COMING OUT OF THE CLOSET: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON LGB INDIVIDUALS FROM TÜRKİYE

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ABSTRACT

COMING OUT OF THE CLOSET: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON LGB INDIVIDUALS FROM TÜRKİYE

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This study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the coming out process and experiences of LGB individuals in Türkiye. Through purposive sampling, the study was conducted with 18 LGB individuals who were born and raised in Türkiye, older than 18 years old, and came out to at least one of the parents regarding sexual orientation. Semi-structured and online interviews were conducted with each of the participants. Interviews were analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis, and four personal experiential themes emerged based on the results of the analysis. These were "The beginning of sexual orientation identity formation," "The process of acceptance of sexual orientation," "Coming out journey," and "Mental health professionals." Findings, implications for mental health practices, and limitations of the present study were discussed depending on the existing literature.

Keywords: coming out experiences, coming out, sexual orientation, interpretative phenomenological analysis, qualitative study

ÖZ

DOLAPTAN ÇIKIŞ: TÜRKİYE'DEKİ LGB BİREYLER ÜZERİNE YORUMLAYICI FENOMENOLOJİK BİR ÇALIŞMA

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Bu çalışma, Türkiye'deki LGB bireylerin açılma sürecini ve deneyimlerini derinlemesine anlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Amaçlı örneklem yöntemiyle, Türkiye'de doğup büyümüş, 18 yaşından büyük ve cinsel yönelimlerini en az bir ebeveyne açıklamış 18 LGB birey ile çalışma gerçekleştirilmiştir. Her bir katılımcıyla yarı yapılandırılmış ve çevrimiçi görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Görüşmeler, yorumlayıcı fenomenolojik analiz yöntemi kullanılarak analiz edilmiş ve analiz sonuçlarına dayanarak dört kişisel deneyimsel tema ortaya çıkmıştır. Bunlar "Cinsel yönelim kimliği oluşumunun başlangıcı", "Cinsel yönelimin kabul süreci", "Açılma yolculuğu" ve "Ruh sağlığı profesyonelleridir." Bulgular, ruh sağlığı uygulamalarına yönelik çıkarımlar ve çalışmanın sınırlılıkları mevcut alanyazın doğrultusunda tartışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: açılma deneyimleri, açılma, cinsel yönelim, yorumlayıcı fenomenolojik analiz, nitel çalışma

To my dad, who taught me to embrace life's journey with courage and resilience, was always supportive of me and showed his love and gratitude in his own way

&

To my mom, the strongest woman I have ever known, who raised me to be as strong as herself and devoted her whole life to me and my brother

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
Kaos GL	Kaos Gay and Lesbian Cultural Researchers and Solidarity Association
LGB	Lesbian, gay and bisexual
LGBTI+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SES	Socioeconomic Status
SPoD	Social Policy, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Studies Association

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background to the Study

In recent decades, there has been a significant shift in the history of queer rights and societal attitudes toward them. Initially, queer individuals faced widespread stigmatization, discrimination, prejudice, and criminalization due to same-sex relationships being illegal and socially condemned in many parts of the world. The mid-20th century gay rights movement, notably marked by the 1969 Stonewall Riots, significantly accelerated change and increased visibility in terms of queer people (Carter, 2004). In the subsequent years, advocacy for queer rights gained momentum, leading to increased legal protections and the recognition of same-sex partnerships and marriage in various countries. Despite this momentum, queer people are still perceived as negatively, deviated, and wrong in many parts of the world. Still, queer people face stigmatization and discrimination (Detenber et al., 2013; Yılmaz & Göçmen, 2016). This stigmatization and discrimination may cause many queer individuals to hide their gender identity and sexual orientation (D'Augelli et al., 2010; Meyer, 2003).

In Türkiye, while being a queer individual is not legally criminalized, queer individuals often encounter discrimination, stigmatization, negative attitudes and prejudice both in society and under the law (Kara, 2022). The fight for queer rights has started since the 1990s, yet significant barriers have remained in terms of social acceptance and legal equality. Events such as Pride Marches, especially in large cities, have played an important role in increasing social awareness and solidarity regarding queer individuals. However, such activities occasionally face government intervention and bans (Demir, 2022). Media, non-governmental organizations, and some political figures continue their efforts to raise more awareness and support for the rights of queer individuals.

In Türkiye, acceptance of queer individuals within society remains limited among a significant part of the population. According to data from the World Values Survey Wave 7 (World Values Survey Association, 2022), 68.2% of 2,415 Turkish participants held negative views on queer relationships and expressed disapproval. Additionally, 75.8% indicated they would be uncomfortable if their neighbors were queer individuals. Such stigmatization, prejudice, and discrimination significantly hinder many queer individuals from self-acceptance and openly living their lives in society (Gelgeç-Bakacak & Öktem, 2014).

Individuals who could not live openly in society are hiding in the closet, which is a metaphor used in queer communities to refer to living without disclosing their sexual orientation. The decision to come out to someone is one of the milestones in queer people's lives. Although the experience of coming out is unique from individual to individual, coming out is broadly defined as an ongoing process involving coming out to themselves, i.e., self-acceptance, coming out to significant others such as family members and friends, and coming out to others such as extended family and colleagues (Guittar, 2013).

In the literature, there are several models for explaining the process of coming out, which are Cass's six stages of homosexual identity formation theoretical model (1979), Coleman's developmental stage of coming out process (1982), and Troiden's formation of homosexual identities model (1989). All three of them mentioned the process of self-awareness and self-acceptance of sexual orientation and coming out to someone, such as friends, siblings, parents, and coworkers. The duration and sequence of those model's stages can vary from individual to individual. As mentioned above, societal attitudes and the community where they live are influential factors throughout the coming out process and experience.

The process of coming out can be challenging for queer individuals. Meyer (2003), in the minority stress theory, highlights internalized heterosexism[1] as a significant barrier to self-acceptance for queer individuals. Moreover, being discriminated against and stigmatized may lead to adverse mental health issues, such

[1] Meyer used the term "internalized homophobia." However, "Internalized heterosexism" is used instead in this thesis (Szymanski et al., 2008), since the core issues are seen mainly stemming from the cultural and institutional biases faced by queer individuals.

as depression, anxiety, and even self-harm (Meyer et al., 2008). Coming out to parents, friends, or co-workers is a stressor for queer people. Among them, coming out to parents is the most stressful one (Charbonnier & Graziani, 2016). Research shows that queer individuals are afraid of parental rejection (Carnelley et al., 2011), losing their financial support due to parental rejection (Grafsky, 2018), and social exclusion (Corrigan & Matthews, 2003). Therefore, some prefer to hide their sexual orientation (Meyer, 2003). Others who choose to come out often first disclose their sexual orientation to their friends rather than their parents (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993). In terms of parents, they are more likely to talk to their mothers about their sexual orientation (Rossi, 2010; Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003). In a survey study conducted among European countries (Statista Search Department, 2020), it was found that Denmark, Netherlands, Sweden, Belgium, United Kingdom, and Germany have the highest level of sexual orientation openness, ranging from 66% to 54% in terms of coming out to someone, whereas North Macedonia, Serbia, Poland, Romania, Greece, Bulgaria, and Cyprus have the lowest level of openness, ranging from 17% to 24%.

Coming out brings both positive and negative effects on queer people. After coming out, they have higher self-esteem, less depression (Legate et al., 2012), and a higher level of self-compassion (Crews & Crawford, 2015). However, some may face peer bullying (Matthews & Salazar, 2012), victimization (Rimes et al., 2019), and related to this, they have a higher level of depression (Ryan et al., 2015) and suicidal ideas (Rimes et al., 2019). Some use alcohol to cope with the negative effects of coming out (Gerena, 2021).

In Türkiye, only two studies have specifically focused on the coming out experiences of queer individuals. One of them is a qualitative study inquiring about gay and lesbian young adults' self-awareness, self-acceptance, and coming out experiences (Kabacaoğlu, 2015). In this study, the negative attitudes of the society that the participants encountered during the process of self-acceptance and coming out to someone negatively affected their experiences in their coming out process. Relatedly, they experienced internalized heterosexism, which led to anxiety and internal conflict. After working on anxiety and internal conflicts, most of the participants decided to come out to their friends and received support from their friends. The other study is also a qualitative study inquiring about gay and lesbian young adults and their parent's

experience of coming out (Mater, 2021). In terms of gay and lesbian young adults, this study demonstrates the experiences of confusion and loneliness that they experienced during the self-acceptance process. Despite the worries about receiving negative reactions, participants decided to come out to their friends and parents because of the burden of hiding in the closet. After coming out, they felt relieved, especially when they received support from their parents. Both studies highlight the coming out experiences of gay and lesbian young adults in the Turkish context. So far, there is not any study in Türkiye including bisexual individuals' coming out process and their experience.

Considering that queer individuals are a minority group in society, they are more vulnerable to mental health issues due to stigmatization, discrimination, prejudice, and internalized heterosexism (Meyer, 2003). Additionally, the process of coming out is a challenging and complex experience for queer individuals (Matthews & Salazar, 2012). Therefore, receiving mental health support can help overcome these difficulties and be beneficial in making sense of what has been experienced during the coming out process and in predicting what will happen (Ali & Lambie, 2018; Kalra, 2012). However, the competency and characteristics of mental health professionals is a crucial issue while working with queer clients (Bettergarcia et al., 2021). For instance, providing a safe and affirmative therapeutic environment and using inclusive language are two key characteristics a mental health professional should possess (American School Counselor Association, 2022; King, 2008). Regarding mental health professionals in Türkiye, research has been conducted on approaches to working with queer clients, highlighting a need for increased awareness and education in this area (Kurt & Ateş, 2008; Toplu-Demirtaş & Akçabozan-Kayabol, 2018). Both prospective and practicing mental health professionals often have limited awareness and knowledge about the coming out experience of queer individuals. Consequently, even those who are willing to work with queer clients may be uncertain about the best approaches and methods to employ.

Considering all the aspects above and noting the lack of research on bisexual individuals' coming out experiences, as well as a comprehensive understanding of the coming out process for lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals, there is a need to explore the unique experiences of LGB individuals within the Turkish cultural context.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to gain an in-depth understanding of Turkish LGB individuals' coming out process and their experiences.

1.3. Research Questions

Following the purpose of the study, this research seeks to address the following questions:

1. How do Turkish LGB individuals experience the process of awareness of their sexual orientations?
2. How do Turkish LGB individuals experience the process of acceptance of their sexual orientations?
3. How do Turkish LGB individuals define the “coming out”?
4. How do Turkish LGB individuals experience the process of coming out to their friends, family members, and others in their lives?
    - 4.1. What are the motivations for coming out for Turkish LGB individuals?
    - 4.2. What are the feelings Turkish LGB individuals experience before coming out to someone?
    - 4.3. What are the feelings Turkish LGB individuals experience after coming out to someone?
    - 4.4. What are the reactions Turkish LGB individuals received after coming out to their parents?
    - 4.5. What are the reactions Turkish LGB individuals received after coming out to their friends?
5. How do Turkish LGB individuals perceive receiving mental health support in their coming out process?

1.4. Significance of the Study

Given the specific focus of this study, its findings are not intended for broad generalization. However, various professionals, including teachers and mental health practitioners, and LGB individuals themselves, may benefit from the coming out experiences of other LGB individuals.

In terms of counselor education, a study conducted in Türkiye (Kurt & Ateş, 2018) shows that prospective psychological counselors have little knowledge about the experiences of LGB individuals in Türkiye. They desired to work with LGB individuals but were concerned about unintentionally causing harm. Another study (Kağnıcı, 2015) showed that when prospective counselors have a lesson about LGB individuals' experiences, their awareness, positive attitudes, empathy levels, and knowledge increase. Thus, this study may serve as a tool for mental health practitioners to see what LGB individuals went through in their coming out journey and decrease the lack of knowledge about LGB individuals' experiences.

Since coming out is a process starting with childhood and continuing throughout life (Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1982; Troiden, 1989), school counselors have crucial roles in supporting and guiding LGB individuals in their coming out journey besides their academic, social, and emotional development (American School Counselor Association, 2022). According to the American School Counselor Association (2022), school counselors should provide a non-judgmental, safe, and inclusive environment for LGB students and be advocates for them. Nevertheless, studies in Türkiye show that prospective and practicing teachers and school counselors have negative attitudes toward LGB individuals (Bakır-Ayğar et al., 2015; Bardakçı-Bayar, 2016). However, Arık (2017) demonstrated that when school counselors meet and know an LGB individual, it helps increase their positive attitudes toward LGB students. Therefore, this study aims to represent what LGB individuals were going through from childhood to adulthood regarding their coming out journey. It may be used by school counselors to foster empathy and learn about their experiences when they decide how to approach an LGB student.

Related to minority stress, LGB individuals encounter higher levels of mental health difficulties due to discrimination, prejudice, stigmatization, and internalized heterosexism (Meyer, 2003). For instance, they have higher rates of depression and substance use, and engage in more sexually risky behavior, such as unprotected sex (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2008; Ryan et al., 2015; Storholm et al., 2016). Moreover, LGB young adults have a higher risk of suicidality compared to their heterosexual peers (Erdoğan & Köten, 2015; Marshal et al., 2011; Miranda-Mendizabal et al., 2017; Rimes et al., 2019). Suicidality is related to negative reactions from parents (Van Bergen et al., 2013), rejection from parents (Ryan et al., 2009), losing friends (Puckett,

2016), minority stress (Meyer, 2003; Rimes et al., 2019). Poteat et al. (2012) found that LGB students who feel included in their school reported fewer suicide attempts. Nevertheless, the practice of inquiring about sexual orientation during mental health evaluations is frequently overlooked, representing a significant oversight in mental health evaluation (Parameshwaran, 2017). Therefore, an improved understanding of what LGB individuals experience in their coming out process and how this process affects their mental health could help mental health professionals in assessing LGB individuals' current circumstances and addressing the risk of depression, substance use, and suicidality. Additionally, this study may facilitate developing mental health support programs or conducting psychoeducational seminars in schools and private practices. Thus, mental health practitioners prevent the acceleration of risky behaviors and mental health problems, and LGB individuals can gain knowledge to identify what happened in their lives and what will happen next in their coming out journey.

From the perspective of LGB individuals in Türkiye, reading others' narratives and experiences may aid in discovering and accepting their sexual orientations and coming out to someone. Understanding that many people undergo similar struggles, emotions, and experiences may help validate and normalize their experiences. This understanding could, therefore, alleviate feelings of isolation and loneliness and foster a sense of belonging to a larger community. Knowing that others have faced challenges yet persisted in their journey can instill hope and resilience in those who are contemplating or undergoing their own coming-out process. Additionally, these narratives could serve as a powerful source of motivation and inspire them to embrace their authentic selves.

Similarly, parents may benefit from the results of the study. Although this study aims not to generalize the results, reading participants' experience and their stories may aid the parents in understanding the steps their children took in their lives. Consequently, this could facilitate parents' understanding and acceptance of their children's sexual orientation.

1.5. Definitions of Terms

Gender Identity: "a person's own psychological sense of identification as male or female, another gender, or identifying with no gender" (American Psychological Association, 2009, p.14)

Sexual Orientation: "a person's sexual and emotional attraction to another person and the behavior and/or social affiliation that may result from this attraction" (American Psychological Association, n.d.). Some examples of sexual orientation are lesbian, gay, heterosexual, and bisexual.

Lesbian: having emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attraction to females (American Psychological Association, 2008). The word "lesbian" is used for women.

Gay: having emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attraction to males (American Psychological Association, 2008). The word "gay" is used for men.

Bisexuality: "sexual orientation characterized by romantic, emotional, and/or sexual attraction to, or engagement in romantic or sexual relationships with, more than one gender" (American Psychological Association, n.d.).

Sexual Orientation Identity Formation: "changes, processes, and experiences over time that can involve awareness, exploration, appraisal, commitment, integration, and communication concerning a person's identity as a sexual being, which is based on their patterns of sexual attractions and behaviors" (Hall et al., 2021, p.1).

Coming Out: It is the process of acknowledging and explaining one's sexual orientation to family, friends, and/or others, such as coworkers (Guittar, 2013).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, definitions of major concepts, theoretical models, and previous literature regarding the coming out experiences of LGB individuals were presented.

2.1. Definitions of Coming Out and Being in the Closet

2.1.1. Coming Out

Coming out is defined in various ways in the literature, reflecting the diverse perspectives of queer individuals. While there are multiple aspects to consider, a common thread in these definitions is that coming out is an ongoing process influenced by situational, relational, and circumstantial factors.

Bochenek and Brown (2001) define coming out as "becoming aware of one's sexual orientation or gender identity and beginning to disclose it to others. A person may be selective 'out' in some situations or to certain people without generally disclosing his or her sexual orientation or gender identity. 'Coming out' is a process that takes place over time, in some cases over many years" (p. vii).

McLean (2007) brings a new term to the coming out concept: disclosure necessity. Disclosure necessity refers to coming out to someone when there is a need to come out, for instance, to a romantic partner at the beginning of a relationship. Orne (2011) also suggested a new term while defining coming out: strategic outness. Strategic outness refers to a preference for selectively coming out in specific social environments rather than others. Queer individuals do not have to come out on every occasion, meaning coming out is a spectrum, not a linear and one-time event (Orne, 2011).

Similar to Bochenek and Brown's (2001) definitions, Guittar (2013) stated that there are three perspectives on coming out among queer individuals: self-acceptance,

disclosing to family and friends, and revealing their identity to a broader circle, including extended family, relatives, and others. Coming out does not have one definition, and each person from queer community adds their meaning to the definition of coming out. Some individuals see self-acceptance as a prerequisite for coming out, and some see it as a part of the process. For some, accepting themselves as queer also means coming out, and in this definition, there is no necessity to share their sexual orientation with someone. For others, coming out to someone involves the expectation of acceptance by others and validation. As common features, coming out is an ongoing and transformative process for queer people (Guittar, 2013; Orne, 2011).

Moreover, Ryan et al. (2015) also define coming out as an explanation of sexual orientation to the immediate social circle, and it is not a one-time event but an ongoing process. Lastly, Brumbaugh-Johnson and Hull (2018) define coming out as after individuals realize that they are different regarding sexual orientation or gender identity; they share their sexual orientation or gender identity with others, such as family members, friends, and coworkers.

It can be said that from all those definitions, coming out is an ongoing process; when queer individuals enter a new environment and meet new people, they decide whether to come out or not. Self-acceptance, coming out to family members and friends, and coming out to others are the components of coming out.

2.1.2. The Closet/Being in the Closet

The term ‘the closet’ or ‘being in the closet’ serves as a metaphor within the queer community, closely associated with the process of coming out. It is defined as “the experience of living without disclosing one’s sexual orientation or gender identity (also referred to as being 'in the closet')” (Bochenek & Brown, 2001, p. vii).

Seidman (2002) used ‘the closet’ metaphor regarding “a life-shaping pattern of homosexual concealment” (p. 25). Being in the closet involves hiding one’s sexual orientation from significant others such as family, friends, and coworkers. Likewise, Pachankis et al. (2015) define being in the closet as a circumstance where queer people do not disclose their sexual orientation to anyone. The closet metaphor is seen as related to the phrases 'a prison' and 'a coffin' world. Whether or not to stay in the closet depends on factors such as age, socioeconomic status, gender, religion, race, region, and nationality.

Seidman (2002) attributes the creation of the closet to various societal forces, including government, family structures, popular and scientific culture, and a predominantly heterosexual society, linking it to broader themes of social oppression. The author further argues that individuals who are in the closet observe the heterosexual dominant society to be able to act as heterosexual individuals. By doing so, they try not to get any attention regarding disclosing their sexual orientation. They live a double life: They cannot behave how they are in society and even in the places where their friends and families are. Therefore, being in the closet affects individuals' psychological and social life. Seidman (2002) also states that this brings social and emotional isolation from their significant others. Social isolation and secrecy bring shame, guilt, and fear. When they hide in the closet, they also hide their true self, which leads queer individuals to loneliness and resentment against society. Regarding what Seidman highlighted, Orne (2011) mentioned that hiding in the closet causes severe depression due to not living and behaving in society as they are. Therefore, coming out of the closet closes the gap between who they are and how they behave in society (Varan, n.d.).

2.2. Theoretical and Developmental Models of Sexual Orientation Identity Formation and Coming Out Process

There are three models of sexual orientation identity formation: (a) Cass's six stages of homosexual identity formation theoretical model (1979), (b) Coleman's developmental stage of coming out process (1982), and (c) Troiden's formation of homosexual identities model (1989). Each model views the formation of sexual orientation identity as a developmental process. All three models highlight the internal exploration of the sexual orientation identity process. The community where they live, social norms, and interactions with others are influential in understanding and accepting their sexual orientation identity. Additionally, each model underlines that the stages are not necessarily experienced sequentially, and the duration of the stages can vary from individual to individual. Those stages focus on lesbian and gay individuals' experiences of sexual orientation identity formation; however, bisexual individuals' experiences were also found compatible with those developmental stages (Calzo et al., 2011; Floyd & Stein, 2002; Rosario et al., 2011).

2.2.1. Vivienne C. Cass's Homosexual Identity Formation Theoretical Model

Cass's (1979) six-stage developmental model states that identity formation develops over time through experience and is influenced by interactions with others. Cass (1979) explained the coming out journey with six developmental stages: identity confusion, identity comparison, identity tolerance, identity acceptance, identity pride, and identity synthesis. She stated that these stages are not linear, and the duration and intensity of these stages can vary from individual to individual.

In the identity confusion stage, individuals begin to question their sexual orientation, experiencing uncertainty about their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors related to it. Individuals may start to feel different from others and experience internal conflict and struggles regarding lack of clarity. They may deny those feelings and thoughts.

In the identity comparison stage, individuals start to accept that they are different from others and accept the possibility of being an LGB individual. They start to compare their experiences, thoughts, and feelings with others self-identifying themselves queer. They may feel alienated due to seeing themselves as different from others. To ease the burden of alienation, they seek information and support from the queer community.

In the identity tolerance stage, the acceptance of sexual orientation starts, and internal conflicts decrease. Individuals may begin to meet others in the queer community but not necessarily establish deep connections. Positive contact with others in the queer community leads to exploring their identity further and becoming more open about their sexual orientation.

In the identity acceptance stage, individuals fully acknowledge and embrace their sexual orientation. They feel more comfortable with their sexual orientations, yet not coming out to anyone. They may develop a social life within the queer community while maintaining a "public image" that hides their true identity.

In the identity pride stage, individuals not only accept their sexual orientation but also are proud of it. They immerse themselves fully in the queer community and distance themselves from heterosexual people. In other words, they see the world dichotomously: queer people and heterosexual people. They become more involved in queer communities and advocate for their rights. In this stage, they feel like they

belong to the queer groups. Additionally, coming out to people also occurs at this stage.

In the identity synthesis stage, the dichotomy loosens. Individuals integrate their sexual orientation into their overall identity. They achieve a balance and are comfortable interacting in various settings and communities with heterosexual people.

2.2.2. Eli Coleman's Developmental Stage of Coming Out Process

Coleman (1982) based his developmental stages on Cass's homosexual identity formation theoretical model, Erikson's psychosocial stages, and Sullivan's interpersonal theory. He explained the coming out journey with five developmental stages: pre-coming out, coming out, exploration, first relationships, and integration. These stages consist of interpersonal and intrapersonal characteristics.

In the pre-coming out stage, individuals sense a difference from their peers, leading to feelings of alienation. During this stage, the family and society's values regarding being LGB individuals are internalized. Therefore, they think what LGB individuals do is wrong, and this brings a conflict within individuals regarding what they felt and what they heard from society. The conflict may result in low esteem, depression, behavioral problems, and psychosomatic symptoms and even result in suicide. In this stage, a healthier behavior is facing internal conflicts and accepting being different.

In the coming-out stage, individuals are aware of their sexual orientation, but they do not put a name on it. This awareness involves confusion, denial, and guilt. When individuals accept this awareness and differences, their self-confidence increases. Coleman (1982) argued that getting professional help from counselors can help navigate their negative emotions about awareness and lead them to self-acceptance. After the acceptance, they may start to come out to people around them expecting positive reactions. Receiving positive reactions after coming out may facilitate their coping mechanism when they receive negative reactions.

In the exploration stage, individuals start to explore their sexual orientation and engage in sexual and social activity in the queer community. They discover their sexuality in this stage. However, Coleman (1982) suggested that they must be informed about sexually transmitted diseases, safe sex procedures, and risky

behaviors. Within this community, the use of alcohol and drugs may be a coping mechanism for dealing with rejection and low self-esteem.

In the stage of the first relationship, they start to engage in more stable relationships regarding emotional and sexual needs and look for intimacy. They learn how to be a partner in their relationships in a heterosexual-dominant society. They may face challenges in their relationships if one partner is at a different stage in the coming out process. In case of a breakup, some can return to the exploration stage, and some continue to seek stable relationships.

In the integration stage, individuals integrate their sexual orientation as a natural part of their overall identity. There develops a balance between who they are in the queer community and their personal life. Thus, they can live a more authentic life. This is a lifetime stage; individuals experience more rooted and trustful relationships with their partners.

2.2.3. Richard R. Troiden's Formation of Homosexual Identities Model

Troiden (1989) divided the formation of homosexual identities into four sociological stages: sensitization, identity confusion, identity assumption, and commitment.

The sensitization stage occurs during early childhood before puberty. They know they are different from their same-sex peers, but they do not label it. Social interactions and experiences reinforce the idea of being different from the heterosexual dominant society.

The identity confusion stage often occurs in early and mid-adolescence. Individuals recognize their different attractions to others. Identity confusion can stem from society's negative views of queer people, ignorance about queerness, and "altered perception of self" (Troiden, 1989, p. 53). This confusion may lead them to fear of rejection and alienation. In response, individuals may develop several mechanisms, such as denying or redirecting feelings, behaving like heterosexual individuals, and avoiding having sexual experiences with same-sex individuals. For instance, if they have a sexual experience in a queer relationship, they redefine their experiences, such as, "It is a peculiar case, or it will not happen again, and it is a one-time thing." Some may accept their sexual orientation, try to learn accurate information, and seek professional support.

The identity assumption stage often occurs in late adolescence or early adulthood. Individuals accept their sexual orientation. Coming out of their sexual orientation to a small circle, including queer acquaintances and friends, starts in this stage. They may seek sexual experiences with same-sex individuals, and they start to engage with the queer community as well. However, they may face stigmatization from society.

In the commitment stage, individuals fully embrace their sexual orientation, integrating it into their overall lifestyle. Coming out to a broader circle, including parents and close friends, and engaging in romantic relationships are characteristics of this stage. This stage also involves deeper involvement in queer communities and relationships.

2.3. Minority Stress Model

The Minority stress model, proposed by Ilan H. Meyer, is a psychological theory relevant to queer people that seeks to explain the elevated stress experienced by minority groups. The model highlights that individuals in minority groups face unique stressors due to their characteristics, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity. This specific type of stress is termed "minority stress" (Meyer, 1995; Meyer, 2007). Minority stress is unique to minority groups, which means they experience the consequences of being a minority throughout their life. This stress is socially constructed and perpetuated by the dominant society and its norms (Meyer, 2003; Meyer, 2007). Experiences of discrimination, prejudice, rejection, or even violence are examples of stressors for minority groups (Meyer, 1995; Meyer, 2007).

Meyer (2003) identified various stressors experienced by minority groups and categorized them along a continuum from distal to proximal stressors. Distal stressors are objective and not directly tied to individuals' characteristics or actions (Frost & Meyer, 2009). For queer individuals, these include anti-queer movement in society, prejudice toward queer individuals, and discrimination. Those stressors lead to more proximal stressors, which are subjective, involving personal perceptions of the environment as threatening. Examples include anticipating rejection and hiding in the closet to avoid stigma and discrimination (Meyer, 2003). Among the most proximal stressors experienced by queer individuals is internalized heterosexism, where they

absorb society's negative perceptions of queer identities, and this leads to self-doubt, inner conflict, and low self-esteem (Frost & Meyer, 2009; Meyer & Dean, 1998). During the process of sexual orientation identity formation, internalized heterosexism is commonly experienced, and working on it is a key factor in the formation of a healthy self-concept (Cass, 1979; Rowen & Malcolm, 2003; Troiden, 1989). Remaining in the closet is also an example of minority stress and is associated with internalized heterosexism (D'Augelli et al., 2010).

2.4. Empirical Research on Acceptance of Sexual Orientation and Coming Out

2.4.1. Internalized Heterosexism and Acceptance of Sexual Orientation and Coming Out

Internalized heterosexism is highly associated with poor mental health for queer individuals, e.g., including depression (Gómez et al., 2021; Yolaç & Meriç, 2020), anxiety (Gómez et al., 2021; Lorenzi et al., 2015), and suicidal ideas (Su et al., 2016). It is also associated with the process of sexual orientation identity formation (Rowen & Malcolm, 2002). For example, Ong et al. (2021) conducted a study with 564 gay, bisexual, and queer individuals. They found a positive relationship between internalized heterosexism and delayed acceptance of sexual orientation. Moreover, a positive association was found between delayed acceptance of sexual orientation and the age of coming out. Specifically, the longer individuals took to accept themselves, the longer they delayed coming out to others, including family members like siblings and parents.

In another study with 1,452 LGB adults with an average age of 25.16, Liu et al. (2022) found that the outness level of participants, i.e., the extent to which they disclosed their sexual orientation to others, was a moderator between perceived social prejudice and discrimination, and internalized heterosexism. When LGB individuals had a higher level of coming out to someone, the effects of perceived social prejudice and stigmatization on internalized heterosexism were lower.

A case report study conducted by Set (2018) focused on a gay Turkish 18-year-old adolescent to examine internalized heterosexism and his journey of coming out. Set discovered that the participant's internalized heterosexism was associated with self-anger, self-hatred, and a high level of depression. Consequently, therapeutic

sessions were employed to address internalized heterosexism, which aided in the process of accepting his sexual orientation. After working on internalized heterosexism and self-esteem, the participant decided to come out to someone in his life, beginning with his friends.

2.4.2. Forms of Coming Out

Coming out is an ongoing process, including self-awareness, self-acceptance, and disclosing their truth to others in terms of their sexual orientation identity (Guittar, 2013; Manning, 2015; Rust, 2003). When it comes to coming out to someone, there are two ways: direct manner, which involves face-to-face conversation, and indirect manner, which involves writing a message or posting on social media (Ryan et al., 2015). Wandrey et al. (2015) introduced a new term: "causally coming out," which refers to the natural and comfortable disclosure of one's sexual orientation within the flow of conversation.

Ben-Ari (1995) conducted a study with 32 lesbian and gay individuals (M = 32.7) who came out to at least one parent. Nineteen preferred to come out face-to-face, while others preferred to come out via letter or telephone. Similar to this study, Savin-Williams and Ream (2003) conducted an interview study with 164 young LGB individuals. They found that 75% of the participants came out to their parents face-to-face, and others chose to come out indirectly via telephone, writing a letter, or e-mail.

Rossi (2010) also found similar results to those of Ben-Ari (1995) and Savin-Williams and Ream (2003). She conducted an interview study with 53 gay and lesbian young adults and reported that 89% of participants chose a direct approach, face-to-face conversation, to come out to their mother. Only 42% of participants preferred to come out to their fathers face-to-face. 58% of the participants chose indirect ways of coming out to their father: writing a letter or through another person, initially their mother. If participants came out simultaneously to their parents, 80% preferred face-to-face conversation.

2.4.3. The Age of Awareness of Sexual Orientation, Self-Acceptance, and Coming Out to Someone

Since coming out is an ongoing process (Guittar, 2013), the age of self-

awareness, self-acceptance, and coming out to someone may differ from individual to individual. In one of the pioneer studies, D'Augelli and Hershberger (1993) surveyed 194 LGB individuals aged 15- 21. They found that the age of first awareness of sexual orientation occurred around the age of 10, self-acceptance occurred around the age of 14, and coming out to someone did not occur until around the age of 16. In later years, D'Augelli (2002) conducted another study with 542 LGB youths aged 14-21 and found similar results.

Floyd and Stein's (2002) findings align with those of D'Augelli and Hersberger's (1993) and D'Augelli's (2002) studies. They conducted a study with 72 LGB individuals aged 16-27. They found that participants were aware of their sexual orientation around the age of 10 and accepted their sexual orientation around the age of 16. Between 16 and 18, they come out to someone and their parents. Similarly, Grafsky (2018) conducted a qualitative study with 22 LGB youths aged 14-21 and found that the first awareness of sexual orientation occurred around the age of 12 (ranging from 6-18 years), and the average age of self-acceptance and coming out to someone was 16.

The literature shows that the age of awareness, acceptance, and coming out has increased in the following years. Wandrey et al. (2015) interviewed 17 bisexual women between the ages of 18-25 and reported that the average age of first awareness of sexual orientation is around 14 (ranging from 5 to 19 years). In 2014, Svab and Kuhar conducted a focus group study with 36 gay and lesbian individuals aged 19-40. They found that the average age of first coming out to someone is around 19.5 years old.

Rosati et al. (2020) surveyed 266 Italian LGB adults spanning young, middle, and older age groups. They found that the first awareness had occurred around the age of 15, and self-acceptance and first coming out to someone were around the age of 21. This result is similar to Pistella et al.'s (2019) study with 412 lesbian and gay individuals aged 15-45. They reported that the first disclosure to someone occurred around the age of 20.

Haltom and Ratcliff's (2020) study, surveying 1136 LGB adults, aligns with previous research findings. They discovered that awareness of sexual orientation tends to occur at different ages for female and male participants. For female participants, this awareness typically arises around the age of 14-17, with 29.03% reporting this age

range. This is followed by those who became aware at 14 years of age or younger (24.06%) and those in the 18-21 age range (23.46%). For male participants, the most common age range for becoming aware of their sexual orientation was 18-21, reported by 28.95% of respondents. This was followed closely by the 14-17 age range (25.44%). Regarding the age of first coming out to someone, there were also differences noted between female and male participants. Female participants predominantly came out around the age of 18-21, with 32.51% doing so in this age range. This was followed by the 22-29 age range, where 24.83% of female participants came out. Male participants also primarily came out around the age of 18-21 (28.34%). However, a significant proportion came out during the period of being 30 and older (22.85%), followed by those who came out between the ages of 14-17 (21.94%) and 22-29 (21.21%). In terms of coming out to parents, Rossi (2010) demonstrated in the study with 53 lesbian and gay young adults that the average age of coming out to their mother is around 17 and to their father is around 18.

In Türkiye, Kabacaoğlu (2015) interviewed 15 lesbian and gay individuals aged 19-29 and noticed that five of the participants were aware of their sexual orientation during middle school years, four of them during high school, and four of them during university years. Similar to prior studies (e.g., D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993), self-acceptance occurs after the awareness. Ten of the participants accepted their sexual orientation during the university, and others accepted it during the middle (two of them) and high (two of them) school years. In another study conducted in Türkiye with ten lesbian and gay young adults by Mater (2021), six of them realized their sexual orientation during their adolescence years, followed by childhood.

2.4.4. Reasons For and Against Coming Out

2.4.4.1. Reasons for Coming Out

There are several reasons for coming out to family, parents, and friends. Motivation for coming out differs based on the individual and cultural background, and most individuals wish to live a genuine life with their parents and friends without hiding their true colors (Rossi, 2010; Savin-Williams, 2001; Svab & Kuhar, 2014). In one of the prior studies with 32 gay and lesbian young adults, Ben-Ari (1995) found that 59% of them came out to at least one parent, motivated by the desire not to hide

or not to live a lie, and 33% of them came out to share their happiness with their parents. Others' motivations were also needing help, relieving the pressure of hiding in the closet, and needing to feel respected and loved.

Savin-Williams and Ream (2003) conducted a study where they phone-interviewed 164 young LGB individuals aged between 17 and 25. This study explored the experiences of coming out and reasons for these individuals coming out to their parents. As a result, they found varied reasons for participants coming out to their mothers and fathers. Most of the participants (52%) reported that they came out to their mother because she asked them about their sexual orientation. This indicates a reactive approach to coming out, prompted by the mother's inquiry. Following this, 43% of participants expressed a desire to be closer to their mothers and share life experiences as their reason for coming out. This highlights the importance of emotional closeness and sharing in the coming out process. Additionally, 26% of the participants were outed by someone else, and 14% mentioned needing help as their primary reason for revealing their sexual orientation to their mothers. When it comes to coming out to fathers, the dynamics appeared somewhat different. The study found that most participants (57%) were outed by someone else. Furthermore, 34% of participants felt it was the right time to come out and wanted to get it over with. This was followed by 22% who needed help and chose to come out to their fathers for this reason. Another 14% came out to their fathers because their fathers asked them questions related to their sexual orientation.

Similar to those studies, in his book about coming out to parents of 65 LGB individuals, LaSala (2010) stated that reasons for revealing their sexual orientation to parents differ from individual to individual. Yet, numerous young individuals wish to maintain strong connections with their families, enabling them to live genuinely as themselves. Aligned with this study, Orne (2011) conducted a qualitative study with 13 gay individuals and found that the motivation for coming out is "not living a lie." Some participants saw coming out as a tool for being happier in their lives by showing their true selves.

Kabacaoğlu (2015) interviewed 15 lesbian and gay individuals aged 19-29 and stated that the majority of the participants decided to come out to their friends due to the need for social support. Another reason for coming out is the desire to reduce the discomfort of lying when sharing something about their own lives. In terms of coming

out to their parents, they came out to escape the pressure of marriage imposed by their families, to relieve the discomfort of lying while talking about their lives, and to share their experiences as they are with their parents.

2.4.4.2. Reasons against Coming Out

Coming out is an ongoing process (Guittar, 2013), and LGB individuals may choose to come out selectively, carefully considering to whom they reveal their sexual orientation (Orne, 2011). After coming out, the possibility of facing negative reactions is a stressor for LGB individuals.

For instance, Savin-Williams and Ream (2003) carried out phone interviews with 164 young LGB individuals aged between 17 and 25. The study focused on understanding the reasons why these individuals chose not to come out to their parents. A significant portion of the participants (61%) reported not coming out to their mothers because they felt it was not the right time and were concerned about potentially harming their relationship. This highlights the importance of timing and the perceived impact on familial bonds in the decision to come out. Other reasons for not coming out to mothers included fear of negative reactions, with 25% of participants worried about losing financial support and another 25% concerned about disappointing their mothers. These factors indicate the multifaceted anxieties surrounding the coming out process. Concerning fathers, the study found that 55% of the participants felt they had a distant relationship with their fathers, implying that coming out to them was not considered impactful or necessary. This suggests a different dynamic in the parent-child relationship regarding the coming out process. Furthermore, 30% of participants did not come out to their fathers because they believed it was not the right time. Similar to their feelings about mothers, fear of negative reactions and losing financial support (25%) were also significant concerns in deciding not to come out to their fathers.

Kabacaoğlu (2015) interviewed 15 Turkish lesbian and gay individuals aged 19-29 and highlighted that the fear of facing heteronormativity and being excluded from their friends' circle are crucial factors that make coming out to friends difficult for the participants.

Rodriguez (2019) interviewed nine LGB individuals aged 18 to 39 and found that for 78% of the participants, the family's religious beliefs and values are one of the

stressors regarding the coming out process and reasons against coming out to the family. Rodriguez also revealed that eight respondents could not come out to their parents and siblings due to the fear of rejection. In another qualitative study (Hemphill, 2020) with four LGB individuals between the age of 28-45, fear of rejection, negative family reactions, loss of support, and loved ones (three out of four) were the reasons that they could not come out to their family.

2.4.5. Coming Out to Who

As highlighted by D'Augelli and Hershberger (1993) and Guittar (2013), coming out is a multifaceted process that involves self-acceptance and disclosing one's sexual orientation to significant others, such as family, close friends, and potentially distant relatives, friends, and coworkers. Sexual minority individuals might choose to come out selectively, which involves hiding in the closet on some occasions and being out on other occasions, depending on the context, place, and necessity (McLean, 2007; Orne, 2011).

Many studies indicate that LGB individuals often choose to come out to their friends before their parents or one parent (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Kabacaoğlu, 2015; Pistella, 2019; Rossi, 2010). Furthermore, when it comes to parents, many choose to come out to their mothers before their fathers (Katz-Wise et al., 2016; Reed, 2020; Rossi, 2010; Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003). Regarding the reasons for choosing to come out to their mother before their father, Carnelley et al. (2011) found that participants who experienced a welcoming and accepting childhood with their mother were likelier to come out to their mother before their father.

D'Augelli and Hershberger (1993) surveyed 194 LGB individuals aged 15-21 and found that 73% of the participants revealed their sexual orientation to their friends first. Only 19% of the participants stayed in the closet regarding parents. 63% of the participants disclosed their sexual orientation to their mothers only, and 25% disclosed both parents.

Savin-Williams and Ream (2003) conducted a survey study with 164 LGB individuals between the ages of 17 and 25. They found that 47.07% of the participants disclosed their sexual orientation identity to at least one of their parents. Furthermore, 53.62% of those participants revealed their sexual orientation identity to their mother

first, and only 11.60% revealed their sexual orientation identity to their father before their mother.

Rossi (2010) interviewed 53 gay and lesbian young adults aged 18-25 to explore their coming out experiences. It was found that 66% of the participants first disclosed their sexual orientation to a friend before their parents, followed by 21% to a sibling or counselor and 13% to their mother. 49% of the participants revealed their sexual orientation to their parents separately, and 96% of those participants preferred to come out to their mother before their father.

In a survey study (Henry, 2013) with 258 LGB individuals aged 18-72, 74.4% of the respondents first came out to their friends, followed by mothers (7.8%), siblings (3.9%), and fathers (0.3%). 57.6% chose to come out to their mothers before their fathers, whereas 11.4% chose to come out to their fathers before their mothers. 25% of the participants preferred to come out to both parents simultaneously.

In 2014, Svab and Kuhar conducted a focus group study with 36 gay and lesbian individuals aged 19-40. They found that the majority of the participants (77%) preferred to come out first to their friends, followed by mothers (7%), siblings (5%), and fathers (3%). Similarly, Grasfsky (2018) conducted a qualitative study with 22 LGB youth aged 14-21 and found that 59.1% of the participants first came out to their friends, followed by their mothers (13.6%).

In the Italian context, Pistella et al. (2019) surveyed 412 lesbian and gay individuals aged 15-45. They highlighted that 68% of the participants came out to their best friends before their parents or siblings. In another survey study of 266 Italian LGB individuals aged 20-80, Rosati et al. (2020) found that almost all participants (97.7%) came out to their best friends, followed by colleagues (83.7%), siblings (83.6%), mothers (76.1%), and fathers (58.7%).

In their study, Reed et al. (2020) interviewed 25 LGB college and graduate students who disclosed their parents. They found that 10 of them told their sexual orientation to their parents separately, and nine of those 10 participants revealed their sexual orientation to their mothers before their fathers.

In Türkiye, Kabacaoğlu (2015) conducted a qualitative study with 14 lesbian and gay individuals aged 19-29 and detected that 13 of the participants preferred to come out to their friends before their parents or one of their parents, and six of them did not come out to their parents. Three out of nine participants came out to only their

mothers, and two out of nine came out to only their fathers. In another study conducted in Türkiye with ten lesbian and gay individuals aged 21-33 by Mater (2021), eight out of 10 participants revealed their sexual orientation to their mothers before their fathers.

2.4.6. Experiences Before Coming Out

Coming out to someone itself is a challenging and ongoing process (Matthews & Salazar, 2012). Coming out stress differs from individual to individual, and nearly every LGB individual encounters at least one stressful coming-out experience when they prefer to come out to someone (Charbonnier & Graziani, 2016). However, coming out to parents is one of the most stressful events for LGB individuals (Charbonnier & Graziani, 2016).

Ben-Ari (1995) conducted interviews with 32 lesbian and gay individuals, with an average age of 32.7 years, who had come out to one or both parents. The study focused on the emotions and concerns they experienced before coming out to their parents. A significant portion of the participants, 52.4%, reported fear of rejection by their parents as a major concern before coming out. This highlights the apprehension about not being accepted by their family upon revealing their sexual orientation. Another 23.8% of the participants were afraid of confronting heteronormativity from their parents. This reflects the concern about the expectation of heterosexuality and the potential lack of understanding or acceptance of their sexual identity. Additional fears included the worry about increasing their parents' guilt, reported by 19.4% of participants. Concerns about worsening relationships with parents were noted by 9.5%, as were fears of being blamed by their parents and the possibility of losing their parents, each also at 9.5%.

The studies by McLean (2007), Perrin-Wallqvist and Lindblom (2015), and Gattamorta and Quidley-Rodriguez (2018) collectively underscore the pervasive anxiety and fear experienced by LGB individuals regarding their coming out process. Despite their different participant demographics and focus, these studies highlight similar concerns about family reactions and the potential consequences of coming out.

McLean's (2007) in-depth interview study with 60 bisexual individuals aged 21-66 revealed that the decision to come out was fraught with anxiety over potentially losing loved ones and their support. Perrin-Wallqvist and Lindblom (2015) further

delved into this fear but with a focus on gay and lesbian individuals aged 32-38. They found that participants were afraid of coming out to their parents due to the anticipation of negative reactions, which might include expressions of hatred. This fear is not just about the immediate reaction but also the long-term impact on family dynamics, e.g., the fear of worsening relationships and losing them. Similarly, Gattamorta and Quidley-Rodriguez's (2018) qualitative study with 20 LGB young adults aged 19-28 highlighted fears of judgment, differential treatment, financial insecurity, and the disappointment of family members. These concerns were significant enough that some participants preferred to wait until they achieved financial independence before coming out to their parents, indicating a strategic approach to mitigate potential negative consequences.

The studies by Gerena (2021) and Price and Prosek (2020) both offer insights into the emotional experiences of LGB individuals during the coming out process, particularly regarding the anxiety and fear associated with revealing their sexual orientation to their parents. In Gerena's (2021) study involving 15 gay individuals aged between 27-40, the prevalent feeling of anxiety and depression before coming out to their fathers was evident. The majority of these participants (13 out of 15) experienced these emotions due to fears such as losing family support, facing rejection from the family, and the potential of causing embarrassment to their family. These concerns were significant enough that 14 of the participants sought support from friends or therapists, underscoring the profound emotional impact of the coming out process. Similarly, Price and Prosek's (2020) qualitative study with seven LGB young adults aged 18-24 revealed that all participants experienced anxiety before coming out to their parents. Their anxiety stemmed from the uncertainty of how their parents would react. This shared theme of anxiety, driven by the fear of negative responses and potential loss of familial support, highlights a common emotional challenge faced by LGB individuals across different age groups when coming out.

2.4.7. Experiences After Coming Out

Coming out experiences can be positive and negative, depending on the reactions of people to whom queer individuals came out (e.g., D'Augelli et al., 2008). Increased psychological well-being, facilitating interpersonal relationships with

others, and diminishing risky behaviors are positive sides of coming out of the closet, whereas getting physically hurt, facing discrimination, and heteronormativity are opposing sides (Corrigan & Matthews, 2003).

Shilo and Savaya's (2011) survey of 461 LGB youths ranging from 16 to 23 years old emphasized the importance of acceptance from family and friends. They found that such acceptance is strongly correlated with better overall well-being and lower levels of mental distress. Additionally, the support of friends is an essential contribution to the process of public-social coming out, whereas family acceptance plays an essential role in the process of self-acceptance.

Legate et al. (2012) conducted a study with 161 LGB individuals aged 18-65. They highlighted that participants who have a supportive environment in their family have lower levels of depression and higher levels of self-esteem when they are out of the closet. Similar to this study's findings, Henry (2013) conducted a survey study with 258 LGB individuals aged 18-72 and found that being out of the closet is significantly associated with higher self-esteem and significantly and negatively associated with with depression.

In a qualitative study (Hemphill, 2020) with four LGB individuals aged 28-45, being proud of who they are, happiness and a sense of freedom were the positive feelings they experienced after coming out to their parents. Moreover, participants expressed gratitude for finally authentically living their lives without hiding in the closet and living on their terms. Similar to this study, Gerena (2021) surveyed 15 gay individuals between the ages of 27 and 40 who came to their fathers. Respondents reported that after coming out to their fathers, they experienced a sense of freedom involving living in their truth and being authentic. However, those who experienced a high level of anxiety after coming out to their fathers, used alcohol as a way of coping mechanism.

Price and Prosek (2020) qualitatively explored the experience of seven LGB young adults aged 18-24 regarding coming out process to their parents in terms of their sexual orientation identity. All participants' parents accepted their children's sexual orientation after coming out, and they supported their children. Additionally, receiving support from parents increases the sense of authenticity of participants and living as who they are (n=5).

2.4.8. Mental Health Professionals and LGB Individuals

In this section, the competency level of mental health professionals and barriers and facilitators to consult with mental health professionals are explored through the existing literature.

2.4.8.1. Competency of Mental Health Professionals

Being a queer individual and the journey of coming out itself are stressors in the lives of queer people. They experience minority stress and societal stigmatization, prejudice, and discrimination (Meyer, 2003). Moreover, they experience depression and anxiety before and after coming out (e.g., Gerena, 2021). Receiving mental health support is a facilitator while coping with their issues about being an LGB individual and the coming out process (Ali & Lambie, 2018). However, professionals may lack the competency to work with LGB people (Bidell, 2012) even though they want to work with them (Farmer et al., 2013; Toplu-Demirtaş & Akçabozan-Kayabol, 2018).

According to the American Counseling Association (2014) and American School Counselor Association (2022), counselors should consider multicultural issues, including sexual orientation, while working with their clients and should not behave discriminately. Having a non-judgmental attitude, using inclusive language, and advocating for their rights are other characteristics that counselors should have (American School Counselor Association, 2022; Logan & Carter, 2017). Additionally, counselors must work on their own prejudiced and discriminatory attitudes before working with LGB individuals and should get consultation and supervision while working with LGB clients (Logan & Carter, 2017).

In their study with 468 counselors in different settings (school counselors, community practice, counseling students, and counselor educators), Farmer et al. (2013) used the Sexual Orientation Counselor Competency Scale (Bidell, 2005) to measure the knowledge, attitudes, skills while counseling LGB clients. Results showed that counselors felt competent about their attitudes towards LGB clients but had lower levels of skills to work with them.

In another study in Türkiye, Kurt and Ateş (2008) interviewed 20 prospective counselors to explore their attitudes toward LGB individuals when counseling. They found that counselor candidates are willing to work with LGB clients but are hesitant

to approach them because they are not familiar with this group. They are concerned about harming their clients due to not knowing their experiences and the stigmatized beliefs coming from society.

In another interview study (Crockett et al., 2022) with 24 queer individuals aged between 18-23, participants stated that mental health professionals should be competent to work with queer people and have a positive and non-discriminative attitude towards queer people.

2.4.8.2. Barriers and Facilitators to Mental Health Help-Seeking

As Meyer (2003) noted in minority stress theory, LGB individuals are particularly vulnerable to mental health issues due to stigmatization, prejudice, and discrimination they face due to their identity. Related to those stressors, LGB individuals have issues seeking mental health care (Cronin et al., 2021).

In their study, Zay Hta et al. (2021) interviewed 28 LGB young adults aged 21-34. They discovered several barriers to seeking professional mental health help among this group. One significant barrier was internal resistance, which included hesitation to come out and a perceived lack of need for help. Additionally, they identified a lack of resources and information about mental health as a key issue. Another challenge was the limited availability and accessibility of services. This included financial difficulties and a scarcity of LGB-ally services. The study also found a negative perception of mental health services and professionals. This negative view was partly due to doubts about the effectiveness of therapy, as well as personal and others' negative experiences with therapy. Furthermore, the stigmatization associated with seeking mental health help was a considerable barrier. Lastly, participants expressed fear of discrimination and the risk of being forced to undergo conversion therapy.

On the other hand, several factors facilitate the decision to seek help from mental health professionals (Zay Hta et al., 2021). First, self-awareness, particularly recognizing therapy as a viable coping method, and a genuine desire to get help play a crucial role. Additionally, affordability is a significant facilitator. When therapy is financially accessible, individuals are more inclined to seek help. Time and location flexibility also contribute to making mental health services more appealing. Another key facilitator is the holding of positive beliefs about mental health professionals. This

includes the perception that professionals are non-judgmental. Finally, positive experiences with mental health professionals encourage individuals to seek assistance.

In their study, Crockett et al. (2022) interviewed 24 queer college students aged 18-23 about seeking mental health help. They identified multiple barriers categorized as individual, social, and related to mental health services. The individual barriers included fear of discrimination and concerns about confidentiality, especially regarding the outing of their sexual orientation and gender identity to their parents. Additionally, previous negative experiences with mental health professionals and a lack of knowledge about accessing services were significant hindrances. On the social front, the primary barrier was the negative attitude of parents and peers toward mental health professionals. Regarding the services themselves, the high cost of mental health care and long waits for affordable services were identified as major obstacles.

The opposite of these barriers is the facilitators to seeking mental health help (Crockett et al., 2022). Awareness of the benefits of receiving mental health care is crucial. Support from parents and peers also plays a significant role. Additionally, formal agreements between universities and mental health services that ensure affordability and accessibility are key facilitators in obtaining mental health care.

2.5. Summary of the Literature Review

Coming out is a unique experience for LGB individuals that differs from individual to individual and is one of the turning points in their lives. Coming out is defined as an ongoing process that involves self-awareness, self-acceptance, and coming out to someone (Guittar, 2013). Self-acceptance also refers to coming out to oneself. Therefore, some LGB individuals do not see self-acceptance as a prerequisite for coming out since it is a way of coming out (Guittar, 2013; Orne, 2011). There are three key models in the literature for understanding the coming out process: Cass's six stages of homosexual identity formation (1979), Coleman’s developmental stage of coming out process (1982), and Troiden’s formation of homosexual identities model (1989). Each model underscores that the process mostly starts in childhood and continues throughout life, including the exploration of sexual orientation, self-acceptance, and the decision process of whether to come out to someone. Each model emphasized the individual and cultural factors in the coming out process. Therefore,

they all underline that the stages are not linear and experiences are unique to individuals (Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1982; Troiden, 1989). In addition to those theoretical and developmental models, Meyer (2003) introduces a minority stress model that involves and considers LGB individuals. According to Meyer (2003), minority groups face unique challenges and stressors due to stigmatization, prejudice, discrimination, and internalized heterosexism stemming from their characteristics such as sexual orientation, race, and gender. This minority stress is highly associated with mental health difficulties such as depression, anxiety, and suicidality (Meyer et al., 2008). Moreover, minority stress theory is also associated with the coming out process of LGB individuals. Internalized heterosexism hinders the self-discovery and self-acceptance process (Ong et al., 2021; Set; 2018) and affects the decision of whether to come out to someone (Liu et al., 2022).

The blossoming literature demonstrated that the average age of self-awareness, self-acceptance, and coming out to someone increases over time. The average age of self-awareness increased from 10 years old to 15 years old, the average age of self-acceptance increased from 14 years old to 21 years old, and lastly, the average age of coming out to someone increased from 16 years old to 21 years old.

In literature, although LGB individuals mostly prefer to come out face-to-face during a conversation, some write a message or post on social media (Ryan et al., 2015). The motivation for coming out differs from individual to individual. However, the burden of hiding in the closet is one of the key motivations for coming out (Rossi, 2010). Hiding in the closet requires lying to their significant others, living in a world of lies, and hiding their authentic selves from others (Lasala, 2010). LGB individuals decide to disclose their true identity to ease the burden of hiding in the closet. They mostly prefer to come out to their friends before their parents (e.g., Pistella, 2019) and mothers before their fathers (Reed, 2020). Before coming out to someone, especially to parents, they experience anxiety and fear stemming from anticipating negative reactions such as rejection, loss of financial support, and discrimination (Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018). After coming out, the reactions they received make the experiences positive or negative. Increased psychological well-being and improvement in interpersonal relationships are the positive aspects of coming out, whereas facing discrimination, peer bullying, and getting physically hurt are the negative aspects (Corrigan & Matthews, 2003; Matthews & Salazar, 2012).

Regarding mental health professionals, literature shows that prospective and practicing mental health professionals have little knowledge about LGB individuals and their experiences during the coming out journey (Farmer et al., 2013; Toplu-Demirtaş & Akçabozan-Kayabol, 2018). In addition to that, LGB individuals mostly do not prefer to get mental health support (Cronin et al., 2021). Financial difficulty, the possibility of being judged and discriminated against by professionals, concerns about confidentiality, and bad previous experiences are the reasons LGB individuals do not receive mental health care.

Overall, the reviewed research underscores the diverse experiences associated with the coming out process of LGB individuals, including self-awareness, self-acceptance, and coming out to someone. The relevant research and theoretical perspectives, particularly on developmental models of coming out, lay the foundation for the current study. Thus, this study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of Turkish LGB individuals' coming out process and their experiences.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

This section introduces the research design, the method of qualitative investigation, participants selection and sampling procedure, sample size and participants' demographic information, data collection instrument and procedure, data analysis, the researcher's role, trustworthiness, and study limitations.

3.1. Research Design

This study aimed to explore and understand the coming out process and experiences of LGB young adults and adults in Türkiye. By considering the purpose of the study, a qualitative approach was chosen. In a qualitative approach, researchers do not work with scale and numbers to demonstrate the comparison between groups, they aim to understand the research topic's meanings, subjectivity, and context (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Researcher's purpose is to explore the unique experiences of individuals or try to observe and understand the reflections about a particular experience (Creswell, 2012). Therefore, the research questions revolve around "how" and "why" questions, aiming to acquire in-depth insights about the phenomenon from the viewpoints of the participants (Creswell, 2007).

3.1.1. The Method of Qualitative Investigation

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) aims to explore the unique experiences of people for a particular phenomenon, and the main focus of IPA study is to find out what specific phenomena and experiences mean to those involved (Smith & Osborn, 2003). In other words, "the participants are trying to make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world." (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p.53). Therefore, the researcher has an active role in the research process. While exploring the particular phenomenon, the

researcher takes into consideration “what it means” and “what it is like” for the participants to experience events, processes, or relationships (Larkin et al., 2006). While doing this, the emotions and concerns of the participants are also essential to consider (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

The present research focused on exploring and understanding the coming out process and experience of LGB young adults and adults in Türkiye. As suggested by Larkin et al. (2006), semi-structured interviews were used to capture the narratives of their experiences. By considering the research focus and data collection instrument, IPA was seen as the most suitable method for analyzing the data.

3.2. Participants

In the present study, 18 lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) young adults and adults from Türkiye were recruited through snowball and purposive sampling, as suggested by Smith and Osborn (2003). Via purposive sampling, the homogeneity of the sample was tried to be ensured. A homogeneous sample is suggested for IPA to investigate the research question with a relatively closed group of people (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Therefore, the inclusion criteria for the study were as follows:

1. Identifying themselves as a lesbian, gay, or bisexual individual,
2. Being older than 18,
3. Being born and raised in Türkiye,
4. Coming out to at least one of the parents regarding sexual orientation.

An announcement poster involving the inclusion criteria and e-mail of the researcher was prepared and shared on social media. In total, 30 participants reached out to the researcher via e-mail and Facebook direct message. Among them, two candidates were declined due to not coming out to one of the parents, and one candidate was declined because their sexual orientation is not gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Nine interviews (six gay individuals, one lesbian individual, and two bisexual individuals) were done within three days. After that, recruiting gay participants was stopped to make a balance among the number of participants for each sexual orientation group, and bisexual and lesbian participants were included in the study. Eventually, 18 individuals (six gay participants, six bisexual participants, and six lesbian participants) participated in the study.

3.3.Sample Size and Demographics of Participants

3.3.1.Sample Size

In a qualitative research design, the quality of data is more important than the number of participants, and the aim is to try to reach data saturation (Creswell, 2012). Since the main focus of IPA is an in-depth exploration of a particular phenomenon, a small sample size is suggested not to get overwhelmed by the data analysis process and give full consideration case by case (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). On the other hand, Turpin et al. (1997) recommended six to eight participants for IPA. Therefore, considering the data saturation and recommended participants number, the researcher completed the interviews by selecting six individuals for each sexual orientation (six for gay individuals, six for lesbian individuals, and six for bisexual individuals).

3.3.2. Demographics of Participants

After participants signed the informed consent, the researcher started the interviews by asking demographic information questions. Demographic information questions consisted of the age of the participants, gender and sexual identity, occupation, education level of participants and their parents, political and religious affiliation, self-acceptance age, and age of coming out to someone and family.

The present study was conducted with 18 LGB individuals aged between 18 and 39, and all of them came out to at least one of their parents. They all grew up in large cities such as Ankara, İzmir, İstanbul etc. Income levels were written down based on participants' perceptions. To ensure confidentiality, all participants' names were anonymized. The summary of the characteristics of participants can be seen in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

Characteristics of the Participants

Anonymized Name	Age	Gender Identity	Sexual Orientation	Last Completed Education Level	Perceived Income Level
Can	29	Male	Gay	Bachelor's degree	Middle
Kaan	19	Male	Gay	High School	Middle
Burak	39	Male	Gay	PhD	High

Table 3.1. (continued)

Hakan	22	Male	Gay	High School	Middle
Deniz	24	Nonbinary/ Female	Lesbian	Bachelor's Degree	Upper-Middle
Ömer	28	Male	Gay	Master's Degree	Upper-Middle
Beyza	26	Female	Bisexual	Bachelor's Degree	Upper-Middle
Kerem	31	Male	Gay	Master's Degree	Middle
Fatih	25	Male	Bisexual	Bachelor's Degree	Middle and Upper-Middle
Pelin	27	Female	Bisexual	Master's Degree	Lower-Middle
Görkem	25	Nonbinary	Bisexual	Bachelor's Degree	Middle and Upper-Middle
Defne	22	Female	Bisexual	Bachelor's Degree	Lower-Middle
Ada	27	Nonbinary/Female	Bisexual	Master's Degree	Middle or Upper-Middle
Kayra	18	Transmasculine nonbinary	Lesbian	High School	High
İlayda	26	Female	Lesbian	Bachelor's Degree	Upper-Middle
Mercan	25	Nonbinary	Lesbian	Bachelor's Degree	Not specified
Leyla	25	Female	Lesbian	Bachelor's Degree	Middle Class
Alara	26	Female	Lesbian	Bachelor's Degree	Low Class

Table 3.2

First Coming Out to Someone

Anonymized Names	Age of Self-Acceptance	Age of First Coming Out to Someone	The First Person They Were Coming Out	Voluntarily	Ways of Coming Out
Can	15	15	First lover	Yes	Face to face
Kaan	17	16	Close friends	Yes	Face to face
Burak	19	20-21	His Queer Sister	Yes	Face to face
Hakan	15-16	15-16	Close Friends	Yes	Face to face
Deniz	18-19	19-20	A Close Friend	Yes	Face to face
Ömer	16	16-17	Family	No	-
Beyza	13	13	Friend	Yes	Face to face
Kerem	17-18	17-18	Friend	Yes	Face to face

Table 3.2 (continued)

Fatih	18	18	Close Friends	Yes	Phone Call
Pelin	20-21	22-23	Two queer friends	Yes	Face to face
Görkem	21-22	22	Stepbrother	Yes	Face to face
Defne	18-19	18-19	Friend	Yes	Face to face
Ada	21	14	Close friends	Yes	Face to face
Kayra	11-12	12	First crush	Yes	Via message
İlayda	21-22	21-22	A queer friend	Yes	Face to face
Mercan	22	22	A best friend, friend's sister, sister's friends	Yes	Face to face
Leyla	17-18	17-18	A group of summer house friends	Yes	Face to face
Alara	18	20	A close friend	Yes	Face to face

Participants' acceptance of their sexual orientation identity age ranged between 11-22, and their age of first coming out to someone ranged between 12-23. They mostly preferred to come out first to their friends, such as queer friends, childhood friends, or close friends, and the majority of the participants came out voluntarily and face-to-face. Coming out involuntarily means participants' families confronted them after they learned about their children's sexual orientation identity. Therefore, the ways of coming out are not included for those who did not come out voluntarily since the participants did not initiate the coming out by their choice. The summary of the self-acceptance age, coming out to age, and first coming out to someone can be seen in Table 3.2.

Within the family, majority of the participants came out to their mother first, and the coming out age ranged between 13 and 25. In the table, coming out to family includes mother, father and siblings. Most of the participants came out voluntarily and face-to-face similar to their first coming out experiences. Similar to Table 3.2., the ways of coming out are not included for those who did not come out voluntarily since the participants did not initiate the coming out by their choice. Their family or parents confronted or talked to participants after they learned sexual orientation identity. The summary of coming out to family can be seen in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3

First Coming Out to Family

Anonymized Names	Age of Coming Out	First Person in the Family	Voluntarily	Ways of Coming Out
Can	17	Father and Mother	No	-
Kaan	17	Mother	Yes	Face to face
Burak	20-21	His Queer Sister	Yes	Face to face
Hakan	13	Mother	No	-
Deniz	20	Sister	Yes	Face to face
Ömer	16-17	Family	No	-
Beyza	17-18	Sister	Yes	Face to face
Kerem	17-18	Mother	Yes	Face to face
Fatih	18-19	Father	Yes	Face to face
Pelin	23-24	Mother	Yes	Face to face
Görkem	22	Brother	Yes	Face to face
Defne	20	Mother	Yes	Face to face
Ada	20-21	Mother	Yes	Face to face
Kayra	18	Mother	Yes	Face to face
İlayda	21-22	Mother	Yes	Face to face
Mercan	25	Mother	No	-
Leyla	19	Mother and Father	No	-
Alara	20	Sister	Yes	Via message

3.3.2.1. Can

Can is 29 years old and grew up in a big city. He identifies his gender as male and his sexual orientation as gay. He identifies himself ethnically as Turkish. He has a bachelor's degree in guidance and psychological counseling. Currently, he is not a student and is unemployed. As for his family background, he is an only child. His mother's education level is a primary school, and she is currently unemployed. His father finished his studies at a military school and works as a soldier. Economically,

Can categorizes his family as middle class. Regarding religious beliefs, Can and his family see themselves as Muslim, but he stated that they do not engage in the practice of religion. They lean towards secular beliefs politically.

Can is not alone during his acceptance of the sexual orientation identity process; he discovers his sexual orientation identity with his high-school sweetheart. Therefore, at the age of 15, he accepted his sexual orientation identity and came out to his boyfriend voluntarily and face-to-face. He did not voluntarily come out to his parents. At the age of 17, his boyfriend's family told his parents.

3.3.2.2. Kaan

Kaan is 19 years old and grew up in a big city. He identifies his gender as male and his sexual orientation as gay. He identifies himself ethnically as Turkish. He completed his high school degree. Currently, he is not a student and is unemployed. As for his family background, he has one younger sister. His mother's education level is a primary school, and she is currently unemployed. His father finished secondary school, but his occupation is not specified. Economically, Kaan categorizes their family as middle class. Regarding religious beliefs, Kaan describes his family's religion as Sunni Islam, while Kaan personally adheres to a Muslim perspective from a philosophical standpoint. Politically, Kaan positioned himself as a leftist, whereas he positioned his family as a rightist.

Around the age of 14-15, Kaan's mother saw him as wearing a handmade princess dress. At that moment, Kaan came out to his mother as bisexual, even though he thinks of himself as a gay individual, to be able to get a less severe reaction from his mother. At the age of 16, he came out to his high school best friend as gay face-to-face. Shortly after coming out to his best friend, he came out to his mother as gay. His father found out about his sexual orientation while he and his mother were in a conversation at the age of 17. He accepted his sexual orientation identity at the age of 17. Later that year, his younger sister learned about his brother's sexual orientation from his mother.

3.3.2.3. Burak

Burak is 39 years old and grew up in a big city. He identifies his gender as

male and his sexual orientation as gay. He identifies himself ethnically as Nusayri. He completed his Ph.D. and is currently working as an academician. As for his family background, he has 11 siblings. His mother is illiterate, and she is currently unemployed. His father is also illiterate, but he was doing merchant business. Economically, Burak categorizes their family as high class. Regarding religious beliefs, while his family follows the Nusayri tradition, Burak positions himself as an atheist. Politically, he aligns his family with the center leftist views, but he leans towards anarchist ideologies.

Burak accepted his sexual orientation identity at the age of 19, and around the age of 20-21, he came out to his queer sister voluntarily and face-to-face. Around the age of 31-32, he came out to his mother voluntarily and face-to-face. He did not come out to his other siblings and father.

3.3.2.4. Hakan

Hakan is 22 years old and grew up in a big city. He identifies his gender as male and his sexual orientation as gay. He continues his philosophy degree at university and works as a content creator. As for his family background, he has two siblings: an older brother and a sister. His mother completed her bachelor's degree and works as a teacher. His father completed high school, but his occupation is not specified. Economically, Hakan categorizes his family as middle class. Regarding religious beliefs, while his parents are Muslim, he stated he disagrees with his family's religious affiliation. Politically, he and his family align with leftist views.

Hakan accepted his sexual orientation identity around the age of 15-16, and within the same year, he came out to his close friends from high school face-to-face. His family learned his sexual orientation before he put a name on it. His mother found personal things in their shared computer during middle school and asked him after school. He did not come out to his father and his siblings.

3.3.2.5. Deniz

Deniz is 24 years old and grew up in a big city. Deniz identifies her gender as non-binary/female and her sexual orientation as lesbian. She completed her bachelor's degree in chemical engineering and is currently a master's student. As for her family

background, she has one younger sister. Her mother and father completed medical degrees and are currently working as doctors. Economically, Deniz categorizes her family as upper-middle class. Regarding religious beliefs, while her father is not religious, her mother is a believer. She is an unbeliever. Politically, she aligns her mother as a leftist and her father as a nationalist.

Deniz accepted her sexual orientation identity around the age of 18-19, and within the same year, she came out to a close friend voluntarily and face-to-face. At the age of 20, she came out to her sister when she talked about her date, and she came out to his mother around the age of 22-23 voluntarily and face-to-face. She did not come out to his father.

3.3.2.6. Ömer

Ömer is 28 years old and grew up in a big city. He identifies his gender as male and his sexual orientation as gay. He completed two master's degrees in data analysis and financial economy and works as a data analyst in a bank. As for his family background, he has one older brother. His mother completed her bachelor's degree in Persian language and literature and is unemployed. His father completed a bachelor's degree and works as an engineer. Economically, Ömer categorizes his family as upper-middle class. Regarding religious beliefs, while his father is not a believer, his mother is a Muslim, but he stated that she does not engage in practices of religion. He is an unbeliever. Politically, his family aligns with leftist views, and he positioned himself as a liberalist.

Ömer accepted his sexual orientation identity at the age of 16, and within the same year, his whole family learned. His mother saw his personal files in their shared computer and told his father and older brother. After he came from school, there had been a family meeting.

3.3.2.7. Beyza

Beyza is 26 years old and grew up in a big city. Beyza identifies her gender as female and her sexual orientation as lesbian. She completed her bachelor's degree in international business and trade and works as a system administrator and software consultant. As for her family background, she has one older sister. Her mother and

father completed bachelor's degrees. Economically, Beyza categorizes her family as upper-middle class. Regarding religious beliefs, she and her family are Muslim but not religious. Politically, she aligns her family and herself with republican and secular.

Beyza accepted her sexual orientation identity at the age of 13, and within the same year, she came out to her childhood friend face-to-face. At the age of 17-18, she came out to her mother and sister at different times and face-to-face. She did not come out to his father.

3.3.2.8. Kerem

Kerem is 31 years old and grew up in a big city. He identifies his gender as male and his sexual orientation as gay. He is a Ph.D. candidate in cognitive sciences and works as a research laboratory assistant. As for his family background, he has one younger sister. His mother completed her bachelor's degree and works as an English teacher. His father completed a bachelor's degree and works in a private company. Economically, Kerem categorizes his family as middle class. Regarding religious beliefs, he and his family are atheists. Politically, he and his family align with leftist views.

Kerem accepted his sexual orientation identity around the age of 17-18, and within the same year, he came out to his friend face-to-face. Again, within the same year, his mother asked him what was going on with him, and then he decided to come out to his mother face-to-face. On that day, his mother told his father as well. Since there is an age gap between him and his sister, he has not decided to come out to his sister.

3.3.2.9. Fatih

Fatih is 31 years old and grew up in a big city. He identifies his gender as male and his sexual orientation as bisexual. Academically, he completed his bachelor's degree in industrial engineering and works in the marketing department. As for his family background, he has one younger sister. His mother completed her master’s degree, and she is unemployed. His father completed a master's degree and works in his own office. Economically, Fatih categorizes his family as middle or upper-middle class. Regarding religious beliefs, his family is Muslim, and he is an atheist.

Politically, he aligns his family with center/conservative rightist views, and he positioned himself as a leftist.

Fatih accepted his sexual orientation identity at the age of 18, and within the same year, he came out to his high school close friend via phone call. Again, within the same year, he came out to his father in an argument, and two years later, he came out to his mother voluntarily and face-to-face. At the age of 21, he came out to his sister face-to-face.

3.3.2.10. Pelin

Pelin is 27 years old and grew up in a big city. Pelin identifies her gender as female and her sexual orientation as bisexual. She completed her master's degree in social policy and is currently unemployed. As for her family background, she is an only child and has an intact family. Her mother completed her bachelor's degree and works as a nurse. Economically, Pelin categorizes her family as lower-middle class. Regarding religious beliefs, she and her family are atheists. Politically, she aligns her family as a radical socialist and herself as a liberalist.

Pelin accepted her sexual orientation around the age of 20-21. One year later, she came out to her two queer close friends, who were also in a relationship. Around the age of 23-24, she came out to her mother and father at different times and face-to-face.

3.3.2.11. Görkem

Görkem is 25 years old and grew up in a big city. They identify their gender as non-binary and their sexual orientation as bisexual. They completed his bachelor's degree in translation and interpreting studies and works as a simultaneous translator. As for their family background, they have one older stepbrother. Their stepmother completed her medical degree and works as a doctor. Their father completed a bachelor's degree and is self-employed. Economically, Görkem categorizes their family as middle or upper-middle class. Regarding religious beliefs, their family is Muslim, and they are atheists. Politically, they align their family and themselves as dissidents.

Görkem accepted their sexual orientation identity around the age of 21-22, and

within the same year, he decided to come out to his whole family during dinner time. At that time, only his stepbrother acknowledged his sexual orientation identity, and their parents did not acknowledge it. One year later, he again came out to his father and his stepmother face-to-face.

3.3.2.12. Defne

Defne is 22 years old and grew up in a big city. Defne identifies her gender as female and her sexual orientation as bisexual. She completed her bachelor's degree in psychology and is currently unemployed. As for her family background, she has one younger brother. Her mother completed her bachelor's degree and is a Quran course trainer. Her father completed secondary school. Economically, Defne categorizes her family as lower-middle class. Regarding religious beliefs, while her family is Muslim, she is not a believer. Politically, she aligns her family as a rightist and herself as a leftist.

Defne accepted her sexual orientation identity around the age of 18-19, and within the same year, she came out to a queer friend from a queer university club face-to-face. At the age of 20, she came out to her mother voluntarily and face-to-face. After a year, her father found pictures of her with a woman on her computer, but they did not discuss this. Since there is an age gap between her and her younger brother, she has not decided to come out to him.

3.3.2.13. Ada

Ada is 27 years old and grew up in a big city. Ada identifies her gender as non-binary/female and her sexual orientation as bisexual. She completed her master's in English language and literature and is unemployed. As for her family background, she is an only child. Her mother and father completed bachelor's degrees, and Ada economically categorizes her family as middle or upper-middle class. Her family is conservative and unreligious regarding religious beliefs, whereas she does not lean on this issue. Politically, she aligns her family and herself as Kemalists.

Ada accepted her sexual orientation identity at the age of 21. However, at 14, she came out to her school crush. After the self-acceptance, she came out to her mother voluntarily and face-to-face. Later that year, her mother told her father.

3.3.2.14. Kayra

Kayra is 18 years old and grew up in a large city. Kayra identifies their gender as transmasculine non-binary and their sexual orientation as lesbian. Academically, they are a student in the English translation department. As for their family background, they are only children and have an intact family. Their mother has a medical degree and works as a doctor. Their father completed a bachelor's degree and works as an engineer. Kayra economically categorizes her family as high-middle class. Regarding religious beliefs, their family is religious Muslim, whereas they are in between Muslim and spiritual. Politically, they align their family as conservative rightists and themselves as apolitical.

Kayra accepted their sexual orientation identity around the age of 11-12. Within the same year, they came out to her platonic crush via a message. At the age of 18, they came out to their mother face-to-face. They did not want to come out to their father.

3.3.2.15. İlayda

İlayda is 26 years old and grew up in a large city. İlayda identifies her gender as female and her sexual orientation as lesbian. She completed her bachelor's degree in psychology and works as a psychologist, currently. As for her family background, she has one younger brother. Her mother completed high school, and her father completed a bachelor's degree. Economically, İlayda categorizes herself and her family as upper-middle class. Regarding religious beliefs, whereas her family is Muslim and live according to Muslim practices, she does not lean on this issue preferably. Politically, she aligns her family as social democrats and herself as an apolitical.

İlayda accepted her sexual orientation as bisexual around the age of 18-19, and at the same time, she came out to her queer friend face-to-face. Again, within the same year, she came out to her mother voluntarily and face-to-face. After two years, she realized that her sexual orientation was lesbian not bisexual. Within the same time, around the age of 21-22, she came out to her same queer friend and her mother at different times and face-to-face. After her mother, she came out to her brother face-to-face as well.

3.3.2.16. Mercan

Mercan is 25 years old and grew up in a big city. Mercan identifies their gender as nonbinary and their sexual orientation as lesbian. Academically, they completed their bachelor's degree in dentistry and are currently unemployed. As for their family background, they are only child, and they have an intact family. Their mother has a bachelor's degree and works as a teacher. Their father completed a bachelor's degree and works as a financial advisor. Regarding religious beliefs, their family is non-religious Muslim, while they are in between Deism and Agnosticism. Politically, they align their family and themself as leftists.

Mercan self-identified themselves as asexual during their high school years. After that, around the age of 20-21, they identified themselves as bisexual and came out to their queer friends face-to-face. After that year, they accepted their sexual orientation identity as lesbian. Again, in the same year, they came out to their best friend, best friend's sister, and friends simultaneously face-to-face. When they were 25, their mother found their therapy journal and read it. This is the time their mother found out about their sexual orientation. They did not want to come out to their father.

3.3.2.17. Leyla

Leyla is 25 years old and grew up in a big city. Leyla identifies her gender as female and her sexual orientation as lesbian. She completed her bachelor's degree in Turkish language and literature and is unemployed. As for her family background, she has one younger brother. Her mother has an associate's degree, and her father completed a bachelor's degree and works as a textile engineer. Economically, Leyla categorizes her family as middle class. Regarding religious beliefs, her family is conservative religious Muslim while she is atheist. Politically, she aligns her family as conservative, and she disagrees with her family.

Leyla self-identified herself as bisexual around the age of 15-16, and that year, she came out to her queer friend via a message. One year later, she accepted her sexual orientation identity as lesbian. She came out to a group of summer house friends face-to-face in a truth or dare-game. At 19, her parents found personal files on her computer and confronted her. Around the age of 23-24, she came out to her younger brother since her brother came out to her first via phone call.

3.3.2.18. Alara

Alara is 26 years old and grew up in a big city. Alara identifies her gender as female and her sexual orientation as lesbian. She identifies herself ethnically as Nusayri. She completed her bachelor's degree in pharmacy and is an assistant pharmacist. As for her family background, she has one older sister. Her mother and father completed primary school, and Alara categorizes her family as low-class economically. Regarding religious beliefs, her mother is a deist, and her father is religious. She is an atheist. Politically, she aligns her family and herself as Republican democrats.

Alara accepted her sexual orientation at the age of 18 and remained in the closet for two years. At age 20, she came out to her close friend after her friend asked what was going on with her. Within the same year, she came out to her sister via message while walking. One year later, she came out to her mother in an argument.

3.4. Data Collection Instrument

The primary data collection method was the semi-structured interview due to its advantages of allowing researchers to explore the subject and maintain a conversational framework simultaneously (Larkin et al., 2006; Smith & Osborn, 2003). Semi-structured interview questions were developed by reviewing the literature. After getting feedback from the thesis advisor, an updated version of the semi-structured interview was sent to two experts from the counseling field working with the LGB population for expert opinions. One of the experts suggested asking questions directly about the sociocultural dynamics of being a Turkish LGB individual. Therefore, questions such as “What made it difficult to accept your sexual orientation?” changed into “When you think about the characteristics of the environment in which you were born, grew up, and live (Turkish/Laz family, Muslim family, etc.), what were the things that made it difficult to accept your sexual orientation?” Changes were also made after the second expert's opinion. The other expert suggested adding the definition of gender identity and sexual orientation to the interview schedule and explaining them while asking about the participants’ gender identity and sexual orientation. The question "How do you define coming out?" moved to the top of the second part of the interview as an ice-breaker question. Some of the

questions were omitted due to involving binegativity[2] (e.g., "While your sexual orientation was gay/lesbian, did you come out as bisexual to people?"). New questions were added after the expert's suggestion. For instance, "What is your opinion/attitude towards being a L/G/B individual now?" is added after "What were your thoughts/attitudes towards being a L/G/B individual at first?" Before asking questions about coming out to family, "How would you describe your processes of coming out to your family members?" is added. Lastly, "the psychiatrist" was added to "Did you need the support of a psychologist/psychological counselor during your coming out process?" Some of the questions' wording is changed to make them softened. For example, "Do you plan to come out to your father/mother?" is changed to "What are your feelings and thoughts about coming out or not coming out to your father/mother?" Some of them were changed to make it clearer. For instance, the question "To what extent do you agree with your family's views?" was changed to "To what extent do you agree with your family's views? (Political/Religious views)." Based on the last revisions, the interview schedule was finalized (see Appendix A) with the guidance of the thesis advisor on June 2, 2022.

After the semi-structured interview questions were established, a pilot study was conducted with a female lesbian participant at the age of 21 on June 22, 2022. The participant was found via personal contact. She is a college student and is open to her friends and mother regarding sexual orientation. After the pilot interview, feedback about the questions was collected. For the question about the hard and easy parts of self-acceptance and coming out to someone, she stated the difference was unclear since the exact wording was used. Therefore, the researcher highlighted the differences between the questions by adding this sentence during the interviews: "The same questions will also be asked about your coming out experiences besides self-acceptance."

The interview questionnaire consists of two parts. In the first part, demographic information such as participants' age, gender and sexual identity, education level of participants and their parents, and occupation were asked. The second part consists of

[2] Binegativity is used instead of biphobia in this thesis as suggested by Herek (2004). "Phobia" refers to fear, disgust and repulsion, whereas "negativity" refers to people's negative and discriminatory attitudes, and biases toward LGB individuals.

questions about awareness of their sexual orientation, acceptance of their sexual orientation, meaning of coming out, the experience of first coming out to someone, coming out to parents/one of the parents, coming out to siblings and friends and whether receiving mental health support during the coming out process.

3.5. Data Collection Procedure

At the beginning of the study, an ethical application was made to the Ethics Committee of Middle East Technical University. Detailed information about the study was given, including the purpose of the study, interview questions, informed consent forms, and an announcement poster. The ethics committee approved the application on June 20, 2022 (Acceptance protocol no: 0348-ODTUİAEK-2022). The ethics committee's approval can be seen in Appendix B.

An announcement poster (see Appendix C) was posted on the researcher's Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter accounts to recruit the participants. The researcher contacted university LGBTQ+ clubs with the announcement poster via Instagram and Twitter's direct message. Moreover, the researcher posted the announcement poster on Facebook LGBTQ+ groups (such as Kuir Karikatürler [Queer Comics], Kuir Hayatlar [Queer Lives], Hacettepe Üniversitesi Toplumsal Cinsiyet Sorunlarını Araştırma Topluluğu [Hacettepe University Research Group on Gender Issues], LGBT Türkiye) and two state university (Boğaziçi University and Middle East Technical University) groups (approximately 20.000 and 30.000 members). The announcement poster was sent via e-mail to LGBTQ+ NGOs in Türkiye (SPoD, KAOS GL, Kırmızı Şemsiye [Red Umbrella], Lambda İstanbul LGBTİ Dayanışma Derneği [Lambda İstanbul LGBTI Solidarity Association]). Additionally, the researcher asked the participants to share the announcement poster with their friends.

The researchers and participants were contacted via e-mail to arrange the interview meetings. Eighteen interviews (six gay participants, six bisexual participants, and six lesbian participants) were conducted between 27.06.2022 and 25.07.2022. Data was collected through semi-structured and online interviews for 45-60 minutes. The online platform was selected as ZOOM due to the easiness of usage for both the researcher and participants. All participants were familiar with using ZOOM in their school or work life.

Only two participants were in public areas (cafeteria and cafe) during the interviews, and both experienced internet connection issues throughout the interview. This disrupted the flow of the conversation and made it difficult for the researcher to understand them. Therefore, questions from before the connection loss were asked again. Regarding their safety, they both stated that they felt safe even though they were in public. The other 16 participants joined the study from their homes; mostly, they were alone. They stated they were in a quiet environment where they felt safe before the interview schedule started.

All voice recordings of the interviews were taken using a phone only accessed by the researcher. The reason for not using the ZOOM platform for audio recordings is that it does not allow for audio-only recording. Participants who wanted to turn on their camera would compromise their sense of security because it recorded both the screen and the audio. During the interviews, the researcher was alone at home. This allowed for recordings to be taken without using headphones and using a device other than a ZOOM platform.

Before interviews, informed consent was sent to the participants, and written consent was taken. Additionally, verbal consent was also taken at the beginning of the interviews (see Appendix D). After completing the interviews, the researcher let all participants know they could reach out with any further questions or additions to their responses concerning the study by email. However, none of the participants reached out to the researcher after the interviews. Three participants requested a copy of the results to be sent to them when the study was completed.

3.6. Data Analysis

Before the data analysis, the researcher transcribed all the interviews verbatim, including laughter, pauses, and tearing ups. For transcriptions, the MAXQDA 2022 transcription section was utilized. It was used for playbacks, adding time duration, the researcher's name, and the participant’s nicknames. All interviews were transcribed after the interviews were done.

Smith et al.’s (2022) steps of IPA were used to analyze the interviews. The researcher read the transcriptions to get familiar with the data. Smith and Osborn (2003) suggested that the interviews should be read one by one. In other words, the

researcher moved on to the other interview after the first one was completely read and finished. While reading, MAXQDA 2022 was used to take notes for the possible codes, notes, and comments. Each interview was read multiple times to familiarize transcripts before starting the categorization of the codes. The next step was finding the recurrent codes and notes. At this stage, MAXQDA 2022 was used to extract the recurrent codes and similar codes among interviews. Connections between codes were found and clustered together, aiming to make sense of the data. Experiential statements were established via MAXQDA 2022, and each quote was read to check the connections among them and experiential statements. Some quotes were omitted at this stage, and some were moved to other, more suitable themes. Then, a table was extracted via MAXQDA 2022 to list the personal experiential themes (PETs), experiential subthemes, and quotes.

3.7. Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is the validation of the study, and there are several ways to present the study's trustworthiness (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Morrow, 2005).

To increase the credibility of the data, only those genuinely interested in participating in the study were included (Morrow, 2005). Participants who reached out to the researcher via announcements of the poster or hearing from their friends were selected. Before the interview, informed consent was taken both verbally and in writing, highlighting the right to withdraw from the study whenever they want (see Appendix D). The confidentiality and the method of data storage were explained, and the anonymity of the participants was promised to the participants.

Another way of increasing trustworthiness is the audit trail, which presents the details of how the data were collected, recorded, and analyzed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher documented a detailed audit in the methodology section, as suggested by Richards (2015), by showing every step of how she did the study and analysis to increase the credibility of the data.

Transferability is another essential step to ensure trustworthiness in qualitative research, which is about the possibility of transferring the results to another setting with different participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To enhance the transferability,

participants' selection criteria, information about the participants, and semi-structured interview questions were given, and the steps of the study were explained. As Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested, thick descriptions were utilized to enrich the transferability by giving direct quotes from the participants.

Peer reviews were completed with two peers to discuss the validity of the themes and codes. One is an academician in a private university. He completed his Ph.D. dissertation using qualitative research design and narrative inquiry. The second peer graduated from the Department of Psychological Counseling and Guidance and did their master's thesis on gender minorities at Middle East Technical University. They are currently doing a Ph.D. in counseling. They are interested in the individual and relational well-being of sexually and gender-diverse people, gender identity development, and building resilience among trans-identifying folks against minority stress.

3.8. The Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher is an instrument to collect and analyze the data. Therefore, explaining the researcher's role is essential to understand how the researcher affects the data collection procedure and how the researcher is affected by the research process (Probts & Berenson, 2014).

The topic is chosen for the researcher's professional and personal interest in gender and sexual identities. The researcher works with sexual and gender minority groups in her counseling practice. Even though the researcher participated in workshops and seminars to serve her clients better, she noticed that she lacked information on the process of sexual orientation identity formation in the Türkiye context. This lack of information increased the researcher's curiosity to discover the missing parts. Personally, she witnessed the challenges and difficulties of the coming out process in her friend's circle. One of the reasons for choosing this topic was seeing her friend having difficulty making sense of what he was going through and witnessing the internal conflicts he experienced due to internalized heterosexism. The process was painful for him due to several factors, and as a friend, she also had a hard time finding a proper way to approach her friend. Therefore, she chose this topic to be able to understand the coming out experiences more.

The researcher's professional client profile includes queer people, and she has lots of queer friends. She attempted numbers of trainings, seminars, and workshops about working with queer people and about how they are their lifestyle, struggle, processes, and experiences. She also did personal readings and research in the field of queer literature. Therefore, she positioned herself as a queer-ally, not a heteronormativist.

At the beginning of the interviews, the researcher thought that less conservative parents would be more open and accept their children's coming out. She was surprised during the interviews when she heard the participants' stories about how their conservative parents and friends were welcoming. Additionally, while listening to the experiences, the researcher started to think about how cultural and individual differences affect the process of self-acceptance of sexual orientation.

After each interview, the researcher kept a journal about how she felt during the interview, what she observed from the computer screen, and what she thought while hearing the participants' experiences. Whenever the researcher asked a question different from the interview schedule, she also added to her diary to dig into why she asked that question. For example, she wondered how participants felt when they found out that the person with whom they came out shared their sexual orientation with someone else without their consent. While asking this question, she expected the upcoming emotion to be anger, but she was surprised when she heard positive emotions like relief and happiness. She considered this a personal boundary violation; however, participants saw it as a way of validating themselves from that person.

Furthermore, some interviews were planned to be face-to-face by the choice of participants since the researcher and participants were in the same city. However, as the interview date approached, some participants canceled it and said they wanted to hold the interview online if it is possible. One of the most striking reasons was that they got anxious while the interview date approached, did not trust the researcher, and they had to consider the possibility of setting a trap for them. After the online interview started, one of them explained what happened before the interview and said, "I wish I could come to the meeting face to face. I got very anxious and could not take even the slightest risk because I had to consider my safety." During these moments, the researcher thought about the great impact on their lives of the widespread

heteronormative view in Türkiye and hate speech which is clearly reflected in all social media.

Some meetings were very emotionally intense for participants. Especially when participants talked about their experiences with their parents, some wanted to stop the interview and took a few minutes to calm down. Additionally, some smoked cigarettes and drank alcohol to calm themselves. While some had tears in their eyes, some cried. At that time, the researcher tried to maintain a humane approach due to the intensity of the stories and emotions shared. There were moments when the researcher's eyes were also filled with tears. In moments of such intense emotional states, the interview protocol was stopped to allow the participant to remain in that emotion and to create space for them to regulate their emotions. Considering all the interviews, these were the most difficult moments for the researcher. Showing compassion through a screen was challenging for her.

3.9. Limitations of the Study

Firstly, the announcement poster only reached out to people with social media accounts and subscribed to the channels posting the announcement. Therefore, people who did not have the Internet and social media accounts could not participate in the study.

Secondly, although the aim was not only to reach out to people from large cities and higher socioeconomic status (SES), most of the participants came from middle or middle-higher SES and graduated from at least college, except two participants, all of whom were raised in large cities. Therefore, this study could not involve the experiences of low SES LGB individuals, born and raised in small cities.

Finally, due to the nature of the research question, the study is retrospective. Participants may not remember the exact details of their experiences and intense emotions. This may result in underreporting or overreporting their experiences due to processing their feelings and memories over time.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This study aims to gain an in-depth exploration and understanding of the coming out process and experience of LGB young adults and adults in Türkiye. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six gay, six lesbian, and six bisexual individuals, and the data were audio-recorded.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was utilized to analyze the transcribed interviews. Based on the IPA, four personal experiential themes emerged: (1) Beginning of Sexual Orientation Identity Formation, (2) The process of Acceptance of Sexual Orientation, (3) Coming Out Journey, and (4) Mental Health Professionals. Each theme was presented individually in this section, and two or three sample quotes were provided. Figure 4.1. summarized all personal experiential themes and experiential subthemes with their dimensions.

4.1. Beginning of Sexual Orientation Identity Formation

The first personal experiential theme is about the beginning of sexual orientation identity formation, including clues and awareness. This theme captures the hints about the possibility of being different from their same-sex peers regarding sexual orientation during their childhood and adolescence and the awareness of sexual orientation. “Awareness” is used here as the first realization of their sexual orientation, although it is an ongoing process. This personal experiential theme involves the experiences of the pre-acceptance process of sexual orientation.

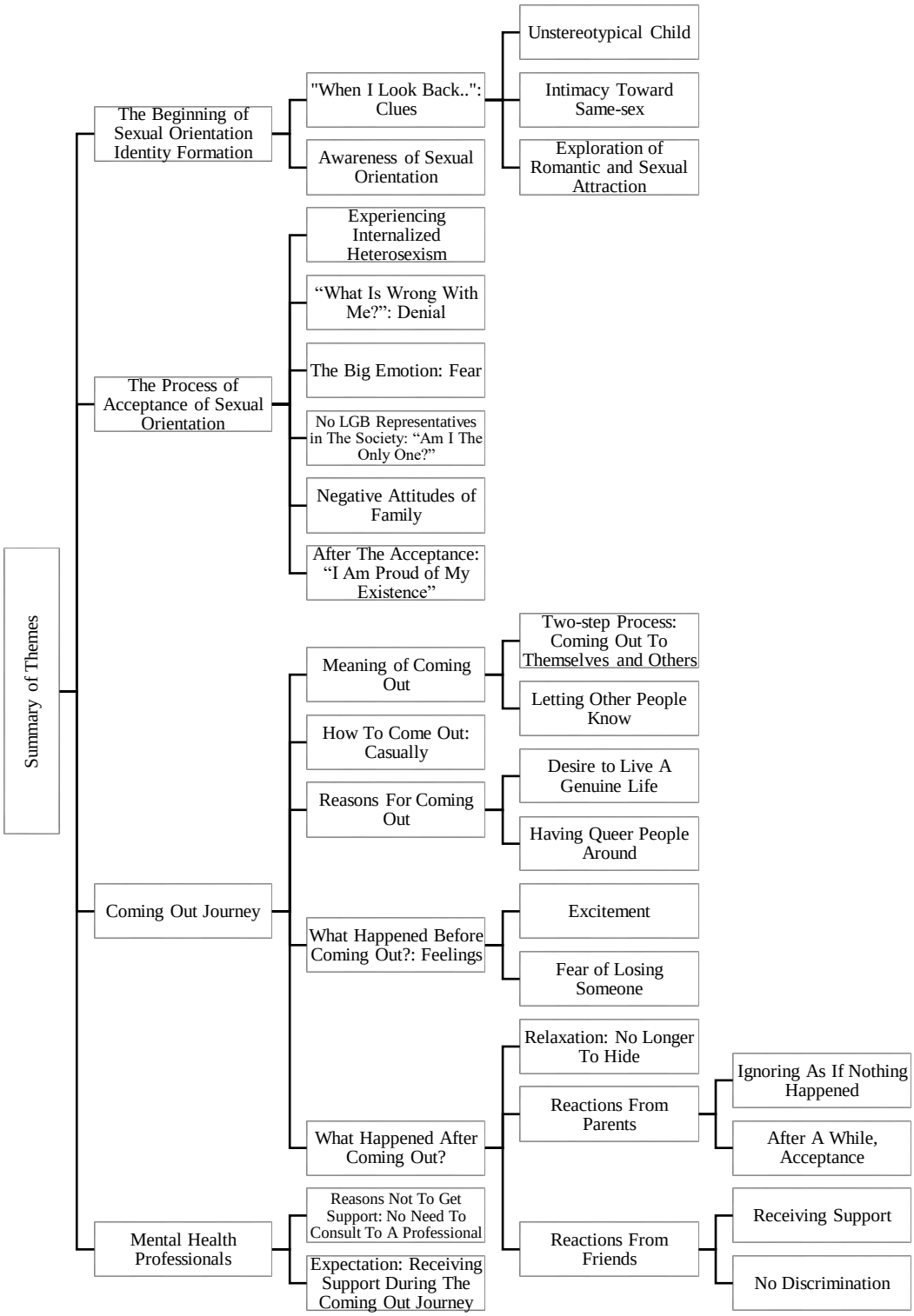
4.1.1."When I look back…": Clues

Three dimensions were mentioned by participants while talking about the clues that they captured when they looked at their childhood and adolescence years. These

were being an unstereotypical child, feeling intimacy toward same-sex peers, and exploration of romantic and sexual attraction.

Figure 4.1

Summary of Themes



4.1.1.1. Unstereotypical Child

Seven participants mentioned their childhood experiences related to gender roles and behaviors. They mainly mentioned their preferences and behaviors that did not conform to traditional gender expectations. For example, some mentioned playing with dolls over cars and experiencing exclusion from peers due to wanting to jump rope with the girls rather than playing with boys. Some mentioned being called names for playing with the opposite gender or for not adhering to stereotypically gendered behaviors. Others recall a mix of feelings towards traditional gender roles and relationships from a young age, including feelings of not belonging and feeling of being different.

The first extract from Burak (male and gay) is about wanting to play with girls in the neighborhood and experiencing name-calling because of it;

"Çocukken sokakta kızlarla ip atlıyorsam bunun için eve gönderildim. Bazı hareketlerim kibar konuşurken biraz ağzımı yayıyor olmam dolayısıyla kız kılıklı olarak adlandırıldım ötekileştirildim."

"When I was a child, if I jumped rope with girls on the street, I was sent home for that. I was called a girly girl and marginalized because of some of my movements and the way I spread my mouth a little when I spoke politely."

The second extract from Beyza (female and bisexual) is about being a different girl compared to her peers;

"Böyle bir kreşte falan otuz tane çocuk var on beş kız on beş erkek diyelim, kızların hiçbirisiyle hiçbir zaman hiçbir şey oynayamıyordum. Sürekli erkeklerin peşinde beni de oyuna alsınlar diye geziyordum. Ne bileyim yani böyle stereotipikal bir hetero kız çocuğu şeyinin biraz dışındaydım."

"In a daycare center, there were thirty children, let's say fifteen girls and fifteen boys, I could never play anything with any of the girls. I was always chasing after the boys to get them to let me play. I don't know, I was a little bit outside of such a stereotypical hetero girl."

The third extract from Kayra (transmasculine nonbinary and lesbian) is about not liking the experiences of being liked by a boy in the class;

*"O zaman kızlara olan ilgiden ziyade erkek çocuklarına olan ekstrem nefret ve mide bulantısıyla kendini göstermişti. Hatta annemin öğretmenimle hani konuştuklarını hatırlıyorum bu durumun çünkü ee ben bir erkek çocuğunun bana bir çiçek mi, bir ufak bir nesneyle, bir ilgi gösterisi yapması üzerine ee yumruklamam hadisesi gerçekleşmişti *gülüyor*"*

*"At that time, it showed itself with extreme hatred and nausea towards boys rather than interest in girls. I even remember my mother talking to my teacher about this situation because I punched a boy when he showed interest in me with a flower or a small object *laughs*"*

4.1.1.2. Intimacy Toward Same-Sex

Eleven participants shared their memories about the processes of sexual exploration and identity search they experienced during childhood and adolescence when considering same-sex peers. Most of them felt excitement, curiosity, jealousy, and admiration toward same-sex peers, but they could not label it and figure out where those feelings came from. For instance, some had minor physical contact with same-sex peers during primary school, and they felt admiration and excitement. Some wanted to be a friend with a specific student in their class and tried to learn new games to bond with them, yet they could not interpret these feelings as awareness of their sexual orientation.

Role-playing games, such as playing house and doctoring at an early age in understanding sexual curiosity and identity, are mentioned by participants. For example, some stated that they are uncomfortable with touches from the opposite sex but that they enjoy close encounters with same-sex peers. Some were unimaginably jealous of their best friend, yet they could not name those feelings regarding the source. Additionally, some stated they do not have any crush on or date with opposite-sex peers like their same-sex peers. These feelings felt from early childhood gained a clearer meaning with adolescence and led participants to define their own sexual identities.

The first extract from Alara (female and lesbian) is about always having a best friend;

"Erkeklere karşı mesela herkesin bir çocukluk aşkı olur işte anasınıfı aşkı olur ilkokul aşkı olur falan bende hiçbir şekilde bir erkek yok. Böyle bir serüven de yok ama daha çok mesela çok kendime hep çok yakın bir arkadaş seçip hep onunla zaman geçirmeyi hani evet bir sürü arkadaşım oluyordu ama hep bir kadın yani dişi arkadaşımla bir tık daha yakın ee daha ileri düzeyde daha çok sevdiğim bir arkadaşım oluyordu. Arkadaş diyordum o zaman böyle."

"For example, everyone has a childhood crush, a kindergarten crush, a primary school crush, etc. I have no crush on men at all. I don't have such an adventure, but more like, for example, I always chose a very close friend for myself and always spent time with her, yes, I had a lot of friends, but I always had a female

friend, a friend who was closer, a friend I liked more at a more advanced level. I called it a friend then."

The second extract from Hakan (male and gay) is about feeling admiration for same-sex peers during high school;

"Lisede şey oluyor mesela hani herkes daha böyle dating işlerine daha öyle buluşma hoşlanma işlerine girdiğinde, benim hiçbir kıza öyle aşırı ilgim- hiçbir kıza ilgim yoktu hani. Daha çok böyle hani beğendiğim erkekler vardı ama ben onun geylik olduğunu değil de hani, hani hayranlık, daha onun gibi olmak isteme tarzı bişey olarak düşünüyordum. O erkeği hani görmek hoşuma gidiyor, onla onunla vakit geçirmek falan."

"It happens in high school, for example, when everyone was more into dating, more into dating and liking, I didn't have such an extreme interest in any girl - I didn't have any interest in any girl. There were mostly guys I liked, but I didn't think it was gayness, you know, like admiration, wanting to be more like him. I like to see that guy, you know, to spend time with him."

The third extract from Defne (female and bisexual) is about exploring intimacy through playing pretended games;

*"4 yaşımda 5 yaşımda falan kız çocuklarıyla öpüşüyorduk biz merak ediyorduk deneyimliyorduk bunu yani oyun oynarken evcilik olsun falan. İşte annelerimiz görmesin diye çabalıyorlardı ben bilmiyorum hiçbir şey onlarla keşfedeceğim onlar planlamışlar akıllarına gelmiş *gülüyor* İşte annemlerin odadan gitmesini bekliyorlar. Hatta bir kere de yakalandık annem kızdı ama ciddi derecede kızmadı. O yüzden kötü bir anı olarak hatırlamıyorum onu. Keyif de alıyordum bu yaşadığım deneyimlerden keyif de alıyordum. Oğlan çocuklarıyla yaşadıklarımdan keyif almıyordum çünkü onu istemiyordum ama o zaman zorla oluyordu."*

*"When I was 4 years old, 5 years old or something, we were kissing with girls, we were curious, we were experiencing it, I mean, when we were playing games, playing pretended games or something. They were trying not to be seen by our mothers, I don't know anything, I will discover it with them, they planned it, it came to their minds *laughs* They are waiting for my mother to leave the room. We even got caught once and my mom got angry, but not seriously angry. So I don't remember it as a bad memory. I was also enjoying these experiences. I didn't enjoy the ones I had with boys because I didn't want them because it happened by force."*

4.1.1.3. Exploration of Romantic and Sexual Attraction

Seven participants mentioned their exploration of romantic and sexual attraction to same-sex peers. They generally stated that they explore their sexual orientation by encountering online materials during adolescence. For instance, few participants stated that they were impressed by the relationship of a queer couple in the television series and thus began to question their own sexual orientation. Another

participant explains that he enjoys looking at photos of athletes on the internet and that this interest has turned sexual in time. Additionally, others share that they realized they were gay through sexuality-related websites or porn content. Some stated that they dreamed of a same-sex peer rather than an opposite-sex after they got home from school.

The first extract from Deniz (nonbinary/female and lesbian) is about exploring kissing with a girlfriend;

"Bir kız arkadaşımla öpüşüyorduk ama öpüşmek dediğim dillerimizi birbirimize değdiriyorduk yani onun dili benim dilime değiyordu. Ondan sonra "aa dilimiz değdi" diyip çıkıyorduk ama hani bir şekilde hoşuma gidiyordu. Yani aklıma bir tek böyle şeyler geliyor hani ilkokul ortaokul öncesini düşündüğümde."

"A girlfriend and I were kissing, but what I call kissing was touching our tongues to each other, that is, her tongue was touching my tongue. Then we would say "Oh, our tongues touched" and leave, but somehow, I liked it. I mean, I can only think of such things when I think of before primary school and middle school."

The second extract from Ömer (male and gay) is about discovering sexuality by watching gay porn;

"Erken ergenliğe girmiştim işte dördüncü sınıf civarında. O zamanlarda böyle işte pornoyla ilk tanışma zamanımda ee şeye yöneldiğimi hatırlıyorum gey pornolarına yöneldiğimi hatırlıyorum."

"I entered puberty early, around the fourth grade. At that time, when I was first introduced to porn, I remember I headed towards, uh, I remember I headed towards gay porn."

The third extract from Fatih (male and bisexual) is about exploring masturbation with non-straight porn;

"7. ve 8. sınıfta dediğim gibi mastürbasyon ve pornoyla karşılaştığım zaman hızlı bir şekilde ne denir straight pornun dışına yöneldim. Mastürbasyon yaparken farklı şeyler denemeye başladım. Hani bunu net söyleyebilirm 7. ve 8. sınıf olarak."

"In 7th and 8th grade, when I encountered masturbation and porn, I quickly moved out of what is called straight porn. I started trying different things when I masturbated. You know, I can say that clearly from 7th and 8th grade."

4.1.2. Awareness of Sexual Orientation

Ten participants gave details about their moments of awareness when they

mentioned the awareness process of their sexual orientation identity. Some stated that they began to discover their sexual orientation through the characters they saw and admired in TV series and movies during adolescence in high school years, and others stated that this awareness began at an earlier age, in childhood. Many participants stated that their first emotional and sexual attraction was toward same-sex peers, and this awareness created feelings of shyness, surprise, or confusion in them. While participants talked about these experiences and what they felt during sexual practices such as masturbation, some talked about their tendency to hide those feelings after awareness.

The first extract from Defne (female and bisexual) is about awareness of liking a woman's body;

"Yani mastürbasyon yapmaya başladıktan sonra bu hoşlandığım kadınları düşündüğümü biliyorum. Lise yıllarıma denk geliyor ilk 10. sınıfta falandı sanırım işte yavaş yavaş artık bir kadının bedeninde neyi sevdiğimden fark etmeye başlamıştım. Erkeklerle asla interaksiyona girmek istemiyordum."

"I mean, I know that after I started masturbating, I started thinking about the women I liked. It was in high school, I think it was in the 10th grade or something like that, and slowly I started to realize what I liked in a woman's body. I never wanted to interact with men."

The second extract from Alara (female and lesbian) is about having an awareness of not liking men;

"Bunun farkındalığı ben lisedeyken bir an böyle dedim ya sen bir erkekten hoşlanmıyorsun sana çekici gelmiyor sen onunla birlikte olmak istemiyorsun. Ha şöyle oldu konuştuğum erkekler oldu ama hiçbir şey hissetmiyorsun."

"The realization of this is that when I was in high school, one moment I said like this, you don't like a man, he does not seem attractive to you, you don't want to be with him. Although there were men I talked to, but I didn't feel anything."

The third extract from Burak (male and gay) is about the undeniable desire for same-sex peers;

"Ortaokulda orta son ve lisenin ilk yıllarında bu benim için artık travmatik bir arzuya dönüşmüştü. Utanç duyuyordum yani kimi görünce heyecanlandığımı biliyordum ve bunun böyle olmaması gerektiği düşüncesindeydim. İşte hani kendi düşlerimde… kendime dokunurken öyle diyeyim o insanları arzuluyor olmaktan utanç duyuyordum bir süre hatta bunu yapmamayı denedim ama hani doruk noktasında diyeyim şimdi yaptığım eylemin o kendi kendime yaptığım bu şeyin doruk noktasında yine gözümün önünde bir hemcinsim geçiyordu. Bir süre hiç yapmamayı denedim.

Rüyalarda bu kez başıma gelen geliyordu ve bu tabii benim kabul etmem gereken bir şey olduğunu biraz idrak etmeye başlamıştım."

"In middle school, in the last years of middle school and the first years of high school, this had turned into a traumatic desire for me. I was ashamed, I mean, I knew who I was excited to see and I thought that it shouldn't be like this. You know, in my own dreams... I was ashamed of desiring those people, let's say while touching myself, and for a while, I even tried not to do it, but at the climax, let's say at the climax of the action I was doing, at the climax of this thing I was doing to myself, a same-sex person was passing in front of my eyes again. I tried not to do it at all for a while. This time it was happening to me in my dreams, and I started to realize a little bit that this was something I had to accept."

4.2. The Process of Acceptance of Sexual Orientation

This second personal experiential theme includes the experiences after the awareness process and is about the acceptance process of sexual orientation. This theme captured their experiences of internalized heterosexism during the acceptance process, denial, feelings of fear and loneliness, the impact of negative attitudes toward LGB individuals within the family, and the experiences after the acceptance of their sexual orientation.

4.2.1. Experiencing Internalized Heterosexism

One-third of participants expressed their guilt, shame, disgust, and hatred for themselves via internalized heterosexism during their acceptance process. Some mentioned that they force themselves to talk to girls, avoid feminine-like behaviors, and start exercising to develop a muscular body. Some stated that they felt uncomfortable watching gay relationships and guilty during and after sexual intercourse. Internalized heterosexism is also intertwined with religious beliefs: one participant, coming from a religious background and having same-sex attraction, felt self-hatred and disappointed.

The first extract from Leyla (female and lesbian) is about the conflict between having a religious background and being a queer person;

"Çok sünni koyu dindardım şeye kadar 15 16 yaşına kadar. Namaz kılıyordum. Yani öyle bir çocukluk geçirdikten sonra zaten insan doğal olarak kendine karşı queer bir insansan kendine karşı bir nefret güçlü bir kelime olacak ama onaylamama hali kendini hayal kırıklığına uğratma hali oluyor kesinlikle."

"I was Sunni and deeply religious until I was 15 or 16 years old. I was praying.

I mean, after having such a childhood, naturally, if you are a queer person, maybe self-hatred is a strong word to use, but there is definitely a state of disapproval and disappointment against yourself."

The second extract from Fatih (male and bisexual) is about feeling disgusted while watching same-sex intercourse;

"O zorluk hatta uzun bir süre devam etti şimdi söyleyeceğim zorluk… Birazcık kendimden iğrenme… Yakın zamanda aşmaya başladım belki de sonunda aştım diyebileceğim bir şey. Gey ilişkiyi izlemek görmek dediğim gibi iki tane dizide niye ben izlemeden geçtim onları atraksiyon varsa? Her an kendini sorgulamaya devam etmek sen gerçekten biseksüel misin yani hem erkeklerden romantik hoşlanmadığını düşünürken nasıl biseksüel diyebiliyorsun kendine? Bu sorgulama çok uzun süre devam etti."

"That difficulty even lasted for a long time, the difficulty I'm going to tell you now... A little bit of self-disgust... I recently started to overcome it, maybe it's something I can say I finally overcame. Watching and seeing gay intercourse, as I said, why did I pass by two TV series scenes without watching them? Continuing to question yourself at every moment, are you really bisexual, I mean, how can you call yourself bisexual when you think you don't like men romantically? This questioning continued for a very long time."

The third extract is from Kaan (male and gay) and is about forcing himself to talk to girls to get rid of the pressure of internalized heterosexism:

*"İçselleştirilmiş homofobiden kaynaklı ben öyle değilim galiba hani diyip kendini işte kızlarla da konuşmaya zorlamak… ki hayatımda böyle bir dönem de var karanlık çağım *gülüyor*"*

*"Forcing yourself to talk to girls because of internalized homophobia and saying I guess I'm not like that... which is also a period in my life, my dark age *laughs*"*

4.2.2. "What Is Wrong with Me?": Denial

Seven participants shared their experiences of denial of the truth about themselves regarding their sexual orientation identity. Many of them thought that what they experienced was wrong and needed to be changed. That is why few of them started to date with opposite-sex peers to deny their feelings. Additionally, some renamed their feelings to same-sex peers as best friendships rather than love or like as a way of denial.

The first extract from Can (male and gay) is about what he experienced is not right;

"Böyle ya evet bu yanlış ama sen yanlış bir yoldasın gibi bir şey vardı. 8-9 yaşımdan itibaren sanırım hep böyle bir bilinçaltımda şey vardı ya evet hani yanlış bir şeyin içerisindesin gibi."

"There was something like, yes, this is wrong, you are on the wrong path. From the age of 8-9, I think I always had this subconscious thing like yes, you're in something wrong."

The second extract from İlayda (female and lesbian) is about renaming feelings;

"Hani mesela herkes bir sanatçıyı çok sever ama ben aşık olma şeyindeydim ve hepsi kadındı. Yani bir erkeğe karşı çekim hissetmiyordum. Arkadaşlarım ileride evlilik hakkında konuşuyorlardı ama ben hiçbir erkekle evleneceğimi hayal etmedim. Hep bir kadına yönelik bir eğilimim vardı ama bunu tabii çok farklı boyutlandırıyorsunuz hani LGBTİ olarak değil de ya hayranlıktır ya da hani ilgimi çekiyordur. Hep böyle üstünü kapattım."

"For example, everyone loves an artist, but I was in love, and they were all women. My friends were talking about marriage in the future, but I never imagined that I would marry a man. I always had a tendency towards a woman, but of course, you define it very differently, you know, not as LGBTI, but it is either admiration or I am interested. I always covered it up like this."

The third extract from Pelin (female and bisexual) is also about renaming their relationship as best friends instead of lovers;

"Lise 1'deki çok yakın arkadaşım bana mesela aşk mektupları yazıyordu. Ben de ona aşk mektupları yazıyordum. Bu böyle bunun aşk mektubu olduğunu içten içe bir tarafım biliyordu hayır arkadaşlık böyle bir şey diyen bir tarafım da vardı."

"My very close friend in high school 1 was writing love letters to me. I used to write love letters to her too. There was a part of me that knew in my heart that it was a love letter, and there was a part of me that said no, that's what friendship is like."

4.2.3. The Big Emotion: Fear

Eight participants mentioned that the emotion of fear hardened the process of self-acceptance. This fear involves getting negative reactions from their families including physical harm and rejection, exclusion from society, knowing that life will be hard, and not knowing what comes next.

The first extract from Burak (male and gay) is about getting physically harmed. He has 11 siblings, including older brothers, and he is the last one born;

"Ben direkt öldürüleceğimi düşünüyordum yani özellikle babamın ya da

abilerimin kulağına giderse kesinlikle öldürülürüm. Eğer sosyal bir ortamda erkek grubu tarafından öğrenilirse dövülürüm. Yani direkt fiziksel şiddet de ilişkilendiriyordum. O yüzden zaten kadınlarla başladım açılmaya yani onların fiziksel şiddetini düşünmüyordum öyle bir tahayyülüm yoktu. Sözel ya da psikolojik şiddetle baş edebileceğimi düşünüyordum ama fiziksel şiddet beni çok korkutuyordu. Evet yani kesinlikle öldürülme ve dövülme korkusu."

"I thought that I would be killed directly, especially if my father or my brothers heard about it, I would definitely be killed. If it is found out by a group of men in a social environment, I will be beaten. That's why I started coming out to women, I wasn't thinking about their physical violence, I didn't have such an imagination. I thought I could cope with verbal or psychological violence, but physical violence scared me a lot. Yes, I mean definitely the fear of being killed and beaten."

The second extract from Deniz (nonbinary/female and lesbian) is about knowing that life will be hard;

*"Korku sanırım kabullenince gerçekleşmek yani yüzleşmek zorunda olduğum. Hani çünkü biraz da hani insanların çocukken fark etmesi mantıklı geliyor çünkü yüzleşmek ve cebelleşmek zorunda olduğun hiçbir şeyin aslında farkında değilsin ama hani 19 20 yaşıma gelmişim bunun eğitimini almışım lisede geylerin ne kadar zor hayatlar yaşadığını öğrenmişim her şeyi biliyorum ondan sonra bunu kabullenmek tabii böyle bile bile *gülüyor*"*

*"I guess the fear is that when I accept it, it becomes real, that I have to face it. You know, because it makes sense that people realize it when they are children because you are not aware of anything that you have to face and struggle with. But you know, I'm 19 or 20 years old, I've been educated about it, I've learned in high school how difficult the lives of gay people are, I know everything, and then to accept it, of course, knowing that *laughs*"*

The third extract from Fatih (male and bisexual) is about the expectation of receiving a rejection from his mother due to his father's behaviors;

"Babam anneme söylememem konusunda beni ikna etti ve bu kafamda hani anneme söylediğimde annemin beni reddeceği fikri. Babam bana bunu aşıladı annemin beni reddeceği fikri benim tüm süreçlerimi çok zorlaştırdı."

"My father convinced me not to tell my mother and this is an idea in my head that my mother would reject me if I told her. My father instilled in me the idea that my mother would reject me, which made all my processes very difficult."

4.2.4. No LGB Representatives in The Society: "Am I The Only One?"

Half of the participants stated that they felt lonely during the self-acceptance process, and loneliness made the process harder. The society that they live in is a

heteronormative dominant society. Therefore, all thought that having a role model or seeing queer people in society may facilitate acceptance of themselves.

The first extract from Can (male and gay) is about living in a heteronormative dominant society, witnessing stereotypical boy talks and behaviors and experiencing the feeling of differences;

"Toplumun hep heteroseksüel olması zaten birincil etmen. Bir de erkek çocuğusun kız çocuklarıyla anlaşıyor olsan da erkek çocuklarının işte daha erken seks konuşması sürekli bel altı muhabbet etmesi tabii ki de yaygın olan şeyler o dönem. Tabii ki bir porno izleme eğilimi arkadaş içinde konuşulması vs durumları başladı. Orada ilk böyle bir onlar gibi davranmaya çalışıyorsun ama onlar gibi olmadığını biliyorsun."

"The fact that society has always been heterosexual is the primary factor. Also, even if you are a boy and you get along with girls, boys talking about sex earlier and constantly talking below the belt are of course common things at that time. Of course, a tendency to watch porn, talking about it among friends, etc. started. You first try to act like them, but you know you are not like them."

The second extract from Alara (female and lesbian) is about seeing only heterosexual couples;

"Bilmediğim bir dünya hani etrafında evet heteronormatif ilişkileri çok görüyorsun ama homoseksüel ilişkileri görmüyorsun bilmiyorsun. Bu biraz korkutucu aslında hani nasıl bir dünya nasıl iletişim kuruyorlar nasıl ilerliyor ya da arkadaşları nasıl yaklaşıyor çünkü hiçbir arkadaşım yoktu açık olan bana."

"It's a world I don't know, you know, you see heteronormative relationships around you a lot, but you don't see homosexual relationships, or you don't know if there is any. It's a bit scary actually, you know, what kind of a world it is, how they communicate, how it progresses, or how their friends approach them because I didn't have any friends who came out to me."

The third extract from Görkem (nonbinary and bisexual) is about not seeing any examples from their life;

"Mesela gerçekten dışarıda başka bir lubunya ile tanışana kadar da çok böyle bir şeyin mümkün olabileceği noktasında da değildim. Şüphesiz şey her zaman zor sonuçta çevrem ve ailemde benden önce gelmiş bir LGBTİ+ açık bir LGBTİ+ barındırmadığı için bu norm dışı bir gelişimdi ve norm dışı olan her şey tabii ki zor oluyor."

"Well, I wasn't really at the point where such a thing was possible until I met another queer person outside. Of course, it is always difficult, because my environment and my family did not have an open LGBTI+ before me, so this was a development out of the norm, and everything that is out of the norm is of course difficult."

4.2.5. Negative Attitudes of Family

In the process of acceptance of their sexual orientation, many participants mentioned their families' negative attitudes toward LGB individuals. Fourteen participants stated that their family members perceived that being a queer person as wrong, disgusting, and something to be ashamed of it. Some stated that their families do not see LGB individuals as human beings. Some participants' family members were name-calling to queer individuals when they see on TV or outside. Their family did not see the possibility of experiencing queer romantic or sexual relationships since "something" is missing, especially considering sexual intercourse. Some parents were relieved when they heard their children have an opposite-sex date.

The first extract from Mercan (nonbinary and lesbian) is about their mother's hate speech about a lesbian individual;

"Annem "Ben bir lezbiyenle aynı sofrada yemek yemem istemem" demişti hani bu da açılma olayından da öncesinde olan bir olay aslında."

"My mother said, "I wouldn't want to eat at the same table with a lesbian," which was actually an incident that happened even before coming out."

The second extract from Burak (male and gay) is about his brothers' opinions;

"En basitinden iğrenilen bir şeydi ailede ama abilerim için kesinlikle dövülmesi gereken insanlar ya da öldürülmesi gereken insanlardı eşcinseller. Yani yaşam hakları pek önemsenmiyor."

"It was something that was seen as disgusting in the family, but for my brothers, homosexuals were definitely people who should be beaten or killed. So their right to life is not very cared about."

The third extract from Görkem (nonbinary and bisexual) is about their father's using heteronormative talking;

"Baba tarafında standart şeyi biliyorsunuz o eril şakalaşma hani insanlar birbirlerini aa topa benziyor vs muhabbetlerini. Yani hiçbir zaman birine yönlendirilmese de gerçekten gay bir insana çıkıp sen topsun demek gibi değil de herhangi bir insan farklı bir şey yaptığı zaman "aa top gibi aa ibne" vesaire falan filan süregeliyordu."

"You know the standard thing that masculine teasing, on the father's side, you know, people saying to each other, "Oh he looks like a ball[3]" and so on. So even though

[3] "Ball" is a Turkish slang used to insult a male person who behaves femininely.

it was never directed at someone, it wasn't like going up to a gay person and saying you're a ball, but when a person did something different, it was like "like a ball like a faggot" and so on."

4.2.6. After The Acceptance: "I Am Proud of My Existence"

After the self-acceptance process, eight participants mentioned their feelings, especially highlighting their pride. Many of them stated they are happy and excited about their new beginnings and experiences with their sexual orientation.

The first extract from Kaan (male and gay) is about being proud of who he is after the acceptance;

"Ben artık böyle bir varlığından onur duyma evresindeyim ki gerçekten varlığımdan tamamıyla onur duyuyorum ve hiçbir utanç duymuyorum varlığımdan. Yani bütün olumlu ve olumsuz özelliklerimi geyliğime bağlıyorum."

"I am now in such a phase of being proud of my existence that I am really completely proud of my existence, and I don't feel any shame. So, I attribute all my positive and negative qualities to my gayness."

The second extract from Deniz (nonbinary/female and lesbian) is about expressing the joy of being a lesbian. That time, she was doing a master's degree abroad and had two close lesbian friends whom she spent time with them;

*"Şu an oldukça mutluyum ee çoğu kadına çok üzülüyorum erkeklerle beraber olmak zorunda oldukları için yani bunun tercih olmamasına çok üzülüyorum gerçekten *gülüyor* yani yaşadığım yerde çok fazla yakın arkadaşım yok ama en yakın iki arkadaşım lezbiyen beraberler. Genellikle onlarla vakit geçiriyorum ve çok mutluyum. Sürekli saçma sapan şeyler yapıyoruz böyle kendi lezbiyen dünyamızda yaşıyor gibiyiz. Keşke daha fazla kişi olsaydık diyoruz sadece ve lezbiyen ülkesine mülteci olarak gidebiliriz isterseniz falan diye şakalar yapıyoruz. Hani şu an açıkçası kendimi şanslı hissediyorum baya *gülüyor*"*

*"I'm quite happy right now, I feel very sad for most women because they have to be with men, I mean I feel very sad that it's not a choice really *laughs* I mean I don't have many close friends where I live but my two closest friends are lesbians, and they are together. I usually spend time with them and I'm very happy. We're always doing silly things, it's like we live in our own lesbian world. We just wish there were more of us, and we joke that we can go to the lesbian country as refugees if we want to. Honestly, I feel very lucky right now *laughs*"*

4.3. Coming Out Journey

The third personal experiential theme is a follow-up theme after the acceptance of sexual orientation. This theme captures what coming out meant to participants, how

they preferred to come out, reasons for coming out, and lastly what happened before and after coming out to someone.

4.3.1. Meaning of Coming Out

This experiential subtheme involves the meaning of coming out for participants. It has two dimensions: a two-step process involving coming out to themselves and others and letting other people know their sexual orientation.

4.3.1.1. Two-Step Process: Coming Out to Themselves and Others

One-third of participants highlighted that coming out involves two steps: firstly, accepting themselves as who they are, and secondly, sharing their sexual orientation with someone. Even though they mentioned two steps of coming out, they see coming out as an ongoing and never-ending process.

The first extract from Can (male and gay) is about never-ending process and including two-steps;

"Hani bitmeyen bir şey açılmak denen şey işte 3-5 insana söyledim bitti değil ya da tüm dünya öğrense dahi biten bir şey değil. Kendine açılma kısmı var öncelikle başkalarına açılma kısmı var aile ve çevre ya da bunların sırası değişebiliyor. Bana göre çok farklı kombinasyonlar var."

"You know, the thing called coming out is not something that does not end, even if I told 3-5 people, or even if the whole world finds out, it is not over. First of all, there is the part of coming out to yourself, then there is the part of coming out to others, family, and the environment, or the order of these can change. For me, there are many different combinations."

The second extract from Ada (nonbinary/female and bisexual) is about dividing the process into two;

"İnsanın hani böyle kendiyle yani kendine söylediği hikaye belki kendine kendiyle ilgili anlattığı hikaye bir bu kısmı var. Bir de bunu yakın çevreye veya uzak çevreye veya dünyaya yani bir şekilde şey olarak iletmek kabul ederek iletme kısmı var. İkisi farklı şeyler benim gözümde. Yani bence hani birbiriyle ilişik olsa da, hani bazen insanlar sonuçta kendilerini kabul edip bazı korkular, bazı toplumsal baskılar sebebiyle kabul ettirme kısmından uzak duruyorlar. Onun için böyle iki aşamalı bir şey olarak algılıyorum herhalde açılmayı."

"There is this part of the story that people tell themselves, the story that they tell themselves about themselves. And then there is the part of conveying it to the close environment or the distant environment or the world by somehow accepting it as

something. These are two different things in my eyes. I mean, I think that even though they are related to each other, sometimes people accept themselves and stay away from the acceptance part because of some fears, some social pressures. Therefore, I guess I perceive coming out as a two-stage thing."

The third extract from Alara (female and lesbian) is about starting with self-acceptance and continuing to come out with others;

"Bence böyle artık kendini kabul edip önce kendine bunu kabul ettirip daha sonra kendini dış dünyaya açmak bana açılmak olarak geliyor."

"I think this is what it means to me to accept yourself, to make yourself accept first and then open yourself to the outside world."

4.3.1.2. Letting Other People Know

For seven participants, coming out is a fact that is known by others. It does not involve a dramatic declaration of sexual orientation to the world or hiding from the world. It is the thing that they let their friends, family members, and other people in their lives know.

The first extract from Ömer (male and gay);

"Benim için açılma diğer insanların benim cinsel yönelimim, cinsiyet kimliğimle ilgili bilgiyi edinmesi. Aslında benim dışındaki insanların bunu bilmesi."

"For me, coming out is when other people learn about my sexual orientation, my gender identity. Actually, people other than me know about it."

The second extract from Deniz (nonbinary/female and lesbian);

"Cinsel yönelimimi belirtmek açık açık söylemek ee belirtmek daha doğrusu söylemekten daha çok sanırım yok hani reddedilemeyecek bir şekilde barizce belirtmek."

"To state my sexual orientation, to say it openly, to state it more precisely than to say it, I guess, to state it explicitly in a way that cannot be rejected."

The third extract from Beyza (female and bisexual);

*"Cinsel yöneliminin ya da cinsiyet kimliğinin beklenen ailenin tarafından ya da işte arkadaşların tarafından beklenenin dışında olması durumunda aile ya da arkadaşları bunu haber vermek gibi diyebiliriz *gülüyor* Onlarla bu konuşmayı yapıp onları bilgilendirmek."*

*"If your sexual orientation or gender identity is different from what is expected by your family or friends, we can say like informing your family or friends *laughs* Having this conversation with them and informing them."*

4.3.2. How to Come Out: Casually

Six participants mentioned that they preferred to come out casually. Causally coming out means coming out to someone without making a plan and talking about it within the conversation (Wandrey et al., 2015). As the meaning implies, participants preferred to come out without making a detailed plan and came out in the flow of the conversation.

The first extract from Burak (male and gay) is about the decision to come out to someone but not making any plans;

"Hep yüz yüze açıldım evet hepsi de. Şöyle oluyor genelde bir gün diyorum ki ben bu kişiye açılacağım. Diyorum ki işte 2 gün sonra şu şekilde hiç plan yapmıyorum sadece diyorum ki sohbet konusu oraya geldiğinde ben artık gizlemeyeceğim. Yani eğer cümlenin çevresinden dolanıyorsa atıyorum eski yaşadığım bir aşkla ilgili işte sevdiğim kişi diyeceğime mesela erkek arkadaşım diyeceğim."

"I have always come out face to face, yes all of them. I usually say one day I'm going to come out to this person. Saying that 2 days later, I don't make any plans, I just say that when the topic of conversation gets there, I will no longer hide it. I mean, if it goes around the sentence, I will say, for example, my boyfriend, instead of saying the person I love, about a love I had in the past."

The second extract from Beyza (female and lesbian) is about weighing the environment and people before deciding the coming out, and then coming out within a conversation;

"Açıkçası önce bir de ortamı tartmak gerekiyor yani bu insanlarla problem çıkar mı yani eğitim düzeyleri, kafa açıklıkları nasıl anlayış düzeyleri, nasıl falan. Ondan sonra mesela bir konu geçiyor yani çok random bir şekilde atıyorum birisi kötü yaşadığı bir date'i anlatıyor ben diyorum ki "ay benim de öyle bir date'im oldu E diye bir kızla" mesela diye böyle başlıyorum ve çoğu insan zaten "aaa sen biseksüel misin" yapmıyor yani orada anlıyorlar bir zahmet."

"Obviously, it is necessary to weigh the environment first, I mean, will there be problems with these people, their level of education, their level of understanding, how is their level of understanding, and so on. After that, for example, a topic comes up, I mean, in a very random way, someone talks about a bad date they had, I say "Oh, I had such a date with a girl named E" for example, I start like this and most people don't say "oh, are you bisexual" anyway, so they understand there."

The third extract from Deniz (nonbinary/female and lesbian) is about talking about coming out like a regular topic;

"Tanıştığım herkese de açılıyorum ama komşulara ne bileyim önceden tanıdığım insanlara tekrar açılmıyorum. Yeni tanıştığım insanlara açılıyorum ama

biraz açılma gibi değil de ben bugün regl oldum demek gibi. Olacağı zaman söylüyorum öyle olmayacaksa ee buna gerek duymuyorum sanırım."

"I come out to everyone I meet, but I don't come out to the neighbors or people I already know. I come out to people I just met, but it's not like coming out, it's like saying I got my period today. I tell when it's going to happen, if it's not going to happen, I guess I don't see the need to come out."

4.3.3.Reasons for Coming Out

This experiential subtheme captures the reasons for coming out to someone. This theme has two dimensions: participants' desire to live a genuine life and seeing queer people around themselves.

4.3.3.1. Desire to Live a Genuine Life

Fourteen participants stated that they do not hide their sexual orientation anymore from their parents, siblings, and friends. The desire to not lie about their life and tell the truth during the conversation, for instance, saying the word "boyfriend" rather than covering up with "girlfriend", is one of the facilitators to living an authentic life. The need for intimacy with their parents, siblings, and friends, and sharing real experiences; in other words, talking about their problems, issues, or dates without the need to censor the part related to their sexual orientation, led them to come out to their significant others. They did not want to feel the burden of living a lie, discomfort, anxiety, or alienation from themselves and their loved ones.

The first extract from Alara (female and lesbian) is about the desire to live an authentic life;

"Ben dedim ki bir yalan üzerine hayat kurmak istemiyorum artık. Yabancı gibi hissetmekten çok sıkıldım. Konuştuğum insanları erkek diye anlatmaktan çok sıkıldım çünkü fikir almak istiyorsun bir şeyler anlatmak istiyorsun ve bir şekilde anlatmak istiyorsun. Ben de dedim ki umurumda değil artık evet üzülürüm çünkü ben hayatımda insan kaybetmekten hoşlanmam arkadaş kaybetmekten de hoşlanmam ama dedim ki yapabileceğim bir şey yok ben buyum ve onlara (arkadaşlarıma) da söyledim hepsine öyle bir karar verdim."

"I said I don't want to build a life on a lie anymore. I'm so tired of feeling like a stranger, I'm so tired of describing the people I talk to as men because you want to get ideas, you want to tell something, and you want to tell it somehow. So, I said I don't care anymore, yes I would be sad because I don't like losing people in my life, I don't like losing friends, but I said there is nothing I can do, this is who I am and I told them (my friends) and I told them all, I made such a decision."

The second extract from Kaan (male and gay) is about the burden of living in the closet;

"Herkes bilmeli ve ben rahat yaşamalıyım artık açık yaşamalıyım. Kapalı yaşamak gizli yaşamak çok kötü bir şey bence yani zorunlu olduğu durumlar haricinde ama bu tabii ki de şey değil deneyim atamak değildir. Yani atıyorum sen gizli yaşıyorsundur ya da A kişisi B kişisi gizli yaşıyordur kesinlikle bunu kötülemiyorum. Benim için çok kötü bir şeydi çünkü benim ruhuma baskı yapıyordu."

"Everyone should know and I should live comfortably, I should live openly now. I think it's a very bad thing to live closed, to live secretly, I mean, except when it's necessary, but of course, it's not like assigning experience. I mean, for example, you live in secret, or person A, person B lives in secret, I'm definitely not discrediting that. It was a very bad thing for me because it was pressuring my soul."

The third extract from Defne (female and bisexual) is about wanting to share good and beautiful experiences that she lived in her life with her mother and not wanting secrecy;

"Ben şeyin sıkıntısını çekmeye başladım hani annemden saklamak konusunda hiçbir sıkıntım yoktu benim hayatımı irdelemiyorlardı ama ben onlara anlatmak istiyordum. Ben annemle güzel anılarımı paylaşmayı seviyorum. Yaşadığım deneyimleri paylaşmayı seviyorum. Tamam dindarlar işte partilediğim alkol gecesini anlatmıyorum ama hani bir şeyler romantikleşmeye başladığında anlatmak istiyorum en kötü ve böyle bir parçam gizli kalsın da istememeye başladım bir noktadan sonra."

"I started to have trouble with this thing, I mean, I had no problem hiding it from my mother, they didn't dig into my life, but I wanted to tell them. I like to share good memories with my mother, I like to share the experiences I've had. Okay, they're religious, I don't tell them about the drinking night I partied, but you know, when things start to get romantic, I want to tell them at least, and I don't want to keep such a part of me hidden after a certain point."

4.3.3.2. Having Queer People Around

Half of the participants mentioned that having queer people in their surroundings makes the coming out process easier for them. They expected that they will be understood by those queer people since they are also part of this community and know the experiences that they go through. That is why, for instance, seeing a queer couple in the street, participating in school clubs, and having queer acquaintances and friends impact their coming out decision.

The first extract from Hakan (male and gay) is about living in a city where queer people can show their true selves without the need to hide and freely without getting bothered;

"Gaylerin açık açık gezmesi, trans bireylerin sokakta rahat rahat gezmesi. Sokakta yürüyorlar hani görüyorsun, kimse onları rahatsız etmiyor hani bu yüzden."

"Gays walking publicly, transgender people walking freely on the street. They walk on the street, you know, you see them, no one bothers them, that's why."

The second extract from Mercan (nonbinary and lesbian) is about coming out to a queer friend;

"Güvende hissetmek aslında hani çevremde bu şekilde güvende görebildiğim sırrımı yani sır olarak saklayabileceğine inandığım biri vardı çünkü o da aslında benim gibiydi. Yani dışlanan bir yanda, bu temel üzerinde dışlanan bir insandı ve gerçekten karakter olarak çok benziyorduk. Aynı mesleği yapıyoruz ikimizde aynı mesleğin öğrencisiyiz yani aynı yerlerde hani delege olarak çalışıyoruz. O yüzden benim için güvendeydi. Her konuyu zaten paylaşabiliyordum. Bu konuyu da paylaşınca da şeyi hissetmiştim sonunda hani hiç gizlemem gerekmeyeceği bir insan buldum falan diye bir rahatlama yaşamıştım."

"Feeling safe actually, you know, there was someone around me who I could see as safe in this way, who I believed could keep my secret as a secret because he was actually like me. I mean, he was a person who was excluded on this basis, and we were really very similar in character. We have the same profession, we are both students of the same profession, I mean, we work as delegates in the same places. That's why he was safe for me. I could already share everything, and when I shared this issue, I felt relieved that I had finally found a person with whom I didn't have to hide anything."

The third extract from Görkem (nonbinary and bisexual) is about living in an activist circle;

"Okuduğum üniversite, yaptığım Exchange programı, arkadaşlarım, çevremdeki bu kadar queer insan, yaptığım aktivizm aslında. Biraz da muhalif görüşün getirdiği buradaki muhalif işte illa şey bir muhalif değil işte siyasi muhalifliği değil ama norm dışı aktivizm. İşte aslında çevremdeki insanları hep bu alanda tuttum ve bütün bunlar bir araya geldiği zaman şeydi hani çok fazla kolaylaştıran etken vardı."

"The university I studied at, the Exchange program I did, my friends, so many queer people around me, the activism I do. It's not necessarily a dissident, not necessarily a political dissident, but non-norm activism. In fact, I always kept the people around me in this field and when all these things came together, you know, there were many facilitating factors."

4.3.4. What Happened Before Coming Out?: Feelings

This experiential subtheme captures the emotions that participants experience before coming out to someone, especially to their parents, siblings, or friends. Those feelings are excitement and fear of losing someone.

4.3.4.1. Excitement

Eight participants mentioned that they felt excitement before coming out to someone. This excitement includes the determination to come out no matter what happens after and the expectation of increasing intimacy between them and someone they came out with.

The first extract from Leyla (female and lesbian) is about coming out to her younger brother and knowing they are getting closer. Her younger brother came out to her first;

"Kardeşimle yaşadım çok komik bir şekilde aslında insanlara açılmaları tamamen bıraktıktan sonra çok böyle heyecanlandım böyle kalbim.. İlk tepkisi ilk tepkimiz ikimizin de çok heyecanlanmak olmuştu. Böyle ellerim terliyor. O ilişkimiz çok değişecek bundan sonra muhtemelen çok daha yakın olacağız muhtemelen de onun heyecanı birazcık."

"I lived with my brother in a very funny way, in fact, after I completely stopped coming out to people, I was so excited like this, my heart... His first reaction was… our first reaction was that we were both very excited. My hands are sweating. Our relationship will probably change a lot from now on. We will probably be much closer; this kind of excitement is a little bit."

The second extract from Kaan (male and gay) is about feeling the excitement of the determination to come out to his high school friends despite the possibility of being rejected;

"Heyecanlıydım korkmuyordum. Onlar (friends) beni reddetse bile umurumda bile değildi hani homofobi uygulasalar bile ilgilenmeyecektim bununla. Kendimi bu şekilde şartlamıştım çünkü değişmesi gereken kişiler onlardı ben değildim. Bunun farkındaydım o yüzden de çok heyecanla açıldım sağ olsunlar bir çoğu da benim bu heyecanıma ortak oldu."

"I was excited, I wasn't afraid, I didn't even care if they (friends) rejected me, even if they got homophobic, I wasn't going to care about it. I had conditioned myself in this way because they were the ones who needed to change, not me. I was aware of this, so I came out with a lot of excitement, and thanks to them, many of them shared my excitement."

The third extract from Defne (female and bisexual) is about the feeling of excitement due to anticipating that she will not receive a really bad reaction from her mother;

"Daha çok heyecanlıydım. Kaygıdan çok heyecanlıydım çünkü şimdiye kadar yaşadığım tepkilerden deneyimlerden annemin çok büyük tepki vermeyeceğini

biliyordum."

"I was more excited than anxious, more excited than anxious because I knew from the reactions and experiences I had had so far that my mother would not react badly very much."

4.3.4.2. Fear of Losing Someone

Half of the participants mentioned a strong feeling of fear before coming out to someone. This fear is linked to the possibility of losing those people after coming out to them.

The first extract from Burak (male and gay) is about increased fear of losing his friends at the beginning of coming out;

"Tabii biraz heyecan oluyor ve heyecanlı bir durum. Küçük bir endişem oluyor ama yani ilk zamanlar bu endişe biraz daha yüksekti. Onları (friends) kaybeder miyim korkusu vardı. Şimdi neredeyse zaten kaybediyorsam çok iyi oluyor zaten benim bu insanlarla görüşmemem gerekiyor şeklinde bir rahatlıkla konuşuyorum."

"Of course, there is some excitement, and it is an exciting situation. I have a little bit of anxiety, but I mean, in the beginning, this anxiety was a little bit higher. I was afraid that I would lose them (friends). Now I almost speak with the comfort that if I am already losing them, it is very good, I should not see these people anyway."

The second extract from Fatih (male and bisexual) is about the fear of losing a best friend including the possibility of being misjudged by him;

"Yani V ile olan ilişkimin zedeleneceğinden çünkü daha doğrusu... E diye asıl benim en yakın arkadaşım yani arkadaşları sıralamak kötü bir şey ama E gerçekten benim en yakın arkadaşım V ikinci duygusal konuları konuştuğum insandı birazcık da E'ye açılırken ekstra korkmuştum. Çünkü hani o bir de erkek yanlış anlarsa şey yaparsa ne denir terslerse böyle duygusal konuları da konuşmadığım biri yani. Genel olarak iki en samimi olduğum arkadaşıma da açılırken de bir reddedilme bir her şey eskisi olmayacak... Hani reddedilmekten öte... Reddedeceklerini düşünmüyordum. Yaklaşık görüşlerini biliyordum arkadaşımın ama hep artık bir bir şey değişecek korkusu eskisi gibi olmayacak korkusu yavaş yavaş aramız bozulacak korkusu bu vardı."

"I mean, I was afraid that my relationship with V would be damaged because… E is actually my closest friend, so it's a bad thing to list friends, but E is really my closest friend, V was the second person I talked about emotional issues with, and I was a little bit extra scared when I came out to E. Because, you know, if he misunderstands since he is a man, if he does something, what is called, if he snaps since he is someone I don't talk about such emotional issues. In general, while coming out to my two most close friends, rejection and everything will never be the same ... You know, more than rejection... I didn't think they would reject me. I knew my friend's opinions, but there

was always the fear that something would change, the fear that it wouldn't be the same as before, the fear that our relationships would slowly deteriorate."

The third extract from Alara (female and lesbian) is about the expectation of receiving negative reactions from her friends because her mother reacted to her badly after coming out;

"Bilmiyorum korktum ama bir yandan da daha rahat olacağımı hissettim yani söylemeden önce korktum. Dediğim gibi insan kaybetmekten hoşlanmıyorum. Bir anda yani ikilem arasında kalıyorsun ya evet tanıdığın insanlar yıllarını geçirdiğin insanlar aslında açık görüşlü olduğunu düşündüğün insanlar bir yandan da diyorsun ki annen bu (negatif) tepkiyi verdi onlar neden vermesin."

"I don't know, I was scared, but at the same time I felt that I would be more comfortable, so I was scared before I said it. As I said, I don't like losing people. Suddenly, you are caught in a dilemma, yes, you know those people, the people you have spent years with, the people you think are open-minded, and on the other hand, you say that your mother had that (negative) reaction, why shouldn't they?"

4.3.5. What Happened After Coming Out?

This experiential subtheme captures the feeling of relaxation after coming out to someone and the reactions they received from their parents and friends. The reactions of parents are immediately ignoring the coming out and, in time, accepting their children as who they are. The reactions of friends are showing support and having a non-discriminatory attitude toward themselves regarding their sexual orientation identity.

4.3.5.1. Relaxation: No Longer to Hide

One-third of the participants mentioned that they felt sort of a relaxation since they did not need to hide in the closet anymore. For example, they were more relaxed to share what is going on in their life. Additionally, this relaxation also involves the feeling of safety: they feel safe enough to behave as their true selves and share their experiences with others.

The first extract from Alara (female and lesbian) is about the feeling of relaxation that brings freedom in her life to share whatever she wants to share with others;

"Biraz rahatlamış hissettim hani birine söylemek rahat hissettirdi beni çünkü kimse bilmiyor sadece sen biliyorsun. Etrafındaki insanlara yalan söylüyorsun ya

biriyle konuşsan anlatamayacaksın. O zaman rahat hissettim dedim ki "aa evet ben artık biriyle konuştuğumda bunu paylaşabilirim" ya da ne hissettiğimi belki anlatabilirim."

"I felt a little bit relieved; you know, it made me feel comfortable to tell someone because no one knows, only you know. You are lying to the people around you; you will not be able to tell if you talk to someone. Then I felt comfortable, and I said "Oh yes, I can share this when I talk to someone now" or maybe I can tell what I feel."

The second extract from Beyza (female and bisexual) is about no longer hiding their thoughts and experiences when she is around her friends;

"Yani yanlarında yoldan geçen insanları keserken ya da mesela çok güzel bir kız yanından geçerken gözü takılır ya onu saklamaya çalışmayı bırakmak falan ya da atıyorum bir yerlerden bir kızla flörtleşiyorsam bunu o zamana kadar söylememişsem, artık böyle ya "Bu arada date'im var" falan böyle söylemeye başladım. Yani biraz daha açık olmaya başladım."

"I mean, when they are looking at people passing by, or for example, when a very beautiful girl passes by, stopping to try hiding it, or if I'm flirting with a girl from somewhere, if I haven't said it until then, I started to say, "By the way, I have a date" or something like that. So, I started to be a little more transparent."

4.3.5.2.Reactions From Parents

Participants mentioned two reactions after they came out to their parents. The first one is the immediate reaction of ignoring. The second one is when the time passes, they accept their children as who they are.

4.3.5.2.1. Ignoring as If Nothing Happened

Half of the participants mentioned that their parents (mother, father, or both) ignored the fact of the coming-out incident and acted as if that had not happened.

The first extract from Kaan (male and gay);

"Konuşulmadı yani sanki ben heteroymuşum gibi devam edildi olaya ve böyle de iki sene idare ettik biz bu durumu."

"It was not talked about; it was continued as if I was hetero and we managed this situation for two years."

The second extract from Kayra (transmasculine nonbinary and lesbian) is about their moher's reaction;

"Annem sanki böyle bir detay hayatımızda yokmuş gibi davranıyor. Görmezden geliyor bu durumu ama aramız iyi yani sadece yok sayıyor."

"My mother acts as if such a detail does not exist in our lives. She ignores it, but we are on good terms, so she just ignores it."

The third extract from Görkem (nonbinary and bisexual) is about when they came out to their parents, their parents did not even react;

"Keşke olsaydı (tepki). Hiç olmadı bahsettiğim kimlik silme bu aslında hiçbir şekilde bir değişiklik olmadı. Acknowledge [tanımak] etme ve bunu kabul etme bunun farkına varma gibi de değil yani daha çok biraz şey gibi bir yerde kaldığını hissediyorum benim sosyal aktivizm içerisinde yaptığım bir adımdı ve gerçek değildi ve kurguydu gibi bi yerde kaldı gibi olduğunu düşünüyorum. Yani tercih ederdim açıkçası kızmalarını. Kızdıkları zaman çözüme ilerleyebilirdik şu an çözüme ilerleyebilecek bir zeminimiz yok."

"I wish it had happened (reaction). It never happened, this erasure of identity that I'm talking about, actually there was no change in any way. This is not acknowledging, accepting, or realizing, I mean, I feel that it is seen more like a step I took in social activism and it was not real, and it was fictional. I mean, I would have preferred them to get angry. When they got angry, we could move towards a solution, we don't have a ground to move towards a solution right now."

4.3.5.2.2. After a While, Acceptance

Seven participants mentioned that their parents (mother, father, or both) accepted their sexual orientation after time passed. Some said that putting a physical distance and living in a different place made the process easier, for example, going to college, staying in a dorm and going to a summer house. Additionally, some stated that their parents needed time to process and evaluate the "situation" of coming out before the acceptance.

The first extract from Can (male and gay) is about his mother's feelings of guilt after the coming out;

*"Annem de kendisi diyor yani "Baban daha çabuk kabul etti her şeyi. Benim kabul etmem daha zor oldu çünkü ben kendimi suçladım. Suçladım diyorum seni ben doğurduğum için sanki babanın hiç payı yokmuş gibi yani" *gülüyor* Böyle şeyden tutun işte hamileyken aldığı vitamin ilaçları mı beni gey yaptıdan tutun da işte her türlü o durumu hissetmiş. Tek çocuk olmam bu arada. O da ayrı bir dram oldu hepimiz için herhalde. Annemle kabul sürecimiz çok zor geçti."*

*"My mom herself says, "Your father accepted everything more quickly. It was harder for me to accept it because I blamed myself. I say I blamed myself for giving birth to you as if your father had no share in it." *laughs* She felt all kinds of things, from things like whether the vitamin pills she took, while she was pregnant, made me gay. By the way, I am an only child. I guess that was another drama for all of us. The acceptance process with my mother was very difficult."*

The second extract from Fatih (male and bisexual) is about after the physical distance period, his mother asked an inclusive question to him involving the possibility of romantic or casual relationship with a guy when spending the night out;

"Anneme açıldıktan sonra annem o 1-2 saat sonra evden çıktı gitti çünkü yazlıktalardı. Bana yemek haftada 1 yemek bırakmaya eve destek olmaya falan geliyorlardı ve sonra ben 1 ay 1.5 ay daha boyunca yaz bitene kadar haftada 1 gördüm annemi bazen 2 haftada 1 gördüm. Döndüğünde de hiçbir şey olmamış gibiydi. O yüzden hani birazcık da o konuda şanslıydım veya şansızdım bilmiyorum ama yüz yüze söylememe rağmen uzak olduğum bir ortamda olduğum için belki de onu sindirmeye… Hani bilmiyorum onun tarafında ne oldu ama 1 ay bir sindirme süresi oldu ve döndüğünde işte döndükten kısa bir süre sonra "birlikte gittiğin kişi kadın mı erkek mi olayı" oldu."

"After I came out to my mom, my mom left the house after 1-2 hours because they were at the summer house then. They were coming to support me by dropping me food once a week and then I saw my mom once a week for 1 month and 1.5 months until the end of the summer, sometimes I saw her once every 2 weeks. When she came back, it was like nothing had happened. So, I don't know if I was lucky or unlucky in that regard, but although I told her face to face because I was in an environment where I was far away, maybe she was trying to digest... You know, I don't know what happened on her side, but there was a digestion period of 1 month, and when she returned, shortly after she returned, there was that question "whether the person you went with was a man or a woman."

4.3.5.3. Reactions From Friends

Two dimensions were mentioned by participants about the reactions they received when they came out to their friends. Dimensions were (1) receiving support from their friends after coming out to them and (2) experiencing no discriminative attitudes from their friends.

4.3.5.3.1. Receiving Support

Seven participants stated they received support from their close friends after coming out to them. Some friends noticed changes in the participants, directly asked them what was happening, and encouraged them to share their experiences or issues. Moreover, some of the participants' friends, in particular, normalized the situation by making jokes about it, thus making the issue lighter and easier to accept. Additionally, some friends set up meeting with their other queer friends to show their support. Thus, communing with other queer people and talking about their experiences made their process easier.

The first extract is from Deniz (nonbinary/female and lesbian) and it is about receiving support and guidance from their friend to meet a person from the queer community;

"Buluşma ayarladı o gey arkadaşıyla (arkadaşı). Gey arkadaşı, o ve ben buluştuk. Ondan sonra o nasıl açıldığından bahsetti. Tinder açmamı önerdi denememi önerdi ancak bu şekilde arkadaş bulabilceğimi söyledi."

"My friend arranged a meeting with their gay friend. Their gay friend, them and I met. After that, they talked about how they came out. They suggested that I should open a Tinder account and try it. They said that's the only way I could find friends."

The second extract from Defne (female and bisexual) is about receiving support and having a conversation about the discovery of sexual orientation;

"Hepsi çok pozitif karşıladılar. Değişimleri tebrik oldu öyle söyleyeyim. Hani destekliediler beni. Kendileri mesela kendi cinsel yönelimlerine dair keşfettikleri şeyleri konuşmaya daha rahat oldular."

"They were all very positive. Their change was congratulations to me, let me put it that way. You know, they supported me. For example, they became more comfortable to talk about the things they discovered about their sexual orientation."

The third extract from Hakan (male and gay) is about talking freely with their friends;

"Hiçbiri sıkıntı etmedi yani hepsi daha böyle destekleyici oldu. Böyle her şeylerimi rahat konuşabiliyordum."

"None of them had any problems, so they were all more supportive. I could talk about everything comfortably."

4.3.5.3.2.No Discrimination

Half of the participants shared that after coming out, they did not receive any discriminative attitudes from their friends. Their friends' attitudes were understanding, and they immediately rolled with the fact of coming out and their sexual orientation identity. While some friends stated they already knew and were not surprised, others did not make it a big deal. In general, participants stated that they could talk about their sexual orientation among friends without receiving a negative reaction or discrimination.

The first extract from Beyza (female and bisexual) is about receiving the same reaction she would get if she talked about a heterosexual relationship;

"İşte sekizinci sınıf.. Yine sekizinci sınıfın sonu P başka bir liseye, başka bir şehre lise okumaya gitti. Yazın ondan sonra biz de öyle buluşmuştuk. Sonra P gidince ben fark ettim bayağı aşık falan olduğumu. Sonra da işte çocukluk arkadaşıma dedim ki "Ya sana bir şey diyeceğim, ben Pye âşık oldum galiba" falan dedim. O da "Nasıl ya falan" dedi böyle normal tatlı bir şekilde konuştuk. "Ee söyledin mi bak P haftaya Mersin'e geliyor, sen de söylersin tamam mı görüşelim" falan böyle şeyler yaptı. Gayet herhangi bir erkekten hoşlandığımı söylesem yapacağı tarzda bir tepki."

"The eighth grade… Again, at the end of the eighth grade, P went to another high school and went to another the city for high school. That's why we see each other in summer. Then, when P left, I realized I was quite in love or something. Then I said to my childhood friend, "I will tell you something, I think I am in love with P." He said, "How is it?" and we talked in a normal, sweet way. "Well, did you tell? P is coming to Mersin next week. You can tell her, okay? Let's meet" and so on. It's the kind of reaction I would have if I told him I liked a guy."

The second extract from Alara (female and lesbian) is about receiving no discriminative attitudes and facing no negative reactions from their friends after she called them one by one via phone;

"Ben eşcinselim dedim bir tanesi dedi ki "ee napıyım bana ne. Bu beni neden ilgilendirsin ki" dedi. Bir tanesi dedi ki "tamam ben bunun farkındaydım zaten neden şu an açıklama gereği hissettin ki bunu" dedi. Bir tanesi dedi ki "Korktun mu tepki mi vereceğimizi zannettin" dedi. Geneli aslında farkındaymış hiçbiri de kötü tepki vermedi."

"I said I'm gay and one of them said, "Well, what do I care? Why should that concern me?" One of them said, "OK, I was already aware of that, why did you feel the need to come out now?" One of them said, "Are you scared, or did you think we would react?" Most of them were actually aware and none of them reacted badly."

The third extract from Ömer (male and gay) is about receiving no discriminative attitudes from a religious friend when he came out with three high school friends;

"Üçü de gayet güzel karşıladı bunu. Çok tatlılardı o açıdan hatta bir tanesi aslında şeydi nasıl diyeyim oldukça dindar bir insan. Ama bir yandan da böyle kafası açık böyle yeni bir şeylere falan. Aramız da iyiydi böyle bir arkadaşlığımız da iyiydi bence. Ona da açılmıştım o da çok şey karşılamıştı yani normal gayet güzel karşılamıştı öyle yani."

"All three of them took it very well. They were very sweet in that respect, and one of them was actually, how should I say, a very religious person. But on the other hand, his mind was open to something new. I think we had a good friendship, too. I came out to him too, and he was very welcoming, I mean, he reacted normally and very well, that's how it was."

4.4. Mental Health Professionals

The fourth and last personal experiential theme is about mental health professionals. This theme demonstrates the reasons why LGB individuals did not consult to a professional during their acceptance coming out process which is they do not see as a need and reveals the expectations from mental health professionals which is receiving support, for instance, about understanding and working on their emotions that they felt during their self-acceptance and coming out process.

4.4.1. Reasons Not to Get Support from Professionals: No Need to Consult to a Professional

Seven participants stated they did not need to consult to a professional considering their experiences and emotions. For some, youth does not need mental health care. For others, what is experienced during this process is much less severe than the difficulties they encountered earlier in life. Moreover, one participant emphasized that she does not see her sexual identity as a problem and that receiving support may actually be more necessary for other individuals due to a lack of social acceptance and understanding. Lastly, since the process of self-acceptance and coming out to someone went smoothly for some participants, they received support from their friends and family instead of consulting to a mental health professional.

The first extract from Burak (male and gay) is about receiving support from friends and family;

"*Hiç olmadı. O seviyede ihtiyaç duymadım. Öyle bir yalnızlık duygusu ya da işte ihtiyaç duygusu hiç gelmedi. O açıdan ilk açıldığım kişinin ablam olması ve lezbiyen olması işte arkadaşlarımın o kadar korkunç tepki vermemeleri ve tabii bir de benim açılacağım kişileri biraz daha doğru seçmeye meyil etmiş olmam bende büyük bir zorluk yaratmadı açılma sürecinde."*

"It never happened. I never felt that level of need. I never had that feeling of loneliness or that sense of need. In that respect, the fact that the first person I came out to was my sister and that she was a lesbian, the fact that my friends did not react so horribly, and of course, the fact that I tended to choose the people I came out to a little more accurately did not cause me a great difficulty in the coming out process."

The second extract from İlayda (female and lesbian) is about the one who does not accept queer community needs mental health support;

"Yani bunu ben hiçbir zaman bir rahatsızlık olarak ya da hani şey olarak görmedim. Bende de bir herhangi bir kötü etki yaratmadı açıkçası. Ben buydum, yaşıyordum. Sadece karşıdaki insanlarla alakalı bu, benimle ilgili değil. Yani psikolojik destek alması gereken bence onlar. O yüzden herhangi bir tedavi ya da destek görmek istemedim çünkü ihtiyacım yoktu."

"I mean, I never saw it as a disorder or anything like that. It didn't have any bad effect on me either, to be honest. I was like this; I was living it. It's only about the other people, it's not about me. So, I think they are the ones who need psychological support. That's why I didn't want any treatment or support because I didn't need it."

The third extract from Görkem (nonbinary and bisexual) is about choosing to be a fighter during their experiences. Görkem stated that choosing to be a fighter was their own choice in their life. They preferred to solve their problems on their own before getting help. They specifically said that doing this was similar to making something with their own hands.

"Belki ihtiyacım olmuştur belki hâlâ o dönemden kalan bir şeyler taşıyorumdur üstümde ama kendi deneyimimde hayır ve kendi deneyimimde… benim kendi çıkardığım öz envanterimi çıkardığım zaman hissettiğim şeyler bana gösteriyor ki psikolojik destek almadım almaya ihtiyacım olmadı. Alsaydım bazı şeyleri kolaylaştırabilir miydi bazı şeyleri fasilite edebilir miydi? Bazı şeyleri edebilirdi. Bu da dediğim gibi bazı şeyler benim kendi mücadele isteğimden geldi."

"Maybe I needed it, maybe I still carry something from that period, but in my own experience, no, and in my own experience... the things I feel when I take my own self-inventory show me that I didn't get psychological support, I didn't need it. If I had, would it have made some things easier, would it have facilitated some things? It could have facilitated some things. This, as I said, came from my own will to fight."

4.4.2. Expectation: Receiving Support During the Coming Out Journey

Half of the participants expressed how internal and family conflicts affect their process of accepting their sexual orientation and coming out to someone. They mentioned receiving support from mental health professionals on their discovery of sexual orientation, self-acceptance of their sexual orientation, understanding their emotions and needs during the process, and managing the conflict within their family and their lives. They also stated how mental health professionals can aid and fasten the self-acceptance process.

The first extract from Fatih (male and bisexual) is about better understanding his emotions that he experienced and giving a name to those experiences he had during his journey;

"Bir sürü duygunun açılma konusu korku mutluluk acı hepsinin bir anda olduğu ve duyguların karıştığı bir an. Bir psikolog bunu anlayıp duyguları cımbızla duyguları tek tek ayırıp hepsini ayrı ayrı anlamama yardımcı oldu 5 sene sonra da olsa da oldu. O zaman olsaydı çok daha iyi olurdu."

"It's a moment when a lot of emotions, coming-out issue, fear, happiness, pain, all at once and emotions are mixed. A psychologist helped me understand this and separated the emotions one by one with tweezers and helped me understand them all separately, even if it was after 5 years. It would have been much better if it had happened then."

The second extract from Leyla (female and lesbian) is about going through the process smoothly;

"2-3 sene boyunca kesinlikle insanın kendini kabullenişinde böyle ee saçma sapan şeyler söylemeyecek biri psikolojik eğitim almış birisinden yardım almak kesinlikle çok iyi olurdu. Çok daha hızlandırırdı süreci muhtemelen ve çok daha ee çalkantısız geçirmeme yardımcı olurdu yani."

"For 2-3 years, it would definitely be very good to get help from someone with psychological training who would not say nonsense things in self-acceptance. It would probably speed up the process and help me go through it more smoothly."

The third extract from Burak (male and gay) is about getting help from a professional while coming out to someone;

"Açılacağım zaman bana destek olmasını bekleyebilirim yani. Diyelim ki açılmak istediğim kişiyle beraber gidiyoruz psikologa. Beraber açılıyoruz ki hani bak sadece ben değil bir uzman da bunu söylüyor gibi."

"I can expect him to support me when I come out to someone. Let's say we go to the psychologist together with the person I want to come out to. We come out together so that it's like, look, not only me but also an expert says this."

4.5. Summary of the Results

This study revealed the coming out process and experiences of LGB individuals born and raised in Türkiye. The process began with the realization of being different from their same-sex peers and led to the acceptance of one's sexual orientation. Initially, many misidentified their experiences; they sensed their difference but did not associate them with sexual orientation. They recognized a lack of conformity to stereotypical gender roles and experienced intimacy with same-sex peers. Mostly, realization was followed by a self-acceptance process. The self-acceptance process involved conflicts and dilemmas, often stemming from

internalized heterosexism, fear, and loneliness. However, the acceptance process led to pride and a sense of self-affirmation.

The meaning of coming out varied among individuals, but fundamentally, it revolved around self-acceptance and coming out to someone. This included coming out to oneself and then to others. Moreover, coming out also meant letting other people know about their sexual orientation. Motivations for coming out included the desire for an authentic life, free from the need to hide in the closet or lie to loved ones. Additionally, seeing queer individuals in their social circle was also motivating, offering examples to learn from their experience and support networks to rely on.

Before coming out, individuals often experienced a mix of excitement and fear, particularly about the potential loss of relationships. These feelings typically subsided after coming out, leading to a sense of relief. Parental reactions to coming out varied, initially often marked by denial but gradually moving towards acceptance over time. Friends generally offered support and showed no discriminatory attitudes, which helped in the adjustment to the world with their sexual identity.

Lastly, mental health was a critical aspect of the coming out process. Many chose not to seek a mental health practitioner, believing they could manage their process independently. However, those who sought professional help looked for support and a safe and understanding environment during their coming out process.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the results of the study were discussed in the context of existing literature. Theoretical and practical implications and suggestions for future studies were presented.

5.1. Discussion of the Findings

This study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the coming out process and experience. Eighteen LGB individuals, older than 18 years old, born and raised in Türkiye, and came out to at least one parent, were interviewed.

As previously expressed within the literature review, there is a gap in the current knowledge about LGB individuals' experiences of coming out, especially bisexual individuals' process of coming out in the Turkish context. Research on the coming out process and experiences of individuals in Türkiye tended to focus on lesbian and gay individuals (Kabacaoğlu, 2015; Mater, 2021). Additionally, mental health practitioners know little about what they went through and how they experienced the coming out process (Kurt & Ateş, 2008; Toplu-Demirtaş & Akçabozan-Kayabol, 2018).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 LGB individuals, and audio recordings were transcribed. Demographic information regarding the age at which individuals came out, the people to whom they disclosed their sexual orientation, and the manner in which they came out was reported. The data were analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis. As a result of this analysis, four personal experiential themes were found, which were named (1) the beginning of sexual orientation identity formation, (2) the process of acceptance of sexual orientation, (3) the coming out journey, and (4) mental health professionals. Demographic information and each personal experiential theme were discussed based

on the relevant literature.

5.1.1. Age of Coming Out, Coming Out to Whom, and Ways of Coming Out

Participants' age of self-acceptance ranged from 11 to 22, with an average of 16. This range and average age align with previous studies (Floyd & Stein, 2002; Grafsky, 2018; Haltom & Ratcliffs, 2020). Regarding coming out to someone, the age ranged from 12 to 23, with an average of 18. The range and the average age of participants coming out to someone are also in line with previous studies (Floyd & Stein, 2002; Haltom & Ratcliffs, 2020; Svab & Kuvar, 2014). This may be explained by Erikson's psychosocial stages and Sullivan's interpersonal theory (Feist & Feist, 2009). The phases of questioning sexual orientation and accepting one's sexual orientation typically coincide with the pre-adolescent and adolescent years (Feist & Feist, 2009). During these years, individuals often engage in sexual activities and explore intimacy, which brings the matter of sexual orientation to the forefront. However, the findings are inconsistent with Kabacaoğlu's (2015) study conducted in Türkiye, where the average age of self-acceptance is found to be 20-21. This can be explained by the passage of time and changes since 2015. As Cass (1979) and Troiden (1989) discussed, it is challenging to name and accept one's own experiences in terms of sexual orientation, especially when unaware of alternatives and exposed predominantly to examples of heteronormativity. Therefore, as mentioned by O'Riordan (2005) and Lovelock (2016), the increasing use of the internet and the ability to communicate with a diverse range of people globally may enable individuals to identify their experiences more quickly. Furthermore, the growing visibility of non-governmental organizations considering LGB individuals in Türkiye and an increase in projects and studies focusing on LGB individuals may also influence the ages at which individuals come out.

Most participants initially came out to their close friends, and among family members, they predominantly came out to their mothers. Both the findings are consistent with previous studies (Kabacaoğlu, 2015; Katz-Wise et al., 2016; Reed, 2020; Rossi, 2010). In terms of coming out to close friends, LGB individuals may anticipate a more positive reaction relying on trust and close bonds in their relationships, as discussed by Pistella (2019). Additionally, they might prefer coming

out to their friend first because it is easier to sever ties with a friend than a family member in case of a negative reaction. In terms of family members, the tendency to come out to their mothers can be explained by their close relationship with their mothers. In the Turkish family dynamic, mothers are seen as primary caregivers and nurturers, whereas fathers are seen as rule-makers and breadwinners (Ataca, 2009). As discussed by Carnelley et al. (2011), mothers are perceived as more nurturing and accepting compared to fathers. Related to this, mothers can be viewed as mediators between themselves and their fathers if they want to come out to their fathers.

The majority of the participants preferred to come out face-to-face, aligning with the other studies (Ben-Ari, 1995; Ross, 2010). A possible explanation is that face-to-face coming out allows for intimacy and direct contact with the person they choose to come out. As Matthews and Salazar (2012) discussed, coming out is a life-changing event encompassing several steps, such as self-awareness and self-acceptance. Therefore, a face-to-face approach may make the experience more memorable and meaningful for them. Additionally, this approach may enable the individual to observe their immediate reactions, which, if positive, may provide a sense of validation. Another explanation may be the opportunity to come out during a conversation when the topic naturally arises, potentially reducing the stress associated with coming out by making it feel more spontaneous and less forced.

5.1.2. The Beginning of Sexual Orientation Identity Formation

In this personal experiential theme, participants answer the question of how they experienced their awareness of the sexual orientation process. The participants talked about their childhood and adolescent experiences during the period when they became or started to become aware of their sexual orientation. While talking about these experiences, they mentioned the clues they noticed about their sexual orientation: they were not stereotypical children, felt attracted to peers of the same sex, and went beyond heteronormativity during their romantic and sexual explorations. They also touched upon the moment they realized that things were truly different for them.

Being different from same-sex peers as a child was one of the first mentioned by participants as a clue for the beginning of sexual orientation identity formation. In line with the sensitization stage in Troiden's formation of the homosexual identities

model (1989), individuals had "non-regular" interests and behaviors compared to their same-sex peers, especially in their childhood. For example, it was seen that participants prefer dolls over cars and play with opposite-sex peers. This may be explained by being open to new experiences, such as toys and games, or by behaving as they wish without considering traditional gender role expectations. They acted as they wished, but this caused name-calling for the participants (Levounis et al., 2012; Troiden, 1989). In line with other studies (Bell et al., 1981; Tyler & Schmitz, 2018), they were marginalized by their friends and peers and experienced bullying because of it. In short, being different from their same-sex peers often leads to bullying, which is associated with negative effects on LGB individuals' mental health, social relations, and education. For example, LGB students tend to have lower academic achievement and feel less safe in school environments (Kosciw et al., 2020), which can result in school dropouts (Bidell, 2014) and increased psychological distress (Collier et al., 2012).

Intimacy toward same-sex peers is the second dimension of the clues in the experiential subtheme. In accordance with Coleman's developmental stages of the coming out process (1982) and Levounis et al. (2012), individuals could not be consciously aware of their same-sex feelings and describe what is going on with them. It was seen that while participants mentioned those feelings and experiences with their same-sex peers, they did not delve into those feelings but named them differently, such as admiration or having a best friend. This may be explained by internalized heterosexism from the minority stress model (Meyer, 2003). Since Türkiye has a heteronormative structure, they witnessed and saw many examples of heteronormativity in society, and they may not know there are other possibilities out there. Therefore, at the beginning of sexual orientation identity formation, they could not name their feelings around the concept of sexual orientation. As Cass (1979) and Troiden (1989) discussed in their identity formation models, people need to be aware of other alternatives besides heterosexual relationships to be able to identify their experiences.

The exploration of romantic and sexual attraction is the third dimension under the clues subtheme. In the exploration phase, participants mentioned physical intimacy with same-sex peers, and they remembered those intimate moments in a good way

although they could not figure out what those feelings came from. As Coleman (1982) and Troiden (1989) discussed in their models, having positive feelings after physical intimacy with same-sex peers facilitated participants' exploration of their sexual orientation and paved the way for acceptance. Moreover, participants also mentioned that the internet played a facilitator role in exploring the existence of queer relationships. For instance, seeing queer people on TV series made them think that kinds of relationships also exist. This thought process is consistent with Cass's (1979) and Troiden's (1989) findings. People need to know the existence of queer relationships to be able to name their feelings and experience. This finding also aligns with what Harper et al. (2016), Kabacaoğlu (2015), and Levounis et al. (2012) highlighted in their study. The internet has a facilitator role during the exploration of sexual orientation identity since it is a primary source to learn about sexuality, for example, via porn websites.

The second experiential subtheme is the awareness of sexual orientation. Even though being aware of their sexual orientation is not a one-time event, as emphasized by Guittar (2013), participants mentioned their moments of awareness. The undeniable desire for same-sex peers sexually and romantically and knowing that something is definitely different for them are the indicators of being an LGB individual. Having different experiences with their same-sex peers made them question their interest and desire for someone. In other words, as their peers, they do not have the same reactions to opposite-sex peers sexually or romantically. After figuring out they do not have the same experience as their peers, they seek alternatives to identify what they experience. Thus, they start to name their feelings and thoughts about sexual orientation, and this process paves the way for acceptance of sexual orientation as consistent with the stage of identity assumption in Troiden's formation of homosexual identities model (1989).

5.1.3. The Process of Acceptance of Sexual Orientation

In this personal experiential theme, participants were asked what their experience of accepting their sexual orientation was like after realizing something was different for them. During the self-acceptance process, participants experienced internalized heterosexism, denied their sexual orientation at first, and felt emotions of fear and loneliness. They also carried the negative attitudes of their family toward LGB

individuals. However, participants accepted who they were at the end of this process.

In the first experiential subtheme, participants expressed feelings of shame, guilt, disgust, and hatred toward themselves in the context of internalized heterosexism. They perceived their feelings and desires as sinful or wrong since societal attitudes led them to this conclusion. They did not tolerate any non-heteronormative behaviors. A possible explanation is that the norms pressured by society were weighted more than what they felt and experienced at the early stage of the self-acceptance process. In line with what Meyer (2003) emphasized in the minority stress model, LGB individuals absorb others' negative attitudes toward themselves, and those internalized thoughts lead them to feel guilt and shame (Brown et al., 2015; Greene & Britton, 2015). Additionally, the majority of people in Türkiye are Muslim, and one of the basic teachings of Islam condemns LGB individuals and associates them with damnation. Therefore, another possible explanation may be growing up in an Islamic society and constantly hearing about the condemnation of LGB individuals as deviants might intensify their internalized heterosexism.

Denial, identified as the second experiential subtheme, is closely linked to internalized heterosexism. As discussed by Coleman (1982), feeling different in a heteronormative society, and having internalized heterosexism lead individuals to crisis. In response, they used denial as a defense mechanism to avoid facing the crisis (Coleman, 1982). This finding also aligns with Troiden's (1989) identity formation model. In the identity confusion stage, individuals not only internalize others' negative attitudes towards LGB individuals but also recognize the stigma associated with being LGB individuals (Troiden, 1989). In Türkiye, stigmatization, discrimination, and prejudice against LGB individuals are visible, which may make the acceptance process difficult. Therefore, denial is one of the tools to evade the reality of their sexual orientation. Moreover, some participants reported dating opposite-sex peers as a strategy to conform to societal expectations and to convince themselves and others of their heterosexuality. In other words, they forced themselves to engage opposite-sex peers to suit heteronormative society and avoid facing identity confusion. As discussed in the identity confusion stage from Cass's identity formation theoretical model (1979), denial is one of the ways to approach identity confusion. By doing so, they try to ease the feelings of ambiguity, confusion, and conflict.

Fear is the third finding experienced by participants in the process of acceptance of sexual orientation. This may be explained through the lens of proximal stressors from the minority stress model (Meyer, 2003). Being aware of negative societal attitudes toward LGB individuals makes the acceptance of the sexual orientation process difficult. Individuals may fear that these negative attitudes will lead to rejection and discrimination. Therefore, taking into consideration the negative attitudes of Turkish society toward LGB individuals, concerns about physical harm, rejection, and exclusion from society may be the baseline for their feelings of fear. As aligned with Barnett et al. (2019), the fear of knowing and anticipating a difficult life ahead hinders the self-acceptance process. Furthermore, attitudes towards LGB individuals in Türkiye are generally unwelcoming, partly due to religious beliefs. The majority of the population believes in Islam, and for some, Islam does not accept LGB individuals and sees them as deviant. Therefore, LGB individuals may fear reactions from devout Muslims. They frequently encounter hate speech on various platforms, including television and social media, exacerbating their fear and impeding their self-acceptance.

The fourth finding focuses on feelings of loneliness in the heteronormative society. One possible explanation for this finding is that in Türkiye, LGB individuals are less visible due to prevalent negative attitudes, stigma, and prejudice against them. For example, LGB individuals who are open about their sexual orientation face bullying in their workplace, and even they get fired (Acar Erdur & Özgünlü, 2020). Therefore, participants have difficulty finding societal role models to identify with. In line with Mater (2021), and Valenti and Campbell (2009), they thought they were the only ones who experienced those same-sex attractions in the world, and they did not know how to handle those feelings. This finding is also consistent with the stage of identity comparison in Cass's theoretical model of homosexual identity formation (1979), where individuals perceive themselves as the sole example that leads to feelings of isolation and alienation.

The fifth experiential subtheme is witnessing their families' negative attitudes toward LGB individuals. Families' negative and discriminatory attitudes and prejudice toward LGB individuals hinder the self-acceptance process and foster the fear of rejection by their families. This finding may be understood through the lens of distal and proximal factors from minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003). As discussed by

Meyer (2003), seeing hatred, disgust, and prejudice toward LGB individuals (distal factors) leads to the expectation of rejection (proximal factors). Consequently, LGB individuals experience internalized heterosexism, which makes the process of self-acceptance difficult and complicated for LGB individuals.

The last experiential subtheme focuses on the self-acceptance and feeling of pride coming with it. After participants manage the challenging part of the self-acceptance process, they accept themselves as who they are. This acceptance is followed by being proud of their existence. This may be explained by the difficulty of awareness and self-acceptance process. They have to deal with the new incoming awareness, emotions and desires in a heteronormative society. As mentioned above, they do not have role models, which brings loneliness and alienation. Thus, overcoming those negative experiences and finally accepting themselves for who they really are leads to pride. In other words, it may be seen that they have earned this acceptance, considering the challenging process. They also experience a sense of belongingness to a larger community - the queer community. This is in line with works by Cass (1979), Coleman (1982), and Troiden (1989). In their identity formation models, they highlight the feeling of pride after working on their internalized heterosexism and fear. This finding is also consistent with the valence identity in minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003). Valence refers to self-validation and includes diminished internalized heterosexism and improved self-acceptance.

5.1.4. Coming Out Journey

This personal experiential theme explored the meaning of coming out for the participants, ways of coming out, and motivations for coming out. For some, coming out is a two-step process, including self-acceptance before coming out to someone, while for others, it means informing others about their sexual orientation. Getting rid of the burden of hiding in the closet and having role models around their social circle were the motivations for coming out to someone. Participants were asked how their experiences were before and after coming out to their friends and family members. Excitement and the possibility of losing someone are the emotions they experienced before coming out. After coming out, those feelings were replaced by relief. Parents' immediate reactions were ignoring the fact that their children came out to them.

However, this denial was followed by acceptance of their children in time. Regarding friends, they received support from their friends and did not face any discriminatory attitudes toward themselves.

The first experiential subtheme has two dimensions: coming out is a two-step process and informing other people about their sexual orientation. Regarding the first dimension, participants described the coming out process from two perspectives: coming out to oneself and then to others. They perceived self-acceptance as a prerequisite for coming out to someone. This may be explained by the notion that without accepting themselves first, they have nothing to share with others. They need to identify their experience with the sexual orientation concept and accept themselves as who they are before deciding to come out to someone. In line with the literature (Brumbaugh-Johnson & Hull, 2018; Guittar, 2013; Ryan et al., 2015), although coming out is not a one-time event, self-acceptance is seen as a step before coming out to someone.

The second dimension is letting other people know about their sexual orientation. For the participants, coming out is more about sharing information regarding their sexual orientation rather than making a formal declaration. In other words, telling others about their sexual orientation without pre-planning or making a significant event of it. This finding is new to the literature. It could be explained by the activist's perception that being an LGB individual is not different from being a heterosexual individual. The rationale is that if heterosexual individuals do not need to come out explicitly, then LGB individuals should not feel compelled to make an effort to come out. In line with Wandrey et al.'s (2015) concept of "causally coming out," when the topic is relevant and there is a place to tell, they choose to mention their sexual orientation to others.

The second experiential subtheme is about casual coming out, which means coming out to others when in suitable conversational contexts. One of the possible explanation for this finding is it is associated with the finding of letting other people know. They prefer to come out to people when the conversation leads the way. It is not planning beforehand and weighing every possible occasion to come out. Another explanation for this is that participants felt more comfortable when they came out naturally during a conversation, as Wandrey et al. (2015) argued. Making a plan may

make them nervous and stressed before coming out. This result aligns with Manning's (2015) study, indicating a preference for spontaneous coming out during a conversation while also considering their safety.

In the third experiential subtheme, participants were asked about their motivations for coming out to someone. The first motivation is the desire to live a genuine life. In other words, they no longer hide their sexual orientation from their significant others, such as family members and friends, and they do not want to tell lies to hide their sexual orientation. Before coming out, they need to tell lies when they talk about their romantic or sexual experiences with others and to cover up their trails of lies. Therefore, a possible explanation for the finding is that it is a great burden to carry on their shoulders. Additionally, they must always be alert about not showing their true colors. Seidman (2002) discussed that they have to live a double life: one life for their true identity and the other for their public identity. The burden of continuing this dichotomy affects their life. Hiding in the closet and lying to hide in the closet created huge distress for them (Eliason et al., 2018). Therefore, as consistent with the literature (Eliason et al., 2018; Hemphill, 2020; Mater, 2021), they decided to come out to significant others.

The second motivation for coming out to someone is the presence of queer people around themselves. This may be explained with the expectation of being understood by others within the queer community. As consistent with Cass (1979), Coleman (1982), and Troiden (1989), when they have queer people in their social circle, they tend to come out to those people. This may also be explained within the sociocultural context. LGB individuals in Türkiye came out to their friends, especially close and queer friends, before their parents (Kabacaoğlu, 2015). This pattern aligns with findings in the broader literature (Henry, 2013; Rosati et al., 2020). The anticipation of support from friends and the perception of sharing a similar destiny may motivate participants to come out.

The fourth experiential subtheme is about emotions before coming out to someone, especially friends and parents. The first emotion is excitement, a relatively new finding in the literature. Common emotions identified in previous studies are anxiety and fear (Gattamorta & Quidley-Rodriguez, 2018; Perrin-Wallqvist & Lindblom, 2015). The participants' excitement may stem from the determination to

come out to someone. They accept themselves as they are and are not ashamed of themselves. Thus, this determination may lead to excitement before coming out to someone. Another explanation may be the excitement of anticipation regarding what comes next, viewing the coming out as an irreversible turning point in their lives.

The second emotion is fear, specifically the fear of losing someone. This may link to the anxiety they experienced during the coming out process (Charbonnier & Graziani, 2016). Anxiety refers to worried thoughts and anticipation of negative outcomes, incidents, and reactions (Kazdin, 2000). As mentioned by McLean (2007), this fear of losing their loved ones is rooted in anxiety. Despite knowing the person to whom they are coming out, they could not anticipate what reactions were coming from them. As in line with the previous studies (Ben-Ari, 1995; Gerena, 2021; Price & Porsek, 2020), this uncertainty brings anxiety, and anxiety brings the fear of losing them.

The fifth experiential subtheme in the coming out journey is experiences after coming out. The first dimension is the relaxation. A possible explanation for this finding is participants may feel relieved because they no longer need to hide in the closet and feel safe enough to be themselves. As highlighted in the experiential subtheme of motivations for coming out, hiding their true selves, and lying are huge stressors and burdens to carry on their shoulders (e.g., Hemphill, 2020). Therefore, coming out to someone results in relaxation for participants. This aligns with the findings of Shilo and Savaya (2011), who noted that when individuals receive positive responses after coming out, their level of distress diminishes, and they experience relief.

The second dimension is reactions from parents. Some parents ignored the incident of coming out and acted as if it had never happened. This could be explained by the shock parents experienced upon hearing the news from their children, possibly requiring time to digest it. Connected to this, another explanation might be that they do not know what to do and how to behave after the coming out. As argued by Kabacaoğlu (2015), some parents perceive their child's sexual orientation as their fault, and they need to face the feeling of guilt before moving forward. This observation aligns with the studies by Mater (2021) and Gattamorta and Quidley-Rodriguez (2017), where the immediate parental reaction to coming out often ignores the fact of coming out.

Another reaction coming from parents is the acceptance of their children in time. Initially, parents may be more concerned with what others think of them and their children rather than focusing on their children's needs and experiences. Therefore, as related to the previous finding, they ignored or rejected their children's coming out. After the cool-down period, parents may become more open to talking about their children's sexual orientation and open to accepting their children. As Ghosh (2019) discussed, the acceptance process is complex for the parents and takes time. Another explanation can be made through the lenses of Chrisler's theoretical framework of parents' reactions to coming out. After receiving the information coming out, parents need time to digest considering, for instance, their beliefs, values, and religion. Some might start to dig into to learn queer culture more to be able to understand their children's experiences as a whole. For example, some might learn that sexual orientation is not a choice; it is inborn, and it could not be changed by choice. Therefore, parents may accept their children as they are after working on their beliefs and values.

The third and last dimension focuses on reactions from friends after coming out to them. One reaction is the support received from their friends. A possible explanation for this finding is the participants' strategy of choosing "safe" friends to whom they come out. In other words, they tend to avoid coming out to friends who might react negatively. This is similar to what Orne (2011) emphasized in the concept of strategic outness. LGB individuals carefully select whom to come out to, considering their relationship with them and their safety. This finding is in line with Kabacaoğlu (2015), Klein et al. (2015), and Savin-Wiiliams' (2005) study. Participants often come out to friends who are open-minded and not heteronormativist. Thus, they try to minimize the likelihood of receiving negative reactions. Another reaction coming from the friends is discrimination. Contrary to what is often reported in the literature (e.g., Averett et al., 2018; Savin-Williams, 2005), participants did not experience discrimination from their friends after coming out to them. This may be explained by similar reasons for receiving support from their friends after coming out. Participants tended to carefully select their friends throughout their lives and they also considered their relationships with their friends during the coming out. Thus, when they decided to come out to their friends, they did not face discriminatory attitudes from them.

5.1.5. Mental Health Professionals

This personal experiential theme focuses on mental health professionals. Participants were inquired about whether they saw a mental health professional during their coming out process and asked to explain the reasons for either seeking or not seeking mental health care. Additionally, participants mentioned their expectations from mental health professionals when they received care.

The first experiential subtheme is about the reason why participants did not seek mental health assistance during their coming out process. They mentioned they did not see it as a need. This finding is new to the literature. As discussed by participants, they felt that they did not need to see a mental health professional because they were young and believed themselves capable of handling their issues or problems on their own. This is similar to the views that Siegel (2013) discussed in this book. He stated that youths often believe they can handle their issues independently without seeking help. Another possible explanation for this finding could be the presence of supportive friends. Participants reported not experiencing negative reactions from their friends; instead, they received support. In alignment with Zay Hta et al. (2021), participants may turn to their friends for help when needed. Additionally, some participants mentioned that they did not perceive their experiences as problematic or disordered. Related to this, the questioning and experiences encountered during their coming out journey can be seen as natural and normal aspects of the sexual identity formation process.

The second experiential subtheme is the expectations from mental health professionals. Some participants expressed their need for emotional support and guidance from mental health practitioners during their coming out process. As previously mentioned, they experienced a great amount of positive and negative emotions and often felt loneliness during the coming out process. A possible explanation for this finding is their need for guidance on managing their coming out process, their emotions, and particularly how to handle negative reactions from others. Meyer (2003) argues that LGB individuals have unique stressors, such as internalized heterosexism, prejudice, and discrimination, due to being a minority person. Therefore, in line with the findings of Bishop et al. (2021), receiving support and understanding from a mental health practitioner can ease the negative aspects of the

coming out process.

5.2. Implications for Theory and Practice

5.2.1. Implications for Theory

This study is the first study in Türkiye that involves the coming out experiences of bisexual individuals, even though the aim is not to compare the experiences of bisexual, gay, and lesbian individuals. Studies (Calzo et al., 2011; Floyd & Stein, 2002; Rosario et al., 2011) demonstrated that there are no differences among gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals' coming out experiences. For instance, experiencing romantic and sexual engagement in the exploration process and identifying their experiences and differences in the context of sexual orientation, which lead them to self-acceptance, are the steps LGB individuals experience. Regarding this study, it was also observed that bisexual individuals' experiences overlapped with gay and lesbian individuals' experiences. Each theme includes their perspective and experiences as well.

Moreover, some themes coincide with Vivienne C. Cass's homosexual identity formation theoretical model (1979). The clues that participants relate to their sexual orientation in their childhood, the experiences of internalized heterosexism, and the denial process appear to be aligned with the stage of identity confusion. During the acceptance process, the feeling of loneliness corresponds to the stage of identity comparison. In this stage, individuals begin to accept their sexual orientation identity but feel isolated due to being different from their same-sex peers and lack of role models around them. This study's findings suggest that the emotion of fear may also be experienced in the identity comparison stage. It is an emotion that hinders the acceptance process due to the fear of rejection and physical harm. Furthermore, reasons for coming out overlap with the stage of identity acceptance. They accepted themselves as who they were, but they could not come out to their friends or families. Therefore, they need to maintain a public image besides their true identity. They could not live authentically and had to lie to their significant others. To ease the burden of telling lies and wishing to live an authentic life, they start to come out to people around them, which is related to the identity pride stage. In this stage, they start to disclose their sexual orientation to their friends and family members. Additionally, being proud

of themselves and their sexual orientation identity after the acceptance occurs at this stage, which coincides with this study's findings.

5.2.2. Implications for Practice

The results of this study shed light on the experiences of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals during their coming out process. Coming out is not a singular event but a continuum, encompassing the realization of differences in one's life, naming these differences, self-acceptance, and the decision to disclose one's identity to others, such as parents and friends. This process begins in childhood and continues throughout life. While the aim was not to generalize the findings to all populations, commonalities were found between the findings of this study and existing sexual orientation identity models (Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1982; Troiden, 1989) and minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003).

The study has implications for LGB individuals, their parents, and mental health practitioners. A key finding in this study is the loneliness experienced during the self-acceptance process. LGB individuals who felt lonely during their coming out can find a connection in the shared experiences of others documented in this study. By reading these stories, they may see similarities with their own experiences and feel less isolated, gaining insights into what to expect during the coming out process, particularly with parents and friends. Since this is the first study to investigate the coming out process of bisexual individuals, it provides a unique opportunity for them to read about others' experiences. This can help them make sense of their own situations. Consequently, LGB individuals, including those who are bisexual, may feel less lonely and more connected to a larger community. They can identify and label their past experiences and anticipate what they might encounter next if they decide to come out.

Furthermore, parents concerned about their children's behaviors can use the findings of this study as a guide to understand better and connect with their children. For example, observing a child who does not conform to stereotypical behaviors or noticing their relationships with same-sex peers might facilitate a deeper understanding of the child. It is important to clarify, however, that not every child who diverges from traditional gender roles is necessarily an LGB individual. Instead, such

differences should be normalized and accepted. Additionally, if children are in the early stages of sexual orientation development and self-acceptance, these findings offer parents a window into what their children might be experiencing. They can learn about the role of internalized heterosexism and negative familial attitudes in these processes, encouraging them to reconsider the use of heterosexist language and phrases in their daily interactions. Finally, in the context of Turkish families, where there is a lack of literature on the coming out process, especially for young adults and bisexual individuals, this study provides valuable insights. Understanding the experiences detailed in this study can help parents comprehend what their children might have gone through during their coming out process. This knowledge can be instrumental in helping parents identify and meet their children's needs more effectively.

Prospective and practicing mental health professionals can use the findings of this study to gain insights into the coming out process. These findings shed light on the experiences of Turkish LGB individuals, outlining potential steps in the coming out process. This information is invaluable when clients seek guidance about coming out in the Turkish context, enabling practitioners to provide informed responses based on the study's findings and direct them to reliable sources for further reading. For example, counselors can share the experiences of parents after their children come out to them with their clients. Thus, they can discuss with their clients the possible reactions that clients' parents may make. Additionally, they can discuss what comes next in terms of after the acceptance of their sexual orientation and during the coming out process with their clients to show them possible pathways in the journey. However, it is crucial to emphasize that counselors should keep in mind that the coming out process and experience can vary significantly from one individual to another. Moreover, this study highlights the challenges involved in the coming out process, underscoring that it is a lifelong journey. Considering the difficulties LGB individuals face, mental health practitioners are encouraged to organize group counseling sessions. These can include support groups specifically for LGB individuals and psychoeducational groups for and about LGB individuals. Such initiatives ensure that LGB individuals feel recognized and supported by professionals, providing them with the necessary assistance during their coming out process. In the support groups, for instance, the impact of internalized heterosexism, negative attitudes of the family

toward LGB individuals, and the emotions of fear and loneliness can be discussed. However, it is important to recognize that LGB individuals may have concerns beyond their sexual orientation. Mental health practitioners might become aware of a client's sexual orientation amid therapy sessions. Being informed by this study's findings, practitioners can better prepare themselves to work with these stigmatized and discriminated groups, ensuring they provide comprehensive and empathetic care.

School counselors could use the study's findings while conducting screening tests or students' introductory meetings in their schools. The coming out process is a challenging and complex process for LGB individuals and may result in adverse mental health issues, such as anxiety, suicidal tendencies, and depression (Meyer et al., 2008). Therefore, school counselors must include questions about sexual orientation in their assessment as a prevention strategy. By doing so, they can detect students who need support in their exploration of their sexual orientation, psychoeducation, or mental health care. Moreover, they can develop school-wide programs about minority groups, including LGB individuals, to reduce stigmatization, discrimination, and bullying and foster an inclusive, non-judgmental, and accepting school culture. In terms of parents, school counselors could organize parent meetings and seminars to inform them about the journey LGB children experience through their self-awareness, self-acceptance, and coming out process. Additionally, school counselors can facilitate support group sessions for parents of LGB individuals, creating a space for them to express and share their feelings, concerns, or experiences with one another.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working with LGB individuals and with their families can utilize the insights from this study's findings to promote a more inclusive society. NGOs can highlight the needs and challenges faced by LGB individuals and advocate for legal protections, anti-discrimination laws, and inclusive policies. Furthermore, NGOs working with minority groups can benefit from this study in their volunteer training. For example, they can highlight the emotions of fear and loneliness and experiencing internalized heterosexism during the acceptance process since those factors hinder the acceptance and coming out process and are associated with being a sexual minority group in society. Therefore, understanding the specific processes and experiences they encounter is crucial for offering appropriate support and assistance.

5.3. Recommendations for Further Research

This research, aiming to comprehensively examine the coming out processes and experiences of LGB individuals from Türkiye, was conducted using a qualitative research design. To further evaluate the findings in detail and make evidence-based generalizations, there is a need for additional research on this subject using quantitative or mixed research designs. For example, the Outness Inventory (Mohr & Fassinger, 2000) can be used to measure the extent to which LGB individuals are open about their sexual orientation, and the Turkish Adaptation of Internalized Homophobia Scale (Yüksel, 2002) can be used to measure the degree of internalized heterosexism in participants. Supplementing these measures with qualitative questions about the meaning of internalized heterosexism to participants and their experiences with coming out, particularly considering their level of internalized heterosexism, can help gain a more comprehensive understanding of the coming out journey.

In this study, the coming out processes and experiences of lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals were investigated. Other sexual orientations, such as pansexual, asexual, and ambisexual, were not included. Future research can shed light on the coming out experiences of these groups, thereby revealing the similarities and differences in the coming out processes between them and LGB individuals.

Furthermore, the majority of the participants in this study were born and raised in large cities. Researchers could conduct a similar study with individuals living in smaller cities and rural areas. This would help reveal any similarities and cultural differences that arise from one's place of residence.

Additional information regarding the expectations of mental health professionals would be beneficial in establishing approaches for working with LGB individuals, particularly during their coming out experiences. Moreover, investigating any interactions and experiences with mental health practitioners could provide further insights into the needs and requirements of these practitioners.

LGB individuals often turn to online support platforms, especially when they lack support from their families (Cannon, 2017). In Türkiye, several queer NGOs, such as SPoD and Kaos GL, offer support and helpline services during the week. This study did not explore the participants' experiences with these online support platforms or whether they sought such support. Future studies could beneficially consider these aspects of support.

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APPENDICES

A. INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (TURKISH)

Bu yüksek lisans tez çalışmasında Türkiye'de doğup büyümüş, yetişkin LGB bireylerin açılma deneyimlerini araştırmayı amaçlamaktayım. Türkiye literatüründe bu konuda çok az sayıda çalışma var. Bu nedenle benim amacım LGB bireylerin deneyimlerini daha görünür kılmak ve LGB bireylerin deneyimlerinden yola çıkarak bu konuda önleyici ve müdahaleye yönelik çalışmalar yapmak.

Görüşme soruları toplamda iki bölümden oluşmaktadır. İlk bölümde demografik sorular, ikinci bölümde ise açılma deneyimleriniz hakkında bazı açık uçlu sorular yer almaktadır. Görüşmemizin yaklaşık 45-60 dk. sürmesi beklenmektedir.

Bu çalışma için Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi etik kurulundan gerekli izinler alınmıştır. Görüşme boyunca adınızı vermek zorunda değilsiniz. İsterseniz herhangi bir takma isim/rumuz kullanabilirsiniz. Sizin için de uygunsa eğer görüşmemizin ses kaydını almak istiyorum. Alınan ses kaydı yalnızca transkript oluşturmak için kullanılacak, bilgisayarda şifreli bir dosyada tutulacak, ben ve tez danışmanımdan başka kimsenin erişimi olmayacaktır. Ayrıca, transkript ve tüm yazılı metinlerde gizliliğinizi korumak için rumuz kullanılacaktır. Bu ve benzeri katılımcı haklarınız birazdan sizinle paylaşacağım bilgilendirilmiş onam formunda da var ancak ben sesli de dile getirmek istedim. Sizin bana çalışmayla ilgili sormak istediğiniz bir şey var mı? (Katılımcının düşünebilmesi için bir süre beklenir ve soru gelirse yanıtlanır.)

(Katılımcıyla onam formu paylaşılır.) Sizden ricam, çalışmanın amacını anladığınız, görüşmenin ses kaydının alınmasına onay verdiğiniz ve istediğiniz zaman çalışmadan çekilebileceğiniz ifadelerinin olduğu koyu renkli kısımları yüksek sesle okur musunuz? Vermek istediğiniz herhangi bir takma isim/rumuz var mı?

Bölüm I. Demografik Bilgiler

Görüşmenin ilk kısmında bazı demografik sorular sorarak bilgi almak istiyorum.

1. Kaç yaşındasınız?

2. Nerede doğup büyüdünüz? (Büyükşehir, il, ilçe, kasaba, köy gibi)
3. En son bitirdiğiniz okulun düzeyi neydi? (İlkokul, ortaokul, lise, lisans, yüksek lisans ve doktora)
4. Şu anda hala öğrenci misiniz? (Hayır ise 5'ten devam edilecektir.)
   Evet ise;
   4.1. Hangi düzeyde öğrencisiniz? (Ön lisans, lisans, yüksek lisans, doktora)?
   4.2.Bölümünüz nedir? (Okul ismi alınmayacak.)
   4.3.Kaçıncı sınıftasınız?
   4.4.Tam zamanlı ya da yarı zamanlı bir işte çalışıyor musunuz?
      4.4.1. İşiniz nedir?
      4.4.2. Ne kadar süredir çalışıyorsunuz?
5. Tam zamanlı ya da yarı zamanlı bir işte çalışıyor musunuz?
   5.1.İşiniz nedir?
   5.2.Ne kadar süredir çalışıyorsunuz?
   5.3.Hangi bölümden mezun oldunuz? (Okul ismi alınmayacak.)
   5.4.Ne zaman mezun oldunuz?
6. Cinsiyet kimliğinizi nasıl tanımlıyorsunuz? ***(Açıklama: Cinsiyet kimliği, kadın, erkek, trans gibi kendinizi ait hissettiğiniz cinsiyeti ifade eder.)***
7. Cinsel yöneliminizi nasıl tanımlıyorsunuz? ***(Açıklama: Cinsel yönelim, belli bir cinsiyetteki kişi veya kişilere yönelik duygusal, romantik ve/veya cinsel çekimi ifade eder.)***

Bölüm II. Açılma Deneyimi

Şimdi görüşmemizin ikinci kısmına geçeceğiz. Bu kısımda size büyüdüğünüz aile, çevre ve açılma deneyimleriniz hakkında bazı sorular soracağım.

1. ***Öncelikle sizin açılmayı nasıl tanımladığınızı sormak istiyorum.*** Siz açılmayı nasıl tanımlarsınız?
2. Nasıl bir çocukluk geçirdiniz?
   2.1. Nasıl bir aile ortamında büyüdünüz?
      2.1.1. **Bahsetmemişse**, kardeşiniz var mı?
      2.1.2. Ailenizin sosyoekonomik düzeyi nedir?
         2.1.2.1.Ailenizin eğitim düzeyi nedir?
         2.1.2.2.Ailenizin geliri nasıldır? (Gelir memnuniyeti)

2.1.3. Ailenizin dini görüşü nedir? Ailenizde din ne derece önemlidir?

2.1.4. Ailenizin politik görüşü nedir?

2.1.5. Ailenizin LGB bireylere yönelik tutumları/düşünceleri nasıldı?

2.1.6. Siz ailenizin görüşlerini ne ölçüde benimsiyorsunuz/görüşlerine katılıyorsunuz? (Politik/Dini görüşleri)

2.2. Nasıl bir çevrede büyüdünüz? (Geniş ailenin ve komşuların dini/politik görüşleri ve LGB bireylere yönelik tutumları gibi)

3. Cinsel yöneliminize dair farkındalığınız ne zaman oluştu?

3.1. Cinsel yöneliminize dair farkındalığınızın oluştuğu zamanlara baktığınızda aklınıza ilk gelen şeyler neler?

3.2. Okul öncesi yıllarınızda cinsel yöneliminiz konusunda nasıl bir farkındalığınız vardı?

3.3. İlkokul/Ortaokul yıllarınızda cinsel yöneliminiz konusunda nasıl bir farkındalığınız vardı?

3.4. Lise yıllarınızda cinsel yöneliminiz konusunda nasıl bir farkındalığınız vardı?

4. L/G/B (katılımcının cinsel yönelimi ne ise o söylenir) olduğunuzu ne zaman kabullendiniz?

4.1. L/G/B olmaya yönelik düşünceniz/tutumunuz ilk başlarda nasıldı?

4.2. Şimdi L/G/B olmaya yönelik düşünceniz/tutumunuz nasıl?

4.3. Sizin için kabullenme süreciniz nasıl/nasıldı?

4.3.1. İlk başlarda cinsel yöneliminizi nasıl tanımladınız?

4.4. Sizin için kabullenmeyi zorlaştıran neler/nelerdi?

4.4.1. İçinde doğup büyüdüğünüz ve yaşadığınız çevrenin özelliklerini düşündüğünüzde (Türk/Laz aile, Müslüman aile vb.) kabullenmeyi zorlaştıranlar neler/nelerdi?

4.5. Sizin için kabullenmeyi kolaylaştıranlar neler/nelerdi?

4.5.1. İçinde doğup büyüdüğünüz ve yaşadığınız çevrenin özelliklerini düşündüğünüzde (Türk/Laz aile, Müslüman aile vb.) kabullenmeyi kolaylaştıranlar neler/nelerdi?

5. İlk kime açıldınız? (Aile üyelerinden (anne-baba-kardeş) biri değil ise 5.1'den devam edilecektir. Aile üyelerinden kardeş ise 6.1. ile devam edilecektir. Aile üyelerinden anne ya da babaya ya da ikisine de aynı anda açılmış ise 7.1'den devam edilecektir.)

5.1.Nasıl açıldınız (açılma şekli)?

5.1. İlk bu kişiye açılmaya nasıl karar verdiniz? (Motivasyonu, açılma amacı nedir?)

5.2. Kaç yaşında açıldınız?

5.3. Öncesinde neler düşündünüz ve neler hissettiniz?

5.4. Nasıl bir tepki aldınız?

5.4.1. Açıldığınız kişinin davranışlarında, söylemlerinde bir değişiklik oldu mu sonraki süreçte?

5.5. Sonrasında neler düşündünüz, hissettiniz ve yaptınız?

6. Aile bireylerinize açılma sürecinizi nasıl tanımlıyorsunuz?

6.1. Aile bireylerinizden (anne-baba-kardeş) ilk kime açıldınız?

Kardeşe açılmışsa;

6.2. Açılmaya nasıl karar verdiniz? (Motivasyonu, açılma amacı nedir?)

6.3. Nasıl açıldınız (açılma şekli)?

6.4. Kaç yaşında açıldınız?

6.5. Öncesinde neler düşündünüz ve neler hissettiniz?

6.6. Nasıl bir tepki aldınız?

6.6.1. Açıldığınız kişinin davranışlarında, söylemlerinde bir değişiklik oldu mu sonraki süreçte?

6.7. Sonrasında neler düşündünüz, hissettiniz ve yaptınız?

7. Ebeveynlerinizden ilk hangisine açıldınız?

Önce kardeşe açılıp sonra anne/baba ya da ikisine birden açılmışsa;

7.1. Açılmaya nasıl karar verdiniz? (Motivasyonu, açılma amacı nedir?)

7.2. Nasıl açıldınız (açılma şekli)?

7.3. Kaç yaşında açıldınız?

7.4. Öncesinde neler düşündünüz ve neler hissettiniz?

7.5. Nasıl bir tepki aldınız?

7.5.1. Açıldığınız kişinin davranışlarında, söylemlerinde bir değişiklik oldu mu sonraki süreçte?

7.6. Sonrasında neler düşündünüz, hissettiniz ve yaptınız?

8. İlk anneye açılmışsa,

8.1. Annenize, babanızdan önce açılma kararını nasıl verdiniz?

8.2. Bu kararı vermede etkili olan çocukluk yaşantıları/annenizin tutumları neler oldu?

9. İlk babaya açılmışsa,
   9.1. Babanıza, annenizden önce açılma kararını nasıl verdiniz?
   9.2. Bu kararı vermede etkili olan çocukluk yaşantıları/babanızın tutumları neler oldu?
10. Babaya açılmamışsa,
   10.1. Babanıza açılmaya ya da açılmamaya ilişkin duygu ve düşünceleriniz neler?
      10.1.1. Düşünüyorsanız, açılmaya nasıl karar verdiniz? (Motivasyonu, açılma amacı nedir?)
      10.1.2. Nasıl bir plan yaptınız? (Açılma şekli, beklentileri, korkuları, kaygıları, endişeleri)
      10.1.3. Düşünmüyorsanız sebebi/sebepleri ne(ler)?
11. Anneye açılmamışsa,
   11.1. Annenize açılmaya ya da açılmamaya ilişkin duygu ve düşünceleriniz neler?
      11.1.1. Düşünüyorsanız, açılmaya nasıl karar verdiniz? (Motivasyonu, açılma amacı nedir?)
      11.1.2. Nasıl bir plan yaptınız? (Açılma şekli, beklentileri, korkuları, kaygıları, endişeleri)
      11.1.3. Düşünmüyorsanız sebebi/sebepleri ne(ler)?
12. Kardeşe/Kardeşlere açılmamışsa,
   12.1. Kardeşinize/Kardeşlerinize açılmaya ya da açılmamaya ilişkin duygu ve düşünceleriniz neler?
      12.1.1. Düşünüyorsanız, açılmaya nasıl karar verdiniz? (Motivasyonu, açılma amacı nedir?)
      12.1.2. Nasıl bir plan yaptınız? (Açılma şekli, beklentileri, korkuları, kaygıları, endişeleri)
      12.1.3. Düşünmüyorsanız sebebi/sebepleri ne(ler)?
13. Bu bahsettiğiniz kişilerden başka açıldığınız çevre/kişiler oldu mu?
   13.1. Olduysa açılmaya nasıl karar verdiniz? (Motivasyonu, açılma amacı nedir?)

13.2. Nasıl açıldınız (açılma şekli)?

13.3. Kaç yaşında açıldınız?

13.4. Öncesinde neler düşündünüz ve neler hissettiniz?

13.5. Nasıl bir tepki aldınız?

13.5.1. Açıldığınız kişinin davranışlarında, söylemlerinde bir değişiklik oldu mu sonraki süreçte?

13.6. Sonrasında neler düşündünüz, hissettiniz ve yaptınız?

14. Sürece genel olarak baktığınızda, içinde doğup büyüdüğünüz ve yaşadığınız çevrenin özelliklerini düşündüğünüzde (Türk/Laz aile, Müslüman aile vb.) açılmanızı zorlaştıranlar neler/nelerdi?

15. Sürece genel olarak baktığınızda içinde doğup büyüdüğünüz ve yaşadığınız çevrenin özelliklerini düşündüğünüzde (Türk/Laz aile, Müslüman aile vb.) açılmanızı kolaylaştıranlar neler/nelerdi?

16. Tüm bu açılma süreçlerinizi, özellikle ailenize açılma sürecinizi düşündüğünüzde, neyi farklı yapardınız?

17. Tüm bu açılma süreçlerinizi, özellikle ailenize açılma sürecinizi düşündüğünüzde, açılma öncesinde, sırasında ve sonrasında nelere ihtiyacınız oldu?

17.1. Açılma sürecinizde bir psikiyatrist/psikolog/psikolojik danışman desteğine ihtiyacınız oldu mu?

17.2. Açılma sürecinizde bir psikiyatrist/psikolog/psikolojik danışmandan destek aldınız mı?

Almışsa,

17.2.1. Kimden ve ne tür bir destek aldınız?

17.2.2. Psikolojik yardımın size faydaları neler oldu?

Almamışsa,

17.2.3. Bir psikolojik destek almamanızın sebepleri nelerdi?

17.3. Psikolojik danışmanların/psikologların hangi konularda size destek olmasını isterdiniz? (açılma ve kabulleme süreçlerinde)

18. Şu an cinsel yönelimi konusunda farkındalığı olan ve cinsel yönelimini kabul etmiş ama başka birine açıl(a)mamış bir bireye nasıl bir mesaj vermek istersiniz?

19. Son olarak sizin için açılma deneyiminizi konuşmak nasıldı?

20. Benim sormadığım, sizin paylaşmaya değer gördüğünüz, benimle paylaşmak istediğiniz bir şey var mı?

Katılımınız için çok teşekkürler!

B. THE ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL FORM

UYGULAMALI ETİK ARAŞTIRMA MERKEZİ
APPLIED ETHICS RESEARCH CENTER

ORTA DOĞU TEKNİK ÜNİVERSİTESİ
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20 HAZİRAN 2022

Konu: Değerlendirme Sonucu

Gönderen: ODTÜ İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu (İAEK)

İlgi: İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu Başvurusu

Sayın Zeynep HATİPOĞLU SÜMER

Danışmanlığını yürüttüğünüz Hande ÖZKAN'ın "Dolabın Dışında: Türkiye'deki LGB Bireylerin Açılma Deneyimleri" başlıklı araştırmanız İnsan Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu tarafından uygun görülerek gerekli onay **0348-ODTUİAEK-2022** protokol numarası ile onaylanmıştır.

Bilgilerinize saygılarımla sunarım.

Prof. Dr. Mine MISIRLISOY
Başkan

Doç. Dr. İ. Semih AKÇOMAK
Üye

Dr. Öğretim Üyesi Müge GÜNDÜZ
Üye

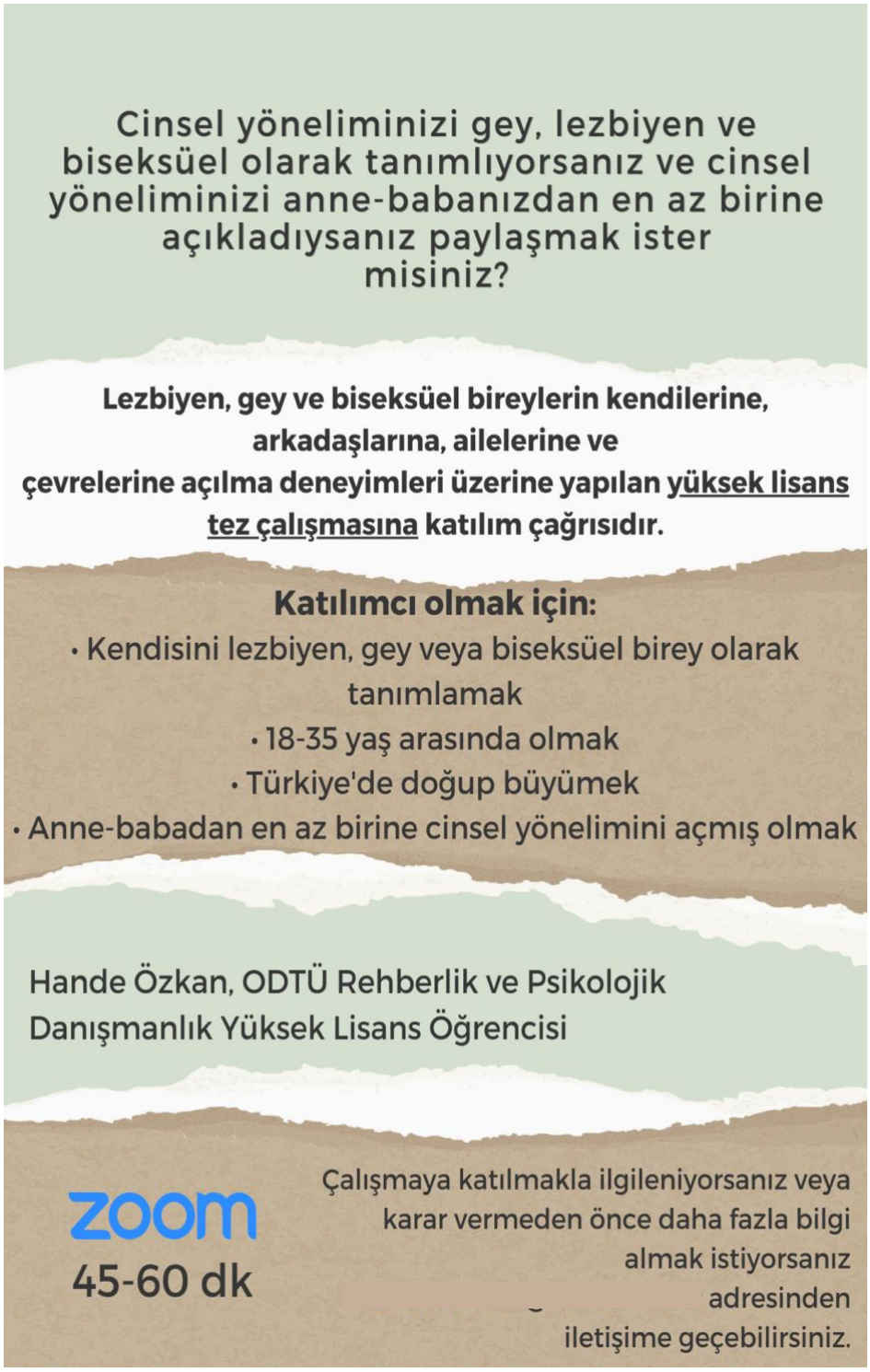
Dr. Öğretim Üyesi Şerife SEVİNÇ
Üye

Dr. Öğretim Üyesi Murat Perit ÇAKIR
Üye

Dr. Öğretim Üyesi Süreyya ÖZCAN KABASAKAL
Üye

Dr. Öğretim Üyesi A. Emre TURGUT
Üye

C. ANNOUNCEMENT POSTER



D. INFORMED CONSENT FORM (TURKISH)

Bu araştırma, ODTÜ Eğitim Bilimleri Bölümü, Rehberlik ve Psikolojik Danışmanlık programı yüksek lisans öğrencisi Hande Özkan tarafından Doç. Dr. Zeynep Hatipoğlu Sümer'in danışmanlığında yürütülen bir tez çalışmasıdır. Bu form size araştırma koşulları hakkında bilgi vermek için hazırlanmıştır.

Çalışmanın Amacı Nedir? Araştırmanın amacı Türkiye'de doğup büyümüş ve cinsel yönelimini gey, lezbiyen veya biseksüel olarak tanımlayan yetişkin bireylerin açılma deneyimlerini incelemektir. Araştırmaya katılmayı kabul ederseniz, sizinle ZOOM platformu üzerinden bir çevrimiçi görüşme gerçekleştireceğiz. Görüşme yaklaşık 60-75 dk sürecektir.

Bize Nasıl Yardımcı Olmanızı İsteyeceğiz? Araştırmaya katılım, gönüllü katılımı onayladığınız takdirde size görüşme boyunca açılma deneyimleriniz (arkadaşlarınıza, ailenize ve çevrenize) ile ilgili sorular yönlendirilecektir. Sorulara verilen yanıtlar daha sonrasında yazıya dökülmek üzere ses kaydına alınacaktır. İçinde sim kart takılı olmayan şifreli ve araştırmacıdan başka kimsenin kullanmadığı bir telefon yardımıyla ses kayıtlarınız alınacaktır. Ses kayıtları bilgisayarda şifreli bir dosyada tutulacaktır. Ses kayıtlarına araştırmayı uygulayan kişi ve tez danışmanından başka kimsenin erişimi olmayacaktır.
Görüşme boyunca adınızı ve kimliğinizi belli edebilecek hiçbir bilgiyi paylaşmak zorunda değilsiniz. Dilerseniz takma ad/rumuz kullanabilirsiniz.

Sizden Topladığımız Bilgileri Nasıl Kullanacağız? Araştırmaya katılımınız tamamen gönüllülük temelinde olmalıdır. Görüşmede, sizden kimlik veya kurum belirleyici hiçbir bilgi istenmemektedir. Cevaplarınız tamamıyla gizli tutulacak, sadece araştırmacılar tarafından değerlendirilecektir. Katılımcılardan elde edilecek bilgiler toplu halde değerlendirilecek ve bilimsel yayımlarda kullanılacaktır.

Katılımınızla ilgili bilmeniz gerekenler: Bu çalışma günlük hayatta karşılaşılan

problem ve sorunların ötesinde fiziksel veya psikolojik herhangi bir risk etmeni içermemektedir. Katılım sırasında sorulardan ya da herhangi başka bir nedenden ötürü kendinizi rahatsız hissederseniz görüşmeyi yarıda bırakıp çıkmakta serbestsiniz. Böyle bir durumda görüşmeyi yapan kişiye çalışmadan çıkmak istediğinizi söylemek yeterli olacaktır.

Araştırmayla ilgili daha fazla bilgi almak isterseniz: Bu çalışmaya katıldığınız için şimdiden teşekkür ederiz. Araştırma hakkında daha fazla bilgi almak için ODTÜ Eğitim Bilimleri Bölümü, Rehberlik ve Psikolojik Danışmanlık programı yüksek lisans öğrencisi Hande Özkan ile iletişim kurabilirsiniz.

Yukarıdaki metni okudum ve katılmam istenen çalışmanın kapsamını ve amacını, gönüllü olarak üzerime düşen sorumlulukları anladım. Çalışmada ses kaydı alınacağını ve transkript için kullanılacağını anladım. Bu çalışmayı istediğim zaman ve herhangi bir neden belirtmeden bıraktığım durumda, herhangi bir olumsuzluk ile karşılaşmayacağımı anladım.

Rumuz:

Tarih:

Bu çalışmaya katılmayı kendi isteğimle (lütfen uygun seçeneği işaretleyiniz):

Kabul ediyorum. ☐ Kabul etmiyorum. ☐

E. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET

DOLAPTAN ÇIKIŞ: TÜRKİYE'DEKİ LGB BİREYLER ÜZERİNE YORUMLAYICI FENOMENOLOJİK BİR ÇALIŞMA

1. GİRİŞ

Son yıllarda queer haklarının tarihinde ve onlara yönelik toplumsal tutumlarda önemli bir değişim yaşanmasına rağmen queer bireyler dünyanın birçok yerinde hala olumsuz, sapkın ve yanlış olarak algılanmaktadır. Türkiye'de yasal olarak suç sayılmasa da queer bireyler hem toplumda hem de yasalar önünde sıklıkla ayrımcılık, damgalanma ve önyargı ile karşılaşmaktadır (Kara, 2022). Queer hakları için mücadele 1990'lardan bu yana başlamış olsa da toplumsal kabul ve yasal eşitlik açısından önemli engeller devam etmektedir. Yaşadıkları engellenmeler, damgalanmalar ve karşılaştıkları önyargı ve ayrımcılık, birçok queer bireyin kendini kabul etme sürecini etkilemektedir. Ek olarak, toplum içinde de hayatlarını açıkça ve rahatça yaşayamamasını önemli ölçüde etkilemektedir (Gelgeç-Bakacak ve Öktem, 2014).

Birine açılma kararı, queer bireylerin hayatlarındaki dönüm noktalarından biridir. Açılma genel olarak kişinin kendisine açılmasını, yani kendini kabul etmesini, aile üyeleri ve arkadaşlar gibi önemli diğer kişilere açılmasını ve geniş aile ve iş arkadaşları gibi diğer kişilere açılmasını içeren, devam eden bir süreç olarak tanımlanır (Guittar, 2013). Açılma sürecini açıklayan üç model bulunmaktadır: (a) Cass'ın altı aşamalı eşcinsel kimlik oluşumu teorik modeli (1979), (b) Coleman'ın açılma sürecinin gelişimsel aşaması (1982) ve (c) Troiden'ın eşcinsel kimliklerin oluşumu modeli (1989). Bu modellerin üçü de cinsel yönelimin farkında olma ve kendini kabul etme ve arkadaşlar, kardeşler, ebeveynler ve iş arkadaşları gibi birilerine açılma sürecinden bahsetmektedir. Toplumsal tutumlar ve içinde yaşanılan toplum, açılma süreci ve deneyimi boyunca etkili faktörlerdir. Bununla da ilişkili olarak, açılma deneyiminin aşamalarının sırası ve süresi kişiden kişiye değiştirebilir. Her bir birey için öznel bir süreçtir.

Açılma süreci queer bireyler için zorlayıcı olabilir. Meyer (2003), azınlık stresi teorisinde, içselleştirilmiş heteroseksizmi queer bireylerin kendilerini kabul etmelerinin önünde önemli bir engel olarak vurgulamaktadır. Dahası, ayrımcılığa uğramak ve damgalanmak depresyon, anksiyete ve hatta kendine zarar verme gibi sorunlara yol açabilir (Meyer, 2008). Ebeveynlere ve arkadaşlara açılmak queer bireyler için bir stres faktörüdür. Araştırmalar, queer bireylerin ebeveyn reddi (Carnelley vd., 2011), ebeveyn reddi nedeniyle maddi desteklerini kaybetme (Grafsky, 2018) ve sosyal dışlanma (Corrigan ve Matthews, 2003) gibi durumlardan korktuklarını göstermektedir. Bu nedenle, bazıları cinsel yönelimlerini gizlemeyi tercih etmektedir (Meyer, 2003).

Açılmak, queer bireyler üzerinde hem olumlu hem de olumsuz etkiler yaratmaktadır. Açıldıktan sonra öz saygıları ve öz şefkatleri yükselmekte ve depresyon düzeyleri azalmaktadır (Crew ve Crawford, 2015; Legate vd., 2012). Bununla birlikte, bazıları akran zorbalığı (Matthews ve Salazar, 2012), mağduriyet (Rimes vd., 2019) ve buna bağlı olarak daha yüksek düzeyde depresyon (Ryan vd., 2015) ve intihar riski (Rimes vd., 2019) ile karşı karşıya kalabilmektedir. Bazıları açılmanın olumsuz etkileriyle başa çıkmak için alkol kullanmaktadır (Gerena, 2021).

Türkiye'de özellikle queer bireylerin açılma deneyimlerine odaklanan iki çalışma bulunmaktadır. Bunlardan biri, gey ve lezbiyen genç yetişkinlerin öz farkındalık, kendini kabul etme ve açılma deneyimlerini araştıran nitel bir çalışmadır (Kabacaoğlu, 2015). Diğer çalışma ise gey ve lezbiyen genç yetişkinlerin ve ebeveynlerinin açılma deneyimlerini araştıran nitel bir çalışmadır (Mater, 2021). Şu ana kadar Türkiye'de biseksüel bireylerin açılma süreci ve deneyimlerini içeren herhangi bir çalışma bulunmamaktadır.

Queer bireylerin toplumda azınlık bir grup olduğu düşünüldüğünde, deneyimledikleri damgalanma, ayrımcılık, önyargı ve içselleştirilmiş heteroseksizm nedeniyle ruh sağlığı sorunlarına karşı daha savunmasızdırlar (Meyer, 2003). Ayrıca, açılma süreci queer bireyler için zorlu ve karmaşık bir deneyimdir (Matthews ve Salazar, 2012). Dolayısıyla, ruh sağlığı desteği almak, bu zorlukların üstesinden gelmeye yardımcı olabilir ve açılma sürecinde yaşananları anlamlandırmada ve süreçte olacakları öngörmede faydalı olabilir (Ali ve Lambie, 2018; Kalra, 2012). Bununla birlikte, queer danışanlarla çalışırken ruh sağlığı profesyonellerinin yetkinliği

önemli bir konudur (Bettergarcia vd., 2021). Türkiye'deki ruh sağlığı profesyonelleriyle ilgili olarak, queer danışanlarla çalışmaları hakkında araştırmalar yapılmış ve bu alanda daha fazla farkındalık ve eğitime ihtiyaç olduğu bulunmuştur (Kurt ve Ateş, 2008; Toplu-Demirtaş ve Akçabozan-Kayabol, 2018). Hem adaylar hem de alanda çalışan ruh sağlığı profesyonelleri genellikle queer bireylerin açılma deneyimi hakkında sınırlı farkındalığa ve bilgiye sahiptir.

Yukarıdaki tüm hususlar göz önünde bulundurulduğunda ve biseksüel bireylerin açılma deneyimlerine ilişkin literatür eksikliğine dikkat çekildiğinde, LGB bireylerin özgün açılma deneyimlerinin Türkiye'nin kültürel bağlamı içinde araştırılmasına ihtiyaç duyulmaktadır.

1.1. Araştırmanın Amacı

Bu çalışma, Türk LGB bireylerin açılma sürecini ve deneyimlerini derinlemesine anlamayı amaçlamaktadır.

1.2. Araştırma Soruları

Araştırmanın amacına uygun olarak, bu çalışma aşağıdaki soruları ele almayı amaçlamaktadır:

1. Türk LGB bireyler cinsel yönelimlerinin farkına varma sürecini nasıl deneyimliyorlar?
2. Türk LGB bireyler cinsel yönelimlerini kabul etme sürecini nasıl deneyimliyorlar?
3. Türk LGB bireyler “açılmayı” nasıl tanımlıyorlar?
4. Türk LGB bireyler hayatlarındaki arkadaşlarına, aile üyelerine ve diğer insanlara açılma sürecini nasıl deneyimliyorlar?
5. Türk LGB bireyler açılma süreçlerinde ruh sağlığı desteği almayı nasıl algılıyorlar?

1.3. Araştırmanın Önemi

Bu çalışmadan ruh sağlığı uzmanları, LGB bireylerin kendileri ve aileleri fayda sağlayabilir. Türkiye’deki çalışmalar, psikolojik danışmanların LGB bireylerin açılma deneyimleri hakkında az bilgiye (Kurt ve Ateş, 2018) ve onlara yönelik olumsuz

tutuma sahip olduklarını göstermiştir (Bakır-Ayğar vd., 2015). Bu çalışmanın bulguları, ruh sağlığı uzmanlarının LGB bireylerin açılma yolculuğunda neler yaşadığını görmeleri ve LGB bireylerin deneyimleri hakkındaki bilgi eksikliğini azaltmaları için kullanılabilir.

LGB bireyler ayrımcılık, önyargı, damgalama ve içselleştirilmiş heteroseksizm nedeniyle akıl ve ruh sağlığı açısından daha savunmasızdırlar (Meyer, 2003). Örneğin, depresyon, madde kullanımı ve intihar riski oranları daha yüksektir ve korunmasız seks gibi riskli cinsel davranışlarda daha fazla bulunmaktadırlar (Erdoğan ve Köten, 2015; Hatzenbuehler vd., 2008; Ryan vd., 2025; Storholm vd., 2016). Ruh sağlığı değerlendirmelerinde cinsel yönelim konuları sık sık göz ardı edilmektedir (Parameshwaran, 2017). Bu nedenle, LGB bireylerin açılma sürecinde neler yaşadıklarını ve bu sürecin ruh sağlıklarını nasıl etkilediğini daha iyi anlamak, ruh sağlığı profesyonellerine LGB bireylerin mevcut durumlarını değerlendirmede ve depresyon, madde kullanımı ve intihar riskini ele almada yardımcı olabilir. Ayrıca, bu çalışma okullarda ve özel uygulamalarda ruh sağlığı destek programlarını geliştirmeye veya psikoeğitim seminerleri düzenlemeye destek olabilir. Böylece, ruh sağlığı uzmanları riskli davranışların ve ruh sağlığı sorunlarının şiddetinin artmasını önleyebilir. LGB bireyler de hayatlarında ne olduğunu ve açılma yolculuklarında bir sonraki adımda ne olacağını anlayabilmek için bilgilenebilirler.

Türkiye'deki LGB bireyler için diğerlerinin anlatıları ve deneyimlerini okumak kendi cinsel yönelimlerini keşfetme, kendilerini kabul etme ve birine açılma sürecinde yardımcı olabilir. Birçok kişinin benzer mücadeleler, duygular ve deneyimler yaşadığını görmek, yalnızlık ve izolasyon duygularını hafifletebilir ve daha büyük bir topluluğa ait olma hissini arttırabilir. Ek olarak, açılma sürecinde olumlu deneyimler yaşandığını görmek, süreçte zorluk yaşayanlara umut verebilir. Ebeveynler için de çocuklarının yaşadıkları süreci anlamalarına ve onları kabul etmelerine destek olabilir.

2. YÖNTEM

2.1. Araştırmanın Deseni

Bu çalışmada nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden olan ve belirli bir olayı veya olguyu insanların nasıl deneyimlediklerini araştıran Yorumlayıcı Fenomenolojik Analiz (YFA) yöntemi kullanılmıştır (Smith ve Osborn, 2003).

2.2. Katılımcılar

YFA yönteminin doğasına uygun olarak, araştırmada amaçlı örneklem yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Katılımcı seçim kriterleri şu şekildedir: (a) kendini lezbiyen, gey ya da biseksüel olarak tanımlamak, (b) 18 yaşından büyük olmak, (c) Türkiye'de doğmak ve büyümek, (d) anne ve babasından en az birine cinsel yönelimini açmak.

Bu çalışma, yaşları 18 ile 39 yaş arasında değişen 18 LGB bireyi ile yapılmıştır. Çalışmaya altı lezbiyen, altı gey ve altı biseksüel birey katılmıştır. Tüm katılımcılar Ankara, İzmir, İstanbul gibi büyük şehirlerde büyümüşlerdir. Katılımcıların hepsi en az liseyi bitirmiş ve büyük çoğunluğu lisans mezunudur.

2.3. Veri Toplama Aracı

Veri toplama yöntemi olan yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme soruları literatür ışığında geliştirilmiştir. Tez danışmanından geri bildirim alındıktan sonra, yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu, uzman görüşleri için LGB bireylerle çalışan, psikolojik danışmanlık alanından iki uzman akademisyene gönderilmiştir. Uzmanlardan alınan geribildirimden sonra bir lezbiyen kadın katılımcıyla pilot görüşme yapılmıştır. Görüşme soruları Ek B'de verilmiştir.

2.4. Veri Toplama Süreci ve Verilerin Analizi

Çalışmanın başlangıcında Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi Etik Kuruluna başvuru yapılarak etik izin alınmıştır. Çalışma için hazırlanan duyuru afişi araştırmacının sosyal medya hesabında ve LGB Facebook gruplarında paylaşılmıştır. Katılımcılarla görüşme randevuları e-posta aracılığı ile belirlenmiştir. Görüşmeler çevrimiçi ZOOM platformu üzerinden gerçekleştirilmiş ve kaydedilmiştir. Katılımcılarla bilgilendirilmiş onam formu paylaşılmış ve hem sesli hem de yazılı olarak izin alınmıştır.

Katılımcılarla yapılan görüşmeler 45-60 dakika arasında sürmüştür. Tüm ses kayıtları, görüşmeler tamamlandıktan sonra MAXQDA 2022 programı aracılığı ile deşifre edilmiştir. Görüşmelerin analizi için Smith ve arkadaşlarının (2022) IPA adımları kullanılmıştır. Araştırmacı, verilere aşina olmak için önce tüm deşifreleri okumuştur. Okuma sırasında olası kodlar ve yorumlar için notlar alınmıştır. Kodların kategorizasyonuna başlamadan önce her görüşme birden fazla kez okunmuştur. Tekrar

eden kodlar MAXQDA 2022 aracılığı ile bulunmuştur. Deneyimsel ifadeler oluşturulmuş ve her bir alıntı okunarak aralarındaki bağlantılar ve deneyimsel ifadeler kontrol edilmiştir. Kişisel deneyimsel temaları, deneyimsel alt temaları ve alıntıları listelemek için bir tablo çıkarılmıştır.

2.5. Araştırmanın Sınırlılıkları

Duyuru afişi yalnızca sosyal medya hesabı olan ve duyuruyu yayınlayan hesaplara abone olan kişilere ulaşmıştır. Bu nedenle internet ve sosyal medya hesabı olmayan kişiler çalışmaya katılamamıştır.

Katılımcıların çoğu orta veya orta-üst sosyoekonomik statüden (SES) gelmekte ve iki katılımcı dışında hepsi büyük şehirlerde yetişmiş en az üniversite mezunudur. Dolayısıyla, bu çalışma düşük SES'li, küçük şehirlerde doğup büyümüş LGB bireylerin deneyimlerini içermemiştir.

Ek olarak, araştırma sorusunun doğası gereği, çalışma geçmişe dönük sorular içermektedir. Bu nedenle, katılımcılar deneyimlerinin ve yoğun duygularının tam ayrıntılarını hatırlayamamış olabilirler. Bu durum, duygularını zaman içinde işlemeleri nedeniyle deneyimlerini eksik veya olduğundan fazla rapor etmelerine neden olmuş olabilir.

3. BULGULAR

Analiz sonuçlarına dayanarak dört kişisel deneyimsel tema ortaya çıkmıştır. Bunlar "Cinsel yönelim kimliği oluşumunun başlangıcı", "Cinsel yönelimin kabul süreci", "Açılma yolculuğu" ve "Ruh sağlığı profesyonelleridir."

3.1. Cinsel Yönelim Kimliği Oluşumunun Başlangıcı

Bu temada çocukluk ve ergenlik yaşantılarından bahsedilirken iki alt deneyimsel tema bulunmuştur: ipuçları ve cinsel yönelim farkındalığı. İpuçlarından biri olarak katılımcılar, çocukluk ve ergenlik dönemlerinde aynı cinsiyetten akranlarından farklı ilgi alanlarına sahip olduklarını ve farklı davrandıklarını belirtmişlerdir.

"*Çocukken sokakta kızlarla ip atlıyorsam bunun için eve gönderildim. Bazı hareketlerim kibar konuşurken biraz ağzımı yayıyor olmam dolayısıyla kız kılıklı olarak adlandırıldım ötekileştirildim."* (Burak, erkek ve gey)

İkinci ipucu olarak katılımcılar aynı cinsiyetten akranlarına karşı yaşadıkları yakınlıktan ve yoğun duygulardan bahsetmişlerdir. Aynı cinsiyetten en yakın arkadaşlarını kıskanmaları, hayranlık duymaları, bedenlerine dair hissettikleri merak ve heyecan duygularının o zamanlarda adını koyamadıklarını belirtmişlerdir.

"Lisede şey oluyor mesela hani herkes daha böyle dating işlerine daha öyle buluşma hoşlanma işlerine girdiğinde, benim hiçbir kıza öyle aşırı ilgim- hiçbir kıza ilgim yoktu hani. Daha çok böyle hani beğendiğim erkekler vardı ama ben onun geylik olduğunu değil de hani, hani hayranlık, daha onun gibi olmak isteme tarzı bişey olarak düşünüyordum. O erkeği hani görmek hoşuma gidiyor, onla onunla vakit geçirmek falan." (Hakan, erkek ve gey)

Son ipucu olarak da katılımcılar romantik ve cinsel çekimlerinin keşfi sürecinde, dizilerdeki queer karakterlerinin ve internette izledikleri porno içeriklerinden bahsetmişlerdir. Bu deneyimlerinde cinsel yönelimlerine dair farklılıkların olduğunu görmeye başladıklarını belirtmişlerdir.

"*Erken ergenliğe girmiştim işte dördüncü sınıf civarında. O zamanlarda böyle işte pornoyla ilk tanışma zamanımda ee şeye yöneldiğimi hatırlıyorum gey pornolarına yöneldiğimi hatırlıyorum."* (Ömer, erkek ve gey)

İkinci deneyimsel alt tema olarak ise katılımcılar cinsel yönelimlerinin farklı olduğunu anladıkları anlardan bahsetmişlerdir. Tek bir anla sınırlandırılmayan bu farkındalık sürecinde, katılımcılar deneyimledikleri bazı özel anlardaki şaşkınlık ve utanç duygularından da bahsetmişlerdir.

"*Yani mastürbasyon yapmaya başladıktan sonra bu hoşlandığım kadınları düşündüğümü biliyorum. Lise yıllarıma denk geliyor ilk 10. sınıfta falandı sanırım işte yavaş yavaş artık bir kadının bedeninde neyi sevdiğimden fark etmeye başlamıştım. Erkeklerle asla interaksiyona girmek istemiyordum."* (Defne, kadın ve biseksüel)

3.2. Cinsel Yönelimin Kabul Süreci

İkinci kişisel deneyimsel tema, cinsel yönelimi kabullenme süreciyle ilgilidir. Katılımcıların deneyimlerinden yola çıkılarak altı deneyimsel alt tema bulunmuştur. Bunlar sırasıyla kabul sürecinde içselleştirilmiş heteroseksizm, inkâr, korku ve yalnızlık duyguları, aile içinde LGB bireylere yönelik olumsuz tutumların etkisi ve cinsel yönelimlerini kabul ettikten sonraki deneyimlerdir.

İlk alt temada katılımcılar yaşadıkları içselleştirilmiş heteroseksizm nedeniyle yaşadıkları suçluluk, iğrenme ve kendilerine yönelik nefret duygularından bahsetmişlerdir.

"*O zorluk hatta uzun bir süre devam etti şimdi söyleyeceğim zorluk... Birazcık kendimden iğrenme... Yakın zamanda aşmaya başladım belki de sonunda aştım diyebileceğim bir şey. Gey ilişkiyi izlemek görmek dediğim gibi iki tane dizide niye ben izlemeden geçtim onları atraksiyon varsa? Her an kendini sorgulamaya devam etmek sen gerçekten biseksüel misin yani hem erkeklerden romantik hoşlanmadığını düşünürken nasıl biseksüel diyebiliyorsun kendine? Bu sorgulama çok uzun süre devam etti."* (Fatih, erkek ve biseksüel)

İkinci alt temada katılımcılar kendilerinde bir yanlışlık olduğunu düşündükleri için cinsel yönelimlerine dair oluşan farkındalıklarını reddetmeye, hislerini ve yaşadıklarını farklı şekilde adlandırmaya çalıştıklarından bahsetmişlerdir.

"*Hani mesela herkes bir sanatçıyı çok sever ama ben aşık olma şeyindeydim ve hepsi kadındı. Yani bir erkeğe karşı çekim hissetmiyordum. Arkadaşlarım ileride evlilik hakkında konuşuyorlardı ama ben hiçbir erkekle evleneceğimi hayal etmedim. Hep bir kadına yönelik bir eğilimim vardı ama bunu tabii çok farklı boyutlandırıyorsunuz hani LGBTİ olarak değil de ya hayranlıktır ya da hani ilgimi çekiyordur. Hep böyle üstünü kapattım."* (İlayda, kadın ve lezbiyen)

Üçüncü alt temada farkındalık sonrası yaşadıkları korkudan bahsetmişlerdir. Yaşadıkları korkunun içinde fiziken şiddete uğrama ve toplumdan dışlanma gibi olumsuz tepkiler yer almaktadır.

"*Ben direkt öldürüleceğimi düşünüyordum yani özellikle babamın ya da abilerimin kulağına giderse kesinlikle öldürülürüm. Eğer sosyal bir ortamda erkek grubu tarafından öğrenilirse dövülürüm. Yani direkt fiziksel şiddet de ilişkilendiriyordum. O yüzden zaten kadınlarla başladım açılmaya yani onların fiziksel şiddetini düşünmüyordum öyle bir tahayyülüm yoktu. Sözel ya da psikolojik şiddetle baş edebileceğimi düşünüyordum ama fiziksel şiddet beni çok korkutuyordu. Evet yani kesinlikle öldürülme ve dövülme korkusu."* (Burak, erkek ve gey)

Dördüncü alt temada kabullenme sürecinde yaşadıkları yalnızlıktan bahsetmişlerdir. Toplum içerisinde gözlemleyebilecekleri ya da rol model alabilecekleri açık kimlikli queer bireylerin olmadığını söylemişlerdir.

"*Bilmediğim bir dünya hani etrafında evet heteronormatif ilişkileri çok görüyorsun ama homoseksüel ilişkileri görmüyorsun bilmiyorsun. Bu biraz korkutucu aslında hani nasıl bir dünya nasıl iletişim kuruyorlar nasıl ilerliyor ya da arkadaşları nasıl yaklaşıyor çünkü hiçbir arkadaşım yoktu açık olan bana."* (Alara, kadın ve lezbiyen)

Beşinci alt temada katılımcılar ailelerinin LGB bireylere yönelik olumsuz tutumlarından bahsetmişlerdir. Televizyonda gördüklerinde ya da konusu açıldığında, ailelerinin nefret söyleminde bulunduğunu belirtmişlerdir.

"*Annem "Ben bir lezbiyenle aynı sofrada yemek yemem istemem" demişti hani bu da açılma olayından da öncesinde olan bir olay aslında."* (Mercan, nonbinary ve lezbiyen)

Son alt temada ise cinsel yönelimlerini kabul ettikten sonra yaşayacakları yeni deneyimlere açık olmalarının verdiği mutluluk ve heyecandan bahsederken onur hissine değinmişlerdir.

"*Ben artık böyle bir varlığından onur duyma evresindeyim ki gerçekten varlığımdan tamamıyla onur duyuyorum ve hiçbir utanç duymuyorum varlığımdan. Yani bütün olumlu ve olumsuz özelliklerimi geyliğime bağlıyorum."* (Kaan, erkek ve gey)

3.3. Açılma Yolculuğu Teması

Üçüncü kişisel deneyimsel tema, açılma deneyimlerini içermektedir. Bu tema, açılmanın katılımcılar için ne anlama geldiğini, açılmayı nasıl tercih ettiklerini, açılma nedenlerini ve son olarak birine açılmadan önce ve sonra neler olduğunu ele almaktadır.

Katılımcılar açılmanın onlar için ne anlama geldiğinden bahsederken iki alt tema bulunmuştur: iki aşamalı süreç ve başkalarına haber verme. Ada'nın (nonbinary/kadın ve biseksüel) ifade ettiği gibi iki aşamalı süreç, kendine açılmayı ve başkalarına açılmayı içermektedir:

"*İnsanın hani böyle kendiyle yani kendine söylediği hikaye belki kendine kendiyle ilgili anlattığı hikaye bir bu kısmı var. Bir de bunu yakın çevreye veya uzak çevreye veya dünyaya yani bir şekilde şey olarak iletmek kabul ederek iletme kısmı var. İkisi farklı şeyler benim gözümde. Yani bence hani birbiriyle ilişik olsa da hani bazen insanlar sonuçta kendilerini kabul edip bazı korkular, bazı toplumsal baskılar sebebiyle kabul ettirme kısmından uzak duruyorlar. Onun için böyle iki aşamalı bir şey olarak algılıyorum herhalde açılmayı."*

Açılmanın diğer bir anlamı olarak da cinsel yönelimlerini başka insanlara haber vermek olarak tanımlamışlardır.

"*Cinsel yöneliminin ya da cinsiyet kimliğinin beklenen ailenin tarafından ya da işte arkadaşların tarafından beklenenin dışında olması durumunda aile ya da arkadaşları bunu haber vermek gibi diyebiliriz *gülüyor* Onlarla bu konuşmayı yapıp onları bilgilendirmek."* (Beyza, kadın ve biseksüel)

İkinci alt temada açılma deneyimlerinden bahsederken, katılımcılar bir sohbet esnasında sırası geldiğinde planlamadan açılmayı tercih ettiklerini belirtmişlerdir.

"*Hep yüz yüze açıldım evet hepsi de. Şöyle oluyor genelde bir gün diyorum ki ben bu kişiye açılacağım. Diyorum ki işte 2 gün sonra şu şekilde hiç plan yapmıyorum sadece diyorum ki sohbet konusu oraya geldiğinde ben artık gizlemeyeceğim. Yani eğer cümlenin çevresinden dolanıyorsa atıyorum eski yaşadığım bir aşkla ilgili işte sevdiğim kişi diyeceğime mesela erkek arkadaşım diyeceğim."* (Burak, erkek ve gey)

Birine açılma motivasyonları sorulduğunda ise katılımcılar yalan içermeyen gerçek bir hayat yaşamak istedikleri için açılmaya karar verdiklerinden bahsetmişlerdir.

"*Ben şeyin sıkıntısını çekmeye başladım hani annemden saklamak konusunda hiçbir sıkıntım yoktu benim hayatımı irdelemiyorlardı ama ben onlara anlatmak istiyordum. Ben annemle güzel anılarımı paylaşmayı seviyorum. Yaşadığım deneyimleri paylaşmayı seviyorum. Tamam dindarlar işte partilediğim alkol gecesini anlatmıyorum ama hani bir şeyler romantikleşmeye başladığında anlatmak istiyorum en kötü ve böyle bir parçam gizli kalsın da istememeye başladım bir noktadan sonra."* (Defne, kadın ve biseksüel)

İkinci açılma motivasyonu olarak ise çevrelerinde bulunan queer bireylerin arasında güvende hissettiklerinden ve onların kendilerini anlayacaklarını düşündükleri için onlara açılmaya karar verdiklerinden bahsetmişlerdir.

"*Güvende hissetmek aslında hani çevremde bu şekilde güvende görebildiğim sırrımı yani sır olarak saklayabileceğine inandığım biri vardı çünkü o da aslında benim gibiydi. Yani dışlanan bir yanda, bu temel üzerinde dışlanan bir insandı ve gerçekten karakter olarak çok benziyorduk. Aynı mesleği yapıyoruz ikimizde aynı mesleğin öğrencisiyiz yani aynı yerlerde hani delege olarak çalışıyoruz. O yüzden benim için güvendeydi. Her konuyu zaten paylaşabiliyordum. Bu konuyu da paylaşınca da şeyi hissetmiştim sonunda hani hiç gizlemem gerekmeyeceği bir insan buldum falan diye bir rahatlama yaşamıştım."* (Mercan, nonbinary ve lezbiyen)

Birine açılmadan önce iki duygu yaşadıkları bulunmuştur. Bunlardan biri Kaan'ın (gey ve erkek) da bahsettiği, kendini kabul etmenin ve olası olumsuz tepkilere rağmen açılmaya karar vermiş olmanın heyecanı:

"*Heyecanlıydım korkmuyordum. Onlar (friends) beni reddetse bile umurumda bile değildi hani homofobi uygulasalar bile ilgilenmeyecektim bununla. Kendimi bu şekilde şartlamıştım çünkü değişmesi gereken kişiler onlardı ben değildim. Bunun farkındaydım o yüzden de çok heyecanla açıldım sağ olsunlar birçoğu da benim bu heyecanıma ortak oldu."*

Birini kaybetme korkusu ise açılmadan önce hissettikleri ikinci duygudur.

"*Bilmiyorum korktum ama bir yandan da daha rahat olacağımı hissettim yani söylemeden önce korktum. Dediğim gibi insan kaybetmekten hoşlanmıyorum. Bir anda yani ikilem arasında kalıyorsun ya evet tanıdığın insanlar yıllarını geçirdiğin insanlar*

aslında açık görüşlü olduğunu düşündüğün insanlar bir yandan da diyorsun ki annen bu (negatif) tepkiyi verdi onlar neden vermesin." (Alara, kadın ve lezbiyen)

Birine açıldıktan sonra yaşanılan deneyimler üç kişisel alt temaya bölünmüştür. İlki Beyza'nın (kadın ve biseksüel) değindiği gibi saklanmak zorunda kalmamanın getirdiği rahatlamadır:

"*Yani yanlarında yoldan geçen insanları keserken ya da mesela çok güzel bir kız yanından geçerken gözü takılır ya onu saklamaya çalışmayı bırakmak falan ya da atıyorum bir yerlerden bir kızla flörtleşiyorsam bunu o zamana kadar söylememişsem, artık böyle ya "Bu arada date'im var" falan böyle söylemeye başladım. Yani biraz daha açık olmaya başladım."*

İkinci alt tema ise ebeveynlere açıldıktan sonra onlardan aldıkları tepkileri içermektedir. Katılımcılar ebeveynlerine açıldıktan sonra ebeveynlerinin hiçbir şey olmamış gibi durumu görmezden geldiklerinden bahsetmişlerdir.

"*Annem sanki böyle bir detay hayatımızda yokmuş gibi davranıyor. Görmezden geliyor bu durumu ama aramız iyi yani sadece yok sayıyor."* (Kayra, transmaskülen nonbinary ve lezbiyen)

Ebeveynlerden alınan ikinci tepki olarak ise bir süre sonra çocuklarının cinsel yönelimlerini kabul ettikleri yönündedir.

"*Annem de kendisi diyor yani "Baban daha çabuk kabul etti her şeyi. Benim kabul etmem daha zor oldu çünkü ben kendimi suçladım. Suçladım diyorum seni ben doğurduğum için sanki babanın hiç payı yokmuş gibi yani" *gülüyor* Böyle şeyden tutun işte hamileyken aldığı vitamin ilaçları mı beni gey yaptığından tutun da işte her türlü o durumu hissetmiş. Tek çocuk olmam bu arada. O da ayrı bir dram oldu hepimiz için herhalde. Annemle kabul sürecimiz çok zor geçti."* (Can, erkek ve gey)

Son olarak ise arkadaşlarına açıldıktan sonra destek gördüklerinden ve ayrımcı bir tutumla karşılaşmadıklarından bahsetmişlerdir. Desteklemek için Deniz'in (nonbinary/kadın ve lezbiyen) örneğinde olduğu gibi açıldığı arkadaşı onu bir LGB bireyle tanıştırmıştır:

"*Buluşma ayarladı o gey arkadaşıyla (arkadaşı). Gey arkadaşı, o ve ben buluştuk. Ondan sonra o nasıl açıldığından bahsetti. Tinder açmamı önerdi denememi önerdi ancak bu şekilde arkadaş bulabileceğimi söyledi."*

İkinci tepki olarak da arkadaşlarına açıldıktan sonra olağan bir şekilde dönüt aldıkları için ayrımcı bir tutumla karşılaşmadıklarından bahsetmişlerdir.

"*İşte sekizinci sınıf.. Yine sekizinci sınıfın sonu P başka bir liseye, bir şehre lise*

okumaya gitti. Yazın ondan sonra biz de öyle buluşmuştuk. Sonra P gidince ben fark ettim bayağı aşık falan olduğumu. Sonra da işte çocukluk arkadaşıma dedim ki "Ya sana bir şey diyeceğim, ben Pye âşık oldum galiba" falan dedim. O da "Nasıl ya falan" dedi böyle normal tatlı bir şekilde konuştuk. "Ee söyledin mi bak P haftaya Mersin'e geliyor, sen de söylersin tamam mı görüşelim" falan böyle şeyler yaptı. Gayet herhangi bir erkekten hoşlandığımı söylesem yapacağı tarzda bir tepki." (Beyza, kadın ve biseksüel)

3.4. Ruh Sağlığı Profesyonelleri Teması

Dördüncü ve son kişisel deneyimsel tema ise ruh sağlığı profesyonelleri ile ilgilidir. İlk kişisel alt temada katılımcılar bir ruh sağlığı profesyonelinden destek almamalarının nedeni olarak buna ihtiyaç duymadıklarını ve kendi başlarına açılma sürecini hallettiklerini belirtmişlerdir.

"*Belki ihtiyacım olmuştur belki hâlâ o dönemden kalan bir şeyler taşıyorumdur üstümde ama kendi deneyimimde hayır ve kendi deneyimimde… benim kendi çıkardığım öz envanterimi çıkardığım zaman hissettiğim şeyler bana gösteriyor ki psikolojik destek almadım almaya ihtiyacım olmadı. Alsaydım bazı şeyleri kolaylaştırabilir miydi bazı şeyleri fasilite edebilir miydi? Bazı şeyleri edebilirdi. Bu da dediğim gibi bazı şeyler benim kendi mücadele isteğimden geldi."* (Görkem, nonbinary ve biseksüel)

Son olarak bir ruh sağlığı profesyonelinden destek aldıkları zaman onlardan açılma sürecinde destek beklediklerinden bahsetmişlerdir.

"*Bir sürü duygunun açılma konusu korku mutluluk acı hepsinin bir anda olduğu ve duyguların karıştığı bir an. Bir psikolog bunu anlayıp duyguları cımbızla duyguları tek tek ayırıp hepsini ayrı ayrı anlamama yardımcı oldu 5 sene sonra da olsa da oldu. O zaman olsaydı çok daha iyi olurdu."* (Fatih, erkek ve biseksüel)

4. TARTIŞMA

Bu bölümde bulgular alanyazın ışığında tartışılmıştır.

4.1. Cinsel Yönelim Kimliği Oluşumunun Başlangıcı

Katılımcılara cinsel yönelim kimliklerinin oluşmaya başladığı zamana dair sorular sorulduğunda katılımcılar o zamanki deneyimlerini ve yaşadıklarını direkt cinsel yönelimlerine bağlamasalar da birtakım ipuçlarından bahsetmişlerdir. Akranlarına göre farklı bir çocuk olmak, aynı cinsiyetten akranlara duyulan ilgi ve romantik ve cinsel ilişki keşifleri sırasında heteronormatif beklentilerin dışına çıkmak Cass (1979), Coleman (1982) ve Troiden (1989) modelleriyle örtüşmektedir.

Ek olarak, Guittar'ın (2013) bahsettiği gibi cinsel yönelim kimliğine dair farkındalık tek bir andan oluşmasa da katılımcılar çocukluk ve ergenlik zamanlarındaki bazı anların onlar için ayırt edici olduklarından bahsetmişlerdir.

4.2. Cinsel Yönelimin Kabul Süreci

Cinsel yönelimlerinin kabulü sürecinde katılımcıların yaşadıkları içselleştirilmiş heteroseksizm, cinsel yönelimlerini reddetmeleri, zarar göreceklerinden ve toplumdan dışlanacaklarından korkmaları, çoğunluğu Müslüman olan bir ülkede yaşamalarıyla açıklanabilir. İslam, LGB bireyleri sapkın ve günah olarak görmektedir ve toplumda da bununla ilişkili olumsuz tutumlar vardır. Meyer'in (2003) de bahsettiği gibi toplumun olumsuz tutumları kabul sürecini olumsuz etkileyebilmektedir.

Kabul sürecini etkileyen diğer bir faktör ise toplum içerisinde açık kimlikli LGB bireylerin olmamasından dolayı yalnız olduklarını düşünmeleridir. Cass'in (1979) modelindeki kimlik karmaşası aşamasında değinildiği gibi, süreç içindeyken etraflarında tanıdıkları ya da duydukları LGB bireyler olmadığında, dünyada tek olduklarını ve yaşadıklarını paylaşabilecekleri kimsenin olmadığını düşünmektedirler. Kabul sürecini etkileyen başka bir faktör de aile içinde şahit oldukları olumsuz tutumlar ve nefret söylemleridir. Meyer (2003) aile ve çevresindeki insanların etkilerini uzak faktörlere koyar ve bireylerin kendilerini kabullenme sürecindeki olumlu ya da olumsuz etkisinden bahseder. Aile içindeki nefret söylemlerine şahit olmak içselleştirilmiş heteroseksizmle de ilişkili olup katılımcıların kendilerini kabul sürecini olumsuz etkilemiştir.

Son olarak, kendilerini kabul sürecini tamamlayan katılımcılar yaşadıkları süreci de göz önünde bulundurunca bunu onur duygusuyla ilişkilendirmişlerdir. Cass'in (1979), Coleman'ın (1982) ve Troiden'ın (1989) modellerinde de bahsedildiği gibi cinsel yönelimini kabul eden bireyler varlıklarından onur duyma evresi yaşamaktadırlar.

4.3. Açılma Yolculuğu

Katılımcılar açılmanın onlar için ne anlama geldiğinden bahsederken, bunu kendilerini kabul etme ve başkalarına açılma olarak iki aşamalı bir süreç olarak tarif

etmişlerdir. Alanyazınla paralel olarak (Guittar, 2013; Ryan vd., 2015), birine açılmadan önce kendilerine açılmaları gerektiğinden bahseden katılımcılar bunu bir önkoşul olarak görmektedir. Alanyazın için yeni bir bulgu olarak da bazı katılımcılar açılmayı uygun bir zaman geldiğinde haber vermek, bilgilendirmek olarak tanımlamışlardır. Plan yapmadan ve açılma olayını büyütmeden, rutin hayatlarında olan bir bilgiyi paylaşır gibi paylaşmak olarak açıklamışlardır. Benzer biçimde, katılımcılara nasıl açıldıkları sorulduğunda plan yapmadan, sohbet ettikleri konunun içine yedirerek açıldıklarını belirtmişlerdir. Alanyazında da belirtildiği gibi (Manning, 2015; Wandrey vd., 2015), plan yapmak bir stres faktörü olduğu için konunun akışında uygun bir yerde açılmak onlara daha güvenli gelmektedir.

Alanyazına paralel olarak (Hemphill, 2020; Mater, 2021), katılımcıların açılma motivasyonlarından biri yalan bir hayat yaşamak istememeleridir. Söyledikleri yalan zincirini takip etmenin ve çevrelerinde değer verdikleri kişilere yalan söylemenin zorluğu nedeniyle bu yükü daha fazla taşımak istemedikleri için açılmaya karar vermişlerdir. İkincisi ise çevrelerinde tanıdıkları queer bireylerin varlığıdır. Alanyazınla tutarlı olarak (Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1982; Kabacaoğlu, 2015), benzer bir süreçten geçtiklerini ve açıldıklarında olumsuz bir tutumla karşılaşmayacaklarını düşündükleri için tanıdıkları queer bireylere açılmaya karar vermişlerdir.

Açılmadan önce yaşadıkları duygular heyecan ve açıldıkları kişiyi kaybetme korkusudur. Heyecan, alanyazında yeni bir bulgudur ve katılımcıların kendilerini kabul etmenin ve kendileriyle onur duymanın verdiği kararlılıkla birine açılmak onlar için heyecan vericidir. İkinci duygu olan açıldıkları kişiyi kaybetme korkusu ise alanyazına paraleldir (Gerena, 2021; Price ve Porsek, 2022). Açılmadan yaşadıkları kaygı ile açıklanabilir (McLean, 2007). Yaşadıkları kaygı nedeniyle açıldıkları kişiden negatif tepkiler beklemektedirler ve bunlardan biri de onları kaybetme olasılığı yaratan reddedilmektir.

Açıldıktan sonra artık yalan söylememenin verdiği ve kendileri gibi olabileceklerini bilmenin etkisiyle katılımcılar rahatladıklarını dile getirmişlerdir. Çocukları kendilerine açıldıktan sonra ebeveynlerin belirli bir süre sonra kabullenmelerinde etkili olan faktörlerden biri, toplumun LGB bireylere yönelik olumsuz tutumları ve durumu kendilerinin suçu olarak görmeleri olabilir.

Arkadaşlarına açıldıktan sonra ise destek gördüklerinden ve ayrımcı bir tutumla karşılaşmadıklarından bahsetmişlerdir. Bu da alanyazınla da ilintili olarak

açılacakları arkadaşlarını iyi seçmeleriyle açıklanabilir (Kabacaoğlu, 2015; Klein vd., 2015). İyi anlaştıklarını düşündükleri ve uzun süredir tanıdıkları, başka bir deyişle "güvenli liman" olarak gördükleri arkadaşlarına açılmaya karar vermişlerdir.

4.4. Ruh Sağlığı Profesyonelleri

Bir ruh sağlığı profesyoneline ihtiyaçları olmadığını düşündükleri için destek almayı tercih etmemeleri alanyazın için ilginç bir bulgudur. Sorunlarını kendi başlarına çözebileceklerine inandıkları ve mevcut durumu bir sorun olarak görmedikleri için ruh sağlığı uzmanına ihtiyaç duymamış olabilirler. Başka bir açıklama ise, çevrelerinde destek alabildikleri arkadaşların varlığı olabilir.

Katılımcılar, açılma sürecinde ruh sağlığı uzmanlarından destek alma ihtiyacını dile getirmişlerdir. Açılma sürecinde yaşadıkları duygularını yönetme ve özellikle başkalarından gelen olumsuz tepkilerle nasıl başa çıkacaklarını yönetme konusunda ihtiyaçları olabilir. Bishop ve arkadaşlarının (2021) bulgularıyla uyumlu olarak, bir ruh sağlığı uzmanından destek almak ve anlaşıldığını görmek, açılma sürecinin olumsuz yönlerini hafifletebilir.

4.5. Kuram ve Uygulamaya Yönelik Çıkarımlar

Çalışmanın amacı biseksüel, gey ve lezbiyen bireylerin açılma deneyimlerini karşılaştırmak olmasa da bu çalışma Türkiye'de biseksüel bireylerin açılma deneyimlerini içeren ilk çalışmadır. Alanyazınla tutarlı olarak (Calzo vd., 2011), bu çalışmada da LGB bireylerin açılma deneyimleri arasında bir fark gözlemlenmemiştir. Ek olarak, çalışmanın bazı bulguları Cass'in eşcinsel kimlik oluşumu teorik modeliyle (1979) örtüşmektedir. Örneğin, kabul süreci sırasında yaşanılan yalnızlık duygusu, kimlik karmaşası aşamasına denk gelmektedir.

Çalışmanın bulguları, LGB bireyler, ebeveynleri ve ruh sağlığı uzmanları için önem taşımaktadır. Türkiye'de biseksüel bireyleri de içine katarak yapılan ilk çalışma olmasıyla birlikte, araştırmanın bulgularından yararlanarak LGB bireyler kendi deneyimleriyle benzerlikler görebilir ve daha az yalnız hissedebilirler. Ayrıca, ebeveynler ve arkadaşlarla açılma süreci sırasında ne bekleyebileceklerine dair fikir edinebilirler. Böylece ebeveynler, çocuklarının ihtiyaçlarını daha etkili bir şekilde belirleyebilir.

LGB bireylerle çalışan ya da çalışmak isteyen ruh sağlığı uzmanları, danışanlarının deneyimlediği olası süreçler hakkında bilgi sahibi olabilirler. Bireysel danışmanın yanı sıra, LGB bireylerin karşılaştığı zorlukları göz önünde bulundurarak, LGB bireyler için destek grupları ve psikoeğitim grupları düzenleyebilir. Ek olarak, okul psikolojik danışmanları, okullarındaki tarama testlerini veya öğrenciyi tanıma görüşmelerini yürütürken cinsel yönelime dair sorular ekleyebilir. Böylece, depresyon, anksiyete ve intihar gibi olası riskleri önceden görme, tespit etme imkânı bulunabilir. Çalışmanın bulgularından yola çıkarak okullarında LGB bireyler hakkında seminerler yapabilirler.

Ek olarak sivil toplum kuruluşları, çalışmanın bulgularından edindikleri bilgilerle LGB bireylerin ihtiyaçlarına yönelik projeler geliştirebilir ve ayrımcılık karşıtı yasalar ve kapsayıcı politikalar için savunuculuk yapabilirler.

4.6. Gelecekteki Araştırmalar için Öneriler

Bulguları daha ayrıntılı değerlendirmek ve kanıta dayalı genellemeler yapabilmek için, nicel veya karma araştırma yöntemleri kullanılarak araştırmalar yapılabilir. Yapılacak yeni çalışmaya panseksüel, aseksüel ve ambiseksüel gibi diğer cinsel yönelimler dahil edilebilir. Ek olarak, açılma sürecinde hem bireylerin hem de ebeveynlerinin deneyimlerini araştırmak, aile dinamiklerini her iki perspektiften incelemeyi sağlayabilir. Son olarak, LGB bireylerin ruh sağlığı uzmanları ile deneyimlerini araştırmak, bu uzmanların yetkinliklerini ve ihtiyaçlarını daha iyi anlamaya yönelik fikir sağlayabilir.

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