

An Analysis of Family Reaction When Their Children Come Out as Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual

Tyler Owens, Frank W. and Sue Mayborn School of Journalism, and Honors College
Susan Eve, Department of Sociology, College of Public Affairs and Community Service, and Honors College

RESEARCH TOPIC

This study will analyze the way that families cope with the situation when their children come out of the closet as gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

I will study the reaction of families that come from different cultural, ethnic, and political backgrounds.



RESEARCH QUESTION

How do families in different cultures react when their children come out as gay, lesbian, or bisexual?



LITERATURE REVIEW

Baptist & Allen (2008) work with mixed family types and look at how each individual member of several families cope with the coming out process.

Potoczniak, Crosbie-Burnett & Salzburg (2009) specifically study the differences in the coming out process for families of different cultures.

Savin-Williams (2001) wrote *Mom, Dad, I'm Gay* to illustrate the “diversity of life experiences that sexual-minority youths have with family members” and to assess the “inherent resiliency and mental health of sexual-minority youths.”

Potoczniak, et al. (2009) focus on the functioning minority family groups, such as African-Americans, Hispanics, and South Asians, but Baptist and Allen point out that the family members that they interviewed had to cope with actually becoming a minority once a family member came out. Many family members felt a sense of exclusivity once a family member came out.

In the two peer-reviewed journal studies (Baptist & Allen, 2008; Potoczniak, et al., 2009), the teen or young adult that was coming out was interviewed, as well as the family members of the teens. Most family members in the Baptist and Allen study had unique experiences and coped with the coming out experience in different ways. Savin-Williams (2001) based his book on his own experiences as a developmental psychologist and the “personal odysseys” of GLBT youth.

Potoczniak, et al. (2009) also looked at each family’s experiences from a religious perspective. The families that had a strong religious background were typically less open to their children that were coming out. Many teens felt significantly less welcomed when they grew up in religious families.

A main point that all three sources make clear is the fact that each family had a unique experience. Some family members felt homophobia, while others felt comfortable and even blessed to be in such a unique situation (Baptist & Allen, 2008).

METHODS

I will conduct research by contacting local LGBT support organizations in the hope of scheduling interviews with gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth before and/or after they come out of the closet to their families.



REFERENCES

Baptist, J., & Allen, K. (2008). A family’s coming out process: Systemic change and multiple realities. *Contemporary Family Therapy: An International Journal*, 30(2), 92-110.

Potoczniak, D., Crosbie-Burnett, M., & Saltzburg, N. (2009). Experiences regarding coming out to parents among African American, Hispanic, and white gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning adolescents. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*, 21(2-3), 189-205.

Savin-Williams, R. C. (2001). *Mom, Dad, I'm gay: How families negotiate coming out*. (1 ed.). Washington: American Psychological Association.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

- Warren Burggren, Ph.D., Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
- Vish Prasad, Ph.D., Vice President for Research and Economic Development
- Roy Busby, Ph.D., Dean, Frank W. and Sue Mayborn School of Journalism
- Gloria Cox, Ph.D., Dean, Honors College