SPEAKING OF GAY: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY
OF THE INFLUENCE OF PRIVACY MANAGEMENT ON PARENTS' DISCLOSURES OF
A SON'S OR DAUGHTER'S SEXUAL ORIENTATION

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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Central Michigan University
Mount Pleasant, Michigan
August 2013

"You've got the words to change a nation,
but you're biting your tongue. You've spent a life time stuck in silence afraid you'll say
something wrong. If no one ever hears it, how we gonna learn your song."
-Emeli Sande

This is dedicated to my friends
and mentors Lesley, Shelly, and Nancy.
Your unwavering faith, guidance,
and support has allowed me to mature
and advance; for that I am forever grateful.

ABSTRACT

SPEAKING OF GAY: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY
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Coming out has been research in many contexts and is considered an important element in developing an individual's identity; however, little research has explored how families' manage coming out in terms of privacy. This study utilized Communication Privacy Management and Family Communication Patterns to explore a parent's decision to disclose his/her son's or daughter's sexual orientation to others. The relationships between family privacy boundaries, family communication patterns, motivations to disclose a child's sexual orientation, and a parent's willingness to disclose a child's sexual orientation are explored.

The study recruited 57 parents of lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals. Results indicate that both interior and exterior privacy boundaries are not significant predictors of willingness to disclose (R^2 =-.049, $F(2,37) = .092$, $p = .91$); however, regarding family communication patters, results indicate that the model was partially supported (R^2 =.074, $F(2,37) = 2.561$, $p = .09$). The degree of conversation was significantly positively related to willingness to disclose (β=.317, p=.046). To test motivation to disclose a measure was devised to test for seeking understanding, pride, burden of a secret, and concern for safety. The proposed model was a significant predictor of willingness to disclose (R^2 =.262, $F(4,33) = 4.278$, $p = .007$). A post hoc analysis revealed a significant relationship between family communication patterns as a predictor of interior family privacy boundaries (R^2 =.404, $F(2,37) = 14.235$, $p < .001$).

Both practical and theoretical implications are discussed. Limitations of the study are discussed. Suggestions for future research are offered.

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INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Coming out has been well researched from the perspective of the lesbian, gay, and

bisexual (LGB) individual, yet little research has examined parents' experience of whether and

how to disclose to others their son's or daughter's sexual orientation. This exploratory study

investigated the initial attempts of parents' disclosures of their son's or daughter's sexual

orientation to others in an attempt to accomplish three goals: 1) to explore parents' disclosure of

a son's or daughter's sexual orientation with an eye toward discovering new lines of research

regarding the family and the coming out process, 2) to apply Communication Privacy

Management (CPM) theory as a possible explanation for how motivation and family privacy

culture influence parents' willingness to disclose a son's or daughter's sexual orientation, and 3)

to test CPM theory in the context of families with LGB sons or daughters.

CPM theory offers a unique lens that can help to predict and explain the decisions

individuals make when deciding to disclose private information (Petronio, 2010). Although well

researched, CPM has primarily focused on general topics of private information. For example,

Hammonds (2009) asked participants to think about personal topics they regard as "highly

private" (without disclosing what that topic entailed) while completing a survey instrument.

Private information is information people own (Petronio & Caughlin, 2006), but CPM does not

define specifically the nature of the private information due to the subjective nature of individual

experience and the ambiguity of what information is owned, and by whom. Although CPM does

not seek to focus on specific private topics, it is important that CPM be applied more specifically

to gain an understanding of how particular private topics are managed. The present study

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defined private information as one's homosexual orientation. Specifying the topic of the private information allows CPM to provide insight into how homosexuality is managed as private information.

Regarding the disclosure of private information, CPM researchers have stated that motivation is a key factor when deciding to reveal private information (Petronio, 2002, 2004, 2010; Petronio, & Caughlin, 2006; Vangelisti, & Caughlin, 1997; Vangelisti, Caughlin, & Timmerman, 2001). The present study suggests that four main motivations lead to the willingness to disclose a son's or daughter's sexual orientation: the burden of a secret, pride in one's son or daughter, seeking understanding/sympathy, and concern for the safety of the son or daughter. In conjunction with family privacy culture, these four motivations lead to a parent's willingness to disclose a son's or daughter's sexual orientation.

First, this chapter describes terms pertinent to this study; specifically, sexual orientation, the closet, coming out, and privacy are defined. Second, this chapter looks at the relevant literature. This chapter reviews the relevant literature on the disclosure of sexual orientation, the theoretical base of CPM, the development of family privacy culture, and motivation research to understand the factors leading to the disclosure of a son's or daughter's sexual orientation.

Key Terms

Sexual orientation. Sexuality is a construction of social practices, norms, and legal regulations surrounding biology (Fejes, 2000). Hill (2009) explained sexual orientation (i.e., the state of being heterosexual, bisexual, or homosexual) as the way in which people understand themselves in terms of being a sexual and/or romantic person. For the purposes of the present study, sexual orientation is one's understanding of his/her sexual and romantic desires for

someone of the same sex, opposite sex, or both biological sexes that is influenced by the social constructions of culture, politics, and history. Homosexuality is a type of sexuality, but is often defined in terms of its differences from heterosexuality. However, a few researchers, such as Hillier (2002), have endeavored to define homosexuality not by its differences, but on its own terms. Hillier described the homosexual orientation as the recognition of one's sexual attraction to another of the same biological sex.

The closet. Most people would describe a closet as a space in which individuals store items out of open view until the need or the desire arises to utilize those items. In relation to homosexuality, a common understanding of a homosexual's state of being "closeted" is the concealment of an individual's sexual attraction to others of the same sex. Newman and Muzzoniro (1993) described the closet as "the process of developing a lesbian or gay identity" (p. 215). In this process, gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals conceal their sexual orientation to avoid social shunning. Gray (2009) stated, "what we call the 'the closet' springs from the idea that identities are waiting to be discovered and unfold from inside out" (pp. 1181-1182). Based on these understandings of the closet, the present study defines the closet as the process or state of developing a gay or lesbian identity that has not yet been disclosed to an intended individual.

Coming out. In developing a gay or lesbian identity, disclosure of one's sexual identity is labeled "coming out." Coming out, as defined by Gorman-Murray (2008), is a shift in sexual identity when an individual defines oneself as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Although Gorman-Murray's definition provides important aspects of coming out, this definition misses an important communication aspect: disclosure. Others define coming out as a process of realizing one's sexual orientation and disclosing it to others (Mehra & Braquet, 2011). Waldner and Magrader's (1999) definition also incorporates disclosure in the coming out process, explaining

that coming out is an acknowledgement of a gay identity and the disclosure of that identity to others. Hill (2009) defined coming out as "recognizing, exploring, integrating, and disclosing an alternative sexual orientation" (p. 347). By adding exploring and integrating to the process, Hill further develops the idea of what coming out entails. It is one thing to accept or acknowledge one's sexual orientation, but the understanding that comes from exploring and integrating that orientation leads to a better understanding of the disclosure. Therefore, coming out is a multistage process of self-identification, realization, acknowledgment, and disclosure of one's sexual orientation. It must be noted, however, that because sexual orientation is not a visible aspect of a person's identity, gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals must repeatedly come out or revert to the closet depending on the social, personal, professional, and educational relationships they experience during their lifetimes (Mehra & Braquet, 2011).

     Privacy. People can experience internal struggles to simultaneously meet opposing, conflicting needs. This "push and pull" can be understood as relational dialectics. Relational dialectics explains how these internal conflicting desires or needs, known as dialectical tensions, can cause relationships to be in a constant state of flux (Baxter, 2006). Privacy, too, can be looked at as a dialectical tension; specifically, a dialectical tension exists between the need to maintain one's privacy and the simultaneous need for self-disclosure or openness. Because people cannot simultaneously have both complete privacy and complete openness, decisions need to be made to either be open about information or maintain privacy. Privacy refers to people's desire to keep information to themselves, whereas openness is the desire to share information with others (Petronio, 2002). Privacy and openness are true opposites; if all information were available to everyone, privacy would not exist, and if all information were restricted from others, there would be no openness.

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With these key terms identified and defined, this chapter will review the literature relevant to these concepts. As previously mentioned, the literature review focuses on the disclosure of sexual orientation, the theoretical base of CPM, the development of family privacy culture, and finally, motivation research to better understand the factors that could lead to the disclosure of a son's or daughter's sexual orientation.

Review of Literature

Coming out, as previously defined, allows for a general understanding of the individual perspective. The coming out process needs to be situated in its influence on others, societal understandings, and the family to be able to comprehend its place in privacy research. Coming out, although individual in nature, is an experience that impacts others—including family members. The following describes how coming out can alter the reality of others, offers a discussion of societal influences, and finally, looks at family research.

Coming Out Research

Influence on others. Coming out is not merely a single act of self-disclosure; coming out is an ongoing process of self-disclosure that openly gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals repeat for the rest of their lives (Mehra & Braquet, 2011). Chirrey (2003) stated, "…in coming out, speakers are not only using language to create a new facet of the self's identity but, in addition, are altering reality for the self and altering reality for others" (p. 25). This reference to altering others' reality means that the individual can use communication to offer a different perception to others. Many times, this perception of a homosexual individual is created by societal beliefs and understandings rooted in issues of heteronormativity and stigmatization.

Societal influences. Society creates normative expectations, establishing "natural" categorizations of personas and acceptable attributes on which people tend to rely (Goffman, 1986). Heterosexuality is one such expectation created by our society, leaving homosexuality stigmatized. Stigma is the idea of reducing a person, or viewing someone as less than desirable to the point that we discredit the individual. People tend to view stigmatized individuals as less than human (Goffman, 1986).

Goffman (1986) discussed three specific types of stigma. The first type of stigma is *abominations of the body*, which come in the form of various physical deformities. These individuals are stigmatized for being visibly physically different than an individual who does not have a physical deformity. A second type, *tribal stigma*, includes race, nationality, and religion. With tribal stigmas, people may be viewed as different or as outsiders due to their race, national origin, or religion. Tribal stigmas can be passed down through generations. The last type of stigma, *blemishes of individual character*, involves traits perceived as weak, domineering, or involving unnatural passions. This type of stigma includes, but is not limited to, mental disorders, imprisonment, addiction, alcoholism, unemployment, suicide attempts, radical political behavior, and homosexuality. To understand how individuals with blemishes of individual character--particularly homosexuals--are stigmatized, one must understanding how negative perceptions are developed in society. Heteronormativity explains how the stigmatization of homosexuals occurs.

In Western culture, realities are structured by heterosexuality, and these structures allow people to function under the assumption that all people are heterosexual unless told otherwise (Gray, 2009). Heteronormativity is the idea that heterosexuality is positioned as the social norm; through the process of normalization, heterosexuality is defined as natural due to its link to

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biological sex and procreation (Robinson, 2010). Based in the belief that men and women are anatomically made for each other (Jackson, 2006), normalization is a social phenomenon negotiated and perpetuated through dominant discourse, creating a dichotomy of hetero/homosexual. Ultimately, normalization is about power and reinforcing the norm (Robinson, 2010). Heteronormativity leads to heterosexism, or enacting the norm of heterosexuality, which in turn can lead to the stigmatization of other sexual orientations (Hill, 2009). Goffman (1986) explained that, from within a given category in society, people are pressured by expectations to support a particular norm. Heteronormativity and heterosexism are damaging to society in that they create a sexuality hierarchy. State and institutional policies can reinforce that hierarchy, dictating which relationships are socially acceptable and recognized (Jackson, 2006).

Society is responsive to change and can move to legitimize different relationships (Jackson, 2006). A heterosexist society does not necessarily dictate heterosexist responses and reactions to the homosexual population (Gorman-Murray, 2008). Goffman (1986) suggested that if stigmatized individuals are at ease with their difference (such as their homosexual orientation), people without the stigma ("normals") become more comfortable with the difference, as well. With the homosexual population becoming more visible publicly, and homosexual individuals showing society that they are "normal" through events such as those comprising the gay rights movement, a different perspective on the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered population can develop.

The events of the gay rights movement prompted many lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered to announce their sexual orientation. Manning (2007) described this public coming out as an *educational/activist coming out*. The educational/activist coming out occurs

when an individual participates in a panel or other forum that requires the homosexual's expertise as a member of the gay and lesbian community; by being on the panel or forum, the individual reveals her/his sexual orientation to those in attendance. Through efforts such as the gay rights movement and mass public acts of educational/activist coming out, the meaning of coming out has changed over time from a social taboo to a more acceptable part of society (Beeler & DiProva, 1999). Coming out has become a culturally recognized process (Beeler & DiProva, 1999). This move away from the closet of leading double lives toward social acceptance is known as "beyond the closet" (Martin, Hutson, Kazyak, & Scherrer, 2010). Although we are not yet beyond the closet, normalization occurs. With more gays, lesbians, and bisexuals disclosing their orientations, families are being pushed "to face their own understandings, fears, stereotypes, and knowledge (or lack thereof) of gay and lesbians" (Martin, Hutson, Kazyak, & Scherrer, 2010, p. 985).

Moving beyond the closet can also create a tension among gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth between seeing coming out as a healthy process and feeling vulnerable to rejection by their families (Hillier, 2002). Gray (2009) found evidence of this tension in her research with youth coming out online, with many of her participants expressing that they felt torn by and saddled with culturally accepted norms that dictate heteronormative family relationships. Family communication research on the coming out process must be examined to understand the struggle homosexuals experience when deciding whether to come out.

Family research. Historically, families tended to function under the assumption that their son or daughter is heterosexual until proven otherwise; many families still make assumptions of heterosexuality for their sons or daughters today. The adoption of heteronormative norms leaves parents—and other family members—uneducated due to a lack of

exposure to unbiased homosexual content (Waldner & Magrader, 1999), and this lack of education creates difficulties with their son's or daughter's coming out process. Fields (2001) found that the struggle parents have with a son or daughter coming out could be attributed—in part—to the lack of a script. Fields found that there are scripts, or ways in which we should respond, to just about any situation, including deaths, accidents, receiving bad news, but not for the coming out of a son or daughter.

Research on the gay, lesbian, and bisexual community has tended to focus on what happens to individuals after coming out of the closet, yet little research has focused on the family. It is equally important to focus on the family within the coming out process. Considering that home and family are the starting point for most individuals, it makes sense that the research community should seek answers to questions about developing a homosexual identity in the family home. The family home is one's place of origin (Gorman-Murray, 2005); as such, the home holds one's family heritage and the complex interconnected relationships between one's self, siblings, and parents. Most importantly, the family home can be a center of support while one transitions through childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Gorman-Murray stated that the "home is not just a physical site, but also a matrix of social relations, personal meaning, emotional attachments" (p. 32).

Past research reports describe negative reactions from family members to a son's or daughter's coming out. Some research has suggested that, for some parents, a son's or daughter's coming out is like losing that child (Robinson, Walters, & Skeen, 1989). "For parents just learning that an adolescent son or daughter is gay or lesbian, disparaging messages internalized about homosexuality may undermine previously held thoughts about their son or daughter as a positive of themselves, creating a sense of narcissistic injury" (Saltzburg, 2004, p.

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110). This internalization may account for the family's negative reactions. Hillier (2002) found

that, of the 748 participants in her study, reported that parents did not celebrate their son's or

daughter's newly revealed sexual orientation. In early research, the most positive parental

reaction found was passive acceptance, which included screaming and tears after the son's or

daughter's revealed his/her sexual orientation; the worst reaction was the ejection of the son or

daughter from the family home (Hillier, 2002). Beeler and DiProva (1999) explained that these

negative reactions occur because families:

> suddenly find it difficult to identify with their "now gay" son or daughter (sister or
>
> brother); their family member may suddenly seem unknown. They may even feel that
>
> their past relationship with that family member has been fraudulent. Moreover,
>
> disclosure is often experienced as a reflecting back on the family. (p. 445)

Even parents who have long-standing suspicions of their son's or daughter's sexuality often have

poor reactions to the disclosure of their sexual orientation (Herdt & Koff, 2000). Parents who

held long-standing suspicions attributed their reactions to their worst fear becoming true; the

parents often hoped that the suspicion would be disproven in time.

    Although there is an abundance of literature on the negative initial reactions to coming

out to family members, there is evidence to suggest that, in time, family communication gets

better. Savin-Williams and Dube (1998) explained that with time, some family members do

eventually come to accept the son's or daughter's sexual orientation. Some research shows that

even after a bad coming out experience, relationships with family members do tend to improve

and, in some cases, relationships are even better than before the disclosure of the homosexual

orientation (Beaty, 1999). It is sometimes easier to accept the family member's sexual

orientation than continuing to fight. Acceptance does not mean that additional arguments on the

subject will not occur; however, a parent's need to have a heterosexual son or daughter tends to diminish as the greater desire to allow their son or daughter to express his/her self rises (Savin-Williams & Dube, 1998). This shift can occur due to a reorganizing of the parenting structure in which parents start to adapt to the son or daughter being gay or lesbian, start to accept their new identity as a parent of a gay or lesbian son or daughter, and change their understanding of the social context to include a gay or lesbian family member (Saltzburg, 2004). Baptist and Allen (2008) found that as families seek answers to their questions, the discomfort with the issue of a gay family member tends to dissipate, and the focus often turns to the concern for the son's or daughter's safety. According to the case investigated in the study, relationships developed as the family learned to discuss the issue of homosexuality. A key element suggested in moving the family forward is moving beyond the language of society that prevents acceptance, such as normalcy and biology (Fields, 2001). In a case study, Fields found that once families were able to remove the blame, they were able to move toward acceptance and eventually embrace pride in their family that included a gay, lesbian, or bisexual son or daughter.

However, parental and family acceptance of a gay, lesbian, or bisexual family member is just the beginning. Goldfried and Goldfried (2011) stated that "when GLB [gay, lesbian, and bisexual]/transgendered individuals come out of the closet, their parents and relatives go in" (p. 699). Family members have to come to terms with the newly revealed sexual orientation of the gay, lesbian, or bisexual family member (Goldfried & Goldfried, 2011). Beeler and DiProva (1999) stated, "families worry about their own fit and may struggle with a new sense of marginality, vulnerability and stigmatization" (p. 445). In doing so, they have to reorganize their expectations and values in a process similar to that used by gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals when coming out of the closet (Goldfried & Goldfried, 2011). "Having finally reached a point

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parents—and other family members—can take the next step of sharing this information with family members and close friends" (Goldfried & Goldfried, 2011, p. 688). How parents and other family members "take the next step" to disclose the sexual orientation of another family member depends on how they negotiate and make choices about their use of private information.

The foundation developed for the coming out process is vital in understanding the nature of the issue of homosexuality in regards to privacy. To fully understand the private nature of homosexuality, the underpinnings of Communication Privacy Management (CPM) need to be explored. This section of the literature review first looks at the broader understanding of CPM, followed by an extension to CPM known as family relational culture, and finally, motivation's role in the disclosure of private information. The next section examines the five basic principles of CPM.

Communication Privacy Management Theory (CPM)

As mentioned in the introduction, relationships are in a constant state of flux due to dialectical tensions that naturally occur due to conflicting needs (Baxter, 2006). Three primary dialectical tensions occur within relationships. The first, connectedness vs. separateness, addresses the fact that people in relationships desire to be close and bonded while simultaneously fearing the loss of identity. The second is certainty and uncertainty; this tension addresses the fact that people in relationships like the comfort of predictability, but at the same time, enjoy mystery and spontaneity. The final tension is openness and closedness. This tension is concerned with people's desire to reveal personal information to others, while also wanting to retain their privacy. Vic (2006) stated:

it is difficult to understand [the] disclosure of private information without really defining it as a dialectical tension. Therefore, disclosure and privacy had to be joined because it is problematic to consider disclosure (or making something public) without considering a sense of privateness. (p. 1943)

Vic's characterization of privateness provides the basis for CPM Theory.

Sandra Petronio's development of Communication Privacy Management (CPM) in the early 1980s stemmed from her "orneriness" with the current self-disclosure research (Petronio, 2004). In developing the theory, Petronio noticed that like relational dialectics, tensions or contradictory forces accompany people's desire to disclose information and their desire to remain private. Research focused on these tensions revealed five basic principles regarding the management of private information.

Basic principles. Petronio (2010) stated that five basic principles guide the theory and utilized a boundary metaphor to describe the way in which information is managed. As defined by Petronio, "a boundary represents a place that information, judged as private to the individual or the family, is housed" (p. 178). The first of the five principles of CPM is that private information belongs to the individual. In owning information, people are able to choose to do as they wish with their privately held information; in other words, individuals have the right to share information as they please, and with whomever they wish.

The second principle is that the person who owns the information has the right to control the information (Petronio, 2010). An individual may seek more control over private information. For example, an individual's sexual orientation may be regarded as highly private information given the stigma associated with homosexuality. Information regarded as highly stigmatized

may be more restricted in comparison to information that is less stigmatized, such as an individual's blood type.

The third principle of CPM is that people develop a rules system for controlling the flow of the information, providing an insight into how we decide with whom, how, and when we share information (Petronio, 2010). The rules system that people use to control the flow of information is based on protection rules. *Protection rules* are guidelines that individuals form to prevent others from learning information or to avoid having to discuss the information with others (Petronio, 2002). Protection rules are influenced by different factors such as gender, motivation, culture, and/or the sex of the person(s) to whom the information is disclosed (Vangelisti, Caughlin, & Timmerman, 2001). According to Vangelisti and Caughlin (1997), individuals are more likely to disclose information when they have a reason motivating them to do so. The risk-benefit calculation is an important process when deciding to disclose. If the information (such as one's sexual orientation) poses risks or threats to one's social standing, such a disclosure may be accompanied by a warning, such as, "I'm going to tell you, but you cannot tell anyone." Attempting to limit risk through negotiating the management of shared information is the focus of the fourth principle, which discusses co-ownership of private information.

The fourth principle takes effect after information has been shared; it explains that once shared, information becomes co-owned (Petronio, 2010). When an individual decides to disclose information to another, privacy rules are enacted. *Privacy rules* are coordinated boundaries that are mutually agreed upon as to how the private information will be managed. It is important to note that young adults may change their privacy rules when they leave the home and develop a separate identity from their families (Ledbetter, Heiss, Sibal, Lev, Battle-Fisher, & Shubert, 2010). When looking at privacy rules, there are three rules of interest to the understanding of the

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coming out process: linkage rules, permeability rules, and ownership rules. *Linkage rules* define who else can be privy to the information (Petronio, 2010). In the case of revealing one's sexual orientation, the closeted person may disclose the names of others—if any—who already know the information. Next, *permeability rules* indicate which aspects of the private information others within the co-owned privacy boundary should know. For example, imagine a scenario in which a gay individual comes out to all of his friends and family; later, he starts dating someone privately. The gay individual shares the news that he is dating with one of his close friends. The two friends negotiate who is privy to this new information. The gay individual may not want his family to know about the dating; the new information is tied to his sexual orientation, so he might wish that his family members not know about the dating until he tells them himself. To clarify, in this scenario, family members are linked to the knowledge of the gay individual's sexual orientation, but are not privy to any information tied to the gay individual's choice to date due to the permeability rules. Finally, *ownership rules* state how much control the co-owners have over the information. In some cases, the original information owner may be the only one who is allowed to disclose the private information to others. In the disclosure scenario described above, the friends may negotiate the rule that the friend must keep the secret, discussing the information with no one but the gay individual. Then again, since the homosexual had previously disclosed his sexual orientation to all of his friends and family, the friends might negotiate a rule that would allow the friend to speak to anyone aware of the gay individual's sexual orientation (but no one else), or the rule could state that the information is open for discussion with anyone, even those not in the circle of family and friends. In summary, linkage rules are negotiated to decide who is aware of the information, whereas permeability rules pertain to how much of the information can be shared, and with whom. Finally, ownership rules

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regulate which individuals can use the information. When multiple people co-own information, problems can occur; the final principle of CPM focuses on these potential problems.

Boundary turbulence, the final principle guiding CPM, occurs when co-owners have different understandings of how to manage the information (Petronio, 2010). CPM suggests that when private information is shared and co-ownership is negotiated, guidelines for managing the private information should be established between the co-owners, creating shared privacy boundaries. With these established guidelines in place, individuals should be aware of what they can and cannot do with the information. If an individual intentionally violates one of the established privacy rules, turbulence results. For example, if a gay individual explicitly states that someone else is not to be told about his sexual orientation, and his friend chooses to disclose the information anyway, turbulence is likely to occur. Privacy rules may not always be explicit. If the gay individual did not explicitly state that the friend should not share the information, the friend has to make a decision to disclose based on implicit privacy rules negotiated. If the friend discloses and should not have done so, turbulence will result. An argument can be made that the stigma of homosexuality would dictate not disclosing in most situations, but an argument can be made for disclosing, as well. If a gay individual has come out to all of his friends and family, one could argue that the information about his sexual orientation is no longer as protected as it once was; therefore, disclosure may not violate privacy rules and may avoid turbulence. Boundary turbulence is a natural part of privacy management when more than one person is involved and becomes particularly salient when dealing with families.

CPM has been studied in many different contexts regarding family communication. Golish and Caughlin (2002) studied privacy in relation to topic avoidance in step-families finding support that more impermeable privacy boundaries are developed between child and

step-parent. CPM has also been studied to find if privacy varies based on sex, culture, context, relationship satisfaction in a family, and relationship maintenance in the family (Morr Serewicz, Dickson, Morrision, & Poole, 2007). Morr Serewicz et al. found that people in families without married parents, and blended families have more permeable exterior privacy boundaries. Bridge and Schrodt (2013) tested the relationship between family communication patterns and family privacy boundaries, discovering support for a predictive relationship between family communication patterns and family privacy boundaries. CPM has also been used to study same sex couples and the alteration of family boundaries when deciding to marry a partner (Lannutti, 2013). CPM has been useful in gaining an understanding of family communication in a variety of contexts, and although not tested in the context of a parent's disclosure of a son's or daughter's sexual orientation, previous research suggests CPM's promise for this area of research.

CPM provides a foundation for understanding how the issue of disclosing a son or daughter's sexual orientation can be grounded in privacy research. CPM offers an explanation of how privacy is defined within a family, and by defining what is private, family members make decisions about how that information is managed. Boundary turbulence occurs when privacy rules are violated; to better understand how families develop privacy rules through patterns of communication, this next section turns to Hammond's (2009) work on family privacy culture.

Family Privacy Culture

In discussing CPM, Petronio (2002) argued that individuals learn privacy rules at a young age, using the phrase "family privacy rule socialization" (p. 72) to refer to the ways in which the fundamentals of privacy management are developed within the family. Hammonds (2009)

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extended CPM's family privacy rule socialization, arguing that the cultural context that influences privacy disclosures is best understood through the family. The family, he argued, has its own culture of privacy. Drawing on Wood (2000), Hammonds stated that although culture is typically understood as national borders and ethnicity markers, the fact that culture is often described as the shared reality of ethnic groups mean it can also be understood through smaller social units such as the family. In this concept, which he labeled *family relational culture*, children are socialized through family communication patterns to uphold family privacy boundaries. Family relational culture is a subset of culture and a factor that contributes to the development of privacy protection rules. In developing this concept, Hammonds (2009) found that a family's relational culture predicts a son's or daughter's likelihood to disclose private information to his/her parents.

Although Hammonds' argument for family relational culture is well developed, the concept's label can be confusing. The term "relational culture" is used to describe the communication processes that lead to the management of private information. With the concentration of the present study on family privacy, the term "family privacy culture" is more fitting, keeping the focus solely on the development of privacy within the immediate family. Therefore, the term *family privacy culture* will be used henceforth to refer to the influence of family context on members' privacy disclosures. A family's privacy culture is best understood in two ways: through family privacy boundaries and family communication patterns.

Privacy boundaries. As previously discussed, boundary turbulence occurs due to the violation of the established rules of privacy. *Privacy boundaries* are developed through privacy rules, and are used to describe the way private information is managed by individuals and families. CPM outlines two specific types of privacy boundaries: exterior privacy boundaries

and interior privacy boundaries (Petroino, 2002*). *Exterior family privacy boundaries* are concerned with information that is collectively owned by the family, but not shared with those outside the family. For example, all members of an immediate family may know that a family member has identified as homosexual, but the family may choose not to share that information with those outside of the family. *Interior family privacy boundaries* are concerned with how members create privacy cells, or boundaries surrounding information that is privy only to select members within the family. Referring back to the earlier example of a gay individual disclosing his sexual orientation to a family member, these boundaries would determine which family members know about the individual's sexual orientation, or whether that information is owned by all.

Family privacy boundaries provide an insight into how families are socialized to manage private information; these boundaries are a good indicator of whether private information is revealed within the immediate family or outside of the immediate family. The influential nature of family privacy boundaries leads to the first hypothesis:

H1:   Family privacy boundaries will be related to a parent's willingness to disclose a

son's or daughter's sexual orientation.

Family communication patterns. Family communication patterns (FCP) have been a strong area of research in family communication. Koerner and Fitzpatrick (2002) argue that that FCP is an area of study in family communication that can describe and explain a wide range of behaviors and outcomes. In recent years, FCP has been used to study how family communication functions as a primary context for developing attitudes, value, and beliefs (Dong, 2005), to explore how conversation orientations are related to relationship maintenance behaviors (Fowler, Pearson, & Beck, 2010), to predict difficult family conversations (Keating,

Russell, Cornacchione, & Smith, 2013), and to discover the communication patterns associated with individual privacy orientations (Bridge, & Schrodt, 2013).

Family communication patterns refer to two aspects: the family's use of the degree conformity and conversation. The *degree of conformity* is the level at which individuals pursue relational goals by complying with parental authority. The *degree of conversation* refers to the level of encouragement individuals receive to express autonomous opinions and ideas (Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990).

Hammonds (2004) discovered that together, the degrees of conformity and conversation provide insight into how families manage private information (see Table 1). Family members both low in conformity and low in conversation were described as *laissez-faire* (Fitzpatrick, 2004). These individuals had few interactions in the family, and were easily influenced by other social groups. If an individual was low in conformity and high in conversation, he/she was described as *pluralistic*. Pluralistic individuals showed levels of open communication and displayed independent thought. Individuals who were high in conformity and low in conversation were described as *protective*. Protective individuals displayed an emphasis on obedience, and were persuaded by authority figures within the family. Family members high in conformity and high in conversation were described as *consensual*. These persons felt a pressure to agree with the expectations of the family. These characteristics help in understanding the ways in which a family member manages private information (Fitzpatrick, 2004). A visual representation of the relationship between conformity and conversation in a family is shown in Figure 1. With this understanding of the influence of family communication patterns on the management of private information, a second hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Family communication patterns (conformity and conversation) will be related to a parent's willingness to disclose a son's or daughter's sexual orientation.

CONFORMITY

	Low	High
Low	laissez-faire	protective
High	pluralistic	consensual

(left axis label: CONVERSATION)

Figure 1. *The Relationship of Degree of Conformity and Degree of Conversation*

The literature on family privacy culture provides a foundation for understanding parents' management of private information such as a son's or daughter's sexual orientation, but does not address privacy violations. Privacy boundaries explain the rules for how private information is managed, but not the reason why families break the privacy rules, such as disclosing to others a son's or daughter's sexual orientation. The motivations for breaking the rules are an important element to consider in the management of private information within the family.

Motivation

Motivation is a key factor when deciding to reveal private information (Petronio, 2002, 2004, 2010; Petronio & Caughlin, 2006; Vangelisti & Caughlin, 1997; Vangelisti, Caughlin, &

Timmerman, 2001). CPM's socialized rules and boundaries, family members are expected to

protect information both inside and outside of the family. Sometimes, however, family members

violate the privacy rules negotiated within the family. The motivations for disclosing private

information vary, but the primary explanation is the psychological pressure created by keeping

secrets (Petronio & Caughlin, 2006). Keeping a secret can create anxiety and preoccupy family

members, causing a desire to reduce the stress associated with keeping the secret. Derlega,

Winstead, Greene, Serovich, and Elwood (2004) also pointed out that individuals have a self-

focus that leads to the motivation to disclose. Disclosing information that is burdensome serves

as a form of catharsis. This research creates a possible motivation for a parent to disclose a son's

or daughter's sexual orientation: *to lessen the burden of a secret*.

Waters and Ackerman (2011) explained that motivation is dependent on a person's needs;

for example, a person's tolerance for ambiguity is telling of an individual's likelihood to disclose

private information. If a person has a low tolerance for ambiguity, then that person's motivation

to disclose is likely to increase. As the coming out research explained, there is little information

available to educate parents about what to do when their son or daughter comes out (Waldner &

Magrader, 1999), and some parents do not know how to respond due to their lack of script

(Fields, 2001). These ideas, coupled with argument that a person can be motivated to disclose

private information to seek reciprocity (Petronio, 2002), suggest that parents may be motivated

to disclose a son's or daughter's sexual orientation to lessen ambiguity by *seeking*

understanding.

Baptist and Allen (2008) found in their case study that as families adjust to the

knowledge of having a gay, lesbian, or bisexual family member, the focus turns to the concern

for the individual's safety due to the societal treatment of the homosexual community. Similarly,

Petronio and Caughlin (2006)'s study of violating privacy boundaries found that parents may become concerned with safety issues (such as bullying and suicide) that sometimes are associated with the stigma of homosexuality. This *concern for safety* becomes a third possible motivation for a parent's willingness to disclose a son's or daughter's sexual orientation.

Derlega et al. (2004) explained that individuals might be motivated by an other-focused purpose: the desire to educate others. The coming out research suggests that as families move toward a period "beyond the closet" and take the next steps to discuss a family member's sexual orientation, they seek to understand and embrace the individual's sexual orientation (Goldfried, & Goldfried, 2001; Martin, Hutson, Kazyak, & Scherrer, 2010). This other-focused motivation, and suggestions that Western culture may be moving toward more social acceptance of homosexuality, offer a fourth motivation for parents to disclose their son's or daughter's sexual orientation—*pride*. Accepting parents may choose to tell others about their son's or daughter's sexual orientation as a means of expressing their pride in and support of their son or daughter.

These motivations to disclose – specifically, seeking understanding, lessening the burden of a secret, the concern for safety, and pride – have not yet been explored as possible influences on parents' willingness to disclose a son's or daughter's sexual orientation. The need to understand the motivation to disclose led to the development of a third hypothesis:

> **H3:** Motivations to disclose a son's or daughter's sexual orientation will be related to a parent's willingness to disclose a son's or daughter's sexual orientation.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the relevant literature regarding the disclosure of sexual orientation, the theoretical base of CPM, the development of family privacy culture, and finally,

disclosure motivation research to understand the factors that could lead to the disclosure of a son's or daughter's sexual orientation. Specifically, this chapter first described how coming out alters the reality of others, discussed the societal influences, and provided an overview of the family experience with coming out. Then, the chapter turned to CPM, reviewing the five basic principles of CPM and boundary turbulence. Next, the chapter focused on how families develop a privacy culture, explaining that family privacy culture is a construct composed of family privacy boundaries (interior and exterior) and family communication patterns (conversation and conformity). Finally, the chapter explored motivation and privacy, focusing on four possible motivations for a parent's disclosure of a son's or daughter's sexual orientation: seeking understanding, lessening the burden of a secret, concern for safety, and pride.

From the literature reviewed, the following three hypotheses were developed:

H1:   Family privacy boundaries will be related to a parent's willingness to disclose a son's or daughter's sexual orientation.

H2:   Family communication patterns will be related to a parent's willingness to disclose a son's or daughter's sexual orientation.

H3:   Motivations to disclose a son's or daughter's sexual orientation will be related to a parent's willingness to disclose a son's or daughter's sexual orientation.

The present study investigated these hypotheses to accomplish the following goals: 1) to see whether exploring the initial attempts of a parent's disclosure of a son's or daughter's sexual orientation leads to new lines of research regarding the family and the coming out process, 2) to apply Communication Privacy Management (CPM) theory to the understanding of how motivation and family privacy culture influence a parents' willingness to disclose a son's or

daughter's sexual orientation, and 3) to test CPM theory in the context of families with LGB

family members.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

This study explored whether a relationship exists between a family's privacy culture for managing private information and their decisions to disclose a son's or daughter's sexual orientation to another individual. Additionally, this study investigates whether parents' motivations for disclosure influences their decisions to disclose their son's or daughter's sexual orientation to another individual. To explore these potential relationships, this study used survey methodology in a cross-sectional quantitative study. This study also included open-ended questions to help inform the decision to disclose a son's or daughter's sexual orientation.

Participants

Because access to this target population is limited and there is stigma associated with homosexuality in American culture, online recruitment offered the major advantages of global access and anonymity. Thompson (2010) found that people immersed in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community find the anonymity of the Internet safer and issues of homosexuality easier to discuss online rather than face-to-face. Purposive sampling was utilized to target the parents of LGBT sons and daughters. Participants were recruited by the use of solicitation e-mails and posts to the websites (Appendix A), online discussion forums, and/or listservs of 399 organizations such as PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), an open post to the HRC (Human Rights Campaign) Facebook page, and 248 organizations that support the family members of the LGBT community. By using online recruitment, 57 participants from fairly diverse family privacy cultures, of differing ages, and of differing sexual orientations were recruited to participate. Cleaning the data resulted in the

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removal of three participants for not meeting the qualification of being a parent of a gay, lesbian, or bisexual son or daughter; 14 more participants were removed for not fully completing the survey. After cleaning the data, 40 participants remained in the study.

Of the 40 participants, 31 participants reported being female, and 9 participants reported being male. The age of the participants ranged from 33 to 78 years old. The average age of the participants was 57.7. Of the 40 participants, 37 reported having a straight sexual orientation; one participant reported being gay, and two participants reported being lesbian. Results indicate that 30 participants reported being the mother of a son or daughter who is gay, lesbian, or bisexual and seven reported being the father of a son or daughter who is gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Two reported being the step-mother of a son or daughter who is was gay, lesbian, or bisexual. One participant reported being other, describing him/herself as a family member with a different relationship to the person who had come out. Of the 40 participants, 23 reported that their son or daughter is gay, 13 participants reported that their son or daughter is lesbian, and four participants reported having a son or daughter who is bisexual.

Procedure

The informed consent form and survey were hosted by Surveymonkey.com; participants did not provide their names or other identifying information on either the informed consent form or on the questionnaire to ensure anonymity. The participants were first directed to the online informed consent page (Appendix B). The informed consent form provided participants with the necessary information to make an informed decision about whether to participate in the study. Participants were reminded that if they felt uncomfortable continuing with the study—or decided that they no longer wish to participate—they could withdraw from the study at any time without

fear of penalty. To give consent, participants clicked the link to begin the online questionnaire. Upon completing the questionnaire, participants were thanked for their participation, and were offered the opportunity to provide their email address to be entered into a drawing to win one of two twenty-five dollar Amazon.com gift certificates. Upon request, participants were provided a summary of the study's findings.

Measures

Demographics and disclosure questionnaire. To understand the participants' background information, a basic demographics and disclosure questionnaire was devised (Appendix C). The questionnaire contained questions relating directly to the participants including their age, sex, and sexual orientation. The rest of the questionnaire pertained to the participants' LGBT son or daughter, asking questions regarding the son's or daughter's sexual orientation and whether the parent had disclosed the son's or daughter's sexual orientation to a third party. Depending on the participant's response, the participant was redirected to a different set of questions. If the participant answered "yes," he/she was directed to a set of questions regarding to whom the participant disclosed the information, whether the participant believed the third party was aware of the son's or daughter's sexual orientation, and two questions regarding the parents' reasoning for disclosing the son's or daughter's sexual orientation. Upon answering those questions, participants who answered "yes" were given an addition measure that addressed reasons for disclosure. If the participant answered "no," the participant was redirected to the measures regarding the participant's Family Communication Patterns.

Motivations for disclosing a son's/daughter's sexual orientation. A new 12-item measure, the Motivations for Disclosing a Son's or Daughter's Sexual Orientation scale

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(Appendix D), was developed to account for potential motivations for parents' disclosure of a son's or daughter's sexual orientation. This measure asks participants to think of the person they described in the demographics and disclosure questionnaire and asked to respond to the statements about their motivation to disclose on a seven point scale (1 = strongly agree, 7 = strongly disagree). The measure begins with the root statement: "I told this person that my child "came out…." Following the root statement, the 12 items measure the four motivations for disclosing one's son's or daughter's sexual orientation: to lessen the burden of a secret, out of concern for a son's or daughter's safety, to show pride, and to seek understanding.

Three items were created to measure each of the four motivations suggested by the privacy research. Past privacy dilemma research found that, despite the privacy boundaries, families disclose private information if they believe that someone's safety is in question (Petronio & Caughlin, 2006). Based on this research, three items were developed to measure the concern for a son's or daughter's safety. One item measuring concern for the son's or daughter's safety states, "because I needed reassurance about my child's safety."

Privacy research also found that the psychological pressure of a secret can lead to the disclosure of private information to alleviate the discomfort (Petronio & Caughlin, 2006); from this research, three items were created to measure the motivation of lessening the burden of a secret. For example, one item pertaining to lessening the burden of keeping a secret states, "because I could not keep the secret any longer."

Three items concerning pride were developed in response to research suggesting that some parents are "taking the next steps" toward acceptance of their LGB sons or daughters (Goldfried & Goldfried, 2011). This research found that the move toward social acceptance of homosexuality can result in parents developing pride in their homosexual son or daughter. This

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concept of parental acceptance led to the development of the four items measuring pride in one's

son's or daughter's sexual orientation. One item measuring pride in one's son or daughter as a

motivation for disclosure states, "because I was proud of my child for 'coming out.'"

Finally, three items that measure the motivation of seeking understanding were developed

based on research on parental reactions to a son's or daughter's coming out and the lack of

existing education available to help families adjust (Beeler & DiProva, 1999; Herdt & Koof,

2000; Hillier, 2002; Robinson, Waldner, & Magrader, 1999; Saltzburg, 2004; Robinson, Walters,

& Skeen, 1989). One item measuring the motivation to disclose in order to seek

understanding/sympathy states, "so this person would better understand what I'm going

through."

The newly developed Motivations for Disclosing a Son/Daughter's Sexual Orientation

measure demonstrated acceptable reliability. The subscale measuring the motivation of seeking

understanding initially resulted in a Cronbach's alpha reliability of $\alpha = .59$. After further

investigation, the twelfth item was dropped. After removing the twelfth item, a reliability of

$\alpha = .78$ was observed. The subscale measuring lessening the burden of a secret resulted in a

reliability of $\alpha = .87$. The subscale measuring pride resulted in a reliability of $\alpha = .94$. The

subscale measuring the motivation of concern for safety resulted in a reliability of $\alpha = .94$. With

the twelfth item removed, the entire measure had a Cronbach's alpha reliability of $\alpha = .82$.

Family privacy culture. As previously discussed, family privacy culture consists of two

separate measures: the Family Communication Patterns measure (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1990)

and the Family Privacy Boundaries measure (Morr Serewicz & Canary, 2008). The first, the

Family Communication Patterns (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1990) consisted of 26-items utilizing a

seven point Likert type scale (1 = "strongly disagree" and 7 = "strongly agree") that explores

family relational culture on two levels: 15 items measure the *degree of conversation* within the family, and 11 items measure the *degree of conformity* within the family (Appendix E). The *degree of conversation* measured whether a parent encourages a son or daughter to express and develop self-directed views and opinions. Degree of conversation items included: "In our family, members often ask my opinion when the family is talking about something; members of our family encourage me to challenge their ideas and beliefs; and "Members of our family often say something like, 'You should always look at both sides of an issue.'" The *degree of conformity* measures the expectation to conform to parental authority (Kelly, Keaten, Finch, Duarte, Hoffman, & Michels, 2002). Degree of conformity items included: "My spouse and I often say something like, 'You'll know better when you grow up'" and "My spouse and I often say something like, 'My ideas are right and you should not question them.'" Hammonds (2009) found Fitzpatrick and Ritchie's scale to be reliable, with a $\alpha = .93$ for the items measuring degree of conversation, and $\alpha = .88$ regarding the items measuring the degree of conformity. With the modifications, the inter-item reliability for the degree of conversation was $\alpha= .95$; the inter-item reliability observed for the degree of conformity was $\alpha=.93$.

The second measure—the Family Privacy Boundaries measure (Appendix F) —was created and refined over the past decade. The original, 12-item measure was created by Morr (2002), then modified by Morr Serewicz and Canary (2008) to include only 12 of the original items. The present study used the modified Morr Serewicz and Canary (2008) measure. The family privacy boundaries scale measured the permeability of a family's interior and exterior boundaries on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 meant "strongly disagree" and 7 meant "strongly agree." As previously discussed, the permeability of a family's interior boundaries refers to the likelihood that individuals will disclose information they consider private with other family

members. Items measuring a family's interior boundaries included: "Family members are very open with each other," and "Family members keep secrets from one another" (reverse coded). The permeability of a family's exterior boundaries refers to the likelihood that members of a particular family will disclose information considered private with people outside the family. Items measuring a family's exterior boundaries included: "The family shares information freely with those outside the family," and "The family keeps secrets from outsiders" (reverse coded). Items two, four, five, seven, nine, and eleven were reverse coded.

The family privacy boundaries scale consisted of two subscales—the interior privacy boundaries and exterior privacy boundaries. For the present study, the inter-item reliability for the interior privacy boundaries subscale was $\alpha=.79$ and the exterior privacy boundaries inter-item reliability was $\alpha=.77$. The study showed a slight decrease in reliability for both subscales than those previously reported (interior, $\alpha=.83$ and exterior, $\alpha=.78$; Morr Serewicz & Canary, 2008).

Willingness to disclose a son's/daughter's sexual orientation. To measure the participant's desire to disclose a son's or daughter's sexual orientation, a new measure was developed. The Willingness to Disclose a Son's/Daughter's Sexual Orientation scale (Appendix G) is a five item, seven point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The measure's items gauge the participant's willingness to disclose a son's or daughter's sexual orientation to someone else. Items include statements such as: "I wanted to tell someone about my child's sexual orientation," and "I did not feel any need to tell anyone about my child's sexual orientation" (reverse coded). The new scale measuring the willingness to disclose had a Cronbach's alpha reliability of $\alpha=.86$.

Son's/daughter's sexual orientation questionnaire. Questions about the son's or daughter's sexual orientation were placed last and consisted of a series of statements to which

participants responded using a seven point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The Son's or Daughter's Sexual Orientation Questionnaire items included: "My child told me directly that he/she is a homosexual," and "At the time my child disclosed his/her sexual orientation to me, this information about my child's sexual orientation was common knowledge to others." The questionnaire also contained the question: "Did your child ask you not to tell others?" This question resulted in two possible outcomes for the participants. If the participant answered "yes," then he/she was directed to two more questions: who did the son or daughter ask the parent not to tell, and did the parent honor the son's or daughter's request? If the participant answered "no," he/she was taken to the final web page that thanked the participant for participating in the study.

Data Treatment and Analysis

The data collected through the online questionnaire were downloaded into a SPSS compatible format. The spreadsheet was then opened and saved in SPSS. The data were treated before they were analyzed; in particular, the scale measuring family privacy boundaries required the fourth and eleventh items to be reverse coded, and the scale measuring willingness to disclose a son's or daughter's sexual orientation required the third item to be reverse coded. Mean scores were calculated and reliability analyses were performed for each scale and sub-scale. Multiple regressions were performed for each hypothesis to determine if statistically significant relationships existed between the variables.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

In this chapter, the results of the current study are presented. First, the study reports the results of the demographic questionnaire. Second, the chapter reports the findings that resulted from testing the hypotheses. Finally, the chapter reports post hoc analyses that were performed.

Demographics Questionnaire

One portion of the survey asked participants about their disclosure of their son's or daughter's sexual orientation to someone else. When asked whether the participant disclosed the son's or daughter's sexual orientation, 38 (95%) of the 40 participants reported disclosing, and two reported having not disclosed. When asked to whom the participant disclosed the son's or daughter's sexual orientation, three participants reported telling a male friend, 11 (27.5%) participants reported telling a female friend, 12 (30%) participants reported telling a male immediate family member (of those, 10 (25%) reported that the male immediate family member was a spouse, one reported telling an older son, and one participant did not respond), and eight (20%) participants reported telling a female immediate family member (six (15%) reported that the female immediate family member was a daughter, two (5%) participants reported telling their mother, and one (2.5%) participant reported telling a brother). Of these 38 participants, three (7.5%) did not respond to this question (Table 1). The present study defined "immediate family members" as including one's spouse and children, so the respondent who reported telling his/her mother went outside of the immediate family in his/her response.

The next question asked if the person to whom the participant disclosed the son's or daughter's sexual orientation knew previously; 27 (67.5%) reported that the person told did not

know, 10 (25%) reported that the person told did know, and one (2.5%) participant did not

respond.

Table 1. *Person To Whom Parents Disclosed Son's/Daughter's Sexual Orientation*

Relationship to Participant	Reponses (*n*=40)
Male friend	**3**
Female friend	**11**
Male immediate family member	**12**
spouse	10
older son	1
did not respond	1
Female immediate family member	**8**
daughter	6
mother*	2
Male extended family member	**1**
brother	1
Female extended family member	**0**
Did not respond	**3**
Reported not disclosing	**2**

Note. Bold items indicate a total of participant responses for the recipient description.
Items not in bold represent the subcategories provided by participants
* Participant indicated this individual under the wrong recipient description according to the provided instructions.

The next set of questions asked for specific information about the son's or daughter's

sexual orientation. The first of these questions addressed whether the son or daughter told the

parent directly. Of the 40 participants, 35 (87.5%) that reported their son or daughter had told

them directly about his/her sexual orientation and five (12.5%) participants reported that their

son or daughter did not tell them directly. The second question asked if the son's or daughter's

sexual orientation was common knowledge; 11 (27.5%) participants reported that it was common

knowledge, 29 (72.5%) participants reported that the son's or daughter's sexual orientation was

not common knowledge. The third question asked if the son or daughter had asked the parent to

not tell anyone else about his/her sexual orientation; five (12.5%) participants reported that their son or daughter asked them not to disclose his/her sexual orientation, and 35 (87.5%) participants reported that the son or daughter did not make such a request. Of the five participants who were asked not to tell others about the son's or daughter's sexual orientation, two (5%) reported specific individuals that the parent was asked not to tell. One (2.5%) participant reported that the son or daughter requested that the parent not tell anyone except the son's or daughter's father. Another (2.5%) participant stated that he/she was asked to not disclose to the son's or daughter's father, grandfather, or sister. One (2.5%) participant did not respond. The participants who were asked to not disclose the son's or daughter's sexual orientation were then asked if they honored that request; all five of the participants reported honoring the request.

Testing Hypotheses

Hypothesis one. Hypothesis one proposed that family privacy boundaries (interior and exterior privacy boundaries) would relate to a parent's willingness to disclose a son's or daughter's sexual orientation. A standard multiple regression analysis was performed. The results of the regression indicated that the model was not significant (R^2 =-.049, $F(2,37)$ = .092, p = .91). Neither interior privacy boundaries (β=.061, p=.716) nor exterior privacy boundaries (β=.028, p=.868) were significantly related to willingness to disclose. Hypothesis one was not supported.

Hypothesis two. The second hypothesis posited that family communication patterns would relate to a parent's willingness to disclose a son's or daughter's sexual orientation. A standard multiple regression analysis was performed. The results of the regression indicated that the model was not significant (R^2 =.074, $F(2,37)$ = 2.561, p = .09). The degree of conversation

was significantly positively related to willingness to disclose (β=.317, p=.046), but the degree of conformity was not significantly related to willingness to disclose (β=.147, p=.351). In other words, the degree of conversation was positively related to willingness to disclose, meaning that as the degree of conversation increased, the willingness to disclose increased. Hypothesis two was partially supported.

Hypothesis three. Hypothesis three proposed that motivations to disclose a son or daughter's sexual orientation relate to a parent's willingness to disclose a son's or daughter's sexual orientation. The results of the regression indicated that the model was significant, with the four predictors (seeking understanding, the burden of a secret, pride, and concern for safety) together accounting for 26.2% of variance (R^2 =.262, $F(4,33) = 4.278$, $p = .007$). The seeking understanding motivation was significantly positively related to willingness to disclose (β=.509, p=.001). However, the other three factors (burden of a secret, β=.155, p=.430; pride, β=-.158, p=.276; concern for safety, β=-.262, p=.131) were not significantly related to willingness to disclose. Seeking understanding was positively related to willingness to disclose, meaning that as seeking understanding increased, the willingness to disclose increased. Hypothesis three was partially supported.

Post Hoc Analyses

A Pearson's correlation analysis was performed to explore other possible relationships between the variables. Degree of conversation and interior privacy boundaries were significantly positively correlated, $r(38)$=.54, p<.01. In other words, the greater degree of conversation the more openly a family discusses private information. The degree of conformity and interior

privacy boundaries were significantly negatively correlated, $r(38)=-.45, p<.01$. The greater the degree of conformity, the less likely families were to discuss private information.

To further investigate the relationship, a standard multiple linear regression analysis was performed to see if family communication patterns relate to interior family privacy boundaries. The results of the regression indicated that indicated that the model was significant, with the two predictors (degree of conversation and conformity) explaining 40.4% of the variance ($R^2 =.404$, $F(2,37) = 14.235, p < .001$). Both the degree of conversation ($\beta=.491, p<.001$) and conformity ($\beta=-.379, p=.004$) were significantly related interior family privacy boundaries. The degree of conversation was positively related to interior family privacy boundaries, meaning that as the degree of conversation increased, the interior family privacy boundaries increased. The degree of conformity was negatively related to interior family privacy boundaries; as conformity increased, interior family privacy boundaries to disclose decreased.

With the understood relationship between interior and exterior family privacy boundaries, a second standard multiple regression analysis was performed to see if family communication patterns relate to exterior family privacy boundaries. The results of the regression indicated that the model was not significant ($R^2 =-.049, F(2,37) =.084, p =.920$). Neither the degree of conversation ($\beta=-.029, p=.864$), nor conformity ($\beta=.057, p=.732$) were significantly related to exterior family privacy boundaries.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

This chapter presents a discussion of the results of the present study. The results provide insight into the management of private information within families in general, and for the management of private information regarding a son's or daughter's sexual orientation in particular. To fully understand the implications of this research, a discussion of family privacy culture relates the new understandings of family communication patterns and family privacy boundaries back to the CPM literature. Following this discussion, the implications for understanding motivations to disclose private information are discussed. Next, the limitations of the present study are discussed. Finally, suggestions for future research are provided.

Parents' Disclosure of Son's or Daughter's Sexual Orientation.

Regarding the LGBT community, this study provides some insight into how and to whom parents choose to disclose a son's or daughter's sexual orientation. Out of 38 participants that reported disclosing a son's or daughter's sexual orientation, 20 reported telling immediate family members. Given past research on family communication patterns and interior family privacy boundaries, those high on the conversation dimension (pluralistic and consensual family members) are more likely to share information with other family members than those low on the conversation dimension (laissez-faire and protective family members; Fitzpatrick, 2004). To apply this information to those families with a son or daughter who has come out of the closet, coming out in a family with high conversation patterns means that it is much more likely that family members will discuss openly the issue of the son's or daughter's sexual orientation. A case study analysis revealed that the more a family discussed a family member's sexual

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orientation and the experiences of the family with the coming out, the better the family members

understood and appreciated each other (Baptist & Allen, 2008). Not only is this information

pertinent for those deciding to come out of the closet, but therapists counseling LGBT

individuals could also benefit. If an individual is not ready for more than one family member to

know about his/her sexual orientation, then the individual--and his/her therapist--need to be more

cognizant of the way communication functions within families and the likelihood that

information known to one family member will be shared with other family members.

Family Privacy Culture

        Family communication patterns & interior privacy boundaries. Past research has

defined family privacy culture (previously labeled family relational culture) as the ways in which

children are socialized in the family, through communication patterns, to uphold family privacy

boundaries (Hammonds, 2009). Two measures that assess different aspects of family privacy

culture are Fitzpatrick and Ritchie's (1990) family communication patterns and Morr Serewicz

and Canary's (2008) family privacy boundaries. Although it was not the original intent of this

study to test the relationship between these measures, a Pearson's correlation test of all variables

revealed a significant relationship between family communication patterns and interior privacy

boundaries existed. Upon further investigation, a standard multiple regression indicated that

both subscales of family communication patterns (degrees of conformity and conversation)

significantly predicted interior, but not exterior, privacy boundaries.

        Interior privacy boundaries are concerned with how family members create privacy cells,

or boundaries, surrounding information that is privy only to select members within the family;

exterior family privacy boundaries are concerned with the regulation of private information with

those outside of the family (Petronio, 2002). After reflecting upon the research about family communication patterns, it becomes more apparent as to why family communication patterns relate to the use of interior, but not exterior, privacy boundaries. As stated earlier, examination of a family member's scores on the conformity and conversation dimensions revealed that person's general orientation toward the management of private information: laissez-faire, pluralistic, consensual, or protective (Fitzpatrick, 2004). Knowing where one falls on these dimensions helps to explain whether a family member is likely to discuss private information with others within the family. Protective individuals (those who score low on the conversation and high on the conformity dimensions) would most likely keep private family information to themselves, while those who fit the pluralistic definition (those who scored high on conversation and low on conformity) would be more likely to share information with others in the family. Interior privacy boundaries focus more on the degree of openness within the family; this openness as shown by the results significantly related to the degree of conversation and conformity. Exterior privacy boundaries, however, is related to what information is not shared with those outside the family. Perhaps it is the case that exterior privacy boundaries are more constrained by the topic than degrees of openness. If exterior privacy boundaries are constrained by topics, then it would be whether the family discusses things such as family tasks, family problems, or other topics.

Degree of conversation & willingness to disclose. A significant relationship was found between the degree of conversation family communication pattern and parents' willingness to disclose a son's or daughter's sexual orientation. The positive relationship indicates that as the degree of conversation increases, the families' willingness to disclose increases. This relationship is supported by the research on Family Communication Pattern, individuals high on

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the conversation dimension (pluralistic and consensual family members) are more likely to share information with other family members than those low on the conversation dimension (laissez-fair and protective family members (Fitzpatrick, 2004).

Family privacy boundaries. In the present study, no significant relationship was found between family privacy boundaries (interior and exterior) and parents' willingness to disclose a son's or daughter's sexual orientation. Past research found that families expect that members will protect family information based on the rules the family has negotiated (Petronio, 2002). CPM states that boundary turbulence does occur, despite family privacy boundaries, and can be motivated by the need to lessen the burden of a secret or out of concern for an individual's safety. The lack of a relationship between family privacy boundaries and willingness to disclose a son's or daughter's sexual orientation suggests that family privacy boundaries do not seem to be a factor when deciding to disclose a son's or daughter's sexual orientation. Perhaps parents are more concerned with their own struggles with the son's or daughter's sexual orientation than the son's or daughter's privacy.

Motivations to disclose. There was no significant relationship between the burden of a secret, pride, nor concern for safety and parents' willingness to disclose, suggesting that these factors are not reasons for parents to disclose a son's or daughter's sexual orientation. However, there was a significant relationship between seeking understanding and a parent's willingness to disclose a son's or daughter's sexual orientation. Of four motivations suggested by Communication Privacy Management theory (lessening the burden of a secret, concern for safety, pride, and seeking understanding), only seeking understanding was significantly related to a parent's willingness to disclose a son or daughter's sexual orientation. These results suggest that CPM does not provide an adequate explanation for the motivation of parents' disclosure of a

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son's or daughter's sexual orientation. However, CPM is not the only theory that predicts that people are motivated to disclose to others in order to gain a better understanding of a situation; in fact, these results suggest that theories of social support may provide a better explanation for these disclosures than does CPM theory.

Researchers have been hesitant to define a universal definition of social support for fear of its limiting nature (Vangelisti, 2009); however, some have attempted to describe social support as people feeling connected through shared accounts, and providing love, security, and stress (Trobst, 1999). Burleson (2003) explains that social support can help with coping with a distress, and is sought to find care and empathy. A recent study explored seminal works on social support in an attempt to better define the term; seeking social support "is the acknowledgement of the experience that something is lacking and the intention to alter that experience" (Virtanen & Isotalus, 2012, p. 36). The "sense of lacking" mentioned in this definition is explained as an experience that challenges one's way of being. The desire to seek out others refers to a person experiencing a change in his/her way of being who wishes to fill this void with input from others. Parents may experience a change in their understanding of their world when their son or daughter comes out (creating "sense of lacking" or a void), challenging their way of being and motivating them to disclose to others to better understand the situation (filling the void). The desire to seeking understanding and the willingness to disclose are concepts that fit equally well (and perhaps better) within social support research seeing some research suggested that social support affects emotional wellbeing (Burleson & Goldsmith, 1998), and can serve as a buffer from the negative effects of stress by facilitating coping (Goldsmith, 2004). Reframing the family's process of seeking understanding through the lens of

social support opens new lines of research in pursuit of a better explanation of parents'

disclosure of a son's or daughter's sexual orientation.

Although a further exploration of social support is outside the scope of this study, the

results suggest a model through which parents' disclosure of their son's or daughter's coming out

can be better understood. Keeping in mind that the degree of conversation family

communication pattern related significantly to a parent's willingness to disclose a son's or

daughter's homosexual orientation, along with those that found that parents are motivated to

disclose to seek understanding, suggest a new model for family social support when a son or

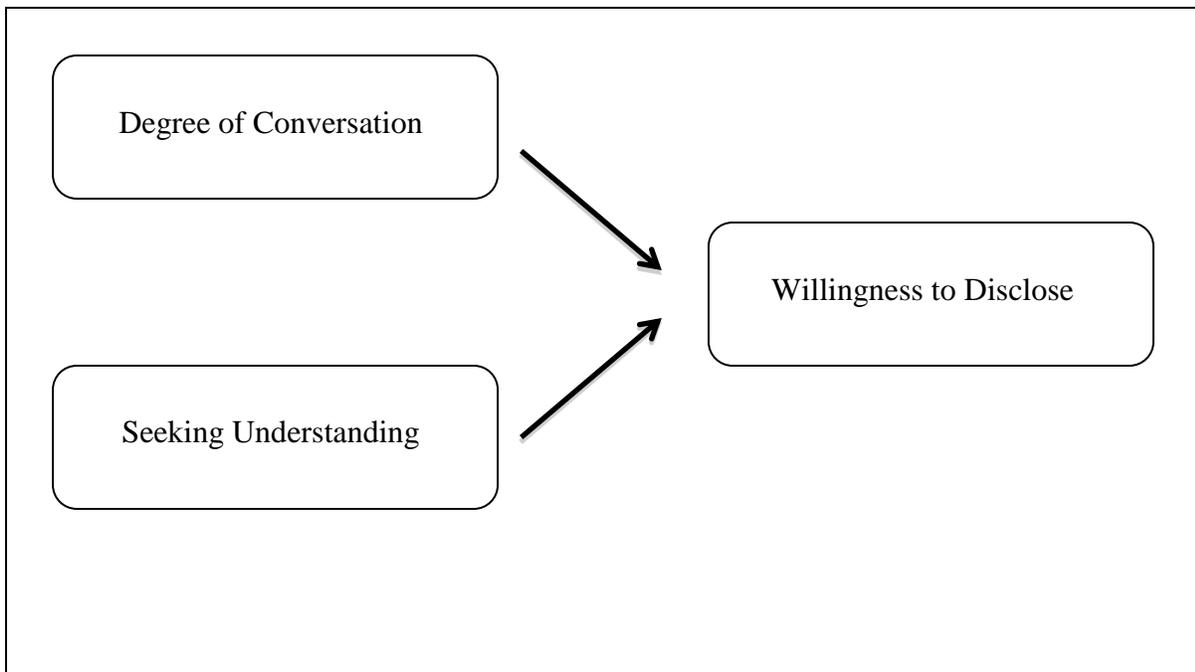daughter reveals his/her homosexual orientation (Figure 2).

Figure 2. *Factors Leading to the Disclosure of a Son's or Daughter's Sexual Orientation*

The model suggests that the degree of conversation and seeking understanding predict parents' willingness to disclose a son's or daughter's homosexual orientation. As mentioned earlier, social support literature explains that parents' "sense of lacking" challenges their way of being and motivates them to seek understanding (Virtanen & Isotalus, 2012). An important element of social support is the perception that it is available when needed (Kessler, 1992). Research indicates that the interdependent nature of families places emotional support as the hallmark of high-quality family communication (Caughlin, 2003).

Additional Implications

Exploratory research is useful when studying new areas of interest and when working on theory development (Malhorta & Grover, 1998). Exploratory research is limited in its abilities to make generalizations or concrete statements regarding the interpretation of the data. However, exploratory research does provide insight that encourages further inquiry.

One of the major implications of this research is for the individual coming out. As explained earlier, coming out is a difficult process. Currently, there are limited resources available to help individuals and their families through the coming out process. Resources need to be provided, and those resources should discuss typical initial family reactions and the factors that can promote acceptance. This research suggests that the way in which the family manages private information (both within and outside of the family) does not account for parents' disclosure of a son's or daughter's sexual orientation. Upon learning their son's or daughter's sexual orientation, parents may seek out other family members to help them understand this new information. Those coming out need to be prepared for this possibility, as otherwise, they may view the disclosure as a violation of their privacy rather than a parent's need for support.

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Therapist and school counselors need to be made aware of these possibilities, as well, and advise LGB individuals accordingly.

This research provides some implications for families. Past literature has found that families often have little education on LGB family members to guide them through a son's or daughter's coming out process (Waldner & Magrader, 1999). In general, this lack of information occurs because sons and daughters are usually assumed to be heterosexual until they tell their families otherwise. Parents often do not seek out this information. The present study suggests that parents talk with other family members to seek understanding and support, and although they may do so with good intentions, they need to be aware of their LGB son's or daughter's privacy needs, as well. Instead of creating turbulence in the family with a potential privacy violation, it may be wise to seek outside assistance (counselors, therapists, LGB friendly organization, or online support groups) until the LGB son or daughter is ready to discuss his/her sexual orientation with others in the family.

How to disseminate information about the coming out process and privacy concerns is unclear. With a society that still has issues of heteronormativity, it is difficult to suggest to school systems that students and parents need to be informed of issues concerning the coming out process and privacy concerns. As social change occurs, these concerns may be alleviated and proactive educational resources may become readily available. In particular, these resources could encourage LGB individuals and their families to engage in dual perspective, being aware simultaneously of their own needs (e.g., privacy) and others' needs (e.g., support). Not every parent is going to have a gay son or daughter, but all parents should be better educated and prepared in case they do. This information would not guarantee a smooth coming out process for

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individuals or their families, but with proper education, individuals and families can make better decisions about how to communicate through the coming out process.

Limitations

The exploratory nature of this study creates many limitations in terms of generalizability. The first of these limitations is the sample size (*n*=40). A sample size of at least 100 participants is desirable when using survey methodology (Malhotra & Grover, 1998). Next, 77.5% of the population was female. The parent population demographics are unclear, but it can be assumed that more than 22.5% of that population is male. The lack of fathers' participation in this study limits our knowledge of how they communicate about their son's or daughter's sexual orientation. A third limitation is that some basic demographic information was not included in the demographic measure; missing from the study were questions regarding the participants' race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status. These and other demographic questions may have provided a better indication of whether the sample is representative of the larger population. Together, these limitations prevent the study from being generalizable.

Another major limitation of the study dealt with the recruitment of participants. As part of the purposive sampling technique, participants received invitations participate via the websites of lesbian-, gay-, and bisexual-friendly organizations. Seeking participants through this recruiting procedure limited the study to those parents more likely to have accepted their son's or daughter's orientation and those who have chosen to take part in organizations that advocate for lesbian, gay, and bisexual rights. Targeting this population created a possible bias in the study. Accepting parents may be more comfortable discussing their son's or daugther's sexual

orientation with others, increasing their willingness to disclose their son's or daughter's sexual orientation.

An additional limitation of the study was the creation and use of two previously untested measures (Motivations to Disclose a Son's/Daughter's Sexual Orientation and Willingness to Disclose a Son's/Daughter's Sexual Orientation) and the use of the modified Family Communication Patterns measure (Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990). Although the measures showed strong inter-item reliability, they need further testing to verify their reliability and validity with a larger sample.

Suggestions for Future Research

As mentioned early in the study, this study was exploratory in nature. Malhorta and Grover (1998) explained that exploratory studies are useful to theory development and in refining new possibilities and dimensions of interest. The results from this study indicate at least three new avenues for research should be explored, including measure development, retesting the study, and theory development.

Measure development. The reliability of the Family Communication Patterns measure increased slightly from what had been reported in past studies. Hammonds (2009) reported $\alpha =$ .93 for the items measuring degree of conversation, and $\alpha = .88$ regarding the items measuring the degree of conformity. The present study observed a slight increase in inter-item reliability of the degree of conversation to $\alpha = .95$, and the degree of conformity to $\alpha = .93$. The small sample size and exploratory nature of this study does not allow for generalizability, but the improved reliability suggests that there may be reason to use this version of the measure in future studies. The other newly developed measures, Willingness to Disclose a Son's/Daughter's Sexual

Orientation and Motivations to Disclose a Son's or Daughter's Sexual Orientation), showed acceptable reliability. Prior to this study, no scales existed measuring parents' willingness to disclose a son's or daughter's sexual orientation. This measure shows promise for future coming out research. With further testing of the measure, future studies can continue investigating parents' desire to disclose in other contexts including, but not limited to, LGB bullying research, suicide studies, communicating pride, and courtship for divorced parents. The motivations to disclose measure could be useful for developing two lines of future research. First, the measure indicated motives for disclosing a son's or daughter's sexual orientation supported by past research. Future studies can further develop the measure to investigate how parents communicate about their son's or daughter's sexual orientation. The second line of research is the further development of the measure assessing parents' desire to seek understanding. The current measure tests four motivations, of which only the desire to seek understanding showed a significant relationship with willingness to disclose. A new or modified measure focusing solely on the desire to seeking understanding could provide additional insight into this motivation and its potential role in supportive communication.

The present study should be replicated with a larger and more representative sample. Results for the first hypothesis (family communication patterns are related to willingness to disclose a son's or daughter's sexual orientation), and the third hypothesis (motivations to disclose are related to willingness to disclose a son's or daughter's sexual orientation) revealed partial support. Although a significant result was achieved the limited population size prevents generalizability. A larger, more representative sample will allow for generalizable results that could support the claims suggested by this study.

The original question that prompted this research project was the concern for the privacy regarding a son's or daughter's sexual orientation. Exterior privacy boundaries are concerned with information that is collectively owned by the family but not shared with those outside the family (Petronio, 2002). Attention needs to be called to the measure of privacy boundaries. As previously explained, the exterior privacy boundaries are specifically concerned with information that is not shared with others. The current measure makes statements regarding whether private information is shared with individuals outside of the family. Provided with this information, the measure should explore why specific types of information are shared outside families rather than whether information is shared outside the family. By taking the time to investigate the role of the topic in the decision to disclose information, a stronger relationship between family communication patterns and family privacy boundaries could be uncovered.

In conclusion, this chapter provided a discussion of the results from the present study and their implications. The chapter then turned to the study's limitations. Finally, the chapter provided suggestions for future research. Although exploratory, this study did provide scholars with reasons to further investigate parents' motives to disclose their son's or daughter's sexual orientation. This study suggested that a family's degree of conversation and their motivation to seek understanding is related to their willingness to disclose their son's or daughter's sexual orientation. These results suggest that the disclosure of a son's or daughter's sexuality may be an issue of social support—opening the door to additional lines of research that will only help in understanding the coming out process in our ever changing world.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Hi! My name is Justin Motto and I am a graduate student in Communication Department here at CMU, working to complete my thesis for my Master's degree. I would like to invite you to participate in a study by completing an online survey about your child's sexual orientation, and the way in which you manage that information. It will probably take approximately 30 minutes of your time to complete the series of questions.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may choose to terminate your participation at any time. Your participation would be greatly appreciated; if you choose to participate, you may start by following the link below. If at any point you have any questions, please contact me at motto1js@cmich.edu or 989-774-3177.

Thank you in advance,

Justin S. Motto

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/68QMH6Y

APPENDIX B

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A STUDY

Study Title: Parent's Disclosure of a Child's Sexual Orientation
Research Investigator: Justin S. Motto

Contact Information for Investigators:

Justin S. Motto   Dr. Lesley A. Withers
Communication and Dramatic Arts   Communication and Dramatic Arts
Central Michigan University   Central Michigan University
333 Moore Hall   350 Moore Hall
Mount Pleasant, MI 48859   Mount Pleasant, MI 48859
Phone: (989) 774-3177   Phone: (989) 774-6673

Invitation to Participate: You are invited to participate in a research study about family interaction surrounding coming out as a homosexual to family members. The following information should help you make an informed decision whether or not to participate. If you have any questions about the study, please contact Justin Motto or Dr. Lesley Withers.

What is the purpose of this study? The purpose of this study is to study the possible relationship between family communication styles and the disclosure of a child's sexual orientation. You are eligible to participate in this research because you are at least 18 years old, and have a child with a homosexual sexual orientation.

What will I do in this study? If you decide to participate in this research project, you will be asked to complete several measures on topics related to how you communicate in your family and information regarding the individual with whom you shared information about your child's sexual orientation. You also be asked some demographic information including your sexual orientation, biological sex, and age.

How long will it take? Filling out the measures should take about 30-45 minutes.

Are there any risks of participating in this study? This study will ask personal questions regarding your sexual orientation and your family interaction. You may stop participating at any time if you feel uncomfortable or no longer wish to continue. Additionally, if at any time you feel you need to talk with someone, GLBT National Help Center offers a free support line: (888) 843-4564.

What are the benefits of participating in this study? This research will give you an idea of how we collect data in the field of communication. It may also help us to gain insight into how individuals communicate with others about their child's sexual orientation. This information may help future researchers in their approach to family communication about sexuality.

Will anyone know what I do or say in this study (Confidentiality)? As you will not identify yourself on the questionnaire, there is no way for the investigator to know who filled out which questionnaire. Any data under the investigator's control will, if disclosed, be presented in a manner that does not reveal the subject's identity, except as may be required by law.

Will I receive any compensation for participation? Is there a different way for me to receive the compensation of this study? All participants who provide their email address will be entered into a drawing for one of two $25 Amazon gift cards.

Who can I contact for information about this study? You may contact Justin Motto at (989) 774-3177 with any questions you have about this study. Please print a copy of this informed consent form for you to keep in case you have questions later.

You are free to refuse to participate in this research project or to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation in the project at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled or affect on your relationship with the institution(s) involved in this research project.

If you are not satisfied with the manner in which this study is being conducted, you may report (anonymously, if you so choose) any complaints to the CMU Institutional Review Board by calling (989) 774-6777, or addressing a letter to the Institutional Review Board, 251 Foust Hall, Central Michigan University, Mount Pleasant, MI 48859.

Clicking the link to begin the survey (below) indicates that all my questions have been answered. I agree to participate in the project as described above.

DEMOGRAPHICS & DISCLOSURE QUESTIONNAIRE

1. **Age:** Please indicate your age in years.

    _____ years old

Please select the answer that best represents you from the options below:

2. **Sex:**

    _____ Male   _____ Female

3. **My sexual orientation:**

    _____ Straight   _____ Gay   _____ Lesbian   _____ Bisexual

4. **I am the _____ of a person who is homosexual.**

    _____ Mother   _____ Father

    _____ Step-Mother   _____ Step-Father

    _____ Legal Guardian _____ Other (please describe): _____

5. **My child's sexual orientation:**

    _____ Gay   _____ Lesbian   _____ Bisexual   _____ Straight

6. Have you told anyone about your child's sexual orientation?

    _____ Yes   _____ No

7. Thinking back to when my child first told me about his/her homosexuality, the **<u>first person I told</u>** about my child's sexual orientation was my: (select the one response that best describes your relationship with this person)

_____ Male friend   _____ Female friend

_____ Male immediate family member   _____ Female immediate family member

_____ Male extended family member   _____ Female extended family member

If you told a family member, please describe his/her relationship to *you* (immediate: your spouse, son, daughter; extended: your sister, brother, mother, father):_____

8. I believed that the person I told:

_____ Did NOT know about my child's homosexuality at that time

_____ Did know about my child's homosexuality at that time

9. Why did you choose to tell this person <u>first</u> (before anyone else)?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

10. What were your reasons for telling this person about your child's sexual orientation?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

MOTIVATIONS FOR DISCLOSING SON'S/DAUGHTER'S SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Instructions: Still thinking of the <u>first person you told</u> about your child's homosexuality, please answer the questions below using the following scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Neutral			Strongly Agree

I told this person that my child "came out"…

1. So this person would better understand what I'm going through. (u)

2. because I could not keep the secret any longer. (s)

3. because I was worried about my child's safety. (c)

4. because I was proud of my child for "coming out." (p)

5. because I needed to know if my child was going to be safe. (c)

6. because I needed someone else's opinion about my child's "coming out." (u)

7. because I needed to get the secret off of my chest. (s)

8. because I wanted to speak proudly of my child. (p)

9. because I needed reassurance about my child's safety. (c)

10. because it was too difficult to keep the secret any longer. (s)

11. because I wanted others to know I'm proud of my child. (p)

12. because I wanted this person to know about this significant event in my life. (u)

Note:
(s) Lessening the burden of keeping a secret item
(p) Statement of pride item
(u) Desire for understanding/sympathy item
(c) Concern for safety item

APPENDIX E

FITZPATRICK AND RITCHIE'S (1990) FAMILY COMMUNICATION PATTERNS

Instructions: When reading the following statements, please think about the communication you experience with <u>your immediate family</u>; specifically, think about the *communication between you, your spouse/partner, and your children*.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Neutral			Strongly Agree

1. In our family, we often talk about topics like politics and religion where some persons disagree with others. (a)

2. In our family, we often says something like, "Every member of the family should have some say in family decisions. (a)

3. In our family, members often ask my opinion when the family is talking about something. (a)

4. Members of our family encourage me to challenge their ideas and beliefs. (a)

5. Members of our family often say something like, "You should always look at both sides of an issue." (a)

6. I usually tell members of our family what I'm thinking about. (a)

7. I usually tell members of our family almost anything. (a)

8. In our family, we often talk about our feelings and emotions. (a)

9. Members of our family and I often have long, relaxed conversations about nothing in particular. (a)

10. I really enjoy talking with members of our family, even when we disagree. (a)

11. Members of our family like to hear my opinions even when they don't agree with me. (a)

12. Members of our family encourage me to express my feelings. (a)

13. My spouse and I tend to be very open about our emotions. (a)

14. We often talk as a family about things we have done during the day. (a)

15. In our family, we often talk about our plans and hopes for the future. (a)

16. My spouse and I often say something like, "You'll know better when you grow up." (b)

17. My spouse and I often say something like, "My ideas are right and you should not question them." (b)

18. My spouse and I often say something like, "A child should not argue with adults." (b)

19. My spouse and I often say something like, "There are some things that just shouldn't be talked about." (b)

20. My spouse and I often say something like, "You should give in on arguments rather than risk making people mad." (b)

21. When anything really important is involved, my spouse and I expect our children to obey without questions. (b)

22. In our home, my spouse and I usually have the last word. (b)

23. My spouse and I feel that it is important to be the boss. (b)

24. My spouse and I sometimes become irritated with our children's views if they are different than ours. (b)

25. If my spouse and I don't approve of it, we don't want to know about it. (b)

26. When our children are at home, they are expected to obey our rules. (b)

Note:
(a) Degree of conversation subscale
(b) Degree of conformity subscale

MORR SEREWICZ & CANARY'S (2008) FAMILY PRIVACY ORIENTATION

Instructions: In the following questions, please continue to think about the relationships and communication you have within <u>your immediate family</u>, and please answer the following questions:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Neutral			Strongly Agree

1. Family members are very open with each other. (i)

2. Family members do not discuss private information with one another. * (i)

3. Within the family, everybody knows everything. (i)

4. Family members keep secrets from one another. * (i)

5. There are specific groups within the family that keep information from one another. (i)

6. Family members share their private information with each other. (i)

7. The family keeps secrets from outsiders. * (e)

8. The family shares private information freely with those outside the family. (e)

9. Family members are free to discuss the family's private information with friends and

   acquaintances. (e)

10. Family members are free to discuss the family's private information to anyone who is not a family member. * (e)

11. The family has no secrets from people outside the family. (e)

12. Family members carefully protect the family's private information from outsiders.* (e)

Note:
* Denotes a reverse coded item
(i) Interior boundaries subscale
(e) Exterior boundaries subscale

APPENDIX G

WILLINGNESS TO DISCLOSE SON'S/DAUGHTER'S SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Instructions: Please think about your decisions to disclose your child's homosexuality, and answer the questions using the following scale:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Neutral			Strongly Agree

1. I felt compelled to tell someone about my child's sexual orientation.

2. I wanted to tell someone about my child's sexual orientation.

3. I did not feel any need to tell anyone about my child's sexual orientation.*

4. I was willing to tell someone about my child's sexual orientation.

5. I felt as though I should tell someone about my child's sexual orientation.

Note:
* Denotes a reverse coded item.

APPENDIX H

SON'S/DAUGHTER'S SEXUAL ORIENTATION QUESTIONNAIRE

1. My child told me <u>directly</u> that he/she is homosexual.

_____ Yes   _____ No

2. At the time my child disclosed his/her sexual orientation to me, this information about

my child's sexual orientation was common knowledge to others.

_____ Yes   _____ No

3. Did your child ask you to not tell others?

_____ Yes   _____ No

4. Was there anyone in particular your child asked you not to tell? If so list that person's

relationship to you. (For example: <u>your</u> spouse, parent, mother, father, a family friend)

_____

_____

5. Did you honor your child's request to not tell?

_____ Yes   _____ No

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