Coming out experiences in young gay men: an exploration through thematic analysis

A thesis submitted by

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Abstract

Coming out (CO) is widely regarded as the ongoing process by which sexual minorities reveal their identities to others. Individuals may choose to disclose or conceal their identity in different contexts. The literature acknowledges that timing differences of CO exist cross-generationally but lacks research of contemporary methods and influences on these disclosure decisions. For the present study, 9 gay men discussed their CO experiences in a semi-structured interview. By analyzing data inductively and deductively through thematic analysis, I found data that support the literature's stance that gay men disclose or conceal their identity based on interacting external factors and internal processes. I expand the existing framework of an ongoing process by defining the difference between CO and being out (BO), and explicit and non-explicit disclosures. My findings on social media use support existing literature. Finally, I discuss limitations and implications for future research.

Key terms: coming out, homosexuality, sexual identity development

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Problem Statement

Coming out (CO) has been widely viewed as a developmental milestone (Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1993) in a lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) individual's life in which they realize, accept (Manning, 2015) and share (Stonewall, 2015) this personal aspect to others. CO has marked positive outcomes for mental health (Meyer, 2003; Rosario, Scrimshaw & Hunter, 2009), quality of life (LaSala, 2010) and relationships (Grafsky, 2017; LaSala, 2010; Roe, 2017). Despite the benefits, certain contextual factors may make it unsafe to reveal one's minority sexual identity (Dominguez, 2017). Much of the literature studies this phenomenon in terms of the predecessors, motivations and outcomes of disclosure as dyadic variables. Contemporary research, however, regards the disclosure of sexual identity as an ongoing (Legate, Ryan & Rogge, 2017) and often recursive (Eliason & Schope, 2007; Mohr and Fassinger, 2000) process which is contextually driven (Dziengal, 2015). Although this new body of research is emerging, it has yet to define many variables. For example, there have been no recorded descriptions of the different strategies that individuals can use to intentionally disclose or conceal their identity. Research must acknowledge this ongoing nature of CO, and constantly adapt to an evolving social climate. Some studies have reported a generational difference in disclosure timing (Martos, Nezhad & Meyer, 2015). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that a new generation may also have qualitatively different experiences which must be updated regularly in order to regard the phenomenon through an appropriate lens. Finally, it is important to note that CO is a phenomenon experienced by people with a variety of identities. Most of the coming out research focuses on identity labels of lesbian (L), gay (G), bisexual (B), transgender (T) and queer/questioning (Q) and refers to relevant populations using acronyms made up of these letters. The literature, however, is inconsistent as to whether experiences can be generalized to all

subpopulations, and different studies address the needs of different subpopulations under the LGBTQ umbrella.

The present study uses thematic analysis to understand the disclosure experiences of a young generation of gay men. I used a semi-structured interview, which allowed participants to talk about their CO experiences through the lens of their own values and experience, rather than through more restrictive measures.

Literature Review

The Decision to Come Out: An Intersection of Overlapping Factors

Rather than a discrete event, CO is a series of contextually driven decisions to disclose or conceal one's sexual identity (Legate et al., 2017). In creating the Be/Coming Out Model, Dziengal (2015) established a distinction between these behaviors, positing that coming out does not accurately capture the experiences and stress of being out. By this model, LGBTQ individuals experience both resilience and ambiguity in their ongoing disclosure behaviors through three intersecting spheres of influence: self-perception, social relationships and society structures.

Within this model (Dziengal, 2015), *self-perception* referred to the intrapersonal effects that being gay and out might have on the individual. Aspects include self-identity and acceptance, relief, love and companionship, authenticity, identity confliction, doubt/self-esteem, sense of belonging, health risks and spirituality. The *social relationships* dimension referred to different ways in which being out may strengthen or weaken relationships. Aspects of social relationships include new relationships, bonds formed through honesty, role modeling, support systems, rejection, minority stress, isolation, and religious institutions. *Society structures* referred to the legal and political processes that might support or make difficult a homosexual lifestyle.

These include legal protections and discriminations, education, leaders, community support, media, and broad societal values. These concentric circles often overlap, and many are relevant to more than one dimension. Also, research on disclosure varies in its focus on individual motivation and outcomes. In the following section, I will discuss the research pertaining to disclosure decisions as they pertain to each of these intersecting spheres of influence.

Self-perception. Research and theory supports the benefits of CO for a sexual minority person's physical and mental health and wellbeing. By certain stage theories, when an LGB person reaches a certain developmental milestone, disclosing their sexual identity to others can help to accept and affirm their identity while integrating it into their existing identity (Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1993). In fact, this disclosure may actually be a release of stress in LGBT people. The Minority Stress Model details a network of interacting factors that contribute to the overall mental health of members of stigmatized groups. Meyer (2003) modified this model specifically for LGB populations and claimed that concealing one's sexual identity causes stress that leads to negative mental health outcomes. By this theory, disclosing one's identity can alleviate this stress and increase mental health. Other studies have found that disclosure has positive effects for self-esteem (Henry, 2013), increases healthy coping and resilience (Rhoads, 1995), and acts as a protective factor from using alcohol as a coping mechanism (Rosario et al., 2009).

Personal factors of self-perception may also cause a sense of ambiguity, which discourages LGBT individuals from disclosing their sexual identity (Dziengal, 2015). By the Minority Stress Model, disclosure may also expose the LGB individual to levels of discrimination and violence (Meyer, 2003) that can affect their sense of personal safety, or more covert, invalidating messages of bias (Nadal et al., 2010). Those who experience rejection due to their sexual identity are also at risk for mental health issues (Henry, 2013; Meyer, 2003; Mitriani

et al., 2017), physical health issues (Frost, 2013) a negative self-perception (Baiocco, D'Alessio and Lagi, 2010), and risky health decisions (Baiocco et al., 2010).

Social relationships. Identity disclosure and personal relationships have bidirectional effects on one another (Dziengal, 2015). Theoretical frameworks (Troiden, 1993) and research (Baiocco et al., 2010; Martos et al., 2015) suggest that close friends and families of origin are the most crucial existing relationships in which LGB individuals make disclosure decisions. Studies that focus on the recipients of disclosure behavior found that LGB peers, followed by heterosexual peers, and then families, are typically the earliest disclosures (Martos et al., 2015). From an ecological systems perspective, disclosure tends to be discussed within the most intimate microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1994), and less so in increasingly distant relationships.

The most thoroughly researched social relationship is that of family of origin. Indeed, youth often desire to disclose to their families of origin (LaSala, 2010), but may choose not to do so based on a myriad of factors (Ghabrial, 2017; Green, 2000). Family reactions to disclosure vary, but are often initially negative (Roe, 2017) due to the need to alter beliefs and values to accommodate the new identity (Trussel, 2017).

In a mixed-methods study, Grafsky (2017) explored youth disclosure decisions in the family context. She proposed a model of four interrelated factors that contribute to these behaviors: 1) internal preparation, 2) family dynamics, 3) messages, and 4) expectations. Internal preparation was measure through a quantitative measure: the sexual identity development and integration scale (SIDI). This scale referred to the internal preparation that the participant felt. In the interviews, youth talked about wanting to feel secure in their sexual identity before revealing that information to loved ones. This finding supports the developmental nature of CO within sexual identity development (Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1993). Family dynamics were measured by

the parent child closeness (PCC) questionnaire, and qualitatively through a semi-structured interview. Participants who reported close relationships expressed a stronger desire to disclose their identity, whereas those who reported distal relationships expressed a low desire to disclose, alongside not knowing what kind of reaction to expect. Messages referred to those received from their environments pertaining to LGBT communities or identities. Participants talked about experiences in which parents, siblings, or friends said or did something that implied that they would not accept the individual's identity. Finally, expectations referred to how the participant believed that disclosing their identity would affect their personal lives or relationships. Within this factor, the author identified two reflective questions: "Can I- or do I want to – deal with the outcome?" and "How will my relationship with this person change if I disclose" (Grafsky, 2017). In this section, participants talked both about immediate reactions of the disclosee, and long term effects that it may have on their health or wellbeing. These four factors interacted with one another to form a "disclosure barometer", which informed the youths' decisions to either disclose or conceal their identity.

LaSala (2010) found that many young people desired to disclose their identities for the purpose of living authentic lives, and creating a sense of trust and honesty within the relationship, which supports the intersection of Dziengal's (2015) self-perception and personal relationship dimensions. Furthermore, in an interview-based study, LGBTQ adolescents revealed that CO to family was necessary to support their mental wellbeing, and that they desired explicit support from parents and family members (Roe, 2017). Findings suggest that positive family reactions may have positive implications for LGBTQ young people's future functioning, Despite the desire and need to come out to one's family, critics acknowledges that this research has

primarily been conducted with White, upper-middle class samples (Green, 2000), and cannot be generalized to other groups.

Societal structures. Societal attitudes and policies can affect whether it is safe or wise for an LGBTQ person to reveal their sexual identity in a given context (Dziengal, 2015). The most thoroughly researched societal structures are religion and political attitudes, both of which include pervasive beliefs that can in turn affect the social relationship and self-perception dimensions of disclosure decisions. Ghabrial (2016) supported these claims in a qualitative study in which she interviewed LGBTQ people of color about their experiences. One theme that she identified was CO as a cultural value held by the White gay community. Some participants cited both cultural and religious contexts as inhibiting CO because disclosure would likely result in severance from family and culture of origin or threats to safety at the most extreme. Due to these conflicting cultural, religious and societal values, many of the participants in that study chose to remain closeted in the family context. Other studies have found that conservative sociopolitical views and high religiosity of family members were the strongest inhibitory factors of disclosure in LG individuals (Baiocco et al., 2015), and that high religiosity was the most salient barrier to acceptance (Roe, 2017). Importantly, these societal values can be counteracted by individual qualities. Personal factors such as proclivity towards acceptance may mediate the effects of religion on negative disclosure reactions (Zeninger, Holtzaman & Kraus, 2017).

Societal values may also send covert messages to the individual that inhibits Dziengal's (2015) self-perception dimension. Microaggressions experienced by the LGBTQ community are indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against those with a sexual or gender minority identity (Nadal, Rivera & Corpus, 2010; Sue, 2010). These messages may in turn develop into

internalized sexual stigma (ISS; Herek, 2003). High levels of ISS have been associated with low levels of sexual identity disclosure (Pistella et al., 2016).

Notably, LGBTQ individuals may choose to disclose their sexual identity despite a lack of positive societal messages. One study found that some LGBTQ teachers disclosed as an "impetus of activism and social change" (Wells, 2017). Participants disclosed their sexual identity regardless of potential negative outcomes to be positive role models for their LGBTQ students and provide representation within their communities. Although literature in this area is sparse, that study suggests that some individuals may disclose their identity in an active effort of normalization and engendering social change.

Coming Out as a Developmental Process

Although research clearly demonstrates that CO is largely contextually driven, it must also be viewed through a developmental lens. Theories have been emerging in sexual identity development literature since the 1970's in an attempt to define a universal model through which LGBTQ individuals create and integrate their sexual identity within a primarily heterosexual culture. Early theories define CO as a milestone of identity development towards the ultimate goal of integration. Cass (1979) described disclosure during a stage of *identity acceptance*, in which the individual "may disclose their LGB orientation to some heterosexual peers or families of origin". Another major theorist postulated that LG individuals have "an increasing desire to disclose the homosexual identity" during the *commitment* stage of homosexual identity development (Troiden, 1993). Although both theorists acknowledged that behaviors may vary based on personal, social and professional values, they did little to describe the variations. One theory used CO as a focal point in sexual identity development with three stages: 1) *before coming out*, 2) *during coming out*, and 3) *beyond coming out.* By this model, CO refers to a time

in which gay individuals reveal their identity and renegotiate relationships with important people in their lives. They then leave this discrete stage and integrate their homosexual identity into their everyday lives. Critics of these stage theorists claim that CO cannot be confined to a discrete moment in time or developmental stage. Eliason and Schope (2007) acknowledged the potentially linear path of sexual identity development, but questioned the universality of the stage theories, maintaining that sexual identity development can occur at any age, or not at all, and that individuals may experience different stages at different times, recursively, or not at all.

The combination of contextual and developmental influences indicates that sexual minority development, and thus the disclosure of this identity, can occur at any point in one's life, or not at all (Gov, Bimbi, Nanin & Parsons, 2006; Hunter, 2005; Martos et al., 2015). Typical sexual identity development involves the development and integration of one's sexual identity into other social, psychological and biological aspects of their lives, and often starts in adolescence with the onset of puberty (Diamond & Savin-Williams, 2009). A survey of lesbian women and gay men, however, challenges the relationship between homosexual identity development and puberty. Grossman, Foss and D'Augelli (2014) found that the onset of puberty in boys (spermarche) was associated with the achievement of sexual milestones, but the same in girls (menarche) had no significant association. Findings of this study suggest that biological bases are less significant than contextual factors in sexual identity development in some sexual minority individuals.

In addition, LGB individuals are disclosing their identities at increasingly younger ages. Martos et al. (2015) examined age cohort differences in sexual identity milestones. Participants were separated into young (18-29), middle (30-44) and older (45+) age cohorts and asked about disclosure milestones. The youngest cohort reported a mean age of first disclosure of 17.97 years

old, nearly two and a half years younger than the sample mean of 40.43 years (Martos et al., 2015). Results of this study imply that LGB individuals are coming out earlier. Due to the contextual impacts on disclosure, results of this study could perhaps indicate an increasingly accepting and supportive social climate.

Social Media as a Tool for Coming Out

Martos et al.'s (2015) study shows a clear generational difference in disclosure behaviors for sexual minorities. Younger experiences further differ from older ones in their access to Internet and social media. Owens (2017) noted that this access has given LGB individuals power and/or anonymity to disclose or conceal their identity in various contexts. For his study, he interviewed 42 college-aged gay men on their use of Facebook to facilitate their disclosure or discretion of their sexual identity to their larger social network. This study organized styles of social media presence into *out and proud*, *out and discreet*, and *Facebook closeted*, and examined the extent to which gay men were comfortable posting content related to their sexual orientation. Some people used Facebook as a tool to disclose their identity to people with whom they did not have a close relationship, whereas others actively catered their posts to prevent revealing information to various people. This study presented a framework for different levels of "outness" among different social circles. Facebook friends can include family members, school friends, co-workers, and members of a religious community that has access to posted content. The use of social media as a lens through which to view coming out has allowed it to begin to be considered in a more dynamic manner than simply a milestone in development.

Other young gay men used the Internet and social media as ways of facilitating in-person CO behaviors. Harper et al. (2016) interviewed gay men ages 15-23 about their internet use and sexual identity development. Through in-depth qualitative interviews, researchers found that

many participants came out to other gay individuals on blogs and chatrooms to gauge reactions, and gain confidence to come out to important individuals in their lives. Others used the Internet to come out to their close friends. The nature of these conversations allowed the gay men time to articulate responses to their friends without the pace of an in-person interaction.

The Present Study

There have been extensive studies examining the phenomenon of CO. Disclosure of one's sexual identity can be associated with a multitude of positive and negative outcomes. As American society changes and adapts to the growing LGBTQ social movement, the experiences of sexual and gender minorities are changing markedly across generations. Yet, the research continues to use the same factors when exploring the phenomenon. Research is needed to understand this generation's motivations to disclose or conceal their identity. The literature is still growing in its understanding of disclosure as a dynamic and ongoing process. One dimension that current research lacks is definition of different methods in which disclosure can happen, particularly in ongoing behavior with new relationships. One dimension that has been explored, however, is social media: a tool that the current generation has that previous generations did not.

I designed the present study to address the holes that I have identified in the research. I collected data through semi-structured interviews, which allowed participants to talk about their CO experiences with minimal guidance towards contexts and rationale behind their decisions. Although the research is mixed on subpopulations of the LGBTQ community, I decided to focus on gay men to fit within the scope of a master's thesis. By interpreting their responses through thematic analysis, I aimed to discover themes that have yet to be addressed by the existing body of literature. To do so, I focused my analysis with the following research questions: 1) what roles

do contextual influences such as religion and personal relationships play in coming out behaviors in young gay men, 2) how do internal processes such as sexual identity development, beliefs and values affect these disclosure decisions, and 3) how do young gay men use social media to either disclose or conceal their sexual identity. Through my analysis of the data, I also added a fourth research question: 4) what are different methods that young gay men use to disclose their sexual identity in their ongoing behaviors, and what influences their decision to use these?

Method

Participants and Recruitment

Participants responded to a recruitment flyer posted in various locations in the Boston area, including LGBT-oriented bars, university groups and health care centers, and online platforms including Facebook groups and listservs. See appendix 1 for recruitment flyer. The flyer requested volunteers who met the inclusion criteria of gay men between the ages of 18-29. After participation was completed, willing individuals distributed the same flyer through snowball sampling.

The sample consisted of nine self-identified gay men between the ages of 18-27. Seven participants identified their ethnicity as White, one as Asian, and one as both White and Asian. Three participants were undergraduate students, one participant was a graduate student, and five participants were full-time employees with a college education. See table 1 for detailed demographic information.

Procedure

The study was conducted in a two-part design. Candidates who responded to the recruitment flyer received a link to part 1, a Qualtrics questionnaire, which they completed remotely and online. See appendix 2 for layout and flow of Qualtrics questionnaire.The first

section of the questionnaire consisted of three screening questions regarding age, gender, and sexual orientation. If participants met inclusion criteria, they proceeded to an online consent form. See appendix 3 for online consent form. At this time, participants also received a resource form which presented various LGBTQ+ friendly counselors, psychologists, hotlines and informational websites. See appendix 4 for LGBTQ+ resource form. Following the informed consent, participants completed measures of demographics and internal perception of sexual identity. At the conclusion of part 1, participants supplied their preferred e-mail address. At this time, participants were assigned an identification number, by which they were referred throughout the remainder of the study. Participant information was tracked using a password-locked Excel Spreadsheet on my personal, password-locked computer.

Following completion of the questionnaire, I corresponded with participants to coordinate a mutually agreed upon time and location for part 2 of the study, the interview. Interviews were held either at local coffee shops or private study rooms on the Tufts University campus, depending on the participant's preferences. At the interview location, I provided participants with three documents. Two documents were identical consent forms, one for study records, and one for participant records. Refer to appendix 5 for interview consent form. The participant was given adequate time to review the consent before signing jointly with me. The third document was the same resource form provided to them during part 1 of the study. I then conducted a 30-60-minute semi-structured interview with the participant relating their opinions and experiences of coming out. Following the interview, I thanked the participants for their time, compensated them with a $25 gift certificate to Amazon, and had them sign a tracking sheet acknowledging receipt of the gift card. I also provided willing participants with recruitment flyers, which I asked them to distribute to other potential participants. I recorded the interview with a digital recorder,

and uploaded sound recordings to my personal, password-locked computer. I immediately deleted recordings from the digital recorder following import.

Potential Risks

This study was deemed minimal risk to participants and approved by the Tufts University Social and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Research Board. Discussing personal and emotionally charged topics during the interview may have implications for psychological or emotional distress to the participants. Due to this potential strain, and my lack of adequate mental healthcare training, I provided participants with a list of accessible, LGBTQ+ friendly mental healthcare providers, and consistently reminded them of their ability to withdraw from the study at any point. Although no participants chose to withdraw from the study, I created a withdrawal form that I would have asked them to fill out. See appendix 6 for study withdrawal form.

Measures

Screening questionnaire. Screening was conducted using the Qualtrics questionnaire, and consisted of three questions referring to age, gender and sexual orientation.

Other demographic information. Demographic information not addressed in the screening questionnaire was assessed after the participant completes consent. Information included race, ethnicity, education, and occupation.

Measure of internalized perception of sexual identity (MIPSI). I created a measure for the purpose of measuring the participants' internalized understanding and perception of their sexualities. This measure was adapted from a measure of internalized sexual stigma (ISS) (Baiocco et al., 2016), and microaggressions purported to impact LGBTQ+ people (Nadal, Rivera & Corpus, 2010) to understand both the experiences and internalization of different

attitudes and beliefs surrounding sexuality. Participants were offered two opposing statements and chose one, to report that the statement is "strongly like me" or "somewhat like me". This portion was delivered in a Likert-Scale to avoid negative connotations and randomized to minimize reporter bias. Categories of questions included gender role flexibility, participation in gay community, comfort/approval in own sexuality, comfort/approval in sexuality of others, gay behaviors, divulging gay identity, and experience of homophobia. The purpose of having two opposing statements was to present both positive and negative options, one of which individuals selected to best represent their experience. This method has been effective in college-age students (Neeman & Harter, 1986)

Interview protocol. I created a semi-structured interview protocol, intended to take 45-60 minutes, to address participants' experiences and opinions of coming out. Of note, I wrote the protocol to provide guiding questions to gather information about the participants' experiences. If the participant spontaneously went out of order, or produced information outside of question categories, I tried to get him to elaborate on his chosen topics, rather than strictly adhere to the protocol. Refer to appendix 7 for interview protocol. I conducted all of the interviews myself, while under the supervision of my faculty advisor.

Analysis

This study relied primarily on interview data with supplementary analysis of quantitative data. I analyzed quantitative data through descriptive statistics, and interview data using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Faculty advisor Sara Johnson, Ph.D. supervised analysis on a weekly basis.

Measure of internalized perception of sexual identity (MIPSI). I analyzed the sample's data using frequency charts. Each question was given point values of "1", "2", "3" and

"4". For each category, a low score indicated low endorsement of the category, where a high score indicated a high endorsement. Categories of questions included: gender role flexibility, participation in gay community, comfort/approval in own sexuality, comfort/approval in sexuality of others, gay behaviors, divulging gay identity, and external acceptance of sexual identity. A participant with a high score of gender role flexibility indicated that he was less concerned with the gender presentation of himself or other gay men. A low score indicated that he conformed to masculine gender identity expression. A participant with a high score for gay community more actively sought and engaged in the gay community, whereas one with a low score avoided or lacked one. A participant with a high score for comfort/approval of sexuality of self or others endorsed more positive thoughts about their sexual identity. Those with low scores endorsed more disapproval or disappointment in this identity. For the gay behaviors and disclosure categories, high scores indicated that the participant valued and engaged both in behaviors that are associated with being gay and disclosing their identity to others. Finally, a high acceptance of sexual identity scores implied that the participant felt accepted and supported in their social contexts in regard to their sexual identity. A low score indicated low acceptance and possibly discrimination or homophobia. For example, a participant with an average score of 1.5 in the "experience of homophobia" category reported low levels of being victimized or discriminated against due to their sexuality.

Interview. I analyzed data using a thematic analysis approach. This qualitative analysis process allowed me to identify and define patterns of experiences and behaviors within and between participants. I analyzed the data guided by the notion that CO is a dynamic and contextually driven process (Legate, Ryan & Rogge), and an experience that cannot necessarily by captured by one specific theory. Unlike grounded theory, a thematic analysis does not intend

to create theory, rather, it is intended to provide a complex understanding of the given phenomenon (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis can incorporate both deductive (top-down) and inductive (bottom-up) analysis approaches, and I used both in my analysis.

The deductively-focused aspect of the analysis reflected topics that addressed through specific questions of the semi-structured interview. Questions were framed to understand the contexts in which CO occurs while acknowledging the contextual variances of the phenomenon (Legate et al., 2017). For example, some themes reflected particular relationships (e.g. among friends or family members), or contextual values (e.g. religion, culture) that contributed to a participant's disclosure behaviors.

In the inductive component of the analysis, I developed potential themes based on commonalities in the data that may not fit into pre-existing categories of responses identified above. I created several drafts of themes as I transcribed and coded the data through an ongoing process of analysis. This part followed a 6-phase process of thematic analysis as described by Braun & Clarke (2006). During data collection and interview transcriptions, I identified and compiled patterns and potential themes into a document. At the conclusion of data collection, I created an initial codebook based on features that I identified as salient across a large proportion of the participants. At this point, interviews and codes were uploaded to NVivo software for continuing analysis.

At this point, I hired graduate student as a reliability coder. This coder familiarized herself with the codebook and interviews before beginning coding, and ultimately coded 5 interviews. I met with the second coder three times during this process: after she coded 1, 4 and 5 interviews to discuss discrepancies in coding, and necessary updates to the codebook. Refer to appendix 8 for codebook**.** Due to the size of the dataset, and the fact that I personally coded all 9

interviews, I did not formally assess interviews for reliability. Through conversations with my advisor and the coder, I deemed my method of conversational revision to be sufficient.

Throughout both the individual and collaborative creation of the codebook, themes were continuously and recursively assessed for coherency and applicability. In this process, coherency referred to fluency and concision, and applicability referred to the validity of the themes across the larger data set (i.e., that the themes applied to several participants)

I organized the final codebook to reflect my research questions in a way that was also coherent to the reader and coder. Vignettes were coded for instances in which the participant discussed disclosure thoughts or behaviors. First, the coded vignette was identified as 1) *a discrete event* in which the participant actively made a choice to disclose or conceal his sexual identity, 2) *ongoing behaviors* that the participant engaged in on a day to day basis that either disclosed or concealed his identity, 3) *an anticipated or hypothetical event* which had not occurred, but the participant discussed how he expected the event to occur if it had, or 4) *discussion of beliefs or values* in which the participant talks about coming out or disclosure in terms that are not bound to a specific event. Each vignette could then be coded with a variety of codes from any of three categories: participant codes, context codes, and social media presence.

Participant codes involved the participant's discussion of either himself, his values, or his beliefs. This addressed my research question regarding the role of internal processes in making disclosure decisions. First, he was coded for his level of being out, on a scale of 1) *completely out*, 2) *mostly out*, 3) *partially out*, or 4) *in the closet.* This was only coded with the interview questions "Do you consider yourself to be out of the closet… what makes you say that?" in order to gauge the participant's perception of his own disclosure status before being primed by more leading interview questions.

As there has yet to be a qualitative measure of outness, I loosely based my criteria on Mohr & Fassinger's (2000) Outness Inventory (OI). The OI is a measure of the extent to which gay men and lesbian women are out in specific relationships in their lives including mother, father, siblings, extended family, old heterosexual friends, new heterosexual friends, strangers, new heterosexual friends, work peers, work supervisors, members of one's religious community, and leaders of one's religious community. I decided to base levels of outness on the number of these relationships to whom the participant said that he specifically concealed his sexual identity. Since all of the participants were at some level of outness, I assumed that, unless they specifically told me that they concealed their identity, that they had disclosed, or chosen not to hide it within the specific relationship.

In the data, many participants also mentioned that they would conceal their identity in various contexts, specifically when traveling to a location in which they did not know the social culture, or they assumed the culture negatively viewed homosexuality, or LGBTQ+ individuals. By this, I decided to add "foreign or other geographical contexts" to the list of relationships in which the participant could be out, bringing the total items to 12. If any of the above listed contexts were not relevant for a participant (e.g. no religious community, no job), then I did not consider them to have a concealed identity in that context.

Next, the interview was coded for the participant's self-identified importance in both coming out (CO) or being out (BO). CO referred to the intentional disclosure of sexual identity in a clear concise way, whereas BO referred to the ongoing status of having a disclosed identity. I made this distinction because I noticed that participants would talk about both CO and BO when asked about disclosure, and that their opinions on both varied too much to be conflated into a single code. Both of these measures were coded at a valance of high, medium, low, or negative.

See codebook for further detail. I used these codes on two occasions. In the first instance, I coded importance of BO/CO when I, the interviewer, explicitly asked "how important is coming out to you?". In the second scenario, I coded this when the participant spontaneously asserted that he valued one or the other. I typically coded the latter with disclosure events.

I then coded vignettes for interaction expectations, which detailed the valance of how the participant anticipated the disclosure event to occur. I included this to understand how anticipated reactions related to ultimate decisions and behaviors.

I then coded at the level of participant preparation, which captured when the participant expressed a level of ability or willingness to disclose their sexual identity. I intended this to address the developmental capabilities of the participant in their understanding of their identity, and of their ability to confront bias and uncomfortable situations related to disclosure of their sexual identity.

I then coded at the level of perceived implications of coming out. This code captured how the participant believed that disclosure or concealment of identity would affect his life going forward. I identified themes as 1) *relationship quality*, 2) *personal wellbeing*, 3), *desire for normalization*, and 4) *desire for connectivity with the gay or LGBTQ community*. Some of these themes were used both as reasons to and to not come out, so I also included a valence level of how the participant expected this aspect to be impacted by disclosure.

Once participant codes were complete, I moved on to the second grouping, which was for context codes. These codes captured the environment, and the people involved in a disclosure discussion. While I initially had this as the first grouping, I moved it down after a discussion with my second coder in which we recognized that many vignettes included internal processes unattached to a specific event. Thus, not all vignettes had a specific context, while all of them

had internal processes. In addition to "who" and "environment" codes, I also included categories for "context values of the LGBTQ+ community" and "external factors that contribute to disclosure behavior". Both refer to the participant's description of the environment, or other party involved in a potential disclosure situation. The latter code refers to reasons why the participant stated that the context had certain views, or aspects of the context that the participant stated were reasons that he made his disclosure decision. These codes included 1) *context* exposure, 2) *context* values, 3) *disclosee(s) personal thoughts and values about LGBT people and issues,* and 4) *quality of relationship with disclosee(s)*. I originally struggled with where to put these latter two codes. As an interview study, anything that the participant says can be considered an internal process because they are actively interpreting their environment, even as they report it. I ultimately organized the codebook this way in order to address my research question pertaining to the role of external factors on disclosure behaviors.

I then coded vignettes for disclosure behaviors of the participant. I coded for behaviors if the participant spoke about any decision that he made to either conceal or disclose his sexual identity to another person. First, I coded whether he did so in person, or not in person. I decided to add this section later in the coding process, when I found that participants were talking about reasons both to come out in person, and to do so remotely. I then coded descriptive aspects about the disclosure event. Original codes were 1) *explicit disclosure,* or an intentional conversation in which the participant reveals that he is gay or is attracted to men, 2) *non-explicit disclosure*, which refers to behaviors or characteristics that the participant engages in regardless of whether it connects him to his sexual identity, sometimes with the intention of disclosing it, 3) *unintentional or forced disclosure*, in which the participant is unknowingly or unwillingly revealed or assumed to be gay, and 4) *conceal*, in which the participant takes actions to hide his

sexual identity. I also gave descriptive subcodes when applicable. Later, to capture events that occurred earlier in the participant's process, I added *first disclosure*. Finally, after reading several interviews, I found it salient to also include *stepping stone disclosure*, which refers to the participant disclosing a non-gay identity before eventually coming out as gay.

Finally, in order to address my research question about social media use, I coded interviews for social media presence as described by Owens (2017). Vignettes could be coded for 1) *out and proud*, 2) *out and discreet*, or 3) *social media closeted*. I coded for these instances when the participant responded to the question "have you ever used social media to disclose or conceal your identity", or when the participant spontaneously mentioned it.

I also used a constructivist approach to interpret the data. This approach posits that this individual is influenced by sociocultural contexts and structural conditions, in contrast to the essentialist approach which considers experience, emotions and meaning to be innate (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Results are reported according to each identified theme. First, themes were considered in an inductive manner, viewing them solely within the context of the dataset. Second, themes were considered in light of existing literature in a deductive manner.

In addition to information from earlier research, I as a researcher also brought my own particular experiences, assumptions, and biases into this study. Throughout the data collection and analysis process, I constantly recognized and acknowledged my biases and monitored their impact on the research. For example, I initially coded levels of outness based on general impressions of how the respondent talked in the interview, and my own opinions. My second coder helped me to standardize this definition as described.

Results

The Results section is organized first by themes within cases, and then across cases. The within-case section includes participant case summaries, which detail specific vignettes and make connections between themes for each person. The across case section includes quantitative data, and a discussion of themes, using examples from the interviews. I assigned all nine participants pseudonyms to respect their confidentiality.

Case Summaries

The following section will detail the within-case findings. Each case summary will include participant demographic information, a brief overview of their reported experiences, and results of the IPSI questionnaire.

James. James was a 25-year-old full-time worker in the medical field who self-defined and was overall completely out of the closet. James had a generally high CO and BO valance. In his early disclosures, confidence in sexual identity and quality of personal relationships were the most important factors supporting his CO behaviors. He explicitly came out to his best friend, his mother and his brother very shortly after having a conversation with a hotline operator, in which he first thought “oh shit, I’m gay”. These relationships, particularly with his family, were important to him, and he planned to tell each person explicitly. Although his mother was an immigrant and came from a conservative background, he believed that the quality of their relationship within their “close-knit” family would cause her to react well to his disclosure. He came out in person to his mother and to his best friend but used Skype video chat to come out to his brother. He partially did this out of convenience, having lived far away from his brother at the time, but he also “wanted some distance in case things went awry”, since his brother had generally conservative views about homosexuality, and may have reacted poorly.

At the time of the interview, James' disclosure behaviors were more non-explicit. BO was very important to him. His primary motivator was personal wellbeing. In his day-to-day life, he does not tell most new people that he is gay, but will talk about his boyfriend, and wears a rainbow lanyard at work. One exception to this rule is that he explicitly came out to his future employer, saying "I'm gay, is that going to be a problem"? In this case, CO was an important tool to effectively BO. He did the same when talking to his family, who lived in Malaysia, to ensure that his partner would be welcome during an upcoming trip. Although in his personal life, he did not conceal his identity, he cited personal wellbeing as a reason for gay men to conceal. He said that, although he was privileged, some people's safety and financial security may be risked by coming out. Due to time constraints, James was unable to talk about his social media use.

James scored a 3.50 overall on his MIPSI with highest categories including gay behaviors (4.00) and disclosing identity (4.00). Other scores included gender role flexibility (3.00), involvement in the gay community (3.50), approval of own sexuality (3.80), approval of others' sexuality (3.00), and feelings of external support (3.20). His highest scores were consistent with his ratings of importance of CO and BO, and the importane of his sexuality in his life.

Sam. Sam was a 23-year-old recent college graduate working in clinical research. Sam had generally low CO values, and varying BO values. Although he considered himself to be out of the closet, I coded him as partially out. He had "never had a sit-down conversation" in which he had told anybody of his sexual identity at the time of the interview. Rather than use explicit terms, Sam began talking about sexual partners and attractions in college, which he described as having a "fun little liberal campus", indicating that the context values of the environment were supportive of his behaviors. The disclosure that closest resembles an explicit discussion occurred

when he called his close friend from home to tell her about a man that he was interested in. He said that the event "didn't feel like a disclosure", rather, that he was "just talking about [his] life" (Sam). In this particular event, CO was low, but BO was high, resulting in his non-explicit disclosure. Although the event was not in-person, he did not give any explicit reasons for why he chose that method.

Sam had not come out to his immediate family at the time of the interview because the quality of his family relationship did not warrant it. Disclosing of his sexual identity would not change his ability to BO, because his behaviors as a gay man did not leak into his family relationships. While he reported that his mother "would be fine with it", and likely knows already, he said he had not told her because "she'd probably make a big deal about it". He referenced the fact that his twin brother did not have to come out as heterosexual, suggesting that normalization was not an important factor in his disclosure decision.

Of note, Sam had a comparatively low average MIPSI score of 2.65. His disclosure behaviors are supported by a low disclosing identity score (2.00). His highest scores were in gender role flexibility (3.00), engagement in the gay community (3.00) and gay behaviors (3.00). He scored lower in the approval of his own (2.60) and others (2.33) sexuality, and feelings of external support (2.60). His low scores were consistent with his disclosure behaviors, and assertions that his sexuality was an unimportant aspect of his life.

Evan. Evan was a 27-year-old man who worked full time while pursuing a graduate degree in higher education. At the point of the interview, he considered himself to be out of the closet, and was overall completely out. As a 12-year-old, he came out as bisexual to his friends and family, following a trend in his high school. He followed up on this about 4 years later at a Relay for Life event, when he went up to each of his friends and explicitly told them that he was

gay. He did not intentionally follow up with his mother until she confronted him about content that he had written in his journal, at which point he explicitly disclosed that he was gay. He was 18 at this time.

In his current life, at the time of the interview, Evan was "out to everyone in [his] life", and his sexuality was "not something that [he] hide[s]". For him, BO is an important tool for both normalization and for personal wellbeing, although he censors the extent to which he expresses his identity depending on the context. For example, he discussed painting his nails. He felt comfortable doing so in a liberal space, such as his liberal-leaning workplace because he enjoyed "challenging [his] coworkers". In more conservative spaces, such as among his older relatives, he would remove the nail polish because he did not feel comfortable having the conversation, saying it would "not be productive". This may imply that Evan was not willing to engage in emotional labor when he did not expect a positive reaction. Evan was "out and discreet" on Facebook in that he would post gay-themed content but blocked certain family members from viewing it.

Evan scored the highest of the sample in the MIPSI with a score of 3.74. His highest categories included approval of his own sexuality (4.00), gay behaviors (4.00), and disclosing identity (4.00). Other scores included gender role flexibility (3.43), engagement in the gay community (3.83), approval of others' sexuality (3.33), and feelings of external support (3.60). His high scores were consistent with his disclosure behaviors and reported importance of his sexuality across contexts.

Connor. Connor was a 27-year-old college graduate working full time. He both self-defined, and was overall out of the closet, only concealing his identity in foreign contexts where he expected his safety to be threatened. Connor came out in high school after a panel of LGBT

high school student spoke in his freshman year health class. The school's exposure to diverse students allowed him to become confident in his sexual identity and disclose his identity. He first told his best friend at the time, saying she was "an accepting, loving person" who's values would indicate her support of him. Connor initially came out to his father as bisexual so that he could "gauge his reaction" and "take [it] back" if the reaction was negative. He anticipated a negative reaction due to previous remarks that his father had made about opposing gay marriage. He did not come out as gay until a few months later, when he wanted to share with his family that he was dating a man. He told his mother "I'm dating someone, his name is…" in an attempt to non-explicitly disclose, but told his mother "I'm gay", explicitly, when she pushed him to define his identity. He wanted to disclose his father personally, so asked his mother not to tell him, however, she ultimately disclosed Connor's identity for him without his permission. In this case, he disclosed for personal wellbeing, so that he could actively date his boyfriend, and to strengthen his relationship with his parents and share aspects about his life with them.

In his adult life, Connor identified as "aggressive about being open", and was active in the gay community at the time of the interview. He promoted an ability and willingness to deal with both emotional labor and discrimination. For example, he engaged in a political discussion with a superior at work who made anti-gay comments. He engaged in the conversation in an effort to normalize the gay experience and educate. He never had an explicit conversation with his grandfather, however, because "he is a business man, and that's all he really talks about". He non-explicitly disclosed his identity to his grandfather by introducing him to his long-term partner, and but "we don't talk about it".

Connor scored a 3.64 in the MIPSI with his highest scores being involvement in the gay community (4.00), gay behaviors (4.00) and disclosing identity (4.00). Other scores included

gender role flexibility (3.14), approval of own sexuality (3.80), approval of others' sexuality (3.33), and feelings of external support (3.20). His high scores are consistent with his disclosure behaviors and reported value of sexual identity and discussion of the support of past and previous environments.

Robbie. Robbie was a recent college graduate and full-time worker. He considered himself completely out, to which his overall rating was consistent. He was out in all contexts but considered that he might not be "as outwardly gay" in locations other than Northeast America. Robbie first came out to a university doctor when he broke his foot. The doctor routinely inquired after Robbie's mental health, to which he responded, "the problem is that I'm gay". After a few follow up sessions, Robbie came out to his family during his spring break. He highly valued his personal relationships, citing them as a reason that he "wanted them to hear it from me". He explicitly disclosed in person among these relationships regardless of the anticipated reaction. Robbie said that he was most nervous to come out to his father, who had previously made homophobic comments, and his friend, who came from a strictly religious and conservative family. Despite this, he explicitly came out to both of these individuals because he "didn't want them to hear from anybody else".

Up until that point, Robbie was not "ready… to be openly gay". In several occasions in high school, he lied or mislead the conversation when someone would talk about romantic interests, or even asked him point blank "are you gay?". Once he felt confident in his sexual identity, however, CO was important for him to enhance personal relationships, and BO allowed him to connect with the gay community and pursue relationships. I coded him as "out and proud" because he posted articles supporting gay marriage and pictures with a boyfriend. Although he

did not do so to explicitly disclose, when someone "liked" one of his posts, he thought "maybe now they know, and are okay with it".

Robbie scored a 3.42 on the MIPSI with highest scores including involvement in the gay community (3.83), approval of own sexuality (3.60), gay behaviors (3.75), disclosure of sexual identity (3.86) and feelings of external support (3.60). Other scores were gender role flexibility (2.29) and approval of others' sexual identity (3.00). I expected Robbie to score higher overall, but his high scores were brought down by his two substantially lower scores. Perhaps this indicates that gender role flexibility may not be a pertinent component of sexual identity as it relates to disclosure.

Callum. Callum was a 23-year-old graduate student. Although he self-defined as completely out of the closet, I coded him as overall mostly out. Callum came out for the first time to a group of his female friends. He did so by typing the words "I'm bisexual" onto his phone. Confidence in his sexual identity played into this stepping stone disclosure because at that he "hadn't truly admitted to [him]self" that he was gay". Typing it out provided a "layer to hide behind" that made it "not so real". Disclosing his sexual identity at this point improved Callum's wellbeing and relationships by digging him out of a "deep dark hole" and allowing him to "be who [he] was and talk about things that [he] wanted to talk about with people [he cared] about".

Callum's sexual identity was forcefully revealed to his parents when his father found a bill for Callum's PReP, an HIV preventative medication, often prescribed to sexually active gay men. When confronted about the bill, Callum explicitly disclosed that he was gay, and had sex with men. Callum had concealed his identity up until that point because he anticipated a negative reaction. His parents were immigrants from China, which had strict family values. Specifically, his parents "feared that [he] wouldn't have kids and… be able to pass down the family name".

Alongside with conflicting cultural values, Callum believed that his parents would have trouble accepting his sexual identity because "they really don't know a ton about homosexuality and this world that I live in", thus having limited exposure. In this case, an anticipated negative reaction, context exposure and context values lead Callum to conceal his identity.

At the time of the interview, Callum had debated whether or not he valued BO in a professional context. He had concealed his identity from both his mentor, and the people who worked for him, because his sexuality "feels out of place in a professional relationship". Although he said that he might non-explicitly disclose in a professional setting if he had a long-term partner he still concealed his identity in a professional setting and would censor comments around coworkers to do so. In this situation, the quality of his relationships caused him to conceal his identity.

Callum's social media identity was out and proud. Although he had never posted an explicit status about being gay, he did not censor posts made to social media. Most of his posts involved articles regarding social political issues because "visibility is important", and he posted to show "support for something that… is important to [him]".

Callum scored 2.88 in the MIPSI, with highest scores including disclosing of sexual identity (3.71) and gay behaviors (3.25). Other scores were gender role flexibility (2.43), gay community (2.3), approval of own sexuality (2.80), approval of others' sexuality (2.33), gay behaviors (2.50), and external support (2.60). Callum's low scores are consistent with his disclosure behaviors, particularly in the family and work context.

David. David was a freshman in college who had come out to his friends and family late in high school. He considered himself to be "like half-way" out of the closet, and I coded him as partially out for both categories of outness. After viewing a gay-themed movie, David "came out

to [him]self", and then to his parents because "they're important figures in [his] life". Once he felt confident in his sexual identity, he explicitly disclosed to his parents to support their existing relationship. David had not come out, however, to his younger brother. As a freshman in high school, David said that he was "a little immature" and might not deal with the information "in a way that's necessarily constructive". In this, David is unprepared for emotional labor of confronting a potentially negative reaction from his brother. David also feared losing his relationships with his conservative extended family, saying that, if he disclosed his sexual identity, "they could disown me or something".

David said that he did not talk much about his sexual life or attractions, not because he was uncomfortable with disclosing his identity, but because he regarded "romantic relationships and situations to be more private". Although he thought that BO in a context was a tool to "have a close connection" with others, he "[doesn't] want it to be an issue" and would conceal his identity if it was irrelevant to the conversation, or if he thought mentioning his sexuality would "cause more questions… and divert the conversation to [his] sexuality". In this case, he would contextual choose to disclose or conceal his sexual identity, which was informed by a mid-level BO, changes in relationship quality, relevance of his sexual identity and willingness to engage in emotional labor. While David had high importance of CO among his parents, he displayed low levels of the same with other relationships. I coded David as "out and discreet" on social media because, although he did not express a desire to conceal his identity on social media, he rarely used social media and had never posted anything referring to his sexual identity.

David scored a 2.69 on the MIPSI, with highest scores including involvement in the gay community (3.17) and external supports (3.20). Other scores were gender role flexibility (2.86), approval of own (2.80) and others' (2.33) sexuality, gay behaviors (2.50), and disclosing of

sexual identity (2.00). David's low scores are consistent with his disclosure behaviors, values, and reported importance of sexual identity.

Nathan. Nathan was a freshman in high school who had disclosed his sexual identity to friends and family a few months before the time of the interview, upon arriving at university. He self-defined as completely out, but I coded him as mostly out, as he was unsure whether his extended family or old friends knew about his identity. In high school, he had concealed his identity where there was "no conversation about sexuality at all", and "maybe two openly gay people… out of 1200". When he got to college he saw a shift in exposure. "There are a lot more gay people here" he said, "and it made it a lot easier for me to kind of get over the feeling that I would be seen so much differently… I already had that idea going into college". The context exposure lead Nathan to believe that his relationships would not change by revealing his identity. So, when he explicitly disclosed his identity to a friend he had known for less than a month, he "was kinda prepared to do it… I just knew that I was going to at some point" (Nathan). In this case, when Nathan arrived at college, he was confident in his sexual identity, and the context exposure supported his action. After this CO experience, he both explicitly and non-explicitly spread the news to his friend group with the original disclosee. Although he expected his friends to be accepting, he said "I can't see myself having that conversation with everybody". So, he used third-party non-explicit disclosure to help alleviate the emotional labor of coming out to a large number of people.

Nathan explicitly disclosed to his parents the next time he saw them when they visited him at college. When asked why he felt comfortable coming out at this time, he said "I think the shift in the environment of college just indirectly affected my mental state around my sexuality" (Nathan), again indicating that the values and exposure of the college environment increased his

personal preparation and confidence in his sexuality. When his mother told him that she would tell his grandparents, he was initially relieved. At the time of the interview, however, he expressed that he wished he had told them because he had more experience coming out to people, and "would be more capable of having that discussion in a mature way", indicating an increased capacity for emotional labor over time. In his ongoing life, Nathan expressed that he did preferred to disclose his identity in one-on-one conversations, rather than to a large group of people, because "that would open up so many questions from so many people", which indicates the heightened need for emotional labor among a larger group.

Nathan scored a 3.25 on the MIPSI, with highest scores including gay behaviors (3.63), disclosing sexual identity (3.43), and external support (3.60). Other scores were gender role flexibility (2.43), involvement in the gay community (3.17), and approval of own (3.20) and others' (3.33) sexuality. His disclosure and support measures support his reports of CO in the college context. His slightly lower scores may be indicative of the early stages of his sexual identity development.

Lawrence. Lawrence was a freshman in college who considered himself to be completely out of the closet. Since he concealed his identity from his maternal extended family and from a close piano teacher, I coded him as overall mostly out. Lawrence came out explicitly to his sister when he was 12-years-old. When asked why he made his decision, he said "we grew up the same… like parents and a lot of things", and "she's the kind of person who I knew I could trust her. And yeah, I was expecting a good response". To him, both the quality of their relationship, and the values of the context supported his decision. When pressed on his family nature, he said that his father's side of the family was historically liberal and atheist, whereas that of his mother was conservative and Russian Orthodox. In the immediate family his father "kind

of changed [his mother's] mindset from a rigid to a more tolerant mindset… by the time I came out, I was basically raised atheist" Lawrence also had a gay uncle and a bisexual grandmother on his father's side of the family. The exposure, and the political and areligious values all contributed to the environment in which Lawrence disclosed. Despite this environment, Lawrence's disclosure to his parents was forced when his father found his gay pornography. Although Lawrence inevitably explicitly disclosed in this vignette, he had initially concealed because he "wasn't that close with them at the time" and "he thought it was embarrassing". As a young adolescent of 13, his relationship with his parents, and his willingness to deal with the emotional labor of having an embarrassing conversation contributed to his concealing behavior but given that he had come out to his sister earlier that year, his confidence in his sexuality contributed to his eventual disclosure.

As one of the first out gay people in his high school, Lawrence had a high BO valance, which could be seen in his efforts to normalize the gay experience. He said that that people in his high school had "skewed perceptions of the gay community", namely that gay men were sexually promiscuous. Lawrence would hold his boyfriend's hand in the hallway "to show people that… being gay is totally normal, and relationships are possible in high school". Lawrence used BO and non-explicit disclosure to both normalize gay experiences for the heterosexual community, saying "representation is the first step to disclosure", and to inspire the gay community by "showing other queer people who were in the closet that this is definitely something that your future can have". Lawrence was "out and proud" on Facebook. After coming out to his close friends and family, he was "sick of hiding it" and "wanted to put it out there without doing the work."

At the time of the interview, Lawrence only concealed his identity from his extended family on his mother's side, whom he identified as religious and conservative. Particularly, he expected his grandfather to "withdraw financial support" and "stop viewing me in such a good light" upon discovering Lawrence's sexual identity. His grandfather's values contribute to Lawrence's perceived negative reaction, which would take the form of both personal wellbeing and relationship quality.

Lawrence scored a 3.33 on the MIPSI, with highest scores including involvement in the gay community (4.00), approval of own sexuality (3.60) and gay behaviors (3.88), and external support. Other scores included gender role flexibility (2.00), approval of others' sexuality (2.67) and disclosing identity (3.57). I would expect slightly higher scores from Lawrence given his disclosure behaviors and reported importance of sexual identity and disclosure. Perhaps his two lowest scores further indicate that gender role flexibility and approval of others' sexuality have insignificant effects on disclosure.

Measure of Internalized Perception of Sexual Identity

Participants had low variability of scores between each category of this measure. Across the sample, participants displayed a medium level of gender role flexibility ($M = 2.73$, $SD = 0.47$), high activity in the gay community ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 0.56$), high approval of their own sexuality ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 0.52$), a medium-high approval of the sexuality of others ($M = 2.93$, $SD = 0.40$), high activity in gay behaviors ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 0.53$), high activity in disclosure behaviors ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 0.82$) and reported high levels of external support ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 0.41$). Although scores had little variation, the sample had an average score below a 3 in gender role flexibility (2.73) and approval of others' sexuality (2.93). See table 2 for participants' scores on this measure.

Defining Disclosure Behavior

In order to fully understand the different factors that influence coming out, one must understand the different ways in which gay men choose to disclose or conceal their sexual identity. I identified 4 ways in which participants intentionally controlled others' knowledge of their sexual identity: 1) *explicit disclosure*, 2) *non-explicit disclosure*, 3) *stepping stone disclosure*, and 4) *conceal*. I also identified a fifth category in which the participant's sexual identity was unwillingly revealed to another person: 5) *unintentional or forced disclosure*.

Explicit disclosure. Explicit disclosure (ED) occurred when the participant begins or shifts a conversation with the disclosee with the intention of CO. This conversation involved a declarative statement in which the participant told the disclosee that he was gay, or that he was attracted to men. I coded ED 31 times over all 9 interviews. Examples of explicit disclosure include some of the following:

"I'm gay, is that a problem?" (James) when talking to potential future employers, and again when talking to his extended family whom he planned to visit with his boyfriend.

"For like 6 hours, that's what I did. I just walked with my friends and told them individually" (Evan) when talking about coming out to his friends during Relay for Life, a nightlong fundraising event.

"I say down and was like 'hey, can I talk to you about something?'… so, I just like told her I was gay" (Lawrence), when talking about how he came out to his little sister.

Non-explicit disclosure. Non-explicit disclosure (NED) occurred when the participant would intentionally reveal an aspect of his life that was related to his sexual identity. An NED specifically differed from and ED in, in NED, the participant did not have a specific conversation with the disclosee about his sexual identity. A participant could engage in NED either by

slipping personal information into conversation, giving indirect physical or nonverbal cues, or by allowing a third party to disclose for him. I coded NED 26 times over the course of 8 interviews.

A participant may have NED by slipping information about his personal life into conversation. Evan engages in NED in his everyday life. He is "comfortable mentioning [his] boyfriend" to new people that he meets, but he does not "bring it up in conversation" (Evan). Although he does not specifically tell disclosees in this vignette that he is gay, he references behaviors that connect him to his sexual identity. Participants who engaged in this type of NED also connected themselves to the gay community, by talking about "working at a gay resort" (Evan), or by saying "that guy is cute" (Robbie).

A participant may also engage in NED through their behaviors. When asked if he considered himself out of the closet, James said "yes… I'm one of the co-chairs of [LGBT organization] at work… I wear a rainbow lanyard at work" (James). He described both that he was engaged in the gay community, and that he gave physical cues, when talking about his sexual identity. When asked whether he used social media to disclose his sexual identity, Sam said "I posted on Instagram a photo of the Pride Parade… you could probably figure it out from scrolling through my Instagram" (Sam).

Finally, a third party may help the participant reveal his identity to others. While the conversation that the third party has with the disclosee may have be explicit, I coded these instances for NED because the participant did not have the conversations themselves, and therefore could not control the content. Vignettes only fell under NED if the participant indicated that he gave permission to the third party to disclose his identity. For example, after Nathan came out to his friend in college, the two of them spread the news together, either "together, telling

someone as it came up" or "her telling some people". Given the context of the two of them coming out together, I coded this as NED as opposed to UIFD.

Stepping-stone disclosure. A stepping-stone disclosure (SSD) occurred when the participant revealed to the disclosee that he had a sexual minority identity other than the one that he identified with at the time of the interview. I coded SSD 5 times over the course of 4 interviews. In 3 of these cases, the participant told the disclosee that he was bisexual, and in 1, the participant told his sister that he was confused about his sexual identity.

Conceal. Concealing indicated that the participant intentionally hid his sexual identity from the disclosee. I coded concealing identity 28 times over the course of 8 interviews. A participant could conceal his identity by avoiding situations that might indicate his sexuality or lying to/ misleading the disclosee when confronted with situations that may indicate his sexuality. For example, Connor described his behavior with his boyfriend while traveling together to Morocco, a country where, Connor says, "being gay is not okay". Although they did not lie about their relationship, "we just didn't hold hands. We didn't kiss. We didn't express any PDA" (Connor). This vignette was 1 of 12 that I coded for avoiding situations among 6 interviews.

Before Robbie came out for the first time, he would either "change the subject" or "give a stupid lie answer of which girl I was interested in" (Robbie) whenever the topic of relationships arose. This instance was one of 9 codes over 7 interviews.

Unintentional or forced disclosure. Unintentional or forced disclosure (UIFD) referred to an instance in which the participant's sexual behaviors or identity were unwillingly made known to the disclosee. I coded UIFD 5 times over 5 interviews. A participant may have been outed when the disclosee found evidence of gay behavior and confronted the participant. I also

coded a vignette if the participant then went on to include intentional disclosure behavior. For example, as a teenager, Lawrence had not wanted to tell his parents about his sexual identity because he was he was "in his angsty teen phase" and "thought it was embarrassing". When his father found and confronted him about gay pornography, Lawrence "just said 'I'm gay' to him… and ran away" (Lawrence). In this vignette, I coded conceal, for the time prior that he had chosen to not disclose his identity, UIFD, for the discovery of the pornography, and ED for the affirming statement.

A participant could also have been outed through UIFD if a third party told a disclosee without the participant wanting or asking them to do so. Evan said that his mother "told her siblings at one point, but no one told me [that she told them]". In this case, Evan neither knew nor wanted his mother to tell his aunts and uncles. Although he later expressed that he was "glad that [he] didn't have that conversation" with those family members, the disclosure event itself was unwarranted. Connor also had a similar experience when he specifically asked his mother "'please don't tell dad, I want to tell him myself', and then she went home and told my dad" (Connor).

Internal Factors

Internal factors refer to the participant's personal processes and states of being that contribute to his disclosure decisions. These factors include his level of outness, his beliefs about the importance of outness, how he expects a disclosure event to occur, his own preparation to deal with the event, and how he expects disclosure to affect his life moving forward.

Levels of outness. Participants were given two outness codes: self-described, and overall. Self-described outness results refer to responses to the explicit question, as I wanted to capture the way that the participants thought about themselves before being primed by any other

questions. 6 participants self-defined as *completely out*, 1 as *mostly out*, 2 as *partially out* and 0 as *in the closet*.

Completely out. I coded a participant as completely out if he answered that yes, he was completely out of the closet, offered additional information that supported his answer, and only mentioned concealing his identity to 0-1 of the above contexts. James talked about being out in many contexts: "I am out to my family, my friends, and I wear a rainbow lanyard at work", as well as his participation in gay organizations at his place of work. Similarly, Evan was out to all important people in his life, and said "when I meet people, it's not something that I hide." He also would talk about his experiences as a gay man among coworkers and students. Of those who were completely out, 3 had concealed their identity in some context. Connor was completely out of the closet in his everyday life, "except when it's a safety matter, like when we're traveling abroad, and local customs might be different". Similarly, Robbie stated that "there are definitely places where I wouldn't be as outwardly gay as I would be here in the Northeast of America". One participant was not out to old heterosexual friends to which he said, "I haven't talked to in a while… but they could've heard from mutual friends" (Nathan). These participants did not list any important and current relationships in which they intentionally concealed his sexual identity, rather acknowledged contexts in which he may be less open or had not had the chance to disclose.

Mostly out. I coded the participant as mostly out if he responded that, yes, he was out of the closet, but reported more than one relationship in which he had concealed his sexual identity. Only one participant, Lawrence, fell into this category. He considered himself to be completely out of the closet, but concealed his identity from an old piano teacher, and elderly relatives.

Partially out. I coded a participant as partially out for one of two reasons: if he said anything other than "yes" or indicated that he was fully out of the closet, or if he reported that he was not out in multiple current relationships. Two participants fell under this category. David, for example indicated that he was "halfway [out], maybe", and said that he had not told his brother of his sexual identity. Sam, on the other hand, considered himself to be out of the closet, but had not told any of his immediate family of his sexual identity, including his parents and his brother.

In the closet. I did not code any participant as in the closet. This code would indicate that the participant had not disclosed his identity in any significant context in his life.

Overall outness. Overall outness referred to the participant's outness as described in the context of the entire interview. If the participant mentioned specific contexts or people who at the time of the interview did not know his sexual identity, that contributed to his overall outness. If the participant did not know whether his identity was known in the described context, it was also counted as nondisclosure. While some participants described new situations in which they would not disclose their identity, only Callum differed between his self-described outness and his overall outness. Although he self-defined as completely out, he later revealed that his extended family and his coworkers did not know his sexual identity. Of note, all participants identified as *completely out* described situations in which they might conceal their sexual identity when traveling to a foreign country, or another part of the country. See Table 3 for more detail regarding differences between self-described outness, overall outness, and the relationships in which participants conceal their sexual identity.

Beliefs about outness. Beliefs about outness was originally a code that was specific to the question series including "how important is coming out to you?". This particular code went

through much revision. Participants would talk about the importance of outness both when directly asked and when discussing motivations for their own disclosure behaviors. Because of this consistency, I coded for beliefs about outness in any situation when the participant made a statement regarding these beliefs. Participants discussed the importance of outness in both their overall life, and contextually.

In initially creating the codebook, I drafted a section for "Importance of coming out", in which I detailed the valance at which participants talk about their values of disclosing their sexual identity. Upon further analysis of the interviews, however, I found that participants discussed the phenomenon of coming out in one of two different ways: one was coming out (CO), and the other was being out (BO). CO refers to the discrete instances of intentionally informing another person about their sexual identity. CO may be either and explicit conversations that the participants have to disclose their sexual identity, or non-explicit clues that the respondent gives another person with the intention of making sure that they know about his sexual identity. BO, on the other hand, refers to the respondent's status of having a disclosed sexual identity. BO refers to ongoing behaviors that may link the individual to his sexuality, but without the intention of making it known. Participants varied in their reported importance of CO and BO.

Importance of coming out. I coded CO at the valence of high, medium, low, or negative. A high valence indicated that coming out was of utmost importance in the participant's life. When talking about having a disclosure conversation, the participant only gave reasons to explicitly disclose sexual identity, and none against. I coded high CO value 12 times over a course of 6 participants. As an example of high CO, James explicitly disclosing his identity to his future employer, saying "I'm gay, is that going to be a problem?" (James) to make sure that he

was able to talk about his personal life without fear of discrimination in the workplace. In this case, CO was a tool that lead to BO. Robbie also had a high CO in the context of his family and close friends, whom he "didn't want to hear about it from somebody else" (Robbie). CO was important for him to control the message. In this case, if he were to let his loved ones find out that he was gay before he told them, then he believed that they might think less of him, and their relationship. I coded these examples of high valance of CO in conjunction with in-person, explicit disclosures. Although this was consistent across much of the data, there were exceptions. For David, although coming out is important to him, he had still not come out to his brother at the time of the interview. Also, importance of CO was talked about more frequently with early, explicit, and in-person disclosures.

A medium valence indicated that the participant cited reasons both why CO was and was not important in the given vignette or may detail situations in which he would alter his disclosure behaviors. I coded medium CO valance 19 times across 8 interviews. For a vignette in which medium CO is endorsed, disclosure value may "depend on the person" on whether the participant would "bring it up randomly" or just "slip it into conversation" (Evan). Evan disclosed his identity regardless of the situation, often differently depending on the context, and sooner if he presumed the disclosee was also gay.

David also displayed a medium importance of coming out as it pertains to its role in normalization.

> Uh I think also, like it makes, like as more people come out, that questions the assumption that everyone is straight, which I think is an important thing to question. I think eventually, it would be nice if nobody had to come out, and there wasn't a moment that you had to come out. Like you explore that on your own, and then you find someone

> that you want to be with, and always is something that is, I don't know placed into you at birth. But as of now, that's not something that we can do. So, I think that coming out is a breaking point for some people- making that a reality. And that's personally something I don't think every gay person wants that, because I think that there's something unique about being part of a community that is marginalized in a sense. But I think there's a connectivity that comes along with that. I don't think that's something that will necessarily be compromised if that is a world that we're moving to.

While David expressed a desire for a future world where CO was not necessary to live the way one might want, he acknowledged that the social climate at the time of the interview was such that it may be necessary for some gay men. For both of these examples, context was an important factor in whether CO was important. I coded medium valance CO with explicit disclosures, non-explicit disclosures, as well as in-person and not in-person disclosures.

A low valance of CO importance indicated that the participant only gave reasons to not have a conversation about their sexual identity. An important distinction between low and negative CO valance is that, low CO still indicated a desire for BO, whereas a negative CO indicated either no desire to BO, or a specific desire to conceal identity within the given context. I coded low CO 16 times across 7 interviews. For example, I coded David with a low CO valance because he would "definitely disclose" if his sexuality was relevant to a specific conversation but didn't want it to "be an issue", or "cause more questions… that would divert the conversation to my sexuality" (David). While disclosing his identity was important to him, he concealed his identity in circumstances where CO might make him uncomfortable.

A negative valance of CO indicated that the disclosee did not see value in CO, and also did not acknowledge a desire to BO in the particular context. I coded negative CO 3 times across

2 interviews. In his interview, Sam expressed that he had not come out to his family because he did not see a reason to do so.

> I guess the first part of that- it's not super important to me that they know, um, like when I first meet someone I feel like I don't wanna just launch right into like my dating life, um, but like, I feel like it is important, like, I don't wanna have to like be talking about, like if that comes up, I don't wanna have to like stop and have a conversation about it, you know? So I guess it is pretty important that people like know, but, I guess it would be a bigger deal to me if they like make a big deal about it. I don't know. Like in a perfect world, I feel like we would all just be like, share those parts about ourselves without like having like the whole conversation around sexuality if that makes sense. But for gay people, we still do, which is annoying.

Similar to David, Sam expressed frustration that gay people have to come out and perform the emotional labor in order to disclose his sexual identity. In cases like this, his desire to not CO was more powerful in indicating his behavior than his desire to BO. In this vignette, this frustration contributed to the fact that he had not come out to his family. In another part of the interview, he remarked that if his heterosexual twin brother did not have to come out as straight, then he would not do the same. Across the dataset, there were only 3 codes across 2 interviews for negative CO, and all accompanied codes for concealing of sexual identity in the given vignette.

Being out. Being out referred to ongoing behaviors that may indicate the participant's sexuality. This was the participant's ability to "live authentically" (James) as a gay man, without censoring his actions. In many cases, it could be important for the participant to be out, but not important to come out. While the importance of CO for some participants over time, most would

still talk about a high BO. James talked about the time period in which he first came out, "it was super important to tell everyone… kind of like an oversharing thing. Now it's a more passive thing in that I wear a visual cue" (James). Although the explicit conversations lost their importance to James, he still wanted people to know his sexual identity, and made physical efforts to indicate this. While James believed that BO was valuable for his mental health, he also acknowledged "the privilege that comes with coming out". He went on to talk about discuss that being white, cisgender, financially secure and masculine presenting had made it easier for him to be an openly gay man. He also cited the contextual privileges of living in a "blue, liberal academic community" as making it easier to be out. Most participants had a high value of BO (coded 20 times over the course of 8 interviews).

Similar to the CO variable, a medium valance indicated acknowledging both the risks and benefits of BO with the same weight when discussing these themes. I coded medium BO 16 times over a course of 8 interviews.

A low BO valance indicated that, in the vignette context, the participant did not feel the need to behave in a way that indicated his sexual identity. An important distinction between low and negative BO is that in the former, the participant did not describe actively concealing his identity. Since Sam's family did not talk about their "sexual affiliations" (Sam) in day to day life, Sam did not actively stifle a part of his behavior by not BO in the family context. I coded low BO 10 times across 5 interviews. While this occasionally accompanied concealing identity codes, like in the case with Sam, I more often coded it as an ongoing belief, not attached to a disclosure behavior.

A negative BO indicated that participants actively did not want to behave in a way that would indicate their sexual identity to others. I only coded this 2 times over the course of 2

interviews and referred to past behaviors. Both Sam and Robbie talked about not feeling the need to be out in their high school context.

Interaction expectations. These expectations refer to the participants beliefs about how the disclosee would respond to disclosure. While this can be based on the context itself, I coded it as the participant's beliefs. I coded vignettes if the participant discussed a reaction to a discrete event, not for longer term effects. Expectations could be positive (10 references across 5 interviews), neutral (7 references across 6 interviews), negative (15 references across 8 interviews), or unsure (8 references across 6 interviews). Most frequently, positive expectations were associated with explicit disclosures. Participants who explicitly disclosed in this scenario may have "thought [the disclosee] would be cool with it" (James), or expected a positive reaction because "I kind of figured that she knew already" (Sam).

Participants who anticipated a negative reaction were also likely to conceal their sexual identity within the context. When he would meet new people, Sam would not bring up his sexuality right away if he "wasn't sure if it would like make people uncomfortable or would make people react negatively". Callum had also avoided disclosing his identity to his parents because he feared a negative reaction and did not have a specific reason to disclose.

Importantly, other participants anticipated a negative reaction, and explicitly or non-explicitly came out anyway. Robbie, for example was worried that his father would negatively react to his sexual identity, but his father was the first important relationship in which he came out.

Individual preparation. I coded for participant preparation any time that the participant talked about his own preparation to talk about his sexual identity. This preparation could accompany a specific disclosure behavior, or whenever he talked about aspects of his identity

that might support this theme. I coded for participant preparation if he talked about 1) *comfort in sexual identity*, 2) *willingness to engage in emotional labor*, and 3) *ability to confront overt discrimination*. I did not code for valance in this theme, rather, just whenever a participant promoted this theme. Therefore, any and all categories may be positive and supportive of disclosure, or negative and preventative of the same. I coded personal preparation 35 times over within 8 interviews.

Comfort in sexual identity. This code is directly related to the participant's own confidence and acceptance of his sexual identity. Often, this comfort took the form of the participant being ready to come out. I coded comfort in sexual identity 13 times across 7 interviews. The participant could either be comfortable in his sexual identity, or not comfortable in his sexual identity. For example, when Robbie was in high school, he concealed his identity, even when directly confronted about it.

> People would assume… that I was gay without me being ready to, you know, be openly gay… I didn't have any worries that people were not going to accept me for who I was. It was me; I wasn't ready. I wasn't okay with [my sexuality], you know?

Although he identified the context to be supportive, Robbie had not felt personally prepared to come out. David, however, talked about coming out to his parents once he had come to the conclusion himself that he was gay. David said that seeing a gay-themed movie was "the first moment that I accepted it was okay to like guys… so I came out to myself, and then specifically to [my parents]" (David).

Willingness to engage in emotional labor. This code referred to the participant's preparation or desire to deal with uncomfortable or intrusive conversations about their sexual identity. Participants could either be willing or unwilling to do this emotional work, and codes

typically referred to specific disclosure conversations. I coded emotional labor 24 times over the course of 7 interviews. I often coded emotional labor alongside with negative interaction expectations. Some participants explicitly disclosed in a context where they expected a negative reaction if they felt prepared to deal with the uncomfortable conversation. Participants who are unwilling to engage in emotional labor might say that the conversation is "too difficult" (Lawrence), or that it would "open up to so many questions" (Nathan). Participants may be more prepared to confront emotional labor if "[they] have had more experience in telling people and… feel more capable of having the discussion in a mature way" (Nathan).

Ability to deal with discrimination. Similar to emotional labor, participants who discussed their ability to deal with discrimination felt prepared to deal with negative situations. In particular, these negative situations referred to overt negative reactions to the participant's sexual identity. I coded ability to deal with discrimination 3 times across 2 interviews, and it was only brought up in the context that the participant did not feel able to confront adversity. One participant did not reveal his sexual identity to a stranger that "was a little rough around the edges" who was harassing a girl because he "was alone, didn't know how to approach it… and it didn't feel like a battle [he] wanted to deal with that day" (Evan). Other participants felt more prepared to deal with discrimination. Although he was "hyper aware of [his sexuality] in certain situations and around certain people", James reported never concealing his sexual identity. If he were to be discriminated against, he would take the stance of "que sera, sera: what will be will be", and would not take steps to avoid confrontation.

Relevance of sexual identity. This category pertained to whether the participant found his sexual identity important enough to disclose in the given context. While it was related to the confidence in sexuality, it more related to whether the context was one in which the participant

felt was worth disclosing his sexual identity. For example, Sam's family does not speak about their "sexual affiliations" with one another, therefore, his own sexual identity was not important enough for him to bring up spontaneously. Importance of sexuality could also be a positive factor to coming out. David, in the above example mentioned that he came out to his parents when he had accepted the identity for himself. He then went on to say that "it felt wrong to talk about being with a girl in the future, and not have [my mother] know that [I am gay]" (David). In this scenario, his sexual identity was important enough to him, and to the context that he chose to disclose it. I coded importance of sexual identity 8 times across 3 interviews.

Perceived implications. These codes referred to the long term affects that the participant believed would result from the disclosure. Unlike reaction expectations, perceived implications go beyond the disclosure event itself. These implications could have a positive, negative or neutral effect on the participant's life going forward, or the participant could believe that disclosure would have no implication for his life moving forward. I coded positive implications 24 times over a course of 8 interviews, negative changes 18 times over a course of 9 interviews, neutral changes 5 times over 5 interviews, and no change 5 times over 5 interviews. I coded perceived implications with or without a specific disclosure behavior. I categorized perceived changes as follows: 1) *changes in relationship quality*, 2) *changes in personal wellbeing,* 3) *normalization*, and 4) *connection to the LGBT community*. Perceived changes could be coded at the descriptive level without being coded at the valance level if the participant did not explicitly state how he would define the change.

Changes in relationship quality. This theme referred the effect that disclosure would have on his relationship with the disclosee. Relationship quality could change for the better, for the worse, or not at all. I coded relationship quality 30 times over the course of all 9 interviews.

When talking about how he would come out to most new people that he would meet, Evan said that he would bring it up early because "I don't like having a fake relationship, I like to feel genuine" (Evan). Disclosure would also allow the participant to "be open about their own experiences and share more about themselves" (Connor). Robbie also disclosed his sexual identity, not to improve his relationships, but to avoid the perceived negative effect of withholding that aspect of his identity. He wanted to tell them "before they found out from anybody else", and that he "didn't wanna lose any closeness with them" (Robbie) by not telling them. David specifically had not told his extended family at the time of the interview, because he believed that "they could disown [him]", thus severing any kind of relationship that he may have with them. Other participants also perceived a social change by coming out. Sam did not come out in high school because "people would look at me differently and think of me differently and talk to me differently" (Sam) if he were to do so.

Changes in personal wellbeing. This code referred to any changes in the participant's personal life that would be affected by disclosing his sexual identity. Positive personal changes included the ability to live authentically and improved mental health. Negative personal changes include discrimination, and decreased safety or access to resources. I coded personal wellbeing 32 times over all 9 interviews. James discussed a "cost-benefit analysis" that gay people go through when deciding "is [coming out] worth it?" For James, "the benefits outweigh the costs". Coming out relieved him of the "mental anguish" of concealing his identity, but he acknowledged that for other gay men, CO and BO may risk their physical safety.

Normalization. Some participants said that disclosure of sexual identity could change the social atmosphere surrounding homosexuality and LGBT issues. Participants who came out for normalization could have done so either to provide exposure to the broader community, or to

serve as a role model for other gay men. I coded normalization 17 times over the course of 6 interviews.

Lawrence came out at a young age, around 12-years-old. As a result, he was one of few gay people in his community at the time. On many occasions, he cited normalization as an important result of both BO and CO. In his high school, "people had skewed perceptions of the gay community… They think everyone just hooks up". Lawrence would hold hands with and kiss his boyfriend in public to show people that "relationships are possible in high school" for gay men. His behaviors were targeted towards the heterosexual community as through the concept of "representation is the first step to acceptance", and towards "other queer people in the closet" (Lawrence) as a model of positive experiences.

Connection to the gay community. Some participants reported that coming out would give them access to other gay men and groups. For some participants, this meant that they could now pursue sexual and romantic relationships. For others, disclosure would provide new social opportunities. I did not code the latter with disclosure decisions, but some participants talked about how CO ultimately led to new friendships. Notably, three participants talked about having a Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) in their high school, but all three explicitly said that they were not a part of it or actively avoided it, even after they came out. I coded community 9 times over the course of 5 interviews.

Before he came out, Robbie "wasn't dating in any way shape or form… it wasn't a part of my life at that point". He specifically came out to his roommate because "as soon as I did, I planned to start pursuing" (Robbie). Similarly, Evan said that, soon after he came out to his friends and family, "all I wanted to do was date a guy" (Evan). Being an out gay man for these two participants meant that they able to actively engage in sexual and romantic relationships.

External Factors

External factors refer to the contextual influences on a participant's disclosure behaviors. Participants spoke about aspects of the environment that they believed to be supportive or unsupportive of LGBT individuals and the coming out process. Contexts could include individuals or environments to whom the participant makes a disclosure decision. Participants were asked specifically about family and religious community. Other relationships were spontaneously mentioned by the participant when asked to talk about various disclosure experiences. Aspects about the context were condensed to valance (positive, negative, neutral, don't know) and quality. I developed 4 themes for external factors, including 1) *context exposure,* 2) *context values*, 3) *disclosee views about LGBT issues and people*, and 4) *quality of relationship with disclosee. It* is important to note that all external factors are through the perception of the participant and cannot be separated from his own reflections about the qualities of the context.

Who. The who code referred to specific individuals who were involved in disclosure vignettes. I coded friends the most, at 28 codes in all 9 interviews. Immediate family (27) and extended family (24) were also present across all 9 interviews. I coded coworkers 6 times across 5 interviews healthcare workers 2 times over 2 interviews and strangers 3 times over 2 interviews.

Environment. Environment codes referred to the physical location or context in which the disclosure decision was made. I coded general, everyday life 12 times, across 7 interviews, religious community 22 times across 8 interviews, school or university 8 times across 4 interviews, foreign country 4 times across 3 interviews, and the family as a context 7 times over 4 interviews. The latter code differed from immediate or extended family in that it captured

general ideals of the family, or events that involved multiple family members. Finally, a cultural community referred to a non-American culture, either existing within the United States, or in a foreign country, and was coded 8 times over 4 interviews.

Contextual factors. Contextual factors referred to aspects about the environment or disclosee that the participant describes in the context of making disclosure behaviors. These themes could either be supportive or unsupportive of the participant's eventual disclosure. I categorized environmental factors into the following categories: 1) *context exposure*, 2) *values/opinions*, and 3) *quality of relationship*. The former two themes typically referred to the larger environmental context, and the latter two referred to the individual disclosee attributes. I coded these themes either if a disclosure behavior was made in the vignette, or if it described the atmosphere for other vignettes (e.g. in the participant's everyday life).

Exposure. Context exposure referred to the participant's perceived visibility of gay people in the vignette context. This code typically referred to an environmental context but could have also referred to the interactions that a disclosee may have had with the gay or LGBT community. I coded context exposure for 21 times over the course of 8 interviews. Context exposure was discussed both as a facilitator of disclosure behavior when it was present, and as a preventative factor when it was absent in a context.

Nathan came out within the first two weeks of arriving at college, before which he was completely in the closet. Although he had a liberal-leaning high school, there was "really no conversation about sexuality at all" and "maybe 2 openly gay people… out of 1200". Conversely, he found it "really easy to talk about [my sexuality] here [at this university]" (Nathan), and people did not talk about people in regard to their sexuality.

Callum, on the other hand, talked about concealing his sexual identity at the barber shop. Although he acknowledged his bias, he viewed the context as a "very masculine space" with "a lack of exposure to gay people". In that case, Callum was hesitant around "a bunch of them… straight white jocks" to reveal aspects about his sexual identity.

Values/opinions. I coded values/opinions when the participant made a statement about theme, when coded with a "who" code often referenced either personality traits or past experiences with a disclosee that may inform their opinion on gay people. Connor, for example, came out to his mother before his father because his father had previously expressed his opposition to gay marriage. "I was more nervous about him because I knew he had that opinion" (Connor). Connor still expressed that he wanted to tell his father in person, although his mother ultimately did it for him. Connor also talked about monitoring what he said around his grandfather, who had "very conservative, republican views". One trend was that extended family codes, particularly grandparents often accompanied values and opinions that opposed LGBT values.

When coded with an environment code, it may have referred to established ideals or policies that the particular context had about gay people. Contexts with values/opinions mostly included: religious community, political community, extended family, school, and foreign country. Contexts with high or accepting values of LGBT people were liberal political climates, and university settings. Contexts with low values of LGBT issues included conservative political climates, religious communities or institutions, and extended family, foreign countries. James talked about planning a trip to South East Asia in which he would only visit countries where "being gay is okay" (James). Lawrence also talked about the overarching religious context of his Russian Orthodox family. These values were "very conservative [and] traditional", and

unaccepting of gay people. A former boyfriend of his came from a conservative, culturally Chinese family who would "accept it [the relationship]", but Lawrence and his partner "could not be open about it" when they were around the family.

Quality of relationship. When discussing their decisions to make various disclosure behaviors, some participants referenced their relationship to the disclosee party as a reason for making their decision. Some participants talked about close relationships, usually with friends and family, when making their decisions. Other participants discussed more peripheral relationships, often with coworkers or extended family, when talking about their decision to disclose or conceal their identity. Quality of relationship accompanied a variety of disclosure behaviors, both with type of disclosure (explicit disclosure, non-explicit disclosure, conceal), and with location of disclosure (in-person, not in-person).

When participants reported a close or valuable relationship with the disclosee, they were likely to explicitly disclose, and to do so in-person. James came out to his self-described best friend immediately after coming to the realization that he was gay. Similarly, he came out to his mother because they had a "very close-knit family… she [had] to accept me one way or another" (James).

When participants reported a more distal relationship, they were more likely to either conceal their identity, or disclose non-explicitly. Sam had concealed his identity from his brother because they "don't really have a relationship" (Sam).

I often coded non-explicit disclosures when a participant described a less important relationship. When talking about social media use, Connor would post about issues like National Coming Out Day after he had come out to his friends, believing that "if they're friends with me

on Facebook, now they know" (Connor). He specifically hoped that his aunt would see those posts, so that he would not have to have the explicit conversation with her.

A specific subset of quality of relationship is relevance of sexual identity. This pertained to whether the participant found his sexual identity important enough to disclose in the given context. While it was related to the confidence in sexuality, it more related to whether the context was one in which the participant felt was worth disclosing his sexual identity. For example, Sam's family does not speak about their "sexual affiliations" with one another, therefore, his own sexual identity was not important enough for him to bring up spontaneously. Importance of sexuality could also be a positive factor to coming out. David, in the above example mentioned that he came out to his parents when he had accepted the identity for himself. He then went on to say that "it felt wrong to talk about being with a girl in the future, and not have [my mother] know that [I am gay]" (David). In this scenario, his sexual identity was important enough to him, and to the context that he chose to disclose it. I coded importance of sexual identity 8 times across 3 interviews.

Social media use. I coded vignettes for social media use in every instance in which the participant discussed using any online platform with any disclosure behavior. I coded out and proud 9 times over 7 interviews. I coded out and discreet 5 times over 4 interviews. Online closeted was coded for 1 time. No participants talked about using social media to explicitly disclose to another individual, although Evan used AIM to talk with other gay men after he came out, and Lawrence made a Facebook status announcing to his network that "I'm gay" (Lawrence). Social media was often used to disseminate identifying information to more distant connections. Participants who posted about Pride Parades partners would do so without the

intention of telling anyone that they were gay, but with the awareness of "If they're friends with me on Facebook, now they know" (Connor).

Discussion

I designed this qualitative study to understand the factors important to this generation of gay men when coming out. Analyzing semi-structured interviews through thematic analysis allowed me to learn inductively the values, beliefs and behaviors about identity disclosure among nine young gay men. The results of this study suggest several contributing factors to a gay man's decision to come out in a particular context. I identified both internal processes and external influences that interact to inform the individual's disclosure decisions.

Finally, I identified additional factors including participant's beliefs about CO/BO, and level of outness. These factors are important to examine with regard to the ongoing disclosure decisions.

RQ1 & RQ2: What are the internal processes and external influences on sexual identity disclosure decisions in a young generation of gay men?

My first two research questions referred to the internal and external influences on a gay man's sexual identity disclosure decisions. Although in my original proposal I had them as separate questions, I decided to discuss them together. I made this decision because through analysis of my data and recent review of the literature, I found them to be factors that interact with one another and should not be regarded independently.

Although all participants had come out of the closet to some capacity at the time of the interview, all mentioned specific or hypothetical contexts in which they would conceal their identities. Regardless of their actual behaviors, the need to make conscious disclosure decisions in day to day life is consistent with the research that regards CO as an ongoing, rather than one-

time experience (Legate et al., 2017). Grafsky (2017) theorized 4-factors of sexual orientation disclosure to family: 1) sexual identity development and integration (SIDI) processes, 2) family dynamics, 3) messages, and 4) expectations. My internal process themes of importance of CO and BO, personal preparation, interaction expectations, and perceived implications, and external factors of context values, context exposure, and relationship quality help to expand and reframe Grafsky's work to apply it to other relationships and ongoing disclosure behavior.

Personal factors. Participants talked about personal preparation as a factor to disclose their sexual identity. Indeed, my theme for confidence with sexual identity very closely aligns with Grafsky (2017)'s sexual identity development and integration (SIDI) process. Within my personal preparation theme, I also included ability to deal with discrimination, and willingness to engage in emotional labor, which Grafsky organized under her expectations factor through guiding questions of "Can I- or do I want to – deal with the outcome?" and "How will my relationship with this person change if I disclose" (Grafsky, 2017). I found them to be better suited under the personal preparation category, as they reflected an internal process. Emotional labor can also be seen as a facet of minority stress (Meyer, 2003), and the effort that explicit disclosures costs may also be further researched to add to this model. I also created separate subcategories within participant codes for importance of CO and BO so that I could make the distinction between the two terms. Grafsky did not acknowledge these factors, although may have considered them under her SIDI factor.

I also created the Measure of Internalized Perception of Sexual Identity (MIPSI) to help to contextualize interview responses by understanding inner working models. I created this measure using aspects of internalized sexual stigma (ISS, Herek, 2003) and sexual minority microaggressions (Nadal et al., 2010). Participants who scored higher were more likely to value

BO and CO. This finding may support Pistella et al. (2016)'s finding that LGB individuals with high levels of ISS were less likely to come out to family members.

Implications of disclosure. The other internal factor at play when making a disclosure decision was the participant's belief about how disclosure might affect their lives going forward. This category aligned closely with Grafsky's expectation factor but expanded beliefs into different categories. Participants talked about personal wellbeing, relationship quality, normalization, and connection to a community as aspects of their lives that may be changed by disclosing their sexual identity.

When discussing personal wellbeing, positive mental health benefits tended to support the decision to disclose, whereas threats to safety and security discouraged disclosure. Research suggests that CO can have positive mental health implications. Concealing one's sexual identity contributes to minority stress (Meyer, 2003), and can lead to longer term mental health disparities (Rosario et al., 2001) Participants described the relief of this minority stress as a weight that had lifted, or a dark hole that they had come out of (Callum). Disclosure allowed these gay men to "live authentically" (James), allowing them to be out in certain environments, which is supported by LaSala (2010)'s findings that youth come out to express their identity around their families. While the literature supports the positive outcomes of CO for personal wellbeing, results of this study indicate that gay men may be aware of the positive effects before they disclose, thus factoring into actual decisions made.

This study also identified ways in which disclosure may have negative implications for personal wellbeing, which may or may not lead to the concealing of one's identity. Participants of this study suggested both physical (Frost, 2013) and financial (Grafsky, 2017) safety risks that disclosure may cause. Ghabrial (2017) found in her study of LGBTQ+ people of color that these

individuals may not come out to family for fear of being disowned, cut off, or physically harmed. Lawrence concealed his identity from his Russian Orthodox grandfather, who he believed may withdraw financial support upon discovering Lawrence's sexuality. Research has found that negative outcomes of disclosing a nonheterosexual identity, particularly to family, may indeed result in violence, verbal harassment, or threats to financial security (D'Amico & Julien, 2012).

Participants also discussed how disclosure might affect their relationships with the disclosees. In some contexts, participants believed that disclosure would strengthen relationships, which is supported by findings of Lasala (2010), and Savin-Williams (2001). Fear of rejection and damaged relationships (Potoczniak et al., 2009), while uncommon, also existed.

Participants often chose to disclose their sexual identity in order to promote social change. Some participants, such as Connor and James, used their sexual identity as a way to educate others on social issues pertaining to the LGBTQ community. Others, like David and Lawrence wanted to be a role model for other LGBTQ people who may be in the closet. While some existing research suggests that teachers may come out as gay to promote social change (Wells, 2017), the same has not been noted in general disclosure decisions of gay men. Notably, normalization was most often coded with ongoing, BO behaviors. Perhaps this connection has not been made because ongoing behaviors have not been framed as disclosure decisions yet in the literature.

Finally, a few participants also used disclosure to connect to the gay community. They felt that by being out, they were then available to pursue sexual, romantic, and platonic relationships with other LGBTQ+ individuals. The literature does not yet acknowledge the role of disclosure in connection to the gay community. This can have important implications in that disclosure may be an important tool to allowing participants to engage with a social network that

is supportive of their lifestyle. Research does, however, acknowledge that having LGBTQ+ peers may be supportive. For example, Martos et al. (2015) found that LGB adolescents disclosed their identity earlier to other LGB peers than to heterosexual peers and family members. Stage theories also acknowledge a developmental milestone of seeking other gay individuals, and participating in the gay community (Troiden, 1994; Cass, 1979).

Relationship factors. Participants also talked about relationship quality as a contributing factor to their disclosure decisions. Those who talked about close relationships with the disclosee more often disclosed their identity than those who talked about distant relationships. These results expanded Grafsky (2017)'s original family dynamics factor to pertain to all relationships in which a gay man may disclose or conceal his sexual identity. Grafsky's model within the family context is important given that sexual minorities often first disclose their identity to friends and close family (Martos et al., 2015), however participants of this study more frequently talked about the quality of the relationship than the nature of the relationship when discussing their decisions to disclose. For example, Sam discussed concealing his identity from his family, to whom he did not feel close, but not from close friends. The closeness of a relationship may also be a preventative factor if the individual believed that disclosure would negatively affect the relationship. Lawrence, for example, was his grandfather's favorite grandchild, but finding out that Lawrence was gay may cause his grandfather to "view him differently". The literature supports apprehension in disclosing a sexual identity due to fear of rejection and damaged relationships (Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003) within the context of the parents. This suggests that this fear may extend to relationships with extended family. Future research may seek to understand these specific relationships. Notably, this factor differed from relationship implications in that the former refers to a motivating factor, whereas the latter refers to a belief.

For example, Sam had not disclosed to his mother because he was not close with his family in that they talked about sexuality (motivating factor), although he said, "she probably wouldn't care" (belief).

Context factors. By analyzing the prevalence of LGBTQ people in the environment along with policies and behaviors that indicate attitudes about homosexuality, participants made decisions about whether or not to disclose their identity. This is most closely related to Graftsky (2017)'s messages factor. These messages could either be interpersonal, in which a person expressed bias or homophobia, or environmental which can be expressed by policies, or representation of LGBTQ individuals and ideals. Participants were more likely to come out in a context where they believed that the values and experiences would lead to a positive or supportive reaction.

Two contextual factors mentioned across the dataset were religiosity and political beliefs. In highly religious or politically conservative settings, participants more often concealed their identity, whereas in areligious or politically liberal settings, participants more often disclosed their identity. Research supports the notion that religiosity and political conservativism are both associated with negative reactions to CO (Pistella et al., 2016).

When originally considering both the internal and external factors contributing to a gay man's decision to disclose his identity, I tried to find a way to create a hierarchy of importance. Graftsky (2017), however, frames the phenomenon much better in describing factors as interacting, and contributing to a "disclosure barometer". This allows each experience to be individual, and accounts for varying priorities and experiences.

RQ3: What are different methods that young gay men use to disclose their sexual identity in their ongoing behaviors?

Coming out is an ongoing process, therefore, a gay person must make decisions to disclose or conceal their identity with every new person that they meet (Dziengel, 2015; Legate, 2017). While this was acknowledged by the literature, there is a scarcity of research on the different ways in which gay men can make their sexuality known. This study revealed several of those methods and made connections to why participants made their decisions.

In order to address this question, I differentiated between explicit, and non-explicit disclosures. Explicit disclosures referred to the intentional conversations that the participant had with others with the intention of having a conversation about their sexual identity. These decisions were often made in early disclosure situations, with existing relationships. Non-explicit disclosures refer to the daily, intentional decisions that gay men make that may indicate to another person that they are gay. These themes included: 1) *reference to an existing or desired sexual or romantic partner*, 2) *participation in the gay community or events*, 3) *third party disclosure*, and 4) *indirect, nonverbal cues*. Participants could have chosen to engage in non-explicit disclosure for a variety of reasons, such as unwillingness to engage in emotional labor, or an unimportant existing relationship, however, the most common connection that I found was the developmental differences between explicit and non-explicit disclosure. To analyze this, I first distinguished the difference between coming out (CO) and being out (BO), and connected disclosure behaviors to past or ongoing behaviors.

Being out vs coming out. Participants in this study had a clear distinction between their early disclosures and their current disclosures. Through my analysis, I identified a distinction between coming out (CO) and being out (BO). The distinction of BO and CO is supported by Dziengel (2015)'s Be/Coming Out Model of identity disclosure. This model posits that CO does not accurately capture the experiences of BO but fails to define either term. I defined CO as a

discrete, explicit disclosure, in which the individual makes a statement with the intent of having a conversation about their sexuality. I defined BO as living one's life authentically as a gay man in a given context, without concealing aspects of one's personality or behaviors, which may include non-explicit disclosures of their sexual identity. My internal and external influences on disclosure behavior, while structured differently, are supported by Dziengel's self-perception, society structures, and social relationships dimensions. This research, however, only addressed *whether* an individual might disclose or conceal an identity. My findings add a dimension of *how* an individual might disclose their identity, either explicitly or non-explicitly. Future research may seek to confirm both my definitions of CO/BO and explicit/non-explicit disclosure, and also to specifically understand their relationship across a larger sample. This may be done through more targeted interview questions, or perhaps quantitatively to broaden the scope.

By my results, I would propose adding several factors of resiliency to some of Dziengel's dimensions. My theme of *context exposure* may fit well within the *society structure* dimension. No current research addresses representation of LGBTQ+ figures as a supportive factor to disclosing one's sexual identity, although some theories posit that lesbian women and gay men seek out information and communities before the disclosure process (Troiden, 1994; Cass, 1979). My themes of *willingness to engage in emotional labor*, and *ability to deal with discrimination* would be included in the *self-perception* dimension. These themes both refer to an individual's preparation to confront potentially negative interactions, although are distinguished between overt bias and covert discomfort with situations. While the negative interactions themselves may cause minority stress (Meyer, 2003), different individuals have varying levels of ability and desire to respond to the negative feelings and outcomes presented by this bias.

Disclosure as a developmental process. CO may refer to disclosure to peers and family of origin (Cass, 1979), and the desire to disclose one's sexual identity (Troiden, 1994) in an explicit way. Notably, CO generally occurred in early disclosure vignettes. In James' experience, there was "a period where it was super important to tell everyone", and that he was "super excited to be living as [his] authentic self", but "now it's more of a passive sort of thing" (James). Perhaps during these early stages, an increase in internal motivation indicated high levels of resiliency in Dziengel's *self-perception* dimension, that contributes to the desire for explicit disclosure. As individual comes out to more people, and they are able to live more authentically, the drive make active changes in his life also lowers. At this point, for some gay men, they may become aware of that coming out can be "a lot to deal with" (Nathan) and is "emotionally draining" (Lawrence). The emotional labor of having to explain one's sexual identity is related to minority stress (Meyer, 2003). Gay men may then seek different methods of disclosure so that they could satisfy the needs described by the self-perception dimension (Dziengel, 2015) "without doing the work" (Lawrence). This could mean either non-explicit disclosures, in which the individual gives allusions to their sexual identity, or not-in-person disclosures, in which they either explicitly or non-explicitly disclose their identity over social media, or other remote means. For Lawrence, this meant posting a Facebook post in which he said, "I'm gay". Some participants noted a point during their CO experience when they stopped actively concealing their identity. After he came out to friends and family, Robbie noticed that he "wasn't holding [himself] back anymore" and "would do more… stereotypically gay mannerisms" (Robbie), thus not-explicitly indicating his identity in social contexts.

The early, explicit behaviors of CO may relate to Alderson (2003)'s *during coming out* stage. BO, however may help to define disclosure behaviors beyond a developmental milestone.

When talking about ongoing behaviors in their current live, participants more often referred to subtle, non-explicit ways that they would indicate their sexual identity to new people in their lives. While theories refer to later stages as times in which the gay individual engages with the LGBTQ community and synthesizes a gay identity into their existing identities (Cass, 1979), they fail to acknowledge the regular decisions to disclose in new contexts (Legate et al., 2017). The current study supports the need to more accurately define ongoing disclosure behaviors in existing theories.

Although stage theories may help to capture a universal experience, they are limited in that they constrain behaviors to discrete stages. Even if an individual can move back and forth between stages recursively, (Eliason et al., 2007; Mohr & Fassinger, 2000), disclosure is an ongoing process. Rather than assume that an individual goes "back" a stage when he decides to conceal his identity, researchers and practitioners should acknowledge the contextual influences on disclosure behavior. Perhaps a stage theory can acknowledge a point in which the individual starts negotiating which contexts in which to disclose or conceal his identity, but the ongoing behaviors may exist outside of the stage-like structure as a constant state of being.

This study also provides further evidence that while CO can be a vehicle to BO, one does not need to have explicit discussions in order to behave in an authentic and unrestrained manner. Some participants of this study expressed desire for a future where "nobody has to come out" (David), rather, explore and live their lives on their own time. One participant "never sat [his] family down and told them [he] was gay" (Sam), yet considered himself to be out of the closet. This has implications for future models of homosexual identity development. While some theories acknowledge that individuals "might" disclose their identity (Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1994), others refer to it as a definite milestone (Alderson, 2003). Future models can be further

refined to indicate a stage where an individual begins to disclose his identity, and further describe the multitude of ways that he can either explicitly or non-explicitly make his identity known within chosen contexts. In my study, I targeted young gay men of a young cohort. Due to the clear generational differences in CO experiences (Martos et al., 2015), future research may examine between-cohort differences of CO and BO behaviors.

Achievement of sexual identity development milestones may be a factor of the shift from CO to BO behaviors, in the types of relationships to which the individual discloses. In all but one case, CO regarded the participant disclosing their identity to an existing relationship. When Robbie had come out to the important relationships in his life, he told the "you can say whatever to anyone now" (Robbie). When Connor met new people, his sexuality "naturally comes out… I don't usually start by saying, 'I'm gay and you should know this about me'" (Connor). Disclosures may be more explicit when regarding existing relationships that have to shift their perception of the discloser. Research with families indicates that, after coming out, parents often must renegotiate values, ideals, and family expectations to match the seemingly new identity of their child (Trussel, 2017). New relationships may not have the same prior assumptions about the individual, nor the obligation to change their ideals.

RQ4: How do young gay men use social media to either disclose or conceal their sexual identity?

All participants fit either into "out and proud" or "out and discreet" categories proposed by Owen (2017). Of note, some participants suggested that they were not particularly active on social media, which did not fit neatly into any of the categories. Only one participant, Lawrence, used social media to explicitly come out, which is consistent with Owen (2017)'s definition of *out and proud.* Lawrence's motivation, however, was to disseminate information about his

sexuality explicitly without going through the emotional labor, doing the "practical work" (Dilley, 2010) online. Other participants who were out and proud posted articles and pictures that were important to them without concern for others seeing. Robbie, in regard to Facebook friends "liking" a photograph of him and a boyfriend mused that "maybe they know now and are okay with it" (Robbie). Others, while they do not actively post about their sexuality online, simply "don't use social media that often" (David). Perhaps an update to Owen (2017)'s model could include a *Facebook silent* category for those who do promote feelings of either reaffirmation or anxiety about social media, and do not actively post material regardless of its relation to the individual's sexual identity.

Limitations

Thematic analysis is a powerful tool to understand the experiences and needs of a population through its members. This study allowed for the voices of nine gay men to be heard but cannot capture the experience of the entire community. Due to the scope and time constraints of conducting a study for a master's thesis, my sample represents a small, self-selecting range of experiences from gay men living in the Boston area. Having a sample limited to one geographical location meant that experiences and attitudes may have been influenced by the greater social values of the city. Also, by nature of the study, participants were a self-selecting group of men who considered them to be out of the closet. Therefore, many of their disclosure processes were recalled retroactively, and anecdotes may have been affected by the participants' current values and attitudes. Although the results of this study cannot be generalized to the greater community, they provide new perspectives from which to view identity disclosure. Future research can build on the themes suggested above.

As one of the sole researchers, analysis and interpretation of the data were subject to my own bias. My own attitudes and experiences of identity disclosure may have affected the way that I conducted the research at all points, including design, data collection, and analysis. Particularly, by analyzing interviews that I myself conducted, I may have used memories of body language, vocal inflections, and nonverbal cues that a third party would not have access to when analyzing data. I addressed this bias through supervision with my faculty advisor, and by working with a second coder. Having multiple researchers helped to check my bias through conversations about the data. Future studies may reduce investigator bias by having separate teams for study design, data collection and analysis.

Conclusion

My study both supports and contributes to existing CO literature. These results give a base for further study of motivations to come out, such as normalization, disclosure as an ongoing process, the differences between explicit and non-explicit disclosure, and the reasons for choosing various strategies. These findings can have implications for those who work with young gay men and their families.

Mental health practitioners who utilize a minority stress approach with young gay men should be aware the interacting influences that both disclosure and concealment may have on the individual and understand that these influences vary in different contexts. These professionals must be prepared to help young gay men navigate their individual contexts to make the healthiest disclosure decision. They may also help a gay man who is struggling with coming out by presenting different non-explicit strategies of disclosure and helping them to pick which is right for them. Professionals working with families of young gay men can also help parents and siblings to understand the daily and contextual disclosure choices that their child has to make.

Families may unknowingly contribute to minority stress by pressuring their child to either conceal or disclose their identity. By normalizing the variety of influences into these decisions, professionals may be able to address and minimize stressful behaviors. Finally, conceptualizing different disclosure strategies can help to give practitioners a deeper understanding of the experiences and challenges of their clients.

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Table 1

Demographic Information

Participant	Age	Race	Ethnicity	Education	Occupation
James	25	White/Asian	Not H/L	4-year degree	Full Time Worker
Sam	23	White	Not H/L	4-year degree	Full Time Worker
Evan	27	White	Not H/L	Graduate School	Full Time Worker/Part Time Student
Connor	27	White	Not H/L	4 Year Degree	Full Time Worker
Robbie	22	White	Not H/L	4-year degree	Full Time Worker
Callum	23	Asian	Not H/L	4-year degree	Full Time Student
David	19	White	Not H/L	Some College	Full Time Student
Nathan	19	White	Not H/L	Some College	Full Time Student
Lawrence	18	White	Not H/L	Some College	Full Time Student

Table 2

Measure of Internalized Perception of Sexual Identity

Participant	Gender Role	Gay Community	Own sexuality	Others' sexuality	Gay behaviors	Disclosing Identity	External Support	*M*
James	3.00	3.50	3.80	3.00	4.00	4.00	3.20	3.50
Sam	3.00	3.00	2.60	2.33	3.00	2.00	2.60	2.65
Evan	3.43	3.83	4.00	3.33	4.00	4.00	3.60	3.74
Connor	3.14	4.00	3.80	3.33	4.00	4.00	3.20	3.64
Robbie	2.29	3.83	3.60	3.00	3.75	3.86	3.60	3.42
Callum	2.43	2.33	2.80	3.00	3.25	3.71	2.60	2.88
David	2.86	3.17	2.80	2.33	2.50	2.00	3.20	2.69
Nathan	2.43	3.17	3.20	3.33	3.63	3.43	3.60	3.25
Lawrence	2.00	4.00	3.60	2.67	3.88	3.57	3.60	3.33
M	2.73	3.43	3.36	2.93	3.56	3.40	3.24	3.23

Table 3

Self-Described vs Overall Outness

Participant	Self-Described Outness	Overall Outness	Relationships who do not know sexual identity
James	Completely Out	Completely Out	Foreign contexts
Sam	Partially Out	Partially Out	Mother, father, sibling, extended family
Evan	Completely Out	Completely Out	Foreign contexts
Connor	Completely Out	Completely Out	Foreign contexts
Robbie	Completely Out	Completely Out	Foreign contexts
Callum	Completely Out	Mostly Out	Extended family, work peers, work supervisors
David	Partially Out	Partially Out	Siblings, extended family, strangers
Nathan	Completely Out	Mostly Out	Extended family, old heterosexual friends
Lawrence	Mostly Out	Mostly Out	Extended family, old heterosexual friends

Appendices

Appendix 1: Recruitment flyer

Appendix 2: Qualtrics questionnaire survey flow

Appendix 3: Online consent form

Appendix 4: LGBTQ+ resource form

Appendix 5: Interview consent form

Appendix 6: Study withdrawal form

Appendix 7: Interview protocol

Appendix 8: Codebook

Appendix 1: Recruitment Flyer (see following page)

- Note: Due to formatting issues, pull tabs not included in appendix. Flyer had 20 pull tabs with text reading “Coming Out Study: EPComingOutStudy@gmail.com”

Are you a Gay Man Between the Ages of 18-29?

We want to learn more about the coming out experiences of young gay men. Participating involves two things:

1. Fill out a short survey (15 minutes) about your experiences of your sexuality and disclosing of sexual identity.
2. Participate in an in-person interview lasting about 45 minutes to an hour, about the same topics as the survey. You will receive $25 for doing the interview.

Interested? Contact EPComingOutStudy@gmail.com

Appendix 2: Qualtrics online survey (see following page)

Access Link:

https://tufts.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_ahQcCxdM9JkMbBj

Preview Link:

https://tufts.qualtrics.com/jfe/preview/SV_ahQcCxdM9JkMbBj?Q_SurveyVersionID=current&Q_CHL=preview

Coming Out Study: Online Questionnaire

Survey Flow

Block: Default Question Block (1 Question)
Standard: Demographics (3 Questions)
Standard: Rejection Block (1 Question)
Block: Informed Consent (2 Questions)
Standard: Other Demographic Information (4 Questions)
Standard: Perceptions of Sexuality (1 Question)
Standard: Block 7 (2 Questions)

Page Break

Start of Block: Default Question Block

Welcome Welcome to the Coming Out Study! The purpose of this study is to understand the coming out experiences of young gay men. We are interested in looking at the experiences of gay men in all stages of the process of coming out. On the next page, you will be asked a few screening questions, which will determine your eligibility for this study. If you are eligible, you will be shown an informed consent form. If, after you have read the form and consent to participate in the research, there are two phases. Phase one of the study will include a brief online questionnaire that should take no longer than 30 minutes. In this questionnaire, you will be asked to answer some questions about yourself, your sexual identity, disclosure of your sexual identity, and attitudes and behaviors related to your sexual identity. You will not be compensated for completing the online survey. Upon completion of phase one, you will be given the opportunity to participate in a 45-60 minute interview about your experiences coming out to various individuals and groups in your life. For completing the interview, you will be compensated $15.00 for your time. If you are interested, please continue below.

End of Block: Default Question Block

Start of Block: Demographics

Q6 Age (years)

▼ Under 18 (154) ... 30 or older (167)

Q7 Gender

Male (1)

Female (2)

Other (Please Describe) (3) _____

Q11 Sexual Orientation/Identity (choose one)

Heterosexual (1)

Bisexual (2)

Homosexual (3)

Other (please describe) (4) _____

End of Block: Demographics

Start of Block: Rejection Block

Display This Question:

If Age (years) = Under 18

Or Age (years) = 30 or older

Or Gender != Male

Or Sexual Orientation/Identity (choose one) != Homosexual

Q30 Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. We are conducting interviews with young gay men about their experiences in coming out to friends and family members. Unfortunately, you do not meet the eligibility criteria to participate in this study.

Exit Survey (1)

Skip To: End of Survey If Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. We are conducting interviews with you... = Exit Survey

End of Block: Rejection Block

Start of Block: Informed Consent

Informed Consent **Tufts University: Eliot Pearson Department of Child Study and Human Development Consent to Participate in Research Study Principal Investigator**: Anthony DeBenedetto, BA **Contact Details:** PI: Anthony.debenedetto@tufts.edu (508)451-9003 Faculty Advisor: s.johnson@tufts.edu (617)627-4449 Room 164 105 College Ave, Medford, MA 02155 **Study**: Coming Out Study I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Anthony DeBenedetto from Tufts University. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about past experiences pertaining to my sexuality and coming out experience. This questionnaire is the first of two phases of the study, the second of which will be an in person interview that will last 45-60 minutes. I will be one of approximately 25 people participating in this questionnaire. 1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation in this questionnaire. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. 2. This questionnaire may be completed at my own pace. The questionnaire is expected to take no more than 30 minutes to complete. 3. Questionnaire items ask about personal experience, thus have the potential to elicit negative thoughts or emotions in some people. I may choose not to answer any question presented to me, but if I do so, the information that I provide may not be used in the research. 4. I understand that my name will be attached to the results of this questionnaire only for the purposes of scheduling and matching to interview data. Once both measures have been collected, data will be de-identified and no longer attached to my name. If I choose not to participate in the interview, my information will be immediately de-identified. 5. Only study staff will have access to my identified questionnaire data. This precaution will prevent my individual comments from having any negative repercussions. 6. I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Studies Involving Human Subjects: Behavioral Sciences Committee at the Tufts University. For research

problems or questions regarding subjects, please contact Lara Sloboda Ph.D. by e-mail: lara.sloboda@tufts.edu, or by phone: (617)627-3276. 7. Risk: The risk of participating in this phase of the study is deemed minimal. There may be emotional reactions to certain questions. The PI will provide me with a list of mental health resources that I may use should I be unable to deal with these elicited emotions. Resource page can be found at the bottom of this page, and a printable copy can be requested by e-mailing anthony.debenedetto@tufts.edu. There also may be social implications associated with participating in a study for gay men. For example, completing the questionnaire in a public place may allow someone to see me, and have a negative reaction to my participation in a study with this content. 8. Benefits: There are no direct benefits to this study. I may find it to be an interesting or engaging way to think about my own past experiences, but is not intended to be therapeutic or advisory. 9. Compensation: I will receive no compensation for completing this questionnaire, but will be given an opportunity to participate in part 2 of the study, which will be an interview with a compensation of $15.00. 10. E-Mail: I give permission for the investigator to communicate with me via the e-mail that I provide. E-mails will be kept on a password-protected account accessible only to the research team. 11. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. 12. Any questions pertaining to the research may be referred to the principal investigator: Anthony DeBenedetto, BA Anthony.debenedetto@tufts.edu , or staff advisor Sara K. Johnson, Ph.D. s.johnson@tufts.edu 13. I have access to a printable version of this consent form by either a) printing this browser page, or b) requesting a copy be sent to my e-mail from the principal investigator at anthony.debenedetto@tufts.edu If you agree to the above terms, please check the box below as consent to proceed.

I have read and agree to the terms above (1)

Skip To: Q29 If Consent = I have read and agree to the terms above

Skip To: Q29 If Consent = I have read and agree to the terms above

Skip To: Q29 If Consent = I have read and agree to the terms above

Skip To: Q29 If Consent = I have read and agree to the terms above

Q29

Tufts University:
Eliot Pearson Department of Child Study and Human Development
Resource Form

Principal Investigator: Anthony DeBenedetto
Email: Anthony.debenedetto@tufts.edu
Phone: (508)451-9003

Faculty Advisor: Sara K. Johnson, PhD
Email: s.johnson@tufts.edu
Phone: (617)627-4449

Thank you for your participation in the Coming Out Study! The data gained from your questionnaires and interview will be incredibly valuable in understanding the stories of young

gay men during the coming out experience. While this study is categorized as LOW RISK, talking or thinking about these experiences may elicit strong emotions. In the event that you feel psychologically distressed by participation in this study, if you have any concerns for your mental wellbeing, or if you are simply interested in LGBTQ+ resources in the Boston area, please access any of resources below.

Tufts Mental Health Emergency Hotline (available for anyone): CALL IF YOU EVER FEEL LIKE YOU MAY CAUSE PHYSICAL HARM TO YOURSELF OR OTHERS. "Offers 24-hour crisis intervention counseling for **ANYONE** at risk of dangerous or life-threatening mental health emergencies". Phone: (617) 627-3030 Tufts University Counseling and Mental Health Services (available for Tufts students only): Free mental healthcare. Appointments can be made by phone or in person. Phone: (617) 627-3360 Address: 120 Curtis St. Somerville, MA 02144

Fenway Health (available for anyone): LGBT oriented physical and mental healthcare providers. Provides LGBT specific primary healthcare, outpatient mental health services, therapy and support groups, access to blogs and LGBT current events. Toll-Free Listening Gay and Lesbian Helpline: (888) 340-1528 Behavioral health inquiries and services: (617)927-6202 Website: http://fenwayhealth.org/care/behavioral-health/

End of Block: Informed Consent

Start of Block: Other Demographic Information

Q49 Race (Check all that apply)

- ☐ White (1)
- ☐ Black or African American (2)
- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native (3)
- ☐ Asian (4)
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (5)
- ☐ Other (6)

Q51 Ethnicity (Check only one)

- Hispanic/Latino (1)
- Not Hispanic/Latino (2)

Q53 Highest completed level of education

- Less than high school (1)
- High school graduate (2)
- Some college (3)
- 2 year degree (4)
- 4 year degree (5)
- Professional degree/Graduate School (6)
- Doctorate (7)

Q55 Occupation (check all that apply)

- ☐ Full time student (1)
- ☐ Full time worker (2)
- ☐ Part time student (3)
- ☐ Part time worker (4)
- ☐ Unemployed (5)
- ☐ Other (6)

End of Block: Other Demographic Information

Start of Block: Perceptions of Sexuality

Q29 You will now be presented with a serious of opposing statements of thoughts or behaviors of men who identify as gay or bisexual. For each item, first decide which of the statements is MORE like you, and then decide whether it is very much like you, or somewhat like you.

	Very much like me	Somewhat like me	Somewhat like me	Very much like me	

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	
I make an effort to uphold a masculine appearance (1)					I do not make an effort to uphold a masculine appearance
I do not avoid practices or behaviors that may be considered feminine (2)					I avoid behaviors and practices that may be considered feminine
I do not seek romantic partners with masculine qualities (3)					I seek romantic partners with masculine qualities
I am concerned for appearing too flamboyant (4)					I am not concerned with appearing too flamboyant
I like to maintain specific gender roles (5)					I do not like to maintain gender roles
I am embarrassed when OTHER men behave in a stereotypical, feminine, or flamboyant way (6)					I am not embarrassed when other gay men behave in a stereotypical, feminine, or flamboyant way
I try to minimize my own feminine qualities (7)					I do not try to minimize my own feminine qualities
I am comfortable going to known "gay" places (8)					I am uncomfortable going to know "gay" places

I identify as queer (9)	I do not identify as queer
I have lots of LGBTQ+ friends (10)	I have few or no LGBTQ+ friends
I consider myself a model for younger gay, bisexual or questioning men (11)	I do not consider myself a model for younger gay, bisexual or questioning men
I seek out LGBTQ+ communities (12)	I do not seek out or actively avoid LGBTQ+ communities
I enjoy participating in pride parades (13)	I do not enjoy participating in pride parades
I prefer to live in a place where I can openly express sexual identity (14)	I do not prefer to live in a place where I can openly express sexual identity
I am uncomfortable disclosing my sexuality to others (15)	I am comfortable disclosing my sexuality to others
I would be straight if I could (16)	I would not be straight if I could
I am happy to be gay (17)	I wish that I was not gay

I find it important to disclose my sexual identity in all of my important relationships (18)	I do not find it important to disclose sexual identity in all of my important relationships
I prefer not to withhold information about sexual identity from loved ones (19)	I prefer to withhold information about my sexual identity from certain loved ones
I am comfortable with public displays of affection with a same sex partner (e.g. kissing, hand-holding) (20)	I am uncomfortable with public displays of affection with a same sex partner
I worry about public opinion when choosing a romantic partner (21)	I do not worry about public opinion when choosing a romantic partner
I am uncomfortable publicly dating members of the same sex (22)	I am comfortable publicly dating members of the same sex
I am uncomfortable seeing other same-sex couples participating in public displays of affection (e.g. kissing, hand-holding) (23)	I am comfortable seeing other same-sex couples engaging in public displays of affection

I date members of the opposite gender (24)	I do not date members of the opposite gender
I date members of the same gender (25)	I do not date members of the same gender
I have sexual relationships with members of the same gender (26)	I do not have sexual relationships with members of the same gender
I have sexual relationships with members of a different gender (27)	I do not have sexual relationships with members of the opposite gender
I am "out" to my immediate family (28)	I am not "out" to immediate family
I am not "out" to most/all people (29)	I am "out" to most/all people
I am uncomfortable talking about my romantic partners in social settings (30)	I am comfortable talking about my romantic partners in social settings
I will only disclose my sexual identity if the anticipated reaction is positive (31)	I will disclose sexual identity regardless of anticipated reaction
I was bullied for my sexuality in school (32)	I was not bullied for my sexuality in school

I do not feel accepted in most/all settings for my sexuality (33)		I feel accepted in most/all settings for my sexuality
I feel accepted for my sexuality in work/school settings (34)		I do not feel accepted for sexuality in work/school settings
I feel unaccepted for sexuality in family settings (35)		I feel accepted for sexuality in family settings
I feel that other people in my community perceive my sexuality positively (36)		I feel that other people in their community perceive my sexuality negatively

End of Block: Perceptions of Sexuality

Start of Block: Block 7

Q30 Thank you for participating in phase one of the Coming Out Study. Again, there is no compensation for completing these questionnaires. The next phase will include a 45-60 minute interview with one of our researchers about your experiences of coming out. For participating in the interview, you will be compensated $25.00. If you are still interested in phase two, please provide the e-mail at which you would prefer being reached, and you will be contacted to schedule a time and location for your interview. Your e-mail address will only be used for scheduling purposes, and all correspondence will be destroyed following the interview.

Q31 E-mail Address

_____

End of Block: Block 7

Appendix 3: Online consent form (see following page)

Tufts University: Eliot Pearson Department of Child Study and Human Development
Consent to Participate in Research Study
Principal Investigator: Anthony DeBenedetto, BA

Contact Details:
PI: Anthony.debenedetto@tufts.edu
(508)451-9003
Faculty Advisor: s.johnson@tufts.edu
(617)627-4449

Room 164
105 College Ave,
Medford, MA
02155

Study: Coming Out Study
Welcome to the Coming Out Study! The purpose of this study is to understand the coming out experiences of young gay men. We are interested in looking at the experiences of gay men in all stages of the process of coming out. On the next page, you will be asked a few screening questions, which will determine your eligibility for this study. If you eligible, you will be shown an informed consent form. If, after reading the form, you consent to participate in the research, there are two phases. Phase one of the study will include a brief online questionnaire that should take no longer than 30 minutes. In this questionnaire, you will be asked to answer some questions about yourself, your sexual identity, disclosure of your sexual identity, and attitudes and behaviors related to your sexual identity. You will not be compensated for completing the online survey. Upon completion of phase one, you will be given the opportunity to participate in a 45-60 minute interview about your experiences coming out to various individuals and groups in your life. For completing the interview, you will be compensated $15.00 for your time. If you are interested, please continue below.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation in this questionnaire. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

2. This questionnaire may be completed at my own pace. The questionnaire is expected to take no more than 30 minutes to complete.

3. Questionnaire items ask about personal experience, thus have the potential to elicit negative thoughts or emotions in some people. I may choose not to answer any question presented to me, or I may choose to stop taking this questionnaire at any time. However, I understand that if I choose not to answer every question, I may not be able to participate in phase 2 of the study. If I choose not to answer every question, or I am not chosen to take part in the next phase of the research, any information I do provide will be deleted and not used for research.

4. I understand that my name will be attached to the results of this questionnaire only for the purposes of scheduling and matching to interview data. Once both measures have been collected,

data will be de-identified and no longer attached to my name. If I choose not to participate in the interview, my information will be immediately de-identified.

5. Only study staff will have access to my identified questionnaire data. This precaution will prevent my individual comments from having any negative repercussions.

6. I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Studies Involving Human Subjects: Behavioral Sciences Committee at the Tufts University. For research problems or questions regarding subjects, please contact Lara Sloboda Ph.D. by e-mail: lara.sloboda@tufts.edu, or by phone: (617)627-3276.

7. Risk: The risk of participating in this phase of the study is deemed minimal. There may be emotional reactions to certain questions. The PI will provide me with a list of mental health resources that I may use should I be unable to deal with these emotions. Resource form may be found at the bottom of this page, and I can request a printable copy by e-mailing Anthony.debenedetto@tufts.edu. There also may be social implications associated with participating in a study for gay men. For example, if I complete the questionnaire in a public place, someone may see the content on my computer or phone screen and have a negative reaction.

8. Benefits: There are no direct benefits to this study. I may find it to be an interesting or engaging way to think about my own past experiences, but is not intended to be therapeutic or advisory.

9. Compensation: I will receive no compensation for completing this questionnaire, but will be given an opportunity to participate in part 2 of the study, which will be an interview with a compensation of $15.00.

10. E-Mail: I give permission for the investigator to communicate with me via the e-mail that I provide. E-mails will be kept on a password-protected account accessible only to the research team.

11. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

12. Any questions pertaining to the research may be referred to the principal investigator: Anthony DeBenedetto, BA Anthony.debenedetto@tufts.edu , or staff advisor Sara K. Johnson, Ph.D. s.johnson@tufts.edu

13. I have access to a printable version of this consent form by either a) printing this browser page, or b) requesting a copy be sent to my e-mail from the PI.

If you agree to the above terms, please check the box below as consent to proceed.

Appendix 4: LGBTQ+ resource form (see following page)

Tufts University:
Eliot Pearson Department of Child Study and Human Development
Resource Form

Principal Investigator: Anthony DeBenedetto
Email: Anthony.debenedetto@tufts.edu
Phone: (508)451-9003

Faculty Advisor: Sara K. Johnson, PhD
Email: s.johnson@tufts.edu
Phone: (617)627-4449

Thank you for your participation in the Coming Out Study! The data gained from your questionnaires and interview will be incredibly valuable in understanding the stories of young gay men during the coming out experience. While this study is categorized as LOW RISK, talking or thinking about these experiences may elicit strong emotions. In the event that you feel psychologically distressed by participation in this study, if you have any concerns for your mental wellbeing, or if you are simply interested in LGBTQ+ resources in the Boston area, please access any of resources below.

- Tufts Mental Health Emergency Hotline (available for anyone): CALL IF YOU EVER FEEL LIKE YOU MAY CAUSE PHYSICAL HARM TO YOURSELF OR OTHERS. "Offers 24-hour crisis intervention counseling for **ANYONE** at risk of dangerous or life-threatening mental health emergencies".
  Phone: (617) 627-3030

- Tufts University Counseling and Mental Health Services (available for Tufts students only): Free mental healthcare. Appointments can be made by phone or in person.
  Phone: (617) 627-3360
  Address: 120 Curtis St. Somerville, MA 02144

- Fenway Health (available for anyone): LGBT oriented physical and mental healthcare providers. Provides LGBT specific primary healthcare, outpatient mental health services, therapy and support groups, access to blogs and LGBT current events.
  Toll-Free Listening Gay and Lesbian Helpline: (888) 340-1528
  Behavioral health inquiries and services: (617)927-6202
  Website: http://fenwayhealth.org/care/behavioral-health/

Appendix 5: Interview consent form (see following page)

Tufts University: Eliot Pearson Department of Child Study and Human Development
Consent to Participate in Research Study
Study: Coming Out Study

Contact Details:
Principal Investigator: Anthony DeBenedetto
Email: Anthony.debenedetto@tufts.edu
Phone: (508)451-9003
Faculty Advisor: Sara K. Johnson, PhD
Email: s.johnson@tufts.edu
Phone: (617)627-4449

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Anthony DeBenedetto from Tufts University, under the supervision of faculty advisor Sara K. Johnson, Ph.D. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about past experiences pertaining to my sexuality and coming out experience. I will be one of approximately 25 people being interviewed for this research.

1. Participation involves being interviewed by graduate students in the Eliot Pearson School of Child Study and Human Development. Notes will be written during the interview. An audio tape of the interview will be made. If I don't want to be taped, I will not be able to participate in the study. All audio recordings will be moved to a password-protected computer and deleted from the recorder after the interview. Audio recordings will be transcribed using a de-identified number and deleted after transcription.

2. My participation in this project is voluntary. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

3. This interview is expected to take 45-60 minutes but may be more or less depending on the content given.

4. Interview questions ask about personal experience, thus have the potential to elicit negative thoughts or emotions in some people. If I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview. I will also be given a list of resources for mental, emotional and physical health that I may use at my discretion if I find it necessary following this study.

5. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be labeled with de-identified numbers for organizational purposes.

6. Only study staff will have access to my identified questionnaire data. This precaution will prevent my individual comments from having any negative repercussions.

7. I understand that personal information that I provide may be included in the final write-up of this study, including interview quotes, and questionnaire answers. No identifying features will be included, and pseudonyms will be used in place of actual names. It is possible, but unlikely that someone may connect my data to me.

8. I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Studies Involving Human Subjects: Behavioral Sciences Committee at the Tufts University. For research problems or questions regarding subjects, please contact Lara Sloboda Ph.D. by e-mail: lara.sloboda@tufts.edu, or by phone: (617)627-3276.

9. Any questions pertaining to the research may be referred to the principal investigator: Anthony DeBenedetto, BA Anthony.debenedetto@tufts.edu, or staff advisor, Sara K. Johnson, Ph.D. s.johnson@tufts.edu .

10. Risk: The risk of participating in this phase of the study is deemed minimal. There may be emotional reactions to certain questions. I have received a list of mental health resources alongside this consent form should I be unable to deal with these elicited emotions. There also may be social implications associated with participating in a study for gay men. For example, interviews may be conducted in a semi-public space where someone may overhear the content of the interview and have a negative reaction. I know that if I would be more comfortable completing the interview at a different location, I may ask the PI at any time to move.

11. Benefits: There are no direct benefits to this study. I may find it to be an interesting or engaging way to think about my own past experiences, but is not intended to therapeutic or advisory.

12. I will be compensated $15.00 for participating in this study. If I choose to withdraw at any time, my compensation will not be affected.

13. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

14. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

_____

_____

Participant Signature Date

_____

Printed Name of Participant

_____

_____

Researcher Signature Date

_____

Printed Name of Researcher

Appendix 6: Study withdrawal form (see following page)

Tufts University:
Eliot Pearson Department of Child Study and Human Development
Withdraw Form for Coming Out Study

Contact Details:

Principal Investigator: Anthony DeBenedetto
Email: Anthony.debenedetto@tufts.edu
Phone: (508)451-9003
Faculty Advisor: Sara K. Johnson, PhD
Email: s.johnson@tufts.edu
Phone: (617)627-4449

I _____ have decided to withdraw from this study.

Please check one of the following:

- o I give consent for all of the data that has been collected up to this point to be used in data analysis.
- o I give consent for questionnaire data, but not interview data to be used in data analysis
- o I give consent for interview data, but not questionnaire data to be used in data analysis
- o I do not consent to any of my information to be used in data analysis.

I understand that any data that I do not consent to be used for analysis will be destroyed immediately following the signing of this document.

Please indicate below the reason for withdrawal from this study:

_____

_____

_____ _____

Participant Signature Date

_____

Printed Name of Participant

_____ _____

Researcher Signature Date

_____

Printed Name of Researcher

Anthony DeBenedetto, M.A. candidate
Tufts University, Eliot Pearson School of Child Study and Human Development
Anthony.debenedetto@tufts.edu, (508)451-9003

Appendix 7: Interview Protocol

NB: Interview protocol is intended to provide guiding questions. Participants will be allowed to talk in depth about topics of importance to them. The order of topics addressed may vary depend on information that the participant spontaneously generates. For example, if the participant mentions social media use while talking about their first disclosure, the interviewer should ask questions under the social media headline at that time.

I. **Introductory Question**: rapport building
   a. What interested you in participating in this study?

II. **Questions about sexuality**: continued rapport building
   a. What does being gay mean to you?

III. **Questions about importance of being out**
   a. Do you consider yourself to be out of the closet?
   b. What makes you say that?
   c. How important is coming out to you?
   d. What are your thoughts about whether all gay men should come out?

IV. **Questions about first disclosure**
   a. To whom did you do it?
   b. How did you do it?
   c. What was the reaction?
   d. What is your relationship now?
   e. How did you feel when you came out?
   f. How did you feel directly after you came out?
   g. How do you feel about it now?

V. **Questions about coming out within personal relationships**- I am going to ask you about 2-3 important people to whom you have or have not come out, and had a conversation about your sexuality.
   a. Questions about immediate family: Consider your immediate family as the people with whom you shared a household growing up. Does your entire family know that you are gay?
      i. If answer is no, there are people in my immediate family that do not know that I am gay, otherwise, skip to part ii
         1. Can you talk about your relationship with the person that does not know that you are gay?
         2. Follow up questions:
            a. Why haven't you done it?
            b. What do you expect the reaction to be?
            c. What is your relationship like?
            d. How would you expect coming out to affect your relationship?
            e. Is it important to you that you eventually come out to this person? Why/why not?

      ii.

1. Was there any member of your family to whom it was most important for you to come out?
2. How did you do it?
3. What was the reaction
4. What was your relationship like when you had the conversation with them?
5. What is your relationship like now?
6. How did you feel directly after you came out?
7. How do you feel about it now?

b. Questions about non-family member

i. Please think of an important non-family person to whom you have come out. Can you talk about that experience?
   1. *If the person cannot think of a relationship, prompt about close friends, role models, mentors, teachers, etc. Otherwise, skip to section c.*

ii. Follow up questions
   1. What was your relationship with this person when you came out to them?
   2. How did you come out to this person?
   3. What was their reaction like?

c. Questions about ongoing coming out behavior

i. When you meet a new person, how important is it to you that they know you are gay?
ii. Are there any contexts in which it is more or less important for you to disclose or conceal your sexuality? For example: workplace, school, team, or religious community?
iii. Can you tell me about the last time that you made a decision to come out or conceal your sexual identity to another person?
iv. Why did you make the decision that you did?
v. What is your relationship with the person now?
vi. *If response is that they intentionally revealed identity:* Did you have an explicit conversation about your sexuality with this person?

d. **Questions about intentional nondisclosure** *If participant has discussed nondisclosure earlier in the interview, ask about a different relationship*

i. Is there any person or context, for example: workplace, team, school, in which you have intentionally concealed your sexual identity?
ii. Why have you chosen to conceal your sexual identity in this context?

VI. **Questions about social media use in CO experience**. *If social media is mentioned spontaneously by the participant in other sections, use these as guiding questions.*

a. Have you ever used any form of social media to come out to someone?
b. *If answer is yes:*

i. Think of one instance in which you used social media to come out to someone
   1. What was your relationship with that person at the time
   2. What is your relationship now?

3. Why did you choose to use social media to come out to this person instead of face-to-face?

ii. Do you consider yourself to be completely out on social media?
1. Have you ever posted to explicitly come out?
2. Do you post about things that may be linked to your sexuality?
3. What kinds of things do you post?
4. Do you make an effort not to post about things that can be linked to your sexuality?
5. Why?

VII. **Questions about religion's role in CO experience**. *If religion is mentioned spontaneously by the participant in other sections, use these as guiding questions.*
a. Do you have a religious affiliation? *If no, skip to part VIII*
b. Is your religion an important aspect of your identity?
c. Did your religion affect your decision to come out?
d. How?
e. Are you out within your religious community?
f. What is your current relationship with your religious community?

VIII. **Wrap up question**:
a. Is there anything else pertaining to these topics that we haven't covered that you would like to talk about?

Appendix 8: Codebook

Vignette Codes- codes pertaining to a specific or hypothetical event where participant considers coming out or talks about coming out. Vignettes were coded if they were either a specific disclosure incident, or a discussion about internal processes that referenced disclosure behaviors or attitudes. Chunks began with the question, and ended either when a new (not follow-up) question was asked, or the interviewee spontaneously changed subject (and did not return to topic)

Type of vignette
Actual event
Ongoing behavior
Anticipated or hypothetical event
Discussion of internal processes or values

Participant Codes: What is the participant saying about himself, his values, his beliefs?

Levels of being out: To what extent do people in the participant's life know that he is gay? – Code only based on first question. It is looking at the participant's personal views of self-disclosure identity before being primed.
Completely out: Everyone in the participant's life knows that he is gay. He actively makes sure that people know and does not conceal his sexual identity in any context. If people don't know his sexual identity, it is not because he has actively concealed it.
Mostly out: Most people in the participant's life know he is gay. There are a few important people in his life who do not know, and he makes a conscious effort to conceal his identity from these people.
Partially out: Some, but not all people in the participant's life know he is gay. There are several people who do not know, and he makes a conscious effort to conceal his identity from these people.
In the closet: Nobody or very few people know that the participant is gay. He intentionally conceals his identity from important people in his life.

Internal Processes that contribute to disclosure behaviors (specific to participant)
Beliefs about outness in specific context. Can be coded 1. When specifically asked about importance of coming out, or 2. They discuss it as a reason for specific behaviors.
Importance of being out (regarding ongoing behaviors): how important is it for the participant that other people know his sexual identity? → Can be referencing *personal life*, or *other generalized gay person* when talking about importance of being out
High: person wants to/should be out in all contexts. Participant feels prepared to deal with adverse or uncomfortable situations regarding sexual identity. Can be referencing personal life.
Medium: person should be out, but may have to conceal in certain contexts, may conceal aspects of identity to certain people. May be uncomfortable in certain situations/unprepared to be out among certain individuals. May be discreet for the comfort of others.

Low: people don't need to be out; only people that need to know should know. This part of identity is unimportant/irrelevant. The person may not be fully committed to their identity. Maybe the person should be out to a few individuals, but the context in which they live requires them to conceal identity in most situations. Participant still reports that being out is important to some extent.
Unimportant: people should actively conceal identity in all contexts.
Importance of coming out (regarding discrete events): how important is it for the participant to come out in this specific situation? Usually not referencing the general other gay in this situation.
High: Coming out is necessary and important. Participant felt prepared to deal with adverse or uncomfortable conversations.
Medium: Acknowledges that coming out is necessary but is unhappy that coming out has to be the method for people knowing/finding out. May want to come out to people but is uncomfortable with having the conversation.
Low: Coming out is not/should not be necessary. Does not explicitly come out. This part of identity is unimportant/irrelevant (Note, is different from *negative* in that the participant does not actively conceal identity)
Negative: Participant does not value coming out and also actively conceals sexual identity

Interaction Expectations: How does the participant expect disclosure (either explicit or non-explicit) to be met in this particular context? (Code with disclosure event).
Positive
Neutral
Negative
Unsure

Participant preparation to disclose identity (developmental)
Comfort in sexual identity: Does the participant say that he is ready to come out? Is he confident in his sexual identity, or is he still questioning it? Understands
Willingness to engage in emotional labor: Dealing with other person's discomfort or negative reactions (code with interaction expectations).
Ability to confront overt discrimination

Perceived Implications (What effects does participant believe that disclosure will have? What does the participant hope to achieve by disclosing or concealing identity?) (Changes)
Valence of change
Positive
Neutral
Negative
No Change
What will be affected by the participant's coming or being out?
Relationship quality: Either strengthens or weakens relationship. Positive changes can include: ability to share aspects of life, closer. Negative changes include rejection, being viewed through a stereotype. General code if participant believes relationships will change, participant will be viewed differently, social status will change
Personal wellbeing: Positive codes include ability to live authentically, good for mental health. Negative codes include safety, discrimination, access to resources.

Desire for normalization: To educate others on LGBT issues. To normalize, or to be a model for other LGBT people. To expose others to gay lifestyle to make it so that gay people don't have to come out in the future.
Desire for connection with the gay or LGBTQ community: participant will have access to the community, dating and sexual opportunities

Context Codes- Can be in reference to discrete event, or overarching

Who? (Is involved, or mentioned in vignette)
Participant
Immediate family
Mother
Father
Sibling
Extended family
Friend(s)
Coworker
Healthcare professional
Generalized other gay person
Stranger

Environment (Where?)
School
Religious community/context
Cultural community/context
General, everyday life (public sphere)
Workplace
Family as a context (see "who" code in NVivo)
Community

Contextual Factors that contribute to disclosure behavior: Contributing external factors to disclosure behavior (Reasons): What beliefs did the participant have about the context or disclosee that lead him to make the decision that he did? Or, what about the context or disclosee does the participant believe will cause them to react in a certain way? (Code with disclosure behavior codes)

Context values of LGBT issues: participant views about ideas and policies about LGBT people issues, including political, religious, social atmosphere. Code with context values
Disclosee personal thoughts and values about LGBT people/issues (can be coded WITH context values if something like religion has affected their views on LGBT people/issues, but religion itself is the context value): Participant's assumptions about disclosee based on prior knowledge, e.g. things that disclosee has said in the past, disclosee's perceived ability to understand and cope with interaction, disclosee's religious or political identity.

Context exposure: Participant's views about physical representation and conversations of other LGBT people/issues that makes the participant feel included/represented or not (code with environment)
Quality of relationship: Relationship is either supportive or nonsupportive of coming out. Positive codes could include: strong relationship, assumed support. Negative codes could include low necessity of coming out because of a distant relationship. Other e.g. assumed that disclosee already knew
Relevance of sexual identity: How important or relevant is being gay to the participant? How important is it within the context? (beliefs of BO/CO contribute to decision, can include high or low).
Don't know (participant doesn't know)

Context values: or perceptions of LGBTQ+ community (valance) (Code with "environment", or "who") Can be coded regardless of whether it relates to a disclosure behavior, as it captures environmental or contextual attitudes.
Positive
Negative
Neutral
Don't know

Disclosure Behavior Codes

Presence of interaction
In-person
Not in-person
Social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn)
Messaging platform (texting, Facebook messenger)
Audio call (telephone)
Video call (Skype)

Disclosure action: What decisions did the participant make to reveal or conceal his sexual identity?
Explicit disclosure: participant had a clear conversation in which he said that he is gay or attracted to men. Typically involves a sit-down conversation in which participant tells disclosee that they are gay or attracted to men.
Non-explicit disclosure: participant intentionally revealed aspects of his life that would link him to his sexuality. Typically involves the disclosee slipping into conversation topics that link them to being gay or attracted to men.
Sexual/romantic partner (talked about, was intentionally seen with). Can be existing (boyfriend, hook up) or desired (e.g. "oh, he's cute")
Participation in the gay community (participated in pride parade, was part of organization)
Another person disclosed participant's sexual identity (either with permission, or was not explicitly unwanted by participant)

Indirect cues to gay identity: behaviors or identifiers that the participant associates with being gay. E.g. expressivity, wearing rainbow lanyard
Unintentional or forced disclosure: participant's sexual identity revealed or indicated to another person in a way that is unwanted by participant
Disclosee found out about sexual/romantic partner (overheard conversation, saw with partner)
Disclosee found out about participation in the gay community (overheard conversation, saw post on social media made, saw at event)
Another person explicitly or non-explicitly disclosed identity to another person
Indirect cues to gay identity: behaviors or identifiers that the participant associates with being gay e.g. found pornography, expressivity
"Stepping stone" disclosure ("I came out as bi", "I might be interested in men, I don't know"
Conceal: participant actively hides sexual identity
Explicitly lies when confronted (asked about sexuality, asked if he has a girlfriend/is interested in someone)
Change the subject
Actively avoid situations that might indicate sexual identity
Omission: Passive, has not told but has not had to take explicit steps to conceal. Would likely explicitly conceal if it came up. Usually coded with "low importance" for beliefs about importance of CO/BO.

Social Media Presence (Owens, 2017)
Online closeted: Passing as straight on social media. Participant actively manages online persona to appear straight.
Out and discreet: Participant is out in many settings but takes measures to ensure that some people do not know. May use social media to indirectly come out to people not told personally. May use privacy settings to control who can view various content. Has anxiety about social media "outing" him to friends or family who does not know.
Out and proud: Uses social media to celebrate and reaffirm sexual identity. Often posts material related to being gay. May have used social media to explicitly come out.