Transgender Family Transitions: A sibling perspective

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Transgender Family Transitions: A Sibling Perspective

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Glossary

**Cisgender** - refers to a person whose gender identity aligns with their sex assigned at birth.

**Coming out** - a process of disclosing one’s sexual orientation or gender identity based on heteronormative societal assumptions that everyone is heterosexual and cisgender until otherwise specified.

**Gender diverse or Gender expansive** - umbrella terms that are used to describe gender identities that demonstrate a diversity beyond the binary framework.

**Gender expression** - how a person publicly expresses or presents their gender through behavior and outward appearance.

**Gender nonconforming** - used to note behaviors that are not stereotypical for a person’s sex assigned at birth based on the male-female binary. Most often used research included in this study to describe the behavior of children and adolescents.

**LGB** - acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual.

**LGBTQ or LGBTQ** - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer. An asterisk (*) is used by the author as a wildcard symbol, often used in library science and database word searches, to denote the many complex variations of this acronym that exist and recognize that many identities are grouped into the LGBTQ community without a representing letter (e.g., Asexual, Pansexual, Genderfluid, Two-Spirit, etc.). Other researchers may use a plus (+) symbol in the same manner.

**Sex assigned at birth** - the label a medical professional assigns to a baby when it is born, based on observations about the baby’s body.

**TGD** - acronym for Transgender and Gender Diverse.

**Transgender or trans** - an umbrella term, in this context refers to a person whose gender identity diverges from their sex assigned at birth.
Abstract

As more families are seeking professional help to navigate issues surrounding gender, there is a growing need for clinicians who can assist in the family transition that accompanies an individual’s gender transition process (Coolhart, Ritenour, & Grodzinski, 2018). While family therapy literature is currently expanding to address families with a transgender member, existing psychological thought mostly centers therapeutic focus on the identified transgender individuals and their parents, neglecting the roles and experiences of siblings in this process (Blumer, Green, Knowles, & Williams, 2012). The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of those who had a sibling disclose they are transgender, with particular interest in how the process of disclosure and transition affected the sibling relationship as well as how those experiences may relate to or differ from parent-child relationships. Thirteen cisgender individuals who have a transgender sibling participated in individual, semi-structured Zoom interviews with the principal researcher. Data was recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using “grounded theory” methodology as explained by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) to produce themes, theoretical constructs, and form a cohesive narrative. Through the analysis, four domains of experiences were identified: affective reactions, individual change processes, dyadic relationship processes, and family system processes. The discussion examines the data and theoretical constructs against existing literature and family systems theory. Recommendations are offered to clinicians and future researchers to facilitate change, provide support, and develop better understanding of the experiences of this population.
Introduction

During the last several decades, public awareness of people who identify themselves as transgender has increased in the United States, largely in part by high-profile individuals sharing their stories with the public (Austin, 2018; Cantner, 2012; Lev, 2013). It is currently unclear how many transgender people are living in the country due to this information being omitted from wide data collection, such as the U.S. Census. However, meta-regression studies such as one conducted by Meerwijk and Sevelius (2017) from national surveys, estimate that close to one in every 250 adults identifies as transgender, meaning almost 1,000,000 people. Other studies that have attempted to use surveys to capture the proportion of youth who are transgender give ranges between 1.3%-2.6% that identify themselves as transgender (Goodman et al., 2019). Also related to the recent shifts in public awareness and increased acceptance, youth 13-24 years old are increasingly identifying themselves in ways beyond the socially constructed male-female binary, through terms such as non-binary, agender, genderfluid, demi-gender, and more (The Trevor Project, 2020).

To affirm their gender identity, transgender people may choose to change certain parts of their lives based on options of transition that are available to them. The process of pursuing various methods of change, whether legal, social, physical, or medical, is often referred to as a “gender transition” and may occur across any period during one’s lifetime (Lev, 2013). Legal options may include working to change identification cards, drivers’ licenses, birth certificates, or other legal documents. Social changes may involve using a different name, changing pronouns, altering mannerisms, or changing vocal characteristics. Physical transition choices may include changes in clothing, accessories, facial hair, cranial hair, body hair, or other visible characteristics. Medical procedures may also be utilized, such as undergoing gender affirming
surgeries or taking hormones to alter primary and/or secondary sex characteristics. While some transgender people choose to utilize all or most of these options to complete traditionally male-to-female or female-to-male binary transitions, many others that identify outside of the two gender binary choose nuanced combinations of transition options to affirm their sense of gender and/or reduce symptoms of gender dysphoria (Austin, 2018; Ehrensaft, 2016; Graham et al., 2011). Gender dysphoria, for the purposes of this study, is defined as distress or discomfort experienced when an individual’s gender identity and sex-assigned-at-birth is branched (Lindley & Galupo, 2020). Gender dysphoria can be conceptualized as a continuous construct that affects individuals with varying degrees of intensity and is influenced by both individual biological characteristics and social influences (McLemore, 2015). In severe intensity, gender dysphoria may manifest in somatic symptoms of stomach aches or heightened sensitivity, or emotional symptoms of anxiety and worry (Lindley & Galupo, 2020).

As rates of people publicly and privately identifying themselves as transgender continue to grow, research on transgender mental health is important to address major concerns and disparities among youth and families. For instance, Roberts et al. (2013) conducted a large longitudinal study examining the psychosocial outcomes of children across 11 years. These researchers found that compared to gender-conforming peers, children who did not conform to stereotypical behavior scripted to their sexes assigned at birth were at heightened risk of depressive symptoms in adolescence. This is consistent with previous research by Carver et al. (2003) that suggested that any children who demonstrate behaviors outside of stereotypic gender norms for their sex assigned at birth, regardless of transgender identity, are at risk for negative mental health outcomes. This quantitative study with children from 3rd to 8th grade found that youth who feel they do not achieve a typical example of their sex assigned at birth have higher
levels of internalizing symptoms than their peers that present and act in a gender-typical manner. More recently, the 3rd annual “National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health,” by The Trevor Project (2020), surveyed over 40,000 young LGBTQ people ages 13-24 across the United States in 2020. Results from transgender and non-binary participants showed that more than 66% of this sample reported symptoms of major depressive disorder in the last two weeks, 60% reported engaging in self-harm in the past twelve months, more than 50% had seriously considered suicide, and 21% had attempted suicide. The Trevor Project’s national survey is currently the largest survey of LGBTQ youth mental health conducted annually. Other researchers have also confirmed high risk for suicidality among transgender populations compared to cisgender peers, in addition to higher risk for a variety of negative mental health outcomes such as substance abuse and psychosocial distress (Connolly et al., 2016; Taliaferro et al., 2018).

Family rejection has been identified as a prominent stressor for LGBTQ youth that contributes to such high rates of adverse outcomes (Bosse, 2019; Grossman et al., 2005; Pariseau et al., 2019; Roberts et al., 2013). Grossman et al. (2005) found that the more gender nonconforming the youth, the more likely they were to report verbal and physical abuse by their parents, and Roberts et al. (2013) confirmed that the increased risk for depression in adolescents in their study was largely accounted for by physical and emotional bullying and abuse, both inside and outside the home. Furthermore, a qualitative study by Pariseau et al. (2019) with 54 transgender youth and their caregivers found that lower caregiver acceptance predicted increased internalizing problems. Pariseau et al. (2019) also found that caregiver indifference was found to be associated with increased depressive symptoms and that lower sibling acceptance predicted increased suicidal ideation.
Sociopolitical stress, discrimination, and acts of violence against the transgender community in the U.S. also clearly contribute to adverse mental health outcomes for transgender youth. The Trevor Project (2020) found that 40% of their transgender youth reported enduring physical threats or harm due to their gender identity, and 61% experienced discrimination from being able to use a bathroom that corresponded to their gender identity. Experiences of physical harm and discrimination both were significantly correlated to participant reports of attempting suicide within the past 12 months (The Trevor Project, 2020).

Conversely, gender affirmation and family acceptance have demonstrated significant correlations to well-being. The Trevor Project (2020) identified a correlation between access to gender-affirming clothing (e.g., binders, shapewear) and fewer suicide attempts among transgender youth. Their study specified that youth with access to clothing that reduces gender dysphoria reported lower rates of attempting suicide compared to youth without access. Furthermore, youth who reported having their gender mostly affirmed by the people in their lives, such as by using correct pronouns, had significantly lower rates of attempting suicide than those who were not affirmed or respected by others (The Trevor Project, 2020). Other researchers have found similar correlations that suggest gender affirmation has inverse relationships with negative mental health outcomes such as anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, and non-suicidal self-injury (Hughto et al., 2020; Lindley & Galupo, 2020). Caregiver acceptance, in particular, has been identified as a major protective factor against negative mental health outcomes for transgender youth (Bregman et al., 2013; de Vries et al., 2016; Katz-Wise et al., 2018; Olson et al., 2016).

As will be discussed throughout the review of family literature, reactions to transgender and gender diverse children are much more complex than a reject-or-accept dichotomy from the
family member perspective. This means that it is important to understand the complexity among experiences for parents, siblings, and other family members in order to inform more competent and affirming treatment of the community. Beyond direct clinical practice, information can be integrated into training and educational courses for mental health professionals, outreach programs for diverse communities, or important public policy affecting the LGBTQ community.
Literature Review

Family Systems Theory

Family systems theory, developed by Murray Bowen, views the family through a systems perspective to describe the complex interactions within the nuclear unit. One of the core ideas of this theory is that family members are connected emotionally and will intensely affect one another’s thoughts, feelings, and actions. These intense emotional interactions make the overall functioning of family members interdependent to various degrees within their family system. As a theory of human behavior, Bowen believed that this interdependence evolved to help families cooperate to provide members protection, food, and shelter. However, the theorist noted that the same processes that promote cohesiveness can also heighten anxiety among one another through reciprocal interactions when facing intense stress. Clinical issues tend to develop when a family unit experiences heightened and prolonged tension within its system. Tension levels within a family depend on the amount of stress, how the unit adapts to stress, and the unit’s connection to extended family and social networks (Bowen, 1978; “Learn about Bowen Theory,” n.d.). When one family member comes out to the rest of the members as transgender, this may spark a prolonged period of intense stress as the family reacts and processes within its social context.

Doherty and McDaniel (2010) describe the tendency for families to maintain their habitual patterns of behavior, termed “family homeostasis,” in their book Family therapy (pp. 10). The expectations assigned to gender roles or relational labels are one mechanism by which patterns are maintained in the family (Doherty & McDaniel, 2010, pp. 36-42; Healy & Allen, 2020; Norwood, 2012). Transgender identities and transitioning processes may disrupt family or interpersonal homeostasis because expectations and enactment of relational roles depend on socially enforced dichotomous gender constructs. Cultural conceptions of sex and gender within
families may be a factor contributing to family tension and the range in response to gender nonconformity and transgender identity disclosure. Social norms in contemporary North American culture are heavily rooted in the assumptions that sex is biologically dichotomous and that various roles and expectations are ascribed to each category of man or woman (Butler, 2004). In the family context, relationships are largely gendered to align with a binary construct–mother or father, brother or sister, aunt or uncle–each label holding a script of expected behavior in relationships and institutional practices (Norwood, 2012).

It is clear from the literature available that when a transgender person decides to disclose their gender identity and pursue aspects of transition, the people around them undergo an adjustment as well. This process of transition has the potential to change aspects of various relationships, and especially when housed under the same roof, the relationships in the nuclear family. Aramburu (2018) states “A transgender identity in one family member affects all household members.” Healy and Allen (2020) describe that families may experience intense stress from an acute inability to support transgender children within a cisnormative world and may need help from professionals to create new homeostasis. If facilitated well, however, a child’s transition can become part of their individuation process, help them achieve autonomy, and help the family healthily reorganize relationships to create more authentic communication (Healy & Allen, 2020; Nichols, 2012). Given that (a) family acceptance has heavily weighted importance on the mental health and wellbeing of transgender individuals, and (b) families may initially struggle to support transgender children in their developed patterns of homeostasis, it’s important to understand the experiences of the family transition and how all members of a family system may best be served by healthcare professionals.
Parent Transition Processes

One of the most influential and complex relationships within a family system is the parent-child dyad (Laursen & DeLay, 2011). Caregiver acceptance and family functioning have been identified as significant protective factors against negative mental health outcomes for transgender youth. Despite the clear disparities in trans youth experiencing adverse mental health outcomes, Olsen et al. (2016) found that when parents support their children in changing their names, hairstyles, and clothing, youth from 3-12 do not show any significant differences from cisgender peers on measures of depressive symptomatology. Similarly, de Vries et al. (2016) found that transgender and gender diverse youth reported higher rates of life satisfaction and self-esteem, as well as lower rates of depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation, when they identified their parents as supportive during their childhood. To study the effects of family functioning on the mental health of trans youth, Katz-Wise et al. (2018) conducted a qualitative study with thirty-three transgender individuals from ages 13-17 and their family members (48 caregivers and 15 siblings). They found that reports from transgender youth of better family communication were associated with greater self-esteem and resilience, as well as decreased rates of self-harm, depressive symptoms, and anxious symptoms (Katz-Wise et al., 2018). These studies demonstrate the importance of caregiver acceptance and communication for transgender youth in their parent-child dyads, and by extension, the importance of understanding how parents experience their own transition processes.

Models of Conceptualization

In the growing body of literature on the experiences of parents and caregivers of transgender children, several researchers have attempted to capture the parental adjustment process through theoretical models. A few have likened the emotional stages that some parents
go through after learning their child is transgender to Kubler-Ross and Byock’s (1969) stages of grief. Emerson and Rosenfeld (1996) conducted interviews with family members of transgender clients that led to their proposed transition model stages of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Later, Ellis and Eriksen (2002) analyzed case studies and stories written by family members to produce six stages of adjustment: 1) feelings of shock and denial, 2) negative feelings of loss or anger, 3) using coping mechanisms, 4) feelings of change within themselves, 5) acceptance of their transgender loved one, and 6) feelings of resilience and pride. However, both of these models lack empirical validation and have been criticized by Coolhart (2018) for taking a “pathologizing stance” on gender transition. In a review of a gender affirmative model of working with families, Coolhart (2018) points out the problematic comparisons these two stage models make between gender disclosure and death, which pathologize a process that the author argues should be normalized and validated.

Alternatively, the concept of ambiguous loss has been used to conceptualize how parents may experience grief for the future lives or gendered experiences they envisioned for their child before knowing their transgender identity (Di Ceglie & Thummel 2006; Dierckx et al., 2016). The concept of “ambiguous loss” was first developed by Boss (1972) to describe any loss that is incomplete or uncertain based on the physical and psychological presence or absence. For instance, a family member deployed overseas may hold a psychological presence in the family system, but not a physical one. In contrast, a parent suffering from dementia may hold physical presence but psychological absence. According to Coolhart et al. (2018), some parents of male transgender youth in their qualitative study seemed to experience one or both of these types of loss. However, using the concept of ambiguous loss to conceptualize the emotional turmoil of a family with a transgender child is a more recent application of the term and is still currently
under-investigated. While some parents hold experiences consistent with the concept of ambiguous loss, it’s evident that others do not (Coolhart et al., 2018). There may be many parents of transgender youth who do not experience feelings of loss and do not seek therapy to process their child’s gender transition, therefore conceptualizing loss as a common parental experience may be a biased perspective.

Most recently, Abreu et al. (2019) conducted a systematic review of 32 studies from 2002 to 2018 that examined the experiences of parents with transgender and gender diverse children. Used to organize the following review of parental transition literature. The authors identified patterns among this collection of qualitative research and organized them into categories of initial experiences, transformative processes, positive outcomes, and influences on the process.

**Initial Experiences**

There is a collection of research that has looked at reactions that parents have after observing gender nonconforming behaviors in their child, even before a child expresses a potential gender diverse identity. In a qualitative study, Kane (2006) analyzed parents’ perceptions of their children’s’ gendered attributes and behaviors. From interviews with 42 parents of preschool children, the author found that parents across a variety of social locations generally welcome perceived gender nonconformity among their children assigned female at birth (e.g. dressing in sport-themed clothing, playing with cars and trucks, learning to use tools, etc.), offering positive response and encouragement for daughters to be “tomboyish.” However, parental responses to perceived nonconformity among children assigned male at birth (e.g. wearing nail polish, pink clothing, skirts, or dresses; participating in ballet; playing with Barbie dolls; etc.) were much more complex, including more neutral and negative responses toward perceived “feminine” behavior in sons. Part of this complexity was that many parents accepted
what the author labels as “domestic skills and values” among their sons, but tempered acceptance
with negative responses towards “iconic feminine” items and behaviors. Kane (2006) provides
the example that many parents positively commented on their sons’ interest in playing with baby
dolls (viewed as nurturing, preparation for fatherhood), but discouraged interest in playing with
Barbie dolls (an icon of femininity). Contributing further to the complexity in parental response,
the author found that many parents felt responsible to carefully craft their sons’ masculinity.
Many parents in this study, both heterosexual and LGB identified, endorsed fear of how their
sons may be treated if they fail to accomplish a normative conception of masculinity.

The fear that gender nonconformity may compromise a child’s safety has been discussed
in other parental studies as well. Another qualitative study utilizing semi-structured interviews
by Hill and Menvielle (2009) interviewed 42 parents who were participating in the Children’s
Gender and Sexuality Advocacy and Education Program. All participants had contacted
therapists in this program regarding concerns about their gender non-conforming children, who
ranged from 4-17 years old ($M = 8.0$). Of 42 participants, 26 parents expressed fear that other
people would hurt their child verbally or physically because of gendered behaviors not
stereotypical to their assigned birth sex. Parents described especially fearing this outcome at their
child’s school. In narrative interviews with parents of children 8-10 years old, another study
described that

“...outside of the immediate family system all of the parents in this study were acutely
aware of social stigma and the challenges that came from their child being perceived as
‘different.’ Some parents specifically referenced negative newspaper coverage where
children and families had been ‘outed’ and this lack of societal tolerance weighed heavily
on their minds ”(Gregor et al., 2015, pp. 243).
Additionally, Kane (2006) noted that among several heterosexual parents, gender nonconformity in sons was spontaneously connected to sexual orientation, though this connection was not evident in parents’ comments about daughters. Some participants endorsed fear that their son either would be or would be perceived as gay due to nonconforming behaviors (Kane, 2006). In their study, Hill and Menvielle (2009) also found that 50% of participants linked their child’s displays of gender nonconformity to the prospect that they were not heterosexual, though only a handful of parents indicated that this would bother them. More than half of parents in this study contemplated that their child could be transgender, which elicited a much greater range of concerns than the topic of sexual orientation.

A reaction that parents may have in the face of uncomfortable feelings is trying to change their child’s behaviors to be more conforming with traditional gender roles or discouraging nonconforming behaviors (Riggs & Due, 2015). In their review, Abreu et al. (2019) found that a significant number of parents strongly discouraged their child from gender atypical choices (e.g., wearing clothes or colors associated with they were not assigned at birth), while others allowed it. Several participants also endorsed avoidance of discussing their child’s gender, transgender identity, or transition to delay changes (Abreu et al., 2019). Hill and Menvielle (2009), a study included in the review, found that 60% of parents actively policed gender by discouraging cross-gender choices and encouraging stereotypical choices. Some participants attributed their efforts to the urging of grandparents or health professionals to do so. All that endorsed gender policing their child ultimately indicated that it was not helpful, and in some cases, destructive to their child’s wellbeing (Hill & Menvielle, 2009). In a published dissertation study examining characteristics that predict how parents respond to gender nonconforming behaviors in their children, the researchers found that parents with traditional attitudes about binary gender roles
expressed more discomfort with observing gender nonconformity from their children (Spivey et al., 2018). Contrasting previous studies that have described fathers to have more difficulty with their child’s gender variance, Spivey et al., (2018) also found that when traditional views on gender roles are controlled for, fathers and mothers are equally likely to try to discourage nonconformity and change their child’s behaviors.

Though the trajectories of transgender people are all unique, many children become aware of their gender diversity early in their upbringing and disclose it to their parents (Grossman & D’Augelli, 2007; Grossman, D’Augelli, Howell, & Hubbard, 2005). Similar to observing nonconforming behaviors, parents endorse having a variety of strong reactions to their child’s disclosure of transgender identity. Rule (2018) found in a recent qualitative dissertation study that parents experience a wide range of emotional responses such as fear, shock, sadness, confusion, relief, feeling overwhelmed, or feelings of love. Similarly, Abreu et al. (2019) found that across 16 studies, parents reported intense emotional reactions, such as shock. Six studies had parents that described positive and loving reactions to their child’s coming out. When working with parents of transgender children, Brill & Pepper (2008) advise clinicians to normalize and validate the vast range of intense emotions that a person may experience as they begin their personal and family transition processes beside their child.

Transformative Experiences

Across much of the literature, parents described struggling to reconcile their child's gender identity with previously held beliefs about transgender issues, ideologies and beliefs about gender, previously help prejudices about transgender people, and/or the teachings of religious traditions (Abreu et al., 2019). An avoidant reaction many parents endorsed in the face of these challenges was dismissing their child’s nonconforming behavior as “just a phase” or
attempting to rationalize their child’s gender assigned at birth (Aramburu, 2018; Gregor et al., 2015; Hill & Menvielle, 2009). One example given by Aramburu (2018) as a rationalizing statement a parent gave is “Girls can play with trucks and have short hair too…” (pp. 111). Healy and Allen (2019) point out that even well-meaning and accepting parents may cause a harmful delay in important medical treatment for their transgender children due to their discomfort and caution. The researchers termed this reaction as a “filibuster” of a child’s transition.

Participants also described experiencing loneliness, isolation, anxiety, depression, and stress as they thought about their child’s identity and navigating challenging institutional systems (Abreu et al., 2019). Bull and D’Arrigo-Patrick (2018) discovered that some parents feared questions about their child’s identity or gender expression in public places, which contributed to feelings of hypervigilance and anxiety. A qualitative study by Gray et al. (2016) also found that parents often take one of two approaches to parenting when faced with the reality of having a gender diverse child: accepting or rescuing. Accepting characterizes a drive to accept and support their child’s gender identity while focusing on the child’s present happiness through gender expression. Alternatively, rescuing characterizes a drive to rescue their child from being gender variant while focusing on limiting gender expression to avoid stigma and discrimination.

A further reason that parents may struggle to reconcile with their child’s transgender identity is that they also must reconcile with their own parental identity. Research with parents of transgender children conducted by Field and Mattson (2016) suggests that a child’s sex assigned at birth influences and shapes the parental identity. Through qualitative interviews, parents reported that their child’s assigned birth sex implied a gendered road map for parenting, therefore when their child expressed a different gender, their activities of mothering and fathering were
disrupted and caused parents to undergo a significant relational adjustment period. Bhattacharya et al. (2020) also found similar ideas in their semi-structured interviews with 20 transgender youth and their caregivers. Caregivers endorsed an adjustment period in their parental identities to acclimate to parenting a child of a different gender.

In a recent qualitative study with parent-child dyads, Tyler and Abetz (2020) examined the “turning points” that can capture a parent’s shift from their initial perspective to a more accepting one. The researchers specified that as a relational process, the child-parent transition is an ongoing one where the caregiver and child mutually influence each other over time. Across several other studies, parents endorsed constructing new relational narratives for their child and/or themselves to cope with this adjustment. Examples included realizing their child is the same person with the same personality, re-envisioning their child’s future, and incorporating the identity “parent of transgender child” into their personal story (Abreu et al., 2019). Seven articles included in the analysis by Abreu et al. (2019) described parents finding relational benefits to having a transgender child including (a) having more open communication, (b) mending previous disruptions in the relationship, and (c) experiencing more feelings of closeness and supportiveness for their child.

Parents also described experiencing a transformative process of developing new behaviors and skills as parents after learning they had a transgender child (Abreu et al., 2019). These behaviors included searching for information, educating oneself on LGBTQ* identities, attempting to be more flexible around previously held beliefs, and seeking support from LGBTQ family communities. Numerous studies reported that the acquisition of information led participants to change their original beliefs and misconceptions about their child's identity, to
learn the appropriate language and improve communication with their child about their gender identity, and to feel more comfortable with their child’s identity (Abreu et al., 2019).

Active seeking of information may be a result of the need for professional help. Field and Mattson (2016) point out that engaging in medical or physical transition services is one of the major experiences that distinguish parents of transgender children from parents of LGB children. A participant in this study noted “I wouldn’t have to be seeking all this medical advice if my kid was gay. We have our child on puberty blockers right now and that’s been a big hassle, a big expense.” The researchers note that especially for parents who learn of their child’s transgender identity before or during puberty, there may be challenging choices that carry a sense of permanence and a sense of urgency behind them (Field & Mattson, 2016). Youth have also noted that despite caregivers not being immediately understanding, the process of accessing gender-affirming services often led to increased closeness with their caregivers (Bhattacharya et al., 2020).

Abreu et al. (2019) found that many parents developed better awareness of the discrimination faced by transgender people, especially when witnessing the stigma faced by their children. Parents across six studies described an increase in feelings of empathy towards their children and other transgender people after learning about the experiences of hardship and oppression they face. Additionally, some parents reported connecting their values to action, becoming involved in activism, finding meaning in being an advocate, and becoming involved in educating those around them (Abreu et al., 2019). Common concerns that parents raised concerning their expanded awareness were fear for their child’s future and fear their child would endure emotional and physical harm for their identity.
In one of the studies included in Abreu et al.’s (2019) review, Field and Mattson (2016) found that many parents endorsed later feeling guilt or regret of initially showing negative feelings to their children when they first came out. Parents in a study reported by Aramburu (2018) endorsed similar feelings of guilt over not acknowledging their child’s gender sooner, as well as fear that their child suffered hurt due to their lack of attention or dismissal. Some participants viewed their responses to their child’s coming out retrospectively through a dichotomy of a “right” or “wrong” way (Field & Mattson, 2016). Field and Mattson (2016) describe this phenomenon of parents judging their own and other parents’ responses as the “polarization of parental morality.” They described that this dichotomous thinking would contribute to parents policing their actions and thoughts to prove that they are “good” parents that do the “right” supportive thing.

**Influential Factors**

There are a great number of influences on the process that parents experience. Time is an important factor that influences the parental transition process and the parent-child relationship. Many parents across studies describe learning to accept their child’s identity after a period of adjustment and subsequent uncomfortable feelings. Hill and Menvielle (2009) described that while some parents accept their child after little time and consideration, many others endure a much longer process of policing their child’s gender choices or hoping for change. The amount of time that parents need for this process varies greatly (Abreu et al., 2019).

The gender of both the parent and child was also found to be an influential factor. Compared to fathers, mothers typically had less difficulty accepting and advocating for their TGD child (Abreu et al., 2019). One study included by Riggs and Due (2015) had heterosexual parents indicate how supportive and understanding their partners were. Fathers generally rated
their female counterparts to be more supportive than mothers rated their male partners to be. Additionally, Spivey et al. (2018) specifically found that parents of any gender were more likely to discourage gender nonconformity in children assigned male at birth. This appears to be consistent with previously mentioned research on parental discomfort with nonconforming behaviors in sons compared to daughters. It’s important to note that a large portion of the research is focused on parents of children who transition between the male-female binary, with a collection of more recent research looking at parents of transgender and gender diverse children more broadly. With expanding proportions of youth that are identifying themselves in non-binary ways, there is room for research to consider the specific caregiver experiences of these children, especially considering how parents may be re-configuring their “gendered road map” for gender identities that are less frequently recognized by society.

Another influence on the parental transition process and relationship between parent-child was the beliefs of parents as to the cause of transgender identity. Various participants across studies indicated attributing their child’s TGD identity to having a poor relationship with their child, peer pressure, psychological disorders, or genetic condition. Some parents also described perceiving their child’s nonconformity to indicate sexual orientation (Abreu et al., 2019). Reflecting on the study by Gray et al. (2016) on parents taking either an “accepting” or “rescuing” pathway, the study described that parents who viewed their child’s identity as innate were more likely to be accepting and prioritized their child’s current feelings and gender presentation. Alternatively, parents who believed that their child’s identity could be changed looked towards environmental causes and focused on limiting gender expression to protect their child from stigma (Gray et al., 2016).
Abreu et al. (2019) also found that across many studies, the lack of information and knowledge about transgender identities impacted the understanding and emotional experiences of parents. Parents endorsed difficulty understanding the distinctions between gender identity and sexual orientation, as well as understanding that their child’s identity was not a phase. Participants also described that the lack of information contributed to feeling overwhelmed and distressed about their child’s identity (Abreu et al., 2019). One of the studies included, by Field and Mattson (2016), examined the experiences of parents of transgender children compared to parents of LGB children. Parents in this study also described the lack of information they had fed their strong emotional reactions, as well as hardships in resolving their initial negative reactions. Participants described that differing from parents of LGB children, they also had to handle the challenges of their child’s gender dysphoria and acquire help from healthcare professionals. In interviews with parents of prepubescent children with gender dysphoria, Gregor et al. (2015) illustrated the challenges that parents had in the early stages with being unable to know or name exactly what was happening to their child.

Environmental factors outside the family system are also important to consider in terms of their impact on the adjustment process. Bhattacharya et al. (2020) found five significant contextual factors that influence the parent-child bidirectional relationship: school, community, workplace, religion, and extended family. The researchers found that each of these contextual pieces played a part in either easing or exacerbating the stress within the family system. Additional research has shown that parents of TGD children face stigma and rejection from educational institutions, healthcare professionals, and their social groups (Abreu et al., 2019; Hidalgo & Chen, 2019). Five articles in Abreu et al. (2019) indicated that parents faced challenges navigating school systems and gaining the support of school staff. This impacted
some parents’ ability to protect their children from bullying, and some parents reported moving their children to another school for their safety. Nine studies in Abreu et al. (2019) indicated that parents experienced frustration with finding competent and affirming healthcare for their children. In a qualitative study that interviewed 46 individuals with an LGBTQ-identified family member, Haines et al. (2018) found that many family members experience bias and microaggressions towards their family system.

A potential factor that has yet to be thoroughly examined in the literature for parents is the influence of the family system. For instance, Bhattacharya et al. (2020) identified that between some couples the differences in the time it took for each parent to adjust to their child’s identity contributed to “parenting tension”:

“Our child’s gender identity...disrupted caregivers’ gendered social and emotional map to parenting, and in turn, shaped the emotional dynamics of the family system when one caregiver adjusted sooner than another” (Bhattacharya et al., 2020, pp. 8).

Additionally, research has shown that parent-child relationships are also impacted by sibling relationships (McHale & Crouter, 1996), but this dimension has yet to be empirically explored in families with a transgender child.

Across the research previously discussed, it’s important to note that white participants are heavily overrepresented, an outstanding issue among LGBTQ research in general (Heatherington & Lavner, 2008). In several studies included in Abreu et al. (2019), entire participant samples identify as white, and this limitation is recognized by the researchers. One important study that was included on the experiences of Latine parents of LGBTQ individuals found that cultural values and beliefs of familismo, caballerismo, machismo, and marianismo influenced both how parents navigated their relationships with their children and how parents came to accept their
children (Abreu et al., 2019). This is a critical context to understanding parent experiences beyond those of white people. Given the lack of racial and ethnic diversity among the majority of research available, important contextual and cultural factors that influence parent-child relationships within families of color are generally understudied.

**Sibling Transition Processes**

The majority of children in the United States live with at least one sibling in their household (Feinberg et al., 2011; Hernandez, 1997). In the year 2010, King et al. (2010) found that more than 80% of youth lived in the same home as at least one sibling. The frequency of siblings living in the same household suggests that the majority of transgender children in the U.S. also live with at least one sibling (Aten, 2017; Toomey & Richardson, 2009). Daily emotional contact with a sibling has been shown to provide a child with space to practice relationship skills and develop social understandings that will help the child establish other intimate relationships (Feinberg et al., 2011). Within the family system, sibling relationships are unique from caregiver-child relationships in the fact that they typically carry throughout a person’s life cycle, and therefore are often the longest-lasting relationships in one’s lifetime (Feinberg et al., 2011; Goetting, 1986; McGoldrick, 2016). Goetting (1986) also points out that siblings often share similar genetic makeup, social heritage, cultural environment, and early family experiences; aspects that allow them to provide one another emotional support and companionship that tends to outlast parent relationships by 20-30 years (pp. 703-704). McGoldrick (2016) describes that the way siblings can hold each other’s historical context is important in major life cycle transitions and she emphasizes the importance of clinicians addressing sibling relationships whenever possible in therapy, given the significance of sibling relationships on protection and longevity (pp. 256-280).
There is a fair amount of research to suggest that positive sibling relationships can be protective for children against the effects of stressful life events and consequential internalizing symptoms (Gass et al., 2007; Goetting, 1986; Kim et al., 2007). Bowen (1978) describes that within the family system, there are several combinations, termed subsystems, of people that ally together. Growing up in the same household environment can be an aligning experience for siblings to form alliances and coalitions with one another (pp. 172-173; 367-377). Some researchers even posit that sibling coalitions have the power, at times, to compensate for parental inefficacy and/or help children cope with intraparental hostility (Dekovic & Buist, 2005; Goetting, 1986; Kim et al., 2007; Milevsky & Levitt, 2005). Remarkably, Vaillant (1995) found in a longitudinal study that a close relationship with a sibling was an outstanding predictor of emotional health at age 65—a better predictor than childhood closeness to parents, parental divorce, emotional problems in childhood, having a successful marriage, or even having a successful career. Alternatively, research also finds that high levels of sibling conflict or hostility can predict negative outcomes such as higher internalizing symptoms, higher externalizing symptoms, lower temper management, more school problems, greater subjection to bullying, and more physically aggressive behaviors (Kim et al., 2007; King et al., 2018; Stocker et al., 2002).

Researchers have found that in general, LGBTQ* persons most often disclose their identities to either their mother or their siblings before other family members (Szymanski, & Hilton, 2021; Toomey and Richardson 2009). Szymanski and Hilton (2021) speculate that many individuals may find it easier to come out to their siblings first, due to a lack of financial dependence or less fear about negative reactions compared to their parents. It is important to examine reactions to a sibling’s disclosure of transgender identity and observe the sibling’s experience of transition due to the potential protective or conflictual relationships that influence
the mental health outcomes of a dyad. The potential for siblings to protect against stressful life events may even point to an ability for siblings to provide emotional buffers against adverse parent reactions to LGBTQ identity. On the other hand, the emotional intensity of sibling relationships also has the potential to contribute to further distress. Bosse (2019) found that, even after controlling for parental rejection, perceived sibling rejection had a unique contribution to depressive symptoms for transgender young adults. This may suggest that experiencing a sibling’s rejection may be an even harder blow to take than parental rejection.

According to a dissertation study by Aten (2017) that incorporated a needs analysis with professionals that work with transgender youth, the majority of mental health professionals indicated that programming for adolescents with a transgender sibling would be beneficial to their psychological well-being. All the participants reported no knowledge of established programs of this type at the time of the study. To date, there is very limited research on sibling relationships in families with a transgender child to guide this type of group or individual programming. Various studies have been conducted to investigate birth order effects on the likelihood of LGBTQ* identity, to compare outcomes between LGBTQ* individuals and their cis-gender siblings, or to inquire about who LGBTQ* persons most often disclose their identities first in the family system (Dierckx et al., 2016; Toomey & Richardson, 2009). However, there is scarce material on sibling experiences at this point.

**Existing Literature**

In a recent article “Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer siblings,” Szymanski and Hilton (2021) reviewed the scope of existing literature on sibling relationships where at least one sibling is LGBTQ*. The authors identified only two qualitative studies, both doctoral dissertations, that examined the experiences of cisgender siblings of transgender and gender
diverse individuals. First, Bartel (2012) conducted qualitative interviews with seven transgender women, one non-binary person, and one cisgender sibling on their experiences of their sibling relationships throughout the process of identity disclosure. The researcher found that when siblings had a close relationship, the transgender individual was more likely to believe they would receive acceptance to their disclosure. Alternatively, those who felt the relationship was fractured expected acceptance less often. Transgender participants also described that receiving acceptance from their siblings contributed to greater social support and increased life satisfaction (pp. 86-115). The cisgender participant in this study endorsed experiencing relief after her sibling disclosed their transgender identity, as well as sympathy and empathy for her sibling (pp. 100-110). This study originally intended to interview sibling dyads, but for a number of reasons (participant discomfort, geographical location, etc.), was only able to acquire one dyad and therefore only capture the experience of one cisgender sibling.

Second, a dissertation by Davis (2018) explored the experiences of 11 cisgender siblings living in Canada, from ages 14-34 years old, on their experiences with their transgender sibling’s disclosure. Individuals in this study endorsed feelings of surprise, shock, sadness, worry, uncertainty, confusion, relief, sympathy, and empathy by their transgender sibling’s disclosure. Notably, participants overall described viewing their sibling’s transition as a positive contribution to their quality of life. Several siblings in this study endorsed gaining a new conceptualization and awareness of gender diversity and endorsed adjusting easily to new pronouns, names, and physical changes. Some participants reported both worrying about their transgender sibling’s well-being and becoming more aware of discrimination issues facing gender diverse people after their sibling’s disclosure. Davis (2018) noted that almost half of the interviewees reported feeling a need to take a protective role against discrimination, bullying, and gender-related stress for
their siblings. Interestingly, cisgender siblings in the study generally believed that they provided an important source of emotional support for both their transgender sibling and their parents throughout the process. In both of these dissertation studies with cisgender and transgender individuals, participants reported that acceptance led to a deepening in their sibling relationships (Bartel 2012; Davis 2018).

Another dissertation study by Cantner (2012), not included in Szymanski and Hilton’s (2021) review, explored the experiences of family members of transgender individuals. The researcher utilized focus groups to capture the experiences of eight mothers, two fathers, two aunts, two siblings, and one grandfather. Participants were 14-25 years old and had learned about their family members’ transgender identity between 1-15 years prior. Although Cantner (2012) only had two sibling participants in her study, other family members described observing sibling conflicts within their respective family systems including verbal arguments, intensified rivalry, nonacceptance, increasing emotional distance in the relationship, and complaints from a cisgender child to a parent about the transgender sibling. Some individuals also described wishing that the transgender child and their sibling would get along better (pp. 48, 93).

Such a small scope of literature has clear limitations for generalizability, especially considering the small sample sizes and lack of racial diversity among participants. It is also notable that in the study by Davis (2018), the results of participant interviews seemed to take on a more positive tone and discuss more positive outcomes while the study by Cantner (2012) with other family members discussed prominent conflicts and difficulties among siblings. These studies may point to issues within convenience sampling, where individuals with an overall supportive attitude towards their transgender sibling may be more likely to participate in research than individuals with unsupportive or ambivalent attitudes.
**LGB Sibling Research**

Due to the clear gap in the literature on the experiences of individuals with a gender diverse sibling, studies with the siblings of LGB individuals may give a broader picture of potential sibling experiences, despite the populations’ differences. Through interviews with 44 gay and lesbian individuals and 58 heterosexual siblings, Haxhe and D’Amore (2014) found that 54.5% of their lesbian and gay participants disclosed their sexual orientation to a sibling before a parent. Participants described that disclosure was easier to siblings for reasons that include 1) being financially dependent on parents and fear of being kicked out, 2) fear of greater judgment or disappointment by parents for not meeting their expectations, 3) a “testing” phase of parents including asking questions such as “are you sure?”, and 4) anticipation of generating parental guilt. Remarkably, all of the participants described that they did not have to worry about generating guilt among their siblings in the ways they did with their parents. This may be reflective of phenomena discussed in the parent literature when parents attribute a child’s LGBTQ identity to a poor parent-child relationship, and subsequently feel guilt.

In their review of sibling research, Szymanski and Hilton (2021) include several qualitative studies that examined the experiences of heterosexual individuals with their LGB sibling’s disclosure (English, 2008; Hilton & Szymanski, 2011; Huang et al., 2016) as well as the experiences between sibling dyads (Harvey, 2007; Haxhe & D’Amore, 2014). Across these studies, heterosexual sibling participants endorsed a wide range of reactions to the initial disclosure including emotions of confusion, denial, shock, ambivalence, embarrassment, disappointment, devastation, loss, relief, excitement, happiness, and acceptance (English 2008; Harvey 2007; Hilton and Szymanski 2011; Huang et al. 2016).

Several of the included studies identified particularly negative experiences from the
disclosure process. First, in interviews with 10 sibling dyads, Harvey (2007) found that some siblings disliked the way they found out, especially when the LGB individual did not directly disclose to them. Similarly, in a doctoral dissertation study with heterosexual siblings of lesbian women, English (2008) found that some siblings experienced feelings of loss and abandonment. Participants described feeling as if their sibling withdrew from them or left them out of their life after the initial disclosure (English, 2008). Additionally, in Huang et al.’s (2016) interviews with ten first-generation, heterosexual Chinese and Taiwanese Americans who had a gay sibling, participants reported feelings of hurt and anger due to feeling betrayed and lied to. Several participants in this study also reported struggling to accept their siblings because of tension from ethnic cultural values, family values, and faith.

In terms of relationship development post-disclosure, various sibling participants endorsed a number of difficulties arising in their sibling relationships including feeling they couldn’t relate to their LGBTQ* sibling due to the unfamiliarity with such identities (Hilton and Szymanski 2011); working through personal reactions to their sibling’s level of visibility and public displays of affection with a romantic partner; integrating partners into the family; openly discussing sexuality; questioning family allegiances (Harvey 2007); facing cultural and religious beliefs (Huang et al., 2016). Siblings in Haxhe and D’Amore’s (2014) interviews also identified an uncomfortable experience of being the “go-between” person within their family. For instance, one participant described having one parent complain to them about both parents’ disagreement about their sibling’s sexual orientation. Another participant described that their sibling disclosed their identity to their parents in a letter and that the participant had to face questions such as “did you know about this?” without their sibling to refer to (Haxhe & D’Amore, 2014).

Alternatively, many siblings reacted with indifference, were not surprised, and/or
endorsed largely positive experiences across studies (English, 2008; Harvey, 2007; Hilton & Szymanski, 2011; Haxhe & D’Amore, 2014; Huang et al., 2016). Among LGB individuals and their siblings, Hilton and Szymanski (2011) found that changes to the sibling relationship can be negative, unchanged, or positive, but that these changes tend to follow the pre-existing relationship. Therefore, if a pair of siblings were already close, the relationship would likely strengthen and increase in closeness after disclosure, and participants reported spending more time together, increasing communication, being more open, and communicating more effectively. Alternatively, if a relationship was originally distant or negative, several studies found that disclosure was reported to amplify disengagement or conflict (Harvey 2007; Haxhe and D’Amore 2014; Hilton and Szymanski 2011).

Many siblings reported the disclosure to increase closeness and bonding that resulted in both better communication and openness in the relationship (Hilton and Szymanski 2011; Huang et al. 2016). Researchers also found a few other factors that increased sibling closeness after disclosure of sexual orientation. First, bonding over newly disclosed similarities, for instance, being sexually attracted to the same gender (eg. gay man and heterosexual sister) (Harvey 2007; Hilton and Szymanski 2011). Second, when an individual was one of the first to learn about their sibling’s sexuality (Harvey 2007; Huang et al., 2016). Third, when a sibling shows to be a supportive ally (Harvey 2007).

Participants across studies also expressed feelings of anxiety, protectiveness, or concern due to the prejudice, discrimination, and violence towards LGBTQ* people that may affect their siblings’ wellbeing (English 2008; Harvey 2007; Hilton and Szymanski 2011; Haxhe & D’Amore, 2014). Haxhe and D’Amore (2014) found that siblings especially tend to act as reassuring supporters when an LGB individual decides to disclose their identity to their parents.
and may serve as “defenders” when negative parental responses occur.

**Potential Influencing Factors**

Through the limited research described, as well as suggestions by clinicians that have extensive experience working with transgender families such as Brill and Pepper (2008), there are many hypothesized influences on the sibling transition process. In terms of the contextual factors described by Bhattacharya et al. (2020) that influenced the parent-child relationship by intensifying or relieving relational stress, it can be supposed that important factors include specific environments that are shared between siblings. One major difference between parental and sibling relationships is that siblings are much more likely to share institutional and peer environments such as schools, activities, clubs, or youth communities. In the book *The transgender child: A handbook for families and professionals* Brill and Pepper (2008) illuminate that a cisgender sibling may have to decide how to respond to questions from peers about their transgender sibling and/or disclose their sibling’s identity (pp. 55-57). As transgender individuals may face victimization in their encounters, their siblings may experience a similarly intense degree of teasing, bullying, or discrimination from these shared environments that their parents do not encounter (Brill & Pepper, 2008; Coolhart & Shipman, 2017; Katz-Wise et al., 2018). Alternatively, it’s within reason that in the case that peer environments are largely supportive to the transgender child, they may be supportive for the sibling as well.

Factors within the family system may also be indicated as a significant influence on the transition process for siblings. In Davis’s (2018) study, participants disclosed that both the closeness and open-mindedness of their family had an impact on their adjustment after their sibling’s disclosure. In the aforementioned studies with heterosexual siblings of LGB individuals, participants endorsed navigating tricky family dynamics and uncomfortable
communication within the family, such as when a participant needed to keep their sibling’s identity a secret (Harvey 2007; Szymanski & Hilton, 2021). Participants also described having difficulties when other family members reacted negatively, including feelings of anger, frustration, resentment, and disappointment in these relatives that caused strain on the relationship (English 2008; Hilton and Szymanski 2011; Huang et al. 2016; Szymanski & Hilton, 2021). Some siblings identified playing a mediator role that provided support to their LGBTQ siblings, as well as their parents by easing parental fears, reducing tension, increasing communication, promoting acceptance, facilitating new ways of relating in the family system, and challenging heteronormative beliefs in the family (Harvey 2007; Haxhe and D’Amore 2014; Haxhe et al. 2018; Szymanski & Hilton, 2021).

Parental relationships with the children in a family system may also have an impact on a sibling’s process depending on the dynamics. McHale and Crouter (1985) identified that parental differential treatment between siblings can lead to prominent issues within the sibling relationship. Along these lines, in their handbook for families, Brill and Pepper (2008) caution that unequal parent attention in favor of a cisgender sibling may cause discord:

“Because of your discomfort with your child's gender variance, you may unconsciously bond with your other children more than your gender-variant child. By doing this, you inadvertently place the non-transgender sibling in a position of having to choose loyalty to their parent or to their sibling” (Brill & Pepper, 2008, p. 58).

The authors also note that the opposite can be true as well. Some parents may inadvertently focus on the gender variant child to the degree of neglecting other children and potentially causing the cisgender sibling to act out to gain attention.

In the parent literature, three significant factors on the transition process also included
time, gender, and attribution of transgender identity; all of which may be significant factors for siblings as well. A unique factor related to the time that may influence sibling processes is age. Previous sibling research with adolescents has indicated that prosocial qualities in sibling relationships increase as the age of siblings increases, causing late adolescent dyads to experience greater intimacy than early adolescent dyads (Cole & Kerns, 2001). This may suggest that older sibling dyads may have the benefit of closer relationships. Furthermore, the cisgender sibling’s age and developmental capacity to understand their sibling’s disclosure at the time it happens may be a factor to consider.

Additionally, as described in the parent studies, fathers tended to have more difficulty with the adjustment process than mothers, and parents generally had a harder time accepting transgender identities for children assigned male at birth. In a similar fashion, it may be worth examining whether cisgender brothers of transgender individuals have more difficulty than cisgender sisters in the transition and whether the gender of the transgender sibling influences sibling acceptance. For instance, how might the experiences be different for siblings who were assigned the same sex at birth and currently have discordant gender identities, compared to pairs that were assigned differing sexes at birth and share the same gender identity? Coolhart et al. (2018) question if there may be certain emotional reactions to losing or gaining a shared gender experience with their sibling, as seen in some parents in their study.

**Summary**

As the rates of people identifying as transgender continue to increase, the number of families contending with subsequent transition processes will also grow. The available literature clearly demonstrates that parents have a wide range of reactions, emotions, and challenges when a child discloses their transgender identity and that the parent-child relationship undergoes a
mutually transformative process as the parent adjusts over time. Research with the siblings of LGB people points to the potential for siblings of transgender people to also experience a wide range of reactions and clinicians have indicated a clear need for these individuals to have support. However, it remains unclear how cisgender siblings in these families may experience a transgender sibling’s disclosure and transition, how the process may affect important sibling relationships, and how siblings may best be helped by professionals.

This study aims to address gaps in the literature by considering both how individuals experience the gender transition of a sibling, and from its results, think about potential recommendations to what clinicians should keep in mind when working with these individuals. Given the potential similarities and differences between parent and sibling experiences, there may be many ways clinicians would benefit from taking similar or different approaches in helping each respectively adapt to a child’s gender transition. Questions this study poses to research include:

1. What are the experiences of individuals who have a transgender sibling when their siblings’ identities are first disclosed and throughout the transition process?

2. What support do individuals who have a transgender sibling believe they lacked during their sibling’s and family’s transition process?

3. How does the intersection of religious, racial, ethnic, and/or other cultural identities influence sibling relationships when one is transgender?

**Personal Biases**

Qualitative research generally assumes human subjectivity cannot be eliminated from research and is an important part of human interaction. Therefore, it is critical to examine personal subjectivity or biases to determine how they may influence the research (Auerbach &
Silverstein, 2003). Personal subjectivity and biases related to this research that I both hold and am currently aware of include:

1) I identify as a transgender, two-spirit individual who has undergone gender transition.

2) I have specific relationships with my two siblings that shape my personal experience of what it means to be a sibling.

3) I feel strongly about supporting transgender and LGBTQ communities.

4) I have the personal opinion that family members should accept and support transgender individuals regardless of political, religious, or personal beliefs or affiliations.

These positions will be kept in mind throughout the study since they have the potential to influence how this study is conducted at any point in the process.
Methods

Participants

A sample of 13 cisgender adults who have a sibling that identifies as transgender was recruited by convenience sampling. The number of participants was determined by theoretical saturation. Participants were required to be at least 18 years old, to have a sibling that identifies as transgender or gender diverse, to be within five years of age to this sibling, and to have lived with this sibling during some part of their childhood. Participants were also required to have internet and webcam access to participate in an interview via password-protected Zoom. These requirements were confirmed with interested individuals through email correspondence before volunteers were sent forms to collect additional information.

Participants were asked to identify their age, gender, sexual orientation, racial/ethnic identities, and religion. Participants ranged from 20 to 37 years old and the average age was 26.5 years. Four participants identified as cisgender men and nine as cisgender women. Seven participants identified themselves as Heterosexual and one preferred not to disclose. Five participants described their sexual orientation with one or several labels of Pansexual, Bisexual, Lesbian, or Asexual. Notably, this sample of people was not racially diverse, with 11 participants describing themselves as White and/or of European origin (i.e., German, Polish, Scottish, Ashkenazi Jewish, white); one participant as Indian/South Asian descent; and one participant as mixed race, Black/Hispanic/White. This is important to consider in conclusions drawn and in the development of future research. The majority of participants identified as non-religious and others identified themselves as Jewish, Roman Catholic, and Non-Practicing Christ believer. Participants shared their highest level of education through selecting from multiple choices. All participants indicated completing some college. Education levels ranged from five participants
A SIBLING PERSPECTIVE

completing “Some college,” one “College graduate,” two “Some graduate school,” and five “Graduate school diploma.” Demographic characteristics of the sample are displayed below in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>69.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-22</td>
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<td>30.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>23-29</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-37</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sexual Orientation</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBQ+*</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prefer not to disclose</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Racial/Ethnic Identity</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White/European-American</td>
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<td>South Asian/Indian</td>
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<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Race</td>
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<td>7.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Religious Affiliation</strong></td>
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</tr>
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<td>Non-religious</td>
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<td>61.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-practicing Christ Believer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Highest Education Completed</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
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<tr>
<td>College graduate</td>
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<td>7.6%</td>
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</table>
Some graduate school: 2 15.4%
Graduate school diploma: 5 38.5%

*Note: Identities falling under LGBQ+ umbrella were grouped together, as some participants indicated holding several identity labels.

Participants were also asked to describe their transgender sibling’s gender identity, indicate how long ago they found out about their sibling’s identity, and report their family constellation or household composition. Participants described their siblings’ affirmed genders through a range of labels and identities including transgender, nonbinary, transman, transwoman, transmasculine, and gender fluid. Six participants identified their sibling was assigned male at birth and nine participants identified their sibling was assigned female at birth. Two participants reported having two transgender siblings, each noting one assigned male at birth and one assigned female at birth. At the time of the study, seven of participants reported having learned of their siblings’ affirmed gender identities three or more years ago, while six reported learning within the last one to three years. In terms of birth order, four participants reported being the oldest of two children, four participants reported being the youngest of two, three participants reported being the middle child of three, one participant reported being the older middle of four, and one participant reported being a twin. These characteristics of the participants and how they described their sibling are displayed below in Table 2.

Table 2

*Other Characteristics of Participants and Their Siblings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sibling’s Sex Assigned at Birth*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Female 9 69.2%

Years Since Learning Sibling’s Gender Identity
- 1 - 3 years 6 46.2%
- 3+ years 7 53.8%

Participant’s Place in Sibling Birth Order
- Oldest of two children 4 30.8%
- Youngest of two children 4 30.8%
- Middle of three children 3 23.1%
- Older middle of four children 1 7.6%
- Twin, older of three children 1 7.6%

*Two participants identified having two transgender siblings, therefore sum of percentages is greater than 100. Both participants indicated each having one sibling assigned male at birth and one sibling assigned female at birth.

**Design**

This study was conducted with a qualitative approach to generate a theoretical narrative that describes the experiences of individuals who have a transgender sibling by using grounded theory methods as outlined by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003). Open-ended and semi-structured interviews conducted by the principal researcher were used to ask participants to speak about their individual experiences.

**Procedure**

To recruit participants, a recruitment script and flier with information about the study was emailed to local LGBTQ organizations, posted to appropriate social media pages and groups, and sent to relevant listserv addresses (see Appendix A and B). The PRIDE Healing Center’s (PHC) community contacts were used to share the information with organizations that serve LGBTQ community members and their families in the New York metro area. Additionally, using their chapter contact list, emails were sent to chapters of the Parents, Families, and Friends of
Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) organization spanning across the United States. Study information was also posted to the PHC’s social media pages of Facebook and Instagram, as well as online Facebook groups for LGBTQ-serving providers that allow study advertisement. Efforts were made to encourage individuals of diverse cultural backgrounds to participate. For instance, the researcher sent materials to LGBTQ organizations that specifically serve Black, Indigenous, Latine, Asian, and Jewish populations to recruit from. Due to the principal researcher’s established relations with and knowledge of many of these organizations and groups through leadership within the PHC, this was considered convenience sampling.

Recruitment flyers sent via email and social media contained information about the study, advertised a $25.00 gift card provided for participation, listed eligibility criteria as noted in the participants section, and provided the email address for the principal researcher. The principal researcher emailed with interested individuals to confirm they met eligibility criteria, ask them to complete the informed consent form (see Appendix C), audio recording consent form (see Appendix D), and demographic questionnaire (see Appendix E), and respond to any questions they may have included. Those who did not meet the eligibility criteria were sent an email that explained such and thanked them for their interest. Those who met eligibility criteria and sent completed forms to the researcher were asked to schedule an interview time. After a date and time were agreed upon, a unique Zoom link and password was generated for each interview, set up through the researcher’s LIU student account, and a scripted email that reviews the interview process and provides recommendations to the participant to ensure their privacy during the interview was sent to the participant with their link (see Appendix F).

At the beginning of the interview, the researcher utilized an interview script to explain the procedure, review the main points of the informed consent form, and allow the interviewee to
ask any clarification questions (see Appendix G). The researcher reiterated that if the participant could opt-out of answering a question or end the interview without any consequence. Interview questions were asked and the interview audio was recorded through Zoom. Once complete, the interviewer confirmed the best email to send each participant their gift card and saved the audio file to an encrypted flash drive for transcription. Any video or other files processed by Zoom were immediately deleted. The researcher transcribed and de-identified the interview for coding and analysis. Upon completion of the transcription and checking for accuracy, the audio files from all interviews were deleted.

**Interview Questions**

1. Please describe your experience of learning about your sibling’s gender identity.
   - Follow up: What was going on in your mind? What was your emotional experience?

2. Tell me about your experience during your sibling’s transition process.

3. In what ways, if any, do you think your relationship with your sibling changed?
   - Follow up: If I had interviewed you [number of years since sibling disclosure] number of years ago, what do you think would be the most different for you?

4. How do you think your experience of your sibling’s transition has been similar or different from your parents’ experience?

5. What kind of support has been important for you or do you think would be important for other siblings of gender-diverse people?

6. Is there anything else that you want me to know about your experience that I didn’t ask about?
Data Analysis

Four doctoral students were recruited from the LIU Post Clinical Psychology Program to assist the principal researcher in coding interviews, making a team of five. The principal researcher and writer of this paper is White, Indigenous, Mexican, non-religious, queer, and transgender. They have two sisters that are two and four years younger. They had completed the sequence of courses toward their doctoral degree prior to the coding process. The second coder is a heterosexual, cisgender man who identifies as White, culturally Jewish, and religiously agnostic/atheist. This coder has two sisters that are four and a half and two and a half years older than he. The third coder is a heterosexual, cisgender woman who, previous to graduate school, lived the majority of her life in Italy. She identifies as White/Italian and agnostic/atheist. She has one brother who is three years younger than her. The fourth coder is a heterosexual, cisgender man who identifies as White and religiously Jewish. He is the oldest of four children with one sister who is three years younger, and two brothers who are six and ten years younger. The fifth coder is a gay, cisgender man who identifies as White and nonreligious. He is an only child. All coders had completed foundational training in LGBTQ* issues through either or both Safe Zone and Pride Healing Center (PHC) programming at LIU Post.

A preliminary meeting was held with coders to review the coding process as outlined by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003). In addition to training provided by the principal researcher, coders were asked to read relevant sections of the text to become familiar with their responsibilities for each step in the process. At the end of the training meeting, coders were asked to begin determining relevant text. They worked independently through each transcript. Once coders finished identifying relevant text individually, the principal researcher compared the transcripts to one another to identify discrepancies. The principal researcher arranged meetings
via Zoom with the coding team as needed to coordinate the coding process, discuss discrepancies between individual work, and review data analysis methods. Once relevant text was agreed upon for each transcript, coders worked independently once more to identify repeating ideas. The principal researcher compared individual lists to produce the team’s master list of repeating ideas to be discussed and then organized into themes. Again, each coder worked independently to group the repeating ideas into themes. The principal researcher used each coder’s themes to develop a final list of themes and then organize into theoretical constructs. The data were analyzed through a family systems lens to organize themes into a theoretical framework. From this framework, a theoretical narrative was developed to organize data into a story of participants’ experiences.

**Results**

The results are presented in different formats of text according to their level of hierarchy. Repeating ideas are noted in italics, themes are in underlined text, and theoretical constructs are completely capitalized. Some repeating ideas are named from direct quotes from participants and are indicated in quotation marks. Brackets are used to include signal words that complete the quotes based on context but were not said by participants. The relevant text was organized into the 70 repeating ideas, which were then organized into 16 themes. Themes were organized into four theoretical constructs. The hierarchical organization of theoretical constructs, themes, and repeating ideas are displayed below in Table 3. The complete hierarchical data organization including the relevant text can be found in Appendix H.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Hierarchical Data Organization</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Theoretical Construct I: AFFECTIVE REACTIONS

**Theme A: Feelings of worry and concern (10; 76.9%)**

**Repeating Ideas:**
1. General feelings of worry (3; 23.1%)
2. Worry about sibling’s mental health or neurodivergent identities (6; 46.2%)
3. Worry about gender-affirming care (3; 23.1%)
4. “my degree of concern for their like immediate well-being has increased just because being trans is hard in the world” (6; 46.2%)

**Theme B: Experiencing negative emotions (7; 53.8%)**

**Repeating Ideas:**
5. Sadness (5; 38.5%)
6. Feelings of loss or grief (4; 30.8%)
7. Anger (2; 15.4%)

**Theme C: Experiencing neutral to positive emotions (11; 84.6%)**

**Repeating Ideas:**
8. Happiness and joy (6; 46.2%)
9. Excitement (5; 38.5%)
10. “I feel like I didn't really have like, particular emotions about it” (5; 38.5%)

### Theoretical Construct II. INDIVIDUAL CHANGE PROCESSES

**Theme D: Experience of understanding (10; 76.9%)**

**Repeating Ideas:**
11. “What I found so interesting about it when he came out as trans was like all these like childhood memories that now made sense” (4; 30.8%)
12. “So I found out this, that he's a member of the LGBT community in some way beforehand” (5; 38.5%)
13. “In that way it was always something that I had in the back of my mind” (2; 15.4%)
14. “the experience was one of okay, that makes sense, I understand” (5; 38.5%)
15. “understanding my siblings’ identities has really been due to previous exposure and continued exposure to other trans people” (3; 23.1%)
16. Participant’s lgbtq identity helped them understand their sibling’s experience (4; 30.8%)

**Theme E: Experience of not understanding (8; 61.5%)**
### Repeating Ideas:

17. “This doesn’t make sense. I didn’t see this coming” (7; 53.8%)
18. Feelings of confusion, surprise, shock (5; 38.5%)
19. Experiencing conflict, resistance, or denial (4; 30.8%)

### Theme F: Coming to terms with transness (13; 100%)

20. “I needed to change how I’m viewing things” (5; 38.5%)
21. Reconciling with religious/conservative beliefs and values (4; 30.8%)
22. Adjusting to changes (10; 76.9%)
23. “It’s the new normal. It’s real and I had to accept it” (5; 38.5%)
24. “I think that that was really hard for me to process in the beginning, but is something over time, I have been able to do a lot better.” (5; 38.5%)
25. Feelings of guilt for previous responses and reactions (5; 38.5%)

### Theme G: Approaching with love first (5; 28.5%)

Repeating Ideas:

26. “I love my sibling and just want them to be happy” (4; 30.8%)
27. “their coming out has really been a real positive for them” (4; 30.8%)
28. “let's keep good going. Even if I don't understand it, right?” (3; 23.1%)

### Theoretical Construct III. DYADIC RELATIONSHIP PROCESSES

### Theme H: How to relate as siblings now (13; 100%)

Repeating Ideas:

29. Closeness, becoming closer (8; 61.5%)
30. “now we can finally understand each other” (6; 42.6%)
31. Loss of closeness (4; 30.8%)
32. A different gender relationship (3; 23.1%)
33. “But there's some things that are still the same because she's still the same person” (6; 46.2%)

### Theme I: How to support their sibling has been clear (10; 76.9%)

Repeating Ideas:

34. My role has been straightforward (6; 46.2%)
35. “On the front lines” (8; 61.5%)
36. “It’s not about me” (5; 38.5%)

### Theme J: How to support their sibling has been unclear (10; 76.9%)

Repeating Ideas:

37. My role has been confusing (5; 38.5%)
38. “I feel like there's the topic that I just can't bring up or can't talk about, which is a really big topic, which is gender identity” (4; 30.8%)
39. Not on the “front lines” (6; 46.2%)
### Theme K: Challenges of the Sibling Role (10; 76.9%)

**Repeating Ideas:**

- 40. “I feel like my own family's dynamic is what stood in my way of being the best sibling I could be” (5; 38.5%)
- 41. Difficulty deciding when to correct gendered language (6; 46.2%)
- 42. Feelings of frustration or anger with other family members (6; 46.2%)
- 43. Difficulty deciding to tell others outside the family (4; 30.8%)

### Theoretical Construct IV. FAMILY SYSTEM PROCESSES

### Theme L: Serving as a buffer between their sibling and parents (11; 84.6%)

**Repeating Ideas:**

- 44. The first to know (6; 46.2%)
- 45. Correcting language (4; 30.8%)
- 46. Hearing parents’ difficulties (4; 30.8%)
- 47. “I'm trying to gently push them in the same direction of being more accepting” (6; 46.2%)
- 48. “I talk to them so my sibling wouldn't have to because they shouldn't have to do that” (4; 30.8%)

### Theme M: Experience has been different than parents (13; 100%)

**Repeating Ideas:**

- 49. “we've had very different experiences because we've had very different exposures” (3; 23.1%)
- 50. “they've just had a lot more emotion” (8; 61.5%)
- 51. Some of the differences are generational things (4; 30.8%)
- 52. Religion/culture impacted my family's adjustment (6; 46.2%)
- 53. “I understand why they feel this way. But I don't understand why they haven't changed.” (5; 38.5%)

### Theme N: Impact of the family transition on the sibling process (12; 92.3%)

**Repeating Ideas:**

- 54. My family is supportive / was accepting (3; 23.1%)
- 55. My parents became involved in activism / organizations (4; 30.8%)
- 56. My parent was dismissive/denied my sibling's identity (4; 30.8%)
- 57. “They've come a long way” (7; 53.8%)
- 58. “And there have been some really big challenges for my parents and the pronouns and like being able to use the correct pronouns” (5; 38.5%)
- 59. “My experience is just that it's really hard for parents, but like, THAT can be hard on siblings” (6; 46.2%)
- 60. “I'm glad we’re all on the same page there” (5; 38.5%)
- 61. “Like we were kind of coming along for the ride of that journey and...it wasn’t always easy” (4; 30.8%)

### Theme P: Feeling unsupported in the transition (7; 53.8%)
Theoretical Narrative

Cisgender participants with a transgender sibling spoke of their experiences in individual interviews in four distinct and overlapping domains: AFFECTIVE REACTIONS, INDIVIDUAL CHANGE PROCESSES, DYADIC RELATIONSHIP PROCESSES, and FAMILY SYSTEM PROCESSES.

When participants became aware their siblings’ gender identities were different from their sexes assigned at birth, they described a range of initial and delayed AFFECTIVE REACTIONS. Several participants indicated experiencing negative emotions. Feelings of sadness ranged from witnessing how hard disclosure/transition was on their sibling to feeling sad a participant wasn’t one of the first to find out, lacking closeness (Sadness). Others endorsed feelings of grief or loss related to experiencing their sibling’s disclosure/transition as the death of one person and the birth of another, the distance from being able to help, stages of grief, the loss of a same-gender relationship, or losing a sense of closeness (Feelings of loss or grief). Some participants even endorsed feelings of anger. Participants also expressed feelings of worry and concern for their trans sibling. In addition to general feelings of worry, several described worries
related to the social ramifications of being non-cisgender ("my degree of concern for their like immediate well-being has increased just because being trans is hard in the world"), the risks or complications of pursuing gender-affirming care (worry about gender-affirming care), or their intersection of transness with their sibling’s mental health or neurodivergent identities.

Many participants also shared experiencing neutral to positive emotions such as happiness, relief, excitement, pride, and joy. Many folks expressed happiness and joy that their siblings understand themselves better, appeared to be happier, or were pursuing happier lives. Some folks expressed relief that they could better understand their siblings now and communicate better with one another. Participants also expressed feelings of excitement and hope to witness their siblings explore gender and pursue more authentic versions of themselves. A number of folks also expressed feeling neutral or no emotions about their sibling’s disclosure ("I feel like I didn't really have like, particular emotions about it").

Following their siblings’ disclosures, there were a range of INDIVIDUAL CHANGE PROCESSES described by participants as they adapted to this new knowledge about their sibling. As participants described the experience of understanding, several endorsed more immediately coming to a place of understanding and recognition ("the experience was one of okay, that makes sense, I understand"). A handful of individuals reflected on having a sense, before their sibling ever verbalized, that they could be gender diverse ("In that way it was always something that I had in the back of my mind"). Several folks expressed that learning of their sibling’s gender identity provoked childhood memories that they then recontextualized as potential signs of their sibling not aligning with their sex assigned at birth, experiencing gender dysphoria, or behaving in ways more attributable to a different gender ("What I found so interesting about it when he came out as trans was like all these like childhood memories that..."
now made sense”). A few participants also indicated that having knowledge that their sibling was part of the LGBTQ community beforehand, usually by their sexual orientation, helped them understand how their sibling could be transgender (“So I found out this, that he’s a member of the LGBTQ community in some way beforehand”). For those who described reaching a place of understanding relatively quickly, there were a few factors that seemed to facilitate a more immediate process. Participants noted that already having friends that are gender diverse, having familiarity with trans people via social media, or being in proximity to transgender people contributed to a more immediate understanding in contrast to others with less familiarity (“understanding my siblings’ identities has really been due to previous exposure and continued exposure to other trans people”). In a similar vein, it seemed apparent that a participant’s LGBTQ identity helped them understand their sibling’s experience. Interviewees expressed recognition of what it was like to come out to parents and have to explain facets of their identities.

Conversely, many folks described the experience of not understanding their sibling’s transgender identity. A few participants indicated their initial or prolonged reaction to their sibling’s disclosure was colored by feelings of confusion, surprise, or shock. A handful of participants noted even stronger reactions of experiencing conflict, resistance, or denial, describing that a part of them didn’t want it to be true that their sibling was transgender. Some individuals described these feelings and lack of understanding were in part due to not seeing any prior signs that their sibling could be transgender, citing their sibling’s stereotypically gendered interests that fit their sexes assigned at birth (“This doesn’t make sense. I didn’t see this coming”).
Progressing from initial reactions and emotions, a theme of participants’ narrative emerged around coming to terms with transness. For some, their broad views about the LGBTQ community, understanding of transgender people, or personal relation to their sibling had to shift in order to integrate this new knowledge (“I needed to change how I’m viewing things”). A few participants identified that the challenge of reconciling their religious or political ideologies with their siblings’ gender diversity has been significant in this process (Reconciling with religious/conservative beliefs and values). There were some individuals who alluded to previously thinking of transgender, or broadly LGBTQ, identity as a politically liberal one, which caused feelings of tension within their family or intrapersonally.

Almost all participants identified a process of adjusting to changes that took conscious effort on their part, whether getting used to differences in physical appearance, using new names, thinking of their sibling as a different gender, or using different gendered language. Several participants identified that the passing of time was a significant factor in their process of adjustment (“I think that that was really hard for me to process in the beginning, but is something over time, I have been able to do a lot better”), and a handful of participants expressed that at a certain point, their siblings’ affirmed gender became such a part of their daily reality that it required them to reach a level of acceptance they hadn’t had previously (“It’s the new normal. It’s real and I had to accept it”). A number of individuals also expressed feelings of guilt for previous responses and reactions to their sibling’s disclosure of trans identity, now that they have developed a different understanding and acceptance of their sibling.

However, across the range of difficult and uncomfortable experiences described, there was a grounding sentiment among participants of approaching with love first. Many participants expressed a desire for their sibling’s happiness above all else (“I love my sibling and just want
them to be happy”) and a handful of folks indicated that despite their personal feelings or lack of understanding, it has been important to them to be supportive (“Let's keep good going. Even if I don't understand it, right?”). Several folks indicated seeing how the coming out process has been clearly positive for their sibling’s wellbeing (“their coming out has really been a real positive for them”).

After learning of their siblings’ transgender identities, participants experienced a range of DYADIC RELATIONSHIP PROCESSES within their sibling relationship. Interviewees described a consideration of how to relate as siblings now. More than half of the participants indicated that they grew closer to their sibling after learning of their gender identity (Closeness, becoming closer). A number of interviewees expressed that being able to better understand their sibling significantly impacted the relationship in positive ways (“now we can finally understand each other”). A few of the women interviewed shared about a different gender relationship that emerged with their sibling, where they felt they could now bond over same-gender experiences with their now-sisters that they didn’t previously when they thought of their siblings as brothers. Contrastingly, a handful of individuals identified that they became less close to their sibling (Loss of closeness). This experience seemed particularly salient when the sibling disclosed their identity to others (e.g., parents, friends) before the participant. Amidst the experiences of change to different relationships, some folks expressed feeling that their relationships did not change much, as the core of who their siblings are stayed the same (“But there’s some things that are still the same because she's still the same person”).

The very personal and specific role of being a sibling was described by many participants. Some participants noted feeling that in some aspects, how to support their sibling has been clear. Individuals expressed recognizing a specific role for them to play in their
siblings’ disclosure and transition processes of being a supporter, an affirmer, or defender (*My role has been straightforward*). A number of participants expressed the idea of being *on the ‘front lines’* of their siblings’ transition processes, whether being able to witness their sibling’s individual exploration and affirmation, or by facing external systems for their sibling (e.g., parents, insurance companies, society). Another resounding sentiment among participants was to center their siblings’ experiences as transgender people, rather than consider their own experience or needs, even when participants were struggling (“*It’s not about me*”).

In other ways, participants also expressed that determining *how to support their sibling has been unclear*. Several interviewees expressed uncertainty about what their role should be as a sibling, whether that is an advocate, an ally, a protector, an informer, or someone who intervenes (*My role has been confusing*). Some folks indicated that they don’t feel comfortable talking with their sibling about gender or asking further questions that could be clarifying for fear of disagreement, uncomfortable feelings, conflict, withdrawal, or loss of relationship (“*I feel like there’s the topic that I just can’t bring up or can’t talk about, which is a really big topic, which is gender identity*”). For some, it was upsetting that they were *not on the ‘front lines’* of their sibling’s transition process due to factors of physical distance, lack of closeness in the relationship, busy personal lives, or a need for emotional distance from family.

Whether participants had a clear sense of their role or held confusion of their position, many folks identified specific *challenges of the sibling role* overall. Some participants expressed desire to be a “better” sibling or support, but that family dynamics of abuse, close parent relationships, intergenerational trauma, secret-keeping, intense shame, highly expressed emotion, or interfamilial roles impacted their ability (“*I feel like my own family’s dynamic is what stood in my way of being the best sibling I could be*”). Many participants expressed *feelings of frustration*
or anger with other family members for their attitudes, misgendering, mistreatment, or non-acceptance towards their sibling. Several folks also described that they had difficulty deciding when to correct gendered language that others were using, whether within or outside their family, due to conflicting factors of navigating specific relationships, not wanting to “out” their sibling, wanting to be a good “ally,” and being uncertain of what their sibling would prefer them to do. Similarly, some participants identified difficulty deciding to tell others outside the family about their sibling’s gender identity or that they have a transgender sibling for similar reasons. Participants identified a complicated thought process of weighing their sibling’s wishes, potential risks to their sibling’s safety, their own emotional safety, how close they are to the other person, and how they anticipate someone else will react to the information.

Beyond the sibling dyad, participants discussed the broader impact of their sibling’s disclosure on their family and the FAMILY SYSTEM PROCESSES that took place through the transition. Many interviewees identified a position of serving as a buffer between their sibling and parents through the family transition process in some way. Some participants shared the experience of either keeping their sibling’s identity a secret from other family members or assisting their sibling to come out to parents, serving as the initial person their sibling disclosed to (The first to know). A few individuals identified actively trying to change their parents’ views of transgender people by providing education, informational materials, or acceptance coaching (“I’m trying to gently push them in the same direction of being more accepting”). Several individuals described intervening when their parents misgendered their sibling by correcting their language or reminding them of more appropriate terms. At times, this impacted their own relationship harmony to a parent (Correcting language). Notably, participants described interfacing with their parents in ways to reduce the emotional labor or impact on their sibling. A
fair number of people expressed feeling a responsibility to intervene with their parents or other family members to explain gender constructs or transgender identity so that their sibling wouldn’t need to (“I talk to them so my sibling wouldn't have to because they shouldn't have to do that”). A few folks also described that their parents used them as confidants to share a range of emotional reactions and difficulties with their child’s transition (Hearing parents’ difficulties). Some participants expressed feeling glad they could help their parent process so that their sibling didn’t have to hear how much they were struggling.

Participants shared many ways that their experience has been different from parents’ throughout the transition process. Many individuals indicated that their experience has overall seemed less emotionally intense than their parents’ (“they’ve just had a lot more emotion”), which some attributed to differences between parent-child and sibling relationships in general and others attributed to several different ideas. One, that their exposure and familiarity with trans or gender diverse people prior to their sibling’s disclosure was greater than their parents (“we’ve had very different experiences because we’ve had very different exposures”). Two, that some of the differences are generational things, where younger generations have more open attitudes towards LGBTQ identities. Three, that their parents had much stronger associations to religious or cultural values (e.g., patriarchal, fundamentalist, strong gender roles) that do not accept the existence of transgender people (Religion/culture impacted my family’s adjustment). A handful of participants also expressed not making sense of their parents’ reactions or attitudes towards their sibling (“I understand why they feel this way. But I don’t understand why they haven’t changed”).

Amidst these similarities and differences to their parents’ experiences, participants described the overall impact of the family transition on the sibling process. A handful of individuals described their family overall was supportive of their trans sibling (My family is
A SIBLING PERSPECTIVE

supportive / was accepting), and some identified that their parents became involved in
LGBTQ-supportive organizations such as PFLAG or other activism (My parents became
involved in activism / organizations). Others identified that their parents were less accepting (My
parent was dismissive/denied my sibling’s identity) or took a significant amount of time to come
to a more accepting attitude (“They’ve come a long way”). A couple of interviewees noted that
their parents had significant challenges with using affirming language to talk about their sibling
(“And there have been some really big challenges for my parents and the pronouns and like
being able to use the correct pronouns”). Extended from the ways participants described seeing
their parents’ change processes, almost half of the interviewees expressed that it was emotionally
difficult for them to witness their parents struggling, particularly when their parents were having
a hard time emotionally processing changes in their sibling (“My experience is just that it’s really
hard for parents, but like, THAT can be hard on siblings”).

Notably, participants that expressed having a shared experience with their parents or
other family members, even just certain elements of it, was particularly helpful and supportive to
them. A group of interviewees expressed gratitude about their family being “on the same page”
in regards to showing support and acceptance towards their sibling (I’m glad we’re all on the
same page there”). Another group of interviewees expressed having a shared experience with
their parents of greater challenges with coming to terms with their sibling’s identity and
developing acceptance over time (“Like we were all kind of coming along for the ride of that
journey and… it wasn’t always easy”).

Overarching their experiences, individuals shared about their success or challenges with
accessing sibling support. A number of folks shared the sentiment that support and resources
were helpful to them when available and cited things including talking to other siblings, talking
with supportive friends, talking with parents, receiving LGBTQ training in professional life, seeing social media content by other trans people, talking with other people who also have a trans sibling. However, through these processes of adaptation many sibling participants expressed feeling unsupported in the transition. Many folks expressed that they had actually never considered this process as something they needed support with, due to centering their sibling’s experience (“I haven't ever thought about it really as part of an experience I'm going through also”). Several folks voiced a lack of resources geared towards siblings specifically, or that materials over-focus on supporting their trans family member (Lack of support for siblings). Some folks that had accessed information or LGBTQ-serving organizations reported that the resources and support offered weren’t necessarily helpful, due to not being created with sibling relationships in mind. A few individuals also noted that they have skepticism about resources available, wondering if it would actually be helpful, specific enough to their circumstances, or pushing a particular political agenda they are uninterested in.

Participants also had a number of suggestions for what they think could have been helpful to them in the past or could be helpful for other individuals in the future. Suggestions included mental health support, such as individual therapeutic services; groups or communities of other siblings that are centered around the sibling experience or religious experience; information that has guidance for navigating family relationships; and more general information on gender diversity. Across these suggestions, participants pointed towards different needs of supporting their sibling, processing their own experience, and assisting parents with the transition.

**Discussion**

The results will be analyzed through the lenses of Bowen’s family systems theory, experiences within LGBTQ* community, and psychodynamic theory. These perspectives were
used as they offer ways to understand the complex interactions within parent-child, sibling dyad, and familial relationships, particularly as they are influenced by unconscious patterns and processes, as well as the experiences of queerness within a heavily cis-heteronormative society. This is important to this researcher in order to understand the unique position of a sibling within both the emotionally interconnected nuclear family and their broader communities.

**Emotional Salience**

Similar to studies with parents, siblings of LBG individuals, and the limited research on siblings of transgender folks described previously (Davis, 2018; English 2008; Harvey 2007; Hilton and Szymanski 2011; Huang et al. 2016), participants in this study had a wide and variable range of emotional reactions to their sibling’s disclosure (Experiencing negative emotions; Experiencing neutral to positive emotions). The majority of interviewees in this study also expressed fear and concern about their siblings’ safety or experiencing social stigma after learning of their transgender identity (Feelings of worry and concern), which was also reflected in many other parent and sibling studies (Davis, 2008; English, 2008; Gregor et al., 2015; Harvey, 2007; Hilton and Szymanski, 2011; Haxhe & D’Amore, 2014; Hill and Menvielle, 2009; Kane, 2006).

A significant idea that differentiated sibling from parent experiences was participants’ perception that their siblings’ gender transition had less emotional impact on them than their parents (“they’ve just had a lot more emotion”). One explanation of this difference could be that siblings have less or different kinds of investment in one another’s gender. The parental literature suggested that parents develop a gendered “road map” and parental identity in relation to their child’s gender that influences the development of their visions, expectations, or fantasies of what it may be like to raise their child (Field and Mattson, 2016). However, for siblings in this study, it
seemed that there wasn’t necessarily a “road map” for the sibling relationship or sibling identity, that is as strongly based in gender. Though a few participants endorsed feelings of grief or loss of a gendered relationship (e.g., sister, brother), participants weren’t necessarily grieving the loss of what they had imagined their siblings’ lives to be like in the way one might guess their parents were based off the literature (Feelings of loss or grief; A different gender relationship). Rather, siblings seemed to grieve a loss of closeness in their relationship, unresolved feelings in the relationship prior to transition, or the physical distance keeping them from being able to help their families. Notably, almost half of participants endorsed that their relationship to their sibling stayed quite similar to what it was before learning of their sibling’s gender identity, primarily because they saw them as the same person.

Previous research also indicated that LGBTQ folks often disclose their identities to siblings before parents due to worrying less about generating guilt in their siblings than in their parents by disclosing queer identity (Haxhe & D’Amore, 2014). This is likely because parents may conceptualize their child’s transgender identity as a failure of parenting or lack of closeness in the parent-child relationship. Notably, no interviewees in this study expressed conceptualizing their sibling’s identity to be related to their parental relationships or parenting practices. Participants thought that their adjustments were relatively easier than their parents due to the different generations they belong to (some of the differences are generational things), or their relative exposure to LGBTQ community (“we’ve had very different experiences because we’ve had very different exposures”). This may reflect general social changes in visibility, representation, and messaging that younger generations generally have more positive exposure to LGBTQ people.

A family-level explanation for siblings’ relative emotional dilution compared with
parents may be through Murray Bowen’s (1978) concept of the family projection process. In this process, a parent becomes fearful that something is wrong with their child and becomes very focused on them, interpreting their child’s response as a confirmation of their fear, and therefore treating them as if something actually is wrong. In this process Bowen described that the parent feels they have not given enough love, support, or attention to the child and therefore intensifies their investment of time, energy, and worry onto them. Siblings that are not involved in this projection process, according to Bowen, tend to develop into less reactive, less emotionally intensive, goal-oriented people. While this concept is meant to describe a process from a child’s early development, I think it could also explain a more temporary process between adult parent-child-sibling relationships that occur during the transition process. When parents are focused on a their transgender child, especially if they believe the transgender identity is what’s “wrong,” and particularly if they fear there is something wrong in the parent-child relationship that caused queerness, they involve with this child more emotionally until there’s a new understanding. Whereas, the siblings not involved in this projection process may have greater emotional space and distance from the supposed “problem” being projected upon their sibling. Several participants in this study described keeping their sibling’s wants, needs, and experience at the forefront of their attitudes. This posed an interesting challenge in interviews and data analysis because participants more easily spoke about what they knew and perceived of their siblings’ experiences than of their own. Some interviewees had never considered how it felt or was for them due to their focus on their sibling (“I haven't ever thought about it really as part of an experience I'm going through also”; It’s not about me).

The Adjustment Process

Similarly to the only study available on cisgender sibling experiences prior to this one,
participants indicated forming a new conceptualization of their sibling and adjusting to new names, pronouns, and physical changes (Adjusting to changes). While participants in the previous study endorsed a relatively easy adjustment process (Davis, 2008), interviewees in this study contrastingly endorsed a wider spectrum of relative ease to difficulty in dealing with feelings of discomfort and making changes in their language, thinking, and view of their sibling (Coming to terms with transness).

How participants initially conceptualized their sibling’s transness may also be important factors in the salience of their emotional experiences, ease or difficulty in adjusting, and length of transition process. In previously mentioned literature, parents who conceptualized their child’s trans identity being caused by environmental factors often focused on changing or limiting their child’s gender expression while parents who viewed their identity as innate focused on acceptance (Gray et al., 2016). Many participants in this study identified that exposure to other transgender people or the LGBTQ community broadly helped them make sense of their sibling’s identity (“understanding my siblings' identities has really been due to previous exposure and continued exposure to other trans people”). Additionally, several folks described recontextualizing old childhood memories as possible “signs” that their sibling had been a different gender all along (“What I found so interesting about it when he came out as trans was like all these like childhood memories that now made sense”). Likely because these individuals already had an understanding of LGBTQ identity as innate, it was easier to understand their sibling’s trans identity.

Other participants expressed being more blindsided by this new information about their sibling (“This doesn’t make sense. I didn't see this coming”). Participants expressed confusion about not seeing any “signs” that their sibling could be transgender (Feelings of confusion,
surprise, shock), which in part, seemed to come from a lack of understanding about gender as a social construct. Some interviewees expressed being very unfamiliar with the LGBTQ community due to lack of exposure and lack of access to information. In some cases it seemed that some participants had previously perceived transgenderism as a liberal political issue more than a human identity that anyone of any political leaning could hold. One participant even humbly shared about coming to a new understanding that transgender people actually exist through this experience with their sibling.

Interestingly, there was one participant in this study that expressed worry he had potentially caused or encouraged his younger sibling’s identity as a transgender man due to including them in stereotypically masculine activities when they were kids. This experience seemed more closely aligned with the experiences of parents who worried their quality of parent-child relationship was a reason for gender diversity. It may be important to note that this participant was the older sibling of the dyad, indicated religious identity as personally significant, and expressed greater emotionally difficulty of “losing” a sister than many other participants. However, since only one participant in this study endorsed this kind of fear, it is difficult to speculate about reasons for this difference in experience from other participants.

Though most participants did not explicitly endorse conceptualizing their sibling’s transgender identity as “caused” by environmental factors such as peer pressure, poor parenting, or a political agenda, it seemed that several folks had previous ideas about transgender people as a population that changed with this new and intimate proximity to someone of transgender identity. Closely aligned with experiences described in parental literature, many participants endorsed struggling to accept or reconcile their sibling’s gender identity with their beliefs and cultural identities that felt dissonant (Reconciling with religious/conservative beliefs and values).
One interviewee shared “like I wasn't even sure if gay people should get married. And now all of a sudden I have someone who is openly advocating for trans rights” (P1). Several participants identified needing to contend with previously held beliefs or prejudices about transgender people, strong gender roles, partriarchical or misogynistic family ideas, messages from religious leaders or lack of messaging from religious authority. Another interviewee expressed:

"Like what do we do as Catholics with this situation? Because no one's answering that! It's like I can find a million Catholics... explaining why theoretically speaking and philosophically speaking, the transgender movement is... not gonna last and it’s contrary to God’s greater order. And it's like, I got that. Like no one's talking about what I do. Like what should I do as a brother?" (P5).

Similar challenges have been endorsed in a several studies with parents and siblings of LGB individuals (Abreu et al., 2019; Gregor et al., 2015; Hill & Menvielle, 2009; Huang et al., 2016). Consistent with previous parental literature, it also seemed that participants who identified more conservatively had gaps of knowledge and understanding of the LGBTQ community as a whole, and described a greater learning process (“I think that that was really hard for me to process in the beginning, but is something over time, I have been able to do a lot better”).

A study reviewed previously by Tyler and Abetz (2020) discussed the process of relational “turning points” that may characterize a parent’s shift from non-acceptance to acceptance across time. This relational process, acknowledging some differences in the parent-child relationship from a sibling dyad, seems to capture the process over time that some participants identified as well (“I needed to change how I’m viewing things”). One participant shared,

“it sort of just got to the point to realize.. it's not that she was a boy and now she's a girl.
Like realizing that she was a girl the whole time. And it was just like a boy disguise. That was sort of, for me, that was the easiest way” (P11).

Many participants indicated that at some point, a “new normal” emerged that seemed to have a different affective settling than the transition from old “normal.” The idea of the “new normal” that participants described may indicate a relational turning point in which the sibling dyad or the family has adapted enough to achieve a sense of homeostasis once again (“It’s the new normal. It’s real and I had to accept it”).

Notably, some participants also expressed feelings of guilt during their interview about how they initial reacted and responded to their sibling when they first came out (Feelings of guilt for previous responses and reactions). One participant shared even trying to repress feelings they felt guilty about:

“But it really wigged me out I think. it was just so weird to see [sibling] be this new person. And not that I don't want them to be that person but I think deep down I did resist that a little bit. I was having trouble, sort of, relating to this new [sibling] and understanding the new [sibling]. I didn't like that I was feeling that way. So I was trying to sort of just repress it a little bit” (P9).

This experience was also reflected in a few studies with parents, who endorsed guilt and regret for initially showing negative feelings to their child’s disclosure (Aramburu, 2018; Field & Mattson, 2016). It would seem that as family members become more familiar with transgender identity or further understanding of their transgender member’s experiences, they gain clearer awareness of their impact on this person relationally.
The Sibling Relationship

For a number of siblings that had less immediate understanding of their sibling, they expressed a sentiment of approaching with love first. Amidst their own confusion, conflict, and other feelings, interviewees expressed desire for their siblings to be happy (“I love my sibling and just want them to be happy”) that outweighed a need to understand (“let's keep good going. Even if I don't understand it, right?”) and acknowledgement that their disclosure was a positive change in their life (“their coming out has really been a real positive for them”). Previous research with siblings of LGB individuals indicated that change in the sibling relationship appeared to follow the direction it was already leaning towards, meaning that if siblings were close, the disclosure fostered closeness, and if siblings were already distant, the disclosure furthered their distance (Harvey 2007; Haxhe and D’Amore 2014; Hilton and Szymanski 2011). However, changes in the interviewees sibling relationships did not occur as simply as previous research suggested.

A number of participants shared that their relationship to their sibling became closer following their sibling’s disclosure of transgender identity (Closeness, becoming closer). An increase in closeness, both in this study and in previous sibling research, seems to be facilitated by a few factors. One, many participants indicated that their sibling’s disclosure facilitated better understanding and communication between one another (“now we can finally understand each other”), therefore deepening the relationship (Bartel 2012; Davis 2018; Hilton and Szymanski 2011; Huang et al. 2016). One participant shared that after learning of their sibling's identity, they thought to themselves “now we can finally understand each other and bond maybe a little bit more, and that's actually what's happened.”

Two, sharing LGBTQ identity with a sibling before parents also functioned as an
expression of trust and already apparent closeness in the sibling relationship (Harvey 2007; Huang et al., 2016). A few participants expressed pleasant surprise that their sibling told them before their parents. Some participants shared that being asked to help tell parents or needing to keep their sibling’s secret from parents built trust between one another (The first to know).

Three, some participants described bonding over newfound similarities. In studies with siblings of LGB individuals, this looked like bonding over being sexually attracted to the same gender (eg. gay man and heterosexual sister) (Harvey 2007; Hilton and Szymanski 2011). However, in this study, this looked like gaining a new shared gender experience for some participants. One interviewee expressed,

“I think now it's different, like a sisterly bond. I was showing her makeup and nails and hair stuff… And like she always says when they give her the estrogen shot, she says it's like going through a period sort of and like having the emotional swaying and all that stuff. So we do have that shared experience now” (P8).

These new shared experiences seemed more apparent for folks that had a binary-transgender sibling (i.e., brother or sister) than those who had non-binary siblings.

Four, participants described feelings of joy, excitement, and happiness to witness their sibling come into greater authenticity, openness, and confidence in themselves. Several participants described that their sibling’s transition has had a positive effect on their life (“their coming out has really been a positive for them”), a sentiment also reflected in the previous study with cisgender siblings (Davis, 2008). This process may relate to theory developed by psychoanalyst Donald Winnecott (1965) conceptualizing the true self and the false self. His theory describes the false self as a defensive mask made up of learned behaviors and heavily controlled by the individual wearing it, often contributing to feelings of emptiness and
disconnect. Contrastingy, the true self represents the authentic sense of self that feels spontaneous, alive, and truly present. Theoretically, when one can let go of the false self, they can step into their genuine self. The vitality and excitement that participants described of seeing a “side” of their sibling they hadn’t seen before following their disclosure appears similar to this process of stepping into the true self. For instance, one participant shared “my sister would always sort of have a shield up before she transitioned. So, I feel like after she transitioned, we sort of got to see who she really was in a way that we never really did before.” The increasing feelings of closeness for participants may be due to developing relationship to their sibling’s authentic self rather than a disconnected and empty false self.

Lastly, participants described ways in which they were “on the front lines” of their sibling’s transition process and providing support they believed was within their role (My role has been straightforward). Some of the ways interviewees identified providing support to their siblings were giving affirmation, celebrating physical changes from gender affirming care, helping try new names or language, navigating issues with insurance companies, helping inform parents, listening to their sibling’s experiences, or correcting pronouns with shared peers (How to support their sibling has been clear).

Some participants endorsed a loss of closeness with their sibling following disclosure. One participant expressed feeling their sibling withdrew from them after the disclosure, an experience similarly described in a study of heterosexual siblings of lesbian women (English, 2008). One participant expressed that,

“because I will always remind them of the time in their life that...people knew them as a female, then like because I grew up with them that might be like a wedge in our relationship a little bit that I couldn't really control” (P12).
This experience points to an interesting example of McGoldrick’s (2016) conceptualization that sibling’s hold each other’s historical context through major life cycle transitions. In this case, the sibling relationship seems to be likened to a holding space of one’s past identity, where their sibling may wish to distance from their ego dystonic history.

Physical distance also seemed to be a factor in closeness or distance in the sibling relationship following disclosure. Some participants expressed a desire to be closer to “the front lines” but unable to to be due to the distance they lived from their families (Not on the “front lines”). Notably, barriers due to location also seemed to afford some participants greater emotional distance from their families. This may be related to Bowen’s (1978) concept of differentiation of self in the family system. This concept outlines how different members of the family differ in their levels of emotional interdependence based on how differentiated they are from the family. Consequently, families with less differentiated members or select members that are not well-differentiated are vulnerable to periods of heightened anxiety as the family traverses stressors. Many participants in this study described being away at college or living in different places than their nuclear family when their sibling disclosed transgender identity, potentially pointing to differentiation from the nuclear family that afforded them some emotional distance. However, while protective from the family stress, it seems that being further away also caused interviewees greater stress individually as they couldn’t be as helpful to their siblings as they wanted.

Another factor that appeared to correlate with loss of closeness for participants was not being able to talk about gender with their transgender sibling (“I feel like there’s the topic that I just can’t bring up or can’t talk about, which is a really big topic, which is gender identity”). Interviewees described holding back questions or clarifications from their siblings for fear of
rupture in their relationship. One interviewee shared, “honestly, I think the support that I needed is just being able to talk to [sibling] about this stuff. But I know I can’t, and that's never gonna change. And so I do feel a little bit stuck about that” (P9). Not being able to talk about gender with their sibling seemed to mitigate openness and vulnerability in the relationship.

Moving beyond the dyad, many participants had unresolved questions around the role they should play in supporting their sibling. The majority of participants expressed that how to support their sibling has been unclear in some ways and some noted that their role has been confusing for a variety of reasons (My role has been confusing). One participant expressed “But I think a lot of confusion about should I say something? would that be overstepping? And truly just discomfort within myself. I don't know what to do so I'm just gonna do nothing” (P3). Participants identified a number of questions and uncertainties including what their sibling wants from them, how they should behave around their families, when they should correct misgendering from family or others, if it’s their place to correct language, how they can be protective and also maintain sibling relationship, if they should be a spokesperson on their experience, or if they should go into work that serves LGBTQ populations.

Participants also described a conflictual experience trying to decide if, how, or when they should share with others outside the immediate family that they have a transgender sibling (Difficulty deciding to tell others outside the family). Examples included grandparents, distant relatives, community members, friends, coworkers, acquaintances, service workers, first responders, and people on social media. Many factors went into their consideration and decision making including the degree of relationship to someone (e.g., stranger, acquaintance, family), the chance of seeing someone again or needing to sustain relationship, the perceived level of safety telling someone based on their political beliefs or cultural identities, if someone had met their
sibling before they identified as transgender, and a guess of what their sibling would want them
to do. An example of when the mechanic asked one participant how their brother was doing. The
participant described internal conflict between if he should just say “good” to be polite, or
disclose he has a sister now.

This points to some similarities and differences in how transgender people decide to
disclose their identities and how siblings or family members may decide to disclose a relative’s
identity. Brumbaugh-Johnson and Hull (2019) found that transgender individuals make strategic
decisions to reveal their affirmed gender identity based on navigating three domains: the gender
role expectations of others and deciding whether or not to adhere to them; anticipated and actual
responses of others; and the threat of violence. Based on the findings in this study, siblings share
two of these three considerations and have one unique to their sibling status. Given the step
removed from personal experience, siblings likely do not navigate the gender role expectations
of others, and certainly don’t consider whether or not to adhere to them as it’s not their own
identity. However, siblings in this study did endorse considering the anticipated responses of
others, as well as the potential threat of violence towards their sibling. The additional
consideration that siblings described in this study was what their sibling would want them to do.
Especially when there was less open communication with their sibling, it was hard for
participants to ascertain what their sibling would want them to do, seemingly paralyzing them in
a state of uncertain inaction.

Influences of Family Processes

One of the most notable findings of this study that distinguished sibling and parent
experiences was the role the majority of participants took on in one capacity or another in
serving as a buffer between their sibling and parents. This is consistent with and expands on
previous sibling research that described siblings becoming a “go-between” person, a “defender” against negative parental responses, a protector, or a mediator that supports both sibling and parents (Davis, 2018; Harvey 2007; Haxhe and D’Amore 2014; Haxhe et al. 2018; Szymanski & Hilton, 2021). Some interviewees described that their parents shared their practical or emotional difficulties of adjusting with them without prompting (Hearing parents’ difficulties) and others indicated actively taking responsibility to buffer their sibling against parent reactions, feelings, or challenges (“I talk to them so my sibling wouldn't have to because they shouldn't have to do that”; “I'm trying to gently push them in the same direction of being more accepting”). Though several interviewees took on this role themselves, it seemed it was often a difficult and uncomfortable position to be in (“My experience is just that it’s really hard for parents, but like, THAT can be hard on siblings”).

Also consistent with the sole available dissertation study on siblings (Davis, 2018), almost all participants in this study identified that their family’s process had a significant impact on them or their own adjustment (Impact of the family transition on the sibling process). Particularly, it seemed that being “on the same page” as the rest of the nuclear family in their approach to their transgender sibling was helpful or allowed for an easier adjustment. Some participants noted their family’s loving and accepting attitude towards their sibling was important for them (“I’m glad we’re all on the same page there”). Others noted that they faced similar challenges that their parents or other family members did together as a unit (“Like we were kind of coming along for the ride of that journey and…it wasn't always easy”). However, when the family or certain members had attitudes discordant with participants, it was more difficult. Consistent with several aforementioned studies with siblings of LGB folks (English 2008; Hilton and Szymanski 2011; Huang et al. 2016; Szymanski & Hilton, 2021), participants described
challenging situations with other family members who reacted negatively and their feelings of anger, frustration, and disappointment towards these relatives (*Feelings of frustration or anger with other family members*).

Related to Bowen’s (1978) description of subsystems within the family system, it can be theorized that some siblings may be faced with the uncomfortable position of who to align themselves with relationally. Particularly when the family is not “on the same page,” they have an ongoing decision process to align with their transgender sibling or with the family. For those who had better understanding of trans identities, stronger familiarity with LGBTQ communities, and close relationships with their sibling already, it seems that coalition with their trans sibling and buffering against parent issues was the clear choice. For some, this even came at the expense of their own parental relationships. Alternatively, for those with greater internal conflict or less close sibling relationship, it seemed more likely that they deviated back and forth between coalition with their sibling and aligning to their parents who had shared experiences (“I feel like my own family’s dynamic is what stood in my way of being the best sibling I could be”).

A different way of looking at this challenge of the sibling role could be through a timeline process. When adults disclose transgender identity, it can be assumed that they have undergone their own self-reflection and self-discovery processes to realize their gender does not align with their sex assigned at birth. From the time they disclose to others, family members are likely playing catch up to process and integrate this new information, putting them significantly behind in the timeline of transitioning. Other factors described previously certainly influence where family members start and how quickly they progress through this process. Previous research indicated that the amount of time that parents need to come to acceptance of their transgender children varies greatly (Abreu et al., 2019; Hill & Menvielle, 2009). Based on
participants’ narratives in this study, it can be conceptualized that siblings occupy some middle space on the timeline between their parents and their transgender family member. While attempting to proceed in their own process of moving closer to their sibling, many also hold personal responsibility for trying to pull their parents along as well. Even those who don’t take on the buffering role seem to feel discomfort with occupying this middle space, caught in a balancing act of trying to reduce as much tension in their family system as possible. One participant shared “I want to be there and genuine for my sibling but I also don't want to feel like… I’m like the Crusader. I just want to be their little sister and I want to have that bond” (P7).

Returning to the point of interviewees tending to center their sibling’s experience through transition (“I haven’t ever thought about it really as part of an experience I’m going through also”), it also seems that at times participants were called upon or opted to support their parents as well, then centering the parent experience outside the sight of their sibling to protect them. Perhaps the role of dually supporting family members in this way, while acknowledging a lesser emotional salience, reinforces the sentiment that participants shared, “It’s not about me.” This finding begs the question then, when and where can siblings of trans individuals find space to center and recognize their own feelings, difficulties, and adjustment process?

Areas for Additional Support

All participants had ideas to share about either what support was helpful to them or lacking in their experience (Accessing sibling support). Interviewees noted helpful support (Support and resources were helpful) to include training on LGBTQ issues acquired in professional space, following social media accounts of other transgender and nonbinary people, and talking with other people (e.g., their other siblings, parents, roommates, colleagues).

Similar to past research with parents that indicated a lack of information and knowledge
about transgender identity impacted levels of understanding and emotional experiences, participants in this study indicated that lack of familiarity with LGBTQ issues, community, and information impacted their experiences (Abreu et al., 2019). Participants noted a need for access to more information (*More information would have been helpful*), and more specifically, information that is more individualized to their particular circumstances as a sibling and/or as a cultural being. When interviewees expressed that *the resources and support offered weren’t necessarily helpful*, their critiques were either about information being largely focused towards parents and parent experiences, or the lack of integration with religious, political, or cultural identities. Participants expressed lack of trust from prominent sources of support due to skepticism about their political agendas, or possibility they would be “pushing” certain ideals (*Skepticism about resources offered*). This is important to consider in the development of informational resources such as websites, pamphlets, social media, etc. that there are demographics of siblings that will not be reached through certain resources and perhaps a very intentional approach to gear information towards this population could be meaningful and helpful.

As mentioned in the review of literature, a majority of mental health professionals who work with transgender youth indicated that programming for siblings would be beneficial (Aten, 2017). Several participants in this study agreed with this sentiment by expressing that having *mental health support would have been helpful* in their adjustment process. Many interviewees also expressed that some kind of *groups or community of other siblings would have been helpful*. In each of these suggestions, it seems that support that centers the sibling experience and emphasizes the challenges that come with siblinghood to trans individuals could have been beneficial. Understandably, several participants recognized that centering their own experience
while trying to help their sibling in transition could have been harmful to them (It’s not about me). Nevertheless, it seems that having space outside of their sibling relationship and family system to recognize their own experience and process was desired among some participants.

Recognizing the unique role siblings play from these results as a buffer, mediator, or supporter, it seems that information focused on navigating family relationships is also important. A few participants expressed desire for guidance on how to address issues with their parents or extended family, as well as resources to point their respective relatives towards (Guidance for navigating family relationships would have been helpful). On a similar but distinct note, some interviewees also wished that their parents were more open to asking or talking with them about their own experiences as siblings going through the family adjustment. This may be important to include in resources and guidance that is geared towards parents, to consider how their other children may like or need various kinds of support.

**Clinical Implications**

If there is one point that is clear from this study that should be communicated, it is that there is no “true” or “right” experience for siblings to have. The range of emotions, reactions, processes, challenges, and experiences across participants are not all-capturing of the possibilities. With the broad differences in family dynamics, sibling relationships, and other factors, there is no “correct” way to navigate a transition process, though there are ways that have been meaningful to participants. A second point important to make clear from this research, is that siblings have experiences and narrative to share. Many folks during their interviews had difficulty speaking from THEIR experience, being so focused on centering their trans sibling. Affectionately, their tendency came from a place of love, but this study serves as an invitation for siblings to put themselves back in the process and consider the ways in which they are impacted.
Conducting these interviews has opened my eyes as a clinician to more broadly consider family experiences through the sibling view. My hope is that this research can help clinicians and families understand processes and potentially reduce harm to trans individuals and their siblings. There are many findings here that I hope will help normalize a range of experiences for other siblings who have similar stories. Additionally, many participants offered ideas of what kind of services could have been helpful and that could guide the development of new material, programming, or community-building efforts.

**Limitations, Critiques, and Further Research**

Although this study provides an informative narrative of what the experience is like for individuals with a transgender sibling, it is not without it’s limitations. To start, there are limits to the qualitative method and conclusions that can be drawn from this type of research. Given the hypothesis-generating intention of using grounded theory, rather than hypothesis-testing methodology, this study cannot determine how common the reported experiences actually are and there is little numerical data to analyze. The designation “most participants” does not reflect most of the population, therefore the results may potentially over- or under-estimate the commonality of actual lived experiences. Future studies with increased sample sizes and multi-method analyses could collect more specific results to reflect a potentially more accurate picture of the population. A potential question to analyze with a larger number of participants is whether sibling experiences are influenced by the various combinations of the participant and their sibling’s sexes-assigned-at-birth (e.g., sister-sister, brother-sister, brother-brother), the relative birth order between participant and sibling (e.g., youngest, middle, oldest), or the constellation of siblings all together.

Additionally, it is very important to consider who did and did not participate in this study.
The participants in this study had a lack of diversity across their social locations, particularly in terms of their racial identities and socioeconomic statuses. Of the 13 participants in this study, 11 of them were white and all participants had completed some amount of college. Clearly, these results are not generalizable to the diverse makeup of society, and future research needs to consider creative ways to recruit and incorporate the experiences of folks who have not pursued college education, Black siblings, Indigenous siblings, families of color more broadly, and those of various religious affiliations.

Furthermore, this study only recruited adult participants, all of whom reported learning of their sibling’s affirmed gender identity during adulthood. A large number of participants also described living outside of their parents’ home when their sibling came out. Previous research has described that late adolescence sibling dyads experience greater intimacy than early adolescent dyads and that prosocial qualities in sibling relationships increase as age increases (Cole & Kerns, 2001). From a developmental perspective, it would be remiss to assume that the experiences of the adults in this study also capture what it may be like for a child or teenager still living in their family’s home when their sibling comes out as transgender.

Another limitation that also pertains to participant makeup is likely an issue of convenience sampling, where most individuals expressed a supportive attitude towards their transgender sibling. Though some participants indicated a shift over time from a more ambivalent stance to accepting, there are likely significantly unsupportive or non-accepting perspectives missing from the narrative. As one participant also alluded to, the acceptance or rejection of LGBTQ identities has been so heavily politicized to the point where some individuals will not engage in activity they suspect is part of a liberal agenda. This points to a somewhat complicated problem from the intersection of recruitment strategies and researcher
biases. It is likely that professionals conducting research in this realm of LGBTQ* issues are supporters and allies of the community, if not LGBTQ* themselves, and are familiar with places and organizations that serve queer folks and families. Therefore, the convenient samples available to these researchers, as with this study, are from spaces that skew towards supportive and accepting stance. Even the language used on recruitment materials may intentionally or unintentionally signal the beliefs, values, and biases of the researchers involved. To capture the true range of sibling experiences, future research will likely need creative solutions to this disconnect.

**Conclusion**

This study sought to invite and include the sibling voice into the growing literature of transgender family experiences. Since the time I initially proposed this study to my committee, more than 300 anti-LGBTQ bills have been passed or introduced into our current political landscape. After the first state outlawed gender-affirming care for trans minors, many states have followed suit to limit, and even criminalize, transgender health care. There have even been threats in some states to deem parents and families that are accepting and supportive of their transgender children as child abusers through the policies of child protective services. Through the arenas of youth sports, bathrooms, schools, libraries, and healthcare, public life and basic human rights for transgender people and their families is increasingly under the scrutiny of our legislative bodies. The rapid changes and surmounting attack on LGBTQ* communities and families at this time has emphasized the importance of this research and what it can contribute to our understanding, clinical work, and community care. The participants in this study highlighted how having a sibling who is transgender comes with a range of emotional reactions, adjustment processes, family impacts, and relationship changes. It is my hope that this study contributes to
greater understanding of transgender issues as well as amplified curiosity about the powerful nature of sibling bonds to transcend hate, ignorance, and prejudice.
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Appendix A

RECRUITMENT EMAIL SCRIPT

Hello [recipient],

I am writing to ask that you please forward this request for research participation to individuals who are above 18 years of age and who have a transgender or gender diverse sibling. Gender diverse identities include many different labels such as transgender, MtF, FtM, genderqueer, nonbinary, agender, androgynous, gender non-conforming, bigender, gender fluid, pangender, omnigender, two spirit, and more. The purpose of this research study is to explore the experiences of individuals who have a gender diverse sibling during their initial disclosure and throughout their siblings and families’ transition processes. Participation in the study will require a one-time commitment of approximately 1 to 1.5 hours for an online interview via Zoom. Interviews will be recorded, have their audio transcribed, and have all identifying information removed. Participants will receive a $25.00 gift card for their participation. To be included in this study, participants must meet the following criteria:

- Aged 18 years or older.
- Have a gender-diverse sibling.
- Be within 5 years of age to this sibling.
- Have lived with this sibling during their childhood.

This study has received IRB approval from Long Island University. Anyone that is interested in participating or has questions about this study can contact me via email at mariessa.robles@my.liu.edu. Thank you for your help!

Sincerely,

Mariessa Robles, M.S.

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RECRUITMENT SOCIAL MEDIA SCRIPT

Research participants needed!

I am seeking research participation from individuals are above 18 years of age and who have a transgender or gender-diverse sibling. Gender diverse identities include many different labels such as transgender, MtF, FtM, genderqueer, nonbinary, agender, androgynous, gender non-conforming, bigender, gender fluid, pangender, omnigender, two spirit, and more. The purpose of this research study is to explore the experiences of individuals who have a gender-diverse sibling during their initial disclosure and throughout their siblings and families’ transition processes. Participation in the study will require a one-time commitment of approximately 1 to 1.5 hours for an online interview via Zoom. Interviews will be recorded, have their audio transcribed, and have all identifying information removed. Participants will receive a $25.00 gift card for their participation. To be included in this study, participants must meet the following criteria:

1. Aged 18 years or older.
2. Have a gender-diverse sibling.
3. Be within 5 years of age to this sibling.
4. Have lived with this sibling during their childhood.

This study has received IRB approval from Long Island University. Anyone that is interested in participating or has questions about this study can contact me via email at mariessa.robles@my.liu.edu. Thank you for your help!
Appendix B

RECRUITMENT FLYER

Do you have a gender diverse sibling?
Participants needed for important research

*Gender diverse includes many different gender identities such as transgender, MTF, FTM, genderqueer, nonbinary, agender, androgyne, gender non-conforming, bigender, gender fluid, pangender, omnigender, two spirit, and more*

As a person with a sibling who is gender diverse, you are invited to participate in a research study that seeks to understand your personal experiences. Participants will partake in a single interview and receive a gift card.

Required Qualifications
- You must be at least 18 years of age
- You must have a sibling that is gender diverse
- You must be similar in age to your sibling (within 5 years of age)
- You must have lived in the same household as your sibling for some part of your childhood

Online Interviews
Individual interviews will be conducted over Zoom platform, lasting 1 - 1 ½ hours. The interview will include questions about your personal experiences before and after learning about your sibling’s gender identity. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. All identifying information will be removed.

Importance and Incentive
Sibling relationships are largely neglected in empirical research, and especially in LGBTQ-focused studies. Each participant will receive a $25.00 gift card for their time and participation.

Interested in participating?
To participate in this study or inquire further about study details and procedures, please contact Marissa Robles at mariessa.robles@my.liu.edu.

Principal Investigator:
Marissa Robles
mariessa.robles@my.liu.edu

Faculty Supervisor:
Dr. Eva Feindler
(516) 299-3212
Appendix C

LONG ISLAND UNIVERSITY POST
Informed Consent Form for Human Research Subjects

Principal Researcher: Mariessa Robles, M.S.
Faculty Dissertation Chair: Eva Feindler, Ph.D.

You are being asked to volunteer in a research study called Transgender Family Transitions: A Sibling Perspective, conducted by Mariessa Robles, M.S., who is a doctoral student in the Clinical Psychology Doctoral Program at Long Island University, Post. This study is under the supervision of Eva Feindler, Ph.D., professor in the Clinical Psychology Doctoral Program, and is being conducted in order to fulfill Mariessa Robles’s degree requirement. Before participating in this study, please read this consent form carefully, as it describes the study and any risks that may be involved. If there is any information you do not understand, please ask the principal researcher before continuing to participate.

Purpose: The experiences of people who have transgender and gender-diverse siblings have been overall neglected in empirical research. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of individuals who have a sibling that is gender diverse to better inform mental health professionals that provide supportive and therapeutic services to family members of transgender individuals.

Procedures: As a participant, you will be asked to engage in an individual interview lasting 1 - 1 ½ hours. The researcher will ask questions about your personal experiences during the time your sibling first disclosed their gender identity and throughout their gender transition process. Interviews will be conducted online using a secure Zoom link that is password protected and unique to each interviewee. The interview will be recorded and all video files with be deleted immediately after the session. Only the audio file will be saved for transcription so that the investigator can have an accurate account of your experiences. There will be three graduate students from the Clinical Psychology Doctoral Program who will serve as independent coders and will not know the identity of participants.

Confidentiality: Your identity as a participant will remain confidential. This consent form is the only document identifying you as a participant in this study; it will be stored securely along with all of the data on an encrypted flash drive. Your name will not be included on your demographic form, audio file, or audio transcript. If you agree to participate, you will be assigned a random number so that your identity will be anonymous to all but the investigator. The audio files will be viewed and transcribed only by the investigator, and you will be identified in the transcripts only by your code number. Once the audio files have been transcribed and all of the necessary information has been collected from them, they will be deleted. The transcripts will be analyzed by the researcher as well as three independent coders. Your identity will not be revealed in any publication or presentation of the results of this research. Parts of the transcribed interviews may be presented verbatim in the results section of the study, however, all participant identities will remain concealed.

Although your IP Address will not be stored in the survey results, there is always the possibility of tampering from an outside source when using the Internet for collecting information. Similarly, the researcher cannot guarantee the privacy or security of any content being sent through email. While all emails are kept confidential and the confidentiality of your verbal
responses will be protected once the data is downloaded from the Internet, there is always the possibility of hacking or other security breaches that could threaten the confidentiality of your responses.

**Risks to Participation:** Participation in the study is expected to contain minimal risk. One risk is that you may feel discomfort or anxiety while discussing your feelings and experiences. To mitigate this risk, you may skip questions you do not feel comfortable answering or withdraw from the study at any time.

**Participation Incentive:** Each participant will receive a $25.00 gift card upon completion of the interview. At the end of the individual interview, the principal researcher will confirm the necessary contact information needed for you to receive the gift card and ensure it is submitted.

**Withdrawal:** Your participation in this research is voluntary and you may stop participation at any time. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled, and you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty. The only consequence of withdrawing from this study is that you will no longer be eligible to receive the gift card.

**Questions/Concerns:** If you have questions about the research you may contact the investigator, Mariessa Robles at mariessa.robles@my.liu.edu, or the faculty supervisor, Dr. Eva Feindler, at (516) 299-3212. If you have questions concerning your rights as a subject, you may contact Michael Marino, Executive Director of Sponsored Projects, at (718) 488-1413

Your signature indicates that you have fully read the above text and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the purposes and procedures of this study. Your signature acknowledges receipt of a copy of the consent form as well as your willingness to participate.

Printed Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

Mariessa Robles, M.S.
Principal Researcher

Date
Appendix D

LONG ISLAND UNIVERSITY POST
Consent to Audio/Video Recording & Audio Transcription

Study: “Transgender Family Transitions: A Sibling Perspective”
Principal Researcher: Mariessa Robles, M.S.
Faculty Dissertation Chair: Eva Feindler, Ph.D.

This study involves the audio and video recording of your interview with the researcher through Zoom. Upon completion of the interview, Zoom video files will be deleted. Only the audio file from your interview will be kept for transcription. Neither your name nor any other identifying information will be associated with the audio, the audio recording, or the transcript. Only the principal researcher will be able to listen to the recordings.

The files will be transcribed by Mariessa Robles, M.S., and erased once the transcriptions are checked for accuracy and de-identified. Transcripts of your interview may be reproduced in whole or in part for use in presentations or written products that result from this study. Neither your name nor any other identifying information (such as your voice) will be used in presentations or in written products resulting from the study.

By signing this form, I am allowing the researcher to audio and video record me as part of this research. I also understand that this consent for recording is effective until _____________.
On or before that date, the tapes will be destroyed.

Participant’s Signature: ___________________________ Date: _______________
Appendix E

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Participant Code: (researcher will complete)

1. What is your age? ____________________________________________

2. What is your gender? _________________________________________

3. What is your sexual orientation? ______________________________

4. What are your racial/ethnic identities? __________________________

5. If applicable, what is your religion? ____________________________

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed? (please circle/highlight one)
   a. Grades 0-8
   b. Grades 9-11
   c. High School or GED
   d. Some College
   e. College graduate
   f. Some graduate school
   g. Graduate school diploma

7. How old is your transgender-identifying sibling? ________________

8. What is your sibling’s sex assigned at birth? (please circle/highlight one)
   a. Male
   b. Female
   c. Intersex

9. How does your sibling describe their gender identity? ______________

10. Approximately how much time has passed since you first became aware of your sibling’s transgender identity? (please circle/highlight one)
     a. Less than 1 month
     b. 1 month - 6 months
     c. 6 months - 1 year
d. 1 year - 3 years

e. More than 3 years

11. How many years did you live in the same household as your sibling? ________________

12. Who else lived in your household during your childhood? (e.g. mother, father, grandparent, other siblings, family friend, etc.)

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Appendix F

INTERVIEW CONFIRMATION EMAIL SCRIPT

Hello [recipient],
We are all set for [date, time]. Here is some important information for our meeting:

**Zoom Link:** [unique link and password]

**Privacy:** To ensure your privacy and confidentiality, there will be a waiting room feature set up so that only you are granted access to the meeting. Please make sure you are in a private area where you are alone and feel comfortable speaking freely. It may be helpful to use headphones or a noise machine app on your mobile device to maximize the privacy of your surroundings.

**Procedure:** In the interview we will spend some time reviewing the consent forms and answering any last questions you may have. Then I will ask you interview questions. At the end of the interview I will confirm that I have the correct information from you in order to ensure you receive your gift card.

Please let me know if you have any further questions in the meantime.

Best,
Mariessa Robles, M.S.
Appendix G

INTERVIEW SCRIPT

Before arrival to the interview session, demographic questionnaires will have been filled out with a matching number code to the participants to de-identify all identifiable information. Upon arrival to the interviews, or prior to interview sessions for online participants, informed consent and audio consent forms will be read, signed, and returned to the researcher. The researcher will start the interview by giving an introduction: “Hello! My name is Mariessa, I’m the principal researcher for this study. Thank you again for participating and welcome to the interview. This interview is going to last approximately one hour. Before we begin, please note that I will be audio recording this session and transcribing what is said later. I will remove all identifying information from the transcript before it is analyzed by my research team. Only I will have access to this audio recording and all identifying information stated in this interview will be confidential. This is to help ensure that you can be as honest and forthcoming today as possible. That said, please share only what you feel comfortable sharing. I have a few questions to help me learn about your experiences, but they are broad and are meant to serve as springboards for you to tell me your story. Feel free to elaborate and share as much information as you feel comfortable that you think is important regarding your experience. I may probe and ask you to elaborate at certain points. You may skip or opt-out of answering any of my questions without any consequence. Do you have any questions before we begin?”

Once participant questions have been answered and they are ready to begin, the researcher will begin the audio recording and start asking interview questions:

1. Please describe your experience of learning about your sibling’s gender identity. Follow up: What was going on in your mind? What was your emotional experience?

2. Tell me about your experience during your sibling’s transition process.

3. In what ways, if any, do you think your relationship with your sibling changed? Follow up: If I had interviewed you [# of years since sibling disclosure] number of years ago, what do you think would be the most different for you?

4. How do you think your experience of your sibling’s transition has been similar or different from your parents’ experience?

5. What kind of support has been important for you or do you think would be important for other siblings of gender-diverse people?

6. Is there anything else that you want me to know about your experience that I didn’t ask about?

When the participant has finished answering questions, the researcher will stop the audio recording and close the interview: “Thank you so much for your participation. I have a few gift card options that I will list in the chat box. Please let me know what option sounds best to you.”

The researcher will confirm their choice and confirm the email they used to send completed forms and set up an interview time is the best email to receive the gift card. The researcher will say, “Thank you again for participating. I will have the gift card sent to your email within the next few days. Please let me know if there are any issues receiving it,” and then end the Zoom meeting.
Appendix H

HIERARCHICAL DATA ORGANIZATION

The hierarchical data organization along with numerical data for each theme and repeating idea is included below. The number and percentage of participants whose text was included in the idea or theme is denoted next to each item. Each bullet point indicates the participant based on the three number code in parentheses.

I. AFFECTIVE REACTIONS
Theme #1: Feelings of worry and concern (10; 76.9%)

1. General feelings of worry (3; 23.1%)
   - (001) I think concern... always like what this meant, what would [sibling] be happiest moving forward was always my biggest concern because I almost never knew if like [sibling] knew what they wanted in the end.
   - (001) But when they first came out to now, I think I'll stick with like confusion and concern as my main two emotional states.
   - (009) So mostly I'm just worried. Worried about [sibling]. And hope that they figure it out and they'll be okay.
   - (009) So usually my emotion is just concerned. Not concerned that they're gender diverse. Just because I know that that's probably going to be really hard and make their life more difficult.
   - (009) So I worry but I try not to.
   - (009) just happy and concerned
   - (011) I think probably, one thing that's changed is that I was a lot more worried for her when she first came out
   - (011) So definitely it would have been a lot more fearful the day after.
   - (011) and kind of worried at that point

2. Worry about sibling’s mental health or neurodivergent identities (6; 46.2%)
   - (001) [Sibling]'s also autistic.
   - (001) My biggest concerns with [sibling] have always been their mental health issues. So like, some of that has been tied to gender identity, but most of that has not.
   - (001) My therapy revolved around [sibling]'s mental health.
   - (002) My sibling has been in therapy for I don’t know how long, but many years. But yeah, we're very familiar with like, like psychiatric help and therapy and things like that.
   - (002) and also they are neurodivergent.
   - (002) So I think that in terms of neurodivergence and identities and stuff, a big part of growing up was my parents not believing my sibling when they said they had medical issues.
   - (005) he has been diagnosed with other mental illnesses
   - (005) We spent very little time thinking about how we're going to adapt him as a trans person and almost all of the time thinking how are we going to help him work through the emotional and behavioral problems that he’s experiencing.
   - (008) And she also struggled with mental health for a long time. but she struggled with mental health, like in and out of hospitals for like two years before she officially came out
   - (008) but also, I think with the whole mental health aspect really made a difference for me because I was like, she wasn't happy. She literally wanted to die when she wasn't identifying as a female. So I think that really pushed me to accept it.
(008) And then I was mean when she was really transitioning, and she was in and out of hospitals for two years.

(009) [Sibling] has also struggled with depression for a long time so I worry about [sibling] a lot, so I have to do a lot of self-preservation to not worry about [sibling] too much, otherwise I kind of go insane. I kind of have to distance myself sometimes and [sibling] also needs a lot of distance, so I sort of just let [sibling] come to me whenever they feel they need something or want to talk about something. I try not to insert myself too much because I know that [sibling] does not like that.

(009) their journey with their gender identity really is so tied up with their mental health for me, that's really the main thing I'm concerned about.

(009) [Sibling] has also struggled with depression for a long time

(009) it sounds like that's been a huge cause of the depression also.

(009) But she's also saying I'm kind of worried that I just traded my depression for social anxiety now, because it's just a different set of problems.

(009) The worry is really not so much about the gender as it is just about [sibling]'s mental health. So we worry about [sibling]'s mental health. And we know that [sibling]'s gender identity is part of that puzzle.

(009) he's struggling with.. a specific type of depression that he has, basically permanently depressed. there's not really any hope of that changing. Or there wasn't until recently. Now, there is hope because it might be that figuring out gender identity that may have just been the cause. Like that's what was wrong all these years. And we just didn't know it because [sibling] was holding onto it for so long.

(009) we worry a lot about him. just knowing how much [sibling] has struggled and having been worried about [sibling] killing himself. I used to have these dreams that [sibling] would die and it was awful. that was probably the hardest thing for me ever.

(009) their journey with their gender identity really is so tied up with their mental health for me, that's really the main thing I'm concerned about.

(009) So that has sort of defined most of my experience with it. Just wanting to make sure that [sibling] is mentally healthy.

(012) They had a lot of mental health challenges, like depression, growing up.

3. Worry about gender-affirming care (3; 23.1%)

(001) You know, I think we've had the most disagreements about, like, gender reassignment because I, we've had arguments like, you're putting so much stock into this and you have so much more going on. I'm just afraid that if you do gender reassignment surgeries and you put all of your stock in that you will feel better, that you will still have all these problems that you still have. Like right now it's just the legal name change…

(001) Like I said, we haven't had that conversation [about surgery] in a long time. I don't know what surgery they, or she would want to do, but I just know that was like, a conversation we've had previously.

(005) However it's as if the treatment programs are a bit siloed off, as I mentioned before, there are other behavioral issues going on here, to the extent that they relate to his decision to identify in this way, I think, is a question that's very hard to unravel. And how we probably can't fully understand and so…

(005) probably, if there was some coordination between the people who are administering hormone treatment and the people who are dealing with him from a psychiatric point of view, psychological point of views… And given the issues that we've had with him from anger management and things like that, you know, you might go, [testosterone]'s not a great idea.
• (005) Do I think that there are some underlying physiological problems that aren't changing? And that are like coming up now, right? No matter on the surface level what kind of changes he's able to accomplish, there's some pretty deep changes that they're not changing, without serious infusion of money they're not changing. And so that's… and then how is that going to affect his emotional status and his relationships and his own well-being? I don't know. The fact that he still menstruates. I know it's very frustrating. I don't know how he deals with that. We certainly never discussed it but it's a reality. And so, how does that make him feel? I don't know. I mean that's a tough, that's a really tough one,

• (005) When 10 years in, we're still seeing the same sorts of behavioral issues.

• (014) And then when they start talking about top surgery, it was just worry.

• (014) And then when they start talking about top surgery, it was just worry. My sibling and I both have what's called Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome… a connective tissue disorder. So any surgery is kind of higher risk. I think I'm stressed about it.

4. “my degree of concern for their like immediate well-being has increased just because being trans is hard in the world” (6; 46.2%)

• (001) Sometimes I get nervous when [sibling] goes out because [sibling] essentially looks like a hippie just like long hair, you know, some small breasts, but still generally, male presenting. Sometimes I worry like, how is that gonna be taken in certain places and situations? it took me years to accept that...And I know that there are people who are less understanding than, you know, I was.

• (001) So, they're kind of awkward person to begin with and, you know, like you can't control other people and I think [sibling] is still, you know, sometimes I wish [sibling] was more confident in who they are...it's part of the reason why I don't tell people like [sibling]'s identity now is because I just don't know how they're gonna take it. How it's going to come back to [sibling]? How it's gonna come back to me? Like, do I have to defend [sibling]? Like, if we're ever out, like if something happens, like, that's just my anxiety running wild, but it is, you know, still in the back of my head.

• (002) There's a lot of, there's a lot of weight on them, because that's a lot of like, spheres of identity to inhabit, that are very oppressive.

• (004) I may be more protective than we were before. My degree of concern for their like immediate well-being has increased just because being trans is hard in the world. And so I have an increased like degree of protectiveness. I would say that actually applies to both of my siblings.

• (007) Because they also always seemed to have like a wall between the world and themselves

• (007) I know it's been very hard for them

• (007) I get very protective. But it's like, you're older than me, you know what you're doing, you're in control, but at the same time, uggggghhhhh.

• (007) But also it's so frustrating when not just our family, but the world is the way it is.

• (007) And I know they are also pretty defensive because of the world being the way it is.

• (007) It's definitely been a learning experience about the prejudices that were in my family already that maybe I was subconsciously aware of, but now it's pretty black and white where it's like oh, you can't even accept your child or your sibling for being who they are and they're right in your business everyday pretty much, you visit every week. That says something to a worldview that I wasn't exposed to before.

• (007) So it's like, is it even safe for them to go down and visit?

• (009) So yeah, I initially was just worried this is just like another thing that's gonna make
their life harder and I just hope that it will work out okay.

- (009) and being trans is so hard, it's just so hard because there's just still a lot of people that still don't understand it or accept it and it's just so hard. And so I just was worried that it was going to worsen [sibling]'s depression and just make life harder. But I'm glad to have been hopefully proven wrong.
- (009) So it kind of just varies like when [sibling] has been out, I worry about how they'll be accepted and treated by their friends and their peers and their roommates and stuff. And then when [sibling] hasn't been out, I worry that they're not out, being who they want to be. So a lot of it really is just me trying to deal with that worry and not let it bother me too much.
- (011) But now that all that is in the past and everything has pretty much turned out fine, I'm not so worried anymore. Now she's pretty much like a hundred percent feminine. I don't think anyone would really mistake her. But that first year was pretty challenging and a lot of people would like mis-identify her so that definitely brought her a lot of pain so just getting past that hump, it's been going great now.
- (011) it's hard because you don't want someone you love to go through stuff like that and especially the judgments from people, it makes you angry because you can't really do anything about it. Like that's just gonna happen.

Theme #2: Experiencing negative emotions (7; 53.8%)

5. Sadness (5; 38.5%)

- (005) And I feel for him, I guess. I really feel for him because I just go sometimes like, huh, you know, we're still here. We're still at a very kind of difficult emotional space.
- (008) I was sad for a little bit but I wouldn't really say that I went through like a depression stage at all.
- (009) It was rough because I could see the [sibling] of the summer, when [sibling] was using she/her pronouns, and [sibling] back to using he/him in the fall, it was just opposite ends of the spectrum there, really. And it really made me really sad to see [sibling] going just sort of back to being who he had been for a long time, the [sibling] I was used to, but also.. I was so glad to see happy [sibling]. So that was hard and again, it's hard because, just because of the way [sibling] is, I couldn't do anything about it.
- (012) And then maybe like, a little bit like, saddened or like feeling like a loss of closeness when I knew they weren't telling me right away and would tell other friends first.
- (014) A real feeling of pain and struggle that they've been going through for a long time. So I guess that one thing that was sad for me was like how long have they been going through this that I have not known and have been unable to support them?

6. Feelings of loss or grief (4; 30.8%)

- (001) I know that a lot of it's like, you know, the death of someone, and then this new person emerges. And I think that definitely happened for me.
- (005) A little bit of grief about feeling distant from the situation
- (005) I mean, in a sense that it is a loss. Easier in some ways, more difficult than others, in that, when someone passes, you reconcile yourself, there's a mourning process in which you sort of, you think about your relationship with that person. in this case, you don't really, we don't like, no, we don't talk about [sibling’s deadname]. I mean, maybe a joke, every so often a picture comes up and it's [sibling deadname] playing soccer. I'm not saying a grieving process is in order, but it is a loss and so watching my parents go through that loss has been really tough for me.
• (005) Like [sibling deadname] was a beautiful singer and she was really incredible and like I'd be lying if I told you I don't go on Facebook sometimes and watch the videos of her singing because it's really incredible the way she could sing. And he can sing now. The hormone treatment has had a deleterious effect on his singing. He knows it and it's tough. And she had a really beautiful voice. Now, his voice is just sort of good, but it's nothing I would say it's beautiful. That's always, you know, that's been tough. I've had some really emotional moments thinking about that loss.

• (005) And I guess I always kind of thought that we would iron it out, but I'll never iron things out with [sibling deadname]. We left our relationship in not a great place. And so that's sad for me to think that I didn't have the gumption or the foresight or the courage, at that age, to really work through that. It's a bummer. And so that's where we left it.

• (008) I think that when you have someone in your life who's trans it's like you lose who they were. So you really go through the stages of grief and I definitely went through the stages.

• (008) so hard to explain. just like you have a sibling, you just lose them. The person that my sister was 10 years ago is not the same person she is now. So it was just like getting used to that,

• (010) I really almost feel like I lost a sister even though I also feel like I gained a brother. So that was a little bit difficult to reconcile.

• (010) I almost didn't even mourn like the death of my sister, so to speak. Because I was just so quick to jump in and be like, I support you, let me help with mom and dad. And then I kind of had this moment a few months later of like, I did have an older sister and there was kind of some emotional aspect to that for me.

7. Anger (2; 15.4%)

• (008) I was angry. Like I was just mean to her for no reason. She came into my room, I was like can you turn my light off please. And she was like, no. And I was like, okay, well if you don't then I'm gonna slap you and she didn't. So I got up and I slapped her and I think that's when I realized I was like, oh my god, like why am I 19 years old acting this way. And obviously that had a big impact on her. And so I was definitely angry. I was just mean for no reason.

• (008) I was just very mean and angry about it.

• (009) I sort of revert back to that old sibling relationship when we were doing stuff together a lot when we were younger like I can be kind of mean and he's really the only person that I'm mean to. So I was trying not to revert to the mean bully of myself when I was around her.

Theme #3: Experiencing neutral to positive emotions (11; 84.6%)

8. Happiness and joy (6; 46.2%)

• (001) And I think, finally, they're understanding what they want. So I'm happy about that.

• (002) So, in a way I'm like, I'm really grateful for them

• (007) And it was actually a little bit of a relief because it was like, okay. Now, I can understand what's going on

• (007) and being able to understand that, it was a relief to be like, okay, now we can finally understand each other

• (007) But as long as it's being real and we're communicating, I'm very happy for that, because that's like, first time in forever and it feels really good.

• (009) just happy

• (009) I was so glad to see happy [sibling].
• (010) I immediately just tried to jump on board of all I can do is believe you and what you say, and if this is what you're telling me then great, I'm happy for you.
• (012) And so that, to me, was like, really great and I just was filled with joy that they feel like they could come as they're full authentic self.
• (012) but I was like, happy that they could like, feel like they were getting the care that they need to on their own and like feeling really independent around this.

9. Excitement (5; 38.5%)
• (002) I felt proud of them for pursuing that
• (004) But it's been really cool and exciting to watch them explore honestly. Like for my part it's been really exciting to like get to be on the inside of them doing that.
• (007) it was kind of exciting for them. Well for me to hear and also to see them going down it.
• (007) On one hand [learning about sibling’s identity], it was really exciting.
• (008) So it was kind of exciting for me
• (012) I felt excited that they were feeling like they could fully be themselves, and that was really an exciting moment.
• (012) And this was an exciting thing that maybe could help them a lot.

10. “I feel like I didn't really have like, particular emotions about it” (5; 38.5%)
• (002) I feel like I didn't really have like, particular emotions about it.
• (002) So, it wasn't something that I had negative feelings about.
• (002) It was something that I guess, it was positive / neutral, I didn't feel a certain way about them transitioning or anything, but it wasn't like a negative way.
• (008) Didn't care. Not that I don't care, I just was like okay you do you.
• (008) I didn't really have any feelings. I mean, I did have feelings, but nothing really negative, honestly. Was just kind of like okay.
• (011) I was like, okay, like, that's completely fine.
• (013) it wasn't something that I was like resistant to.
• (014) So, I don't know that I had a big emotional reaction.
• (014) Like this is just… like why would I care?

II. INDIVIDUAL CHANGE PROCESSES
Theme #4: Experience of understanding (10; 76.9%)

11. “What I found so interesting about it when he came out as trans was like all these like childhood memories that now made sense” (4; 30.8%)
• (007) it always felt like they were struggling
• (007) because they also always seemed to have like a wall between the world and themselves
• (010) I used to say to my friend jokingly, I felt like I was raised with two brothers, not an older sister. And so when he came out as trans I was like I've been saying this for years and had no idea I was actually right.
• (010) I could kind of start putting the pieces together of like, oh, when he was nine he cut his hair really short and refused to wear girls clothes. And when, you know, back in the 90s, when McDonald's would only give you the Barbie, or the Hot Wheels car with your meal, and I always wanted the Barbie, but I wanted him to like me. So whatever he ordered I would order. And every time I was like, oh, the car again. I want the Barbie. So all those like, really seemingly, what's the word, like unimportant memories started
making sense.

- (010) we had good family friends in our neighborhood growing up and we have this home video… they have two daughters and so it was the four of us and we're all wearing long sport shorts and running around in a circle in their basement in towels and no shirts on. And as we approach the camera, we flip up the towels, and we're like, we're boys! And it was my brother's idea. And so now, all of us are like, how did none of us see this?
- (010) What I found so interesting about it when he came out as trans was like all these like childhood memories that now made sense… when he came out as trans, my best friend from college was coming out to visit for the weekend. And I kind of warned her you're coming in two days after my mom and dad just found out my brother's trans, so it might be weird but let's go. And so we were, me and my friend were sitting with my mom one night and my mom had pulled out this picture of my brother and showed it to us, and he loved Peter Pan growing up, was his favorite Disney movie, and so he dressed up as Peter Pan for Halloween one year, and my mom had put it in this Peter Pan themed picture frame that says “I'm a lost boy” and my friend just looked at it and was kind of like I can't say anything but like… what?? You know, my mom's kind of upset and teary-eyed and we're like mom, it's like YOU put it in the frame that says I'm a lost boy [laughs].
- (013) And my twin was always quite insistent early on that they were part girl.
- (014) But I also kind of already knew because… as a kid, my sibling would scream if they were in girls clothes. A lot of kids have that experience, but it felt more of a sort of painful experience for them I think.
- (014) Um, but then it was like going backwards, it all made sense.
- (014) But they were going through, I mean we didn't know, but it was like gender dysphoria at the same time as all of this trauma from medical providers actually kind of hurting them.

12. “So I found out this, that he's a member of the LGBT community in some way beforehand” (5; 38.5%)

- (002) I feel like my sibling kind of, was like, in a way preparing me for it. they had a talk with me about, like, being gay and not implying that they were gay, but rather just like saying like, you know, being gay is okay. I think that was them kind of like dropping hints.
- (003) So I found out this, that he's a member of the LGBT community in some way beforehand
- (008) I always knew that she was gay growing up. It was obvious. And then when I was a senior in high school, she came out as gay and I was like okay. Didn't really care. Supportive, of course, but I was like, okay.
- (009) Especially since [sibling] came out as gay,
- (009) So [sibling] is also gay. So I was the first person that [sibling] came out to.
- (010) It is also very similar to when he had originally come out as gay to me, about maybe 10 years prior to that.
- (010) it just definitely took them a while. It was similar to when he came out as gay as well because in their mind they were just kind of like we're okay with it. We still love him but emotionally we need some time to adjust. Whereas I was just like okay like yep, this is the new reality. That's cool.

13. “In that way it was always something that I had in the back of my mind” (2; 15.4%)

- (002) I feel like my sibling kind of, was like, in a way preparing me for it. they had a talk
with me about, like, being gay and not implying that they were gay, but rather just like saying like, you know, being gay is okay. I think that was them kind of like dropping hints.

- (002) I just knew.
- (002) So I kind of had an idea about it before.
- (002) In that way it was always something that I had in the back of my mind, like I always had knowledge of it, that they were queer...
- (004) They both had been playing with binaries and, and non-binary-nes for a while in ways that I thought were kind of obvious..
- (004) And so for me, it was something where I was like, I wonder?

14. “the experience was one of okay, that makes sense, I understand” (5; 38.5%)

- (002) So in a way it was very easy. I was very readily accepting of it
- (004) in neither one of their cases was it a surprise.
- (004) the experience was one of okay, that makes sense. Like I was like, oh, confirmation. That makes sense. I get this. Great.
- (004) But I was just like, this is great. This is cool.
- (007) I was like oh. Yeah that makes perfect sense and I'm happy that you finally been able to put your finger on what was going on.
- (007) It just clicked in my head where I was like, yeah that makes perfect sense that sounds exactly like you.
- (007) So when they called me up and told me that I was just like, yeah, okay. Yeah.
- (007) I would describe them but like not a box or a category. Always just them.
- (007) it made so much sense like when they came out.
- (007) Because, like, trans made sense.
- (007) It's like, it was easy to think, individualism as a strong individual and that makes sense.
- (010) And within two minutes I was like, oh, this just makes sense.
- (010) when I mentioned as soon as he came out as trans I was like, oh, this makes sense,
- (013) we talked about [their non-binary identity] a little bit and I'm like, oh well that makes sense.
- (013) but at the same time, like also growing up in the same environment, I totally understand why they would have kind of repressed themselves a little bit when they were informed that it wasn't really okay to grow up in that environment and express themselves the way they wanted to.

15. “understanding my siblings' identities has really been due to previous exposure and continued exposure to other trans people” (3; 23.1%)

- (004) I also have a lot of trans friends of various sorts as well, either non-binary.
- (004) I think that I have a lot more experience with people I'm close to coming out as non-binary or like binary trans. I've known them through their process of figuring stuff out. And so like I've gone through this in a, like not a family way before my older sibling came out to me, but I've been through it with a bunch of friends. So I've been familiar with teaching myself to think about somebody as their gender identity and not as the gender they were assigned at birth. And like that it's not just memorizing pronouns and it is actually like a process of thinking about them differently. Like that's something I'm used to like… not used to-used to, but like something I do. Like it's something that's in my life already.
- (004) my adjustment to understanding my siblings' identities has really been like previous
exposure and continued exposure to other trans people.

- (004) And so like my friendships with other people who have transitioned in some way, the social media they share, the accounts they follow where they’re like, hey, these people have really good takes on trans issues, if you follow them, like that would be valuable for you know, learning like relationships like that.

- (004) I’m also an an ecologist by trade and so, like, getting impersonal understandings of, like, things around me that I interact with is how I learn frequently… I go to my ring of friends who are trans and talk to them about stuff that like I’m trying to figure out as opposed to necessarily, like I’ll ask by siblings something if I have a question, but I’ll also ask, like, friends outside and be like, hey, I’m having these thoughts. Like what do you think? And then there’s even further outside, where you’re scrolling through trans Twitter. Reading people’s experiences, you know, and getting lots of different layers of proximity gives you a better understanding of what people are going through. So you’re better able to be supportive of them.

- (010) I think I’ve always been much more liberal than my parents and I lived in New York City for five years, pretty much right before he came out. I was interacting with all different people that I hadn’t grown up around… So for me, I already had a sense of issues the trans community was dealing with, what was important to them. I mean, not on a personal level, I didn’t know, but I had a general sense.

- (012) I have a lot of friends who identify as nonbinary or use they/them pronouns. And so for me, it was like a very easy transition

- (012) So like right when I found out, I also got involved with the local activist organization for LGBTQ rights, as well.

16. Participant’s LGBTQ identity helped them understand their sibling’s experience (4; 30.8%)

- (002) it was almost like she [mom] was scared to talk to me [when participant came out]. Like, she just avoided contact with me for a week. And it wasn’t in a way like, she didn’t seem angry. She just seemed like she didn’t want to talk to me.

- (002) So they were just like, that’s not valid. You know, that’s not our kid anymore. This, this is our kid, our kid has to be who we want them to be.

- (003) and I had come out to my parents when I was a freshman in college.

- (003) they didn't take me coming out, super horribly, but it’s like not supportive. It’s definitely gotten much much better as I’ve gotten older and had partners and things like that. But initially it, you know, didn't feel great.

- (003) so our role as sexual minority people, who are then like every time we’re correcting them, we’re reminding them that we’re also queer.

- (013) I’m bi and my partner’s non-binary. it wasn’t something that I was like resistant to.

- (013) I was actually surprised at how, well, both of my parents took me coming out as bi, but up until now, it’s been pretty smooth.

- (014) I also have a different understanding of all of it because I’m on the asexual spectrum.

- I have an intellectually hard time understanding what it would be like to be non-binary, because I just am cis and that’s easy for me to understand, but I have the experience of having something that’s different than what everyone else is and everyone else not understanding it and can apply that to my sibling’s experience.

- (014) But we’ve had a lot of conversations about this

- (014) and also our parents have like both had bad reactions to it, so that it’s been sort of a bonding experience.
Theme #5: Experience of not understanding (8; 61.5%)

17. “This doesn’t make sense. I didn’t see this coming.” (7; 53.8%)
- (001) I think that while there’s a lot of stuff that, you know, me and my family aren’t comfortable with, there’s still a lot that we don’t understand, despite all the things and all of the training I’ve been through all of the conversations we’ve had with other people.
- (001) Like this is, this was my brother. Now, they’re my sister. I don’t understand this at all and I’m trying to deal with that on top of all the other stuff that’s going on in my and their life.
- (001) Like I think that that takes a lot of time and I don’t know if I’ll like, ever really understand what [sibling] is going through. But I think that I don’t have to anymore,
- (001) it’s really something that like is kinda, still lost on me that like, you were assigned male at birth and now you are female and like that, I don’t know if I’ll ever fully wrap my head around.
- (001) there were no signs that [sibling] might… like any indications that she was considering this. she had traditionally male interests like video games and comics and stuff like that.
- (002) But I was still in a place where I didn’t really understand what was happening because I was getting like two sides of the story.
- (002) [access to resources/information] And I think that’s something I didn’t have. So I think that’s like part of the reason why my sibling and I, you know, there was no understanding. Like I didn’t get it.
- (004) I don’t understand it because it’s never been like an experience that I’ve explored,
- (005) I don’t think I fully understood at the time, what this meant. And so I think initially my response was that let’s see where you’re at six months from now on this. I don’t think I fully appreciated how drastic of a decision this would be, how much it would change the trajectory of his life.
- (009) I didn’t see it coming.
- (010) In my immediate reaction, I was like, I didn’t see this coming.
- (011) that would have never been on my radar for something to expect.
- (011) I was definitely shocked because she was very like, manly man.
- (011) But when she said she was transgender, I definitely did not know what to expect from that. Like she was sort of explaining and I was like, “oh, so like you want to like wear girls clothes?” Like I really didn’t understand.

18. Feelings of confusion, surprise, shock. (5; 38.5%)
- (001) I was just confused
- (001) I was just really caught by surprise more than anything.
- (001) It’s like, what are we supposed to refer to you as? That also added a little bit to the confusion while they were trying to figure themselves out.
- (001) I think I was mostly just confused because at that time too, when [sibling] came out..
- (001) But when they first came out to now, I think I’ll stick with like confusion and concern as my main two emotional states.
- (001) I was confused a lot but my confusion just like this is what you’re telling me, so I’m just gonna roll with the punches here, like whatever comes comes.
- (001) Like it went from confusion to be like, okay.
- (001) if you interviewed me, like five years ago, I’d have a very different responses to all this… I think I’d be much more confused. I think even more than now I’d be like, what is going on?
19. Experiencing conflict, resistance, or denial (4; 30.8%)

- (001) Like what was the most difficult about that change originally. that like conflicting ideology that I had growing up
- (001) Like I wasn't even sure if gay people should get married. And now all of a sudden I have someone who is openly advocating for trans rights.
- (005) And so, like inevitably it's kind of about me. And so, how to work through that. How to think through that without hurting [sibling] is something that, you know, I think about all the time. And I don't know if I have any good answers, really.
- (005) But I've always sort of wondered when you have this acceptance framework in place at the expense of anything else, do you create an expectation in that person's head whereby they go, my experience of reality, my perception of reality is going to be ratified by the outside world and to the extent it doesn't, that's their problem. And it doesn't work that way.
- (005) But certainly I guess the tough part is as we grind on and you look at the situation you go… it's an impossible question. It's counterfactual to say, you know, has this resolved the issues the turmoil he was experiencing? Is he happier now? Is he living a more meaningful life as it's opened up opportunities and ways of understanding the world that his prior identity would not have. These are all really tough, but you know, it's hard not to ask these questions.
- (005) We're still, I'm still looking at my little brother and not seeing someone who's living a fulfilling life. And I know he's not where he wants to be and maybe that has nothing to do with the transition and may be even worse if it were not for the transition. However, it's impossible not to think like, wow, you know, this is something that requires a ton of mental energy to do. having to look at what I do. What men do, what dad does, what other men around him do and trying to replicate that, because it doesn't necessarily come naturally to him. Some of it does. Some of it doesn't. That's a lot.
- (005) thirdly, kind of wondering what have we… Is this… was this for the best? And not knowing what to do with that feeling and kind of thinking that I have no choice but to ask
that feeling, based on what I'm seeing. Because I don't know how it could ever be settled. So in a sense because it's the transition, I don't know what the static point is. The static point was the a priori and now we've busted through that and I don't know where the next like feeling of satisfaction is. And I don't know if he knows where that is because I don't know if he's ever gonna get to the point of an aside where he's like, a man like me. I don't know how he gets there, maybe you can approximate it and that will be enough, but it doesn't feel like it sometimes.

• (005) I guess what would be unique to me and not to my parents would be sort of the ways in which our relationship shaped the decision and it's impossible to unravel that.
• (005) I wanted play sports with somebody. So, you know, I would put the freaking football pads on her and we'd go play whatever. And so, you know, it's silly to think that had anything to do with it. But of course, you're going to think so. I mean, of course, at some level you're gonna have a... sheesh like, like what lines are kind of going into that?
• (008) It wasn't easy seeing your little brother wearing nails and heels.
• (008) Like I was in denial a little bit for a while. Even though I don't think I was ever really in denial, but
• (009) I think at first, I resisted it a little bit. I don't really know why.
• (009) But it really wigged me out I think. It was just so weird to see [sibling] be this new person.
• And not that I don't want them to be that person but I think deep down I did resist that a little bit. I was having trouble, sort of, relating to this new [sibling] and understanding the new [sibling]. I didn't like that I was feeling that way. So I was trying to sort of just repress it a little bit. So I was just trying not to be judgmental.
• (009) since [sibling] is my only younger sibling, [sibling] has always been the brunt of if I'm ever in a bad mood. It's usually [sibling] that has to deal with it and nobody else. So sometimes I sort of revert back to that old sibling relationship. when we were doing stuff together a lot when we were younger like I can be kind of mean and he's really the only person that I'm mean to. And I'm using “he” because I'm thinking about when we were children. So I was trying not to revert to the mean bully of myself when I was around her.

Theme #6: Coming to terms with transness (13; 100%)
20. “I needed to change how I’m viewing things” (5; 38.5%)
• (001) And I mean I've changed since that
• (001) Like what was the most difficult about that change originally. that like conflicting ideology that I had growing up and the changes that I needed to make to kind of assimilate like, this is the person I love, clearly I need to change how I’m viewing things.
• (001) Like I wasn't even sure if gay people should get married. And now all of a sudden I have someone who is openly advocating for trans rights.
• (001) Um, well now I definitely think gay people can get married. Definitely. [laughs] That has changed.
• (001) I know that there are some families that are like, all right. Cool. It was not as straightforward for us.
• (003) I kind of viewed him as a girl at the time, which is shitty looking back
• (004) And then there's also a piece of me that was trying to figure out like okay what does this mean for how I relate to this person now? how do I approach the fact that my sibling is transitioning?
• (004) And I have to remind myself that, like, someone exploring their gender doesn't mean that like… anytime I have like a moment of like, well that's weird, I'm then like wait a minute, that's not weird, it's what they're doing. I just am trained in a certain way to
think a certain way.

- (010) So yeah, just those little things (childhood memories) were really interesting to me how quickly it lined up and I think that did help me reconcile things faster or kind of process it faster.

- (010) I do distinctly remember in high school having girlfriends who had older sisters and they were like, oh we talk about our boyfriends or boys we like, and we do each other’s hair and makeup and I was like my sister and I definitely don't do that. Like she punches me and kicks soccer balls at me. I remember being upset, like why is my older sister not this person I’m supposed to have as a friend like that? So in some sense I was like okay there's really not that much to reconcile because he wasn't the older sister I imagined he should be.

- (010) I think the hardest aspect was reconciling I no longer have an older sister. Now I have an older brother.

- (010) I think playing soccer together was a big part and, you know, if if he had been born, like cis male or something, we would have never had that experience.

- (011) it sort of just got to the point to realize.. it's not that she was a boy and now she's a girl. Like realizing that she was a girl the whole time. And it was just like a boy disguise. That was sort of, for me, that was the easiest way.

21. Reconciling with religious/conservative beliefs and values (4; 30.8%)

- (001) I was raised in a, you know, conservative Catholic family, so that took a lot of adjustment for us to kind of understand.

- (001) my mom, she's very Catholic. And she's like, I don't know what to make of this, like this is not what they said in the Bible. And I think that... was at least the hardest part of my family is like this goes against what we believe. Not that we'd necessarily hated trans people to begin with. we don't know how we feel about this in the beginning. And obviously we have changed since then. But I think especially if you're looking at [sibling], how they're interacting, I think that that is one of the biggest factors in how I was able to process.

- (001) And I mean I've changed since that, but like in high school, I went to a Catholic high school. Like I wasn't even sure if gay people should get married. And now all of a sudden I have someone who is openly advocating for trans rights.

- (001) [references religious/conservative background] that's really where a lot of the confusion came from.

- (001) I think that coming from a conservative background, it was a lot harder than other people who may have come from like a more liberal background.

- (001) It just, this clashes with you know what I was raised and what I believed growing up and you know it was really just kind of through trying to be as open as possible, as like this is radically different than like everything we've learned like growing up. And now I'm trying to be different as much as I can to show that I support you, even if I didn't agree with everything 100%.

- (001) and it's awkward at the dinner table now, between my very conservative mother and my, you know, very liberal sister. And that's where a lot of the tension still lies. Like what was the most difficult about that change originally. that like conflicting ideology that I had growing up and the changes that I needed to make to kind of assimilate like, this is the person I love, clearly I need to change how I’m viewing things.

- (001) Well, this is just absolutely terrible. And we were just kind of sitting around and we let [sibling] have the floor and [sibling] was expressing how difficult you know, it was for her. But regardless, it essentially went from my partner died to, you guys are evil for
voting for Trump. I align more with [sibling] than I do with my parents at this point. But it's still, you know, I feel for my mom, even if I disagree with her. I told [sibling] like that was not cool but point received.

- (001) I think there are still some things that like I am… And this is where I think the confusion is that, I don't know how I feel about like trans athletes like competing at high levels like that. I'm still… me and [sibling]... it's something I just don't even bring up because I'm sure we'll disagree on. Um, you know, like the bathroom laws, I think I'm a more left wing on that now. I'm just like, yeah, where you feel comfortable, but even there's still like, in the back of my head is, like, is that how you feel? So it's…I haven't fully swung, I mean [school] helped. I am definitely more left than when I started [my] program. But I am still not where I think [sibling] want us to be and I think that that kind of adds to the mental health problems, where like [sibling] will go back and forth between like, I understand that you love me and you're supporting me. And why do you still not believe these things that I believe? And that is where a lot of the tension comes from too.

- (002) my family is Indian and both of my parents immigrated from India. So they are very like, conservative immigrant parents. So it was like, obviously a lot of like homophobia and transphobia on their end and also just being who they are, they like went to disown my sibling, they cut them off financially...

- (002) my parents being as conservative as they were, it was just like second nature to want to rebel against that. Just because their ideologies are different.

- (003) My family is libertarian, it's a brand of crazy conservative people.

- (005) you know what I'd like and it doesn't exist? Like what do we do as Catholics with this situation? Because no one's answering that! It's like I can find a million Catholics on First Things and Commonweal and Communio and all the relevant journals explaining why theoretically speaking and philosophically speaking, the transgender movement is no bueno, it's not gonna last and it's contrary to God's greater order. And it's like I got that. Like no one's talking about what I do. Like what should I do as a brother? if you found me a group of Catholics trying to work through this, Christian's trying to work this, a group of people who believe in created order, in order created by God, and who are trying to figure out, how do we support… how do we still support people who have… who are dealing with this? That would be, I think that would be something that I would really want to do because I don't get it. And I don't really know how to talk about it without alienating my fellow Catholics. And I don't know how to talk to him without alienating… or I don't know how to talk about with you guys, without really just kind of like totally throwing out some pretty fundamental beliefs that I have

- (005) Um but on the flipside, there's nothing on the other end. There's nothing saying like, okay, like stipulate that all of your Catholic beliefs are true but like what do we do now? That would be helpful.

22. Adjusting to changes (10; 76.9%)

- (001) So at first [sibling] asked to be called [different name]. So that was first and it took us a while to really get the pronouns down--that also switched a couple times. And obviously, she now goes by [sibling name]. So that also took a little while. It's like, what are we supposed to refer to you as?

- (001) [sibling's old name] is dead.

- (001) like, I'm used to calling [sibling], you know, [sibling] and using, you know, she/her pronouns.

- (001) it's just getting used to it and I think that's really like… it really just comes down to
time and, I want to say repetition but just more familiarity

• (003) So I think for a while, I was like, well I think he goes by he/him pronouns. But at home, he goes by dead name and that's when I see him, right?
• (003) he went by, it took him a while to choose his name [sibling’s name] at first. He was shortening his dead name to a more masculine version, so it was easy to pretend that it was still the same like gender. That the shifted name was not as consequential until he chose his name.
• (005) I have throughout called him the name that he seems to be called.
• (005) I’ve always referred to him as [sibling] as he is now known.
• (007) So he's receiving testosterone boosts. And so just you know, for me, he's 18 and that's his responsibility
• (007) and it was also a learning experience because [sibling] at the time, too, was also learning whether they wanted to go by he/him pronouns, they/them, or they had a phase where they were like when you meet me, whatever pronouns click into mind, it's okay for you to use.
• (008) And kind of like accepting it. Like saying “my sister” was difficult for me for a while. instead of just saying “my younger sibling,“ it was hard for me to officially feel comfortable saying “my sister.” I would say it probably took me a year and a half, two years to really feel confident saying it.
• (008) But it's also like I grew up having a little brother and always saying that I had a little brother and then I had to somehow get myself to accept and be able to say that I had a little sister.
• (008) I think we just kind of had to get used to the pronouns, because she went from he/him to they/them. I think that was kind of difficult and then going to the she/hers was definitely difficult. You just kind of get used to it at some point..
• (008) I personally just would try to avoid saying any pronoun thing
• (008) then I would get anxious when I had friends over and I would tell them, but they're not talking to her all the time. there were a few times where my friends were over and like, they slipped up on the pronouns and they didn't even realize, but I realized because I was so paranoid about it and I still get paranoid about it, even though all my friends know. Paranoid that someone's gonna misgender her on accident.
• (008) first it's a weird thing like, what was a little boy wearing nails, hair, doing stuff, talking about her boobs. Like that kind of was difficult and we kind of all were uncomfortable, especially my dad too. And then kind of getting used to it, there being three girls in the house and talking about boobs and girl stuff.
• (008) It wasn't easy seeing your little brother wearing nails and heels. Then I was like, okay, you do you. I've been trying to get her to do that my whole life and then here she is. But it was just like, okay, what's next?
• (008) I was at a weird time in my life because I was away and then I'd come back to something new. So it was just like adjusting to this new person pretty much. I would come home and she’d have her nails painted, or another time she was wearing heels. So just like getting used to that. And I was never judgmental at all, just like, okay, it's just interesting to see.
• (009) So as you can tell we've gone through a few transitions with the pronouns. obviously I am just here to support [sibling] in any way I can and you know, I don't care what [sibling]’s pronouns are, I will use them however [sibling] wants,
• (009) And [sibling] also is not the best at keeping us up to date. this is part of us not being able to insert ourselves, it's just whatever [sibling] feels like telling us, whenever. So sometimes I find out that.. like the pronoun switches, I didn't always find out right away,
it was a month later or something. It's like, oh okay, so [sibling] is using this pronouns again. So it's been quite a ride.

- (010) And then also, one thing that was weird for me at first with the pronouns was like when I would talk about him in the past or tell a story about him from the past, I was like, do I use he/him pronouns? Do I use she/her pronouns? But I finally just asked him and he was like, well, I think I've always felt like I was a boy. So he said to me I think I always thought of myself as a boy but knew I wasn't supposed to think that, so in my mind, I was always a boy and therefore, memories of me should be referred to as he/him, and that made perfect sense to me. And since then, I haven't had any issues with the pronouns speaking in the past.

- (010) it took me like a few months to get used to using he/him but just talking about it a lot with friends really helped. And I don't know why, it was just very natural for me that if I messed up and used she/her in front of him, I was very quickly able to be like, oh, sorry, like switch and fix it. So, it boggles my mind where people struggle with that…

- (010) so then he had top surgery, and I hadn't seen him since the first time I saw him was last summer and you know he's just walking around his property just in like swimming trunks and no shirt on and it was definitely like a little jarring at first, just like, I'm not used to seeing you this way. I mean that's like my own discomfort, you know, and so it's just, I didn't say anything obviously. But that was a little weird for me,

- (011) I think as for the pronouns, I feel like for me it was easier than other members of my family, it sort of just got to the point to realize.. it's not that she was a boy and now she's a girl. Like realizing that she was a girl the whole time. And it was just like a boy disguise. That was sort of, for me, that was the easiest way. Once I realized that, like the pronouns just became easy because it was like, oh it's she, it's her. Like, that's a girl, like, that's my sister. She's always been my sister, even though I thought for a while she wasn't.

- (011) But yeah, my experience of it, I guess was pretty easy, but I definitely do have guilt when I accidentally slip up. I don't do it anymore, obviously. But during the beginning of the transition, it was a little bit harder and then I felt really bad when I did make a mistake.

- (011) I think it's just she made it so obvious that it hurt her when we would mess up. And it was hard because we would say like he and him for--I think she was 22 when she came out--so my whole life practically it was he/him so it was very difficult to, in a matter of a short period, to make that switch. So during that period and even in the transition she's still looked kind of masculine. So then it made it also harder to say she. I guess that part was when I felt most guilty because it's like, you try to say she and you try to remember, but then every now and then it's like, it just slips out. And then she would visibly be like [sighs] and then I'd just be like, oh, I'm so sorry. I'm trying my best, you know?

- (012) And there were times when I was a little unsure of what to do, or what pronouns to use or what name to use and just felt some confusion around that, because I wasn't getting a lot of information from them and couldn't really ask.

- (013) It took a little bit to get used to, obviously, having grown up again, referring to them with gendered pronouns, took some getting used to.

23. “It’s the new normal. It’s real and I had to accept it” (5; 38.5%)

- (001) Just going from like, what is this to, you know, correcting people when they misgender [sibling], I think we kind of are used to it by now or it's, it's really just normal.

- (001) it's becoming more and more real. And I think that I've kind of accepted that, but not fully

- (001) despite it not being normal for me, it's still so normal at this point, like it's a very
24. “I think that that was really hard for me to process in the beginning, but is something over time, I have been able to do a lot better.” (5; 38.5%)

- (001) Um, you know, I think it’s still evolving
- (001) see this is how far away I am from the LGBTQ community
- (001) And I think that was most helpful and really, it was, it was time. It just really took time to be like, no, your name is not [sibling’s deadname] anymore.
- (001) Like I think that that takes a lot of time [to understand].
- (001) And I think that that was really hard for me to process in the beginning, but is something over time, I have been able to do a lot better.
- (007) On the other hand. It was a learning process for me, too. Because, like, trans made sense. I didn't understand non-binary for a little bit. It took me a few months and then it was okay.
- (007) But there were still some stuff that wasn't exactly clicking and I had a bunch of my own stuff going on so it took me a little bit to come up to speed completely with…
- (007) So there was a lot of them learning and me trying to catch up with their evolution at the time too.
- (011) Like, when she first came out to us, I didn't really know what transgender was. So after she explained it… I certainly learned a lot since then, but yeah, it's definitely been eye-opening. I've learned of a lot of different gender identities.
- (011) I didn't really know much about transgender people.
- (012) I just didn't know because it wasn't something that I knew that much about.
- (013) It was just something that I had to learn about.
- (013) So, that's really the extent of that one, but it was more of a growing into it, an evolution.
- (013) And so kind of all of that growing together and understanding each other happened at the same time as I was also learning.
25. *Feelings of guilt for previous responses and reactions* (5; 38.5%)
- (001) sometimes I wish [sibling] was more confident in who they are. And I think some of the guilt comes from that… That I realize that comes from us, kind of questioning, you know, like we're like what's going on here. That definitely doesn't help [sibling] and their identity and they kind of figured themselves out this in spite of you know, family not always understanding.
- (001) One thing I always think about is like, do I have to like, go into, like LGBTQ work, the answer is typically no for me. And I feel guilty.
- (002) [parents confronting about gender identity] So the whole time it was just me sitting at the side, not making a sound, because I didn't want to get involved. Which I realized now wasn't the right thing to do,
- (002) I thought it was a little bit funny when they told me because I already knew that. But seeing the way that they were reacting and like being just so devastated by it. I guess like, for a second, I felt guilty for not telling them.
- (003) I think I had this idea in my head I could be this great advocate for him and I really wasn't for a while.
- (003) I think maybe that I just knew I would feel guilty at the time when I was like not speaking up and not like really being vocally supportive in those situations and just not doing everything I could to ask my brother what he wanted or need and like be really open with it.
- (003) I still feel a little guilty about that. I'm not like hung up on it by any means, but like looking back, I'm like yeah, like that sucked that was not cool of me. And I knew I would feel that way at the time and like yes I do feel that way now, you know like I'm gonna regret this in the future.
- (003) Here I am like in the future being like again not hung up on it. we moved past that. but still like.. Looking back. Like yes, I was correct. So I feel like that is something like if I could tell other siblings whose siblings come out about it of like just get like, start doing what you need to do sooner rather than later, because like you will regret it.
- (005) and I guess there's a certain guilt with that you know, not really having been there in a close setting in the aftermath of this, having rather been distant and maybe getting information secondhand.
- (011) I definitely do have guilt when I accidentally slip up. I don't do it anymore, obviously. But during the beginning of the transition, it was a little bit harder and then I felt really bad when I did make a mistake.
- (011) I guess that part was when I felt most guilty because it's like, you try to say she and you try to remember, but then every now and then it's like, it just slips out.

**Theme #7: Approaching with love first (5; 28.5%)**
26. *“I love my sibling and just want them to be happy”* (4; 30.8%)
- (001) But, you know, we were always accepting like… we will be there with you even if we don't always get it. Like we love you and we just want you to be happy even if we don't understand.
- (001) what would [sibling] be happiest moving forward was always my biggest concern
- (001) I really just want [sibling] to be happy.
- (001) And I think that like that's kind of how I viewed it originally. It's like I love you and we'll figure out the rest as time goes on.
- (001) I just kind of accept [sibling] for who they are and love them for who they are. And that's enough.
(01) it's becoming more and more real. And I think that I've kind of accepted that
(01) [sibling] is happier now by far than they have been. So let's keep good going. Even
if I don't understand it, right?
(01) And I'm like, I want you to be happy.
(01) this is the person I love
(09) I always just want [sibling] to be happy.
(09) But in ways, I worry less because I know that [sibling]'s on their way to
discovering who they are. So that makes me happy and I know that [sibling] is happier.
(09) I mean my whole family, we’re on the same page of like we love [sibling] and we
want [sibling] to be happy and whatever that takes, we’ll support. So, I'm glad we're all
on the same page there.
(09) I was so glad to see happy [sibling].
(09) And [sibling] was just a totally different person and.. because they're happy, it was
great.
(11) I just wanted to make sure that she knew it was absolutely fine, no matter what she
would say, it wouldn't change anything. I still loved her just the same.
(11) we just wanted the best for her
(11) Even my dad, he definitely didn't understand what was going on but he could see
how scared she was to even say that. And so he went over to her and gave her a big hug
and was like “I'll love you, no matter what you shouldn't be scared to tell me something
so important to you. Like when it comes down to it, you're my child, I love you. And I
want what's best for you.” So that was sort of what all of us conveyed, first things first.
(12) And when I first found out and I just said “I love you” then they were like crying
and like really touched by that too.

27. “their coming out has really been a real positive for them” (4; 30.8%)
(01) I think in terms of like life in general, her coming out has really been a real positive
for her.
(01) And this is… I think, like I said before, the most positive thing that has happened to
[sibling].
(09) It was so much better, saying how a weight has been lifted and feels so much better,
and I could tell.. So that was awesome.
(11) my sister would always sort of have a shield up before she transitioned. So, I feel
like after she transitioned, we sort of got to see who she really was in a way that we never
really did before. Because she was always really unmotivated and just did not want to go
through life.
(12) So, yeah, and then overall like they have been happier… like I can see the
difference. Like it's definitely… they feel better in their own body and that can help any
relationship with anyone. And so that's really wonderful too.

28. “let's keep good going. Even if I don't understand it, right?” (3; 23.1%)
(01) so I'm just gonna roll with the punches here, like whatever comes comes.
(01) [sibling] is happier now by far than they have been. So let's keep good going. Even
if I don't understand it, right?
(01) Like we were kind of coming along for the ride of that journey and…and it wasn't
always easy.
(01) But, you know, we were always accepting like… we will be there with you even if
we don't always get it. Like we love you and we just want you to be happy even if we
don't understand.
III. DYADIC RELATIONSHIP PROCESSES

Theme #8: How to relate as siblings now (13; 100%)

29. Closeness, becoming closer (8; 61.5%)

- (001) Like I think that that takes a lot of time and I don't know if I'll like, ever really understand what [sibling] is going through. But I think that I don't have to anymore
- (001) And I think that like that's kind of how I viewed it originally. It's like I love you and we'll figure out the rest as time goes on.
- (001) And now I'm trying to be different as much as I can to show that I support you, even if I didn't agree with everything 100%.
- (005) And so not hearing much in the alternative [of acceptance/support] that was more or less what I did, perhaps not in an explicit way but rather just sort of, I guess implicit by not lodging any objections that I did not feel he was looking for, or I was really positioned to lodge.
- (005) I think that we've followed what we were asked to do, I would say, as a family. And we did what we were asked to do, we did what everyone said to do.
- (005) And so I think as a unit, you know, it was the playbook that you're given is acceptance and in support. And I think we did that.
- (005) And we've done nothing but follow the playbook, as it were, that's sort of put forth by all of the relevant institutions and actors.
- (005) And I think at 19, I wasn't in a position to really provide any type of guidance as to the decision, and certainly he wasn't seeking it at that point. I didn't feel like I was in a position to weigh in...
- (011) I just wanted to make sure that she knew it was absolutely fine, no matter what she would say, it wouldn't change anything. I still loved her just the same.

- (002) So I would probably say that they're my best friend partially because I don't have any other friends [laughs] but we're very close.
- (003) I feel like we're a lot closer now than we were when we were younger.
- (003) Like me and my brother are very close
- (004) Along with like their identities, the older sibling came out and then moved out to [pacific northwest]. So the relationship has changed in that we spend a lot more time together like we get to hang out more often, we get to spend time together on a more regular basis, than we did before even with there being a pandemic going on. so we are decidedly closer then we were before, but also it's hard to say if it's them feeling more comfortable, if it's just increased proximity, you know it's hard to say what like the change in relationship is difficult to, like parse where it comes from. we are closer than we were before.
- (004) So in both cases, I feel like I'm closer to my siblings than I was before and there's also life stuff happening alongside the fact that they've come out and I can't tease those like strings away from each other. for instance, my older sibling seems more at ease with themselves than they have ever seemed before since coming out. so socializing for us has been easier than it was before and then our younger sibling's across the country with a new baby, and a respiratory pandemic. So haven't gotten to hang out much recently. Weirdly closer in both cases.
- (007) [our relationship]’s definitely gotten closer, more genuine. so our childhoods were kind of rough. We were kinda a little bit like trauma bonded, but now it's like more beyond that. We’re like actual siblings and not just like people who got through and into a hurricane together. So there's a lot more warm feeling there.
• (010) I think we're definitely closer [since transition]. We weren't very close in high school... But then after I got out of college, we just started keeping in touch more often. And so we became close slowly. But then I definitely think him coming out as trans has made us a lot more closer, given that I've often been that buffer for our parents and all that stuff.

• (011) I feel like our relationship has changed a lot and I don't know if that's just because we're closer now that she's got this off her chest or if it's even like a sister-brother versus sister-sister relationship sort of dynamic. Because I feel like we butt heads more than we used to. That again can be just because we're closer,

• (012) So there have been times in some ways, we've gotten further apart, but in some ways closer.

• (014) I feel like [sibling and I] are closer.

30. “now we can finally understand each other” (6; 42.6%)

• (001) it's funny because I always say that like [sibling] was my first patient. So like now we have come to an understanding, especially now that I've like gone through more... It's like we need to have a more sibling relationship, more than like me trying to help you and I think that that has been for the better, but that also means that like, we don't talk as much. we have dinner and we will just sit in the car for like 45 minutes in silence, because pretty much the only thing we had to talk about was mental health...

• (002) And I'm also really protective of them because the longer I stay here, the more I learn about the things that my parents did to them.

• (002) my sibling and I started communicating more afterwards [coming out to parents]

• (005) And so the new relationship, I think I've been able to build a relationship, and I think I've got a willing participant in a lot of ways. It's not all me.

• (007) But as long as it's being real and we're communicating, I'm very happy for that, because that's like, first time in forever and it feels really good.

• (007) So it's changed for the positive and I think we are, or at least, I'm able to identify things that we can work on it, so it's not just like a big [slicing motion] kind of thing.

• (007) now we can finally understand each other and bond maybe a little bit more, and that's actually what's happened.

• (007) So it's been really nice actually. I know it's been very hard for them, but it's been a lot more real and I've loved getting to know them more and all that.

• (007) I know that I understand them more and I think they understand me a little bit more, but I think there's still a lot of prickles there.

• (007) Like um, like three years ago, they were like it took me a while to come out to you because I thought you had, like, such strong Christian values. And I was like ME?? So I think there's still a lot of learning to do there where I think they project some kind of otherness onto me without seeing me completely. But it's baby steps kind of stuff.

• (011) my sister would always sort of have a shield up before she transitioned. So, I feel like after she transitioned, we sort of got to see who she really was in a way that we never really did before.

• (013) [Prior to transition] we would, basically be able to spend a few hours together without getting into some sort of a stupid argument or other. we see each other and occasionally hang out in the same group of friends, and try not to fight in front of people, but it was always butting heads. we're probably both autistic with different sensitivities and different learning disabilities and very different communication styles. And so kind of all of that growing together and understanding each other happened at the same time as I was also learning.
• (013) And understanding with my twin that happened along the same time as getting to know them again, as an adult, after we had had very tenuous discussions and talks.
• (013) So I think because that kind of all happened together, it really was more of a positive transition in our relationship like oh okay. Well this is just another part of them that I get to understand and work with and understand and know them better.
• (013) [in regards to twin] So I think again because it happened at the same time, we were kind of a re-discovering a positive relationship with each other… it helped me to kind of understand okay, this is what they were going through.
• (013) This is why we had some, not disagreements about gender per se, but like a different understanding of the way that each other’s minds worked that was apparently not accurate

31. Loss of closeness (4; 30.8%)
• (008) [Our relationship] definitely changed. We were always close growing up.
• (009) I think [sibling] will sometimes come to her (mom) for advice more than me, which is a bit of a switch because I'm usually [sibling]'s confidant.
• (011) I feel like our relationship has changed a lot… because I feel like we butt heads more than we used to.
• (012) feeling like a loss of closeness when I knew they weren't telling me right away and would tell other friends first.
• (012) because I will always remind them of the time in their life that...people knew them as a female, then like because I grew up with them that might be like a wedge in our relationship a little bit that I couldn't really control.
• (012) the only loss of the relationship was just like maybe a little bit of like that they would never be as close with me, because I was there in their life at that time that wasn't as good. So that was the only loss I felt.
• (012) So there have been times in some ways, we've gotten further apart, but in some ways closer.

32. A different gender relationship (3; 23.1%)
• (003) Like cause [sibling] didn't act like... we didn't bond over girly things. We didn't like sit around and talk about boys like that was just not the nature of our relationship and I feel like we're a lot closer now than we were when we were younger.
• (008) And I think now it's different, like a sisterly bond. I was showing her makeup and nails and hair stuff. But like that sister bond is, I guess, just different. But there's some things that are still the same because she's still the same person, but she's not. it just is different. It's just hard to put into words. It definitely is a different bond than two girls versus boy and a girl. Like the things we talk about.
• (008) Honestly, you get the best of both worlds. I was able to have a sister and brother in one, but it definitely like. I always loved having a little brother of course. But like I always would try to paint her nails and stuff. So it was kind of exciting for me, but it was hard to get used to that in general. now I have someone stealing my clothes or things like that.
• (011) And like she always says when they give her the estrogen shot, she says it's like going through a period sort of and like having the emotional swaying and all that stuff. So we do have that shared experience now.
• (011) just the fact that like she's going through a second puberty and I know her hormones can be a little bit high sometimes and so she can sometimes be a little bit hard to deal with.
33. “But there’s some things that are still the same because she’s still the same person” (6; 46.2%) 
- (001) And I’ll say this, we were never like… close. we kind of are only as close as we are today because we’ve been forced to live together for so long.
- (005) I think part of the reason is that we have other things now in our relationship that we’ve had to sit down and talk about that if they are related to this transition, they are only related in a secondary way. the transition has kind of added challenges to our relationship but they’re not, I wouldn’t say, the primary issues that we had to work through. So we’ve been busy trying to work through other, I would say, roadblocks in our relationship. it’s really like a background thing that is just sort of there, and to kind of unearth that one, I think would be more than either of us are really willing to take on.
- (005) Certainly if there were no other behavioral problems then we would, we may be able to get into this. But it’s just that there are just so many other things where it's like… man we got to talk and figure out how we’re going to get your life going in a meaningful way you know, so that you’re going in a meaningful way.
- (005) It's tough like thinking of our relationship as younger siblings, and sort of thinking of the ways in which I wasn't there and maybe could have been in a way that might have helped him work through… and I don’t mean to suggest that there was some sort of work through of this. I don’t mean to suggest that there wasn’t either. But certainly, I wonder at times that my responses to him and my sense that he was, through things that just had nothing to do with any of this.. not having a super close relationship when we were, you know, 8 through 18.
- (008) But there's some things that are still the same because she's still the same person
- (009) Just sort of continuing what I've already sort of been feeling and experiencing for the past few years with [sibling].
- (009) I don't think [our relationship] changed much in tangible ways that I can of because we've been sort of in this mode for a while. So we've sort of been in this same relationship space for a while. So it hasn't really changed too much. Except that I worry more [laughs]... So yeah, I really can't think of any changes.
- (011) When she was a guy, she was never like super, like, stereotypical guy. I was always the tomboy. So it wasn't really like that stereotypical dynamic of like the older brother takes care of the little sister. Like I was kind of more of the... like the more outgoing, the more like sort of bad one. but like she was one of the soft, likes art and video games, whereas I like sports and stuff like that. So I guess like the dynamic didn't really change much considering like even when she was a guy, I still had more like the male roles. So since that was sort of our relationship, her going from a male to a female didn't really change much because She didn't really do many male things to begin with.
- (014) I feel like we're pretty supportive of each other, but I don't really feel like our relationship is different.

Theme #9: How to support their sibling has been clear (10; 76.9%) 
34. My role has been straightforward (6; 46.2%) 
- (004) I feel like for my part as the sibling, my role as a brother has been pretty straightforward and cut and dry. It's like, you're here to support your siblings and affirm them. And so, the experience has been kind of straightforward for me.
- (004) I think it's interesting having now talked about it, how clear and straightforward things were in my mind about it all.
- (004) I know that a lot of other people have more struggle around it and I'm grateful that I
had the social context before finding out any of it. That it really didn't feel like a thing to me for the most part.

- (007) I think the most different would be that back then, I just wanted to be as supportive as possible because I knew that they were going through changes but they were going to be positive changes.
- (007) So because I mentioned that we're all kind of trauma bonded, I'm always kind of defensive of my siblings… I have a specific thing now where it's like, okay I can identify the big bad scary thing and there's something I can help with. It's not just like a generalized we're sticking together kind of thing.
- (008) I was always very supportive.
- (008) Supportive, of course, but I was like, okay.
- (008) the whole mental health aspect really made a difference for me because I was like, she wasn't happy. She literally wanted to die when she wasn't identifying as a female. So I think that really pushed me to accept it. Like why would I be supportive of someone that wasn't themselves? So I just kind of had to come to terms with that.
- (009) So I think when they came out I took it in stride. Like okay, this is just [sibling] on [sibling]'s journey to wherever [sibling] is going.
- (009) So I was just sort of approaching it like okay we're just on this ride now and we'll see what happens. I'll be here to help.
- (009) So my experience really was just sort of as the passive support. I'm here, talk to me if you want because [sibling] will not talk to you unless they want to, so it's totally on their terms.
- (009) And it's hard because [sibling] really doesn't like when people sort of insert themselves into their life, I have to just sort of be on the sidelines. Which is hard because I feel like I want to do more but [sibling] will not take that well.
- (009) And I fully support [sibling], whatever they want and need and who they want to be. So I'm just here to support that journey I think.
- (010) And so he asked me to essentially pull some resources for them, so that they would have kind of things on hand when he did tell them.
- (011) I mean, as long as I was there for her and supported her and made her feel safe within the family, I guess that was really all I could do.

35. “On the front lines” (8; 61.5%)

- (004) For my older sibling, who I'm more closely connected to because they live in the region, as opposed to our younger sibling, who's over actually [across the country], I've gotten to like kind of be on the front line of people they're talking to about some of the ways they're exploring finding gender affirmation. And how they're looking to experiment with their gender and try on things that feel better or worse for them. And so that's been really neat.
- (004) But it's been really cool and exciting to watch them explore honestly. Like for my part it's been really exciting to like get to be on the inside of them doing that. Like them sharing as much as they have with me about it. Before they share with the family text chat or in other spaces, we've had conversations about binders and binder tape and glues or like adhesives and stuff that I would never encounter in my life otherwise. So that stuff often is reaching me before it's reaching the rest of the family, but also largely like, some of that stuff is getting to the rest of the family as well. Like a photo of them with a beard got sent to the whole family chat, which was.. I mean adorable [laughs]. It was really great.
- (005) I've, notwithstanding my own personal views, I’ve gone to bat for him with the
insurance companies when it was a problem and we’ve appealed decisions and I drafted all the appeals. When it comes to the nuts and bolts of it, notwithstanding some sort of deeper reservations, I’ve gone to bat for him on that.

- (007) And like, it’s a very tangible negative impact that I feel like, okay, I know some of the steps I can be an ally with, I know the things I can ask you with if you need help with and [sibling]’s, actually started opening up more and asking certain members of the family, mainly me and my mom for like concrete help that they need, and it’s such a relief. That we’re able to help and it’s not just them versus the world.

- (009) So it’s a bit weird and so on Sunday when we found out that [sibling] is back using they/them, I always call my mom and my mom told me. So like I haven’t even talked to [sibling] since that happened. Sometimes it feels like my mom is in the loop and I’m not. Sometimes I’m in the loop and my mom’s not. Just depends on what [sibling] feels like doing.

- (011) but we just sort of talked about it. And then she was like, “oh can you help me? Can you tell mom for me?” And I was like, I don’t really think I can tell her for you, like that’s kind of awkward. So then we just hung out a couple hours and then we went to my mom’s house and I was like, I’ll hold your hand, I’ll be there for you, you can tell her though because it really should come from you, I can’t really be the one to say it.

- (012) I was like there for like while their voice was changing and they were so excited and like sharing it with my family and that was good.

- (012) And they did have gender affirming top surgery. And they did call me like two weeks before to tell me that they were nervous about it. And then I felt like, oh wow, like I was really there for that moment when they were feeling nervous. That was a moment that I was, I think, just there as a listener, to be there for them.

- (012) And then also like, when they were so excited to show me that they now could take their shirt off. It was so exciting and that was a really special moment to be able to experience with them too.

- (012) But in some ways I’ve been able to be there for them in times, like, when they were about to have top surgery and feeling nervous, I was able to be there. And that’s almost sometimes brought us closer too. So that’s really good.

- (013) So yeah, as far as like, with friends and stuff, I’ll just, if someone else slips up [with pronouns], then I’ll correct them.

- (014) And I kind of felt like they were trying the language on me first. It’s like actually saying the words out loud for the first time, sort of thing.

36. “It’s not about me” (5; 38.5%)

- (004) thinking about it as thinking about somebody else’s transition as it relates to me is like, it’s not about me.

- (005) And, you know, just the difficulty of … it’s not about me.

- (005) I think generally my response has just been like I might as well play it safe and just not make about me at all.

- (005) I still kind of always come back to the fact that like, I’m not gonna make this about me. That’s the last thing I think would be good for him and would be for me, [sarcastically, playful] you know how hard this has been for me??

- (007) I know that my experience is nowhere near yours is

- (009) Once again, I’m just trying to be supportive no matter what and I’m trying to come out with the attitude that it’s not about me.

- (009) So I try not to worry too much about myself. I’m just here to help. So maybe that is not good for me but I don’t know. It’s going fine so far.
(009) So I was saying how it's not about me, and it's not about me.
(012) I wouldn't, I didn't even think to look up how can I get support through this. Because it wasn't me, like it's not me going through the transition.

Theme #10: How to support their sibling has been unclear (10; 76.9%)

37. My role has been confusing (5; 38.5%)

- (001) So like that's also in the back of my head to like, what is, what would [sibling] want in a given situation? Like it's not just me like expressing it for, you know, my purposes and my comfort. It's if this does come back around like what is [sibling] gonna have to say?
- (001) is now the time that I intervene?
- (001) One thing I always think about is like, do I have to like, go into, like LGBTQ work? Like, for [sibling]? Like do I take [sibling] and like, be like, I care about you so, I care about everyone else like that? like do I focus all of my work on it? But I, you know, the answer is typically no for me. And I feel guilty because like, there still is a lot of like countertransference just because of [sibling]'s, you know, issues and everything that they're going through. So like I'm still trying that, that's always my fear. I've never had a trans patient but like if I did, am I gonna see [sibling] in them? Like do I have to represent like [sibling]? Do I have to either try extra hard? Do I have to make sure I'm not like acting like [sibling] is in front of me? I really don't do much for the LGBTQ community. Like I support [sibling], whatever they're doing. But like it's not like I attend pride events, like I didn't even join the LGBTQ thing at [my school]. I like, want to, in principle but like in just practicality.. I'm really worried about the countertransference and everything. And like I feel bad about that, that I am worried about dealing with one specific group that is in need of mental health services because of someone I know and someone who I care about.
- (001) I also understand that I probably, just through my experiences, have a better understanding than anyone else does. It's just like, is it my responsibility to tell you about all my life and like people who are like me or should you have to figure that out on your own. Because I'm not a representative for everyone and it's weird doing it secondhand.
- (003) I didn't know what he wanted and I felt uncomfortable talking about...
- (003) I think that the fact that it wasn't a personal conversation probably didn't help me with broaching the subject to him in a more direct way of what do you need from me? I think it made me feel a little bit lost as to what he wanted my role to be, because I didn't feel like he came to me, it felt like he was just going to tell people.
- (003) like [sibling] hasn't asked us to say anything. Um, he hasn't told us [me and sister], he was kind of do whatever you want.
- (003) So he's been on T for a little over a year now. But before that, I felt very lost, honestly, I feel like what I should do around my family...
- (003) But I think a lot of confusion about should I say something? would that be overstepping? And truly just discomfort within myself. I don't know what to do so I'm just gonna do nothing.
- (003) I think just like fear and like discomfort you know of like we don't talk about this in my family and I'm not gonna be the one to do things and like he didn't say anything to me in person.
- (004) So there was a little bit of confusion I guess as well about like how do I approach the fact that my sibling is transitioning?
- (007) And they can open up and rant too, and it's like yeah I know, I know, and I know that my experience is nowhere near yours is, so I want to be on the same page and I don't
want to be anywhere near dismissive and also have like positive conversations… and not just… and I don't want to be toxically positive either. So it's a very strange kind of thing going on.

- (007) I want to be there and genuine for my sibling but I also don't want to feel like our relationship is, I'm like the Crusader. I just want to be their little sister and I want to have that bond

- (007) I get very protective. But it's like, you're older than me, you know what you're doing, you're in control, but at the same time, ugggggghhh.

- (009) It's a bit confusing I guess. I don't really know how to behave, except to be as supportive as possible.

38. “I feel like there's the topic that I just can't bring up or can't talk about, which is a really big topic, which is gender identity” (4; 30.8%)

- (001) [regarding national trans issues] it's something I just don't even bring up because I'm sure we'll disagree on… I am still not where I think [sibling] want us to be and I think that that kind of adds to the mental health problems, where like [sibling] will go back and forth between like, I understand that you love me and you're supporting me. And why do you still believe these things that I believe? And that is where a lot of the tension comes from too.

- (005) I don't think we (sibling and me) have ever addressed it head-on. I don't think we've ever sat down and kind of like, went through his decision…

- (005) I'd like to think that I've never avoided it. However, I'd never really courted a conversation.

- (005) And there's just so little opportunity for that kind of conversation as is, it's really such a small window already. it's like afait accompli, I would say.

- (005) And certainly he and my mother have had extensive conversations about the decision. he's quite prickly about it. It's not really something that he wants to dig into, I would say. He makes sure, you know, there are jokes sometimes but in a real like deep philosophical, like what was going on, what like, why are you identifying in this way, I think that would get a prickly… I know with my mom that has gotten a very prickly response and I don't know why it'd be different with me.

- (005) Have I talked to him about this? No. He hasn't asked me. He's not asking for my opinion on the subject and I respect that.

- (005) I don't know how he deals with that. We certainly never discussed it but it's a reality. And so, how does that make him feel? I don't know.

- (009) Honestly, I think the support that I needed is just being able to talk to [sibling] about this stuff. But I know I can't, and that's never gonna change. And so I do feel a little bit stuck about that.

- (009) Like I couldn't say “[sibling], I'm concerned that, you were so happy when you were using she pronouns and presenting as female. And you seem really unhappy now that you're back to he/him.” I could never say that million years because [sibling] would beat me up and throw me out [laughs]. So that's just not a conversation we could have. And [sibling] probably knew that I was having those thoughts but I couldn't voice them. And that's always how it's been with [sibling]. Like I just don't really get to voice my concerns because [sibling] doesn't want to hear them. [Sibling] doesn't really respond well to them. So I have to show [sibling] that I care in other ways, and that's really the most I can do. And I think, yeah, [sibling] knows that I care. But we also just can't really talk about it. So that's where the worry comes from. It's like I worry about [sibling], but I don't get to ever talk to [sibling] with these worries. It's a little rough out here.
• (009) So that was hard and again, it's hard because, just because of the way [sibling] is, I couldn't do anything about it.
• (012) because I wasn't getting a lot of information from them and couldn’t really ask.
• (012) I wasn't allowed to ask any questions and that was made very clear for my whole family and so I honestly felt a little bit unsure what was happening
• (012) I feel like there's the topic that I just can't bring up or can't talk about, which is a really big topic, which is gender identity because they don't want to talk about it with us and has been very clear about that.
• (012) And I don't think it's a bad thing, but one time I was talking with a friend of mine who [de-transitioned]. And the friend was like “you should talk to your sibling about gender, like it's really important and tell them about like my experience,” like all this. And I'm like, I can't. And she was like “then you're not gonna have a really good relationship with your sibling if there's something you can't talk about,” but I was like, this is the only way I can preserve my relationship with my sibling is if I don't talk about this. So like, it's weird.

39. Not on the “front lines” (6; 46.2%)
• (002) for a lot of [sibling’s transition process] I wasn't involved because it was at a time when we were not having a good relationship but they have been taking hormones and they had a legal name change, which I found out about due to my parents.
• (005) I was gone…
• (005) And I was far removed from it, like I said, I was at [college], I had a million things going on. I went immediately into law school right afterwards and so I hadn't been on the front lines in a sense
• (005) A little bit of grief about feeling distant from the situation
• (005) It's tough like thinking of our relationship as younger siblings, and sort of thinking of the ways in which I wasn't there and maybe could have been in a way that might have helped him
• (008) so it's hard to hear about it and watch even though I wasn't there.
• (009) [Sibling] has also struggled with depression for a long time so I worry about [sibling] a lot, so I have to do a lot of self-preservation to not worry about [sibling] too much, otherwise I kind of go insane. I kind of have to distance myself sometimes and [sibling] also needs a lot of distance, so I sort of just let [sibling] come to me whenever they feel they need something or want to talk about something. I try not to insert myself too much because I know that [sibling] does not like that.
• (009) So that was hard and again, it's hard because, just because of the way [sibling] is, I couldn't do anything about it.
• (009) So it's a bit weird and so on Sunday when we found out that [sibling] is back using they/them, I always call my mom and my mom told me. So like I haven’t even talked to [sibling] since that happened. Sometimes it feels like my mom is in the loop and I'm not. Sometimes I'm in the loop and my mom's not. Just depends on what [sibling] feels like doing.
• (012) because I wasn't getting a lot of information from them and couldn’t really ask.
• (012) I wasn't super involved like once they made the decision to change their pronouns on their own and change what they were going to be called on their own and change, like decided to take testosterone on their own. So I wasn't intimately involved.
• (012) And then maybe like, a little bit like, saddened or like feeling like a loss of closeness when I knew they weren't telling me right away and would tell other friends first.
(013) I don't know if they consider themselves closeted, or just closeted to my parents or they don't talk about it.

(013) I believe my younger sibling has come out to my parents and it seemed like for a little bit they were, or my mom anyway, was like, on board and at least trying to respect it. And then recently has been referring to my younger sibling, again, as her daughter. So, I don't know where they're at.

**Theme #11: Challenges of the Sibling Role (10; 76.9%)**

40. “I feel like my own family's dynamic is what stood in my way of being the best sibling I could be” (5; 38.5%)

- (002) I think my parents are definitely responsible for my sibling and I previously having a very broken relationship. Because my parents, while they were very financially abusive, they're also very manipulative. And right now, I actually live with my sibling. We've been living together for a year and a half. But this is like a recent thing, where we reconnected. Before that, my parents kind of used me as like, like a spy, I guess to, like, figure out what's going on in their life because they didn't want to talk to my parents. So we didn't talk regularly for a very long time. And being someone who is being manipulated, I broke their trust very often because I was buying into that narrative that my parents had made about my sibling being the enemy in the situation.

- (002) I think that if my parents were not involved in the situation, our relationship would have still been as strong as it was when we were kids. when we were younger, we were pretty solid because they kind of took me under their wing. And I think that if my parents didn't get involved and did not react the way that they did, like just taking them out of the picture, I don't think their relationship would have changed at all after they transitioned. I think it was that outside influence that made us fall off.

- (002) I think that I felt guilty for not telling them because at that time, I felt a stronger bond with them than I did with my sibling. As if I owed them something. But I think that's also just me being like, the person that I was and feeling like my, like I had to worship my parents if I didn't want to get yelled at, you know?

- (002) in my family, we never hugged. We never said, I love you. That was just like there was no showing of emotion, unless it was rage.

- (002) When I first moved here, I was definitely like a huge brat because the way that my parents put all those expectations on me, they also like, in a way, like made me incapable of being independent and being without them. So I think that I was not a great person to be around when I came here, but I think my sibling humbled me, like they gave me a chance I guess to like, in a way redeem myself when I messed up and I feel like I have grown a lot since coming here.

- (002) I think for like talking about the dynamic in my family, up until maybe like two years ago, I was the peacekeeper. But also like the very obedient kid. Like when my sibling was always very confrontational, I was the opposite. So I had a certain loyalty to my parents that I think got stronger when my sibling left for college, because it was just the three of us then. And so I guess, like having that loyalty towards them and being fed all of these, like, lies about my sibling that they had come up with to try and like, get us to feel resentment towards each other.

- (002) in ninth grade we had recently moved to Texas, my parents and I, the reason being because they wanted to get away from the drama of being around my sibling.

- (002) the longer I stay here, the more I learn about the things that my parents did to them.

- (002) It just comes down to intergenerational trauma. There is an opportunity to break the cycle but they just never took it. And I think that's where there's a lot of resentment
towards them because they had an opportunity to take this and grow and make amends with my sibling, but they just never did.

- (003) and I was really upset that my parents didn't tell me or didn't tell him that I was gay, because they asked us both to keep it a secret basically.

- (003) And I was very upset with them, that they didn't tell me so that I could be talking to him about it and being supportive of him more so.

- (003) And a part of it was that I didn't know what my parents knew. I didn't know what to bring up in front of my parents.

- (003) secrets in my family are very much, a bigger… not talking about what happens in my family is a thing.

- (003) But with him, it just felt like constant being called a dead name, constant being used the wrong pronouns. And again, I didn't even know if my parents knew and for some reason I didn't ask him how much they knew until a year later and then found out that he really told them at the same time. But with him, it just felt like constant being called a dead name, constant being used the wrong pronouns. And again, I didn't even know if my parents knew and for some reason I didn't ask him how much they knew until a year later and then found out that he really told them at the same time.

- (003) I kind of viewed him as a girl at the time, which is shitty looking back, but that's how we talked about him in front of my parents.

- (003) and it really made me realize my privileges as a cis sexual minority person. Because a lot of times we just could, like, not talk about the fact that I'm gay with my family.

- (003) And like just feels very like we're especially used to being so silent around like our own experiences (participant and sister).

- (003) my parents, I don't know if they ever told my aunt and uncle that [sibling] is trans.

- (003) I think just like fear and like discomfort you know of like we don't talk about this in my family

- (003) I feel like my own family's dynamic is what stood in my way of being the best sibling I could be to him.

- (007) it's like I can't tell mom things because it'll freak mom out

- (008) So then it affected me, selfishly, like are my parents gonna come visit as much? Or certain things like that, were frustrating.

- (010) But then I think I'm seen as the lecturer in the family. So I think they heard like the 20% of me saying, don't do this, don't do this, don't do this. And not the 80% of, like do this.

41. Difficulty deciding when to correct gendered language (6; 46.2%)

- (001) I did it once where I was talking to a mechanic just casually, it's like “oh how's your brother doing...” I was like “actually sister,” and [sibling] got mad at me like that was not your place like to out me like that. And I was like, noted won't do that again.

- (001) So like that's also in the back of my head to like, what is, what would [sibling] want in a given situation? Like it's not just me like expressing it for, you know, my purposes and my comfort. It's if this does come back around like what is [sibling] gonna have to say?

- (001) We were sitting in the living room waiting for EMS to come and EMS kept misgendering [sibling], and [sibling] was just like every time. And [sibling] would just be like, she, she, she. And I was like, do I... is now the time that I intervene? My mom actually did intervene though. My mom was like actually it's you know, she/her pronouns, so I'm kind of grateful for that. That my mom did what I was nervous about doing.
• (003) But I think partly probably being just my education or my counseling psychology program, of like advocacy, like this is something that's like I cannot be letting this happen in my own house like to the extent that he feels comfortable with it and especially like in his absence, right? I feel like for me it's a lot easier to say things when he's not there because I don't want him to feel put on the spot. at the time it feels so invasive for me to be the one correcting his pronouns and making what could be like him feel hypervisible or afraid in a moment where that's not what he wanted.

• (003) like [sibling] hasn't asked us to say anything. Um, he hasn't told us [me and sister], he was kind of do whatever you want. We were like yeah we should just kind of be a little bit more correcting and saying something about it

• (003) I feel like, okay. Like we need to just act differently in front of them and need to be better siblings in general.

• (009) And that has sort of strained our relationship between me and my dad. Um, because my dad just, my dad is also supportive but just struggles with the pronouns. Just cannot wrap his head around using different pronouns. this was right after [sibling] came out and I hadn't seen my dad since then, and my dad used he/him and I said, oh [sibling], he's using she/her now. And he's really insecure about that. And so he didn't like that I corrected him but he thought I was attacking him for that. I was like, oh no, I really just wanted to make sure that you knew. And so, my dad's really sensitive about the pronouns, about using the right pronouns. And now I'm sensitive about not hurting his feelings and it kind of feels like we're all just tiptoeing around the pronouns a little bit.

• (012) Or like if I said anything wrong it would really cause a huge fight.

• (012) And that, I have gotten yelled at from my sibling because I haven't necessarily corrected them every time and I need to be a better ally. So that sometimes was difficult. Something I was suggested too, is like not only getting the pronouns right myself, but then being an ally and making sure others are getting them right, when they're not. Like sticking up for my sibling. So that's the thing I learned from this experience as they were undergoing the whole change.

• (013) So yeah, as far as like, with friends and stuff, I'll just, if someone else slips up [with pronouns], then I'll correct them.

• (014) We were at a satyr, then my dad was like, “oh girls, you can get food,” and I was just like, what? Like can you not? So in moments like that I'm like, should I say something? Or does saying something make it worse and it's better to just make it a fleeting moment?

42. Feelings of frustration or anger with other family members (6; 46.2%)

• (002) it's hard because I, myself have had to deal with their abuse as well... working through that thought process of like, I understand why they feel this way. But I don't understand why they haven't changed, you know? And so there are times where it seems like my parents felt hurt that my sibling disconnected from them... like they felt betrayed, they felt sad, but also it was very much deserving. You know they were deserving of all that, is how I would see it. I think I was a lot more forgiving and understanding before I left the house and came here. And like seeing everything from a different perspective and just being separated from that. I don't feel for them.

• (002) I think that they felt betrayed, which I don't think is justified.

• (002) It just comes down to intergenerational trauma. There is an opportunity to break the cycle but they just never took it. And I think that's where there's a lot of resentment towards them because they had an opportunity to take this and grow and make amends with my sibling, but they just never did.
(002) our parents don't need to know that about them. They don't… like they don't have the right to, you know, have access to my sibling's life.
(003) Like because they would just be like, “well, I just don't refer to HER with pronouns.” I was like, do you hear yourself? Like, do you hear yourself when you're talking?
(003) It just sucks because I see him do boy things with [older sibling]. So imagine if you put that investment into your other son.
(007) while at the same time, feeling the anger and sadness for my sibling
(007) My experience has always been like, first it was frustration with the rest of my family… it was frustrating for me because it made so much sense like when they came out.
(007) And it feels really frustrating that my sibling’s finally being their genuine self and I would like for them to be getting more support with that and more acceptance.
(007) So it's very frustrating.
(007) It's just like it's not that hard. Please just put in some effort.
(007) It's like they haven't been paying attention. And it's just a lot to try and take in or come to terms with without just feeling very sad.
(007) but also it's so frustrating when not just our family, but the world is the way it is.
(007) And the saddest thing for a long time was that mom didn't even tell people that [sibling] had transitioned. So [sibling] lost out on like three years of like Christmas cards and talking to people and that was pretty upsetting because it's like, I want help but also it's up to [sibling] with what they disclose.
(007) And it's like having that fear, and that kind of anger. And my dad's still making like, bearded lady jokes. So fuck him. And my brother, he doesn't know the difference between like an artist like a drag queen, and a trans person who's just living their authentic life and you can't explain it to him. And oh it's just an exhausting soup pretty much.
(007) when she first learned, I was kind of mad because it's like, you're the mom, you should be… it should click, oh, right, [sibling] is being [sibling].
(009) So it's sort of, after this long it's like, okay dad. You need to do better. That's how I feel about it sometimes
(010) And like after 6 to 10 months, they were still messing up his pronouns. I was really upset because, to me, that's saying you're not even talking about him, you're not even trying if you're still messing up his pronouns
(010) And now it's really interesting to see my mom get really angry when my aunts and uncles and cousins mess it up, and I kind of want to be like, don't be so hard on them, you were quite bad about it too for a while.
(010) And I didn't really feel like they made much of an effort at first to learn anything. a year after he came out as trans, they were like--he mentioned that, “oh, I scheduled top surgery” and they were like “what's top surgery?” And I was like, How have you not even googled this? Like have you read nothing I gave you?
(010) Yeah, I was definitely upset about… I know in my mind when I think of independent bookstore owners, I think of super liberal progressive people who are open-minded. So I was kind of like, mom, like why aren't you on this train? Like, come on.
(012) [when parent was upset about not getting pronouns] I was mad at him. I think my main emotion was anger. Like, how could you make this about you? This is not about you.
43. Difficulty deciding to tell others outside the family (4; 30.8%)

- (001) It's not just like my confusion, just like my friends. It's like, oh boy, how do I address this?
- (001) Like, especially coming up in a conservative town. I'm like, do I just say that they're doing good and move past that, or do I need to explain to everyone what's going on? And that's like... there's some confusion on that still,
- (001) but in the beginning, like I had to sit my friends down, like [sibling] had to sit me down, like this is what's happening.
- (001) I think the people who are closest to me disclosed
- (001) now people who are more distanced, it's usually not worth the effort if I don't think I'm gonna see them again. Now it's just kind of like yeah good, and moving on.
- (001) sometimes I feel like maybe I should correct and then I'd get into whole conversation about what's actually going on and other times... it probably isn't worth that conversation... It's just kind of like catching up the people who haven't seen in a while and they're trying to be polite. It's like how honest do I be right?
- (001) it's part of the reason why I don't tell people like [sibling]'s identity now is because I just don't know how they're gonna take it. How it's going to come back to [sibling]? How it's gonna come back to me? Like, do I have to defend [sibling]?
- (005) I guess some of the like the points that which it becomes tricky is with grandparents.. grandma has probably only got a couple more years, do we tell her or do we just kind of like let this one go? And we just kind of let it go, what are we going to accomplish by trying to tell her that [sibling deadname] is not [sibling deadname].
- (008) Probably the hardest part would be having to tell everyone in my life like oh I don't have a little brother anymore, or my sister, or my sibling just changed their pronouns. And like having to tell everyone. I still have people that have been in my life for years that don't know or recently found out because I posted a Tik Tok. So that's definitely the hardest part I would say.
- (008) Like when I would meet people, I used to just avoid saying that I had a sibling and now I'm like oh I have a younger sister.
- (008) Because I guess, you got to tell your friends.
- (008) And for my parents they had to go and tell every single person in their life this change and I obviously did too, but since I was at such a weird time, all my home friends grew up, everyone from my high school knew I grew up with a little brother and then people at college, not everyone knew. So like some people only know me as having a sister, like, they don't know her dead name. They don't know any of that. So that's kind of different than my parents. Because I kind of had two different lives and some people knew more about my past than other people. So I was meeting more people in college. I'm a senior now so like throughout the years and like there's just some people that have only known me as having a sister.
- (008) So telling people was 100% the hardest part. telling people that I grew up with my whole life that I have a sister now. If I felt comfortable with someone, I would tell them. If I've heard someone say conservative views or if I knew that they voted for Trump, I was like okay I'm not going to tell you. And the guys are kind of conservative a little bit. And they're still my friends and it's okay we have different views but I was always, and still am, uncomfortable telling them. And then there is this one day where we were hanging out. And one of the guys said something like, “I don't understand the whole thing with pronouns. imagine just waking up, imagine just like your little brother telling you that they want you to call them they/them.” I was like, wow, imagine that. But I didn't say anything. So I was just so shook in the moment and also, another fear of mine was that I
would tell them and they would feel really bad and be like, “oh, I'm so sorry” and I didn't want that at all. I didn't want someone to apologize, like you're allowed to think what you want. So whenever we'd hang out, I get major anxiety, like, oh, are they gonna bring it up? And I'm so open talking about it, but I'm just weird cuz I didn't know. And obviously, I knew that they'd be very supportive of it. Like, to me at least they wouldn't say anything rude when I told them. They'd be like, oh, that's awesome. There's just this awkwardness.

- (008) Because I've really only had to disclose it to half my life but not the other half. But because now I'm in college, if I meet someone new I will tell them like, oh my sister is trans, if I'm comfortable with them. Like if I know they're not going to be judgmental. And I like when people ask me questions because I want to tell, I want to educate people, because I feel like sometimes people don't understand. For example, I student teach, so I was thinking..... like when do I tell my teacher that my sister is trans? And part of that is because I don't want them ever saying anything homophobic around me. I'd want to just tell them so they know not to if they ever had those thoughts. So it really depends on the person I disclose it to.

- (008) last year, I was like, I just need to get it out. So I made a Tik Tok and I posted it, and then I made another TikTok this year.

- (008) That's my way of kind of getting it out there, because like for my mom she had Facebook so she would post off on Facebook, so that's how everyone found out for her. And then for me, it was like what am I supposed to do? So that's what I kind of did. I would say that social media was easier than in person.

- (014) One thing that is hard is that the people I work with are old, a lot of them in their 70s. So I just don't ever talk about my sibling at work because it was like “my sister, my sister, my sister.” I don't want to misgender them but if I start using non-binary language it will like lead to big conversation. So I just don't talk about them at work. I don't know how respectful people would be, some of the older people. But it's like I don't feel like it's my place to bring my sibling into it when they like, don't know my sibling. I haven't figured out how to deal with that. But they're not like horrible people. It's just like people in their 70s, there's just like a disconnect there.

IV. FAMILY SYSTEM PROCESSES

Theme #12: Serving as a buffer between their sibling and parents (11; 84.6%)

44. The first to know (6; 46.2%)

- (002) I did not tell my parents [about sibling’s gender identity] because that wasn't something that we were comfortable sharing with them

- (004) I found out for my older sibling because we were having this very personal conversation and we were going to be continuing to not tell the rest of the family about it for a while longer.

- (004) As well as like a bit of anxiousness about okay, how do I continue to be affirming for my sibling in a way that they're expressing they appreciate without also outing them to our parents which is not like my place to do.

- (004) I had to check myself on what I say to, for instance, our parents. Because I know that my older sibling is telling me things that my parents are not hearing, but that's also just being a sibling to begin with anyway, that's always been the case. Like there's always stuff we tell each other that we don't tell our parents.

- (010) given that we weren't totally sure how my parents would respond.

- (010) he was nervous about telling our parents and our younger brother. And so he asked me to essentially pull some resources for them, so that they would have kind of things on
hand when he did tell them.

- (011) And then she was like, “oh can you help me? Can you tell mom for me?” And I was like, I don't really think I can tell her for you, like that's kind of awkward. So then we just hung out a couple hours and then we went to my mom's house and I was like, I'll hold your hand, I'll be there for you, you can tell her though because it really should come from you, I can't really be the one to say it. And it was funny, I remember she made them sit back to back because she didn't want to look my mom in the eye when she told her. So she was like back to back with my mom, holding her hand and she told her, and my mom was like, “oh honey, that's completely fine, you terrified me.”

- (011) And then it was like a few days until she told my dad, and she couldn't even tell my dad. The three of us--me, my mom, and my sister--went to my dad's house and we were just all sitting in the living room and my mom was like, “oh [sibling] really wants to tell you this but it's really hard for her to say, she's transgender. This is the situation.”

- (011) I was honestly surprised that my sister came to me first and not my mom. That was like, really weird to me.

- (013) I don't know if they consider themselves closeted, or just closeted to my parents or they don't talk about it. But like I will, out of habit, refer to them as they/them when I'm talking to my parents. And now I just try to use first names because otherwise it creates a potential discussion that they may not be ready to have yet.

- (014) I guess the fact that I kept a secret from my parents for a long time, I think kind of built some level of trust.

- (014) And the next thing was like, how are they going to tell my parents? my dad had said things, made not great comments about “non-binary people are just confused” or being like “everyone in this generation is confused about everything,” or just kind of joking comments like, he didn't know.

- (014) They were assuming that my parents would have a horrible reaction

45. Correcting language (4; 30.8%)

- (003) And I think more, as the years passed by, we would just start correcting my parents when they use the wrong pronouns.

- (003) me and my little sister would start correcting my parents when they use the wrong pronouns and just aggressively saying his name..

- (003) as soon as they like cracked that door open a little bit and I was like okay this is something we all know and like you need to be better. Um, it got a lot easier.

- (003) But I think just like it just kind of happens slowly over time to some extent, like within the family unit of like, once my parents started using he pronouns sometimes it was all over. okay, you'll do it now?

- (007) I feel like I'm kind of like back up, where it's like, my sibling will say, mom's not using my pronouns, the aunts aren't using my pronouns, our brother is making jokes so then I have to go in and while I'm having conversations with them, I'll just slide it in, like hey mom's not getting a lot of help at home catching onto the pronouns. It’d be really nice if everybody could try, you don't have to get it right off the bat, but as long as you're trying, maybe it'll come more naturally to you if you're all bouncing it off each other. And that's a conversation I've had like so many times over the past three years, where it's like, all you have to do is try. No one's gonna bite your head off but you have to put in that effort.

- (009) My dad and I, we just had that little bit of conflict. He's really insistent that if he uses the wrong pronoun, it's not because he means to, he's doing his best, but it's just an accident. But he almost never uses the right pronouns. So it's sort of, after this long it's
like, okay dad. You need to do better. That's how I feel about it sometimes but I also don't want to upset my dad. I know he's very sensitive about it and I know it's not because he doesn't love [sibling], so I try not to get too frustrated with my dad about that.

- (014) And my parents have a lot of trouble being like, “how are we gonna tell this friend and that friend?” Or “people won't understand” or a lot of trouble with language. Like, “what do I say?” I say you just say, like, my two children. Just say my older child, I have two children, one is this age and one is that age.
- (014) I mean sometimes our parents will ask me like, “well what's the correct way to say this or that?” And like something like that.

46. Hearing parents’ difficulties (4; 30.8%)
- (001) I mean, [mother] would always talk to me like, [participant name], what's going on like, what's going on? I don't know what to think about this. Like this goes against my beliefs. Like, I don't, I don't know what to do, or to say in these situations. Like, I feel like I keep messing up pronouns and, like, trying my best but like, I'm still, like, not doing this. I'm not used to this. So it was a lot of that in the beginning.
- (004) They've definitely expressed confusion
- (004) And they've expressed that to me in various ways of like I just don't get it.
- (004) But they've expressed to me their difficulty understanding. And then also, like, expressed in the next breath that they know they don't need to understand.
- (012) My dad called me one time and like really in tears crying because he couldn't get it. And like my sibling didn't understand how hard it was for him. That's what he was saying. And just like so upset about it… it was a very different experience where I was like “you need to be getting this right. And you can't be.. this is not okay for you to be the one upset about this. Like it's not your thing.” But it was hard for him to understand. I was mad at him. I think my main emotion was anger. Like, how could you make this about you? This is not about you. Um, but also trying to have empathy and be there for him and I felt sad that he was crying and upset about this.
- (012) When I was in the car with my mom after [sibling came out], I was like, how are you feeling about it? And she broke down crying, and was kind of like, “wow, it's like a loss of a daughter” kind of thing. That time I didn't feel as angry. I felt just like, okay, like I'm here for you. Like I understand like there is a loss with any change and like really happy that she was crying to me and not my sibling. Like that was really good, like I felt good in that moment for that and to be able to be there for that.
- (014) After the text message, my dad was calling me in the middle of the workday crying
- (014) My parents were kind of asking they were like “can you tell [sibling] that text was horrible?” And I was like… the text WAS horrible. Like it was. I read it and it was like what the actual hell? You couldn't have done this in an angrier way. But I also understand why [sibling] had those emotions. So it's sort of like, your feelings are completely valid. So no, I'm not gonna tell them that.
- (014) But I feel like now, I'm no longer necessarily being asked to choose sides. Because there was a drawn out period, because they weren't talking to each other, and it was like “can you tell this person this” almost type thing.

47. “I'm trying to gently push them in the same direction of being more accepting” (6; 46.2%)
- (003) I'm like, Dad, it's just like me being gay. Like you got over that, you came around with that.
- (007) I'm trying to gently push them in the same direction of being more accepting
- (010) And so he asked me to essentially pull some resources for them, so that they would
have kind of things on hand when he did tell them.

- (010) I did my best. I essentially had bought this book written by this trans woman who had transitioned in her 50s, I think and had formerly been a successful financial person, and was religious, a Christian, and all the stuff. And I was like, oh like kind of like my dad. Maybe like, he'll just understand this a little bit more if it's coming from that perspective. So I had that book and I had the PFLAG guide book for parents or something of like how support your transgender children. So I printed that out for them and I had looked up the PFLAG organization in our county and when they met so I had that on hand.

- (010) and I tried to give them the whole spin of like, he's finally figured out who he is and he's happy like this and therefore, we should be happy for that.

- (010) I don't think my parents are gonna go like marching in a pride parade anytime soon but that's my next goal.

- (012) And then I told them that they should get involved with their local PFLAG chapter and they did and are now on leadership and are very involved and have made a huge community and are activists for LGBTQ community, which is incredible.

- (013) So [my parents and I] have kind of more generally alluded to, the quote unquote, non-binary discussion because it's not a discussion, but they're my parents and that's their deal.

- (013) And there's a really good video that I watched. And so what's been helpful for me to describe to both my parents and just people in general if they're questioning about it is okay, if physical sex in sexual expression isn't a binary... And so trying to kind of show [my parents] that it's not something new, doesn't mean that it isn't normal...

- (013) If one, or both siblings decided to directly come out to them, then they would maybe be a little more receptive or at least know where it was coming from. And I think they're probably more in line with resistant to change.

- (014) I could answer all of the really sort of insensitive, weird questions that my parents were gonna ask and give them some resources.

48. “I talk to them so my sibling wouldn't have to because they shouldn't have to do that” (4; 30.8%)

- (003) I do feel like I feel that greater sense of responsibility [for educating father].

- (003) we've had conversations about it. Like, just me and my dad. there are several times I sat him down and was like you need to get better about [sibling] or he will stop coming home one day. Like he will just not be your child anymore if you don't get better about this. And like I don't think you want that to happen.

- (010) it was definitely a little stressful, but I was happy to... in my mind, I was like if this is helping my brother I'd rather do it than have him have to do it, given that we weren't totally sure how my parents would respond.

- (010) And I'm happy to play that role. I think I'm very diplomatic by nature. I feel like I have two very distinct sides, where I can see both sides very easily and kind of communicate each side to the other and so like that's very natural for me.

- (010) And I also tried to explain to them there's two sides to this and it's perfectly okay if you've never met a trans person or come across a trans person or interacted with that community, you're not gonna understand things and you're gonna be confused and you're not going to understand the right words to use and that's okay. But you need to do that learning on your own and not put it on my brother and also if you're struggling with this, he doesn't need to know that. All he needs to hear from us is we love you. We support you. We're happy for you. I don't think they understood that split of like you can be
emotional and confused but you can also support him and be happy for him at the same
time, so that's what I tried to get across.

- (010) And I had even told them, if there's something you don't understand about
transgender people or community or the issues they face, come to me. I don't know if I'll
have the answer, but we can learn about it together and keep from [sibling] having to do
everything, and they never once did that.
- (010) I think they probably felt like I would judge them if they didn't know a certain thing
or didn't know the proper word. Even though I tried to preface that with “there's a lot of
things you're not going to know in the same way there's things that I don't know.”
- (010) But then I definitely think him coming out as trans has made us a lot more closer,
given that I've often been that buffer for our parents and all that stuff.
- (010) I was just so quick to jump in and be like, I support you, let me help with mom and
dad.
- (012) but it was good that I was there for my parents to talk about these things with,
rather than talking to my sibling. So that was really good because it would not have been
okay for them to have talked to my sibling about some of these things.
- (014) I offered to talk to them so my sibling wouldn't have to because… they shouldn't
have to do that.
- (014) I could answer all of the really sort of insensitive, weird questions that my parents
were gonna ask and give them some resources. It's like my sibling shouldn't have to be
there for that bad reaction.

Theme #13: Experience has been different than parents (13; 100%)

49. “we've had very different experiences because we've had very different exposures” (3; 23.1%)

- (004) So we've had very different experiences because we've had very different exposures
over time.
- (004) [my parents] expressed like to me and not to my siblings, to my knowledge, they've
definitely expressed confusion in a way like I described earlier that like I've had
confusion about okay how do I readjust how I'm relating to this person or do I need to in
some way or whatever?
- (004) For instance, our parents are in rural [place]. And I am involved in big communities
[in the pacific northwest]. when you have big communities in the northwest, there's
probably a reasonable like trans population within them that you're in community with.
- (004) Whereas they have been grappling, I think, with the very idea of it. And they've
expressed that to me in various ways of like I just don't get it. They've been having
trouble with pronouns, it's been like nearly three years for my older sibling, and we've
known for, you know, a year and a half-ish maybe two for my younger sibling. So like for
our experiences together, everyone's starting to lose their patience with them over that
part a little bit, just like come on. But they've expressed to me their difficulty
understanding. And then also, like, expressed in the next breath that they know they don't
need to understand. And also that like they're having trouble getting there. I think mine
(adjustment) has been much easier just because I have so much more exposure through
like community out here.
- (004) And for my parents, it really wasn't. [referencing parents] they love their kids.
They're doing the darndest they can as, like, people born in the 50s. they're trying but also
it's pretty obvious that they like haven't wrapped their head around what it means that
someone is non-binary as opposed to like, they haven't wrapped around their mind,
around seeing someone as they want to be seen instead of memorizing pronouns. They're
having trouble with it even though they want to do the kind thing, the kind thing being to
use correct pronouns.

- (010) I think even when my older brother was young and wanted to cut his hair short and only buy boys clothes, like there was no word that my parents were aware of for transgender or transitioning or any of that, like it never even crossed their mind to search for something like that. So I think that's also why it was harder for them. Whereas I grew up a little bit more with just seeing other ways people live.
- (010) I think they had never heard of transgender people, come across it very much, you know, maybe seeing a few transgender actors in movies.
- (010) And we didn't have social media when my parents were growing up.
- (010) I think it really just stemmed from a lack of understanding whatsoever.
- (010) my older brother and I have been trying to get my parents to also think more about anti-racism work and all these other things and we're like maybe through all of these societal issues that we're trying to get them to be more aware of, you'll realize how it relates to my brother. But slowly, slowly.
- (012) And then they had a really hard time with the pronouns in a way that I didn't, because I have a lot of friends who identify as nonbinary or use they/them pronouns. And so for me, it was like a very easy transition but for my parents, it was like really, really hard. They got into a lot of fights with my sibling. They would really not be happy when they got the pronouns wrong.

50. “they've just had a lot more emotion” (8; 61.5%)

- (002) I think that they felt betrayed, which I don't think is justified.
- (002) it's hard because I, myself have had to deal with their abuse as well... working through that thought process of like, I understand why they feel this way. But I don't understand why they haven't changed, you know? And so there are times where it seems like my parents felt hurt that my sibling disconnected from them... like they felt betrayed, they felt sad, but also it was very much deserving. You know they were deserving of all that, is how I would see it. I think I was a lot more forgiving and understanding before I left the house and came here. And like seeing everything from a different perspective and just being separated from that. I don't feel for them.
- (003) my dad...really did feel like he was losing a daughter in a way that I did not feel like I was losing a sister. Like my sibling is just my sibling. I'm like did I ever feel that way but I don't think so.
- (005) I think the emotional impact has not been as strong because that kind of creative bond that I think exists between a parent and a child. Perhaps even until totally different kind of emotional trauma or difficulty to have to go through, than that of a sibling. So everything with me and my parents is like I experienced everything but less so I think.
- (005) So I guess my emotional responses, slightly distinct and so far as it relates to the sibling relationship, but it's pretty similar. Just I don't think it's the same degree. I don't think I get as upset as my mom does. I know I don't because my mom does or my dad does.
- (005) This was my mom's only daughter, she doesn't have a daughter anymore. I was gone but I knew she cried every night for years. She's still upset. We're 10 years in on this, at this point,
- (008) I think that was definitely hard for them and didn't affect me as much, because I didn't really understand or I wasn't home for it.
- (008) I also think that it's, obviously, in a way it's different than losing a sibling versus losing a child.
- (008) I think is very different than what parents go through
(009) So my dad's emotional journey has been just doubting whether he can do it and worrying that he's not gonna be good enough for [sibling]. I don't have that concern at all because that's never been a problem for us and same with my mom. We're not worried about that like we know we're good enough for [sibling] and [sibling] is fine with that so my dad is a bit different.

(010) my parents, they definitely cried.

(012) Yeah so my parents felt like a loss of a daughter in a way that I didn't feel. And so I think that was probably the biggest difference because I didn't feel like I was losing a sibling or anything.

(012) But it wasn't, like, I didn't feel like a loss of a sister or anything like that. But for my parents, they like, really felt the loss of a daughter and they're was a lot of crying.

(014) So they've just had a lot more emotion.

51. Some of the differences are generational things (4; 30.8%)

(008) And obviously, I feel like it's harder for adults to get used to pronouns than people my age, because we're just more used to it.

(009) because of my generation it's not as difficult for me to accept gender diversity.

(009) Not that my dad hasn't accepted it, but, you know, he's like 64 and an old white man. So he's doing his best.

(010) I think to some extent, it's the generational thing, right? That it just wasn't talked about as openly. And we didn't have social media when my parents were growing up. And so, it's very easy to be isolated from communities that weren't your own.

(010) I would say it's probably somewhat generational

(010) I think even when my older brother was young and wanted to cut his hair short and only buy boys clothes, like there was no word that my parents were aware of for transgender or transitioning or any of that, like it never even crossed their mind to search for something like that. So I think that's also why it was harder for them.

(014) But I think people of their generation... It's not just them, it's sort of the surrounding they're in where you can't just use gender neutral language and leave it at that and have people understand.

(014) Their reaction was like, absolutely horrible. I think with both me and my sibling sort of, like, trying to put himself into it. Being like, “well I wouldn't be happy” and kind of trying to fit it into that and like put his wants, which was like he very much wanted to get married and have a cis-hetero relationship and that has made him really happy in his life. But I think it's just like, I don't know, I think younger people generally have an easier time understanding that different people want different things and things are more fluid.

(014) But they're not like horrible people. It's just like people in their 70s, there's just like a disconnect there.

52. Religion/culture impacted my family's adjustment (6; 46.2%)

(002) So I think one other important thing to mention is that my sibling is Muslim and my parents are very Islamophobic because of the whole India, Pakistan divide. So, that's something that has also alienated them.

(002) I think that pressure, the way that Indian culture is very misogynistic and patriarchal. So, you know, my parents relationship dynamic, was very like, subservient mom, and like, you know, dominant aggressive dad.

(002) But I think that getting married to my dad and following all of the rituals that she was supposed to follow as a woman, that influenced her point of view.

(002) So about Indianness, I think that If you really want to, it's very easy to separate the
harmful traditions of a culture from the things that are enjoyable. but just like Indianness in general, I feel like, isn't something that has these, like, harmful norms…I think that a big part of India is how patriarchal it is.

- (002) It just comes down to intergenerational trauma. There is an opportunity to break the cycle but they just never took it. And I think that's where there's a lot of resentment towards them because they had an opportunity to take this and grow and make amends with my sibling, but they just never did.

- (002) I had been dropping hints like little by little with my mom that I was queer, but I think she picked them up and ignored them because I was supposed to be like, the daughter that didn't do them wrong, the one that didn't mess up in the way that they thought my sibling messed up.

- (002) And coming out, just like, broke that image that she had of me of like, being the good one… Which I guess is really stressful because, like, I was expected to be everything that my sibling is not. Because, you know, they felt like they went wrong with my sibling. So they were just like, that's not valid. You know, that's not our kid anymore. This, this is our kid, our kid has to be who we want them to be. So it's very hard to develop any individuality. It's like at a point, they had given up on my sibling, and then now invested all of these expectations into me.

- (003) So my family is religious but I feel like in a weird way. I went to church every Sunday growing up. All of my siblings did until we're all 18. I don't think it affected me and [sibling]'s relationship through his transition or the way I reacted. It wasn't like a battle for me when I realized I was lesbian. they've been saying awful shit for years. I didn't feel like a personally commitment or connection of the religion. that was kind of like gone in a way far before [sibling] came out. I think with my parents, honestly, and like, how I feel like they are with me it too, like, with me, being queer, but because that's more of my experience.

- (003) And they haven't said anything to me about [sibling] being trans, but I feel like it's more, like, rather than them thinking, like, God hates fags, God hates… It's like, what are people going to think we're not following the word of the Lord? rather than them having, like a conflict thinking that like Jesus will, like, not love their trans son, or their gay daughter they like, we feel very uncomfortable bringing [sibling] to church, with [sibling] having used to like not be [sibling]. And like that's how I felt with me. it was never like a religious conversation with me or what [sibling] as far as what God would want

- (007) My dad's like a volunteer minister and he's running a whole bunch of different churches. The rest of my siblings are just kind of exhausted with it. My mom's never been really religious, so it's really just like a source of irritation kind of.

- (007) Like um, like three years ago, they were like it took me a while to come out to you because I thought you had, like, such strong Christian values. And I was like ME??

- (007) [Thinking about possible support for me as a sibling] is a hard question because… I know this is an issue in hard families where the children aren't really seen as individuals kind of. I think if we had just been seen and supported as ourselves instead of like extensions of somebody's ego from an early age, it would have been easier, it would have been a hell of a lot easier for all of us just to be ourselves and grow into who we were…

- (007) I think the one thing that I was actually thinking about this earlier today where it's like, when children or your siblings aren't allowed to express their gender identity. So, I mentioned before, my house was a very misogynistic one. So I actually, in college, had to go on a journey of okay, this is what being a girl is. Like who wears dresses and puts on makeup and stuff. Because there was no support of any gender and I didn't have any really role models like that at all. if [sibling] had been able to explore being nonbinary
instead of woman bad/crazy, boy good, then I think we all would have been able to find
where we were on the spectrum. But we were all pretty much pushed towards masculine
and it was not fun. So even my gender expression was limited, and it took a while to be
okay just being really girly and enjoying pink and what the fuck ever.

- (010) I think there's an aspect of my family being--I wouldn't say they are super
religious, but you know, I grew up going to church, my mom owns an independent
bookstore. So we're not super faithful by any means. So for my dad, he's more religious
than my mom. So I think he had a hard time just kind of reconciling that with what he
was taught.

- (010) I would say it's probably somewhat generational, a little bit of religious.

- (010) We're from a small Midwestern farming town, essentially, and it's not as scary as
maybe you might think of like the South but it's pretty conservative, pretty just like
mainstream.

- (010) I think I've always been much more liberal than my parents and I lived in New
York City for five years, pretty much right before he came out. I was interacting with all
different people that I hadn't grown up around… So for me, I already had a sense of
issues the trans community was dealing with, what was important to them. I mean, not on
a personal level, I didn't know, but I had a general sense.

- (010) My older brother and I have been trying to get my parents to also think more about
anti-racism work and all these other things and we're like maybe through all of these
societal issues that we're trying to get them to be more aware of, they'll realize how it
relates to my brother. But slowly, slowly.

- (011) I think probably, one thing that's changed is that I was a lot more worried for her
when she first came out because I just didn't know like how things would go, how family
would react, because extended family we have half that's super liberal and accepting and
open-minded and then the other half is pretty conservative and kind of scary. So I was
worried about how those relationships would change.

- (013) And so being in a fairly fundamentalist, conservative Christian household, (sibling
identifying as part girl) that didn't fly really well, with my dad in particular, parents in
general.

- (013) And they (parents) tried to instill the belief pretty hardcore that having a penis
makes you a boy and having a vulva makes you a girl.

- (013) But at the same time, like also growing up in the same environment, I totally
understand why they would have kind of repressed themselves a little bit when they were
informed that it wasn't really okay to grow up in that environment and express themselves
the way they wanted to.

53. “I understand why they feel this way. But I don't understand why they haven't changed.” (5;
38.5%)

- (001) I really still don't know how my dad feels about it. He's kind of quiet, keeps to
himself and it's kind of like, yeah, [sibling] like, but I do not know like what his actual
feelings about everything are.

- (002) I understand why they feel this way. But I don't understand why they haven't
changed, you know?

- (010) Yeah, I was definitely upset about… I know in my mind when I think of
independent bookstore owners, I think of super liberal progressive people who are
open-minded. So I was kind of like, mom, like why aren't you on this train? Like, come
on.

- (013) Just because again growing up somewhat fundy (fundamentalist), [referencing
parents agreement with legislature] in California, trying to ban gay marriage. I can't understand where they're coming from.

- (014) I think my dad in particular just doesn't understand and I think maybe he feels some feeling of embarrassment almost. But it's also complicated because I think at the same time he... had pronouns and pride colors added to his email signature at work. And he will say things like “oh, if [sibling] is happy, I'm happy.” But...then he keeps asking like, “well does [sibling’s husband] care?”

Theme #14: Impact of the family transition on the sibling process (12; 92.3%)

54. My family is supportive / was accepting (3; 23.1%)

- (005) And so I can't think of, I can't think of anyone in the family who sort of was not okay with sort of recognizing the change.
- (008) And my parents are very supportive.
- (008) My family was very supportive.
- (008) So very supportive family and parents.
- (008) Like I said, my mom's the president and my mom's also a school psychologist. So that helps. So my mom runs support groups for parents. And the other day, actually, there is a parent, a father who was struggling and my mom was telling my dad and my dad was like, I'll talk to him. So even now my dad's..even really good at talking to people but he was texting and on the phone with this dad. And I was like, wow, both my parents are like out there supporting. My sister got very lucky.
- (011) And then my mom, I mean she was accepting. I don't really think it changed the relationship between them much at all. If anything I feel like it brought them closer because my sister would always sort of have a shield up before she transitioned.
- (011) I think my mom is super happy...And so when she came out, my mom was sort of like, oh, okay it makes sense now. So I think my mom definitely is grateful that this whole thing happened.
- (011) Then my mom was absolutely fine, because my mom's the most lovable, giving person.
- (011) she was really scared for nothing because my mom was absolutely great and accepting and just wanted to make sure she was okay and understand the situation better.
- (011) Even my dad, he definitely didn't understand what was going on but he could see how scared she was to even say that. And so he went over to her and gave her a big hug and was like “I'll love you, no matter what you shouldn't be scared to tell me something so important to you. Like when it comes down to it, you're my child, I love you. And I want what's best for you.” So that was sort of what all of us conveyed, first things first.
- (011) I think my mom's definitely enjoying it more as like having two daughters. But like I said it didn't really change much just because of who she was... like for example my dad, I wouldn't really say that his experience really changed just because the things that they would have done when she was a guy are the same as now. I feel like, if anything, they got a bonus daughter but didn't really lose anything, because like now my mom sometimes goes with my sister to like hair appointments and nail appointments, but like, me and my mom aren't really like that. Like we don't get anything done all feminine like that.

55. My parents became involved in activism / organizations (4; 30.8%)

- (005) My mom is in PFLAG.
- (008) Like my mom is the president of PFLAG in our county.
- (008) So my mom runs support groups for parents. And the other day, actually, there is a
parent, a father who was struggling and my mom was telling my dad and my dad was like, I'll talk to him. So even now my dad's even really good at talking to people but he was texting and on the phone with this dad. And I was like, wow, both my parents are like out there supporting. My sister got very lucky.

- (011) I mean I know for my mom, she joined PFLAG. That was a great support for her and now she's president of PFLAG actually.
- (012) And then I told them that they should get involved with their local PFLAG chapter and they did and are now on leadership and are very involved and have made a huge community and are activists for LGBTQ community, which is incredible.
- (012) I did a little bit of LGBTQ activism as well, but not as much as they have taken on like, especially with taking a leadership role. I would not have seen that coming but it's like a big exciting difference in the way that we approached.
- (012) So like right when I found out, I also got involved with the local activist organization for LGBTQ rights, as well.
- (012) So like we've kind of all stepped up to make this an issue that we all care about.

56. My parent was dismissive/denied my sibling's identity (4; 30.8%)

- (002) my dad has four kids and all of them are queer. And he's like the most homophobic, transphobic guy you'll ever meet.
- (002) I was not shocked, but a little bit surprised about how different our reactions were, because I always knew that my parents had anger issues and were just terrible. But I didn't expect them to feel personally attacked by my sibling being queer.
- (003) My dad is like a jerk when it comes to anything regarding gender or sexuality. He is a good dad lot of ways, we very much do feel like he cares about us and that he has a good heart. He just has stupid beliefs, and it's not like all gay people should go die, but it's "that's not like, really real" type of thing. So my dad was the one who would be like, I just don't use pronouns for my sibling.
- (003) I feel like [sibling] also loves my dad. Like we love my dad. We just also kind of can't stand him.
- (007) my dad's a huge jerk. So he's still not on board, he doesn't know what's going on…
- (007) but my brother and dad are pretty dismissive misogynists.
- (011) She's always been my sister, even though I thought for a while she wasn't. But I think for my dad, for example, I don't think he really has that switch necessarily. I think he still thinks of her as like a male so that he sort of struggles with it a little bit.
- (011) So I'd say his experience was probably a lot worse because he definitely was, out of our immediate family, he was the least accepting I'd say. And it's not that he didn't accept her, but he just wanted a different route for her. He didn't want her to have to go through that. So he was sort of in denial almost like, no, this isn't it.

57. "They've come a long way" (7; 53.8%)

- (001) Um, my mom definitely struggled the most with it. She is very Catholic but now she's a part of like LGBT... But now my mom is correcting other people when they misgender [sibling], so come, come a long way.
- (001) it took her longer, I think…(mother)
- (003) I feel like my dad was like that's my daughter and really struggled to see him in a different way and I feel like still does to some extent
- (003) I feel like my dad really likes struggled, and thought something, from the bottom of his heart, thought something was wrong with [sibling] almost.
- (003) But it just took him a long time. (father)
(007) But it's actually been a learning process with her. And she's still struggling today, but I think she's gotten used to it. And yeah, at no point has my mom ever stopped communication or anything. She's always tried to be supportive in her way.

(007) Well, my mom is trying very hard... Where she wants to be loving, she wants to be supportive, but she's very reactionary and for [sibling], it's like I can't tell mom things because it'll freak mom out.

(007) It's hard to get my mom to talk about her actual feelings on things. She'll kind of just tell you what, I believe, she thinks you want to hear. So she sounds very supportive when I talk to her and then [sibling] will tell me, “you know mom, when she talks to the aunts, uses she/her pronouns, mom won't tell her siblings anything about me.” Mom has definitely gotten better about it

(009) I think that my dad is a bit more complicated. So I was saying how it's not about me, and it's not about me. And I think my dad also knows it's not about him, but I think it also is a lot about him... but he wants to just do his best to support [sibling]. So my dad's emotional journey has been just doubting whether he can do it and worrying that he's not gonna be good enough for [sibling]. I don't have that concern at all because that's never been a problem for us and same with my mom. We're not worried about that like we know we're good enough for [sibling] and [sibling] is fine with that so my dad is a bit different.

(009) So I think especially with my dad and his girlfriend... they talked to people more about it and they do research and stuff. They have some gay friends in Florida and my dad told me that he had a conversation with them about it, just asking them about what their experience has been and, you know, just for their insight on it because I think they are just so unsure of how to approach it. So they are... So their adaptation guess would be just trying to understand more.

(009) It's definitely more challenging for him than it is for me and my mom. Because for me and my mom it was like, oh okay, new pronouns, we got it, no problem. And my dad's like, okay, it's gonna take me a month to figure this one out.

(010) And also we were lucky that they weren't like “you're not part of our family. We don't approve of you” or anything like that, but it was definitely not this very progressive open, like, oh, we're so happy for you.

(010) They've never had friends who don't look like them so I think they just were really like there's this whole world out there we've never heard of and now our son is telling us he's part of that world.

(010) I think my parents were definitely caught off guard.

(010) I was kind of impressed when my mom was getting pissed when my aunt couldn't remember his pronouns, and I was like, you've come so far.

(010) It just definitely took them a while.

(010) But overall, yeah, my parents seem good. When he got top surgery, my dad went out and helped him for the week... so my dad was helping him with the [post-op stuff]. So that was really nice to see that they were just kind of helping where they needed rather than like making some big deal of it. So I would say overall good yeah.

(011) I feel like for my dad he's sort of had trouble accepting it at first, because he was of the mindset that it's a choice you're making, and that down the road she might regret the decision. Which I think now, he's coming to terms with the fact that it's not something you regret. Slowly I think he's like accepting that, no, this is just the way it is now. So I'd say his experience was probably a lot worse because he definitely was, out of our immediate family, he was the least accepting I'd say. And it's not that he didn't accept her, but he just wanted a different route for her. He didn't want her to have to go through that.
• (014) I think their friends have actually been really supportive. And I think they're doing better.

58. “And there have been some really big challenges for my parents and the pronouns and like being able to use the correct pronouns” (5; 38.5%)
  • (003) I feel like even though he does gender [sibling] correctly and uses he pronouns now, which is crazy what testosterone will do. Like I don't think my dad will be doing that if he wasn't on T, which is like very upsetting. but it sucks that the gender validation from my family didn't come until that.
  • (003) my mom has Alzheimer's. But I think for her she just really struggles because she follows my dad's lead and I think she's always been like that, but I think you know, like nowadays, she knows she has very poor memory.
  • (003) I feel like [sibling] was never really hurt by my mom not gendering him correctly. Even before we got her diagnosis. Like he was hurt by it but not like to the extent of my dad because he's just like mom is just like a little lost up there like you know.
  • (003) he's worried that my mom will forget that he's a man, and like, will be like, where is [sibling’s deadname]? Like where is she? So I think it's always been a little more like gentle with my mom and don't expect as much from her in those ways because we don't feel it's her words or her come.
  • (011) I think as for the pronouns, I feel like for me it was easier than other members of my family
  • (012) And there have been some really big challenges for my parents and the pronouns and like being able to use the correct pronouns.
  • (013) And my parents have, like, tried to correct me or been a little bit resistant to it or whatever.
  • (014) And then my parents are not great with pronouns.

59. “My experience is just that it's really hard for parents, but like, THAT can be hard on siblings” (6; 46.2%)
  • (002) I thought it was a little bit funny when they told me because I already knew that. But seeing the way that they were reacting and like being just so devastated by it. I guess like, for a second, I felt guilty for not telling them
  • (002) I think that I felt guilty for not telling them because at that time
  • (005) And so my emotional response, you know, I would say the toughest part was watching my parents.
  • (005) So that's been tough really watching the emotional difficulties that my mom and my dad have gone through in losing their only daughter.
  • (005) but it is a loss and so watching my parents go through that loss has been really tough for me.
  • (005) Really tough for my parents, really tough to see my parents go through it.
  • (008) and I think it's hard because you, as a sibling, you watch your parents go through it, you watch them struggle
  • (008) And I feel like watching my parents go through it, and like I said, she really struggled with mental health. I was in college and they were dealing with that at home, so it's hard to hear about it and watch even though I wasn't there.
  • (010) In terms of what I would have liked… I just wish my parents had been more interested in engaging with the topic.
  • (010) I wish they had been more open and just kind of like talking out…
  • (010) I would say that I just wish my family members had wanted to talk about it and
engage in it more. Yeah like no one, like my mom never asked like, are you upset for losing an older sister or anything like that. It's just kind of like have you talked to [sibling] recently?

- (012) it was taxing. There were a lot of challenges from my family as a whole.
- (012) And also the little bit of sadness that it felt like it was almost tearing my family apart a little bit, which was really hard to see.
- (014) I've been watching them go through grief.
- (014) And it's I think actually a lot of guilt of being like, “well, did they have a horrible childhood?”
- (014) So my parents are kind of doing this thing of going through all of these memories and being like, “were they actually happy then? were they actually happy then?”
- (014) My experience is just that it's really hard for parents, but like, THAT can be hard on siblings.
- (014) I feel like most of my emotions around it have been around managing my parents.

60. “I’m glad we’re all on the same page there” (5; 38.5%)

- (005) And so I think as a unit, you know, it was the playbook that you're given is acceptance and in support. And I think we did that.
- (007) and it's such a relief. That we're able to help and it's not just them versus the world.
- (009) her and I do talk about how weird we are about [sibling], because we can't talk to [sibling] about it. So we share that.
- (009) My mom's a therapist and she specializes in LGBTQ youth. So when [sibling] came out, it's like she's perfectly equipped for this, she's on top of it, you know, this is her thing. So her and I are probably having a bit more similar experiences because of my generation it's not as difficult for me to accept gender diversity.
- (009) I think we [the family] think a lot more about trans issues.
- (009) We're all sort of wondering more about [sibling] and with every pronoun change we're just trying to keep up. So I think we have all just tried to more flexible with [sibling]. We're all just trying to have an open mind and because we do not want to add any more to [sibling]'s plate.
- (009) Because for me and my mom it was like, oh okay, new pronouns, we got it, no problem
- (009) I mean my whole family, we’re on the same page of like we love [sibling] and we want [sibling] to be happy and whatever that takes, we’ll support. So, I'm glad we're all on the same page there.
- (011) But like when it came down to it, I feel like it didn't really change much because my family was all super accepting and we just wanted the best for her.
- (012) So like we've kind of all stepped up to make this an issue that we all care about. And so I think that overall we feel more accepting, maybe overall as a family and like obviously like I said, there have been a lot of tensions that have come up. even before the gender transition, it's kind of a fraught relationship anyways.

61. “Like we were kind of coming along for the ride of that journey and...it wasn't always easy” (4; 30.8%)

- (001) Like we were kind of coming along for the ride of that journey and...and it wasn't always easy.
- (001) I know that there are some families that are like, all right. Cool. It was not as straightforward for us.
- (001) like [sibling] will repeatedly say like you are the second-best trans family I know.
And I was like that’s saying something. I don't think we're bad family, but I wouldn't put us at the top of the list here [laughs].

- (001) [Parents] have similar reactions [to surgery], you know, it's I almost wonder if the conversation stopped because we weren't getting anywhere with it.
- (008) I think we [as a family] all kind of struggled, like the mental health part was a struggle. And just kind of like coming to terms with it.
- (009) but I think it's been kind of hard on my family, especially my dad.
- (009) And I think we all worry about [sibling] more.
- (009) So I think my mom and I are having pretty similar experiences,
- (009) for my mom and I think it's been pretty similar. We're both just glad that [sibling] chose to confide in us and we're happy for [sibling]. We waffle between being happy and concerned. So we've been sort of on the same emotional journey, of just happy and concerned.
- (009) And then I think my mom and I, we really, we just we just worry more I guess. But her and I are sort of just doing what we've usually done.
- (011) So, yeah, if anything, it's like an addition not really a subtraction. I feel like it didn't really change much in the family to be honest. I think it might have brought us (the family) closer together if anything.
- (011) my sister would always sort of have a shield up before she transitioned. So, I feel like after she transitioned, we sort of got to see who she really was in a way that we never really did did before.

**Theme #15: Feeling unsupported in the transition (7; 53.8%)**

62. *Lack of support for siblings (6; 46.2%)*

- (001) sometimes the family gets forgotten a little bit I suppose.
- (005) I have not joined anything…
- (005) I mean like it's, you know, I don't have an outlet in a sense.
- (005) there's guidelines about what to do and then there's like, all right, how are YOU doing?
- (005) I got support stuff out the wazoo here, how to, you know, how to support your trans sibling. How to support your trans child. There’s not a lot about you. Beyond what you can do to support them.
- (008) And people don't talk about how it affects siblings at all. And it does.
- (008) I definitely think that there is a lack of support for siblings. I think nobody thinks about it, how it affects siblings at all. People just think of the child and the parents and I honestly always had a problem with that. So I'm like, you don't even understand.
- (010) I don't feel like I had any support. I think my parents just kind of took it at face value that I was cool with everything and happy for him and didn't really follow up or ask about it. From my perspective, that comes down to family dynamics because my family, we’re all very independent and we don't really talk about emotions with each other. And so I think that just played out in this as well, whereas I’d like to think if you had a more close knit family, they would be talking about it more or supporting each other more.
- (011) But as for external resources, I don't really think there was anything… I didn't really join anything.
- (012) I had no support
- (012) But I don't know how I would have found it, or I couldn't ask my sibling for it because I didn't want to put the burden on them.
- (012) I wouldn't, I didn't even think to look up how can I get support through this. Because it wasn't me, like it's not me going through the transition. So yeah. I don't know
if I necessarily felt like I needed any support but it was taxing. There were a lot of challenges from my family as a whole.

63. “I haven't ever thought about it really as part of an experience I'm going through also” (5; 38.5%)

- (001) Well, no one's... You are the first person to ask me, like, what was it like? Like a couple people have asked me but like it's kind of just more curiosity, more than like understanding. Like how did you go through all of this? Like what did that mean to you? Versus like how do we take this knowledge and apply it to maybe make it a little easier moving forward?
- (004) I haven't ever thought about it really as part of an experience I'm going through also.
- (005) I never thought of anyone supporting me with this and so that's why I'm sort of drawing a blank as to what would have been helpful for me.
- (005) I mean like it's, you know, I don't have an outlet in a sense. Um, this was a great outlet, thank you. No one's ever asked me any of this stuff. No one has ever talked to me about this stuff. I don't bring it up, frankly. There's no real outlet to even like talk about this stuff and I guess it's like, get a shrink, but I am fine. there's not really like an outlet for it but then I go back to the whole like but if there was an outlet for it, would I go? I'd probably be very skeptical of anyone who would be setting up that outlet and so I probably wouldn't go. So maybe I'm shooting myself in the foot [laughs].
- (005) It's like as much as I think this is important and I'm thinking it's great like, someone has thought about this, because it doesn't seem like it's thought about very much
- (008) I feel like not a lot of people talk about how it affects the siblings... I feel it's not really talked about how it affects siblings because you only hear how it affects that person and how parents like, oh they lost a child, pretty much. But you never hear anyone talk about the siblings.
- (012) I had no support, so that is interesting, I didn't even think about it.
- (012) Maybe it would have been nice to have, I just didn't think about it.

64. The resources and support offered weren't necessarily helpful (4; 30.8%)

- (005) I was given materials to review... they say to support and accept, or typical mantras that you'll hear.
- (005) I got support stuff out the wazoo here, how to, you know, how to support your trans sibling. How to support your trans child. There's not a lot about you. Beyond what you can do to support them.
- (005) My mom is in PFLAG. So there were various resources that were provided to my mom primarily and she would read them and pass them along to us. It's been years now since really I read them. It was really, I would say like, whatever you would expect your doctor to hand you...
- (005) But if you're credulous and I don't believe they're coming from a place of bad will, and so maybe the kind of more like steps, you know, seven steps to supporting your trans sibling would be helpful just for someone looking for like immediate answers and it's something like just happening and they need to like respond quickly or something like that. So it's not to say that doesn't have a place, maybe.
- (005) I don't know what kind of resource I would want.
- (008) I'd tell my friends and they'd be like, oh, that's awesome. And I'm like, okay, well you don't get it. You don't know what it's actually like. You only see it like, oh, like this is such a beautiful thing, but you don't know what it's actually like when it happens to you
(008) also something that would really piss me off is one person was like, when she changed her name I remember telling my freshman year roommate and she was like, oh, how does that make you feel? And I was like, that's just a terrible thing to say. Like oh, you think I'm not gonna be supportive? Like things like that would bother me.

(011) I feel like me personally, I'm not the type to go out there and seek people or something for comfort, but I could see that being beneficial to some people or even the online community, but I'm sure there is something like that, and I'm just not the type to find it... I guess just some sort of community of people going through the same thing as you would be nice.

(012) I went to a PFLAG meeting and honestly, I couldn't do it because people have pretty different views. They are all very accepting but it's like they're in different processes of understanding their child coming out. And so for me it was difficult to be at a very different space than them. It's really good that space exists for people, but yeah, maybe like being more with people my age would have been helpful or like people with similar understandings of the trans community.

65. Skepticism about resources available (2; 15.4%)

(005) Candidly, beyond my brother who I'm with 100%, I'm exceedingly skeptical of the enterprise. And I try to open my heart and I try to be honest with myself. And so I personally don't know if you guys would have like weekly or monthly kind of like meetings or something like that, that I would attend.

(005) Maybe that's the wrong approach. Maybe I should be more open to that, but I don't know if I would... I don't know if I want more information from you guys about what I'm supposed to be doing in these situations. Candidly, really, I don't know if I want, if I trust it, frankly, I probably would not. I would read it respectfully, if you have things, like, please email them to me, I will read them. But I don't think I'm gonna be someone who's like consistently looking for information from trans support groups about how to help me get through this. this is me and my brother now, and we've got to find a way to have a relationship and honestly it's not about this.

(005) or I don't know how to talk about with you guys, without really just kind of like totally throwing out some pretty fundamental beliefs that I have

(005) I didn't mean to blively say that I wouldn't go to one of your meetings. But like, that's kind of why I wouldn't because I would just be there like.... This is just so not consistent with what I truly understand to be how the world is.

(005) I'd probably be very skeptical of anyone who would be setting up that outlet and so I probably wouldn't go. So maybe I'm shooting myself in the foot [laughs].

(005) I guess what I'm maybe conflating are more like informational things which like... go... come learn from this speaker about how to do... like handle your response to your transgender... that I think is what I'm very skeptical of. Because that would have a ton of like, a priori, like preconceptual.. like a ton of like fixed facts in there. That for me, I'm like well we got to get back to basics here if we want to talk about how to relate this. Like you're talking about... we have fundamental disagreements about how the world works and so we're just... we're not even starting on the same place. So I think that's what I would be skeptical to is if that's what's offered.

(005) But I am skeptical of maybe a more heavy-handed, for lack of a better term, here's how to deal with this from PFLAG. I'm not going to that [laughs] sorry.

(005) I don't know if groups, any sort of associational... any sort of association would have been helpful to me.
• (008) I don't even know because I was always like why would I talk to someone that doesn't know what it feels like?
• (008) I could have seen a therapist but I just didn't want to. I'm trying to think of what they could even do, like support groups for siblings maybe. something where siblings can talk to each other. It's kind of difficult, of course, it's like the siblings are just there. And both my parents went to therapists. I didn't really do anything. I just kind of talked myself into it.
• (008) That was my mindset and also I was like, I don't really care to, or have the time to. I guess maybe it would have been helpful to talk about the grieving process when I was angry and in denial. And maybe how to talk to people about it, how to tell people, because there's literally still people that think I have a little brother. the thing is, my mom is a psychologist so my mom could help me with that.

Theme #16: Accessing sibling support (13; 100%)
66. Support and resources were helpful (7; 53.8%)
• (001) You know, it's weird cuz like [sibling] came out before I started getting all the training on LGBTQ issues. So for me, that was helpful.
• (003) I feel like [younger sibling] and talking to her was really very helpful.
• (003) Me and my little sister would talk about it some. And knowing that she was feeling the same way was helpful.
• (003) [My sister and I] don't talk about it anymore, except for being annoyed with my parents who would just like say something stupid.
• (004) And also frankly, social media that's been really helpful. And it's a lot of ways that people can share things that resonate for them that are designed to reach a broad audience. Yeah, I mean that on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter all like, I get content that pops up from people I followed specifically with the goal of exposing myself to wider varieties of ways of thinking about gender identity like in general. So like learning by exposing yourself to more, is something that I think is really helpful and exposing yourself to people's process where they're already in a place where they're openly sharing about whatever their process happens to be.
• (004) And talking about the things that come up for them. sometimes it's even easier when it's someone you don't know. So, you get to sit back and observe and watch what that is and hear those kind of processing thoughts that they're having about things, as they learn more than themselves and share other content. Like having outside sources to say, oh, yeah, I see that and I do or don't see that reflected in my own sibling. But it gives you more ability to even have conversations with and talk to siblings who are transitioning in some way, like, by having that better context and education. both exposing yourself to more people and exposing yourself to a whole lot more ideas and like being willing to sit with the fact that sometimes people are going to be really angry at like categories that you are in. But it's a lot easier to read that when it's impersonal and like not coming from family. And then I've already kind of like sat with the idea, than it is to hear it from family who's already, like doing something that's kind of intense and kind of scary at times.
• (004) sometimes it's even easier when it's someone you don't know
• (004) But it's a lot easier to read that when it's impersonal and like not coming from family
• (010) talking about it a lot with friends really helped
• (010) thankfully I have a lot of really supportive friends and so just in talking with them about it, I was able to get used to using he/his/him pronouns because I could mess up a
bunch with them and it wouldn't really matter. And just doing that a lot, really helped.

- (011) I think like my mom was a great support because when she found out she took to the internet and she was like, let me know everything there is to know about the transgender experience and all the psychological stuff behind it. So then my mom would then talk to me about everything going on. And then that was a great form of information for me because I didn't really know much about transgender people. So I guess having her as a support was great because we got to talk about what's going on and everything.

- (011) Yeah, but I guess just having (mom) her was enough.

- (012) And now I live with a roommate who has a very similar situation and so that's been helpful to have a friend who's going through the same thing and be able to reflect together has honestly been really nice. And maybe it would have been nice if I had more of that.

- (014) [referencing support] I have a really good group of friends and housemates. My housemate “A” has a sibling that’s also non-binary. So that was helpful just being able to ask A questions.

- (014) And then all of my whole circle of friends knows and then actually like one of my work colleagues I'm really close with.

67. Mental health support would have been helpful (4; 30.8%)

- (001) But no one seeked out help for gender identity issues

- (001) may it would have been helpful in retrospect and maybe it would be helpful to kind of process this new person who is emerging for other people and other siblings in the future.

- (003) I like don't know what to say other than individual therapy to work through your own shit so you can be there for your sibling or like child.

- (005) there's guidelines about what to do and then there's like, all right, how are YOU doing?

- (005) But I guess that’s the key distinction I guess I’m making between like the informational versus the support for how you are feeling. Without the kind of like, here's how you should feel, right?

- (009) So maybe I just need therapy.

68. Groups or community of other siblings would have been helpful (6; 46.2%)

- (002) or maybe groups.

- (002) having groups for people with gender diverse family members in general, maybe having like a, you know, there are queer Centers around the city, maybe something like that.

- (003) or like a group therapy session or whatever would be helpful but I think just like support and kind of working through whatever is in the way,

- (005) I actually as I'm thinking about it, I think I'm wrong because if the goal is to go someplace to have a place to explore how I'm feeling about it, and it would be affirmed, that you don't just say you're right. But at least it would be like, okay that's like, you know, kind of how I imagined these talking group settings where people are looking for help. I think I would actually, maybe I should go to that. Maybe I would go to that,

- (005) If it was like a AA for trans, like a support system where like, we just got to go and like, talk and I got to hear other people talk about it and like maybe change my mind who knows? I would be wrong to not try that. If it was just to like, let it all out. Or just like a chance to, like, talk about it. So I guess I’m not skeptical of that.

- (008) I probably would have done a support group. Maybe if there was a good group for siblings, I probably would have done that. I actually, I probably wouldn't have, to be
honest, but looking back it would have been cool to do something like that. Now I totally am comfortable with it. Of course, I would totally talk to siblings that are going through it who are struggling.

- (008) But yeah, just support groups, I guess.
- (011) I feel like me personally, I'm not the type to go out there and seek people or something for comfort, but I could see that being beneficial to some people or even the online community, but I'm sure there is something like that, and I'm just not the type to find it... I guess just some sort of community of people going through the same thing as you would be nice.
- (012) But yeah, maybe having support out there through an organization like PFLAG.

69. Guidance for navigating family relationships would have been helpful (2; 15.4%)

- (003) if they are already in their heart supportive, like being vocally supportive of them, it's about family relationships.
- (003) [referencing what support for a sibling would look like] but like help with giving them [my parents] support. I think it’s hard because I think if you're gonna seek out those resources and you're already in a certain kind of head space because like, the resources, my parents would seek out would not be that. Like the informed, good perspective of what you like, that's not the book they're going to reach for if they're not in that place
- (007) And now, I know more about what they were up against and what the family's reaction would be and how exhausting that was going to be, I would have known what kind of support they actually needed starting off, that was more than just “great, that makes sense.

70. More information would have been helpful (6; 46.2%)

- (002) I was in a place where I didn't have access to anything because my parents were very protective. So I think that what would be helpful would just be like, having access to anything, whether it be websites
- (002) I think just that just access to, like information is important because you need to understand what something is before you understand the person and how they're dealing with what that is.
- (003) I feel like for people who are outside the queer community, resources would probably be important. just learning about the trans, LGBT community in general, like that, it exists. And like here are some terms you should use, maybe whatever modem of material is what people will like, a book or TV show
- (005) Um but on the flipside, there's nothing on the other end. There's nothing saying like, okay, like stipulate that all of your Catholic beliefs are true but like what do we do now? That would be helpful.
- (009) I don't know anybody else with trans family members. I don't really know a lot of trans people. So I think maybe just some literature, maybe would have been helpful. Just some information for family members, I guess even generic would be okay. I also don't really know what I would have been told that would have changed anything I've done.
- (012) So, maybe access to resources that I wouldn't even think to know existed would be interesting to think about
- (012) maybe they would be really valuable for siblings to have training and like how to support families or like other people too, to be like real allies. And maybe if I had known before to be an ally and correct people when people used the wrong pronouns, before my sibling had to tell me that would have been really really meaningful and impactful.
- (013) I think that it's obviously difficult, not wanting to be the teacher for everyone and
having to explain every little aspect or just get all of the questions. And so, I'm not sure if there is currently like a resource like an FAQ for gender diversity, but I think that might be helpful. Some sort of a web page or something that would be easy to direct someone to. And that might take a little bit of the load off of the gender diverse people and then help anyone in their family, but particularly siblings and people they relate to more on a peer level to make the transition with them.

- (013) having a dialogue box pop up, what is your relationship to the non-binary person and then have it so that it would go through the FAQ from that perspective and kind of guide you through just more like an interactive tutorial kind of that would be kind of neat.