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I, M Hadassah Ward, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Communication.

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Transitional Perspectives on Family: Impact of Coming Out on the Personal Meaning of Family for Transgender Individuals

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Transitional Perspectives on Family: Impact of Coming Out on the Personal Meaning of Family for Transgender Individuals

A thesis submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Cincinnati in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

In this study, the researcher explores how coming out as transgender to family member(s) causes a re-negotiation of the meaning of family for the individual coming out by performing in-depth qualitative interviews. Three case studies were examined under the guidance of three main queer theorists viewpoints on queer family. Overall, the study identified five themes common in the three participants' narratives in response to the guiding research questions and gathered data. First, participants experience trepidation and anxiety about coming out. Second, after coming out to their mothers participants experienced a shift in their transition journey. Third, participants experienced a reinforcement of their pre-coming out family structure after coming out. Fourth, after coming out some participants experienced familial misgendering and relationship struggles. Last, participants came to experience family as blood with chosen family added and all explicitly defined family as choice after coming out. Ultimately, participants explicitly defined family as chosen family but implicitly defined, through enactment, majorly heteronormative and nuclear family structures with some family of choice around the edges. This family structure introduced an innate tension between the way participants came to describe family and the way they enact family. Participants differing implicit and explicit definitions of family contrasts with the clearly defined lines between family structures presented by queer theorists and supports research that indicates queer folk who are constructing families combine all forms of family depending on emotional and social needs.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

As of 2016 approximately 1.4 million Americans identify as transgender (Flores, Herman, Gates, & Brown, 2016). While more people are identifying as transgender, this community suffers discrimination in all areas of life, including employment, housing, and family relations (Grant et al., 2010). Another area of life where transgender individuals experience discrimination and rejection has been family. Even when transgender individuals do not experience rejection, family life can be complicated by the alterations that occur in the life of the trans individual and in the family following coming out (Norwood & Lannutti, 2015, p. 52). Due to the transitional nature of the coming out process for transgender individuals, family members must re-conceptualize their transgender family member's gender, pronouns, name, "and even the ways in which they relate to that person" (Norwood & Lannutti, 2015, p. 53).

There is a good deal of research delving into the medical transition, availability and benefits of social support, and romantic relationships of transgender populations. Meanwhile, there is very little research exploring the individual experience of re-negotiating life as transgender and how the disclosure of gender identity (or coming out) effects the personal definition of family. In order to start to address this gap, this project studies the experience of family reported by transgender individuals, before and after their coming out and transition. Those experiences contribute to how they define family and establish what it means to them. To engage those experiences, I use a phenomenological approach to qualitative interviews. To ground the overall project, this chapter defines key terms related to being transgender, describes challenges trans individuals face, and then overviews the thesis project.

Defining Transgender and Queer

There is no universal agreement regarding the terminology of the transgender community or the queer community as a whole. In her book, Transgender History, Susan Stryker emphasizes the broad sense of the word "transgender:"

> "Transgender is a word that has come into widespread use only in the past couple decades… I use it in this book to refer to people who move away from the gender they were assigned at birth, people who cross over (trans-) the boundaries constructed by their culture to define and contain that gender… In any case, it is the movement across a socially imposed boundary away from an unchosen starting place, rather than any particular destination or mode of transition, that best characterized the concept of transgender that I develop here" (Stryker, 2017, p. 1).

Stryker uses "gender assigned at birth" because gender is generally developed through social interaction, including how others refer to you. Later in this paper we will discuss the difference between the terms sex and gender. In accordance with the definitions of sex/gender in this paper, Stryker is using transgender to include anyone who moves away from the sex assigned to them at birth, regardless of how they choose to transition, as well as those who explicitly identify as transgender. With this in mind, I will use transgender as "an umbrella term for people whose gender identity [differs from] the sex they were assigned at birth" (GLAAD, 2017). Trans will be used as shorthand for transgender.

Another term which has broad and diverse meanings in many different contexts is "queer." The term queer will be used in this thesis as an umbrella term for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, pansexual, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQPIA) community. Queer is

used as an umbrella term with the understanding that this term was once used as a derogatory term and has now been reclaimed by the community it was once used to marginalize (GLAAD, 2016). Queer will also be used to refer to any non-normative (not heterosexual) sexual orientation.

Being Transgender and Transition

Transgender individuals are those whose gender identity and assigned-at-birth sex do not match (Unger, 2016). Gender and sex are often used interchangeably or combined, but there are key differences. Sex is "the classification of a person as male or female" usually assigned at birth "based on the appearance of their external anatomy" or genitals (GLAAD, 2017). Gender, on the other hand, "refers to an individual's social, cultural, and psychological characteristics that pertain to stereotypes, norms, traits, and the roles of men and women" (Budge et al, 2013, pp. 602-603). While introducing their 2013 study, Budge et al identifies two key concepts which help us understand gender:

> "*Gender identity* is an individual's sense of gender as it is privately experienced in one's behavior and self-awareness of being female, male, ambivalent, or at a defined point along a gender continuum; *gender role* is defined as the behaviors associated with a public expression of maleness, femaleness, or ambivalence" (Budge et al, 2013, p. 603).

Gender identity is an internal psychological element: It is invisible to the outside world and may not fit the social binary. Gender identities may be male, female, transmale, transfemale, gender non-binary, gender fluid, or gender queer (GLAAD, 2017). Gender role (or gender expression) encompasses the way an individual expresses their gender to the outside world. Much of the American public does not recognize the difference between sex and gender, viewing them as one

in the same. This societal norm of sex matching gender identity greatly impacts the ability for transgender individuals to come out to friends, family, and co-workers, as well as the ability to live day-to-day while outwardly displaying their gender expression in public.

All transgender individuals go through some type of transition. Transition can involve a number of things including telling one's family, friends, and others in the individual's life (coming out); "using different name and new pronouns; dressing differently; changing one's name and/or sex on documents;" and medical and/or surgical intervention (GLAAD, 2017). For some, this transition process is purely social (name, pronouns, dress, etc) and for others, it can include medical transition (hormones) and/or surgical transition (surgery) (Grant et al, 2010, p. 4).

Many doctors require transgender individuals to go through counseling and/or obtain a Gender Dysphoria diagnosis in order to access hormone treatment and/or surgery. In their 2010 study, Grant et al found that 75% of respondents had engaged in counseling in relation to their gender identity and another 14% wanted to receive counseling in relation to their gender identity someday. 89% of respondents that had medically transitioned had received counseling (Grant et al, 2010, p. 10). Some transgender individuals are diagnosed with gender dysphoria (GD). GD is a psychiatric term for when one's "physical or assigned gender and the gender with which he/she/they identify" do not match, or agree (Parekh, 2016). The diagnosis has been critiqued by trans advocates as "pathologizing naturally occurring gender variance," but "many doctors require this diagnosis before providing hormones or surgical treatment" (Grant et al, 2010, p. 10). Other trans advocates believe that without an official GD diagnosis many transgender people would be left without "health insurance that covers the medically necessary treatment recommended for transgender people" (GLAAD, 2017). It is important to emphasize that not all trans-

gender individuals have gender dysphoria and the diagnosis of gender dysphoria can be seen as a strategy to medicalize the identity of trans folks.

Access to medical transition interventions is also limited by the requirement of many medical professionals that a trans individual first live as their self-identified gender for 12-24 months. This is considered a "real life test" before engaging in the second step of hormone therapy (Unger, 2016, p. 878). During this step the transgender individual is required to "life full-time as their self-affirmed gender for a predetermined period of time" (usually 12 to 24 months) "before starting cross-sex hormones" (Unger, 2016, p. 878; Davey, Bouman, Arcelus, & Meyer, 2014). This is intended to aid in social transition from one gender to another. Many health care providers have done away with this step because it is often hard to socially transition from one gender to another when the individual does not "pass" as their "self-affirmed gender" due to their appearance (Unger, 2016, p. 878). After going through this stage (if required by their medical provider) transgender individuals may choose to go undergo hormone therapy in order to help their body affirm their identified gender (Unger, 2016). Hormone therapy is followed by one of two options, living life with continued hormone treatment or continuing hormone treatment in conjunction with one of many surgeries to physically alter the individual's sex (GLAAD, 2017). The decision to engage in any portion of gender reassignment is completely up to the individual (GLAAD, 2017).

Gender reassignment surgery, historically, has been a very socially controversial process. But research has supported that gender reassignment surgery results in positive well-being outcomes and helps alleviate symptoms of GD. In 2014, de Vries, McGuire, Wagenaar, Doreleijers, and Cohen-Kettenis published a longitudinal study which followed 55 transgender young adults

whose GD was treated through hormonal puberty suppression. These young adults were assessed for psychological functioning and objective and subjective well-being at 3 different points in their live: before the start of puberty suppression, when cross-sex hormones were incorporated into treatment, and a minimum of 1 year after gender reassignment surgery. These young adults were assessed on "GD, body image, global functioning, depression, anxiety, emotional and behavioral problems, social and educational/professional functioning, quality of life, satisfaction with life, and happiness" (de Vries et al, 2014, p. 696). Results from the study support that gender reassignment may be an effective treatment for GD. Researchers found that after gender reassignment, GD was alleviated in some manner, psychological functioning had improved, and well-being (both objective and subjective) were "similar to or better than same-age adults from the general population" (de Vries et al, 2014, pp. 696 & 702).

Challenges for Trans Populations

Being transgender nowadays is also marked by experiences of violence, trauma, discrimination, and mental/physical health risks. In a 2010 survey, it was found that 41% of transgender individuals have attempted suicide, compared to 1.6% of Americans overall (Grant et al, 2010, p. 14). It was also found that 2.64% of trans individuals are infected with HIV, four times the national average (Grant et al, 2010, p. 13). In the same study, 8% of respondents reported currently using drugs/alcohol to cope with mistreatment motivated on the basis of their trans identity and 18% said they had done so in the past but are not currently, compared to 7.3% of Americans overall (Grant et al, 2010, p. 14). Among study respondents it was also found that 30% of trans populations smoke, compared to 20.6% nationally (Grant et al, 2010, p. 14). These statistics in-

dicate a population that is at significantly-higher-than-average risk for a wide variety of negative mental health and physical health outcomes.

As of 2017, it is legal to discriminate on the basis of gender identity for employment and housing in 30 states, public accommodations in 31 states, education in 36 states, credit in 35 states, and jury selection in 43 states (Human Rights Campaign, 2017, p. 44). As of 2017, only 19 states include gender identity protections in their hate crimes law and 20 states do not allow transgender people to change their name and gender on their driver's license (Human Rights Campaign, 2017, p. 45).

Reasoning for Undertaking the Project

After spending 2 years in university residence life and a year as an LGBTQ Ambassador for my undergraduate institution, I feel the need to support the queer community through research. I was one of a few live-in queer staff and as a result, I was often the resident assistant who got early morning knocks about family rejection, sexual and contraceptive questions, and coming out anxieties from queer and trans residents. I held my LGBQ and trans residents as they wept about losing family members and lifelong friends after they came out. I had in-depth conversations with my trans residents about body parts, transitional choices, and sexual protection choices as they explored their sexuality as newly out transgender individuals. I watched my trans peers and residents stumble, fall, and pick themselves back up no matter what life threw at them. I came to admire the resilience and determination of this population. I also came to feel kinship with my trans peers and residents as part of the queer community.

As a result of these experiences, I fell in love with the small actions and conversations I had with these residents. I fell in love with the ability to support their personal journeys and became curious about how these experiences effected the way they perceived family. As a cisgender pansexual woman navigating life with a cisgender male partner, I do not have personal identity ties to the transgender community. I will not ever be able to say I fully understand or empathize with their experiences. I will, however, continue to sympathize with these experiences to the best of my ability and support the community by shedding as much light as I can onto these experiences. I hope that this project, and those that follow it, will give critical insight to the families of origin of trans individuals about the experience of being trans. I also hope this critical insight may lead to less loss of family of origin for trans individuals.

Overview of Chapters

Throughout the coming chapters I will review the guiding literature, methodology, study results, and implications of the study results. Chapter 2 will address why family and community are so important to transgender folks and three main queer theory perspectives on queer family in order to guide my exploration into participants' family experiences. Chapter 2 will also present the guiding research questions. Chapter 3 will review the methodology of my research study, interview procedure, and thematic analysis approach to the gathered data. Essentially, chapter 3 presents a methodology of semi-structured interviews with transgender participants exploring their open-ended detail-driven description of their family experiences before and after coming out.

Chapter 4 reviews five overarching themes found throughout the gathered data. First, all participants experienced trepidation and anxiety about coming out. Second, once all participants came out to their mothers they experienced a turning point in their coming out and/or transition experienced. Third, all participants experienced a reinforcement of their family structure after coming out. Fourth, after coming out some participants experienced both intentional and unintentional misgendering and family struggles which caused familial distance. Last, participants came to experience family as nuclear or heteronormative at its core with mostly queer family of choice around the edges. All participants came to explicitly define family as choice but enacted family as primarily heteronormative with some addition of family of choice.

Chapter 5 discusses the implications of the study results in the context of the proposed research questions and guiding literature. In the first and second sections, we discuss how participants experiences of family before coming out and after coming out support, complicate, and contradict existing literature. We then explore how participants heteronormative enactment of family with some family of choice complicates and introduces tension to the explicit definitions introduced by participants. Last, we explore how influences of religion contradictorily contribute to both negative and positive considerations in participants coming out and family experiences.

Chapter 2: Literature

In order to frame this project we will first discuss extant literature on trans experiences with family and community and then explore prominent queer perspectives on family. Following discussion of the guiding literature, I will present the overarching research questions which will guide this study.

Importance of Family and Community

In a world where trans folks face barriers everywhere they turn, it is important to understand where support can come from in order to live a successful, happy life. Much like others with marginalized identities, transgender individuals experience better physical health, mental health, and social outcomes when they experience increased social support. Psychology scholars have established the significant need all people have for social support "due to its impact on both emotional and physical health" (Budge et al, 2013, p. 607; Leary et al, 1995). In a 5-part study Leary, Tambor, Terdal, and Downs found that participant feelings of self-esteem were connected to "perceived social exclusion" or the amount of social support perceived by the participant (1995, p. 528). Additionally, gender can impact how an individual employs and searches for social support (Budge et al, 2013, p. 607; Wohlgemuth & Betz, 1991). This general need for social support is even more prevalent in marginalized communities such as communities of color, LGB communities, and trans communities.

Many trans individuals attempt to draw social support from the broader communities in which they might live. heinz (2015) examined the experience of community among trans individuals on Vancouver Island in Canada. heinz found that while most participants highly valued

being part of a strong trans community as "tolerant, supportive, and accepting," many still felt isolated or lonely (p. 45).

The experience of trans individuals in the Vancouver Island community is not unique to that location. heinz emphasizes that all trans individuals experience relationship estrangement:

> "Trans individuals, regardless of how much support they receive in identifying as trans or transitioning, lose the familiar guideposts of interpersonal relationships as all their relationships become estranged. Estrangement does not necessarily mean that a relationship comes to an end or is negatively affected; it can simply refer to the changed nature of the relationship resulting from one relational member's gender transition. While their family members, friends and coworkers also need to adjust the guidepost of their relationship with the trans person, the impact of this estrangement of familiar relationships is compounded for trans people since the nature of all their relationships changes, often in a fairly compressed time period" (heinz, 2015, p. 46).

This renegotiation of relationships and identity results in many trans folks seeking out the social support of those who can relate to or have similar experiences as themselves, usually other trans people. "It clearly emerged from the data that having a strong trans community was important to participants" for a variety of reasons (heinz, 2015, p. 37). Without this empathetic social support, trans individuals encounter the feeling of loneliness that heinz (2015) examines in this study.

Other studies also affirmed the emotional toll inflicted by lack of emotional support. Through the analysis of eighteen semi-structured interviews with transgender-identified individuals regarding "emotional and coping process throughout their gender transition," Budge et al. (2013) found that lack of social support was tied to emotional hardships and increased social

support was tied to "affirmative emotional experiences and more facilitative coping mechanisms" (pp. 601 & 637). Additionally, increased social support during transition resulted in increased social support and "sense of community post transition" (Budge et al, 2013, p. 637). Participants without or lacking social support reported feelings of "hopelessness, rejection, loss, fear, depression, and anxiety" as well as experiences of "suicidal ideation and attempting suicide" (Budge et al, 2013, p. 638). Pinto, Melendez, and Spector (2008) found similar results when examining the types of social support networks built by transgender individuals originating from the clinic they were receiving transitioning medical care from. This study also found that social support systems built among transgender individuals often encourage civic and political engagement, which in turn expands the social support system.

Additional literature which explores social support and transition confirm the findings of Budge et al and Pinto et al., especially in regards to support after reassignment surgery and hormone treatment. In another 2013 study, Budge, Adelson, and Howard found that increased social support resulted in less depressive mental health symptoms and confirmed existing research "in regards to social support—the more social support a [transgender] individual experiences, the less distress will be evident" (p. 546). A study by Davey, Bouman, Arcelus, and Meyer (2014), recruited 103 GD-diagnosed individuals who participated in a comparison study with matched controls. Participants were assessed via questionnaire packets regarding social support, psychopathology, quality of life, and life satisfaction. Trans participants in this study were found to have significantly lower levels of social support compared to typical levels of social support for cisgender individuals (Davey et al, 2014). This lack of social support is not uncommon in the

transgender community (Norwood & Lannutti, 2015; Haimson et al, 2015; Cipoletta, Votadoro, & Faccio, 2017; Marciano, 2014; Green, Bobrowicz, & Ang, 2015).

Social support during all stages of transition, and after, increases positive mental, physical, emotional, and social outcomes for transgender individuals. Social support also assists transgender individuals in (re)negotiating both their identity and their relationships as they transition (Norwood & Lannutti, 2015; Haimson et al, 2015). Much of the transgender community turns to the Internet (Farber, 2017; Miller, 2017; Cipolletta, Votadoro, & Faccio, 2017; Haimson, et al, 2015; Green, Bobrowicz, & Ang, 2015; Marciano, 2014), but family and community support is also used (Bishop, 2015; Norwood & Lannutti, 2015; heinz, 2015; Budge et al, 2013; Meier et al, 2013; Wilson et al, 2012; Pinto, Melendez, & Spector, 2008; Wren, 2002). No matter the context that the research takes place, it is clear that "research involving trans people consistently points to strong emotional and support needs" (heinz, 2015, p. 34).

Online Community Support

When trans folks turn to the Internet for social support they use sites such as YouTube, Facebook, and Tumblr, as well as sites specifically designed to provide support or a forum for discussion among trans individuals. The use of support websites and messaging boards provides a valuable alternative site for social support for transgender individuals that are not able to access social support in more "traditional" (face-to-face) ways. Marciano (2014) found that transgender users employ cyberspace as one of three operative spheres of interaction: preliminary, complementary, or alternative. Those using community message boards as a preliminary sphere of interaction are able to use the Internet to explore different experiences before enacting them in the real world, such as starting a relationship online and later moving it offline (Marciano, 2014, p.

830). Use as a complementary sphere of interaction involves cyberspace as another arena of social interaction, "just like school or work" (Marciano, 2014, p. 830). In this sphere there is little separation between the user's online and offline worlds and cyberspace serves as just another site of social support for complementary users. The third, and most separate, sphere of interaction is the alternative sphere. In the alternative sphere, users "constitute a parallel world that provides its inhabitants with different and sometimes contradictory experiences from those available in the offline world" (Marciano, 2014, p. 830). Here a user may adopt an identity that doesn't quite match the offline identity of the user, but allows the user to explore something which increases well-being. For example, a user may enter an online relationship while hiding their biological sex. Transfeminine users are able to exercise what it is like to be "'real biological women' in a way that cannot be achieved in the offline world, not even by sex reassignment surgery" (Marciano, 2014, p. 830). Understanding the ways in which trans individuals garner support via the internet, allows for the categorization of online community interactions by the basic purpose associated with each sphere of interaction.

Haimson et al conducted nine in-depth interviews with transgender participants who had recently or were currently reinventing "their personal style during gender transition" (2015, p. 3811). The researchers found that "online interactions were key to supporting exploration around shifting style identities" (Haimson et al, 2015, p. 3816). In this study, participants were found to rely on both close friendships and stranger relationships over the Internet for social support (Haimson et al, 2015). Interacting within the complimentary sphere (Marciano, 2014), participants employed close friendships to explore "private and potentially embarrassing questions" and to experiment with "new looks that may expose vulnerabilities" (Haimson et al, 2015, p.

3816). This complimentary sphere interaction allowed participants to confirm their choices against the expectations of their close social support networks. Within the preliminary sphere (Marciano, 2014), social support of strangers allowed participants the anonymity to address the same things they did with close friendships, but with little to none of the risk (Haimson et al, 2015). This study pointed out that trans individuals "engage in collaborative, social ways of… crafting selves during identity changes" and that both anonymous and strong tie social support is imperative to the transitional exploration of identity for trans folks (Haimson et al, 2015, p. 3817).

Although the Haimson et al (2015) study identified both the preliminary and complimentary spheres, Youtube generally represents a space for the preliminary sphere of interaction identified by Marciano (2014). The use of anonymity by Haimson et al participants to mitigate negative outcome risks of trying new personal style choices operated within this sphere. The preliminary sphere is where trans individuals can test the waters. A later study by Miller (2017) focused on content and topics of Youtube channels. Miller found that on 8 of the most popular transgender Youtubers channels 65% of the videos focused on themes such as hormones, surgery, or dating while transgender. Youtube-based online community support acts within the preliminary sphere by offering trans folks a site to explore different ways to express trans identity.

Cipolletta, Votadoro, and Faccio (2017) found that online message boards serve as an important site for social support. In this study, researchers examined online conversation groups through message boards and Facebook groups. Participation in these online communities was motivated by the users' need for help and that these communities consisted of "peers who have had similar experiences and professionals who [serve] as moderator" (Cipolletta, Votadoro, &

Faccio, 2017, p. 1542). This study examined a primarily complimentary sphere of interaction. For most message board participants, the message boards served as just another site of community support interaction which may or may not remain exclusively online and is integrated into main parts of their real world life.

With similar results, Farber (2017) completed a mixed-methods study that involved an examination of 38 "user-generated message threads about fitness from a Reddit message board for transgender men" and in-depth interviews with seven transgender men who subscribed to one of these threads (Farber, 2017, p. 257). For transgender people "who may lack access to culturally competent health care and are often excluded from health and scientific research," "the use of virtual message boards enables individuals to share information, motivation and resources which might be non-existent or inaccessible in mainstream settings" (Farber, 2017, p. 255). Farber found that transmen often feel uncomfortable entering a gym space "with cisgender men often controlling the gym space" (Farber, 2017, p. 262). Additional concerns about forced disclosure on gym applications by checking "'F' on the signup sheet if (the gym) want(s) to see ID," creates another barrier for transmen (Farber, 2017, p. 262). The online message boards Farber studied also served to "offer one another support in entering and using the gym" in spite of the barriers related to their trans identity (Farber, 2017, p. 262). Much like the Cipolletta, Votadoro, and Faccio (2017) study, the use of message boards in this study served as a compliment to participants' existing social spheres. These message boards acted as online communities for transgender men to encourage, motivate, and discipline one another to use fitness to transform their bodies into more "masculine" bodies (Farber, 2017).

Family Social Support

While community and online support is important, family often provides the first social support that any individual receives. Current research indicates that family and romantic partner support of a trans-identifying individual greatly impacts the risk behaviors, mental health, and negotiation of stigmatized identity of the trans-identifying individual (Norwood & Lannutti, 2015; Meier et al, 2013; Budge et al, 2013; Wilson et al, 2012; Wren, 2002). But often giving this social support is easier said than done. In the introduction to their 2015 study, Norwood and Lannutti point out some of the experiences of family members of transgender individuals:

> "Some family members are instantly supportive of their transgender relative or partner and adjust to the transition without much difficulty; however, others struggle with making sense of transgender identity, accepting their transgender loved one, or adjusting to the changes that often occur during the transition process (Grossman, D'Angelli, Howell, & Hubbard, 2005; Israel, 2006; Norwood, 2013a, 2013b). For partners and spouses of transgender persons, a primary struggle is the relational uncertainty and the adjustments they must make in expectations of relational intimacy, relationship routines, and public presentation of the transgender partner and the relationship (Alegria, 2010; Hines, 2006)." (Norwood & Lannutti, 2015, p. 53).

In this study, Norwood and Lannutti completed 37 telephone interviews with family members of transgender individuals. Participants identified many feelings surrounding the coming out of their transgender family member including: shock, uncertainty, sadness, concern for the transgender person, and relief (Norwood & Lannutti, 2015, p. 55). Some participants felt that if their transgender family member was LGB (lesbian, gay, or bisexual) it would have been easier to come to terms with for themselves and for the transgender individual. These concerns were

related to the more extended coming out process for transgender individuals (the process of transition) and the more difficult adjustment for family members concerning the trans person's identity (including name, pronouns, and physical changes, among others). In order to mitigate these stressors, family members often employ information seeking techniques to reduce the uncertainty they feel regarding the coming out and transition processes of their transgender family member. While these participants engaged in information seeking as a way of reducing uncertainty, some interpersonal scholars have argued that additional information can also increase uncertainty. Brashers (2001) points out that "people may be distressed by information, which may lead them to avoid situations in which they would encounter it" (p. 489). Norwood and Lannutti ultimately found that "transgender individuals and their families may need means of social support that are distinct from what currently exist for LGB people and their families" and that when family members forsee a change in their family member's identity they are more able to come to terms with the change and offer social support for that transgender family member. This differing need of social support for transgender individuals, compared to LGB individuals, constitutes another barrier for trans folks to navigate.

In a 2002 study where family members and some children from 11 families where one of the children in the family has "a well-established gender identity disorder" were interviewed in qualitative semi-structured interviews, it was found that there are many different outcomes of parental social support for "cross-gender" identifying children (Wren, 2002, p. 380). It is important to point out that this study was completed in the clinical psychology field and does not identify the children in this study as transgender. In this study some parents were very careful to manage their communication with their "cross-gendered" child in order to avoid hurting them.

Other parents "reported an unwillingness to take seriously their child's claims and [were] dismis(sive) of their concerns" and "tended to avoid open confrontation" (Wren, 2002, p. 391). It was found that when parents are supportive of their child and careful to manage communication for optimal outcomes, the child is encouraged to be independent and tends to better adjust to their transitioning identity (Wren, 2002). When parents are dismissive or refuse to communicate about gender-related needs of the child, the child is less likely to develop independent coping mechanisms to aid in their identity transition. Additionally, mothers in the study were more concerned with relationship maintenance and careful communication, whereas fathers were more concerned with continuing "normal" day to day actions including breadwinning and guiding the child to "represent conventional moral and behavioral expectations" in order to ensure the child's safety in the "adult world" (Wren, 2002, p. 394). A later study by Wilson et al, found that transgender female youths with perceived parental support participated in consistent condom usage and those without perceived parental support inconsistently or did not use condoms, putting them at a greater risk for HIV/AIDs infection (2012).

Additional studies regarding family support find that romantic partner support as a form of social support can be crucial in supporting transgender individuals throughout transition and identity (re)development. A 2015 study found that among participants, the partners of trans men "are able to sustain or increase their sexual attraction for trans men's bodies as they change, even in the face of bodily changes they might find unattractive in other contexts" (Bishop, 2015, p. 84). While not all romantic relationships for transgender folks persist throughout transition, for those that do this evolution of sexual attraction and support within the relationship allows for the partner to challenge ideas of masculinity and help establish the transitioning masculinity of their

partner. Meier et al (2013) found that among study participants, trans men had lower instances of symptoms of depression and anxiety when they perceived social support from a romantic partner. Overall, increased social support through family and/or a romantic partner results in better mental, physical, and emotional outcomes throughout the coming out and transition processes for transgender individuals.

Queer Perspectives on Family

Family is a foundational structure in the social development of a child. One's experience of family in childhood shapes norms and expectations around family and intimacy for all or most of one's life. The hegemonic family norm is the heteronormative nuclear family—a legally married cisgender man and cisgender woman with two children, within the mythical white picket fence. This taught expectation of what a family should be exclude the reality of most families, including queer families. Childhood family experiences almost never match the construction of family that queer folks experience later in life. The queer community as a whole and queer individuals have grappled with the emotional and social needs that family is traditionally supposed to fulfill. As queer communities and scholars have attempted to figure out how to satisfy "family" within queer lives, many different viewpoints on how queer family can and should manifest have developed.

Many LGBTQ individuals turn to the Internet and LGBTQ community support to relearn how to "do" family since their families of origin (childhood families who raised them) are unable to represent queer family (Cipolletta, Votadoro, & Faccio, 2017; Farber, 2017; Miller, 2017; Cavalcante, 2016; Haimson, et al, 2015; Green, Bobrowicz, & Ang, 2015; Marciano,

2014). Since the reviewed research supports that support, often in the form of family, positively impacts the risk behaviors, mental health, and negotiation of stigmatized identity of queer individuals, queer kinship structures are incredibly important (Norwood & Lannutti, 2015; Meier et al, 2013; Budge et al, 2013; Wilson et al, 2012; Wren, 2002). These kinship structures can be called many things such as family of choice, queer family, queer kinship, or nothing at all (Weston, 1991; Bernstein & Reimann, 2001; Halberstam, 2011). No matter what these kinship structures are called, one thing remains the same: family, or some semblance of family, is incredibly important and desired by queer folks.

This desire for queer family must be negotiated within a constantly diversifying world where queer folks are trying desperately to carve out their own place for kinship that does not match the heteronormative expectations of family. As the queer community has continued to fight for familial recognition, theorists such as Jack Halberstam (2011), Mary Bernstein & Renate Reimann (2001), and Kath Weston (1991) have all asserted their own theorizations about the reality of queer familial structures and what queer familial structures should be. In this section we will first look at the heteronormative family standard and then explore three overarching views of queer family: the homonormative family, the family of choice, and the radical position on family. Although these forms of familial structure are theorized about separately, the exploration and combination of these perspectives can be used in broader contexts to inform familial development and queer evolution in a world where queer folks are trying to both preserve their queerness and find a way to be equal (in all ways) to their hetero counterparts. In this thesis, these perspectives will serve as context to help the researcher better understand the (re)negotia-

tion of participant's personal experience of family pre and post coming out to their family of origin.

Heteronormative Family

The hegemonic heteronormative family structure is identified as "The Family" by Bernstein & Reimann (2001). "The Family" is the previously mentioned nuclear heteronormative family usually consisting of "a legally married (biologically male) husband and a (biologically female) wife, approximately two children, and the obligatory dog or cat" (Bernstein & Reimann, 2001, p. 2). Generally this archetypal construction of family expects the husband and wife to perform their societally gendered roles - the wife takes "care of the home, husband, and children" while the husband is expected to work providing monetary support for the family (Bernstein & Reimann, 2001, pp. 2-3). The husband may elect to assist the wife, but this is not his responsibility within "The Family" hierarchy (Bernstein & Reimann, 2001). This conception of family excludes families with single parents, transgender members, same-sex couples, non-procreative couples, any family that has been (re)negotiated after divorce, and is generally "not representative of the majority of American families" (Bernstein & Reimann, 2001, p. 3).

The nuclear family "holds a sacred place in the American psyche and is embedded in most major social and legal institutions" (Bernstein & Reimann, 2001, p. 2). As "The Family" becomes less and less realistic, it has also been put on a higher and higher societal pedestal because of its rarity and heteronormative idealization. Often upheld as the epitome of morality, queer and other non-nuclear families are marginalized by their labeling as immoral when compared to "The Family" which can effect everything from access to marriage, child rearing opportunities, and general societal resources and acceptance (Bernstein & Reimann, 2001). More

modern forms of heteronormative family include any family structure which consists of a heterosexual couple, relies on a hierarchical power structure, and can come in many forms. Bernstein and Reimann point out that:

> "Families come in all shapes and colors ranging from traditional families to couples without children, single parent families, stepfamilies, and families of choice whose members are not always related by marriage blood or law" (Bernstein & Reimann, 2001, p. 3)

Queer kinship can manifest as everything but the nuclear family, or "The Family," because components of the nuclear family are inherently heteronormative and cisnormative. Since these socially constructed norms are not applicable to queer kinship, many queer individuals are left with no sense of how to approach the construction of their family structures or how to seek and construct family based support.

Homonormative Family

Homonormative family manifests as closely to "The Family" as a queer kinship structure can. Also known as an assimilationist approach, this idea of family is very similar to the heteronormative traditional family with two married parents and children (Yep, Lovaas, & Elia, 2003). By wanting to enact the same tenets of kinship structure and marriage that hetero couples reflect, same-sex couples may be aiming to create a queer version of the "traditional" family (Lannutti, 2008).

This type of queer kinship structure is often reflected in arguments for and against same-sex marriage and same-sex adoption (Sullivan, 1989). Often "(neo)conservatives and members of the religious right deploy 'family values' through both policy and rhetoric in order to exclude

certain kinds of people from national belonging" (Chavez, 2010, pp. 139-140). These "certain kinds of people" are generally those that do not assimilate to the heteronormative status quo.

Although "family values" is often wielded as a weapon against queer communities through the labeling of non-normative sexual and gender expressions as deviant, Sullivan (1989) argues that homonormative families can only promote family values, rather than challenge them. Part of this argument rests on the fact that homonormative family structure allows for hetero-normative families to have a space for their gay members to simply follow the family structures they were taught in a way that is true to their sexual orientation or gender identity. Same-sex marriage, and effectively queer family, is simply an extension of traditional family values (Sullivan, 1989). Sullivan also argues that gay marriage could help mend the often large rift between gay individuals and their parents.

Sullivan goes on to emphasize that same-sex marriage, and consequently homonormative family structures, allow for the recognition of same-sex relationships in the exact same way as straight relationships with the same expectations of responsibilities and societal benefits. This familial structure would communicate that hetero and homo relationships are equal. In lieu of the many arguments which state that "queer parents will produce gay children or children with inappropriate gender roles;" Sullivan also states that this marriage-based structure could help nurture children by opening a new avenue for adoptive parents (Bernstein & Reimann, 2001, p. 9; Sullivan, 1989). Sullivan then asserts that same-sex marriage is not a threat to straight marriage because same-sex marriage is not an alternative to straight marriage for straight people. Same-sex marriage may even help bearded marriages (gay individuals hiding in a straight marriage) subside, helping families avoid a lot of pain.

Haas & Whitton (2015) point out that, for many same-sex couples, cohabitation may serve as a "symbol of relational commitment and permanence" because of the stigmatized nature of same-sex attraction, marriage, and access to marriage (p. 1242). Haas & Whitton's discussion of queer relational commitment highlights the fact that marriage is not always the end-all-be-all of homonormative family commitment. For many same-sex couples, moving in together symbolizes a permanent, life-long, level of commitment (Haas & Whitton, 2015). In fact, many of Haas & Whitton's participants emphasized that cohabitation represented commitment, family, and shared life. A participant stated:

> "Moving in together felt more like being married than after our commitment ceremony. Moving in together meant we acted as a married couple and I was not prepared for that, so it was a huge adjustment (mostly balancing out chores). We have built a life together as a family, and that would not be possible if we did not live together" (Haas &Whitton, 2015, p. 1251).

Although Sullivan (1989) pushes for same-sex marriage as a mechanism for homonormative family, for Haas & Whitton's study participants homonormative family was not contingent on marriage, it was contingent on commitment and choice (2015).

This homonormative form of queer family has not just been used as a theoretical argument for same-sex marriage, scholars have seen this type of queer family manifest in their work. Karma Chavez (2010) investigated *Family, Unvalued*, which was the "first comprehensive report on the rights of bi-national same-sex couples" (Chavez, 2010, p. 139). Chavez found that "*Family, Unvalued* uses a strategic homonormative discourse of middle class family values to…construct normal families with whom a legislator or decision maker may identify" with (Chavez,

2010, p. 140). Couples interviewed for *Family, Unvalued* painted themselves as wholesome, children-centered, and middle (occasionally upper) class people who were just normal Americans trying to keep their families together. Each participant narrative is familiar and relatively homonormative; the two partners fall in love, decide to spend their lives together, and (for most) build a family with children, which aligns with the "traditional notions of the American family" (Chavez, 2010, p. 141). A participant stated:

> "We just want to be able to have a normal life as a family, just get past this and do what normal people do, just have the freedom to be like everyone else, and not have the government so bigoted against our rights to not have that. We'd rather spend our energy helping the kids with their homework, seeing a movie, worrying about normal financial issues, not these overwhelming questions" (Chavez, 2010, p. 141).

This child-centric version of "traditional" family for queer individuals is only accessible to a small portion of the queer community. Money is a huge barrier for many LGBTQ folks wanting to pursue a homonormative family since "the needs and interests of poor queers who are or want to become parents are disregarded" by the systems that could support their existing children or help connect them with future children through adoption or fostering (Bernstein & Reimann, 2001, p. 9). Bernstein and Reimann emphasize that the cost of nontraditional procreation can be high, so the procreative component of queer family is not accessible to all queer folks. "Put simply, the more money one has, the more options one has" when pursuing queer parenthood (Bernstein & Reimann, 2001, p. 9).

Aligning with traditional American "family values" works for some queer families, but simply does not work for most queer kinship. Lisa Duggan (2011) argues that this type of fami-

ly, and traditional marriage, "is a very narrow and utterly inadequate solution for the problems that most queer people face" (Duggan, 2011, p. 1). For people that do not have a life-long committed partner, rely on a network of social support instead of one partner, are uninterested in or unable to procreate (or adopt), or are morally opposed to marriage, homonormative family just is not possible. This normalized idea of queer family is a choice for those that can enact it, but it cannot be the only form of queer family due to its exclusionary nature.

Family of Choice

Many LGBTQ families are families of choice. This type of family has been written about under many terms including queer family, gay family, chosen family, and family of choice (Weston, 1991; Bernstein & Reimann, 2001). Although different theorists define this type of family various ways, this kinship structure is simple: family is who you choose to identify as family and who you show up for, no matter what. Here, LGBTQ individuals find the freedom to rebuild a family structure in a queer, egalitarian, non-normative, non-traditional fashion.

Mary Bernstein and Renate Reimann examine multiple forms of family in the introduction to their co-edited book, Queer Families Queer Politics: Challenging Culture and the State (2001), but eventually settle on a form of chosen family. Bernstein and Reimann open their conversation about queer family by first exploring a few types of family. First, "The Family," mentioned in this paper's introduction, was discussed as the heteronormative ideal type where a legally married cisgender man and cisgender woman have two children and a pet (Bernstein and Reimann, 2001, p. 3). The wife is expected to take care of the home/husband/children and the husband is to be the breadwinner due to the hierarchy of "The Family". This idea of family is what (re)enforces the patriarchal and heterosexist nature of family structures that many queer

theorists cite as opposite to queer kinship goals. By asserting that this is "The Family," the epitome of family essence, any other kinship structure, queer or otherwise, is invalid.

Accommodating other (mostly non-queer) kinship structures, Bernstein and Reimann discuss the modern family. The modern family is seen as the type of family that is most common or actually realistic. Although the ideal type of modern family can be the "traditional" family (see "The Family"), this type of family ranges from "traditional families to couples without children, single-parent families, stepfamilies, and families of choice whose members are not always related by marriage, blood, or law" (Bernstein & Reimann, 2001, p. 3). Modern family structures are generally heteronormative and hierarchical, in a sense, but are not the typical nuclear family, or "The Family."

Terry Boggis points out that "approximately 25 percent of U.S. households are comprised of a mother, father, and kids" (Boggis, 2011, p. 2). The other 75 percent of households contain families that are "single-parent households, grandparents raising kids, other kinship care arrangements, adults living alone, BFFs, friends with benefits, multiple-generation households, extended families, all those families described above, and more that none of us can imagine" (Boggis, 2011, p. 2). The modern family incorporates non-nuclear heteronormative family structures but, unfortunately, does not leave much room for LGBTQ familial structures.

Bernstein and Reimann (2001) argue that modern families would not work for queer folks because they are inherently heteronormative and abide by rules established by heterosexist tradition. "'Queer' implies a self-conscious deconstruction of heteronormativity and a breaking down of arbitrary boundaries based on sex, gender, and sexual orientation" (Bernstein & Reimann, 2001, p. 3). The reclamation of the term "queer" by the LGBT community signified a

commitment to "seek to destabilize categories of (binary) identity" and "focus on politics of inclusion rather than exclusion" by "build[ing] coalitions among disparate groups… to break down barriers that demarcate identities such as transgender, lesbian, or bisexual" (Bernstein & Reimann, 2001, p. 3).

Although homonormative families may adhere to the modern family, no other queer kinship structures do. In fact, "LGB people often embrace white, middle-class, straight suburban American norms in the ongoing quest for acceptance" which ignores and farther marginalizes queers of color, of lower socioeconomic status, and those that cannot pass for binarily male or female and therefore cannot embrace those norms in order to familially assimilate (Bernstein & Reimann, 2001, p. 5). Susan Raffo proposes that family should not be so exclusionary, stating that:

> "We (should) use 'family' to refer to the people we show up for, no matter what, and who show up for us. And when we choose this family, we choose them for the hard as well as the easy. Living with the uncomfortable as well as the comfortable, showing up for people even when it isn't easy, is one of the gifts of having a family" (Raffo, 2012, pp. 1-2).

Raffo's explanation of family of choice is very similar to both Weston and Bernstein & Reimann. Bernstein & Reimann propose the concept of queer family to satisfy these needs that modern families do not include. This concept of queer family truly represents all previously discussed theorizations about family of choice. Queer family refers to anyone with "non-normative gender behaviors or sexual orientations" that "define each other as family and share a strong emotional and/or financial commitment to each other, whether or not they cohabit, are related by

blood, law, or adoption, have children, or are recognized by the law" (Bernstein & Reimann, 2001, p. 3).

Kath Weston (1991) also addresses this form of family in her book, *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship*, which is one of the first resources that discussed queer families and the way they can/are constructed. Weston first discusses the history of gay family, stating that, at the time, for many years queer identity was considered a rejection of family based upon two basic assumptions: 1) queer individuals do not have children or long term relationships and 2) queer individuals always become estranged from their family of origin after coming out (Weston, 1991). In this understanding of queerness, heterosexual was automatically paired to family while gay was automatically removed from the possibility of family by essentially tying family to the ability to reproduce. Historically queer folks were seen as deviant for the most normal things, like competing for a job. Weston cited an instance where LGBTQ people were chastised for "competing against 'people with families' for scarce employment" in the high-cost city of San Francisco (Weston, 1991, p. 24). This identification of deviance assumed queer people did not have families and/or did not need a job if they did not have a family. Weston emphasizes that this idea was not uniquely heterosexual, many gay people felt it too. "Some lesbians and gay men had embraced the popular equation of their sexual identities with the renunciation of access to kinship" (Weston, 1991, p. 25). These lesbians and gay men saw the renunciation of access to kinship as a basic tenet of their gayness.

Weston promoted a form of family defined as "organized through ideologies of love, choice, and creation, gay families [that] have been defined through a contrast with what many gay men and lesbians called 'straight,' 'biological,' or 'blood' family" (p. 27). This form of fami-

ly could be “friends, lovers, or children” (p. 27). Weston pointed out that by contrasting these normative and non-normative forms of family we are able to recognize two ends of a relational spectrum. Weston recognized that we cannot have one without the other and that family of choice gives meaning to family of origin and vice versa (Weston, 1991, p. 28).

The transition which often occurs from family of origin to chosen family can be filled with turmoil. Weston describes the experiences of those who feel a pull between their two families during the holidays or have trouble fully identifying chosen family as a true form of family because of their culturally understood notions that strictly tie family to blood. Weston made a point of discussing that some constraints, such as religion or “own sense of racial or ethnic identity,” made it hard for queer folks to use the language of "family of choice” (Weston, 1991, p. 36). For example, Paul Jaramillio “a Mexican-American man who did not consider his lover or friends to be kin” said “‘you’ve got one family, one biological family’” (Weston, 1991, p. 36).

Although there are some challenges for queer folks building families of choice, this idea of family is seen by many queer theorists as the most inclusive form of queer family (Weston, 1991; Bernstein & Reimann, 2001; Raffo, 2012). As we have divorced sexuality from reproduction and introduced “new opportunities for same-sex couples to procreate,” heterosexuality has been dissociated from reproduction (Bernstein & Reimann, 2001, p. 4). This means that queer family or chosen family can fully challenge “patriarchal assumptions” about traditional gender roles (Bernstein & Reimann, 2001, p. 5). The visible creation and existence of queer family, procreative or not, can help resist heteronormativity and engage in queer politics while still representing the essence of being familially queer.

Queer Rejection of Families

Jack Halberstam (2011) takes on the concept of queer families in "The Queer Art of Failure." Through the context of forgetful Dory from Finding Nemo, Halberstam argues that LGBTQ individuals must forget the heteronormatively constructed idea of family and avoid it for fear of erasing alternative (and often queer) modes of kinship.

Dory is a character from Finding Nemo who has severe short term memory loss and is constantly (re)constructing the relationships around her since she is also constantly forgetting who counts as friends, kinship, or enemies. Halberstam asserts that Dory's severe short term memory loss and its associated actions represent a "loopy stupidity associated with forgetfulness" (Halberstam, 2011, p. 54). Dory's forgetfulness is contrasted against "modes of active and passive forgetting (that are) often misread as stupidity" which Halberstam associates with male stupidity (Halberstam, 2011, p. 54). Halberstam emphasizes that male stupidity is seen as "part of the charm" while female stupidity is seen as natural and justifiable in the social order which privileges men (Halberstam, 2011, p. 55).

Halberstam employs "the benign forgetting of the dude variety" to exemplify the type of forgetfulness that can prove useful in queering one's existence (2011, p. 58). This benign forgetting is displayed in characters Jesse and Chester in Dude, Where's My Car? Halberstam describes this movie as a chronicle where,

> "Two idiot stoners who lose their car and then have to reconstruct the (forgotten) events of the night before in order to find the car, pay back money they owe, and win back the love of the twins they are dating while saving the universe from certain destruction and in the process kicking the ass of moronic jocks, pissing off Fabio, escaping from a fifty-foot hot space alien woman, and receiving as presents from the space aliens some necklaces

> that make their girlfriends develop huge 'hoo-hoos,' and receiving in return not sex but only some dumb berets with their names embroidered on them" (Halberstam, 2011, p. 60).

In the midst of ridiculous attempts at comedy that include butt jokes, titty teasers, and lots of pot, Halberstam finds a treasure trove of relationships between "forgetting, stupidity, masculinity, and temporality" (Halberstam, 2011, p. 60). These ideas coalesce as benign forgetting. Benign forgetting opens up a space for reinvention and new self narratives which can prove useful in queering one's existence. Forgetting disrupts the socially constructed system of acceptable/unacceptable and opens "the white hetero male body… to other forms of desire" (Halberstam, 2011, p. 66).

Forgetfulness can be useful in another way for queer people and women; to jam up the system and "start from a new place" (Halberstam, 2011, p. 70). Women are often the ones who carry the traditions and constructed norms. They are tasked with becoming the "transmitters of that logic for the next generation," so they are in a unique position to upend the seemingly stagnant generational system (Halberstam, 2011, p. 70). Queer people "seek to uncouple change from the supposedly organic and immutable forms of family and inheritance" and can use forgetting to find opportunities to "begin afresh, unfettered by memory" and tradition so that new egalitarian structures can come into conception (Halberstam, 2011, p. 70). By employing forgetfulness new opportunities are opened for non-normative familial structures and non-normative gender roles.

"It may be the case that we must forget family in our theorizations of gender, sexuality, community, and politics" because "the deployment of the concept of family, whether in hetero or homo contexts, almost always introduces normative understandings of time and

transmission" (Halberstam, 2011, p. 71). Halberstam essentially posits that family is inherently heteronormative and causes the erasure of other modes of kinship. Dory is discussed again, this time emphasizing that Dory disconnects from her (assumed) family of origin and relies on chosen relationships to friends and the community as her alternative, but constantly in flux, mode of kinship. In sum, Halberstam asserts that Dory's kinship runs parallel to queer kinship.

Halberstam's position on queer family is essentially a radical theoretical view on same-sex marriage and, consequently, queer family. Yep, Lovaas, & Elia (2003) explain that the radical position on same-sex marriage says that marriage is contrary to queerness for one of three reasons. First, marriage is inherently flawed because of its inability to be separated from its patriarchal and heterosexist history. Second, the negative effects of same-sex marriage such as the potential decrease in queer visibility, and the potential creation of a new hierarchy within queer communities which will "further marginalize those who have chosen alternative relationships" do not outweigh the positives of same-sex marriage (Yep et al, 2003, p.171). Last, the enactment of alternative social support networks (family of choice) is basic tenet of queer family which cannot be enacted within same-sex marriage or queer family. This view of family theorized about by Halberstam (2011) and highlighted by Yep, Lovaas, & Elia (2003) basically sees family as inherently heteronormative and family avoidance as a manner of protecting alternative (and often queer) modes of kinship.

This idea of radical queerness without familial labels is not the most realistic viewpoint on family, but it brings to the forefront important concerns about being queer and creating families. In fact, the point of this radical view is to challenge what is realistic and what can be real, so this view in conjunction with understandings of homonormative families and families of choice

allow for the development of effective queer familial structures which promote greater societal acceptance without sacrificing one's queerness.

Queer Formations of Family

Queer formations of family manifest in many structures that are too diverse to identify. Instead, theorizations about the implications of and needs of queer familial structures govern the scholarly discussions that can be had about the decision to develop, development of, and evolution of queer families. While some theorists say that homonormative families are the path to societal acceptance for queer families, others say homonormative families are not realistic for the majority of LGBTQ populations. Theorists that align with radical views on queer families and same-sex marriage have a completely opposite view; families are inherently not queer and cannot be queer, so instead queer networks of social support must be present without labels.

In a 2008 study, Pamela Lannutti found that same-sex partners who were married or engaged and had been together for over a year considered all three types of family structures when conversing about the decision to marry. As evidenced by this study, enacted queer family is not formed around a single theoretical viewpoint. Queer family is uniquely formed based on the needs of its members. For some queer folks this family is truly one life-long partner with children, but for most it is not. For most, queer family is ever changing and evolving. For most, queer family is a network of supporting LGBTQ people, accepting biological family members, children (adopted, fostered, biological, or otherwise), internet connections, and/or allies who refuse to back away from uncomfortable and challenging moments with their queer family members. Needs such as children, money, legal rights, personal morals, community implications, and much more are considered as queer familial structures evolve. Very rarely would someone be

able to adhere to a viewpoint such as Halberstam's, as family is not something many people will just throw out on principle. But the idea of forgetting and re-defining allows queer individuals to make room for newly constructed concepts of family. Although, not all queer people completely replace their family of origin with family of choice, the idea of family of choice allows for those gaps (created through forgetting) to become filled.

These multifaceted interpretations of queer family allow for the validation and support of the many familial structures queer folks build for themselves. These social support systems may be strictly non-procreative (no children) and completely of choice, such as groups of gays and lesbians that rely on each other instead of their family of origin who may have rejected them. They may be imitative of the nuclear hetero family with a queer couple and children. They could be somewhere in between these strictly choice and strictly homonormative options. These reimagined forms of kinship allow space for the queer community to forget, as Halberstam suggests, the norms and propaganda traditionally associated with family and marriage. In the wake of this norm purge, we are able to take the good from the traditional and blend it with the radical queerness present in views like Halberstam to create a whole new world of queer familial intertwinement. By considering these viewpoints in tandem while analyzing the narratives of my participants, we are able to better recognize the transitions and patterns present in the (re)negotiation of family for transgender individuals pre and post coming out.

Research Questions

As shown above, existing literature confirms the need for family support and structures in the lives of transgender individuals. But, little research has been done to understand the experi-

ence of family for transgender individuals before, during, and after the coming out process. In order to investigate this gap in the literature, the following research questions are proposed:

RQ1: How do participants articulate their experiences of family prior to coming out as transgender to one or more family members?

RQ2: How do participants articulate their experiences of family after coming out as transgender to one or more family members?

RQ3: How do participants define "family"?

Chapter 3: Method

I conducted semi-structured interviews to allow participants to articulate their own experience of family and how coming out as trans impacted family for them. Study participants were recruited in Spring of 2019. Participants were first recruited through the LGBTQ Center at the University of Cincinnati, LGBTQ Programs and Services Office at Northern Kentucky University, and my network connections. Through these primary connections, snowball sampling continued to find study participants. Eligible study participant criteria included being between the ages of 18 and 28, self-identifying as transgender, and that the participant had come out to at least one family member of origin (i.e., the family who raised them). Participants were invited to participate in an in-person interview.

Semi-structured interviews were employed to collect data from participants. Semi-structured interviews allowed me to delve into certain areas of response with follow-up questions to best gather rich data that addressed the research questions. "If the researcher wants to learn more about a story, theme, or idea mentioned by the participant, he or she may ask the participant to expand" (Allen, 2017, p. 84). Here, I had the freedom to both gain an overview of the individual participant experience while also guiding the conversation in order to "make comparisons across participants" (Allen, 2017, p. 84). A semi-structured interview guide was developed (Appendix B) which helped me start the interview and guide subsequent responses. After providing informed consent, participants were asked about their experience identifying as transgender, coming out, personal definition of family, and experiences of family before and after coming out.

Interviews were intended to last approximately one hour and ranged from approximately 41 minutes to approximately 78 minutes. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, edited to remove participant identifiers and identifying information, then analyzed.

Interview Procedure

Interviews took place in locations of the participants' choosing, in order for them to have a comfortable or familiar place within which to discuss family issues. At the beginning of each interview, participants were provided with a consent document (Appendix A). I walked participants through the consent document and then gave as much time as needed to for participants to read the consent document. Participants then were given an opportunity to ask any questions about the study and/or interview. After I received the signed informed consent document, a blank copy was given to the participant, and then I turned on the recorder and conducted the semi-structured interview.

Participants were first asked about their experience of gender identity realization and one of the first moments they realized they were transgender. Next, participants were asked about life prior to coming out as transgender. Specifically, participants were asked about their gender expression, conversations regarding gender, and experience/definition of family at that time in their life. Then participants were asked about differences in current family experience compared to family experience prior to coming out. Some participants were then asked about coming out experiences and the decision to come out, if this had not been covered by previous responses. Last, participants were asked about how they would now define family, their feelings regarding family,

who counts as family now and how participants feel about those who do/do not (anymore) qualify as family to them.

Analysis

Data collection yielded three interview sessions ranging from 41 minutes to 78 minutes. Participants were ages 20, 21, and 25. Two participants identified as transgender men and one participant identified as a transgender woman. In order to analyze this data, I employed an inductive thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) to effectively incorporate the individual experiences of each participant and the emergent themes prevalent across interviews. Each participant's responses represented a rich narrative that allowed me to take a deep dive into the individual experiences of the participants. These rich narratives gave context and complexity to the common emerging themes among participants.

Thematic analysis within communication has been carried out in many forms throughout the history of the field. Owen (1984) first theorized about repetition, recurrence, and forcefulness as criteria to help form emergent themes across data. These same criteria were reflected in the methodology of Watts and Orbe (2002), Apker, Propp and Ford (2005), and Orbe and Kinefuchi (2008) along with others. Thematic analysis has also been a label used for various forms of methodology that finds thematic results, but thematic analysis methodology may vary depending on the study needs and researcher's guiding literature. I chose to use Braun and Clarke's guidelines for constructing a thematic analysis due to the step-by-step articulation of the process which creates a standard methodology while being open ended. This made it easy to apply and form around the needs of my study.

Braun and Clarke (2006) call for a six step approach to thematic analysis. First, the researcher should transcribe and become familiar with the data through reading and re-reading. Second, the researcher should code across the data, making note of interesting features of the data and pulling together similar codes. Third, the researcher is to take these preliminary codes and categorize them into potential themes. Fourth, those themes are refined using principles of *internal homogeneity* (that the coded material associated with the theme coheres) and *external heterogeneity* (that the coded material and themes are distinct from each other). Fifth, the research should refine the specifics of the themes and generate "clear definitions and names for each theme" (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 87). Last, the researcher is to produce the analysis report which should incorporate a "selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts" and relate those extracts back to the research questions and literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87).

I first read each interview transcript, generating codes from a close reading of each participants narrative. Codes were iteratively constructed based on a close reading of the transcript followed by a preliminary consideration of the transcripts in light of the literature (Tracy, 2013). This process helped develop the first tier of codes that recognize manifestations of certain family structures, resistance from family, and forms of family social support (or lack thereof). Five categories of codes were initially generated: identity realization, emotions, actions, coming out, and family. Each category allowed me to focus on particular components of the participants' stories. The identity realization code categorizes instances where participants described moments when they realized or learned something about their trans identity. This includes moments where they question their gender assigned at birth, realizations that they were trans, and instances of gender

expression. The emotions code captures descriptions of the participant's or a family member's emotions which manifested in relation to the participants trans identity. The actions code focuses on any description of participant or family member actions which occurred outside of (before or after) the immediate coming out event. The coming out code allows for categorization of anything regarding the immediate coming out event. All participants set the coming out event as a pivotal event in their narrative that organized their life experiences into pre and post coming out times. Material about coming out was coded into its own category that was then co-coded with action or emotion codes, as appropriate. The family code categorizes who the participant considers family, how the participant describes their family dynamic, how they define family, and reasons for change/consistency in family as perceived by the participant. Each of these broad categories were broken into sub-categories with additional codes within them.

I then went through this large set of coded data and identified when participants responses were coded the same/similarly and formed themes from these similarities. Themes were identified based on an inductive consideration of coding overlap and overlap in the experiences of participants. Existing literature then helped refine explanations of inductively-generated themes and situate those themes in relation to larger scholarly discussions of family and queer family.- During the next step, I created a thematic table to connect my themes in a way which better fit the gathered data. This thematic table included each theme and its sub-themes. Finally, I selected examples of participant responses which best exemplified these themes in order to consciously frame the narratives as presented by the participants themselves. These data extracts were then incorporated in the thematic table.

Chapter 4: Results

Throughout this chapter we will discuss the themes presented in the data set. Due to the small number of participants, I will not count the number of instances each theme appeared. Instead, I will explore which of our three participants experienced each theme along with they way they described a connection to the theme in their interview in order to best preserve the way each participant articulated their own experience. We will start by introducing each participant by reviewing their basic demographics, biological family structure, their first transgender identity realization, and their coming out timeline.

Kathryn is a 21 year old white transgender woman with divorced parents and one biological sister. Prior to coming out as trans, Kathryn would escape into books, television, and video games that would allow her to identify or play as a female character. This allowed Kathryn to imagine life as female. As a result, Kathryn realized she was transgender while playing a video game:

> It was through a video game of all things. I just spent like four days straight playing this game where I'm like, 'Oh yeah, you're living at life as a normal girl and everything's great.' It's like, wow, that's the most amazing experience ever, why did that relate so much to me? Why did that make me feel so good? I was like, 'Oh, oh, that's why. Okay.'

After this realization, Kathryn came out to her best friend and sister in late 2016. Kathryn came out to her mom in mid 2017, her father in early 2018, and then came out and started living as trans full time in mid 2018. Kathryn had been out for a little less than a year when she completed her interview.

Allen is a 20 year old white transgender man with married parents, one biological sister, and one biological brother. Allen was close to his siblings because they were homeschooled and spent most of their free time together. Allen learned about transgender identities and more about the LGBT community through the social media platform Tumblr, early in high school:

> I don't think I really realized that I was trans until I was like 14 and that's simply because I stumbled my way onto Tumblr. And saw all sorts of LGBT stuff there. And I was like, this is a whole world that I never really looked into before. And so as I like learned a little bit more about the LGBT community, I was like, 'So being trans is a thing,' and I kind of like realized the way I had behaved growing up and how I was always the tomboy kid and used to always get my hair cut short. Um, and I would dress like a boy and I used to like wish I was a boy and stuff like that. It was like, 'Oh, those are symptoms of being a boy.' Um, so I guess that's kind of how I realized about six years ago.

Allen's coming out was not planned and was a result of his mom asking about his gender identity. Put on the spot, Allen decided to come out for reasons discussed below. During this conversation with his mother, Allen's father came into the room, resulting in Allen coming out to both parents that night. Allen's family generally refers to Allen with they/them pronouns because Allen came out as non-binary to his family and is slowly incorporating he/his pronouns into conversation to make the social transition from non-binary to transmale. Allen had been out for approximately two years when he completed his interview.

Emmett is a 25 year old white transgender man with married parents, one biological sister, and one biological brother. Emmett first realized he was transgender at the age of seven when watching a documentary about trans youth. The documentary included Jazz Jennings, a young

transgirl from Florida who became a national phenomenon after coming out at the age six and eventually starring in a TLC reality show:

> It's kind of cliche, just kind of like, I'm sure you've heard other people say like, 'I've always known kind of thing.' But, uh, the first [moment] I like knew the word for it, I guess both of my parents are psychologists, [and we] watch like documentaries and stuff. And when I was like seven, my mom and I were watching the one about, what was her name? Jazz? Um, it was about her and she was a little younger than I was, I think. She was part of it, [and] it was all sorts of Trans Youth. I'm like, 'Wow, like there's a word for this,' you know, like, 'I'm not the only one who feels like this' because growing up, I thought nobody wanted to be a girl.

Emmett had been out to his family for approximately five years when he completed his interview.

The remainder of this chapter will discuss the themes identified in participant's narratives about their coming out experiences and their family. Five themes were identified in the interviews.

Theme 1: Trepidation and Anxiety about Coming Out

As each participant started to negotiate their trans identity, they experienced feelings of trepidation and/or anxiety regarding coming out. Some of these fears and concerns preceded coming out, while others experienced anxiety during the act of coming out itself. These fears included being far along enough in transition to come out as trans, religion, safety, rejection, being discovered as transgender, and anxiety about the coming out event.

Emmett first experienced anxiety about coming out at the age of seven, when a moment of misunderstanding convinced Emmett to stay in the closet for much of his childhood and young adult life. After watching the previously mentioned documentary, Emmett wanted to come out to his mom in that moment:

> During the documentary I was going to tell my mom like right after, 'Like, mom, this is what I am.' But at some part during the documentary she said, 'Oh, that's so terrible.' But me, being young and stupid, I thought she was saying like, 'Oh being trans, it's so terrible.' It's like, never mind on that plan, you know? Um, and that was balled up until I was like 20.

Emmett interpreted his mother's remark as a rejection of trans people, and as a result, Emmett did not end up coming out for over a decade after that moment. Later in life, Emmett realized that she was talking about the negative reactions experienced by the young trans people in the documentary, and he came to know his parents did not hate trans people. Emmett did not anticipate rejection from his parents because they are psychologists who work with doctors who treat transgender folks.

Emmett, like all participants, felt some facet of trepidation based around religion. All participants came from Christian families, and some Christians believe being transgender is a sin, leading to familial rejection of queer and trans people when they come out. Emmett was concerned about how his family would negotiate his trans identity given their religious beliefs:

> Neither of (my parents) would ever say anything like, you know, 'You're a bad person because of this' or anything. But I knew that internally they would struggle with the whole like Jesus thing, you know.

Emmett was also concerned that those in his parents' social circles would react negatively or blame Emmett's parents once he came out as trans. His concern that his parents would experience social repercussions greatly outweighed any concern about his parents' acceptance he had:

> It was just, I dunno, I was more, I was more scared for them then I was scared for myself, I guess….I didn't want like their friends to like get mad at them, you know, or be like, 'Oh, well how could you,' they would say, 'How would you, how could you like raise her to be like that or anything? Like why did you make her think that she was a boy or anything like that?' Like, 'You must be really messed up.'

Emmett's concern was unrelated to fears of familial rejection. Emmett was experiencing anxiety about revealing a part of himself. In fact, after coming out to his mom, Emmett had trouble working up the courage to come out to his father so Emmett asked his mom to come out for him:

> I told mom, you know, 'I, I've tried, you know, I've been alone with dad so many times on like walks and car rides and everything like that and I just, I can't get it out, you know? Will you tell him?' She's like, 'yeah,' um, I think she (actually) said 'I already did,' which was fine...it was very much just like, 'I just can't get it out,' you know, kind of like ripping off a Band-Aid or taking a shot or something like that. Like I just can't get up the courage to just do it.

Emmett experienced anxiety when coming out to both parents because coming out as trans involve renegotiating fundamental aspects of one's identity and relationship with others. Emmett's anxiety is indicative of how hard it is to come out and that coming out evokes feelings of anxiety even in supportive families. After coming out, Emmett and his family found humor in past moments when Emmett shielded his trans identity prior to coming out:

> It's funny cause like a few months before I came out, um, my sister and I were in Target and they had like a rainbow cake, like a make your own rainbow cake mix thing and she kind of teased, 'So you should get this for your coming out party or something.' And I was like, 'Little do you know….'

Emmett's minor concerns that his family knew he was trans turned out to be justified:

> Um, and my mom and my sister, um, we're kind of like, well, 'We knew it!' You know, like they were right. Like they had this suspicion, they were right and they were fine [with it].

For Emmett, most of his trepidation and anxiety about coming out was about being ready to come out rather than concerns about acceptance, protection, or safety like other participants.

Kathryn's trepidation and anxiety, on the other hand, mostly surrounded fears of rejection and safety. For a long time, Kathryn felt like she could not come out because she was not transitioning and there was no one around her to help her transition or explore her identity:

> And I don't know, I felt like I had to be at a certain point in my transition before I could come out to people. And, um, I guess at that point I didn't really have many people to talk to about this. Well, I had no one to talk to.

Kathryn felt that her trans identity would not be understood or relevant until she presented as her chosen identity after a certain point in the transition process. Kathryn was also concerned about how her family's religious beliefs would impact their acceptance of her identity:

> I was utterly terrified because my family is like super Christian, all that. So. Um, Yeah. And I had no clue how this was going to go. Uh, cause, coming out to people was still super new, I'm still kind of terrible [at coming out].

Kathryn was concerned about rejection so she planned each coming out. Along with her fears of rejection, Kathryn also experienced some fears for her safety prior to coming out. She felt this fear the most when planning to come out to her father:

> My father, I very carefully planned it. [I decided] I [was] going to come out to him right before I go spend a week with my mom. So he has some time to process this and so that if it's bad, I don't have to spend a week in a very not good place.

The first time she attempted to come out to her father the anxiety and fear won out:

> Um, my dad was harder to come out to. The first time I tried to come out, I ended up just like backing out of the thing. No, no. You know, 'I'll do this later' and it took me like another month to work up the courage to finally get around to it.

Kathryn retreated from coming out to her father initially. When approaching his home during her second—and successful—coming out, Kathryn wondered if, once her coming out plan was carried out, she would ever return to her father's home:

> I remember when I was heading to his house that day, I was like, 'I wonder if this is going to be the last time I ever come up here.'

Kathryn's biggest fears were about outright rejection upon coming out and some of these fears of rejection were paired with trepidation about safety.

Allen's fear of his family accidentally discovering he was trans led him to change his dress and gender presentation in high school. While Allen had primarily presented as a tomboy with relatively androgynous dress, but in high school, he emphasized a feminine gender presentation:

> I remember like one year I tried to get into like more feminine fashion and stuff because I was like, 'Okay, well I don't want anybody to know that this is how I'm feeling. Maybe I should like dress more femininely so they won't like be on to me.' And then maybe, I think there was also a hope that like if I could get into it then like maybe it was all just a phase and that I would like would turn out to be cis[gender] and then we can just let the whole trans thing go and I wouldn't have to like think about it. Um, but that didn't work. I wasn't into it.

During this brief venture into feminine cisgender emphasis, Allen experienced a significant fear that his trans identity would be discovered because his mom questioned the sudden style change from tomboy to girly-girl:

> My mom asked me about that. I had always been, I would wear like basketball shorts and like baggy tee shirts and go play in the dirt with like all of my other dude friends. Um, and so suddenly when I wanted to like get leggings and like form fitted low cut shirts and my mom was like, 'Where's this coming from?' She was like, just like, 'This is odd. Why are you acting like this?' So I think my mom like questioned, a little bit, but she, but only a little, then she like rolled with it. She was like, 'Okay cool, if you want to do that, that's fine.'

Allen's strategy to protect himself from being discovered by emphasizing his cisgender presentation raised questions for at least one family member. But, at least that time, his mother just accepted the style change as a teenage quirk rather than an attempt to cover up a trans identity. Allen's fear of being discovered contributed to his fears about coming out. If he was discovered, he may not have control over his coming out event which could contribute to a higher like-

lihood of family rejection. While he was not discovered that time, Allen's concerns about discovery were only fueled by the religious trepidation he experienced:

> Um, before coming out, I had, of course, heard all of these horror stories of people coming out to parents or family members and being completely rejected and kicked out of their houses and disowned. Um, and so I was very reasonably terrified of the thought of coming out to anybody that I knew growing up because we were like a Super Christian home and did everything the Bible told us to.

Allen knew his family was observant of their religious laws and feared that these stances would be immovable:

> My parents, particularly my dad, I knew my dad would have like a very firm stance on something and then never changed his mind ever. And so I think I was mostly worried about how he would react.

In fact, Allen was even prepared never to come out due to these fears:

> It was kind of something where I could like have pictured myself staying in the closet my whole life and not like, dealing with plenty of anxiety up to that point. Like I always would put stuff off. If it didn't have to happen, then it wasn't going to.

As we will later discuss, Allen did not come out until prompted by his mother and his unplanned coming out was a direct result of his mother becoming suspicious about his gender identity.

Trepidation and anxiety about coming out was common among all participants. These feelings represent a significant part of the pre coming out experience for transgender folks and help us better understand the internal struggle which occurs when deciding to come out to family. These fears and anxieties will be addressed in the coming themes as we examine how partici-

pants articulated their coming out event, post coming out familial experiences, and participant's definitions of family.

Theme 2: Maternal Coming Out as a Turning Point

Participants all described their coming out to their mother as a turning point in their family journey. After coming out to their mothers, all participants starting experiencing changes in family openness and trans identity exploration. They all also started moving forward the process of coming out publicly.

Although Kathryn came out to her sister before coming out to her mom, she described her sister's reaction as "apathy" and Kathryn did not articulate much of an impact on her family experience after coming out to her sister:

> My sister didn't really care and that worked like both ways in that she wasn't, you know, annoyed or anything about, but she also didn't really want to talk about it or she'd get bored. She would get like bored very, very quickly if we ever tried to talk about it. Um, so I kind of just didn't talk about it much.

Kathryn decided to come out to her mom because she was not making any progress in pursuing her true gender identity:

> I was kinda like, 'Okay, I really need to come out because I'm not accomplishing anything that coming out, so let's get this started.' I had decided like, 'Okay, this is the point when I'm going to do this.'

Kathryn came out to her mom about nine months after coming out to her sister:

> I sat her there. I was like, 'Okay, I need to talk to you about something serious and this is probably going to be the most important conversation we ever have.' It was very dramatic, which ended up working quite well because she thought I had like murdered someone. So when I told her I was trans she and she was like, 'Oh that's all, thank goodness.' Um, because yeah, she ended up being absolutely lovely about it. Uh, apparently my entire family pretty much knew this already.

After coming out to her mom, Kathryn received some family support as her mom tried to learn about the community and trans experiences:

> She was very confused by it because, you know, most parents don't really understand what this actually means, but she really tried to be as supportive as she could to learn about this stuff. Um, you know, she definitely communicated, asked me lots of questions, all that kind of stuff.

Coming out to her mother and adjusting to her trans identity in her mother's home helped Kathryn move toward coming out to her father almost a year later. As previously mentioned, her first attempt to come out to her father was unsuccessful. When she finally came out to her father, his reaction was not as accepting as her mother:

> He was not happy with it. He, his reactions were never like angry and confrontational. It was more, 'I don't like this.' He made that very clear. Um, I remember when I first came out, I [said], 'Oh yeah, I was super scared. I was afraid you were going to like kick me out or something.' And he was like, 'Well, that wouldn't accomplish anything, so.'

Kathryn found that having divorced parents in separate homes allowed her to come out on her own timeline and compartmentalize her coming out experience:

> For me it was easy, easier cause I got to like just box everything up. Place it all in it's own little spot and handle everything separately, which you know, was nice I guess. Or it worked for me at least.

Allen's coming out was quite a bit different. Allen's college roommate, Kai, came out as transgender in Allen's freshman year. Allen was incredibly supportive both at school and when Kai came over to Allen's family home. As previously discussed, Allen feared that someone would discover his transgender identity and his mom even questioned his gender expression at one point, but Allen felt relatively safe that no family member would see his ally behaviors as indicative of his queerness or trans identity because most straight cisgender people would not recognize it as such:

> So when you typically run your, like your 'ally behaviors,' by like cis-het individuals, they don't typically pick up on it. They don't identify you as a queer individual because they're like 'everyone's cisgender and heterosexual.' They would just assume that you were as well.

But Allen's mom knew better:

> But my mom picked up on it really quick, that I immediately switched names and pronouns for Kai and that, um, I never seemed to screw it up at all. And that I was very, um, I got on everybody else's cases about referring to him by the right name and pronouns.

Allen's mom got suspicious that Allen did not identify as cisgender and acted on that thought by asking Allen how he identified and he was caught off guard:

> At that point, nobody had ever outright asked me that. Especially someone like my mother. And so I didn't really realize at that point that like, you can absolutely lie to like keep yourself in the closet, like it's safe to do that and you're allowed to do that.

Allen had no idea that he could lie to shield his identity, that shielding your queer or trans identity is acceptable in the queer community to avoid coming out. Allen felt concerned about his future acceptance into the queer community when he was questioned by his mom:

> I kind of thought, well, if I lie about my identity that I'm like being a bad member of the community, right? Like if I pretend I'm straight and cisgender, then I'm like failing the LGBT community is kind of what I thought.

Whether Allen's concern was more about allegiance to the queer community or about acceptance by the community, is unclear. But, no matter the motivation, due to this concern about future queer social support, Allen ended up coming out to his mom in that moment:

> So I just kind of like nervously ended up coming out to my mother, um, because she asked me about it and I didn't know that I could just lie about it and say, 'No, I'm straight and cisgender, No, no, no big deal there.'

Unlike Kathryn, Allen did not have the ability to compartmentalize his parental coming out events and he ended up coming out to both parents simply because his father stumbled onto Allen's coming out to his mother:

> Um, my dad sort of came into the room as this was happening and he was like, 'Wait, start from the beginning.' And I was like, 'No, like, oh, my God, here we go.'

In this instance, a participant's concern about suspicion was accurate and, as previously discussed, Allen's concerns about queer community acceptance ended up pushing him to come

out to both of his parents almost unwillingly. Throughout the coming out event, Allen's father was consistent in his invalidation during the coming out and after, even interrupting Allen's conversation with his mom while he was coming out:

> He would like chime in occasionally from the couch about how nonbinary people don't exist, 'That's not a real identity.' This entire time, actually I did kind of appreciate this: my mom would like tell him to shut up. She'd be like, 'We're having an important conversation, Bob stop.'

Allen appreciated his mom's protective words but continued to experience concerns that his father would react violently as the news sank in:

> I was incredibly stressed about it [that night] and I remember the next several days I was like an anxious mess because I didn't know if they were going to like suddenly start treating me differently or, um, if my dad was going to like suddenly be horribly abusive and like beat me up and like just smack me around or whatever.

During Allen's unplanned coming out, he was also concerned about how his parents would adjust to the drastic change and if they would react with anger. Partially due to this concern, Allen came out as non-binary with them/them pronouns, before moving to he/him pronouns, and in order to cushion the drastic change lied about being comfortable with his parents still using she/her pronouns:

> I certainly wanted to try and be as passive as possible in the conversation. I remember telling my mom and dad like, 'It's okay if you still use she, her pronouns' when like I didn't really want them to, but mostly because I just wanted them to like not get angry at me. Um, and I wanted the conversation to be over. I was like, 'I don't want to talk about

this anymore. I specifically remember like after I realized, ‘Oh, this is, I'm coming out now, I guess.’ Um, I did absolutely everything I could to be like passive in the conversation and try and be like, ‘no, it's okay. We can go back to being the way it was if you want to.’

Allen’s coming out experience was completely unplanned but still served as a maternally driven coming out event that impacted the trajectory of Allen’s identity expression. As previously mentioned, Allen was prepared never to come out due to his trepidation and anxiety about coming out. If his mother had never asked, Allen is unsure if he would have ever come out:

I don't know that if I had not been put in that situation by my mother that I would like have ever come out to everybody. I think, that was a big defining moment where I was like, ‘Okay, well let's just keep going.’

Emmett, on the other hand, experienced almost no fears about family acceptance. Largely, Emmett expected his parent’s to continue to accept him into their home after coming out:

Um, so yeah, I knew that they wouldn't disown me or anything. That was never a fear of mine.

Even though Emmett was confident that his parents would accept him, Emmett still experienced a significant amount of anxiety when coming out to his family. Emmett specifically talked about how he came out to his mother and the contradictory feelings of anxiety and an expectation of acceptance:

We were driving home and I started off with, uh, ‘So you probably already know this,’ but then she was like, ‘Oh no.’ ‘You know, I'm trans.’ And she was like, ‘What?' I was like, ‘You know, like I feel like a guy,’ she's like, ‘Oh,’ and then was just kinda like silent

for a bit, and she was kind of like, 'Yeah, I can see that.' Um, and I'm like shaking. I'm like almost crying even though I know for a fact that she will accept it and that she'll love me, you know, um, it's still hard. So I can't imagine like coming out to someone who you don't know how they'll react or even yet, you know, that they'll react badly.

Coming out to his mom was a turning point, the first step in coming out to his entire family and in seeking family support in his trans identity. After coming out to his mom, Emmett used his mom as a support to help him come out to the rest of his family. As previously discussed, Emmett was so nervous about coming out to his dad that he ended asking his mom to do it for him. Once out to both parents, Emmett started sharing his identity with his siblings with the full confidence that they would accept him. Emmett did not even formally come out to his sister, she just stole his phone and read some texts to find out:

> My sister being my sister, uh, just kind of like stole my phone cause she was like, 'Who are you talking to?' I was like, 'friend, Leo.' And she's like, 'Oh, what does he have to say?' And she took my phone and she's like, 'Oh!' I was like 'Surprise!' She was like, 'Not really.'

Both his mom and sister told Emmett that they knew he was trans prior to Emmett coming out. Coming out to Emmett's brother was the last piece of the family puzzle. Emmett was so sure that his brother would accept him that Emmett very casually and humorously came out to his brother:

> During Christmas and my brother came over from the Northern United States, um, and my family was like, 'Well, you need to tell him.' I'm like, 'Oh, all right.' Um, so he was upstairs and I texted him like, 'Come downstairs.' No context at all. He probably said it was just like dinnertime or something, you know. And he came downstairs and like half-

way down the stairs I was like, ‘Leo, I'm trans!’ And my sister and mom were like, ‘That's not how you do it!’ He was like, ‘What?' Um, so I dunno seemed like the easiest way to me.’

For all the participants, coming out to their mother was a pivot point in their coming out and transition journey. All the mothers inhabited a uniquely supportive role in their child’s coming out experience by serving as the first step in coming out to the entire family and coming out publicly. Even for Kathryn, who came out to her sister first, coming out to her mom was the first step in really being “out” because coming out to her sister did not change how Kathryn was treated or supported by a family member regarding her trans identity. By reacting with positive questioning or outright acceptance these moms helped support each participant as they came out to other family members, even when those family members reacted with resistance.

Theme 3: Post Coming Out Reinforcement of Family Structure

All three participants maintained their immediate families and much of their family dynamics after coming out. All participants were very close with their siblings before coming out and continued to be close after coming out. Emmett experienced a consistently close relationship with both parents before and after coming out. Kathryn and Allen both had slightly distant relationships with their fathers before coming out and continued having a distant relationship after coming out. Participants attributed this consistency and reinforcement of family to a number of strategies including increased religion, information seeking, family reactions to coming out, and family closeness.

Both Emmett and Allen believe that one of the reasons that their family dynamic stayed consistent after coming out is because of the religious beliefs of their families. Allen attributed family loyalty to religious morality:

> I think it's, um, the way that we were raised. They had like this very, like we grew up in like this Christian environment and they always had a very like, Christian outlook on life. The thing that they tend to value like more than upholding like old laws in the Bible, they're very much like, 'I'll take care of my family first, like my blood family, whoever I have with me. Like I will take care of them even if we don't agree,' is kind of like their stance on it. I'm sure if they had had a different outlook on that, whereas [if they had] an attitude that like some other religious families will have where 'If you're like gay or trans, like we have to get rid of you. You're not part of our family anymore,' [it would be different]. It's very much, their attitude was like family comes first and um, 'We're not going to like get rid of you for being different than us.'

For Allen, religion was part of the glue that held his family together by morally demanding unconditional love and acceptance. Allen also talked about his sibling dynamic as almost unbreakable because of how he and his siblings were raised:

> Being homeschooled, we were always like at home together and we would get involved with our homeschool co-ops. So we'd like did have some school friends but we weren't like seeing them every day. It was only like once a week. And other than that, all of our friends were the three of us hanging out in our house and like playing pretend and try not to do our school work as much as possible. So they were really like my closest friends growing up.

Although Allen did not credit religion directly with his parents decision to homeschool himself and his siblings, Allen's narrative conveyed that his parents worked to keep the family tight knit due to religious beliefs. Emmett, on the other hand, attributed his family consistency to God blessing him with an amazing and accepting family:

> It's kind of like kind of a luck thing. You know, I was really lucky to get my parents. I was really lucky to get my, um, brother and sister, you know, not everybody gets the same as I do, you know, definitely as a kid I thought, you know, everybody loves their mom and dad. Like my mom and dad are great, you know, this is mom and dad. Everybody has this, everybody loves them… And when I grew up, I found out that's not the case at all. And how amazingly lucky and blessed I am to have them. Um, like I said earlier, I'm a Christian. Um, you know, I don't, know if like, if like God gave me them, but like, I'm pretty damn sure that He did, you know, cause I don't know how if could have lasted so long without them.

The consistency of queer and trans acceptance in Emmett's home has allowed Emmett's home to become a safe haven for himself and his queer friends even though his family is Christian and incorporates religion into their day-to-day lives:

> But like, you know, we have people over all the time, just like, most of my friends are queer in some way. You know, we have them over for dinner or whatever, and we do pray every time, but like, they obviously don't have to or anything, you know, as long as they're just like quiet for like the 30 seconds, it's whatever, you know. Um, but, you know, I've told my friends, like, you know, 'Your dad sucks. You can share mine,' kind of thing.

Emmett felt that God served a role both in blessing him with a family who had the resilience to love Emmett unconditionally and in his acceptance of his own identity. Emmett felt that God often affirms his identity and credits Him with giving Emmett accepting friends and coworkers, as well as family members:

> The whole like God thing, you know, I'm even still like, I don't know, in a way, I know that He doesn't care, like He made me this way and things like that. And then like, you go online [and there's] all of this just bombarding of hate, you know? And I have to, I have to keep on telling myself, you know, this is hate and God is not hate, so this is not God's kind of thing, you know? Um, and I prayed about it a lot, you know, and like, He hasn't struck me by lightening yet and He's only given me good signs, if that makes sense. You know what I mean? He's not giving me a rejection… He gave me supporting parents… I am a supported kid! He gave me a supporting boss, He gave me supporting coworkers. It's only been positive things that makes me think, well, if I keep asking and He keeps affirming, you know what I mean? So like, I really don't think, not that He doesn't care, but that He knows, you know?

This affirmation helped Emmett stay secure in his trans identity and continue seek support from his family members. For Emmett, having confidence that family and God would (and did) accept his trans identity allowed Emmett to come out with ease compared to other participants and allowed him to remain confident that all parts of himself, including his belief system, would remain consistent after he came out. For both of these participants, religion played a role in why they believe their family stuck together after these participants came out.

All participants mentioned some form of information seeking which reinforced the familial bonds present prior to coming out. Information seeking came through research about religion, LGBT literacy, and employment, among others. Emmett and his family did research in order to negotiate their religious beliefs with Emmett's trans identity:

> Um, and I know for a fact that both of them [my brother and father], when I came out, went into it, went into like the Bible, went into like blogs, went into anything that anyone had to say about it ever, you know, um, reading both sides and everything. But they kept that very to themselves. They didn't say like, call me up and be like, you know, 'pussyslayer69 said that trans people are bad.' You know, they would never say anything like that. It was all very independent research for them.

Allen's mom also searched for information in order to negotiate her religious beliefs with her son's identity. Allen believes this religious information seeking is also an attempt by his mom to be more LGBTQ literate in general:

> Um, my mom has, um, she hasn't outright said this to me, but she has been, um, I think certainly looking into the LGBT community more and like how to be an ally. Um, I remember she brought up at one point, um, a book that her new pastor, um, was reading that had recommended to her, um, after a Bible study one day, I forget what it was called, but it was like, like Women, Slaves, and Homosexuals, or something. Hmm… It basically broke down how in the Bible it said like, slaves were okay and women have to be treated like this and homosexuality is bad or whatever. Um, but then it broke down like, why the Bible said it this way and why we have to stop having that attitude now… So the book was kind of about how like we've got to treat people equally and like respect everyone

> because like that's what the Bible and religion is all about instead of, um, continuing to use these like several thousand year old texts… Um, so I remember her talking about specifically like the slavery part of that, but like the fact that like homosexuality was brought up in that as well. It makes me think like, she's certainly been reading up on like LGBT resources.

Allen's mom also used Allen as a source for information seeking in order to work toward being more educated on the LGBTQ community:

> As I started to grow into being a member of the community and sort of like raising awareness among my own family for like the past several years, um, she also kind of started to change her stance and look into it a little bit more. Um, so when I ended up coming out as trans, she didn't quite know how to like deal with it, but she didn't outright say like, 'No, that's terrible. You're still a girl.' She had a lot of questions.

Kathryn, on the other hand, experienced a lack of trans education from her parents while communicating about her career aspirations:

> I'm like, I'm trying to be a teacher and my, both my parents are constantly like, 'That's such a terrible idea. You're never going to be able to do that. None of the parents will let you' and most of the other people I've talked to are like, 'No. You should be fine.'

This parental concern effected how Kathryn perceives her parents support of her, potentially making her feel as though her parents do not believe she can succeed because she is transgender. In order to combat these misconceptions with her father, she positioned herself as a resource even when family members did not particularly want it:

> Uh, I ended up explaining a lot of the stuff to him, kind of without him particularly wanting [me] to, I was just like, okay, we're sitting at dinner, 'I'm going to explain this stuff to you because you have no clue what's going on and you're not interested. But I dunno, I feel like I need to explain this to you because you are a part of my family and I would like you to understand this.'

In this case, Kathryn searched for information for family members and almost forcibly delivered that information in the aim to maintain family consistency by making sure her father understood who she was.

For each of these participants, the information gained by family members was believed to have contributed to why their familial relationships remained the same. For Emmett and Allen, this meant figuring out how their trans identities could fit into the religious beliefs of their families. Allen, along with Kathryn, saw this informative material as a way for their family members to understand who they are both as transgender people and as part of the larger queer community.

Allen and Kathryn both mentioned that family reactions to their coming out was not negative enough to warrant eliminating them from their lives. These participants only experienced resistance from family members, where family members were combative about adjusting their relationship to include their trans family members chosen identity. Because they were not outright rejected, Allen and Kathryn did not feel that they needed to cut family members resisting their identity out of their lives. Kathryn was just happy that she was safe and had a home after coming out:

> I was fortunate that my family didn't kick me out or start, you know, angrily yelling at me, or any of that. Like, so there was still enough there I guess that I felt like I could work with them.

For Kathryn, without complete rejection any relationship was bearable:

> I guess because for me, no one's reaction to this was bad enough that I couldn't accept it.

Allen felt similarly, tolerating his fathers stance that trans folks are not real because his father did not reject him, he just continues to resist Allen's chosen pronouns and gender identity. Allen said to is easier for him to bear it than fight it:

> I try to ignore it. I'm not sure how it would change if he were like outwardly acknowledging it. I mean, like best case scenario, he would like ask a questions and tried to like respect my pronouns and identity. But I also know that [may] not necessarily be the case and that if he were to acknowledge it, that it might just be like a constant arguments. Also it's a tough conversation to have with someone when you're not sure how they're gonna react. And so I think I preferred that he just like leaves the conversation alone and I'm sure there'll be a day where I'm just like, 'Listen, this is who I am and this is how it has to be. And if you can't respect to that were done.' I'm sure that will come up at some point, but right now while I still like depend on them for insurance or whatever, I'm like if he does not want to bring it up and if he wants to stay quiet and not talk about it, that's fine by me. At least we're not arguing.

When coming out, both of these participants encountered distance that we will later discuss. Even in light of that distant, family member relationships stayed consistent because their reaction was considered tolerable by these two participants.

After coming out, both Kathryn and Emmett experienced an increase in familial closeness in one or more of their family relationships after coming out which reinforced the family dynamics experienced prior to coming out. Kathryn attributed this increase in closeness to her ability to be open and independent of her family as an adult. Since she is not living with her family anymore, there is no obligation to spend time together and so her relationships have more fullness:

> Um, and I think part of that's just like now that we're not all living together anymore, they're now like, oh, we need to put in more effort because, you know, we don't just see each other every day. So like nowadays we actually have dinner together sometimes, but once a week or whatever. But like, it's, yeah. I feel like there's more, feels like there's less quantity of time, but more quality.

She also feels that now that she is out she is less socially anxious and is able to put forth the effort to cultivate a close relationship. Kathryn specifically talked about how this effected her relationship with her sister:

> I'm reaching out more, I'm putting more effort into social interactions, putting more of myself into these interactions. Before it was very much like she talked and I listened. And now more we both talk. Yeah. It's more equal now I guess.

Kathryn also felt that since she has come out, even her father, who very much resisted her trans identity, has made strides to better understand who Kathryn is. One of these strides includes seeing a therapist that pushes her father to cultivate a close relationship with Kathryn:

> And I know recently his therapist told him that he should probably be more accepting of my transition and I think that's helped push him in that direction. Um, I feel like since

then he's been putting a bit more effort, been better at calling me Kathryn and trying to be a little more comfortable about it. And I think, I think deep down, he still has those feelings [of discomfort about my trans identity]. He doesn't show it as much.

Emmett felt this increased closeness because his relationships are more open now that he does not have to hide who he is anymore:

I think overall it made my life better, you know? Um, not like hiding anything from like these people who I'm very close to, you know? Um, and like, yeah, we can so easily talk about it now. It's nothing taboo or anything. Like when I started [hormone therapy] I was telling my brother like, 'Hey, I'm going to start T, I'm thinking about like growing a beard or something.' And he just like laughed at me. He's like, 'Good luck. I can't grow a beard and dad can't grow a beard and you can't grow a beard.'

Emmett often engages in this type of humor with his family members:

My dad and I will make gay and trans dad jokes all the time, you know, like going to Europe, he'd be like, you know, 'You're going TRANSnational,' like things like that.

Even things that used to be a fear for Emmett, like potential social repercussions for his parents because he is trans, can now be seen humorously between himself and family members:

Um, which was funny because then once my dad and I started talking a bit after I came out, (I found out) that he wasn't scared for himself. He was scared for me, you know, we're both just worrying about each other, you know? Um, because he knows like the violence and stuff that can happen to trans people. Yeah. He doesn't want that for me.

For Emmett, coming out allowed him to be open enough to not just talk about his identity but weave it into his familial relationships in a light-hearted and loving manner. Both Allen and

Emmett experienced this increased familial closeness as a direct result of revealing their trans identity because it allowed for closer and better quality relationships.

Theme 4: Post Coming Out Misgendering and Family Struggles

Allen and Kathryn both experienced instances of increased family distance after coming out. Experiences identified as increased familial distance were instances that did not impact the general dynamic of a family relationship or who is considered family but still contributed to feelings of trans identity invalidation or resistance among these two participants.

Allen experienced an increased distance from and momentary struggles with his father even though they maintained their relationship. Due to his father's resistance to Allen's trans identity, Allen occasionally felt tension with his father and moments of relational distance:

> If a conversation about the LGBT community gets brought up, like with my mom or something and my dad happens to be in the area, I know there's like a bit of tension that I can feel from him. Like he's still aware of the fact that I'm trans. He just really does not want to acknowledge it at all. He wants to just sweep it under the rug and pretend it's not a thing. Um, but if the conversation is not about the LGBT community, it's very much the same way it was before. Um, and I don't, I personally don't really think about the conversation like at all.

Kathryn, on the other hand, experienced about two years where she and her sister grew distant due to her sister's constant misgendering after Kathryn first came out. After getting in a fight about Kathryn correcting her sister, Kathryn almost gave up:

> Like, I don't know, cause like on one hand I feel like what I'm asking isn't that unreasonable? But it's clearly upsetting her very much and yeah. So what am I supposed to do about that? So for the most part, I kind of just, after that I stopped ever correcting her and just let her figure it out on her own, once I came out she started putting in like an actual effort into this. And now it's, you know, worked out and is fine, but she's made it very clear that I should not ever correct her.

After Kathryn publicly came out, her sister started to make an effort to properly use Kathryn's chosen pronouns and name. Due to this distance, Kathryn often feels that she cannot correct other people for fear that they will get upset with her:

> That kind of made it difficult for me to correct other people when they called me by the wrong name or pronouns, which, you know, happens a lot. But nowadays I'm always afraid to do this because I've seen, oh, this does not go well.

This negative communication precedent may follow Kathryn for the rest of her life. Kathryn also experiences a more neutral distance from her mom:

> I often feel like she doesn't put a lot of herself out there when we talk. It's mostly just she wants to know everything that's going on in my life. And I'm like, 'Hey, why don't you tell me about yourself?' And things like that. And she's like, 'Oh, you don't care about that.' Even though I'm asking, really asking, her… I think most of that is just comes from, you know, we're growing up, and she wants to hold on to us and she's so desperate to know everything about us that she's forgetting about herself.

Although this distance is more the effect of growing older, rather than coming out, Kathryn's growing distance with her mother is indication that transgender young adults share many common experiences with cisgender young adults.

Both Allen and Kathryn experienced increased family distance after coming out and, as we will now explore, this distance was mostly a result of familial resistance or simply growing up. Familial resistance was marked as any perceived reaction or action that pushed against, invalidated, or ignored the trans identity disclosed by the participant to a family member that did not result in complete familial rejection (family loss). Kathryn experienced this in many ways, one way was her father's previously discussed reaction of simply being unhappy that Kathryn came out as transgender. Allen's father just wanted to ignore the coming out:

> And because my dad just wanted to drop it and move on, I didn't bring it up with any of [my siblings].

For both of these participants, this immediate reaction from their family members was only the start of the resistance. Both of these participants experienced misgendering from multiple family members. Family members misgendered the participants for many reasons including ignoring the coming out, needing time to adjust, uncertainty about how to react, and waiting until the participant came out full time in an effort not to out the participant. Allen experienced some malicious intentional misgendering from his father and Kathryn experienced frustration with her sister misgendering her during the previously discussed two years of distance, but besides these experiences, most of the misgendering recounted had to do with good intentioned or less intentional misgendering.

Allen experienced his father's complete rejection of trans identities in general. His father does not believe transgender identities are valid and intentionally misgenders and dead-names if it is convenient:

> His stance is very much, um, 'I don't think it's right and I don't want to acknowledge people as trans.' Like, if he knows your dead name and if he knows what you used to be, he's to use those deliberately. But also he's not going to go out of his way to like get involved and start fights over it. If the conversation gets brought up, he will express himself and what he thinks and like about his views. He'll very much like make it known that like, 'I don't think this is right and I think you are just delusional.' But he's not going to like go out of his way to start fights with anybody that he thinks might be trans or non-binary.

Allen, for the most part, just ignores his father's resistance to his gender identity. Because he expects the misgendering, he almost does not notice it anymore:

> I'm just like, I think I accepted after he was like, 'No, I don't, um, I'm going to call you a girl.' I was like, I think I just kind of accepted that as like, 'Okay, fine, like you can't win all of them.' And I just let it go. And so I don't even really notice when he misgenders me because I expect it from him, so I don't [notice].

Kathryn also experienced consistent resistance from family members. Kathryn specifically talked about the two years of distance she experienced with her sister while she was constantly misgendering Kathryn right after she came out. Kathryn focused on one particular argument about her sister's misgendering:

> [The family was] talking about like where we wanted to go to dinner and [my sister] called me, 'he' and I corrected her, 'she.' And she got really, really mad at me and for like

> the next hour we just were furious at each other arguing nonstop because she thought I was derailing the conversation and making it all about me. I thought I was putting in a tiny mention while moving on with the conversation, but she was not having that. And so we just went back and forth like that for a while, um, until it finally resolved itself by me just ignoring it and moving on. Um, yeah, I, I think part of her anger at this is like, she kind of knows that she shouldn't be doing this. Like at one point she said, 'Oh yeah, I know if, like, we told this story to someone, they would think I'm the bad guy or whatever.' And so it was just that she was very defensive, but it kind of ended up being a long running thing.

Kathryn experienced misgendering with almost all of her family members, but her sister was the most combative in adjusting to Kathryn's chosen pronouns and name. In fact, all of Kathryn's family went through a period of adjustment where they had trouble with misgendering:

> It kind of took [my sister] until I came out full time, like, gosh, two years later for her to actually start calling me by my name, using female pronouns, all that stuff. And that's kind of how it worked with pretty much all of my family. They kind of just ignored it for, ya know, a year or two.

Most of this misgendering was attempting to adjust or just messing up, but Kathryn's mom had a unique reason for this period of adjustment:

> Her stance was always, 'I'm not going to call you by your name until you come out,' because she was very, very, very worried about outing me to people. Which, on one hand, it comes from a place of concern and that's really sweet. But I don't know, it was just, it was frustrating.

Although her mom at her best interest at heart, Kathryn just wanted her mom to use her chosen pronouns. But due to the fight which scared Kathryn about correcting people about her pronouns, Kathryn often felt like she just had to accept the misgendering. During her interview Kathryn attempted to justify her sister's defensiveness about misgendering by saying defensiveness was human nature:

> I mean, she does not like when anyone corrects her about anything. She, and I mean, you know, not taking criticism well, it's just how humans are.

Allen similarly justified his mom's misgendering by saying that because they do not see each other often, he does not get to correct her and make his chosen pronouns a norm:

> For the most part I still get like she/her pronouns from her, but that's I think simply because she's still not sure how to deal with it. And because we don't see each other that often, I can't like get on her case about it and be like, 'I'm trans.'

For both of these participants, misgendering had a huge impact on life after coming out. Fights about misgendering resulted in Kathryn often feeling unable to correct those around her on her pronouns. Misgendering made Allen accept that his father would not call him by his chosen pronouns and even made him blame himself for not teaching his mom to adjust. Misgendering is just another way that family members resist against trans family members coming out, identity, and day-to-day adjustment to outwardly being trans.

Some of the above moments of misgendering were fueled by invalidation of a participant's trans identity. But misgendering is not the only way that a family member would resist accepting that trans identities are valid and/or that a family member identifies as transgender. Both Allen and Kathryn have fathers who invalidated their trans identity at some point. Kathryn

experienced this soon after she came out when her father tried to convince her that she was just confused and attempted to "fix" her trans identity:

> He kept trying to convince me that like, 'Oh no, you, you're not trans, you're just like confused. You know, you need to just get out and socialize more. That'll help you figure this out for yourself.' Um, he was very insistent that I attend therapy because he seemed to think that if I saw a therapist, they'll talk me out of it because clearly that's what any therapist would do. That's the only reasonable.

For a while, Kathryn chalked this invalidation up to religious beliefs but soon learned that her father just did not like queer or trans people:

> He is still very clearly uncomfortable with the subject. Uh, even now or the other day I was like, I was asking him about what his, why he had issues with gay people. I assume. I assumed, it's cause he's like Super Catholic and he buys into the rhetoric. [But,] he was like just straight up like, 'Oh no, I just think it's kinda gross.'

Allen experienced a similar invalidation from his father when he came out:

> My dad called the whole deal stupid and was like, 'No, that's dumb. Um, you were born a girl and you're still a girl. You can't change that.' And then pretended the whole thing never happened. Um, and that's still his stance on it today.

As we previously mentioned, Allen's father continues to misgender and invalid Allen's gender identity. These experiences of family distance and what has fueled that distance impact participants relationships with their family in ways that are not overt or restructuring. These experiences instead chip away at trans participants sense of self, advocacy, and family acceptance.

Theme 5: Family = Nuclear+

Every participant recalled some part of their conception of family prior to coming out that was different after coming out. Prior to coming out, participants felt that family was defined by blood or nuclear structure. After coming out, participants say that family is defined by who chooses to be family, even if their own families remain connected by blood. For these participants, family of blood is still family, but family is chosen and can be more inclusive. Here participants have chosen their nuclear family of origin and others as family.

Before coming out all participants believed, at some point, that family was defined by blood. For Emmett, the belief that family was defined by blood changed just a few years before coming out because he learned that family was not always good and was not always love:

> I mean definitely when I was little, um, it was definitely only blood and that was family. But probably like by high school and I saw it like other kids. Um, you know, I heard stories of other kids and not getting along with their families. I was like, 'What? How could you not? Family's great.' But once I kind of like heard their stories and they're like, 'You know, these people aren't my family.' Like yeah. I couldn't call them family either.

Although Emmett does not believe that all families are defined by blood, he still maintains the belief that some of his family members are tied to him because of blood:

> I don't think like a lot of people in this [the queer] community, like families are their chosen family, but I kind of separate family and friends. Kind of sounds like maybe a bad thing, but I don't know.

Kathryn also recalled feeling like family was defined by genes and bloodlines. Although family felt like an obligation prior to coming out, she still considered her extended family family:

> Um, because I think back then at least I did [consider my extended family my family]. Genes are part of what makes up family, not necessarily, but would definitely be a part of it.

Although Kathryn experienced consistency with all of her immediate blood family (parents and siblings), she experienced loss with some extended family members when she came out. For Kathryn, some family members she once labeled as family because of blood, she just does not see them that way anymore:

> I mean I definitely feel like family, not something, it's not like genes or, blood or whatever. I mean, my extended family, I couldn't care less about them. I mean that's, they're the people that you have to go to awkward parties with once a year.

She no longer considers those people family anymore, regardless of their shared blood. Allen also saw family as defined by blood, but identified biological families with nuclear families:

> At that time, I think I would have considered family, I probably still would have had like a very nuclear family idea about it. Um, but I think I also would have included like if you've got one like really close friends that'll be your kid's weird uncle or something. Like they can also be family and live with you. Um, but it was very a very nuclear idea of idea of family. Absolutely.

Although Allen mentioned that prior to coming out he felt that a family may have one chosen family member as a "weird uncle," he saw that chosen family member as the odd one out, not a true family member in the same way as the rest of the nuclear and blood related family. For Allen family was defined both by blood and proximity prior to coming out:

> [Family was defined by] blood definitely, but also proximity.

For the most part, Allen recalled consistently feeling like family is nuclear. Families had room for outside members to be close, but they were not truly family:

> Whereas then I still thought like you get married and you stay with that one person and then you have your kids and that's your family unit and you can have other friends and people you care about, but your family unit is just that.

Each participant believed that family was tied to blood and genes prior to coming out and changed that belief right before or after coming out. For Emmett, the definition of family started to change in high school. For Allen and Kathryn, coming out completely changed their definition of family. All participants now believe that family is based upon choice, who you chose as family is family no matter how the connection is made. Allen mentioned this change:

> Family very much now to me is not about blood anymore. I'm like, do I have family who also happened to be blood relatives? Absolutely. But to me, family is very much the people that you love and care about and who love and care about you. Um, and the people you have like the strongest relationships with, um, regardless of whether you are related by blood or not.

Both Emmett and Allen found folks after coming out that they now consider family. Emmett has two best friends who he considers brothers. First is his childhood friend, Leo, who shares the same name with his brother, Leo. Although Emmett has known Leo since he was a kid, they have endured many changes and both have come out (for different reasons) during adulthood:

> I talked earlier about friend Leo, I've known him since sixth grade and we still talk all the time. He's in the Northern United States, still, but he's definitely a brother. You know,

> well it's kind of funny cause when we were little, um, you know, I was a girl and he was a boy. [People would joke,] 'Oh, you're going to get married!' And then I came out as trans and then he came out as gay and they're like, 'Oh, you're going to get married!' But no, neither of us feel that way. We're both very, you know, brotherly, I guess.

Even though Emmett and Leo are not destined for romance, Leo is Emmett's family through and through, regardless of blood. After coming out, in college, Emmett found Charles. Charles became Emmett's other chosen brother:

> I go to his house every Tuesday and Friday, you know, I came from his house to here, you know. He's very, not in the same [way] as Leo, you know, obviously. But, he would never leave for any kind of crap I've done or any way I feel or anything like that.

For Emmett, who he considers his family relies more on permanence and sticking together than blood. Allen felt very much the same way about Joe and Brittany, his two best friends who he considers family:

> I'm actually moving into my friend's house next semester and her husband's just got accepted into law school in the Western U.S., so he's going to be gone. And she's like, 'I'm going to be so lonely.' And I was like, 'I'll move into your house.' So like I'm moving in. And then, um, our other best friend, Joe, he's also moving into the house and so like we're all just going to kind of like live together. That's very much my idea of family now is who you choose to be with.

For Allen, his family of choice will be physically located together and under the roof of a married couple, much like his nuclear conception of family prior to coming out. But this conception

of family has nothing to do with blood or who raised Allen, this family of choice is based on acceptance and understanding:

> I think it's because I just grew so close to them. Um, and because when I like came out as trans, the change in their attitudes and their like pronoun usage and how they like spoke about me was immediate. Um, there was like no hesitation with the change there. I was just like, 'Oh, by the way, he/him pronouns' and they were like, 'You got it.'

Although Allen and Emmett were the only ones to incorporate family of choice into their familial structure, all participants believe that family of choice was just as validly family as those you grew up with or who raised you. All participants talked about the fact that some or all of their family happened to be related to them by blood, but that was not the reason they were family, the reason they were family is because participants chose to identify them as family. Emmett pointed out that families are constructed in diverse ways, even though his own family is mostly blood related:

> Like somebody else's family might not be mom, dad, brother, sister. It could be friend, aunt and grandma, you know? Um, that was my family and other people can have other families. I know some people, their family is just friends, you know. It's nothing related to blood at all.

For each of these participants, choices about family were based on diverse reasoning, but all of the reasoning came back to who they felt was a priority and who made the participants a priority. Chosen family, as identified by participants, was based upon prioritization of themselves and their relationship. Participants saw this prioritization through three characteristics: value, permanence, and main source of support.

Priority was seen by participants as being valued by their chosen family member and valuing their chosen family member. For Allen and Emmett this value manifested as love. Revisiting Allen's articulation of chosen family, he states that family is love and caring:

> Family is very much the people that you love and care about and who love and care about you.

Emmett felt very similar, stating that family displays platonic love:

> There has to be like, as cliche as it is, like there has to be love, like neutral love, you know?

Kathryn, on the other hand, saw value as importance. For her, family is whomever is most important to you:

> Family is, someone who you spend a lot of your time with and you feel, you know, close to and who you don't, who you just feel really comfortable with it. Yes. It's the, it's the whoever is most important to you in your life right now.

Each participant felt that when choosing family, they must be valued and must value the family member. Valuing another person was shown here through who was loved and who was important. Valuing another person was just one part of choosing family who prioritizes and are a priority. All participants also felt that family is someone they choose to be permanently in their life, continues to make an effort to prioritize being in their life, and vice versa. Prior to coming out, Emmett felt like family might disappear. Even though he was confident his family members would not reject him for being trans, there was always the fear that someone would prove him wrong:

> Before I was kind of more like, you know, family might leave, you know? But now it's kinda like family won't leave. It's kind of like, even if it's just like a friend who you consider family that person will never leave you. And if they do, then they weren't family in the first place. You know, you could say the same thing for like a dad. If you like, were really close to your dad and then you came out and then he left you, you know, he wasn't family in the first place.

Emmett still believes that family and friends are separate. But for him, the separation between family and friends is not blood, it is permanence:

> I mean, it's like just the most important thing to me. You know, if somebody says, you know, 'What's most important thing to you?' Like first thing, it's family and then friends. So, um, yeah, they're not really replaceable. Like I said earlier, friends are kind of, you know, they come and go, but family really doesn't.

Allen felt very similarly. When Allen talked about his family of choice, he talked about all of their life plans and conscious commitment to stay in each others lives:

> We all kind of have like these aspirations for like where we want to go and how we want to keep each other in our lives and like how we intend to do that in the future. And so it's very much like a, a planning kind of thing, almost like there's so much we're going to see and do and we're going to do it together.

For Kathryn, this sense of permanency came from a feeling of openness, comfort, and lack of judgment which she continued to associate with her family after coming out, even when encountering resistance:

> I guess, yeah, it was mostly just like my family is someone I can easily spend time with without fear of judgment… I guess the main thing was I felt like my family was someone I could feel comfortable talking to very easily. With everyone else, I was always worried about being judged, but with my family was just like, oh yeah, I can just share everything. Um, you know, that felt really nice.

These participants feel like family does not have to be blood to be permanent, but someone has to be permanent to be family. Much like value, permanence is all about prioritizing the family member and that family member prioritizing the participant. The last component of prioritization was articulated by participants as family being a main source of support. Every single participant believes that family shows up, no matter what, when they cannot turn to anyone else. Emmett believes this means that family is always on your side:

> People you can trust or even just a person you can trust. It doesn't have to be multiple people, but you know, just a group of people you can trust with anything except for like, maybe, murder or something. Like, you know, who you go to when, um, well it feels like nobody else is on your side or anything like that.

For Emmett, family simply shows up. Family is your team, is there when you need them, and make it a priority to be there.

Kathryn, on the other hand, believes that family is your main source of support for everything, but particularly emotional support. As previously discussed, Kathryn feels that family is who you can go to without judgement and with the full confidence that they will support you:

> Now I would define family as, who are the people that you are really close to that core group of like where you go for emotional support and spend most of your time with.

Much like Kathryn and Emmett, Allen believes that family shows up, no matter what. But Allen also believes that showing up and supporting family means doing whatever you have to in order to be that support:

> I would do anything and everything for these people. Um, whatever they asked me to do, I would do it for them and um, if they need something, if I need to sacrifice something for their benefit, like that's okay with me and I would be willing to do that. If there were any sorts of like arguments going on, I would like take their side and I would like have their back and help support them. Like no matter what, [they get] very much a 'I am on your team and that's how that is' kind of attitude.

No matter what, family shows up. No matter what, family prioritizes each other. Choosing family means choosing people who prioritize you and who you want to prioritize. Whether that prioritizing manifests as value, permanence, or support, participants believe that when they chose family they chose family who are a priority and who prioritize them. Each of these participants experienced consistency in who was considered family, even if a few family members were added by choice. For these participants, family of blood is still family but so are others, all of which are family because they were chosen to be family. Although these participants all maintained family of blood, they all believe that family can be blood, choice, or anything in between because family is what you make of it and family is what you choose.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

The participants in this study articulated family experiences which included acceptance, resistance, struggle, and change. These themes both amplify and complicate findings in existing literature. In this section I will address the research questions in light of the findings in Chapter 4.

Experiences of Family Prior to Coming Out

RQ1 addressed participants' experiences of family prior to coming out, and their experiences are primarily captured by the first theme. Participants all had a heteronormative family experience prior to coming out. Two participants experienced this as "The Family" and one participant experienced this as a modern family. "The Family," as defined by Bernstein and Reimann (2001), is the heteronormative family structure ideal, consisting of two married straight cisgender parents, with two or more children, and often a pet. Although Emmett and Allen did not mention any pets, both participants experiences of family prior to coming out involved married cisgender parents in a straight relationship accompanied by their two siblings. Modern family, as defined by Bernstein and Reimann (2001), are families which do not fit the nuclear framework of "The Family" but are still heteronormative at their core. Modern families include non-procreative couples, single parent households, step families, families divided through divorce, and many other forms of family that are primarily heteronormative but nonnuclear. Kathryn's experience of family prior to coming out was very similar to Bernstein and Reimann's (2001) modern family. Kathryn's modern family consisted of a sister and two biological parents who were divorced and living separately. Kathryn's non-nuclear modern family was heteronormative and reinforced the

heteronormative expectations of family in a similar way to other participants' nuclear family structures.

As previously discussed, the family structure of a child shapes the expectations and norms regarding family and integration for much or all of their life. Experiencing family as "The Family" or modern family reinforces heteronormative standards that are highly unlikely to apply to their adult structures of family. Additionally, because heteronormative families, specifically heteronormative nuclear families, are regarded as the epitome of morality for many Americans (Bernstein & Reimann, 2001), learning family in this way could lead to feelings of invalidation or complication when queer/trans folks who have experienced family as primarily heteronormative come out or transition to more queer structures of family in adulthood.

While speculative, we should consider the long-term impact of the heteronormative family experiences on trans individuals. Existing literature on the family in queer studies indicate that experiencing family as heteronormative prior to coming out might lead to post-coming out families that emphasize a similar child-centeredness and family loyalty. By adopting and normalizing these heteronormative values, participants may pigeonhole themselves to queer family structures such as homonormative family (two married/committed queer partners with children). This possibility would contribute to and support Chavez's (2010) findings that many binational queer couples focus on homonormative family in order to assimilate in the U.S. Most queer kinship does not adhere to these values and structures, thus complicating the understanding of what family can be and should be for these participants (Duggan, 2011; Boggis, 2011; Bernstein & Reimann, 2001; Raffo, 2012; Weston, 1991; Halberstam, 2011).

Coming out and Experiences of Family After Coming Out

RQ2 addressed experienced of family after coming out, but results indicated that coming experiences plays an important role in the post-coming out experience. For each participant, having their mother know they were transgender changed their transition journey. Each participant also experienced a reinforcement of their previous family structures, while two participants experienced misgendering and family struggles after coming out.

As participants engaged in identity disclosure by coming out, but not all came out to the same person first. For instance, Emmett and Allen both came out to a friend before coming out to family and Kathryn came out to her sister before coming out to any other family members. But no matter who they came out to first, when each participant came out to their mother the trajectory of their transition experience changed. Emmett received support from his mom in his identity exploration, including her assistance in coming out to other family members, and coming out to her was the beginning of Emmett's public coming out. Allen's mom showed her support by recognizing that Allen was not conveying a cisgender identity anymore and urged him to come out, breaking his pattern of coming out avoidance. Allen's mother also asked lots of questions and looked for information on her own to better support Allen. When Kathryn came out to her mother, she gained a partner in exploring and learning about the trans community, and her mom supported Kathryn's coming out to her father and subsequent public transition.

After coming out to their mothers, all participants experienced some new level of social support. For Emmett this was support and acceptance, for Allen this was information seeking, and for Kathryn it was exploring trans identity together and a new level of openness. This increase in social support made the coming out process easier, which is supported by existing re-

search showing that increased social support results in easier negotiation of trans identity and better mental health outcomes (Norwood & Lannutti, 2015; Meier et al, 2013; Budge et al, 2013; Wilson et al, 2012; Wren, 2002). Additionally, maternal reactions to participants' identity disclosures supported the findings of Wren (2002) that mothers prioritized relationship maintenance and careful communication after their child shares feelings of gender variance.

While participants had a positive experience in coming out to their mothers and they were not ostracized by their family or experienced other family loss, participants still experienced misgendering and other family struggles, as identified in the fourth theme. Allen and Kathryn's experiences of their father invalidating their identities and refusing to properly gender them support Norwood and Lannutti's (2015) finding that family members struggle to adjust to a trans person's gender identity and also supports a 2002 study by Wren which found that fathers tend to be more concerned about returning to the pre-coming out normalcy than adjusting to the preferences of their trans child. Additionally, Allen's experience coming out as non binary in order to buffer the coming out conversation with his parents supports Wren's finding that when parents are dismissive of their trans child's identity, the child is less likely to engage in behaviors that will help them adjust to their trans identity (2002).

Participants familial relationships also displayed an exceptional amount of durability. For instance, Allen's relationship with his father experienced strains that were related to Allen's trans identity including malicious misgendering and identity invalidation, which is still occurring. In spite of these struggles, Allen maintained his paternal relationship. This durability may be due to the shared experiences prevalent in these exceptionally tight knit families, such as Allen's home-

schooling and Emmett's transparent psychologist parents. This may indicate that experiencing stable relationships prior to coming out may increase family relational durability.

All participants experienced their family members renegotiating how they relate to, identify, and understand the participant. This change supports the study findings of Norwood and Lannutti (2015) that family lives and dynamics are complicated by the coming out process and observations by heinz (2015) that all trans folks experienced some form of relationship estrangement during their transition process. This change or estrangement is not necessarily permanent, as any family member distances themselves from the person they knew as cisgender in order to better understand the person they are now adjusting to being trans. This estrangement can be exacerbated by unnecessary or spiteful misgendering and identity invalidation like what some participants experienced from their fathers. This intentional identity dismissal or overt invalidation makes coming out and the resultant transition process more difficult and more complex than it needs to be.

Through coming out all participants entered into family dynamics of increased openness and honesty with their families. Coming out also resulted in increased closeness within parental relationships with the exception of Allen's father, who still continues to reject Allen's trans identity. In a broader response to RQ2: after coming out, all participants experienced consistency in their pre coming out family dynamic, all experienced some sort of increase in familial closeness, and some experienced family adjustment struggles which did not result in familial rejection.

Family Definition

Each participant had a definition of family which evolved throughout their coming out and transition journey, and these definitions are the focus of RQ3. Each participant pretty strictly defined family as blood prior to coming out, but after coming out (or in Emmett's case, right before coming out) each participant articulated their explicit family definition as choice. Although all participants continued to identify their family of origin as family, they also either recognized the validity of family of choice or added family members of choice to their family throughout their identity journey. In response to RQ3, we will discuss participants vocalized belief that family is defined by choice and how that definition contrasts with participants family structures before and after coming out which remained majorly heteronormative and nuclear with some family of choice incorporated along the edges.

Theme three discusses how family stayed the same for participants after coming out. The importance of coming out to family members and how identity disclosure effected participants lives support existing research that positive family social support positively impacts transition outcomes such as identity renegotiation and adjustment (Norwood & Lannutti, 2015; heinz, 2015; Budge et al, 2013; Wilson et al, 2012; Wren, 2002). Additionally the use of information seeking techniques by family members to learn about and negotiate their trans family member's identity with their existing beliefs supports existing assertions by Norwood and Lannutti (2015) that information seeking techniques reduce uncertainty regarding the transitioning process of their transgender family member. Complicating this support of information seeking with positive outcomes, Kathryn's forced information delivery to her father and his attempts to avoid those conversations better support Brashers (2001) assertion that information can cause distress and lead those experiencing that distress to avoid information. Other familial structure reinforcement

strategies such as reactions of resistance rather than rejection, religion, increased relationship quality, and other family member coping mechanisms were not touched on in the reviewed literature but bring to light an interesting point about family structure after a transgender member comes out: In these three cases, the family was close prior to coming out, and they become closer, with family ties reinforced after the acceptance and/or support of a trans family member. For instance, even though Kathryn's father did not react with acceptance, he recently started to attend therapy to better understand his feelings and reactions to Kathryn's trans identity. Although this is not an accepting action, it is an action of support which caused a strengthening in Kathryn's paternal bond.

While all participants maintained their family from before coming out, two participants experienced an addition of family of choice members. Emmett and Allen's family of choice supports the theoretical assertions of scholars like Bernstein & Reimann (2001), Weston (1991), and Raffo (2012) which address the concerns of scholars like Boggis (2011) and Duggan (2011) by asserting that chosen family is just as valid as blood or nuclear families and are more encompassing of queer and non normative family experiences. For Emmett and Allen, these family members of choice were either queer/trans themselves or supportive and knowledgable about the queer and trans community. Through their choice of these family members, Emmett and Allen built an extension of their family which could also be considered community support, supporting scholars such as heinz (2015), Bishop (2015) and Pinto, Melendez, and Spector (2008) whose studies support that community support can serve many of the same social support roles as family.

Emmett's chosen brothers and Allen's chosen family, Joe and Brittany, represent real life manifestations of chosen family as defined by theorists such as Bernstein & Reimann (2001), Weston (1991), and Raffo (2012). Allen alluded to the fact that his commitment to his chosen family is incomplete, as he is waiting to ratify his chosen family once he moves in with them in the next school year. Allen's use of moving in as a form of commitment aligns with Haas and Whitton's 2015 assertion that queer cohabitation can serve as a symbol of permanency and commitment. Haas and Whitton's study focused on same-sex couples employing cohabitation as a romantic form of commitment, but I feel this same theoretical idea of familial permanence symbolized through cohabitation is supported by Allen's chosen family structure. Emmett's experience of "The Family" was accepting and positive with little risk of family rejection or family loss due to Emmett's coming out and Emmett also added his family of choice who were consistently accepting. Emmett's chosen family members also were spoken about more in a friendship context, unlike Allen's coming cohabitation commitment. Although Allen and Emmett's family definition "labels" are the same, nuclear plus chosen family, their experiences of nuclear family were completely different after coming out but their reasoning for including chosen family was similar.

Kathryn, on the other hand, did not experience any change in who was considered family around her coming out. Instead, Kathryn maintained her modern family with divorced parents and single sibling and added no family of choice. Kathryn's view on chosen family aligned with the family definitions of Allen and Emmett: family can be blood or who raised you, but does not have to be. Family can also be who you choose and consider family.

Another interesting thing about participants defining family as choice and seeing the inclusion of blood family as choice, is that historically when queer folks came out it was assumed they would lose their family of origin or blood family (Weston, 1991). While there is a tension between the implicit and explicit definitions of family for these participants, the fact that this tension exists because participants family of choice includes both blood family and non-blood family is new. Until recently, when queer and trans people built families of choice they did so because their family of origin was no longer an option due to expected loss (Duggan, 2011; Boggis, 2011; Weston, 1991). Participants choice to include both completely choice family and blood connected family marks a change in the possibilities in queer family structures. Participants showed that maintaining family of origin is an option when building family of choice.

As explored in theme five, the ultimate family definition explicitly adopted by all participants aligned with the previously mentioned family of choice scholars: family is who you consider family, for whatever reasons you consider them family. The most interesting thing about this understanding of family by participants is that all participants considered their family of blood/birth still family, but believed family can be more than that. By defining family as family of choice but enacting family as heteronormative and mostly nuclear with some exceptions which incorporate family of choice, participants complicate queer possibilities of family and introduce a significant tension between their explicit definition of family and their enactment of family. If, for participants, family is always heteronormative at it's core, does that mean family of choice will always be the weird uncle Allen once referred to? This heteronormativity alongside elements of family of choice go against queer theorizations of family based around forget-

ting such as Halberstam (2011) but still relate to and partially support queer theorizations by scholars such as Bernstein and Reimann (2001) and Weston (1991).

Additionally, when talking about family, participants separated family of choice from (heteronormative) family of origin in their description. This separation, seeing and articulating family of choice as separate with equally valid as family of origin, gives credence to Weston's (1991) assertion that normative (heteronormative/nuclear/blood) and non-normative (queer family/chosen family/etc) give meaning to each other and vice versa. Without an understanding of who their family of origin is and what makes them different from their family of choice, Emmett and Allen would not separate their family of origin from family of choice.

Overall, participants definitions of family asserted that family is who you consider family; blood, choice, or otherwise. Considerations about how participants identify family and why family is identified through priority supports research like Lannutti's 2008 study which found that queer families are not relegated to one theoretical family structure, instead considerations of family structure and who is family involves a diverse and overlapping consideration of all forms of queer family structure. These considerations can result in the employment of just one type of structure, like Kathryn's modern family, or more than one type of family, like Emmett and Allen's nuclear family plus chosen family. What does this mean for queer family structures for transgender folks? It means that, as shown in existing studies like those done by Lannutti (2008) and Yep, Lovaas, & Elia (2003), all types of theorized queer family structures are considered and enacted in combination and tandem in ways that best apply to and are accommodative of participants lives. The only contradiction to existing studies is that, for these participants, heteronorma-

tive family continues to be the base in which the rest of their queered family structure is built around.

Contradictory Religious Influences

All participants discussed religion in some aspect, often mentioning religion in contradicting ways. Emmett, Allen and Kathryn all experienced anxiety prior to coming out that was fueled by religion. Yet later in their interviews, Allen and Emmett proposed a positive role for religion in their coming out experience and their families' acceptance of them. Emmett said that religion provided a resource for his realization of his trans identity. Allen claimed that religion provided a social 'glue' that helped hold his family together. Kathryn was the only participant who did not identify a positive role for religion in her experience. The duality in participant's depiction of religion's role in their lives is notable. As others have noted, contemporary Christianity often views queer/trans identities and Christianity "as incompatible and mutually exclusive" and (Spencer & Lynch, 2016, p.64).

Emmett first mentioned religion in the context of someone else's spiritual beliefs. During childhood, a Native American friend was talking to Emmett and he responded "I bet I was a guy in my past life or something like that." Emmett mentioned that this was one of the first times he shared a trans thought with someone. In this way, someone else's religion helped him share an identity realization without risking being discovered. Emmett then talked about religion as a source of coming out anxiety. Emmett feared that his family would have trouble negotiating his trans identity with their religious beliefs and that their social circles, which presumably contain their church-going friends, would blame his parents for Emmett's trans identity. This concern

supports concerns that Christianity fuels morality claims that exclude queer identities (Spencer & Lynch, 2016; Sullivan 1989). In contrast, Emmett also talked about religion as a source of identity affirmation. Emmett believes his supportive family and friends were placed in his life by God as signs of His support of Emmett and his trans identity. For Emmett, religious is a place of both fear and affirmation/safety, causing him trepidation about the impact of his coming out and affirming that he is right to come out. These contradicting feelings align with the fighting rhetorical perspectives present in Spencer and Lynch's piece (2016).

Religion was source of coming out anxiety for Kathryn, fueled by the fear that she would be rejected after coming out. Kathryn felt like her family's religious beliefs would lead them to reject her for being transgender. Allen shared this fear. Their resultant concerns about coming out rejection was not unfounded due to the knowledge that "Christian LGB life is littered with stories of.. deeply religious families abandoning their queer children" (Spencer & Lynch, 2016, p. 62). But Allen, like Emmett, experienced religion in contradictory ways. Allen saw religion as a source of coming out trepidation but also as the reason his family did not reject him after he came out. For Allen, Christian religion and its associated beliefs of family allegiance and unconditional support is the reason his family stuck together after he came out. Allen believes that because his family believes in a Christian philosophy of love and acceptance, rather than the Christian philosophy of sin and sinner that leads to rejection, no matter how Allen identifies or how much his family members might disagree with his identity they still identify and support Allen as family unconditionally. For example, Allen's relationship struggle with his father, who still misgenders Allen regularly and still believes that trans identities are not valid, impacts how accepted Allen feels by his father but does not result in rejection because their religious beliefs imbue fa-

milial loyalty and unconditional love. But his experience with his father is still indicative of the resistance talked about in the Spencer and Lynch (2016) piece due to the resistance to trans identity acceptance shown by his father. His father supports Allen as his child, but not Allen's trans identity under a similar facade as some modern religious leaders, such as Pope Francis (Spencer & Lynch, 2016).

For all participants, religion was a source of coming out anxiety and trepidation due to the rejection that many trans folks face by religious families, as addressed in theme one. But the interesting piece of our participants mention of religion in their lives is Emmett and Allen's seemingly contradictory source of negative and positive effects of religion in their coming out and family experiences. While, yes, religion was a source of trepidation, religion was also credited with identity affirmation and family retention after coming out. Emmett and Allen's experiences indicate the potentially contradictory and contrasting nature of the effects that religion has on family experiences for trans folks. Additionally, the core of heteronormative family present in all participants family structures support the assertion that Christian morality, even when accepting of queer identities, does not foster the formation of diverse queer family structures.

Limitations

All participants were white, middle class, college educated, and experienced relatively supportive family reactions to their identity disclosure. No participants experienced outright family rejection, and all family members, except Allen's father, have worked toward correctly gendering and naming their trans family member. Many family members also engaged in coping mechanisms such as therapy or information seeking to negotiate their trans family member's

identity with their existing beliefs, family dynamic, or understanding of their trans family member. This is often not the case for trans folks coming out to their families, many of whom experience family rejection or loss as a result of their coming out event. Additionally, participants may have experienced familial consistency due to the experience of less societal discrimination due to the race, class, and education status of participants fueling the concern that participants experiences were not representative of most trans folks.

The family experiences of study participants did not represent existing literature which states that lack of social support is very common among transgender populations in all facets including family (Norwood & Lannutti, 2015; Haimson et al, 2015; Cipoletta, Votadoro, & Faccio, 2017; Davey et al, 2014; Marciano, 2014; Green, Bobrowicz, & Ang, 2015). The experiences of these participants do align with existing research that states that increased social support, often in the form of family, results in positive mental, physical, and emotional health outcomes (Budge et al, 2013; Budge et al, 2010; Pinto, Melendez, and Spector, 2008). This is evidenced by theme two which discusses maternal coming out and the resultant support/guidance which allowed each participant to more easily continue coming out to family members and transition toward their transgender identity.

This study also was completed in a one year time frame, lessing the chances of recruitment success and generalizable amounts of data. Additionally, the researcher had significant trouble with recruitment through her primary recruitment method resulting in a smaller number of participants. this study only had three participants. Due to the small participant scope, experiences examined throughout this project can not be indicative or representative of general trans family experiences.

Future Directions

This study examined a small non representative transgender population whose experiences largely confirmed existing literature. In order to more fully represent trans populations, I would recommend gathering more data to examine in the same manner. This would not only be more representative, it would add rich data to the existing discussion and allow us to draw additional conclusions regarding family definition evolution for transgender folks.

I would also encourage future research to examine existing data through an interpersonal or family theoretical framework in order to better understand how coming out interactions effect the overall experience of family pre and post coming out. This would examine participants experiences more individually and allude to potential coming out outcomes resulting in minor family dynamic changes, compared to the existing queer theoretical framework which applies more to drastic family structure changes, which majorly did not occur in these participants experiences.

Future research should also aim to connect with participants through resources they already use or are involved in. Although this project attempted to do this, due to institutional timelines and willingness to help these attempts were unsuccessful. By connecting with resources and communities that potential participants are already involved in, researchers would be able to recruit a larger number of participants with a more intentional participant selection to move toward being more representative of existing trans populations.

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