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Coming Out and Losing Out: Gay Men in Emerging Adulthood and Family Support

Joshua Cafferty
University of Arkansas, Fayetteville

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Coming Out and Losing Out:
Gay Men in Emerging Adulthood and Family Support

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of the requirements for the degree of
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by

Joshua Cafferty
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_____
Dr. Brandon Jackson
Thesis Director

_____   _____
Dr. Patricia Herzog   Dr. Shauna Morimoto
Committee Member   Committee Member

Abstract

This thesis utilizes interviews completed on twenty homosexual, cisgender men who are in emerging adulthood to gain a better understanding of the ways in which family support functions, and can change at this lifestage. Unlike much of the previous research, this qualitative study argues that family support is not a question of simple acceptance or rejection, but is instead a complex combination of multiple forms of support, that can be lost or sustained for a multitude of reasons. Emerging adulthood is applied to show the benefits of family support during this life-stage, as well as to show the complexity of family support. This article identifies four main forms of family support: financial support, emotional support, romantic support, and social relationship support. Through analysis, this study shows that these forms of support can function independent of one another, and need to be studied in such a manner. Another aim is to show the need for taking the entire coming out process into analysis, and not to treat it as a single disclosure event. Examples are provided on how different steps of the coming out process affect different forms of support from these individual's families. Many studies exist that show the effects that a lack of family support has for these individuals, but this work provides an understanding to the complex ways in which family support can be lost.

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Introduction

Existence of social support from families has been directly linked to the overall well-being in emerging adulthood (Pettit, Roberts, Seeley, & Yaroslavsky, 2011). Family social support becomes especially important to study when considering the possible impact that homosexuality can have on familial relationships. Emerging adulthood is defined as the life-stage between adolescence and young adulthood, characterized by a lack of independence, and personal feeling of not yet reaching adulthood (Arnett, 2000). For gay men, this life-stage is especially important due to the continuous identity formation that occurs through the milestone experiences in the coming out process (Floyd & Stein, 2002). Research on emerging adulthood has shown the importance of family support, and how complex this support can be; making it a crucial addition to this study that has been ignored in the gender and sexuality research.

Quantitative studies have documented the negative impact of rejection by family members for LBG individuals (Ryan, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2009); however, this literature provides a dichotomous view of rejection and acceptance. While providing a basic understanding of general effects, this research does not show the complexity of support individuals can lose and sustain throughout the coming out process. While a family may be "accepting" or "rejecting" of an individual, this does not necessarily denote that all forms of support will be sustained or removed. Unfortunately, at this point, sociological research has not fully examined the processes and results in relation to the coming out process amongst gay men.

Through a qualitative analysis, this study will examine the relationship between family support and the coming out process amongst gay cisgender men in emerging adulthood. Cisgender means that the individual's gender identity matches the gender identity that was assigned to them at birth (McGeeney & Harvey, 2015). The guiding research question for this endeavor is: What happens to family social support during and after the coming out process for

gay men in emerging adulthood? Specifically, using semi-structured interviews, I examine how financial, emotional, romantic, and social relationship support from families are perceived through the eyes of these gay men. I argue that this process is more complex than acceptance or rejection. Instead, this study will show the various ways in which social support can be lost or sustained, and provides a better understanding of the effects of coming out as homosexual in relation to familial social support in emerging adulthood. This research will show that family support is itself complex, and that each form of support needs to be looked at differently, as they all seem to function in unique ways, making the focus of each different from one another. In this pursuit, I provide literature on emerging adulthood, the coming out process, and family social support. I will then move into a description of my methods, which utilized grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Straus, 1967). Finally, I will provide an analysis of the data, as well as a discussion regarding its implications.

Literature Review

Coming Out

R.W. Connell's (2005) theory of hegemonic masculinity argues that men in power have a dominant social position that subordinates women and marginalizes men who do not meet the ideal forms of hegemony. The current normative type of masculinity is the white, heterosexual, male; anyone who does not meet these criteria does not achieve hegemonic masculinity and thus, becomes marginalized (Connell, 2005). It is impossible for gay men to achieve hegemonic masculinity, because they do not meet the sexual identity criteria (Connell, 1992; Connell, 2005). This marginalized status can lead to self-doubt and delay in both their own acceptance, and disclosure of their sexuality (Chrisler, 2017). We see evidence of hegemonic masculinities role Jay Clarkson provides an example of this idea by exposing the rampant antifemininity and

homophobia that exists within the gay community. Many gay men attempt to dissociate themselves with non-masculine individuals who do not meet the normative behaviors of hegemonic masculinity, and have even gone as far as creating a website specifically for heteronormative gay men (Clarkson, 2007). Rabun and Oswald (2009) have a similar finding with gay men hoping to uphold and expand the idea of the "normal family," instead of challenging what constitutes the normal family. While being an openly gay male limits access to the status of hegemonic masculinity, many gay men do not actively challenge the heteronormative aspects of masculinity, and may instead attempt to emulate them. Since their sexual identity does not conform to the heteronormative ideals that have been presented to them as hegemonic masculinity, they will struggle with this aspect of themselves during adolescence, and typically deny this part of their identity (Floyd & Stein, 2002; Pascoe, 2007).

Floyd and Stein (2002) argue that there are approximately ten major milestones in the coming out process: awareness, questioning, sex with opposite gender, acceptance, sex with same gender, told someone, told a parent, "came out," same-gender serious relationship, and told another family member. This study shows that coming out is not instantaneous, but instead spans over many years, beginning with attempts to conform to heteronormativity, and finally rejection of this norm of hegemonic masculinity. While this process typically begins in adolescence, it will typically last into emerging adulthood, making emerging adulthood an important life stage to study the effects of the coming out process.

In their research, Grov and Bimbi (2006) found that the most recent generation of gay men are coming out earlier than previous cohorts. Kennamer, Honnold, Bradford and Hendricks (2000) found that white men were more likely to disclose their sexuality and this increased with education level; however, amongst African American respondents, not only were they less likely

to disclose their sexuality, the likelihood of this decreased with a rise in education. There is also evidence showing that rural and urban areas play a large part in delaying and managing the coming out process for gay men. Urban locations have increased levels of diversity, rural areas tend to be more homogeneous, leading to social isolation for gay men in rural locales (Johnson, 2013; Gray, Johnson, & Gilley, 2016). These studies are important as they highlight the difficulty and complexity of the coming out process for gay individuals, which can be exacerbated by a variety of social factors.

The literature displays the coming out process as one of complexity with multiple steps, and many social factors that will inevitably affect this process and create a unique process for everyone. However, research focusing on these individuals who have gone through the coming out process have not typically accounted for these complexities. Further, rejecting the heteronormative aspect of hegemonic masculinity occurs during this process, making it difficult for individuals to complete the coming out process. Even more so, families must adjust as well throughout the coming out process. The ways in which a family supports, or does not support gay men through the coming out process helps us to gain a better understanding of this process and its affects.

Emerging Adulthood and Family Social Support

The term emerging adulthood was coined by Jeffrey Jensen Arnett (2000) and it describes the life-course stage between adolescence and young adulthood. Arnett (2000; 2014) argues that the life-stage between 18-25 years old does not typically meet implied characteristics of "young adulthood," because they are not married, do not have children, and do not feel independent through accepting responsibility for themselves, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent through steady full-time work. While it is easy to see 18 as the

separation between adolescence and emerging adulthood, the upper age of emerging adulthood is harder to define. For this reason, Arnett has argued for 25, but typically states it can be up to 29, with people in their 30's typically reaching young adulthood (Arnett, 2014). Emerging adulthood is important in understanding identity formation, and I argue that this is especially important for gay men, as they redefine one aspect of their identity through the coming out process. Research of family support has been extensive on gay men in adolescence, but is lacking on emerging adulthood. It is crucial to study family support for gay men in the context of this life-stage because family support has been shown to promote positive outcomes in emerging adults (Spencer & Patrick, 2009). The conceptual understanding of emerging adulthood is important for studying people in this age group because in understanding what encompasses emerging adulthood, we have a better understanding of why family support is important.

Family social support for emerging adults has been increasing over the last few decades. In 1986, fifty-two percent of young adults maintained contact once a week or more, and in 2008, sixty-two percent have maintained that same level of contact. (Fingerman & Yahirun, 2013). Moreover, it has been shown that fifty-five percent of emerging adults are in contact with their parents daily (Arnett & Schwab, 2013). This increase in family support has had great implications for these individuals. Intense family support—receiving financial, advice, and emotional support multiple times a week—leads to better psychological development, and life satisfaction for young adults (Fingerman, Cheng, Wesselmann, Zarit, Furstenberg, & Birditt, 2012). Increases in family support can lower levels of depression (Pettit et al., 2011), have positive influences on an individual's romantic lives (Sprecher & Felmlee, 1992), aid them in finishing college (Fingerman & Yahirun, 2013), and even assist people through economic hardships (Seltzer, Strohm, & Bianchi, 2011). Overall, higher levels of family support have

many benefits for people in emerging adulthood, making family support in emerging adulthood a crucial area to research for different populations.

The research has provided insight into the relationship between lack of social support in emerging adulthood and the likelihood of engaging in risky behaviors—like risky sexual activities or substance abuse. While this research typically focuses on health disparities, primarily HIV/AIDS, it shows that a lack of family social support that many gay men experience in emerging adulthood has a direct effect on willingness to engage in risky behaviors (Bruce & Harper, 2011). Further research analyzing social support shows that gay men in emerging adulthood develop an identity within the context of heterosexist discrimination. The research shows a direct link of depression and low self-esteem to lack of social support (Spencer & Patrick, 2009).

Using a sample aged from 21 to 25, Ryan, Huebner, Diaz, and Sanchez (2009) wanted to understand the predictors of negative health outcomes for LGB individuals. They found that those individuals who reported high levels of rejection from family members were 8.4 times more likely to attempt suicide, 5.9 times more likely to report high levels of depression, 3.4 times more likely to use illegal drugs, and 3.4 times more likely to engage in unprotected sexual intercourse than the participants who reported acceptance from their families (Ryan et al., 2009). This research explicitly shows the importance of social support from family for homosexual individuals. Acceptance or rejection for these individual's sexuality is shown to be integral in their overall well-being. The consequences for losses in social support appear to be too drastic to ignore. These results make sense in the context of Collin's conceptualization of positive emotional energy leading to the feelings of being a good person, and negative emotional energy leading to feelings of being a bad person. When families reject these homosexual individuals

they are applying negative emotional energy which will inhibit these individual's overall well-being (Collin, 1993).

Looking at the opposite side, family acceptance will lead to higher levels of self-esteem, and general health amongst homosexual individuals (Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2010). Acceptance from family members provides a protective effect against depression, substance abuse, and sexually risky behavior (Ryan et al., 2010). We can see that for these individuals receiving positive emotional energy, their overall well-being is enhanced (Collins 1993). With a review of the literature, it becomes clear that family plays a large role in many aspects of a homosexual individual's overall well-being. However, the research takes a dichotomous view of either acceptance or rejection from family.

This focus on a dichotomy of acceptance or rejection is found throughout the literature. In a study focusing on the efforts of PFLAG – Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbian and gays – Goldfried (2001) argues for the benefits of parental acceptance, and the devastating effects of parental rejection for homosexual individuals. While the three previous research projects focused solely on the dichotomy of acceptance or rejection, there have been some research that has begun to move away from this. In a study on same-sex couples and their perceptions of family support, Rostosky (2004) defined the quality of support as positive support – receive support from one or more family members, non-support – receive no support from one or more family members, and ambivalent support – receive variable support from family members e.g., over time or perceived differently by each member of couple. This study shows that family support is more complicated than just a full acceptance or rejection. Changes occur over time in this support, and it varies by family member. This viewpoint is consistent with Chrisler's theoretical framework for identifying how parents process sexuality disclosure of their children. Chrisler (2017) argues that

there is an initial appraisal by the parents which leads to the parent response, a coping time, and a second reappraisal about their children. This theoretical framework complicates the idea of a dichotomous viewpoint of acceptance vs. rejection even further. A final study that pushes the dichotomy of acceptance or rejection further is Feinstein's article focusing on the effects of parental acceptance and family support on minority stress and depressive symptoms amongst homosexual individuals. In this research, Feinstein (2014) held the dichotomy of acceptance or rejection, but added the concept of general family support. Like most of the research on this subject, this study was quantitative, and was limited on their definition of family support. The dichotomy of acceptance or rejection provides a dichotomous variable that simplifies statistical analysis, but as studies have begun to show, this family support tends not to be as simple as pure acceptance or rejection. While the envelope has been pushed slightly past this dichotomy, research is needed that explains the ways in which family support is lost or sustained for gay men in emerging adulthood. This study aims to further these concepts by exposing the complexity that exists in family relations for gay men in emerging adulthood, and provide a more accurate description beyond that of acceptance or rejection that can be utilized in further research.

More research is needed to understand the ways in which social support changes for gay men in emerging adulthood, and throughout the coming out process. While the consequences of losing overall support have been investigated, it is currently unclear what possible forms of support, and the different combinations of support, that are sustained or lost. There are currently existing studies looking at social support for emerging adults, but they typically do not look at the issue of sexuality in familial relationships. This study will provide an analysis of social

support from family members for gay men in emerging adulthood, and how this changes through the coming out process.

Methods

Participants

This study utilizes interviews conducted with twenty homosexual, cisgender men, living in Fayetteville, AR, between the ages of 19-32. There are thirteen individuals who self-identify as white, five who self-identify as black, one identifying as Asian, and one who identifies as both Native American and White. Looking at the distribution of ages, one participant is under the age of 20, twelve between 20 and 25, three between 26 and 30, and two over the age of 30, with an average age of 25. While it is true that Arnett (2014) argues that by 30 most people have moved beyond young adulthood, I argue for the inclusion of some individuals in their early 30's in my sample, as many sociologists have argued emerging adulthood can last until 35 (Herzog, 2016). Individual, in-person interviews were conducted lasting approximately an hour and a half. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms have been employed for the discursive purposes of the study.

Setting

The participants were all living in Fayetteville, AR at the time that the interview took place. This is a city with a population of 78,960 and is home to the University of Arkansas. Being a college town, all but one of the participants have at least some college education. Only two of the participants did not move to Fayetteville, AR to attend the University. The majority of participants are from small towns scattered throughout Arkansas. This provides a unique insight into gay men, as all but one of the participants describe their parents as holding religious beliefs and values. This consensus of their parent's religiosity is not surprising due to Arkansas' location within the Bible Belt. The Bible Belt has been shown to be rampant with religious-based

homophobia, and LGB individuals have posited that this leads to isolation and self-loathing (Barton 2010). While located in the South, or Bible Belt, participants in the study describe the city of Fayetteville as a "safe-haven," and go further to say "… I feel the safest and most welcome here than I have felt anywhere else in Arkansas, for sure." The support of these individual's families in the context of rural areas in the Bible Belt provides a unique and interesting perspective in their perceptions of family social support, and how they view this being affected by their sexual orientation.

Data Collection

Due to me being a member of the gay community, I had prior access to many of the participants. Utilizing my own personal social connections as a gate keeper, I gained participants through these connections, and through snowball sampling. This sampling strategy made purposive attempts to add diversity to the participants, while still being able to gain access to participants.

From my current data and other studies on the coming out process, it appears that many people come out of the closet after their first year in college (Floyd & Stein 2002). Coming out acts as the beginning of the process of being integrated into the gay community and building social connections with other gay people. Unfortunately, this means that gay men between the ages of 18 and 20 are harder to gain access for either not being out of the closet, or not yet having many social connections in the gay community that would make it possible for me to reach them with my sampling method. In snowball sampling, some recommendations were made for individuals that were not out of the closet in Fayetteville, but these people were deliberately excluded. There were two reasons for this exclusion. First was to protect individuals who were not yet comfortable disclosing their sexual identity. While all information is being kept

confidential, the meeting itself presented a small risk of being seen entering the office by others who know my research, and thusly being outed. I determined this risk, albeit a small one, was not worth the possible consequences. The second reason these individuals were excluded is because they would not yet have possible changes in family support that occur through the coming out process. In terms of gaining a racially diverse sample, Fayetteville, AR is 83.8% white (U.S. Census Bureau. 2010, April 1), meaning that the small number of gay men out of the closet is even more restricted in terms of racial diversity.

Participants were first contacted through text messaging, Facebook messenger, or email. For the participants gained through snowball sampling, they were first contacted by the individual and then by myself. The purpose of this was to remove the possibility of obtaining their contact information without first gaining prior permission to have it released to me. Eight of the individuals contacted chose to not participate in the study. After the initial contact a meeting time and location were scheduled.

Three locations have been used for interviewing, eighteen were conducted in two different offices located on the University of Arkansas campus, and the remaining two were conducted in my home. At the beginning of the meeting the purpose of the interview was explained in full to the participant, the IRB approved Invitation to Participate was discussed; a copy was given to them for their records, and a signed copy was retained. A private, semi-structured individual interview followed that lasted approximately ninety minutes.

As the interviewer, my personal standpoint of identities influences the research process (Charmaz, 2014). My shared status of being a gay male of similar age plays a role in having the participants divulge certain details that they may not be willing to divulge to an individual who does not share these identities (Kleinman, 2007). However, I am also a white individual, while I

share this identity with some of my participants, I do not with others. This could affect the information that an individual is willing to share, especially when issues directly related to race come up in the discussion.

Being a gay man has the possible effect of the interviewees attempting to conceal information that they feel reflect negatively on themselves, and focus on instances that they feel reflect positively through self-presentation (Goffman, 1978). This was brought to my attention after four of the participants either hit on me prior to the interviews, or propositioned me for dating purposes after the interviews. A heterosexual researcher interviewing a heterosexual of the opposite sex can lead to a bias through self-presentation to be sexually appealing (Kleinman, 2007; Wilkins, 2008). The same can occur with a homosexual researcher interviewing a same-gender individual. As the interviewer, my possible influence on the data was critically reviewed through the collection, and analyses portions of the research project.

Interview Questions

The interview questions were originally developed to gain basic descriptive information about the individual, as well as the support that they receive from different social groups. A multitude of other explorative questions were included to find any unknown connections to the guiding research connection. In keeping with grounded theory, the interview questions adapted to the emerging topics as more interviews were completed; with every interview adding to, or reframing at least one question (Charmaz, 2014; Straus & Corbin, 1998).

The interviews covered a multitude of topics, but those questions that provided the greatest impact to this study deal with information about the participant's family, family support, and the coming out process. The descriptive information gained on the family included demographic information, and religiosity. Questions were then asked in relation to the types of

support that have been received from family, focusing on financial, emotional, and social, and if these have changed at different points in their life. There are also questions discussing the coming out process with family, how open they are about their sexuality with different family members, and questions related to a variety categorical interests. While Floyd and Stein (2002) provided a general idea of the ten steps of the coming out process, it is important to note that many of the respondents in their study did not partake, have yet to participate, or reached the aforementioned milestones in different orders. This means that it was very important to understand what milestones the participants in this study had completed, and when they completed them. Overall, the interview questions followed the qualitative methodology of grounded theory through emergent concepts, and were developed in hopes of gaining emergent theories in contrast to previously conceptualized theories.

Data Analysis

For this research project, I have used grounded theory methodology in data collection, as well as analysis. Grounded theory is a qualitative methodological approach that focuses on theory emerging from the data, meaning the emergent theory is "grounded" in the data (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In following this approach, I began data collection as the initial step, without a hypothesis, or having completed a thorough literature review. I created a semi-structured interview and began contacting participants. During, and immediately after the interview, an initial memo was made for each participant, highlighting any important aspects of the interview, and emerging themes. After the interviews were completed and transcribed, I again added to memos with important aspects of each interview through reviewing the transcripts.

Once the interviews were completed and transcribed, the interviews were coded with initial codes, and then focused codes. The qualitative software NVivo has been used to organize the data found in the transcripts, as well as in the coding process.

Findings

This study will analyze the levels of perceived and actualized social support among gay men in emerging adulthood and their families. Specifically, this work examines financial support, emotional support, romantic support, and social relationships of gay men in emerging adulthood, and any changes that may occur through the coming out process. The aim is to provide a framework for understanding the different combinations, ways, and reasons these individuals provide as to why they lost or sustained different forms of support from their families. In this effort, different examples of possible outcomes will be provided, not to show the single most common occurrence, but to illuminate the complexity of these outcomes. This will provide the framework for future research illuminating the complex ways family social support can change for these individuals.

Financial Support

Financial support appears to be the simplest form of support to analyze due to its quantifiable nature. However, for the purposes of this paper, financial support is defined as both actualized and perceived financial support. This means that financial support can take the form of monthly monetary contributions, or the willingness of the participant to go to family for financial assistance should the need arise. This definition was formed after the interviews were completed. It became obvious that even if someone does not receive monetary contributions routinely, it does not mean that they feel they have been cut off from financial support. For many of the individuals, lack of monthly contributions simply means that their parents do not always

have the means to make those normal contributions, or they do not require monthly financial assistance. This section will provide insight into the complex nature of family financial support.

Financial support is the most consistent form of support for the participants through the coming out process. This can be exhibited by Michael, a twenty-one-year-old white participant who like most of the participants, is from a small town in Arkansas. He is currently a senior at the University of Arkansas. Michael has none of the other forms of support that this paper will discuss, but does receive financial support from his family. In discussing his family's overall support, he says, "I really wouldn't say that my parents were super supportive emotionally… it really wasn't a very prominent aspect in their parently duties to me. Financially though they are like the bomb dot com." While receiving no other form of support, Michael's family consistently provides financial support through all stages of the coming out process. It seems that for Michael, as with other participants, the coming out process resulted in losing other forms of support, but cutting off financial support was not an option for these families.

While Michael's example was a common one, many of the participants seemed to lose forms of financial support as a direct result of leaving adolescence, and not necessarily through the coming out process. Amos provides us with a good portrayal of this scenario. He has not yet disclosed his sexuality to his family, but in discussing financial support he says, "not financial, I don't receive any financial help from anyone in my family but besides on birthdays. They might try to send me money but besides that, no." Once Amos had moved out of the house, he stopped receiving support from his family. This was not a direct result of the coming out process, but instead was an advancement in a life-stage that his family no longer provided regular financial support. Amos, like others, lost financial support through emerging adulthood, and not as a result of his sexual identity.

While retaining financial support, or losing financial support through emerging adulthood were the most common scenarios, there were some cases in which people felt they lost financial support as a direct result of the coming out process. Each of these will be discussed in detail here not because they are the most common examples, but because they show what can happen, and exhibit the complex ways in which financial support can be loss.

The first example of losing financial support that will be discussed will be the most common form that many people think about. This is when an individual is immediately cut off from all forms of financial support as soon as initial disclosure to family members is made. Leonard provides us with a prime example of this occurrence. Leonard is one of the older participants at 31, and grew up in a small town outside of Fayetteville, AR. When we began to talk about Leonard's religious views he began talking about the environment that he grew up in. He said, "my parents were very much bubble people. So, they kind of created their own world of what was and wasn't." They attended a strict Pentecostal church, and Leonard described his family's religious views as very strict. Leonard was already living on his own after graduating high school when he disclosed his sexuality to his family. He was engaged in a serious relationship, which prompted the disclosure of his sexuality to his family.

> We thought we would be together forever, so I came out to my family. They were like OK we are cutting you off completely, and they were rich. I grew up not needing anything. I was like that's fine, and they were like you have to understand we pay for everything, so you are going to have nothing. I accepted those consequences, they were like we aren't paying for college. I went to AR tech, which is probably the dumbest decision I have ever made. But I was like, I don't need acting school in NY, I don't need you to pay $30k. I shot off at the mouth and lost everything. I changed the entire trajectory of my life because I decided to come out for this boy, who I never got back.

Leonard describes his relationship as still strained, but improving slightly. "I just got my first Christmas present, so this is my second time getting a Christmas present. They went a whole 10 years, like making me come to Christmas and Thanksgiving, but still not getting me cards, or

letting me participate in it." Leonard's story shows how initial disclosure of a gay man's sexuality to family can result in immediate loss of all forms of financial support.

The next participant that we will talk about shows how an individual can perceive financial support loss through a different stage of the coming out process. Roger is a white participant who grew up in a small town outside of Fayetteville. He originally disclosed his sexuality to his father when he was eighteen years old. At first Roger's dad was accepting of his son's sexuality, and assured his son that he loved him just the same. His parents were divorced, and his father became re-married, and through this relationship became more religious. This led to Roger's father becoming less accepting of Roger's homosexuality. Eventually, Roger moved in with his partner. As a result, his father cut off all financial support while Roger was in college. This seems to be consistent with the emerging adulthood literature, as many individuals lose financial support from their families when they move in with their significant other (Arnett, 2014). As Roger explain, his father, "…attributed this to, well if you're going to live with your significant other than you've made that adult decision, then you have to grow up and start paying for stuff on your own at that point." Roger felt that his loss of financial support was a direct result of his father's disapproval of him living with a man. Roger has a brother that is one year younger than him who attended the University of Arkansas along with Roger. When Roger lost financial support, he knew that his younger brother was receiving financial support. When I asked if he thought that his brother would have lost financial support had he moved in with his girlfriend, Roger responded: "… I feel my dad would have been more willing to help him, just because I know how my dad feels about me being gay. I'm sure that did play into his decision to cut me off financially." It becomes obvious here that analyzing losses of support are quite complex. On the surface, one would assume that Roger lost financial support as a result of

moving through emerging adulthood. While this might be the case, this is not how Roger describes the situation. Roger feels that his loss of support is a direct result of engaging in a serious relationship with a man, which is a late stage in the coming out process. This unique and complex scenario is hard to capture in survey research that might pose a basic question about the reason behind loss of financial support from family. It is important for this research to account for more complicated situations like Roger's.

The final example of a loss of financial support will show how complex financial support itself can be. In this facet, the example will demonstrate how financial support can be simultaneously lost and sustained. Tony was one of the youngest participants to participate in the study at nineteen years old. He is a white sophomore at the University of Arkansas, and like many of the participants, grew up in a small town in Arkansas. Tony's parents are divorced, and he had two different reactions from his parents when he was outed for being homosexual. Tony was seventeen years old, and thought his parents were going to disown him. "I got home and my dad was waiting for me on the couch. He said that he was disappointed, I thought I raised you better, I thought I raised you that you would know that I wouldn't care either way; and that was that. But my mom cried… she was really upset about it." Tony's mother is financially stable, while his dad has struggled financially due to complications with alcoholism. As a result of his mom being financially stable and his father not, Tony receives monthly monetary support from the parent that is not accepting of his homosexual identity. Tony was living with his father, until he no longer could. "When my dad went to rehab, my, his fiancé left him. We lost our house, and I had nowhere to go." Tony's younger siblings both live with his mom and he has not disclosed his sexuality to them. "I wanted to tell them, but my mom said if I told them that she would never let me see them again." This came into play when Tony had no place to live, as he was not

allowed to live with his mother, for the fear that they would discover his sexuality, and be affected by it. In this scenario, we can see that Tony has simultaneously received support, through monthly monetary contribution, and lost financial support, in not being able to move into his mother's house. Financial support as a sole dichotomous variable seems to be problematic, when issues like this are exhibited by the participants.

Emotional Support

Emotional support can be understood as a broad topic that can cover many areas of an individual's life. It would seem that emotional support would encompass support in regards to topics like help with work or school, relationships, or nearly any other stressor that an individual might encounter in their lives. For this reason, I allowed the participants to define what emotional support means to them. Through this process, emotional support will be discussed in a capacity of how comfortable the individuals were in going to their family with personal issues. This could range from topics pertaining to school, friends, or even crises within the family. Romantic support was not included in this definition because the participants defined this form of support separately from emotional support. For this reason, romantic support will be discussed in the next section. To begin, this section will be about the participants who sustained most of their emotional support from their family members, and the different ways in which this plays out. The end of the section will then demonstrate the different ways in which gay men can lose emotional support at different stages in the coming out process.

The people in the study that had sustained emotional support from their families were in the minority. In fact, there were only three participants who felt that them being a homosexual had no effect on the emotional support that they had from different family members. More common for those who feel they have emotional support from families, is that they have it only

from specific family members, or that they lost emotional support after disclosure of their sexuality, and then gained it back later. Kendrick is a twenty-one-year-old white participant whose parents are divorced. When talking about emotional support Kendrick from his family, he talked of a split between his two divorced parents.

> And as far as emotionally, I definitely, at least in the past few years, I've felt more connected to my dad. Which is really weird, because when they divorced I didn't want anything to do with my dad. But now we've just gotten so close, and I feel like I'm able to talk to him, for the most part. Whereas like my mom, I just like, I don't feel as connected to her and just because of the way that she reacted when I came out to her. That impacted our relationship really heavily. I try not to let it, but like it's always in the back of my mind, you know?

We can see here that Kendrick has emotional support, but not from both of his parents. As a result of the reaction his mother had when he disclosed his sexuality to her, Kendrick does not feel a connection to her like he does with his dad. The result of this is that Kendrick does not go to his mother for emotional support. This provides a good example of immediate family members and the disparity that can exist in regard to emotional support. While this was the most common, another occurrence in a similar vein was for individuals who had extended family who identified as homosexual. Rusty, a Native American twenty-nine-year-old, states that he receives no emotional support from his immediate family, but does receive it from his extended family that also identifies as homosexual. Another participant, Amos, has two gay uncles who he says that he goes to for most of his emotional support.

The other most common scenario for those who had emotional support from family members were those who lost it at initial disclosure of their sexuality, but then gained emotional support back at a later time. This was most common amongst the older participants in the study, as more time had passed for them to be able to gain emotional support back. In fact, the oldest participant, Davin, who is thirty-two, provides us with a good example of this occuring.

When I moved up [to Fayetteville], that was when basically I came out. I remember getting a phone call from my mom and I didn't talk to her for seven months after this phone call. She said the only reason you wanted to move to Fayetteville and go to the University of Arkansas was so you could suck some dick. I didn't talk to her for seven months afterwards. So it was kind of very hard coming out. They were always in disbelief. It was not something we talked about for the first three years, maybe four.

His parents had a harshly, negative reaction to Davin disclosing his sexuality, so Davin would not go to his family for any emotional support. As time passed, Davin eventually began talking to his mom again, and while he says, "I do get emotional support much more from my friends than I do my family," Davin feels he can now go to his family for emotional support, if he should need it.

While we can see that some individuals maintained, or eventually gained back emotional support in different facets from family members, this was not the case the majority of the time. Most of the participants experienced losses in emotional support through the different stages of the coming out process. Amongst the participants, emotional support was lost in the early stages of the coming out process, at the disclosure of their sexuality to family, and in some cases, the later stages of the coming out process.

For many of the participants, emotional support was lost as early as the Awareness and Questioning stages of the coming out process. Michael, who was introduced earlier in that he only received family support in a financial capacity, provides a good understanding to how gay men can lose emotional support even before disclosing their sexuality. When asked about emotional support from his family, Michael said, "I never felt comfortable talking to them about anything. Obviously, part of that was I was hiding and they were super religious and I knew how they felt about it, so yeah." We can see here that Michael was in fact the one that cut off emotional support with his family when he knew he was gay, but prior to disclosing his sexuality to his family members. In thinking that his family would not accept his homosexual identity

when he would choose to disclose it to his family, he did not feel comfortable relying on his family for emotional support in any form. This was the most common way that a loss of emotional support with family transpired.

The Told Parent, or Came Out part of the coming out process is the one where people might assume losses in emotional support will typically occur. While this did happen with the participants, as previously stated, losses before these stages in the coming out process were more common. Leonard, who was introduced in the financial support section, provides a good representation for those who lost emotional support as a direct result of their disclosure. When talking about his relationship with his mother prior to coming out, Leonard says, "My mom wanted a daughter I'm pretty sure, so she was excited to have a little gay boy to hang out with because we were best friends. But as soon as I got older, and said hey I'm gay, as a bi-product of [acting like a daughter], she associates that with failure…" I asked Leonard what type of support he receives from his family after he came out of the closet and he said, "Zero. I mean I don't have much contact with them, other than like Thanksgiving, and stuff. They hate the sin, love the sinner. Just saying that drives me fucking nuts." As he goes more into detail, Leonard felt like he had a lot of emotional support from his family while growing up. He was especially close to his mom as previously depicted. Once he disclosed his sexuality to his family all of that support was removed immediately. Even though he is now thirty-one, he says this loss of emotional support has not changed.

The final way that can be shown through another participant we have previously discussed. Roger lost financial support when he moved in with his boyfriend. During this stage of the coming out process, Same-Gender Serious Relationship, Roger also lost emotional support. As previously stated, Roger's father was supportive at initial disclosure but then became

less accepting of Roger's sexuality as he himself became more religious. When Roger was engaged in a serious relationship with another man, Roger's dad took it upon himself to rid Roger of homosexuality. This led to every discussion the two of them had ending in an argument about homosexuality. Roger eventually could not take it anymore, and no longer talks to his father, and has lost all emotional support. Instead of losing emotional support prior to, or immediately at disclosure, Roger lost it as a result of a later stage in the coming out process, Same-Gender Serious Relationship, and his father's growing religiosity.

This research on family emotional support provides a view into just how complex family emotional support can be for these gay men in emerging adulthood. Focusing on this one aspect of support, we can see the coming out process playing a diverse role, in people losing emotional support at various stages in the process. It also becomes clear that once lost, emotional support can later be reinstated, and that loss of emotional support from one family member, does not mean that the individual will lose it from all family members.

Romantic Support

Romantic Support was separated out from general emotional support for two main reasons. The first being that the participants themselves defined this separately from emotional support. The second reason it was separated is due to the ability to have a more comprehensive analysis. While having Emotional Support from family is a prerequisite to receive Romantic Support, Emotional Support did not always translate into Romantic Support. For the purposes of this paper, romantic support is defined as support received that directly relates to romantic relationships, i.e. serious relationships, or general dating experiences. Romantic support was rarer than any of the other forms of support, as only two participants stated they received romantic support from their families holistically, with four others stating that they receive

Romantic Support on a limited basis. This section will focus on those who do not receive Romantic Support from some, or all family members. The way in which the participants speak about lack of Romantic Support was surprisingly universal amongst those who do not receive it at all, and those that partially receive it.

First, we will focus on the individuals who receive some Romantic Support, but not from all family members. The reason we are focusing on this first, is that unlike Emotional Support, there does seem to be a gender effect; more specifically, heterosexual men do not provide Romantic Support amongst any of the participants. Roger, who we have previously talked about, says his mom is the only one in his family he will go to for Romantic Support, "… it doesn't seem like my mom cares or thinks about my relationship differently with a man from if I were with a girl." While he doesn't feel comfortable going to his father, or his brothers with anything about his relationship. Conway, a twenty-two-year-old white participant said when speaking about relationships, "I won't really get into specific details like with my dad, but I tell my mom and my sister anything." While Emotional Support does not seem to differ amongst different genders, we see this having a greater effect on Romantic Support.

Amongst those who receive no Romantic Support, and even those who receive some support, there were two main ways in which this was enacted. First, we will look at the reasoning for those who do not feel that it is their family's responsibility to provide Romantic Support to them. When I spoke to Davin behind the reasons he doesn't talk to his family about romantic details in his life, he says, "… we never talk like boyfriends and going on a date. You know we don't do that. It's not because I don't want to. It's out of respect for them." Jasper, a twenty-three-year-old black participant said, "I just don't feel that comfortable. I just don't want that awkwardness with my mom and dad so I don't talk to them about dating and stuff like that. We

haven't gotten to that part yet, but I think that's kind of my fault. That's just me still being kind of guarded." These two participants exhibit what many of the participants feel. Like Davin, many of the participants feel that it is disrespectful to mention their dating experiences, because they know that their families do not agree with homosexuality. Then there are many others like Jasper, who are themselves uncomfortable talking about it with their families, due to their attempts to hide their sexuality for so long.

While it was popular for many of the participants to feel it was their choice to not receive Romantic Support from their families, this was not always the case. When Tony talks about his mother and his siblings, he said, "I wanted to tell [my brother and sister], but my mom said if I told them that she would never let me see them again." This translates into that entire side of the family, and he is not allowed to ever talk about his sexuality, much less his relationship and dating experiences.

The final example will look into the rare cases of when a participant receives full Romantic Support from their families. Bernard, who was one of the two participants who felt they had full Romantic Support from their families. When he was asked about talking to his family about dating and relationships, Bernard said, "My immediate family, like my mom and dad I'm completely open. And then like my grandma and grandpa I mean they like know, and they know if I'm seeing someone or not, but I don't tell them like oh I'm going on a date or something. My parents know everything, like hey I'm going on this date, if I'm excited, but I don't call up my grandma." We can see from this example that Bernard is comfortable talking to his family about different aspects of his dating life, even if he only goes into greater detail with his immediate family.

By looking at Romantic Support separately, we can see that it operates in a much different fashion from Emotional Support. For one thing, Romantic Support amongst the participants was very rare, and even rarer still from heterosexual male family members. This also begins to allude to some of the participants relationships with their families. They will rely on families for emotional support on other topics, but out of respect for their families, they will not bring up topics of romantic support. By ignoring this aspect of their lives, they are able to still rely on their families for other forms of emotional support. Finally, we see how this topic can not only be uncomfortable, but be a forbidden topic among some of the participants.

Social Relationship Support

Social Relationship Support was conceptualized after the majority of the interviews had been completed. When speaking with these gay men, it became obvious that many gay men in emerging adulthood lose out on a type of support that has yet to be discussed, and is often overlooked. Many of the participants experienced a loss in Social Relationship Support from their families through them feeling uncomfortable, or unwelcomed around their families. This materialized through avoidance of visiting family, or by them, or their partners, not being allowed to participate in family holidays and other events.

The main way that we see this play out is through individuals simply avoiding their families out of uncomfortableness. Jasper spoke about why he avoids family gatherings, or visiting home. "They're like [Jasper] we can't wait to see you, you need to come back. But it's actually a big fear of mine to be put in the situation and have somebody get drunk and put me on the spot. And try to verbally attack me or whatever, you know what I mean?" Jasper knows that not all his family are happy about his sexuality, and while they appear to be civil, he is afraid that a situation could arise, should he visit home. He remedies this by making excuses like he is busy

with school, or work any time there are family gatherings. Amos has a similar story, he says that he avoids visiting his family home as much as possible. His story is unique amongst the participants, in that he has yet to disclose his sexuality to his entire family. The few times that Amos does go to his family home he says that his family will often talk about homosexuals negatively, "…and I am reluctant [speak] because I am gay and I don't want them to know. So, I usually just sit there and be quiet and drink my tea." These individuals have slightly different reasoning for wanting to avoid their families, but they both stem from the same idea that their families are not happy with homosexuality, and due to that, they lose a form of support of having a place to feel comfortable and spend time with family.

While there were many individuals who avoid their families out of their own uncomfortableness, there are also those individuals who do not visit family, or participate in events because they, or their partners are not welcome at said events. Michael attempted to bring his boyfriend to his brother's wedding, and was told that if he wanted to bring his boyfriend, that he would be uninvited to the wedding. Connor, a twenty-one-year-old white participant has a similar situation, "I'm not allowed to have my boyfriend come to any family things. He's not allowed to stay at our house if I'm there." Most of the hostility is focused on the materialization of their homosexuality through the boyfriends. Many people are able participate in these events by simply acting as if their partners are just friends. Chester says that his family is uncomfortable with the idea of him having a boyfriend, but, "… I also don't introduce [my boyfriend] like, hey this is my boyfriend [name]." Like many of the participants, Chester is able to be welcome to these events by simply not disclosing his relationship with his partner. They act as if they are close friends. Even though the participants assume the families know who the person is in reality, it is somehow more acceptable if it remains unspoken.

Social Relationship Support is a form of support that has been ignored by much of the literature. Through this analysis, we can see that this should be studied, as it can have important effects on an individual. Another interesting aspect of this is the management that that participants like Chester place on their interactions with their family. By not actively labeling his boyfriend as his partner, he is able to manage the relationship with family, and maintain social relationship support. This seems to function similarly to those who will go to their families for emotional support, but not romantic support. By managing the romantic side of their lives, they are able to maintain these different forms of support.

Conclusion

The main goal of this qualitative analysis is to provide a more complex understanding of what happens to the different forms of family support for gay men in emerging adulthood through the coming out process. This research aims fill some of the current gaps in the literature in regard to family social support for this demographic. While there is currently ample quantitative analysis on the effects of a loss of support from family, there is not an adequate qualitative analysis that displays the complex ways in which different forms of support can be lost, and the different combinations of those forms of support that can be lost. As a result, quantitative research will typically focus on the dichotomy of acceptance and rejection, or possibly a slightly more in-depth version. A more comprehensive perception of family support is needed to adequately measure the effects it can have on these individuals. By understanding loss of social support in a multitude of ways, researchers will have a more informed understanding of what gay men in emerging adulthood experience in terms of social support lost. This paper also furthers research in gender and sexuality by employing emerging adulthood literature. This concept has been nearly absent from sexuality studies, even when the individuals are in the age

range. Understanding this life-stage, and the ways that family support impact it, are crucial when attempting to study these different forms of support. The literature not only provides a basis for the benefits of family support during this time, but also provides a contemporary view of how complicated family support can be. This provides further evidence against the employment of a pure acceptance vs. rejection model of analysis when studying homosexual emerging adults and their family support.

Through studying financial, emotional, romantic, and social relationship support, this study has provided a view of the true complexity that can occur in these familial relationships. We can see that financial support is the most commonly sustained form of support, and often exists in the absence of all other forms of support. When Financial support is lost, it can occur at initial disclosure of sexuality to family members, but can also occur at later stages in the coming out process, such as engaging in a serious same-sex relationship. Like many of the forms of support, this speaks to the importance of analyzing this in context of the overall coming out process for these individuals. Emotional support seems to function in a similar manner to financial support, just at a lower rate, as it can be lost at different stages in the coming out process. Emotional support is shown to be lost more often, and many times earlier in the coming out process, preceding even disclosure of sexual orientation. It was decided that Romantic support would be separated from Emotional support, due to the unique ways in which these operate. As participants would avoid the topic of Romantic support, for various reasons, when going to their families for different forms of Emotional support. We also see in Romantic support a gender divide occurring, in that heterosexual males would not provide Romantic support as often as women in the family would. The final form of support that was looked at, social relationship support, is perhaps the most unique form in this analysis. Using the idea that support

for emerging adults can be as simple as being welcome or feeling welcome in their family home, has not been looked at in the current literature for gay men. This form of support shows the ways in which people can lose the support, but also how some are able to manage it. Participants like Chester who side-step the identity of his boyfriend, as his boyfriend is able to maintain social relationship support, whilst others lose this form of support through this identity. This research shows the complex ways family support functions for gay men in emerging adulthood, and provides a better viewpoint to begin future research into studying the effects of family support for these individuals.

As stated in this paper, there are limitations to this study. The first of which is in an absence of emerging adults who are not yet out of the closet. While this group is an important part to understanding the perceived consequences to coming out of the closet, it was deemed that it was risky to ask these individuals to participate in the study. There were also issues in terms of racial diversity. Due to the heterogeneity of the area, racial diversity was not achieved at a high level. While there was inclusion of racial minorities, the large number of white participants indicates that the results will most likely be more applicable to white individuals. The final limitation to be discussed is the natural propensity for individuals who are more involved in the gay community to be selected for the study. Through social connections and snowball sampling, it is more likely that a participant is further integrated in the gay community than not.

This study looked at the social support lost and received from family members for gay men in emerging adulthood. Through the framing of emerging adulthood, we are better able to understand the challenges and identity formations that individuals experience at this point in their lives, and how crucial family support can be. The experience of homosexual individuals appears to be complicated through the fact of a changing form of identity through the coming out

process regarding familial relationships. Through analysis, while not homogeneous, but much more complex, we can see the adherence to a sexual minority status can result in a loss of financial, emotional, and romantic support; as well as a loss of social connectedness to family members. Due to the current gap in the literature, this study is needed to promote a better understanding of the effects of family social support on gay men during this time of their lives.

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UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS

Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board

July 6, 2016

MEMORANDUM

TO:	Joshua Cafferty Brandon Jackson
FROM:	Ro Windwalker IRB Coordinator
RE:	New Protocol Approval
IRB Protocol #:	16-05-773
Protocol Title:	*Social Support Networks for Gay Men in Emerging Adulthood Living in Fayetteville, AR*
Review Type:	☐ EXEMPT ☒ EXPEDITED ☐ FULL IRB
Approved Project Period:	Start Date: 07/01/2016 Expiration Date: 06/30/2017

Your protocol has been approved by the IRB. Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. If you wish to continue the project past the approved project period (see above), you must submit a request, using the form *Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects*, prior to the expiration date. This form is available from the IRB Coordinator or on the Research Compliance website (https://vpred.uark.edu/units/rscp/index.php). As a courtesy, you will be sent a reminder two months in advance of that date. However, failure to receive a reminder does not negate your obligation to make the request in sufficient time for review and approval. Federal regulations prohibit retroactive approval of continuation. Failure to receive approval to continue the project prior to the expiration date will result in Termination of the protocol approval. The IRB Coordinator can give you guidance on submission times.

This protocol has been approved for 20 participants. If you wish to make *any* modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval *prior to* implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.