

LEAVING A LASTING IMPRESSION: THE ROLE OF FOUNDATIONAL FAMILY,
PRIVACY, AND GENDER MESSAGES ON COMING OUT DISCLOSURES

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates the influence of family messages about gender, free expression, conformity, and privacy on coming out disclosures, a difficult experience in today's society. Using communication privacy management theory, this study explored how heteronormative beliefs, family privacy boundaries, and family communication patterns relate to disclosure concerns.

A total of 218 self-identified lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) participants were recruited using convenience and snowball sampling techniques. Participants completed an online survey to measure family privacy orientations, family communication patterns, heteronormative attitudes and beliefs, and disclosure concerns. Six linear regression analyses were performed.

The findings suggest that both family privacy orientations and family communication patterns contribute to concerns about disclosing one's sexual orientation. The study did not find heteronormative beliefs and attitudes to play a significant role in disclosure concerns. Additional findings indicate that family communication patterns inform family privacy orientations, which suggest a more complicated chain of influence. The findings of the study highlight the influence of early communication on LGBT individuals' long-term ability to communicate about their sexual orientation.

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CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION

When people come into this world, they do not have an understanding of privacy or gender. Privacy (Petronio, 2002) and gender (Gross, 2005) are learned practices. Early in life, children receive messages that explain the standards that should be followed (social norms). The family is the primary source of information on social norms (Burleson & Kunkle, 2002). Children are taught what can be discussed, where topics can be discussed, and who can talk about those topics (Serewicz, 2013). They do not enter this world knowing anything about anatomy, what sex is, or who should love whom. Children are initially guided by parents through control of toys, activities, and gender displays (Blackmore, Brenebaum, & Liben, 2009). The messages presented to children that encourage or discourage certain gender displays create an understanding about acceptable behavior. Research indicates that between the ages of two and three years of age, children learn to differentiate between boys and girls, recognize gender-specific toys and clothing, and understand the category to which they belong (Fagot, Leinbach, & O'Boyle, 1992). These early messages about privacy and gender create individuals' basis for understanding communication about sexual orientation.

The goal of this study is to test the dynamics among family communication practices, family privacy expectations, gender expectations, and the level of comfort experienced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals in coming out disclosures. People's upbringing influences their future decisions (e.g., attachment styles; Bowlby, 1982). In particular, the initial messages families teach and reinforce about privacy expectations and gender should have a direct relationship with the level of comfort in coming out disclosures.

Coming Out

Coming out is often defined through common LGBT experiences. It is frequently described as a shift in defining oneself as LGBT (Gorman-Murray, 2008) that results in disclosures about one's sexual orientation (Mehra & Braquet, 2011). One of the first experiences is feeling different from other children (Beaty, 1999; Hill, 2009; Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993). The second common experience is adopting an LGBT identity, which often consists of accepting their same-sex attractions (Beaty, 1999; Hill, 2009; Manning, 2015). Finally, sharing one's sexual orientation is the third common experience reported by research (Beaty, 1999; Gray, 2009; Hill, 2009; Manning, 2015; Newman & Muzzoniro, 1993). Hill (2009) summarizes the experience as, "recognizing, exploring, integrating, and disclosing an alternative sexual orientation" (p. 347). Because sexual orientation is not a visible aspect of a person's identity, LGBT individuals will continually go through the process of coming out and reverting to the closet depending on the social, personal, professional, educational relationships, and discrimination they experience during their lifetime (Dindia, 1998; Mehra & Braquet, 2011).

LGBT individuals experience conflicting desires when it comes to sharing their sexual orientation with others. Sexual orientation is typically considered private information (Manning, 2015), and private information is defined by people's right to keep that information to themselves (Petronio, 2002). On the other hand, the disclosure of sexual orientation may be necessary in order to feel as if one is leading an authentic life (Eguchi, 2006). Baxter & Montgomery's (1996) concept of dialectical tensions explains how individuals can experience a desire to maintain their privacy while simultaneously experiencing a desire to be open with others, with the relative strength of each desire in a constant state of flux. Family members enhance the tension experienced by LGBT individuals.

The family plays an important role in the coming out experience. The family home is the place of origin that functions as a support system for children's transition through childhood, adolescence, and into adulthood (Gorman-Murray, 2005). For LGBT children, the difficulty in coming out emerges at a young age. From as early as four years old, LGBT children recognize they are different from other children (Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993). The sense of difference is not explicitly about sexuality or gender; rather, children feel there is something difficult to define or explain that sets them apart. Family members often poorly understand this sense of difference (Manning, 2015; Oswald, 2000; Savin-Williams & Dube, 1998). Fields (2001) attributes the absence of understanding to a lack of exposure to LGBT relationships, negative messages about LGBT relationships, and a lack of communication scripts to handle discussions pertaining to the LGBT experiences. Ryan, Russel, Huebner, Diaz, and Sanchez (2010) echo Field's concern about the lack of literature available for parents, but indicate that improvements are being made. The sense of difference and concern of family reactions experienced by LGBT individuals contributes to gay-related stress.

Gay-related stress is an additional factor that complicates coming out disclosures. Gay-related stress is feeling stigmatized for being or being perceived as an LGBT individual (Rosario, Schrimshaw, Hunter & Gwadz, 2002). The stigmatization hinders coming out due to the negative experiences of LGBT individuals. Often times, LGBT individuals experience variety of discriminatory actions from others and towards oneself. Some of the negative experiences include violence, verbal abuse, and rejection from others. Additionally, negative social messages about LGBT identities foster internalized negative feelings (e.g., internalized homophobia; Eguchi, 2006). These experiences hinder LGBT individual's identity development (Rosario,

Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2008) and promote concealing one's sexual orientation (Rosario et al., 2002). Privacy is central to the concern of concealing sexual orientation.

Coming out is a unique example of a sensitive, private topic. To better understand the complexity of this topic, an investigation into the foundations of a person's private information management is needed. Going back to the messages about how private information is shared may provide valuable insights into early constructions of privacy pertaining to coming out—the creation of the closet.

Privacy

Privacy is a learned behavior central to communication practices. According to Petronio (2011), privacy permeates our daily lives and every conversation. Every time we engage in conversation, the way we manage private information influences the disclosures made in those conversations (Petronio, 2002). People are not born with these management systems. We know that people first learn to manage their private information from their family (Petronio, 2002). This management system takes the form of imaginary boundaries. While we understand the complexity of these management systems, we currently fail to understand the repercussions these family teachings of privacy management have on the discussion of sensitive topics later in life. This question is particularly salient when discussing topics like sexual orientation that are linked to a person's health, confidence, and well-being (Manning, 2015).

Research has shown that views of privacy impact decisions regarding whether to disclose sensitive information. Nichols (2012) found that people do not disclose sexual history if they feel the information is private. Limiting disclosures and viewing sexual history as private is problematic because it can hamper discussions necessary to safe sexual practices. Similarly, Lewis, Matheson, and Brimacombe (2011) found that female patients who report low comfort

with disclosing information share less information or alter facts when discussing sexual history with physicians; physicians' abilities to treat patients are limited by insufficient information, which can put patients' health at risk. Lesbian women in rural areas are less likely to seek out preventative healthcare because of lack of LGBT-oriented healthcare facilities (Barefoot, Warren, & Smalley, 2017).

Understanding how family and cultural messages about sensitive topics impact disclosures is important to vulnerable populations. Aldeis and Afifi (2013) argue that understanding this interaction is imperative to reducing the vulnerabilities associated with college students and risky behaviors. Like college students, LGBT individuals are a vulnerable population who are at risk of self-harm, suicide, and struggles with depression (McDaniel, Purcell, & D'Augelli, 2001). Although understanding the interaction of the variables may not solve these problems, it can provide valuable information to educate families on developing environments that encourage open and receptive communication about the sensitive topic of disclosure and sexuality.

CHAPTER TWO. LITERATURE REVIEW

To understand the role learned family communication patterns, privacy management behaviors, and gender expectations have on an individual's comfort with disclosing his/her sexual orientation, this chapter will review relevant literature. First, this chapter will present research on family reactions to coming out in order to establish the prevalence of heteronormative expectations. Second, research on social norms regarding gender will be explored to situate coming out in a predominantly straight society. To understand the role of managing private information, the chapter will present Communication Privacy Management (CPM) theory. Finally, this chapter will take a focused look family privacy culture.

Family Research

Family is a complex concept that tends to be a vital part of people's lives. The family is the place of origin for most people (Gorman-Murray, 2005). It is where people develop their first relationships and understandings of self. The family home is frequently the center of support as people transition life stages. Gorman-Murray (2005) describes the home as a "matrix of social relations, personal meaning, [and] emotional attachments" (p. 32). Because of these foundational experiences, the family is conceptualized as the social relationships between individuals in the primary place of care. The family is constantly evolving and difficult to define outside of living arrangements (Dinisman, Andresen, Montserrat, Stozik, & Stozik, 2017). The importance of family makes it natural that coming out research focuses on the role of family members.

Some heterosexual families struggle to understand when a child reveals an LGBT orientation. Families assume that their son or daughter is heterosexual until proven otherwise. Many families make assumptions of heterosexuality and do not educate themselves about LGBT relationships (Waldner & Magrader, 1999). Fields (2001) found that participants cite the lack of

a script as an initial struggle with a son or daughter coming out. Fields indicates that information on how to respond to an LGBT child is not readily available.

Research has consistently focused on the reactions of parents towards a child's coming out as LGBT. Earlier research suggested that some parents equated coming out with the loss of a child (Robinson, Walters, & Skeen, 1989). To a lesser degree, Beeler and DiProva (1999) explain that family members equate the LGBT member to a stranger. They explain that family members call into question the authenticity of the person they thought they knew. Hillier (2002) reported that passive acceptance was the most positive response and ejection of the child from the family home as the most extreme negative response. Even some parents with long standing suspicions have responded negatively (Herdt & Koff, 2000). Ryan, Huebner, Diaz and Sanchez (2009) indicate that parental rejection increases in families of immigrants, strong religious beliefs, or low-income. Manning (2015) reports that denial, shaming, and aggressive responses are still evident.

Scholars have offered different explanations for negative parental responses to coming out. For parents in particular, scholars suggest that parents respond negatively due the self-blame they place on the relationship between their parenting the child and the child's sexual orientation (Beeler & DiProva, 1999; Fields, 2001; Saltzburg, 2004). Soliz, Ribarsky, Harrigan, and Tye-Williams (2010) explain that negative social messages about LGBT relationships infiltrate family functioning. Floyd (2001) points out that fathers may struggle with a gay son because it impacts their understanding of a "real man." Chesebro (2001) argues that masculinity is challenged and that a man with a male partner is somehow equated to be less masculine. In trying to explain reactions, a common thread emerges. LGBT sexual orientations challenge the

social messages and expectations about sexual identity. This does not mean that positive experiences do not occur; positive experiences have been reported.

Positive coming out experiences do occur both after the initial coming out and during coming out disclosures. Family members may eventually come around to accepting the son or daughter's sexual orientation (Savin-Williams & Dube, 1998). Even in bad coming out experiences, some people report having stronger relationships following the experience (Beatty, 1999). Ryan (2004) found some parents initially accept LGBT children; challenging an assumption that all parents react negatively. Research shows that positive affirming relational messages, nonverbal immediacy, and laughter and joking have been reported in coming out experiences (Manning, 2015). A Canadian study showed that 69% of mothers were accepting and 66% of fathers were accepting following coming out disclosures (D'Amico & Julien, 2017); the study does not indicate if the acceptance is during the coming out experience or after.

Research indicates that anxiety is often present during coming out because individuals are aware of negative coming out experiences and social messages about same-sex relationships (Hartwell, Serovich, Grafsky, & Kerr, 2012). Thus, despite positive reports, coming out is a challenging communicative act. As the primary source of socialization (Burlison & Kunkle, 2002), families play a role in disseminating social norms.

Social Norms

Early messages about gender create confusing messages for LGBT children. The earliest messages of gender come from our families (Jackson, 2006). According to Martin and Ruble (2004), children's understanding of gender is made clear by the age of five. This young age is important for LGBT individuals. Between the ages of four and nine, LGBT children establish a sense of being different (Newman & Muzzongiro, 1993). Heteronormativity has been argued as

one of the main reasons LGBT individuals feel different (Gray, 2009; Jackson, 2006; Manning, 2015)

Heteronormativity is an omnipresent complex message repeated in society about the dynamic between men and women. It is the idea that heterosexuality is the social norm (Jackson, 2006). Biological sex and procreation are the foundation for the belief that heterosexuality is natural (Robinson, 2010). Habarth (2009) made the case that heteronormativity can be understood (and measured) through people's understanding of gender and expectations of people in sexual relationships. The commonly held belief is that men and women have complementary genders (there are two genders), and the expectation is that people are in straight relationships (the two genders belong together).

The expectation of heteronormativity is pervasive in the lives of everyone (Chevrette, 2013). It impacts people from both straight and LGBT communities. For example, heteronormativity is visible in straight men's efforts to prove their masculinity (Pascoe, 2005). Similarly, in LGBT relationships an attempt at assimilating to heteronormative standards is visible in the privileging of a monogamous relationship, getting married, and having kids (Duggan, 2003). In the case of young LGBT individuals, the struggle is to understand where they fit in and how to navigate their sexuality (Gray, 2009). One of the by-products of expectation of heterosexual relationships is homophobia.

Homophobia is a negative attitude grounded in an unfounded fear and/or hatred of LGBT individuals (Weinberg, 1972). Social messages about LGBT sexual orientations contribute to negative attitudes toward LGBT community individuals. These social messages can take many forms; however, prominent messages about the expectation of heterosexual relationships are

considered one of the largest contributors to negative attitudes toward LGBT sexual orientations (Puckett & Levitt, 2015).

LGBT individuals are not immune to homophobia; they can experience a negative attitude and self-hatred towards their own sexual orientation. This experience is called internalized homophobia (Tskhay & Rule, 2017). Research indicates that internalized homophobia is related to an individual less likely identifying with an LGBT identity and contributes to LGBT individuals struggling to make sense of who they are (Eguchi, 2006). Hertzman (2011) describes the impact of internalized homophobia on coming out as, “not only that one’s sexuality can feel scrutinized, different or wrong, but in addition one’s own sense of belief about oneself, and indeed about one’s relationships, can come to feel equally under attack” (p. 351). These feelings often result in remaining closeted.

Internalized homophobia may keep LGBT individuals from identifying with their sexual orientation. Meyer (2003) explains that LGBT individuals live in a world that constantly invalidates their identity simply through the dominant representation of heterosexual relationships. This invalidation can prevent outward expressions of sexual orientation. Tskhay and Rule (2017) found in their sample that gay men with high levels of internalized homophobia are less likely to share their sexual orientation with family, friends, and colleagues. Although it may be difficult, overcoming homophobia is possible. Herrick et al. (2013) notes that most LGBT individuals overcome internalized homophobia over time. In their study, Herrick et al. found that stronger integration of one’s sexual orientation into one’s life and connection to sexual minority communities corresponded with less internalized homophobia. Heteronormative beliefs are therefore likely to contribute to a sense of disconnect between the individual and their sexual identity, resulting in discomfort with sharing one’s sexual identity. The opposite is likely

to be true of those with fewer heteronormative beliefs. Thus, the strength of heteronormative beliefs should be related to a person's disclosure concerns about his/her sexual orientation. As a result, I propose the following hypotheses:

H1: Gender as binary beliefs will be positively related to disclosure concerns about one's sexual orientation.

H2: Heteronormative sexual behavior beliefs will be positively related to disclosure concerns about one's sexual orientation.

The tension between heteronormative beliefs and disclosure concerns situates coming out as a private topic to be managed. CPM theory explores the process of dealing with private topics (Petronio, 2002). The following details CPM and the role of family in the management process.

Communication Privacy Management

Petronio changed the scholarly conversation about self-disclosure. Previous research focused on breadth and depth of self-disclosure (Altman, 1977). Petronio introduced a conceptual shift that put a focus on privacy, rather than the self (Petronio, 2002). Petronio (2002) believes that privacy is central to all interactions. Privacy is a focus on private information rather than the individual (Petronio, 2011), while self-disclosure is the process of revealing private information. Drawing on Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) dialectical theory, CPM argues that there are contradictory forces between the desire to be private and the desire to share information (Petronio, 2002). The tension between these desires compels people to go through a process that may lead to disclosure of private information or a decision to maintain privacy. LGBT individuals feel this tension through the struggle to live an authentic life. To illustrate this process, Petronio used the metaphor of boundaries.

Boundaries as a metaphor help illuminate the ebb and flow of private information. People can restrict information from others by putting up an invisible wall (boundary) that limits their access; however, people can share private information (Petronio, 2002). Sharing information links others to the boundary. Boundaries are malleable because of changes in information sharing. The malleability of a boundary is called permeability (Petronio, 2002). Petronio illustrates the management of private information in five principles. The following focuses on the first three principles due to their focus on the development of individual management practices. The fourth and fifth principles are outside the scope of the study and deal with the shared information and the turbulence experienced between co-owners.

Principle One – Ownership

The first of these principles is that people own their information (Petronio, 2002). According to Petronio, the private information is not something that others are privy to unless shared—marking an ownership. Sexual orientation is an example of owned information. This information is personal, and others are not aware of the information unless the owner shares it. Ownership comes with the privilege to share the information.

Principle Two - Right to Control

Control is the second principle of CPM theory (Petronio, 2002). Because people own their information, they control the rights to the information they own. This right to control allows for selective sharing of information or complete privacy if the owner desires. The desire to share sexual orientation illustrates control. People can decide to keep the information to themselves or to share the information.

Principle Three - Personal Management

The third principle focuses on the development of a rules system that governs how one shares the information (Petronio, 2002). People protect their information by developing protection rules. Protection rules are a system that everyone uses to secure their information. An example of a protection rule could be that an LGBT individual does not discuss their sexual orientation with a person until they have established a friendship. Social and individual factors play a role in developing this security. These factors include the motivation to share information, the culture of which an individual is a part, gender expectations, and a risk-benefit ratio that assesses the value of disclosing information.

Motivation. Motivation to share is the desire a person feels toward sharing information (Petronio, 2002). People are driven for a variety of personal reasons to disclose or withhold information. In the case of disclosing an LGBT orientation, a person may be motivated to express themselves. According to Manning (2015), people are naturally driven to express their distinctiveness. A person could also be motivated for personal health. Sharing one's sexual orientation is also considered healthy for an LGBT individual's psychological well-being (Hillier, 2002). These examples of expressing distinctiveness and for health are two of the many different motivations a person may have for sharing information about sexual orientation.

Gender. Gender guides privacy regulation through practices of social norms (Petronio, 2002). Men and women reveal different information based on cultural expectations of masculinity and femininity (Petronio, 2002). According to Gross (2005), children are taught at a young age to conform to gender roles. Men are to prescribe to masculinity, and women to femininity. A person that does not have a straight sexual orientation may therefore not share his/her sexual orientation due to the social expectations of gender. These issues are illustrated

earlier in the discussion of social norms; CPM advances the argument that communication about gender regulates sharing sexual orientation.

Context. Contextual constraints consist of situational need to share information (Petronio, 2002). When people experience new contexts, they adjust their privacy boundaries to accommodate the situation. For example, a person may share his/her sexual orientation with a health professional. If the spouse of an LGBT individual were hospitalized, the spouse could reveal their sexual orientation for the privilege of health updates and visiting privileges.

Risk-benefit. Risk-benefit is the evaluation process people experience in deciding to share information (Petronio, 2002). Sharing private information comes with a risk of vulnerability; however, sharing the information can also benefit a relationship's development. Risk-benefit is based on a comparison of the potential positive outcomes of sharing information to the potential negative outcomes of sharing information. Disclosing sexual orientation comes with the risk of rejection and discrimination (Hillier, 2002). It also comes with the possibility of developing stronger bonds and a healthier attitude towards one's identity (Baptis & Allen, 2008). Given both possibilities, an LGBT individual may consider if stronger bonds and a healthier attitude towards his or her identity outweighs the risk of potential rejection. This decision might not be clear-cut. More information from the other criteria (motivation, context, gender, and/or culture) would be considered in this process, but this risk-benefit ratio would be at the core of the decision.

Culture. Culture focuses on the values, beliefs, and expectations developed about privacy (Petronio, 2002). Culture informs individuals about what is socially acceptable. Cultures value privacy to varying degrees. The cultural value placed on privacy will dictate the expectation of disclosure or concealing of information. Petronio (2010) points out that, in part,

privacy expectations are based on one's country of origin; however, these cultural norms are refined within individual families. Serewicz and Canary (2008) argue that the family establishes expectations for what kind of information can be shared both within and outside of the family. Furthering this argument, Hammonds (2009) showed evidence that the communication patterns within the family perpetuate the family's culture of privacy.

Family Privacy Culture

Originally termed family relational culture (Hammonds, 2009), family privacy culture is the idea that families influence member's privacy expectations (Motto, 2013). Hammonds originally argued that family privacy culture is the way families socialize their members to uphold privacy expectations through communication. In his work, Hammonds (2009) found support that a family's privacy culture predicts a child's likelihood to disclose private information to his or her parents. He conceptualized family privacy culture as consisting of family privacy orientations and family communication patterns.

Family Privacy Orientations

Family privacy orientations are learned approaches to managing information. According to Petronio (2002) people learn how much and what type information should be shared, both among family members and with people outside of the family. Petronio labels the learned expectations of how information is shared within the family as an interior family privacy boundary; the expectations of how to share information outside the family is called an exterior family privacy boundary.

Interior family privacy boundaries focus on sharing information within the family. The permeability of interior family privacy boundaries can vary. According to Petronio (2002) families range from low permeability (little information shared within the family) to high

permeability (a lot of information shared within the family). Interior family privacy boundaries guide the general amount of information shared among family members. Idiosyncratic differences in families can lead to the development of cells within the interior privacy boundaries. Petronio (2010) explains that privacy cells within the family are channels of communication among specific family members. An example of a cell would be the information shared between a mother and child. The information shared between the mother and child may not be the same as information shared between two children; however, the general amount of information being shared between the mother and child is guided by the interior family privacy boundary.

Exterior family privacy boundaries focus on the family information shared with individuals outside of the family. Petronio (2002) explains that the entire family collectively protects these boundaries. Exterior family privacy boundaries include members decided upon by the family. The boundaries can include extended family members (i.e., aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.) or even close family friends (Petronio, 2002). Like interior family privacy boundaries, exterior family privacy boundaries vary from low to high permeability, based on the amount of information shared or concealed.

Family privacy orientations may have some variation through time, but tend to remain consistent. Petronio (2002) notes that the orientation towards sharing information inside and outside the family is instilled at a young age. As families grow and new members join through relationships, some accommodations are made to the permeability of privacy orientations, but new members are typically oriented to the pre-existing family privacy orientations (Petronio, 2002). Serewicz and Canary's (2008) extension suggested that new in-laws bring their privacy management skills from their families of origin, but use their married partner's family privacy

rules for information specific to the new family. Holding the two orientations simultaneously can result in differences of opinion on how information should be managed.

Family privacy norms are related to individual's subsequent trust of others and flexibility in sharing information. According to Petronio (2002), individuals from families with both low internal and external permeability orientations exhibit lower amount of trust towards a target of disclosure; conversely, high levels of permeability tend to show larger amounts of trust towards the receiver of shared information. Moderate levels of permeability are linked to flexibility of sharing information (Petronio, 2002). Families with moderate levels tend to have less strict rules for privacy that change depending on need for sharing information.

As previously established, family privacy orientations play a vital role in the way that people manage information both within and outside the family. According to Serewicz, Dickson, Morrison, and Poole (2007), "these rule [interior and exterior] orientations reflect overarching values related to privacy that determine the rules for boundary management and patterns or routines for the application of boundary rules" (p. 124). These orientations have implications beyond shared family information and are the foundational premise for one's general orientation towards privacy. The way an individual manages information should be informed by the long-established family privacy orientations. From this logic, if family privacy orientations are foundational to privacy management, family privacy boundaries should be related to an LGBT individual's comfort with sharing sexual orientation information (disclosure concerns about his/her sexual orientation). Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: The permeability of family interior privacy boundaries will be negatively related to disclosure concerns about one's sexual orientation.

H4: The permeability of family exterior privacy boundaries will be negatively related to disclosure concerns about one's sexual orientation.

The family plays a pivotal role in the development of an individual's regulation of private information. Through teaching children how to regulate private family information, families present information about how much information to share and what kind of information is acceptable. These messages are encouraged or discouraged by family communication patterns.

Family Communication Patterns

Family communication patterns include the extent to which families encourage independent thought or enforce beliefs on their members (Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990). There are two dimensions of family communication patterns: the degrees of conformity and conversation. The degree of conformity is the amount that parents expect their children to comply with parental authority. The degree of conversation refers to how much parents encourage children to share their own opinions and ideas. These two dimensions interact in a way that influences communication of family members.

Ritchie and Fitzpatrick (1990) describe four resulting categories based on the varying degrees of conformity and conversation. Laissez-faire individuals exhibit low degrees of conformity and conversation. These individuals have shown to have fewer interactions in the family, and are easily influenced by other social groups. Pluralistic individuals have low degrees of conformity and high degrees of conversation. These individuals showed levels of open communication and independent thought. Protective individuals display high degrees of conformity and low degrees of conversation. Protective individuals display an emphasis on obedience, and are persuaded by authority figures both within and outside the family. Their reliance on authority results in a distrust of their own decision making skills. Finally,

individuals that exhibit high levels of conformity and conversation are described as consensual. These individuals struggle between conforming with family expectations and pursuing new ideas. They often feel a pressure to agree with the expectations of the family.

Bridge and Schrodtt (2013) indicate that family communication patterns are related to the way people manage private information. The results suggest that individuals from families of high levels of conformity result in low levels of individual privacy permeability. Communication about sexual orientation would be constrained or encouraged by both family beliefs about gender and sexual identity, as well as the degrees of conformity and conversation in the family. A sensitive topic like sexual orientation might be heavily guarded in a family that has high levels of conformity. Whereas, families that have high degrees of conversation may feel differently. Research suggests that sensitive topics are discussed more frequently in families with high degrees of conversation (Booth-Butterfield, & Sidelinger, 1998). The results imply that families with high degrees of conversation discuss sensitive topics such as sex more frequently. Open communication fostered by families with high degrees of conversation could reduce disclosure concerns. While topics about sex may assume heterosexuality, the encouragement fostered by degree of conversation could provide a platform for discussing different sexual identities. Accordingly, the following hypotheses are advanced:

H5: The degree of conversation family communication pattern will be negatively related to disclosure concerns.

H6: The degree of conformity family communication pattern will be positively related to disclosure concerns.

Summary

This chapter presented research on family experiences with coming out, social norms, the theory of CPM, and family privacy culture. First, this chapter presented research on the family to show the prevalence of heteronormative expectations. Second, research on social norms regarding gender was explored to situate coming out in a predominantly straight society. To understand the role of managing private information, the chapter presented Communication Privacy Management (CPM) theory. Finally, this chapter took a focused look at family privacy culture.

CHAPTER THREE. METHOD

Overview

To understand the relationship between family communication patterns, family privacy orientations, heteronormative beliefs, and comfort with disclosure, this chapter will explain the procedures taken to test the hypotheses proposed in chapter two. It operationalizes family communication patterns, family privacy orientations, heteronormativity, and disclosure concerns. First, a description of the participant protocol is provided. Then a discussion of the procedures is included. The chapter concludes by explaining the measures used and analyses performed.

Method

Participants

Participants above the age of 18 were recruited to understand the impact of past messages on adult concerns about disclosing sexual orientation. Participants were 218 self-identified LGBT individuals. 28.4% ($n=62$) identified as male, 59.2% ($n=129$) as female, 4.6% ($n=10$) as transgender, 7.3% ($n=16$) as other, and .5% ($n=1$) as declining to respond. The average age was 28 years old (ranging from 18 to 70). Three participants indicated they had not disclosed their sexual orientation, while 215 participants indicated having disclosed their sexual orientation. 42.7% ($n=93$) reported being single, 33.5% ($n=73$) partnered, 17.9% ($n=39$) married, 5% ($n=11$) other, and 0.9% ($n=2$) declined to respond. Additional demographic information is provided in the following table (see Appendix H for demographic questionnaire). Two participants who identified as straight males were kept in the data, in recognition of the population of men that identify as straight and engage in sexual behavior with other men (Lapinski, 2010).

Table 1

Demographic Information

Variable	<i>Responses</i>	<i>%</i>
Sexual orientation		
Straight	2	0.9%
Gay	55	25.2%
Lesbian	42	19.3%
Bisexual	66	30.3%
Queer	23	10.5%
Pansexual	17	7.8%
Asexual	7	3.2%
Other	4	1.8%
Decline to respond	2	1.0%
Cultural/racial background		
African American/Black	4	1.8%
Hispanic American/Latino/a	9	4.1%
Asian American or Pacific Islander	4	1.8%
Native American	5	2.3%
White/Caucasian	185	84.9%
Biracial/Multiracial	6	2.85
Other	4	1.8%
Decline to respond	1	0.5%
Religious identity/affiliation		
Christian	51	23.4%
Jewish	9	4.1%
Buddhist	2	1.0%
Atheist	65	29.8%
Agnostic	61	28.0%
Pagan	4	1.8%
Spiritual	4	1.8%
Other	5	2.3%
Decline to respond	17	7.8%
Type of household raised in for majority of childhood		
Step-family/blended family with two same sex parents	1	0.5%
Step-family/blended family with two opposite sex parents	26	11.9%
Two same sex parents	2	0.9%
Two biological opposite sex parents	157	72%
Single-mother family	20	9.2%
Single-father family	2	0.9%
Grandparent(s)	1	0.5%
Adoptive family	1	0.5%
Other	5	2.3%
Decline to respond	3	1.4%

Note. *N*=218 participants

Procedure

After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (Protocol #HS18050), this study used convenience sampling to recruit LGBT participants via solicitation emails and social media posts. Convenience sampling relies on reaching out to a pool of participants that are readily available and easy to contact. After initial contact, the study relied on snowball sampling to recruit additional participants. Snowball sampling asks participants to further recruit qualifying individuals from their connections.

Social media posts and emails contained a brief description of the study, a list of participant criteria, a link to an online survey hosted by Qualtrics, and contact information of the researcher for questions (see Appendix B & C). After following the link, participants were presented with an informed consent statement. The statement provided participants with the necessary information to make an informed decision about participating in the study. Participants were informed to click a link to indicate consent and begin the online questionnaire. After answering items related to family communication patterns, family privacy boundaries, heteronormative attitudes and beliefs, and disclosure concerns, participants were presented with demographic questions. Upon completion, participants were thanked for their participation. Identifying information was not collected.

Measures

Family communication patterns. Fitzpatrick and Ritchie (1990) developed the family communication patterns instrument. The measure consists of 26 items employing a seven-point Likert-type scale (1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree”). The scale consists of two subscales: 15 items measure the degree of conversation within the family, and 11 items measure the degree of conformity within the family (see Appendix E). The degree of conversation

measures whether a parent encourages a child to develop and express self-directed views and opinions. Degree of conversation items consisted of statements such as: “My parents encourage me to challenge their ideas and beliefs.” The degree of conformity measures the expectation to conform to parental authority. Degree of conformity offers statements such as: “My parents often say something like, ‘You’ll know better when you grow up.’” Past studies have shown acceptable reliability for the measure with a $\alpha = .93$ for the items measuring degree of conversation, and $\alpha = .88$ regarding the items measuring the degree of conformity (Hammonds, 2009). The current study provided similar reliability (degree of conversation, $\alpha=.93$, $M=62.37$, $SD=20.69$; degree of conformity, $\alpha=.91$, $M=42.61$, $SD=14.98$).

Family privacy orientation. The family privacy orientation measure (see Appendix D) was created and refined over the past decade. The original, 11-item measure was created by Morr (2002), then modified by Serewicz and Canary (2008). The family privacy orientation scale measures the permeability of a family’s interior and exterior boundaries on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 means “strongly disagree” and 7 means “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 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). Both subscales have previously reported acceptable reliabilities (interior, $\alpha=.83$ and exterior, $\alpha=.78$; Serewicz &

Canary, 2008). The current study showed acceptable reliability (interior, $\alpha=.88$, $M=21.63$, $SD=8.35$; exterior, $\alpha=.87$, $M=14.29$, $SD=6.32$).

Heteronormative attitudes and beliefs. Habarth (2008) developed the heteronormative attitudes and beliefs measure (see Appendix F). The heteronormativity measure consists of two subscales: gender-as-binary and normative sexual behavior. In this study, the normative sexual behavior subscale is labeled heteronormative sexual behavior. Habarth labeled the scale based on society's expectations of what is normal, but it is in fact heteronormative. Each subscale consists of eight Likert-type statements rated from one to seven (strongly disagree to strongly agree, respectively). Gender as binary refers to the binary beliefs held about gender and sex (Habarth, 2008). Gender-as-binary consists of items such as: "All people are either male or female," and "Gender is a complicated issue, and it doesn't always match up with biological sex" (reverse coded). Heteronormative sexual behavior gauges the expectations for men and women in sexual or romantic relationships (Habarth, 2008). Heteronormative sexual behavior items include statements such as: "In intimate relationships, women and men take on roles according to gender for a reason; it's really the best way to have a successful relationship" and "It's perfectly okay for people to have intimate relationships with people of the same sex" (reverse coded). Both subscales have reported acceptable reliability with a both straight and an LGBT sample (gender as binary, $\alpha=.85$ and heteronormative sexual behavior, $\alpha=.86$; Habarth, 2008). The gender as binary showed acceptable reliability in the current study ($\alpha=.80$, $M=12.71$, $SD=6.51$). Heteronormative sexual behavior did not achieve statistical reliability ($\alpha=.37$, $M=14.92$, $SD=3.10$).

An exploratory factor analysis using principal components extraction and varimax rotation was employed to further investigate the low reliability of the heteronormative attitudes

and beliefs subscale. Table 2 reports the variables and factor loadings. Three factors accounting for 61.71% of the variance were revealed; however, only two variables met the criteria for factor loading. The resulting scale consisted of variable seven and eight and did not achieve acceptable reliability ($\alpha=.49$, $M=2.33$, $SD=0.96$).

Table 2

Factor Loadings of Heteronormative Attitudes and Beliefs Subscale

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
1. In intimate relationships, women and men take on roles according to gender for a reason; it's really the best way to have a successful relationship.	.389	.584	-.400
2. In intimate relationships, people should act only according to what is traditionally expected of their gender.	.481	.705	-.063
3. It's perfectly okay for people to have intimate relationships with people of the same sex.	.710	-.412	.194
4. The best way to raise a child is to have a mother and a father raise the child together.	.550	-.379	-.306
5. In healthy intimate relationships, women may sometimes take on stereotypical 'male' roles, and men may sometimes take on stereotypical 'female' roles.	.013	.047	.745
6. Women and men need not fall into stereotypical gender roles when in an intimate relationship.	.169	.361	.542
7. People should partner with whomever they choose, regardless of sex or gender.	.674	-.393	.026
8. There are particular ways that men should act and particular ways that women should act in relationships.	.799	.173	.121
Eigenvalue	2.31	1.47	1.16
Proportion of Variance	28.87%	18.35%	14.49%

Note. Bold numbers indicate scaled items.

Disclosure concerns. The disclosure concerns scale was adapted from Berger, Ferrans, and Lashley's (2001) HIV disclosure measure (see Appendix G). The adaptation of the measure consisted of changing the term "HIV" to "sexual orientation." The adapted measure gauges concern about revealing one's sexual orientation. The scale consists of 10 Likert-type statements

rated from one to seven (strongly disagree to strongly agree, respectively). Items consist of statements like, “I work hard to keep my sexual orientation a secret” and “I never feel I need to hide my sexual orientation” (reverse coded). The scale has reported acceptable reliability ($\alpha=.90$; Berger, Ferrans, & Lashley, 2001). The current study achieved similar reliability ($\alpha=.91$, $M=35.55$, $SD=14.13$).

Data Treatment and Analysis

The data collected through the online questionnaire were downloaded into an SPSS-compatible format. The data were treated before they were analyzed; specifically, the scales required items to be reverse-coded, and 33 incomplete surveys were removed from the data set. Incomplete surveys were defined as missing responses to the entirety of at least one measure. Mean scores were calculated, reliability analyses were performed for each scale and sub-scale, and correlation tests were performed among the seven measures.

Linear regressions were performed for each hypothesis to determine if statistically significant relationships existed between the variables (see Appendix A for a complete list of hypotheses). Regression analysis is a descriptive statistic that provides detail into the relationship between variables. Regression analysis models the relationship between explanatory variables (independent variables) and a response variable (dependent variable). The independent variables were family privacy orientations, family communication patterns, and heteronormative beliefs. The dependent variable was disclosure concern. Regression analysis attempts to predict a linear relationship between the variables (Levin, Fox, & Forde, 2010) and was employed to understand the predictive relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The predictive relationship explains what variable is causing change in another (or strongly influencing); whereas, a correlation would only indicate that a relationship exists and trends in a certain

direction. Correlations do not have an independent and dependent variable. No matter what order one enters the variables, the same data will result. You cannot interchange the variables in a regression and get the same results. The result from linear regression provides the amount of variance accounted for by the independent variables; in other words, the amount of influence the independent variables have on change in a dependent variable.

CHAPTER FOUR. RESULTS

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis one proposed that gender as binary beliefs will be positively related to disclosure concerns. A standard linear regression was performed. The results of the regression indicate that the model was not supported ($R^2=.01$, $F(1,216) = 2.73$, $p=.10$). Gender as binary was not predictive of disclosure concerns ($\beta=.11$, $p=.10$). Hypothesis one was not supported.

The second hypothesis proposed that heteronormative sexual behavior beliefs will be positively related to disclosure concerns. Because the heteronormative sexual behavior measure did not reach statistical reliability, the hypothesis was not tested.

Hypothesis three proposed that the permeability of family interior privacy boundary will be negatively related to disclosure concerns. A standard linear regression was performed. The results of the regression indicate that the model was significant ($R^2=.06$, $F(1,216) = 14.71$, $p<.01$). Family interior privacy boundary positively predicted disclosure concerns ($\beta=-.25$, $p<.01$). As interior family privacy boundary permeability decreases, there are increased disclosure concerns. Hypothesis three was supported.

The fourth hypothesis proposed that the permeability of family exterior privacy boundary will be negatively related to disclosure concerns. A standard linear regression was performed. The results of the regression indicate that the model was not significant ($R^2=.01$, $F(1,216) = 1.98$, $p=.16$). Family exterior privacy boundary was not predictive of disclosure concerns ($\beta=-.10$, $p=.16$). Hypothesis four was not supported.

Hypothesis five proposed that degree of conversation will be negatively related to disclosure concerns. A standard linear regression was performed. The results of the regression indicate that the model was significant ($R^2=.02$, $F(1,216) = 3.77$, $p=.05$). Degree of conversation

negatively predicted disclosure concerns ($\beta=-.13, p=.05$). The greater the degree of conversation, the less likely an individual would experience disclosure concerns. Hypothesis five was supported.

The sixth hypothesis posited that degree of conformity will be positively related to disclosure concerns. A standard linear regression was performed. The results of the regression indicated that the model was significant ($R^2=.06, F(1,216) = 10.43, p<.01$). Degree of conformity positively predicted disclosure concerns ($\beta=.22, p<.01$). The greater the degree of conformity, the increased likelihood that an individual would experience disclosure concerns. Hypothesis six was supported.

Table 3

Correlation Matrix

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Gender-as-Binary	1.588	.813	-				
2. Family Interior Privacy Orientation	1.122	.378	.329	-			
3. Family Exterior Privacy Orientation	2.854	1.262	-.097	.365**	-		
4. Family Communication Patterns (Conversation)	4.163	1.374	.057	.740**	.259**	-	
5. Family Communication Patterns (Conformity)	3.863	1.362	.003	-.493**	-.305**	-.630**	-
6. Disclosure Concern	3.549	1.409	.112	-.252**	-.095	-.131*	.215**

Notes. Cell entries are Pearson Product-Moment Correlation coefficients, * $p\leq.05$, ** $p<.01$.

Post Hoc Analyses

A Pearson’s Product-Moment correlation analysis revealed additional relationships of interest between family communication patterns and permeability of family privacy boundaries (see Table 3). Degree of conversation and permeability of interior privacy boundaries were positively correlated ($r=.74, p<.01$). The correlation matrix also indicated a relationship between degree of conformity and permeability of interior privacy boundaries. The degree of conformity

and permeability of interior privacy boundaries were negatively correlated ($r=-.49, p<.01$). Permeability of exterior privacy boundaries revealed a similar relationship. The degree of conversation was positively correlated with permeability of exterior privacy boundaries ($r=.26, p<.01$). Finally, degree of conformity was negatively correlated with exterior privacy boundaries ($r=-.31, p<.01$).

Standard linear regression analyses were performed to better understand the relationship between family communication patterns and permeability of family privacy boundaries. The regression adds directional clarity by providing a slope line that can help predict relationships between independent and dependent variables. Starting with the degree of conversation, the results of the regression indicated that the model was significant, explaining 55% of the variance ($R^2=.55, F(1,216)=260.98, p<.01$). Degree of conversation ($\beta=.74, p<.01$) significantly predicted permeability of interior family privacy boundaries. This result indicates that as the degree of conversation increases, the permeability of interior family privacy boundaries increases. The model significantly explained 26% of the variance ($R^2=.26, F(1,216)=15.54, p<.01$). Degree of conversation significantly predicted the permeability of exterior family privacy boundaries ($\beta=.26, p<.01$), denoting that as the degree of conversation increased, the permeability of exterior family privacy boundaries increased.

Looking into the relationship between degree of conformity and permeability of family privacy boundaries indicated that the model was significant, explaining 24% of the variance ($R^2=.24, F(1,216)=69.20, p<.01$). Degree of conformity ($\beta=-.49, p<.01$) significantly predicted interior family privacy boundaries; meaning that as the degree of conformity increased, the permeability of interior family privacy boundaries decreased. The model explained 9% of the variance ($R^2=.09, F(1,216)=22.17, p<.01$). Degree of conformity ($\beta=-.31, p<.01$) significantly

predicted exterior family privacy boundaries, suggesting that as the degree of conformity increased, the permeability of exterior family privacy boundaries decreased.

Summary

This chapter presented the results of the study. Linear regression analyses were performed to test the relationships among heteronormative attitudes and beliefs, family privacy orientations, family communication patterns, and disclosure concerns as outlined by the hypotheses proposed in chapter two. Additionally, a correlation test revealed a relationship between family communication patterns and family privacy orientations. Four additional linear regression analyses between the two dimensions of family privacy orientations and two dimensions of family communication patterns were performed to further understand the results. The next chapter will discuss the findings of the study, study limitations, and directions for future research.

CHAPTER FIVE. DISCUSSION

The results highlight the relationship between family communication patterns, family privacy boundaries, and disclosure concerns regarding coming out as gay. To understand these implications, the following will discuss the results of each hypothesis test and the implications for family communication and coming out literature. Additionally, limitations of the study and suggestions for future research are presented.

Heteronormative Attitudes and Beliefs

The first hypothesis predicted that gender as binary beliefs would be positively related to disclosure concerns about one's sexual orientation. The results of the study indicate that a significant relationship was not present between gender as binary beliefs and disclosure concern. The gender as binary measure revealed low average responses that indicated participants strongly disagreed with gender as binary beliefs on the whole (see Table 3). The participants' rejection of these social beliefs may be the reason a relationship to disclosure concern was not present. Furthermore, an unreliable scale prevented testing the second hypothesis that heteronormative sexual behavior beliefs will be positively related to disclosure concerns about one's sexual orientation. While these results may appear perplexing at first, it becomes clear that the approach to measurement may be confounding the relationship between heteronormative beliefs and disclosure concerns.

While the participants exhibit strong disagreement with gender as binary beliefs, the data cannot tell us that these beliefs did not initially have an impact on their lives. Chevrette (2013) argued that LGBT individuals experience institutionalized discrimination, violence, and messages about how heterosexual relationships are natural. These are outside forces. Much of the argument made in this study is that an LGBT individual's heteronormative beliefs would be

internalized in a way that subsequently influenced disclosure concern; however, instead of assuming that these beliefs are held by LGBT individuals, it is possible that it is individuals' concerns for others' heteronormative beliefs and attitudes that influence disclosure concern.

Additionally, time may be a factor that has impacted LGBT individual's heteronormative beliefs. The median for approximate years since coming out was seven. Heteronormative beliefs may be reduced over time. Herrick et al. (2013) found that participants with higher levels of identity acceptance and integration of identity into their relationships were more resilient to internalized homophobia, which is developed, in part, by heteronormative beliefs. Participants that have had a longer period of time since their first disclosure may have become more comfortable and knowledgeable with how their relationships vary from heteronormativity.

Even if heteronormativity is not a factor for LGBT individuals who have shared their sexual orientation, it does not mean that it is not a factor for those who have not disclosed or those that are still attempting to understand their sexual orientation. This study did not have access to many individuals who have not disclosed their sexual orientation; individuals who fear disclosure about their sexuality may, in fact, be resistant to participate due to the predominance of heterosexual norms. Past research presents the case that our understandings of relationships are shaped by heteronormative beliefs (Chevrette, 2013; Eguchi, 2009). While it is important to consider these factors, social changes also need to be considered.

Social changes may reduce the perceptions of heteronormative beliefs as normal. The United States president shared full support of same sex marriage five years ago in 2012, and the Supreme Court ruled against same sex marriage bans in 2015 (Nakamura, 2006). Social changes such as these may impact the views about gay relationships. Additionally, Jackson (2006) argued that as society changes, different relationships are legitimized. The legitimization of LGBT

relationships changes the influence social expectations hold over coming out disclosure concerns. The results from the current study indicate approximately two-thirds of the sample first disclosed their sexual orientation in the past five years. Further research is needed to know if social change was the motivation for the results.

Family Privacy Boundaries

The third hypothesis predicted that the permeability of interior family privacy boundaries would be negatively related to disclosure concerns. The current study indicates a significant relationship between the permeability of interior family privacy boundaries and disclosure concern. The relationship indicates that as the permeability of interior privacy boundaries decreased, disclosure concern increased. This finding reveals that the less family members share with one another, the less an LGBT family member feels comfortable disclosing their sexual orientation in general. This discovery is in line with privacy literature (Petronio, 2002); higher concern for private information (or low boundary permeability) is associated with lower family disclosures to each other and people outside the family.

Family privacy orientations are suggested to be the foundation of what is acceptable in privacy management practices (Serewicz et al., 2007). These results indicate support for a untested assumption about family privacy boundaries made in previous research (Petronio, 2002; Serewicz et al., 2007). The way families do or do not talk about private topics within the family can have an impact on future disclosures for LGBT individuals—specifically, sexual orientation disclosures. This extends CPM theory by providing evidence for the foundational influence family privacy practices have on future disclosures of sensitive information.

These results indicate that low permeability boundaries practiced within families add to the concern LGBT individuals feel about disclosing their sexual orientation. Adding to coming

out literature, it can be acknowledged that sharing more private information within the family can help mitigate disclosure concerns. This finding adds to the body of literature in the field of communication research on coming out by moving away from a focus on the coming out experience itself and examining how previous communication in the family influences future disclosures. As Manning (2015) argues, coming out research rarely focuses on communication. These results indicate coming out is an issue of privacy management; coming out is influenced by our communication practices and warrants further understanding from a communication perspective. Further investigations need to be done to better understand the dynamics between family communication and coming out to help improve coming out experiences for both individuals and their families. Altering family communication practice before coming out can help alleviate concerns attached to initial coming out disclosures.

The fourth hypothesis predicted that the permeability of exterior family privacy boundaries would be negatively related to disclosure concerns. The study did not find a significant relationship between the permeability of exterior privacy boundaries and disclosure concern. While the result is not what was expected, the low averages suggest that participants commonly reported that families did not share information with people outside the family. The framing of the measure may provide insight into the lack of relationship between these elements. The questionnaire frames exterior privacy boundaries as family information, whereas interior is framed as personal information (see Appendix D). Protecting family information from outsiders may not be related to disclosure concerns, because sexual orientation may be framed as personal rather than family-owned information.

As articulated by Communication Privacy Management theory, private information like sexual orientation is owned by the individual and is under their purview of how to disclose the

information (Petronio, 2002). CPM further states that how we develop our privacy rules is informed by social and family interactions. In this particular case, exterior family privacy boundaries may not be directly related to disclosure concern. But this does not mean that exterior privacy boundaries did not influence the development of an individual's privacy rules that result in disclosure concerns.

Family Communication Patterns

The fifth hypothesis predicted that the degree of conversation would be negatively related to disclosure concerns. The study indicated a significant negative relationship between the degree of conversation in family communication patterns and concern for disclosing sexual orientation. This result suggests that increased degrees of conversation lessen the concern for disclosing sexual orientation. A higher degree of conversation encourages free thought and independent thinking (Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990). Unlike degree of conformity, this result helps make the case for encouraging children to freely form their opinions on matters. These beneficial family communication behaviors promote LGBT individuals' ability to disclose their sexual orientation.

The sixth hypothesis predicted that the degree of conformity would be positively related to disclosure concerns. The present study indicates a significant relationship exists between the degree of conformity family communication pattern and concern for disclosing sexual orientation. This result is not surprising, provided that a high degree of conformity signifies that family communication practices discourage free thought and opinions of children (Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990). This result helps make the claim that family communication patterns play a vital role in LGBT individuals' ability to discuss their sexual orientation. The messages LGBT individuals receive as children impact their future ability to disclose sexual orientation. The

ability to share one's sexual orientation is an important factor in developing one's identity (Floyd & Bakeman, 2006). Therefore, the use of conformity patterns within the family results in higher disclosure concerns, which could be impeding on an LGBT individual's identity development.

Family communication patterns help build the case that foundational family communication informs later disclosure concerns. On the one hand, high degree of conversation contributes to lessened concerns about disclosing sexual orientation, while high degree of conformity contributes to increased concerns. Further analysis is needed to understand how specific family types outlined by Ritchie and Fitzpatrick (1990) are related to disclosure concerns; however, the results suggest that individuals from a pluralist family (low conformity, high conversation) would exhibit lower disclosure concerns. The caveat here is the impact of these results. In this study, both degrees of conformity and conversation accounted for a small contribution to what causes change in disclosure concern. The post-hoc analysis may provide better insight into these relationships.

Family Privacy Culture

The post-hoc analysis indicated significant relationships between family communication patterns and family privacy boundaries. Initially, this result seems logical, given the previous claims made by Hammonds (2009), that family communication patterns and family privacy orientations are the same concept labeled "family privacy culture;" however, his resulting model only included degree of conversation and family privacy orientation. The strength of the relationships revealed in the current study alters the understanding of Hammonds' earlier beliefs. Family communication patterns have a strong predictive relationship with family privacy orientations. This suggests that one leads to the other rather than family privacy boundaries and family communication patterns acting as one concept. These results challenge past

understandings of the relationship between family communication patterns and privacy. Family communication patterns influence family privacy orientations.

Degree of conversation positively predicted the permeability of interior and exterior privacy boundaries, while degree of conformity negatively predicted the permeability of interior and exterior privacy boundaries. Family communication patterns theory examines how families encourage or restrict free expression (Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990). These factors are directly related to the case Petronio (2002) makes about family privacy orientations. Family privacy orientations teach children what can and cannot be discussed in the family. As the family culture is engrained in children, family communication patterns socialize children to the proper management of privacy.

Individual privacy orientations may be a missing factor in understanding disclosure concern. Individual privacy orientations are the management practices for personally owned information, the degree to which an individual feels comfortable sharing their private information. Petronio (2002) and later Serewicz, Dickson, Morrison, and Poole (2007) made the case that family privacy orientations are the foundation for individual privacy orientations. Individual privacy orientations could be a stronger predictor of disclosure concerns. Family communication patterns have been found to be predictive of individual privacy orientations; however, unlike the current study, the relationships were weak (Bridge & Schrod, 2013). The degree of conversation positively influences both interior and exterior family privacy boundaries. The degree of conformity negatively influences both interior and exterior family privacy boundaries. The remaining elements of the model need to be tested. It is proposed that both interior and exterior family privacy boundaries aid in the development individual privacy

rules. As previously described, protection rules are the guides developed by individuals to safeguard private information.

Implications

The current study attempts to change the scholarly conversation about coming out literature. A large body of literature dating back decades focused on coming out experiences for families (e.g., Beeler & DiProva, 1999; Manning, 2015; Robinson, Walters, & Skeen, 1989; Ryan et al., 2009). Rather than asking questions about the experience of coming out, this study focuses on what factors influence the concern attached to those conversations. The results can drive more research to uncover the problematic communication behaviors that contribute to disclosure concern. Understanding these relationships can benefit future families before a coming out discussion even occurs, rather than just looking at what to do after disclosures occur. The results of this study begin to fill in the missing information about the role family plays in LGBT individuals' comfort with disclosing their sexual orientations.

Family privacy orientations are important to understanding privacy and coming out. Past research on privacy orientations have focused on the moderating role privacy orientations play in the way in-laws assess family member's sharing practices (Serewicz & Canary, 2008), children's relational satisfaction in families (Serewicz, Dickson, Morrison, & Poole, 2007), and how family communication patterns and family privacy orientations function as a single factor (Hammonds, 2009). While all of these studies indicate that family privacy informs the way adults manage information, no one has tested the assumption proposed by Petronio (2002) and Serewicz et al. (2007), which claims that family privacy practices develop values that impact individual privacy perceptions. Petronio (2002) states, "Through the maturation of the personally private boundary, autonomy may be developed. However, the boundary ties to the parents continue to exist" (p.

155). These ties are present in this study. The results provide support for the claim that family privacy boundaries have bearing on adult privacy concerns. This study suggests that parents leave a lasting impression on their LGBT children's privacy management practices. The resulting privacy management practices play a role in the disclosure concerns LGBT individuals experience later in life.

Limitations

It is important to acknowledge the questionnaire exclusions, collection procedures, and measurement challenges. First, the questionnaire may have limited responses by only asking about biological sex and sexual orientation. The lack of gender identity questions may have affected responses by preventing participants from identifying with the study. Some qualitative responses indicated that participants stopped responding due to gender-related questions. Gender identity allows for respondents to report a less restrictive label pertaining to how they identify rather than a label assigned at birth. Asking about gender identity rather than biological sex is a more inclusive approach that could help prevent respondents from dropping out of future studies.

The collection procedure may have also influenced the results. The survey was distributed primarily through higher education institutions and organizations that focus on gender equality and LGBT studies. This level and type of education could have affected participants' responses to measures, particularly those having to do with gender and heteronormativity. Students learning about gender equality and LGBT studies and members of LGBT organizations are often presented with information about heteronormative beliefs. Having prior knowledge of these beliefs could have resulted in responses that intentionally challenge gender as binary or heteronormative beliefs (e.g., responding strongly disagree to an item). Intentionally responding to a measure to advance a particular belief will lower the reliability of an item. An intentionally

extreme response would create an inconsistency in comparison to the way the items are answered by those without prior knowledge of heteronormative beliefs, resulting in low variability in responses. When less variability exists, it creates smaller proportions of variance to be explained by reliability tests; this results in a low reliability score.

Finally, the survey lacked a frame of reference for retrospective response measures (family communication patterns and family privacy orientations). A frame of reference would have asked participants to provide information about their thought process while answering the questionnaire. It would have provided answers to questions such as, “Who were you thinking about while responding to these statements?” The results cannot show if a particular parent or situation was the frame of reference or if responses would change if the frame of reference were specified by the directions. This prevents specificity in the results and the application of the data. Failing to ask who the participant thought about while responding to the different measures limits the understanding of the data. While this does not hamper the understanding of the analysis, it does impact how specific and far reaching the results can be applied.

Future Research

This study provides new insights that illuminate new lines of research. The first is related to a problem experienced with the heteronormative attitudes and beliefs subscale. This particular measure has shown to be reliable in past studies. Adapting the measure to focus on messages received from others may be more informative about how other people’s views impact disclosure concern, rather than assuming LGBT individuals hold heteronormative beliefs. This attention to messages puts more emphasis on communication’s role in disclosure concern instead of an internally held belief of a participant. Understanding the relationship between messages about acceptable relationships is vital to understanding how to change the conversations about sexual

orientation. Altering these conversations can provide a wider perspective that could help in minimizing gay-related stress and promote healthier environments for coming out. As illustrated by Rosario et al. (2008), positive supportive families help reduce, but do not remove concerns about gay-related stress.

A second recommendation is to further investigate the relationship between sexual orientation and privacy. An LGBT sexual orientation assumes private information; however, heterosexual relationships do not experience the same privacy dilemma. Straight people do not have to grapple with privacy surrounding their sexual orientation. While it is safe to assume that the negative social norms surrounding LGBT sexual orientations contribute to the sense of privacy, there must be other communication, such as how others' expressions of gender can impact LGBT disclosure concerns. Martin, Hutson, Kazyak, and Scherrerr (2010) implied that society is moving towards a time beyond the closet, but in order to dismantle the closet we need to understand how we encapsulate it in secrecy. To do this, we must investigate understandings of personal protection rules and how people navigate co-ownership of information.

Additionally, more research is needed on the perceptions of privacy and sexual orientations. While we assume an LGBT individual's sexual orientation is private, that may not be the case for all LGBT individuals. Qualitative responses indicated that some participants did not treat sexual orientation as private information. If sexual orientation is not perceived as private, it may impact the way LGBTQ individuals discuss and share that information. Perception of privacy and sexual orientation can also provide valuable insights into how to move beyond the closet.

Finally, we need to better understand the influence of family communication on adult practices of privacy. While the data suggests implications for LGBT disclosure concerns of

sexual orientation, this may not be the case for other sensitive topics (e.g., risk-taking behaviors or health concerns) in both straight and LGBT populations. Only further studies can help us understand the reach of family communication influence. Future studies should investigate how family communication influences disclosures about topics such as health, sex, or drug use.

To understand the impact of social and familial messages on disclosure concerns, this study revealed previously unknown relationships and opened new lines of inquiry for CPM. Petronio (2011) stated, “A theory should never be finished; otherwise, it dies and ceases to exist. I hope that others help me keep CPM alive by applying it to as many circumstances as possible” (p. 206). In applying CPM to disclosure concerns, this study revealed that coming out is situated within privacy concerns and extended the scope of CPM and its ability to predict future practices of privacy management.

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APPENDIX A. PROPOSED HYPOTHESES

H1: Gender as binary beliefs will be positively related to disclosure concerns about one's sexual orientation.

H2: Heteronormative sexual behavior beliefs will be positively related to disclosure concerns about one's sexual orientation.

H3: The permeability of family interior privacy boundaries will be negatively related to disclosure concerns about one's sexual orientation.

H4: The permeability of family exterior privacy boundaries will be negatively related to disclosure concerns about one's sexual orientation.

H5: Degree of conversation family communication pattern will be negatively related to disclosure concerns about one's sexual orientation.

H6: Degree of conformity family communication pattern will be positively related to disclosure concerns about one's sexual orientation.

APPENDIX B. RECRUITMENT E-MAIL

Dear Participant,

Justin Motto, a graduate student from the Communication department is conducting an online survey under the guidance of Drs. Carrie Anne Platt and Ann Burnett. We are looking for LGBTQ+ individuals who are willing to answer a series of questions regarding the way they communicate with their family, their expectations of gender, and how they feel about sharing their sexual orientation.

It will take you about 5-10 minutes to complete the survey. Along with the topics mentioned previously, you will also be asked to provide basic demographic information. You must be 18 years or older to participate in the study. Your responses will be completely anonymous, and your identity will be unknown to the researchers.

The link <https://goo.gl/LVottA> is where you can access the survey. You can click directly on the link, or copy and paste it into the URL space on a webpage, and it will take you to the survey. In order to take the survey, you must read and accept the information about informed consent pertaining to the study before entering the survey itself.

If you have any questions about the rights of human participants in research or to report a problem, contact the NDSU IRB office at (701) 231-8995, toll free at (855) 800-6717, or ndsu.irb@ndsu.edu. If you have any questions regarding this research study, please contact Ann Burnett at ann.burnett@ndsu.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Justin Motto, Graduate Student
Dr. Carrie Ann Platt, Associate Professor
Dr. Ann Burnett, Professor
NDSU Department of Communication

APPENDIX C. RECRUITMENT POST FOR SOCIAL MEDIA

Greetings! I am recruiting individuals who self-identify as LGBTQ+ individuals to participate in a survey. The survey will ask about the way you communicate with your family, the expectations you have of gender, and how you feel about sharing your sexual orientation.

Individuals who are 18 years of age or older are invited to participate in this study. The survey will take you about 5-10 minutes to complete.

Your participation is completely voluntary. No personal identifying information will be retained with the data from the study.

You can find the link to participate here: <https://goo.gl/LVottA>

If you have any questions about the rights of human participants in research, please contact the NDSU IRB office at (701) 231-8995, toll free (855) 800-6717, or ndsu.irb@ndsu.edu. If you have any questions regarding this research study, please contact Ann Burnett at ann.burnett@ndsu.edu

APPENDIX D. FAMILY PRIVACY ORIENTATION MEASURE

Instructions: Think about your immediate family (mother, father, guardian, siblings, etc.) while considering the following statements; rate the statements according to the following scale.

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: *Reverse coded item; (i) Interior boundaries subscale; (e) Exterior boundaries subscale

APPENDIX E. FAMILY COMMUNICATION PATTERNS MEASURE

Instructions: When answering the following questions, please think about your parent(s) with whom you regularly interact. Please rate the following statements based on your experience with those family members.

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. ¹
2. My parents often say something like “Every member of the family should have some say in family decisions.” ¹
3. My parents often ask my opinion when the family is talking about something. ¹
4. My parents encourage me to challenge their ideas and beliefs. ¹
5. My parents often say something like “You should always look at both sides of an issue.” ¹
6. I usually tell my parents what I’m thinking about things. ¹
7. I usually tell my parents almost anything. ¹
8. In our family we often talk about our feelings and emotions. ¹
9. My parents and I often have long, relaxed conversations about nothing in particular. ¹
10. I really enjoy talking with my parents, even when we disagree. ¹
11. My parents like to hear my opinions, even when they don’t agree with me. ¹
12. My parents encourage me to express my feelings. ¹
13. My parents tend to be very open about their emotions. ¹
14. We often talk as a family about things we have done during the day. ¹
15. In our family we often talk about our plans and hopes for the future. ¹
16. My parents often say something like “You’ll know better when you grow up.” ²
17. My parents often say something like “My ideas are right and you should not question them.” ²
18. My parents often say something like “A child should not argue with adults.” ²

19. My parents often say something like “There are some things that just shouldn’t be talked about.”²
20. My parents often say something like “You should give in on arguments rather than risk making people mad.”²
21. When anything really important is involved, my parents expect me to obey without question.²
22. In our home, my parents usually have the last word.²
23. My parents feel that it is important to be the boss.²
24. My parents sometimes become irritated with my views if they are different than theirs.²
25. If my parents don’t approve of it, they don’t want to know about it.²
26. When I am at home, I am expected to obey my parents’ rules.²

¹ Conversation subscale; ² Conformity subscale

APPENDIX F. HETERONORMATIVE ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS MEASURE

Instructions: Think about the following statements; rate the statements according to the following scale.

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

9. Gender is determined by biological factors, such as genes and hormones, before birth. ¹
10. There are only two sexes: male and female. ¹
11. All people are either male or female. ¹
12. In intimate relationships, women and men take on roles according to gender for a reason; it's really the best way to have a successful relationship. ²
13. In intimate relationships, people should act only according to what is traditionally expected of their gender. ²
14. Gender is the same thing as sex. ¹
15. It's perfectly okay for people to have intimate relationships with people of the same sex. * ²
16. The best way to raise a child is to have a mother and a father raise the child together. ²
17. In healthy intimate relationships, women may sometimes take on stereotypical 'male' roles, and men may sometimes take on stereotypical 'female' roles. * ²
18. Sex is complex; in fact, there might even be more than 2 sexes. * ¹
19. Gender is a complicated issue, and it doesn't always match up with biological sex. * ¹
20. Women and men need not fall into stereotypical gender roles when in an intimate relationship. *²
21. People should partner with whomever they choose, regardless of sex or gender. *²
22. There are particular ways that men should act and particular ways that women should act in relationships. ²
23. People who say that there are only two legitimate genders are mistaken. *¹
24. Gender is something we learn from society. *¹

¹ Gender as binary subscale; ² Heteronormative sexual behavior subscale; *Reverse coded item

APPENDIX G. DISCLOSURE CONCERNS MEASURE

Instructions: Think about the following statements; rate the statements according to the following scale.

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

1. I never feel I need to hide my sexual orientation*
2. I worry people who know about my sexual orientation will tell others
3. I am very careful to whom I tell about my sexual orientation
4. I work hard to keep my sexual orientation a secret
5. I tell people close to me to keep my sexual orientation a secret
6. In many areas of my life, no one knows about my sexual orientation
7. Telling someone about my sexual orientation is risky
8. I worry that people may judge me when they learn about my sexual orientation
9. It's easier to avoid friendships than worry about sharing
10. I worry about people discriminating against me

*Denote reverse coded item

APPENDIX H. DEMOGRAPHICS QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Sex:
 - Male
 - Female
 - Transgender
 - Other: _____
 - Decline to respond

2. What is your sexual orientation?
 - Straight
 - Gay
 - Lesbian
 - Bisexual
 - Other: _____
 - Decline to respond

3. What is your relationship status?
 - Single
 - Partnered
 - Married
 - Other: _____
 - Decline to respond

4. What is the sex of your partner?
 - Male
 - Female
 - Transgender
 - Other: _____
 - Decline to respond

5. What is your cultural/racial background?
 - African American/Black
 - Hispanic American/Latino/a
 - Asian American or Pacific Islander
 - Native American
 - White/Caucasian
 - Biracial/Multiracial
 - Other: _____
 - Decline to respond

6. What is your religious identity/affiliation?

- Christian
- Jewish
- Muslim
- Buddhist
- Hindu
- Atheist
- Agnostic
- Other: _____
- Decline to respond

7. What is your age?

- _____

8. Have you disclosed your sexual orientation?

- Yes
- No

9. What year did you first disclose your sexual orientation?

- _____

10. What was the year of the second time you disclosed your sexual orientation?

- _____

11. Approximately, how many people have you come out to?

- _____

12. What type of household were you raised in for the majority of your childhood?

- Step-family/blended family with two same sex parents
- Step-family/blended family with two opposite sex parents
- Two same sex parents
- Two biological opposite sex parents
- Single-mother family
- Single-father family
- Grandparent(s)
- Foster family
- Adoptive family
- Relative(s)
- Other (please list):