The First Life Journey of Many: The Lived Experience of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning Individuals Who Were Raised Within the Catholic Church on Their Coming Out Process

Michelle Colarusso

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THE FIRST LIFE JOURNEY OF MANY: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, QUESTIONING INDIVIDUALS WHO WERE RAISED WITHIN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH ON THEIR COMING OUT PROCESS

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
The degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By
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December 2017
THE FIRST LIFE JOURNEY OF MANY: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, QUESTIONING INDIVIDUALS WHO WERE RAISED WITHIN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH ON THEIR COMING OUT PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

THE FIRST LIFE JOURNEY OF MANY: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, QUESTIONING INDIVIDUALS WHO WERE RAISED WITHIN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH ON THEIR COMING OUT PROCESS

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Michelle M. Colarusso, M.A., LPC, NCC

December 2017

Dissertation supervised by Fr. Louis Jocelyn Gregoire, CSSp., Ed.D.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning (LGBTQ) adults encounter societal challenges, pushback from religious organizations, and discrimination from lawmakers which interfere with their ability to come out as their true selves. This qualitative, phenomenologically oriented study explored the LGBTQ identity and practicing Catholic religious beliefs in an attempt to develop a rich description and understanding of the experience of LGBTQ individuals’ coming out process in relation to the practice of Catholic religious beliefs. The central research question that guided this inquiry was the following: What are the lived experiences of persons who identify as Catholic and who have come out as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning?

Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model of Development (1979) and the Cass Model of Sexual Identity Development (1979) were the conceptual frameworks used to support the study,
and van Manen’s Phenomenological Existential Approach (1997) provided insight into the problem of the study. Findings after data analysis emerged to uncover the following themes related to the coming out process of LGBTQ identifying individuals who were raised within the Catholic Church: a) My family will disown me for being Gay; b) What happens if I can’t pay my bills (Financial Stability)?; c) Catholic Church: Are you for or against?; d) Would you choose a lifestyle that is not accepted in society?; e) Who am I and what am I feeling?; and f) I am who I am, and I am okay with that. This study also addressed the practical implications for professional counselors, the Catholic Church, and areas for future research. Finally, this study addressed some of its own limitations and identified recommendations for future research.

Keywords: LGBTQ, Catholic Church, Religion, Sexual Identity, Counseling, Identity
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family.
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This research study was funded by the credit card of the researcher.

I would first like to recognize my dissertation chair, Dr. Gregoire, for his motivational, educational, and spiritual guidance throughout the Doctoral program and dissertation process. You allowed me to find the motivation and strength within myself to finish this research study and write the dissertation. Dr. Jungers and Dr. Zeleke, I would like to also thank and acknowledge you, as well, in my dissertation journey. I would not have been able to complete this process without you and your support.

Getting to this point would not have been possible without the Pi-cohort who supported me, not only throughout the dissertation process, but within our classes. Lastly, I would like to thank my dad, my mom, my sister Laura, and my boyfriend Ross, who supported me throughout my education and in my doctoral program, and Duquesne University. I can finally become a fully functional and normal member of our family again without the ball and chain of this dissertation.
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The First Journey of Many: The Lived Experience of Coming Out for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning Individuals who were Raised within the Catholic Church

Chapter 1: Introduction

Overview

In the United States, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) identifying individuals often experience fear of rejection or discrimination from people who hold societal values and religious beliefs different than their own. Societal values and religious beliefs not only challenge the religious identity of LGBTQ identifying individuals, but challenge their sexual identity, as well. Challenges, such as acceptance and inclusion within the religious and societal culture of LGBTQ identifying individuals, emphasize the diverse experience between LGBTQ identifying individuals and heterosexual individuals (Subhrajit, 2014). Each individual who is collectively included in the LGBTQ identity has struggled to develop one’s own identity and a sense of safety and congruence when coming out or revealing their sexual identity to family and friends (Subhrajit, 2014).

LGBTQ identifying individuals often face discrimination in the workplace; for example, laws in 29 states allow an individual to be terminated on the basis of sexual orientation and sexual identity (Mihelich, 2014). LGBTQ identifying individuals also face hostility or rejection from religious groups or families due to differing views and values regarding the concepts of marriage and the nuclear family, as well as difficulties related to a lack of education and awareness from members of religious congregations regarding LGBTQ culture (Tubbs, 2016). LGBTQ identifying individuals are at higher risk for suicide and homelessness, as safety concerns for coming out can trigger violence, family abandonment, or hate crimes towards the
LGBTQ identifying individual (Subhrajit, 2014; Tubbs, 2016; Wolff, Soares, Himes, & Kwon, 2016). These risk factors have led to increased minority stress and mental health concerns, such as depression, anxiety, self-harm, and suicidality for many LGBTQ individuals (Maycock, 2009; Subhrajit, 2014; Wolf et al., 2016). The LGBTQ community generally faces risks to their health and wellbeing, and beyond those risks that heterosexual individuals may face. These risks might be exacerbated for LGBTQ identifying individuals with competing religious and sexual identities while they are involved in the coming out process. It is important to be aware of these risk factors when working with LGBTQ individuals who are in the process of coming out, and at a crossroads within their sexual and religious identities (Maycock, 2009; Subhrajit, 2014).

Acceptance of LGBTQ individuals may reduce the risk of mental health concerns, self-harm, or suicidality (Bayne, 2016; Maycock, 2009). Discrimination and perceived inequality are only one of the major issues that LGBTQ populations face (Subhrajit, 2014). Another significant issue or consideration for the LGBTQ population lies in the intersection of religious identity with sexual identity. Religion plays a crucial role within the lives and coming out process of many LGBTQ identifying individuals, and is associated with protective factors such as a belief in God and also risk factors, including feelings of abandonment (Bayne, 2016; Rosenkrantz, Rostosky, Riggle & Cook, 2016). There are still many religious communities for whom social and cultural advances, such as the passage of laws permitting marriage between same sex persons, are against church teachings and preventing the acceptance of LGBTQ individuals into their communities (Drushel & Hancock, 2016). Religious groups, such as the Catholic Church, and their values across cultures are slower to accept their congregation members as LGBTQ (Bayne, 2016; Maycock, 2009). Furthermore, family members with strong Catholic religious connections can be unaccepting of a loved one’s
sexual identity; potentially inhibiting the latter’s willingness to come out as LGBTQ. Some people who identify as LGBTQ can therefore choose to suppress their sexual identity in favor of their religious identity and family acceptance (Bayne, 2016). According to the Pew Research Center’s Survey of LGBTQ Americans (2013), 39% of LGBTQ individuals surveyed stated that, at some point in their lives, they were rejected by a family member due to their sexual identity, and 29% stated they felt unwelcome within their chosen place of worship. These statistics are at least one indicator that navigating the coming out process might be especially difficult for people who strongly identify with their LGBTQ sexual identity and also strongly identify with their religious community, or come from a family that does.

Tension between sexual and religious identities is mostly felt for LGBTQ identifying individuals who are “caught in the middle” between a sexual identity that they feel reflects who they are, and a Catholic Church that rejects that identity (Roseborough, 2006). Although researchers (Roseborough, 2006; Rosenkrantz et al., 2016; Wolf et al., 2016) have presented the idea of a disconnect between the Catholic Church and sexual identity, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2006) stands on the foundation of the Catholic Church’s belief that God created everyone out of love and “created in the image and likeness of God” (p. 1). Moreover, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2006) argues that the Catholic “Church teaches that persons with a homosexual inclination must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity” (p.1). In Pope Francis’ book, *The Name of God is Mercy*, he is quoted as asking, “who am I to judge?”, something that he feels is his reflection of the Catholic Church’s teachings found in the catechism. These convictions differ from the opinions of other researchers (Bowland et al., 2013; Roseborough, 2006; Rosenkrantz et al., 2016; Wolf et al.,
2016) regarding religious identities, and show the importance of understanding various perspectives surrounding LGBTQ identifying individuals’ own lived experiences.

In providing counseling to LGBTQ identifying individuals, mindfulness on the part of professional counselors aligns with the growing need for cognizance surrounding the lived experiences of their LGBTQ clients, based on religious beliefs, sexual identity, and family values as related to the coming out process (Rosenkrantz et al., 2016). Due to fears of rejection, oppression, and abandonment, there are underlying beliefs and fears that coming out creates tension and turmoil within all aspects of the LGBTQ identifying individual’s life (Roseborough, 2006; Rosenkrantz et al., 2016). The key is having awareness in understanding the difficult decisions that the religious identity and the sexual identity bring, creating disorder and disconnect within LGBTQ individuals, their family units, and their religious communities (Rosenkrantz et al., 2016). Carl Jung referenced the interworking of religious and sexual identities “when sexual questions were brought to him, they invariably turned out to be religious questions: religious questions that were brought to him always turned out to be sexual. The religious and sexual dimensions of our lives are deeply intertwined, whether we are conscious of it or not” (Roseborough, 2006). For LGBTQ identifying individuals to successfully move through the coming out process, society, the Catholic Church, and counselors would work with LGBTQ identifying individuals to promote self-acceptance within daily life (Roseborough, 2006; Wolff et al., 2016).
Statement of the Problem

Despite some increasing societal acceptance, as seen through positive media attention, and laws that protect the rights of LGBTQ identifying individuals, the lived experiences of the practicing Catholic LGBTQ population during the coming out process are often minimally addressed in related counseling literature. According to the research, LGBTQ individuals are faced with more societal and personal barriers in life than those whose sexual identity is heterosexual or congruent with their religious beliefs (Bayne, 2016). When sexual identity and religious identity are in conflict, this can be a trigger for exploration of one or both identities (Bayne, 2016). With Catholics becoming the largest single religious denomination in the United States, and the slow acceptance of LGBTQ culture into society, counselors need to be aware of all identities within their clients, and specifically in LGBTQ individuals (Bayne, 2016; Plante, 2015). The slow acceptance of LGBTQ identifying individuals into society and the increasing population of the Catholic Church has led to the overriding problem of increased mental health symptoms, including depression, anxiety, and stigma associated with the identity of LGBTQ individuals, which was the crux of inspiration and intrigue for the completion of this study (Wolff, et al., 2016). Hence, with the increase of the Catholic Church’s awareness for the growing need of acceptance for the LGBTQ culture, as well as the release of Pope Francis’ book _The Name of God is Mercy_, where he is quoted as asking, “who am I to judge?” cultural pressures seem to be creating conversation around LGBTQ individuals and changes in the Catholic Church (Wood and Conley, 2013). LGBTQ identifying individuals who were raised in a family with strong Catholic beliefs and who have come out to their families and friends are the population affected by this problem. This study was phenomenologically orientated, as the researcher looked at participants’ lived experiences of their coming out process with their having
grown up with Catholic values. A qualitative research study was chosen, as the researcher felt there was a substantial topic area within LGBTQ identifying individuals and conflict between their religious and sexual identities, and the literature and researcher’s personal experience corroborated the need for further investigation (Creswell, 2012).

The cause for abandoning one identity in favor of the other is rooted in the potential risk for self-stigmatization and an internal struggle with negative messages from the Catholic Church’s beliefs, teachings, and practices (Roseborough, 2006; Tan & Yarhouse, 2015). Thus, the effects of abandoning one identity for another can lead to victimization or bullying from family members or close friends, and also feelings of having to compartmentalize one’s life based on sexual and religious identities (Jaspar & Cinnirella, 2010; Ritter & Terndrup, 2002).

Budge (2014) and Apperson et al. (2015) do not provide a definition of coming out anywhere throughout their research. This is problematic due to the nature of the articles and the exploration of the coming out process. However, the Human Rights Campaign (2017) defines coming out as “the process in which a person first acknowledges, accepts and appreciates his or her sexual orientation or gender identity and begins to share that with others,” which aligns with the American Psychiatric Association’s (2015) definition of coming out. Bayne (2016) discussed the integration of religious and sexual identities, but went beyond the discussion of the coming out process and further investigated the after effects with individuals have already come out. This article missed a crucial piece of one’s identity by not exploring the coming out process as a part of one’s identity, but as a separate experience.

Research conducted for this study showed that little has been explored on the specific topic of Catholic religious identity and the coming out process of LGBTQ identifying individuals; however, there are articles on religious identity in the context of a religious
institution, though not necessarily the Catholic religion (Page, Lindahl, & Malik, 2013; Rosenkrantz et al., 2016; Rostosky et al., 2016). For this study, the researcher compared the values of religious identity to the Catholic values and to the coming out process. There are also articles (Apperson, Blincoe, & Sudlow, 2015; Budge, 2014; Etengoff & Daiute, 2013) that have explored the coming out process for LGBTQ individuals with little emphasis on Catholic religious beliefs, but which did include family values as a comparison. These same articles (Apperson, Blincoe, & Sudlow, 2015; Budge, 2014; Etengoff & Daiute, 2013) are peer-reviewed articles and have been published within the last five years, thus offering research which is more contemporary and up-to-date. There is a lack of research including individuals identifying as LGBTQ and looking at the impact of Catholic religious beliefs on their coming out process.

This research study explored the conflicting religious and sexual identities, recognized conflicts and challenges of compartmentalization between both identities, elaborated on the importance of self-acceptance and self-efficacy within LGBTQ identifying individuals’ lives, and heard the negative and invalidating messages received from core relationships in their lives (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010; Page, Lindahl, & Malik, 2013). The researcher’s methodology was a hermeneutic phenomenologically-oriented study which utilized a thematic cross-case analysis to focus on the experiences of the participants throughout their respective coming out processes. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, and then transcribed and coded for emerging themes. Possible themes explored the lived experiences of all participants’ coming out processes, as well as the shadow cast by the Catholic Church’s views and individuals’ families’ beliefs, and how each participant overcame or experienced this time in their lives. Findings presented themes from all participants that included negative and invalidating messages from family and the Catholic Church. These negative and invalidating messages include rejection and
fear, and are homophobic in nature, causing conflict within their identities that comes from individuals who are unaccepting or unfamiliar with their sexual or religious identities (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010; Page et al., 2013). Hence, faced with the unaccepting nature of their Catholic faith, fear of rejection from family, and negative messages from core people within their lives, LGBTQ identifying individuals struggle with coming out to their Catholic families.

**Significance of and Need for the Study**

The rationale of this study originated from the researcher’s own experiences over the last few years in working with LGBTQ identifying individuals within the community mental health field. The researcher found that religion influenced many individuals during the process of exploring and accepting their sexual identities, including dealing with the stigma attached to coming out as LGBTQ. Working with LGBTQ identifying individuals, this researcher recalled a specific client who identified as a gay male and was struggling with coming out, and the idea of his religion not accepting him for who he was and how he identified. The situation intensified when his devout Catholic family felt they were unable to sit with him at the dinner table due to his sexual identity. He also experienced turmoil and increased depression when his father was diagnosed with cancer, and he was unable to see his father on his deathbed. The clinical situation deepened this researcher’s interest in and awareness about the coming out process for LGBTQ identifying individuals, especially with regard to potential increased risks to sound mental health when a person is coming out to his or her family and has a strong religious affiliation. The need for this study extends beyond the researcher’s own clinical and professional experiences, however, and rests also on the fact that few articles have looked at all three points of identity under discussion here; most articles have examined a combination or intersection of all-inclusive LGBTQ identities and religious affiliations. Sherry et al. (2010) argued that,
although there are contributions to the literature on sexual and religious identities, there are few articles that have addressed the intersecting identities. Bayne (2016) argued that individuals who can positively progress through stages of religious identity develop supportive relationships while allowing for the exploration and integration of religious and sexual identities. There are fewer articles that have focused on the coming out process and the all-inclusive culture of individuals who identify as LGBTQ. Research has instead leaned towards the loss of religious/spiritual identity and sexual identity without specifying the identifying LGBTQ culture. This dissertation has filled the gap in the literature by exploring the lived experiences of LGBTQ identifying individuals who were raised within the Catholic Church and have come out to their families.

The stigma and incongruence in their identities created significant turmoil in their lives, which led them to seek mental health treatment (Bayne, 2016; Maycock, 2009). The researcher of this study used the term sexual identity throughout this study in order to focus on the self and the identity of the LGBTQ individual, as well as the type of partner that individual prefers. Other terms used in the literature—such as sexual orientation, sexual attraction, and gender identity—were not used in this study due to the core message of this study being about how an LGBTQ individual identifies himself or herself, as well as how they outwardly identify to their family, friends, and God. Sexual orientation focuses on the attraction to a potential type of partner of the LGBTQ individual, and not on their inner identity, and Gender identity focuses on the identification of one’s own gender, this being male or female (Anti-Defamation League, 2015; APA, 2015).

This study provided an outlet and opportunity for individuals identifying as LGBTQ to have their voices and experiences heard by other individuals and scholars who have had similar
experiences or are interested in this topic. This research study is significant because it adds to the literature in order to provide a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of catholic individuals during their coming out process as LGBTQ for the purpose of providing this population with the best support and guidance possible in their living as LGBTQ individuals with Catholic beliefs, and also helping professionals who will be involved in the helping relationship with this population. This the necessity comes from their being a lack of research integrating the topics of the coming out process, Catholic religious beliefs, and sexual identities (Apperson et al., 2015).

Budge (2014) utilized college students as her sample population, which limits the sample size to younger individuals; however, Rostosky et al. (2016) was all inclusive of LGBTQ individuals’ identities, but their sample population was predominantly female, white, and highly educated. Wood and Conley (2014) combined religion and spiritual identity throughout their article, but do not separate the two identities. Wood and Conley (2014) also only included LGBT identifying individuals and do not mention the coming out process impacting these individuals throughout their article. Simply, there is a gap in the literature on the population of LGBTQ individuals who are coming out and who also identify as Catholic. Yet, although there is little research specifically combining the coming out process and Catholic beliefs, research has recognized the need for future research specifically looking at the coming out process, sexual identities, and Catholic religious beliefs. This study contributes to this area in providing an important dimension and platform to the literature by developing and continuing a foundation of research that outlines the impact of Catholic religious beliefs on the coming out process of individuals who identify as LGBTQ.
In order for researchers, counselors, and the Catholic Church to understand the influences on the coming out process of individuals who identify as LGBTQ, there first needed to be change in cultural attitudes at large in order for LGBTQ individuals to feel safe and congruent (Drushel and Hancock, 2016). The outcomes of this study provide mental health professionals with insight into meanings behind coming out and the impact of Catholic religious influences on one’s life. Additionally, this study provides insight into the congruence and or compartmentalization of sexual and religious identities in individuals who identify as LGBTQ.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenologically oriented study was to examine the lived experience of individuals who identify as LGBTQ, practice Catholicism, and live within the Western, Pennsylvania area. Specifically, this study analyzed the relevant themes that emerge from individual interviews with eight individuals with a LGBTQ identity and who are practicing catholic religious beliefs, working to develop a rich description and understanding of the experience of LGBTQ individuals’ coming out process in the midst of such individuals also practicing Catholic religious beliefs.

Palkki (2015) completed a study that looked at the lived experiences of two LGBTQ music teachers who were coming out in the workplace and at their identity disclosure decisions. Although this study had only two participants, a multiple case study design was implemented in order to allow both participants to openly share their thoughts and experiences regarding the disclosure of their gay identities at school (Palkki, 2015). After completing interviews and data analysis, the researcher uncovered four themes that emerged from the data, one of them being “negotiating the closet door,” which referenced the participants’ hesitation to disclose sexual identity in their workplace (Palkki, 2015). In the end of the study, the participants felt that,
although they were asked about their gay identity by coworkers, this questioning was “for the better” in regards to their relationships with coworkers. However, the participants still did not disclose their identities to students, thus compartmentalizing their lives while in the workplace (Palkki, 2015).

The current study has reinforced the notion that negative messages associated with both religious and sexual identities influenced compartmentalization and delayed the coming out process for individuals who identify as LGBTQ. Furthermore, delaying the coming out process caused feelings of emotional distress, internal conflict, fears of rejection, and financial pressures (Page et al., 2013; Wolff et al., 2016). The idea of an ecological impact of religious beliefs and the sexual identity of LGBTQ identifying individuals was also explored in order to determine the effect of one’s environment on their religious and sexual identity, as well as their coming out process (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Wolff et al., 2016).

**Research Questions**

Aligned with the above statement of the problem and purpose of the study, the following research questions that drove this study were designed after a review of the literature related to the coming out process for Catholic individuals who identify as LGBTQ. The review of the literature directly addressed the experiences of this population by outlining how the research viewed Catholicism, sexual identity, religious identity, family values, and coming out. Each of the five areas previously mentioned in this paragraph focused on how the lived experiences of LGBTQ individuals and their coming out process was validated. The guiding question for this inquiry was as follows: What are the lived experiences of persons who identify as Catholic and who have come out as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning? The four supplemental research questions that were used are:
1. How do individuals who identify as LGBTQ and Catholic describe their coming out experience?

2. What are the Catholic beliefs and practices that challenge or support the coming out process for individuals who identify as LGBTQ?

3. What lived existentials (e.g. time, space, person, and relationship) do people who identify as LGBTQ and Catholic experience during their coming out process?

4. What are the risks and protective factors that affect individuals who identify as LGBTQ and Catholic during the coming out process?

The intent of this study was to provide a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of Catholic individuals during their coming out process as LGBTQ for the purpose of providing this population with the best support and guidance in their lives as LGBTQ individuals with Catholic beliefs, and also to keep assisting professionals who will be involved in the helping relationship with this population. Thus, the research questions for this phenomenologically oriented study were developed to help in understanding the lived experiences of LGBTQ individuals who identify themselves with Catholic belief and practice, and to explore what those experiences have meant to them.

Study Objectives:

The major objective of this study was to examine the lived experiences of individuals who identify as LGBTQ and were raised Catholic or who are Catholic, and the influence of those religious beliefs on their coming out process. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Explore the experience of the coming out process and what effect the experience of Catholic religious beliefs had, if any, on the decision to come out as LGBTQ.
2. Explore decisions about how to manage religious and sexual identities in the coming out process.

3. Describe the lived experience of conflicting religious and sexual identities during the coming out process.

**Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

This qualitative, phenomenologically oriented study was designed to examine the lived experiences of LGBTQ individuals who practice Catholic religious beliefs in Western Pennsylvania. Specifically, this study was intended to examine the role of a Catholic religious belief system and its practice in the coming out process of the individual. Hence, the conceptual framework is the combination of researched literature on Catholic religious beliefs, religious identity, sexual identity, LGBTQ identifying individuals, and the coming out process. The qualitative design was grounded in the theoretical framework of van Manen’s *lived body, lived space, lived time, lived human relation*—four life world existentials—and the bio-ecological model of human development, as well as literature on the coming out process (Apperson et al., 2015; Bayne, 2016; Wolff et al., 2016; van Manen, 1997). These models were considered, for the purposes of this study, to provide a clear understanding of the lived experiences of LGBTQ individuals’ coming out process and the factors that influenced their coming out processes while practicing Catholic beliefs.

The four lifeworld existentials as described by van Manen (1997) are lived space (spatiality), lived body (corporeality), lived time (temporality), and lived human relation (relationality). According to van Manen (1990), the first existential, lived space, refers to the ways individuals experience their environments and places. The second lived existential is the lived body, which refers to the qualities of the human body and our embodiment, and the
encounters of the five senses that unfold within our lives. The third lived existential is lived time, which refers to our personal history and our chronological relationship with time and the various ways we experience it. Lastly, the fourth lived existential is lived human relationship, which refers to the connections we have and maintain with other human beings (Seamon, 2012; van Manen, 1990).

In order to understand human development, it is vital to consider the entire ecological system in which growth occurs. Bronfenbrenner (1979) played a large role in this undertaking with his ecological model, which portrays the importance of congruence within all systems of an individual. The significance of utilizing this model comes in the form of it being better able to explain how the microsystem and ecosystem of an individual’s environment could cause incongruence within the self. This ecological model will be covered in detail in Chapter 2. Both Catholic religious and sexual identities are influenced by the coming out process of individuals who identify as LGBTQ, and could cause concealment of identity, feelings of intimidation, and isolation, along with experiences of the stigma associated with their identities (Wolf et al., 2016). The Cass Model (1979) was utilized to better explore the developmental stages of sexual identity in a non-linear progression (Bayne, 2016). For instance, family values could play a significant role in messages regarding sexual identity for LGBTQ identifying individuals (Bayne, 2016). Individuals who are struggling with their religious identity also reported higher levels of anxiety and feelings of guilt, inadequacy, and trauma (Rosenkrantz, Rostosky, Riggle, & Cook, 2016). This model will be covered in more detail in Chapter 2. Congruence with both religious and sexual identities influences the coming out process for individuals identifying as LGBTQ. By utilizing the models to better understand human development in relation to the participants’ own
lived experiences throughout the coming out process, it allows researchers to make the connection between sexual identity and development and religious identity development.

**Operational Definitions.**

For the purpose of this study, there are several terms that need to be defined in order to understand the significance of the study. The terms are as follows and listed below:

**Religious Identity**: A specific part of one’s identity formation that encompasses their religious beliefs and affiliation to a larger group or congregation.

**Sexual Identity**: How an individual views him or herself in terms of who they are sexually attracted to, and how they interrelate in a specific culture.

**Sexual Orientation**: Determined by one’s physical, emotional, or romantic attractions to persons of the same sex, opposite sex, or members of more than one gender (Anti-Defamation League, 2015; APA, 2015).

**Same-sex Marriage**: Marriage between two partners of the same sex.

**Coming out**: The process by which one acknowledges and accepts one’s own sexual orientation or identity. It also encompasses the process through which one discloses one’s sexual orientation or identity to others (APA, 2011; Human Rights Campaign, 2017).

**Gender Identity**: Gender in terms of one’s own internal view of their gender identification as either male or female, which is not visible to others (Anti-Defamation League, 2015; APA, 2015).

**Catholic**: Believing in, following, and abiding by the teachings and doctrines established by the Roman Catholic Church.
LGBTQ: An acronym for a group comprised of individuals identifying as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Questioning.

Catholic Family Values: The Catholic values and morals held and reinforced within the family unit.

Scope of the Study

This study primarily focused on the experience of LGBTQ identifying individuals (18 years of age and older) who were raised with and/or practice Catholic religious beliefs, and who have come out to family in the Western Pennsylvania area. Study participants were selected who had already come out to their families and friends, and who had been raised within the Catholic Church. Research has shown that coming out is a crucial decision, a stressor, and an obstacle for LGBTQ individuals who reveal their sexual identities to family members (Perrin-Wallqvist, & Lindblom, 2015). The researcher interviewed participants who have already come out to family and friends in order to understand the reflective nature of their thoughts after their coming out process, and to do so from a historical prospective. The literature conceptualized coming out as a fluid and dynamic process (Perrin-Wallqvist & Lindblom, 2015; Rust, 2003). Many researchers contend that coming out is an important part of the LGBTQ identifying individual’s sexual identity (Corrigan & Matthew, 2003; Heatherington & Lavner, 2008; Perrin-Wallqvist & Lindblom, 2015; Willoughby, Malik, & Lindahl, 2006). The researcher believed that, in order to obtain fundamental information, data should be collected from all individuals who identify as LGBTQ and had been brought up in the Catholic Church, regardless of race or ethnicity.

Some limitations of this study included self-reporting, lack of understanding feelings associated with identifying as LGBTQ, and generalizability to other cultures. This study did not provide enough time to conduct multiple interviews with participants, which could result in
further information not being gathered. However, in an effort to manage the inaccuracies of self-reporting in the study, the researcher prepared semi-structured interview questions that allowed for consistency within the interviews with participants. Additionally, this study was a qualitative research study and the findings cannot be generalizable to other religious entities beyond those discussed herein. There was also a lack of research in the area of coming out and LGBTQ identities, as well as research specifically looking at the Catholic Church and LGBTQ teachings.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented a brief overview of the completed study, including the reasoning behind the researcher’s interest in embarking on this study, the population and individuals affected by this problem, significance, scope, and the purpose of this study, all of which was supported by current literature and provided some insight into the methodology and findings of the study. Chapter 1 also outlined the research questions for this study and provided operational definitions for terms utilized throughout in an effort to help the reader understand the specific uses of terms within this study.

Organization of the Dissertation

In this first chapter, the researcher has provided an introduction to explain the reasoning behind conducting research in the area of sexual identity, religious identity, and the coming out process. In Chapter 2, the researcher provides a literature review on sexual identity, religious identity, Catholic religious identity, coming out, and the view of the Catholic Church on LGBTQ individuals in the Catholic Church. Chapter 2 also includes theoretical frameworks, including Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model of Development (1979) and the Cass Model of Sexual Identity Development that supported this study and provided insight and connections to the problems being addressed. Chapter 3 provides a description of the qualitative methodology,
along with the descriptive framework, recruitment and data collection, data analysis, and the limitations of the methodology. In Chapter 4, the researcher provides the study’s findings through an analysis of the research questions and narratives of the participants’ responses. In Chapter 5, the researcher provides a discussion of the findings, and practical implications for the counseling field, future research, and the Catholic Church, along with the limitations of the study and opportunities for future research.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Given the recent media coverage and division of opinions regarding the transgender bathroom debate (Somashekhar, 2016), along with the Catholic Pope, Pope Francis’ (Donadio, 2013) views on the inclusion of individuals identifying as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Questioning (LGBTQ) as members of the Catholic Church, there is a necessary need for counselor awareness and knowledge building around this topic. As the need for greater knowledge and awareness grows and pushes towards the forefront of concerns within the counseling field, there arises more of a need for trustworthy, up-to-date, and comprehensive research based on current and past literature. This chapter is meant to review and synthesize the literature in more depth for a clear understanding of the relationships between the coming out process of LGBTQ identifying individuals and Catholic views. The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to explore, describe, and gain insight into the lived experiences around the coming out process for Catholic, LGBTQ identifying individuals who are 18 years of age and older. Research findings and theoretical frameworks on this topic are addressed in the following four sections: “Sexual Identity,” “Religious Identity,” “Coming Out,” and “Theoretical Frameworks.”

Sexual Identity

The fundamental idea of this study is based on the coming out process of LGBTQ identifying individuals in relation to their religious Catholic families. As previously stated, there is a lack of research connecting the Catholic faith specifically to the coming out process of LGBTQ identifying individuals. The Catholic Church’s views are different than societal views in their acceptance of human sexuality and sexual identity, expressing that “sexuality is a fundamental component of personality, one of its modes of being, manifestation, of
communicating with others, of feeling, of expressing, and of living human life” (Pontifical Council for the Family, 1995). Wolff and Conley (2016) described the societal view of sexual identity as involving concealment, harassment, and stigma related to one’s chosen sexual identity. Shepler and Perrone-McGovern (2016) discussed the evolution of sexual identity within past research which itself showed that, before the 1980s, LGBTQ identifying individuals were less “mentally healthy” and more likely to suffer from depression, suicidal thoughts, and self-harming behaviors than heterosexual individuals (p. 579). More recent research has showed that although LGBTQ identifying individuals may experience more psychological distress than heterosexual individuals, environmental and societal factors, such as family support, allow for a healthy developmental path that is similar to that of heterosexual individuals (Shepler & Perrone-McGovern, 2016). Without positive societal and environmental factors for LGBTQ identifying individuals, experiences of stigmatization can lead to internalized negative thoughts and feelings surrounding one’s sexual identity (Dyar, Feinstein, Schick, & Davila, 2016).

There are two main ways that sexual identity is viewed in relation to this study, these being how the Catholic Church views sexual identity, and how the LGBTQ identifying individual views sexual identity. Tan and Yarhouse (2010) agreed there could be a divide between the two views, forcing sexual minorities to choose the best way to navigate the Church’s views and their own view of sexual identity. This divide between identities could lead to compartmentalization of sexual identity, with individuals keeping it concealed in order to allow their religious identity to flourish, or vice versa, allowing one’s religious identity to be concealed in favor of living out one’s true sexual identity (Bayne, 2016). In 2009, the APA Task Force Report acknowledged the challenge of LGBTQ identifying individuals experiencing conflict between religious identity and sexual identity based on conventional church views (APA, 2009).
In support of this theory, Love (2005) argued that, when an individual decides to explore his or her sexual identity, he or she may unknowingly trigger the simultaneous exploration of religious identity, creating conflict between the two. These two conflicting views are described below.

**View of the Catholic Church on Sexual Identity.** Wolff et al. (2016) reported in their study that Catholic LBG adults have experienced more conflict between their sexual identity and religious identity than any other religious group. With Catholicism being the largest single religious denomination in the country—78 million people, or 24% of the population—many professionals have underestimated diversity within the Roman Catholic Church and LGBTQ identifying individuals within this group (Plante, 2015).

The Catholic Church refers to LGBTQ identifying individuals who are entering into marriage as having “same-sex unions” and defines sex as “the power to procreate” (Lynch, 2004, p. 383; Pope, 2004, p. 12). Paprocki (2007) identifies the Catholic Church as teaching that “marriage is limited to the union of one man and one woman” (p. 248), but argues that the Catholic Church “did not invent marriage as an institution limited to heterosexual couples” (p. 249) and that it is more associated with conservative beliefs (Kirby and Michaelson, 2008; Paprocki, 2007). In the Book of Matthew, marriage is outlined as: “God made them male and female. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate” (Matthew 19:4-6). This scripture mentions the power of God in bringing two individuals, a man and a woman, together in the sacrament of marriage with the intention to have a long, healthy marriage uninterrupted by sin.

The conservative beliefs described by the Catholic Church include viewing marriage as having two fundamental purposes: the good of the spouses and the procreation of children,
referencing marriage as both unitive and procreative throughout the teachings of the Catholic Church (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2009). The Catholic Church believes that marriage is a relationship and a permanent bond between a man and woman, through which two bodies become one and are inseparable (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2009). The Church’s argument against same-sex marriage is that it “empties the term of its meaning” and excludes the connection between a man and woman, suggesting that the idea of marriage between a man and a woman within the Catholic Church is now irrelevant, given the inclusion of same-sex couples (Dempsey, 2008; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2009).

With that being said, going back to the beginning of the Catholic view that comes via Matthew’s teaching, there are three main concepts involved in this discussion. First, God created humans, “male and female,” to become complimentary sexes for one another (Dempsey, p. 73, 2008). Secondly, God created marriage between a man and a woman in order for the man to “have a suitable partner” and consummate the relationship for “the two to become one flesh” (Dempsey, p. 73, 2008). Lastly, God made this union for his work of creation, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it”—therefore creating a union in marriage between a man and a woman to be fruitful and sexually complimentary, and defining a marriage in the scriptures as “heterosexual monogamy” (Dempsey, p. 73, 2008; Goh, 2014). In St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans, readers are given insight into the shame males and females have experienced for their decisions to partake in relations with same-sex individuals.

Rom 1:25-28: They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and revered and worshiped the creature rather than the creator… Therefore, God handed them over to degrading passions. Their females exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the males likewise
gave up natural relations with females and burned with lust for one another. Males did shameful things with males and receiving in themselves due reward for their perversion. In other words, since they would not consent to acknowledge God, God abandoned them to their unacceptable thoughts and indecent behavior (Dempsey, 2008).

The Catholic Church follows this doctrine in St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans, in that marriage is intended to be an “intimate partnership between a man and a woman for their mutual support and the precreation of new human life,” and those who partake in other forms of sexual activity will be excluded from the kingdom of God (Dempsey, p. 74, 2008; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2009).

The overarching idea and argument against same-sex marriage within the eyes of the Catholic Church stands on the basis that “marriage and same-sex unions are essentially different realities” (Pope, 2004; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2009, p. 23). Most recognition for same-sex marriage within the Catholic Church today is “equated with non-discrimination, fairness, equality, and civil rights” (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2009).

However, the language surrounding the idea of same-sex marriage versus marriage between a man and a woman is essentially the same (Lee, 2008). Regardless of sexual identity, when a couple decides to make a commitment to one another to share their lives and fulfill the obligation to procreate and raise children, they are mirroring the idea of marriage in the Catholic Church (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1994; Lee, 2008). Where the language and views of the same-sex marriage change is the idea of biological unity, or sexual intercourse, for the procreation of children (Lee, 2008; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2009). Genesis describes the idea of marriage as having the goal to “be fruitful; and multiply” (1:28),
which aligns with the Catholic Church’s definition of marriage. Same-sex marriage is not recognized for a multitude of reasons, these specifically being the biological barriers for procreation of children, the definition of marriage according to the Catholic Church, and the idea of a family being a mother and father raising their biological children (Lee, 2008; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2009).

At the same time, the Catholic Church has evolved with its idea of what unjust discrimination amongst same-sex marriage means. In 1994, the Catholic Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith stated that there are areas where “it is not unjust discrimination to take sexual identity into account,” specifically when placing children for adoption or into foster care, when hiring teachers or coaches of students, and in the recruitment of the military (Catholic Church, 1994; Dempsey, p. 78, 2008). The Catholic Church is not in favor of discrimination of homosexual individuals and believes that they are welcome in the Church; however, it does recognize and promote unjust discrimination in one’s ability to adopt or foster children, military recruitment, and/or being in a position to teach or coach students. At this time, the Catholic Church cannot view same-sex marriage as a legal union due to the inability for them to simultaneously defend their longstanding values and definition of marriage as being between a man and a woman; however, the Church does recognize the need for the same equality amongst homosexual individuals within the Church as heterosexual individuals within the church (Dempsey, 2008; Goh, 2014; Lee, 2008). According to the Pontifical Council for the Family (1995), there are no other relationships that are binding, aside from marriage, within the eyes of the Catholic Church, thus showing the importance of not only describing the idea of the Catholic Church’s view of marriage, but the notion that LGBTQ identifying individuals do not have the legal right to have a same-sex marriage within the eyes of the Catholic Church. The Catholic
Church’s view on same-sex marriage is a core foundational belief that LGBTQ identifying individuals feel challenges them throughout their coming out process, as is the case with perceptions of members within the Catholic Church (Lee, 2008).

The Catholic Church agrees that sexual identity or same-sex attraction, the term they use to describe this identity, is not something an individual chooses, and also suggests therapy and “training in the virtues” for those individuals who are experiencing “homosexual tendencies” (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2009, p. 7). But although the Catholic Church is in agreement with therapy surrounding “homosexual tendencies,” the American Counseling Association’s Code of Ethics (2005) feels that it is the responsibility of a therapist to be aware of their “own values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors and avoid imposing values that are inconsistent with counseling goals” onto clients (ACA, 2005, A.1.a). A therapist with devout Catholic beliefs may not impose their ideals of stopping “homosexual tendencies” upon their client if the client’s well-being is not the focus of therapy, regardless of the Catholic Church’s views and values (ACA, 2005; United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2009, p. 7).

Along with those experiencing homosexual tendencies, the Catholic Church has recommended that everyone who is a practicing Catholic, regardless of sexual identity, partake in training of virtues. The Catholic Church (1994) describes acquiring virtue as becoming brave, just, or prudent, and expects all members of the Catholic Church to “perform acts that embody that virtue” (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2009, p. 8). Lastly, the Catholic Church (1994) views chastity as a special virtue by which all people, married or single, are called on to live out and abide by this virtue, defining chastity as: “the successful integration of sexuality within the person and this the inner unit of man in his bodily and spiritual being” (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2009, p. 8).
**View of LGBTQ Identifying Individuals on Sexual Identity.** Sexual identity is a broad construct, and defined as a “substructure of sexual function that includes gender identity, object choice, and intention” (Yardhouse, 2001). According to Bayne (2016), sexual identity development is the ability to move through personal acceptance and pursue a connection with others, while responding to discrimination in a healthy way. Sexual identity also serves as a key piece for individuals who are questioning or challenging their own religious identity (Sherry, Adelman, Whilde, & Quick, 2010). For LGBTQ identifying individuals, the challenge during the coming out process has led to higher levels of shame, guilt, internal conflicts, and evaluations of oneself, as well as internalized homophobia (Sherry et al., 2010; Page et al., 2013). These messages have led to an increased likelihood of negative sexual identity development, thus leading individuals away from fully exploring or divulging their true identities (Love, Bock, Jannarone, and Richardson, 2005; Page, et al., 2013).

Bayne (2016) describes six stages of sexual identity in the Cass Model and acknowledges that these stages do not necessarily follow a linear progression, but may be fluid and revisited at any time during one’s lifetime. The first stage is identity confusion. During this stage, LGBTQ identifying individuals will struggle with just that, their identity. They will ask questions such as “Am I gay?” and “Why am I attracted to individuals of the same sex?”, causing internal conflict, and for Catholic individuals, seeing homosexuality as a sin can offer an added layer of conflict (Bayne, 2016). Repression of feelings and desires comes up in this stage, as well. To hide one’s sexual identity from family and friends can increase negative sexual identity, create internalized homonegativity, and leave individuals at risk for anxiety and low self-esteem (Page, Lindahl, & Malik, 2013). Family plays a large role in the repression of sexual identity at this stage due to the fear of being judged or chastised for one’s alternative identity (Bayne, 2016). Conflict and a
lack of strength from core support systems, such as family, are key contributors to LGBTQ identifying individuals’ challenges (Page, Lindahl, & Malik, 2013). Thus, families tend to put LGBTQ identifying individuals in a difficult position—choosing their Catholic values or living out their true sexual identity, but not both—which leads to the next stage.

The second stage in the Cass Model is identity comparison, which occurs when LGBTQ identifying individuals internally accept their own sexual identity; however, they may compartmentalize their identities, being careful to not allow them to intersect (Bayne, 2016; Wolff, Himes, Soares, & Miller Kwon, 2016; Sherry et al., 2010; Rosenkrantz, Rotosky, Riggle, & Cook, 2016). This stage is key in intersections of both sexual and religious identities, as individuals in this stage may decide to reject their homosexual identity in favor of their religious identity (Bayne, 2016). Reactions to keeping sexual identity hidden include compartmentalization of an LGBTQ identity and not allowing an individual to explore openly, but only in certain situations, along with acceptance of homosexual feelings accompanied by a refusal to participate in a homosexual lifestyle (Bayne, 2016).

The third stage is the identity tolerance stage, where an individual realizes and accepts that he or she may not fit in with the heterosexual culture and that heterosexual friends may not ever be able to fully understand and accept their LGBTQ identity (Bayne, 2016). Family relationships that once flourished may be more painful and complicated than ever before due to one’s struggle in tolerating and accepting an LGBTQ identity (Page et al., 2013; Sherry et al., 2010). Mental health concerns arise in this stage, which make LGBTQ identifying individuals more likely than their heterosexual counterparts to seek out counseling (Sherry et al., 2010; Wolff et al., 2016). Identity tolerance leads into the fourth stage of the Cass model, which is identity acceptance. Individuals in this stage begin to explore and integrate themselves into the
LGBTQ community, as well as to become more open-minded regarding their own identity (Bayne, 2016). LGBTQ identifying individuals in this stage, although more accepting of their own sexual identity and having created a support system surrounding them, still may choose to keep their identity hidden from family and religious institutions for fear of rejection (Bayne, 2016; Sherry et al., 2010; Wood & Conley, 2013).

The fifth stage of the Cass Model is identity pride, where LGBTQ identifying individuals integrate more within their communities, become increasingly more aware of “prejudice and oppression of the heterosexual culture,” and become more observant of the level of criticism received from other groups outside of the LGBTQ community (APA, 2011; Bayne, 2016, p. 63). Individuals at this stage tend to develop a sense of community strength, working together with their peers to combat social injustices and oppression directed towards the LGBTQ community (Bayne, 2016). Increased social stigma in this stage is often attributed towards discrimination and an individual’s world coinciding with homophobic or unaccepting environments, as can be seen in certain religious institutions when one is engaged in exploring one’s sexual identity (Bayne, 2016; Sherry et al., 2010). Exploration guides the sixth and last stage of the Cass Model, identity synthesis. Not only does the individual find a balanced, safe, and secured sexual identity, but also his or her own personal identity as a whole feels complete (Bayne, 2016). This balance includes both religious and sexual identities, thus promoting a healthy integration of both into one’s lifestyle (Page et al., 2016). Also in this stage, lifestyles of both LGBTQ identifying individuals and their heterosexual friends come together in such a way that the individual experiences a sense of pride for who he or she is, particularly when sexual identity is challenged or questioned (Bayne, 2016; Page et al., 2016). Bayne (2015) argued that individuals who can positively progress through stages of religious identity develop supportive relationships while
allowing for the exploration and integration of religious and sexual identities. This shows the importance in finding congruence between both religious and sexual identity, along with obtaining understanding of both identities individually.

**Religious Identity**

Religion is now defined as identifying with personal beliefs, God or a higher power,, rituals, experiences, or institutional beliefs (Rosenkrantz et al., 2016; Sherry et al., 2010; Wood & Conley, 2014). Considerations of the identity of an individual go back to Erickson’s work with psychosocial stages of development and the idea that one’s personal identity is integrated into one’s whole being. However, if a person’s identity is confused or fragmented, it is considered challenging (Love et al., 2005). Erickson recognized the complexity of a person’s identity within his stages of development, and that identity could change over time, being shaped by society, personal experiences, or cultural aspects, including religion (Love et al., 2005).

Given the significant experience of growing up with a strong religious influence, religion can be a core value for an individual. For many individuals, positive core religious beliefs can be seen as a strong sign of faith and connection (Bayne, 2016). Religion can be a source of stigma and discrimination, but also a source of support and strength (Rostosky et al., 2016).

Allport (1950) outlines three general stages of religious identity development: raw credulity, satisfaction of rationalism, and religious maturity. These three stages are based on the process by which individuals are able to critically immerse themselves into a mature faith system (Love et al., 2005). The first stage, raw credulity, is based on one’s acceptance of everything related to a specific religion as it is given to them or passed down from parents, religious figures, or religious teachings. This could include the idea that homosexuality is a sin or that the sacrament of marriage is made between a male and a female (Allport, 1950; Bayne, 2016; Love
et al, 2005). At this stage, parents may seek out religious traditions, teachings, and groups to facilitate access to religious connections in order to pass along beliefs to their children (Bayne, 2016; Rostosky et al., 2016). Individuals at this stage may feel uncomfortable challenging or questioning what they are being told, this being due to their lack of insight or awareness into their religious identity (Allport, 1950; Bayne, 2016). The second stage, that of satisfying rationalism, happens when the challenging and questioning of one’s religious identity begins (Allport, 1950; Bayne, 2016). This stage is sometimes associated with negative feelings such as shame, guilt, inadequacy, depression, low self-esteem, isolation, trauma, hyper vigilance, and suicidality due to conflicting messages or values within one’s religious beliefs (Allport, 1950; Bayne, 2016; Rosenkrantz et al., 2016; Sherry et al., 2010). Individuals tend to assimilate and yearn for explanations in this stage, due to the evaluative and questioning nature of the stage (Bayne, 2016; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010). The final stage is that of religious maturity, which is the individual’s ability to tolerate discrepancies in religious beliefs, approach issues with a critical eye, and be able to examine ideas and theories rather than taking facts at face value (Allport, 1950; Bayne, 2016). At this stage, individuals can hold their own religious beliefs while also exploring other religious meanings in other areas (Allport, 1950; Bayne, 2016). For example, individuals can feel content with their own religious identity while supporting or learning about others’ religious identities.

**Catholic Religious Identity.** According to a Pew Research Center survey (2014), 85% of self-identified Catholics at ages 18-19 felt that LGBTQ identifying individuals should be accepted by society, whereas older adult age groups were less likely to be in favor of acceptance of LGBTQ identifying individuals within our society (Lipka, 2014). There is a generational divide between self-identifying Catholics, with younger generations being more accepting of
LGBTQ identifying individuals. Catholics ages 65 and older, 57% agree that LGBTQ identifying individuals should be accepted (Lipka, 2014). It is the self-identifying Catholic parental generation in between these two age groups that struggle with acceptance for this community of people.

24% of Americans identify as Catholic, and of those individuals, Catholic Americans identifying as LGBTQ report more conflict about their sexual identity than those identifying as Jewish, atheist, and agnostic (Wolff et al., 2016). The Catholic Church has remained solid on the idea that they hold timeless religious perspectives, maintaining that only heteronormative roles and relationships are morally acceptable in the eyes of the Church, even though the Catholic Church has experienced scrutiny and negative press in the past couple of years regarding sexual abuse and sexual identity amongst members (Plante, 2015; Wolff et al., 2016). Recent statements from Pope Francis have, however, suggested a nonjudgmental attitude regarding differing sexual identity through his asking, “If someone is gay and he searches for the Lord and has good will, who am I to judge?” (Donadio, 2013) These words differ immensely from those of Pope Benedict XVI in 2005, who said homosexuality was “a strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil” (Donadio, 2013). However, while the Catholic Church is not blatantly against homosexuality, it draws definitive lines between homosexual acts and homosexual tendencies, which are outlined below.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2006) outlines general principles within the beliefs of the Catholic Church in respect to human dignity, the place for sexuality in God’s plan, homosexual acts and sexuality, the difference between homosexual inclination and homosexual acts, and therapy for homosexual individuals. Although the teachings of the Catholic Church are presented in a black and white fashion, though, they do leave room for
interpretation. According to The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2006), respecting human dignity is a core Catholic belief that is grounded within the Church’s teachings, and respecting human dignity includes acknowledging and respecting all human beings, as everyone was created in God’s image and likeness.

The place of sexual identity and sexuality within God’s plan is also addressed within the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2006), the relevant portion stating that sexuality within God’s plan is the creation of man and woman as different entities, but complimentary as one in that, together, they can enter into the bond of marriage and create life. Furthermore, the belief and teaching of the Catholic Doctrine that “homosexual acts cannot fulfill the natural ends of human sexuality” add on to the notion that sexual identity does have a place within the Catholic Church and in God’s plan; however, there are fulfillment requirements (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006, p. 3). These fulfillment requirements come with the understanding that sexual acts are undertaken within the marital relationship and that acts such as homosexuality which are not within the marital bond are in violation of the Catholic Church’s teachings as well as God’s plan, and are “contrary to the natural law” (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006, p. 4).

The Catholic Church expresses, as stated above, that homosexuality or same-sex relationships or attractions are in violation of God’s plan. However, the Church distinguishes a homosexual inclination from homosexual acts, in that a homosexual inclination is not a sin and is merely a sign or a red flag that there is an attraction to the opposite sex, but where the individual has not acted on the inclination (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006). On the other hand, the Catholic Church understands the idea of homosexual acts as engaging in the process of sexual acts with another individual of the same sex, and in the eyes of the Catholic
Church, this is considered a sin (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006). The Catholic Church also establishes that “those who experience same-sex attraction experience it as an inclination that they did not choose” (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006, p. 7). For LGBTQ identifying individuals, religious abuse due to these foundational Catholic beliefs may lead to divisive struggles arising from an increased doubt about their God’s existence or His answering of their prayers (Wood & Conley, 2014).

Kirby and Michaelson (2005) found that Religious Identity is challenging for LGBTQ identifying individuals who also identify as Catholic, specifically as related to the idea that values and beliefs about sexuality can be emotionally charged for most individuals. Congregation members are not the only individuals who can become emotionally charged regarding their identities as Catholics. Plante (2005) argues that clergy rarely agree with everything the Church says or does, complicating their own religious identities. Most clergy retain their own religious identities and beliefs, while also following and teaching the doctrine of the Catholic Church (Plante, 2005; Wood & Conley, 2013). Research (Plante, 2005; Wood & Conley, 2013) surrounding the clergy’s opinion of religious beliefs shows that although Catholic clergy must follow and teach the word of God, they do understand feelings and conflicts of identity related to Catholic religious identity or pastoral response. LGBTQ identifying individuals who feel conflict tend not to reach out towards religious affiliations due to the stigma attached to coming out. Negative experiences include rejection from religious communities, religious family members, and LGBTQ communities, all of which can lead to negative beliefs regarding the Catholic faith (Rosenkrantz et al., 2016). The stigma associated with the coming out process for LGBTQ identifying individuals is detailed in the following section.
**Coming Out**

Recent research has not elaborated on a specific definition of what coming out is for LGBTQ identifying individuals, let alone offered empirical studies regarding therapeutic intervention for the LGBTQ population (Apperson, Blincoe, & Sudlow, 2015). Rust (1993) defines coming out as a “single event, usually first identification of oneself as homosexual” (p. 52). More recently, theorists have “conceptualized coming out as a process,” but not elaborated any further (Rust, 2003, p. 52). There have been many early researchers who identified steps of homosexual identity formation in a linear formation; however, most individuals skip steps in the process of coming out and sexual identity formation, and sometimes abandon the process altogether in order to return to their heterosexual identity (Rust, 1993).

According to the developmental model of coming out, abandoning the process of sexual identity formation is indicative of changes in self-identity and self-acceptance (Rust, 1993). In order for individuals to be their authentic selves and experience higher self-esteem, they must begin the process of self-reflection because it externalizes the conclusion that they do not personally think there is anything wrong with whom they are (Budge, 2014; Rust, 1993). These changes are considered signs of maturity within the individual, showing an increase of development and commitment to changes in sexual identity (Rust, 1993). The main goal of the coming out process is to discover whether an individual’s essences, including “one’s sexual thoughts, feelings, and behaviors,” are predominantly homosexual or heterosexual (Etengoff & Daiute, 2014; Rust, 1993). The problem arises when individuals try to fit themselves into the dichotomous models of sexuality, but their true selves do not fit perfectly into the offered box (Etengoff & Daiute, 2014; Rust, 1993).
Research has shown that, even after coming out as having their chosen sexual identity, many individuals undergo times of uncertainty regarding their identity, creating trust issues not only within themselves, but also within their families (Apperson et al., 2015; Rust, 1993). Apperson et al. (2015) honed in on the idea of trust in a relationship between LGBTQ identifying individuals and their family members during their coming out process, stating that once the trust is eroded within such a relationship, it can be difficult to earn back. Trust plays a significant role in the relationship between parents and the average LGBTQ identifying individual. For the parents of LGBTQ identifying individuals, the bond between parent and child is critical, as is the type of relationship and the level of comfort held between the larger family unit and the LGBTQ individual (Apperson et al., 2015). Research shows that the sooner LGBTQ identifying individuals come out, the better their relationships are with their families, and this will be explored in more depth in the following section (Apperson et al., 2015; Budge, 2014; Etengoff & Daiute, 2014).

**Family Impact.** The relationship an individual has with his or her family plays a crucial role in the coming out process. Developmentally, there have been many suggestions for family system models concerning LGBTQ identifying individuals, as the current models do not clearly focus on family units, individuals, or sociocultural activities, such as religious affiliation (Etengoff & Daiute, 2013). Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (1979) shows different environmental levels for individuals who are affected by human development, specifically family and religious affiliation (Etengoff & Daiute, 2013). Bronfenbrenner’s theory (1979) suggests that family and religion are bi-directional influences, meaning that an individual’s family may affect his or her religious beliefs; however, the individual may also affect the religious beliefs of his or her family. The bi-directional influences show the importance of trust in all areas of...
LGBTQ relationships. Apperson et al. (2015) argues that an erosion of trust or a lack of trust means it can be difficult to earn trust back; therefore, hesitation about coming out can be significant.

In the coming out process, psychoeducation for LGBTQ clients and their families has been reported as one of the most helpful interventions (Budge, 2014). Family values and messages about sexual identity and religion can affect individuals, as individuals can become fearful of upsetting or being judged by their support system (Bayne, 2016). In being providing psychoeducation and support during the coming out process, LGBTQ identifying individuals can feel safe and more comfortable about disclosure of their identity, allowing for individuals to be more spontaneous, authentic, and genuine in their relationships with their families (Apperson et al., 2015). There is also evidence that timing can influence the reaction and relationship experienced when coming out to family— for example, delaying disclosure may compound or create a problem, not alleviate one (Apperson et al., 2015). Reactions to not coming out include compartmentalization of a LGBTQ identity and individuals not allowing themselves to explore openly, but only in certain situations (Bayne, 2016).

**Theoretical Frameworks**

This section of the literature review will cover two theoretical frameworks in more depth: Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model of Development and the Cass Model of Sexual Identity Development.

**Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model of Development**

Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model of Development provides a holistic view and understanding of how an environment affects or communicates with an individual’s development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The ecology of human development in this model refers to the lifespan...
and specific experiences of a person’s development in relation to his or her environmental framework and also provides insight into the difficulties individuals have with adjusting to new or changing environments (Abrams, Theberge, and Karan, 2005). Bronfenbrenner’s model points to the understanding of environmental or personal influences on one’s psychological stress and wellbeing, as shown in Etengoff and Daiute’s (2013) study. For this research study, the researcher utilized Brofenbrenner’s theory in order to understand the environmental and personal influences LGBTQ identifying individuals experience throughout their religious and sexual development.

Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) model incorporates four ethological levels: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem.

Level 1: The microsystem includes the interpersonal social relationships of the individual. These relationships signify direct interactions between the person and his or her family, friends, school, and workplace settings.

Level 2: The mesosystem refers to an interconnection between two or more Microsystems that direct an individual’s life to include interrelations among settings in a developing person at a specific stage in life—the overall connections between systems and Microsystems that indirectly impact an individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

Level 3: The exosystem includes the sociopolitical laws, mass media, and socioeconomic influences of the outside environments or settings that indirectly influence an individual—the “social structures, both formal and informal, that do not themselves contain the developing person but impinge upon or encompass the immediate settings in which that person is found” (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 515).
Level 4: The macrosystem references “the overarching institutional patterns of the culture or subculture… of which micro-, meso-, and exo- systems are the concrete manifestations” (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 515). This level incorporates the culture, social norms, stereotypes, biases, and beliefs of society (Abrams et al., 2005).

Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model of Development Theory enhanced this research study by connecting how beliefs and stereotypes in society influence all aspects of a person’s life, including the self and environmental, psychological, and institutional structures.

**Cass Model of Sexual Identity Development**

The Cass Model of Sexual Identity Development provides insight into and recognizes the need for sexual identity development of LGBTQ identifying individuals. Insight into sexual identity development for LGBTQ identifying individuals can be explored with narrative therapy in order to process their own history or story of coming out (Bayne, 2016). Research has showed that utilizing narrative therapy in conjunction with this model is beneficial when implemented in the counseling session (Bayne, 2016). This theory describes the progression of the development of sexual identity for LGBTQ identifying individuals in a non-linear progression (Bayne, 2016). Cass’s (1979) model consists of six stages of sexual identity development: identity confusion, identity comparison, identity tolerance, identity acceptance, identity pride, and identity synthesis (Bayne, 2016; Cass, 1979).

Stage 1: Identity confusion is where individuals begin to feel that they are different from their peers. The individual begins to be aware of their feelings of attraction towards same-sex individuals and may experience isolation from the heterosexual culture or religious culture, this sensation then feeding into the belief that homosexuality is a sin (Bayne, 2016; Cass, 1979).
Stage 2: According to Bayne (2016, p. 62), identity comparison is the rationalization stage where an individual “internally accepts his or her feelings but attempts to compartmentalize or rationalize” his or her own sexual identity (Cass, 1979). This is the decision stage where individuals may choose to reject their sexual identity in favor of their religious identity. They may feel isolated, like they are the only individuals experiencing such feelings of homosexuality (Cass, 1979). Also during this stage, family values play a role in whether one accepts or rejects their sexual identity, as based on the family dynamic and their standards or beliefs (Bayne, 2016).

Stage 3: The identity tolerance stage is where a person begins to reach out to other individuals within the LGBTQ community. They have not reached full acceptance of their identity, but are able to tolerate the differences between the homosexual and heterosexual culture, which that are becoming stronger in this stage. Individuals who have come out during this stage may also experience rejection from their family or friends and recognize the need to reach out to supportive LGBTQ communities (Bayne, 2016; Cass, 1979).

Stage 4: Identity acceptance is the stage where individuals become more strongly connected to the LGBTQ community and are willing to accept themselves as LGBTQ identifying individuals. Individuals are able to answer the question of “Who am I?” that they may not have been able to answer in earlier stages (Cass, 1979). There still may be points during this stage where individuals are not out to certain family, friends, or religious groups, but they do have a support system and are more fully integrated into their sexual identity (Bayne, 2016; Cass, 1979).

Stage 5: Identity pride comes when an individual develops awareness of the incongruence between their increasingly positive view of their self as LGBTQ and the societal acceptance of
this population (Cass, 1979). Individuals are more engaged with their community, and aware of prejudices and biases regarding the homosexual culture. Feelings of anger and pride collide within the individual, these emotions being outwardly directed as a result of the social injustice present in society (Bayne, 2016).

Stage 6: Identity synthesis comes at the point of an individual gaining personal comfort with their sexual identity, and having feelings of congruence, balance, and wholeness compromising one’s entire personal identity (Bayne, 2016). Individuals recognize the heterosexuals who are supportive of their lifestyle, along with those who are not supportive (Cass, 1979). Their LGBTQ identity becomes integrated within their complete personality structure instead of being seen as just one entity within it (Bayne, 2016). Their sense of pride with their sexual identity is strengthened (Cass, 1979). Cass’s Model of Sexual Identity Development links to this study by focusing on the sexual identity development process and fluidity between the stages, along with elaborating upon how the LGBTQ individual views himself or herself throughout this stage in their lives.

Summary of Literature

This chapter has discussed literature that shows the Catholic religion dominating the United States’ population with 78 million individuals who associate with this religious belief (Plante, 2015). The majority of the research discussed was published within the last five years, thus being new and up-to-date. For the purposes of this research study, Catholic values are understood to be predominantly conservative, as are the families who believe and practice within this religious identity. For LGBTQ identifying individuals struggling with their identity and coming out, Catholic religious values and beliefs of family can lead to a struggle within the individual to trust others and go forward with disclosing their sexual identity to their Catholic
family for the first time (Bayne, 2016). LGBTQ identifying individuals can look at religion as a source of stigma and discrimination, but also as a source of support (Rostosky et al., 2016). Uncovering the connection between this outlook on religion and a positive internal motivator or a negative one can be the crux of the coming out process for some individuals. Looking more closely at how safe individuals feel within themselves to disclose their sexual identity to family and friends, as well as obtaining a comfort level with their own sexual identity, marks the beginning of the coming out process. With religious identity and affiliation with the Catholic Church, individuals have an added layer of stigma attached to considering the coming out process.

The research showed that there is a lack of conclusively amongst researchers surrounding the coming out process for LGBTQ identifying individuals. Emerging LGBTQ adults are in a vital transition phase of their lives that combines all identities, including sexual and religious, which can cause psychological damage to one’s self-esteem (Allport et al., 1950; Bayne, 2016; Kirby & Michaelson, 2008; Rosenkrantz et al., 2016; Rostosky et al., 2016; Sherry et al., 2010; Wolff et al., 2016). Growing up in the church, families who are devout Catholics may have a harder time accepting LGBTQ identifying individuals during the coming out process or influence the decision to come out to family (Apperson et al., 2015).

In Chapter 3, the methodology of this study will be discussed in an effort to explore, describe, and gain an in-depth understanding of the impact of Catholic religious beliefs on the coming out process for LGBTQ identifying individuals.
Chapter 3: Research Methods

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore, describe, and gain insight into and understanding of the impact of Catholic beliefs on the coming out process of LGBTQ identifying individuals. These individuals were 18 years of age or older, were raised with or currently practice Catholicism, and reside in Western Pennsylvania. The guiding question for this research study was as follows: What are the lived experiences of persons who identify as Catholic and who have come out as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning? The four supplemental research questions that were used are:

1. How do individuals who identify as LGBTQ and Catholic describe their coming out experience?
2. What are the Catholic beliefs and practices that challenge or support the coming out process for individuals who identify as LGBTQ?
3. What lived existential (e.g. time, space, person, and relationship) do people who identify as LGBTQ and Catholic experience during their coming out process?
4. What are the risks and protective factors that affect individuals who identify as LGBTQ and Catholic during the coming out process?

This chapter provides a synopsis of the research study by presenting information regarding: (1) the study’s guiding philosophy, (2) van Manen’s Four Lived Existentials, (3) the sample, (4) participant recruitment, (5) informed consent, (6) protocol for semi-structured interviews, (7) trustworthiness, (8) the researcher’s role and assumptions, (9) data collection, (10) analysis of the data, and (11) a summary of the chapter.
Guiding Philosophy

This study used a qualitative research methodology to examine how Catholic religious beliefs impact the coming out process for LGBTQ identifying individuals. Over the last twenty years of research, philosophical assumptions have shaped research paradigms throughout qualitative research exploration. Creswell (2012) provided an outline and overview of the four philosophical assumptions that aid interpretations of qualitative research:

1. Ontological- The researcher sought to find, report, and embrace evidences (themes) of multiple realities by using the words of the participants that underline the individual participant’s perspective;

2. Epistemological- The researcher provided inside experience about the participants by conducting research in the field in which the participants live and work;

3. Axiological- The researcher admitted and reported values and biases while collecting the information;

4. Methodology- The researcher followed an inductive process where the data collected shaped the study and the research questions were modified to reflect the research problem.

This qualitative research study described, explored, and gained insight into and understanding of the coming out process and religious beliefs of LGBTQ identifying individuals through the use of individual, semi-structured interviews and observations. The qualitative research study was based on a phenomenological methodology and individual interview approach. This study focused on how Catholic religious beliefs influence the coming out process of individuals identifying as LGBTQ through the lenses of the participants’ worldviews and experiences with coming out to friends and family. The researcher was interested in obtaining an
undivided understanding of the LGBTQ individual’s coming out process, and the impact of Catholic religious beliefs on the same.

**Ethnography**

In qualitative research, there are many methodological approaches used to carry out research studies. “Ethnography is one of these methodological approaches and is described as the study of social interactions, behaviors, and perceptions that occur within groups, organizations, and communities” (Reeves, Kuper, & Hodges, 2008, p. 512). The fundamental purpose of ethnographic research is to provide rich insights into views, actions, and locations of an intended population by utilizing observations and interviews as a vehicle to gather desired information (Brewer, 2011; Reeves et al., 2008). The main undertaking of ethnographic research is documentation of the culture, perspectives, and practices of the targeted population in their natural setting, or “telling like it is from the inside” (Brewer, 2011, p. 17; Reeves et al., 2008).

**Hermeneutic Phenomenology**

The researcher used a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology design to explore and understand the lived experiences related to Catholic religious beliefs impacting the coming out process of individuals who identify as LGBTQ. This hermeneutic phenomenologically oriented study utilized a thematic cross-case analysis to focus on the respective experiences of the participants throughout their coming out processes. Hermeneutic phenomenology is “focused on the subjective experience” of participants in an attempt to reveal the world and the lived experience of a participant through their lens and life stories (Kafle, 2011, p.186). Englander (2012) approached the phenomenological research interview by claiming that the interview is the most important part of data collection for this type of research. He went on to state that researchers utilizing a phenomenological-based methodology are interested in the subjectivity of
other human persons, and thus it seems reasonable for the researcher to get descriptions and interviews of the participants (Englander, 2012).

**van Manen’s Four Lived Existentials**

Given that this research study was phenomenologically orientated, the researcher drew from van Manen’s (1997) Phenomenological Existential Approach to reflect on the participants’ lived experiences and lived meaning. van Manen (1984) described phenomenology as:

> the study of the lifeworld—the world as we immediately experience it rather than as we conceptualize, categorize, or theorize about it. Phenomenology aims to come to a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences. (van Manen, 1984, p. 37)

The four lifeworld existentials as described by van Manen (1997) are lived space (*spatiality*), lived body (*corporeality*), lived time (*temporality*), and lived human relation (*relationality*).

According to van Manen (1990), the first existential, lived space, signifies the ways in which individuals experience their environments and the places in which they find themselves and which they know. The second lived existential is the lived body, which refers to the qualities of the human body, and our embodiment and encounters of the five senses that unfold within our lives. The third lived existential is lived time, which refers to our personal history and our chronological relationship with time and the various ways we experience it. Lastly, the fourth lived existential is lived human relationship, which refers to the connections we have and maintain with other human beings (Seamon, 2012; van Manen, 1990). He described each of the four existentials as a vehicle for reflection on the life experiences of “all human beings, regardless of their historical, cultural or social situatedness” (van Manen, 1997, p. 101). The
understanding of lived experience is crucial to phenomenological research studies since lived experience are where the research begins and what is reflected on throughout such a study.

Sample

The target participants of this study are LBGTQ identifying men and women aged 18 years of age and older, who came out as LGBTQ to family and friends, and are residing in the Western Pennsylvania area. The researcher conducted fifteen in-depth interviews with all participants who identify as LGBTQ, were raised in the Catholic religion, and who have come out to their family as LGBTQ. However, after concluding the interviews, it was decided through a dissertation committee meeting that interviews would be reduced from fifteen to eight in order to gain thick description, quality of interview presentation, and a stronger sense of lived experience. Table 1 shows the criteria for all participants who participated in this study. This qualitative research study recruited participants by utilizing chain sampling (Creswell, 2012) and purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2012) from surrounding community mental health centers and local universities. The researcher utilized chain sampling to identify participants who knew other people who met the criteria for the study, and purposeful sampling to add credibility to the sample and for decisions on whom to recruit as participants (Creswell, 2012). To ensure all participants met the criteria for the study, the researcher reviewed the criteria with participants again prior to completing a respective interview.
Table 1: Description of Participant Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify as LGBTQ</td>
<td>Individuals who self-identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Questioning, and are aged 18 years of age and older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raised Catholic</td>
<td>Individuals whose family was Catholic, and who grew up practicing the Catholic faith and in the Catholic Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Came out to Family</td>
<td>Individuals had revealed their sexual identity to their family members and friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness to Participate</td>
<td>Individuals who had signed the consent form</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participant Recruitment

The participants were recruited from local Catholic Universities and community agencies targeting LGBTQ individuals in the Western Pennsylvania area. According to the Pittsburgh Diocese, in 2016, one third of people within a six-county region identified as Catholic. The researcher used this heavily populated Catholic geographic region to lend credibility to the sampling and recruitment strategies. The researcher distributed the recruitment flyer (Appendix A) throughout universities and to professional connections with local community agencies and leaders in order to locate and recruit members of this specific population. In addition to connecting with local community leaders who have direct access to this population, the researcher emailed recruitment flyers to local universities and to the community agencies targeting the LGBTQ population. These flyers included information on eligibility for participants, requirements, and the purpose of the study, as well as contact information for the researcher and the dissertation chair. If the recruited individual would be interested in participating in the study, they were instructed to contact the researcher by calling or emailing.
The researcher briefly screened callers and those who emailed based on the participant criteria evident in the flyer. During each phone call with a potential participant, the researcher discussed the purpose of the research study, reviewed the requirements, and set up a meeting time for an interview. All interviews took place in a location convenient to the participant and where they felt safe. At the conclusion of the study, the participants received a $10 Starbucks gift card for compensation for their time and participation in completing the interview. Participants received a gift card from the researcher to show appreciation for their time and the sharing of their story.

**Informed Consent**

Once a participant contacted the researcher by phone or email, the researcher screened the participant over the phone to ensure criteria were met before the interview. The researcher obtained a consent form granting their participation in the study, and then set up a time and place to conduct an interview. The Consent Form (Appendix C) includes the purpose of the study, risks and benefits, compensation for participation, confidentiality, the withdrawal process, access to study results, and a statement of voluntary consent. During the interviews with participants, the researcher reviewed the purpose of the study and gave each participant the right to withdraw at any time during the interview. Participants were under no obligation to participate in this research study and were free to withdraw consent at any time during the interview. After the interview, the participant would need to contact the researcher to notify them of their unwillingness to participate any further in the study, and interviewees were also made aware that, after the transcription process was complete, they would be unable to withdraw consent at that time. If a participant wanted to withdraw from the study during the interview itself, the
participant could inform the researcher of his or her decision to withdraw and at that time leave the interview room. Such participants’ responses were destroyed and not used in the study.

After the researcher provided an overview of the study, potential interviewees were given a consent form outlining the purpose of the study, confidentiality, risks and benefits, compensation for participation, the withdrawal process, access to study results, and a statement of voluntary consent. When the consent form was signed and received by the researcher, the interview could begin. For this research study, the researcher followed interview protocols as a guide for ensuring the honesty of the study.

**Protocol for Semi-Structured Interviews**

The researcher conducted a semi-structured format when facilitating the interviews, which consisted of in-depth interview questions (see Appendix A) to collect data from research participants in the study. The semi-structured, open-ended questions allowed participants to explore identities, self, family values, religious values, Catholic beliefs, and counseling topics with the expectation that additional questions not originally slated for the protocol guide would be asked to encourage elaboration upon specific topics. McCracken (1988) emphasized this technique in order for the interviewer to be nondirective and to be ready and willing to follow the lead of the interviewee.

The interviews were audiotaped for transcription purposes. Each of the semi-structured interviews took about 30-50 minutes to complete in their entirety. This timeframe included the consent to participate and interview. During each interview, the researcher used narrative therapy techniques to empower the interviewee’s authoring of their own story and how they view themselves through Van Manen’s (2007) four life existentials (Bayne, 2016).
Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

In order to increase credibility and dependability, a research design was implemented to ensure and explore the level of trustworthiness within this research study. To ensure credibility, the researcher collected data from more than one resource, including the participants’ responses from individual interviews and the researcher’s observation notes. Trustworthiness in a qualitative research study is a combination of internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity, where a study is ethical and fair, and where findings represent the experiences of participants as accurately and as closely as possible to the in-person interview (Padgett, 2016). Before and during each interview, the researcher attempted to build positive rapport with participants in order to elongate participation in the interviews and deliver a sense of comfort to participants.

The researcher’s goals were to ensure that the voices of the participants be heard, transcribed correctly, and interpreted accurately during the analysis of the data. Conformability was achieved by accurately and firmly linking the findings from the data with the literature presented in this study (Padgett, 2016). To establish dependability during the study, the researcher audiotaped interviews, which were transcribed by an online transcription company, TranscribeMe.com, and interview responses, were coded using Creswell’s (2009) steps for data analysis throughout the interview. Triangulation is the process of authentication that increased validity by incorporating multiple viewpoints and methods in order to investigate a single phenomenon (Yeasmin & Rahman, 2012). The researcher had multiple individuals on the dissertation committee working together to review all of the data collected through interviews, which allowed for increased confidence in the results (Yeasmin & Rahman, 2012). Thick description was obtained by utilizing van Manen’s (1997) four lived existentials to describe in
detail the participants’ experiences within the context of the study. When utilizing thick description, the researcher must provide comprehensive details surrounding a specific theme or case (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Creswell, 2012), in order to gain the full picture from participants’ lived experiences.

Research studies are accompanied by ethical considerations which a researcher must be aware of when conducting a study. For this study, the concerns included confidentiality, topic areas, anonymity, and data storage. To ensure confidentiality, the researcher used numbers to identify the participants and to keep their true identities confidential. However, being that audiotapes were used, the participants could be identified by voice recognition, and confidentiality and anonymity could not be guaranteed during the interviews. All written materials and consent forms collected during this research study were stored under password-protected computer files in the researcher’s home. All identifying information was removed from transcribed summaries, and the participants’ responses only appear in data summaries. Only participants’ first names were utilized in the study and these do not appear on any transcript. The researcher was aware that, given the individuals identification as LGBTQ and the nature of the topic under discussion, certain questions might bring up some uncomfortable thoughts or feelings for participating individuals. Thus, if necessary, the researcher provided post-interview debriefing sessions for any participant who inquired about the study after the completion of the interview.

**Researcher Role and Assumptions**

The researcher provided data through observation, notes, and the administration of interview questions for the purpose of this qualitative study. The researcher worked with LGBTQ individuals in a clinical mental health setting for over a year, having developed a
continued interest in working with this population through research and their current employment. The researcher recognized a preconceived notion regarding this specific topic of interest and was aware of biases that could influence the design and execution of this study. Additionally, the researcher’s role was to obtain and maintain confidentiality of participants and their responses by storing all interview materials, written documentation, consent forms, and audiotapes in locked files or password-protected computer files. The researcher de-identified all information containing participants’ personal information. Moreover, all information provided by participants and discussed during the interviews was not distributed to anyone, outside of the results summary and the interview room.

Data Collection

Interviews were the main data collection method in this qualitative research, acting as an instrument to administer interview questions to participants (Englander, 2012). Data collection was inductive, and obtained from individual interviews and the researcher’s observation notes throughout interviews, along with audiotapes of the interviews (Creswell, 2012). The researcher conducted interviews to gather an in-depth understanding of the impact of Catholic religious beliefs on individuals identifying as LGBTQ and their coming out process. Although the time of the interviews was average in relation to existing research studies, the researcher was able to obtain thick descriptive responses from all interviewees, which added to the overall goal of understanding participants’ lived experiences of their coming out process and the influence of their Catholic religious beliefs on the same. Follow-up questions were used to elicit additional information from participants. The interviews took place in locations convenient to the participants’ respective communities and in places where they felt safe and comfortable, such as local universities and coffee shops chosen by the participants. Once the interviews were
completed, the data was transcribed. The researcher used Nvivo to code the individual interview transcripts, researcher memos, and observations in order to pull out common themes among the interviews.

**Analysis of Data**

Once the researcher completed the interviews with all participants, an online transcription company, TranscribeMe, transcribed the data. TranscribeMe is a reputable company, which transcribes interviews and provides them to the researcher through word documents for their use. When the company provided transcripts to the researcher, the researcher printed each transcript and reviewed it for accuracy. The researcher then read through each transcript three times in its entirety in order to be immersed in the interview as a whole prior to breaking each one into parts (Creswell, 2012). In reviewing each transcript, the researcher highlighted major points, areas of questions, and explored thoughts regarding the behavior of the participants. The researcher analyzed coding to find emerging themes within the interview transcripts, such as those regarding the lived experience of the coming out process among individuals identifying as LGBTQ and their religious beliefs.

The analytical process for this hermeneutic phenomenologically orientated methodology was built to explore and gain understanding of the lived experiences LGBTQ individuals have had during their coming out process in regard to being raised in the Catholic faith. The researcher took an inductive approach when looking at, collecting, and categorizing data in order to begin with a broad topic and allow a theory to emerge from the data (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The researcher then cleaned the data and transcriptions, and discussed the materials with the dissertation committee in order to ensure the data was ready to be coded. Coding was
completed based on the research questions due to the phenomenologically oriented study and the intention of finding and describing emerging themes.

In order to uncover themes throughout the transcripts, the researcher followed a five-step scheme of data analysis described by McCracken (1988), along with computer software to allow for a “process for organizing the raw material of data collection” (p.57). The purpose of McCracken’s (1988) data analysis method is to categorize and scientifically redefine data into analytical categories, this process resulting in the emergent themes presented in Chapter 4 (Table 4.01) and, finally, the predominate themes in Chapter 5. In the first stage of data analysis, the researcher read through the data transcripts three times, making notations in the margins in order to search for systematic themes (Piercy, 2015). This process was meant to act as a way to first sort out important information from the unimportant, and find “utterances” as noted by McCracken (1988) throughout each transcript. The first step resulted in conceptualizing the interviews and uncovering broad themes throughout each transcript. The second stage consisted of uncovering data, themes, and observations found in the first state, and then extended until “implications and possibilities are more fully played out” (McCracken, 1988, p. 45). The researcher began to utilize Microsoft word during this stage and “free coding” began, this consisting of the use of broad labels and coding of the transcripts for additional codes (Piercy, 2015). Uncovering broad labels and coding during this stage was accomplished through researcher observation throughout the interview process with each participant and then again as the researcher combed through transcripts.

Working in the third stage of McCracken’s (1988) analytical framework, the researcher began to thoroughly examine existing preliminary codes in order to identify and make connections to develop emerging themes (Piercy, 2015). McCracken (1988) concurred with this
idea of patterns emerging by stating, “a field of patterns and themes should be rising into view” during this stage (p. 45). This stage also incorporated the transcription notes and patterns found through observation, looking at each transcript’s interconnectedness and frequencies in comparison to one another for emerging patterns and themes, which are displayed in Chapter 4 (Table 4.01).

In the fourth stage, themes emerged through consistency, observation, and contradiction, and a determination of basic themes was completed (Fenstemacher, 2008; Piercy, 2015). This stage was the point where major themes emerged from the data, thus finalizing the data analysis for the research study, as made evident in Chapter 5. For the purposes of this phenomenologically orientated study, the researcher looked for lived experience regarding how each participant lived during their coming out process, and thus a theme was defined as “a statement of meaning that runs through all or most of the pertinent data, or one in the minority that carries heavy emotional or factual impact” (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, & Steinmetz, p. 150, 1991; Piercy, 2015). The last stage of McCracken’s (1998) analytical framework examined themes from all transcribed interviews across such categories, delineating predominant themes contained in the data, thus answering the research questions and forming a basis for writing up the data findings (McCracken, 1988; Piercy, 2015). McCracken states that once this step occurs, analytic categories and themes are written up and presented in the results section, along with a check of emergent themes against the data (Fenstemacher, 2008; McCracken, 1988; Piercy, 2015).

After the researcher received the transcriptions from the transcription company and coded the data, the fifteen interviews were reduced to eight interviews to be utilized in the data analysis. These eight interviews were chosen due to their representations of qualities that
resonate with the literature, thick description, and overall quality in identifying themes for the lived experiences of participants. This decision was made as a result of a meeting with the dissertation committee, who suggested reducing the number of interviews for quality and thick description in order to enhance the quality of the interviews as well as the overall study.
Observations are developed into preliminary categories based on literature

Examination of preliminary codes to make connections and develop codes

Determination and emergence of basic themes and specific codes

Examine themes from all interviews to delineate predominance in themes that answer research questions

Source: McCracken, 1988
Summary of the Chapter

A qualitative study intends to be a response to a problem, purpose and identified research questions of the study. The researcher for this study utilized a hermeneutic phenomenological orientated approach and explored the lived experiences and gains an in-depth understanding of the common themes in individuals identifying as LGBTQ. This approach also looks into the perspective on Catholic religious beliefs and their coming out process. Utilizing four philosophical assumptions, qualitative research findings, reports biases, and themes of multiple topics from participant interviews, the study was conducted through an inductive process.

The researcher of this study utilized the Cass Model of Sexual Identity Development (1979) as a theoretical framework to provide insight on the impact of one’s religious identity, the self, and the family dynamic through development of sexual identity. The researcher also used van Manen’s (1997) Phenomenological Existential Approach to reflect upon and grasp the participants’ lived experiences and lived meaning. The target population of this study included individuals identifying and having come out as LGBTQ, aged 18 years of age and older, who were raised in a family with Catholic beliefs and living in the Western Pennsylvania area. Semi-structured interviews, observations, and audiotapes collected valuable data for the study. The interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed for themes and patterns, through utilization of qualitative coding methods to strengthen the trustworthiness of the study. Chapter 4 highlights the results of the data analysis from the participants’ interviews.
Chapter Four: Research Findings

This chapter provides an in-depth exploration of the processed data, the demographic characteristics of participants, and case-by-case narratives which are offered in order to fully explore participants’ lived experiences in regard to their coming out process. Chapter 4 begins with an explanation of the demographic profiles of all eight participants followed by an analysis of individual interviews, and a case-by-case narrative analysis. After the analysis of narratives, each participant’s narrative is presented along with a summary completed by the researcher. This summary connects the theoretical frameworks of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Bioecological Model of Development, van Manen’s (1997) four lived existentials, and the Cass Model (1979) of Sexual Identity Development to the lived experiences of participants and the findings of the study. Due to the phenomenologically orientated nature of the study, a modified Venn diagram of emerging themes is presented for each participant in order to display the shared aspects of themes throughout the research (Verdinelli & Scagnoli, 2013).

After all eight participant narratives and researcher summaries are presented, the chapter addresses challenges and supports of the Catholic Church that have outlined the protective factors and risk factors of living as LBGTQ identifying individuals within the Catholic Church, utilizing Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Bioecological Model of Development. This section answers research question number two, regarding whether LGBTQ identifying individuals felt supported by the Catholic Church. The next section outlines the existential experiences of coming out in alignment with van Manen’s (1997) four lived existentials of lived body, lived time, lived space, and lived human relations, as well as answers research questions three, four, five, and six. Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Bioecological Model of Development is also utilized in the next section.
to explore ecological factors across all participants’ lived experiences throughout the findings, and lastly, a chapter summary is presented.

The material from the data is related to specific aspects of the theoretical framework of this study, as presented in Chapter 2. Notably, the guiding question for this inquiry is: What are the lived experiences of persons who identify as Catholic and who have come out as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning? Descriptive analyses of the data is presented in relation to each of the following four supplemental research questions:

- How does an individual identifying himself/herself as a Catholic describes their coming out experiences?
- What are the Catholic beliefs and practices that challenged or supported such an individual’s coming out process?
- What lived existential (time, space, person, and relationship) do Catholic individuals experience during their coming out process as LGBTQ identifying individuals?
- What are the risks and protective factors that affect such an individual living both as LGBTQ and Catholic?
Demographic Profiles

Eight participants were included in this research study, all fitting the selection criteria, whereas there were fifteen interviews completed. After a meeting with the dissertation committee, it was decided that eight interviews would be chosen for quality and thick description, and to analyze these eight interviews moving forward. Nastasi, Varjas, Sarkar, and Jayasena (1998) agree that, with phenomenology based research, the goal is saturation, and if achieved prior to including all interviews, the number of interviews or participants may be reduced. Penner and McClement (2008) concur with the reduction of participants during data analysis in order to adequately provide rich description of the phenomenon or if the existing interviews do not have the thick description that is the goal of phenomenological research (Nastasi et al., 1998).

Gender identities are displayed in Table 2.01, which shows participants consisted of four individuals who identify as lesbian and four who identify as gay. There were no participants who identified as bisexual, transgender, or questioning among study subjects. All participants were raised within the Catholic Church and brought up grounded in the Catholic faith (see Table 2.01). Three participants reported that they are still practicing Catholicism and attend mass regularly. Five participants (see Table 2.01) report they still consider themselves a part of the Church and believe in the Catholic faith, but are not practicing. These five participants reported that they have either personally chosen not to attend mass or feel that they are not welcome within the Church.
Table 2.01: Participants’ Identities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Variable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Raised Religious Identity</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Current Religious Identity</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practicing Catholic</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Practicing Catholic</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Current Sexual Identity</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In regards to the age at which participants were coming out, all eight participants reported having experience an age at which they came out to themselves, and a later age at which they came out to their families, along with their current age (see Table 3.01). None of the participants reported that they came out to their family at the same age at which came out to themselves.

The demographic profiles and tables display the frequencies of the eight participants for each category and indicate a unique perspective in regards to the coming out process of individuals identifying as LGBTQ within the Catholic faith. All participants reported being raised within the Catholic Church and that their families were very religious, in the respect that they were active in church while growing up. Five participants broke away from the Catholic Church to some extent, continuing to believe in the Catholic faith but not practicing or attending mass, or else feel uncertain whether there is a God and what their current stance on religion is.

The majority of the participants identify as gay males and there are a wide variety of demographics (e.g., age, religious identity).
Table 3.01: Participants’ Age of Coming Out

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant N=8</th>
<th>Current Age</th>
<th>Came out to Self</th>
<th>Came out to Family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>21</td>
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<td>P5</td>
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<td>12</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of Individual Interviews

In this qualitative inquiry, the data analysis process began simultaneously with data collection. As a qualitative researcher, I was fully aware that I have an influence on my study. Therefore, the reflexivity technique was employed during interviews and the process of data analysis (Nastasi et al., 1998). I practiced reflexivity by questioning my understanding during the data analysis, and I paid close attention to my voice and to my participants’ voices throughout the interview process (Nastasi et al., 1998).

The next section of this chapter focuses on the eight participants’ responses to the interview protocol questions and research questions through narratives and researcher summaries. According to Penner and McClement (2008), a phenomenological researcher must go back to the original works of literature that shaped the research in the beginning, “which will result in research that is clear in its purpose, structure, and findings” (p. 96). Research here started with the literature and moved forward in completing the study, and uncovered findings through themes. Each participant’s narrative is described in detail, explored, and presented through their lens and their experience. The researcher then provides a summary of the narrative
and connects each respective participant’s experience to the theoretical frameworks and literature presented in Chapters 2 and 3. This analysis delivers a narrative of the participants’ perceptions, lived experiences, and worldviews through a series of questions exploring sexual identity, the coming out process, Catholic religious beliefs, lived time, lived space, lived body, and lived human relation, and Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Bioecological Model of Development, all of which aligns with the study’s research questions.

Case-by-Case Narrative Analysis

This section provides a case-by-case narrative discussion of each interview that was conducted in this study. The interviews are organized and presented based on the first research question: *How do individuals who identify as a Catholic describe their coming out experiences?* Before each narrative, the participant’s number as well as their first name, age, and gender identify the participant whose narrative follows. After each participant’s narrative and the researcher’s summary, a figure of emerging themes is presented for each participant. Verdinelli & Scagnoli (2013) felt that, when utilizing a figure to display qualitative research data, a modified Venn diagram encompass and represents openness and mutual influence that each separate theme has on another, and displays shared aspects of a concept or theme. All eight participant narratives are followed by the researcher’s reflective narrative and summary, which are presented in order of participants, one through eight. The eight narratives are listed below:
Interview - Participant 1 - Kelly, 22, Female

Narrative

On the evening of December 15th, I met with Kelly on the campus of a university within the Western Pennsylvania area. Together, we went over the informed consent and she shared with me her own interest in the topic and her excitement to begin the interview. Kelly started the interview by proudly revealing that she currently identifies as Catholic and attends mass as much as she can. Kelly disclosed that she was a sophomore in a Catholic high school when she first realized she was attracted to females. “I only knew one other person in school who was [gay], so everyone kind of talked about it,” Kelly mentioned when describing her coming out process. Kelly did not come out and tell her parents about her sexual identity; she reported that her mother went through her phone and found out through text messages. She continued to live her life as a lesbian, with only her immediate family knowing. It was not until she was twenty years old when everyone around her knew she identified as lesbian. She said, “I didn’t want to tell people separately because that seemed like too much of a big deal,” so when Kelly was twenty years old, sitting in her family’s living room, she stated that she had an announcement. She reported being nervous leading up to her coming out, but felt inspired after watching her favorite TV show with a lesbian woman as the main character, who had also come out to her family.

She felt less open when it came to her Catholic religious identity influencing her coming out process, specifically around her Catholic friends in her church group. Kelly stated, “I was just more aware and nervous… if they were very open about their faith. I feel like, if people voice their faith more… they are the ones who are going to be more judgmental.” She then told a stimulating story about her experience on a southern Kentucky missionary trip with her church. Kelly mentioned having had “bad experiences” her first time going on the trip with other
individuals who, she reported, were conservative, and in an area of the country that is very conservative, as well. Disconnected from the outside world and from all electronic devices, people in her group still got the sense that “something big must have happened.” It was not until she got back into the church and was listening to the sermon of the priest that this became clear, when he announced the legalization of gay marriage. Kelly said, “When I heard that, I got really excited… sitting there.” She said her excitement was immediately taken away when the priest said, “So I guess they can just do whatever they want now, so we need to keep fighting the good fight.” Kelly said she was taken aback and shocked. Later, she made the decision “to be at peace with it at this point.”

After she discussed her coming out process to her family, she reflected back on the time leading up to the conversation with her parents. She shared her nervousness leading up to coming out, specifically in regard to her relationship with her parents and an argument she had with them prior to coming out, about “whether or not gay people should be allowed to marry.” She reflected on their differing opinions and how she felt she “…would have to come out for the rest of her life” to each person she or her family met. Kelly talked about conflicting beliefs within herself and how she feels identifying as lesbian, but also as Catholic. She describes herself as “having [had] a lot of trouble over the last few years” and as feeling paranoia regarding the authenticity of her friends supporting her coming out and her beliefs. She said she feels the effects of adversity: “I will always question myself in certain situations because all of these people are telling you that you are wrong.”

Kelly talked about how she has “had a lot of trouble with it over the last few years” in regards to how she feels about herself identifying as lesbian and Catholic. She also talked about her Kentucky trip and coming out to that group of friends ending up being the point where she
felt more “at peace with it.” She continued to struggle after that and discussed a relationship she was in for two years, but which she had to end due to her partner’s parents finding out their child was gay; Kelly stated, “They acted like it was the most horrible thing that could have ever happened to them.” The fall-out from this relationship caused Kelly to question if she “was doing the right thing,” and to feel as if: “Satan was tempting [me]; I started to wonder if I was a sin.” She reported this was how she viewed herself for a while, and that it was a “really bad” time.

As far as Kelly’s physical experience of her coming out process, she mentioned that she never felt attractions to men and feels “the idea that marriage is for a man and a woman is so archaic.” She reported that the only time she felt uncomfortable with herself was after she had “had sex for the first time and afterwards… felt kind of bad. I don’t know if that was because it was with a female or if it’s just because I did that for the first time.” She reported that now she is more comfortable with herself physically, rationalizing that, “I tell myself that I’m not the only one doing that, and so it’s not that big of a deal.”

Catholic beliefs are a large part of Kelly’s life; she reports that she feels supported by the Catholic Church, specifically in her relationship with God and the commandment of “love thy neighbor as yourself.” She also feels solace in that, “Jesus hung out with the worst of the worst people,” and attributes her strong Catholic beliefs to her support from the Catholic teachings. She went on to describe an instance at her local Catholic church near her hometown, which she felt was challenging. She talked about the time right after the Orlando shooting occurred, and how she was “expecting to hear some kind of prayer for it, just because it was the biggest mass shooting,” and the priest did not bring it up at all during mass. “I was most challenged because I thought we had come so far, and then they were still silent about it. That was tough.”
Kelly reflected on her most challenging part of coming out as someone who identifies as Catholic and Lesbian being the fact of her “not knowing how people [were] going to react,” and she went on to talk about the uncertainties and disappointments of her family’s acceptance of her relationships, and specifically how she has felt when her “sisters have new boyfriends, [and] they get bombarded with questions… I was ready for a lot of questions because that is how it goes… and no one asked anything.” Kelly said she tries not to make a big deal about it, because she is a private and quiet person and her family knows this; however, she did express the “weirdness” of the situation and reflected on her own feelings of disappointment regarding her family’s reaction; “I was fully preparing myself for questions… and feeling uncomfortable,” she said, but reports that no one asked her about her girlfriend.

Kelly mentioned she feels most supported by the friends she made at her undergraduate college. She reflected that they made her feel most at ease and lightened the mood when it came to her coming out: “just being there for me and encouraging me to do it.” The Catholic Church is who she does not feel supported by, she stated, in saying, “I think I am supported by the people within the Church…. but definitely not the actual Catholic Church.”

**Researcher’s Summary**

According to Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model of Development (1979), there were conflicting interpersonal relationships throughout her microsystem when it came to the coming out process. I noticed Kelly’s demeanor change when she was speaking about her relationship with her friends versus her relationship with her family prior to coming out, oscillating between feelings and expressions of support and struggle. Kelly stated that she had come out to her family and friends two years ago, and when reflecting back on her coming out process, she was primarily referring to the time just prior to and after coming out. Being that she recently came
out, two years ago, I feel her self-acceptance was not fully established, thus creating a heightened awareness and reflection of her own role within her family, friends, and church, or her microsystem.

Kelly also mentioned the lack of support she felt from the Catholic Church, another element in her microsystem. When referring to the Catholic Church and its lack of support, Kelly spoke to the idea that the institutional aspect of the Catholic Church is where she feels unsupported, but claimed she did feel some support from the members within the Catholic church who are open-minded and “who have different ideas” about the Catholic Church and its teachings. Kelly elaborated on the people within the Church who she feels are “less judgmental” and “more open-minded” as being members of the congregation who attend mass. I sensed that Kelly felt disappointed with the Catholic Church as an institution, and the rules and expectations from priests and those with a higher power to block the forward movement of LGBTQ individuals within the Catholic Church. I also heard hope in her voice, that there are practicing Catholics within the Church who are understanding and open-minded enough to support her as an LGBTQ identifying individual. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), the microsystem is the most influential ecological level, and I observed that Kelly’s story presented with some disconnect between her experiences with her friends coming out versus her own experience with her family, along with her lack of support from the Catholic Church.

When Kelly discussed her experience at the church in Kentucky on her field trip, her microsystem was fully active, with both friends and the church causing distress during this time. I noticed Kelly’s tone of voice and attitude changed from being upbeat and excited to sullen and truncated when reflecting on her “bad experiences” and feelings of “worthlessness” during this mission trip. Kelly’s experience challenges the norms of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) microsystem
in his bioecological model by illustrating conflicting views between her supportive factors within the microsystem.

**Figure 2.01: Participant 1 - Kelly - Emergent Themes**
Interview - Participant 2 - Michelle, Female, 43

Narrative

It was at the local Panera Bread, in a quiet corner near the back, where I met Michelle for this interview. Together, we went over the informed consent and began the interview. Michelle began by stating that she currently identifies as lesbian and is also a practicing Catholic. She described what it means to her to identify to be a lesbian and a Catholic, stating, “It’s been a very tough journey, something that in the past has always been very quiet, very not talked about.” Michelle described her coming out process; she came out for the first time when she was twenty-two years old. She reported that she “came out in community, and that was a really tough spot.” Michelle was planning to become a nun, and thus she was in community as preparation; she described community life as “a two year time when you are pretty much sequestered into prayer, self-reflection.” Community can be described as a time and place in which one lives while preparing for life as a Catholic sister or nun, sequestered into prayer and reflection after taking vows of poverty, obeisance, and chastity. She came out to herself in community at age twenty-two, realizing that “this is who I am, but it does not define me as who I am. It is part of me.” Michelle reflected on coming out to her family on her twenty-ninth birthday, when she was at her family home with friends. She recalled her mother asking her, “Are your friends gay?,” and she said, “Yes”. Her mother then asked, “Are you gay?” Michelle described having wanted to walk quickly to the door to avoid the question, but finally replied, “Yes”. She never did complete community to fully become a nun, but remains devout to the Catholic faith.

She mentioned the fact that she was so nervous about telling her family, but in the end, her mother said, “I have always thought so.” Michelle reflected on that conversation with her mother, when her mother told her, “I wish you would have come out sooner.” Michelle talked
during the interview about coming out being a “process… to even come to understand, because growing up… in the 70s, that is something you did not talk about.” She told her mother, “I had to be comfortable with myself in order to be comfortable to even tell you.”

Being an active and devout member of the Catholic Church, Michelle talked about her relationship with God, stating, “I believe that I was created in God’s image and likeness, and I believe I am made this way.” She feels her relationship with God is “a spousal relationship; God is God.” As for her friends, she said that, like her mother, “they all knew before me,” and she described them all as being very understanding and respectful of her religious values and her sexual identity. Michelle discussed how she relates carrying both identities in a world that, at times, is not always supportive. She beamed when discussing a fifteen-year relationship with her current partner, who supported her and her Catholic faith so much that she converted to Catholicism and they currently practice together. “We got together and just my influence of my Catholic faith kind of rubbed off on her, and she converted to be Catholic.”

When asked about her relationship with her own body, Michelle felt a strong physical experience, stating, “I was always taught and I believe, your body is a temple, and it’s sacred.” She shared her strong feelings regarding sex and the Catholic Church: “I truly believe that this is a part of me that I don’t just give to anybody. It is to somebody who I am committed to and want to be in a relationship with. So that, to me, is something that Catholicism has taught me… sex is sex. Love is something different.” Michelle stated that she feels this way “regardless of whether you choose a homosexual or heterosexual relationship.”

She continued to express her passionate values when discussing challenging and supportive teachings of the Catholic Church. Michelle mentioned that one challenge was the opinions of others towards the Catholic Church that influenced her own options as well, stating,
“some of the issues with priests and some sisters are coming out, and obviously the scandals… you mention you are gay or lesbian and everyone is on edge.” Michelle said that her faith and her community of nuns supported her during the coming out process, “reading scripture and attending mass.” She recalled a specific scripture that she felt embodied her belief, in the Song of Songs; this verse “does not mention any sex of the individual,” she said, and went on to elaborate upon the scripture mentioning the vulnerability of man in “resting his head on another man’s shoulder,” explaining that the gesture was not made to be sexual in nature, but showed a loving and supportive relationship. Michelle went on to say that there are “so many interpretations of the Bible,” and she has high hopes for the Catholic Church moving forward, and intrigue to where acceptance of LGBTQ identifying individuals will come into play.

Lastly, Michelle was asked about challenges and supports that she has felt as someone who identifies as both Catholic and lesbian. Michelle mentioned challenges first, saying she was very “fearful of the community. It was very strict and you never got too close.” She continued and discussed the strong bonds with other members of her community, and said that even though the bonds were strong, she felt judgment: “I felt that I could not be authentically who I was or am.” As far as factors that supported her, Michelle mentioned “open-minded people, open-minded sisters, [and] open-minded family” who were supportive. She revealed that her father was not in the picture: “I did not see my dad for over thirty-some years.” She also mentioned her mother, who welcomed her with phrases like, “If there is anything you ever need, you could always come home. You could always come home if it doesn’t work out.” Michelle ended the interview by expressing excitement and hope for not only herself, but also for LGBTQ individuals in the Catholic Church.
Researcher’s Summary

According to van Manen (1997), lived temporality suggests time experiences in the past, present, and future. In other words, it speaks of a past or personal history and where someone feels they are headed in their life, such as future goals or ideals. Michelle’s awareness of her sexual identity came at a time and space when she was in one of the most sacred and reflective experiences known for any religious figure, while she was in community. This time is crucial for any religious individual on their path to becoming a Catholic sister or nun, but for Michelle, it served as a time for her to explore and come to a decision regarding her true sexual identity. Her drive and dedication to her community shined through when discussing the process of this realization, and the resulting change of dynamic within her community and with her sisters. I observed Michelle speaking very highly and intently on this experience of being in community and coming out as a significant part of her sexual and religious identity. It almost seemed as if this rooted her in not only her religious identity, but also in self-acceptance of her sexual identity. Her past experiences, according to van Manen’s lived time and lived space (1997), shaped her future, and her past memories thus stick with her and influence how she experiences herself.

I listened to Michelle talk about many lived relations with not only her family members, but also her profound relationship with God, as she stated, “And that’s what God and me, that’s our relationship, is a spousal relationship, and not everybody gets that.” According to van Manen (1997), relationality is the space shared with others. Michelle’s narrative speaks to her relationship and the space she shares with God, which seems to be the foundation of her life. I noticed her genuineness, passion, and deep-rooted relationship with not only the Catholic Church, but also for God. Michelle exuded faith and hope for a strong relationship between
LGBTQ individuals and the Catholic Church so much so that I felt inspired and hopeful after this interview.

Lastly, it must be noted that this inspiration did not come without struggles for Michelle in her coming out process. When Michelle discussed her Catholic beliefs being challenged with the scandals in the Church, disappointment came through on her face. It did not seem as if she was disappointed in the Catholic Church, but in the priests and members of the Church who took vows to live their lives according to the values of the Catholic Church. I feel that Michelle identifying as a member of a religious community, at one point during her coming out process, changes her perspective on the Church from being an external perspective to an internal perspective. According to van Manen (1997), her internal perspective is attributed to her entering into community and to her once future goals of becoming a nun, whereas now her external perspective of the Catholic Church is skewed due to her time spent within community and her understanding of the inner workings of the Catholic Church and the religious figures who are the face of the Catholic Church.
Figure 3.01: Participant 2 - Michelle - Emergent Themes

Self-Acceptance

Relationship with God

Ambivalence

Support by Church

Foundation of Beliefs

Support from Family

Commandment: Love thy Neighbor

Michelle

Support from Family

Commandment: Love thy Neighbor

Ambivalence

Support by Church

Foundation of Beliefs

Support from Family

Commandment: Love thy Neighbor

Michelle

Support from Family

Commandment: Love thy Neighbor

Ambivalence

Support by Church

Foundation of Beliefs

Support from Family

Commandment: Love thy Neighbor

Michelle
Interview - Participant 3 - Adriane, Female, 36

Narrative

After the New Year, I met with Adriane for a FaceTime interview. Prior to the interview, I emailed her the consent form and went over it with her. She signed the form and returned it via email. Adriane stated that she currently identifies as lesbian and Catholic, but is not currently practicing. She mentioned that growing up rooted in the Catholic faith and traditions gave her the outlook to “love one another,” as she identifies as both lesbian and Catholic. When asked about her coming out process, Adriane described the process as: “more or less a battle between my parents not accepting me, and me defying their rules as a teenager.”

She went on to reflect about her coming out process when she came out to herself as a high school student, having felt attracted to females since she was 15 years old. She did not realize at the time that the issue was not that her parents were against her sexual identity, but more so her behavior as a teenage girl. She recalled a few instances where she butted heads with her parents’ views of how she was behaving, one of them regarding her first homosexual relationship. Her parents were against her bringing her girlfriend home, telling her, “We do not want that in our house; you need to respect our house and our property,” and then continued with “You are lying to us; you want to be with her, but are not telling us.” Adriane described her teenage years as “contradictory,” when one minute her parents would be “putting Bible verses on my door saying to love one another, but… not allowing me to love who I want to love.” Looking back, Adriane agreed with her parents that, at sixteen years old, she should not have been engaging in relationships as she did, regardless of whether they were with a male or female. She also expressed that: “my mother and I have never been extremely close as far as [me] telling her everything; I have always been closer with my dad than with my mom.”
Adriane revealed another instance where she felt her parents “tried to make [her] life miserable.” She described her mother: “going as far as throwing out anything that was rainbow that I had owned. I got this rainbow vest at Goodwill; it wasn’t a rainbow vest, just a vest with four colors, and my mom threw it in the garbage.” After this experience, Adriane talked about how she began to skip school and hang out with girlfriends until her parents said, “You are spinning out of control as a teenager,” and sent her to her grandmother’s house for the weekend so they could “figure out what they were going to do.” She reflected on this experience, saying that she saw “it as a gay thing, but they probably saw it as a delinquent teenager thing.” Adriane felt her parents: “hated me because I’m gay: they don’t want to accept me, they don’t want me to be happy.” Looking back, she does not blame them because she says she “shouldn’t have been doing these teenager things in the first place, regardless of [her] sexual identity.”

Adriane mentioned that her identity describes that the coming out process is like: “you have to keep coming out all the time. I wish people would just know me.” She gave an example of this: “I have a new boss who wants to go to dinner with me, and he’s like ‘please bring a guest,’ and I’m thinking, well now I have to say, ‘oh, this is my wife’. I am not embarrassed about it, but it’s just like you constantly have to keep coming out and [you] never know how people are going to react.”

When asked about her coming out process influencing relationships with core people in her life, Adriane cited her relationship with her grandmother, who is “the most religious person in my life,” and spoke about when she told her she’d gotten engaged. She described her hesitation and uncertainty in telling her due to not knowing how she would react. After telling her they were engaged, though, her grandmother responded with, “Oh, well. I love you and I love her and God will always be number one.” Adriane thought, “I didn’t see that as negative,
and to me, it was almost like her approval and her saying, ‘I love you, and I love God’.” She mentioned that her relationships with her extended family—aunts, uncles, and cousins—grew closer, but her parents “are whom [she] grew the furthest away from.” As for her relationship with God, she felt that “God has made everybody and if God didn’t create you, he would have loved you. I feel like there are other things we could blame God for… and being gay isn’t one of them.” She also noted that “nobody chooses to be gay, nobody chooses to be different.”

Adriane talked about her physical surroundings of coming out as: “it probably brought me places that I shouldn’t have been going, like bars or people’s houses that were having parties, but that was just because that’s who I associated with… I continued to go to church, and I continued to go to Catholic school; I never really saw a separation.” Adriane elaborated on how she relates to herself with her Catholic and lesbian identities as saying: “I knew my faith before I really knew much about myself. I think that because it was my foundation from as early as I can remember.”

She disregards the “negative remarks” about the Catholic Church’s view on gay marriage, and specifically when asked about Catholic beliefs, teachings that she felt challenged or supported her during her coming out process, she began with challenging aspects of Catholic beliefs stating the Ten Commandments and the “perspective of other people wanting to say, ‘well, what you’re doing is wrong,’ but they are not the judge; we all know who the judge is and we all face the same judge, who says to love one another and be kind to your neighbor.” Adriane said she feels that the “golden rule is [to] love your neighbor as yourself, and [asks] why are people not doing that?” She feels that it’s a challenge when others do not hold true to their beliefs from the Catholic Church, thus parishioners seem judgmental.
Adriane mentioned reciprocity in relation to what was challenging and supportive during her coming out process. She mentioned the individuals who show respect, and how she feels that “if I show kindness, and if I show respect, and if I do what’s right, then I can lead by example.” She felt that it was hard to “overcome beliefs that my grandmother has held about the Catholic Church for years” from older generations and “perspectives of people in general. God creates everyone in His likeness, but I don’t know what that likeness is. We can only look around us and assume.” She talked more about the challenge, which lies within others and their beliefs within the Catholic faith that do not align with her sexual identity. Lastly, Adriane talked about supportive factors during her coming out process being “opportunities to be involved” within the Church and within her Catholic high school. She attributed these opportunities to be involved in the Catholic Church as well as explore her faith as the “Catholic environment gives opportunities to be your own person, lead by example.”

**Researcher’s Summary**

According to Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model of Development (1979) and its systems, Adriane has many relational conflicts and supports as mentioned throughout her interview, impacting her microsystem and mesosystems. Adriane spoke to her family’s core Catholic beliefs and her relationship with her family and the Catholic Church. Bronfenbrenner’s model would show disparity in Adriane’s mesosystem between her role in her Catholic family, her role in the Catholic Church, and her sexual identity. Adriane’s vast insight into her coming out process and her ability to reflect back now—on what she saw then as her parents not agreeing with her sexual identity—to recognize her behaviors were more of a concern. I noticed her constant reflection and questioning of her parents’ opinions throughout the interview, which really helped me to understand her coming out process. I also noticed Adriane having a stronger
connection and belief system with her religious identity than with her sexual identity during her coming out process. She showed that her strength and commitment to the Catholic faith during her coming out process was a source of support and determination.

Adriane talked about the feeling of having to keep coming out to individuals who do not know her, and other participants’ and their stories reflected the same idea. She also mentioned that being gay is not a choice, which is reflected in all of the interviewees’ narratives regarding identifying as LGBTQ and it not being an identity that one would choose. I felt Adriane’s respectful demeanor as a person who identifies as LGBTQ as well as Catholic, although she is not actively attending church. She embodies and lives by the values of the Catholic faith throughout her daily life and in all of her relationships, including those with family, friends, and God. Lastly, Adriane’s relationship with her grandmother was most apparent throughout the interview. I sensed the bond and connection throughout her narrative, as well as the determination she has to feel accepted by her grandmother.
Figure 4.01: Participant 3 – Adriane - Emergent Themes

- Self-Acceptance
- Relationship with God
- Ambivalence
- Having Children
- Commandment: Love thy Neighbor
- Foundation of Beliefs
- Lack of Support by Family
- Having no Choice

Adriane
Interview - Participant 4- Mara, Female, 55

Narrative

Right before the New Year, I met with Mara for a FaceTime interview. Prior to the interview, I emailed her the consent form and went over it with Mara. She signed the form and returned it via email. Mara stated that she currently identifies as lesbian as well as Catholic, although she “does not agree with their rules.” She discussed what it means to her to have both identities and reflected that she “feels torn.” She elaborated on this emotion with a story about a homily she heard in church when the priest talked about: “one man, one woman in marriage, and I remember just sitting there thinking, are you kidding me? I thought we have come a little further than this. And then I just felt like getting up and going home, but I thought, ‘no, don’t do that.’ I stuck it out, but felt really disappointed.”

Mara described her coming out process, talking about coming out to herself at twenty-one years old, when she was living at home with her parents. She stated, “I lived a lie for 15 years; that was the 80s [and] no one was coming out then, especially being an only child in an Italian family.” It was not until she was thirty-six years old when she came out to her mother. She described the moment as: “I was at Eat’n Park with my mother; we were talking about my new apartment that I had just moved into, and my mother said to me, ‘You are going to be living in your studio, right?’ and I said, ‘Well yeah, Mom, that’s what it’s there for.’ She then asked me, ‘You’re not going to be living with Sue, are you?’” Mara stated that Sue was her girlfriend at this time, but her mother knew her as her friend. Mara continued and said, “‘No, Mom, I am going to be living in my own apartment.’ After a long pause, my mom asked, ‘Is Sue gay?’ I was mortified. I did not want to answer the question and my mom asked me again, ‘Is Sue gay?’ I remember standing up in the booth, and said, ‘Yes, Sue’s gay.’ My mom then asked, ‘Are you
I finally stood up to my mother and said, ‘Yes, I am gay.’ My mother could not believe it—she thought I was kidding and continued to argue with me; she did not talk to me for months, [and] it was a mess.” Mara said she remembered “crying [her] heart out” after leaving Eat’n Park, and recalled, “One of the meanest things my mother ever said to me was, ‘Maybe this is God’s way of telling me you weren’t meant to be.’” She here references the fact that her mother had a difficult time getting pregnant with her, but continued to try.

Mara said her Catholic beliefs “absolutely” influenced her coming out process, commenting further: “I was never going to come out. I waited until my dad died. My mom told me she wished I came out to her while my dad was still alive so she would have someone to talk to.” Mara said she “never had a problem coming out to other people,” referencing her relationships with her friends when she was coming out. She mentioned one friend in particular, who was her best friend in high school. Mara said, “She was getting married but never asked me to be in her wedding; this was so weird. Later on, I reconnected with her and asked why she didn’t have me in her wedding, and her response was, ‘Mare, you were gay.’” Mara reflected on her anger, shock, and disappointment over this moment, and her relationship with her friend. As for her relationship with God, Mara said, “I believe God loves me no matter what. I don’t care what the Bible tells me, that I am going to hell; I do not feel like that.”

When discussing the influence of her surroundings during her coming out process, Mara mentioned that going to church, and specifically communion, would: “make me feel weird, but it never stopped me from going to communion.” She said where she felt the most different was at home with her mother; she described it as “hell”. Mara described a story about her coming home after having had sex with her girlfriend for the first time, and remembered thinking: “I felt like a whole different person, I feel so different. My mom said she made cupcakes for me that was on
the table, and I could never look at them the same. I remember thinking, ‘if my mom finds out, she is going to be so disappointed.’” Mara never felt the same, hence why she waited 15 years to come out to her mother after this night. As far as social changes in places Mara frequented Mara recalled “going to gay bars and clubs more, but back then that was a part of how it was, not really a gay thing.”

When asked about her physical experience of identifying as both lesbian and Catholic, Mara discussed her inability to have a biological child at her current age stating, “I could kick myself in the ass for not having a kid when I could have, because I know I would have raised a fine little human being.” She placed blame, inadvertently, on the Catholic Church as one of the biggest influences on why she never had a child, and stated, “That makes me sad, [and] it kind of pisses me off, but I don’t know; I don’t know.” She went on to discuss her physical attraction to females, saying, “I’ve never gotten those butterflies in my stomach for a man, ever. I had a beautiful fiancée who was a man, but never had the butterflies. I have only had the butterflies with women.”

Lastly, Mara was asked about her challenges during the coming out process to her family, friends, and the Catholic Church. She recalled one specific instance where she was at a wedding with her parents and “the groom’s sister in the wedding was obviously gay; she had spikey hair and a tux on. When we got into the car, my dad said, ‘I don’t know, they didn’t raise her right,’ and I remember saying out loud that they raised her just fine. My mother or father did not speak to me the rest of the car ride home.”
Researcher’s Summary

According to van Manen (1997), lived experiences, and specifically lived body, holds the meaning that we are always bodily within the world, existing within the body and with the body. Throughout the interview, I felt Mara’s emotional connection through her stories and experiences. When listening to her describe her coming out process and the detailed story of her sitting at Eat’n Park with her mother, I felt as much shock and anger as Mara expressed in the situation. When her mother asked her if she was gay in the booth at Eat’n Park, I was dumbfounded that someone’s mother would ask a question like that in such a direct way and in a public place. Mara went on to discuss her mother’s questioning of her ability to have grandchildren, given that she was gay. Mara mentioned that she told her mother that she would be able to have children, and her mother said, “Don’t you dare bring a child into that lifestyle.” My heart reached out for Mara, the 36-year-old sitting in that booth at Eat’n Park, feeling rejected by her own mother after coming out. The idea of bringing children into a gay or lesbian lifestyle, which is not accepted by the Catholic Church, was brought up within other interviews, as well. Mara felt that her family’s values surrounding her lesbian lifestyle, as well as the Catholic Church, held her back from having children at an earlier age, and seemed to have some regret about not having children years ago.

Mara was faced with a lot of adversity when coming out, not only from her mother and father’s beliefs and opinions on LGBTQ individuals, but from her friends, as well. Expressing that she had limited supports during her coming out process, Mara acknowledged that her self-awareness and determination were her sole supports during this time in her life. Throughout this interview, hearing Mara’s lived experience, I could see how her determination shined through and helped her get to where she is today. Mara recognized how the opinions of others,
specifically in church, impacted her when she discussed her experience going to communion. Mara recalled, “I’d get up and go to communion, and I could feel all the eyes on me,” referencing her sexual identity as a reason for her to not be receiving the sacrament of communion.

Van Manen’s (1997) concept of the lived body mentions that, depending on how we feel about someone; our view of them may become distorted. Mara expressed that she “never had the choice to have feelings for men; she only had the butterflies for women,” reiterating and concurring with other interviewees’ beliefs that identifying as LGBTQ is not a choice. In Mara’s life, her family and friends’ opinions or feelings changed towards her when she came out to them, but this never deterred Mara from living her life to the fullest, which is something that I picked up on throughout her interview.

Lastly, Mara described her regret over not having a child when she was younger. Having that option taken away, as voiced by her mother and due to her sexual identity, was hurtful. Mara reflected on her own experience and physical ability to have a child as a lesbian woman, but placed some blame on the Catholic Church. I was surprised at where she placed this portion of blame, as she seemed to have been supported by the Church, but having the Catholic faith be so against this “lifestyle,” and having the belief that marriage is for a woman and a man to procreate, changed Mara’s view towards her own body, creating dissonance. I felt her disappointment and regret when she spoke about this issue, but also heard hope for the future in her voice.
Figure 5.01: Participant 4 – Mara - Emergent Themes

- Self-Acceptance
- Fear
- Homelessness
- Relationship with God
- Ambivalence
- Having Children
- Foundation of Beliefs
- Secrecy
- Receiving Communion
- Lack of Support by Family
- Lack of Support by Church
- Having no Choice
- Having no Choice
- Having no Choice
Interview - Participant 5 - Nickolas, Male, 31

Narrative

On a Friday evening, I met Nickolas at his home to complete the interview. I provided him with the informed consent and we went over it together before he signed it and we began the interview. When asked what it means to him to have both his sexual identity as a gay man and his Catholic identity, Nickolas described it as a: “conflicting thing because, growing up Catholic, there were very rigid rules around how you had to be and who you were, and being gay didn’t fit with that.” When discussing his coming out process, Nickolas credited the internet with his knowing what being gay was; he said, “I would look stuff up online, go[ing] into chat rooms and talk[ing] to people.” He said he came out to himself around twelve years old and ended up coming out to his mother at age fourteen. He mentioned that his mother was “confused and didn’t know what to say; she was also worried about my safety.” He elaborated about what “safety” meant, saying that this mother was worried “he would get HIV and die.” After coming out to his mother, Nickolas felt “she was very standoffish for a very long time; it was almost like the family secret.”

Moving into how his Catholic religious beliefs influenced his coming out process, Nickolas described the connection as “an internal struggle,” saying, “my family is not okay with it because of our religious beliefs, but I am gay.” He mentioned that he was “not a very religious person to begin with, but wanted to hold onto that part of me to still be connected to my family and these cultural traditions of going to Catholic Church, and I did not want to be outside of that.” As Nickolas struggled to hold onto his Catholic faith through his family, he felt as if he had to compartmentalize his life when around his family. “I really never brought anybody over to meet my family as my boyfriend; even now, I have been in a relationship for about three years
now and I just started feeling comfortable bringing my partner to my family home.” He continued to say that, although he considers his partner his boyfriend, he has never said to his family, “this is my partner or this is my boyfriend.” Throughout his interview, Nickolas expressed themes of secrecy and hiddenness regarding his family towards his sexual identity.

Nickolas talked about his coming out process and the influence his identities had on core relationships in his life, starting with his family: “I felt like I had to keep a boundary between myself and everyone else, mostly because I was worried they would leave or disown me.” Nickolas mentioned that he always had this “exit plan” in the back of his mind, which led to “his overall independence and self-efficacy” due to the idea that his family could “change their minds at any minute” and he would have nowhere to go, and he could not live with the thought that he could be homeless, so he needed to “be able to do everything on my own If I had to.”

Nickolas’ relationship with the Catholic Church, now, is “conflicting.” He agrees that, when he was younger, he received all of the sacraments and attended church with his grandparents. Today, he recalls when he came out; he started “questioning everything, like why do bad things happen to good people? I started questioning the idea of a God and researched more religions to see what they had to say. It was a blessing, being able to step back a little from the idea of God and Catholicism in order to sort out myself.” Nickolas does not negate his background and growing up in the Catholic Church, but he feels he has the privilege now to “be open-minded” and explore the meaning of religion.

Nickolas reflected on the influence of his surroundings on his decision to come out. He did mention that he had not been to church since he was sixteen, but “does not know how much that is connected to coming out, but it was definitely a part of it.” He did mention that he attended a Catholic wedding recently and felt as if it was “a big joke; we were the gay guys there
in a Catholic church.” Nickolas summed up the experience by expressing ambivalence in relation to his returning to or attending Catholic mass: “I don’t necessarily avoid going into churches, but I am not pursuing it either.” He mentioned that he felt drawn to or had a sense of “safety in going to gay bars, which really turned into the gay church.” He continued, “I always felt safe—there was this sense of freedom, knowing while you were there, you wouldn’t be judged my family members, judged by friends, or judged by people in the community.” He clarified by saying that these experiences occurred when he lived abroad, whereas with gay bars near his family home, he felt as if he “can’t go there; someone will see me and it will get back to my family.”

In relating both sexual and religious identity to himself, Nickolas recalled, “I was always curious about sexuality, but I did feel like it’s something that I had to hide.” He reported he never really felt a connection in relating to a religious identity; once he came out, it was “more of a disconnection of I am gay and I am Catholic, but how do they mingle together?” The idea that Nickolas describes is a disconnect of religious and sexual identities, which was brought up in other interviewees’ lived experiences, as well. When describing his relationship with his own body during the coming out process, in a way suggesting a physical experience, similar to other interviewees’ experiences, Nickolas mentioned that he “always thought being gay was not a choice.” He questioned his intentions of being gay by stating, “I could just go and get married, get a woman pregnant, and have a family and be normal in the eyes of the Church. Be right with God. But that just never sounded like a happy life for me.”

Nickolas talked about the challenges and supports he has faced during his coming out process, these including receiving the sacraments, and specifically communion. He reflected back to attending a Catholic wedding, and “having to make a split second decision to get up for
communion, or to remain seated. I always think, ‘I can’t go up there and receive communion because I am gay, and that’s not okay in the Catholic Church.’” Nickolas talked about support from Catholic beliefs during the coming out process, which he credits to “the confirmation process and having to choose a saint to be confirmed after. That was super cool because it was with my grandma; she was so excited about it and [it was] such a big deal for me.”

Lastly, Nickolas discussed the challenges and supports of identifying as a gay man and as a Catholic. He mentioned, “internalized homophobia feelings, internalizing that God hates me, [and the question of] why am I on this earth was the biggest challenge. It brought on a bout of depression and I had no self-worth. Coming to terms with myself to achieve some self-acceptance was the most challenging part.” As far as supports, Nickolas attributes “a close group of friends” as being very helpful, this group mostly including friends who do not identify as Catholic or are not religious at all. “Later on, I met friends who… identified as Catholic, and I felt included and supported by them, too.”

**Researcher’s Summary**

Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model of Development (1979) describes four systems that provide meaning for environmental influences on an individual. Nickolas mentions many conflicts within his systems throughout his interview. First and foremost, there are the struggles between his own sexual identity and his family’s religious beliefs. This system directly impacts the individual as well as their development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Nickolas mentioned the strain in the relationship between him and his mother after coming out, and still to this day, his hesitance to bring his partner to his family home. I felt the uncomfortable tension Nickolas was referencing when he began reflecting on his family’s acceptance of his sexual identity. The feeling of being disowned is a direct threat to his mesosystem, according to Bronfenbrenner. He
spoke to the notion of needing financial and emotional independence prior to coming out, due to his worry that his family would disown him, which was echoed by many other interviewees’ experiences during their coming out process, as well. Ambivalence was evident throughout the interview, specifically when Nickolas mentioned his hesitance to bring boyfriends over to his grandparents’ house, or introduce one as his boyfriend or partner. He also alluded to the idea of his being hesitant to return to the Catholic Church, particularly due to his feelings while at mass and while receiving communion. The experience Nickolas mentioned regarding receiving communion during Catholic mass also resonated within the experiences of other interviewees. He expressed feelings of relief when mentioning that he “was glad to be able to take a step back from the Catholic Church” and truly explore his role within the Catholic faith, now identifying as a gay man.

There is also conflict within the exosystem, being that Nickolas mentioned he felt uncomfortable and judged when receiving the sacrament of communion in the Catholic Church due to his sexual identity. When he mentioned he felt as if he was the “big joke,” I felt myself experiencing disconnect from the Catholic faith, as did Nickolas, and understanding his hesitation to attend mass and be involved within the Catholic Church. I heard the uncertainty in Nickolas’ voice when talking about his relationship with the Catholic Church and it seemed as if he is in no rush to be active in the Catholic Church at this time.

Nickolas spoke to the camaraderie he felt when visiting gay bars and clubs that were outside of his hometown. His face lit up with excitement when describing his feelings of inclusiveness and support from individuals who identify with him. Nickolas also mentioned that he felt as if he needed to choose between his religious identity and his sexual identity in order to be a member of our society—something that was also brought up in other interviewees’
experiences regarding having to abandon one identity for the other. The idea that someone would have to choose between two core identities goes against Bronfenbrenner’s ideals of having fluidity within all systems in his model. Lastly, Nickolas spoke to the idea that being gay is not a choice, something that he felt he questioned growing up, which was also something reflected in other interviewees’ experiences during their coming out process. I noticed determination in his voice throughout the interview, however it was not to be outshined by hesitancy and questioning when he mentioned the conflict between his religious and sexual identities during his coming out process and even in his life today.
Figure 6.01: Participant 5 – Nickolas - Emergent Themes
Interview - Participant 6 - Jonathon, Male, 28

Narrative

I met with Jonathon after the New Year for a FaceTime interview. I had emailed him the consent form and we went over the document together prior to beginning the interview. Jonathon signed the form and emailed it back, and the interview began. Jonathon began by describing what identifying as a gay man and as a Catholic means to him, stating, “I feel like it is a place of contradiction.” He also revealed he does not currently identify as Catholic, but did grow up in a family which practiced Catholicism. When asked to describe his coming out process, Jonathon revealed that he “knew his parents knew, but just didn’t come out. Every parent of a gay child knows.” He reflected that he felt his “parents tried every way that they could to make me feel comfortable to come out; they would always let me know they were watching Brokeback Mountain and I should watch with them.” He did mention his coming out to his dad: “when my dad was on his death bed. I came home for the weekend and was sitting with him alone and I ended up telling him then and there. He wasn’t super responsive, but I got the feeling he understood what I was saying. He passed away a couple days later.” Coming out to his mother happened around the same time; Jonathon mentioned that, “I asked my mom after the funeral if she knew who Chris was today, and she said, ‘Yeah, your boyfriend,’ and that was kind of it. Jonathon mentioned that he “came out to himself years before [he] fully came out to everybody else. There is something to be said about the length of time it takes and what someone should do internally to be comfortable with themselves first.”

Jonathon discussed the influence of his Catholic religious identity on his coming out process, and stated, “I grew up in the Church; I was pretty involved and ended up becoming a peer minister. I was coming to terms with my sexuality; I realized I couldn’t be both at the same
time. I very much know, when I am at church, I can’t really be gay.” Jonathon continued by saying, “I just didn’t feel comfortable being out and proud in the church.” He reiterated that he feels he has to compartmentalize his life when at church, and stated, “I feel a tremendous amount of guilt because I am Catholic.”

When discussing how his coming out process influenced relationships with core people in his life, Jonathon reflected that, “My family was pretty Catholic, but were also very accepting of me and also gay people, so that was a difficult thing. Still today, I feel hesitation to be as open or be as close with some people just because I don’t know what their feelings are.” As far as his relationship with God, Jonathon said, “I spent 18 plus years believing in God and the Catholic Church; I can’t just turn that off right away.” He feels that there was a lot of “conflict” with some of his friends who are devout Catholics and that they “carry a lot of Catholic beliefs, where their church said I can’t be who I want to be.”

Jonathon talked about his experience of his surroundings during his coming out process, and he mentioned the biggest change he saw was in moving to the big city versus being in his hometown in the suburbs, stating, “I was drawn to the city, and I knew I wanted to move there and, being gay, I was even more drawn to the city of San Francisco. It felt like a place I could really be who I wanted to be. I did not feel comfortable holding my boyfriend’s hand, walking down the street in my hometown, but in San Francisco, they have more open energy and make me feel comfortable.” Jonathon felt he had to compartmentalize his life while in his hometown, but did not feel that way living in the big city. He attributed being drawn to gay bars and that lifestyle as it “being a whole new world for me that I never engaged with, and with San Francisco and their rich, queer history, I wanted to be a part of that scene.”
When asked about how he relates his religious and sexual identities, Jonathon stated, “I go back to the guilt, not just growing up Catholic but Asian.” He continued to discuss his feelings of questioning and constant struggle between the sentiments of “I shouldn’t be doing this, but then I ask myself, why am I feeling this way?” Johnathon talked about the coming out process also, and suggesting a physical experience, he said, “I feel like the identities can’t coexist, within one person at least. I have sex that is not for procreation and I am okay with that, although the Catholic Church is not. I feel I am a pretty sex positive person, regardless of my Catholic upbringing; the guilt around that kind of went away.” He also reflected that, when he was twenty years old and coming out, he felt himself “not wanting to engage in certain sexual acts and not wanting to because it was wrong in my head.”

Jonathon debated about Catholic teachings and practices that were supportive or challenging during his coming out process. He felt he: “struggled with my Catholic upbringing. One of the Catholic beliefs that supported me the most was this idea of loving thy neighbor and supporting each other in that way.” The Catholic teaching Jonathon mentioned about loving your neighbor as yourself aligns with other interviewees’ examples of how they felt support through the Catholic Church, as well. He attributed “everything else Catholic” to being challenging. He went on to talk about the idea of “marriage and having a relationship that is devalued and invalidated through the eyes of the Church. It is as simple as going to a Catholic wedding was challeng[ing], because [I feel] ‘I can’t go there, and why would I want to do that?’” Jonathon continued to discuss challenging aspects of his coming out process in relation to his parents being “the last people [he] came out to,” saying, “My sister and friends, I came out with them early on, but I held onto not telling my parents due to the conversation of being Catholic and gay.”
Researcher’s Summary

Van Manen’s (1997) lived temporality plays a large role in Jonathon’s coming out process. Jonathon came out to his father when his father was on his death bed, not having much time left to live. Van Manen (1997) suggests that *lived time* is our way as human beings to be oriented in the world. Jonathon’s timing in coming out to his father is a core memory from during his coming out process. He mentioned that he spent eighteen years believing in God and having a relationship with him, and that he “can’t just turn that off.” Van Manen (1997) suggests the temporal dimensions of the past influence their present. Jonathon’s Catholic belief was strong for eighteen years; I can see how it would be difficult for him to denounce his religious beliefs in favor of his sexual identity. I heard the conflict within Jonathon’s voice when he was talking about the church and how he felt “he couldn’t be gay” within the church.

Van Manen’s (1997) *lived body* suggests that we physically reveal something about ourselves and hide something at the same time. Jonathon spoke to his identities not being able to coexist within one person, referencing his religious and sexual identities. I felt disconnect in Jonathon’s voice and his story regarding his identities not coming together in a natural way. He expressed no hesitation in a physical sense regarding the “Catholic guilt” surrounding sex before marriage, and I did not sense any Catholic guilt today, but Jonathon suggested that he had felt it in the past.

Van Manen’s (1997) *lived space* is felt space in one’s day to day existence. Jonathon spoke to his feelings of judgement in his suburban hometown, mentioning that he did not feel comfortable being outwardly gay in the community, such as with gestures such as holding hands. He made the decision to move to San Francisco, a progressive city for the LGBTQ community. I noticed excitement in his voice when he was talking about the vast differences between the
acceptance in his hometown and the acceptance he feels living in San Francisco. He experienced a sense of “lossness” living in his hometown, but was able to find meaning in his gay identity in the big city.

Figure 7.01: Participant 6 – Jonathon - Emergent Themes
Interview - Participant 7 - Brendan, Male, 23

Narrative

Right before the holiday, I met with Brendan in a private room at Panera Bread. I provided him the consent form and we went over the document together prior to beginning the interview. Brendan was in agreement with the interview and signed the consent form. Brendan began the interview by talking about what it means to him to identify as a gay man as well as Catholic. He reported that now “he is proud to be gay, but before it was scary.” He reports he grew up Catholic and saw the “loving side and how warm and welcoming it is, and then pretty much as soon as I came out, that was like a switch.” He reiterated the feeling of it being a “disconnect, [which] means a lot of disappointment, kind of like wishing that things were different. Frustration, and then [it] eventually got to a point where it’s just kind of realizing they are not going to change, and I cannot make them change, so I have to just live my life.”

When describing his coming out process, Brendan talked about “knowing I was gay for a long time, but did not admit to myself that I was gay until I was 17.” He recalled having a girlfriend at the time when he came out to himself, and began realizing, “when things got more physically intimate, I was not into it, so I broke it off with her because I did not want to hurt her.” He elaborated on his coming out process by saying, “I first came out to a couple of my close friends, because I knew one of my best friends was gay. I came out as bisexual at first. I kind of got over that very quickly and then I just said to myself, I am just gay.” He continued to talk about his coming out process to his parents, saying, “I did not plan to come out to my parents until I was financially independent. I also suffer from depression, and I noticed it getting worse around this time. I came out to my parents due to my depression; I was very down, secretly dating guys and just not in a good place.” He continued and said that his girlfriend was
concerned with him killing himself, and she told her parents, who in turn told his parents. He said, “My parents sat on this information for two weeks, not really knowing what to do with it. Then my dad finally confronted me about this because he was so worried. I didn’t even think about this happening, because I had planned for this in the future. They weren’t not accepting, but didn’t know how to react.” Brendan went on to talk about how his girlfriend outted him to his parents and the impact of their strong Catholic beliefs surrounding this situation.

Brendan talked about how his identification as Catholic influenced his coming out process, saying, “My parents were never anti-gay; they just never thought this would be a problem.” He feels that “being gay and Catholic kind of don’t vibe. Not because of anti-gay language, but there was more pro-straight, pro-heteronormative expectations. You get married; you wait for sex until marriage, get married to a woman, and have children. I guess I was just scared of the unknown if I did come out.” The idea of financial independence came back up, as his family’s Catholic faith is very strong; Brendan was worried that he would be “homeless. I cannot afford to live on my own.” He recalled, “I made the decision to wait to come out because of the financial piece; I would have been devastated if they rejected me because of my sexual orientation.”

Brendan discussed how his core relationships with his family, friends, and God were influenced during his coming out process. He talked to his parents, but not knowing how to reconcile with being gay, not sure, “if they should try and fix me, or change themselves. It was a harder discussion to help them understand than anything else. I had a lot of anger towards them just because they did now know. I couldn’t do anything to make them accept me, but they kind of made the choice that we love our son and we want to have him in our lives, and we need to be the ones that change.” He reflected that he had seen the amount of “soul searching” his parents
did to change. As far as his two older sisters, Brendan did not come out to them; he said his mother talked with them about his sexual identity. As far as his extended family, Brendan reports that his parents “act like a shield to other family members. Nothing really changed with my relationship with extended family; we just don’t talk about it.” As far as his relationship with God, Brendan described it as: “God is your friend, He is your father, and that’s my relationship with Him. I know He loves me, and I love Him. Nothing really changed there. I feel this is how He made me, and He was okay with that.” This same idea of God being the creator of all resonated within other interviewees’ experiences, as well. Like Brendan, they felt strongly that their own relationship with God was strong and impenetrable, regardless of the outside influences or perspectives on their relationship with God or their identities.

Brendan talked about places he feels that he was drawn to or wanted to avoid during his coming out process, and he mentioned the sacrament of reconciliation and “talking to priests. I avoid that because I feel like I get lectured and they are trying to fix me.” He talked about avoiding going to places where people did not know him because: “I just did not tell a lot of people in my life. I avoided places where I felt that me being gay could be brought up.” When asked about how his identities influence the way he feels about himself, he reiterated, “I feel great about myself. I love being gay. I don’t feel bad about myself because I’m right with God and I’m right with myself.” When asked about the physical experience that the coming out process suggests, Brendan stated, “I do not have a lot of guilt. I am not celibate. I don’t have guilt about being sexually active; it’s part of my life and I am going to live my life.”

Brendan reflected on Catholic teachings or practices that he felt supported by or challenged by during his coming out process, and he mentioned that the challenging part was the “belief that it’s a sin to be gay. I don’t feel like being gay is a sin, [so] how do I accept an
institution that believes my sexual orientation is a sin?” He reiterated that he does not feel supported by the Catholic Church, and he said there is nothing that he feels says, “We’re here for you. We’re here for you coming out.”

Lastly, when asked about the most difficult or challenging part of coming out as a gay man who identifies as Catholic, Brendan immediately said, “My parents. I did not know how this relationship with them would work out, because it did not look like it would work out for a while. The most difficult part was [that] it was not my choice [for them] to accept me, and I couldn’t make that choice for my parents.” The factor that Brendan felt was supportive of him during his coming out process was: “My own relationship with God.” He also reported that his friends were supportive and included his relationship with his parents as an eventual support because he has “a better relationship with them now.”

**Researcher’s Summary**

Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model of Development (1979) describes four systems that make up and impact an individual’s environment. Brendan experienced conflict within all four levels throughout his coming out process. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), the microsystem is made up of groups directly impacting the individual. Brendan discussed his coming out process to his family as “fearful,” as he put off coming out due to the fact that he could be homeless if his family rejected him. This idea of needing financial independence was echoed by other interviewees as a reason to keep their sexual identity concealed, due to their not being financially independent and risking their family’s rejection. The fear of homelessness resonated with other interviewees along with Brendan, all of whom came out to themselves as a teenager living in their family home.
I noticed hesitation in Brendan’s voice when he described the way he was “outed” by his friend due to her concern with his depression. The impact of the microsystem occurred with his parents needing time to process and think about what had just transpired. Brendan’s uncertainty and inability to find his own self-acceptance at this point caused turmoil within his family unit, as well as with some of his peers who “outed” him.

Brendan spoke to his relationship with God and his involvement with the Catholic Church as being different experiences. He mentioned that he has his “own relationship with God,” which made it sound as if the relationship has been a positive influence on his life and remained relatively strong. As far as his relationship with the Catholic Church, it did not seem to be as strong. He questioned the Catholic Church’s belief that being gay is a sin, and was adamant during the interview that he did not feel this way. I noticed the frustration and anger in his voice, and noticed his body language change at this point in the interview, with him becoming upset with the Catholic Church’s views. This conflict would be within the macrosystem, according to Bronfenbrenner, gesturing to the link between the Catholic Church, which he feels he does not have a place in currently, and his gay identity.
Figure 8.01: Participant 7 – Brendan - Emergent Themes

- Self-Acceptance
- Fear
- Homelessness
- Relationship with God
- Ambivalence
- Secrecy
- Lack of Support by Church
- Having no Choice
- Supported by Family
- Foundation of Beliefs
- Brendan

Supported by Family

Lack of Support by Church

Having no Choice

Foundation of Beliefs

Relationship with God

Ambivalence

Secrecy

Fear

Homelessness

Self-Acceptance

Brendan
Interview - Participant 8 - Daniel, Male, 36

Narrative

I met with Daniel a few days before Christmas in a local coffee shop where it was quiet. We sat at a table that was secluded from other customers, which made it easier to conduct the interview. I provided the consent form to Daniel and went over it with him prior to beginning the interview. He was in agreement and signed the consent form. Daniel was asked about what it means to him to identify as a gay man and be in the Catholic religion, and he answered that, “The first word that comes to mind is oppressed, a sense of negativity associated with being truly who I am, and that can’t change.” He continued by saying, “Growing up with the structure and the philosophy of what is determined to be good and correct and whole, and then not fit the criteria as a gay man, I started to drift away from the Catholic religion.”

Daniel described his lengthy coming out process as being one where he had to “come to terms with accepting myself first, even though I knew it was within me forever, something that was not a choice.” Daniel reiterated that he felt he “didn’t fit within a specific mold of [society] with what I thought it would be if I were gay and to come out, so I didn’t think that I would ever come out.” He talked about the fact that, although he had come out to himself, he “hid behind activities and awards and accolades in school throughout high school and college.” He never came out to his family until he was thirty-two years old; he recalled having earlier opportunities to come out, giving an example of being in the car with his dad after he’d graduated from college, and him asking his dad, “What’s next?” And my dad said, ‘Well, you get married and have kids,’ and as soon as he said that, I remember thinking, ‘Well I don’t know about that.’” Daniel mentioned that he went back to school to become a pilot, to finally obtain that “independence,” and at thirty-two years old he came out, but not until he: “had my own place,
had] moved out, and upgraded to captain. Being gay was becoming more prevalent and accepted. Once I did come out, I thought to myself, ‘How do I do this?’ My biggest fear, emotionally, was being a minority.” After this experience, Daniel talked about the fact that, once he told his mother, “it became a series of like, well, everyone is going to know. I still had to tell people one by one for some time, but my dad was the last one to know.” Daniel talked about his feeling that he needed to keep coming out to various people, and: “At first, there was shame, internalized shame. I began to explore the gay community and be around people who supported me. It turned into an adventure, then a true acceptance in the fact that I think there was power in numbers.”

Daniel discussed how his identification as Catholic influenced his coming out process and how he felt he had to compartmentalize his life. He mentioned that he was “heavily involved in the church growing up,” and he reported that, as he got older, he still went to church, but was “there physically, but not there mentally. I started to pray for selfish reasons and question the scandals of the Church, as these are the people we are looking up to, and this is happening.” He mentioned that: “eventually, I mean I knew I was gay, so I knew that I was an abomination and kind of stopped going regularly. I would go on Christmas and Easter, and still do today.”

As far as his relationships with core people in his life and how the coming out process influenced those relationships, Daniel said, “I started to drift away. I feel like it’s all a money-making scheme. As far as the relationship with my family, they were not overly involved with my life.” Listening to Daniel speak, it did not seem that his relationship with his family was influenced by him coming out. Daniel described how he experienced his surroundings during his coming out process. He referenced being at Church as: “instead of being welcomed, it was
dagger eyes; I didn’t feel welcomed and I don’t know if I ever felt welcomed.” He mentioned that he felt supported by a non-denominational church, though, and he stated that: “I felt like it was a show. So, I felt good. I felt welcome, a little but too welcome. I thought to myself, I am actually enjoying myself; I’m not supposed to enjoy myself.” Socially, Daniel said that he “did not jump to the gay bars, [but] I kind of continued to do that I was doing. I felt uncomfortable walking into gay bars.”

When asked about how his sexual and religious identities influence the way he feels about himself, Daniel said he questioned himself and “felt bad about myself. I felt, why am I not good enough to be, have an easy life like a straight person? I know being gay is not a choice. This was not in line with society’s boundaries of what I should be achieving—that’s where the unhappiness is.” Daniel spoke to his physical experience of the coming out process by going back to the idea of the nuclear family and him not being able to relate to those feelings or ideals. He mentioned his feelings of: “depression, thinking I am not good enough and not meeting expectations of society. I had to step aside and realize I only have one life and I can be happy or not.” He continued by saying, “That’s what the coming out process and physical experience is to me, either I stay closeted, hide, and never have a fulfilled life, or I charter this faith that I am totally unsure of and face possible rejection from friends, family, or my employer.”

Moving into the aspects of Daniel’s life where he felt supported or challenged by the Catholic Church’s beliefs and teachings, he mentioned that one of the biggest supports and challenges is “the media and the government, and the fact that marriage equality has come out. I feel that the media sort of glamorized it in a way, but it’s almost like you are cool to be different. With celebrities and having the visibility of that being normal, they are raising children, [and it] pushes back the argument that gay marriage is bad.” Daniel went on to discuss the challenges of
coming out with the industry he is in being “very conservative, and [I need to keep] having the
courage it takes to be true to yourself. There is discrimination everywhere, and I do not want to
be second-guessed and have everyone else think they have to double check everything I am
doing because I am gay.” Daniel said his hardest moment of coming out was his “father’s
rejection.” Daniel summed up the challenges of coming out being the fact that he had to have
the determination and courage it takes to “live my life to the fullest.”

Lastly, Daniel discussed factors that were supportive of him during his coming out
process. He mentioned, “My family and closest friends and my mom. When I told my mom, her
response was, ‘if that’s the truth, that’s fine with me.’” Daniel reiterated the feelings of support
that he felt from his core relationships in his life, and mentioned that although his father is
supportive of him now, it “took him a little longer to think it through” after he came out to him.

**Researcher’s Summary**

According to Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model (1979), Daniel shows a struggle
between multiple systems. Daniel talked a lot about his microsystem and the influence of his
family relationships on why he waited so long to come out. In his microsystem are those people
who have a direct impact on Daniel’s life. The threat comes when there is a conflict between
him and his family, the Catholic Church, friends, or his employer. Daniel mentioned many of
these conflicts throughout his interview, including reference to his hesitation to come out and the
feelings of oppression he felt for identifying as a gay man. Daniel also described the clash
between the interconnections of his life, with his family’s Catholic religious beliefs and him
identifying as a gay man. These relationships would be within his mesosystem, according to
Bronfenbrenner. Daniel also shows a struggle within his exosystem, being that he feels he “is a
minority” and “unwelcome” in many aspects of his life. Overall, Daniel seems to be pushing
forward in his macrosystem, according to Bronfenbrenner. His culture of LGBTQ individuals seems to be positive due to the media and social media providing support in an inadvertent way.

Daniel described the idea that he felt he needed financial independence and to be living on his own before he came out, and this concept was reflected in what other interviewees also said about their own need for financial independence prior to coming out, due to the fact that they could lose the supportive environment of their home and family. I heard the worry in Daniel’s voice when he discussed the possibility of not having a safe and secure place to live. Even when Daniel spoke of his current job, I felt the hesitation and constant need he experiences, pushing him to hide his true identity in the workplace because of the fear of being judged or, as he stated it, “second-guessed for being gay.”

Daniel mentioned that he felt as if he was a “minority” and I was taken aback by this comment; as a white man, he holds the most privilege, but in his eyes, being gay takes away some of that privilege and puts him into a different category. Daniel also brought up the fact that he has questioned his gay identity by rationalizing that what he was doing was a lie and that he could have that nuclear family and live by the values and sacraments of the Catholic Church. What Daniel said about questioning his gay identity and thinking he could just get married and have the sacraments and values within the Catholic Church, as a heterosexual man, resonated with other gay male interviewees views as seen in this study.

Lastly, Daniel’s experiences regarding his religious and sexual identities show disappointment. I heard the frustration in his voice when it came to his discussing the merging or influence these identities have on how he feels about himself. He initially questioned his identity, and specifically his sexual identity, and his unhappiness surrounding how he feels about himself was evident. I felt unhappiness coming from Daniel when he was exploring the feelings
regarding his identities, but recognized his ability to come to terms with his identity and find self-acceptance, overcoming what he described as a “dark time and a dark place.”

Figure 9.01: Participant 8 – Daniel - Emergent Themes
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Summary of Emergent Themes

This section will enhance and support the emergent themes (see Table 4.01), which were extracted from transcriptions and interviews of participants after data analysis. Themes in this table emerged from researcher observations, consistencies within each transcript, and overarching themes found throughout the interviews in order to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of participants—LGBTQ identifying individuals who grew up in the Catholic Church—during their coming out process. There were 15 themes that emerged from the data analysis of the transcripts, all of which some if not all participants mentioned during their respective interviews. All eight participants described themselves as living with ambivalence throughout their coming out process, which is supported by research showing that families feel ambivalence towards LGBTQ identifying individuals, specifically during their coming out process (Cohler, 2004). Ambivalence within this study can be described as having mixed feelings regarding coming out or feeling contradictions between religious and sexual identities.

Self-acceptance is another theme that seven participants described dealing with during their coming out process. Many individuals associated self-acceptance with the outcome of their coming out process, but reiterated their fear of social and familial rejection during the process. Participants described themselves as living in fear that their families would no longer accept them or that they would disown them if they came out as LGBTQ. Homelessness emerged as an overarching theme for four participants who were under the age of 18 when they came out to themselves. Participants described being financially dependent on their family when they first came out to themselves, while living in the family home and not being of age to have a job or career, so that living with a fear of rejection as well as homelessness emerged.
Another emergent theme was the concept that being gay is not something that LGBTQ individuals choose, but rather something they are born with. Six participants mentioned they never felt they had the choice to not be gay, but were living with this identity their entire life prior to coming out to themselves and their families. Participants described and raised the question of: “Why would anyone choose an identity that is not accepted by all of society?” Participants described living with an identity which society does not fully accept, but which was something they knew was true within themselves, not something they could change or push away. Some participants waited years to come out to their family and friends, living with fears of social rejection not only from their family, but their Catholic faith. ‘Choosing’ is a word that assumes there is a decision to be made, but in this research study, participants felt there was no choice that could be made: they were born gay. Some male participants described forcing themselves to make the choice between their LGBTQ identity and that of a “heternormative” lifestyle that would involve marrying a female, having biological children, and living in a marriage as defined by the Catholic Church. Within the same sentences, those participants disregarded those thoughts as being formed of the ambivalence they lived with during the coming out process, while deep down knew their true self was identifying as LGBTQ.

**Challenges and Supports of the Catholic Church**

This section will outline and describe how participants felt challenged or supported by the Catholic Church throughout their coming out process. This researcher provides data through this section which utilizes a narrative as well as a summary table (see Table 5.01) in order to answer research question #2. Emerging themes are explored along with similar themes amongst all participants through a summary of experiences in Table 5.01.
Participants in this study were asked if they felt any Catholic beliefs, teachings, or practices supported them or challenged them during their coming out process, specifically as someone who identifies as LGBTQ. According to Table 5, six out of eight participants revealed they felt challenged by the perspectives of others within the Catholic Church for identifying as LGBTQ. Along with this finding, six participants also felt challenged by the idea of the sacraments of the Catholic faith. Specifically, there was doubt about their being able to receive the Sacrament of the Eucharist during Catholic mass, as well as during Catholic weddings they are invited to. Participants also revealed that they felt the idea of identifying as LGBTQ being a sin within the eyes of the Catholic Church and the Catholic patrons, as well as the fact that gay marriage is not legally recognized in the eyes of the Church. Participants who felt challenged by these issues further explained their Catholic beliefs and their wanting to raise a family within the Church, and this being a barrier.

There were not many Catholic beliefs, teachings, or practices that participants felt were supportive of their coming out process. Seven participants reported they did not feel any support from the Catholic Church during their coming out process. Two other participants felt their family upbringing within the Catholic Church and their family’s particular connection to the Catholic Church were supportive during their coming out process, giving examples of having attended church with family on a regular basis and developing that relationship with the Church in the family unit. Two participants felt supported by the idea that treating others the way you want to be treated, this giving them hope in the Catholic Church’s mentioning of “the Golden Rule”. Lastly, two other participants felt their own Catholic faith, in the Bible and in their religion, supported them throughout their coming out process.
<table>
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<td>Faith in the Bible</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>10 Commandments, Perspective of others, Idea that being Gay is a sin, Marriage</td>
<td>Golden Rule</td>
<td>She talked about not having the same respect as others within the eyes of the church, Hypocrites of the Catholic word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Receiving Communion, Perspective of others, Catholic Beliefs</td>
<td>Catholic Faith</td>
<td>She credited her own Catholic faith as a support system, Catholic rules and beliefs as a challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Receiving Communion, Perspective of others, Marriage</td>
<td>Family Connection with the Catholic Church</td>
<td>He felt challenged by sacraments, Supported by his family’s involvement in church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Marriage, Catholic Weddings, Communion, Idea that being gay is a sin</td>
<td>Family Connection with the Catholic Church</td>
<td>Felt Catholic guilt was difficult to overcome, Supported by his family involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Idea that being gay is a sin, Reconciliation</td>
<td>No support from the Catholic Church</td>
<td>Felt unaccepted in the Catholic Church for identifying as gay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Media, Sacraments, Perspective of others</td>
<td>No support from the Catholic Church</td>
<td>Felt the media brings awareness to practicing Catholics’ views</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Existential Experience of Coming Out

Research Question 3 - 6: The Existential experience of coming out (lived space, lived body, lived human relationship, and lived time)

Participants’ experiences can be related to lived time, lived body, lived relation, and lived space—van Manen’s (1997) four lived existentials. To answer research questions three, four, five, and six, I used van Manen’s (1997) framework of lived space, lived body, lived human relationship, and lived time to explore how the coming out process influenced each of these lived existentials of hermeneutic phenomenology. Participants were asked a question on each of the four lives existentials and how they were influenced during their coming out process. The responses were as follows:

Lived Relationship

Each interviewee was asked about the influence of relationships with core persons in their lives—specifically with family, friends, and with God—during the time of their coming out. All eight interviewees responded to the question which aligns with van Manen’s (1997) lived time as a part of his four lived existentials, and mentioned how each of their relationships throughout their coming out process was influenced or impacted. Relationship with families added a layer of nervousness and fear when it came time for the coming out process, specifically for four participants who reported distancing themselves from friends or family. According to Participant 5, he felt that he: “had to keep a boundary between myself and my family because I did not feel they were ready to be a part of my gay identity.” After he had come out, his family was hesitant about their sexual identity and the term “partner.” He said, “I never really brought anyone over, [and] I don’t think I’ve ever said the words, ‘this is my partner’ or ‘this is my boyfriend.’” The timing of when to fully be out and when to fully immerse himself into his
family’s world as a gay man was challenging, given their lack of acceptance towards his sexual identity and lifestyle.

Participant 4 was honest with her mother when asked if she was gay, and she had come out, her mother said, “After this, do not call me or write me letters; I will always love you but I will never accept you.” This silence continued for six months after she came out to her mother, before her mother accepted her sexual identity. Participant 7 also felt a shift in his relationship with his family, who “did not know how to deal with it.” His parents spent time understanding and adjusting to his new identity in relation to their place as his parents, which “caused a lot of anger in my life at that point.” Participant 8 felt disconnect in his relationship with his father as a result of the coming out process, but felt the relationship remained the same with his mother and sister. Participants 1, 2, and 3 all felt their relationships with their families remained the same; however, all reported their own hesitation to come out, being fearful that they would not be accepted by their families.

The interviewees relationships with God and throughout the coming out process presented with their either moving away from God and the Catholic Church, or solidifying a relationship based solely on each interviewee’s individual and personal relationship with God. Participant 6 stated that his relationship with God continues to cause himself to question his beliefs, but that after “eighteen-plus years [of] believing in God and the Catholic Church, I can’t just turn that off right away.” According to van Manen (1997), lived time can be personal history, which in this case includes his Catholic foundation of beliefs, or what is believed to happen in the future, which at this point is uncertain. Participant 5 also experienced a similar impact to his relationship with God after coming out. He “started questioning everything” and felt a “conflicting relationship with his idea of a God.” He mentioned that his relationship with
God while he had been growing up in the church with his family had been “strong,” but after coming out, he felt it “was a blessing, stepping back a little bit from this idea of a God and Catholicism.”

Participant 3 felt her relationship with God remained consistent throughout her coming out process and was not impacted, stating, “I have always had the perspective that God has made everybody, and if God didn’t create me, then He wouldn’t have loved me.” Participant 2 also had a similar relationship with God throughout her coming out process, stating, “I believe we were created in God’s image and likeness, and I believe I’m made this way.” The Catholic Church corroborates the idea that Participant 2 sees in her relationship with God, that “God has created every human person out of love” (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006, p. 1). Participant 7 shared a similar experience, saying God “is my friend. He is my Father,” and that he feels God loves him and he loves God, thus this is his relationship with God. He did not feel that his relationship was impacted due to his coming out process, and said that it remained as strong as it had been prior to his coming out.

Participants 1 and 8 felt a shift in their relationships with God as their coming out process and the timing of their coming out impacted it. Participant 1 felt her relationship with God was where she “struggled the most, trying to find a happy medium.” She felt she was always questioning her sexual identity, as the Catholic Church feels “You are not doing the right thing.” She credited herself for trying to work through her relationship with God during her coming out process, and not giving up on having a relationship, but rather determining where she fits in the eyes of God. The feeling of questioning aligns with the first stage of the Cass Model, where during this stage, individuals identifying as LGBTQ will struggle with their identity, asking questions like “Why am I gay?” or “Am I gay?” Participant 8 stated that he felt his relationship
with God “drift[ed] away” and he began to question his own identity within the Catholic Church. He spoke to the idea of attending church with his family when he had been younger and being very involved within the church, but said that he never truly felt accepted after coming out—more so, he felt judged.

**Lived Time**

Each of the eight interviewees were asked if their coming out process had an impact on the experience of their surroundings during the time of coming out. All eight interviewees responded to the question, which aligns with van Manen’s (1997) *lived space* as a part of his four lived existentials, and so each mentioned how their personal experience of their surroundings was influenced. In regards to attending mass, Participant 4 felt that attending mass and specifically receiving communion made her “feel weird,” but never stopped her from receiving the sacrament of the Eucharist. Participant 8 felt his church attendance decline as a result of the coming out process. He reported that he began having doubts and: “knew I was gay and that I was an abomination, and I don’t know if I ever felt welcome.” This sentiment led him to stop going to church regularly and to feel differently about his presence at mass.

Participants 1 and 7 felt similar in their experience with Church during the coming out process. Participant 1 felt a shift when attending a missionary trip through her youth ministry after coming out to her family. She felt she was not “completely open with her Catholic group of friends and family” while on the missionary trip, and nervous about them not accepting her for identifying as lesbian. Participant 7 felt isolated in the Catholic faith after coming out, or being outted, and more so through the “pro-heteronormative, you get married, wait for sex until marriage” views of the Catholic Church. Participant 6 also felt there was always a “hesitation to be as open or as close” to the Catholic Church, due to the uncertainty of the congregation’s
openness to LGBTQ individuals and their lifestyle. Participant 6 felt much conflict within his relationship with the Church, which eventually led to his compartmentalization of sexual and religious identities while practicing Catholicism.

Participant 2 felt there was no compartmentalization of sexual and religious identities experienced in her Catholic surroundings that impacted her coming out process, feeling: “this is what makes me a whole person—there are no pieces and parts, it’s all just one.” Participant 5 felt not that he avoided Catholic churches, but that “they were not places that I felt comfortable being. It is not necessarily where I want to go, but I’m not pursuing it either.” Lastly, Participant 3 felt she did not compartmentalize her life in the Catholic Church, citing the sentiment that “it was never a separation,” this was viewed as a supportive component throughout her coming out process.

As far as the participants’ lived space within their families’ respective homes, many individuals felt they avoided being in their family home. Participant 5 felt that he had to hide his gay identity from his family, not feeling comfortable enough to bring boyfriends or partners to his home or “introduce them as [his] boyfriend.” Participant 4 felt that being at her family’s home “was hell.” She felt she had to hide her true identity and not be herself, living in fear of coming out to her mother. Participant 7 felt he could not disclose his sexual identity or thoughts surrounding his identity to his parents, for fear of “being homeless.” Although there was only a short amount of time between realization of his gay identity to himself and coming out to his parents, Participant 7 did hide his identity and did not plan to come out, for fear of rejection from his family. Participant 8 spent years compartmentalizing his life and his sexual identity from his family and friends, as he felt he was not ready to disclose his identity until he had financial “independence” and was living on his own. Participant 6 had a similar experience, mentioning
that he felt “uncomfortable holding my boyfriend’s hand walking down the street” in his hometown. He was drawn to living within the big city or metro areas due to their “open energy” surrounding LGBTQ culture.

Participants 1 and 2 both stated that they felt supported by their families after coming out and never had to compartmentalize their lives, separating their gay identity from the family dynamic. Participant 1 noted she waited two years to come out to her family, but spent those two years “exploring” her own sexual identity, and did not feel she had to hide it, as she was away at college. Participant 2 was in her religious community at the time when she came out to herself, and stated, “This is part of who I am.” She also mentioned that she was studying to be a nun in community, so her family’s perspective did not change, since she had taken vows entering into the community—these including poverty, chastity, and obedience.

A few participants mentioned lived space such as gay bars or establishments that they felt drawn to or avoided during their coming out process. Specifically, Participant 8: “didn’t feel comfortable going [to such places]; I was too self-conscious to walk into a gay bar.” It was not until he joined an LGBTQ-friendly organization that he even went into gay bars. On the opposite end, Participant 5 felt a sense of “safety in going to gay bars or gay clubs,” but did specifically mention this sentiment only applies to those establishments that were not near or in his hometown, for “fear that it would get back to my family.” He hinted of a congruence between being outside of his hometown and living his authentic identity. Participant 4 also felt herself drawn to gay bars and clubs, which impacted her experience of bars after coming out. She mentioned “everyone went out back then, but I just found myself going to more of the gay bars.” Participant 3 felt her coming out brought her to places “that I shouldn’t have been going,” as she was in a rebellious phase after coming out to her family. She added that she attended
house parties, clubs, and bars with her group of friends who were supportive of her sexual identity.

Lived Space

All eight interviewees were asked if their coming out process changed the meaning of their physical space during or after their coming out process. All eight interviewees responded to the question, which aligns with van Manen’s (1997) physical space as a part of his four lived existentials, and each mentioned how their experience of their physical space was viewed. Compartamentalization plays a role with participant’s physical space as well as the second stage of the Cass Model. The second stage in the Cass Model is identity comparison, which occurs when the LGBTQ identifying individual internally accepts his or her own sexual identity; however, may compartmentalize their identities, being careful not to allow for intersections of their identities. This caution is evident with Participant 6, who felt that being in his family home after coming out was no longer comfortable, as he “could not be who he wanted to be.” The meaning of him being at his family home and in his hometown changed when he came out, as he reported it was not the same feeling he had in metro areas which were more accepting of LGBTQ culture. Participant 4 felt a similar way, living at home with her mother; although she was not out to her mother, she was out to herself at the time. She recalled a time when her friend, who was a hairstylist, gave her a mohawk, and when she came home, her mother said, “You’re a freak, you and these people you hang out with.” She felt she “could not be herself” living in her parents’ house, knowing her true sexual identity was different than what her mother would accept.

Participant 5 had a similar experience in his family home, as well, experiencing a sense of conflict within his family home and also at church. Tan and Yarhouse (2015) agree that the
potential risk for self-stigma and an internal struggle with negative messages coming from the Catholic Church’s beliefs, teachings, and practices is real within LGBTQ religious identities. Meanings in both places changed after Participant 5 came out to himself, which allowed for a conflicting relationship between his family’s religious beliefs and his own sexual identity in both the family home and the Catholic Church. He did not see the Catholic Church as a “supportive place,” as he had when he would attend with his grandmother. After coming out, the meanings of the Catholic Church and his role in the family changed toward his experiencing feelings of “disconnect and abandonment.”

Participant 7 also felt the meaning of his role in his family change. He felt “scared of the unknown” after coming out to his family who, at this time, did not fully understand or support his gay identity. He reported that, after his parents sorted out their feelings about his gay identity, they acted as his “shield” from other family members who they felt may not be as accepting. The meaning of his family unit changed as his parents, as well as his sisters and extended family, viewed him in a different light after his coming out process and once he began identifying himself as a gay man.

Participant 8 described the anticipated a change in his workplace environment if he would have came out at work. With him identifying as a gay man working as a captain in an airplane cockpit, describing his professional world as “a very conservative industry” where you need to “keep politics and religious views out of the discussion.” He felt the meaning of his captain title would be altered if he identified as a gay man in the workplace, and did not want to feel he was being “second-guessed” at work, adding that he worried about the feeling coming from coworkers reflecting the thought, “I have to double-check everything you’re doing now because you’re gay.” He credited coming out in his workplace to having “courage” to make his
own meaning, but seemed hesitant to identify as a gay man in his workplace. Participant 1 also had a similar experience with her sexual identity while on her missionary trip with her Catholic Church. She said she had attended this retreat over the past three years, but this particular year she spoke of came after she had come out to her family about identifying as a lesbian. She felt more “aware and nervous” of others’ openness regarding their faith and judgments surrounding LGBTQ culture. She was more aware of the meaning of what her sexual identity brought, being involved with a Catholic missionary trip from her church now, than she had in years before, and “is [currently] in the process of connecting” her religious and sexual identities.

Lastly, Participant 2 felt that the meaning changed for her in community on her way to becoming a nun. She mentioned that community was a sequestered space where you focus on “prayer, [and] self-reflection,” which is what led her to truly understanding her sexual identity and coming “to understand this is a part of who I am.” She entered community at age 17 and revealed her sexual identity to the community at twenty-two years old only after officially leaving at age 19. The meaning of her identity changed as she went from entering into a Catholic role as a nun, on to discovering her own true sexual identity as a lesbian and removing herself from community to live out her life identifying as a lesbian.

**Lived Body**

All eight interviewees were asked if their coming out process changed their experience with their own body. All eight interviewees responded to the question regarding the change of experience with their own body after coming out, which aligns with van Manen’s (1997) *lived body* as a part of his four lived existentials. Participant 6 felt “shame and guilt” associated with his own body during the coming out process, referencing that he found himself “not wanting to engage in certain sexual acts, and not wanting to because it was wrong—it was wrong in my
head.” He felt that his sexual and religious identities “could not co-exist, within one person,” which could be attributed to his Catholic guilt around his experience of his body. Since coming out, he expressed that he has “shed all of the Catholic guilt that I had in me, or at least that part of it,” referencing the sexual ideals of the Catholic Church.

Participant 5 shared a similar experience, feeling as if he was always “questioning his sexuality” in the eyes of the Catholic Church, stating that “the idea of religion says it’s not okay to be gay, so I felt myself questioning just having the normal life,” this ‘normal life’ meaning being married to a woman and having a family in the biological and the ‘natural’ way, in the eyes of the Catholic Church. Participant 5 felt that his bodily experience was being that of attracted to other men, however he questioned his desire to have biological children within a Catholic marriage. He continued on to say this idea “just did not feel right, and I am going to do what I want to do and I am going to do it on my terms.” He felt he questioned his identities during the coming out process, but afterward felt more confident with who he was and shed his “Catholic guilt.” Participant 8 also wrestled with the idea of the “normal life” in the eyes of the Catholic Church, feeling as if, in society, you are supposed to have “this nuclear family, but when you step aside and realize your ideals do not line up with society’s expectations or religious expectations, you realize you only have one life to be happy or not.” He continued, “Either I stay closeted, or hide closeted and never have a fulfilled life, or I charter this path that I am totally unsure of, which is going to cause me to possibly be rejected and lose everyone I care about.” The meaning for him in his physical body was rejection and not fitting the mold of the Catholic Church’s ideals, as well as societal expectations for a single white man.

In regards to his sexual identity throughout his coming out process, Participant 7 felt he did not “have a lot of guilt about being sexually active. It’s a part of my life.” He credits his
openness to sexual identity to being seventeen years old and, at that time, “sexually inexperienced and just interested in discovering things.” The meaning surrounding his lived body did not change prior to or after he began identifying as a gay man. He remained consistent with his Catholic beliefs as well as in his own personal beliefs, stating, “I am going to live my life.” Participant 1 also shared a similar experience, stating, “It really didn’t get in the way,” in reference to her Catholic beliefs surrounding marriage and sex before marriage. She did, however, feel “uncomfortable after I had sex for the first time and afterwards I felt kind of bad. But I didn’t know if that was because it was with a female or [if] it was because I did it for the first time.” Her meaning was challenged by the views of the Catholic Church, but overall she came to the conclusion that this was her decision and her lifestyle. Participants 2 and 3 did not feel the meaning of their lived body was affected after coming out, as Participant 3 expressed she “never saw not being able to get married in the eyes of the Catholic Church as a problem. I don’t see the Church getting in the way of who I am, who I want to be, and how I live my life.” She established a strong sense of how she views herself in the eyes of the Catholic Church, as well as within society. Participant 2 conveyed her feelings that her “body is a temple, and it’s sacred and I believe that is something to be shared with somebody who you love with your heart.” Her meaning of lived body is rooted in her Catholic beliefs and teachings, with her feeling that “sex is sex. Love is something different.” Participant 2 carried her meanings throughout her coming out process and still holds them true today.

Participant 4 expressed some regret and anger towards the Catholic Church, specifically surrounding values related to family and children. She felt, “I could kick myself in the ass for not having a kid when I could have. I feel that the Church put a big influence on me not to do that.” She talked of her living at home with her mother as a struggle to live authentically within
her own body as a lesbian woman, versus being the heterosexual woman her mother thought she was.

**Ecological Factors**

I used Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Bioecological System to identify the risks and protective factors of the coming out process in each participant’s case. Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) system identifies four systems within the larger system: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. According to Table 6.01, many participants experienced similar risk factors while living within the LGBTQ identity. Fears were evident in every participant, including fear of family rejection and disappointment. Three participants mentioned fear of the unknown, providing examples of having to come out multiple times to various people you may meet throughout your life, such as new bosses, friends, and coworkers. Three participants also mentioned fear of abandonment or rejection from the Catholic Church, providing examples of times during mass or opinions of other members of the Catholic Church that were expressed against LGBTQ cultures and lifestyles. Lastly, three participants mentioned fear of homelessness as a major risk factor in coming out while they were living at home. They shared their feelings of worry and nervousness, in that coming out to their families could have left them homeless; therefore, financial independence was something they strived for, though not all attained it, prior to coming out and living a LGBTQ lifestyle.

Protective factors that were experienced and affected their LGBTQ lifestyles were similar across all participants. Five participants credited having family support as something that affected them living congruently as LGBTQ across all aspects of their lives. Four participants felt that a strong foundation of Catholic beliefs while they were growing up reinforced their confidence in living as LGBTQ individuals. Seven participants acknowledged a strong sense of
self and self-acceptance of their own religious and sexual identities in order to live congruently as LGBTQ identifying individuals, providing examples of coming to the conclusion that they know what is best for themselves, and recognize that being gay is not a choice, therefore enabling them to find support and comfort in that they are not alone in living out their true identity.
Table 6.01 Risk and Protective Factors of Living as an LGBTQ Individual

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analytical Categories</th>
<th>Quotations of Significance</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Protective Factors</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from Family</td>
<td>“I was lucky; my family was always supportive”- P1, Kelly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundation of Catholic Beliefs</td>
<td>“I knew my Catholic faith before I really knew much about myself”- P3, Adriane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Relationship with God</td>
<td>“God created me in His image and likeness; it’s not a genetic mess-up”- P2, Michelle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Acceptance</td>
<td>“Coming to terms with being okay with myself, even if my family did not”- P5, Nikolas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Risk Factors</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homelessness</td>
<td>“I was 17 when I realized I was gay, and if I came out, I could be homeless.”- P6, Brendan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of Rejection</td>
<td>“I didn’t tell my mother for 15 years; I knew she would be so disappointed”- P4, Mara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority Status</td>
<td>“It was very emotional because I did not want to be a minority in society”- P8, Daniel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abandonment</td>
<td>“My mother didn’t talk to me for months after I came out; she didn’t accept me”- P4, Mara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflicting Identities</td>
<td>“Growing up in the church, I knew I couldn’t be gay and Catholic at the same time”- P7 Jonathon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The researcher found family support, strength in self, self-acceptance, a foundation of Catholic beliefs, and support from friends to be protective factors for sexual identity and Catholic religious identity. In addition to the protective factors, the risk factors for both sexual identity and religious identity include fears of rejection from family, conflicting identities, fear of...
homelessness, identifying as a minority, rejection from the Catholic Church, and isolation. This analysis shows the protective and risk factors that emerged from their stories and which contribute positively and negatively to the development of both Catholic religious identity and sexual identity within the LGBTQ identifying individual.
Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model

Interviewee’s Model of Development

Module 10.01 Bioecological Model of Development
Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the data findings collected from interview transcripts and the researcher’s observations. The researcher conducted eight interviews by asking a series of questions from the individual interview protocol on the topics of religious identity, sexual identity, Catholic views, and familial influences. This chapter covered the demographic profiles of participants, van Manen’s (1997) lived existentials (*lived space, lived body, lived human relationship*, and *lived time*) based on the four research questions, and Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Bioecological Model in relation to each participant’s coming out process. In addition to the case analyses for each participant, the lived experiences of participants and the protective and risk factors associated with sexual identity and religious identity were addressed within this chapter. In Chapter 5, the researcher discusses the themes that emerged from these findings, implications for continued practice, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.
Chapter 5: Discussion

This chapter provides a brief overview of the study, focusing on the problem, the purpose, research questions, methodology, and data analysis while connecting the literature to the results of this study. This chapter also provides implications, limitations, and ideas and opportunities for future research.

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenologically orientated study was to explore, describe, and gain insight into the coming out process for LGBTQ identifying individuals whose Catholic beliefs may have influenced their coming out in Western Pennsylvania. According to the research, LGBTQ identifying individuals face challenges during the coming out process that indicate higher levels of shame, guilt, internal conflicts, evaluations of oneself, and internalized homophobia (Sherry et al., 2010; Page, M. L., Lindahl, K. M., & Malik, N. M., 2013). Therefore, it is crucial to understand the lived experiences, attitudes, and actions of LGBTQ identifying individuals, specifically during their coming out process.

The guiding question of this research study was: What are the lived experiences of persons who identify as Catholic and who have come out as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning? The following four subsidiary questions used in conjunction to the central question are as follows:

1. How do individuals who identify as LGBTQ and Catholic describe their coming out experience?
2. What are the Catholic beliefs and practices that challenge or support the coming out process for individuals who identify as LGBTQ?
3. What lived existential (e.g. time, space, person, and relationship) do people who identify as LGBTQ and Catholic experience during their coming out process?
What are the risks and protective factors that affect individuals who identify as LGBTQ and Catholic during the coming out process?

The researcher of this study used van Manen’s (1997) Phenomenological Existential Approach and Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) Bioecological Model of Development as descriptive frameworks for this study, and provided awareness and understanding on the coming out process for individuals who identify as LGBTQ and as a part of the Catholic faith. The researcher conducted eight semi-structured interviews with individuals identifying as LGBTQ who have come out to their family and were raised within the Catholic faith.

The participants were aged 22-55, were raised within the Catholic Church, and identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual; they were recruited by way of snowball or chain sampling, which identified cases of interest through current participants who knew cases that were rich in topic, and also through purposeful sampling, in which a flyer was emailed out to students attending local universities to help ensure that the participants represented the criteria for the study (Creswell, 2013). Data was collected from the individual interviews, and then transcribed, coded, and analyzed for findings and themes. This study’s conclusions, as discussed in this chapter, focused on themes of the findings, leading to implications for practice, limitations, and future research.

Discussion of the Major Findings

The major findings of this study are based on the level of risks and protective factors associated with the coming out process in individuals who identify as LGBTQ and who were raised within the Catholic Church. In this section, the major findings are reviewed using data regarding each participant’s coming out process, van Manen’s (1997) existential factors, the Cass

Challenges and supports within the Catholic Church were discussed through the lens of each participant’s coming out process and their experiences. Data was represented in Table 5.01 to outline specific protective factors and risk factors associated with the coming out process, and specifically within the Catholic Church. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2006) explored the idea that engaging in homosexual acts without having a marital bond is considered a sin in the eyes of the Catholic Church. These teachings and beliefs solidified the argument that participants echoed within their narratives, in that being gay is a sin. Along with trust, family values and messages about sexual identity and religion can affect individuals thinking of coming out, as they could become fearful of upsetting or being judged by their support system (Bayne, 2016). Individuals identifying as LGBTQ can look at religion as a source of stigma and discrimination, but also as a source of support (Rostosky et al., 2016). Thus, the major findings regarding protective and risk factors for the coming out process for participants are displayed in Table 5.01 and categorized by protective factors and supportive thoughts from participants, as well as risk factors along with supportive statements from participants.

Van Manen’s (1997) four lived existential factors were also discussed within Chapter 4 and outlined through participant narratives, as well as through the presentation of findings for research questions three through six. The four life world existentials as described by van Manen (1997) are lived space (spatiality), lived body (corporeality), lived time (temporality), and lived human relation (relationality), and these concepts can act as a vehicle for reflection of the life experiences of “all human beings, regardless of their historical, cultural or social situatedness”
Participants’ narratives were analyzed within the context of these four lived existentials in order to answer the corresponding research question identified for each of the four lived existentials, thus describing each lived experience from the perspective of each participant in the study in a fashion that pulled out emerging themes within this framework.

According to Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model of Development, the development of individuals identifying as LGBTQ and within the Catholic faith is affected by their ecological environment, providing levels of structure much like the Russian dolls, as an example, moving from the innermost level (microsystem) to the outermost level (macrosystem) (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Because we experience sexual identity within a cultural context in Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model, it is in constant in flux at both the microsystem and the macrosystem levels (Bosse & Chiodo, 2016). In addition to explicating experiences and environments, Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model of Development delivered an understanding of the difficulties individuals have with adjusting to various environments, as well as stressors related to those environments (Allport, 1950; Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Bronfenbrenner, 1994). In Table 7.01, the major findings of this study are categorized by protective factors, risk factors, and environments based on the ecological levels of Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) model: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem.
Table 7.01: Factors Identified by Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Risk Factors</th>
<th>Protective Factor</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Oppression</td>
<td>Counseling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Financial Dependence</td>
<td>Financial Stability</td>
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Presentation of Themes

The themes presented in this section are based on the research questions and discussed in the following ways: relevance, reason for the theme, description of findings, assumptions, overlooked concepts, alternative explanations, and evidence from the study’s data and literature review. The following section is divided into two main categories of themes, these being based respectively on the themes related to the risks and protective factors of coming out, and themes related to the lived coming out experience.

Themes Related to the Risks and Protective Factors of Coming Out

Theme 1: *My Family Will Disown Me for being Gay.*

One major theme in the study was that rejection is a factor within the development of LGBTQ identifying individuals who also identify within the Catholic religion. Family emerged as a theme when the researcher began looking at Bronfrenbrenner’s Bioecological Model, given that family is situated within the microsystem and one of the major influencers in LGBTQ identifying individuals’ lives. Living with discrimination inside the family unit stems from the idea of “negotiating the closet door,” which shows that LGBTQ identifying individuals live with uncertainty and ambivalence prior to coming out to their family and friends (Palkki, 2015). The fear of social rejection after coming out and identifying as LGBTQ is a major influence in their identity, family, church, peers, workplace, and society. Although many strides have been made within the culture of U.S. society to move towards accepting LGBTQ individuals for who they are, they still may choose to keep this aspect of their identity hidden from family and religious institutions for fear of rejection (Bayne, 2016; Sherry et al., 2010; Wood & Conley, 2013). Therefore, rejection, specifically within the LGBTQ community, is a staple within society as
well as within the Catholic Church that contributes to the sexual and religious identity development of LGBTQ identifying individuals.

In this study, the LGBTQ identifying individuals experienced some form of fear that family, the Catholic Church, friends, or God would reject them at some point during their coming out process. All participants felt fear of rejection prior to coming out to their family members, and specifically their parents. The gay male participants tended to have more fears attached to their coming out process, specifically rejection from their families. At times, they felt conflict between identities, pressure to conform to societal and familial expectations, fear, worry, secretive, disconnected, oppressed, stuck, alone, hidden, and questioning of their true sexual identity. This theme aligns with stages one and two of the Cass Model (1979), showing participants’ identity confusion (Stage 1) and becoming more aware of the differences within themselves versus those that align with societal norms (Bayne, 2016). Identity comparison (Stage 2) is where the LGBTQ identifying individual is able to accept their identity within themselves, but struggle with family and societal acceptance (Bayne, 2016). Participants had a constant fear of rejection prior to coming out as LGBTQ. One participant said: “I had to keep a boundary between myself and my family because I was almost worried that my family would leave or they would disown me or disapprove” (Nickolas, Male, 32). Messages of rejection from family members can lead to an increased likelihood of negative sexual identity development, thus keeping LGBTQ identifying individuals from fully exploring or divulging their true identity, and also fostering disconnect with their family unit (Love, Bock, Jannarone, & Richardson, 2005; Page, et al., 2013).

Family relationships that were once flourishing may be more painful and complicated than ever before due to tolerating and accepting an LGBTQ identity as one’s own, thus the
fluctuation between Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the Cass Model (Cass, 1979; Page et al., 2013; Sherry et al., 2010). These individuals have stereotypes attached to the LGBTQ identity and they are labeled accordingly within society. Such labels carry over to the family unit as premeditated beliefs that feed into the fears of rejection experienced by the individual identifying as LGBTQ during their coming out process.

**Theme 2: What Happens if I Can’t Pay My Bills? (Financial Stability)**

Another theme that was generated from this study was that LGBTQ identifying individuals, specifically males, struggle with wanting financial dependence in order to feel safe enough to come out to family. LGBTQ individuals are not only dealing with the fear of being rejected by their family for their sexual identity, but the idea of homelessness if they come out prior to establishing financial independence on their own. The top cause of homelessness for LGBTQ individuals is family rejection due to sexual identity (Shelton & Wilkelstein, 2014). One participant mentioned: “I always had this exit plan of thinking, ‘I can make it on my own, I can do this, I can do that,’ [and] in the back of my mind I knew these people could change their mind at any moment, so I need to be able to do everything on my own” (Nickolas, Male, 32). Many LGBTQ individuals feel the need to have responsibility and independence regarding their finances at an early age, right around the time when they are coming out to themselves, in order to create a safety net in case their families are not supportive. For some individuals, this is not possible; one said during the interview: “I didn’t expect to come out to my parents until I was financially independent. I was going to college and they were going to help me; I thought to myself, ‘I can’t do this without them’” (Brendan, Male, 22). The literature is limited on the experience of financial security when it comes to individuals identifying as LGBTQ, however, the feeling of a need for financial independence shows the participants identified skills they had
developed as a result of a fear of facing rejection as being a foundation for their coming out process (M. Wagaman, Foushee Keller, & Jay Cavaliere, 2016). According to the Cass Model of Coming out (1979), the need for financial independence begins to occur within the second stage, identity comparison, due to the LGBTQ identifying individual rationalizing their sexual identity, and beginning to accept and become aware of their sexual identity within themselves (Bayee, 2016; Cass, 1979).

Financial stability is essential to gaining access to not only resources, but also overall independence within your sexual identity. The LGBTQ identifying individuals find themselves waiting or delaying their coming out process to their family for fear of rejection leading to possible homelessness or a loss of financial security. Many individuals reported waiting until they felt financially secure before coming out to their families. One said: “I came out at 32; I was captain for a year, so I had moved out. I got my own place, and I was independent” (Daniel, Male, 36). Four participants felt their coming out process and when they came out to their families was solely based on their financial independence and their ability to have the security if their families rejected them, thus leaving them homeless.

Theme 3: The Catholic Church: Are You For or Against?

There are two conflicting identities within the scope of this study, the Catholic religious identity and sexual identity. Sexual identity serves as a catalyst for individuals who are questioning or challenging their own religious identity, but can also serve as a catalyst for support within their religious identity or a challenge to identify as LGBTQ within the eyes of the Catholic Church (Sherry, A., Adelman, A., Whilde, M. R., & Quick, D., 2010). Many individuals in this study felt both supported and challenged by the Catholic Church, attributing much of the support, if any was present, to their foundation of Catholic beliefs they had gained.
while growing up within the Catholic Church. Previous research combined religion as an all-encompassing term, however, for this study, religion was specifically viewed through the lens of the Catholic Church and those LGBTQ identifying individuals who were raised within the Catholic Church. Individuals who were not supported or who felt challenged by the Catholic Church attributed much of the dissonance to strong Catholic beliefs, teachings, and practices within the Church and within the eyes of parishioners of the church. LGBTQ individuals feel challenged at mass, when there are very few mentions of specific, national events involving LGBTQ individuals within the teachings or homilies of the priests. Kelly stated:

“Right after the Orlando shooting in the gay nightclub, I went to mass expecting to hear some kind of prayer for it, just because it was the biggest mass shooting. So, I thought the priest would acknowledge it during his homily, but there was no mention of it whatsoever during mass.” (Female, 22)

In addition to feeling challenged while at mass, LGBTQ individuals feel challenged by the perspectives and opinions of other members of the Catholic Church. Even though they do not necessarily feel those opinions of others matter, such sentiments can cause them to question their own role within the church and how others view them because of their sexual identity not aligning with the views of the Catholic Church. They feel the Golden Rule, to love your neighbor as you love yourself, is something that is taught by the Catholic Church, but causes them to question their inclusivity within the Catholic Church. Adriane said:

“The perspective of other people wanting to say what I am doing is wrong… well, they are not the judge, and we all know who the judge is. We all face the same judge. And that judge says love one another and be kind to your neighbor. The Golden Rule is love your neighbor as yourself. And why are people not doing that? If we all followed the
Ten Commandments the way they were written, well, the world would be a bit of a different place, as it is right now.” (Female, 34)

There is an internal struggle with the acceptance of one’s own Catholic faith, only to be further compromised by the outside views of others within the Catholic Church. Research supports the presence of an internal struggle within the LGBTQ community and individuals’ coming out processes within religious settings; however, such research has not specifically mentioned the Catholic Church (Rosenkrantz et al., 2016; Wood et al., 2013).

Receiving the Sacrament of the Eucharist is also seen as challenge for LGBTQ individuals who also identify as Catholic. This sacrament in the eyes of the Catholic Church is a rite of passage, and signifies one receiving the Body of Christ; however, LGBTQ individuals feel uncomfortable and judged by other parishioners when attending mass, and specifically when they are attending Catholic weddings. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, anyone who is aware of committing a mortal sin must not receive the Holy Communion (Catholic Church, 1994). Many participants in this study have echoed the notion that their sexual identity creates a dissonance within themselves and their belief in the Catholic Church, and expressed the feeling that “being Catholic did not fit with my gay identity” (Nickolas, Male, 31). It causes internal conflict and questioning of their decision to receive communion, although they identify as Catholic. LGBTQ identifying individuals holding the Catholic religious identity can be challenged specifically because values and beliefs about sexuality can be emotionally charged for most individuals (Kirby & Michaelson, 2005).

Another challenging and emotionally charged view is the idea of legal recognition of marriage within the eyes of the Catholic Church. Yet, LGBTQ identifying individuals felt this is a barrier, but not a challenge: “If the Catholic Church says you can’t get married, well then,
okay, you can’t get married; I never saw it as something that was a problem” (Adriane, Female, 34). The Catholic Church (1994) cannot view same-sex marriage as a legal recognition of unions due to the resulting inability to defend their long-standing values and definition of marriage as being between a man and a woman; however, the Church does recognize the need for equality amongst homosexual individuals within the Church (Dempsey, 2008; Goh, 2014). However, Pope Francis has made progress with his new book, The Name of God is Mercy, and is quoted as asking, “Who am I to judge?” Although the Catholic Church has not made progress with accepting same-sex marriage in the seven sacraments, the Pope does seem to acknowledge that he has no bearing on the identities of parishioners in the Catholic Church. Moreover, LGBTQ identifying individuals think the legalization of gay marriage throughout the United States will encourage and bring awareness to the Catholic Church and its parishioners.

Many LGBTQ individuals who were brought up within the Catholic Church did feel support from the foundation of their family’s Catholic beliefs, which they experienced throughout their childhoods, but felt disengagement after coming out. One said: “I was raised with a very strong Catholic faith, and I always saw the loving side of the Catholic Church and how warm and welcoming it is; then I came out and saw a different side” (Brendan, Male, 22). LGBTQ identifying individuals felt a strong sense of connection to the Catholic Church due to being raised within those ideals throughout their childhood, but began to question their identity after coming out. Another participant explained: “I spent eighteen-plus years believing in God and the Catholic Church. I can’t just turn that off right away” (Jonathon, Male, 28). LGBTQ identifying individuals would benefit from an established support system within their lives to solidify their sexual identity within a challenging society.
Theme 4: Would You Choose a Lifestyle that is Not Accepted in Society?

LGBTQ identifying individuals describe their sexual identity as not being a choice. This theme surrounding lack of choice emerged from the data from multiple participants reflecting on their true sexual identity and relationship with the Catholic Church. Many individuals felt that neither God, nor he or she, would choose to be gay or choose a lifestyle that is more difficult than that of someone who identifies as heterosexual. The Catholic Church validates that same-sex attraction is an experience that one individual does not choose, and feels that certain individuals feel their sexual identity is an “unwanted burden” (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2009, p. 8). Research also shows that, even after coming out as their chosen sexual identity, many individuals undergo times of uncertainty regarding their chosen identity (Apperson et al., 2015; Rust, 1993). Many individuals reported questioning their sexual identity even after coming out to themselves and their families, but deep down knew that there was no choice to be made: “[This identity is] being truly who I am, something that I can’t change” (Daniel, Male, 36). The Catholic Church feels that therapy should be explored for individuals who have “homosexual tendencies” and would benefit from seeking out counselors who are “qualified and competent within the field, as well as one who understands and supports the Church’s teachings on homosexuality” (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2009, p. 8). Although the Catholic Church echoes the theme in this study that being gay is not a choice, they still feel that “homosexual acts” are viewed as a sin within the Catholic Church.

Love (2005) argues that, when an individual begins their exploration of their sexual identity, they may unknowingly trigger the simultaneous exploration of concurrent identities, such as their Catholic religious identity, but there is not a choice involved in when the
exploration begins. One participant noted: “I always questioned if it was choice or not, I guess, to be gay, but [the question] never felt authentic” (Nickolas, Male, 32).

LGBTQ identifying individuals live within two worlds throughout society—their world as they know it, and a world that is not always accepting of their identity and beliefs, but many individuals feel being gay is not a choice. One woman said: “I never had butterflies in my stomach for a man, ever, only with women; it’s a physical thing, something that happens to you, not something you choose” (Mara, Female, 55). All participants who acknowledged and brought up that they never felt identifying as LGBTQ was a choice were adamant that their feelings were authentic and true. The findings in this theme echo and reflect the Cass Model (1979), specifically regarding fluidity through the six stages. Although the theme of a lack of choice involved in being gay did emerge here in this study, the struggle with the thought is ever present within the LGBTQ individual. The lack of choice to identify as LGBTQ is felt throughout the coming out process, it is not until one has attained wholeness and self-acceptance as outlined in the final stage of the Cass Model. The final stage of the Cass Model (1979), Stage 6, is the point where wholeness and self-acceptance meet, and where a sense of pride and acceptance surrounding their sexual identity is strengthened (Bayne, 2016; Cass, 1979).

**Themes Related to the Lived Coming Out Experience**

*Theme 5: Who Am I and What Am I Feeling?*

The theme of the coming out process was generated from the LGBTQ identifying individuals coming out to themselves prior to coming out to their family and friends, as well as from the turmoil and fear surrounding the process of coming out. LGBTQ identifying individuals feel the coming out process encompasses a contradiction and conflict between two identities. They acknowledge feelings associated with coming out as being those of an internal
struggle—oppression, disappointment, fear, disconnection, exploration, worry, secretiveness, pressure, and uncertainty.

The coming out process allows LGBTQ individuals time to move through personal acceptance and pursue a connection with others while responding to discrimination in a healthy way (Bayne, 2016). Time plays a key role in the coming out process for LGBTQ Individuals and their coming out process, and all participants felt the need to wait, after coming out to themselves, before coming out to their families and friends. One said: “I actually came out as bisexual first; I kind of used it as a transition” (Brenden, Male, 22). The idea of feeling safe or having a safety net during the coming out process is important for many LGBTQ identifying individuals. They use the span of time between when they come out to themselves and when they come out to others as a time for exploration, questioning, and preparing to come out to their family and friends. There is also evidence that timing can influence the reactions and relationships when coming out to family; for example delaying disclosure may compound or create a problem, not alleviate it (Apperson et al., 2015). One participant noted: “The coming out process would be described as finally coming to terms with accepting myself first. Even though I knew it was something that was within me forever, I didn’t think I would ever come out” (Daniel, Male, 34). Although most LGBTQ individuals come out to themselves first in order to fully explore their own identities within themselves, for fear of rejection, many individuals participating in this study did not experience negative coming out experiences when coming out to family members.

LGBTQ identifying individuals participating in the study all felt some form of fear or hesitation prior to coming out to their family; however, it was the response from family members
that varies. Some LGBTQ identifying individuals felt their families always knew they were gay, but were waiting for them to come out in their own time.

“I wasn’t living with my family anymore, but I happened to come home. It was my birthday, and I had some friends visiting with me, and my mom asked me a question, and she said, ‘Are your friends gay?’ and I said, ‘Yes,’ and as I am trying to reach for the door to leave, my mom asks me ‘Are you gay?’ and I said, ‘Yes.’ And she said, ‘I always thought so,’ and I left to go out with my friends.” (Michelle, Female, 43)

The hesitation stems from the unknown. Apperson et al. (2015) argue that a lack of trust between the LGBTQ identifying individual and their microsystem means it can be difficult to earn trust back; therefore, hesitation to come out is increased. Without the trust within the family system, the LGBTQ identifying individual faces a more difficult coming out process than that of someone who feels safe and who trusts in their relationship with their family. One participant noted: “My parents tried in every way that they could to make me feel comfortable to come out” (Jonathon, Male, 28). The trusting relationship alleviated the hesitation of the coming out process, allowing the participant to feel more accepted within the family unit. LGBTQ identifying individuals benefit from an established support system within their family unit that can create a trusting relationship throughout their coming out process.

*Theme 6: I am Who I Am, and I am Okay with That.*

The last theme that emerged from data analysis was related to van Manen’s (1997) *lived existentials*, specifically surrounding the coming out process. Individuals identifying as LGBTQ go through many lived experiences in their coming out process, not only with themselves, but also with their families, employers, and friends. Each of van Manen’s (1997) four *lived*
existentials—lived space (spatiality), lived body (corporeality), lived time (temporality), and lived human relation (relationality or communality)—emerged as themes within the data.

Lived time suggests that lived time is our way as human beings of being oriented in the world (van Manen, 1997). The timing of LGBTQ identifying individuals coming out was different for each individual who participated in this study, as was the time between when the individual came out to himself or herself versus the time when they came out to their parents and family was different. LGBTQ individuals waited or planned to wait to come out to their families after coming out to themselves due to the fear of rejection. One noted: “I didn’t admit to myself that I was gay until I was 17. I never expected to come out to my parents until I was financially independent” (Brendan, Male, 19). The feeling of safety and security is also important when deciding when to come out to family and friends, and this was a theme discussed earlier in this chapter. Feelings associated with the timing of coming out are fear, hesitation, conflict, disappointment, and worry. LGBTQ identifying individuals feel they need to be comfortable within their own sexual identity before sharing it with their families. One participant said: “I didn’t tell my mother for 15 years. I lived a lie for 15 years” (Mara, Female, 55). LGBTQ identifying individuals participating in this study were able to recall the specific time associated with their coming out process in order to reflect back on the circumstances and feelings that were coming up. One participant mentioned: “[My coming out] was actually during the time that my father was on his death bed. I found myself wanting to, just realizing, why hide anything like this anymore?” (Jonathon, Male, 28). LGBTQ identifying individuals would benefit from an understanding of lived time during their coming out process. The importance of recognizing lived time is associated with the sensitivity and pressure associated with the timing of their coming out process.
The existential of the *lived body* signifies that we are always bodily within the world; we exist within the body, and with the body (van Manen, 1997). The experience of one’s body differed with each individual who participated in this study, but emerging themes appeared across all of the participants’ interviews. Feelings associated with the body and the physical experience of coming out include oppression, guilt, shame, abandonment, a lack of choice, regret, and uncertainty. The physical body is experienced across all LGBTQ identifying individuals, although some experience it in a positive light and other in a negative fashion. In this study, positive associations with one’s body stemmed from a core belief and strong foundation within the Catholic Church. One participant explained: “Your body’s a temple, and it’s sacred. And I believe that is something to be shared with somebody who you love with your heart” (Michelle, Female, 55). The strong foundation within the Church or within participants themselves emerged as a sense of self-acceptance within one’s body. Another participant said, “I don’t really see the Church getting in the way of who I am, who I want to be, how I live my life” (Adriane, Female, 34). On the other hand, there were negative experiences within one’s *lived body* that were associated with feelings of guilt and shame. One participant noted: “I found myself not wanting to engage in certain sexual acts, and not wanting to because it was wrong, wrong in my head. And that’s what the church taught me, that I couldn’t do that” (Jonathon, Male, 28). The shame and guilt associated with *lived body* stem from the Catholic Church’s views and beliefs which LGBTQ identifying individuals must struggle to overcome. LGBTQ identifying individuals would benefit from an understanding of *lived body* in relation to all aspects of their identities, both religious and sexual, along with a sense of the importance of recognizing the shame and guilt associated with the Catholic Church as related to their coming out process.
Lived human relationship is the space shared with others (van Manen, 1997). LGBTQ identifying individuals share many spaces during their coming out process, such as via their relationship with God, relationship with family, and relationship with friends. They experience a relationship with God being supportive or disconnected. LGBTQ identifying individuals may feel the coming out process has strengthened their relationship with God, feel they are committing a sin or are a sinner, feel hesitant to engage in a relationship with God, feel that they have already relinquished their relationship with God, or feel conflicted in their relationship with God. One participant noted, “I don’t know how I feel exactly about God and higher beings; I spent eighteen years believing in God and the Catholic Church. I just can’t turn that off” (Jonathon, Male, 28). LGBTQ identifying individuals struggle with having two coexisting and conflicting identities, their sexual identity and their religious identity, and with being in a space that is not accepting of who they are.

“I still have this really conflictual relationship with this idea of God. And I think I was this just believer whenever I was little, going through the Church, going to catechism and being confirmed and everything. But now that I really came out, I started questioning everything” (Nickolas, Male, 32).

Two themes emerged in regards to family support. The first theme was family was supportive of LGBTQ identifying individuals throughout the coming out process. The second theme was the LGBTQ identifying individual was initially rejected the family after coming out, but was able to later reconcile the relationship. One participant said, “I came out to my mother, who was very standoffish for a long time, but the big secret [from my mom] was, your grandparents can never know. They will be devastated, and won’t know what to do about it” (Nickolas, Male, 32). The backlash from coming out within the family system was severe for many LGBTQ identifying
individuals. Another participant explained: “I was more worried about my parents having to explain, ‘oh, my daughter has a wife,’ and it causing a situation for them” (Kelly, Female, 22). LGBTQ identifying individuals would benefit from an understanding of *lived human relationship* in relation to all aspects of their identities, both religious and sexual, along with an understanding of the importance of recognizing the conflict that can arise within the space of a relationship associated with the Catholic Church, God, family, or friends as a result of the coming out process.

*Lived space* is felt space in one’s day-to-day existence (van Manen, 1997). There are many spaces which LGBTQ identifying individuals live within during their coming out process, and specifically, their family home and the Catholic Church. Many LGBTQ identifying individuals feel a conflict or disconnect between their sexual identity and their Catholic religious identity, and perhaps especially when attending mass. The feelings of their *lived space* can include openness, wholeness, selfishness, shame, conflict, contradiction, avoidance, and abandonment. One participant noted: “I stopped going to youth group. I felt like that would be weird” (Brendan, Male, 22). Uncomfortableness was a feeling associated with spaces in many LGBTQ identifying participants’ lives, which translates to hesitation and fear of going into or living in such spaces. Another male participant noted: “Back in my hometown, I don’t feel as comfortable holding my boyfriend’s hand walking down the street” (Jonathon, Male, 28). Conflicting spaces was a common theme among all LGBTQ identifying individuals who participated in the study, one of them saying, “Well, I’m gay, but my family’s not okay with it because of their religious beliefs” (Nickolas, Male, 32). Therefore, Nickolas felt uncomfortable living in his family home after coming out. LGBTQ identifying individuals would benefit from an understanding of *lived space* in relation to all aspects of their identities, both religious and
sexual, along with an understanding of the importance of recognizing the conflict that can arise within the spaces associated with the Catholic Church and with their families’ longstanding beliefs in the Catholic faith.

**Summary of Themes**

Six themes were here detailed from the summary of the themes in Chapter 4 (Table 4.01) that encapsulated the lived experiences and personal experiences of participants in this phenomenologically orientated study. The themes included: The Existential Process of Coming Out, Financial Stability, Challenge and Support in the Practice of Catholicism, The Process of Coming Out, Fear of Rejection, and Being Gay Not Being a Choice. In this section, the researcher discussed the findings and the themes that emerged from the data, and made connections to the research questions established early on in the study. The researcher found that themes emerged and intersected with all research questions and with both identifies of LGBTQ identifying individuals.

The existential process of coming out and van Manen’s (1997) four lived existentials are intertwined and embedded within the themes and findings that emerged within this study. LGBTQ identifying individuals struggle with their own lived experiences throughout their coming out process, specifically in the four areas van Manen (1997) discusses: *lived body, lived space, lived relationality, and lived time.*

**Practical Implications**

This study offers a rich awareness and insight into the lived experiences of individuals who identify as LGBTQ and were raised within the Catholic Church, and also into how they verbalized their lived experienced during the coming out process. Thus, the study has practical
implications for the Catholic Church, counselors, families of LGBTQ individuals, and future research.

**Implications for the Catholic Church**

This study shows that individuals identifying as LGBTQ who have grown up in the Catholic Church either want more involvement within the Church in their authentic identity, or they want to move away from the Church, having expressed doubts regarding forward movement and progress with the acceptance of LGBTQ identifying individuals into the Catholic Church. Most participants came into the interview process with a foundational knowledge and awareness of Catholic teachings and scriptures. One participant entered into community on her journey to becoming a nun, and so was especially well versed in the teachings and practices of the Catholic Church. Other participants felt they had a strong foundational base of knowledge regarding the teachings and beliefs of the Catholic Church in regards to LGBTQ identity. The Catholic Sacraments of Marriage and Eucharist were brought up the most within the study’s findings, concerning the areas where individuals did not feel supported or where they felt judgment from other parishioners within the Catholic Church. Participants described feeling social rejection when attending weddings within the Catholic Church, accepting the sacrament of the Eucharist, and living with judgment and fear during mass.

When discussing the Catholic Church and its beliefs in relation to the LGBTQ culture, conflict can arise within one or both identities for an individual, especially if the LGBTQ identifying individual did not feel supported or felt abandoned by the Catholic Church at any point during their coming out process—both of these themes having emerged in this study (see Table 4.01). Starting an open dialogue as a way to educate counselors-in-training, priests, members of the Catholic Church, and families of LGBTQ individuals can, in turn, benefit the
lives and identities of LGBTQ identifying individuals. This dialogue needs to be consistent throughout the practice and beliefs of clergy in the Catholic Church. Consistency meaning each parish and priest should acknowledge national news stories where LGBTQ identifying individuals are at the center. One participant specifically brought up the Orlando shooting of LGBTQ individuals in a gay club, where during the homily, the priest did not acknowledge the mass shooting or discuss it with the congregation at mass, it being something that the participant felt should have been brought up because of the event’s magnitude.

Given the recent decline in parishioners within the Catholic Church, the Church would benefit from a more inclusive community, in relation to LGBTQ individuals. This would alleviate one cause of people leaving the church, since it’s not only LGBTQ individuals who practice less as a result of the Church’s policies, but also people who are friends or family of LGBTQ individuals and grow frustrated with the lack of inclusion or the bias within the Church.

Implications for the Church include the need for doing a better job at bringing awareness and teaching parishioners who hold differing views of LGBTQ individuals within the Catholic Church, having consistency within the teachings and messages from priests presiding over mass, and acknowledgement that the Catholic Church does not reject LGBTQ individuals as a person or parishioner within the Catholic Church, but rejects their same-sex relationship in the eyes of the Catholic Church. As the participants of this study stated and as was shown in the findings, it is the views of the parishioners within the Catholic Church and the Catholic beliefs and teachings that they feel are not supportive, and something they cannot change. Participants felt that their growing up within the Catholic Church created a foundational base of belief (see Table 4.01), which emerged as a consistent theme. The foundational base of beliefs described by participants is not something that can be changed, as it is part of their core identity and gave participants
power and self-confidence (see Table 4.01) enough for four participants to continue practicing Catholicism.

**Implications for Counselors**

The counseling profession is rather new to the ideas surrounding LGBTQ individuals and the inner workings of their lives and their communities; for example, the *ACA Code of Ethics* (2014) requests counselor educators and supervisors be responsible for educating and training new counselors on how to appropriately and competently serve the LGBTQ population, but counselors cannot push or require students to work with this population against their own religious or gender bias (ACA, 2014, F.11.b; Whiteman & Bidell, 2012). It is important for counselors to be aware of their own bias, as a theme within this study is individuals choosing a lifestyle that is not generally accepted in society. Participants felt fearful that social rejection was imminent within their life during the coming out process, and counselors could enhance the feeling of social rejection by inadvertently rejecting an LGBTQ client who has sought their services if such counselors proceed through bias and a lack of education on LGBTQ identity issues. Regardless of one’s own bias, counselors need to be aware that, when working with LGBTQ individuals, the coming out process for many LGBTQ individuals can be a catalyst for depression, suicide, and questioning of all aspects of their lives and identities (Bayne, 2016; Plante, 2015; Rosenkrantz et al., 2016). Some participants in this study described living with deep depression during their coming out process. Specifically, this occurred after they came out to themselves, and prior to coming out to their family and friends. Counselors must be able to make the connection between the coming out process and underlying depression that may be evident within their LGBTQ clients.
Nevertheless, the *ACA Code of Ethics* (2014), although it promotes the idea of educating and bringing awareness to novice counselors regarding LGBTQ clients, also ethically requires educators to be respectful of a novice counselor’s bias, along with protecting a client from working with individuals who are not competent within the diverse population (ACA, 2014, F.8.d; Whiteman & Bidell, 2012). The incorporation of LGBTQ topics and multiculturalism into all aspects of counselor education programs and training programs within employment agencies would benefit counselors, counselor educators, and mental health professionals by integrating a foundation of knowledge and interventions into all training programs and educational programs, enriching their abilities to work with clients who identify within the LGBTQ community.

In addition to training in LGBTQ topics and multiculturalism, counselors should also be given the opportunity to work with and engage in real life experiences related to LGBTQ culture. For example, incorporating real life experiences through immersion projects, internship and practicum experiences, supervised courses, and discussions about the communities and current events that have impacted the LGBTQ culture, as well as discussions of how they think, feel, act, behave, respond, and question their coming out process (Rosenkrantz et al., 2016). Many counseling programs and employment agencies offer multicultural courses and trainings throughout their coursework; however, such training cannot be all encompassing. Therefore, counselors and mental health professionals need to take their own initiative to ensure professional responsibility and research, making sure to attend trainings and gain real life experiences with an in-depth understanding and awareness of LGBTQ identifying individuals (ACA, 2014, C.2.a).
Implications for Research

In conducting research with this population of LGBTQ identifying individuals, bringing awareness to the counseling profession, churches, community leaders, and families is crucial. The LGBTQ community is moving forward and gaining coverage within the U.S. society with the nationwide legalization of gay marriage; however, in the eyes of the Catholic Church, the recognition of same-sex individuals being married has not yet occurred. Therefore, researchers need to understand the importance and the purpose of research, as well as their role and responsibilities to research studies. One suggestion for researchers would be for them to establish a strong relationship with a member of the Church or a Catholic figure within the Catholic Church in order to educate and bring awareness to the parishioners of the Catholic faith about LGBTQ individuals who also identify as Catholic. By providing awareness and education to leaders and parishioners of the Catholic Church about the importance of inclusion, not only among their heterosexual parishioners, but also parishioners who identify as LGBTQ or may be questioning their sexual identity. This suggestion relates back to Bronfrenbrenner’s Bioecological Model of Development, specifically in relation to the mesosystem, which identifies participants’ closest influences to their lives as the Catholic Church, family, and friends. Thus, research can move towards uncovering more about the influences within LGBTQ identifying individuals’ lived experiences, not only in regard to the Catholic religion, but also with all religions. Additionally, when conducting a research study on LGBTQ identifying individuals who identify as Catholic, it is important that researchers utilize snowball or chain sampling in order to gain access to the LGBTQ community and allow for word of mouth referrals for the benefit of the study. As Bronfenbrenner suggests, this method is important
because friends are close influencers of the LGBTQ individual’s culture, and thus this allowance for further participants in studies expands the opportunity for research.

Questions for future studies arose from the emerging themes within this study and generated overarching questions for future research. What does it mean to the LGBTQ individual to go from being a member of the majority to a minority within our society, based on their decision to come out? There was also a predominating theme across all participants regarding their foundation of core Catholic beliefs instilled by their families and their being raised within the Catholic Church. What are the attachments surrounding core Catholic beliefs within the family system by which the LGBTQ individual feels supported and anchored?

**Limitations of the Study**

This section focuses on the limitations of the study and highlights areas that the study’s scope was unable to address. These limitations include the number of participants, self-reporting, timing, the nature of the topic, and the inclusion of transgender individuals as participants in this study. Transgender individuals were not recruited during this study, but may have added additional concerns in related to coming out and the Catholic Church. Participant recruiting took place right at the end of a college semester, meaning that many potential participants were studying for finals or leaving campus to return home for winter break. This could have hindered some potential participants from reaching out to participate in the study due to poor timing. The interviews also took place around the holiday season, and many participants were traveling or had a hard time scheduling a time to meet with the researcher. Along with the timing of the recruitment process, individuals who did not feel comfortable discussing their lived experience, although they met criteria for the study, did not reach out as potential participants.
Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the research study’s findings through existential descriptions, implications of practice, limitations, and opportunities for future research. This phenomenologically orientated research study set out to explore, describe, and gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of LGBTQ identifying individuals who also identify or grew up with Catholic religious beliefs during their coming out process. Through the descriptive frameworks of van Manen’s lived existentials and Bronfenbrenner’s Biocultural Model of Development, the researcher found that LGBTQ identifying individuals experience conflict between their religious and sexual identities during the coming out process, and must cope with developing a strong sense of self-acceptance, financial security, and improving their overall relationship with their family and friends. To prevent abandonment of one of their identities, LGBTQ identifying individuals need to feel a sense of safety and security not only within themselves, but within their family unit and throughout their lives.

Van Manen’s (1997) four lived existentials supported the lived experiences of LGBTQ identifying individuals in relation to the perspective of the experience of their coming out process. Catholic LGBTQ identifying individuals are affected by the Catholic Church and their family unit, and at times the participants in this study felt selfishness, shame, conflict, contradiction, avoidance, or abandonment when they were at mass or events related to the Catholic Church and the Catholic faith (Lived Space). LGBTQ identifying individuals in the study also felt judged within their body and identity, based around how others perceive their sexual or religious identity in society and within the Catholic Church (Lived Body). LGBTQ identifying individuals who participated in the study also experienced worry and fear leading up to and during their coming out process, or when revealing their sexual identity to family and
friends (*Lived Time*). Lastly, LGBTQ identifying individual participants’ interpersonal
relationships depended on and intertwined with their identities and how others perceive and react
to their sexual and religious identities (*Lived Human Relation*).

This study provided practical implication for counselors, continued research, and the Catholic Church. Counselors can bring awareness to the field through professional memberships, conference presentations, and educating counselors-in-training on the importance of LGBTQ identifying individuals being supported prior to, during, and after coming out and within all aspects of their lives. As far as the Catholic Church is concerned, it is important that LGBTQ identifying individuals, along with parishioners, be provided with support and psychoeducation surrounding the impact of Catholic religious beliefs on LGBTQ identifying individuals, along with the feelings of conflict and disconnection that can come up in their religious identity.

This study’s limitations included the number of participants, self-reporting, the comfort of participants disclosing and exploring their own identities, and the timing of the study. Due to the timing of the study being around the holidays and right before winter break, it was challenging to recruit participants for the study as well as schedule a time to meet with recruited participants due to conflicting schedules around this time of year. The researcher found some participants were less comfortable disclosing or reflecting on their coming out process, as well as engaging in this exploration within the context of both sexual and religious identities. These limitations for this research study produced potential research topics to be explored in future endeavors.

Future researchers should study any aspect of this study related to the coming out process of LGBTQ identifying individuals, especially focusing on Catholic religious identity or sexual
identity. This study could also be done utilizing a different religious identity aside from Catholicism. LGBTQ identifying individuals were hesitant to discuss or reflect on their own experience with their bodies surrounding the coming out process, but this would be something else that this researcher felt was an underlying concern, and which was not explored.

This study’s limitations included the number of participants, self-reporting, timing, and the nature of the topic. Due to the number of participants originally interviewed in this study, there were too many participants for the type of data analysis being conducted, thus the number of participants had to be amended to fit within the nature of the study. The recruitment of participants and interviews took place around the holiday season, which may have had an impact on participant responses and availability of participants to be interviewed for the study. The limitations for this study generated potential research questions and topics for future study.

Implications for future research should explore the attachment of the LGBTQ identifying individual to their core Catholic beliefs as instilled by their families throughout their childhood, this research offering a way to further understand the impact of the coming out process on the LGBTQ individual as well as their familial unit. Another question that the findings of this study generated is: what does it mean to the LGBTQ individual to be from the majority, and then to feel as if you are a minority within our society based on the decision to come out? This question focuses on a perceived change in social status as a result of the coming out process.

This study focused on the lived experience and coming out process of LGBTQ identifying individuals who were raised with Catholic religious beliefs, and explored, in depth, the feelings, reactions, disappointments, and revelations related to the experience of coming out. It was not until the findings were presented that themes truly emerged within the narratives of all participants who described their powerful and honest lived experience for the purpose of this
phenomenologically oriented research study in order to continue the conversation and awareness of all members within the counseling profession, the Catholic Church, and future researchers of LGBTQ identifying individuals.
References


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Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY
600 FORBES AVENUE • PITTSBURGH, PA 15282

This researcher is looking at the lived experiences of individuals who identify as LGBTQ, have been raised or currently are a practicing Catholic, and who have come out to their family

Eligibility to Participate
- At least 18 years old
- Identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning
- Have come out to family members as LGBTQ
- Practicing Catholic or raised in the Catholic church

Participation in this study is always voluntary

What Happens if I Participate?
- You will be invited to an interview for 60-80 minutes regarding your lived experiences of coming out as LGBTQ and your Catholic faith.
- Interview will take place in a convenient, quiet, mutually agreed upon location
- Privacy and anonymity of participants will be outlined prior to the interview
- Each Participant will receive a $10 Starbucks gift card

Contact Information
- If you are interested in participating in this study please contact:
  
  Michelle Colarusso
  Duquesne University
  Ph.D. Candidate
  colarussom@duq.edu

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CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

TITLE: The First Life Journey of Many: The lived experience of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning individuals who were raised within the Catholic Church on their coming out process.

INVESTIGATOR: Michelle Colarusso, MA, NCC, Doctoral Candidate, School of Education, colarussom@duq.edu

ADVISOR: Fr. Louis Jocelyn Gregoire, CSSp., Ed.D., Assistant Professor, School of Education, gregoire@duq.edu, 412-396-4442

SOURCE OF SUPPORT: This study is being performed as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the doctoral degree in Counselor Education and Supervision at Duquesne University.

PURPOSE: You are being asked to participate in a research project that seeks to explore the impact of Catholic religious beliefs on the coming out process for individuals identifying as LGBTQ. There are research articles looking at sexual identity, religious identity, and the coming out process, but, to date, there is a lack of research specifically looking at the Catholic religion as a factor and a combination of all the research. The data collected from this study will result in adding to and furthering research in the Counselor Education field.

In order to qualify for participation, you must be:
(1) Identify as LGBTQ
(2) Raised in or currently practicing Catholicism
(3) Have come out to family as an LGBTQ individual

PARTICIPANT
PROCEDURES: To participate in this study, you will be asked to: participate in individual, semi-structured interviews, focusing on questions about the coming out process for individuals identifying as LGBTQ. Participation in this study will take no more than two hours of your time. The researcher will contact the participant to set up a time and place for the interview. The researcher will then travel to that specific location to meet in-person with the participant, and the participant will choose the meeting location.

In addition, you will be asked to allow the researcher to interview you. The interviews will be audio recorded and video recorded, if utilizing skype. The interviews will take approximately 60-80 minutes, participants will only be interviewed once, and the interviews will take place in a location convenient to the participant. Facilitated by the researcher, you will be asked to participate and answer semi-structured research questions, with the possibility of follow up questions to gain further insight into your story.

These are the only requests that will be asked of you.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: There are no risks greater than those encountered in everyday life. However, the time to complete the interview may take up to 60-80 minutes of your time. The benefit of participating in this interview is the contribution to furthering research in the Counselor Education field.

COMPENSATION: You will receive a $10 gift card for your participation in the interview and research study. The gift card will be provided to you at the end of the interview process. Participation in the project will require no monetary cost to you.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your participation in this study and any personal information that you provide will be kept confidential at all times and to every extent possible.

Your name will never appear on any survey or research instruments. All written and electronic forms and study materials will be kept secure. Your responses will only appear in statistical data summaries. Any study materials with personal identifying information will be maintained for three years.
All written forms and materials will be kept in password-protected documents and locked files. Your responses will be deidentified from transcribed interview documents. Audio recordings cannot be guaranteed to be deidentified with information or voice recognition. Audiotapes will be permanently deleted from the device as well as transcriptions destroyed. Any identifiable materials will be maintained for three years after the completion of the research and then destroyed.

**RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:** You are under no obligation to participate in this study and are free to withdraw your consent to participate at any time by emailing the researcher prior to or during the interview. Any collected data will be anonymous. Once your interview is completed and your data has been separated from your informed consent form and/or transcribed and entered into a data base, it will not be possible for you to withdraw from the study. If you decide to withdraw from the study during the interview, the data will be destroyed at that moment.

**SUMMARY OF RESULTS:** A summary of the results of this research will be supplied to you, at no cost, upon request.

**VOLUNTARY CONSENT:** I have read the above statements and understand what is being requested of me. I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time, for any reason. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.

I understand that should I have any further questions about my participation in this study, I may contact Michelle Colarusso or Dr. Louis Jocelyn Gregoire at 412-396-4442. Should I have questions regarding protection of human subject issues, I may call Dr. David Delmonico, Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board, at 412-396-4032.

____________________________________  ____________________________
Participant’s Signature                  Date

________________________________________  ____________________________
Researcher's Signature                   Date
Appendix C: Interview Protocol

THE FIRST LIFE JOURNEY OF MANY: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, QUESTIONING INDIVIDUALS WHO WERE RAISED WITHIN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH ON THEIR COMING OUT PROCESS

Interviewee Number: ______________________

The purpose of this study is to explore, describe, and gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experience of individuals identifying as LGBTQ, holding Catholic Religious values, and their coming out process, ages 18 and over, living in the Western Pennsylvania area who have already come out to their family.

Preparation for the Interview

Review the Purpose of the Research Study

Review and Sign the Consent Form
**Individual Interview Semi-Structured Questions**

The guiding question for this inquiry was as follows: What are the lived experiences of persons who identify as Catholic and who have come out as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning? The four supplemental research questions that will be used are:

1. How do individuals who identify as LGBTQ and Catholic describe their coming out experience?
2. What are the Catholic beliefs and practices that challenge or support the coming out process for individuals who identify as LGBTQ?
3. What lived existential (e.g. time, space, person, and relationship) do people who identify as LGBTQ and Catholic experience during their coming out process?
4. What are the risks and protective factors that affect individuals who identify as LGBTQ and Catholic during the coming out process?