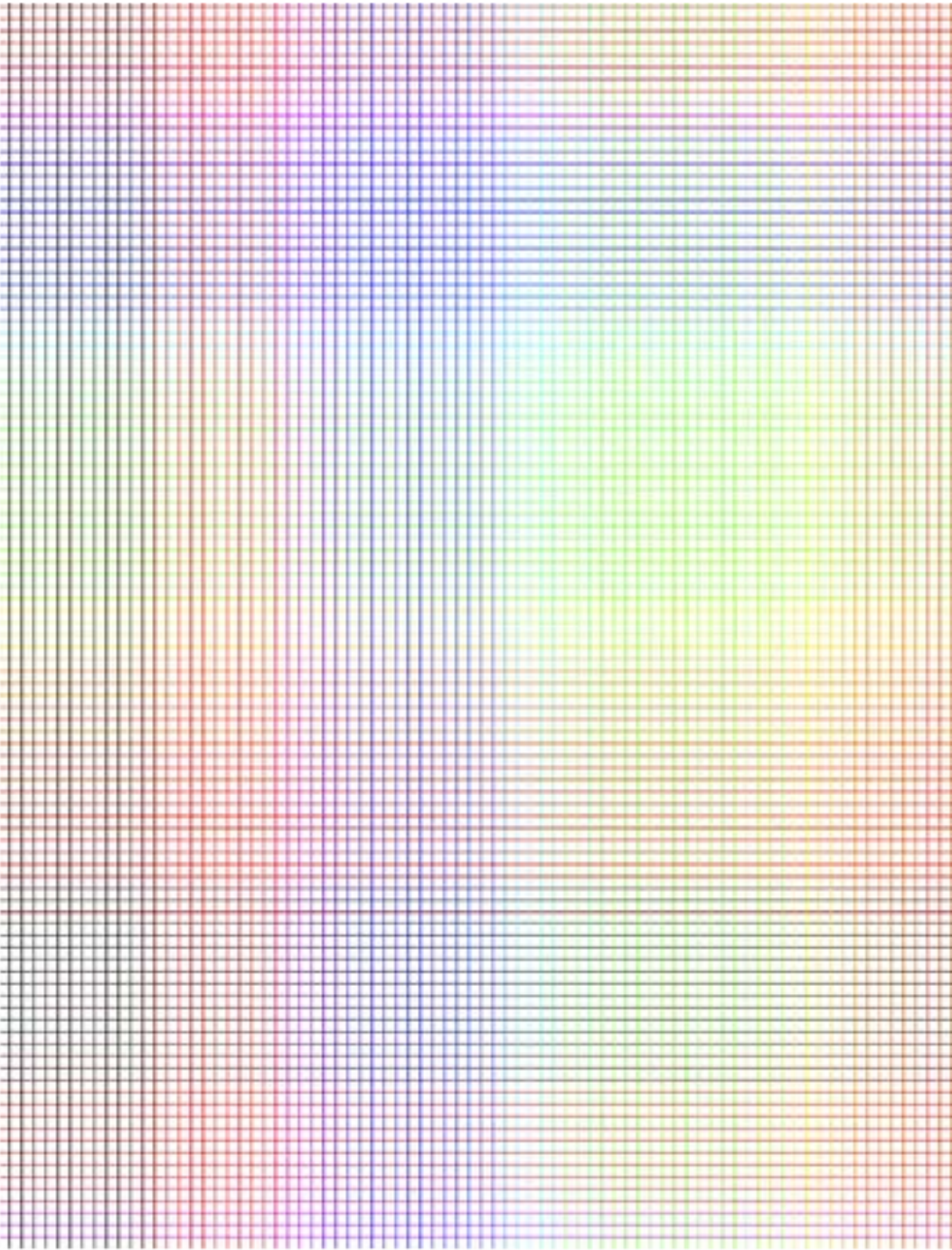


*The Ideal Experience of*  
**Coming Out to the Parents**

*Research Findings for LGBT Community*



*“It's all about communicating with the people you love.”*

# The Ideal Experience of Coming Out to the Parents

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**01**

# **Intro- duction**



## Background Introduction

A study in England, funded by the Department of Health, investigated the high risk of suicide among young LGBT people (aged 16-25). The researchers found that 25% of individuals were hiding their sexual orientation and/or gender identity and did not seek help when experiencing suicidal thoughts or attempting suicide. It comes as a shock to many when they hear that coming out as LGBT is still difficult and traumatic for many people, even today.

## How to use this book?

In the following pages, we have analyzed the data we collected and compiled the results into a framework to explain what we have found in our research. This book therefore intends to provide further insights to designers and also enlighten the LGBT community. We hope this book helps audiences see the coming out to parents process from different perspectives and develop their personal understanding of the ideal coming out process.



**02**

# **Frame- work**

## The Ideal Experience of Coming Out to The Parents

Coming out to parents is a very difficult process. In part, it is about you. You are sharing something very personal with people you love. This makes it a time when you could become closer and more attached, but it also carries the risk of disagreement and pain. The aim of this body of work is to illuminate the ideal experience of coming out to parents, according to the deeply human-centered research we conducted over a period of eight weeks. Our ultimate hope is that our findings, derived from direct observation, interviews, and cultural probes, provide valuable insights for those who are working and designing with the challenges of coming out to the parents.





Coming out is a long process.

I am ready to give my parents the time and space they need to process the fact that I'm LGBT.

My parents will come to accept who I am; it's only a matter of time.

I need to be financially independent when I come out.

I want to prepare my parents when I come out; I don't want to hurt them.

I hope my parents won't worry about my future.

I want to receive support from people I trust.

I want a comfortable space when I share my true self.

When having a coming out conversation, I should maintain a clear mind.

There is no need for my parents to fully understand LGBT. I just want them to accept who I am.

There are external resources available to help parents after their children come out.

I wish to have more opportunities to communicate with my parents.

# Coming Out to My Parents

My parents respect my decision as always

My parents treat me as usual.

I hope they can reassure me that my happiness is the most important thing.

I bring my beloved one to the house, and my family supports us.

My parents help me keep this secret from anyone who might hurt me.

It's all about being honest with myself and the people I love.

I want to be braver, at least enough to defend my sexual orientation.

I don't want to be categorized or discriminated against.

Coming out or not is influenced by culture and religion.

I'm struggling to influence my parents' perspectives as they hold very conservative views.

Having open-minded parents is truly invaluable.

I want to create a memorable experience with my parents.

I want to be fully prepared when I come out.

I want my parents to stop avoiding talking about LGBT topics.

I want my parents to support me.

I want to know who I am.

Coming out is not always a priority.

# Insights

## I want to create a memorable experience.

I hope to see my parents and myself learn and grow from this experience. In the future, we'll reflect on this moment and gain a deeper understanding of who I am.

## I want to be fully prepared when I come out.

Even though I know that I'll still be loved, the 'what if' factor has always been my biggest fear. Therefore, I need to rehearse many times to be very well prepared for my parents' various potential reactions.

## I want my parents to stop avoiding talking about LGBT topics.

I understand that my parents might instinctively want to retreat when faced with something huge yet unfamiliar. However, escaping won't change the reality. I wish they would engage with me, even if it's through very simple questions. All I need is to see that they're willing to understand me and not give up on our relationship.

## I want my parents to support me.

Parents are lifelong companions, and most continue to love their children in a way that enables them to express 'I love you,' accept their child's sexual orientation as reality, and offer support.

## I want to know who I am.

Am I certain of my sexual orientation and/or gender identity? I need to be able to answer the question "Are you sure?" with confidence before I come out.

## Coming out is not always a priority.

Not everyone should come out to their parents. The decision to come out should be based on your specific situation. Don't feel pressured to reveal your identity if you're uncertain that it will improve your circumstances—prioritizing self-love is the most important thing.

03

**Memorable  
Experience**

## I want to create a memorable experience with my parents.

"I hope to see my parents and myself learn and grow from this experience. In the future, we'll reflect on this moment and gain a deeper understanding of who I am."

"I hope I'll be content with my decision to come out. If ever I find myself feeling low in the future, I expect this experience to remind me of my courage."

*"When I look back, I am still glad I came out, even though the result was not good."*







Coming out is a loooooong process.

*"If I come out, I will set up  
a step-by-step plan."*

Coming out is a long and gradual process rather than a single event. Sharing everything at once could overwhelm my parents and potentially lead to unforeseen negative reactions. People often fear what they don't understand, and as their child, it's my responsibility to educate them and help them slowly become acquainted with the real me.

# I am ready to give my parents the time and space they need to process the fact that I'm LGBT.

The realization that "my child is LGBT" can be one of the most challenging facts for my parents to take in. It will take time for my parents to reflect on my behaviors, connect the dots, and gradually understand who I am. People can't instantly accept a brand new or unfamiliar idea. It's important to give them a peaceful space to think about this on their own.

*"I can't force them to understand."*

*"I'll reserve a room for my parents to give them time to digest the news."*

**My parents will come to accept who I am;  
it's only a matter of time.**

*"I had never seen my mom shaking like that and saying so many hurtful words to me like that. But six months later, she told me she'd support me."*

Six months, one year, two years—the prolonged silence and tension were agonizing, and we all suffered deeply. However, after a considerable amount of time, my parents came to accept my identity. After all, I am their child.

TIME  
IS  
PRECIOUS.



04

Fully  
prepared



*"I had a really heated argument with my mom. It was super tense, and everything just happened so fast. I came out on impulse. I felt regret, but it was too late."*


## **I want to be fully prepared when I come out.**

I should be the one to choose the time, place, and people when I come out. It's a moment I've been preparing for my entire life. Saying the words, 'I am LGBT,' will completely change my world.

Even though I know that I'll still be loved, the 'what if' factor has always been my biggest fear. Therefore, I need to rehearse many times to be very well prepared for my parents' various potential reactions."

## I need to be financially independent when I come out.

I have heard and seen many families break down due to coming out. Unless I am extremely confident that my parents will be supportive - as evidenced by their past statements clearly demonstrating acceptance - I need to become a self-sufficient adult before I come out, in case the worst happens.

A photograph of a person from behind, walking through a forest. They are wearing a dark jacket, a brown hat, and carrying a large, dark backpack with orange accents. A white water bottle is visible on the side of the backpack. The background is filled with green trees and foliage.

*“I will come out to my parents once I can be responsible for my life independently.”*




**I want to prepare my  
parents when I come  
out; I don't want to  
hurt them.**

*"I love my parents and I am  
afraid that coming out will  
hurt them."*

Coming out is a personal matter, but coming out to my parents is not just about me. If I truly love them, I will try to see things from their perspective. If it's not the right time, I won't come out; I don't want them to be hurt, either physically or mentally.

People often fear what they are not familiar with or do not understand. My parents also need to be prepared. It has been shown that parents who are more informed about the LGBT community are more likely to be accepting. I will subtly hint at it and keep them informed about the existence of LGBT individuals and our culture.

**Love  
Shouldn't  
Hurt**



*"I need to achieve some goals  
to prove that I am capable of  
living independently and  
protecting myself."*

## **I hope my parents won't worry about my future.**

There are discriminations and invisible injustices out there, and my parents naturally worry about their children's future. They wonder if their children are strong enough to face these injustices. Health issues like AIDS are also a concern. Somehow, they also worry their children are too special to be loved by someone and wonder who will care for their children if they are not around.

If I can show them that I am leading a normal life, have a trustworthy and beloved partner, and that we will take care of each other, things might improve. All parents experience the tension between how their children live their lives and how they would prefer them to live.



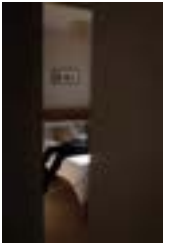
*"I came out to my siblings first  
and received their support."*

## **I want to receive support from people I trust.**

Before I come out, I need to establish a strong network of allies and a support system in advance. First, I will come out privately to those who are most likely to be supportive, such as my best friends or siblings whom I trust. This approach ensures that group consensus is firmly on my side, reinforcing acceptance as the prevailing social norm.



# I WAIT



# COMFORTABLE



**space when I share my true self**

*"I need a safe and private place to come out."*

*"The coming out environment should be peaceful and comfortable."*

*"I prefer to hold a coming out party and invite my parents."*




*"I need an environment that will ease my nerves and provide me with the courage to come out."*

*"I will prepare a dinner for my family and tell them the truth."*

*"I prefer to come out over the phone rather than face to face because my father is not tolerant of LGBT."*





A person is shown from behind, standing underwater. They are wearing a dark wetsuit and white fins. A large, dense cloud of white bubbles surrounds their head and upper body, rising towards the surface. The water is dark blue, and the surface is visible at the top with some light reflecting off it. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

*“I need to have a clear mind when I come out. I cannot be too emotional.”*

## **When having a coming out conversation, I should maintain a clear mind.**

No matter which methods I choose to come out, they should assist me in maintaining a level mindset and organizing my thoughts.

It could escalate the situation if both my parents and I become too emotional during the coming out conversation. I want to ensure that I always maintain control over the situation. Coming out in anger and using my sexual orientation as a weapon is not a good choice.

05

Stop Avoiding

Talking

*"My father switches the channel  
whenever someone discusses LGBT topics on TV."*

**I want my parents to  
stop avoiding talking  
about LGBT topics.**

EXIT

I want my parents  
to stop avoiding talking about LGBT

Topics.



*"When I came out to my parents, I could feel that they were pretending to accept and understand because they were not listening and tried to switch the topic."*

Many parents opt to pretend they are unaware of their children being LGBT, even after being informed. There's no rule in parenting books dictating what parents should do when their children disclose their LGBT identity.

I understand that my parents might instinctively want to retreat when faced with something huge yet unfamiliar. However, escaping won't change the reality. I wish they would engage with me, even if it's through very simple questions. All I need is to see that they're willing to understand me and not give up on our relationship.



There is no need for  
my parents to fully  
understand **LGBT**,  
I just want them to  
accept who I am.

*"It's okay if my parents don't fully understand my sexual orientation. I simply want them to accept the reality."*

Being LGBT is not a choice; it is an intrinsic part of who I am. To me, coming out is merely a process of informing my parents that they have an LGBT child. It is acceptable to me if they maintain their prejudice or even show discrimination. Whether they accept it or not, I want them to acknowledge the reality that I am LGBT, and I am not going to change.





*"I suggested to my parents that they gather more information from social media."*

*"My parents got help from psychologists who help the parents to understand my identity."*

Sometimes, parents who receive a coming out message from their children struggle to accept the fact initially. What they require is additional support from reliable third parties. There are support groups, LGBT centers, and psychologists available to assist parents in understanding this community. While many children suggest that parents seek information from the internet, they have also discovered that much of the information online is biased and does not offer objective facts.





I wish to have more opportunities to communicate with my parents.

*"My father and I used to have minimal communication. He was heartbroken and believed it was his fault for who I have become."*

Some parents immediately attribute negative occurrences to themselves, believing that they are responsible for their children "becoming" LGBT. However, the lack of a shared understanding of certain issues should be held accountable for this unreasonable guilt.

If children have opportunities to engage in more communication with their parents, understanding may come more easily.



06

Support

**I want my  
parents to  
support me.**



Parents play a role of companion in our whole life. Most parents continue to love their child in a way that allows them to say "I love you," to accept the reality of the child's sexual orientation and to be supportive. In fact, now that the relationship between parents and child is on a level of mutual honesty and trust, most parents say their relationship is better than it ever was. All parties begin to feel better about what has happened.



# My parents respect my decision as always

I have made numerous decisions throughout my life, and most of the time, my parents have told me that they respect and support my choices.

Coming out is one of the most significant decisions I've ever faced. It involves choosing how I will live the rest of my life alongside the people I love most. I hope they can respect my decision as they have in the past.

*"My parents think it's my choice. They respect that."*



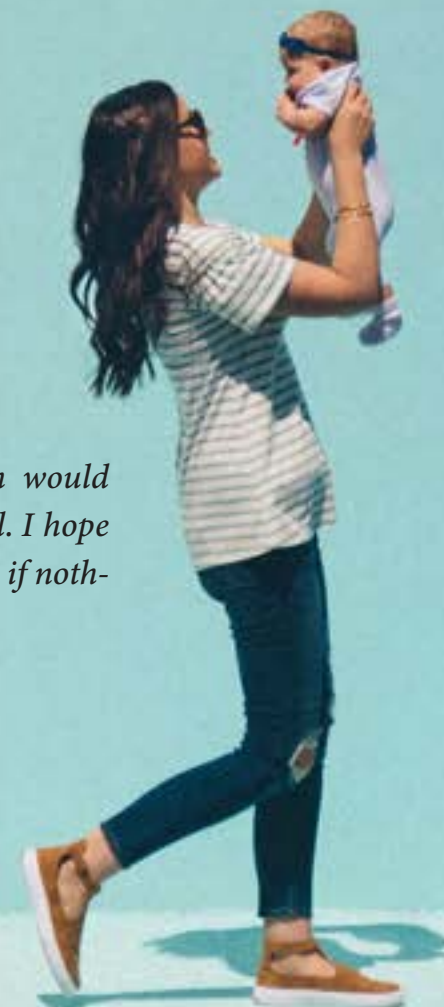
After coming out, the ideal scenario would be for my parents to treat me as usual, rather than become strangers and stop talking to me.

I hope they continue to praise me when it's needed, guide me when I make mistakes, and ask me questions like 'Where are you going?' or remind me to 'Call me when you get home safe,' just as any loving parents would.


And we don't need to question my sexual orientation further.

# My parents treat me as usual.

*"The ideal reaction would be no reaction at all. I hope they can accept it as if nothing has changed."*







I hope they can reassure  
me that my happiness is  
the most important thing.

Before coming out, I prioritized my parents' happiness, often concealing my true self to preserve family harmony.

Is their happiness more important than my own? I've pretended to lead a 'normal' life that isn't really mine. I want to be myself and pursue my own happiness. I hope they can understand that my happiness and their happiness are not the same.

*"My mom wasn't happy, but at least she wanted me to be happy."*

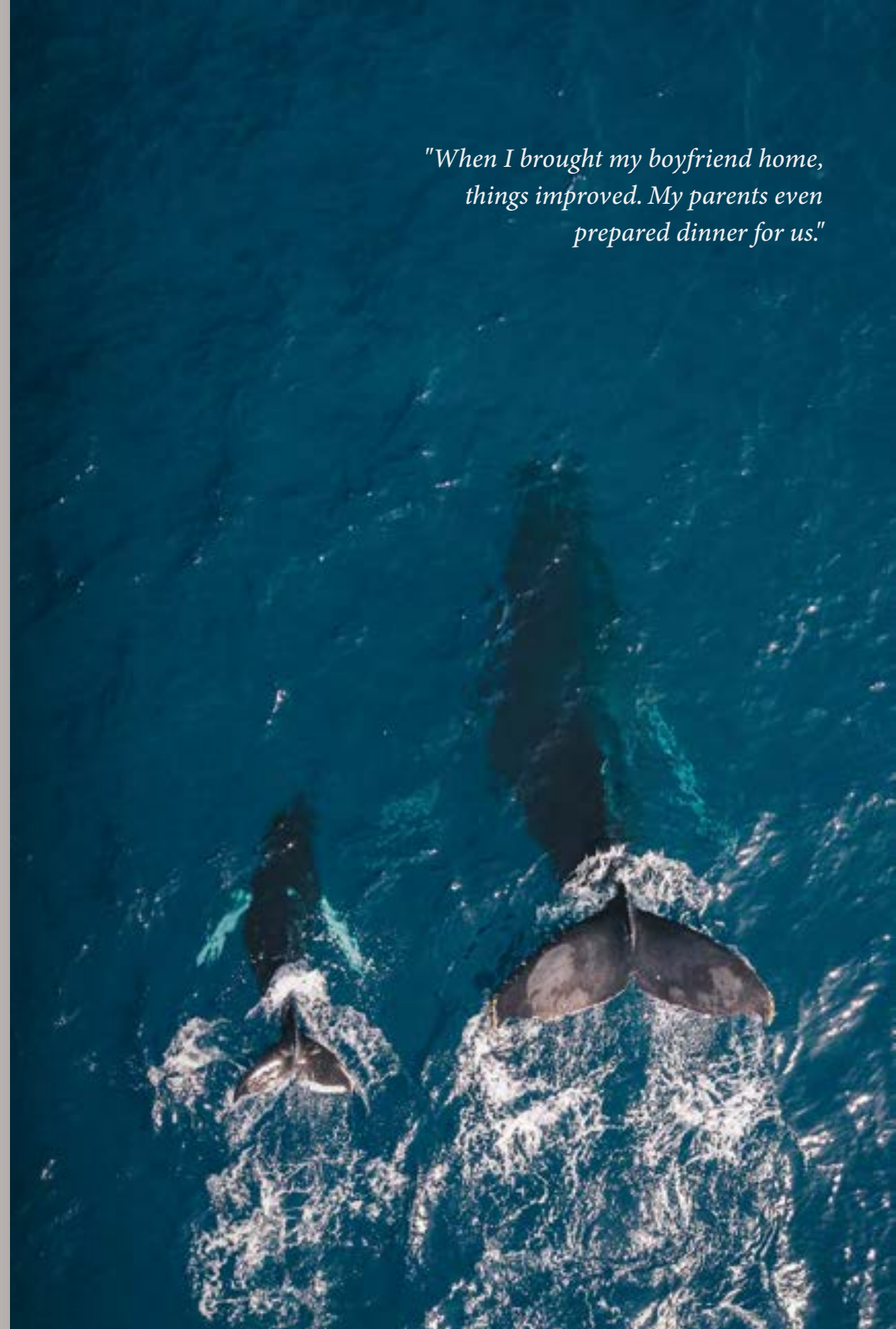


# I bring my beloved one to the house, and my family supports us.

*“We feel happy for our children to have a wonderful person to love.”*

Most often, parents are primarily concerned about their children's future. They wonder: Will they be alone? How will they take care of themselves?

*"When I brought my boyfriend home,  
things improved. My parents even  
prepared dinner for us."*



## My parents help me keep this secret from anyone who might hurt me.

*“My mom helped me keep this secret from my father.”*

Since I was born, my parents have been like umbrellas, shielding me from potential harm and keeping me safe.

Many people face harsh treatment from those who are homophobic. After I come out to any of my parents, I hope they can continue to protect me by keeping the secret, even from those closest to us.





**07**

**Know**

**Who I am**

# I want to know who I am

Am I certain about my sexual orientation and/or gender identity? I need to be confident in my answer to the question 'Are you sure?' before I can discuss it openly. Any uncertainty on my part could exacerbate my parents' confusion and undermine their confidence in my judgment.

*"I watched numerous videos and movie scenes, and even played out scenarios in my mind to understand myself better, which was quite embarrassing."*



A photograph of a person standing on a sandy beach, facing away from the camera and looking out at the ocean. The person is wearing dark shorts and has their arms slightly out to the sides. In the background, there is a large, dark, forested island or headland rising from the water. The sky is overcast with grey clouds. The water is a light greyish-blue with small waves breaking on the shore.

**It is all about being  
honest with myself and  
the people I love.**

*"My mom asked me if I was gay. I told her the truth."*

Coming out enables me to grow as a complete individual and fosters a positive self-image. It relieves the fear of being 'discovered' and alleviates the stress and demoralization of leading a double life. Moreover, for the people I love and those who love me, learning about my sexuality from someone else rather than directly from me would undoubtedly be hurtful.

# I want to be braver, at least enough to defend my sexual orientation.

*"I try to avoid any situation where gay issues are discussed on TV or radio."*

As a member of the LGBT community, I've put a lot of effort into challenging the stereotypes that people may hold, from my friends to my parents. I hope to be braver and let them know that, although I love them, I cannot tolerate any insults.





I  
DO  
NOT  
WANT  
TO  
BE  
CATEGORIZED  
OR  
DISCRIMINATED  
AGAINST


*"It's unacceptable that my parents and cousins don't take LGBT issues seriously and even make jokes about it."*

I struggle with being labeled under terms like "LGBT community" or "LGBT group," as I don't like being categorized, and it makes me feel uncomfortable and discriminated against.



**08**

**Not always  
a priority**

A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a white paper strip. The hands are positioned in the center-left of the frame, with fingers gripping the paper. The background is dark and out of focus, featuring horizontal lines that suggest a window blind or a similar structure. The lighting is soft, highlighting the texture of the skin and the paper.

*"Coming out is not my priority.  
I hate to get caught up in troubles."*

**Coming out is not  
always a priority.**

Not everyone should come out to their parents. The decision to come out should be based on your specific situation. Don't feel pressured to reveal your identity if you're uncertain that it will improve your circumstances—prioritizing self-love is the most important thing.

## Coming out is influenced by culture and religion.

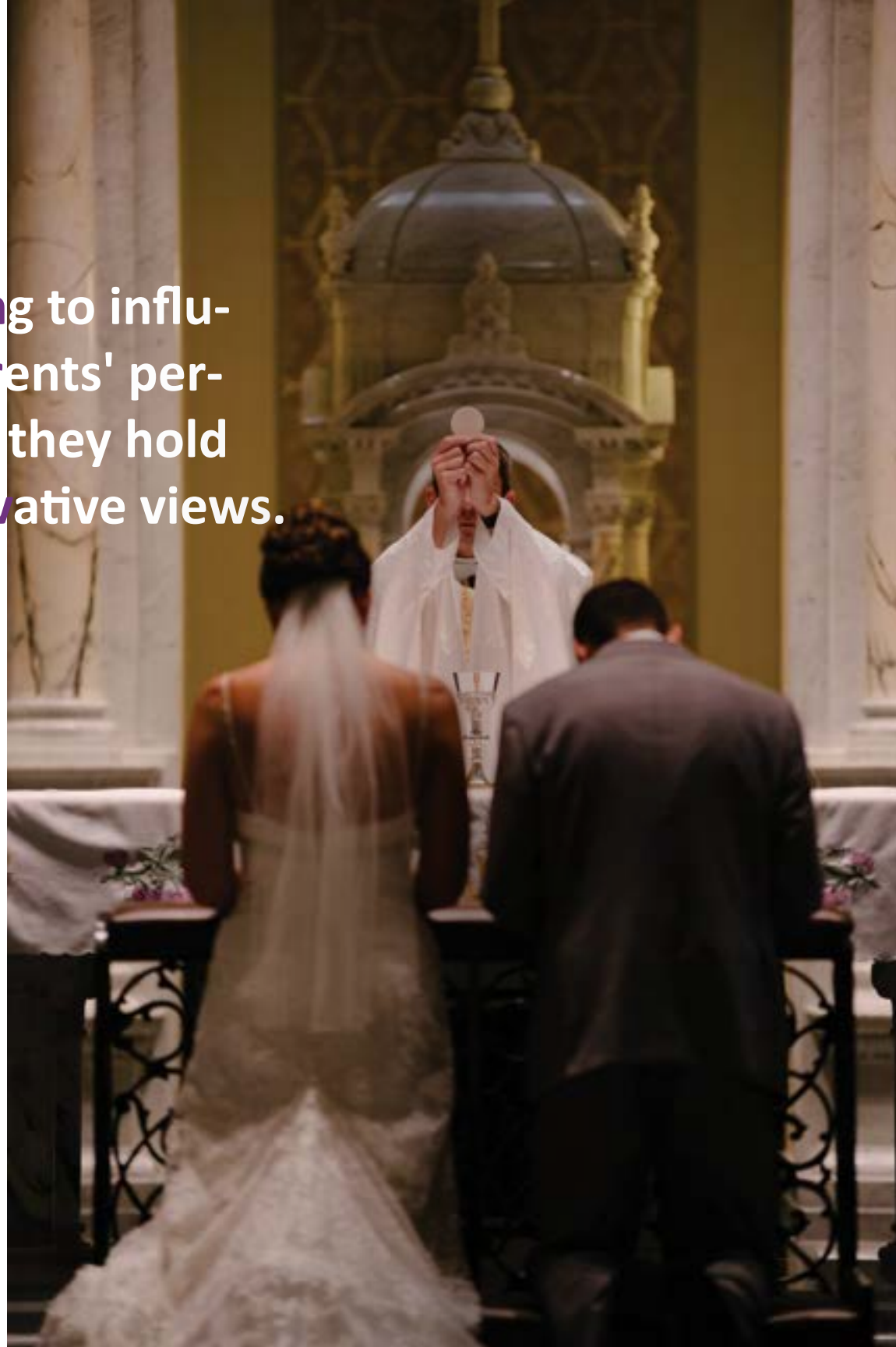
*"Sometimes I think it's ridiculous that my safety is ensured not by my family, but by a green card."*

It is well known that adherents of Islam often strongly oppose LGBT identities, viewing them as violations of God's expectations for His people. People's core values are inevitably shaped by their cultural background and religion, which influence their worldview and behavior. If coming out could harm you without bringing any benefits, it's important to carefully consider your decision.





I'm struggling to influence my parents' perspectives as they hold very conservative views.



Most of the time, parents and children have different views on how life should be lived. This generational conflict is common. Parents, having lived longer, often believe they have a better understanding of life. However, this is only part of the picture. There is a significant chance that parents may not be fully aware of societal changes or fully understand the kind of people their children have become. It takes time and patience to bridge this gap. The most crucial point to remember is that no one knows what is best for you better than you do yourself.

*"My mom still hopes I'll marry a man and have what she considers a 'normal' family."*



## Having open-minded parents is truly invaluable.

*“I am a lucky child. Having an open-minded family is one of the reasons I chose to come out to my mom on Mother's Day.”*

For LGBT individuals, having open-minded parents is a priceless gift. It eliminates the need to hide one's identity. Those who are still in the closet often admire or feel envious of those who have successfully come out, which can inspire them to reveal their true selves to their parents, sometimes driven by emotional impulses.

# Design Opportunities

09



01

Coming out kit for parents - serves as a reliable resource akin to a parenting book. It's designed to help parents understand LGBT culture and provides guidance on how to support and relate to their LGBT children.

02

Coming out activity - LGBT organizations draw inspiration from our research to organize memorable coming out events for LGBT individuals.

03

Coming out prep kit - The kit designed for individuals planning to come out to their parents. It helps users prepare themselves to increase the likelihood of a positive outcome. Additionally, the kit encourages users to think carefully and consider all aspects before deciding to come out, ensuring they make a well-considered decision.



**10**

**Process**

# RESEARCH PROCESS



Topic	Observation	Interview	Cultural Probe	Affinitization	Magazine
<p>The team created a stakeholder map and established 'emotion and process' as the primary lenses. These will guide the subsequent research efforts.</p>	<p>We began our observation at the LGBT center, followed by a visit to Club One gay bar, where we observed patrons and enjoyed a drag queen show. We engaged in participatory observation by joining a kickball game. Additionally, we visited the LGBT center again to participate in one of their church events.</p>	<p>We interviewed 26 people from diverse cultural backgrounds, using open-ended questions to engage our participants. They shared their emotions and personal stories about coming out to their parents.</p>	<p>A cultural probe is a research tool used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data from participants. We constructed a large-scale installation to attract people to participate in our research. During this phase, we gathered substantial data from the public, encompassing both parents' attitudes and the perspectives of LGBT individuals.</p>	<p>We employed the Yellow-Blue-Pink-Green method for organizing our data. We utilized sticky notes to conduct affinitization on over 800 single data points.</p>	<p>We explored options to deliver our research findings and decided to use magazine as it allow users to read at their own pace. The text itself carries powerful communicative ability, but it often requires extensive narrative to convey a point and resonate with users. In contrast, photographs can inherently tell a story and evoke emotions. Combining text with visuals can unleash a unique magic.</p>



INTERVIEW MAP

{ "I hope that one day  
in the future, My beloved one and I  
can walk on the street just like  
any normal couple." }

[ "I want to come out because I  
love them. I'm not concerned  
about others' opinions; I  
simply want my parents to be  
proud of me." ]

“ "I had to rely on myself for  
everything, becoming more  
independent than others my  
age. Because one day, I'll come  
out to my parents, I need to be  
mentally and financially  
prepared in case the worst  
happens." ”

( "At that moment, I began to realize  
that being in a relationship with a  
girl could present various challeng-  
es, including financial concerns, age  
differences, the prospect of having  
children, and uncertainties about the  
longevity of the relationship." )

< "I might not fully understand,  
but I respect his choice. My  
main concern is that people  
outside might treat him poorly." >

[ "If I come out to them, I want  
them to be happy with my  
choice and still proud of me. I'll  
continue living my life just like  
usual." ]



# Image Reference

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Photo from Google Map

*Many thanks to:  
All the participants who shared  
their coming out stories with us.*

