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Exiting the Closet Daily:

Examining the Repetitive Nature of Minority Gender and Sexual Identity Self-Disclosures.

A thesis

submitted in partial fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree

of

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by

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WAIKATO
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Declaration

I hereby declare that, except where sources are cited, the work presented in this thesis is my own. In accordance with the principles of data sovereignty, all data presented as findings in this thesis remains the intellectual property of the participants and has been utilised with permission via informed consent.

Abstract

The process of minority gender and sexual identity self-disclosure is inherently complex. The act of 'coming out' is often perceived as a significant, singular event; however, those with lived experiences recognise that it is an ongoing, repetitive experience influenced by varying social contexts—a concept referred to within this research as identity maintenance. Understanding this phenomenon is paramount in addressing the psychosocial realities of LGBTQIA+ people—both individually and collectively—as they navigate the decision to disclose their minority identity in a range of environments, contexts, and interactions. Specifically, this thesis seeks to illuminate the processes of identity maintenance within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, providing a foundational understanding of the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals. To do so, five research questions were constructed, these include: 1. How do participants interpret their experiences of identity self-disclosure or non-disclosure? 2. What social factors influence the decision to self-disclose minority gender and/or sexual identity? 3. How does the repetitive nature of identity self-disclosure affect participants? 4. How does identity self-disclosure vary in different social environments? and 5. How does language shape identity self-disclosure? This research utilises Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to analyse qualitative data gathered from a cohort of 10 self-identifying LGBTQIA+ participants. By focusing on lived experiences, the research captures the psychosocial factors involved in self-disclosure practices. Participants were selected through a purposive sampling method, ensuring a range of backgrounds and identities were represented, including age, ethnicity, neurological and physical ability, and religious status. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with each of the 10 participants, and five participants elected to complete a diary entry task following their interview. Participants described navigating their LGBTQIA+ identities across different contexts, drawing on a range of psychosocial tools in their day-to-day practice of identity maintenance. Four themes arose from the findings. Firstly, The Temporality of Identity highlighted how the LGBTQIA+ identity is experienced over time, from early identity development to the long-term, ongoing practice of identity maintenance. Secondly, The Tax of Identity theme identified how participants experienced mental, emotional, and educational taxes as a result of their LGBTQIA+ identity. Thirdly, The Ecology of Identity theme identified the ways in which participants experienced effects from distal and proximal environments on the development and embodiment of their LGBTQIA+ identities. Finally, The Language of Identity theme highlighted how participants engaged with both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication to disclose their LGBTQIA+ identity as well as the

social monitoring tools they utilised in disclosure decision-making. The findings of this thesis contribute to existing discourse on LGBTQIA+ identities and form the first known literature on the identity maintenance experiences of Aotearoa's LGBTQIA+ community. Ultimately, this research highlights the ways in which identity maintenance serves as a beneficial tool for restoring the agency of LGBTQIA+ people in choosing when, where, how, why, and to whom identity self-disclosures will be made.

Keywords: identity, LGBTQIA+, coming out, self-disclosure, life course.

Dedication

This research is dedicated to those who exist in this world beyond the bounds of social expectations. Be brave. Be proud. Be you.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Topic Formation

Throughout the last year, as I've moved through this research process, listening, exploring, analysing, and crafting discussions from participants' experiences with identity self-disclosures, I have gained a greater understanding of my own. This research originated from my ponderings about the lifelong processes associated with my LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and more) identity and the frustrations I felt with facing heteronormativity on a daily basis. The topic of repetitive self-disclosures and the decision-making processes regarding disclosure or non-disclosure arose at the dinner table with friends who also identify as LGBTQIA+, as we shared and compared our experiences. During this discussion, I found myself at a loss for terminology or a deeper understanding of how and why the process of identity disclosure or non-disclosure poses a significant, reoccurring phenomenon in the lives of myself and others. From this experience, my curiosity for existing psychosocial research began. I quickly realised just how prominent research focused solely on the initial coming out period was within transdisciplinary Queer theory. Few pieces of literature discussed the concepts of identity management (Orne, 2011) and identity careers (Guittar & Rayburn, 2016); however, these theories were inceptive. Furthermore, limited research examined these concepts from a community psychology approach that purposefully examined people within their many contexts and the psychosocial effect repetitive disclosure had on LGBTQIA+ people. Perhaps unsurprising, given its infancy, literature exploring this phenomenon appeared to be non-existent within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, leaving our LGBTQIA+ community shadowed, yet again, by a lack of lived experience knowledge. Although the scope of this thesis is limited, I hope that this research will open the door to a continued curiosity about identity self-disclosure across the queer life course.

Situating concepts

The research presented in this thesis relies on several concepts that require clear delineation. Firstly, it is essential to establish precisely what is meant by self-disclosure and non-disclosure and how these concepts differ from other forms of disclosure. To do so, I draw upon definitions from early self-disclosure motivation literature that define self-disclosure as a "process by which individuals permit themselves to be known by others" (Taylor, 1979). Conversely, non-disclosure can, therefore, be understood as the process of individuals not permitting themselves to be known by others. Of significance here is the notion of

'permitting' or allowing others access to one's identity, which signifies an element of *self*-disclosure that differs from instances where the choice to disclose may be removed from an individual. Such instances where agency is removed in relation to LGBTQIA+ identity specifically is the concept of being 'outed', in which a person's minority gender and/or sexual identity is disclosed to others without their explicit consent. While the psychological impacts of having one's LGBTQIA+ identity outed are extensive, the inclusion of this disclosure type sits outside of the scope of this thesis.

Secondly, it is essential to acknowledge the chosen terminology used within this thesis regarding gender, sex, and sexuality. While gender and sex are closely related concepts, I have chosen to refer to gender throughout this thesis. As this research explores people within their social contexts and examines the many social constructions surrounding and restraining LGBTQIA+ identity, I have deemed utilising the social construction of gender appropriate. The use of gender acknowledges the framing through which the participants reflected and discussed the concepts of gender and sex, with most, if not all, of the research cohort referring to gender when sharing their experiences. I utilise the concept of gender with the acknowledgement of the, at times, inappropriate interchangeable usage of gender and sex in areas of existing literature. Furthermore, I have used the acronym LGBTQIA+ throughout this thesis to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and more identities. It is, therefore, essential to acknowledge that the use of this particular acronym represents the need for brevity within the limited scope of a master thesis and by no means adequately reflects the vast number of minority gender and sexual identities. I specifically wish to acknowledge the Indigenous minority gender and sexuality identities of Aotearoa New Zealand, which hold significant cultural meanings and histories.

Finally, throughout this thesis, I use the term 'identity maintenance' to refer to the process of ongoing repetitive identity self-disclosure and non-disclosure, as well as the decision-making process associated with these behaviours. I have established the concept of identity maintenance based on Orne's (2011) strategic outness theory, which he terms Identity Management and Guittar & Rayburn's (2016) Identity Career Management. Although heavily guided by Orne's work in particular, I have intentionally altered the terminology I have used to refer to the lifelong processes of self-disclosures on account of the alternative path that my analysis and discussions took from that of Orne's strategic outness strategies. While referred to in contextualising my discussion in Chapter Six, the depth and breadth of my findings resulted in an analysis that drew upon several psychosocial theories. I, therefore, found it

more appropriate to situate this thesis under the analogous yet distinct term to signify its departure from Orne's original work.

Thesis Structure

This thesis is structured within seven chapters. Chapter Two begins by providing a literature review of the transdisciplinary history of LGBTQIA+ identities and lived experiences. Topics included in the literature include the pathologising history of homosexuality, transgender and gender non-conforming, asexual, and intersex identities; queer life courses; traditional psychological identity development theories of homosexual, transgender and gender-diverse, asexual, and bisexual identity; and contemporary identity development theories of sexuality, asexuality, and gender identities. Finally, Chapter Two outlines the current research purpose and questions.

Chapter Three establishes the methodological considerations of this thesis and introduces the ontological and epistemological positions taken within this research. The method of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is described alongside the philosophical underpinnings of this research, such as my positionality and the axiology of community psychology.

Chapters Four and Five present the findings structure in four themes: 1. The Temporality of Identity, 2. The Tax of Identity, 3. The Ecology of Identity, and 4. The Language of Identity. Each theme is established through a minimum of three participant quotes, followed by a short analysis. Two themes are presented per chapter, with Chapter Four dedicated to the interpersonal LGBTQIA+ identity and Chapter Five dedicated to the intrapersonal LGBTQIA+ identity. Each theme consists of subthemes, which are introduced and summarised in relation to the overarching theme.

Chapter Six discusses the findings presented in Chapters Four and Five within the structure of the four overarching themes. More depth is provided to explore the significance of the earlier findings, with links to existing literature and theories underpinning this research. Each theme discussion is situated within a systems-based approach, analysing the participants' experiences within the broader contexts in which they engage daily to discuss the impacts of and on their LGBTQIA+ identities.

Finally, Chapter Seven concludes the research, beginning with an overview of the research purpose and questions, then a summary of the findings and the discussion chapters. The impacts and importance of this thesis are examined, as well as the limitations of the current study. The chapter concludes with suggestions for future research in this field.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The History of LGBTQIA+ Psychological Research

Pathologising Psychology

Historically, psychology paid little attention to the experiences of LGBTQIA+ people; of the minimal early research produced, heavily medicalised and deficit frameworks based on religious values were prominent (Drescher, 2010). Traditional psychologies' interest in LGB research centred around deficits in the internal processes of gay males, with an emphasis on the interpersonal nature of 'coming out', mental health, self-concepts, and social isolation (Orne, 2011). Research concerning transgender identities was often concerned with transsexualism—a terminology that specifically refers to individuals who have taken steps to transition their sex characteristics medically—and transvestism, the terminology used for individuals who cross-dress that does not adequately account for gender or sexual orientation. Much of the early research concerning transgender identities shared similar emphases of internal deficits in patients assigned male at birth as early LGB research, yet often held the lens that trans identities were the sexually perverted result of maladjusted development (Tosh, 2016).

The heavy emphasis on pathology and deficit ideologies concerning homosexuality and transgender identities stemmed from the prominence of religion within Western societies, with both Christianity and Judaism considering homosexuality—and transgenderism by association—a sin (Bullough, 2019). Drawing upon interpretations of religious scriptures that condemned any sexual act outside of the coital imperative and reproductive purposes, male homosexuality, or sodomy, in particular, was widely denounced throughout society (Bullough, 2019). Conversely, lesbianism was given lesser consideration due to patriarchal ideologies that centred men within sexual acts, reflective of the prominence of religion and the broader social climates of the time (Hekma, 2015). Throughout history, churches have symbolised the conservative values of society. As Western culture began to shift away from religious authority to secular authority during the 19th century, many of the religious ideologies of sins, including homosexuality, began to be scrutinised by sciences and social sciences (Drescher, 2015). Religious understandings and condemnation of sodomy eventually transformed into the pathologised diagnostic category of homosexuality (Drescher, 2015).

Pathologising of Homosexuality

Although psychological and medical theorising about same-sex behaviours vastly pre-dates it, the history of the terms 'homosexual' and 'homosexuality' have been traced back to

1869 when Hungarian journalist Károli Mária Kertbeny penned an opposition to a Prussian law, which was also later adopted by Germany, criminalising male same-sex behaviours (Drescher, 2010). In supporting his opposition, Kertbeny proposed a theory of homosexuality as an innate, normal variation of sexuality (Drescher, 2010). Nearly two decades later, Richard von Krafft-Ebing—a German psychiatrist—drew upon Kertbeny's 'homosexual' and 'homosexuality' terminology while refuting the normative variation ideology in his 1886 book "Psychopathia Sexualis" (Drescher, 2010). Instead, Krafft-Ebing promoted the pathologising of homosexuality through the use of Darwinian theory, which viewed any sexual behaviours that are not reproductive as disordered and requiring medical intervention (Drescher, 2010). Despite rejecting the normative variation ideology, Krafft-Ebing was said to believe that homosexuality may be an innate predilection, yet considered homosexuality as a congenital disorder (Drescher, 2010). Krafft-Ebing's "Psychopathia Sexualis" went on to hold significant influence in both the proliferation of 'homosexual' as terminology for same-sex behaviour and as a foundational assumption in pathologising homosexuality within psychiatric diagnoses (Drescher, 2010).

Freud proposed a third ideology regarding homosexuality in his 1905 book "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" (Freud, 2016 [1905]). Freud's (1905) theory of immaturity proposed that everyone innately holds a bisexual predisposition and that homosexuality should be considered a normative phase of heterosexual development (Freud, 2016 [1905]). Furthermore, Freud refuted the assumption that homosexuality is a cognitive disorder, reasoning that homosexual tendencies are present in individuals who show no other prominent deviation from the normative (Freud, 2016 [1905]). As an alternative, Freud (1905) proposed that homosexuality in adults was a result of disordered psychosexual development.

Freud's and other's non-pathological theories were widely disregarded in early 20th-century psychiatry in favour of psychoanalytic 'fixes' of homosexuality built on the ideologies of the second-generation Hungarian psychoanalyst Sandor Rado (Drescher, 2010). Rado directly refuted Freud's proposal of innate bisexuality as well as other's proposals of normative homosexuality, claiming that heterosexuality was the only innate orientation (Rado, 1940). Rado proposed that homosexuality was a 'phobic' aversion to the opposite sex resulting from inadequate parenting (Rado, 1940). The second generation of psychoanalysts viewed homosexuality in line with other subconscious anxiety disorders; however, despite their insistence on the possibility of psychoanalytic 'cures' for homosexuality, the majority of their attempts were unsuccessful (Drescher, 2010).

In contrast to psychiatric, psychological, and medical efforts to 'cure' homosexuality—which drew upon heavily biased research that conflated findings from homosexual patients receiving psychoanalytic treatments to the broader LGB population—sexologists focused on broader populations, including non-patient samples (Drescher, 2010). The most prominent sexology research, conducted by Kinsey et al., included thousands of survey participants, with the findings being published in two reports segregated by the binary sexes: "Sexual Behavior in the Human Male" (Kinsey et al., 1948) and "Sexual Behavior in the Human Female" (Kinsey et al., 1953). Kinsey et al.'s (1948, 1953) findings showed that homosexuality was significantly more present amongst the general population than psychiatric theories and research claimed. Kinsey et al.'s reports were met with animosity from Western psychiatric communities, including the American Psychiatric Association (APA), which shortly after published the first Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (American Psychiatric Association, 1952; Drescher, 2010).

Alongside all other conditions that psychiatrists at the time considered mental and personality disorders, homosexuality and 'transvestism' were published in the DMS-I under the category of 'sociopathic personality disturbance' alongside paedophilia and sexual sadism (American Psychiatric Association, 1952; Drescher, 2010). In the second edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, published in 1968, homosexuality and transvestitism were re-categorised as a 'sexual deviation' personality disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 1968).

Alongside the rise in gay activism in the late 1960s and early 1970s, attention finally began to be given to research that supported non-pathological theories (Drescher, 2010). The APA undertook an analysis of whether homosexuality meets the criteria of psychiatric diagnosis and the perimeters of classifying mental disorders in general, leading to a successful Board of Trustees vote and an APA member referendum to remove homosexuality from the DSM (Drescher, 2010). A revision, issued in 1973, was supported by the finding that mental disorders caused regular subjective distress and impaired patients' social functioning; however, homosexuality—as well as a few other 'sexual deviation' diagnoses when experienced mildly—did not meet this criterion (Spitzer, 1973).

The removal of homosexuality more broadly from the DSM did not signal that the APA supported normal variant theories of homosexuality, nor did the revision eliminate psychiatric pathologisation of same-sex behaviours or conversion therapy practices (Drescher, 2010). Instead, homosexuality was substituted within the DSM-II as 'sexual orientation disturbance' (SOD), which maintained that homosexuality remained a mental disorder contingent on

either an individual experiencing distress as a result of their homosexuality or indicating a desire to change their sexual orientation (American Psychiatric Association, 1968; Drescher, 2010; Spitzer, 1973). Sexual orientation disturbance was revised within the third edition of the DSM, with the diagnosis becoming 'ego dystonic homosexuality', however it was later removed in the revised DSM-III-R when it was found that neither 'sexual orientation disturbance' nor 'ego dystonic homosexuality' met the definition criteria of disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 1980; Drescher, 2010). With the publication of the DSM-III-R, the APA indirectly endorsed the normative variant ideology of homosexuality (Drescher, 2010).

Pathologising of Transgenderism and Gender Non-Conformity

The pathologisation of transgender and gender-diverse individuals stems from medical and psychiatric theories of homosexuality and the assumptions that sexuality, sex, and gender identity are entwined and synonymous concepts (Tosh, 2016). Throughout psychiatry's modern history, there have been numerous terminologies used in pathologising transgender, cross-dressing, and gender non-conforming individuals, with each term often overlapping or building on the previous rather than representing distinct concepts (Tosh, 2016). Much of this conflation comes as a response to public dissent, professional contention and lack of agreement regarding the link between sexual identity and gender non-conformity (Tosh, 2016).

In his work in sexology, Krafft-Ebing's "Psychopathia Sexualis" proposed a four phases theory of the varying degrees of homosexuality, with phase three, labelled as 'metamorphis sexualis paranoica', being defined as men feeling as though they are a woman, and phase four being defined as a man believing that they are a woman (Tosh, 2016). Krafft-Ebings's early conceptualisation of transgenderism resulted in psychiatry understanding homosexuality and gender non-conformity as being one spectrum that ranged from homosexuality to transgenderism (Tosh, 2016). Due to the conflation of homosexuality and transgender identity, transgenderism was also categorised as a pathological sexual deviance; however, the latter held the additional classification of delusional and perverse (Tosh, 2016). The classification of perverse followed Krafft-Ebing's concept of 'fetishism of female attire'—defined as male fixation with women's clothing rather than women themselves—which he labelled as a perversion (Tosh, 2016). Krafft-Ebing defined 'fetish' broadly to be intense feeling and deep interest towards objects, parts of objects, personality, or an idea, while 'erotic fetichism' additionally included subsequent sexual pleasure (Tosh, 2016).

Krafft-Ebing's theories of cross-dressing as a form of sexual desire was adopted by Hirschfield's 1910 work titled "The Transvestites: The Erotic Drive to Cross-Dress", in which he challenged that existing theories of fetishism poorly explained the behaviour by relying on the foundation of homosexuality (Hirschfield, 2020 [1910]; Tosh, 2016). Hirschfield proposed an alternative theory to the fetishism of women's clothing as well as the psychoanalytic theory that cross-dressers were masochists who enjoyed the punitive association of dressing as the subordinate gender—stating that transvestism was motivated by the desire to obtain 'effemination' (Hirschfield, 2020 [1910]; Tosh, 2016). However, Hirschfield agreed with Krafft-Ebing that transvestism was a delusion, concluding that transvestites remain aware of their biological sex even if they feel like the opposite sex while cross-dressing (Hirschfield, 2020 [1910]; Tosh, 2016). Yet, compared to Krafft-Ebing, Hirschfield rejected the concept of strict gender binaries and proposed that gender exists along a continuum with what he termed 'absolute' male and female at each end (Hirschfield, 2020 [1910]; Tosh, 2016). What Hirschfield deemed 'absolute' genders reflects the contemporary understandings of 'cisgender' in which an individual's sexual characteristics at birth match their gender identity (Hirschfield, 2020 [1910]; Tosh, 2016).

Hirschfield's proposed gender continuum, much like natural variant theories of sexuality, was disregarded by the American Psychiatric Association in the publication of the first and second edition of the DSM (American Psychiatric Association, 1952, 1968; Tosh, 2016) Rather, transvestism was seen through the lens of definitions that focused exclusively on heterosexual men, as determined by psychiatrists (Tosh, 2016). Within the DSM-III, published in 1980, transvestism was revised as a subsequent condition of a new category labelled 'paraphilia' (American Psychiatric Association, 1980; Tosh, 2016). Alongside its new categorisation, transvestism was given a revised definition as a range of phenomena from the "occasional wearing of women's clothing to an extensive involvement in transvestic subculture" (American Psychiatric Association, 1980, p. 269). The new definition of transvestism placed emphasis on the typical inclusion of multiple pieces of women's clothing as well as men who present entirely as women, therefore distinguishing transvestism from the previous diagnosis of fetishism (American Psychiatric Association, 1980; Tosh, 2016). However, the re-categorisation of transvestism did not distance the diagnosis from its prior association with fetishism entirely, with a name change from 'transvestism' to 'transvestic fetishism' occurring in the DSM-III-R in 1987 (Tosh, 2016) and 'transvestic disorder' to 'fetishism' in the current DSM-V (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Parallel to psychiatry's history with pathologising transvestism, and its heavy influence of psychiatric ideologies regarding homosexuality, is controversial concepts such as autogynephilia. Autogynephilia—defined as heterosexual males' erotic attraction towards thinking of or seeing themself as a woman—was proposed by Blanchard in 1989 (Tosh, 2016). Blanchard's controversial concept is formed by four categories, 'transvestic'—referring to cross-dressing; behavioural—referring to expressing femininity; physiologic—referring to bodily changes associated with femininity such as menstruation; and anatomic—referring to the desire for body-modifying medical procedures (Blanchard, 1989). The four-category concept, therefore, includes both transgender individuals who undergo gender-affirming medical care and procedures, as well as individuals who cross-dress or experience fetishism towards women's clothing (Blanchard, 1989). The concept of autogynephilia is viewed as controversial and has been highly criticised for its focus on heterosexuality and heterosexual marriage as the benchmark for 'norm', rejection of gender self-determination, the pathologising of femininity, and promotion of paraphilia (Tosh, 2016). Despite these criticisms, autogynephilia was introduced in the DSM-IV and remains a diagnosis in the current DSM-V (American Psychiatric Association, 1994, 2013; Tosh, 2016).

The term transexual, more specifically transsexualism, was first used by Cauldwell in his 1949 work "Psychopathia transexuali" (Cauldwell, 2006 [1949]). Cauldwell defined the term transsexualism as "individuals who wish to be members of the sex to which they do not properly belong" (2006 [1949], p. 40). In addition to his definition, Cauldwell (2006 [1949]) also hypothesised that transsexualism was a result of poor genetics and adverse childhood environments. Cauldwell's 'transsexualism' was further developed in Benjamin's 1966 publication titled "The Transsexual Phenomenon", in which he proposed that cross-dressing, transvestism, and transsexualism were different degrees of gender non-conformity (Benjamin, 1954).

Gender dysphoria, a term coined by Fisk through his work at Stanford University's gender clinic, was conceptualised as a result of his dissatisfaction with the limitation of how transsexualism was defined at the time and the range of people who were able to be treated (Fisk, 1974 as cited by Tosh, 2016). Fisk's gender dysphoria incorporated several subcategories, such as transsexualism, transvestism, as well as other gender non-conformities (Fisk, 1974 as cited by Tosh, 2016). It meant that Fisk was able to refer a more diverse group of people for medical intervention motivated by his opinion that psychotherapy was an inadequate treatment for transgender people (Fisk, 1974 as cited by Tosh, 2016). Since its initial introduction, gender dysphoria has morphed away from Fisk's intention to now more

closely reflect early understandings of transsexualism, with a current definition within the DSM-V of "distress that may accompany the incongruence between one's experienced or expressed gender and one's assigned gender" (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Prior to the publication of the DSM-V, gender dysphoria was categorised as 'gender identity disorder' (Tosh, 2016).

Pathologising of Asexual Identities

While sexual and romantic attraction has historically been assumed to be universal—leading to the term allonormativity—diagnosis of asexual behaviours is a relatively recent occurrence (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Little research has been done in this field, yet the majority of existing research veers towards supporting non-pathologising approaches (Bogaert, 2006). Unlike other minority sexual identities, asexuality was not negatively perceived by early psychiatry, psychology, and sociology due to the religious foundations of sexual discourse that valued abstinence and conservative sexual practices (Bogaert, 2006). However, despite the minimal engagement of psychiatry with asexuality, parallel diagnostic categories that have the potential to encapsulate some aspects of asexuality have arisen in the DSM (Bogaert, 2006). Originally referred to as 'inhibited sexual desire' in the DSM-III (American Psychiatric Association, 1980), 'hypoactive sexual desire disorder', as it is termed in the DSM-IV, is defined as "deficiency or absence of sexual fantasies and desire for sexual activity" (American Psychiatric Association, 1994, p. 496). This diagnostic category was further revised within the DSM-V to form binary diagnoses by sex, referred to as 'male hypoactive sexual desire disorder' and 'female sexual interest/arousal disorder' (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Female sexual interest/arousal disorder is defined as a "lack of, or significantly reduced, sexual interest/arousal" (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 433) and requires at least three additional criteria to be met across a minimum time span of six months, significant distress, and no comorbidity with other nonsexual mental disorder to meet diagnostic criteria. Male hypoactive sexual desire disorder is defined as "persistently or recurrently deficient (or absent) sexual/erotic thoughts or fantasies and desire for sexual activity" (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 440) and requires a minimum time span of six months, significant distress, and no comorbidity with other nonsexual mental disorder to meet diagnostic criteria. A third diagnostic category that was present in the DSM-IV that may have aligned with some asexual experiences is 'sexual aversion disorder', which is defined as "the aversion to and avoidance of genital sexual contact with a sexual partner" (American

Psychiatric Association, 1994, p. 499) and required destress and interpersonal difficulties to meet diagnostic criteria. However, due to a lack of supporting research and the rare use of this diagnosis, it was removed from the DSM-V (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). All sexual dysfunctions categorised by the DSM hold two subtypes—lifelong vs acquired and generalised vs situational—and require consideration of medical and nonmedical correlates (i.e., relationship and cultural factors) in assessing the appropriateness of diagnosis (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

While these diagnostic categories are likely to encompass some forms or variations of asexuality, the diagnostic requirement of distress concerning a lack of sexual desire serves as the contingency for diagnosis and pathologisation. It should also be noted that there are important distinctions between the DSM sexual disorders and asexual sexual orientations (Bogaert, 2006). For example, some asexual people may experience some level of sexual desire and engage in sexual activity, and most people diagnosed with these sexual disorders do not experience lifelong absences of sexual desire or attraction (Bogaert, 2006). Being that diagnosis is contingent on experiencing distress caused by the lack of sexual desire, it is reasonable to expect that the majority of asexual-identifying people would not meet the criteria (Bogaert, 2006). However, this is predominantly speculative as, to date, only minimal empirical data regarding the mental health of asexual people exists (Bogaert, 2006).

Pathologising of Intersex Identities

Contrary to homosexual, transgender, and asexual pathologisation, which held the commonality of primarily being pathologised as psychiatric conditions, variations of sexual characteristics (VSC)—or people who are intersex—have predominantly been pathologised within medicine with a focus on correcting physical ‘abnormalities’ to align with binary gender expectations. Despite an extensive history of hermaphrodism, VSC, as it is termed today, first became known to medical professionals during the mid-nineteenth century, when women presented to doctors with infertility concerns were found to have testes (Newbould, 2014). Other than the presence of testes, these women were found to have no male sex characteristics, causing alarm as the occurrence of VSC disrupted the rigid binary understandings of sex and gendered social expectations of the time (Newbould, 2014).

Emerging in the 1950s alongside early and influential psychological understandings of intersex proposed by John Money (1921-2006), appearance-altering genitalia surgery on intersex people during infancy and youth became a common practice (Newbould, 2014). Money, the founder of the field of psycho-endocrinology, published an article titled “An

examination of some basic sexual concepts: The evidence of human hermaphroditism" (Money, 1955b as cited by Goldie, 2014), which included medical protocols that promoted genital correction so that there is no doubt about a child's gender (Goldie, 2014). These protocols, known as the 'optimal-gender policy', included foundational clauses (Hester, 2004). Firstly, sex should be affirmed to the gender considered most likely to retain reproductivity; secondly, the decision and surgical interventions to obtain the chosen sex should occur as early as possible after birth and no later than 18-24 months; thirdly, full commitment by parents and medical professionals to the chosen sex is required in the medical intervention and child-rearing, with age-appropriate explanations provided to the child, and follow up medical interventions completed (i.e., hormone treatments at puberty; Hester, 2004). Money proposed that meeting these clauses would result in the child not questioning their gender identity, providing them with the ability to assimilate into society normally as a 'healthy' boy or girl (Hester, 2004).

Several assumptions underpin this heavily medicalised approach to VSC. One of the primary assumptions is that a 'normal' genital appearance exists and can be achieved through surgical intervention despite the multitudes of sex markers that extend beyond external genitalia (Newbould, 2014). As Newbould discussed:

> "In biological terms, it can be extremely difficult to identify the "true sex" of an individual because the presence or absence of a Y chromosome is no longer the sole determiner of sex […]" (2014, p. 162).

A second primary assumption is that heterosexual intercourse will be vital in adulthood; however, this does not take into account the non-heterosexual and non-reproductive sexual experiences of intersex people, nor the chance that gender identity may be different to that which aligns with the sex characteristics enforced (i.e., a male-identifying adult who has received female genitalia aligning surgery; Newbould, 2014). These critiques and more, alongside first-hand experiences provided by VSC genital surgery patients, resulted in the Chicago Consensus Statement in 2006 (Hegarty, 2023). The consensus highlighted that Money's work on appearance-altering genital surgery lacked evidence to support the science and promoted the importance of multidisciplinary teams and parental decision-making in medical interventions of VSC (Hegarty, 2023). Although no longer considered 'best practice', genitalia surgeries continue to be practised in some regards to this day (i.e., in cases considered a medical emergency; Newbould, 2014), and there remains a significant lack of psychological research concerning people with VSC (Hegarty, 2023).

Summary of Psychologies History with LGBTQIA+ Identities

The synopsis of psychology and psychiatry's history with LGBTQIA+ identities provided in this section demonstrates how the foundational ideologies, frameworks, and interventions have been deficit-based and heavily medicalised in nature. The influence of such a lens on LGBTQIA+ people, as individuals and as a collective, has been shown to be detrimental by way of stigmatisation (Drescher, 2010). The legacy of detrimental research and treatment of LGBTQIA+ is medical mistrust, including scepticism and fear of psy-professions and practitioners (Cox et al., 2023). It is vital to situate the history of psychology and psychiatry's interactions with the LGBTQIA+ community in understanding how contemporary research may contribute to or contradict the historical deficit framing of diversity.

Queer Life Course

Traditional psychological theories of normative life courses, proposed by theorists such as Freud (2016 [1905]) and Erikson (1959, 1968), frame development as a linear, unidirectional model with set chronological phases beginning from birth and moving through to childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and ending with retirement (Eder, 2022). Each life phase is said to incorporate a set of developmental tasks that individuals should ideally progress through (Eder, 2022). The normative life course framework provides a prescribed timeline for what is expected and appropriate across the lifetime (Eder, 2022). Despite experiences of development being shown not to be strictly homogeneous, linear and unidirectional theories are considered natural developmental progression (Eder, 2022).

Critiques of linear development models reliance on heteronormativity have been made by queer theorists, stating that traditional development models may not be representative of the actual development of LGBTQIA+ individual's and the trajectories of diverse life experiences (Eder, 2022). Such critiques include the works of Halberstam (2004, 2011) and Ahmed (Ahmed, 2006). In "A Queer Time and Place", Halberstam (2004) discusses that while not all LGBTQIA+ people will drastically diverge from the life trajectories assumed by linear, unidirectional models, some individuals do. This departure from the linear norm results in what Halberstam (2004) terms 'queer time' in which individuals experience a different temporality due to stepping outside societal expectations such as reproduction and heterosexual nuclear family/whānau structures. Halberstam (2004) reasons that queer time offers the framework for new understandings of unscripted life courses that remove the centrality of family/whānau and parenthood, allowing for alternative life pursuits. In "The Queer Art of Failure", Halberstam (2011) builds on the concept of alternative life trajectories

further when he discusses that the failure to meet societal expectations of successful development offers potential for LGBTQIA+ individuals to create alternative ways to live. Such alternative ways, which are deemed a failure by linear, unidirectional developmental norms, can result in life trajectories not dominated by capitalist ideologies of maturity, such as reproduction and wealth (Halberstam, 2011). In "Queer Phenomenology", Ahmed (2006) provides an analysis of how LGBTQIA+ people may struggle to fully assume the social norms expected by heteronormative linear models, even if they desire to, calling the discomfort felt by sexual and gender diverse individuals 'queer effects'. Ahmed (2006) additionally highlights how alternative life courses are often unclear in comparison to the heterosexual life course, which is well-demonstrated and easier to navigate.

The life trajectories of people who do not adhere to the heteronormative life course framework are often labelled as immature and at risk of not having a successful future (Eder, 2022). Psychological developmental theories have consistently framed LGBTQIA+ people as being developmentally stalled in a state of adolescence and incapable of achieving legitimate adulthood (Eder, 2022). As Eder (2022) noted, living these alternative life courses may result in marginalisation and additional difficulties for LGBTQIA+ people. For example, a lack of positive modelling and representation of life course possibilities may result in LGBTQIA+ individuals being unable to imagine their future outside of social norms (Eder, 2022).

Coming Out

The 'coming out' process is a critical developmental milestone for LGBTQIA+ people. However, while several theoretical assumptions with similar underlying themes have been proposed to define coming out, there remains a lack of clear definition of how 'coming out' is understood (Orne, 2011). Klein et al. (2015) defined coming out as being open with others about one's minority sexual or gender identity, a process that is often considered a form of political activism and a personal duty. Lev defined experiences of coming out as "a relational and systemic dynamic that intimately involves family, friends, loved ones, and all social relationships" (2006, p. 11). Bohan (1996) proposed a definition that centres around embracing one's minority sexual or gender identity and disclosing that identity to others, noting that coming out may include risky and painful disclosures to significant others.

The murky outline of coming out results from the previously discussed complex history of developmental concepts that range from pathological linear and stage models to naturalistic and social constructionism ideologies. Little agreement and cohesion have been achieved amongst the psychiatry, psychology, and sociology fields, meaning that multiple—and

sometimes paradoxical—definitions linger, convoluting a clear definition across coming out literature (Orne, 2011). Furthermore, the process of coming out itself holds multiple interpretations across both the initial disclosure and repetitive disclosures. For example, Savin-Williams (2001) defines the most common method of coming out as 'direct disclosure' in which an individual will disclose their minority identity to another through statements, such as "I'm gay". Direct disclosure, considered through the lens of initial identity disclosure, has dominated the literature, while additional forms of non-direct disclosure, including identity clues or hints and speculation (Orne, 2011; Savin-Williams, 2001), have been largely ignored. In contrast to the initial disclosure focus, theorists such as Guittar & Rayburn, (2016) and Orne (2011) consider coming out as a life-long process in which minority identities require strategic management with identity self-disclosure practices changing across different environments and requiring different considerations.

However, many of the interpretations of the coming out process given in the literature are amalgamated and infer homogeneity across all LGBTQIA+ identities, despite the nuances present when comparing sexual identities, such as lesbian, gay, and polysexual (i.e., bisexual and pansexual), with transgender and gender diverse identities. Zimman (2009) notes that the repetitive nature of coming out experienced by sexual minority individuals is not necessarily characteristic of transgender coming out experiences. To account for this, Zimman defines coming out in a broader sense as:

> "a venue in which stigmatised identities are enacted and negotiated, thus functioning to forge solidarity between members, to socialise those who are new to the group, and to contest the powerful ideologies that marginalise queer identities" (2009, p. 56).

Traditional Stage Models of Homosexual Identity Development

Despite the varying definitions and interpretations of the coming out process, many early minority sexual identity development theories hold in common the foundation of Erikson's model of identity development (Orne, 2011). Erikson (1968) emphasises the importance of sexual identity—and therefore coming out—during the fifth stage of the linear model, said to occur in adolescence. According to Erikson, adolescents are faced with the development of sexual desires and behaviours and the challenge of integrating their newly developed sexual identity into their self-image (Erikson, 1968); for LGBTQIA+ people, this includes the additional challenge of integrating their minority identity into their broader sense of self (Orne, 2011). Although several differing homosexual identity development models exist, key themes can be found among most of them. The first is the emphasis on the underlying

stigmatisation that impacts the development and eventual embodiment of homosexual identities. Secondly is the ideology that homosexual identity development includes several challenges, which are often chronologically ordered within models as stages. Thirdly, most models maintain that the adoption of the 'homosexual' label is a significant stage in the coming out process. Expanding on this point, the fourth commonality holds that individuals will progress to wanting to share their accepted homosexual label with others, eventually leading to the fifth commonality, which is the formation of homosexual social connections.

Perhaps the most prominent minority sexual identity development model is Cass' (1984) theoretical "homosexual identity formation", consisting of six stages, including confusion, comparison, tolerance, acceptance, pride, and synthesis. Cass' (1984) model was prominent for its application to homosexual men *and* women, contrary to prior models that exclusively examined male homosexual experiences and generalised broadly to other identities. Within the homosexual identity formation model, coming out occurs within the tolerance phase, in which individuals begin to live a "double life", the solution to which is eventual identity self-disclosure (Cass, 1984). However, a notable critique of Cass' model is the narrow focus on the initial coming out event, with the model failing to account for any ongoing identity self-disclosures. Following Cass' model, Troiden revised his previously proposed model to a more condensed four-stage "ideal-typical model of homosexual identity formation" (1989, p. 44). Troiden's revised model stood in contrast to many previous models in that it was not conceptualised as a linear, unidirectional progression. Rather, Troiden (1989) considered homosexual identity development to be a flexible progression that "occurs in back-and-forth, up-and-down ways" (p. 47) with the ability for stages to overlap, occur consecutively or non-consecutively, and reoccur as individually necessary. Despite the drift away from linear progression, traditional models have been critiqued for inferring that homosexual identity development includes an endpoint, at which it is assumed that it is possible and universally desired to be out to everyone (Orne, 2011). The ideology that sexual identity development can and should be 'completed' ignores the continuous process of identity management throughout the lifetime, assumes homogeneity amongst a broad community of people with vastly different experiences, and ascribes a singular way of coming out, allowing space for pathologisation.

Traditional Stage Models of Transgender and Gender-Diverse Identity Development

Building upon sexual identity development models, including the foundations of Erikson's model of identity development, gender-specific models began being proposed in the 1990s to

account for the unique experiences of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals. Like sexual identity models, transgender and gender non-conforming models hold in common intrapersonal and interpersonal processes, such as discovering or exploring, accepting, integrating, and disclosing one's gender identity (Kuper et al., 2018). However, unlike traditional sexual identity models, additional phases are included, such as transitional and post-transitional phases (Bockting & Coleman, 2013). Gender identity models range from four-stage models to six [or more] stage models. The work of Gagné et al. (1997), a four-stage model, begins with the broadly termed phase 'early transgender experiences' followed by coming out to oneself, disclosing to others, and identity resolution. Lewins' (1995) six-stage model included the phases: abiding anxiety, discovery, purging and delay, acceptance, surgical reassignment, and invisibility.

The inclusion of transgender and gender non-conforming specific phases in these and other gender models aims to include values, behaviours, physical or aesthetic, and cognitive processes related to gender normativity that affect transgender identity development (Lindley et al., 2021). However, many of these phases have been critiqued as problematic and homogenising of transgender experiences, particularly phases that promote the necessity of medicalised transitions and adherence to binary gender categories (Lindley et al., 2021). The focus on binary ideologies within these models stems from broader societies' insistence that gender expressions should be easily determinable by other people to be legitimate while conflating sex and gender into a single concept—a phenomenon called gender determination by Westbrook & Schilt (2014). Furthermore, many early transgender identity development models, such as the two discussed, were formed solely on the experiences of male-to-female transgender experiences. Therefore, making them ineffective when generalising to broader transgender and gender-diverse experiences, as alternative lived experiences are ignored while phallocentric discourse prevails (Lindley et al., 2021).

Contemporary transgender and gender non-conforming models have begun to recognise the importance of intersectionality in their consideration of gender development. Models such as the works of De Vries' (2015), Kuper et al. (2018), and Lindley et al. (2021), recognise that transgender and gender non-conforming individuals' experiences exist within the cross-sections of multiple identities and social environments. Furthermore, many contemporary models, such as Lindley et al. (2021), have attempted to examine gender identity development in conjunction with sexual identity development due to their often interactional nature.

Models of Bisexual and Asexual Identity Development

Traditional understandings of bisexual identity development were often considered to be synonymous with homosexual identity development and, therefore, grouped together within 'LGB' stage models. Perhaps the first model that examined the unique experiences of bisexual identity development specifically was Weinberg et al. in 1994. Within their research findings Weinberg et al. (1994) highlighted that bisexual identity development involves a complex rejection of both prominent categories of sexual identity, heterosexuality and homosexuality (Weinberg et al., 1994). Additionally, they demonstrated that, while parallel to the foundational themes found in other homosexual identity development models, bisexuality holds additional challenges at each stage as well as an additional final stage, which includes "intermittent periods of doubt and uncertainty regarding sexual orientation" (Weinberg et al., 1994, p. 34). Like homosexual identity development models, the initial identity phase of confusion was demonstrated; however, additional challenges present at this stage that are unique to bisexual experiences were identified (Weinberg et al., 1994). This includes unsettling and disorientating feelings for both sexes, confusion about same-sex attraction meaning the ending of heterosexual attraction, difficulties in categorising feelings or behaviours, and confusion in reconciling internalised homophobia with polysexual attraction (Weinberg et al., 1994). These additional confusion challenges are said to result in extended periods of denial, with the initial phases of confusion often spanning several years (Weinberg et al., 1994). The third stage of bisexual identity development also expands on homosexual models in that the adoption of bisexual identity labels has the potential to become contextually complex. That is, changes in sexual behaviour appear to be more likely for bisexuals than for those who identify as heterosexual or homosexual, meaning that the viscidity of bisexuality as a label may differ across time depending on such things as the sex of one's partner (Weinberg et al., 1994). Although this complexity in bisexual identity adoption is by no means homogenous, therefore, unlike homosexuality or heterosexuality, it is vital to view the adoption of a bisexual identity through a lens of relative terms (Weinberg et al., 1994). Finally, the additional stage in bisexual identity development put forward by Weinberg et al. includes the lack of closure or complete fit that may be experienced in stage three. Weinberg et al. (1994) found that despite achieving self-acceptance and adoption of the bisexual label, a lack of social validation and support was a contributing factor to bisexuals' experiences of doubt and uncertainty regarding their sexual orientation over time. This reflects the dualistic discrimination of bisexuals within both heterosexual and homosexual contexts, where polysexual identities are considered transitional, disloyal, and wanton

(Weinberg et al., 1994). Due to the potential lack of identity closure— as well as factors such as the lack of bisexual role models, subcultures, and the pressure of conformity—Weinberg et al. (1994) advocate for a non-linear interpretation of the framework and note that not all bisexual people will demonstrate these patterns in their sexual identity development.

Asexual identity development models are considerably more recent than traditional homosexuality, transgender, and bisexual models, with many models being proposed in the late 2010s and into the current decade. Similar to experiences of other non-heterosexual identities, asexual identity development often begins through the discovery of being different from one's peers; however, there are many ways in which asexual identity development may depart from homosexual and bisexual identity development (Kelleher & Murphy, 2022). The initial confusion and discovery of identity are often convoluted by societal allonormativity—the belief that everyone experiences sexual and romantic attraction—resulting in the need to seek explanations for feelings of difference and lack of sexual and/or romantic attraction (Kelleher & Murphy, 2022). Following the initial confusion and discovery stage, asexual identity development can differ not only from other non-heterosexual identity development but also within the different forms of asexual identity, which is considered a spectrum (i.e., asexual to allosexual and aromantic to alloromantic). Despite this, models of asexual identity development have been formed to outline this process, including work by Kelleher & Murphy's (2022, 2024), which provided five themes that align closely with existing homosexual identity development models. The five themes are confusion, discovering asexuality, disclosure, barriers to acceptance, and navigating relationships (Kelleher & Murphy, 2024).

Letting in Framework

An emerging framework that provides an alternative perspective of identity self-disclosure is letting in. Grounded in intersectionality, the letting in framework arises from Indigenous and ethnic LGBTQIA+ communities, in which the process of coming out and its imperative of achieving complete outness is incompatible with lived realities of cultural responsibilities (Nakhid et al., 2022). Letting in is defined as a process of disclosing LGBTQIA+ identities over time to a select audience of people that one feels are safe to disclose to (Bal & Divakalala, 2022). For some, the traditional concept of 'coming out' may be a part of their letting in process (Bal & Divakalala, 2022); however, identity disclosure is not viewed as a compulsory obligation or a universal process, rather an individual's circumstances are the primary determining factors (Nakhid et al., 2022). In Nakhid et al.'s (2022) study of queer

ethnic youth in Aotearoa New Zealand, letting in provided the ability to protect the reputation of their family/whānau, and allowed for cultural traditions and key relationships to be retained; which participants viewed as more important than disclosing their gender or sexuality identity, potentially fracturing their familial and cultural connections. Similar to the continuity of coming out, individuals engaging in letting in may face the need to disclose their identity several times, including considering whether it is safe to convey their identity in its entirety and whether the person they are letting in is trustworthy, accepting, and affirming (Nakhid et al., 2022). Although stressful and exacting at times, the dynamic process of letting in is also considered supportive of LGBTQIA+ individuals' agency and their preferred navigation of disclosure (Nakhid et al., 2022).

Concealment and 'Passing'

Concealment—often used interchangeably with the term 'passing'—is a commonly observed strategy that is employed in varying situations and environments by members of the LGBTQIA+ community. Concealment refers to changing one's behaviour and mitigating clues to, directly and indirectly, reduce the access others have to one's identity (Orne, 2011); therefore, rendering one's LGBTQIA+ identity invisible to appear heterosexual and/or cisgendered (Bohan, 1996). Maintaining invisibility may require people to employ techniques such as changing or avoiding the use of pronouns when discussing a partner, refraining from public displays of affection, dampening one's personality to avoid association with flamboyant or butch stereotypes, and controlling personal environments such as the home by limiting clues to one's identity (i.e., photos and books). Research has suggested that concealment of identity—or passing—can be highly demanding psychologically (Bohan, 1996). Goffman (1986 [1963]) noted that fear is often central for people who have not disclosed their stigmatised identities, and those who engage in concealment may encounter more anxiety related to the perceived instability of their veneer identity. Although these fears may not arise from direct experiences, members of the LGBTQIA+ community are socialised to expect potential repercussions such as social isolation, harassment, and discrimination (Ragins et al., 2007).

Benefits and Challenges of Coming Out and 'Staying In'

Since the gay liberation movement of the 1960s-1980s, where revolutionists such as slain political activist Harvey Milk called on his "gay brothers and sisters" to come out (1978, p. 4), the act of identity self-disclosure has been seen by many as a political strategy for creating

awareness within society (Orne, 2011). However, research spanning the following decades has highlighted many additional intrapersonal and interpersonal benefits, as well as disadvantages of coming out. The benefits of coming out are said to include social connection, strengthening of supportive relationships, increased self-esteem, lower levels of internalised homophobia, decreased psychiatric symptoms such as depression and suicidal ideations, lower cortisol levels, and stress-related personal growth (Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Juster et al., 2013; Schope, 2002; Vaughan & Waehler, 2010). Furthermore, Juster et al.'s (2013) findings demonstrate that transgender youth who were able to engage in disclosure-based behaviours, like using their chosen names across multiple social contexts, were less likely to face mental health risks, such as depression and suicidal ideation or behaviour. However, while research that affirms the benefits of coming out is emerging, it is important to note that correlations between disclosure and positive identity findings may reflect individuals' social contexts (e.g., level of social support; Balsam & Mohr, 2007). For example, these findings may reflect the experiences of LGBTQIA+ people who received positive support from their friends, family/whānau, and other support networks, as research in this field remains limited.

Much of the academic and societal understandings of staying in the closet or benefiting from passing privileges can be explained through the 'disclosure imperative', which positions disclosure and non-disclosure in a strict binary of good and bad, respectively (McLean, 2007; Rasmussen, 2004). Ideologies of non-disclosing identities are often linked with 'living a lie' and oppressive discourses, positioned in contrast to disclosure discourses, which are heavily embedded with 'honest' and liberational discourses (Orne, 2011). Despite the prominence of the disclosure imperative, strategies such as 'staying in the closet' or 'passing' have been said to possess at least some level of social benefits when engaging in a hetero- and cisnormative society. For example, Hall et al. (2021) synthesised across LGBTQIA+ health literature that significant intrapersonal well-being disparities exist for minority gender and sexual persons. These include mental health concerns such as depression, suicidal ideation and behaviours, eating disorders, anxiety, and increased substance use and abuse (Hall et al., 2021; Miller & Grollman, 2015). Many of these disparities have been correlated with societal impacts, such as negative experiences during identity development and the internalisation of hetero- and cisnormative social expectations (Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Hall et al., 2021; Miller & Grollman, 2015). Furthermore, research has highlighted that passing strategies may reduce the amount of negative interpersonal consequences that LGBTQIA+ people are exposed to, such as gossip, behaviour surveillance, and physical and psychological harm (Nakhid et al.,

2022). Utilising identity non-disclosure, or staying in the closet, situationally allows for greater agency and recognises that both disclosure and non-disclosure are complex, nuanced, and, at times, dangerous decisions requiring careful analysis (Orne, 2011). Nakhid et al. (2022) notes that coming out should not be considered the benchmark of identity validation, rather individuals should engage in identity disclosure in ways that are best suited for them and their circumstances. However, in contrast, research has suggested that the required secrecy of identity concealment (i.e., passing) may lead to an increased preoccupation with one's invisible identity, resulting in intrusive thoughts (Smart & Wegner, 2000, as cited by Ragins et al., 2007). The disassociation with a minority gender and sexual identity in favour of passing reduces one's ability to connect with a supportive and validating community, which has been shown as beneficial to LGBTQIA+ people in reducing psychological distress related to minority identity (Bohan, 1996; Meyer, 2003).

Identity Management

Parallel to the concept of letting in, several contemporary theorists have proposed identity management concepts under various titles. Built on the work of Goffman (1986 [1963]), identity management refers to the ways in which people govern the disclosure of information about their identity. Identity management outlasts the often-delineated process society understands as "coming out." While the initial coming-out event is a significant milestone in an LGBTQIA+ person's life—frequently marred by the stressors of self-discovery, disclosure, and social and cultural adjustments—identity management theories recognise that experiences of disclosure or non-disclosure are a lifelong process that requires deliberate management.

Sexuality Identity Management Models

Prominent sexual identity management concepts include Orne's strategic outness framework, which situates coming out as a "continual, contextual, social identity management" (2011, p. 682). Contrary to traditional stage models of identity development, strategic outness does away with the ideology that coming out possesses an endpoint at which completion of identity development is achieved (Orne, 2011). Rather, strategic outness contemplates the nuanced and contextually influenced ways in which people continuously manage their identities; deconstructing the dichotomy of being in or out of the closet (Orne, 2011). Furthermore, strategic outness recognises that people and their experiences do not exist in isolation, removed from societal norms, social contexts, and relationships. Therefore,

motivations to engage in identity maintenance—whether disclosing or not—evolve from, and are reinforced by, these factors also. Alongside social contexts and relationships, the strategic outness framework also examines disclosure strategies and motivational discourses (Orne, 2011). Disclosure strategies within the strategic outness framework involve several formats, including direct disclosure of identity labels or behaviours, clues that infer identity, concealment of identity or behaviours (i.e., passing), and speculation by others (Orne, 2011). Each of these strategies is engaged contextually to govern who, how, and why one's identity is disclosed amongst different audiences and social environments (Orne, 2011). Orne's (2011) motivational discourses align closely with the previously discussed 'disclosure imperative', in which the desire to stay in the closet is dichotomised against 'living a lie' discourses. Once again, the interconnection of coming out and social context are highlighted through the learnt nature of motivational discourses; as Orne notes, "they are informed, crafted, and created through interaction with the outside world" (2011, p. 694). Strategic outness, therefore, requires critical and reflexive analysis of both disclosure and non-disclosure in order to obtain depth in analysing the meaning of different coming out experiences (Orne, 2011).

Asexual Identity Management

While asexuality may be considered to fall within the broad category of sexual identity, research has highlighted specific factors and strategies required in asexual identity management that are additional to the common experiences of lesbians, bisexuals, and gay men. In a study with asexual college students, Mollet (2023) found that two of Orne's strategic outness disclosure strategies applied to asexual experiences: direct disclosure and concealment. However, two additional challenges to identity disclosure that are specific to asexuality—invisibility and erasure—were also highlighted within the research, resulting in a unique disclosure strategy used to counteract these challenges, termed 'developing explanations' (Mollet, 2023). While direct disclosure is a commonly used strategy for asexual people, aligning with Orne's original findings for broader sexual identity disclosures, the additional challenge of asexual invisibility as a result of a societal lack of knowledge means that identity management for asexual people can be complex and burdensome (Mollet, 2023). The need for explanations to counteract the assumptions and confusion around understanding asexuality is seen as additional educational labour that falls on asexual people when disclosing (Mollet, 2023). Although developing explanations may be used in some contexts where education is seen as beneficial, in others, asexual people may opt for concealment as a form of identity management, therefore reducing the burden of additional labour (Mollet,

2023). In addition to avoiding educational labour, concealment is also seen as a tool for reducing experiences of judgement, social invalidation, pathologisation, and sexual violence, and may take the form of adopting better-understood identity labels such as queer (Mollet, 2023).

Gender Identity Management

Building on Orne's strategic outness, Brumbaugh-Johnson & Hull (2019) examined transgender identity management strategies, challenging previous research that dismissed lifelong transgender identity maintenance (see Zimman, 2009). Parallel to Orne's original research with gay males, Brumbaugh-Johnson & Hull (2019) found that the coming out process for transgender people is a complex, interpersonally influenced, ongoing, and situational process that requires "navigating the social implications of one's gender identity and gendered behaviour" (p. 1158). Through the use of identity theory to examine the social dynamics of transgender coming out, Brumbaugh-Johnson & Hull (2019) formed three themes of transgender identity management: navigating others' gendered expectations, navigating others' reactions, and navigating the threat of violence. Navigating others' gendered expectations involves a careful decision-making process, including *if* one will adhere to social expectations of gender (i.e., appearance, behaviour, mannerisms), as well as *how* one might alter their gender presentation to appease others' expectations (Brumbaugh-Johnson & Hull, 2019). Navigating others' reactions refers to the significant impact that positive and negative reactions have on one's gender identity and presentation. Brumbaugh-Johnson & Hull (2019) found that disclosure decisions were heavily influenced by the predicted reactions of others (i.e., support or lack of support). Finally, navigating the threat of violence involves the evaluation of personal safety in coming out and the use of strategic outness to mitigate risks of violence (i.e., passing in public; Brumbaugh-Johnson & Hull, 2019). As Brumbaugh-Johnson & Hull (2019) noted, the navigation of others' expectations is an ongoing process that often begins long before transitioning due to hyperawareness and exteriorisation of gender social expectations, as well as the dissonance between one's at-birth assigned gender and true gender.

Further highlighting the complexity of transgender identity management, Brumbaugh-Johnson & Hull (2019) found that transgender coming out is, for many, proceeded by or parallel to sexuality coming out experiences. This echoes prior research conducted by Bockting & Coleman's (2013), who conducted an intersectional examination of gender and sexuality disclosure experiences amongst female-to-male transgender participants, which

highlighted additional challenges to identity disclosures when both gender and sexuality are considered. The duality of sexuality and gender identity factors in both Bockting & Coleman's (2013) and Brumbaugh-Johnson & Hull's (2019) research was found to influence identity management in that individuals may choose to engage in disclosure of their gender identity or their sexual identity, but not always simultaneous disclosures of both gender and sexuality. This infers the potential requirement of three forms of identity management strategies: sexual identity management, gender identity management, and sexual and gender identity management.

Summary of Current LGBTQIA+ Identity Management Models

Across each of these identity management models four commonalities stand out. Firstly, disclosing one's minority identity is an ongoing, lifelong process rather than a singular significant event or process, as suggested by traditional identity development models. Secondly, social and relational contextualisation is important in identity management, including distal (i.e., broader society) and proximal relationships (i.e., family/whānau and friends). Therefore, LGBTQIA+ people must be seen within their wider contexts to understand identity management practices. Thirdly, the strategies utilised in disclosing a minority identity are equally important as the disclosure itself, including the motivational factors contributing to disclosure or non-disclosure decision-making. Finally, each of the models presented drew upon a form of social evaluation that is intrinsic to identity management, with safety identified as a significant factor. This research addresses these commonalities while also identifying gaps in the models, such as examining the psychological toll that identity management has on LGBTQIA+ people, individually and collectively, and how identity management practices may be altered or evolved over time.

Current Research

While existing research has begun to examine identity disclosure amongst LGBTQIA+ people categorically, there remain four significant gaps in the examination of identity management. These include:

1. The influence of time on the practice of identity management,
2. The psychological implications of identity management,
3. The social factors that contribute to identity management,
4. And the influence of language on identity management.

Each of these gaps will be addressed through this thesis. Furthermore, this research contributes to the existing identity management literature by situating the concept within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, addressing the lack of application outside American research environments. In doing so, this research seeks to contribute to elevating Aotearoa New Zealand's LGBTQIA+ experiences, which remain under-represented within qualitative community psychology research, through interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA). Five research questions will be explored:

1. How do participants interpret their experiences of identity self-disclosure or non-disclosure?
2. How does the repetitive nature of identity self-disclosure affect participants?
3. What social factors influence the decision to self-disclose minority gender and sexual identity?
4. How does identity self-disclosure vary in different social environments? And,
5. How does language shape identity self-disclosure?

Chapter Three: Methodology

Chapter Summary

This thesis aimed to examine the experiences of identity maintenance amongst a sample of people who self-identify as members of the LGBTQIA+ population of Aotearoa New Zealand. The research utilised a qualitative design and consisted of ten participants of diverse backgrounds, including gender, sexuality, ethnicity, physical and neurological ability, and religion. Individual interviews were utilised as the primary data collection method, with each of the ten participants interviewed once. Additionally, diary tasks were completed by five participants following their interview. The data was analysed using Interpretive Phenomenology Analysis (IPA). Within this chapter, I discuss the methodological considerations which informed this research, followed by the methods utilised.

Positionality and Axiology

Personal Positionality

My positionality as a queer researcher has contributed to the direction of this thesis from the outset. My experiences—both first-hand and vicarious—with the processes of 'coming out' and identity maintenance have informed my commitment to utilising critical community psychology as a lens to examine the everyday lived experiences that are unique to the LGBTQIA+ community (Kagan et al., 2011). As such, an emic perspective—that is, my viewpoint as a researcher with a personal, or 'insider', connection with the LGBTQIA+ community—has been taken (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015). However, it is important to note that researchers can never wholly reflect an insider or outsider positionality. While we may share many similarities in our identities and experiences with our participants, differences are also present, rendering strictly binary understandings of insider/outsider positionalities inadequate (Nelson, 2020). Rather, insider/outsider positionalities might better be understood as a continuum on which a researcher's position may vary temporally and situationally (Eliason, 2016). Therefore, within the context of this research with ten self-identifying LGBTQIA+ individuals, my positionality may vary along the continuum from insider to outsider, depending on the participants and my intersectional identities.

My identity as a queer, gender-fluid person in my thirties with lived experiences of the complexities of religious and social influences on my minority identities means that I can be—broadly speaking—classified as an emic researcher. I embody the criteria for participation alongside the ten individuals selected to participate in the research, something which is purposeful in nature. After all, this research came to fruition following years of

conversations with close queer friends about our experiences with day-to-day identity disclosure and the silence we felt existed regarding the identity maintenance process. As I prepared for this thesis, the minimal research regarding LGBTQIA+ identity maintenance did not surprise me, nor did the lack of Aotearoa New Zealand-specific research. While our representation in psychosocial research and resulting literature is increasing through the work done by many of Aotearoa New Zealand's queer researchers, there remains a need for more strengths-based, community-led examinations of the day-to-day challenges that our LGBTQIA+ community faces.

Conversely, in many interviews, I found myself as an outsider as participants shared the challenges and nuances that arise from their intersectional identities. Discussions regarding the intertwined nature of gender and sexual identities with Indigenous and minority ethnic identities, parental identities, and specific health identities placed me at a metaphorical distance due to my inability to relate to those lived experiences. Although I could witness and appreciate the importance of these intersections, the scope of my own intersectional identities could never fully align with each participant's. Furthermore, this thesis marked my first piece of LGBTQIA+ research that included drawing on participants' lived experiences, posing another instance where my positionality reflected an outsider. As the researcher conducting the interviews, I found myself once again distanced from a community of people of which I usually belong on account of the power dynamics involved with the status of researchers. While I consider research that is conducted by queer researchers alongside the LGBTQIA+ community to be of immense value, the inevitable power that comes with the ability to gather information about lived experiences and interpret it into a narrative results in a dynamic that requires a delicate balance (Nelson, 2020). While my status as an insider with my own lived experiences of gender and sexual identities undoubtedly opens the door to more comfort and openness with participants, there remains an ever-present barrier between participant and researcher statuses within data collection processes. The acknowledgement of this dynamic reinforced a sense of responsibility to approach this thesis in an affirming and agentic manner for the participants and the experiences shared with me.

Community Psychology Axiology

Community psychology provides a helpful framework for research alongside groups of people who are marginalised within society, such as the LGBTQIA+ community. Extending beyond the traditional scope of psychology as a bedrock of primarily individualist ideologies, community psychology emphasises the way in which people interact with and are influenced

by the world around them. At the core of community psychology are values such as diversity, liberation, and social justice, alongside intentionality when framing issues and a call to action in collaboration with communities (Riemer et al., 2020). Furthermore, community psychology emphasises that people cannot be accurately understood without accounting for their surrounding contexts and vice-versa (Riemer et al., 2020).

From a paradigmatic perspective, qualitative research methods complement community psychology values and principles. In contrast to quantitative methodologies, in which scientific objectivity is the assumed benchmark of quality research, qualitative methods acknowledge the impossibility of objectivity. Values, principles, and even biases interweave each stage of the research project, and objectivity is considered a barrier to creating interpersonal connections, limiting collaboration and information sharing (Banyard & Miller, 1998). Furthermore, qualitative methodologies consider data inseparable from the context in which data collection occurred (Banyard & Miller, 1998), a notion parallel with the community psychology perspective of the bidirectional importance of people and context.

Guided by community psychology values, I have sought to promote diversity, liberation, and social justice for Aotearoa New Zealand's LGBTQIA+ community (Riemer et al., 2020). Furthermore, I have drawn upon a strengths-based, community-informed lens to frame the project's findings, selecting qualitative methods and analysis approaches that emphasise agency for the voices and experiences of participants. A truly collaborative approach to this research proved difficult, however, as the LGBTQIA+ community—while relatively small in population—is vast in intersectional identities. As no specific sub-population of Aotearoa New Zealand's LGBTQIA+ community was sought during sampling, collaboration with group representatives within the research development phase proved to be beyond the temporal scope of this master's thesis, requiring the input of numerous organisations across Aotearoa New Zealand. However, engagement with various LGBTQIA+ organisations was sought during the distribution of this research, with all organisations showing interest and support for the project. To ensure a safe and informed approach to participant recruitment, data collection, and analysis was achieved, I sought the guidance of subject experts on engaging takatāpui, intersex, transgender and gender non-conforming identities in the context of research, reflecting my desire to see collective liberation through queer research and demonstrating a collaboration effort that was achievable within the scope of this thesis.

Philosophical Assumptions

Aligning with this dissertation's axiologically informed construction, the philosophical assumptions of relativism and constructionism have been taken (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Forming the ontological theory—*what* we think we know—relativism conceptualises 'reality' as the product of human interaction that is localised and conditional, rejecting the notion of universality (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The constructionism epistemology—*how* we think we know—premises that research findings can be produced by applying such things as ontologies, theories, and methodologies (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Much like the principles of community psychology, constructionism assumes that the researcher, participants, and topic are interrelated and that the research is subjective and value-laden (Riemer et al., 2020). Reality is considered to be the sum of multiple social constructs, with findings collaboratively formed by both the researcher and the participant (Riemer et al., 2020), therefore drawing on the ontology of relativism.

The combination of these philosophical assumptions is purposeful and is informed by the undertones of the social, cultural, and political influence on LGBTQIA+ identities. As a collective, the LGBTQIA+ community is often homogenised (Amaya et al., 2019), yet individual experiences are very much localised and conditional. Furthermore, it is important that minority research is informed by the lived experiences of the community directly rather than relying on objective observations, secondary data, or assumptions to define what is known. Therefore, it is paramount that this research does not attempt to universalise the importance or practices of identity maintenance. Rather, it is an opportunity to expand the literature, broaden conversations, challenge the phobias and norms that oppress our community, and give agency to LGBTQIA+ voices and experiences (Amaya et al., 2019).

Data Analysis

Interpretive Phenomenology Analysis (IPA)

Interpretive Phenomenology Analysis (IPA) is a qualitative method used to examine participants' lived experiences, including the meanings and interpretations they make of them (Eatough & Smith, 2017; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith, 2011). First conceptualised for use in health psychology by Jonathan Smith in 1996, IPA combines the theories of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography. Phenomenology refers to the philosophical study of lived experiences examined through a first-person perspective or one's own words (Smith, 2011). Hermeneutics refers to the process of interpretation required to extract and engage with intrapersonal processes such as recall and affect related to participant

experiences (Smith, 2011). Furthermore, within the method of IPA, a double hermeneutic is said to exist in that a researcher attempts to interpret and make sense of a phenomenon that the participant has first interpreted and made sense of (Smith, 2011). Finally, idiography refers to the in-depth analyses of individual cases of language-based data, also referred to as a corpus (Smith, 2011). While IPA draws upon idiography to examine each case study within a piece of research, it is important to note that IPA operates at multiple layers. Firstly, allowing for an in-depth individual examination of phenomena through both the participant's and researcher's perspectives, followed by a cross-sectional analysis of convergent and divergent themes between case studies (Smith, 1996).

The use of IPA within this community psychology thesis is agentic. As a methodology, IPA provides the opportunity to elucidate the identity maintenance phenomenon through lived experiences (Eatough & Smith, 2017). Rather than examining the phenomenon directly, specific experiences and how people make sense of those experiences can be explored. Furthermore, IPA accounts for how each participant is situated within sociohistorical contexts and allows for the ability to highlight commonalities and divergencies between case studies, producing findings that better reflect the points of nuance and uniformity within Aotearoa New Zealand's LGBTQIA+ community (Eatough & Smith, 2017).

Sampling

Snowball Sampling

Snowball sampling was utilised by way of LGBTQIA+ networks and organisations sharing the research advertisement with their digital audiences. This informal referral system served as an important recruitment tool, as trust and connection within the LGBTQIA+ community are often vital to engagement (Corbie-Smith et al., 2007). By establishing a relationship with prominent LGBTQIA+ networks and organisations in the target regions and allowing them to distribute the research information, a broader audience could be reached than my independent efforts alone. Furthermore, potential participants could be assured that the research project, and I, as the researcher, had been deemed safe and informed. As part of the snowball sampling approach, potential participants were required to initiate their participation by completing the online expression of interest form; no further recruitment actions were taken beyond providing information and answering preliminary questions.

Purposive Sampling

To meet the inclusion criteria, individuals were required to self-identify as members of the LGBTQIA+ population, be over the age of 18, and live in the Kirikiriroa–Hamilton or Tāmaki Makaurau–Auckland regions. No restrictions were placed upon other identity characteristics, such as ethnicity, class or economic status, religious affiliation, physical or neurological ability, et cetera. Furthermore, no maximum age restriction or preference for one region over the other was used. Tāmaki Makaurau–Auckland and Kirikiriroa–Hamilton were selected as sampling locations as these regions have the largest and fourth largest LGBTQIA+ populations, respectively (Statistics New Zealand, 2022), and reflected experiences within a large metropolitan city and a smaller, rurally influenced city. Furthermore, these regions were geographically assessable for ease of data collection by a sole researcher.

Purposive sampling was further utilised in selecting participants as a range of identities was sought to provide a more representative sampling of Aotearoa's LGBTQIA+ population. However, due to the extensive range of gender and/or sexual identities, a complete representation of the community was not possible within the scope of this master's thesis, nor would an attempt at universal representation align with the values of qualitative research. Priority was given to participants aged 20 or above, as these participants were more likely to have a greater number of experiences with identity maintenance than younger participants.

Due to the relatively small size of Aotearoa New Zealand's LGBTQIA+ population—and the even further reduced population within the two regions selected—I chose not to include anyone I had an existing relationship with (e.g., friends, colleagues, etc). This decision was cognisant of the previously discussed power dynamics involved in researcher-participant relationships and the potentially sensitive or emotive nature of experiences shared.

Demographics

To protect participant anonymity, specific information that may lead to identification will not be provided. Instead, the demographic information of the group will be described. Ten participants who self-identified as members of the LGBTQIA+ population and lived within the Kirikiriroa–Hamilton or Tāmaki Makaurau–Auckland regions were selected for this research. Participants all completed each field of the expression of interest form, with the exception of the optional 'other identity' field. The participants ranged in age from 18 to 51, with three participants under the age of 20, three participants in their 20s, two participants in their 30s, and two participants aged 40 or above. The ten participants identified as Māori,

Pākehā/New Zealand European, Samoan, Tahitian, Cook Islander, Irish, Indian, and Spanish European; participants could provide multiple ethnic identities via an open text field in the expression of interest form. Participants' sexual identities included lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, takatāpui, queer, and asexual. Participant's gender identities included gender diverse/non-binary, takatāpui, transgender female, transgender male, cis-female, and cis-male. Gender and sexuality information was collected via open text fields, allowing participants to define their own identities and to provide both a sexual and gender identity or only a sexual or gender identity according to what best fits their self-identification. Furthermore, multiple sexual and/or gender identities were able to be provided (i.e., bisexual and pansexual, gender-queer and gender diverse, etc). Of the ten participants, five also included additional identity characteristics that included current or past religious affiliations (three), neurodivergence (three), and disability (one). This optional field also allowed for multiple identifications. Finally, seven participants lived in the Kirikiriroa–Hamilton region and three in the Tāmaki Makaurau–Auckland region.

Procedure

Ethics

Ethics approval for this research project was granted in March 2024 by The University of Waikato–Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato's Arts, Law, Psychology & Social Sciences (ALPSS) Human Research Ethics Committee. Approved documents, including the Participant Information Sheet, Interview Consent Form, and Interview Schedule, are provided in the appendices. Several ethical considerations were considered throughout the research project, including informed consent, the right to withdraw, confidentiality, and minimalisation of harm.

Participants were provided a digital version of the Participant Information Sheet when completing the expression of interest form and at the beginning of their interview. Additionally, where participants requested, the Participant Information Sheet was also provided via email to refresh their understanding of the research prior to committing to an interview, as there was a period of a few weeks between sign-up and data collection commencing. The Participant Information Sheet clearly outlined the research purpose, structure, and outputs, including what they could expect to be asked in the interview, their right to withdraw, confidentiality measures that would be taken, and who they could contact to discuss the research. Each point was additionally discussed with participants prior to the commencement of their interview, and any questions they had were answered.

Informed consent was obtained via a Participant Consent Form, which the participant and researcher signed. A digital copy was emailed to participants following the interview. Once again, the consent form outlined the participant's right to withdraw from the research without reason up to four weeks after the interview, that follow-up questions asked at any time would be answered, that they can decline to answer any questions, stop or pause at any time during the interview, and that they can request the recording devices be turned off at any time during the interview. The Participant Information Sheet provided instructions on how to withdraw from the research, including contact information and a clear explanation and reasoning for the four-week withdrawal period. The right to withdraw and the withdrawal period were reiterated on the Consent Form.

The Participant Information Sheet also clearly outlined confidentiality, including the steps to anonymise the data and its limitations, such as readers of the final thesis who are familiar with a participant's unique experiences. Furthermore, anonymity measures were reiterated verbally prior to the interview commencing and outlined within the Consent Form. Physical copies of identifiable information—for example, consent forms—were retained in a secure, locked cabinet. Digital copies of identifiable information—such as expression of interest forms, records of interview bookings, raw audio recordings and transcripts—were retained on a password-protected computer and University of Waikato-issued cloud storage account. Access to digital files was limited to myself, as the researcher, and Dr Logan Hamley, as the research supervisor. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym, and further anonymity steps were taken during the transcription and analysis stages by removing any identifiable information—such as locations, names, and professional and social associations—and limiting the use of quotes that may signal identity to readers familiar with a participant.

Being mindful of the importance of minimising harm to participants was a significant factor in data collection due to the deeply personal and potentially emotive nature of discussing experiences of identity maintenance. On account of this, participants were informed that they could stop or pause the interview process at any time should they become distressed and that assistance in accessing LGBTQIA+ safe support networks should they want it is available. As a post-graduate psychology student with crisis counselling experience, I was able to monitor for distress during the interview process. To the best of my knowledge, no participant experienced distress as a result of participating in this research, and contact was made with each participant in the days following their interview, which indicated no further duress.

Whakawhanaungatanga With Networks and Organisations

Due to the highly personal and potentially sensitive topic of the research, as well as the legacy of deficit ideologies and harmful practices in historical LGBTQIA+-focused research, whakawhanaungatanga (establishing and maintaining relationships) was a vital stage in the research process. Due to the significance of community for LGBTQIA+ people, I felt it was important to build relationships with trusted, local LGBTQIA+ networks and organisations in order to distribute the research. I began this process by creating a list of all the LGBTQIA+ networks and organisations with primary locations (i.e., offices, drop-in spaces, clinics, etc.) in Kirikiriroa-Hamilton or Tāmaki Makaurau-Auckland that are inclusive of all LGBTQIA+ identities, physical abilities, and ethnicities, as I was not sampling for specific sub-populations within the LGBTQIA+ community. I then reached out to my academic advisors and peers with connections to the LGBTQIA+ community to determine if there were any networks or organisations that I had not recognised. Once I had established this list, I contacted each network or organisation via an initial email that introduced myself, the research, and how their network or organisation could support the project. I ended the initial email by inviting them to meet with me or receive further information about the research. Of the eleven networks and organisations that I contacted, six responded to my initial email and engaged in a whakawhanaungatanga process to learn more about myself and the research. All six networks and organisations agreed to support the research by sharing the digital artwork and expression of interest links to their social media sites. The support of trusted, well-known LGBTQIA+ networks and organisations signalled to potential participants that the research was safe and LGBTQIA+ informed.

Expression of Interest Advertising and Digital Form

A digital advertisement pack was provided to each network or organisation alongside a short research blurb used when posting to their respective social networks (see Appendices Two and Three). Social media and professional networking sites utilised by the networks and organisations included Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Discord. The packs included artwork for timeline posts and stories for Instagram and Facebook, and banners for LinkedIn and Discord. The link to access the expression of interest form was provided in the copy of the post (i.e., Facebook, LinkedIn, Discord), within the network or organisation's profile link (i.e., Instagram), or within the Facebook or Instagram story. In discussion with each network/organisation, I allowed them to determine the frequency of the research advertisement within a sign-up window spanning April and May.

The expression of interest form was hosted on Qualtrics using my University of Waikato—Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato issues account. The form began with a short statement indicating that completion of the form would be considered interest in participation, a short description of what participation required, and a link to download and view the complete Participant Information Sheet. The first question asked if the individual identified as LGBTQIA+, takatāpui, MVPFAFF+, or a similar cultural gender and/or sexual identity; only a "Yes" response to this question resulted in the complete expression of interest form being offered, as self-identification was a requirement for participation. Alongside gathering the individual's name, email, and phone number in order to contact potential participants, further demographic information was gathered to understand their intersectional identities. This included their age, gender and/or sexual identity, pronouns, ethnicity, and any other characteristics they would like to share (i.e., physical ability, neurodiversity, religion, etc.). Expressions of interest for the research exceeded my expectations, with more than one hundred and seventy complete submissions and a 73% completion rate. There was only one "No" response to the self-identification qualifier question.

Purposive Sampling of Participants

Sampling of participants began at the end of the expression of interest period and involved downloading the provided data into an Excel spreadsheet. Incomplete responses were removed from the file, and data were organised by individual's self-identified gender and/or sexual identity. Three rounds of 10 participants each were selected to account for drop-offs between expression of interest submissions and invitations to participate. Once the first round of participants was selected, an email invitation to participate in the research was sent. The invitation welcomed individuals to select an interview date and time via an online calendar-based booking system if they still wished to participate in the research. A response time window of two weeks from the email date was given to keep momentum and allow for the second and third rounds of participant invites to be sent in a timely manner. The subsequent rounds of invitations followed the process outlined above. The first round of participant invitations resulted in five completed interviews; five more invitations were sent during the second round of invitations, which resulted in two completed interviews. Finally, three participant invitations were sent in the third round, all of which completed interviews.

Data collection: Interviews and Diary Task

Semi-Structured Interviews. The primary mode of data collection was through semi-structured individual interviews with each of the ten participants. As described, participants could book an interview for a date and time that suited their availability within July 2024. Once participants had booked their interview, I contacted them via email to confirm if they were located in Kirikiriroa–Hamilton or Tāmaki Makaurau–Auckland; this information was used to arrange a private interview space in the respective cities. Meeting spaces included private rooms at local libraries, community centres, and the University of Waikato's Kirikiriroa–Hamilton campus. Interviews ranged between 30 to 75 minutes long.

Interviews began with an overview of the research, including introductions, explanations of the interview and post-interview processes, the interviewee's rights, and time for questions or discussions. Prior to beginning the interview, consent forms were discussed and signed by both the interviewee and interviewer. Audio recordings of each interview were made using a dictaphone, and a backup recording was taken on my phone to account for potential technological errors. Before moving into the questions prepared in the Interview Schedule (see Appendix Seven), definitions of the terms 'coming out' and 'identity self-disclosure' [identity maintenance] were outlined so that a similar general understanding of what was meant when referring to each was held by the participants and myself. As identity maintenance remains a relatively invisible terminology within psychosocial literature, and even more so within layman's understanding of the associated processes and behaviours, I chose to use the term 'identity self-disclosure' to refer to the *repetitive* day-to-day process of informing or correcting others about one's gender and/or sexual identity. As 'coming out' is a widely understood terminology in both literature and society, I retained this term. I defined 'coming out' as the *first* time an individual discloses their gender and/or sexual identity to another person; emphasis was placed on the involvement of another person as inter-personal identification and acceptance of gender and/or sexual identity often occurs prior to 'coming out' to others (Klein et al., 2015).

To open space for encouraging participants to share their experiences, the first set of questions was aimed at their own understanding of the terms 'coming out' and 'identity self-disclosure' [identity maintenance], as well as the processes of disclosure and non-disclosure of identity. While these questions helped to establish how participants understood their own experiences with the two processes, they also provided an opportunity to analyse differences amongst participants and for alternative definitions to those provided to be considered. Following the opening set of questions, the question guide focused on disclosure, non-

disclosure, decision-making, impacts of disclosure, and disclosure language. Prompts and follow-up questions were asked to expand on participant responses, and the semi-structured format allowed for the discussion to drift towards subjects that were interesting, significant to the participant, or important to the topic. Interviews ended by asking the participants if there was anything else that they wanted to add or if there was anything that we didn't cover that they felt was important to provide space for the participants to direct the conversation towards their thoughts or experiences on the topic.

Diary Task. After the interview, participants were asked if they would like to undertake a follow-up diary task. Diaries and pens were provided and a verbal description of how they might approach the task. A short instruction blurb was also provided inside their diaries, including examples of topics they might write about. Participants were given approximately two weeks from their interview to complete the diary task, and five of the ten participants completed the diary-keeping task. The collection of the diaries was organised via email, and the diary entries were used as supplementary data during analysis.

Analysis: Interpretive Phenomenology

Analysis began with the process of creating transcriptions of each of the participants' interviews. Beginning with the first interview, audio recordings were played and listened to via headphones to enhance the listening experience and to minimise the possibility that the recording may be overheard. As I listened to each sentence, the audio was paused so that I could manually transcribe the spoken words verbatim within a Microsoft Word document. A verbatim transcription method was chosen to preserve as much of the participants' descriptions of their experiences, including pauses, repetitions, and filler words (i.e., like, um, etc). Once the first draft of the transcription was created, a closer transcription was completed to fill in anything missed on the first attempt, once again pausing to edit where necessary. This process was repeated until all ten transcriptions were complete. Transcriptions were then sent via Microsoft Cloud links to participants who indicated on their consent form that they wished to review their transcripts prior to analysis. A period of two weeks was given to provide feedback, with any corrections requested being made prior to the analysis commencing. Entries provided in participant diaries were digitalised through manual transcription into a Word document.

Following the transcription process, IPA was used to examine the data collected. Guided by the flexible guidelines provided by Pietkiewicz & Smith (2014), I followed a four-step

analysis approach. Step one consisted of multiple readings of each transcript and taking detailed notes of observations and reflections on the data. Like the transcription process, I approached step one sequentially, beginning with the first interview and finishing with the tenth. Observations and reflections were made on the interview process (i.e., participant-research dynamic); the experiences described by participants; the language used (i.e., metaphors, symbolisms, repetitions, emotive responses, etc); the significance emphasised by participants and interpretations of significance by the researcher; and any other thoughts that appeared relevant during the process. In addition to detailed notes, phrases that appeared as distinct responses were highlighted yellow. Notes were made directly onto the Microsoft Word document of each transcription using comments linked to the relevant data so that they could be easily tracked. Step two involved transforming the notes compiled during step one into emergent themes. As Pietkiewicz & Smith's (2014) guidelines suggested, I completed this stage while primarily relying on my notes about each transcript rather than the whole document; the ability to do so reflects the level of detail given while compiling notes. During step two, concise, higher abstraction phrases that encapsulate what the participant has said were produced. To account for the reduced detail required at this stage, themes were recorded as secondary comments within each note to retain a traceable line to the original data, as shown in Appendix Eight.

With the formation of emergent themes, relationships between themes could be determined, and clusters could be formed—constituting step three. Conceptual similarities between themes were identified and grouped together with a descriptive overarching title. Themes that appeared weak or did not align well with others while being relatively insignificant to the overall findings were removed. Finally, a list of overarching themes and subthemes was compiled at the end of each transcription document, and a comparison between each transcript's themes and subthemes was made to identify commonalities across the entire corpus. Finally, stage four involved the writing of narrative accounts of all ten case studies individually. Each theme was described, supported by quotes from the transcript, and analysed at both literal and deeper interpretive levels.

Defining Terminology

As discussed previously, literature's use of "coming out" without clear definitions has resulted in conceptual inflation. The use of "coming out" as a broad, undefined concept relies on three assumptions: 1. the interpretation of 'coming out' is singular and universal, 2. the significance of the life event is singular and universal, and 3. a standardised disclosure

process exists. However, gender and sexuality are highly nuanced and contextual, resulting in experiences that are just as unique as any other identity process. Considering this, a pointed effort was made to provide a rudimentary definition of the concepts of coming out and identity management within the data collection and writing process. Primarily, these definitions are rooted in the works of Orne (2011) and supplemented by Guittar & Rayburn (2016). These rudimentary definitions were further clarified by purposefully gaining an understanding of precisely how participants defined these concepts. As previously mentioned, each interview began by providing the research definitions and asking for the participants' definitions. All participant responses, along with the research definitions, are listed below. Combined, these definitions will be used as the foundation for this research with the aim of challenging assumptions of homogeneity by providing clear, participant-informed conceptualisations.

Researchers Definitions of Coming Out and Identity Maintenance

For the purpose of this research, the term "coming out" is defined as the *first time* an individual discloses their gender and/or sexual identity to another person. The term "identity maintenance" is defined as the *repetitive* day-to-day process of informing or correcting [etc.] others about one's gender and/or sexual identity.

Participant Definitions of Coming Out and Identity Maintenance

Kalia (She/Her They/Them). Kalia interprets coming out as a dualistic tool; the first part informs people of one's identity, and the second part involves the response to disclosure, specifically acceptance and understanding, or the lack thereof. While having not previously heard identity maintenance described in the way presented, Kalia views acceptance of identity as important to the initial coming out process and identity maintenance.

Caitlin (She/Her). Although different from her own lived experience, Caitlin interprets coming out as the first or main time someone discloses their identity to others and the beginning of identity embodiment. This contrasts with Caitlin's interpretation of identity maintenance, as heteronormative assumptions that people regularly make about one's identity resulting in constant 'outing' in numerous environments and at multiple levels.

Conner (He/Him They/Them). Connor interprets coming out to be the disclosure of their trans identity. He views people knowing that he is trans as more significant than disclosing

his sexual identity, which is often assumed to be queer regardless of disclosure. Connor utilises identity maintenance in the purposeful use of non-binary identity disclosure to those they are not close with and trans identity disclosure to those he is close with.

Garrett (He/Him). Garrett interprets coming out as identity-centric, stating that it is a process of finding something that helps you understand yourself and informing others so they can understand you in the same sense. While Garrett views coming out as a more significant event, usually involving those closest to you, he interprets identity maintenance as informing new friends or people he engages with throughout life.

Jamie (They/Them). Jamie defines coming out as the first instance in which one explains how their brain works and how that influences how queerness is considered. In contrast, Jamie viewed identity maintenance as less important to them as the people who need to know their identity do so. Jamie notes that their lack of active identity maintenance reflects their view of the concept of gender, which they feel has been broken down to the point that it doesn't matter to them how they are addressed if they are respected as a person.

Rishaan (He/Him). While Rishaan didn't explicitly define his interpretation of coming out, he found identity maintenance an interesting phenomenon. Rishaan described the repetitive nature of coming out as something that happens regularly, stating that he is constantly required to engage in the phenomenon. Rishaan specifically discussed heteronormative assumptions that he often is faced with correcting due to the lack of education surrounding diversity.

Erin (She/Her). Erin interprets coming out as directly informing people of one's identity rather than allowing them to make assumptions or take hints that may infer identity. Erin stated that this often involves clearly defining one's identity so that there is no vagueness when informing people. Erin did not have a definition or interpretation of identity maintenance. Instead, she saw it as a fact of life for minority identities.

Adrian (He/Him). Adrian defines coming out as the first instance of disclosing one's identity to friends and family. Furthermore, Adrian, in part, challenges the concept of identity maintenance, stating that disclosure to a new person still equates to coming out, regardless of when the initial coming out event occurred. In contrast, Adrian would define continuous

disclosure to be linked to education, safety, or authenticity and views disclosure as a breaking away from heteronormativity.

Daniela (She/Her/Ia). Rather than provide a definition or interpretation of the concepts of coming out and identity maintenance, Daniela spoke about her temporal and nuanced experiences with coming out, continued identity self-disclosures, and how she views identity visibility as important at this stage of her life.

Rapata (They/Them). Rapata defined coming out in line with common community understandings as the first instance of self-disclosure. Rapata interpreted identity maintenance as micro-events of coming out that require a decision-making process of whether to disclose or not. They stated that identity maintenance is not necessarily something considered by society and provided examples of introducing yourself and your pronouns to new people.

Chapter Four: The Interpersonal LGBTQIA+ Identity

Chapter Summary

Chapter Four begins to explore how participants in this study understand their experiences with identity self-disclosure and non-disclosure. This chapter will focus on two main themes related to interpersonal LGBTQIA+ identity; these have been titled The Temporality of Identity and The Tax of Identity. The Temporality of Identity theme has been divided into three sub-themes, which explore how participants understood and experienced their LGBTQIA+ identities over the course of their lives. This will be followed by The Tax of Identity theme, in which three sub-themes have been utilised to explore the emotional, mental, and educational costs of LGBTQIA+ identities. In examining these themes and sub-themes, participants' interpretations of their lived experiences will highlight how their LGBTQIA+ identities are relational to time and result in personal and collective taxations.

The Temporality of Identity

Each participant in this study discussed a temporal scope relative to their LGBTQIA+ identity and experiences. The concept of temporality drawn upon within this theme is rooted in the works of queer theorists such as Lee Edelman, Jack Halberstam, and Elizabeth Freeman. As a foundational concept, temporality refers to the culturally constructed understanding of and engagement with time and holds deeply seated associations with heteronormative life paths (Goltz, 2022). Queer temporality interrogates this heteronormative conceptualisation of time and questions how time is performed (Goltz, 2022). This chapter's first section will discuss three prominent subthemes contributing to the temporality of LGBTQIA+ identities: identity development, identity affirmation, and identity maintenance.

Identity Development

The process of identity development, for many of the participants, was a central point in recalling moments of identity self-disclosure or non-disclosure, demonstrating the significance of this queer life event. Participants were asked to reflect on memorable moments when they chose to disclose or not disclose their gender and/or sexual identity. In doing so, they shared insights into 1. the complexities of understanding their LGBTQIA+ identity, 2. the time it took to find and accept their LGBTQIA+ identity, and 3. the emotional experiences tied to embracing their LGBTQIA+ identity. Intergenerational differences emerged when analysing commonalities and divergencies between participants' experiences. Prominently, participants aged 30 or older who shared their experiences of coming out later

in life reflected on how they might not have known their gender and/or sexual identities sooner or what their experiences may have been if they had come out at a younger age.

Caitlin, who lived what might be described as a heteronormative life course, including an opposite-sex marriage and parenting, prior to coming out as an adult, reflects on the suppression of her identity and the growing awareness of her LGBTQIA+ identity that led to her coming out:

> "Yeah, it's funny because I came out when I was, like, 16. And I came out to my friend, who ended up then becoming my husband […] and then I suppressed that. And then, I guess, he was probably the next person I came out to again, actually. […] So… and I remember that conversation. And um… yeah, and I kind of, because the feelings were kind of getting stronger and stronger for me, so I just couldn't ignore them anymore. […] And I said to him, "You know, I really think I am gay". And um, we'd been together, like, so long at that stage. And he was like, "Yeah, I know" [laughing]. […] But then it's still, yeah, it's still a process after that." (Caitlin, age 40+).

Caitlin's recollection of suppressing her identity and dualistic coming-out experiences reflects a temporality of her identity development. Her inability to continue ignoring her feelings about her LGBTQIA+ identity signals that, while not embodied for several years, her LGBTQIA+ identity remained part of her overall identity; however, it was suppressed in favour of heteronormativity. Caitlin's ability to find humour in her temporal experiences indicates that, while the embodiment of her LGBTQIA+ identity took a longer course, she did not see this as a deficit. Furthermore, her husband's acceptance and her disclosure to him in both instances signal that, although her life course included a heterosexual marriage prior to self-acceptance, Caitlin was able to find support in embracing her LGBTQIA+ identity through him.

Rishaan, who experienced coming out later in life following migration to Aotearoa New Zealand, discussed the profound impact losing his mother had on embracing his LGBTQIA+ identity:

> "I always knew. I think I… as soon as I could understand attraction, I knew I was different. I didn't know what it was. But when I knew, I knew that I was gay. But I didn't have the courage to share it with my family at the time. I moved to New Zealand, obviously. I… I grew as a person. And what prompted that coming out was, um, my

> mother's passing, actually. I moved here, and she got sick. And within a year of me moving here, she eventually passed away. […] And I decided then that I cannot have my father also pass away, not knowing who I am." (Rishaan, age 30-39).

Despite having a sense of his LGBTQIA+ identity from childhood, Rishaan felt a need to hide that part of himself from his family in his youth. Rishaan's inability to disclose his identity to his mother prior to her passing resulted in a relationship in which he believed he was an inauthentic version of himself. As Rishaan recounted this, it was clear that it was an experience that held significant depth and emotion for him; it appeared to be a pivotal point in his life. The loss of his mother, along with the self-growth he found through his experiences of migration to a new country, played a significant role in how his identity was embodied and shaped his desire not to repeat that experience with his father.

Adrian, who was aware of his LGBTQIA+ identity from his early teens yet chose not to disclose it due to the fear of being disowned by his religious family, discussed the realisation of missed experiences that resulted from coming out later in life:

> "But I do, like I said, question if things had been different. And then I also feel that because I came out later, and I feel like I missed a bunch of… um, experiences, kind of […] growing up, and I still feel like I haven't kind of got, necessarily, all those experiences. […] Heart Stoppers, when it was on Netflix, and I watched that, and it really hit me, like, the whole teenage experience of, you know, having a crush and having a, you know, a boyfriend, um, at that age, I totally missed out on. And I felt like, when I watched that, I almost went through, like, a grieving process of, "I totally missed out on this. This is a huge thing."" (Adrian, age 30-39).

Adrian's description of a grieving process through which he identifies and attempts to reconcile the loss of LGBTQIA+ experiences during his youth presents a unique element to the temporality of identity for those who come out later in life. His notion of missing out on key relationship experiences during his youth contributes to his broader LGBTQIA+ identity development in the form of stalled identity affirmation. Seen through the lens of prominent LGBTQIA+ identity development models, identity affirmation is often gained through romantic and sexual experimentation during the teenage years. Furthermore, Adrian's use of descriptive terms such as *it really hit me* and *this is a huge thing* emphasises the emotional

connection and significance he associates with these missed experiences within the scope of his current adult identity.

Daniela discusses her LGBTQIA+ identity as an ongoing evolution and describes the temporality of identity confusion in her youth to the proud embodiment in her adulthood:

> "It's just, I guess, you know, a little bit from, you know, being that 19-year-old person that didn't know I was gay to now being androgynous non-gender, wearing my rainbow lanyard. I'm like, "Oh, my god!" You know, like, they said, like, "When did you come out?" […] It's like a permanent kind of evolution. Yeah, and I completely agree. Like, I love the times we're living in. But, you know, sometimes it feels a bit like, I don't know, like, I still have to give myself permission to, you know…" (Daniela, age 40+).

Daniela's assertion that coming out is a *permanent kind of evolution* provides another element of identity's temporality. Other participants mirrored this notion in the way they described their identity development and maintenance, regardless of age (Jamie, Rishaan, and Adrian). The idea that identity development may be permanently evolving stands in opposition to traditional identity development models that emphasise a set of stages culminating in a point of completion (Cass, 1984; Erikson, 1959; Troiden, 1989). However, it aligns well with LGBTQIA+ identity development models, once again highlighting the community's unique experiences. Daniela's sense of needing to continue to permit herself to embrace her LGBTQIA+ identity further speaks to the temporality of identity in that, even at her current age and level of identity affirmation, she continues to experience challenges in accepting her identity.

As outlined, temporality was central to the identity development of these four participants in unique ways, often linked to challenging emotions at the time of the experience or emotive recollections during the interview process. A common theme of self-repression, in some form or another, ran through each participant's recollection, highlighting the significance of these events in forming their LGBTQIA+ identities and perhaps reasons why these stories were front of mind when asked about their lived experiences with self-disclosure and non-disclosure.

Identity Affirmation

For many of the participants, disclosing their LGBTQIA+ identities was seen as affirming, even in the face of fear and, at times, discouraging reactions. The sub-theme of identity affirmation arose in response to different interview questions for various participants. For some, their recollections of memorable times they chose to disclose their identity highlighted experiences of positive reception. For others, identity affirmation came as they gained more experience disclosing their identity over time, resulting in increased self-assurance. When analysing participants' experiences as a collective group, a prominent commonality formed regardless of age, gender, or sexual identity: supportive and accepting receptions from those with whom they held close relationships significantly affirmed their identity.

Kalia, who was raised in a religious-cultural environment, shared how her parents' support for her LGBTQIA+ identity was a positive aspect of their relationship:

> "And, like, so, sometimes there are things where it's like, of course, I still face challenges. But then at the same time, there's like, so much good that's, like, come out of, like, being very… like, for example, of my parents, just like a lot of good that's come out of being able to talk freely with them. And, like, have those conversations." (Kalia, age 20-29).

Kalia viewed the ability to have conversations and talk freely about her identity with her parents as a positive outcome of her disclosure. While she highlights that there are still struggles associated with LGBTQIA+ identities, having close familial relationships in which she can seek support is a core source of identity affirmation. Kalia later discussed in her participant diary that she associates hope with the disclosure process, driven by her desire to connect with others and find understanding, as reflected in her close familial relationships. Furthermore, Kalia noted that she associates disclosure with a sense of freedom that allows her to embody her identity without censorship.

Similarly, Jamie's experience of identity disclosure to their mother was viewed as both calm and affirming of their identity:

> "[…] I'd say that there's been a lot of different reactions. But for the most part… coming out has been quite calm. […] I came out when I was 14, […] but the most notable one would be when I told my mum, but the memory's a bit hazy. All I know is that I just told my Mum, like, "Hey, I think I might be, you know, I'm going to experiment… experiment

a little with my gender identity". And she's like, "Okay, cool." [Laughing]." (Jamie, age 19 or younger).

The acceptance afforded by their mother gave Jamie the freedom to explore their identity confidently in a calm and supportive manner. Although Jamie holds only hazy memories of informing their mother that they wanted to experiment with their gender identity, the clarity of recalling their mother's reassurance that it was okay to do so demonstrates that this was a significant affirming experience in their identity development. Jamie later discussed that they felt very little pressure or anxiety around identity disclosure, perhaps due to the supportive nature created by their mother.

Garrett provided an example of how disclosures within friendships can contribute to identity affirmation during significant stages of identity development:

"A really interesting time that I did self-disclose is on my birthday this year. I saw my friend for the first time in nearly a year. And often, we only see each other on birthdays. But we still have that, you know, close bond, it's really good. But I was like, "Oh, by the way, I'm trans, and I'm taking testosterone". And he was… [laughing] he was just like, "Oh, was there a different name you'd like me to call you?" […] And he went straight away to change it in his phone, so he remembered. And I was like, "Oh…" I was going to cry. Um… and, yeah, he was just really lovely. He was just instantly like, "Okay! And these pronouns?" And I'm like, "Yeah." (Garrett, age 19 or younger).

The automatic acceptance and support of his identity disclosure was an emotive and affirming experience for Garrett. The recollection of how *lovely* his friend's response was and how it nearly caused him to cry demonstrates the significance of this friendship for Garrett and the magnitude that supportive responses from one's close relationships can have on identity affirmation. While the friendship may not exist in the form of everyday contact, this moment and its significance in bolstering his sense of identity were demonstrated through the animated and joyous way in which Garrett described his recollection.

Similarly, Erin discussed how a positive disclosure to her best friend resulted in identity affirmation and comfort in engaging with the embodiment of her identity:

"I came out to a different best friend, and they said, "That was great", and "That was cool". And all that, so that was a real nice one. […] That was one of the best reactions I've

had. Um, that was very affirming, very nice, um, all that stuff. And meant I could, like, get on with the voice with them instantly, and that was good." (Erin, age, 20-29).

Erin's recollection of her best friend's positive reaction to her identity self-disclosure is dualistic in significance. Firstly, the positive reaction serves as an affirmation of Erin's identity that brought positive associations, as demonstrated by her acknowledgement that *it was one of the best reactions I've had* and that it was *very affirming* and *very nice*. Furthermore, the experience signified to Erin that she was now safe to authentically embody her feminine identity with her best friend, allowing her the freedom to engage in identity characteristics, such as *the voice*—that is, utilising vocal characteristics that align with social perceptions of femininity—that further affirm her identity.

The experiences of each of the four participants discussed in this sub-theme highlighted the significance of support in close relationships across familial and friendship contexts. The recollections shared a theme of participants' emotional responses to the positive reactions they received to self-disclosure, ranging from a sense of calm to tears of happiness. These emotional responses demonstrate the intersection of support and affirmation of LGBTQIA+ identity during an otherwise uncertain, vulnerable, and potentially frightening time.

Identity Maintenance

While participants predominantly held stronger conceptualisations of the coming-out process and discussed their experiences with identity maintenance in terms of 'coming out', many maintained a strong sense of managing their identities. Temporality played a significant role in how participants viewed identity disclosure. Younger participants experienced identity maintenance in two distinct ways. For some, it was a tool for achieving affirmation while developing their LGBTQIA+ identity. For others, it was less important, given their views on social constructs like gender. For many participants over 30, the time since their initial coming out and the repetitive nature of the identity self-disclosures altered how they viewed the necessity of disclosure.

Garrett, who has concurrent experiences in both sexual and gender identities, discusses how disclosure remains a necessity for him at his current stage of transition:

"Um, whereas someone who is more on stealth, you know, we often call them stealth or call themselves stealth, where, like, they obviously don't look very trans. They blend into

> society and often don't have to disclose themselves at any point unless they really want to. Whereas someone, for example, like me, who is a binary trans person, but is only, you know, at the starting point of the transition and doesn't look male [laughing]. And yeah, often if I… if I want to be referred to what makes me comfortable, I have to be like, "Look, this is how I want to be referred to" right at the beginning. But it's hard to do that in the middle of a relationship with someone as well. […] And I'm not even just talking about like… like relationship as a like a, you know, partner sense. I'm talking about, like, friends, coworkers, everything." (Garrett, age 19 or younger).

Garrett's explanation of stealth, or passing, following gender transition highlights an element of identity maintenance that is unique to transgender identities. There exists a temporal scope of pre-transition, intra-transition, and post-transition that may be experienced by transgender people who desire to achieve a state of passing as their true gender, during which identity maintenance may be seen as a necessity. However, it is important to note that not all transgender people wish to achieve a state of passing (Kuper et al., 2018). Furthermore, not all transgender people have access to the medical and social tools that enable passing as the binary genders (Kuper et al., 2018). Garrett's analysis of how the necessity of identity maintenance and the difficulties of managing one's identity amid established relationships demonstrates that temporality regarding identity maintenance is often not linear and can, at times, be an added challenge in self-disclosure decision-making.

In contrast, yet a testament to the notion of the temporality of identity maintenance, Jamie discusses how they no longer care as much about correcting gender assumptions so long as they are respected:

> "[…] Um, I think over time, because I've been out for a while, I've gradually stopped trying to correct a lot of people. The people that need to know, know. It's… because, to me, the construct of gender has been broken down a lot and doesn't really matter to me what I get called. So, as long as I can be respected as a person, it doesn't really matter to me if I have to be called a she/her or whatever." (Jamie, age 19 or younger).

For Jamie, the social construction of gender has little influence on their sense of self and, therefore, their desire to correct assumptions made about their gender. Their notion that they have gradually stopped feeling the need to affirm their gender through correcting others who misgender them indicates that there was a time when this may have been more of a priority

for them. However, across the period they have been out, whether they are respected as a person has become a more significant element of intrapersonal interactions, demonstrating another form of identity maintenance's temporality.

Adrian discusses how he was reserved in disclosing his identity when he was younger and how, with age, he has become more comfortable in his identity:

> "So, I guess maybe when I was younger, that was sort of, "I'm not going to necessarily disclose just to kind of see how people react to me first and make sure it's kind of a safe space. […] So, I guess that was, I guess, my attitude when I was maybe younger. But now I'm a bit older, and I, like, don't necessarily care." (Adrian, age 30-39).

Adrian's experiences of the temporality of identity maintenance are demonstrated by juxtaposing and comparing his approaches to disclosure in his youth with those of the present. The strategy of delaying disclosure until he was assured that the people and environments with whom he was engaging were safe perhaps reflects an inexperience with disclosure, stemming from being newly out. This contrasts with his current lack of concern that has come with age, demonstrating a temporality of identity maintenance that reflects a level of comfort and self-assurance over time; Erin and Rapata echoed this notion in their own experiences of identity maintenance at different ages.

Rishaan offers a nuanced recollection of how his culture and upbringing remain significant factors in his identity maintenance practices, demonstrating another level of temporality:

> "[…] So… But I guess, you know, it's not something that we can escape as a proud gay man. I, you know, I love my man, and I want to be able to tell the world that, you know? You know, so I don't shy away from that. But it's just, I think, maybe it's the baggage that I carry, from when I was born and where I grew up, that I'm always conscious of my surroundings, you know? For a… for a large part of my life, I've spent a lot of my energy hiding who I was, and that doesn't go away very quickly. Yes, I've been, you know, out, whatever number of years, but… it's, for lack of a better part of who I am, as I grew up, you know? So, as much as I am out and proud, there is always a little bit of that little Rishaan [pseudonym used] somewhere inside who's scared and conscious of… and don't… He doesn't want to invite unnecessary comments or looks." (Rishaan, age 30-39).

Rishaan speaks about the conflicting ways in which elements of his childhood remain influential in how he engages with his identity and approaches disclosure. In drawing upon the metaphor of baggage that he carries from his birth country and culture, Rishaan brings the intersectional layers of identity to the surface. He is a proud gay man, which is abundantly clear through the passionate and loving way he talks about his partner and their life together. Yet, at times, he struggles to shake off the self-preservation coping mechanisms formed from his upbringing. Rishaan's experiences with this conflict demonstrate the nuances of temporality regarding identity maintenance. In his adulthood, he is confident and committed to his LGBTQIA+ identity; however, he is not without the traces of his origins that once made him feel he needed to hide this part of himself.

Each of the experiences drawn upon in this sub-theme demonstrated how temporality shaped the participants' views of the necessity or value of repetitive disclosure. The common theme of exposure to repeated disclosure as a tool of affirmation or with age and duration of being out was seen in each participant's recollections, highlighting the ongoing nature of identity maintenance. Whether one chooses to disclose their identity or not, identity maintenance remains a temporal experience across the LGBTQIA+ life course.

Summary of Theme

The Temporality of Identity theme has situated significant factors that contribute to identity across time, from the early stages of identity development—regardless of whether this occurred in adolescence or adulthood—to the acceptance of an LGBTQIA+ identity and the later stages of identity maintenance. The sub-theme of identity development illustrated how LGBTQIA+ identities often follow a different, or for some delayed, course than expected, heteronormative life course. The identity affirmation sub-theme explored the significance of the relationships present during these times in one's life. Finally, the sub-theme of identity maintenance highlighted how ongoing and repetitive self-disclosures of LGBTQIA+ identities may change in meaning and significance across one's lifetime. The findings presented will be discussed in more depth in chapter six.

The Tax of Identity

Each participant in this study discussed common taxing consequences tied to their LGBTQIA+ identity and experiences. Much like the works of Meyer's (2003) Minority Stress Theory, which found that individuals with minority sexual identities experienced additional

social stressors due to stigmatisation, participants in this research discussed several forms of mental, emotional, and social taxes associated with the LGBTQIA+ identity. The second section of this chapter will discuss three prominent subthemes regarding the tax of LGBTQIA+ identities: emotional tax, mental tax, and educational tax.

Emotional Tax

Throughout many of the interviews, the emotional tax associated with LGBTQIA+ identity was a prominent onus for participants. When participants were asked if they felt there were any personal effects of repetitive identity self-disclosure, many reflected on how embodiment, disclosure, and moving through a heteronormative society impacted them emotionally. Many shared that the need to engage in identity maintenance evoked a wide range of adverse emotions, the most notable across responses being fear, exhaustion, and frustration. No divergences were found intergenerationally when analysing the emotional taxes of LGBTQIA+ identities, indicating that the age of participants did not lessen or increase emotional taxes; however, the duration of time since coming out indicated that emotional taxes may increase temporally.

Kalia discusses the emotional tax of disclosing to her parents for the first time while away from home and the uncertainty she felt about their reaction:

> "[…] I remember calling my Mum, like, really late at night. And then she was like, really concerned, because I was, like, feeling really emotional. And I was, like, crying. And then I think that was like, the first time I actually came out to anybody that wasn't myself. I think for a long time, I just kind of, like, held that identity. […] But then it was really interesting because I don't know what I expected from her. Like, I expected her to be okay with it. But I didn't know what she would say to me. And there was like this pause, and then I think I experienced that... Like, "I know it will be fine" but, like, I just, you know, you're kind of just like waiting to see what happens." (Kalia, age 20-29).

Despite describing her relationship with her parents as open and accepting of her identity during her interview, Kalia still experienced the weight of emotional tax when disclosing her LGBTQIA+ identity to her parents for *the first time*. Kalia's reflection on this disclosure event, as the first time she disclosed her LGBTQIA+ identity to anyone other than herself, highlights the significant emotional weight of the interpersonal and intrapersonal disclosure process [intrapersonal processes will be examined in Chapter Five]. As she recalls, Kalia held

her identity within herself for *a long time* prior, an often common early-stage process within traditional identity development models in which one begins to develop self-acceptance (Rosario et al., 2011). The combination of her experiences in a religious environment that made her feel ostracised and fearful of discrimination, coupled with the uncertainty and suspense of her parents' reactions, resulted in complex emotional taxation for Kalia.

Connor discusses the, at times, dehumanising effect of wilful ignorance that often is associated with minority genders and sexualities and the emotional taxes this causes:

> "Umm, probably, like, angry. But I think at this point it's just, like [sigh noise], you know? Like, is… like, if we're talking about, like, older people, for example, […] I get that you grew up in a different time, yada-yada. […] But you have to constantly keep learning new things, like every day, to keep up with the world. So, like, that should be one of them. Especially when you're talking about human beings. […] So yeah, I think I'm just, like, tired more than anything." (Connor, age 19 or younger).

Anger, frustration, and tiredness are all emotions that Connor associates with the emotional tax of his identity. Connor specifically focuses here on the frustration he feels when effort in attempting to understand the experiences of minority genders and sexualities is withheld. He notes that constant learning is a part of keeping up with the contemporary world, so the justification of ignorance for intergenerational differences should be challenged, especially in relation to humans and their experiences. Connor's expression of anger, frustration, and tiredness in relation to his identity perhaps highlights the onerous nature of identity maintenance, as well as the interconnectedness of emotional, mental, and educational tax experienced by LGBTQIA+ people.

Similarly, Garrett discusses a deep sense of fear and pressure regarding disclosing his LGBTQIA+ identity and managing parental expectations of his identity:

> "[…] I'm, like, paralysed with fear. And I don't even really know why. Because… see, with my mum, she wouldn't care, but in a bad sense, like, she wouldn't change. […] However, I am quite close with my dad and we're very connected. And, I guess, part of me is scared I'm going to lose that connection with him. You know, firstborn daughter. You know, closest one in the family. Like, he says that I'm like, "The only one he has", you know? And stuff like... And it's like, "I'm feeling a lot of pressure on me, Dad"." (Garrett, age 19 or younger).

Garrett's emotional taxation is complex and fraught with several layers of familial relationship factors. The assertion that his mother *wouldn't care but in a bad sense* speaks to a reconciliation that acceptance of his identity may not ever be given in his maternal relationship—a challenging and emotionally taxing experience in itself. However, Garrett also reflects on how disclosing his LGBTQIA+ identity to his father may potentially unsettle a deeply close and significant relationship. It was evident, through his affect as he spoke during the interview, that this emotional tax weighs heavily on Garrett. This is further evidenced when he states that he is *feeling a lot of pressure* to maintain his paternal relationship and expectations of his identity while embodying his LGBTQIA+ identity authentically.

Erin discusses feelings of vulnerability, self-doubt, and annoyance due to people being unsure how to respond to her self-disclosures:

> "It's definitely getting more and more annoying. Um, it's just getting tiring. Saying it then people not knowing how to respond and all that. Awkward pauses. Um, yeah, definitely not great. Feels vulnerable to do it. […] And I'll… I do kind of, like, question, like, "Ah, could I have stalled this more?" Um, you know? Um, but, I don't know, definitely not associating terribly positive feelings. [There] have been good instances, but those are a bit few." (Erin, age 20-29).

Although she acknowledges that there have been *good instances* of self-disclosure, Erin associates the process of self-disclosure with being emotionally taxing in most cases. Alongside feelings of annoyance, exhaustion, and vulnerability, she addresses the intrapersonal nature of confronting awkwardness when others are unsure how to respond to the disclosure of her LGBTQIA+ identity [intrapersonal processes will be examined in Chapter Five]. The notion that self-disclosure is a deeply vulnerable experience, requiring one to find the courage to be open in revealing a significant piece of one's identity, leads Erin into a space of self-doubt where she questions whether prolonging the disclosure process would have been beneficial.

Each of the experiences discussed draws upon the sub-theme of the emotional taxes of LGBTQIA+ identity and demonstrates the complex range of emotional experiences that LGBTQIA+ people face when self-disclosing their identities. Emotional taxes were

experienced by each participant in this research, and, despite many discussing the overall positive nature of their LGBTQIA+ identity, they spoke to the hardships that are faced in achieving authenticity. The common threads of fear, exhaustion, and frustration ran throughout several of the participants' recollections and were further nuanced by interwoven emotions associated with vulnerability and the weight of others' expectations.

Mental Tax

Mental taxation associated with their LGBTQIA+ identity was a heavy factor for many participants when reflecting on the effect of repetitive identity self-disclosures as well as LGBTQIA+ identities more broadly. As with emotional tax, when participants were asked if they felt there were any personal effects of repetitive identity self-disclosure, many described how identity embodiment and disclosure, as well as heteronormative society, resulted in mental taxes. Commonalities occurred in taxes, such as social invalidation, stress, and environmental hyperawareness. While there did not appear to be any prominent intergenerational differences in mental identity tax, participants who experienced the duality of gender and sexual identities appeared to associate more complex mental taxes than those who experienced sexuality alone.

Erin discusses the mental weight of the necessity of disclosure and the level of stress that identity maintenance can cause:

> "Yeah, so I'm not just doing it for fun [laugh]. It's definitely not a fun process. Sometimes it can go badly. It's a lot of stress. It takes time to, like, mentally prepare. So yeah, if I'm not very involved with someone. That and it does get stalled, like, potentially indefinitely if I think there's going to be a very, very bad reaction […]." (Erin, age 20-29).

Despite finding humour, Erin's assertion that she is *not just doing it* [disclosure] *for fun* highlights the juxtaposition of self-disclosure and the identity maintenance process. While disclosing one's LGBTQIA+ identity may be beneficial to identity affirmation and authenticity, it is often a heavily taxing process. Erin infers in this statement that there is a cost-benefit evaluation that LGBTQIA+ people must undergo to determine if they will disclose their identity, and her personal experience is that this is *not a fun process*. This is further emphasised by Erin acknowledging that it *takes time to mentally prepare* to self-disclose and involves *a lot of stress* as there is a risk *it can go badly*. All these factors demonstrate the mental tax of LGBTQIA+ identities.

Parallel to emotional taxes of guilt, Garrett expresses the weight of societal gender standards for identity validation and the self-doubt that this results in:

> "I often feel quite guilty self-disclosing. […] Just that, I think it's because I'm not passing. It's like, "Oh, well, I totally get why they wouldn't have assumed that those were my pronouns; like, should I even bother, like, disclosing? Because, like, it's just gonna happen again with another person. […] I often, I'm like, "Oh, well, should I even bother?" (Garrett, age 19 or younger).

The mental taxes that Garrett describes here appear to be intrinsically intertwined with emotional taxes, compounding and once again highlighting the interconnected nature of LGBTQIA+ identity tax. Not only does Garrett experience a heavy sense of guilt about self-disclosure and requesting affirming pronouns, but he also infers a state of dissonance in which he is confronted with the challenge of his own identity and the gender standards of broader society. Garrett discusses understanding *why they wouldn't have assumed* due to his early stage of intra-transition in which his appearance does not yet align with what society deems appropriate for a male. The notion of *passing*, often spoken about in LGBTQIA+ culture, is desirable to Garrett but not yet obtainable, resulting in mental and emotional taxes.

Kalia offers an interesting reflection on how LGBTQIA+ people face additional mental taxes as they move through a heteronormative society:

> "Out in the wild. Like, it's… you're always, like, you don't know, I think like the uncertainty of like… Knowing you're in, like, a space, which is not, like, which is not, like, typically, like, accepted. And so, it's kind of like, even though I knew that there would be people that would still, like, want to support me, or like, you know, that even though I knew that the kind of the safety measures were in place. I still was kind of like, "Oh, my God, what's happening? What am I going to do now? Oh, no". (Kalia, age 20-29).

Referring to the broader world as *out in the wild*, Kalia highlights how LGBTQIA+ people often seek to establish safe and accepting environments and relationships as a form of affirmation and support. Outside of these spaces, as Kalia describes, can, at times, result in additional mental taxation by way of uncertainty about safety and acceptance. The notion of holding knowledge that you may be in an environment in which it *is not typically accepted* to

be LGBTQIA+ demonstrates that there is an additional requirement to be environmentally aware, perhaps even hypervigilant of safety.

The mental tax of being faced with identity erasure is reflected upon by Rapata and their experiences of polysexual identity stereotypes:

> "Like, that was something that I encountered, actually, now that I think about it. For like, when I came out as being bi[sexual], a few people, um, kind of viewed it as a, "Oh, well, you'll just be gay next week." Like, it kind of, like, I'm not saying that people that identify as gay now, like, use it as a stepping stone. And that's, like, muddied the identity or anything like that. But people, that kind of misconception like, "Oh, if you're identifying as bi[sexual], you're probably just gay, and you're just waiting." That kind of, I guess, interpretation as well, of, like, say, being bisexual, or something like that. And then, um, "Oh, now you're with a woman, so you're straight, or you're a lesbian." Like, "No! I'm still this." (Rapata, age 20-29).

Identity erasure is a significant mental tax for those who identify or understand themselves as polysexual (Davila et al., 2019; McLean, 2007). Rapata discusses their experiences with polysexual erasure, reflecting on how their initial identity self-disclosures were viewed as transitional due to a social misconception that, with time, polysexual people will come out again as gay or 'return' to being straight. The paradoxical duality of polysexual identity erasure is evident in how Rapata discusses experiences of dating both binary genders; it is assumed that they are gay when they have a male-identifying partner and straight when they have a female-identifying partner. This limiting either/or ideology causes mental taxation for polysexual people, as their identity is invalidated and minimised in both instances, leading Rapata to feel a need to correct the erasure of their identity.

The experiences of the four participants considered in this sub-theme demonstrate the presence of a mental tax experienced by LGBTQIA+ people. The participants' reflections highlight the range and weight of mentally taxing associations with LGBTQIA+ identities, including stress, dissonance, environmental awareness, and identity erasure. These mental taxes align with Meyer's (2003) Minority Stress Theory, which outlines how "stigma, prejudice, and discrimination create a hostile and stressful social environment that causes mental health problems" (p. 1). Considered through the Minority Stress Theory, these

findings demonstrate that, while substantial social change has been made, inequities remain in LGBTQIA+ lived social experiences.

Educational Tax

Many of the participants spoke about the tax of educating other people about their identities. For many, the tax of education was not limited to their immediate relationships but rather extended into public spaces with the education of acquaintances and even strangers. Each participant viewed educating others as both a side effect of their identity—whether perceived to be taxing or not—but also a necessary tool for increasing social awareness and helping others to interact with LGBTQIA+ people in more respectful and informed ways. Across age ranges, this necessity of education was, for most participants, viewed as a burden and a cost of embodying their identities authentically. However, it appeared that older participants were more willing to engage in educational processes with strangers.

Rishaan reflects on the necessity of education through everyday interactions, despite the frustration that a lack of knowledge or ignorance can cause:

> "Yeah, this is very interesting because I… I… I actually often think about this repetitive coming out phenomenon, or whatever you want to call it. It happens a lot of times that… you constantly have to do it. […] as an example, I was calling the bank to get an add-on card for my partner, and I'm saying that I need another card for my partner. And they'd turn around and ask, "So, what's her name?" I'm giving you… you know? […] A gender-neutral term. So, I want you to use that! Anyway. Um, it is frustrating. Um, but it is something that we have to deal with. Um, because not everyone is as educated in this aspect as we'd like. And I guess, um, we educate them." (Rishaan, age 30-39).

Rishaan's evaluation of the necessity of identity education reflects yet another juxtaposition of identity maintenance. His use of gender-neutral language and the significance he places on others picking up on this demonstrates that direct identity disclosure may not always be seen as a necessity. Particularly in situations where that information is not explicitly required—such as dealing with a bank or utility company. However, the frustration of heterosexual assumptions and the dismissal of gender-neutral terms resulted in Rishaan feeling the need to correct assumptions; therefore, engaging in identity maintenance, which was initially seen as unnecessary. Rishaan's reflection that, while frustrating, identity

education is something that we have to deal with due to people not being as *educated as we'd like* sums up the tax of education for LGBTQIA+ well.

Adrian recalls a memory in which he felt the need to enter a conversation to provide the perspective of lived experience:

> "[…] And it was before the meeting was started, and there was a lady, she's a similar age to me, um, another guy who's maybe 10 years older, and they've got young children. And they were sort of talking about, um, I can't remember the full conversation, but it was sort of, like, maybe about educating kids in schools and that sort of thing. And they were sort of like, "Oh, you know, well, I don't know if that's sort of too early". And I just piped up and was like, "I knew when I was 12". And just kind of spoke up, just to put them in their... Put them in their place. And to actually be a voice of someone with that experience. Just to say… "You guys are talking about this and being like, 'Oh, I don't know if this is right'". And it's like, you're not talking to someone that's… you're not talking directly to me. I had to insert myself into that conversation just to be all like, "Actually, it's not an issue. I knew when I was 12. And it would have been good to have these things" (Adrian, age 30-39).

Adrian's experience with overhearing heterosexual individuals discussing the appropriateness of LGBTQIA+ inclusion in childhood education offers an interesting perspective on the notion that education, while taxing, is an important element of LGBTQIA+ collective identity. Adrian highlights that he had to insert himself into the conversation to provide lived experience, which speaks to the broader issue of decisions and public opinions about minority groups being made by those without intimate knowledge of lived experience. The frustration that Adrian felt led him to interject in the conversation and risk the vulnerability of disclosing personal experiences, demonstrating that the benefits of education in improving social awareness may outweigh the personal cost of providing it.

Faced with a contradictory approach to promoting diversity, Caitlin discusses the complexities and importance of approaching identity education:

> "But I think, I think for me, it's really important to be really active. Yeah, it's been really interesting this week, around… or last week around pride in schools. Like, I tried to get my school on board to celebrate it. And they said, "No". And I'm new to the community I'm in, so I'll push it again next year. But, um, yeah, like the response was around the fact

> that they celebrate diversity, but… and then… but there's actually no active visibility around that stuff. And I was kind of talking to them about how important that is. I'm talking to my kids a lot about that as well. But yeah, and I think that's so important. It's really so important. […] So, I'm really… and because of my journey. And my, like, my journey was all around lack of visibility and coming from, like, a Catholic background." (Caitlin, age 40+).

Caitlin's lived experience of struggling to find any representation of LGBTQIA+ identities or culture in her youth has made her passionate about the process of education in adulthood. However, her recent engagement with her children's school, who claim to promote diversity yet would not engage in pride, was a point of educational tax. While Caitlin held a positive outlook on engaging with identity education, she infers within this reflection that it will be an ongoing educational process that she *will push again next year*. Caitlin takes on the role of educator within her immediate relationships as well as the broader community, highlighting how important it is to talk to her kids about identity as well as attempting to educate the school about the importance of pride.

Connor reflects on how disclosing his identity and allowing space for people to potentially make mistakes may be beneficial for social understanding:

> "Um, I try to be not, like, super educational. But I tried to, like, use specific language and be kind of, like, specific about it. Especially with people I don't know and aren't queer or trans. […] Like, I… like, if I'm going to, like, come out as trans, I'll be like, 'I am a transmasculine person. And I'm non-binary. So, what that means…'. It's kind of like, when you have to, like, baby it down. And be like, 'So, what that means is I can go by he/him, or I can go by they/them.' Typically, people will pick up on the he/him because it'll be easier to use. And I'm like, 'That's totally fine.' […] I hope, like… if I'm, like, one of the very few, like, trans people, or transmasculine, non-binary people that someone has met; if they can, like, start learning, and, like, if they fuck up with me, then the next person, they might fuck up a little bit less and a little bit less." (Connor, age 19 or younger).

While acknowledging that he tries *not to be super educational*, Connor explains the significance of using specific language to help others learn about LGBTQIA+ identities and emphasises the importance of this for heterosexual and cisgender people. Connor balances the line of purposely using correct identity language, such as transmasculine and non-binary,

with making the information provided consumable for those without any knowledge of LGBTQIA+ identities, noting that he has to *baby it down*. Connor's assertion that he is willing to have people *fuck up* with them so that when they meet other LGBTQIA+ people, *they might fuck it up a little bit less and a little bit less* highlights that, once again, the education tax is seen as a necessary burden to carry if societal progress is to be achieved.

The four experiences examined in this sub-theme speak to the significant tax that educating people about LGBTQIA+ identities and experiences takes. The reflections provided by participants demonstrate the vast situational contexts in which these conversations occur, from children's schools to workplaces to social institutions. Furthermore, these reflections highlight the burden felt by LGBTQIA+ people to take on the role of educator, which, participants demonstrated, is outweighed by the potential societal process that increasing knowledge of LGBTQIA+ identities and experiences can have for the community.

Summary of Theme

The Tax of Identity theme has outlined how minority gender and/or sexual identities may result in additional taxes for LGBTQIA+ people, including mental taxes, emotional taxes, and educational taxes. Mental taxes highlighted by participants include stress, dissonance, environmental awareness, and identity erasure. Emotional taxes discussed by participants include fear of disclosure and discrimination as well as exhaustion and frustration with the 'coming out' and identity maintenance processes. Finally, educational taxes related to the perceived necessity and responsibility of educating others about LGBTQIA+ identities and experiences were explored. In sum, these findings, which will be discussed in more depth in chapter six, align with the previous works of queer theorists who note that LGBTQIA+ people face additional mental, emotional, and social labour than their heterosexual peers.

Chapter Conclusion

Chapter Four has begun to explore how participants in this research interpret their experiences of identity self-disclosure or non-disclosure, the social factors influencing the decision to self-disclose one's gender and/or sexual identity, and the effect of repetitive self-disclosures on participants. In doing so, two overarching themes that emerged throughout the participants' interviews have been examined. The first theme, The Temporality of Identity, drew upon three identity sub-themes that established the significance of self-disclosure and

disclosure responses in processes of identity development, identity affirmation, and identity maintenance. The second theme, The Tax of Identity, highlighted the effects of repetitive self-disclosure of LGBTQIA+ identities for the participants through the sub-themes of emotional tax, mental tax, and educational tax. Combined, these themes demonstrate the interpersonal elements of identity maintenance through the lens of LGBTQIA+ lived experiences.

Chapter Five: The Intrapersonal LGBTQIA+ Identity

Chapter Summary

Chapter Five continues to examine how participants in this study understand their experiences with identity self-disclosure and non-disclosure. This chapter will focus on two main themes related to intrapersonal identity, which have been titled The Ecology of Identity and The Language of Identity. In exploring these themes, several sub-themes addressing the interpersonal nature and environmental influences of LGBTQIA+ identities will be analysed to continue contextualising participants' interpretations of their lived experiences.

The Ecology of Identity theme will be divided into three sub-themes exploring the different levels of social interactions, utilising the Ecological Systems Theory to situate how social environments and the accompanying social factors contribute to identity self-disclosures. This will be followed by The Language of Identity theme, in which two sub-themes will be explored: the language of disclosure and the language of non-disclosure. These sub-themes have been utilised to situate how participants' use of language and the language of others contribute to the self-disclosure process.

The Ecology of Identity

Participants in this research all discussed how different environmental contexts and the social factors accompanying different environments influenced their broader lived experiences and the disclosure of their LGBTQIA+ identities. This chapter's first section will discuss three prominent subthemes that align with three categories of Bronfenbrenner's (1977) Ecological Systems Theory: the microsystem, the mesosystem, and the macrosystem. The ecological environment, as defined by Bronfenbrenner (1977), refers to an interconnected, nested system of environments in which people live. From the perspective of community psychology, ecological models, such as the Ecological Systems Theory, are helpful tools for understanding the individual within the multiple, often complex, social systems in which they engage (Riemer et al., 2020).

Microsystem

When reflecting on memorable moments in which they engaged in self-disclosure and non-disclosure of their LGBTQIA+ identity, each participant described events that can be contextualised within environments reflecting microsystems. Bronfenbrenner (1977) defined the microsystem as "the complex relations between the […] person and environment in an immediate setting containing that person" (p. 514). In the context of this research, the most

prominent microsystem across all age groups centred on participants' familial spaces (i.e., their family home/whare) and familial relationships. Additional microsystems that offered interesting insights into the nuanced and complex interaction between identity and environments included cultural and social settings. Participants' familial spaces and relationships primarily arose as reflections on the familial microsystems of their youth and the relationships they hold with their parents now as adults. Akin to familial environments, cultural and social environments were significant for identity empowerment and challenges through acceptance or non-acceptance.

Jamie recalls the positive intergenerational home environment that allowed for the acceptance and exploration of their identity:

> "My… my Mum is half [ethnicity redacted], and her Mum's [ethnicity redacted]. And I think the way that she was raised was very, very whatever, you know? It doesn't… doesn't really matter if you're gay, like "Whatever". And that was something that my Mum got raised with as well […]. So, for me being brought up, I didn't find the idea of coming out scary at all. It was just an experience that I wanted to explain to my Mum, and I think I could." (Jamie, age 19 or younger).

Jamie's home felt like a space in which their identity could be fully embraced and explored due to the accepting environment that their mother created. The intergenerational approach to allowing loved ones to embody their whole selves demonstrates the significance that positive microsystem environments, such as the familial home/whare, can have on LGBTQIA+ individuals. As mentioned in the last chapter, the safe and affirming environment that Jamie's mother fostered allowed them to feel comfortable exploring their LGBTQIA+ identity in a calm and relaxed manner. Jamie's recollection of not finding *the idea of coming out scary at all* stands in contrast to the experiences of many LGBTQIA+ individuals regarding this significant life event, once again highlighting the benefits of support in microsystem environments.

In contrast, Rishaan discussed how his relationship with his father was strained due to a lack of acceptance and understanding:

> "[…] and over the years, he still thought that I would get married to a woman. And obviously, I've had to let him down multiple times. I eventually took [redacted name], my partner […] home. And I thought everything was fine, but on my last trip to [redacted

> location and date], he again brought it up. And I was like, “But you've met [redacted name]. I’ve been with him for seven and a half years. Can’t you see how happy I am?”. Like, I… I can understand that he has lived… […] his entire life thinking that there's only one way for two people to be. And this is outside his comprehension. And I just load that on him and expect him to change [redacted age] of his belief, and, you know, in his way of life. And that's difficult for him to do. And maybe he's not even putting in the work to do that. He doesn’t want to do it. And that's fine. That's his choice. I can't force him.” (Rishaan, age 30-39).

Rishaan’s experience of bringing home his same-sex partner to meet his father demonstrates how a lack of acceptance of LGBTQIA+ identities within the familial microsystem can affect LGBTQIA+ people and their familial relationships. Despite understanding why his father may struggle to come to terms with his sexual identity and the recognition that this is not something he can *force him* to accept, it is clearly a difficult challenge for Rishaan. His feeling of having to let his father down *multiple times* regarding any misconception that Rishaan will one day marry a woman may influence how Rishaan approaches his identity in the context of his relationship with his father. This is further confirmed later in Rishaan’s interview when he acknowledges that he and his father barely speak, and at times, he questions why he should bother attempting to maintain the relationship.

Kalia discusses the conflicting experience of receiving support for her LGBTQIA+ identity from her immediate family while facing disapproval from her wider family, reflecting the broader cultural context of her upbringing:

> “I think growing up in a certain context, and around certain types of people... So, it's like, with my parents, because I know that they're supportive, and they'll support me and love me no matter what, like, I feel fine. But like, within the context of, like, my wider family, my close family, I feel like their… a lot of them are in that mindset of either just like straight out homophobia, transphobia, type of thing, or they are okay with it as long as it's not like within. It's more like a “Yeah, I have this one, like, gay friend […]”. But they'll, like, make fun of, like, other cousins that I have, who are, like, either gay, or, like, trans, or, like, something like that. So, and then it's like… even though I am, like, very vocal about, like, supporting, I am still in that point where I'm kind of like… not, like, I don't know if it's, like, not ready or, like, unwilling to, like, even broach the topic with them.

> Just because I'm like, 'I don't want to deal with, like, the… whatever reaction they have'" (Kalia, age 20-29).

The experience Kalia describes is a complex juxtaposition of support and potential rejection of her LGBTQIA+ identity by her family. While she feels accepted and comfortable in embracing her authentic self within environments limited to her immediate family, she has engaged in identity maintenance with her wider family, who demonstrate signs of being unsupportive of LGBTQIA+ identities. Kalia's reflection on her upbringing within a *certain context and around certain types of people*—which she discussed elsewhere in her interview as involving conservative religious and cultural ideologies—has shaped her hesitance to disclose her LGBTQIA+ identity within this environment for fear of potentially being ostracised and faced with homophobia. The juxtaposition of these experiences appears to be conflicting for Kalia, who values her cultural and LGBTQIA+ identities yet is faced with the, at times, incongruous nature of both.

Although recognising the importance of community and socialisation, Erin discusses the conflicting nature of making new friends during the intra-transition of gender identity:

> "So, my social environment's pretty weak at the moment. Yeah, um, well, I only came out, like, less than a year ago. Or I only figured it out, I should say. So, I haven't had time to make it. And I'm also kind of mentally in a very iffy position because I'm like, 'I need to not out myself.' So, I need to subtly go to things if I can. But yeah, I'm also not out, so I feel weird. I feel like I need to keep staying in hiding until I'm, like, socially transitioned a lot. And I feel like I don't want to make any new friends or anything yet, even though I desperately need to, the whole social group's questionable. Um, but it's like, 'I don't know why the frig would I introduce them to this if I can wait a couple of months and just not.' And it's like, 'Why would I go to any situation where I might be forced to use the old voice and introduce someone to that, and then have to change it and then surprise a new person to come out to?' Yeah, it just seems like all stressful…" (Erin, age 20-29).

As evidenced by Erin's reflection, conflict regarding the perceived due process of identity transitions can be a source of anxiety and stress for some LGBTQIA+ people. Despite acknowledging her *social group's questionable*, Erin has identified barriers that she feels hinder her from changing this. The most evident barrier appears to be making friends during the intra-transition process, in which elements of her previous identity may be required. For

example, in social settings where she is not yet out. By weighing the benefits and costs of engaging in making new friends at this point in her identity development, Erin highlights how deeply nuanced the coming-out process for gender identities is in comparison to sexual identities that may be more concealable.

The experiences of each of the four participants discussed in this sub-theme demonstrate how gender and sexual identities interact with microsystem environments. Across the common locations of familial, cultural, and social environments, participants shared how their LGBTQIA+ identities are influenced by their day-to-day surroundings. Often, these environments presented challenges, yet they also demonstrated the benefits that positive interactions regarding gender and sexuality can have for individuals.

Mesosystems

The mesosystem "comprises the interrelations among major settings containing the […] person at a particular point in his or her [or their] life" (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 515). While each individual participant undoubtedly encountered several mesosystems, a prominent mesosystem that arose across the analysis centred on the workplace and interactions with their LGBTQIA+ identities within intimate relationships and religious identities. The prominence of the workplace across most participants' transcripts, regardless of their age, may reflect the age range of this research cohort, with all participants falling within the early and mid-career stages. Therefore, the workplace can be expected to represent a significant environment in their lives, requiring an increased number of interactions with other microsystems.

Caitlin reflected on her hesitance in self-disclosing her LGBTQIA+ identity in her workplace, highlighting that religion was a factor in her decision not to disclose:

> "And the… I haven't actually actively outed myself there. So yeah, which is interesting. It's probably the only space I haven't. And it's probably because they're all nuns I work with. And they know me, and they know that… they know that I'm separated. But I don't know why. Yeah. I don't know why. But that is somewhere I haven't. There's only one woman there that knows that I'm queer. Yeah, I… actually, they're amazingly open women. And I just don't know why. They're older. They're all probably… a lot of them are in their 70s. So, but yeah, that's one place I haven't. […] I suppose I feel a bit of shame about that. But I'm not sure. I always say that I'm not a part of the church, but they kind of assume it,

> I think. And then. I don't know. We just don't… Yeah, we don't talk about that. And I haven't actively, I haven't, like, denied it. But I haven't actively, like, outed myself." (Caitlin, age 40+, p. 9, lines. 356-361, 367, 373-4 & 380-1)

Caitlin's reflection offers an interesting look at the complexity of disclosure decision-making and highlights the social factors influencing her decision process when her workplace and personal identities intersect. While she appears to be comfortable with her religious co-workers knowing that she is separated from her ex-husband, she has withheld that she identifies as LGBTQIA+. The repeated notion, *I don't know why*, signifies that this may not be an entirely conscious decision. Caitlin discussed throughout her interview that she is comfortable with disclosing her LGBTQIA+ identity and regularly takes opportunities to disclose and discuss diversity when they are presented, making this workplace one of the few environments in her life in which she is not entirely comfortable with self-disclosure. The reflection that, while her colleagues are *amazingly open women*, she still *feels a bit of shame* in disclosing her LGBTQIA+ identity to them highlights that socialisation regarding the morality of gender and sexual identity can impact the ways in which LGBTQIA+ people engage socially in differing and intersecting environments. The influence of religion on disclosure was discussed by nine of the ten participants, indicating that it is a prominent consideration for many LGBTQIA+ people.

Connor reflects on how his professional environment and romantic relationship have intersected within the context of his LGBTQIA+ identity:

> "When I went for my interview at [redacted], the at the time manager asked for my pronouns, and this was the first time being out that I had a job interview. So, I said, "Just they/them". She responded well, but the other worker next to her said, "I'm not good with pronouns, so I'll just call you by your name". Yet she still calls me she/her […]. When we changed bosses, I had a similar "I go by they/them; also, I'm legally changing my name, etc., etc." to which she responded with, "Yeah, I was told when I started, I just forget, sorry" and acted like me changing my name legally was an issue? The only time she corrected herself on my pronouns was when my partner came in […]." (Connor, age 19 or younger).

Connor's experience with a lack of respect for his pronouns within his workspace, unless his partner is present, offers a look into how romantic relationships intersect with

professional spaces. The evident frustration here for Connor rests in the disregard for his attempts at self-disclosure and education about his experience of being transmasculine non-binary. Connor discussed several instances in which he disclosed his pronouns and the legal change of his name, yet this was disregarded within the workspace until his partner was present. The colleagues' ability to recognise their error and correct themselves in the presence of Connor's partner highlights that they are aware of Connor's identity and can respect his self-identification, suggesting that it may be complacency or apathy that drives their otherwise regular dismissals.

Daniela described how she has taken two very different approaches to the interactions between her personal identity, romantic relationships, and workplace across her career:

> "Ah, at work, it was kind of difficult. […] I was really scared, like your opportunities in [redacted geographical location], where it's scarce, and I was very competitive, very… you know, really into my job. So, I didn't want to say anything. So, I started having this boyfriend when I started seeing [partner's name redacted], and I was so in love, [but] I started having a boyfriend. And then, like, some of my friends knew that I was with this woman, and they were like, 'Whose boyfriend?' Like, 'Oh! Okay.' [Laughing]. So, it was really confusing. And then, um, when I moved to [redacted geographical location], um, I had to explain what the hell I was doing there. So, I was just like, 'This is my partner.' So, I was gay from the first second. I just came out, you know, on the interview, I was like, 'I came here with my partner.' […] And so, you know, I was always gay there for everything and for everyone. Even though I was in quite a small place." (Daniela, age 40+).

The approaches to self-disclosure, both directly and indirectly, discussed by Daniela demonstrate the complexities of navigating the interactions between one's personal and professional lives. At an earlier point in her career, Daniela felt that appearing heterosexual served her better within her work environment, separating her LGBTQIA+ identity and same-sex relationship from her more conservative professional environment. The performance of heteronormativity reflects Daniela's fear that, should she allow her microsystems to overlap, her career may be damaged, or she may find herself at a disadvantage compared to other candidates in her competitive professional sphere. This contrasts with her later experience in which Daniela chose to self-disclose her LGBTQIA+ identity and same-sex relationship from the get-go, being *always gay for everything* and *everyone*. The contrast between these

experiences highlights how nuanced and contextual LGBTQIA+ experiences are and how social and political factors can contribute to the disclosure process.

The three experiences drawn upon in this subtheme signal the way in which intersections of different settings influence LGBTQIA+ people's identity and disclosure patterns across the workplace—a prominent environment in the day-to-day lives of adults. The common theme of the workplace being a challenging space in which to successfully integrate other microsystems highlights that, while societal progress has been made, the pressures and expectations of heteronormativity still dominate many of the spaces in which LGBTQIA+ people engage. Thus, identity maintenance practices become a necessary tool for LGBTQIA+ people to navigate incongruent mesosystem environments successfully.

Macrosystems

The macrosystem refers to:

> "the overarching institutional patterns of the culture or subculture […] [which] are conceived and examined not only in structural terms but as carriers of information and ideology that, both explicitly and implicitly, endow meaning and motivation to particular agencies, social networks, roles, activities, and their interrelations" (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 515).

Macrosystems that occurred across participants' reflections included healthcare services, politics and public safety, and the heteronormativity of institutions. In accordance with Bronfenbrenner's (1977) conceptualisation, these macrosystems represented both physical environments, such as medical institutions, as well as intangible systems of public ideology, such as implicit homophobia and transphobia.

As part of seeking identity affirmation, Connor recalls the experience of having his transmasculine identity revealed to his mother by his healthcare provider:

> "When I first came out, it was to my doctor who referred me to a counselling place before I started medically transitioning, and she was going to text me the name and details of this place. She accidentally texted my mum instead—who I hadn't come out to about being trans yet. The day after I saw my doctor, my mum comes into my room, I had just woken up, and she showed me the text message. So, then I had to come out as 'not a girl' to my mum to explain what the message meant. Fun fact: my doctor never apologised about it and continued to be a problem for myself and Mum […]." (Connor, age 19 or younger).

Not only is Connor's memory of being outed by his doctor startling and representative of a significant issue within the medicalisation of gender and sex identities, but it is also conflicting in nature. On the one hand, this moment held immense significance as the starting point for Connor achieving physical affirmation of his transgender identity—a time that should have been affirming, empowering, and exciting. On the other hand, Connor faced being forced to disclose his transmasculine identity to his mother due to the doctor's heedlessness. Connor's recollection of not receiving an apology from the doctor and his view of the doctor as a *continued problem* in his healthcare treatment reflect broader issues with the medicalisation of gender and sex. Although strides towards access to affirming healthcare services have been achieved in recent decades, outdated and problematic ideologies and inequalities in healthcare experiences remain largely unchallenged (Ker et al., 2020; Ministry of Health, 2024).

Erin discussed the conflicting relationship that she has with the media as a source of information regarding public safety and the political climate:

> "But, you know, safety is [a] very big concern because a lot of it is based in fear, and I'm friggin' terrified all the time. And all that stuff, news, and all that, has just been horrible and has definitely informed how I go about things and the worst possible scenarios that could happen. And so, that's heavily fed into why I so value getting a read on people and picking and only doing it [disclosure] if absolutely necessary, and everyone else [is] gonna have the sledgehammer approach. Um, and all that stuff. If… if that was less of a thing, then it would be purely running on, um, 'Okay, this is getting a little bit tiring.' But there is very much a version of 'If I make the bad call, if this goes wrong […].' […] I feel like I need to have… I need to know exactly what's going on. And I need to be able to say that so they cannot sweep it under the rug. They cannot, like, you know? It's terrifying in certain places. And I don't want them to, like, just be like, 'Oh, it's not so bad. Or you're overreacting.' Which has forced me into having to learn about it, [which] is very, very much not fun. And there have been some horrific things that just made me cry and be incredibly sad. Very, not great. I need to work on that. But also, if I tried to avoid it, then I start to think that… yeah, I'm not going to be well-equipped to deal with the people who try to pressure." (Erin, age 20-29).

While the media is an obvious point of stress for Erin, she also views it as an essential source of information and a helpful educational tool. This paradoxical nature of the media, being both overwhelmingly centred on negative narratives of transgender experiences and a tool for educating oneself about the political climate of inequality, is a heavy burden for Erin to bear. Her recognition that it is *not great* to be fixated on the *horrific things* reported in the media demonstrates that Erin has evaluated the costs and benefits of exposing herself to this information. Erin has found strength and agency in exposing herself to information that may be detrimental in some contexts by allowing it to inform her safety processes and providing her with the knowledge needed to challenge problematic and uninformed opinions when encountering them.

Similarly, Rishaan discusses how politics, discrimination, and public safety have affected his identity experiences both prior to and after immigrating to Aotearoa New Zealand:

> "Because it was still a crime to be gay in [redacted] at the time. It was still not socially accepted, not that it is widely [accepted now], but it is changing. So, yes, for the fear of being marginalised, for fear of being stereotyped, and how it [might] affect my career. […] I would… I would have chosen not to disclose." (Rishaan, age 30-39).

> "But also, like, yes, New Zealand's very progressive. And it's very accepting as compared to where I come from. But I also see, as an example, very early on, when my partner and I were dating, we were walking close to [redacted geographic location]. […] We were holding hands, and I heard comments in the background, which I do not want to repeat. Um, and that again, you know, yes, I want to be leaving that baggage behind. But then I'm forced to carry that with me when I am, you know, exposed to something like that?" (Rishaan, age 30-39).

Rishaan's experiences of being born and raised in a political environment that discriminated against sexual and gender diversity, specifically his identity as a gay man, instilled a deeply seated sense of fear in him. The fear of being marginalised and stereotyped impacted several of his microsystems, such as his workplace discussed here and his home space discussed within the microsystems section. Rishaan's mention of wanting *to leave that baggage behind* highlights that although he has come a long way in accepting and proudly embodying his LGBTQIA+ identity, he still holds some internalisation of the problematic socialised ideologies that facilitate inequality and discrimination.

Finally, Caitlin reflected on the ways in which her experiences with heteronormativity provide her with an element of privilege that other LGBTQIA+ parents may not receive:

> "[…] maybe I still have some of the privilege of the fact that I had… I had children with a man, you know, and I don't have to navigate that stuff. Whereas I see with my friends who, yeah, had the same sex, like, families. Like they're constantly navigating that. And I can see, I can see that just gets really tiring and frustrating." (Caitlin, age 40+).

The heteronormativity spoken about by Caitlin is complex and reflective of multiple forms of social inequality. Caitlin's identification of perhaps experiencing less discrimination regarding being both a parent and a member of the LGBTQIA+ community because she had her children in a heterosexual relationship is interesting. This narrative may speak to the patriarchal family structure ideology that essentialised the purpose of womanhood to maternity (O'Reilly, 2016), the necessity of a male presence in family structures (Sear, 2021), or a complex intersection of both. Caitlin's reflection on how her friends who have same-sex family structures are *constantly navigating* the challenges of heteronormativity in parenting demonstrates that while progress has been made concerning same-sex rights, social discrimination remains a significant factor for the LGBTQIA+ community.

Each of the four participants discussed in this sub-theme experienced macrosystem influences on their identity and disclosure patterns in unique yet challenging ways. The narratives of lived experiences described speak to the broader challenge of navigating a heteronormative society that isn't designed for or receptive to LGBTQIA+ people. While each of the narratives discussed contains elements of deficit ideologies that present as barriers, it is important to highlight that the participants demonstrate a positive element or association with their agency when recalling the experiences. This demonstrates the strength that the LGBTQIA+ community holds in the face of daily adversity.

Summary of Theme

The Ecology of Identity theme has outlined how identity disclosures may differ in various environments, from the microsystems to the macrosystems in which LGBTQIA+ people are embedded. The environments highlighted within each ecological segment of Bronfenbrenner's (1977) Ecological Systems Theory include familial/whānau, cultural, and social environments (microsystems), the workplace and its interactions with LGBTQIA+

identities in the form of intimate relationships and religious status (mesosystems), and political climate, public safety, and public institutions (macrosystems). While perhaps narrow in scope, the presence of these specific environments is unsurprising as they are prominent elements of an adult's life and their day-to-day interactions with the ecology of society. The findings presented will be analysed in more depth in the following chapter.

The Language of Identity

The Language of Identity theme was formed from the prominence of participant recollections regarding how language serves as a tool for identity self-disclosure and non-disclosure, as well as assessing social interactions. Every participant in this research discussed how they rely on language as a robust measure of acceptance and safety in various social interactions. Furthermore, many participants discussed how they use language, both directly and indirectly, to manage their LGBTQIA+ identities. This chapter's second section will discuss these findings through two subthemes: the language of disclosure and the language of non-disclosure.

The Language of Disclosure

The first subtheme of this section will discuss how language, in its numerous forms, facilitates the disclosure process. For many participants, language extended beyond the direct spoken disclosures often discussed in literature. While such direct statements, such as "I'm gay", were seen as necessary in particular contexts, many participants engaged in non-verbal or indirect language in their day-to-day disclosure interactions. Prominently, identity cues such as clothing or symbols and the use of gender markers were employed by participants to inform others of their LGBTQIA+ identities. Little difference in disclosure language was observed across participant age groups. However, there did appear to be a difference in the use of direct and indirect language when comparing experiences of disclosing gender and sexual identities, with gender diverse and transgender participants indicating that they utilise direct disclosures more often.

Adrian discusses how he incorporates cues about his LGBTQIA+ identity into his daily life and how indirect verbal disclosures can be beneficial in normalising diversity:

> "I try and disclose as much as possible. I try and um… ah, disclose in ways that are nonverbal as well. So, I'll often, like, paint my nails, um... wear necklaces, my clothes are um, camp or colourful, um, so that the person that is interacting with me questions

> [laughs] that, 'Oh, maybe this person is a bit zesty' […]. I don't want them to assume straightaway that I'm straight, you know? And then yeah, there's the… the, I guess, verbal disclosure, where people might bring things up in conversation. So, if, um… if someone sort of says, for example, 'Do you have a girlfriend?', correcting them and saying, 'I don't have a boyfriend' or 'I do have a boyfriend'. Um… but that's the way of, sort of, coming out if I haven't explicitly stated it to them. Or… or I guess validating, for them, if they are, like, questioning because of what I'm wearing or how I look. […] And I'm less, I guess, not… threatening is the wrong word, but like, maybe confronting way [laughing]. Sort of just dropping it in. Yeah, I guess normalising it. So, I guess I try and normalise my disclosures as much as possible." (Adrian, age 30-39).

Adrian's explanation of the way in which he incorporates non-direct disclosures into his daily life offers a lens for examining how LGBTQIA+ people may use indirect forms of language to signal their identities. The notion that these identity cues might make the people who interact with Adrian question his identity removes the onus of disclosure from the LGBTQIA+ individual and encourages people to question their assumptions. Thus, it ultimately challenges the standard of heteronormativity. Similarly, the casual way in which Adrian uses indirect verbal disclosures, by correcting assumptions within a conversation without the need to make a direct statement about his identity, offers an opportunity to challenge heteronormativity and normalise diversity in a non-confrontational way. By incorporating clear information about his identity into his conversations, Adrian is disclosing his LGBTQIA+ identity while reducing the weight of repeated 'coming out' experiences.

Continuing the approach of normalisation, Caitlin purposefully emphasises pronouns and sees them as a tool for creating spaces for conversations around gender and sexuality:

> "Yeah, like, when you talk about your partner. I'm quite obviously, like, I… I will say 'she' rather than just 'partner' because I know I've got some friends that will just kind of keep it quite gender neutral. But, um, I'm quite... Yeah, and I suppose I use my pronouns a lot. Just to try to, yeah… to try and, kind of, create that, like, space, that it's normal to talk about that sort of stuff and open the conversation around gender. If people are… like, they use their pronouns or if somebody openly talks about a same-sex partner or in any way alludes to the fact they're part of the queer community, of course, it, yeah, it brings… put your barriers down and you feel like you want to share, right?" (Caitlin, age 40+).

Caitlin's regular use of pronouns is a way in which she indirectly discloses her identity verbally. The purposeful nature of her pronoun use, alongside the evaluation that she, at times, observes other LGBTQIA+ people employing gender-neutral terms instead, further demonstrates that Caitlin places significance on challenging heteronormative assumptions and creating spaces to have meaningful discussions around gender and sexuality. Once again, the indirect verbal approach to gender removes the onus of making direct statements about one's identity and serves as a tool for normalising diversity when included in a conversation. As Caitlin goes on to explain, the use of identity language, such as pronouns, is also a helpful signifier within the LGBTQIA+ community. The inclusion of pronouns, whether one's own or a partner's, signals to other LGBTQIA+ people that they are in a safe environment with other community members, a notion that was also discussed by Rapata in their interview.

Erin discusses how the context of insider and outsider status can determine the use of language or willingness to engage in deeper conversations:

> "Um, just if I'm feeling safer, and I'm with people who I know, um, understand it a little bit more than yeah, I'll be a little more open to, yeah, expanding my language or talking about specific things. But, like, you know, if I'm with other trans girls and all that, then that's very easy. And with my house, um, it's very easy and all that. Kind of anywhere outside those two situations, though, becomes quite difficult. Um, yeah, there's not much understanding [laughing]." (Erin, age 20-29).

The insider and outsider effect, that is, whether one belongs to a particular community or not (i.e., homosexual or heterosexual identity), alluded to here can contribute to the types of language used by LGBTQIA+ people. Erin discusses how being around other people who *understand it a little bit more* can aid her in being more open with her language, perhaps in terms of using more community-specific language, such as slang, or drawing on lived experience in discussions. Erin makes a comparison between being with other trans girls or being at home as easy spaces for her to communicate, as opposed to broader social contexts in which she feels that there is less understanding. In alluding to the influence of insider and outsider statuses, Erin has highlighted another way in which community and belonging are significant for LGBTQIA+ people and the challenges specific to diverse identities within heteronormative societies.

Kalia offers an important analysis of the intersectionality of her identities and how her use of language is adaptive to her different environments:

> "The language usage changes greatly depending on what social or cultural environment I am in as my understanding and the way that I configure and express my identity changes based on context. When I am around people of my own or similar ethnic culture, I often use language which is linked with the concepts of sexuality and gender expression within that culture. I have found that […] if I use vocab from culture rather than Western concepts, that this demographic is usually more accepting or willing to engage in dialogue since they have a deep respect for culture, which sits together with their devout religious beliefs. When talking with those outside my culture, as I mentioned before, I usually relate with humour if the person seems like an ally or [is] just open to discussion." (Kalia, age 20-29).

Kalia reflects on how her cultural and LGBTQIA+ identities intersect when contextualised in her language use, which draws upon the previously discussed theme of the ecology of identity. Kalia's notion that her *understanding* and *expression* of her identity change *based on context* highlights the significance of cultural LGBTQIA+ experiences. The adaptation of language to draw upon cultural understandings of gender and sexuality is seen as more appropriate and conducive to acceptance or willingness to engage, further demonstrating the nuances of LGBTQIA+ identities and the inseparability of gender and sexuality from the sum of identity. Kalia's experience with adaptive intersectional identity maintenance may reflect the Letting In framework (Nakhid et al., 2022) more than Westernised understandings of 'coming out' practices in her consideration of and value she places on culturally appropriate disclosure.

Finally, Rapata offers another insightful reflection on how their intersectional identity contributes to their use of body language when communicating:

> "But in terms of, like, with your use of using language, um… because this is also something on the side that I've been looking into as well, which is an autism diagnosis. So, the kind of mirroring body language and things like that have become so ingrained and so natural, I guess, with how I am in social… social situations. So, a lot of times, if I'm talking to someone and mirroring their behaviour. With, say, a male, they might interpret it as being… that I'm flirting with them. Not feigning interest in what they're saying. But I guess mirroring their level of interest in it and kind of going with the… I guess those

> social prompts and cues that they're… they're giving me. So, rather than interpreting them as, I guess, as a neuro-typical would, I kind of mirror it back to them at that same kind of level in intensity. So, that's kind of caused some interesting situations where people have thought I've been flirting with them when I definitely haven't been." (Rapata, age 20-29).

The use of body language, as well as other non-verbal communication, was seen as a key form of disclosure for many participants in this research. However, Rapata's reflection highlights how non-verbal disclosure techniques can be complex for some LGBTQIA+ people. The intersection of being LGBTQIA+ and experiencing autism can make disclosures complicated, both in reading the body language and social cues of others and accurately demonstrating non-verbal cues oneself. By recalling moments when mirroring someone's behaviour led to miscommunication regarding their LGBTQIA+ identity, Rapata has demonstrated how the language of disclosure can, at times, be unclear and difficult to navigate.

All five participants examined within this subtheme recalled ways verbal and non-verbal language contribute to their self-disclosures. Prominent topics included the importance of normalising diversity, the benefits of non-verbal and indirect disclosures, and how intersectional identities influence the use of language. Together, these five reflections demonstrate how consequential language, in its many forms, is for expressing LGBTQIA+ identities.

The Language of Non-Disclosure

When reflecting on moments in which they chose not to self-disclose their identity and how others' use of language contributes to their disclosure decision-making process, many participants described how non-disclosure is often a form of safety and involves withholding lived experiences that would signal diversity. Many of the participants discussed how the choice not to disclose their LGBTQIA+ identity was often informed by the conclusions drawn from evaluating someone else's language, both verbal and non-verbal, as well as the environment around them. Interestingly, a generational difference appeared, with many of the older participants stating that they no longer cared about others' acceptance of or opinions regarding their LGBTQIA+ identities. However, the use of language as an evaluation tool remained for these participants.

Rapata describes how they rely on interpreting signals of acceptance or disapproval to determine the safety of social interactions:

> "Like, I'd say, if I was with some friends, or there was another group of people nearby, that were, say, with a like, same-sex partner or something like that. Like, I noticed whoever I was with side eyeing them, or something like that, like, um… like, I'd be more… like, I wouldn't feel comfortable. […] So, it's kind of… I guess, kind of going back to that, like, safety of it. Like, if I notice someone's got those, kind of… I guess this would be kind of called, like, microaggressions, I guess. Then it's something I might pick up, but also, as being possibly autistic, that's not something [I] might not necessarily pick up as well because it's a social cue. So, it's kind of like, if I do notice it, then I'm like, "Okay, that must be obvious enough that they're not even trying to hide it.'" (Rapata, age 20-29).

Although Rapata discussed throughout their interview that they are comfortable disclosing their LGBTQIA+ identity in most situations and that they place little significance on whether others accept their identity, the social monitoring described above indicates that reading cues are still an important tool. Referring to *microaggressions*, Rapata discusses how these social cues inform the level of comfort they would feel in disclosing their own identity and potentially facing those behaviours directly. Interestingly, Rapata again discusses how experiencing autism can be a barrier to reading social or physical cues of acceptance or disapproval, which may mean that they might miss important safety indications. On the other hand, the notion that those cues *must be obvious enough* for them to be able to read indicates that the person likely is not even trying to hide them, thereby becoming a safety signal in itself.

Jamie discusses how language goes beyond just words, with tone being an important indicator of how their identity may be received:

> "There's a lot of things. Um, obviously, I've got an innate aversion to people who are kind of conservative. Um, not necessarily immediately cutting them out. But obviously, it tends to be where a lot of hate comes from. And if someone I find is very, very loud and very… easily frustrated, I'm probably not going to be quick to tell them anything. […] Um, I don't know about words, but more like tone. I think a lot can be derived from how someone says certain sentences or phrases. Like how they are when they're frustrated or are when they're happy. I think tone is a big key for me." (Jamie, age 19 or younger).

The notion that reading someone's tone to assess the potential level of acceptance of LGBTQIA+ identities is an interesting use of language for both disclosure and non-disclosure. Jamie's reflection that *a lot can be derived from how someone says certain sentences or phrases* perhaps dives deeper into communication around identity, in that vocabulary, which is often socialised to reflect particular messages, may not accurately represent someone's true thoughts about a topic. In comparison, tone and body language may offer subconscious cues. Additionally, the assertion that if someone is *very, very loud appears* to signal to Jamie that there is a potential for aggression or confrontation that may inform non-disclosure.

In reflecting on the connotations associated with identity language, Daniela discusses her difficulty in feeling comfortable accepting particular identity labels:

> "In fact, I have a lot of issues with the word lesbian now, do you know? Like, I've met these women, these people the other day because they are doing some research around [redacted work information]. And they are, you know, kind of around your age, you know, much younger than me. And I was like, 'Man, I'm not a lesbian here.' I'm like, 'I'm just, I'm queer.' […] That probably, like, the word lesbian association with, like, anti-trans… And it's taking me, like, 50 years to be a lesbian. And now it's like, 'That's wrong.' And I'm like, 'Okay!'. Like, so I use a lot, for some reason, the word 'Gay', but you know, then I kind of… yeah, then I don't really want men always to be kind of the protagonist of all the stories [laughing]. Like, I kind of, I had this discussion with [redacted] because I'm, like, 'Man, nobody's a cool lesbian, like, how are we going to retrieve the word?' (Daniela, age 40+).

Daniela's reflection on modern social connotations that reflect ideologies of minority hate groups within the LGBTQIA+ community highlights the challenges of adopting standard labels. While Daniela feels she has reached a place of acceptance and embodiment of her LGBTQIA+ identity, she now feels conflicted about how her adoption of the term 'lesbian' will be perceived by others, leading her to choose a label deemed more socially accepted. Furthermore, she underscores the complexities of umbrella terminologies that are often adopted by a range of diverse LGBTQIA+ identities yet traditionally hold associations with men and masculinity. Daniela's assertion that she does not really want men/masculinity to be *the protagonists of all the stories* reflects the dominance of the patriarchy that exists even within the LGBTQIA+ community.

Kalia explains why she considers the choice not to disclose her LGBTQIA+ identity to her grandparents to be significant:

> "I believe I also place a lot of significance when not disclosing, as with my grandparents. I don't feel the need to tell them as I know they are very religious, but that they love me, so [they] would still want to be around me. Additionally, I see no need to correct them when they share their hope for me to marry a man and perform religious rites within the church as I know they want the best for me in the way they see fit but that they wouldn't [indecipherable] me into anything." (Kalia, Diary Entries, age 20-29).

Kalia's decision not to disclose her LGBTQIA+ identity or correct her grandparents' heteronormative assumptions once again reflects her culture and is best understood within the Letting in Framework (Nakhid et al., 2022). Her assertion that, although religious, she knows her grandparents love her and would still want to be around her reflects that she has evaluated the benefits and costs of disclosure for both herself and her grandparents, whom she respects. It appears that Kalia has made the conscious decision that her familial relationships and culture are of greater significance to her than having her grandparents know about her LGBTQIA+ identity. This compromise of intersectional identities aligns with the Letting in Framework and its cultural findings (Nakhid et al., 2022).

Finally, Adrian encapsulates the concept of identity maintenance well in his discussion of who he shares his identity with and how he may do so:

> "Like, if I feel comfortable with someone, I can be myself, I can… and I can constantly disclose. Or… or I can just talk about my life and my queer experiences. Whereas, I guess, maybe non-disclosure for me is not talking about queer experiences. And less about, 'I'm gay', but I might not say, like, 'Oh, you know, I was talking, you know, [to] my lesbian friends' or whatever. Or 'Oh, you know, I was at Winter Pride?'. You know, maybe I'm not necessarily explicitly stating the queer experiences that I'm having with people that I don't know, don't feel comfortable with. Um… and, actually, I don't necessarily owe that to them. Yeah. It's like, actually, I choose who I want to tell these things to…" (Adrian, age 30-39).

The reflection that non-disclosure for Adrian may include *not talking about queer experiences* sums up how one's own use of language may serve as a non-disclosure tool. The

withholding of queer lived experiences, as per the examples Adrian provides, demonstrates a way in which non-disclosure can also be purposefully indirect. Not only can direct identity statements, like 'I'm gay', be avoided, but indirect statements that infer an LGBTQIA+ identity or association with the LGBTQIA+ community may also be withheld to ensure safety and comfort. The notion that Adrian does not *owe* the disclosure of his identity to anyone and his ability to choose who he *wants to tell these things* encapsulates the concept and ideology of identity maintenance well and demonstrates a strong sense of agency.

The five experiences examined in this sub-theme speak to the differing ways language can inform non-disclosures. The reflections provided by participants demonstrate how language can be a beneficial tool in identity maintenance, from reading non-verbal cues to the complex meanings of vocabulary to the agency in choosing not to disclose. These experiences highlight how language expands beyond simple spoken communication and illustrate the additional labour and vigilance required of LGBTQIA+ people when interacting with others.

Summary of Theme

The Language of Identity theme has outlined how language, in its various forms, may be utilised in the processes of self-disclosure and non-disclosure. The language of disclosure sub-theme includes nuanced recollections of non-verbal cues and the indirect use of language to signify identity, the purposeful use of language to normalise diversity, and the influence of intersectionality on language use. The language of non-disclosure sub-theme encompasses language as an identity maintenance tool, the importance of reading non-verbal language cues, and the nuances of identity language. Both themes demonstrate the significance of language and highlight the agency that LGBTQIA+ people have in determining who they will disclose their identity to and how they will do so. These findings will be discussed in more depth in the following chapter.

Chapter Conclusion

Chapter five has continued exploring how participants in this research interpret their experiences of identity self-disclosure and non-disclosure, the social factors influencing the decision to self-disclose one's gender and/or sexual identity, and how language shapes identity self-disclosure and non-disclosure. In doing so, two overarching themes that emerged throughout the participants' interviews have been examined. The first theme, The Ecology of Identity, drew upon three sub-themes aligned with Bronfenbrenner's (1977) Ecological

Systems Theory: microsystems, mesosystems, and macrosystems. The second theme, The Language of Identity, highlights the significance of language, in its many forms, in the disclosure decision-making process by examining the sub-themes of the language of disclosure and the language of non-disclosure. Combined, these themes demonstrate the intrapersonal—and, at times, interpersonal—nature of identity maintenance through the lens of LGBTQIA+ lived experiences.

Chapter Six: Discussion

Chapter Summary

Like many identities, minority gender and sexual identities are embodied, practised, and, at times, hidden throughout one's life course. A minority gender and/or sexual identity can be the cause of celebration and despondency, belonging and exclusion, empowerment and disenfranchisement, yet the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ people are far from binary nor monolithic. Those who experience a minority gender and/or sexual identity know intimately that the process of self-disclosure is a complex, repetitive, and life-long process that extends far beyond their initial 'coming out' experience.

This chapter will provide a more in-depth discussion of key findings presented in Chapters Four and Five, using the same themes—The Temporality of Identity, The Tax of Identity, The Ecology of Identity, and The Language of Identity—woven together with supporting literature.

The Temporality of Identity

The findings of The Temporality of Identity theme demonstrate that while there are some apparent similarities in the experiences of LGBTQIA+ identities, there is no one pathway, timeline, or standard of achievement that can adequately accommodate the nuances and diversity of the LGBTQIA+ community. While some participants undertook exploration and self-acceptance of their LGBTQIA+ identities in their youth, other participants experienced these same identity development stages later in their lives. Some participants rejected the dominant notions of binary genders, identity labels, and other identity socialisations, leaving them outside the bounds of prominent identity development models altogether. Many participants experienced an ebb-and-flow effect in their identity development, returning to stages as required, while others omitted expected stages irrelevant to their development entirely. Furthermore, some participants introduced unique stages, such as grieving the potential of a queer youth and the experiences they may have had if they had come out during that period of their lives. These experiences allude to the significance of temporality in developing and embodying an LGBTQIA+ identity as well as the non-linearity and fluidity of identity. To contextualise this cohort's experiences of temporality, the concepts of queer life courses and identity socialisation will be explored.

In addressing the disconnect between traditional identity development models and lived experiences, Halberstam (2004) proposed the concept of *queer time* to account for unscripted life courses that decentre heteronormativity. Specifically, queer time refers to models of

temporality that depart from the expected temporality of reproduction, family, longevity, and inheritance (Halberstam, 2004). Not all the participants of this cohort departed significantly from the strict structures of heteronormative temporality, aligning with the flexibility Halberstam (2004) constructs around queer life courses in that they are not necessarily mutually exclusive from expected heteronormative life courses. However, many participants did experience a disconnect from the strict expectations of temporality regarding their identity development and ongoing identity maintenance. Identity development is widely considered, both in traditional development models and broader social ideologies, to be a process that is undergone and achieved during adolescence, with successful adulthood requiring a secure sense of self (Erikson, 1968). Yet, the experiences of this cohort failed to verify this ideology.

Adrian reflected on being cognisant of his LGBTQIA+ identity from a young age but did not come out and integrate this identity until he reached adulthood. Caitlin spoke of being aware of her LGBTQIA+ identity in her adolescence yet followed a heteronormative life course that included having children within an opposite-sex marriage before 'coming out' again as an adult. Daniela spoke of her numerous ebb-and-flow experiences with her LGBTQIA+ identity beginning in her youth and continuing into adulthood. Each of these experiences stands in stark contrast to traditional stage models as well as heteronormative life courses in which abstinence, finding a monogamous opposite-sex partner, entering a life-long marriage, raising children within a nuclear family/whānau structure, and enjoying the reward of grandchildren in one's later years, are considered vital achievement standards of adulthood (Erikson, 1968; Halberstam, 2004). In relation to the concept of identity maintenance, the most prominent departure from experiences of heterosexual life courses is perhaps the necessity of continued self-disclosures. Unlike heterosexual life courses in which self-disclosure of sexuality and/or gender is, in most, if not all cases, never required due to heterosexuality being considered the default experience (Eder, 2022; Guittar & Rayburn, 2016), the experiences of this cohort demonstrate the often-unavoidable requirement of continuously declaring their departure from the social norms. This aligns with the findings of Eder (2022) who noted that their participants held a shared assumption that heterosexual adulthood was the taken-for-granted norm that they considered obvious and common sense. Eder elaborated stating that heteronormative adulthood is "often referred to fleetingly or implicitly, with the assumption that everyone would know and recognise this version of adulthood" (2022, p. 92).

Further complicating temporality, LGBTQIA+ identities and queer life courses are often contextualised in opposition to cisgender, heterosexual life experiences, such as marriage and reproduction (Halberstam, 2004), in favour of narratives of promiscuity, irresponsibility, and relational dysfunction (Eder, 2022). Yet the lived experiences of this cohort failed to reflect this. Most participants discussed their committed, romantic relationships at some stage during their interview. Three participants noted that they identified as demisexual or asexual—therefore contradicting the hypersexualised ideologies around LGBTQIA+ identities—and one participant was a primary parent. The fact that at least half of this research's cohort fell outside of assumed behavioural characteristics of LGBTQIA+ people demonstrates once again that minority gender and/or sexual identities are not homogenous, nor are they necessarily antithetical to life events that are commonly associated with cis-heterosexuality. These findings are also supported by that of Eder (2022) who found that many of their participants' queer life experiences were parallel to those expected of heteronormativity, with goals of marriage or monogamous relationships and parenthood not considered unobtainable to women who are attracted to women.

While the respectability of heteronormative life courses are heavily woven throughout broader society (Halberstam, 2004), queer life courses remain limited in their exposure. Ahmed (2006) highlights how, for minority sexualities, the alternative life courses experienced are ambiguous in comparison to the heteronormative life courses that have been demonstrated to them throughout their youth. Furthermore, Ahmed (2006) notes that it is significantly easier to navigate heterosexual life courses due to the heteronormative nature of social systems and institutions. Similarly, for transgender people, the socialisation of cisgender life courses can result in the systemic erasure of transgender and non-binary identities and their corresponding life courses. Phipps & Blackall (2023) define cisnormativity as an unspoken, prominent social ideology that favours the sex assigned at birth over self-assigned gender identities, ultimately rewarding the conformity of gender norms. As with the experience of sexual minorities, diversion from cisnormative life courses may result in psychological consequences, such as the fear of one's identity and the repercussions of that identity (Williams, 2020). In considering this, the lack of diverse socialisation during one's youth may account, at least in part, for the relatively common experience of later-in-life gender and sexuality identity development amongst generations who experienced a significant lack of public representation of diversity, coupled with vast discrimination for the minimal number of visible LGBTQIA+ people. Furthermore, the lack of achievement of cis-heteronormative life course standards may be an additional source of

discrimination, social rejection, and interpersonal struggles with self-acceptance for LGBTQIA+ people, as they are seen to live outside the bounds of social acceptability.

Garrett offered a moment of self-reflection during his interview that demonstrates the self-doubt and psychological toll that not living up to socialised gender expectations can have on LGBTQIA+ people. Garrett notes that in addition to feeling guilty when self-disclosing his transmasculine identity and understanding why people would assume his identity incorrectly during his intra-transition, he also noted that he wished his transition could go faster. While not directly stated, this longing for a sped-up timeline alludes to a sense of anxiety around returning to a traditional temporality, coupled with his transition from the social expectations of femininity to those of masculinity. The re-emergence of puberty characteristics of hormone treatment and the delayed achievement of binary adulthood is a synchronous experience for transgender and gender non-binary people that invites further life course research.

Building on this examination of the socialisation of acceptable life courses, recent research has highlighted the psychological impacts of perceived failure to meet adulthood markers on young adults. Culatta & Clay-Warner (2021) found that falling behind expected adulthood accomplishment markers—such as leaving the family/whānau home, achieving full-time employment and financial stability, and becoming a parent—is associated with increased anxiety and depression. Specifically, falling behind one's expectations of achieving adulthood was associated with anxiety, while falling behind the perceived expectations of others—including society, peers, and parental expectations—was associated with higher levels of depression (Culatta & Clay-Warner, 2021). While these findings are not specific to the LGBTQIA+ population, when taken in consideration with Meyer's Minority Stress Theory, it is reasonable to predict that the social pressures of heterosexual life courses and the lack of modelling and social acceptance of queer life courses would result in additional psychological distress amongst LGBTQIA+ people.

While some progress has been made in the visibility and social acceptance of diversity in recent decades, the prominence of traditional identity development models that include achievement standards has served to oversimplify and homogenise LGBTQIA+ experiences through strict constructions of what a completed identity should look like. Furthermore, achievement standards universalise the idea that a complete LGBTQIA+ identity is a possible outcome rather than a continuously evolving process, such as the concept of identity maintenance. This perhaps reflects the deep history of pathologising minority gender and sexuality in order to understand diversity within the right/wrong binary of essentialism. In viewing LGBTQIA+ lived experiences through the framework of heteronormativity, the

validity of diverse gender and sexual identities and experiences is erased to make way for an artificial set of universal benchmarks that may be unobtainable or irrelevant to LGBTQIA+ people. For example, a commonly posed question to people in same-sex relationships is, "Who is the man and who is the woman in your relationship?" This question assumes and enforces a strict binary understanding of relationship structures and the gender roles that constitute acceptable relationships. Anyone who practices relationships outside of the bounds of opposite-sex partnerships is othered. They are viewed as lacking the requirements of 'masculine' and 'feminine' identity roles that are assumed to be synonymous with romantic connection. During his interview, Rashaan recalled how a brash coworker's questioning of *who the woman was* in his same-sex relationship left him shaken and offended. In attempting to not make a scene within his workplace, Rishaan calmly challenged the coworker's heterosexual and patriarchal assumptions that there is a feminine role within his relationship and highlighted that he and his partner are equals rather than imbalanced by traditional 'masculine' and 'feminine' gender roles. The social standards that informed the coworker's relationship ideologies demonstrate how cultural, social, and emotional contexts that inform LGBTQIA+ identities and experiences are often ignored. Additionally, the possibility that LGBTQIA+ people may find fulfilling, healthy lives while not conforming to expected embodiments and characteristics of identities and relationships is disregarded.

Although modern minority identity development models—such as Orne's (2011) Strategic Outness—allow space for non-linearity, many of the public ideologies that surround LGBTQIA+ identities are formulated on the foundations of traditional models and heteronormative understandings of life courses. The Temporality of Identity theme has continued to support the flexibility and fluidity of identity development through highlighting the ways in which participants of this cohort experienced several effects of time on their identities. By examining the temporality of LGBTQIA+ identities through the frameworks of life courses and socialisation, a greater understanding of how Aotearoa New Zealand's LGBTQIA+ population may develop and experience their gender and/or sexual identities over time has been gained. In building this knowledge, the social influences of identity construction have been examined, including the lack of diverse identity role modelling and the problematic practice mapping of heterosexual life courses onto LGBTQIA+ lived experiences. A prominent and potentially novel finding that invited further examination lies in the psychological implication of the perception of falling behind amongst LGBTQIA+ individuals—specifically transgender and gender non-binary people for whom physical

transitioning may result in synchronistic and sequential delays in expected life course timelines.

The Tax of Identity

Meyer's (2003) Minority Stress Theory provided a useful framework for examining the mental, emotional, and educational taxes felt by members of this cohort as a result of their LGBTQIA+ identities. The Minority Stress Theory conceptualises the psychological consequences of minority gender and sexual identities, stating that LGBTQIA+ people experience chronic stress due to social stigma, prejudice, and discrimination (Meyer, 2003). The experiences presented in The Tax of Identity section of Chapter Four demonstrate how various interpersonal processes and intrapersonal interactions can result in mental, emotional, and educational taxes for LGBTQIA+ people. Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that many participants possessed a high level of emotional intelligence, including awareness of their emotions and mental states and how their identity-based interactions influenced these. Viewed through the framework of the Minority Stress Theory, these experiences can be contextually understood, providing an opportunity to examine the many sophisticated techniques that LGBTQIA+ people utilise to manage societal harm and adapt to additional psychosocial labour.

A strength of Meyer's (2003) Minority Stress Theory is the recognition that identity stress can be a result of both direct and indirect experiences of discrimination. That is, LGBTQIA+ people can experience identity stress from anticipating stigmatisation, prejudice, and discrimination. Engaging in environments in which LGBTQIA+ people perceive their identities could result in negative responses or rejection—even with a lack of explicit discrimination—can result in identity stress. Meyer (2003) notes that this can result in a constant state of hypervigilance, increasing emotional taxes such as anxiety, and is reflective of the experiences of this cohort. Many participants spoke about practising regular self-reflection, individually and with other LGBTQIA+ people. Their reflections often included a form of critical consideration of both the self and LGBTQIA+ people as a collective with shared experiences. For example, Caitlin reflected on the privileges that having children within a heterosexual family/whānau structure has afforded her, noting that her friends who became parents within a same-sex family/whānau structure experienced forms of discrimination that she was aware of but did not experience herself. This example demonstrates how many behaviours and credos formed through self- and group reflections were learned in response to bearing witness to others' harmful experiences and exposure to

stigmatising environments. As a result, LGBTQIA+ people are socialised to fear and adopt protective coping mechanisms in their interactions with society (Meyer, 2003). These taxations existed not only as an individual burden but also as a collective burden, demonstrating how the process of anticipated discrimination traverses individual and group identities. Seen amongst this cohort, personal burdens of identity included behaviours such as passing, self-hyperawareness, social vigilance, and engagement in the education of others regarding LGBTQIA+ identities and experiences. For example, Daniela discussed how she felt that passing as heterosexual early in a competitive and often conservative career was beneficial. However, she now attempts to mentor and educate as much as possible to challenge the lack of diversity within her field. Kalia discussed how being *out in the wild* of public space can result in a heightened need for environmental awareness and social vigilance to ensure that safety measures are in place. The participants of this research associated each of these identity-based social behaviours with increased individual taxations of fear, stress, anxiety, and frustration. For example, Erin discussed how disclosing her identity causes a lot of stress and takes mental preparation. She also noted that she is *friggin' terrified all the time*, demonstrating how prominent psychological taxes can be in navigating a LGBTQIA+ identity. Furthermore, participants spoke of how these practices became shared knowledge of what to expect in public and private social interactions, culminating in a collective identity tax through membership to a marginalised community and the additional labour required to navigate and reduce social stigmatisation. For example, during her interview, Daniela spoke about how knowledge of LGBTQIA+ people's experiences determined factors such as where she was willing to immigrate, with shared information about public safety and political climates being key in her considerations. These examples echo Meyer's (2003) concept of the learnt nature of stigmatisation, with a direct source of discrimination being unnecessary as the "threat is in the air" (Steele, 1997, p. 613).

Identity maintenance thus becomes a robust concept for understanding how LGBTQIA+ people form adaptive coping mechanisms to manage their daily interactions with heteronormative society, as well as examining how the identity maintenance process provides a pathway to reducing the additional labour of diverse gender and sexual identities. Through the deliberate management of one's identity, LGBTQIA+ people gain agency over when, where, how, and to whom they will disclose their gender and/or sexual identity. The contextual nature of identity self-disclosures becomes central to the deliberate management of identities. This context includes the ecological environment of the potential disclosure and the social considerations that may hinder or support disclosures. Furthermore, identity

maintenance allows for considering the overarching motivational factor of identity self-disclosure and evaluates the benefits and costs of doing so. That is, what does one gain or lose from providing others access to their identity, be it at the individual (mental and emotional taxes) or collective level (educational taxes)? By deliberately choosing not to self-disclose one's identity, LGBTQIA+ people can manage their daily engagements with numerous environments and situations that are incongruent with diverse identities, offering an adaptive coping mechanism for avoiding discrimination. These findings are supported by the work of Brumbaugh-Johnson & Hull, (2019) who note that, for transgender people, actual and anticipated appraisals of their identity significantly affect the decision of how, when, and to whom to disclose. They also note that the level of one's outness does little to reduce the evaluation of appraisals, with those who deem themselves to be 'completely out' continuing to anticipate and assess social situations in their disclosure decision-making process (Brumbaugh-Johnson & Hull, 2019). Despite identity maintenance functioning as an additional form of labour that their heterosexual peers do not experience, it remains a vital tool for the LGBTQIA+ community. As Guittar & Rayburn (2016) note:

> "If sexual minorities were no longer stigmatised in society, coming out would become a non-issue—that is, there would be nothing socially significant to "out". Until sexuality ceases to be a socially divisive characteristic, [LGBTQIA+] people will continue to manage careers of coming out." (p. 354).

While serving as a useful framework to understanding the additional taxations of LGBTQIA+ identities, the findings of this thesis expand on Meyer's Minority Stress Theory by examining how educational labour exists as a tax for LGBTQIA+ people. The paradoxical nature of engaging in education is seen throughout the examples provided by participants in Chapter Four. On one hand, taking on the role of educator functions as an individualistic burden that often requires vulnerability in disclosing lived experiences and challenging of heteronormative assumptions and beliefs. On the other hand, education is seen as a powerful tool for social progression towards equality for LGBTQIA+ people, which many of the participants actively engaged in within their close networks and the broader public. Rishaan discussed how education was both frustrating and a necessary task of his LGBTQIA+ identity, noting that *it is something that we have to deal with […] because not everyone is as educated […] as we'd lik*e. He reasoned that due to a lack of knowledge about LGBTQIA+ identities and experiences amongst heterosexual people, *we educate them*. Adrian recalled an example of how he felt the need to interject into a conversation to offer lived experience that challenged assumptions around the appropriateness of diversity education. Adrian placed

himself in a place of vulnerability to do so, offering up details about his experience of LGBTQIA+ identity development. From the perspective of collective benefit, Connor discussed how he hope that people's interactions with them and the education that they provided would help other heterosexual people have better interactions with other LGBTQIA+ people, noting that they hoped that *if they fuck up with me, then the next person, they might fuck up a little bit less*. These examples, provided in Chapter Four, demonstrate how identity taxes and related stressors can extend beyond the psychological considerations of the Minority Stress Theory, and begin to shed light on the broader psychosocial implications of minority gender and sexual identities.

A second topic found throughout The Tax of Identity findings was what has been labelled the 'disclosure imperative'. McLean (2007) defines the disclosure imperative as the positioning of identity disclosure as 'good' and non-disclosure as 'bad' amongst identity development discourse. Commonly, identity disclosure—more specifically, the initial coming out process—is positioned as a vital stage of minority gender and sexual identity development (McLean, 2007). Self-disclosure of one's LGBTQIA+ identity is viewed as a healthy and necessary process in integrating one's gender and/or sexual identity into the broader sense of self and embodying a complete LGBTQIA+ identity (McLean, 2007). However, this imperative of disclosing one's identity, stemming from the ideologies of identity development models, is flawed by lived experiences. The disclosure imperative denotes that LGBTQIA+ people are required to either live in or out of the metaphorical closet and does little to account for the nuanced experiences of identity maintenance seen in participants' experiences. An example of the disclosure imperative in effect within this cohort can be drawn from Caitlin's experiences with not actively disclosing her LGBTQIA+ identity in her professional environment, perhaps due to having highly religious coworkers. Although Caitlin notes that her coworkers are *amazingly open* despite their age and religious ties, she reflected on her workplace being one of the only spaces she has not self-disclosed, and the sense of shame she feels about that. This sense of shame highlights the either/or imperative that has been constructed around LGBTQIA+ identities. The lack of disclosure within one specific environment of her life in no way invalidates her LGBTQIA+ identity any more than a singular disclosure would validate it. Yet Caitlin acknowledges that there is, to some degree, an impact of non-disclosure in that she feels shame for having not actively chosen to disclose her LGBTQIA+ identity, perhaps reflecting the disclosure imperative that you must be "completely out" to earn validation of your identity.

The disclosure imperative thus becomes a harmful ideology due to its binary nature that suggests that people cannot fully embody an LGBTQIA+ identity and practice identity maintenance. Conceptualising identity disclosures within this binary reinforces problematic and unrealistic standards of universality and outdated pathologisation of gender and sexual minority identities that fall outside of the theoretical ideals of 'correct' LGBTQIA+ identity enactment. Resulting in additional social stigmatisation of LGBTQIA+ people and additional minority stress when LGBTQIA+ people internalise the notion that non-disclosure equates to inauthenticity and invalidation. As a concept, the disclosure imperative negates the complexities of LGBTQIA+ people's everyday interpersonal and environmental interactions, as well as the nuanced contexts of those experiences.

Aligned to the inaccuracy of the disclosure imperative, Brumbaugh-Johnson & Hull (2019) discuss how good mental health is often positioned as exclusive to those who have engaged in disclosing their transgender identity. They note that positioning complete disclosure—that is, disclosure to everyone in one's life—as conductive of greater psychological health compared to transgender peers who are only out to select people fails to account for differing levels of identity acceptance in varying environments and situations (Brumbaugh-Johnson & Hull, 2019). Enforcing the disclosure imperative on transgender identities ignores the fact that many social environments remain harmful to transgender identities. Furthermore, the disclosure imperative oversimplifies the vast and highly nuanced experiences of the many embodiments of gender non-conformity.

For example, Garrett discussed that while he currently considers continued disclosure of his transmasculine identity necessary during intra-transition to receive identity affirmation, this is not an easy experience, especially when considering established relationships. He goes on to discuss how he feels a sense of guilt about self-disclosure and second guesses if disclosure is beneficial when he will have to continue to engage with the practice with different people. Context then becomes important, as rates of disclosure and the techniques employed to do so, may vary greatly across time and ecological environments. That is, disclosing to one's family/whānau may be considered important and require repeated disclosures early in transition when social disclosures may appear less important. However, this may reverse the further one is into their transition, rendering the disclosure imperative inadequate to account for the nuances of lived experience.

In opposition to the disclosure imperative, many participants spoke about how they viewed continued self-disclosure as not always necessary, again, citing the importance of context in determining the importance of disclosure. Kalia, for example, discussed how she

valued the ability to purposefully not disclose her LGBTQIA+ identity to her grandparents, citing the importance of her family's interwoven religious and cultural identities. Kalia's approach to identity maintenance aligns closely with the Letting In framework (Nakhid et al., 2022), which places value on protecting familial connections and cultural traditions and rejects the ideology that disclosure is compulsory or universal. Erin discussed during her interview that she will only disclose to those closest to her and therefore considers necessary, such as family and friends. Adrian discusses how he feels that he does not *necessarily owe that [disclosure]* to others, rather he *choose[s] who I want to tell these things to*. Thus, identity maintenance, including culturally specific practices such as letting in, counters the disclosure imperative as a beneficial and empowering form of self- and collective agency. By acknowledging that identity self-disclosures are highly contextual and relational in nature, LGBTQIA+ people can challenge the dichotomy of right/wrong ways of embodying LGBTQIA+ identities. By reclaiming the agency to choose environments, situations, and audiences to whom one discloses, the binary of being in or out of "the closet" is rendered void. In place of the disclosure imperative, diverse identities can be understood and celebrated for their continued etymological nature.

The Tax of Identity theme has presented new and interesting insights about this cohort's felt repercussions of their LGBTQIA+ identities. The mental and emotional taxes that participants of this cohort identified have been framed through Meyer's (2003) Minority Stress Theory, providing continued insight into the additional stress that LGBTQIA+ people experience in their day-to-day lives and the sophisticated strategies that they have developed to address societal challenges. Expanding on the Minority Stress Theory, this theme has highlighted the ways in which the education of heterosexual people regarding LGBTQIA+ identities and experiences can also serve as a source of stress for LGBTQIA+ people, individually and collectively, inviting further examination of psychosocial contributors to minority stress. Finally, The Tax of Identity theme has examined the ways in which identity maintenance can counteract the harm posed by the disclosure imperative, centring the importance of context and restoring personal agency to LGBTQIA+ people in their engagement with numerous environments.

The Ecology of Identity

Bronfenbrenner's (1977) Ecological Model provided a useful framework for examining how differing environments influence both the identity development and identity maintenance practices of this cohort. Aligning with the principles of community psychology,

the Ecological Model emphasises the synergistic nature of people and their various environments, providing a broader understanding of the nuances of identity maintenance for LGBTQIA+ people. The experiences presented in The Ecology of Identity section of Chapter Five demonstrate how various environments influenced the formation of this cohort's LGBTQIA+ identities and how they continued to manage these identities throughout their life courses. Viewed through the lens of the Ecological Model, these experiences illustrated how personal identities are not formed in isolation. Rather, they are shaped by the multiple nestled ecological systems that encompass individuals, including the microsystems, mesosystems, and macrosystems examined within this thesis.

The most prominent environment that participants of this cohort discussed was the familial spaces of their youth, specifically their relationships with their parents. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the impact of one's upbringing on one's identity formation was a common message, with many discussing how the level of support they received within this microsystem influenced if they felt acceptance and security in exploring their LGBTQIA+ identities. Jamie, for example, spoke about how their mother, influenced by her own accepting upbringing, created an accepting home environment where Jamie could freely and confidently explore their gender. Jamie specifically noted how their home environment resulted in a lack of fear of coming out, as they could share the identity exploration experience with their mother. Conversely, Rishaan talked about how his father's expectations of him adhering to heteronormative life courses resulted in him feeling like he had let his father down. Despite demonstrating emotional intelligence in his understanding of his father's worldview and expectations of him, Rishaan highlighted how the lack of acceptance placed a significant strain on his relationship with his father.

In spite of transdisciplinary interest shown to the influence of familial relationships in identity development, which has led to an extensive number of studies, there remains limited empirical research that has examined the relation between parental support of minority gender and sexual identities. Of the few studies that have emerged, parental acceptance or rejection has been found to be important to identity affirmation and self-acceptance. In exploring the role of family/whānau influence in identity profiles of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) youth, Bregman et al. (2013) noted that, although the period of adolescence typically signals an increase in independence from one's parents, the acceptance and support of one's LGB identity was a "critical protective resource" (p. 426) during their identity development process. The findings of Bregman et al's. (2013) study also highlighted that the responses one's family/whānau had were important in forming how youth perceived

themselves and their LGB identity. Specifically, their study found that youth were more likely to feel more positive about their LGB identity when they perceived their parents to be supportive and willing to assist in addressing issues related to their sexual orientation (Bregman et al., 2013).

Findings of recent local quantitative research have explored the perceived rate of parental acceptance amongst Aotearoa New Zealand's LGBTQIA+ community and have highlighted the influence that familial support can have on the psychological well-being of LGBTQIA+ people. The Counting Ourselves survey found that just over half of participants reported that most or all of their families supported them; a statistic also supported by The Manalagi Survey (Thomsen et al., 2023; Veale et al., 2019). Furthermore, the Counting Ourselves survey demonstrated how crucial familial support is for transgender and gender non-binary people, with their findings suggesting that having familial support may play a protective role in reducing suicide attempts:

> "If participants had support for their gender from at least half of their family/whānau they were almost half as likely (9%) to have attempted suicide in the last 12 months compared to those who said most of their family/whānau were unsupportive or very unsupportive (17%)." (Veale et al., 2019).

However, not all local statistics suggest widely available support across families/whānau's in Aotearoa New Zealand. The Identify Survey, for example, noted that while four out of five participants were out to their families, roughly only three-quarters of those participants felt that they had someone within their family/whānau that they could talk to about their LGBTQIA+ identity (Fenaughty et al., 2022). Furthermore, the Identify Survey found that a quarter of participants had family/whānau members who spoke negatively about LGBTQIA+ people; two in five participants had family/whānau who pretended that their rainbow identities were not real; one in five reported rejection from family/whānau members or that family/whānau members distanced themselves from them because of their LGBTQIA+ identity; and two in five transgender and gender non-binary participants had experienced being purposefully misgendered by family/whānau members (Fenaughty et al., 2022). Interestingly, Counting Ourselves also found that older adult participants were less likely to receive support from family/whānau, specifically in the forms of respect, use of their preferred name, and support within social situations (Veale et al., 2019). This generational difference perhaps reflects an influence of recent movements towards social equality on contemporary parenting practices.

Each of these statistics was reflected to some extent in the experiences described by the current research cohort. Erin discussed within her diary entries the difficult relationship she had with her grandmother, who informed Erin that she still loved and supported her but "said some of the worst, most transphobic stuff I've heard in person" (Erin, age 20-29, Diary Entries, p. 1). Kalia discussed how her immediate family were supportive and accepting of her sexuality. However, she noted that her wider family viewed diverse genders and sexuality as okay *as long as it's not […] within [the family]*. Garret discussed the difficulty of having a strained relationship with his mother in which disclosing his transmasculine identity to her would result in *her not caring, but in a bad sense* because *she wouldn't change*. While the space of the family/whānau home is usually associated with initial identity development and the coming out process, these examples also demonstrate how ongoing identity maintenance is also associated with familial relationships—with active labour required by participants to maintain these relationships in the face of discouraging attitudes towards their LGBTQIA+ identities.

A common finding within The Ecology of Identity theme regarding factors that may contribute to a lack of microsystem acceptance of LGBTQIA+ identities was the influence of social constructions of gender and sexuality. When speaking about engaging with their families, friends, or cultural peers, many of the participants recalled times when they felt immense fear about self-disclosing their LGBTQIA+ identity. Often citing the reactions that those close to them would have upon learning that they identified outside of cisgender and/or heterosexuality. While many spoke about arriving at a place where they no longer cared about other's expectations of their gender and/or sexuality, a commonality remained in that there was a period of time in their early LGBTQIA+ identity development in which they faced not living up to these expectations.

The incongruity between the importance of these microsystems and their identities appeared to cause conflict for many of this research's cohort. Participants discussed how expectations held by their parents, cultural and religious associations, and social connections played significant roles in the development, embodiment, and daily practice of their LGBTQIA+ identities. Much of the messaging that surrounded these microsystems reflected socially constructed ideologies around gender and sexuality and the intergenerational socialisation of these identity characteristics. For example, Garret discussed during his interview how his father stated that he would not see transgender people as their true gender "until […] you look like that and you've had […] surgery" (Garret, age 19 or younger, p. 17, lines 646-647). This response led Garret to question what his father's response to his gender

embodiment would be when he came out. Specifically, if his father's perception of gender would result in his identity as transmasculine being ignored or invalidated until he reached a certain level of medical intervention or socially acceptable masculine aesthetic. Kalia discussed how not disclosing to her grandparents, or correcting their heteronormative assumptions, is of great significance to her in maintaining her relationships with them. She noted specifically that she knows that their hopes of her marrying a man come from a place of wanting the best for her rather than homophobic or dismissive intent. Furthermore, Kalia demonstrates an emotional intelligence here in understanding the ways in which generational differences, as well as cultural and religious ideologies, have shaped their perception of heterosexuality as the default sexual identity. Erin discussed within her diary entries how her father's expectations made her concerned about disclosing both her transfeminine and aromantic-asexual identities to him. Regarding her sexuality, Erin noted that her father "really wants to have grandchildren and I have no intention of having any [children]" (Erin, age 20-29, diary entries, p. 1, lines. 36-37). Erin further explained that because her father did not have a good paternal relationship, her father wanted to have a strong relationship with his own son, signifying heavy intergenerational expectations that are interwoven with gender.

Another prominent ecological theme that participants of this cohort discussed was the ways in which broader social influences serve to stigmatise LGBTQIA+ people and shape the way they perceive themselves and their identities. Again, it is little surprise that the society which encompasses an individual has a significant impact on identity formation and ongoing identity maintenance, with the reinforcement of narratives about sexuality and gender being felt through each of the nestled systems within the participant's ecological systems. Many of the participants discussed how socially constructed ideologies—especially those tied to religion, misogyny, and heteronormative social structures—were a source of discrimination at the macrosystem level. Forcible disclosure of identity was seen through multiple participants' recollections. Connor recalled how his healthcare provider unapologetically broke privacy laws when outing his transmasculine identity to his mother, placing him in a position of having little choice but to discuss his LGBTQIA+ identity prior to him being ready to do so. Caitlin discussed during her interview how heterosexuality is privileged within institutions such as education, where school forms assume a mother-father family structure that is often overlooked by those who are unaffected by heteronormativity. Furthermore, public safety and representation within media served as catalysts for heightened fear, anxiety, and hyperawareness amongst participants, resulting in a need for protective identity maintenance strategies (see The Language of Identity discussion). For example, Erin discussed how media

is both detrimental to her mental health and a beneficial tool for understanding how to practice identity maintenance. On the one hand, the media is consumed by extensive negative messaging about LGBTQIA+ identities and the societal dangers of diversity. On the other, this information also serves as a guideline for understanding public safety for those with minority identities, specifically transgender identities, and provides valid information for challenging dismissive narratives that downplay the threat of embodying an identity outside the bounds of cis-heteronormativity.

The influence of macrosystems on LGBTQIA+ health has been explored through several studies. Mustanski et al. (2014) discussed how LGB people have a higher risk of psychiatric disorders, mortality rates, suicide attempts, and substance abuse if they live in societies that lack legal protections and protective social environments and have higher rates of anti-gay prejudice. Clark et al. (2024) found that news or other media that depicted LGBTQIA+ people negatively increased suicidal thinking in the hours following exposure. In seeking an explanation for this finding, Clark et al. (2024) found that concern about rejection or discrimination explained some of the link between exposure to negative news and increased suicidal thinking.

The Ecology of Identity theme has contributed to emerging insights about the development of LGBTQIA+ people through the application of Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems model. In doing so, the findings presented in Chapter Five have highlighted how the decision-making process related to disclosing LGBTQIA+ identities is influenced not only by personal choices but also by societal contexts and dynamics. Aligning with existing research, a key finding of The Ecology of Identity theme is how familial relationships—particularly parental support—have a critical role in shaping the experience of LGBTQIA+ people. Despite an increasing number of studies exploring the importance of family/whānau in the affirmation of LGBTQIA+ identities, gaps remain in exploring the nuances of parental support. The current research has sought to link local quantitative studies, such as the Counting Ourselves and Identify Survey, with the experiences shared by this cohort to emphasise the role that familial support plays in the development and ongoing maintenance of an LGBTQIA+ identity. Furthermore, the experiences shared by participants in Chapter Five also demonstrate how broader macrosystem factors, such as negative media portrayals and practices of social institutions, contribute to the necessity of identity maintenance. In examining how LGBTQIA+ identities are embodied and experienced within the macrosystem, this research has highlighted how societal norms and ideologies, such as

the constructs of gender and sexuality, shape how LGBTQIA+ identities are perceived, and identity maintenance is practised.

The Language of Identity

A key topic occurring throughout The Language of Identity findings was how social interaction impacts the use of language in the practice of identity disclosure and non-disclosure for LGBTQIA+ people. Many participants described how they valued the practice of language monitoring when interacting socially for safety and acceptance cues. Furthermore, participants spoke about how language was dichotomous, in that their identity maintenance was reliant not only on the cues provided by others but also on evaluating how they believed their disclosure would be best received. When choosing to disclose, participants drew upon both direct and indirect forms of language to communicate their LGBTQIA+ identity, depending on the context of the disclosure situation. As alluded to in the findings of Chapter Five, the language of identity is deeply complex yet an intrinsic element of identifying as LGBTQIA+. Two underlying concepts are applicable to this discussion, which will begin by unpacking the many forms of direct and indirect language before moving into an examination of language monitoring practices.

In conceptualising strategic outness, Orne (2011) proposed four strategies in which identity can be disclosed or non-disclosed to others. These include direct disclosure, clues, concealment, and speculation. The participants of this cohort utilised each of Orne's strategies. For example, Caitlin practised clues of identity by emphasising the pronouns of her same-sex partner rather than using gender-neutral terms, while Adrian referred to embracing stereotypes associated with gay men to signify his identity. Rishaan discussed how he practised concealment of his identity prior to immigrating to Aotearoa New Zealand due to fear of being marginalised and stereotyped in his home country. Finally, Erin offered an excellent example of how she intends to utilise a form of speculation that she termed *the sledgehammer approach*, in which people she chooses not to disclose her transfeminine identity with will be required to come to conclusions on their own once she has socially transitioned.

The lived experiences examined throughout this thesis not only demonstrate how participants engaged in each of Orne's disclosure language strategies but also the influence of context in informing which technique is considered best in differing situations. While much of the existing literature focusing on coming out found that direct disclosures, or verbal language, were prominent in initial identity disclosures, the cohort of this research placed

more emphasis on non-verbal forms of identity communication. Perhaps signifying a divergence between initial coming-out processes and ongoing identity maintenance practices. This divergence may be accounted for when considering that the initial coming out process is often viewed as a prominent event in the lives of LGBTQIA+ people and their identity development, requiring clear and explicit communication of one's identity(s) to others. The magnitude of many LGBTQIA+ people's initial coming-out experiences may, therefore, inform the perceived necessity of verbal disclosures. Conversely, the shift from verbal to non-verbal communication in identity maintenance may suggest a deeper integration of identity into one's daily life and interactions, achieved over time and with experience. Furthermore, non-verbal identity disclosures might be attributed to a form of reducing the personal taxation that repetitively disclosing one's identity may have. That is, continuously verbalising one's identity might result in mental, emotional, and educational labour, informing Minority Stress. Whereas the signalling of identity appears to remove the onus from LGBTQIA+ people and encourages others to engage with the non-verbal clues that are provided to them and think critically about their assumptions of hetero- and cisnormativity.

Many participants also spoke of the importance of identity clues beyond the personal level discussed above, with many identifying the collective benefits. Collectively, identity clues were seen as a micro-activism practice in which the inclusion of identity symbols within regular conversations helped to normalise diversity and challenge the notion that disclosing one's LGBTQIA+ identity was required to be a significant, serious event. The importance of non-verbal communication was seen to lie in the ability to reshape how identity is discussed, encouraging critical reflections on social values of diversity and the nuances of identity. Similarly, for participants who practised direct disclosures, the use of clear and informative language was a vital part of their communication process and signified an overlap with education that arose from the opportunity to disclose their LGBTQIA+ identity. As Leap (2023) discussed, language is thick with historical narratives that serve to exclude the minority. For the LGBTQIA+ community, heteronormativity means that minority identity language is often mitigated to the edges of society and clouded by a history of pathological, essentialist, and moralistic ideologies. The contemporary shift in language that seeks to reclaim queer vocabulary, normalise the use of pronouns, and expand on limited identity terminologies are active challenges to the socialisation of language that has previously served as barriers to the LGBTQIA+ population and are seen as activism tools by participants in both their verbal and non-verbal disclosure techniques. These findings align with Zimman's (2024) work on trans language activism, which includes advocating for pronouns,

terminologies for varieties of gender identities, challenging how sexed bodies are discussed, and discursive strategies that minimise misgendering and other forms of transphobia.

In departing from the strategic outness strategies that guided Orne's (2011) identity management concept, the findings presented in Chapter Five also demonstrated the significance of other's language in disclosure and non-disclosure decision-making. Participants of this cohort regularly practised monitoring within social interactions, including reading the verbal and non-verbal language of those they interacted with for safety and acceptance cues. The monitoring practice discussed by participants aligns with the theory of mind concept. David Premack and Guy Woodruff initially proposed the theory of mind in their 1978 work, which explored whether chimpanzees possess the same ability as humans to infer another's state of mind. Since then, the theory of mind has been theorised by numerous psychologists. In its most simplistic definition, the theory of mind can be understood as "attributing thoughts and goals to others" (Leslie et al., 2004, p. 528) and is considered a central mechanism of social life.

The attribution of thoughts and goals—or, more accurately, motivations—aligns with the language monitoring practises highlighted by several participants of the current research. The reading of language, both verbally in the form of vocabulary and intonation and non-verbally in body language and social cues, was seen by many as a vital element of their intrapersonal interactions. Participants spoke about reading and interpreting how people interacted with them, as well as others, to attribute positions of support or disapproval of diversity. Rapata spoke specifically about how others' disapproving body language towards seeing LGBTQIA+ people would inform his level of comfort and noted that these microaggressions may result in him choosing not to disclose his identity.

Also demonstrated within this example is how monitoring of language in social interactions also informed the disclosure strategies utilised by many participants, with some choosing to practice concealment in situations that inferred a risk to their safety or social standing. Passing is often considered a form of privilege within the LGBTQIA+ community, with several critiques highlighting the potentially detrimental effects it can have. Such critiques of passing include how the practice highlights the disparities amongst identities within the LGBTQIA+ community, with those who do not have access to or desire to obtain the binary standards of passing facing a dualistic form of marginalisation from broader society and within the minority community (Fiani & Han, 2019; Pfeffer, 2014). Similarly, passing is also seen by some to place unrealistic or undesirable standards of conformity on LGBTQIA+ people, especially for those who identify as transgender and gender non-

conforming (Pfeffer, 2014). The unobtainable or undesirable status of passing marginalises those who do not adhere to the strict moulds of binary genders or choose to embody and express their identities differently.

Furthermore, passing may be a detrimental source of erasure for those who identify as polysexual. As Dyar et al. (2014) note, the gender of a polysexual person's partner has a significant effect on their inclusion or exclusion within lesbian and gay communities, with the ability to pass as heterosexual while engaged in an opposite-sex relationship potentially resulting in messages of illegitimacy. Historically, the conscious practice of passing was often a necessary behaviour in ensuring safety from violence, pathologisation, and legal repercussions of embodying an LGBTQIA+ identity. In contemporary society, LGBTQIA+ people may continue to practice passing as a safety mechanism. Passing behaviours applied to both gender and sexuality identities within this cohort and could be seen across a range of behaviours and purposes. Erin utilised passing by reverting to her birth-assigned gender while interacting with those she had yet to disclose her transfeminine identity during the intra-transition stage. Adrian spoke about redacting information about the queer lived experience that signalled his identity from conversations. Kalia utilised a form of passing in maintaining her relationship with her grandparents, noting that she did not feel the need to correct their assumptions of heterosexuality.

Intertwined with language monitoring is the dissonance that may occur in relation to language and space. As highlighted by Jamie in Chapter Five, *a lot can be derived from how someone says certain sentences or phrase*s, indicating a potential psycholinguistic challenge to evaluating how disclosures will be received. Keating (2015) discusses how opinions originating in private spaces, such as the home, are typically reframed when discussed in public to reflect socially acceptable ideologies. Relative to LGBTQIA+ identities, strides have been made towards social acceptance and equality for minority gender and/or sexual identities in recent decades, meaning that overt discrimination has become less acceptable in public spaces. However, societal norms remain rooted in the dominance of cis-heteronormativity and serve to maintain the privileges of the majority. As a result, public discrimination towards LGBTQIA+ people may have decreased, yet it has not been eradicated. The endurance of discrimination is seen in the findings of Counting Ourselves (Veale et al., 2019), a recent local quantitative study, which found that almost half of their cohort had experienced discrimination in the 12 months prior to the 2018 survey.

Therefore, dissonance may occur when the public expression of acceptance of LGBTQIA+ identities and experiences fails to match the private opinions that are rooted in

homophobia and transphobia. This represents another way in which social monitoring is significant for LGBTQIA+ people, in that privately held ideologies may be better assessed through non-verbal communication, such as body language and actions, than explicit verbal communication. Daily interactions with language dissonance may serve as another catalyst for Minority Stress due to the implications of intrapersonal social interactions. For example, authentic intrapersonal connections may be hindered by language monitoring practices and constant questioning of one's safety and acceptance. An example of language dissonance drawn from this cohort may be reflected in Connor's experience within their workplace, in which a colleague only engaged with their correct pronouns in the presence of Connor's partner. There appears to be a dissonance here in that the colleague demonstrated that they were capable of remembering and utilising Connor's pronouns yet repetitively chose not to outside of their partners' presence. This suggests that Connor's workplace is a space where their colleague feels comfortable allowing their personal attitudes and opinions about transgender and non-binary identities to determine how they interact with Connor, but they were cognisant of the change in social expectations when Connor's partner visited them at work.

In sum, the practices of language monitoring and identity concealment demonstrate two ways LGBTQIA+ people actively engage in identity maintenance in their daily intrapersonal interactions. Through verbal and non-verbal communication, LGBTQIA+ people can mediate who gains access to their identities, when access is granted, and to what level. Furthermore, identity maintenance allows LGBTQIA+ people to determine which situations are congruent for identity sharing, if disclosure may or may not be beneficial, and the process by which they will disclose. Without language in its multiple forms, identity maintenance is conceptually void; that is, language, either direct (verbal) or indirect (non-verbal), is the basis upon which one can actively and purposefully manage information about one's identity. Although intrapersonal interactions pose a form of additional labour for the LGBTQIA+ community, identity maintenance—through tools such as social monitoring—can offer a mechanism for restoring agency in how LGBTQIA+ people engage with others.

The Language of Identity theme has unveiled several new and interesting insights about the identity maintenance process. Most prominently, these findings highlight the significance of language monitoring within intrapersonal interactions and the cognisance of LGBTQIA+ people with the verbal and non-verbal language of others to inform their disclosure decisions. Secondly, these findings extend current 'coming out' literature to demonstrate how non-verbal language may be preferred in the ongoing identity maintenance process. Finally, the

notion that language, in its many forms and strategies, can act as a form of micro-activism within the context of minority identity disclosures is a seemingly novel concept that invites further examination. This micro-activism concept demonstrates how seemingly minor gestures that signify diversity can amount to broader social shifts that challenge the marginalisation of LGBTQIA+ people.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

Summary of the Research Findings

This thesis has examined the repetitive nature of minority gender and sexual identity self-disclosures of ten self-identifying LGBTQIA+ participants living in the cities and surrounding areas of Tāmaki Makaurau-Auckland and Kirikiriroa-Hamilton. Through this research, I aimed to begin establishing a foundational understanding of the lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals in Aotearoa who practice the concept of identity maintenance in their daily lives. Five questions guided the research:

1. How do participants interpret their experiences of identity self-disclosure or non-disclosure?
2. What social factors influence the decision to self-disclose minority gender and sexual identity?
3. How does the repetitive nature of identity self-disclosure affect participants?
4. How does identity self-disclosure vary in different social environments?
5. How does language shape identity self-disclosure?

Supplementary to the research questions, this thesis was underpinned by three objectives. These objectives include exploring how participants experience repetitive self-disclosure or non-disclosure (identity maintenance), examining the decision-making process related to disclosure or non-disclosure, and highlighting the social contexts and language surrounding self-disclosure decision-making.

Four themes, The Temporality of Identity, The Tax of Identity, The Ecology of Identity, and The Language of Identity, arose during the analysis. Each of these four themes represented analogous concepts found in most, if not all, participants' data and included subthemes as indicated in the table below. Findings from all ten participants, who spanned characteristics such as sexual identity, gender identity, age, ethnicity, neuro ability, and religion, were presented across two chapters.

Table 1

Themes and sub-themes formulated from participant interviews and diary entry data.

Chapter Four	**Chapter Five**
The Interpersonal LGBTIQIA+ Identity	The Intrapersonal LGBTQIA+ Identity
The Temporality of Identity	The Ecology of Identity
Identity Development	*Microsystems*
Identity Affirmation	*Mesosystems*
Identity Maintenance	*Macrosystems*
The Tax of Identity	The Language of Identity
Emotional Taxes	*Language of Disclosure*
Mental Taxes	*Language of Non-Disclosure*
Educational Taxes	

Chapter Four was dedicated to the interpersonal LGBTQIA+ identity and examined the themes of The Temporality of Identity and The Tax of Identity. Within this chapter, two research questions were addressed. Firstly, The Temporality of Identity theme addressed question one: How do participants interpret their experiences with identity self-disclosure or non-disclosure? The presentation of findings within three sub-themes—identity development, identity affirmation, and identity maintenance—highlighted how participants viewed their experience with identity self-disclosure or non-disclosure, both during the initial coming out period and throughout the identity maintenance process. As participants reflected on questions that sought to highlight how they understood their self-disclosure or non-disclosure experiences, a commonality of time arose. For many participants, interpretations of disclosure or non-disclosure were primarily linked to the early 'coming out' period, reflected the significance of intrapersonal reactions to previous disclosures, and held a temporal scope concerning how their perception of the necessity of disclosure. In answering question one and applying a lens of temporality to the findings, a gap in existing literature has been addressed in that the influence of time on identity management, specifically within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, has been explored.

Secondly, The Tax of Identity theme addressed question three: How does the repetitive nature of identity self-disclosure affect participants? Findings were presented within three sub-themes—mental taxes, emotional taxes, and educational taxes—highlighting the ways in which repetitive identity self-disclosures impacted the participants of this cohort. When asked

how they would describe the impact of repetitive self-disclosure during their interviews, participants identified interpersonal and intrapersonal taxes. Common psychological impacts included fear, anxiety, exhaustion, stress, and environmental monitoring, while intrapersonal taxes centred on the weight of educating others about LGBTQIA+ identities and lived experiences. The findings presented within The Tax of Identity theme also address a gap in the existing literature by exploring the psychological impacts of identity management.

Chapter Five examined the intrapersonal LGBTQIA+ identity and introduced the themes of The Ecology of Identity and The Language of Identity. Within this chapter, three research questions were addressed. Firstly, The Ecology of Identity theme addressed questions two and four, respectively: What social factors influence the decision to self-disclose a minority gender and/or sexual identity? How does identity self-disclosure vary in different social environments? In answering these questions, the findings highlighted how ecological environments—from microsystems to macrosystems—influenced how participants engaged with identity maintenance. Within the context of the initial 'coming out' period, the familial microsystem was either a location of support and carefree embodiment or disapproval and fear. For many participants, the politics and dominance of heteronormativity proved to be a significant determinant of ongoing disclosure or non-disclosure. Furthermore, social factors such as conservative religion and culture, as well as homophobia and transphobia, were highlighted as significant in the self-disclosure decision-making process. These findings not only answer the research questions indicated but also address gaps in existing literature regarding how social and environmental factors contribute to identity management.

Finally, The Language of Identity theme addressed question five: How does language shape identity self-disclosure? The presentation of findings within two sub-themes—the language of disclosure and the language of non-disclosure—highlighted how nuanced the use of language is regarding minority identities and self-disclosures. Within each sub-theme, language was examined through the lens of personal use and others' use to situate the influence language had on self-disclosure. For many participants, disclosure of one's identity involved both verbal and non-verbal language strategies. Furthermore, disclosure or non-disclosure decisions were informed by evaluations of other's use of language—both verbal and non-verbal. Combined, these findings demonstrated how language shaped identity self-disclosures of this cohort and addressed a gap in the current literature by exploring how other's use of language informs identity management.

In sum, the research presented in this thesis highlights the ways in which identity maintenance, as a practice of choosing when, where, how, why, and to whom one will engage

in disclosure or non-disclosure of an LGBTQIA+ identity, is a suitably adaptive framework for understanding the nuanced lived experiences of the LGBTQIA+ community. Identity self-disclosure, when viewed through the lens of identity maintenance, allows consideration for the contextual nature of interpersonal and intrapersonal factors and provides agency to LGBTQIA+ people to counteract the physical and psychosocial effects of systemic heteronormativity.

Impact and Importance

This thesis has explored the experiences of ten self-identifying LGBTQIA+ individuals with the ongoing, repetitive nature of minority gender and/or sexuality identity disclosure and non-disclosure—which, drawing upon the works of Guittar & Rayburn (2016) and Orne, (2011), I have termed identity maintenance. While I am cognisant that the cohort is limited in size and intersectionality, the addition of this research complements existing foundational minority identity disclosure research and illuminates Aotearoa New Zealand's LGBTQIA+ communities' lived experiences specifically.

Given the significant lack of research regarding the ongoing, repetitive nature of minority gender and/or sexuality identity disclosure and non-disclosure—especially with no known literature specific to Aotearoa New Zealand's population—I believe this thesis can, firstly, contribute to the psychosocial understanding of how LGBTQIA+ identities are interpreted and experienced beyond the initial coming out process, and secondly, highlight the importance of ecology and intrapersonal experiences in the formation, ongoing development, embodiment, and maintenance of LGBTQIA+ identities. I believe a strength of this research lies in its qualitative systems-based approach, which centres the voices and experiences of the cohort in establishing a foundation upon which future research can continue to build. Together with further research on this topic, I believe this work can help improve professional and social awareness of the under-represented and often unvoiced elements of LGBTQIA+ life courses.

While the initial impact of this research may be minimal, it is my hope that, by providing a platform for identifying and discussing the nuanced LGBTQIA+ lived experiences, strides can be made toward a greater understanding of, and thus improvements to, social inequalities that continue to harm our community. Gaining knowledge of how LGBTQIA+ people interact with the ecology of society over time can serve as a helpful tool in reducing the personal and collective taxations identified by this cohort. Ultimately improving the psychosocial conditions that accompany an LGBTQIA+ identity.

Limitations

As limited research examining identity management exists, with no known research conducted on this topic within Aotearoa, New Zealand, several limitations of this research are present. Firstly, the scope of representation possible within any singular piece of research does not do Aotearoa New Zealand's LGBTQIA+ community justice, signalling the need for continued academic curiosity in this field to build upon the foundation established by this thesis. While effort has been made through purposeful sampling to include as many intersectional LGBTQIA+ identities as possible, a true representation of our population was not feasible for numerous reasons. Prominently, accurate knowledge about Aotearoa New Zealand's LGBTQIA+ population and the vast number of identities remains unachieved and perhaps represents a case in which accurate numerical data collection may not ever be achievable. Strides have been made towards increasing the understanding and knowledge of LGBTQIA+ lived experiences through data collection, such as the 2024 census—which marked the inaugural inclusion of gender, sex, and sexual identity in nationwide data collection—alongside vital academic research like the Counting Ourselves Project, Honour Project, Manalagi Project, and Identify Survey. However, it is important to note that the ability to accurately collect data on all LGBTQIA+ identities remains fraught. While previous decades have brought an increase in multi-discipline Queer research, alongside a (slowly) improving social climate that may encourage LGBTQIA+ people to participate in important knowledge acquisitions such as research, the fact remains that LGBTQIA+ identities remain fluid and nuanced.

Not all people who exist outside the bounds of strict heterosexuality and gender conformity identify themselves with an LGBTQIA+ identity label, which is often heavily relied upon in research for structure and understanding. Not all people who potentially align with an LGBTQIA+ identity are out of the metaphorical closet or in situations that are safe or compatible with active participation in knowledge building. Furthermore, not all people who align with an LGBTQIA+ identity see research as a safe and valuable exercise in which they are willing to participate. Secondly, the scope of this research, including the time and human resources available, allowed for minimal representation. While I was guided through this process by the brilliance of my supervisor and advisor, I completed the research collection of this thesis as a solo researcher within the scope of one year. Participant recruitment and data collection phases were completed within four months, from initial contact with LGBTQIA+ networks and organisations to the final interview, limiting the data collection that was manageable within this timeframe by one person. Considering these first two limitations, the

findings and discussions presented in this thesis are by no means an attempt at universalising or homogenising the lived experiences of Aotearoa New Zealand's LGBTQIA+ community. Instead, all findings and discussions presented here reflect the cohort specifically and act as a broad stepping stone for further research that holds the scope to provide analysis of the differing experiences of Aotearoa New Zealand's LGBTQIA+ community in more refined approaches.

It is also important to acknowledge that the breadth and depth of inclusion and analysis given to intersectional identities is a limitation within this thesis. While attempts at including Aotearoa New Zealand's vast diversity were made, the foundational nature of this research and the timeframe in which it was completed limited the ability to reflect a piece of intersectional research truly. Specifically, the examination of disclosure experiences across as many minority gender and sexual identities as possible did not allow for in-depth examinations of the variations that exist between and within different identities (i.e., how the experiences of bisexual women differ from other bisexual women as well as from lesbians, etc.). Furthermore, there is a significant potential for knowledge of disclosure experiences within cultural and ethnic groups, specifically from the perspective of Indigenous identities, that this research did not allow scope for and would be inappropriate for a Pākehā researcher such as myself to lead. Finally, my positionality as a queer, feminine presenting gender-fluid, Pākehā researcher is a prominent limitation of this research. This thesis came to life through a combination of my own experiences with ongoing and repetitive identity disclosures, conversations with queer friends about our shared experiences, and my lack of terminology for the post-initial coming-out processes of self-disclosure. My status as an emic researcher afforded me many benefits throughout this process. It also reflects the discussions I have formed around the participants' experiences and perhaps reflects my expectations that would have been mitigated by a research team that included researchers from various intersectional identities. However, the context of this master's thesis was incongruent with this; therefore, I acknowledge my positionality in this construction and completion of this research.

Future Research Directions

There are several potential directions for future research on identity maintenance in Aotearoa. Firstly, each core identity under the LGBTQIA+ umbrella offers significant potential for variations of interpretation and experiences. As limited knowledge exists, researchers may wish to conduct similar research focusing on each identity to better understand the convergences and divergences between identity groups. While extensive,

isolated explorations of identity maintenance may contribute to the reduction of homogenising ideologies and over-generalising of dominant groups' experiences to the whole LGBTQIA+ community, providing a better understanding of the nuances of identity and queer life courses. Secondly, it is vital that space is given to understanding Indigenous experiences with identity maintenance and the influences of colonisation in the destruction of Indigenous intersectional identities. Within the context of Aotearoa specifically, researchers may wish to apply a Kaupapa Māori lens to the concept of identity maintenance and include an examination of culturally significant understandings and values of gender and sexuality.

Finally, examining the influence of intersectionality more closely would help form a more rigorous understanding of the lived experiences of the LGBTQIA+ community. Researchers may consider expanding the size of the cohort and purposefully including sociocultural factors such as age, economic caste, ethnicity, religion, physical and mental ability, and geographical locations to better represent the diversity of Aotearoa's population.

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Appendices

Appendix One: ALPSS Human Research Ethics Committee Approval Letters

Te Wānanga o Ngā Kete | ***Division of Arts, Law, Psychology & Social Sciences***

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Jessica Stanley
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Dr Logan Hamley

Te Kura Whatu Oho Mauri
School of Psychology

15 March 2024

Dear Jessica

Re: **FS2024-09**: **Exiting the Closet Daily: Examining the Repetitive Nature of Minority Gender and Sexual Identity Self-Disclosures Through the Ecological Systems Theory**

Thank you for submitting your revised application to the ALPSS Human Research Ethics Committee. We have reviewed the final electronic version of your application and the Committee is now pleased to offer formal approval for your research activities.

We encourage you to contact the committee should issues arise during your data collection, or should you wish to add further research activities or make changes to your project as it unfolds. We wish you all the best with your research. Thank-you for engaging with the process of Ethical Review.

Kind regards

Dr Oleg Medvedev, Convenor
Division of Arts, Law, Psychology & Social Sciences Human Research Ethics

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jl628@students.waikato.ac.nz

Dr Logan Hamley

Te Kura Whatu Oho Mauri
School of Psychology

11 April 2024

Dear Jessica

Re: **FS2024-09: Exiting the Closet Daily: Examining the Repetitive Nature of Minority Gender and Sexual Identity Self-Disclosures Through the Ecological Systems Theory**

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Kind regards

Dr Oleg Medvedev, Convenor
Division of Arts, Law, Psychology & Social Sciences Human Research Ethics

Appendix Two: Participant Recruitment Advertising - Copywriting

Let your voice be heard! An LGBTQIA+ research project, conducted by queer researchers from the University of Waikato, is looking for participants who would like to contribute to a better understanding of the experiences of minority gender and sexual identity self-disclosure in Aotearoa, New Zealand.

You are eligible to participate if you:

- Identify as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community,
- Are 18 years or older,
- Live in Tāmaki Makaurau–Auckland, Kirikiriroa–Hamilton, or surrounding areas.

To download the research information sheet and to register your interest, click here: https://bit.ly/3UfEmJm.

Expression of interest closes on 31 May 2024.

Appendix Three: Participant Recruitment Advertising - Artwork

LGBTQIA+ Research Project

Conducted by Queer researchers.

We are interviewing members of the LGBTQIA+ community to hear their experiences of identity self-disclosure.

You're eligible to participate if you:

- Identify as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community,
- Are 18 years or older,
- Live in Tāmaki Makaurau–Auckland, Kirikiriroa-Hamilton, or surrounding areas.

Participation includes 1x hour-long interview and a diary-keeping exercise.

Contact Jess Stanley (she/they) at jl628@students.waikato.ac.nz if you have any questions or scan the QR code to register your interest.

THE UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

LGBTQIA+ Research Project

Conducted by Queer researchers.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Appendix Three: Participant Information Sheet

Project: Exiting the Closet Daily: Examining the Repetitive Nature of Minority Gender and Sexual Identity Self-Disclosures Through the Ecological Systems Theory *(working title)*.

What is the project about?
The research explores the repetitive nature of minority gender and sexual identity disclosure and the social factors that influence the decision to disclose. Previous research in this area is limited. Therefore, we aim to explore three objectives: how repetitive self-disclosure is experienced, the decision-making process related to disclosure or non-disclosure, and the social context and discourse surrounding self-disclosures. We hope this research might help to shed light on the complexity of 'coming out' and the daily lived experiences of LGBTQIA+ people in our society.

Who are the researchers?
The primary researcher is Jess (she/they), a Master of Applied Psychology – Community student at the University of Waikato. Jess is a queer researcher who has an interest in gender and sexuality-focused psychology and working alongside the LGBTQIA+ community.

Jess is conducting this research project under the supervision of Dr Logan Hamley (he/him).

Why am I being asked to participate in an interview?
It is important to us that research regarding the LGBTQIA+ community and our unique experiences is drawn from within our community. As a member of the LGBTQIA+ community, there is no one better to speak about the project topic. You will be able to provide us with a set of unique experiences that will be valuable in helping us understand the complexities of 'coming out'.

Participation in the project is voluntary and will not affect your relationships with the organisation or network that referred you if you do not participate.

What will you ask about in the interview?
The purpose of the interviews is to hear your experiences with identity self-disclosure. To facilitate this, the interview will take a semi-structured format, meaning that Jess will have some questions prepared that are important to the project. However, we also want to hear your experiences and thoughts. So, Jess will ask follow-up questions and encourage dialogue about anything that may be interesting or important to the project as it comes up in the interview conversation.

Examples of the types of questions you may be asked are:

- Can you describe the last time you self-disclosed your identity?
- Have you ever corrected an assumption about your identity? If so, can you describe what took place?

- What do you consider when choosing to disclose or not disclose your identity?

What will happen to my information?
Your interview will be audio recorded and converted into a written transcript. This and subsequent information, such as diary entries and transcripts from additional interviews, will be analysed and may be used in our findings.

This research project is being conducted as part of a master's thesis; therefore, it will be submitted for grading. Additionally, the thesis may be uploaded to the University of Waikato Research Commons, where it will be publicly accessible.

Will other people know who I am if I participate?
While the research project's findings will be published as a master's thesis, information regarding participants and data they may provide will be anonymised during the research process. Other than being identified as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community in Tāmaki Makaurau–Auckland**,** Kirikiriroa–Hamilton**,** or the surrounding areas, personal information–such as your name–will be removed or disguised to protect your privacy.

However, readers familiar with you and your unique experiences (such as whānau/family/close friends, etc.) may be able to identify you.

What if I agree to participate and then change my mind?
You can withdraw from the research by emailing Jess at any time up to four weeks after your interview. Please make sure that you clearly state your name in the email so that your information can be removed.

After the four-week point, analysis of the data collected may have commenced. Therefore, removing or separating your information from other data collected may be impossible. However, we will try our best to accommodate any changes in participation and will communicate with you what can or cannot be achieved.

How can I find out about the project results?
Two formats of the research project's findings will be made available to participants. Firstly, a digital summary sheet highlighting key elements of the research will be emailed to participants. Secondly, a digital copy of the master's thesis can be emailed to you if you wish to read the thesis in full. Please tick 'Yes' on your consent form to receive the thesis.

Who can I speak with about my participation in this project?
If you have any questions or concerns about the research, you can contact Jess. You can also contact the research supervisor, Dr Logan Hamley, or the University of Waikato's Division of Arts, Law, Psychology, & Social Sciences (ALPSS) Ethics Committee. Our email addresses are provided below.

Will I be asked to sign anything?

Yes, you will be asked to complete and sign an ethical consent form prior to your interview. The consent form will explain your rights as a participant. It also provides options to review the interview transcription and if/how you would like to receive a copy of the research findings.

You will be emailed a digital version of your consent form following your interview, signed by you and the interviewer.

What do I need to do now?
If you wish to participate in the research project, please follow this link or email Jess to schedule an interview.

Contact details:

Jess Stanley (Researcher)	jl628@students.waikato.ac.nz
Dr Logan Hamley (Supervisor)	logan.hamley@waikato.ac.nz
ALPSS Ethics Committee	alpss-ethics@waikato.ac.nz

Appendix Five: Participant Sign-Up Form - Copywriting

Research Project: Exiting the Closet Daily: Examining the Repetitive Nature of Minority Gender and Sexual Identity Self-Disclosures Through the Ecological Systems Theory *(working title)*.

By completing the sign-up form, you indicate interest in participating in research exploring the repetitive nature of minority gender and sexual identity self-disclosures and the social factors that influence the decision to disclose. Research activities include an hour-long individual interview and diary entries.

Name: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Additional Information:
The following information will help assess your suitability for the research project and ensure we provide a safe and considerate research environment. Please answer the questions to the best of your ability and comfort level. Once this data has been collated, it will be anonymised, and your sign-up form will be destroyed to protect your privacy.

Age: _____

Gender and/or sexual identity: _____

Pronouns (optional): _____

Ethnicity: _____

Other identities: _____
[For example: physical ability, intellectual ability/neurological diversity, religion, etc.]

Appendix Six: Participant Consent Form

A completed copy of this form should be retained by both the researcher and the participant.

Name of person interviewed: _____
Pronouns (optional): _____

I have received a copy of the Information Sheet describing the research project. Any questions that I have relating to the research have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can ask further questions about the research at any time during my participation and that I can withdraw my participation at any time up to four weeks after the interview.

During the interview, I understand that I do not have to answer questions unless I am happy to discuss the topic. I can stop the interview at any time, and I can ask to have the recording device turned off at any time.

When I sign this consent form, I will retain ownership of my interview, but I give consent for the researcher to use the interview for the purposes of the research outlined in the Information Sheet. I understand that my identity will remain confidential in the presentation of the research findings.

Please complete the following checklist. Tick the appropriate box for each point.	YES	NO
I wish to view the transcript of the interview.		
I wish to receive a digital copy of the one-page findings summary.		
I wish to receive a digital copy of the full findings [thesis format].		

Participant:	_____	Researcher:	_____
Signature	_____	Signature:	_____
Date:	_____	Date:	_____
Contact Details:	_____	Contact Details:	_____
	_____		_____

Source: University of Waikato. (n.d.). *Ethics consent form template.* https://www.waikato.ac.nz/__data/assets/word_doc/0007/378709/Ethics-Consent-Form-Template.doc

Appendix Seven: Interview Schedule and Questions

Research Project: Exiting the Closet Daily: Examining the Repetitive Nature of Minority Gender and Sexual Identity Self-Disclosures Through the Ecological Systems Theory *(working title)*.

The purpose of the interviews is to have a conversation with individuals who identify as LGBTQIA+ about their experiences with identity self-disclosure. In particular, I would like to explore how you understand your own experiences of self-disclosure or non-disclosure, your decision-making procedures related to self-disclosure or non-disclosure, and the social contexts and language surrounding self-disclosure decision-making.

Introduction guide:

- Introductions – interviewer and interviewee (if comfortable)
- Explain the interview structure:
  - Role of the interviewer – guide the interview, take notes for recall, etc.
  - Semi-structured format – meaning, how the conversation will flow, etc.
  - Rights of the interviewee – can refuse to answer questions, stop at any time, etc.
  - Interruptions – turn phones/tech off, etc.
  - Welcome space – free to share opinions, disagree, challenge constructively.
  - No right or wrong answers – your experiences are important!
- Explain what happens after the interview:
  - Anonymity – steps taken to protect privacy (i.e., pseudonyms, etc.)
  - Overview of analysis – participant voices important in analysis, etc.
  - Access to the transcript following the interview.
  - Access to the final findings at the end of the research.
- Questions before beginning the interview?
- Complete the consent form.
- Begin dictation.

Definition:

For the purpose of this interview, I will define the term "coming out" as the *first time* an individual discloses their gender and/or sexual identity to another person. Additionally, I will define the term "identity self-disclosure" as the *repetitive* day-to-day process of informing or correcting (etc.) others about one's gender and/or sexual identity.

Opening question – situate understanding of terminology and personal relation to disclosure:

1. How do you understand the processes of coming out and identity self-disclosure?
   Deeper prompts:
   a. What significance would you place on each process?
   b. Are there any specific factors that contribute to your perspective?

Main questions:

The next set of questions is aimed at interpreting one's own experiences of identity self-disclosure:

2. Can you tell me about the first or most prominent time you disclosed your identity?
   Deeper prompts:
   a. Who did you self-disclose to?
   b. Where were you when this self-disclosure occurred?
   c. Can you describe why you chose to self-disclose at that moment?
   d. When you think of the first time you self-disclosed your identity, what do you associate with that experience?

3. Can you describe the most recent time you self-disclosed your identity?
   Deeper prompts:
   a. Who did you self-disclose to?
   b. Where were you when this self-disclosure occurred?
   c. Can you describe why you chose to self-disclose at that moment?

4. Take a moment to think about all the times you can remember self-disclosing your identity; are there any commonalities between these events?
   Deeper prompts:
   a. Can you define a pattern of how these events happened?
   b. Can you define a process you follow to self-disclose?

The next three questions are similar to the previous three. However, this time, we will focus on non-disclosure:

5. Can you tell me about the first or most prominent time you chose not to disclose your identity?
   Deeper prompts:
   a. Who was involved?
   b. Where were you when this non-disclosure occurred?
   c. Can you describe why you chose not to self-disclose at that moment?
   d. When you think of the times you chose not to self-disclose your identity, what do you associate with that experience?

6. Can you describe the most recent time you chose not to disclose your identity?
   Deeper prompts:
   a. Who was involved?
   b. Where were you when this non-disclosure occurred?
   c. Can you describe why you chose not to self-disclose at that moment?

7. Take a moment to think about all the times you can remember choosing not to self-disclose your identity; are there any commonalities between these events?
   Deeper prompts:
   a. Can you define a pattern of how these events happened?
   b. Can you define a process you follow when choosing not to disclose?

The next two questions relate to the decision-making process that may be involved in self-disclosure. Remember, there is no 'right or wrong' answer here, just your personal experiences and opinions:

8. What do you consider when choosing to disclose or not disclose your identity?
   Deeper prompts:
   a. Why are those factors the most important to you?
   b. Have these factors always been the most important to you? Please explain how they have changed.

9. Do any social or cultural factors influence your decision to self-disclose your identity? If so, what are those factors?
   Deeper prompts:
   a. How and why does _____ influence your decision?
   b. Do these factors contribute to your decision to self-disclose in different environments? If so, how?
   c. Do you approach self-disclosure differently in different social or cultural environments? If so, how?

The following questions explore if there is any personal impact felt as a result of the self-disclosure process:

10. How would you describe the impact of repetitive self-disclosure on you?
    Deeper prompts:
    a. Do the impacts of self-disclosure contribute to your decision to disclose? If so, how?
    b. What feelings do you associate with repetitive self-disclosure?
    c. Other than non-disclosure, can you describe how you deal with the impacts?

11. Have you ever corrected an assumption about your identity? If so, can you describe what took place?
    Deeper prompts:
    a. Why was it important for you to correct the assumption made?
    b. What contributes to your decision to correct assumptions?
    c. Can you describe how your correction to the assumption was received?

The final set of questions is regarding language used in self-disclosure or non-disclosure events, both by you and those involved;

12. In what ways do you think your own use of language contributes to the process of self-disclosure?
    Deeper prompts:
    a. How does your vocabulary change between events where you self-disclose and non-disclose?
    b. How does your body language change between events where you self-disclose and non-disclose?

c. What meanings or significance do you place on your use of language when self-disclosing?
d. What feelings do you associate with your language when you self-disclose?
e. What feelings do you associate with your language when you non-disclose?

13. In what ways do you think someone else's use of language contributes to the process of self-disclosure?
    Deeper prompts:
    a. What meanings or significance do you place on someone else's vocabulary when non-disclosing?
    b. What feelings do you associate with exclusionary or assumptive language used by someone else?
    c. How does the language used by someone else contribute to your decision-making process?
    d. What queues do you look for in a conversation that may contribute to your decision-making?

14. How does your use of language change in different social or cultural environments?
    Deeper prompts:
    a. How does your use of vocabulary regarding identity differ in different social or cultural environments?
    b. How does your body language differ in different social or cultural environments?
    c. Do you attribute different significance to self-disclosure or non-disclosure depending on social or cultural environments? If so, can you explain?

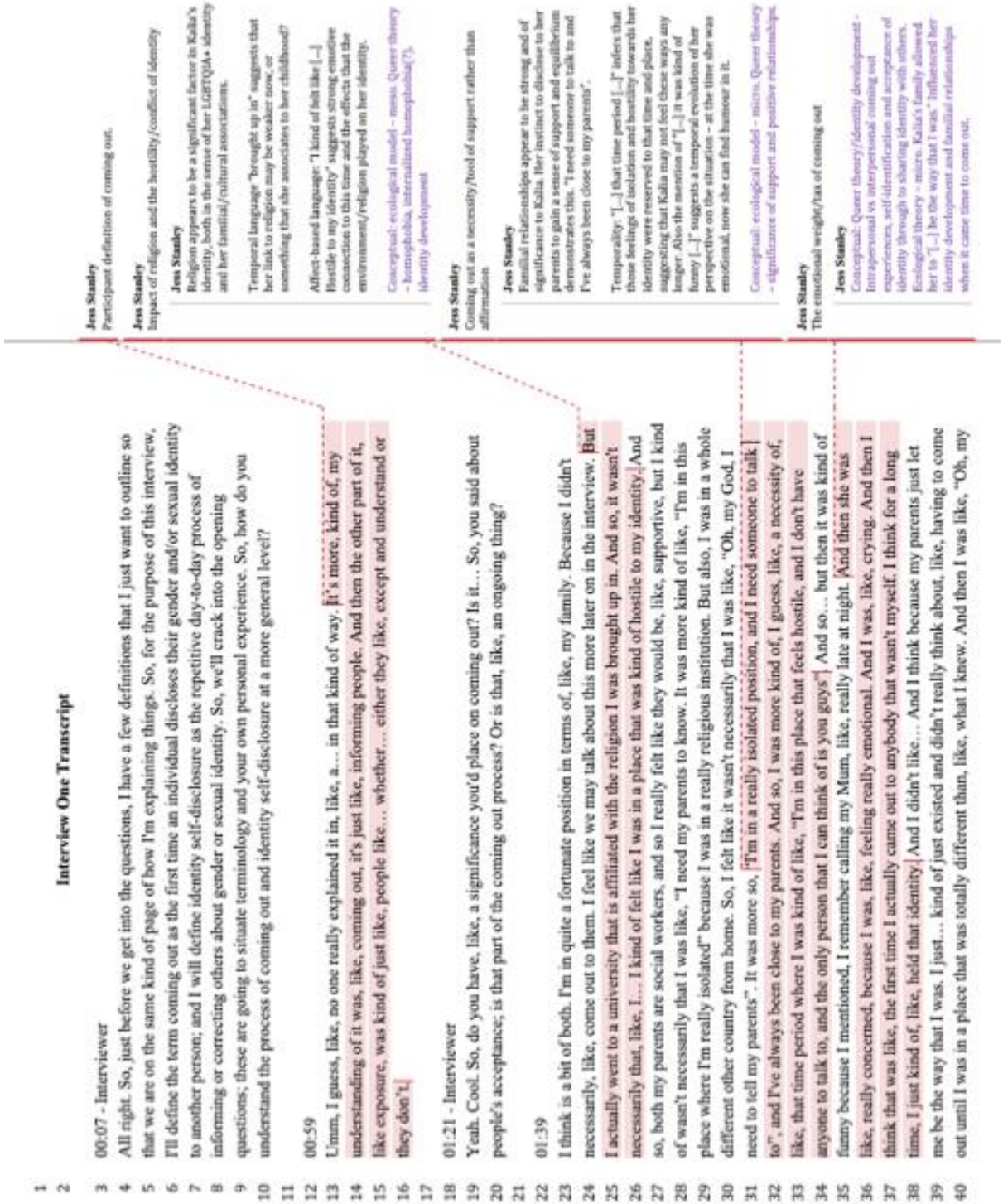
Concluding questions:

15. Is there anything else you'd like to add that we didn't cover?
16. Is there anything we didn't touch on today that you think is important to the topic of self-disclosure or non-disclosure?

Generic prompts:

Can you tell me more about _____?
How did/does _____ make you feel?
What do you mean when you say _____?
You mentioned _____, can you give me an example?

Appendix 8: Example of Coding and Analysis Tracking Used in Transcripts.



Glossary

Allosexual—people who experience sexual attraction to others. A binary categorisation that stands in contrast to asexuality, demisexuality, grey-sexuality, and more sexual identities that experience no sexual attraction, limited sexual attraction, or contextual sexual attraction.

Allonormativity—the social assumption that all people experience sexual and romantic attraction. Allonormativity is promoted and enacted throughout all levels and environments of society, privileging sexual and romantic relationships.

Asexual—is a sexual orientation that refers to individuals who do not experience sexual attraction towards any sex/gender. Asexuality defers from celibacy, in which an individual chooses not to engage in sexual behaviour irrespective of their sexual attraction. Those who self-identify as asexual may choose to engage in sexual behaviours despite not experiencing sexual attraction. Asexuality can include transgender and cisgender-identifying individuals.

Bisexual — is a sexual orientation that refers to individuals who are attracted to both the male and female gender. Similar identities include pansexuality and omnisexuality, which refer to individuals who are attracted to someone regardless of their sex or gender identity. Bisexuality can include transgender and cisgender-identifying individuals.

Cisgender—refers to individuals who self-identify as the sex/gender that they were assigned at birth. Cisgender does not infer sexual orientation; people who identify as cisgendered can identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, or as another sexual orientation.

Cisnormativity—refers to the social assumption that sex/gender is a binary structure consisting of only male (masculinity) and female (femininity) (see gender binary). Cisnormativity asserts that everyone should align with these binaries and associated societal expectations.

Cross-dresser—refers to individuals who dress and present as a gender other than their assigned sex. The use of cross-dresser is seen by many, yet not all, to be a less pathologised terminology that transvestite. Identifying as a cross-dresser or engaging in cross-dressing does not imply a sexual orientation or transgender identity.

Gay—is a sexual orientation that traditionally refers to males who are attracted to males. Contemporary use of the term gay, however, may serve as an umbrella term to include anyone who is attracted to the same sex/gender.

Gender—is widely considered a social construction in LGBTQIA+ studies. The concept of gender is based on primary and secondary biological sex characteristics (see Sex definition below). The social construction of gender infers characteristics that extend beyond biological sex to include socialised norms regarding traditional male and female roles, such as aesthetics, personality, use of space, place within society and the home, etc.

Gender binary—is a dualistic system that emphasises two strict gender identity categories: male and female. Within conceptualisations of gender in the binary format, it is expected that gender will align with the sex assigned at birth.

Gender diverse—is an inclusive umbrella term that refers to the wide variety of gender identities that do not align with the gender binary (see gender fluid and gender non-binary). Gender diverse also includes intersectional gender identities such as those that are culturally specific.

Gender dysphoria—refers to the personal discomfort or distress because of a disconnect between their assigned gender and their true sense of gender. Gender dysphoria is a clinical diagnosis within the current Diagnosis and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5).

Gender fluid—refers to individuals who do not identify with a fixed gender; rather, they often have an unfixed gender identity. Gender fluid does not infer sexual orientation; people who identify as gender fluid can identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, or more sexual orientations.

Gender non-binary—refers to individuals who do not identify exclusively with the binary male and female identity categories. Expressions of gender non-binary are vast and differ from person to person. Non-binary people may identify as male and female simultaneously, somewhere in between the binary categories, or outside of the gender binary completely. Some non-binary individuals may also identify as transgender or within the transgender spectrum, while other non-binary individuals may not.

Heterosexuality—refers to individuals who are attracted to the opposite sex/gender. Heterosexuality can include transgender and cisgender-identifying individuals.

Heteronormativity—refers to the social assumption that everyone is heterosexual by nature and that heterosexuality is the normal, superior sexual orientation. Heteronormativity is promoted and enacted throughout all levels and environments of society, such as interpersonal interactions, the legal and medical systems, housing, and education.

Homosexuality—is an umbrella term that includes anyone who is attracted to the same sex/gender. Homosexuality can include transgender and cisgender-identifying individuals, as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and more sexual orientations. The term homosexuality is considered outdated by some and holds associations with pathologisation.

Lesbian—refers specifically to women who are attracted to women. Lesbianism can include transgender and cisgender-identifying individuals.

Paraphilia—is a broad pathological term that refers to atypical sexual interests or attractions and can include behaviours, people, fantasies, objects, places, and situations. Paraphilia is often associated with perversion and becomes a psychological disorder when it results in personal distress or poses potential harm to another non-consenting person.

Passing—has related yet distinguishable definitions relative to gender and sexuality. Regarding gender, passing refers to transgender or gender non-diverse individuals being perceived as cisgender. Regarding sexuality, passing refers to people of gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, and more sexual identities being perceived as heterosexual.

Queer—is a reclaimed terminology that is simultaneously a sexual identity and umbrella terminology. Often associated with political identity movements and academic ideologies, the individual self-identification of queer can symbolise the rejection and disruptions of binary categorisations of gender, sex, and sexuality. Queer is also used collectively as a reclaimed terminology to reject the discriminatory use of the term and signal a political movement and challenge to heteronormative social norms.

Sex—refers to an individual's sexual organs and is considered the biological foundation of the gender social construction. Sex is understood as consisting of primary and secondary sex characteristics. Primary sex characteristics include genitalia and reproductive organs, while secondary sex characteristics include such things as hormones, body hair, breasts, voice, etc.

Takatāpui—is a Māori umbrella terminology that historically has been defined as a companion of the same sex. In contemporary use, takatāpui refers to Māori who identify as LGBTQIA+.

Transgender—refers to an individual who self-identifies as a sex/gender identity that does not match the gender assigned to them at birth. Transgender is considered a spectrum and a more inclusive terminology that does not infer or require medical intervention. Transgender also does not infer a specific sexual orientation; transgender people can identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, or as another sexual orientation.

Transsexual—refers to an individual who has medically transitioned their gender. Transsexual is often considered an outdated and restrictive terminology. However, transsexual remains used by some to self-identify.

Transvestism—is synonymous with cross-dressing (see cross-dresser) yet has historically been associated with 'transvestic disorder', a pathological diagnosis of the fetishism of the other opposite sexes clothing. Transvestism and transvestic disorder differ from gender dysphoria by the lack of incongruence with assigned sex (i.e., transgender or gender non-diverse identities) and do not infer a sexual orientation.

"+"—throughout this research, a plus symbol has been used at the end of the LGBTQIA acronym for brevity and to acknowledge the existence and validity of several more minority gender and sexual identities. Identities not specifically named, however relevant to the research presented, include identities such as takatāpui, pansexual, agender, and demisexual.

Acronyms

LGBTQIA+: lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, intersex, asexual, and more.
VSC: Variations of sex characteristics
DSM: Diagnosis and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (currently the 5th edition).