection manifested in their family, and one sibling's misfortunes or successes can alternately affect the other sibling. My purpose in this study, then, was to include participants with siblings who have co-resided for an extended period of time in the same family of origin. Further, participants and their sibling were of the same birth cohort and thus influenced by similar cohort experiences. Life course theory was also used to highlight the historical and social settings that underscore the coming out process, as previous scholars have illuminated (Grierson & Smith, 2005; Riley, 2010).

Another theory that has been used to study family relationships is symbolic interactionism. Family relationships can serve as a vehicle for which people create meaning that inevitably establishes, maintains, or changes a person's viewpoint. Symbolic interactionism postulates that as siblings interact with one another, their concepts of self and identity formulate and change (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). The concept of identity and the meaning attached to self-descriptions of being a sibling, or being an LGBT sibling, provide a lens for understanding how having a sexual minority sibling shapes the sibling relationship, as well as the concept and perceptions of self held by both siblings.

Life Course Theory

Life course theory is both developmental and historical (Hareven, 1994), and informs the social organization of life through biological and historical time. Through a life course lens, individuals' and families' perceptions of and responses to various life events in the family and broader social and historical contexts can be illuminated (Elder, 1998). Life course theory emphasizes the importance of life stages, transitions, and trajectories and how they are linked across family members (Walker et al., 2005). Occurrence of these events, too, is noteworthy, as it involves societal and cultural expectations of timing and sequencing of life transitions. With regards to sexual orientation disclosure, for example, it is seen as normative for a person to first self-identify and then come out as a sexual minority in adolescence or young adulthood as opposed to later in life. Adolescence and young adulthood are considered times of experimentation and self-revelation, thus it is deemed developmentally appropriate and socially acceptable to have acknowledged a minority status during this stage of life (Wolfe, 1998). If a person acknowledges a sexual minority status at age 50 – after they have lived in a heterosexual marriage and had children – the timing and sequencing of these events can lead to emotional upheaval in the individual and their family. This particular transition is likely to lead to the reorganization of family life. The individual must contend with the dissolution of a heterosexual relationship, including divorce, the sharing of children between two households, and possible entry into a new dating scene.

Cohort. Individuals who are born and come-of-age during the same time period comprise a cohort (Bengtson & Allen, 1993). Cohorts share a similar life course shaped by unique experiences and common locations in history (Riley, 1973). Westrate and McLean (2010) define cohort as a group of people who experience a cultural event and share its meaning, or at least a mutual understanding of the cultural event. A cohort experience is distinguished from a

personal event, which is limited to one's own understanding and personal meaning-making (Westrate & McLean). Moreover, it is important not to conflate "cohort" and "generation." A generation involves a kin relationship and genealogical lineage incorporating a span of upwards of 30 years (Hareven, 1994). Cohorts are marked by a more specific time frame and a shared historical backdrop, such as the Baby Boomers (1946-1964), the Generation Xers (1965-1980), and the Millennials (1981-1999) (Meriac, Woehr, & Banister, 2010). Those born in the Millennial cohort are the children of the Baby Boomers, and have been raised in a time of economic prosperity and extraordinary technological advances (McGlynn, 2005). Historically, this cohort has witnessed the legalization of same-sex marriage at the state-level, the increased visibility of same-sex parents (Stacey, 2013), and evidence of increased acceptance of sexual minorities (one example of this being "sexual orientation" and "gender identity" added as a protective class in 16 states and DC; Human Rights Campaign, 2013).

Historical context. Cohorts typically share a unique historical context. Historical contexts constitute geopolitical, economic, and technological developments and their impacts on family life (Lanigan, 2009). The technological advancements in computing have led to an increase in Internet usage, including using the Internet for social and romantic connections. Compared to 20 years ago, sexual minority young adults have more opportunities to instantaneously connect with those whom they share common interests. Individuals can engage in chat room discussions, locate gay bars and LGBT-friendly places of worship, and get answers to questions concerning coming out to their families. Indeed, historical forces play a significant role in individual and family trajectories, as they hold a direct influence at the time of the event. Cumulatively, their impacts are inadvertently felt throughout a person's life course (Hareven, 1994), and the impact of historical forces can ripple across cohorts, leaving indirect influences.

For example, the political and social movements of the 1960s and 1970s (e.g., civil rights for African Americans, women's rights, and gay rights) can be indirectly linked to an increased visibility of LGBT student groups across college campuses, which in turn may aid an LGBT young adult in coming out (Riley, 2010).

Trajectories and transitions. Elder (1998) proposed that people are on individual life trajectories consisting of different life transition points that encompass family, education, and work (e.g., graduation from high school, birth of a child). As such, these multiple trajectories and their developmental implications underscore the fundamental building blocks of the life course that provide meaning and structure (Elder, 1998). For example, life transitions typically surround socially created and socially recognized rites of passage when a person undergoes some kind of change, such as graduation from college and entry into the workforce (Bengtson & Allen, 1993). If a participant realized his or her sexual minority status and negotiated the initial coming out process to friends and family at a time when his or her already-out sibling was leaving college and entering into the workforce, this could have deterred the participant from communicating with or relying upon the sibling for emotional support during the coming out process. Moreover, if the participant perceives his or her LGBT sibling as negotiating a demanding transitional point in the life course, the participant might look outside of the sibling relationship for advice and support, thus discounting the already-out sibling as a viable source of emotional support.

Timing of lives. The timing at which individuals experience life events can substantially alter their trajectory. For example, the time at which a person comes out can have a significant impact on his or her life course. If a person comes out to the family of origin at age 14, he or she could risk the severing of emotional and financial ties and be forced to leave home, depending upon a variety of factors such as the level of traditional attitudes the parents hold (Newman &

Muzzonigro, 1993). Furthermore, synchronization of events – which reflects the efforts of family members to coordinate their lives – can be in unison or off-balance (Hareven, 1978). If a child's personal goals contradict the family's goals, tension and conflict can arise (Hareven, 1994). Assuming two parents desire grandchildren, and expect their son to meet a woman in college and enter into marriage, what tensions might arise when these parents learn their son is gay? The parents' goals are out-of-synch with the child's, potentially causing strain in the parent-child relationship. However, family members can be in-synch, such as two siblings who are close in age and forge connections around similar life experiences (Rauer & Volling, 2007). Entering into a romantic relationship and the experiencing of a "first love" is an example of one such event that two siblings close in age may share around the same time in each other's lives.

Symbolic Interactionism

A symbolic interactionism framework emphasizes how an individual influences, and is influenced by, their social interactions. Understanding of the self, behavior, and the creation of meaning evolves through these interactions (Burbank & Martins, 2009). Concepts of symbolic interactionism include the self, identities and roles, and meaning-making. How sexual minority young adults come to define themselves (in accordance to these concepts) and their interactions with their sibling and family was a goal of this study. Further, the ability to understand the meaning that individuals, families, and society attach to roles and how these meanings shape identity and experiences (e.g., coming out) is particularly helpful when trying to understand the individual and familial process of self-disclosure.

Self. Instead of viewing the self as the singular, unique essence of a person, the self should be viewed as a process; that is, the self is dynamic and continuously defined by social interactions (Burbank & Martins, 2009; Lynch & McConatha, 2006). Development of the self,

and the ability to self-reflect (Longmore, 1998), emerge from communication with and responses from other people (Stryker, 2008). The self mirrors society and is shaped by gender, race, age, and sexual orientation (Stryker, 2008). Thus, a sexual minority young adult's self is in a persistent state of flux as they receive messages from a heteronormative society that defines the status quo as "straight." The individual is constantly receiving input from interactions with family, friends, and society-at-large that alters how they, in turn, define themselves. Specific to this study is the attempt to understand how sibling interactions (e.g., their discussion of speculation about mom's reaction to yet another child coming out) mold the participant's sense of self.

Identity. The self is comprised of different identities, and the concept of identity represents the many meanings that are attributed to a person's role by the person and by others (Kaufman & Johnson, 2004). Identities refer to the self-identification that people make according to group memberships, social roles, and categories (Longmore, 1998) in addition to the various role-related behaviors a person exhibits that others then interpret as their identity (Alexander & Wiley, 1981). Identities also maintain a hierarchal order, as individuals demonstrate salience of certain identities signaling the likelihood they will be invoked in a given situation (Stryker, 2008). For example, the identity of *sister* may take precedence over *lesbian* when the second sibling is coming out to the family of origin, as indicated by this kind of statement: "Yes, I am gay and we share that commonality, but I am also your sister and I will be here to support you and stand up for you when you come out to mom and dad."

Role. A role consists of normative expectations and shared meanings for how individuals of similar identities are *supposed* to act (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993; McKinnon, 1994; Stryker, 2008). Roles inform cultural expectations of behavior, thoughts, and feelings, yet are indicative

of *expected* behavior, not actual behavior (McKinnon, 1994). For example, the identity of the first sibling to come out as LGBT might encompass the role of an informal educator to the family of origin on the topic of LGBT sexuality, current laws and policies, and supportive groups and businesses in the local community. Yet, how might roles be reimagined to account for multiple siblings who share a sexual minority status? The current study examined anticipated role performances of the sibling who was negotiating coming out in the context of having a sibling who was out and “paved the way”.

Meaning-making. The construction of knowledge through interpretative interaction reflects the process of meaning-making (Kurzman, 2008). Contingent upon context, meaning-making is “idiosyncratic to each person and each moment...patterned across ever-changing populations and instances” (Kurzman, 2008, p. 7). Indeed, symbols are shared meanings (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993), and the link between symbols and interactions rests on how an individual interprets meaning. For example, if a young adult comes out as LGBT, the way they and others define their sense of self changes. They may receive validation from their parents as evident by an open invitation to bring future romantic partners to family dinner. From this situation, meaning can be derived as supportive and influence whether the person experiences an optimistic sense of self as a sexual minority, possibly contributing to a decrease in the likelihood of internalized homophobia.

Applying the Theoretical Framework to the Present Study

An enriching portrait of the complexity of family life and the ever-changing way people “do” family can be captured through the use of more than one theoretical model (Katz, Lowenstein, Phillips, & Daatland, 2005). The meaningful integration of multiple perspectives helps strengthen a theoretical framework. The integrated framework of life course theory and

symbolic interactionism elucidates the macro-structural forces within which families and siblings are positioned (as guided by life course theory), as well as the micro-process of individual and family interaction (as guided by symbolic interactionism). Life course theory presupposes time as an organizing structure (e.g., age-graded developments, transitions and trajectories) and symbolic interactionism assists in understanding the changing of roles and identities to accompany these transitions. Matsueda and Heimer (1997) highlight the interconnection of both theories whereby individuals apply meaning when considering aspects of the life course – such as age-graded developmental milestones – and that, in turn, informs the behavior of individuals.

Together, both theories allow for comprehensive, yet nuanced interpretation of lived experience through human interactions situated in time. For example, symbolic interactionism presupposes the ability of the self to reflect upon the meanings of LGBT-identification, and how these meanings can be constructed via interaction with an LGBT sibling and the larger society (as expounded upon in life course theory). Thus, if the second sibling to come out is a young gay man who views his LGBT sibling as sexually promiscuous, and further presumes that society expects gay men to be sexually promiscuous, he may reject this role for himself.

Another illustration of the integrated framework suggests that the salience of identities can be understood according to different turning points along the trajectory of coming out. In the beginning stages of self-identification and coming out – when a second sibling decides to come out to his or her parents – the LGBT sibling who is already out might assume the role of a protective, nurturing sibling in order to help ease the process of coming out to parents. In this context, the identity of *sibling* might take precedence over other identities with a participant's sibling stating, for example, “Yes, I may be gay, but I am also your brother and I am here to support you.” However, if the sibling who has already been out for a while decides to take his or

her sibling to a gay bar, then the identity of sexual minority may take precedence, as both siblings discuss romance and dating in the LGBT community. Thus, both theories help illuminate context – and where along their respective trajectories each sibling resides – and how specific situations may contribute to the evoking of certain identities.

Furthermore, when it comes to understanding the meaning a sexual minority individual attaches to “coming out,” it is useful to take a look at how the term coming out has shifted in meaning over the last 40 years (Riley, 2010; Westrate & McLean, 2010). For example, Westrate and McLean (2010) documented the differences between older cohorts (those coming-of-age in the 1960s to 1980s) and younger cohorts (those born after 1983) and their interpretation of coming out. For the older cohorts, their coming out narratives reflected cultural memories centered on politics and other external events (e.g., Stonewall riots), while younger cohorts reported more personal memories, reflecting a move away from cultural definitions of self to a more personal, intimate way of formulating self.

In summary, symbolic interactionism and life course theory amplify each other in terms of social interaction and considerations of context. Whereas symbolic interactionism is focused on social and psychological forces of an individual’s behavior and ability to self-reflect (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993), life course underscores time and historical context as important for structuring (and comprehending) behavior. The integrated framework shaped the present study and guided the data analysis process.

Organization of the Dissertation

This proposal is organized into five chapters. In Chapter One, I introduce the research topic by illuminating the background and significance of the study, purpose of the study, and research questions. I also define key concepts used throughout the proposal. I conclude Chapter

One with the theoretical framework guiding the present study. Chapter Two includes an overview and critique of the existing literature relevant to the study. Chapter Three describes the methodological framework used in the study including an overview of qualitative methodology and constructivist grounded theory. A description of the sample and recruitment strategies, data collection and analysis procedures, and my reflexivity statement are also included in Chapter Three. I present the findings in Chapter Four, and in Chapter Five I discuss the findings and their implications for future research and application.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on the Coming Out Experience

The coming out process comprises a multitude of events – both personal and public – that encapsulate the acknowledgement of a same-sex orientation (Morrow, 2000) as well as a gender nonconforming identity (Bockting, & Cesaretti, 2001). It includes the major developmental milestone of coming out to oneself, as well as the emotional events of telling one's closest family and friends. The coming out process also refers to everyday life experiences, such as work events or social gatherings, and family rituals, such as weddings or funerals (Oswald, 2002). As LGBT individuals encounter new situations and meet new people, they must decide the extent to which they wish to disclose their sexual orientation (Beals & Peplau, 2006; Rothblum, 2000).

The coming out experience can be thought of as coming out to oneself, and coming out to others, such as friends and family members (Groves, Bimbi, Naní, & Parsons, 2006). Typically, coming out to oneself occurs before coming out to others. In D'Augelli and Hershberger's (1993) study of 194 LGB youth (15 to 21 years of age) representing a racially diverse sample, the majority of participants reported coming out to oneself around age 10, with coming out to others occurring, on average, six years later. Further, Groves et al.'s (2006) study that included a cohort of 18 to 24 year-old LGB adults found that people of color came out to oneself and to others around the same age as White LGB individuals (around 15 years of age). However, White LGB individuals were more likely than other racial or ethnic groups to be out to their parents, regardless of age.

When considering coming out events, people of color have to negotiate multiple minority identities, and sexual identity often times can take a backseat to racial and ethnic minority development (Groves et al., 2006). Minority parents of LGB children may retain less than positive

views of their child holding yet another minority identity, and children may realize this and delay coming out to their parents for fear of losing access to valuable family resources (e.g., financial; Grov et al., 2006; LaSala, 2010). As Green (2000) pointed out, a youth's decision to come out is especially impacted by parents' sociocultural positions as children reasonably estimate how their parents, extended family, and community might react. Indeed, Black, Latino, and Asian LGB individuals may contend with the intersection of many cultural factors, such as conservative religious values, traditional gender roles, and the significance of the family, when formulating their LGB identity (Dube & Savin-Williams, 1999; Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2004). In their study of 145 LGB youth comprising Black, Latino, and White racial groups, Rosario and colleagues (2004) did not find cultural factors to be a hindrance to the formation of an LGB identity; however, cultural factors were related to a delay in LGB identity integration. Non-White participants in Newman and Muzzonigro's (1993) study of gay youth reported that "not meeting stereotypes of being gay" hindered acceptance in the LGBT community (p. 224). Whereas it appears that concealing stereotypical traits of being gay or lesbian (also known as "covering"; Moore, 2011) can help with familial acceptance of a sexual minority identity (e.g., Tremble, Schneider, & Appathurai, 1989), it may impede approval in the LGBT community. Newman and Muzzonigro further hypothesized that race alone was not a factor for how sexual minority youth (ages 17 to 20) experienced coming out to their families, as the level of traditional attitudes held by parents was also influential.

Across the literature, the coming out process has been conceptualized through a variety of models and stages. One of the most well-known models to conceptualize the coming out process was established by Vivienne Cass (1979), and focused on the process by which a person adopts the identity of "homosexual." The model incorporates six sequential stages, ranging from

Identity Confusion to Identity Synthesis, and was one of the first illustrations of identity development among lesbians and gay men. Around the time Cass developed her model, the American Psychiatric Association removed “homosexuality” from its Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) as a mental disorder (circa 1973). Cass’s model treated LG people not as deviant or in need of medical attention, but as individuals living in a heterosexist society negotiating a non-heterosexual identity development. Cass’s model is still cited in current research, and is utilized by practitioners working with LGBT populations (see Zubernis, Snyder, & McCoy, 2011), yet it has been the subject of debate (Adams & Phillips, 2009; Savin-Williams, 1998a). The model assumes “a stable homosexual identity” (Cass, p. 221), while excluding the fluidity of sexuality and sidelining those who may not identify as entirely homosexual or entirely heterosexual. Furthermore, Cass’s model is limited in capturing the range of experiences associated with a non-European descent. Adams and Phillips (2009) qualitatively investigated a small sample of two-spirited lesbian and gay (TsLG) Native Americans and found that the close-knit community in which the participants were reared helped to create a safe and open community that allowed for freedom of expression; thus, a few of the participants never had to “pass,” and one in particular never self-identified as heterosexual. Both “passing” and initial heterosexual self-identification are assumed experiences in Cass’s model.

Another stage model, identified by Coleman (1982), proposed five stages to coming out: *Pre-coming Out, Coming Out, Exploration, First Relationships, and Identity Integration*. The *Pre-Coming Out* stage begins when a person is a child and is experiencing distress over being “different.” The child does not yet acknowledge same-sex feelings, which is assumed to be the underlying cause of any behavioral or psychosomatic problems, according to Coleman. Resolving this stage comes only when a person realizes same-sex feelings. The *Coming Out*

phase involves perceiving oneself as LG followed by the task of telling others. *Exploration*, the third stage, requires learning interpersonal skills needed to date, or engaging in sexual experimentation. After experimentation occurs, individuals desire commitment and thus explore *First Relationships*, the fifth stage, until finally achieving *Identity Integration*. Similar to Cass's *Identity Synthesis*, *Identity Integration* pertains to the fusing of private and public image into one identity that has been accepted and integrated into various facets of the person's life. While Coleman acknowledged fluidity, individual circumstances, and non-linearity in his stages, he asserted that each stage should be worked out before identity integration can be reached. Further, Coleman suggested that individuals must singly work through the developmental tasks of each stage. This model has been challenged in the literature, however, as inadequately capturing when exploration and first relationships occur simultaneously.

In 2001, Rosario, Hunter, Maguen, Gwadz, and Smith envisioned a different approach to conceptualizing the coming out process by rejecting stage models altogether. Developed from a study comprised of a racially diverse LGB sample of 80 men and 76 women, Rosario et al. suggested a model that connects coming out to adaptational behaviors. Throughout the coming out process, a person may be negotiating and interweaving among five different areas: involvement in LGB activities, development of attitudes toward LGB identity, comfort with LGB identity, number of disclosures of sexual identity to others, and type of sexual identity. Rosario et al. recognized the flexibility in each category as well as the shifting degree of emphasis according to developmental contexts. The findings indicated that this model could re-focus coming out for young people. Connecting with others via LGB-related activities and discussions helped youth to understand and accept their same-sex identity. As a result, LGB youth may view their sexuality in a positive light and, for example, may realize that just because

one identifies as LGB does not mean one cannot have children (Lev & Sennott, 2013). The gradual evolution of perceiving the coming out process in differing, unique ways attests to the fact that not everyone experiences self-identification and coming out in similar fashions.

In addition to Rosario and colleagues' work (2001), other scholars have envisioned the coming out process as flexible. Floyd and Stein (2002) interviewed 36 men and 36 women to understand variations in the coming out experiences of 16 to 27 year-old LGB persons. Their findings concluded that sexual orientation development varies for each person, continuing across the life course as opposed to something restricted to young adulthood. Indeed, scholars are cataloguing the varying trajectories of sexual minority individuals and are quick to avoid singular developmental niches and universal stage models (Diamond & Butterworth, 2008). A vivid example can be seen in Rickards and Wuest's (2006) qualitative analysis of adult lesbians who came out between 35 to 60 years of age. Rickards and Wuest created a "social process model" that captured three unique phases for the lesbians in their study who were coming out in mid-life: *Facing Scary Love*, *Finding Me*, and *Settling In*. The first stage, *Facing Scary Love*, most likely begins with the realization of having feelings or attractions for another woman. In this stage, the woman confronts the heterosexual life she has led and acknowledges that something has been amiss. She must renegotiate her roles, her identity, and make sense of the impact this realization will have on the people in her life. *Finding Me* involves telling others, nurturing a lesbian identity, and maintaining focus on inner peace in order to avoid a devastating emotional meltdown that can come with reconstructing a new identity. *Settling In* denotes a personal and public affirmation of a lesbian identity as women "reestablish self as credible with those who matter most" (Rickards & Wuest, 2006, p. 541). Women in this phase may also realize the institutionalization of heterosexism in society and refuse to be ashamed of their sexual

minority status. Through this model, Rickards and Wuest have developed a different way to view coming out for people in mid- and late-life, as opposed to adolescence or young adulthood.

Research has also shed light on the nuances of coming out in the African American community and the policy of “don’t ask, don’t tell” (Bates, 2012; Miller, 2011) and “covering” (Moore, 2011). In a case study of two young adults, Miller (2011) found that African American women gained acceptance through limiting conversation about their sexual orientation: “DADT [don’t ask, don’t tell] both provided the assurance that important family relationships would remain intact and provided, although not discussed, space for their lesbian identity” (p. 553). Moore (2011) further discussed the concept of “covering” as a way to reduce discrimination and stigma “by keeping public expression of the stigma to a minimum” (p. 194). In this way, a verbal coming out is not necessarily experienced. For example, a participant in Moore’s study reflected on how she never told her parents or sister that she was a lesbian, but insist they have seen her with her girlfriend and understand they are romantically involved. Operating under a DADT or “covering” policy is not a dismissal of one’s sexual orientation or an attempt to pass as heterosexual – it is a process of de-emphasizing sexuality so as to reduce tensions and maintain familial relationships.

The conceptualization of the coming out process is evolving and beginning to capture a wide range of experiences across all LGBT populations, not just gay men and lesbians of a European descent. As Moore (2011) highlights, though, present-day coming out models need to better attend to the intersections of race, ethnicity, and culture and how sexual identity develops in tandem with other minority identities. However, scholars and practitioners are seeking new pathways by which to think about and redefine the coming out experience, recognizing the multiple transitions and trajectories people traverse. Additionally, attention to integrating the

familial experience, including the role a sibling can play (Toomey & Richardson, 2009), is key to developing a broader picture of the experiences of families in the coming out process. Further, an emergent framework for the coming out experience of multiple siblings may be a contribution of the present study.

Coming Out: What's Age Got To Do With It?

The age at which people are becoming aware of their LGBT identity and coming out to themselves and to others appears to have gotten younger (Lev & Sennott, 2013; Savin-Williams, 2001). A study conducted by Grov et al. (2006) included five age-graded cohorts of a racially diverse sample of LGB adults. Both men and women who were presently in the 18 to 24 age cohort came out around 15 years of age, while those in the 25 to 34 age cohort came out around 16 years of age, and the 35 to 44 age cohort came out around 17 years of age. Moreover, the 45 to 54 age cohort came out around 19, and the 55 and above age cohort came out around 20. Approximately one to two years separated each cohort in their coming out experiences, with a five-year difference marking the 18 to 24 age cohort and the 55 and above age cohort. Furthermore, Floyd and Bakeman (2006) conducted a study to understand how historical contexts affect coming out factors for LGB individuals. The predominantly White sample included 767 people ranging from 18 to 74 years of age. Findings revealed that earlier cohorts (those who came out before 18.5 years of age) self-identified as LGB by adolescence and experienced more openness with their family and friends in their teenage years. The later cohort (those who came out after 18.5 years of age), on average, tended to self-identify in their mid-20s, thus experiencing coming out under a much different context than youth who may still live at home and retain financial dependence on their parents. Another seemingly cohort-specific finding in this study suggested that those coming out before 18.5 years of age are more likely to

self-identify as LGB before engaging in any same-sex encounters, and often times without having experienced a heterosexual encounter. Important to note for the present study was what are the effects of having a sexual minority sibling who was already out? How did this influence the age at which a person comes out, especially if their sibling was out while they were both living in the family home? Given Floyd and Bakeman's findings, a possible link could be observed between being the second sibling to self-identify and an absence of same-sex encounters.

As youth appear to be coming out at younger ages than previous generations, is it any easier, then, to come out in the 21st century? In a Norwegian sample, Giertsen and Anderssen (2007) looked at rates of lesbians' coming out over a nearly 20-year span, and their findings suggest that it was no easier coming out in 2005 as opposed to 1985. That is, the authors contended that heterosexism is pervasive and heteronormativity is still the norm, leading to distress or uneasiness during the initial self-identification of a sexual minority status as well as throughout coming out processes. Floyd and Bakeman (2006) proposed that the current climate indicates more openness, acceptance, and accessible support, which may help the "recognition of same-sex attractions and the search for a self-identity much less daunting, allowing for relatively greater emphasis on integrating identity within other aspects of one's life" (p. 295). Indeed, Rossi (2010) observed in the coming out stories of LGB youth (18-25 years of age) that although the coming out process does not look much different in 2009, what does appear to be different is that the LGBT youth coming out in the 21st century have more resources available, and more importantly, are aware of these resources. Specific to her study, Rossi's sample was derived from universities and college-attending youth where LGBT campus and community groups are a likely resource.

Considering access to resources and sources of support, however, compared to LGB individuals who did not grow up with around-the-clock access to the Internet, younger LGB individuals have increased access to various means of social support (Floyd & Bakeman, 2006), such as those afforded by technology. Baams, Jonas, Utz, Bos, and van der Vuurst (2011) found that, among 16 to 24 year olds, LGBT youth relied on the Internet for social support via online communities, as they can offer anonymity and a less stigmatized atmosphere. Additionally, youth tend to devote ample time watching television or utilizing the Internet to access media (Comer et al., 2008), with reports by the Center for Disease Control estimating three hours of non-school related television usage and an additional three hours of non-school related Internet usage for ages 14 to 18 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012). Research has suggested that adolescents and young adults formulate portions of their identity based on fictional characters represented in the media (Meyer, 2009). In a study conducted in 2005, Gomillion and Guiliano (2011) found a link between positive LGB identity and LGB role models in the media. In addition to noting LGB role models such as Ellen DeGeneres, participants spoke of fictional characters in *Queer as Folk*, *Will & Grace*, and *The L Word* as influencing their LGB identity. Eight years after this study, the number of television programs that feature LGBT individuals and families has increased with popular shows such as *Glee* and *Modern Family*, and Hollywood movies like *The Kids Are All Right*. Mainstream media figures are becoming popular in LGBT communities for their openness and connections with the LGBT community. Celebrities such as Neil Patrick Harris, Jane Lynch, Anderson Cooper, Frank Ocean, Chaz Bono, and Laverne Cox are among those well-known for being out with their LGBT identities. For LGBT young adults, having the opportunity to witness other sexual minorities like themselves in

mainstream media (via Internet, television, movies, and music) may just signal that there does not have to be shame or secrecy surrounding a sexual minority status.

Coming Out: Gender and the Familial Context

After disclosure to a same-age peer, the next person an LGBT young adult is most likely to come out to is a member of the family of origin (Rossi, 2010). Parents, in particular mothers, are likely to be the recipient of initial familial self-disclosure (D'Augelli, 2008; Mays et al., 1998). The finding that mothers tend to be the first member in the family of origin to be informed of an LGBT identity is upheld for both men and women from differing race and ethnicity compositions. For example, in a large sample of 18 to 70 year-old African American LGB individuals, Mays and colleagues (1998) found that the majority of men and women were more likely to be out to their mothers and not their fathers. Additionally, Merighi and Grimes (2000), in their qualitative interviews with 57 gay men from European-, Mexican-, Vietnamese-, and African-American descent (ages 18 to 24), found among all participants a tendency to initially disclose to their mothers and not fathers. Possible reasons for mothers as the initial recipient of self-disclosure are due to the general perception of mothers as being more nurturing and caring, and children feeling more emotionally close with their mother (Riley, 2010). Mothers are also more likely to directly ask their child about their sexual orientation before any self-disclosure has taken place (Rossi, 2010).

While many studies indicate parents – mainly mothers – as the first family member an LGBT person comes out to, Toomey and Richardson (2009) found contradictory evidence in their examination of a Midwest sample of 56 LGBT young adults (18 to 24 years of age) reporting on 107 siblings. In their findings, first disclosure to a family member was more often to a sibling rather than a mother. Research further suggests that, as opposed to brothers, sisters are

more likely to be the recipient of a disclosure (Beals & Peplau, 2006; D'Augelli, Grossman, & Starks, 2008; Grov et al., 2006). However, Toomey and Richardson point out that, with regards to overall outness to siblings, gender was not a factor (and neither was age or birth order) and LGBT siblings were likely to be out to their siblings regardless of sister or brother status. A final important finding of this study revealed that, while gender of sibling was not a reliable determinant, the sexual minority status of the sibling was most significantly related to the degree of outness of the participants to their siblings. That is, sexual minority participants were more likely to be out to a sibling if that sibling was also LGBT. All of the participants who reported having an LGBT sibling were out to that sibling, whereas only 72% were out when the sibling was not LGBT. This peripheral, yet critical finding begs the question: What is it about having an LGBT sibling that aids in one's own self-identification and coming out processes? A sense of mutual understanding might underlie individual and sibling processes, or perhaps the bonds of kinship and familial loyalty. Individual and personal factors that help forge a friendship may also be at work. It was not the goal of Toomey and Richardson's study to delve into these questions, but it was my intention in the present study to expand these findings and offer depth and insight into this unknown yet unique sibling process.

Evidence for coming out to a sibling first before telling a parent has been observed in studies of racial and ethnic minorities. In a qualitative study looking at Asian American lesbians and gay men ages 21-36, Chan (1989) noted the largest majority of first disclosures occurred with siblings as opposed to parents. Dube and Savin-Williams (1999) mirrored these findings in their ethnically diverse sample of 139 LGB young men (16 to 26 years of age), discovering that Asian Americans contained the largest percentage of disclosures to siblings at 59%. It is important to note that racial and ethnic minorities may be sensitive to the cultural expectations of

their families and thus hold off on coming out in order to gauge reactions from siblings and to further use them as a source of support during the coming out process. For example, one Taiwanese youth in a study conducted by Wang, Bir, and Brennan (2009) reflected on whether he should come out to his parents and “instead of making the decision on his own, he included his siblings in the process as a strategy to defuse the anxiety of sole decision-making and to establish a well-prepared network of support for his parents” (p. 291). A 19-year-old African American man echoed similar sentiments in relying on siblings and extended family for emotional support: “I called everyone in my family – my brother, my sister...my stepfather...[and I said], ‘be there for mom because when she finds out she's going to fall on the floor’” (Merighi & Grimes, 2000, p. 36).

Finally, scholars have noted gender differences in the coming out experiences of men and women. Women tend to complete milestones related to awareness and self-identification later in life than men, and are more likely to have heterosexual sexual experiences early on and to initially identify as bisexual (Diamond, 1998). Grov et al. (2006) found in their study of youth aged 18 to 24 that men come out to themselves and to others earlier than women. Utilizing a racially diverse sample, they found that men came out around age 17.5, while women came out around 19.6 years of age. Further, men engaged in earlier same-sex encounters (17.9 years) than women (19.8 years). The implications of these findings for the present study suggest that two siblings who identify as LGBT might experience different coming out events based on gender. That is, men are more likely to identify as a sexual minority while in high school, and most likely while living under the same roof as a sibling and parents. This experience will differ from a sibling (possibly a sister) who comes out while living apart from her sibling and in a college

dormitory. In the present study, I sought a deeper understanding of the nuances gender poses when two siblings identify and come out as sexual minorities.

Research on Young Adults' Sibling Relationships

Adolescence and young adulthood is a time characterized by exploration of roles and identities outside of those prescribed by their family of origin (Feinberg, McHale, Crouter, & Cumsille, 2003). Sibling relationships in young and early adulthood evolve within a context whereby individual developmental transitions, such as leaving the family home, developing a career, entering into a committed relationship, and possibly starting a family are likely to occur (Finzi-Dottan & Cohen, 2011). The period of young adulthood involves tending to personal development, as siblings reflect on the similarities and differences between them (Vivona, 2007). Indeed, two dominating theories imbue the research on sibling similarities and differences in childhood and adolescence: social learning/modeling and differentiation/deidentification (Whiteman, Becerra, & Killoren, 2009). Because siblings spend a lot of time together, the potential for observational learning is high (Updegraff, McHale, Whiteman, Thayer, & Delgado, 2005). Much research has focused on the connection between modeling and observational learning and the similarities that arise between siblings with regards to a variety of attitudes and behaviors, such as empathy (Tucker, Updegraff, McHale, & Crouter, 1999), and sexual behavior (East & Siek Toon, 2005; East, Slonim, Horn, Trinh, & Reyes, 2009). In a predominantly White sample of 16 year-old adolescents, Whiteman and Crouter (2007) found that modeling behaviors led to an increase in sibling intimacy and closeness. Furthermore, it has been postulated that similarity produces a positive influence on personal relationships, as it can stimulate compatible interests, time spent together, and a sense of cohesion (Hoffman, 1991). Indeed, modeling behaviors can lead to similarities among siblings that promote camaraderie, and the influence of

an LGBT sibling on the modeling behaviors of a sibling has yet to be researched. In the current study, I examined whether or not the sharing of a sexual minority status increases perceived sibling intimacy and closeness.

Alternatively, siblings engage in conscious and subconscious processes of differentiation in which they develop in contrast to one another (Feinberg et al.; McHale, Updegraff, & Whiteman, 2012; Schachter, Shore, Feldman-Rotman, Marquis, & Campbell, 1976; Whiteman & Crouter, 2007). Whiteman and Christiansen (2008) found in a sample of 192 families with children ages 14 to 17 that 40% of second-borns and 33% of first-borns reported differentiating from their sibling. Some reported that they actively wanted to or tried to be different from their sibling: “I try to be as different then her as I can because she doesn’t try hard at anything and I don’t want to be like that” (Whiteman & Christiansen, p. 28). Other siblings referenced a more subconscious process of differentiation: “[My brother] got into a lot of trouble and grounded doing certain things, and like I never really had a desire to do any of it, like I learned not to do it” (Whiteman & Christiansen, p. 28). Sibling differentiation has been found to decrease sibling competition and rivalry, providing a “unique place among similar others” (Vivona, 2007, p. 1193). Thus, what might the differentiation process look like for two siblings who both self-identify as a sexual minority? To date, well-known models have overlooked how levels of imitation or deidentification construct the self-identification and/or coming out process for sexual minorities and their siblings. Considering that modeling and differentiation processes are rarely, if at all, understood in young adulthood, I sought to further expound upon the employment of either of these socialization processes in this age group.

Moving forward, it is improbable to speak of young adult sibling relationships without noting the interconnectedness of gender, age, and birth order. Indeed, these three categories can

shape sibling modeling and differentiation tactics. Same-gender siblings who are close in age and birth order are the most likely to attempt differentiation from one another (Schachter, 1976). For example, older brothers are likely to report differentiating from younger brothers in adolescence, yet both siblings are likely to naturally differentiate as they age throughout the life course (McHale, Updegraff, Helms-Erikson, & Crouter, 2001). Understandably, siblings are influenced by the diversity of experiences they encounter once they leave the family home. Other research has purported contradictions to differentiation, citing same-gender siblings as engaging in high levels of modeling due to perceived similarities (Wong, Branje, Van der Valk, Hawk, & Meeus, 2010) and similar pathways to adulthood (Conger & Little, 2010). Indeed, in a sample of siblings ages 12 to 24, Wong et al. (2010) found same-gender dyads to report the most influence on identity development and modeling behaviors when compared to mixed-gender dyads. Examples of modeling behaviors ranged from drug use and sexual activity to intrapersonal traits, such as “not being too timid” or an “open mind and ability to overlook [the little things]” (Bedford, Volling, & Avioli, 2000, p. 66). In the present study, I attended to gender constellation, age, and birth order and how these social locations mitigate and augment differentiation and modeling processes in young adulthood.

To date, no research exists that directly examines the experiences of the second sibling to self-identify and come out as a sexual minority in the family of origin. Previous research suggests that the process of coming out has shifted, and in the present study, I further expanded the conceptualization of coming out beyond the dyad constellation of one heterosexual and one LGBT sibling. How having a sibling who identifies as a sexual minority shapes self-identification, in addition to coming out, is another intended contribution of this study to the literature. Furthermore, examinations of the influences of age and gender on the coming out

process have been studied, and it was an aim of the present study to illustrate how these factors contributed to the experience of being the second sibling to come out as LGBT. Finally, the literature on young adult sibling relationships is scant, and this present study contributes to a large gap in the understanding of transitions during young adulthood as well as modeling and differentiation processes.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

The present study is a qualitative inquiry into the lived experiences of sexual minority individuals, their coming out experiences, and their family of origin relationships, with a particular focus on sibling relationships. Through a constructivist grounded theory (Breckenridge, Jones, Elliott, & Nicol, 2012; Charmaz, 2000, 2006; McGeorge, 2011; Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006a, 2006b), multiple realities converge as the constructivist methodological approach attends to the complex and intricate interactions of differing viewpoints (Charmaz, 2006). In this chapter, I detail how a constructivist grounded theory embedded in a qualitative inquiry guided my sample and recruitment processes, data collection and analysis procedures, and my reflections on the role I assumed as researcher.

Overview of Qualitative Inquiry and Constructivist Grounded Theory

Guided by an integrative life course and symbolic interactionism framework, the present study was also informed by a qualitative inquiry that used a constructivist grounded theory (CGT) method. The employing of qualitative inquiries to investigate sexual minorities and LGBT families has much support in the literature (Gabb, 2013; Goldberg, 2010; LaSala, 2005). Qualitative methods can offer detailed descriptions of the complex phenomena (sexual identity in young adulthood) of an underexplored research area (when two siblings identify as a sexual minority), affording participants the opportunity to share the stories of their unique positions (LaSala, 2005). A qualitative paradigm also complements life course theory and symbolic interactionism. Ontologically, a qualitative paradigm permits multiple, relative truths. Micro-level meanings are subject to interpretation based on macro-level social context and historical place and time, and further gleaned through individual and family transitions and trajectories. Epistemological knowledge is co-constructed between the researcher and participant, and

generally attained through interaction between researcher and participant (e.g., dialogue; Lincoln & Guba, 1994).

Much debate surrounds grounded theory methodology (GTM) and the diverse representations in empirical research (Charmaz, 2006; LaRossa, 2005). Grounded theory can be traced to Glaser and Strauss's (1967) groundbreaking work *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. Yet, Glaser and Strauss diverged on their conceptualization of GTM. Reminiscent of positivism, Glaser viewed GTM with "dispassionate empiricism [and rigid and] rigorous codified methods" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 7). The Glaserian grounded theory views truth as an object waiting to be discovered bereft of bias and interpretation (Hall, Griffiths, & Mckenna, 2013). Strauss recognized, however, that there is no singular, objective truth, and he incorporated human agency along with social and interpretative meanings (Charmaz, 2006; Mills, Chapman, Bonner, & Francis, 2006b) into the folds of what later became the foundation for what Charmaz (2000, 2006) coins "constructivist grounded theory" (Charmaz; Barnett, 2012; Mills et al., 2006b).

Constructivist grounded theory (CGT) contains the philosophical underpinnings of symbolic interactionism, presupposing that reality is socially constructed (LaRossa, 2005). For example, a CGT framework would pay attention not only to *what* the coming out process looks like for a sexual minority sibling, but *how* the coming out process has been socially constructed in the particular time and space it is being studied. Individual processes and collective behavior shape constructions of reality, reflecting the development of new constructions and the signaling of whose constructions are observed (Charmaz, 2006). Thus, because this study examined sexuality and LGBT sibling relationships, all phases of the data analysis process (i.e., open coding, axial coding, selective coding) were viewed through a CGT lens that took into account

societal constructions of heteronormativity and how this prevailing discourse shapes perspectives of sexual identity in and for LGBT individuals and families.

Recruitment Procedures

Sample Selection Process

The target sample was selected to provide insight into the perspectives of a young adult sibling who came out in a family of origin in which another sibling had already come out. Initial inclusionary criteria for participating was:

1. 18-30 years of age and identify as LGBT or sexual minority;
2. must be out to at least one parent; and
3. must have a sibling who is at least 18 years of age, identifies as LGBT or sexual minority, and is considered by both siblings to be the sibling who came out first to a member of the family of origin.

After one month of recruitment efforts, the age range was expanded to include 18 to 35 years of age. After conferring with my dissertation adviser and consulting the academic literature on young adulthood, I determined this was still an appropriate age range in order to capture potential cohort effects. Indeed, I relied on previous literature to capture the age(s) of young adulthood. Some social scientists prefer to use the term “young adulthood” to denote the period between adolescence and adult independence as opposed to “emerging adulthood,” which has been defined as 18 to 25 (Arnett, 2000). The term young adulthood allows for a wider age range, capturing delayed entry into the workforce, marriage, and childbearing, all which can occur past 25 (Cote & Bynner, 2008; Furstenberg, 2010). Studies that have investigated young adulthood have recruited samples ranging in age from 18 to 29 (Rosario, Scrhishaw, & Hunter, 2004), 21 to 32 (Finzi-Dottan & Cohen, 2011), 16 to 34 (Arias & Hernández, 2007), and 17 to 39 (Riggio,

2006). Furthermore, incorporating participants from the same birth cohort allowed for the contextualization of social and historical forces during data analysis.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited and interviewed between June 2013 and November 2013. During this time frame, the constitutionality of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) was being considered by the United States Supreme Court, and was eventually overturned, thus granting federal marriage benefits to gay and lesbian couples. Additionally, six states began issuing marriage licenses to gay and lesbian couples. These events influenced participant recruitment and interviewing, as national news sources reported on the Supreme Court's rulings, sparking discussions on LGBT issues across social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter. Some participants mentioned these events in their interviews, reflecting on their experiences with identifying and coming out as an LGBT person in light of ever-changing public policies.

In order to access a diverse sample, recruitment occurred through a variety of methods. To reach LGBT adults in a university setting, a list of colleges and universities housing LGBT student resource centers was identified via Campus Pride, a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving campus climate for LGBT students and campus affiliates ("What is Campus Pride?", 2013). Six geographic regions were identified (New England, Mid-Atlantic, South, Midwest, Southwest, and West) and five campuses were chosen from each region. LGBT resource center representatives and student group members associated with these campuses were asked to share information about the study via listserv and at LGBT events (see Appendices A and B for recruitment materials). Ten Queer Students of Color groups were also identified via personal contacts and Google search engines and asked to distribute information about the study via listserv and LGBT events.

In order to reach participants who may not be involved in a university or college setting, three LGBT community centers in each of the six geographic regions listed above were solicited. Groups were asked to utilize their listservs and social networking sites to distribute recruitment information, and to hand out study flyers at LGBT events. My personal contacts attending Pride events in San Francisco, CA and Columbus, OH were asked to distribute flyers. The Consortium of Higher Education for LGBT Resource Professionals, whose goals include to “support [LGBT] colleagues and develop curriculum to professionally enhance [their] work” (About us, 2013, para. 1), distributed study information to its members. GayResearch.com – a website aimed at disseminating research opportunities for LGBT people – posted study information. Lastly, an article highlighting the study appeared on GayAgenda.com, a news aggregate site featuring a breadth of up-to-date issues related to LGBT rights.

Furthermore, a considerable amount of recruitment effort involved using social networking, with over 40 hours spent utilizing Twitter. A microblogging site known for its rapid sharing of 140 characters in real time, Twitter mimics snowball sampling techniques by sending public messages (“tweets”) about the study to those following the account (O’Connor, Jackson, Goldsmith, & Skirton, 2014). Those followers, in turn, can re-send the message (“retweets”) to their followers, creating an unprecedented number of times the original messages gets circulated (O’Connor et al., 2014). Thus, a Twitter account was established and daily tweets were posted about the study. Attached to each announcement were various hashtags, which are used to connect people discussing similar topics. (For a visual representation of hashtags used during recruitment, see Appendix C). By the end of recruitment, the study Twitter account had sent approximately 1,000 tweets, and amassed over 600 followers in the United States and across the globe. Exactly seven participants were solicited through Twitter, while four came from group

listservs, two through my personal contacts, and one from GayAgenda.com and one from GayResearch.com.

Once an individual expressed interest in participating in the study, I responded with a screening email asking for confirmation of the study criteria before an interview could be arranged (see Appendix D). Informed consent (see Appendix E) was emailed to participants and electronically signed, indicating consent to participate in the study. Participants had the option of receiving the informed consent via United States postal service, as well. Once electronic consent was received, the interview was scheduled at a time and in a manner convenient for both the participant and me. All interviews were conducted via telephone. A verbal consent was also recorded at the outset of the interview. Each participant was given a \$20 gift card as a token of gratitude for their time and willingness to share their stories.

Description of Sample

Participant Demographics

The sample of this study comprised 15 participants. All participants were between the ages of 18 and 35 ($M=25.46$), with five participants identifying as men, nine identifying as women, and one identifying as a transgender man. Participants self-identified their sexual orientation as lesbian ($n=6$), gay ($n=5$), bisexual ($n=2$), or queer ($n=2$). In terms of race, the sample reported their race to be White ($n=8$), Black ($n=3$), Hispanic ($n=2$), and Biracial ($n=2$). Current geographic locations consisted of East Coast ($n=6$), Midwest ($n=3$), South ($n=3$), and West Coast ($n=3$).

With regards to educational background, nearly half of the sample ($n=7$) had a high school diploma. Six participants had either a Bachelor's degree, or were currently attending a four-year university for their undergraduate degree. One participant had a Master's degree, and

one participant was currently in school for a Master's degree. Concerning household income, 13 participants reported the income they considered to be their primary residence during their youth. Four of those 13 participants reported living in a second residence in addition to their primary household, as their parents had separated or divorced. The annual family income of participants' primary household ranged from \$25,000 to \$40,999, to \$100,000 or more. The most reported primary income was \$25,000 to \$49,999 ($n=6$), while \$50,000 to \$74,999 was the second most reported income ($n=5$). One participant reported \$75,000 to \$99,999, and one reported \$100,000 or more. Additionally, one participant chose not to disclose, and another participant could not recall. For secondary household incomes, all four participants had experienced a parental divorce and reported their father's income. The most frequently reported secondary household income was \$50,000 to \$74,999 ($n=3$), followed by \$25,000 to \$49,000 ($n=1$). In all four cases, the fathers' income levels were observed by participants as being higher than the primary household.

Sibling Demographics

The sample consisted of 15 participants reporting on 15 full- and half-biological LGBT siblings, with the majority being of full biological relationship ($n=14$). Additionally, most of the participants ($n=11$) discussed other siblings in the family. Thus, only four participants had only one sibling. Regarding the dyadic breakdown of participants and the LGBT sibling they discussed throughout the study, there were seven sister-brother pairs, with the remaining eight pairs being evenly represented between sister-sister, and brother-brother. The sexual orientation of the siblings, as identified by the participants, consisted of gay ($n=8$), lesbian ($n=3$), bisexual ($n=2$), queer ($n=1$), and straight ($n=1$). The sibling who identified as straight initially came out as a gay man, but currently identifies as a straight, transgender woman. Two other siblings also

identified as transgender. Ages of siblings ranged from 13 to 38 ($M=26.86$). (See Appendix F for participant and sibling demographics).

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection occurred through three sources: (a) interviews, (b) field notes, and (c) memos. Interviewing is a common method used to understand intricate stories; indeed, families may best be understood through intensive interviewing due their complex nature (Matthews, 2005). The goal of the interviews was to have participants *reconstruct* their lives, their experiences, and ultimately their meanings. As the interviewer, it was my duty to help participants feel at ease during our interview by developing a rapport. I attended to their words, allowed silence, and explored laughter (Seidman, 2006).

Due to the geographic diversity of my participants, I chose to collect data through one-on-one telephone interviews. One of the difficulties of conducting telephone interviews, however, is that I could not attend to facial or other body cues, and it was, at times, difficult to hear participants due to limited cellular phone reception. Thus, moments arose when the participant and I had to repeat ourselves. However, there were many benefits to using telephone interviews, such as my ability to reach a wider audience (Irvine, 2011; Lechuga, 2012). I was also able to take inconspicuous and unobtrusive note-taking, which helped the conversation to flow more naturally (Smith 2005; Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004). Telephone interviews have been found to cultivate a greater sense of anonymity and assist participants in discussing sensitive issues (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004), which may have also aided in the flow of the conversation.

For all interviews, a semi-structured interview protocol was followed, which contained demographic and interview questions (see Appendices G and H). The interview questions consisted of eight open-ended questions and probes that asked participants to share their

experiences with their families, their sexual identification processes, and their coming out events. Interview times ranged from 23 to 69 minutes, with the average interview lasting approximately 43 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by me within two weeks of the interview (Seidman, 2006).

Interview questions for the present study were piloted through a practice interview with a member of the target population. The pilot participant was recruited via a personal contact in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The participant was given a draft of the intended interview questions (complete with probes) and answered the questions while suggesting advice on wording, clarification, and redundancy. In light of participant feedback, alterations were made to the interview questions.

In addition to interviews, information was collected through the extensive use and analyzing of field notes (Matthews, 2005). Field notes were taken before, during, and after the interview took place. Personal notes that were written around the time of the interview were further developed during the initial coding phase. For example, one of my notes, “participant keeps describing sibling relationship as ‘typical’”, was written in field notes and memos as a repetitive sentiment across multiple participants and later identified as a code during analysis.

The last source of data was memoing, which served as a bridge between data analysis and thematic development (Lempert, 2007). As memos accumulated, they resembled a “storehouse of analytical ideas” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 220), which could be divided into three categories: methodological, thematic, and theoretical (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). A theoretical memo for the current study, for example, utilized life course theory and previous literature to determine timing of events. I then charted the timing of events in participants’ lives (such as

parental divorce, parental remarriage, and coming out to family) and whether they were early, late, or on-time (Elder, 1998).

Data Analysis

Constructivist grounded theory (CGT), in conjunction with life course theory and symbolic interactionism, guided data analysis. Data analysis began with the first interview as I took notes in the margins of my notebook and reflected on the stories of my participants. I kept a methods journal in which upon completion of each interview, I wrote a short reflective paragraph on my feelings about the interview, words and stories that grabbed my attention, and memos about connections to theory, previous literature, and other participants in the study.

Initial coding began upon transcription of all 15 interviews. I read each interview two times in order to familiarize myself with the data. On the third reading, I began to name segments of data via line-by-line coding. During this initial phase, I remained open to what I was reading, paying close attention to coding the data as actions and not concepts (Charmaz, 2006; LaRossa, 2005). For example, a participant stated: “I did speak to him [my brother] about coming out,” and so I initially coded this as “*talking* with brother” instead of “sexual orientation discussions”. Attending to the action of *talking* helped highlight the process of sibling relationships and sexual identity formulation and limited my tendency to make conceptual leaps in the initial phase of analysis. Utilizing gerund words (ending in -ing) as initial codes also helped me focus on process and social interaction. Furthermore, because context and language are important in CGT, as well as in life course theory and symbolic interactionism, in vivo coding occurred throughout initial coding. In vivo codes mirror the participants’ social worlds as well as the language of the participants (Charmaz, 2006). In vivo codes contain implicit meanings, and may reflect “condensed meaning of a general term and reveal an individual’s

fresh perspective” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 56). For example, a participant stated: “I’d say [me and my brother] were close. We were a bit like Bonnie and Clyde.” In this example, I would highlight *Bonnie and Clyde* as an in vivo code. In general, these two people have been glamorized since the Great Depression era as calamitous, bank-robbing outlaws who terrorized towns across the Midwest and took the lives of many people. For this participant, however, she imbued her own meaning to describe two siblings who were “thick as thieves,” yet notorious for rousing trouble. At the end of initial coding, I had 36 codes and 87 sub-codes.

The next step, axial coding, began by organizing my large segments of data and sorting them in new and different ways, paying attention to the relationship between codes and sub-codes (LaRossa, 2005). During axial coding, many codes and sub-codes were dismissed, and groupings of codes began to emerge. Up until this point, the codes were mostly unassembled. Through axial coding, I began to organize parcels of specific categories and subcategories, giving meaning and coherence to the emerging analysis (Charmaz, 2006). For example, “texting my brother that I was gay” and “coming out on Skype” were axially coded as “communication via social media.” To aid in the development of axial coding, I created in-depth biographies on each participant (See Appendix I). These biographies contained family histories and personal details of the participant and their sibling’s coming out stories, which allowed me to examine each individual story and compare across participants. My dissertation adviser, who also read and commented on all of the transcripts, worked with me as I also sifted through the codes and began creating charts and concept maps as visual representations of the evolving relationships between codes and categories (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). My adviser would ask probing questions and offer fresh ideas about connections between codes, and I would further investigate via the creation of a detailed chart, which allowed for ease of comparison. Axial coding involved

two iterations: the first iteration narrowed down the list of open codes to 21 codes and 60 sub-codes. The second iteration produced 5 categories and 31 codes.

The last phase of data analysis was selective coding. This phase required decision-making about which codes and preliminary categories to keep, and which to set aside. It is during this phase that the underlying story of the data started to evolve (LaRossa, 2005). Categories and codes became interconnecting themes. “Sibling relationships seen as ‘typical’” contributed to a larger selective code defined as “Sibling Relational Processes.” Through selective coding, I narrowed my categories and codes twice more until I had a final coding scheme containing 3 categories and 10 codes (See Appendix J). The process towards selective coding was not linear, however, and I was constantly returning to previous versions of my coding scheme to reevaluate old codes and to discover new ones. Fresh ideas emerged throughout each phase, especially during conversations with my adviser, who challenged my codes, sub-codes, categories, and themes. A few words (i.e. “normal” and “typical”) kept repeating across participant interviews when they reflected on their sibling relationship during their upbringing. I was challenged to think about what this meant for each participant, and if this indicated a broader sentiment in society about what it means to be a sibling. My adviser encouraged me to consider the implication of codes and categories like these as they related to just one participant, or multiple participants, during every iteration. Data analysis ended after five coding schemes, when saturation of data had been met and no new ideas emerged (Charmaz, 2006).

Establishing Trustworthiness

Williams and Morrow (2009) characterize trustworthiness as an obligation that researchers have to the academic community to show they have practiced “due diligence” (p. 576). Trustworthiness in qualitative research allows readers to trust in the methodological rigor

of the study and its findings, and to use the findings to improve social circumstances (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Because there are no uniform criteria for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research (Rossmann & Rallis, 2012), I used a flexible set of guidelines as denoted by researchers in family studies and other social science disciplines (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002). Thus, trustworthiness was obtained in the following ways: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, and (c) dependability.

Credibility

Using more than one source of data, or “triangulation”, can assist in credibility and data quality (Williams & Morrow, 2009). I used interviews, field notes, and memos as sources of data. Employing a peer auditor to review the data can help corroborate the research process, offer fresh perspective and invigorating feedback, and ensure that the findings are derived from the data (Anfara et al., 2002). My dissertation adviser assumed the role of my peer auditor throughout the duration of the study. Additionally, my dissertation committee served as my primary “community of practice” (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 65). The community of practice is a group of advocates and trusted colleagues who will offer critique and support of “emerging ideas...and half-baked ideas” (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 65).

Transferability

Transferability is the process by which the findings of a research project can be extended to include other populations (Shenton, 2004). Taking into account that my study is qualitative, and thus not intended to be generalized to a larger population, the question of transferability might seem contradictory to the overall aim of this project. While I recognize that generalizability was never the end goal, the findings yield theoretical insights that resonate with similar, though not exact, situations. For example, a goal of this study was to understand the

coming out process of sexual minority individuals when they have a sibling who already identifies as LGBT and is out to the family of origin. The findings of this study can generate theories about coming out in the context of already having a family member who is a sexual minority, such as sexual minority youth with gay and lesbian parents (Kupalanka & Goldberg, 2009), and how that may shape one's self-identification and disclosure process. The potential for new theories can serve as "points of departure" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 17) for future research to extend, refine, or refute.

Dependability

I exercised dependability by transparency; that is, by documenting my research process in a comprehensive audit trail (Anfara et al., 2002). A well-detailed, chronological chain of evidence "provides verification and reproducibility of the processes involved in the research project" (Bowen, 2009, p. 308), allowing other researchers to track my research decisions and produce a similar study. Elements of my audit trail include my recruitment ideas and strategies and exchanges between me and my dissertation adviser during the data analysis phase. I also recorded the details of locating scholarly literature, as well as popular press articles. I kept a running list of databases (e.g., Academic Search Complete and PsycINFO) and search parameters (e.g., keywords and publication dates) that were used to pinpoint peer-referred articles. I further generated a list of academic journals that consistently produced innovative research and theory on LGBT individuals and families, among other topics related to my study.

Statement of Reflexivity

Five years ago when I was beginning my work with LGBT families, I had a very enlightening conversation with my Masters thesis adviser, Dr. Katherine Kupalanka. Informally, we were discussing LGBT families and what experiences ignited our interest and desire to study

diverse family forms. At the time, I confessed to her that I did not have a compelling reason for wanting to work with LGBT families. Unlike so many who study sexual minorities and their families, I did not perceive myself as having a “vested interest.” That is, I did not identify as a sexual minority, and, at the time, I did not have any family members or close friends who identified as a sexual minority. I had little understanding of my relationship with the people I studied.

Now, five years later, I have reframed how I see my connection to LGBT research. I *do* have a vested interest in this research – a deep, passionate vested interest. I have a vested interest in helping to create a world that does not discriminate because of sexual orientation status. I have a duty to the students I teach, to the scholars who have directed my studies, and to anybody who refuses to abide by the status quo to publicly acknowledge the unfair marginalization of sexual minorities and to strive for human equality through the work I have done, will do, and am doing here today.

In the spring of 2012, I had the honor of receiving Virginia Tech’s Ally of the Year award. I came to this research with a commitment to the LGBT community. I bring an overwhelming respect for the people at the center of my research, and this undoubtedly shaped how I structured my study. In an effort to remain focused on the research agenda, and to have a space to explore personal biases and feelings that arose during the research process, I maintained a reflexive journal (Few, Stephens, & Rouse-Arnett, 2003). As a White, middle-class, educated, heterosexual, cisgender woman, I acknowledge that I brought unearned privileges and inherent power to the interviews. Ironically, because I do not identify as a sexual minority, I could have been viewed as unable to empathize or comprehend the experiences of being a sexual minority. While I recognize the set of privileges and obstacles that could have affected my study, I tried

my very best to connect with my participants in the spirit of allyship and the goal of producing new knowledge. In the end, the long journey that led me to this point has been incredibly satisfying. Each and every participant has made a lasting impression in my life and on my study. Each interview was exciting, and each participant was genuinely intrigued in my study and my dissertation process about as much as I was intrigued in their life story. I felt a great sense of appreciation at the connections I made, and I am so proud to be able to share their stories.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present the participants' stories, concentrating on 3 themes and 10 sub-categories. The findings are arranged so as to first follow the participants across the life course, starting with family background, structure, and dynamics. Next, I discuss the coming out experiences of the first sibling (as perceived by the participant), before moving into the participants' own coming out stories and processes. Finally, I describe the meanings that have been constructed by the participants and their families post-coming out.

Family Structure and Dynamics

Using retrospective language, participants discussed their living situations during childhood and adolescence, including details of growing up in their family of origin. These stories highlighted the complexity involved in family histories, including the diversity in family structure and familial processes (e.g., divorce, relocation). The first subcategory, *family structure*, outlines the variety in family arrangement and transitions across the life course. The next subcategory, *sibling relational processes*, focuses on the micro-level relations occurring throughout childhood and adolescence. The last subcategory, *extended families as pathways to LGBT family members*, draws attention to the unique kin networks that connected participants to other LGBT people within their own extended family.

Family Structure

The majority of participants' families represent a departure from the standard North American family (SNAF) model (Smith, 1993). As first theorized by Dorothy Smith, the SNAF is an ideological tenant for families in Western society. Bound by civil marriage are one father, one mother, and biological children. In contrast, in the current study, eight participants experienced parental divorce, while one participant's parents were currently separated. Two

participants were raised in a family whereby one of their parents had been previously married and had children with another person. One participant was raised in a grandparent-headed household, while another participant was raised in a single-parent household. And while all participants shared stories on at least one biological parent or grandparent, five shared experiences with a stepparent or a parent's significant other. Furthermore, the sibling structure of the family consisted of full- and half-biological ties. While most participants ($n=13$) described their LGBT sibling as fully biological, 11 participants discussed other siblings in the family, reporting on 5 siblings who were half-biological.

Sibling Relational Processes

When reflecting on their upbringing, participants were asked to share stories about their sibling relationship. In this category, all 15 participants reflected on their upbringing, as well as the current relationship shared with their sibling. This category consists of three sub-categories, as contained in the participants' words: (a) "We were typical siblings, (b) Modeling processes: "I wanted to be like my sister," and (c) Differentiation processes: "We couldn't have been more different."

"We were typical siblings." Twelve participants spoke to the idea of normalcy, specifically using the words "normal" or "typical" to assess their sibling relationships. Samuel, a 34-year-old gay man, summarized the meaning of a typical sibling relationship:

We were pretty normal, as far as I can tell. [We fought and bickered] like any brother or sister. We had our ups, downs – good and bad. Just like any sibling relationship. You know, fighting one day, playing together the next.

Nathan, a 35-year-old gay man, further clarified the meaning ascribed to normal sibling relationship: “We played together, we had the same circle of friends, but we fought all the time. I don't think it was any really mean-type of fighting, it was just sibling bickering.”

Many participants ($n=7$) also characterized their sibling relationship in young adulthood and adulthood as being typical in that they were not necessarily in constant communication, but knew they could rely on their sibling and vice-versa, thus highlighting the flexible nature of sibling ties across the life course. As Paula, a 21-year-old lesbian, stated: “We are busy with our lives and haven't talked in a while, but we know that we're always going to be there for each other.”

Jackson, a 21-year-old gay man, elaborated on the geographic distance that can accompany sibling relationships, echoing the sentiment that a sibling can always be a source of support regardless of physical separation:

My brother and I don't really talk to each other when I'm at school. There isn't a particular reason as to why...But, I know if I need something, I know I can give him a call. I love my brother to death, and I will always have his back.

Furthermore, a few participants ($n=3$) were careful to depict their relationship as close, but not *too* close, and as friends, but not their *only* friends. Wes, a 33-year-old queer man, claimed: “We've always been close – not close close, but we are friends and he is *one* of my best friends.” Lulu, a 19-year-old bisexual, echoed this sentiment:

We always hang out. We always, uh, are around each other. We are really close, actually. It's not extremely close, like "Oh my god I have to talk to you every second, I have no best friend 'cuz you're it." It's not like that, but we know everything about each other and we talk a lot. We know each other ridiculously, ridiculously well.

Participants' sentiments regarding the closeness of their sibling relationship were ambiguous at times. Some were cautious about being too dependent on their sibling in their everyday lives, thus downplaying the relationship by deemphasizing the closeness. Yet, participants would use the word "friend" throughout the interviews. Maggie, however, a 20-year-old lesbian with three siblings, captured both the theme of typicality inherent in many participants' stories and the sentiment that can accompany sibling bonds:

I guess it's like any other siblings. We talk, we fight, but I mean my sister is like my best friend. I would do anything for them. We've been through so much together, and you can't take that away. Especially, after losing our Mom, you can just tell we've grown so much closer. Sometimes, it feels like we don't have anyone, but we'll always have each other. They are the most important people in my life.

Indeed, ebbs and flows are inherent in any family dynamic, and the sibling relationship must adapt. The inevitable transitions a family experiences across the life course is evident in Maggie's story, and the role of grief in altering familial bonds is demonstrated in the tightening of Maggie's sibling relationship.

Modeling processes: "I wanted to be like my sister." For some participants ($n=5$), their stories revealed moments when they desired to be like their sibling, and thus imitated their sibling in various ways. Other participants ($n=3$) also shared instances of their sibling wanting to be like them. In this sample, modeling behaviors were only reported in same-sex dyads. When speaking of his older brother, Jackson illustrated an admirable role model he wanted to emulate:

Once my parents divorced, my brother was basically a father figure to me. He would always help me with homework, and include me in everything he did. When I got to high school, I participated in all the clubs and organizations he participated in...However,

having my brother be the perfect child, it was hard to live up to what he had accomplished. I was always known as “Edward’s little brother.”

In addition to Jackson, two other participants spoke of feeling overshadowed by a sibling who was often viewed as the “model child.” That did not stop participants from wanting to emulate their siblings throughout childhood and early adolescence, although these behaviors did not permeate into late adolescence and young adulthood.

Switching perspectives, Paula, a 21-year-old lesbian, remembered the position she held as a role model for her younger sister:

I recall her wanting to always be with me and do whatever I did, which drove me crazy....But when I was in high school and she was in middle school, it was really nice actually to be able to be a positive role model for her....I know she has always looked up to me and I think it’s good to have someone you can look up to and can follow.

Differentiation processes: “We couldn’t have been more different.” Many participants ($n=9$) discussed growing up with a sibling with whom they were quite dissimilar. Seven of these stories in particular surrounded differences in presentation of traditional gender roles and gender expression. Tara, a 28-year-old bisexual, discussed how her little sister differentiated from her by exhibiting less traditional notions of femininity:

We have always been different, growing up and everything...she was always playing on the soccer field, even in the snow! She hated pink, hated that “sissy” stuff, you know? She was independent and let people know what she was doing....[She was never] really wanting to hang out with girls, except on or near a sporting event...I was the girl in the family and I was always attached to my mother and her friends. We always went

shopping. I love to bake, I love to decorate! [My sister] was always sickened by that sort of thing, but not me.

Evie, a 20-year-old lesbian, also shared stories of growing up with her twin sisters and not understanding why one sister acted like her – “a girl” – and the other sister behaved in a different manner. Her gender nonconforming sister eventually transitioned and is now her brother. Evie noted:

I can distinctly remember being three or four and [my transgender brother] would just yank on my arm. He was aggressive, even back then....I remember being younger and just saying to him, "Gosh, you are such a boy!"....He always played with boy toys and was always very tomboyish....I didn't think it was normal....and I just wanted a normal sister like [my other sister]. I mean, they were so different and they were twins! So, I did not understand.

Examples of differentiation processes also surfaced in opposite-sex sibling dyads, yet still surrounded issues of gender presentation, as Nathan recalled:

I always wanted to be inside huddled around my mother, and my sister was always outside....We lived in the country and had farm animals and four-wheelers. I wanted nothing to do with the horses or the four-wheelers. My sister did – she loved all that stuff. I would much rather stay in and clean the house, do the decorating. I really liked the artsy sides of things. It was exactly opposite of my sister.

Extended Families as Pathways to LGBT Family Members

Eight participants mentioned having other family members, beyond their sibling, who identified as a sexual minority. Mateo, a 27-year old gay man, reflected on the advantages of having LGB members in his extended family:

My mother is one of 10 kids and out of the 10, 4 identify as LGB. So, it was, I guess it was just something that was ever-present. So, uh, it was fortunate – I've come to understand my own privilege in that sense that I was fortunate enough to not be faced with anything [discriminatory in] nature.

Charlotte, a 26-year-old lesbian, discussed what it was like for her younger gay brother to have a gay cousin of a similar age and the advantages and disadvantages this posed for her brother and cousin:

[My cousin] and my brother came out to each other around the same time, but [my cousin] came out faster to the family than my brother did and he actually got blamed for my brother being gay...but they are best friends. They did everything together growing up. [My cousin] was the first one who took him to his first gay club and that was only 'cuz [my brother] came out to him, it wasn't 'cuz he was forcing it on him.

Additionally, Samuel, a 34-year-old gay man, described a sibling other than his gay brother who identified as lesbian for a short duration. Thus, in his family of three siblings, there was a point in time when all three individuals identified as a sexual minority. As Samuel stated:

My sister was in her experimental college phase and, I guess, she was identifying as a lesbian at that time...[Then], she all of a sudden brought a man to Thanksgiving dinner and we were all like, "What's going on?" And now she's married to him!

Samuel asserted throughout the interview that his sister identified as heterosexual. Upon further inquiring if his sister would prefer the label of bisexual, he stated: "No, I think that was just a quote, unquote "experimental phase.""

Aside from the eight participants who revealed additional LGBT family members, two more participants *suspected* additional family members were LGBT, yet had not come out. In addition to her and her gay brother, Charlotte suspected her sister was LGBT:

Honestly, I think my sister is gay, too, and she is too scared to come out. And my brother will tell you the same thing...she is married to man with a kid...[but], I swear! Even my mom will tell you that. Like, she's just too afraid to come out. She is so attached to my dad's wings, it's not even funny.

According to Charlotte, other family members also suspected that her sister might identify as a sexual minority. However, as Charlotte explained in her interview, her father is a military man and adheres to a traditionalist view of family and romantic relationships. Her sister is very close to their father, and strongly identifies with his traditionalist values. And just like her father, she is also in the military. As described by Charlotte, her sister may not want to disappoint her father (like Charlotte and her gay brother have by coming out), as well as undergo discrimination in her job as an active military soldier. In this situation, it is possible that both personal as well as structural barriers may be a contributor to why Charlotte's sister has not come out.

Wes, a 33-year-old queer man, also discussed a cousin's aunt (by marriage) who never came out, hypothesizing that it was something everyone knew about, but no one in the family mentioned:

She had a roommate for years and they were clearly together, but no one really talked about it. They went out together, and it looked like they were together. I definitely think she is a lesbian....And yeah, she always had the Beatles' haircut. Like, they do not have a conscious queer identity. They do not chat with me or [my gay brother] my about it. We do not talk about it.

Here, Wes is outlining various signs that led him to believe his cousin’s aunt is a lesbian, such as indicators resembling a romantic relationship, or a haircut that (stereotypically) has been associated with a lesbian identity. When thought of in conjunction, as Wes states, these things “just add up.”

Coming Out Experiences

All participants shared coming out experiences associated with their sibling’s coming out as well as their own coming out. (See Table 1 for sibling dyad constellations and coming out order). The coming out experiences are distinguished by four categories: (a) reflecting on the first sibling to come out, (b) reflecting on family reactions of the first sibling’s coming out, (c) pre-coming out feelings of the second sibling, and (d) family reactions of the second sibling to come out. Each of the four categories is further separated into nine sub-categories.

Table 1

Participants’ Sibling Dyads and Coming Out Order

Dyad Combinations	Participants (N=15)
Brother-Brother	4
Sister-Sister	4
Brother-Sister	7
Who Came Out Second?	
Older Sibling	7
Younger Sibling	8

Reflecting on the First Sibling to Come Out

In this category, 15 participants spoke about 16 siblings and their coming out as LGB. Three of these 15 participants discussed the coming out of their sibling as transgender. Participants were the first members in the family of origin that their sibling came out to as LGB in 10 instances, followed by a parent ($n=4$), and siblings and parents were informed together in 2 instances. Regarding the disclosure of a transgender identity, all three participants could not recall a verbal coming out event, but instead discussed slowly witnessing the process over time.

“I was happy for her.” Nine participants indicated feelings of happiness and support for their sexual minority sibling upon initial disclosure. Sofia, a 21-year-old lesbian, conveyed love and gratitude for her older brother during his coming out:

I remember it was just (pause) so special. I remember smiling so big and being like, "Jacob, I knew, of course I knew." And I told him, "I'm so happy, I'm so happy, I feel so special I was the first one you told in the family and I love you so much." I remember it was so beautiful.

Sofia and Jacob have two other siblings, yet Sofia and Jacob have always shared an intimate relationship. When asked why she thinks she was the first person in the family her brother came out to, she responded: “Jacob and I have always had a really special emotional connection – almost spiritual. We just understand [one another].”

Caroline, a 30-year-old lesbian, remembered crying when her transgender sister initially came out as bisexual: “[My brother at the time] had dated some awful girls and I was so happy that he realized this and felt like he could tell me. I cried, I was so happy.” Two years after coming out as bisexual, Caroline’s brother came out as a transgender woman and now identifies as queer. Caroline recalled feeling at ease with her sister’s decision:

At that time, she was going through a lot of hardships with my parents and our younger sisters. No one understood. I knew I had to be there for her. She has a right to be happy....I was supposed to be supportive – as her sister and her friend, that’s my job. I wanted her happy and healthy and I loved her. I was happy for her.

Caroline was one of three participants who had a transgender sibling. Recognizing the challenges of transitioning and asserting an unwavering role of supportive sibling, Mateo offered a similar narrative:

I had a lot of sympathy for my sister, growing up with her. I didn't have to go through what my sister went through....I think she has always appreciated having me there. It's difficult having a sibling who rejects you, and I think having that rejection made her more appreciative of me being there....I have never, never ever thrown that in her face – even in the heat of an argument, you know, ever said "oh well you're not really a woman" or anything like that, like slander....But, we're close and we are built on that kind of mutual respect.

“Okay...now what?” Four participants were grappling with their own sexual orientation and when to come out to family members in the midst of their sibling’s coming out. Three of these four participants reported feeling accepting and supportive, but hesitant about the meaning this held for their own coming out. Nathan shared:

I was accepting, yes. I was really happy that she was coming out and getting to be who she was....I remember [when she told me] I was letting it register and just sink in and I remember thinking, "Oh shit I can't come out now!" I mean, I know I was very self-centered at that time. I was trying to be consoling to her because I knew she was having a hard time. She was nervous about telling me and nervous about telling our parents. But,

at the same time, I was thinking, "Okay, this is over for me. I have to take a backseat. I can't come out. I probably won't ever come out."

When prompted to talk about if he felt that his sister's coming out was a positive or negative experience for him, Nathan stated:

Yes, yes it was definitely both because I was happy for her and I was trying to be very supportive. It was really a non-issue for me because I didn't care either way if she was gay or straight. The negative side was that I was on the verge of coming out and now I can't. It wasn't this whole, "Oh it's going to delay me longer and now I have to wait," it was more – in that moment – "I will never get to come out and this is the life I am going to have to lead."

Nathan attributed part of his hesitation to come out after his sister to the fear that he would shatter his parents' idea of normal. Nathan and his sister were the only children, and Nathan worried that to have both children identify as LG would signal to his traditional parents that heterosexual marriage and grandchildren were unlikely. He eventually told his parents, partly because he felt disconnected from them due to the secrecy, but also because of the events on 9/11. For Nathan, a native resident of the East Coast, the tragedy struck close to home:

I dated another guy and we became quite serious. Quite serious. I remember this was all around the time of 9/11. I remember because 9/11 really played a role in me coming out to my parents.....At the time, I was living in another [East Coast] city about two hours from my parents' house. I was driving back and forth to my boyfriend's house on the weekend and remember thinking, "Wow, my parents have no idea where I am." It was just one of those things where I thought, "What if something happened and they think I'm at home when really I am miles away with my boyfriend?"

Samuel, who at the time had an older sister who already came out as a lesbian, discussed the anxiety surrounding his only other sibling's coming out:

When my brother came out and officially told my mom, I was thinking, "Oh God, I'm the last one...there's no hope for grandchildren for my mother"...It was a little traumatic for me when he came out because I was like, "Oh no, I am having these feelings, too. Now what do I do?" I thought I was going to ruin the family.

Both Samuel and Nathan expressed concern over being the last child to come out, and questioned if they should even come out at all. Raised by his grandparents, Drake, a 22-year-old gay man, experienced a slightly different situation. He suspected his younger brother was gay, and upon questioning his own sexuality, decided to confront his brother about his sexual orientation status. When Drake realized both he and his brother were gay, he was happy, yet apprehensive about how to disclose to their family:

[My brother and I] talked about things and I asked him why he had not told them [he was gay] and he thought they'd respond badly....I thought, "This could be tough, telling [my grandparents] that both of their kids are gay." We both thought it would be a good idea to kind of gradually ease them into it.

Thus, Drake and his brother orchestrated a delayed coming out process in order to "ease them into it." Drake's brother was the first sibling to come out, largely because he was more certain of his sexual minority status than Drake, who was still working through his own feelings about his identity.

Out of the four participants who recalled feelings of hesitation and ambivalence, one participant remembered initially feeling angry and resentful when he was eclipsed by his older brother's coming out, which caused him to delay his own coming out. As Jackson asserted:

At first, I was a little pissed off that my brother came out before I did. I had followed in his footsteps for so long and was excited to have something that he didn't...I actually was thinking about coming out to some of my friends right before my brother came out...I resented my brother for a little while...When I found out he told our parents, I went right back into the closet.

In Jackson's family, he and his brother were the only sons, but they had one older sister. Like Samuel and Nathan, he relayed mixed feelings of his sibling's coming out due to feeling pressure in being the last child in the family who could "pass on the family name." According to Jackson, though: "Those feelings didn't last too long, and I am fine with it now."

"I didn't understand." Two participants admitted to feeling shocked, confused, and saddened by their sibling's coming out. Both participants cited their religious upbringing as contributing to their ambivalent feelings. Evie attended a Roman Catholic middle school when she experienced her transgender brother's first coming out as a lesbian:

Well, we are Catholic and the Catholic Church doesn't approve of anything and [my brother] first came out as lesbian in seventh grade. So, I didn't know until he was in ninth grade and I was in middle school and kids in middle school are just awful. They would hop all over gay kids, it was pretty bad. I would come home from school and yell at him and be like, "Why are you doing this? This is so embarrassing," which is funny because look how I ended up! So yeah, there was a lot of that...My parents supported him more than I did when I was young. I didn't understand at all. We had a lot of fights about that.

The role of the peer group in childhood and adolescence is integral to feeling accepted, as youth desire to fit in with their peers. This developmental stage combined with a conservative religious environment and peer group contributed to Evie's initial unsupportive response:

I hung out with mostly Christian people and they didn't know my [transgender brother] was gay, but they talked pretty negatively about other gay people. I never wanted them to find out that we were different. I was worried how my friends would react at school. I didn't understand. I thought it was wrong. It was ridiculous....But, I was young and only heard what others said at my Catholic school and I just thought it would be awful if everyone knew.

Reflecting on Family Reactions of the First Sibling to Come Out

“Everyone saw it coming.” The majority of participants ($n=8$) claimed that their sibling’s coming out was well-received by at least one parent and other siblings in the family, largely due to a common narrative describing their sibling’s coming out as predictable. Celèstè, a 25-year-old queer woman, summarized this sub-category when she contemplated her older brother’s coming out: “I don't know of any backlash he received. It was really one of those situations where everybody just kind of knew....My dad didn't really have any problems. He was like, "Yeah, I knew you were gay.”

Tara describes a similar narrative whereby her parents presumed her younger sister might be LGB and thus were very accepting when she finally came out:

With my sister, I think they really knew before she even did... my parents were very supportive of her. I don't think they cared because, like I said, they kind of saw it coming and accepted her before she knew herself....She definitely is more butch....We love her and my parents, like I said, knew she was queer. They aren't stupid.

When asked how her family felt about her younger brother coming out, Charlotte mentioned how loving her mother was and how easy she was to talk to about everything. As with Tara’s story,

Charlotte's sibling deviated from stereotypical gender expressions, leading family members to suspect an LGB sexual orientation:

Oh, everyone knew he was gay when he was born. It was obvious! Like, he was one of those girly-girl gays. Like, you could just tell by the way he acted, the way he talked.

Everyone knew before he came out that he was gay.

Likewise, Lulu revealed a similar viewpoint, characterizing her sister as a tomboy: "My little sister always dressed really tomboy and I think my Mom knew about her." Upon further questioning, Lulu offered more detail about her sister and her family's response:

We all knew she was gay....She has always been really butch....We all figured it, but nobody said anything. Nobody asked. I know it's weird, but we all knew and it wasn't a sure, sure thing until she brought this girl home....She never really said it, she just brought her girlfriend over one day. She didn't hide it at all that that was her girlfriend.

Lulu, along with her two sisters, was raised by a single mother in a tight-knit family. Lulu shared that her mother's initial response was helpful in creating an even closer family environment:

Actually, she has been really cool. I have to admit she surprised me, but she has been really good. She could have been like, "This is so terrible" you know, but no...I really think it made us closer that she accepted it.

"They didn't know what to make of it." Four participants in this sub-category detailed family reactions that were not completely positive or negative, but more ambivalent and, at times, indicative of dejection: As Evie noted: "My mom, she cried a lot. She said she didn't understand why he was gay." Other parents also expressed sadness, as Paula recalled: "My mother was depressed forever over it." Charlotte's father also expressed sadness: "My brother sat at the kitchen table while my dad sat on the couch and he sent him a text message that said, 'I'm

gay.’ My dad cried for two weeks.” In addition to feeling anguish, Charlotte’s father and stepmother tried to place blame to, presumably, assist in their understanding of her brother’s sexual orientation:

My dad and my stepmom blamed my cousin for my brother being gay....My cousin and my brother came out to each other around the same time, but my cousin came out first to the family and he actually got blamed for my brother....[They said], “It’s all his fault that [my brother] is gay.”

“It didn’t go over well.” For some participants, the events surrounding their sibling’s coming out were negative and unsupportive. Four participants shared stories of family members initially responding in a hurtful manner, as Nathan described:

When [my sister] came out, [my dad] wrote her a letter. I remember it was not nice. I didn't see the letter, but she told me it was really hurtful. He was not accepting at all [and] was really upset with my sister. He thought it was just a phase and thought that maybe her previous boyfriend was just not good sexually.

Maggie witnessed her older brother telling their dad, reflecting on the cruelty of the situation:

And my brother was like, "I'm gay." Oh my god, it was terrible. My dad freaked out. His face got so red, he was so angry. And like the one comment I will never forget my Dad saying, he said: "You know when I was your age, I beat up faggots like you."

Because of the intensity of the event, Maggie said it “will forever haunt me.” Their father was a “sports junkie” who worked in factory and came from a “homophobic and racist family.” Even though he has shown signs of acceptance, according to Maggie, “He will still tell [my brother] that he is the last man of the family and that our family name is going to die out.”

Two of the four siblings' coming out experiences resulted in them running away from home. Drake noted that his grandparents, who raised him and his younger brother, were active members in their church. They were confused and upset when his little brother came out:

[My grandma] started to tear up and I hugged her. It was sad. They really did not understand. They just had their Bible and the pastor and church. [My brother] ending up running away for a few weeks after that to stay with a cousin.

During this event, Drake received admonishment from his grandfather for not disclosing his brother's sexual minority status. Drake recalled:

Pa finally just looked at me and asked if I had known and I said "Yes" and he asked why I had not told them so they could figure out what to do. I got mad and was like, "What is there to do? He's gay, so what?"

Likewise, Sofia remembered when her mother responded to her older brother in an unexpected way:

[My brother] came out to my mom and to be honest she kind of freaked out. I remember him running away actually and staying with his best friend, who was also gay. My mom was totally freaking out over it and being completely irrational, not knowing what to do.

Sofia remained supportive of her older brother and confronted their mother: "I remember saying to her, "What are you doing? Stop! This is your son." For Drake and Sofia, both of their families "eventually came around" and to this day are very supportive. Acting as voices of reason and compassion, it is possible that their unwavering support contributed to the eventual acceptance of their family.

Pre-coming Out Feelings of the Second Sibling

After witnessing a sibling come out in the family, all participants reminisced about the feelings they associated with their own coming out. Eight participants felt positive about their coming out, while seven participants articulated feelings of hesitation and uncertainty.

Feelings of hope: “They had to accept me!” Eight participants were hopeful for their own coming out. In these cases, participants assumed that because their family was receptive to the first sibling to come out, they believed they would receive a similar type of treatment. Evie captured the underlying narrative in this sub-category: “Oh, you know I totally thought they had to accept me. Like, how would that look if they accepted [my sister] and not me?” Sofia echoed these feelings: “I thought that [my mom] would be more accepting because of [my brother] coming out!” Charlotte also presumed that her mother would be accepting: “I didn't think it would be hard at all! I thought she'd be the easiest person to talk to.” As outlined in the next category when discussing family reactions of the second sibling to come, an initial supportive response was not always the case.

Some participants in this sub-category ($n=5$) also reported feeling less pressure associated with coming out. As Samuel articulated, having his sibling come out first paved the way for a much easier process:

I just didn't feel any of that pressure associated with coming out, and I didn't feel pressure to come out. I felt relaxed...I think the reward with having a sibling come out before me is having that weight off of my shoulders. I wasn't the first one. I wasn't, you know, breaking new ground on my own. That path was already opened up for me and it was a whole lot easier for me to just say, "Oh yeah, me too!"

Two of the eight participants in this sub-category reflected on having a sibling come out as transgender and how this invariably shaped their own perceptions of coming out. This

experience, they noticed, was very challenging for their sibling and family and hypothesized that their own coming out (as LGB) would be less trying. Caroline explained:

They had gone through my sister coming out as trans, so I figured if they could handle that, they could handle me coming out as a lesbian. I mean, I'm small potatoes compared to [my sister]....I wasn't all that worried about it.

This perspective was also represented in Mateo's narrative concerning his transgender sister's coming out:

I didn't have to go through what my sister went through....I think her coming out was an experience of rejection, mine was acceptance....[I knew] I would have it much easier. I certainly don't think her coming out process was like mine at all. It was much more dynamic, much more involved.

Present in both participants' stories is the realization that the coming out process for transgender people is entrenched in complexity. Coming out as LGB, as Caroline put it, "is nowhere on the same level."

Feelings of hesitation: "I was worried". Seven participants communicated feeling hesitant to come out their parents/caretakers, and other siblings in the family. Some participants were concerned about being the second child in the family to identify as LGBT and the disappointment they would bring to their parents. As Jackson reiterated: "I was scared that my family would be disappointed that they have two gay sons." Tara also mirrored Jackson's worries: "I was concerned...I didn't want them to feel sad or, I don't know, ostracized because seriously who has two gay kids? No one!"

Four of these seven participants expressed concern over being perceived as copying their sibling upon their own coming out, or causing people to think an LGBT identity is something

that runs in the family as a learned behavior. Having battled issues of being constantly compared to his older brother, Jackson yearned for independence from his brother's shadow. However, Jackson worried others would perceive his own coming out as a mere imitation: "When he came out, I felt like my family would think that I was just trying to be my brother." Lulu also pondered how she would be perceived upon coming out: "[I thought] people might think we have copied off each other and can't think for ourselves." Additionally, Maggie mused: "I am not simply following my brother, obviously, but [I've wondered] if it's something that won't cross people's minds." Lastly, Paula shared:

I didn't want people to think I was copying my sister, or that it runs in the family – and not genetically...I think that is such a ridiculous accusation! But, I think that's why I gave it some time and came out later."

Allowing for time to pass (about one year) after her sister's coming out and before her own helped lessen anxiety surrounding her eventual disclosure and perhaps served as a time for the family to process the first coming out. Jackson also allotted a large passing of time (about six years) with the hopes of not only allowing his family to come to terms, but to quell preconceived notions that he was simply copying his brother.

Some participants in this sub-category ($n=4$) further reported that because they were the last remaining heterosexual sibling, or the last remaining heterosexual male child, they felt an added expectation that they would have to provide grandchildren for their parents, or as Jackson said, carry on the family lineage: "I felt like I had a lot of pressure to carry on the [family] name, and be the only straight son." One participant felt ambiguous about being the last *brother*. Mateo's family consisted of himself and two brothers – a brother who transitioned and now identifies as a transgender woman, and a self-labeled "hegemonic male" brother. Mateo

perceived his heterosexual brother as desiring a certain type of brotherly relationship, and he was worried about shattering that ideal by coming out as a gay man: “My oldest brother...already had one sibling, one younger brother, saying "I want to be female." So he [already] doesn't get to have that brother-brother bond.”

And still, two other participants in this sub-category expressed hesitation because they were the *last child* to come out in the family. In these families, the participants were indeed the only remaining child to identify (presumably) as heterosexual and, in a way, saw their sibling's coming out as a burden to their own coming out. In her interview, Tara detailed much concern over being the last child to come out. Even though her parents were very supportive of her sister, she was worried that because her parents suspected her sister was a lesbian, it made it easier for them to accept her. Tara had dated guys and never displayed interest in the same gender. She was uncertain about what to expect, and confided in her sister:

Having two gay kids – your only kids – [my sister and I] weren't sure if something like that could affect even the most understanding parents, you know? It was tough thinking about their reactions. In a way, having [my sister] come out before me was hard because I sort of had to bear this extra weight of, “Oh shit, what are they going to think?”...I had all sorts of thoughts going through my head, and I hated that I had to burden them with another child being gay. But, really, [my sister] was good about reminding me that they were our parents and would be awesome about it, so I should calm down.

Tara's story illustrates feelings of hesitation, concern, and fear that her parents would not accept another child – the only child still presumably heterosexual – coming out as a lesbian. Moreover, her story highlights the role her sister served as a guiding voice as well as a source of comfort and support. Four additional participants also described the importance of utilizing their sibling

during the coming out processes. Charlotte specifically remembers when she was first questioning her sexual identity and the assistance she received from her brother: “He was the first person I ever talked to about it....He was extremely supportive. He wanted me to make sure before I started telling people, which makes sense.” Jackson received advice from his brother, as well: “It was pretty easy telling him, because he had been through it all. He basically told me that I needed to come out on my own time, and that nobody could tell me when the time was right.”

One participant wished she would have leaned on her brother for support during her own self-identification process. For Celèstè, a 25-year-old queer woman, the 20 year age difference and geographic distance between her and her brother may have been a reason she initially did not depend on him: “In hindsight, I wish I would have reached out to him because of my own anxieties I was having. I think he definitely would have been there for me. But at the time, I was...going through a lot.”

Witnessing a sibling’s negative coming out event caused hesitation for two participants in this sub-category. Drake’s younger brother ran away from home after his initial coming out to their grandparents, who raised them. This forced Drake to reconsider his coming out process and his identity as a gay man:

I was really uncertain of [coming out] when I realized that Grams and Pa were acting the way they were. I sort of, uh, self-doubted for a bit and Louis talked me out of that. He was like, “This is not right. We know who we are, or at least I do.” And he made me examine myself and make sure I was certain [that I was gay and wanted to come out]...I was just kind of wondering, “Is this worth it?” And then I thought, “Yes, my happiness is worth it.”

Family Reactions of the Second Sibling to Come Out

In this category, all 15 participants spoke on their coming out as LGB, and one participant also spoke on coming out as transgender. Thirteen participants reported coming out to their LGBT sibling first before any other family member, while one participant came out to her father first, and one participant came out to her entire family at the same time. Regarding parents, 14 participants were out to their mother or mother-figure, while 9 participants were out to their father or father-figure.

“They just want me to be happy.” In this sub-category, eight participants discussed their own coming out stories and the supportive responses they received upon their initial self-disclosure from mothers and mother-figures, fathers, and siblings. As Tara illustrated via her coming out to both of her parents:

[My dad said], “As long as you are happy, I don’t care who you bring home”....[Then], they both sat there and asked me when I had these feelings.... They just want our happiness to be the center of focus, not who we sleep with.”

For some ($n=5$) participants who received an initial positive response, they partially attributed acceptance to the fact that they had a sibling who previously came out. It seems having a sibling come out may have paved the way for these participants to have an easier time being accepted. For Celèstè, her father was very receptive to her coming out, and she believed having her older brother come out 10 years earlier aided in her father’s understanding and support:

Well, I think it's always positive when your parents experience something in one of their children that may come up again in another child. I think it was positive for my dad because he saw, you know, your kids can tell you big stuff and they are still going to be your kids and you are still going to love them....It probably has something to do with my

brother, too, and his coming out before me that helped. It's great, too, because you can reach out to your sibling, to know that you didn't have to be the first one.

Maggie articulated a similar story whereby most of her family demonstrated support when she first came out: "My mom was very supportive [and] my family has been accepting. I know I have been very fortunate and I know many people aren't." Bringing the story back around to her brother, she claims: "[Having a gay brother], it just made my life easier. It made my coming out process a lot easier...because the initial shock was over...it helped to soften the blow." Upon first coming out, though, Maggie's dad had trouble showing support. She reminisced about a woman her dad dated and her response to their father:

The woman [my dad] was with for seven years was like, "I can't understand why you are upset over your kids being gay. Like, look at them. [Your daughter] was salutatorian of her high school class. She is going to school on scholarships. She is beautiful and smart, and [your son] is doing so much with his life. They're not on drugs, they are not in jail. They are two really great kids. Who they love should not affect it."

For Drake, disclosing a gay sexual orientation was less problematic when compared to the adverse events surrounding his little brother's coming out to their grandparents, who were their caretakers:

My coming out went better than [my brother's], that's for sure...My grandma was surprised, but said that if she can love Lou, she can love me, too. And we hugged and she continued baking. It wasn't no big thing [like it was with my brother].

Drake's younger brother had been kicked out of the house during his initial coming out. Yet, when Drake came out one year later, his grandmother had shown remorse and resolved to act differently.

A story of acceptance captures Mateo story, too: "[My mom] was accepting...She has never thrown back, you know, in my face being gay and she's always been accepting, never thrown us out of the house because of our identification. "

Two participants noted the relief their sibling felt when they eventually came out to the family, as Evie experienced with her brother: "He was super excited for me. He was super happy for me...I guess because he wasn't alone." The feeling of being alone also resonated in Lulu's story: "I think [my sister] was relieved that I was able to get it out into the open, and that she wasn't the only gay one. I know she felt left alone in the family." Lulu added that her extended family was conservative, and her sister's loneliness may have stemmed from feeling misunderstood. Her sister was very happy when Lulu decided to come out: "She really appreciated that. It brought us closer."

"I don't think my mom was happy about it." Eleven participants revealed unsupportive or shocked responses they received upon their initial self-disclosure from mothers and mother-figures, fathers, and heterosexual siblings. In Evie's interview, she detailed how she told her conservative father and stepmother about her sexual orientation status:

My Dad asked me if I was dating anyone, if I had a boyfriend. I was like, "No," and me and [my brother] were smirking and my Dad noticed and was like, "Oh you do too have a boyfriend." [My brother] was like, "Uh, no it's not a boyfriend." I think he kind of figured it out and was like, "You got to be kidding me. You cannot be dating a girl." And I go, "What if I am?" and he was like, "No, you are not." Yeah, he did not handle it well. We had this whole argument. It was bad. His wife was there and he thinks he has to reference the Bible or else he gets yelled at later. She was like, "Oh that is so sinful! Men and women belong together."

When I asked Evie if her father continued to be unsupportive after her initial disclosure, she said:

[My dad has] said, "I've known you your whole life, and this not how you are. I know you like guys. It's just immoral"....My Dad always tells me he loves me, but I know unless I marry a man he won't be happy.

Nathan, too, had a difficult time telling his mother that he was gay. As he recalled, her idea of normal was shattered:

I told my mother and she immediately started crying...she was upset. I think she was sad that I wasn't normal, that things were not normal....Her life as a mother-in-law or a grandparent would not be met. At the time, she vocalized that she was concerned for my safety and she said that she was always concerned for my sister's safety....She said that we "picked a tough road" and things were going to be difficult for us. She was worried I could lose my job due to discrimination. I think she cried for two days and she couldn't go to work the next day. I think she did the same thing for my sister, as well.

Nathan's mother spoke of his sister in her initial response, and it appears Nathan's coming out ignited some of the sadness his mother experienced around his sister's coming out.

In Celèstè's story, she detailed finally coming out to her mother, who had been inquiring about her sexual orientation for the last 15 years:

My mom had actually been asking me since I was 10 if I was gay and I kept telling her "No." So she felt like I had been lying to her the whole time. She was not happy about that. Then, she went into how this was going to affect her. She's a teacher in the middle school [which] is connected to the high school [where I attended] and she did not know how people were going to respond. She didn't want to look bad or anything like that. For up to a year after, there was still some anxiety and tension between my mom and I.

Sofia also shared an unfortunate reaction she received when, during an emotionally vulnerable moment, she confided in mother that she had her heart broken by a girl:

She was kind of confused at first. I remember her saying, "So, wait. You like girls?" I was like, "Yeah, especially this one." I remember her thinking it was very gross. And [she said], "Ewwww," and that was pretty hard for me.

Charlotte, who was in a nearly five year relationship with a man to whom she was engaged to be married, did not anticipate her mother's reaction to her own coming out, either:

My mom is like the coolest mother ever. You can talk to her about anything. It was harder for me to come out to my mom than for my brother...I didn't think it would be hard at all! I thought she'd be the easiest person to talk to. But, it was a shock for her.

Even though her mother was visibly shocked, Charlotte shared a tight-knit mother-daughter relationship. She attributed her mother's willingness to be honest about her feelings to their close relationship. Charlotte wondered if her mother was also initially shocked when her brother came out, but concealed it:

Like, my mom, the only reason I think things were different is because she actually told me how she felt. She didn't tell my brother how she felt about it – she just supported him. She didn't want him to know... but it was still, like, "Oh my god, half of my kids are gay."

In addition to receiving a myriad of unsupportive and sometimes hurtful reactions to coming out, four of the eleven participants in this sub-category recalled a parent proclaiming that, because they had two LGBT children, they must have done something wrong. Wes shared: "My dad has said he thinks he messed up somewhere along the way. Like, that he did something wrong and that's why we're queer." In a conversation with her mother, Maggie discovered a

similar perspective held by her father: “‘Well, [your dad] wondered what we did wrong to have two gay children.’ That was kind of hard for me to take for a while.”

Lastly, two participants in this sub-category documented unsupportive responses from other siblings in the family. Maggie remembered a conversation she had with her younger sister in which she accused Maggie of taking the easy road by switching her preference to girls: “My sister also said, ‘I think you're just gay because you don't think you are good enough for guys and you saw what [our brother] did and thought it'd be easier for you.’” Moreover, Mateo discussed the pain in coming out to his brother: “I think the hardest person to come out to was my oldest brother....I guess he was let down by it.”

Ambivalent. For some participants ($n=7$), a sense of ambivalence surrounded their coming out to specific family members. Six participants had never come out to or spoken to their fathers or father-figures about their sexual orientation, while one participant had never come out to his mother.

Three of the seven participants spoke of their father or father-figure's conservative views as one reason for not self-disclosing. As Paula explained about her and her sister: “Neither of us have really broached the topic with our dad. He is stoic, really traditional in his views. I think my mom might have said something, but I don't really know.” During Sofia's interview, she attributed her father's racial-ethnic background as a factor: “I think [it] feels awkward because my dad is 100% Hispanic...the [LGBT] stuff is weird to him....Maybe if that ever changes...then sure, [I would tell him].”

Two participants in this sub-category spoke of strain in their relationship with their father, and one participant spoke of strain in their relationship with their mother. Due to the uncertainty of their relationships, they had yet to engage in an open discussion about their

identity. An example of this sub-category can be found in Samuel's story and the events surrounding his upbringing and parents' divorce:

I don't know if my brother or sister told him. I never did. I haven't spoken with him since my junior year of high school....He wasn't around much at all growing up....Come to find out, he had been living with another woman....He was with this woman ever since I was in the womb, so that's why he was never around when I was growing up....Yeah, so, like I accompanied my mom to the courtroom when the divorce was finalized. I kind of exploded on him and said my peace and that's all I ever needed to say to him.

Similar to Samuel's experiences, Jackson acknowledged never speaking to his mother about his sexual identity: "I don't really think I've had a conversation with my mom about it even until this day. But, I think she still thinks I might be straight." Jackson attributed his actions to a complicated relationship with his mother, which included a difficult divorce and substance abuse:

When my parents divorced, my mom basically painted an evil picture of my dad, which is why we didn't speak with him. Then, once I started gaining independence, I began to realize my mom had issues of her own....I learned [she] was suffering from painkiller addiction.

Jackson's decision to avoid telling his mother also hinged on a conversation they had after his brother came out:

My mom asked if I was gay, and when I said I wasn't, she responded with, "Thank God." I will never forget that. I know she didn't mean it to hurt me, but she will never know how much that resonated with me.

Two additional participants who addressed an atmosphere of ambivalence were unsure about their father's reaction because of a lack of communication. Both participants made assumptions that their fathers were aware of their sexual orientation, but showed no desire to engage in direct conversation. In the case of Mateo and his transgender sister, who have different biological fathers, he shared: "I think our dads are okay with it. I think it was just something to this day that, uh, we discuss very little about with them in terms of how they feel."

Finding Meaning Post-Coming Out

Reflections on Identity and Acceptance between LGBT Siblings

Throughout the self-identification and coming out process, participants learned a great deal about themselves. Having watched a sibling go through a similar journey caused some participants to scrutinize their own sense of self in relation to their sibling, coming to conclusions about their own identity and their own privilege. Many participants noticed differences between themselves and their sibling based on their sexual and gender identities, but they also came to appreciate a shared perspective on being two siblings who share a sexual minority status.

"I respect her for what she went through." Six participants reflected on the differences between their journey and their sibling's, articulating a sense of admiration and appreciation for what their sibling has gone through to identify as LGBT. All participants further articulated learning something about themselves from being a witness to their sibling's experiences.

For Mateo, seeing his sister struggle with her gender identity throughout childhood and adolescence made him understand his own privilege as a cisgender male. Mateo spoke of his sister in complete reverence and at many points in the interview expressed sympathy for the challenges she endured before, during, and after her transition. Mateo explained:

[My sister] had it rough and not in terms of like my family, but I think understanding what a trans person goes through it's certainly heartbreaking but at the same time you get an understanding of your own privileges....And I certainly understand and better appreciate what the trans community has to go through to achieve happiness because for my sister, it was a matter of her happiness. You mentioned, um, depression, and I certainly didn't have to go through depression related to my sexual orientation, but my sister was hospitalized for depression at one point during her teenage years in relation to all of this. She has certainly helped me to understand the differences in our community and in us.

Maggie reflected on society and the double-standard associated with identifying as a gay man compared to a lesbian: In this regard, Maggie felt fortunate she did not have to endure the stigma that shadowed her brother:

For my Dad, and in society in general, two lesbians are never seen as repulsive as two men. It's just that stigma that still exists. I don't know, I think it's why my Dad has a harder time [accepting my brother]. It's more unnatural, or seen that way, I guess.

Additionally, three participants spoke candidly about watching their siblings come out in middle school or high school. These stories contained similar themes of bullying, cruel jokes, and the courage it took for their siblings to come out and stay out. As Paula expressed of her sister, who came out during sophomore year of high school:

You can't believe how brave she was. I could have never done that....She received a couple bad messages on her Facebook and lost some friends. It was hard seeing her go through that, but she's incredibly strong because of it....I think she helped me tap into that inner courage we all have deep down.

Maggie also watched her older brother be one of the first gay men in his school to come out:

When he came out, there was maybe one other person we knew who was out....He had to go through a lot of bullying. It was hard to see him go through that....But, the biggest reward was seeing him come out. He was one of the first open people. He is very flamboyant and I am proud to call him my brother. To see him go through that, it instilled courage in me to go through it. I am so proud to have him in my life. He's gone through a lot to be who he is.

“He understands those kinds of things.” Eight participants opened up about the rewards of having a sexual minority sibling who understands various aspects of being LGBT. As Samuel put it: “It’s nice because we’re on the same wavelength.” Relatedly, Sofia mused: “[We] unite under the banner of being sexual minorities. We both view love as the same: It’s love, no matter who you are. That’s what we share.”

Three participants specifically discussed the topic of gender and having a sibling who understood the complexity of gender identity, roles, and expression. As Paula said: “Society holds an archaic view of what gender is...it can be real frustrating, but [my lesbian sister] has been understanding of rejecting the binaries and being flexible.” Furthermore, the issue of gender permeated throughout Nathan’s interview and the amount of people, including his father, who did not comprehend gender in the sense that he and his sister did:

The gender issue is a big issue for us – especially being gay and in the gay community, gender is so fluid. There is such a broad spectrum and we know that and embrace it, but [our father] just cannot comprehend that.

Nathan also conveyed gratitude for having a sister who understands the gay male community:

My sister is so understanding. She understands the gay community. She understands what it's like to be a gay man, in a way, and how gay men and women are different. Usually in straight couples, heaven forbid you look at someone of the opposite sex....My sister gets that we're gay boys, and that can happen! But my mother just does not understand. So, I think it is rewarding she really understands those kinds of things.

Moreover, three participants communicated interest in eventually being able to adopt and navigating a process that can be challenging for LGBT people. At times, navigating the conversation can be challenging, too, as Caroline mentioned:

Having children in the [LGBT] community can be a taboo topic for some, but my sister and I definitely talk about. [I don't talk] about it with my other sisters....My [LGBT] sister understands the stigma and challenges we can face, you know?

Shifting Roles and Perspectives

Families reexamine perspectives. Seven participants were able to see a change in their heterosexual family members and how they viewed sexual orientation and gender identity. For six of these participants, they observed a promising change in their parent, as Celèstè notes:

“Eventually, [my mom] came around full circle and went to my first Pride with me. And actually both of my parents went with me! They are both completely supportive now.” Attending a Pride event resonated in Paula’s story, as well: “Somehow, we got our little Catholic mother to attend a Pride festival! She tries to be more open now....She has really stepped up for us.”

For Nathan, seeing his mother embrace his wedding and her role as mother of the groom reaffirmed the growth she had experienced: “It was so nice to see her...shining and doing what she would do if it was at a straight wedding.” Moreover, Nathan was happy to see her become

more open and seek out advocacy groups such as the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) and Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG):

She has definitely changed. She is much more accepting and more open to...new and different things, different people. I think she is a member of PFLAG...It's funny because she didn't tell us and we saw she had like a newsletter or something and I was like, "What is this?" and she casually was like, "Oh yeah, I am a member." She also had an HRC sticker on her coffee table and I was like, "Mom?" She just smiled. So yeah, she is trying to educate herself in areas I never thought she would care to.

Although Maggie admitted her father occasionally displayed a lack of compassion towards her and her brother, she, too, believed he has changed:

The homophobic and racist...comments have reduced significantly....He works at a factory and has his whole life...but someone was talking about faggots at work recently and my Dad said, "You need to stop. I have a gay son." Like, that kind of thing is so crazy to me. He has come such a long way.

For two participants in this sub-category, the remarriage of a parent caused a reexamination of their child's sexual orientation status. For Samuel, his mother was supportive during his coming out, yet opted out of ever talking about it or bringing it up. When she remarried a conservative, Christian man – who viewed Nathan and his sister as “demon spawn” – she began to actively seek information on the LGBT community and outlets for support. Samuel explained:

Well, because of her new husband being very conservative Christian, she's started to try to find more support out there. She identifies as Christian, but she's the whole "God loves everybody" and she is looking for support in that vein....She never really showed any

interest in it until this whole issue recently with her husband. Now she is reading up online about it, getting in touch with PFLAG organizations near her for support, things like that. But, I think back then she just shut down and didn't want to deal with it. She was supportive and loving as a mother, but the subject was never brought up intentionally.

Alternatively, one participant experienced a negative change her parent's behavior. Evie's father married a Christian woman and slowly withdrew his once accepting and supportive behavior:

My dad remarried this really, really Christian lady. She's kind of radical and he has become that way a bit. When I was younger and would be like, "Why is [my brother] that way?" You know, he was very sympathetic and like, "Oh that's just the way some people are." And told me to be nice and everything. Now he is just the opposite. He is like, "I found God. I found the truth." And he won't call [my transgender brother] a guy. He always says "she." It's just really interesting because he used to call [my transgender brother] a guy, but won't. He has changed a lot.

“My straight sibling has to pass on the family name.” Five participants discussed the shifting emphasis onto their heterosexual sibling to fulfill the heteronormative expectations of having a (heterosexual) wedding, producing biological children, and/or continuing the family lineage. Jackson recalled joking with his brother and heterosexual sister about having grandchildren: “We all joke with each other...like how we're all counting on my sister to have the [family] babies.” Additionally, Paula offered her thoughts on how her heterosexual brother feels: “He knows he has a lot of added pressure to give my parents their version of normal...He's always telling [me and my sister], ‘Thanks, guys.’ We get a laugh out of it.” In these narratives, participants illuminated a traditional idea of family as it relates to biological

connections, presumably because of a conventional view that might still permeate the family norms.

Developing a sense of self in relation to sexual and gender identity. Before, during, and after the initial self-identification and coming out process, participants were continuously formulating their sense of identity in relation to sexual and gender identity. In this sub-category, nine participants spoke of the LGBT stereotypes and assumptions they encountered throughout their life (e.g., all gay men are flamboyant), and how they eventually came to perceive being an LGBT person. Participants referenced their parents and siblings in shaping their perceptions, but also the media, geographic location, and educational environment. Their stories also hinted at combatting heteronormative contexts that privilege a binary system of sex and gender, causing some participants to reconsider their own identities as they became more knowledgeable about sexualities and genders.

For Mateo, his family cultivated a very different – a very positive – meaning attached to being a gay or lesbian person. Mateo witnessed an older male sibling kiss boys and also experiment with gender expression before transitioning. He was also raised with four gay and lesbian aunts and uncles. As Mateo illuminated, though, the school environment was not as supportive as his family:

In my school system kids used "gay" as a derogatory term. "Gay" in my family was used as an identifier. And I viewed the two "gays" as completely different. So, "gay" was associated with all the things it's still associated with now in terms of being derogatory, um "powerless," "sissy" – things like that. "Gay" as the identifier was just another thing...but certainly if I did get in elementary school, "Oh you're gay, blah blah," I didn't connect that derogatory term to what I was already doing which was kissing and flirting

with boys. I kept it, I guess, very separate. And in terms of what I saw my [transgender sister] doing, it was the same thing. I don't know if I saw it yet as the identifier or a derogatory term. I just saw her kissing boys. Which again, in my family, wasn't an unheard of thing. Yeah I didn't see it as a deviance or something to keep secret.

For Nathan, the messages he received from his family surrounding gender identity and sexuality were more heteronormative: “[My dad] is very traditional and thinks women should do one thing and men do another...He could never comprehend the gender issues.” Having a parent who held rigid views of gender caused Nathan to reflect upon his own gender expression multiple times throughout his self-identifying and coming out. Yet, having an older, gender-fluid lesbian sister did aid his positive self-perceptions. Media portrayals were helpful, too, for Nathan and two other participants who recalled the disadvantages of living in a rural town. A lack of exposure to LGBT issues and the LGBT community meant that access to the media could aid in the development, or act as a challenge to, ideas of sexuality and gender. Nathan captured this struggle with reconciling positive and negative images presented in the media:

Well, at the time, all the portrayals on television were overly feminine, over-the-top gay people. And I couldn't identify...it was pretty much there was the one stereotypical version of the gay man and I never fit that and no one should have to fit inside a box. So when I saw the guy on *The Real World* with whom I could identify, I was like, "Great, those people do exist in the community." It was just one piece, I guess, of my coming out and realizing [the person I could be].

As apparent from Nathan's experience, media portrayals of LGBT people have not always captured the diversity in the LGBT community. The media can also serve as a transmitter of negative images and words for LGBT individuals, as Celèstè recalls: “Yeah it's funny 'cuz my

parents never said anything negative about [being gay or lesbian]. I actually got all that negative talk, all that stuff was from television.” For Celèstè, it was important to have supportive parents to help buffer the negativity portrayed via the media.

Lastly, six of the nine participants in this sub-category articulated a lack of familiarity with words to capture their experience and how they came to understand their selves and their identities across adolescence and young adulthood. As Nathan stated: “I knew I was into boys as a little kid. Like, I always was attracted to boys, but I didn't even comprehend it. I never even knew the word ‘gay.’” Nathan elaborated on his lack of understanding of being gay, and his confusion around bisexuality:

Even into junior high and high school, I couldn't really comprehend it. I had heard the word by that time, but I mean, I had girlfriends and I was sexual with them, which only complicated things for me. And I thought, "How could I be gay if I am having sexual experiences with these girls?" I think that kind of confused me and made me delay coming out. At the time, I didn't know that you could do both.

Caroline also shared a similar experience with not being exposed to bisexuality:

I never knew anyone who was bisexual and I guess there was a brief moment where I was even more confused because I thought I needed to decide. Like, I can't have it both ways, that's just not even right and I can't go there. I don't know why I thought that.

Lulu, who identified as bisexual, spoke of not feeling normal because she was attracted to both genders, yet never saw bisexuality as an option that was discussed or acted upon among her peers:

I've never been only attracted to only boys....I noticed [in elementary school] that I had these crushes on boys and girls. At the time, I didn't know it was not normal, but then I

found out I was different and it wasn't acceptable...Everyone always talked about their crushes on boys, and no one ever talked to me about liking girls [or boys and girls].

Wes, who came out first as lesbian and then later as a transgender man, grew up in a suburban city in the 1990s. He explained feelings of conflict because he never identified with being a lesbian, yet did not realize that “queer” and “transgender” were options:

I grew up in the '90s in a suburban [area]. It was before Gay/Straight Alliances were well known....Gay and queer identity was not really a thing you could be. Any stirrings of that were really not obvious....I never felt comfortable with any of the words associated with lesbianism....So, when I came out second [as transgender], it made so much more sense.

It felt good to me. I felt like I found something that fit me better. It worked.

Celeste also discussed confusion around labels used to identify lesbian, transgender, and queer people. At one point in middle school, Celeste thought that because she exhibited masculine gender expression she must be a boy. She was unfamiliar with the term “queer” and experienced different stages in her life where she identified with the word “transgender” and then the word “lesbian.” As Celeste noted:

At that time because I was looking at myself as a girl who wanted to be a boy...When I was around 10, I thought I wanted to transition...But over time, I matured out of needing to label [myself] as a lesbian or as a stud. I came to [know at a] point that I was queer. I was queer in my expression, in the terms of the way I dress, and in terms of my sexual preference.

For Paula, she experienced a lot of confusion around being a sexual minority and how to successfully identify herself and her feelings when she was in middle school and high school:

I do wonder how differently things could have been if I knew back then what I was and that it was okay. Like, I never really knew what was happening to me – I was just different – and there is this negative adjective to describe a sin and is that me? And it was ever only “homosexual” or “gay.” I didn’t know about lesbians, being butch-femme, bi, or even queer...and trans was unheard of...But, I have been able to sort of re-assess the labels and, in a way, they’ve helped me figure out where I fit, and I am thankful for that.

While it was confusing, and even hurtful, for participants to feel isolated in their experiences, Paula revealed an uplifting attitude by noting that, in the end, the labels did help her to initially categorize her feelings and assist in the development of her identity.

In conclusion, the findings of this study expose an added layer of complexity to the coming out process. Family structure and background stories set the stage for interpretation of sibling relational processes throughout childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood. The dual coming out processes of participant and sibling depicted variations in how LGBT siblings navigate not only the difficult task of cultivating a minority identity, but in processing the minority identity of a sibling. The decision to inform family members of an LGBT status, despite having an already-out LGBT sibling, was met with mixed emotions. The initial reception of family members was met with mixed emotions, too. In the wake of family transitions and personal transformation, participants contemplated the meaning of their family relationships and the changes they witnessed in themselves and their family.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The findings of this qualitative study represent a new perspective on the decision to come out as LGBT. Unique to this study was the family dynamic that participants and their families had previously experienced a sibling's coming out event, and this study specifically focused on the journey of the second sibling to come out. The stories of each participant were woven across three themes that highlighted family structure, the coming out experiences of both siblings, and meaning-making after both siblings had come out. In the following section, I discuss these themes and their sub-categories as they relate to the current empirical literature, and in light of my theoretical framework. Limitations of this study are provided, as well as implications for researchers, practitioners, and community professionals. I end the chapter with directions for future research.

Discussion of Findings

Participant Family Structure and Dynamics

The goal of this project was to capture the lived experiences of young adult siblings who were the second sibling to come out in their family of origin. Thus, I chose to focus on family membership as opposed to fictive kin (Walker et al., 2005). The resulting sample was quite diverse and captured a variety of ages, races and ethnicities, geographic locations, and economic statuses. Additionally, participants came to the interviews with a wealth of diverse familial ties and structural compositions. Participants noted family networks that consisted of half and full siblings, stepparents and grandparents, and live-in partners of a biological parent. Sibling constellations, which include the participant, ranged from two sibling- to six sibling- families. To illustrate the exceptional diversity in family structure, as well as offer insight into how participants classified their family structure, consider the following exemplar.

Mateo, a 27-year-old Hispanic gay man with a 29-year-old Hispanic transgender sister, was born to a man and a woman who were both in previous relationships. They had no other biological children together besides Mateo. However, Mateo's mother had two sons (this includes Mateo's transgender sister) from a previous relationship, and Mateo's father had three daughters from a previous relationship. According to Mateo, he only has three half-siblings (when, according to biological determinants, he has five half-siblings). He counted his half-siblings from his mother's previous relationship as full siblings because they all three grew up together. Mateo acknowledged he shared a considerably closer bond with these siblings when compared to his half-siblings from his father's previous relationship, who never co-resided with Mateo.

Families like Mateo's, and many other participants in this study, represented a departure from the Standard North American Family (SNAF) model that privileges biological family ties restricted to the confines of a legal, heterosexual marriage (Smith, 1993). Adhering to a SNAF model intentionally categorizes families as natural or unnatural, creating a divisive discourse on what – and who – counts as family (Allen, Blieszner, & Roberto, 2011; Nelson, 2006; Sharp & Ganong, 2011). Participants in this study actively resisted these categorizations, attaching the meaning of family to shared experiences and perceived closeness rather than restricting meaning to bio-legal factors.

When reflecting on the nature of the sibling relationship in childhood and adolescence, participants likened their experiences to a love-hate relationship (Punch, 2008), which they perceived as being “typical” for siblings. Playing together one minute, and arguing the next, was a common narrative used to describe the “emotional ambivalence” that can arise from the multiple roles a sibling relationship can undertake throughout the life course (McHale & Crouter,

2005, p. 186). Indeed, the role of the sibling throughout childhood and adolescence can manifest as a friend, rival, or even a foe (McHale, Updegraff, & Whiteman, 2012). Transitioning to young adulthood, though, means the changing of roles and meaning for the sibling relationship. In this study, participants and their siblings had moved out of the family home – and away from their sibling – for job or education opportunities, romantic relationships, or personal desires to live on their own or with friends. Embarking down new paths such as these meant the decentering of family ties (Conger & Little, 2010), as participants and their siblings reassessed their trajectories. Many participants characterized their sibling relationship in young adulthood as not “too close,” but instead viewed their sibling as reliable in that they knew they could count on their sibling at any time. This finding reinforces the assessment of Walker et al. (2005) that sibling relationships are often times dormant, yet activated in moments of need.

Taking into account family size, previous research has noted that dyadic constellations, when compared to multiple sibling constellations, exhibit greater conflict throughout childhood and into adulthood (Riggio, 2006). Siblings in dyads have also been found to attribute more negative feelings to their sibling relationship (Riggio, 2006). The present study contradicted this finding, as none of the four participants who were in dyadic relationships painted a conflicted, negative attitude toward their sibling at the present time, or through retrospective accounts of childhood. On the contrary, previous research has documented a greater likelihood of warmth and positivity among siblings in larger families (Bat-Chava & Martin, 2002; Riggio, 2006). In this study, the only narratives exposing sibling negativity came from participants in families with three or more siblings. In the academic literature, this has been linked to more competition for resources, such as space and parental attention (Gondal, 2012; Goodwin & Roscoe, 1990).

Modeling and differentiation processes presented in sibling relationships during childhood and throughout adolescence. The findings in this study support the hypothesis that modeling behaviors will be most pronounced in same-sex dyads (Whiteman et al., 2009; Wong et al., 2010), yet views on this hypothesis are mixed, as previous research suggests that modeling occurs in both same-sex and mixed-sex dyads (Whiteman, McHale, & Crouter, 2007). Differentiation processes, though, were present in same-sex and mixed-sex relationships and mostly surrounded issues of gender expression and differences in sex-typed behaviors. Perhaps because the study focused on LGBT identity and the coming out process, these types of differentiation tactics were at the forefront of participants' minds when sharing their stories.

Participants in this study also referenced *other* LGB family members beyond their LGBT sibling dyad. Occurrences of multiple gay and lesbian persons in the same family network have been well-documented by geneticists, biologists, and social scientists. In a study researching 894 heterosexual men and 694 gay men ages 18 and older, Schwartz, Kim, Kolundzija, Rieger, and Sanders (2010) found that gay men (9%) in their study were four times more likely to report having at least one gay brother than heterosexual men (2.3%). Gay men were also three times more likely to report having at least one lesbian sister (7% compared to 0.7%). Additionally, 6.3% of gay uncles and 4.5% of gay male cousins were reported for gay men as opposed to 3.1% of gay uncles and 1.7% of gay male cousins reported for heterosexual men.

Why does it matter if multiple people in a family network identify as a sexual minority? Hilton and Syzmanski (2011) found a strong correlation between acceptance and support of LG siblings when family members had increased exposure to LGB persons and LGB culture. Sarah Pearlman (2012) suggested that knowledge of and exposure to LGB relatives may have mitigated mothers' initial despondent reactions to their daughters' lesbian identity. Familiarity with LGBT

relatives may lead to a desensitization effect on same-sex behaviors and, at the very least, contribute to a sense of neutrality on LGBT issues and relationships.

The Coming Out Experiences

Reflecting on the first sibling to come out. Previous research has provided mixed results regarding to whom LGBT individuals come out to first in the family of origin. Studies have generated support for both mothers (D'Augelli, 2008; Svab & Ruhar, 2014) and siblings (Chan, 1989; Toomey & Richardson, 2009) as the first recipients of a sexual orientation disclosure. In the present study, the first sibling to come out in the family came out to their sibling first in nearly all cases, regardless of birth order and gender constellation. This finding aligns with Toomey and Richardson's (2009) study that revealed siblings, irrespective of birth order and gender, were the first to learn of a sexual minority status, yet does not align with their finding that age is not a predictor. All siblings in the present study were separated by 5 or less years, except one participant who noted a 20 year age separation as well as learning of her sibling's sexual minority status after both parents.

Initial reactions to the first sibling's coming out were generally well-received by the participant, which challenges Hilton and Syzmanski's (2011) findings that only a slight portion of siblings were happy and accepting upon initial disclosure. Only two participants mentioned feeling upset and saddened by their sibling's disclosure. One of these participants, Evie, reflected on her Roman Catholic upbringing, including her attendance of a Roman Catholic elementary school, and expressed concern over how her religious peer group would perceive her family (Crosbie-Burnett, Foster, Murray, & Bowen, 1996). At the time, Evie's role was clearly defined based on the interactions she encountered in her religious environment. Her role as a Roman Catholic middle-schooler provided for her a set of beliefs, which were further buttressed by her

peer group. These beliefs included an adversarial view on homosexuality. Evie experienced a great deal of sadness and conflict when confronted with challenges to her role, and so an assessment of role hierarchy took place (Stryker, 2008). Should she assert her role as a supportive sibling? Should she assert her role as devoted Catholic and loyal friend? Could there ever be a reconciliation of both roles? Taking into account the timing of her sibling's coming out, Evie was situated in late childhood/early adolescence. A predominant social age norm (Hutchison, 2011) during this developmental phase is the desire to conform to peer group standards. In the end, Evie was not initially receptive to her transgender brother's coming out.

Four participants were questioning their own sexual orientation when their sibling came out before them. For these participants in particular, the experience of their sibling's coming out was met with mixed emotions. They reported happiness over their sibling being able to come out, but also felt uncertain about the meaning of their own coming out. At this point in time, participants perceived their LGBT identity and decision to come out as inextricably linked with that of their siblings' trajectory. According to a life course perspective, family members are interdependently connected, and the fortunes and misfortunes of one family member can be shared by all (Elder, 1998). Indeed, coming out is relational, and once an individual asserts their sexual identity, "it no longer affects just him or her, but also the people to whom he or she came out to and their relationships" (Svab & Kuhar, 2014, p. 19). With the coming out of the first sibling, the participant and their family experienced a shift in role expectation and the meaning of the new familial status (Crosbie-Burnett et al., 1996). For the family of origin, a loss in status has occurred as well as a departure from the dominant culture of heterosexuality (Crosbie-Burnett et al, 1996). New "choice points" arise now, as family members are faced with their own coming out process of who to tell and what to keep hidden (Goldberg, 2007, p. 125). These

choice points were heavily weighted for some participants who were grappling with their own self-identification during their sibling's coming out event, increasing their hesitation about their own sexual identity and when, if at all, to be the second child to come out in their family.

Reflecting on family reactions of the first sibling's coming out. There is support in the literature linking gender nonconforming behaviors to a same-sex orientation (Bailey & Zucker, 1995; Dunne, Bailey, Kirk, & Martin, 2000; Thomas & Blakemore, 2013). Research has also shown that family members can predict a person's coming out by relying on gender nonconforming behaviors, such as boys playing with Barbies and dressing in opposite-gender clothing, and girls playing outside in the dirt and behaving aggressively (D'Augelli, Grossman, & Starks, 2005; Hilton & Syzmanski, 2011). Crosbie-Burnett et al. (1996) pointed out:

Before actually being told, a family member may suspect that his or her child or sibling is gay or lesbian (based on perception and attribution about child's or sibling's behavior) and, therefore, the mental processing of and adjustment to this possibility may begin before the actual disclosure; in this case, the family member's schema about his or her own family begins to shift to integrate the new beliefs. (p. 398)

As D'Augelli et al. (2005) framed it, parents and siblings may have “clues” to direct their suspicions, leading them to react less negatively when their child or sibling eventually confirms their assumptions (p. 481). Many participants said they and other family members suspected their sibling was LGBT based on gender nonconforming behaviors. It appears that when these role expectations were confirmed – and the sibling did come out as LGBT – there was an increase in positive family reactions upon initial coming out.

A few family members reacted with ambivalence, as participants recalled the sadness and/or confusion encompassing their parents' reactions. Emotional responses that included

crying were not uncommon (Grafsky, 2014; Pearlman, 2005), and neither was confusion or shock (Savin-Williams, 1998). Both mothers and fathers were reported as appearing sad and dejected (D'Augelli et al., 2005; Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003), and one father in particular placed blame on a gay cousin for influencing his son's sexual orientation. As discussed in Kuvalanka and Goldberg's (2009) study on queer parents with queer children, realistic concerns exist over the misappropriation of a family member's sexual minority status to another family member who is already out and identified as LGBT. Locating a place of blame – instead of opening oneself up to an emotionally vulnerable coping process – may present a less difficult path for parents to take at that point in time.

Hurtful reactions were present, as well, and mostly originated from a father or grandfather (D'Augelli, 2002; Maguen, Floyd, Bakeman, & Armistead, 2002). One participant, Maggie, recalled her father's insensitive reaction to his gay son's disclosure, as she paraphrased: "You know when I was your age, I beat up faggots like you." This kind of verbal aggression has been found to be directed most often at gay sons and by their fathers (D'Augelli, Hershberger, & Pilkington, 1998). Likewise, hurtful reactions by a parent can also upset the sibling witnessing the backlash at the expense of their already-out sibling. A majority of heterosexual participants in Hilton and Syzmanski's study (2011) reported feeling angry, upset, and disappointed by their parents' reactions to the coming out of their sibling. The (perceived) heterosexual sibling's role in the coming out process of a sibling can be quite powerful. They can serve as voices of reason, diffusing tensions and acting as models of acceptance, love, and support (Crosbie-Burnett et al., 1996). In the present study, participants reported that they openly challenged their parents' negativity, and refused to condone homophobia.

Pre-coming out feelings of the second sibling. To date, no research has sought to understand the experiences of a second sibling to come out in a family of origin. In addition, little attention has been paid to in-depth investigations of families where two or more members identify as LGBT. The pre-coming out feelings described by participants largely encompassed feelings of hope, and feelings of hesitation. Feelings of hope arose from having a sibling “pave the way.” In a sense, participants had the fortune to be able to see another sibling take on the task of being the first child to come out, and were able to mentally and emotionally process the reactions of family members. Having that familial experience at the forefront of their consciousness, participants felt they were able to reasonably deduce what their own coming out process might resemble.

Still, for other participants, they felt the weight of a burden on their shoulders. Even if a sibling’s coming out event was positive, they still worried about the pressures of being their parents’ second LGBT child. Participants from sibling dyads, in particular, contended with being the *last child* who could produce the heteronormative ideals of a wedding and biological grandchildren. The meaning ascribed to their coming out indicated the death of “normalcy,” as all of their parents’ children would be LGBT. Other participants from multiple sibling families felt the pressure of being the last male child who could carry on the family name. Regardless of sibling constellation, some participants also worried about assumptions of “it runs in the family,” or being perceived as merely copying their sibling.

It should be noted that none of the participants in this study indicated copying their sibling, or believed that their sibling influenced their sexual orientation development. For participants, they perceived their process of self-discovery as completely separate from their siblings’. A participant in Kivalanka and Goldberg’s (2009) study on queer parents with queer

children upheld this position: “I am always wary that people will leap to the conclusion that I am only gay because my mom is gay, and that bothers me since I feel that the two are completely unconnected” (p. 911).

A final pattern represented in pre-coming out feelings was the decision to delay the coming out process. While previous research has touched upon delaying coming out (Mark, 2008), and the process of identity management and strategic outness (Orne, 2011), the present study is the first to reveal a decisive effort to forego disclosure because of the prior coming out of another family member. By consciously delaying their own coming out, participants were exercising agency and actively reshaping the trajectory of their coming out process. Refusing to be overshadowed by their siblings’ coming out, and thus having their experiences directly attached to their sibling, participants “constructed their own life course through the choices and actions they [took given] the opportunities and constraints of [their] social circumstance” (Elder, 1998, p. 5). For some participants, this meant more time to explore their sexual orientation in a concerted effort to be “absolutely sure” they were LGBT, while others self-reflected on the meanings ascribed to a sexual minority status (Longmore, 1998).

Family reactions of second sibling to come out. As with the first sibling, participants who were the second sibling to come out discussed both positive and negative familial responses. Participants reporting an initial supportive reaction from family members attributed their parents’ acceptance, in large part, to having already gone through the process of a child coming out. According to some participants, they perceived their parents as having a second chance to “get it right,” and perhaps that is why they displayed a generally positive attitude. The idea that parents may get a second chance to improve aspects of their parenting is an important finding supported by the literature on grandparent-headed families. Discourses of “having greater wisdom and

experience” the second time around along with the knowledge to avoid committing the same parenting mistakes have been echoed by grandmothers raising their grandchildren (Dolbin-MacNab, 2006, p. 569). Indeed, for parents of LGBT children, circumstances encompassing their life course positions and events at the time of the first child coming out may have been different than when their second child came out. Contending with a divorce, navigating new romantic relationships, and the re-structuring of the family household may have played a role in their perceptions of their first child’s coming out. It is possible that parents were able to prescribe a new meaning for their role as parent of not just one, but two children. With the passage of time between coming out events, a critique of the dominant heteronormative culture may have occurred, affording parents the opportunity to rebuke societal expectations and find acceptance with their new familial status.

Acceptance was not always the case, though, and just as some parents may have seized the opportunity to forge a different outlook (i.e., a positive one) to the second child to come out, other parents and siblings delivered unsupportive reactions. It was challenging for participants to mentally and emotionally process why such a reaction might occur. For some, their suspicions had been confirmed and they perceived their parents as mourning the loss of heterosexual children and their vision of “normalcy.” Through focus groups of parents reconciling the coming out(s) of their LGBT children, a participant in Dunne’s (2001) study – who had just experienced not a second, but a third child to come out as LGBT – likened the experience to a crisis such as cancer (p. 8). A participant in a different study conducted by Fields (2001) reflected on the discovery that her second child was also LGBT: “We had no script for this experience, and we suspected no one else did either. We did not know anyone in our situation” (p. 170).

Other participants situated their family's unsupportive position to the inability to "predict" their coming out in the ways they were able to for the first sibling. That is, they *did not* see it coming. These participants acknowledged receiving emotional support, though, from their siblings – both LGBT and heterosexual, and other extended family members who served as allies in this challenging time. For one participant, support came from an unlikely source. Her father's initial negative reaction was ameliorated by the woman he had been dating for the past seven years. According to previous research, non-biological and non-residing parents (i.e., those that did not grow up in the same household with the child) can be a likely source of support for the biological parent. Typically, they are more removed from the situation, and having some emotional distance from the child can redirect their focus to aiding the biological parent in navigating the coming out process (Crosbie-Burnett et al., 1996).

Participants elaborated on the particularly hurtful experience of their parent equating the reality of having two LGBT children with a flaw in their parenting. This initial parental response supports previous findings that when a parent experiences one child coming out, queries of "bad parenting" can arise as parents self-reflect on what they did wrong and how they could have prevented their child's deviation from a heterosexual orientation (Fields, 2001). A noteworthy pattern emerged in that none of the participants mentioned a parent or family member voicing this perspective upon the first sibling's coming out; in fact, these thoughts seemed to arise out of a deep reservation over yet another child's disclosure. Perhaps upon the first child's coming out, if the parent experienced any reservations about their role in "making the child gay," they could meaningfully construct the situation as merely a fluke of nature. After all, the rest of their children appeared to be heterosexual. The introduction of a second child as LGBT seemed to jolt

this perspective, challenging their identity as a parent and the meaning of what “good parenting” resembles.

An atmosphere of ambivalence surrounded familial awareness of participants’ sexual orientation statuses. For some individuals, they refused to verbally disclose their LGBT identity to a parent. For all participants except one, these parents were their fathers. This finding upholds a consensus in the literature that there is a higher likelihood of direct disclosure to a mother or mother-figure in comparison to a father or father-figure (D’Augelli, Grossman, & Starks, 2005; Maguen, Floyd, Bakeman, & Armistead, 2002; Orel & Fruhauf, 2006). Across racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, fathers and father-figures are less aware of a child’s sexual minority status than a mother or mother-figure (Mays et al., 1998; Merighi & Grimes, 2000). Individuals have reported little or no desire to come out to their fathers for a variety of reasons, including fear of rejection, verbal or physical abuse, and homelessness (D’Augelli, Grossman, & Starks, 2005; Potoczniak, Crosbie-Burnett, & Saltzburg, 2009). In the present study, most participants who chose not to speak with their fathers about their sexual orientation designated the father-child relationship as damaged, and claimed they were not as close to their father as they were their mother. Likewise, research has cited children’s perceptions of an impaired father-child relationship, as well as feelings of ambivalence or indifference towards the relationship, as reasoning for circumventing a direct disclosure event with fathers and father-figures (D’Augelli, Grossman, & Starks, 2005).

Lastly, for two participants, the intersections of race, culture, and gender positioned them in circumstances that they perceived as disadvantageous for disclosure. Along with articulating that she did not share a close relationship with her father, Sofia perceived her father’s “100% Hispanic” identity as hindering his ability to accept same-sex individuals and relationships. Paula

also expressed concern over telling her Hispanic father, and mentioned that she feared what he would do and how he would react. Thus, she asked her mother to use her discretion and relay the information onto her father “whenever she felt moved to.” Hispanic culture is deeply rooted in Roman Catholicism, and the blending of religion, traditionalism, and adherence to gender role expectations can contribute to a parent’s negative reaction and disapproval upon disclosure of an LGBT identity (Dube & Savin-Williams, 1999; Potoczniak, Crosbie-Burnett, & Saltzburg, 2009; Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2010). The centrality of *la familia* (the family) implies cohesion, collectivism, and *respeto* (respect) (Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2004). To come out as a sexual and gender minority may be seen by family members as a violation of that respect. Hispanic-American gay men have voiced concerns over the clash between publicly acknowledging their gay identity and protecting the “family well-being and how the family is perceived by others” (Merrighi & Grimes, 2000, p. 39). The managing of multiple marginalized statuses, in particular for Hispanic-American families, can indeed lead to higher levels of anxiety and depression (Kim & Fredriksen-Goldsen, 2012), causing some LGBT persons to reconsider potentially exacerbating an already complicated circumstance.

Constructing Meaning Post-Coming Out

Participants activated meaning-making processes when reflecting on their experiences growing up in their families of origin, the changes in their family relationships across time, and the emergence of a shared sexual minority identity with their sibling. For some participants, they engaged in acts of self-reflection by comparing the experiences of both themselves and their sibling in relation to sexual and gender identities, and as members of the larger LGBT community. These comparisons brought a newfound respect for the differences they shared with their sibling. For example, three participants in particular witnessed the transition of a sibling.

Being a witness to the long, difficult, and painful journey their sibling underwent in order to attain gender congruence caused participants to re-examine their own privileges, musing that perhaps they did not have it so bad after all. Moreover, they observed issues in the LGBT community with treatment towards lesbian and gay individuals as generally accepting without reservation, and treatment of transgender members as suspicious and unfamiliar with the unique challenges and issues surrounding the transgender community (Stone, 2009). The findings of the present study challenge, yet support, previous reports that siblings of transgender individuals can be dismissive and rejecting of their sibling's transgender identity (Factor & Rothblum, 2007). While a few participants perceived difficulties with their heterosexual siblings' acceptance of the transgender identity of the sibling, the participants themselves symbolized strong pillars of support (Kovalanka, Wiener, & Mahan, 2014). LGB siblings were able to empathize under the banner of a shared stigmatized identity and a shared family of origin experience, yet accepted the oppressions faced by their sibling as a result of a transgender identity as out of the scope of something they could ever fully understand.

Rejoicing in the benefits arising from the sharing of a sexual minority status with a sibling permeated some of the narratives, as well. The *Journal of GLBT Family Studies* recently released a special issue devoted to understanding the relationship that LGBT people share (or do not share) with their family of origin. In the introduction to the issue, Bertone and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2014) pose the question: "How can alliances along family ties develop on the basis of shared stories of family diversity and marginalized identities, rather than of loving (and normative) support to GLBT people...from a position of heterosexual privilege?" (p. 10). The present study can offer insight into this question. Aside from a racial or ethnic minority identity, the participants in my study are unique in that they share a stigmatized identity with a member of

their family origin, something rare when reflecting on the empirical literature documenting LGBT experiences (Brown, 1989). As a result, participants reported feelings of happiness and gratitude (and at times, relief) because they had someone in their family who understood – and often times shared – certain aspects associated with the navigation of identifying as LGBT. Sibling bonds are quite unique in that siblings “know one another intimately, as they are linked by childhood experiences unlikely to be known by others” (Walker et al., 2005, p. 176). The combination of a mutually shared familial backdrop and a marginalized sexual orientation identity may have served to intensify closeness as well as the reinterpretation of what it meant to be a sibling and what a “typical” sibling relationship might resemble.

In addition to a reinterpretation of sexual and gender identities, and the role examination of what it means to be an LGBT sibling, participants reflected on the positive transformations of their family members (not including their LGBT sibling). Indicators of a parent or sibling’s positive move towards re-examining their outlook on having two LGBT family members included (a) expanding knowledge of LGBT issues by acquiring LGBT resources and attending PFLAG meetings, (b) subtle displays of pro-LGBT attitude, such as displaying a Human Rights Campaign sticker or circulating a pro-LGBT story on a social networking site, (c) reprimanding homophobic behavior in co-workers and other members in social network, and (d) immersion into LGBT culture by participating in Pride parades. These findings support previous research that has highlighted the similar pathways parents and siblings can travel in their journey towards accepting an LGBT family member (Bertone & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2014; Connolly, 2005).

While reflecting on hesitations surrounding being the second sibling to come out, a few participants perceived a burden of being the last seemingly heterosexual child (and for some, the last heterosexual *male* child) who could fulfil their parents’ heteronormative expectations. These

expectations included the celebration of a heterosexual wedding, biological grandchildren, and/or the passing on of the family name. For some participants, they perceived these expectations as having become a reality for their heterosexual siblings. According to participants, their heterosexual siblings were well aware of this change in role expectations and the requirement to punctuate their life course with events that could fulfill this new role. It should be pointed out, though, that participants did not depict these expectations as coming from parents, but rather they described these expectations as having originated in communications between *all* the siblings in the family. Hypothesizing why that is, siblings could be underscoring a very real message they perceive in their family of origin about what it means to be a family, and the role expectations of an adult child. Implicit, shared meanings of heteronormativity and the SNAF model of family may percolate within the family system. Given that the vast majority of participants were raised in families that rebutted the SNAF model, this finding may highlight the deeply implanted heterocentric messages that structure the macro- and micro-level contexts of society, demonstrating the infiltration of homophobia at the most intimate level of society: individuals and their families.

Finally, cutting across the entire interview process, participants continuously revisited self-identification processes and factors contributing to their sense of self in relation to sexual and gender identity. In addition to families of origin, participants referenced the media, geographic locations, and school environments as influencing their self-perceptions at various stages in the life course. In considering the role of media, the present study sustained findings that media portrayals of the LGBT community can be stereotypical and misrepresentative of the diverse range of LGBT people and experiences (Gomillion & Guiliano, 2011). Yet, for a few participants, the intersection of socioeconomic status and geographic location meant a very

limited exposure to LGBT persons, and media outlets served as an important bridge to the LGBT community. Indeed, for Caroline, her experience growing up in an economically disadvantaged rural town meant that, if there was an LGBT community, it was invisible and unbeknownst to community members (Oswald & Culton, 2003). With no access to community resources or LGBT social networks, Caroline had to rely on television programming. However, the only television in her house transmitted four channels, and the family could not afford to deplete financial resources on cable television. Thus, she recalled watching television at a friend's house and discovering the diverse representations of LGBT people that exist and that they live in communities where they are comfortable being highly visible (Gray, 2009). These early experiences helped shape Caroline's stance on the importance of visibility and always being out and open about her identity, regardless of community context.

Other participants shared stories that revealed the struggles of combatting a heteronormative environment privileging a binary system of sexuality and gender. The mainstream discourses of sexual orientation as being either opposite-sex or same-sex attraction, and gender as male or female, forced some participants into a self-identifier that they never felt comfortable using (Dunne, 2001). As participants became more knowledgeable about diverse sexualities and genders, so, too, did their ways of thinking about their sense of self. The academic literature has acknowledged bisexuality, for example, as a "silenced sexuality" (Barker & Langdrige, 2008, p. 389). The findings of the present study corroborate this phenomenon. Throughout middle and high school, participants were unaware of anyone who identified as bisexual. There was confusion around the language of bisexuality due to never having been exposed to the word itself or realizing that it was an option available to them until the years of late high school or early college. In addition to a lack of visibility, participants expressed the

inaccessibility of the term “bisexual” because it lacked a clear definition that suggested a passing phase rather than a sexual orientation identity (Barker & Langdridge, 2008).

Limitations of Study

The present study has provided a contribution to the understanding of young adult sibling relationships and the coming out process when two siblings identify as LGBT. Limitations should be noted, though. The design of this study was cross-sectional, and participants were interviewed at one point in their life course. Thus, the data are meant to reflect participants’ thoughts and feelings at that moment in time. As families continue to change, it is possible that views may alter (Svab & Kuhar, 2014), and if I were to interview the same participants next year, they might provide a different perspective. The very nature of sibling relationships is especially illusive, and due to its propensity for fluctuation throughout the life course, research “cannot capture growth, stability, or decline” (Walker et al., 2005, p. 176). Furthermore, the fluid nature of sexuality and gender means that participants (and quite possibly their LGBT siblings) may encounter a shift – or multiple shifts – in the way they self-identify (Rothblum, 2000).

The design of this study was created to investigate an individual perspective on sibling relationships, as opposed to a dyadic perspective. Interviewing only one sibling allowed for the freedom to speak openly and candidly about both the positive and negative events related to their sibling and family of origin (Punch, 2007). The focus remained on them, and they did not have to share the stage with their sibling or other family members. However, the opportunity to interview both siblings could have provided abundant breadth and depth (Walker et al., 2005), affording me the opportunity to identify overlap and dissimilarities between each perspective and work towards an integrated viewpoint of a complex family process (Eisikovits & Koren, 2010).

Another potential limitation of the current study was sample size. Recruitment efforts spanned six months and the exhaustion of countless resources in order to access my sample. While I feel I was able to gather a robust dataset and achieve the goals of my study, the issue of a small sample size reflects a larger debate in the academic community. As Roy (2012) surmised, “Is a qualitative study with eight participants less rigorous or informative than one with 45 participants? Can one learn even more from a study with 120 participants? There are no easy answers....The unwritten assumption [is] that ‘more is better’” (p. 661). The Qualitative Research Commission Report formed by the National Council on Family Relations acknowledged that academic audiences may mistrust modest sample sizes, and associate a small number of participants with a weaker research design (LaRossa, Goldberg, Roy, Sharp, & Zvonkovic, 2014).

Implications

The findings of this study hold important implications for family scholars, family practitioners (e.g., clinicians and family life educators), and community professionals (e.g., leaders of LGBT support groups, such as PFLAG) working directly with LGBT individuals and their families. First and foremost, individuals interested in attending to this population need to remain cognizant of the iterative, relational process of coming out (Lev & Sennott, 2013; Svab & Kuhar, 2014). That is, coming out processes not only affect the person (or, persons) coming out, but those they come out to, including families of origin (Bertone & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2014; Rothblum, 2014).

When attending to individuals who are the second sibling to come out in the family of origin, family and community professionals should be aware of who knows of the sexual minority status, and who does not. Being sensitive to the variation within family relationships,

including the propensity for fathers to be uninformed of sexual and gender minority statuses, can help professionals better attend to the needs of the LGBT individual (Brown, 1989). Participants in this study were not always out to their fathers, which tended to reflect rifts in the parent-child relationship that were present irrespective of an LGBT status. Family and community professionals should also be cautious when interpreting the origins of an LGBT status (Kuvallanka & Goldberg, 2009). The findings of this study documented siblings' discord with being perceived as "copying" their LGBT sibling and notions that it "runs in the family." Those working with a second sibling to come out as LGBT must take into consideration that while sibling's lives are inextricably linked through shared family experiences, they perceive their LGBT identity formation processes as separate from that of their siblings' (Crosbie-Burnett et al., 1996).

On a similar note, though, the significance of the sibling subsystem in families of origin should not go overlooked, as is often the case in family-based interventions (Feinberg, Solmeyer, & McHale, 2012). Findings from this study clearly elucidate the vital role of siblings in navigating the coming out process. As participants recalled when their sibling was the first to come out in the family of origin, they served as sources of support and acted as mediators between sibling and parent. Moreover, participants' siblings also served as major sources of support during their coming out events. Perhaps families experiencing discord over coming out processes would benefit from an intervention beginning with the sibling relationship, which may provide a less intimidating approach to the family system than focusing solely on parent-child relationships (Feinberg et al., 2012).

This study also reinforces previous findings that parents of LGBT children tend to locate and utilize resources to aid their journey in coming to terms with having an LGBT child (Bertone

& Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2014). One thing that is clear is that there is no uniform manual on how process the disclosure of a sexual minority status of a child, let alone two children. Family practitioners and community professionals must work to connect these families to sources of knowledge and support (Brown, 1989). In fact, my interest in examining the phenomenon of two LGBT siblings from the same family partially stems from hearing a parent at a PFLAG meeting express concern that no one could possibly understand her situation grappling with having two children who are sexual minorities. This similar notion has been documented in parents of transgender children who state their lack of interest in attending community support groups due to perceptions of being the only parent in their current circumstance (Pearlman, 2012).

Finally, participants in this study came from a variety of cultural, religious, and economic backgrounds. The intersections of race and cultural heritage arose in some narratives, and thus it is important that family professionals attend to these issues and strive to improve their personal cultural competency (Hickling, 2012; Lettenberger-Klein, Fish, & Hecker, 2013). Family professionals must recognize the influence of multiple intersecting (and sometimes marginalized) identities and how they inform sexual orientation development and family relationships (McInroy & Craig, 2012). Suggestions for increasing cultural competency include participating in training programs and workshops directed at sharpening cultural awareness, utilizing suggestions based in academic literature, and recognizing inherent privilege and bias (Taylor, Gamburg, Rivera, & Laureano, 2006).

Future Directions for Research

The academic community has emphasized the significance of attending to the experiences of LGBT individuals and their family of origin (Bertone & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2014; Heatherington & Lavner, 2008). As the larger societal culture becomes more open and accepting

of diverse identities and family forms, access to a wider range of LGBT families of origin willing to share their experiences increases (Rothblum, 2014), affording social scientists more opportunities for the broadening of family scholarship.

The findings of the present study provide insight into the family of origin and the role of parents and siblings in navigating the coming out process. These findings can be used as a touchstone for investigating questions surrounding the perspective of both mothers and fathers when two children in their family identify as LGBT, and when their *only* two children identify as LGBT. This distinction is important to delineate, as the consequence of having additional heterosexual children may alter parental reactions and attitudes towards having multiple sexual minority children. The parent-child relationship, as well as the parent-parent relationship, should be points of focus when pondering the impact of two LGBT disclosures.

Furthermore, when keeping the family of origin in the purview of analysis, the perspective of heterosexual siblings in a family with two (or more) LGBT siblings can afford unique insight into sibling constellations, family size, and family expectations. Family processes underscoring modeling and differentiation across all phases of the life course should be examined, too. The findings of the present study suggest the shifting of alliances within the family as a result of a second sibling's coming out. Findings also indicate that heterosexual siblings may perceive added pressure related to their role as the sole heterosexual child. Perhaps future research could closely examine reorganizations in familial alliances, as well as investigate the presence or absence of expectations related to heteronormative ideas of the family. Additionally, how might heterosexual siblings navigate accommodating processes and trajectory shifts as a result of these expectations?

Considering extended families, the present study offers a glimpse into the potential multiplicity of people in a single family network that can identify as LGBT. Broadening the research and theoretical lenses to include these overlooked, peripheral family ties may reveal information on the access to and utilization of extended kin and their experiences as a sexual minority in the larger familial network. The process of maintaining extended family relationships, and understanding the type of connections they share with the family of origin, could be considered, as well.

Conclusions

The goals of this study served to capture the experiences of young adults who come out in a family of origin in which another sibling had previously disclosed an LGBT identity. This study was purposeful in its attempt to capture a unique family context and a unique coming out experience that had yet to be documented in family scholarship. The emergent findings of this investigation have produced insights into LGBT identity and disclosure processes, sibling relationships, and the family of origin. In light of an integrated life course and symbolic interactionism framework, the diverse and intersecting experiences of individuals, siblings, and families as they navigate multiple coming out processes across the life course yield important implications for family scholars, practitioners, and community professionals. The future of research in family studies holds much promise for the advancement of knowledge of LGBT individuals and families. The intersections of research and practice remind us of the marginalized individuals and families at the center of our work, and the role of family scholars and professionals in contributing to the social and political change needed to better the lives of those we study.

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Participants Needed for Collaboration in Research Study

- *Do you identify as a sexual minority/LGBT?
- *Do you also have a sibling who identifies as a sexual minority/LGBT?
 - *Are you and your sibling between the ages of 18-35?
 - *Are both you and your sibling out to at least one parent/caregiver?
 - *Do you think of yourself as the second sibling to come out?
 - *Are you willing to share your story in a 45-60 minute interview?

If this sounds like you, please consider participating in a research study conducted by Katie Barrow, Doctoral Candidate at Virginia Tech.

Interested parties should email her at barrow2@vt.edu

All eligible participants will be given a \$20 gift card for their time and contribution to understanding the experiences of sexual minority siblings and their coming out stories.

This study has been approved by the Virginia Tech IRB #13473

Appendix B: Recruitment Email

Recruitment email script to listservs, organizations, and groups:

Dear [insert name]:

Hello! My name is Katie Barrow and I am a doctoral candidate in the department of Human Development at Virginia Tech. I am writing to request your assistance in gathering data for my dissertation research project. The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the experiences of individuals who are the second sibling to come out as a sexual minority/LGBT in their family. The study is being supervised by my advisor, Dr. Katherine Allen.

I would greatly appreciate your assistance in distributing the attached recruitment flyer to your listserv(s). The Institutional Review Board at Virginia Tech has granted approval to conduct this research. All information obtained will be kept confidential and any data collected will be used only for the purposes of this study.

I do hope that you will support this research study. You may contact me at (314) 677-5284 or barrow2@vt.edu with any questions or for further details.

Thank you for your time and support.

Sincerely,

Katie M. Barrow, M.S.
Doctoral Candidate, Department of Human Development
Virginia Tech

Appendix C: Twitter Hashtag Word Cloud



Appendix D: Screening Emails

Email response to a potential participant:

Hi [insert name]:

Thank you so much for your interest in my study! Before we proceed, I just need to clarify that you meet the requirements for participation:

- Do you identify as LGBT/sexual minority?
- Do you have a sibling who also identifies as LGBT/sexual minority?
- Are you, the participant, between 18-30? Is your sibling also between 18-30?
- Are both you and your sibling out to at least one of your parents/caregivers?
- Do you identify as the second person to come out (after your sibling) as LGBT/sexual minority?

If you answered yes to all of the above questions, you are eligible to participate in this study. I look forward to hearing from you so we can arrange a face-to-face or telephone interview.

Thank you for your time and support.

Sincerely,

Katie M. Barrow, M.S.
Doctoral Candidate, Department of Human Development
Virginia Tech

Email to participant, once selected:

Hi [insert name]:

Thank you so much for answering my criteria questions, and I am happy to have you participate in this study! Before we can arrange an interview date, time, and possible location, please see the informed consent attached to this email. Take your time and carefully review this information and let me know if you have any questions. If you consent to participate in this study, electronically sign the consent form and return to me by the date of our interview.

Below are available dates and times below for an interview. Please let me know as soon as possible if any of these days work for you.

[Interview dates and times].

A friendly reminder that our interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes and will be audio recorded. You will receive a \$20 gift card for participating in this study, regardless if you decide to opt out of the study at any time.

I look forward to scheduling our interview, and I am very grateful for your willingness to participate. Please do let me know, though, if you are no longer interested in participating in this study.

Sincerely,

Katie Barrow, M.S.
Doctoral Candidate, Department of Human Development
Virginia Tech

Appendix E: Informed Consent

Informed Consent for Participants In Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

Title of Project: When a second sibling comes out: Family transformations and new meanings for sibling relationships

Investigators: Katie M. Barrow, M.S., & Katherine R. Allen, Ph.D.

I. Purpose of this Research/Project

This research project addresses LGBT young adults and their experiences coming out second in their families of origin. Attention will be paid to the second sibling to come out, his or her sibling who also identifies as LGBT, and their family of origin.

II. Procedures

Interviews will take place at a private location (such as a library meeting room or office space). Interviews will take approximately 45 minutes, and will be audio-recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Only the research team will have access to the contact names and identifiers related to the participants. This information will be kept in a locked file cabinet throughout the duration of the project. In the interview, participants will be asked to talk about their family background, their relationship with their sibling and other members of the family of origin, the coming out experience, and their sexual identity.

III. Risks

The risks to participants in this study are minimal. Participants will be asked about their personal relationships, their sexual orientation identity, and their experiences coming out, which might evoke emotion from participants. If participants find any part of the interview distressing, they may skip any question in the interview and they may end participation at any point without penalty. In addition, participants will be provided with community resources, such as counselors, churches, or community centers, if they request assistance in dealing with difficult emotions. Another possible risk for participants in this study includes introspection. When people examine their experiences and beliefs, their reflections may be uncomfortable. The researchers will have available referrals to mental health and community resources for all participants.

IV. Benefits

Although no benefits are guaranteed, participants may gain a greater understanding of how their sibling has influenced their sexual identity and coming out processes. They may also appreciate knowing that their experiences and voices will be heard by a wider audience.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

The confidentiality of each participant will be carefully preserved in the verbatim transcripts and in the writing of the study. The audio tapes will be stored in a locked file cabinet and destroyed once the transcripts are complete. Participants will only be recognized through the use of a pseudonym. Identifying information will only be viewable by the investigators. Information that might be used to identify participants (such as age, location, or other information) may be removed at the time the transcripts are created. It is possible that the Institutional Review Board

(IRB) may view this study's collected data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research.

VI. Compensation

Participants will be provided with a \$20.00 gift card for their participation. This compensation is an extension of gratitude for the time and energy the participants put into the interview.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

Participants are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. Participants are free to refuse to answer any questions without penalty. They will be fully compensated if they complete any portion of the interview process and will still be compensated if they wish to not answer particular questions or decide to stop the interview because they are uncomfortable with the questioning.

VIII. Participant's Responsibilities

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have the following responsibilities:

1. Allow my responses in the interview referred to above to be transcribed by the investigators and used in this research project. I understand that the audio recordings made of the interview as well as generalized demographic information will be the source of data.
2. Permit disclosure of identity to researchers with the understanding that identity will be changed to protect confidentiality.
3. Complete an interview that will last approximately 45 minutes.
4. Permit contact from the interviewer after the interview if there are any discrepancies in the data that need to be clarified.

IX. Participant's Permission

I have read and understand the Informed Consent and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

Participant's Signature

Date

Should I have any pertinent questions about this research, I may contact:

Katie Barrow, co-investigator [314-677-5284] barrow2@vt.edu
Dr. Katherine Allen, faculty advisor [540-231-6526] kallen@vt.edu

If I should have any questions about the protection of human research participants regarding this study, I may contact Dr. David Moore, Associate Vice President for Research Compliance, Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, telephone: (540) 231-4991; email moored@vt.edu; address: Research Compliance Office, 1880 Pratt Drive, Suite 2006 (0497), Blacksburg, VA 24061

This Informed Consent is valid from: May 9, 2013 to May 8, 2014

Appendix F: Participant and Sibling Demographics

Case	Participant Sibling	Age	Gender	Race	Sexual Orientation
1	Mateo	27	Male	Hispanic	Gay
	Adriana	29	TransFemale	Hispanic	Straight
2	Charlotte	26	Female	White	Lesbian
	Kevin	23	Male	White	Gay
3	Wes	33	TransMale	White	Queer
	Clinton	30	Male	White	Gay
4	Sofia	21	Female	Hispanic	Lesbian
	Jacob	26	Male	Hispanic	Gay
5	Celèstè	25	Female	Black	Queer
	Marcus	45	Male	Black	Gay
6	Nathan	35	Male	White	Gay
	Nina	33	Female	White	Lesbian
7	Evie	20	Female	White	Lesbian
	Aaron	25	TransMale	White	Bisexual
8	Samuel	34	Male	White	Gay
	Stephen	38	Male	White	Gay
9	Jackson	21	Male	White	Gay
	Edward	24	Male	White	Gay
10	Lulu	19	Female	Black	Bisexual
	Rachelle	13	Female	Black	Lesbian
11	Maggie	20	Female	White	Lesbian
	David	23	Male	White	Gay
12	Tara	28	Female	Biracial	Bisexual
	Winnie	25	Female	Biracial	Lesbian
13	Drake	22	Male	Black	Gay
	Louis	19	Male	Black	Bisexual
14	Caroline	30	Female	White	Lesbian

	Geri	32	TransFemale	White	Queer
15	Paula	21	Female	Biracial	Lesbian
	Renata	18	Female	Hispanic	Lesbian

Appendix G: Demographic Questionnaire

Please fill out the following information to the best of your ability. You can choose to leave any of the spaces blank, or simply indicate “n/a” or “prefer not to answer.”

Information about you (the participant):

Name:
Age:
Gender:
Race:
City, State:
Education Level:
Place of employment:
Sexual orientation:

Information about your sibling:

Name:
Age:
Gender:
Race:
City, State:
Education Level:
Place of employment:
Sexual orientation:

Information about your family of origin

In the family of origin in which you resided through childhood and adolescence, what was the yearly income? You may choose from the options below:

\$25,000 or less: _____
\$25,000 to \$49,999: _____
\$50,000 to \$74,999: _____
\$75,000 to \$99,999: _____
\$100,000 or more: _____
I don't know: _____
I prefer not to disclose: _____

If you have two families of origin (e.g., your parents divorced and you lived with both parents, separately), what was the yearly income of your second family of origin? You may choose from the options below:

\$25,000 or less: _____
\$25,000 to \$49,999: _____
\$50,000 to \$74,999: _____
\$75,000 to \$99,999: _____
\$100,000 or more: _____
I don't know: _____
I prefer not to disclose: _____

Appendix H: Interview Guide

Interviewer: Before we begin, do you have a preference for how I address you and/or the LGBT community (e.g., L/G/B/T, LGBT, LGBTQ, queer, sexual minority, gender-variant, etc.)?

Family Background

1. Please tell me about your family of origin.

Probe: What was it like growing up in your family?

Probe: How would you characterize your relationship with your parent(s)/caregiver(s)?

2. Please tell me about the relationship you have with your sibling who also identifies as LGBT/sexual minority.

Probe: What was it like growing up with your sibling?

Probe: How would you characterize your relationship with your sibling?

The Coming Out Experience of the First Sibling

3. Please tell me about your experience when you found out that your sibling was LGBT.

Probe: When was it? What were your initial reactions? How did it make you feel?

4. How did other members of your family respond to your LGBT sibling's coming out?

Probe: Can you elaborate on how you perceive their responses as being a positive or negative experience for you and for your sibling?

The Coming Out Experience of the Second Sibling

5. Now, please tell me about your own coming out experience and what it was like being the second sibling to come out?

Probe: How did you come out to your sibling? How did they react?

Probe: How did you come out to other family members? How did they react?

Probe: In what ways did having an already-out LGBT sibling shape your experience?

Probe: How do you think having one sibling who identifies as LGBT contributed to your family members' experience of learning you also identify as LGBT?

6. How did having a sibling who was already out contribute to your identity as an LGBT person?

Probe: What kind of feelings (e.g., inspiration, resentment) did your sibling generate for your own coming out?

Probe: How does your sibling's identity as an LGBT person inform the way you view your identity as an LGBT person?

Sibling Relationships and Family Dynamics Post-Coming Out

7. Tell me about your sibling relationship now that you are both out.

Probe: Emotionally (e.g., do you feel closer?)

Probe: What was or is your biggest challenge or reward with having an LGBT sibling?

8. In what ways, if any, do you perceive that your family has changed since you both came out?

Probe: How did your family change when your sibling came out? How did your family change (again) when you came out?

Appendix I: Participant Biographies

Case 1

Mateo is a 27-year-old gay Hispanic male working on his Master's degree. He has a 29-year-old trans sister, Adriana, who did not complete high school. She is a half-sibling, and both were raised together in the same household with their heterosexual 30-year-old brother, who is a half-sibling to Mateo, and a full-sibling to Adriana. Mateo also has three half-sisters from his father's previous relationships before he married his mother and had Mateo. The family resided in a middle-class home in the South, and were exposed to gay and lesbian family members from a young age, having two aunts and two uncles who identify as sexual minorities. For Mateo, it was "super easy" to navigate the coming out process, but his transgender sister had a more arduous process. The most difficult person for Mateo to come out to was his heterosexual brother. "By that time, he already had one sibling saying 'I want to be female,' so he doesn't get to have that brother-brother bond." Today, all three siblings are quite close, even though Mateo's heterosexual brother says that he feels like "the odd man out."

Case 2

Charlotte is a 26-year-old White lesbian with a 23-year-old gay brother, Kevin. Both are high school graduates. They have a heterosexual sister and brother, both of whom are older. Charlotte's parents divorced when she was 11-years-old, and her Dad remarried a few months later. Charlotte and her siblings lived with their father who moved them around "about 27 times" due to the divorce and military assignments. At the time Kevin came out, which was "not really a shock to anyone," Charlotte was in a relationship with a man who eventually became her fiance. She ended the relationship as a result of her questioning her own sexuality and went to Kevin to discuss her feelings. He was extremely understanding and has been her source of support throughout her coming out because "people were shocked. They did not expect it." Charlotte, Kevin, their mother, a gay cousin, and a few friends recently went to a Pride event, which was a very enjoyable time for everyone. Their father still has trouble accepting that two of children are gay, but due to alcoholism, "he will be okay with it [one day] and then drinks a lot and comes out with [hurtful] comments."

Case 3

Clinton is a 33-year-old White queer trans man with a Master's degree. He has a 30-year-old brother, Wes, who has a J.D. and is a practicing attorney. They grew up in an urban, middle-class home on the East Coast. Currently, their parents are separated after their mother abruptly moved out of the family home and 1,000 miles away. Clinton was raised in a family that never communicated, which has hindered the coming out process for both him and his brother. "Like anything else, we just don't really talk about it...My brother and I were always queer and they just never knew how to process that. We just always noticed this disconnect." Clinton's father had mentioned that perhaps he did something wrong as a parent, but Clinton attributes these sentiments to his father's lack of understanding LGBT individuals or the transitioning process. Currently, he says his mother "has come around [and] is more realistic," and he understands that while he and his brother do not talk about everything, he knows that this is something he can go to his brother about if he ever feels the need.

Case 4

Sofia is a 21-year-old Hispanic lesbian who has completed two years of college and is currently in culinary school. She has a 26-year-old gay brother, Jacob, who has completed his Bachelor's degree. Their family consists of one heterosexual brother who is 24-years-old, and a 12-year-old maternal half-sister who was born after her parent's divorced when Sofia was 10-years-old. Most of their childhood and early adolescence was spent in a suburban, middle-class environment in the Midwest. Growing up, and to this day, Sofia, her mother, and siblings have always been "very tightknit – always watching out for each other, loving each other, supporting each other." Characterized as a deeply emotional and spiritual relationship, Sofia and Jacob are very close and she described her brother's coming out as "really very beautiful" and she felt honored that he came to her first. Thus, when Sofia unexpectedly fell in love with a woman, she knew that Jacob would be the one to talk to due to their very close connection and the fact that he would understand that side of her. However, she did not expect her mother to be so shocked, but is really accepting and supportive and "still has two other kids that can give her grandchildren!" Neither Jacob nor Sofia have spoken to their father about their sexual orientation because neither feel a strong connection to him, and because "he is 100% Hispanic and this is not his thing."

Case 5

Celèstè is a 25-year-old Black queer woman who has a high school degree and has completed some college courses. She has a 45-year-old gay brother, Marcus, who is the son of Celeste's father from a previous marriage. Marcus holds a Bachelor's degree. Celèstè's parents are married and have one additional child, a 29-year-old heterosexual son. Growing up in a middle-class household, Celèstè and her family moved on a few different occasions across the country. Celeste believes it was probably easier for her to come out because of her brother, partly due to her parents already experiencing a sexual minority child and the coming out process. While she feels comfortable talking to Marcus about being LGBT and the intersections of the LGBT and Black community, she wishes she utilized him more during her own anxieties over coming out to her parents: "In hindsight, I wish I would have reached out to him...I think he would have been there for me." Her father was immediately accepting and supportive, having had experienced his son coming out nearly two decades earlier. However, her own anxieties were compounded by her mother – a teacher at the same school that Celeste attended – and her concerns over her daughter being queer and how it could affect her status as a middle school teacher. Today, her mother and father are very supportive and all three have attended a Pride event together.

Case 6

Nathan is a 35-year-old White gay man with a high school degree and has taken some college courses. He has a 33-year-old lesbian sister, Nina, who has a Bachelor's degree. Born in a rural town on the East Coast, Nathan's middle-class family was "pretty normal." Aside from Nathan wanting to stay indoors and "clean and do the decorating," and Nina wanting to be outside with the horses and four-wheelers, they were very close and shared the same group of friends until college. When Nina surprised Nathan and came out to him, he remembered feeling that he could not come out: "This is over for me. I have to take a backseat." It was not until a few years later when 9/11 occurred that Nathan decided he had to let his parents know who he was out of fear that something could happen and his parents would never know this significant aspect of his identity. At the time, his mother cried for two days because "her 'normal' was no longer normal [and] all her expectations...the wedding and the grandkids...changed in an instant." Nathan said

his parents found it difficult to have their only children be gay, but the wedding of Nathan and his partner brought a lot of happiness for their family and things are much better for everyone.

Case 7

Evie is a 20-year-old White lesbian currently working on her Bachelor's degree. She has a 25-year-old trans brother, Aaron, who holds a Master's degree. They have one heterosexual sister, Amie, who is a twin to Aaron. Born in a middle-class family in the Midwest, their mother's job required the family to move around multiple times. Raised mostly by a stay-at-home father, the siblings were close, but since "Aaron and Amie were twins, they were *really* close...they picked on me, left me out of stuff, but it was typical stuff, nothing bad." When Aaron came out and started to transition, Amie did not understand what was happening with her twin, and Evie – a then-student at a Catholic middle school – was embarrassed to be "so different [around people] who talked pretty negatively about other gay people." Around the time Evie was beginning to question her heterosexuality, her parents got divorced. During the coming out process, Evie's mother was not as accepting as her father, but that has since changed since Evie's father married a "radical Christian." Her mother is now very supportive, and Evie has come to realize "he loves me, but I know unless I marry a man, my Dad won't be happy." Evie and Aaron have grown much closer through navigating their personal coming outs processes and the familial responses, and Evie has fully accepted Aaron as her brother: "It makes sense now to call him a guy, like how could he not be? I never really ever saw him as being my sister. I just saw him as my sibling."

Case 8

Samuel is a 34-year-old White gay male with a high school degree. He has a 38-year-old gay brother, Stephen, who holds a Master's degree. They have a 40-year-old sister who used to identify as lesbian, but currently identifies as heterosexual. They were raised in a middle-class suburban household on the East Coast. Samuel's parents divorced when he was 16 years old, and his mother has since then remarried. A couple of years before his parents separated, Samuel's sister was out as a lesbian during "an experimental college phase," and his brother was starting to come out, too. Samuel experienced a crisis, as he too was "experiencing these feelings [but] didn't want to ruin the family." He resolved to tell both of his siblings at the same time, who assumed he might identify as gay. His mother never seemed to care one way or another until she remarried a very religious man who claimed gay children were an abomination. Since then, she has become doubly supportive of her sons. Samuel and Stephen share a close relationship earmarked by "being on the same wavelength," and with two gay cousins, "everyone [in the extended family] is very supportive – it's just not a big topic of discussion anymore."

Case 9

Jackson is a 21-year-old White gay man currently working on his Bachelor's degree. He has a 24-year-old gay brother, Edward, who holds a Bachelor's degree. They have a 28-year-old heterosexual sister who everyone is "counting on to have the [family] babies." Humor and sarcasm have been a key coping strategy of this close sibling triad that has experienced their parents' divorce and father's remarriage, various moves in and out of family homes, and a mother who struggles with drug-addiction. Raised in a suburban middle-class environment on the East Coast, Jackson felt the pains of being constantly compared to his older brother. On the heels of his own coming out, he learned that Edward was gay and decided to go back into the

closet in order to spare the inevitable comparisons, as well as the troubles this could further cause to his already tumultuous relationships with his parents, particularly his mother. Eventually, Jackson decided to come out and has avoided people telling him he is “following in his brother’s footsteps.” Jackson is out to a loving and supportive family, yet is unsure of his mother’s “honest” perceptions of his sexuality due to the strained relationship they share.

Case 10

Lulu is a 19-year-old Black bisexual high school graduate. She has a 13-year-old lesbian sister, Rachelle, who is currently transitioning to high school. They were raised by a single mother in a conservative, Christian working-class family in urban and rural locations across the East Coast. They have one other sibling, a 16-year-old heterosexual sister. All three sisters are close, but Lulu claims to be closest to her youngest sister because “we have the whole gay thing in common.” Ever since her sister was young, everyone suspected her to be a lesbian based on her role as a “tomboy.” So, when she brought a girlfriend home at 13, no one was really shocked. Lulu, though, witnessed much more surprise from her mother than she expected, but was relieved that her sister “broke the ice” for her to come out. Her sister further appreciated not being the “only gay one [and no longer] felt alone in the family.” However, the extended family does not know about Lulu because she is “overshadowed” by her sister’s sexual identity and gender portrayal as a “butch tomboy.”

Case 11

Maggie is a 20-year-old White lesbian currently working on her Bachelor’s degree. She has a 23-year-old gay brother, David, who currently holds a Bachelor’s degree. Their family consists of one heterosexual sister who is 18-years-old, and one 11-year-old half-sister with whom they share the same father. Maggie’s parents divorced when she was young and both have remarried and divorced “so many times [that she] saw a lot of relationships that didn’t really work.” Throughout the trials of moving in and out of various homes across the country, all three siblings remained close. “We’ve been through so much together. You can’t take that away.” When Maggie’s brother initially came out, the family expected it, but their father exhibited homophobia and strong disapproval. Maggie supported David through it all, and found courage through his experience to re-examine her own sexuality and eventually come out. Upon her mother’s death, Maggie noticed their close sibling bond intensify, and has witnessed her father start to come around to the idea of having two gay children.

Case 12

Tara is a 28-year-old Biracial (Black and White) bisexual with a Bachelor’s degree. She has a 25-year-old lesbian sister, Winnie, who is a high school graduate. Raised in an urban upper-middle class home on the West Coast, Tara’s parents are still married to one another, with no previous marriages or divorces. Growing up in a family that was very “tight-knit,” Tara and Winnie were concerned “that something like that [having your only children be gay] could affect even the most understanding parents.” Nearing the end of her first semester at college, Tara decided to come home for Thanksgiving dinner and tell her parents. Her parents were surprised because, according to Tara, had expected Winnie to be gay, but not her. They struggle sometimes with her label of “bisexual,” but are very accommodating and supportive of Tara and Winnie.

Case 13

Drake is a 22-year-old Black gay man with a high school degree. He has a 19-year-old Black bisexual brother, Louis, who is currently serving in the military. They were raised by their maternal grandparents for most of their life after their mother died in an automobile accident. They lived a lower-middle class lifestyle in a rural town outside a major city in the South. Their grandfather is a retired naval officer, and their grandmother is a homemaker who reared the family in the Southern Baptist Church. Drake currently lives near his grandparents in Mississippi and works in retail. He is saving up to go to school in order to pursue a degree in Sports Management. His brother is currently serving in the United States military. Drake and Louis both realized they identified as a sexual minority before ever coming out to their grandparents. In fact, they orchestrated a delayed system of coming out so as to assist their grandparents in coping. Louis's coming out resulted in him being evicted from the family home for a few weeks, an event that further stalled Drake's own coming out and made him reevaluate if "this was all worth it." Currently, they are both out and their grandparents are accepting. Grandma even inquired about baking items for a local Pride event. Extended family members, too, have accepted Drake and Louis because, as Drake explained, "they've dealt with gay people in the family before," referring to an uncle who is gay.

Case 14

Caroline is a 30-year-old White lesbian with a Bachelor's degree. She has a 32-year-old queer trans sister, Geri, who also holds a Bachelor's degree. Their family of origin also consists of two heterosexual sisters who are 26- and 25-years-old. The siblings were raised on the West Coast in a rural, middle-class family where sibling play and sibling rivalry was "as typical as can be when you have three girls in one family." Her parents' divorce was finalized on the day she graduated college at the age of 24 – one year after her transgender sister began the process of transitioning, and one year before her father remarried a woman who convinced him to move across the country. The myriad of transitions occurring around the same time in Caroline's life, including the "physical" loss of her only brother and father, led to an intense personal scrutiny that resulted in her coming out as bisexual, and then as lesbian. Her trans sister was an encouraging and triumphant source of support and inspiration. As Caroline put it, "She always knew who she wanted to be. From day one, she never let anyone tell her otherwise. I was never so lucky to be so sure of myself." Further, Caroline's grandmother came out as lesbian in late life after both Caroline and Geri came out. Their parents, siblings, and extended family are very supportive of the sexual and gender diversity: "They know it makes us cooler than most [families]."

Case 15

Paula is a 21-year-old Biracial (Hispanic and White) lesbian who currently holds a high school degree. She has an 18-year-old lesbian sister, Renata, who recently graduated from high school. They have one heterosexual brother who is a fraternal twin to Renata. Paula's parents are in their first marriage and have no previous marriages and have never been divorced. The middle-class family was raised in a suburban neighborhood in the Southwest under the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. Gender role portrayals were expected to be traditional, yet Paula had difficulty. Suffering from ADHD, she was labeled the problem child "who never spoke softly or liked long hair," while Renata was the "sweet child" who outshone her in academics. They endured a contentious relationship throughout childhood and early adolescence until Renata's coming out forged a more meaningful relationship between them and aided Paula in coming out,

too. And while both parents are still uncertain about alternative sexualities and gender portrayal, their brother is very understanding.

Appendix J: Final Coding Scheme

- I. Family Structure and Dynamics
 - A. Participant family structure
 - B. Sibling relational processes
 - a. “We were typical siblings”
 - b. Modeling processes: “I wanted to be like my sister”
 - c. Differentiation processes: “We couldn’t have been more different”
 - C. Extended families as pathways to LGBT family members
- II. Coming Out Experiences
 - A. Reflecting on the first sibling to come out
 - a. “I was happy for her”
 - b. “Okay...now what?”
 - c. “I didn’t understand”
 - B. Reflecting on family reactions of the first sibling
 - a. “Everyone saw it coming”
 - b. “They didn’t know what to make of it”
 - c. “It didn’t go over well”
 - C. Second sibling to come out: Pre-coming out feelings
 - a. Feelings of hope: “They had to accept me!”
 - b. Feelings of hesitation: “I was worried.”
 - D. Second sibling to come out: Family reactions
 - a. “They just want me to be happy”
 - b. “I don’t think my mom was happy about it”
 - c. “I am not sure he even knows”
- III. Finding Meaning Post-Coming Out
 - A. Reflections on identity and acceptance between LGBT siblings
 - a. “I respect her for what she went through”
 - b. “He understands those kinds of things”
 - B. Shifting roles and perspectives
 - a. Families reexamining perspectives
 - b. “My straight sibling has to pass on the family name”
 - C. Developing a sense of self in relation to gender and sexual identity