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“I’ll Give Them All the Time They Need”: How LGBTQ+ Teens Build Positive Relationships with Their Active, Latter-Day Saint Parents

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Abstract: Strong and supportive relationships with parents are key to promoting the mental health of LGBTQ+ teens. Overwhelmingly, studies have focused on ways to improve parental acceptance, largely neglecting understanding the parent–teen dyad as a unit and ignoring teens’ contributions to their relationships with their parents. To address this gap, we conducted 19 separate interviews with LGBTQ+ teens and their Latter-day Saint (LDS) parents (38 total interviews) to explore the ways that teens contributed to the development of positive relationships. Additionally, we explored teen-related factors that presented challenges to the parent–teen relationship. Thematic analyses suggested that LGBTQ+ teens engaged in several behaviors that benefitted their relationships with their LDS parents, including having authentic and meaningful conversations, fostering family connections, engaging in casual communication, being open about LGBTQ+ identity, and giving parents time and grace. Participants reported several common teen-related factors that presented challenges to the relationship, including communication and connection difficulties, challenges related to general development, and parents and teens avoiding LGBTQ+ and religious topics. Results suggest that while several of these factors may be relevant for parent–teen relationships more broadly, many were specific to LGBTQ+ teens with active, LDS parents. These findings highlight the ways that LGBTQ+ teens manage to foster positive relationships with their parents despite potential conflict between their LGBTQ+ identities and their parents’ religious beliefs.

Keywords: LGBTQ; Mormon; LDS; parent; teen

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1. Introduction

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ+) teenagers experience a plethora of life stressors. Similar to all teens, LGBTQ+ teens must navigate stressors related to their developmental contexts, particularly their increased need for autonomy and independence, which parents may be hesitant to grant (Pérez et al. 2016). Also, as with other teens, LGBTQ+ teens may face stressors that are unrelated to their developmental contexts (e.g., dis/ability, low socioeconomic status, minoritized racial/ethnic identities). However, LGBTQ+ teens also face a unique set of stressors associated with their LGBTQ+ identities that their heterosexual and cisgender peers do not (CDCP 2019; Mustanski and Liu 2013). These stressors include *distal* stressors (e.g., external stressors such as violence, stigma, or interpersonal rejection; (Grigoriou 2014; Kaniuka et al. 2019)) and *proximal* stressors (e.g., subjective internal events and stressors such as internalized negative beliefs about sexuality or gender; (Cox et al. 2010)). Together, these stressors are known as *minority* stressors and have been consistently shown to explain differences in physical and mental health between LGBTQ+ and heterosexual/cisgender individuals (Lefevor et al. 2019b; Meyer 2003).

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning teens who come from a conservative religious background may face an additional layer of stress due to conflict

between religious teachings and their LGBTQ+ identities (Page et al. 2013). Many conservative religions uphold traditional gender roles and values (Altemeyer 2003), explicitly or implicitly discouraging what many LGBTQ+ individuals see as a full or authentic expression of their gender or sexuality. Perhaps unsurprisingly, among LGBTQ+ individuals, religiosity has often been associated with poor self-esteem, feelings of shame and guilt, and increased rates of depression and suicidality (Dahl and Galliher 2012b; Lefevor et al. 2021b). The potential consequences of religious engagement may be especially pronounced for LGBTQ+ teens, who are less likely to have control over their religious environment and more likely to experience discrimination when their family is more religious (Gartner and Sterzing 2018). Evidence suggests that LGBTQ+ teens are at higher risk for proximal minority stressors such as internalized homonegativity (i.e., the process whereby lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons internalize societal messages toward gender and sex—often unconsciously—as part of their self-image; Meyer 2003) as well as mental health problems when their family's faith traditions hold strong hetero- and cis-normative beliefs (Page et al. 2013). Despite these beliefs, some LGBTQ+ individuals choose to continue to affiliate with conservative religions, possibly reflecting their prioritization of family and religious support systems over the open expression of their gender/sexuality (Lefevor et al. 2020).

Substantial research has highlighted the importance of strong and supportive parental relationships for LGBTQ+ teens' mental and physical health (McCormick and Baldrige 2019). Parent–teen relationships and parental support may be especially relevant for LGBTQ+ teens raised in conservative religious environments, as they face an increased likelihood of discrimination, interpersonal rejection, and internalized stigma related to negative religious rhetoric about LGBTQ+ individuals (Goldbach and Gibbs 2017). Strong and supportive relationships with parents can mitigate the detrimental impacts of minority stress and religious identity conflict on health for LGBTQ+ teens (Feinstein et al. 2014). While LGBTQ+ teens with conservatively religious parents may reap the greatest benefits from parental support, they are also considerably less likely to experience this support due to conflict between their LGBTQ+ identities and their parents' religious beliefs (Rosenkrantz et al. 2020).

Despite the considerable amount of research on LGBTQ+ teens from conservative religious backgrounds, few studies have explored the ways in which they form and maintain relationships with their parents. Relatively little is known about how parent–child relationship dynamics may differ when teens' LGBTQ+ identities seem to be at odds with the religious beliefs and practices of their families. Given that these relationships may be particularly health-relevant for LGBTQ+ youth (McCormick and Baldrige 2019), research on the factors that help strengthen and maintain these relationships is critically important. The present study examines the teen-related factors that foster healthy relationship development between LGBTQ+ teens and their parents who are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (CJCLDS).

1.1. LGBTQ+ Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints

As with other conservative Christian faiths, the CJCLDS upholds heterosexual marriage and the family as the ideal relationship configuration (CJCLS 1995). Although the CJCLDS does not consider experiencing same-sex attraction or gender dysphoria to be wrong, it continues to discourage identification as LGBTQ+ and to consider engaging in same-sex relationships or gender affirmation surgery as sin (Oaks et al. 2020). Consequently, members of the CJCLDS who come out as LGBTQ+ face a myriad of unique stressors associated with their religious context. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning Q+ teens who are raised in the CJCLDS may consequently experience tension between their desires for a same-sex sexual relationship or gender-diverse expression and religious policies regarding sexual behavior or gender identity. They may also face stressors such as discrimination in religious spaces or internalize homonegative beliefs from religious teachings. Further, these stressors may vary according to age, with younger LGBTQ+ teens perhaps being more likely to internalize church teachings and older

LGBTQ+ teens experiencing greater tension between desires for sexual/gender expression and church teachings.

Indeed, LGBTQ+ individuals who are engaged with the CJCLDS tend to report more internalized homo/trans-negativity and stigma as they navigate tension between their sexual or gender and religious identities (Lefevor et al. 2019a). This tension often results in feelings of inadequacy, religiously motivated guilt, and depression (Dahl and Galliher 2012a). Further, the CJCLDS's teachings about the importance of heterosexual marriage and traditional gender norms can lead parents to respond to children coming out with feelings of grief, sorrow, anger, and concern (Maslowe and Yarhouse 2015). Evidence suggests that parents' conservative religious beliefs regarding the centrality of heterosexual marriage and traditional gender norms may be the grounds by which some parents reject their LGBTQ+ teens (Baiocco et al. 2014; Etengoff and Daiute 2014; McGraw et al. 2020; Rosenkrantz et al. 2020).

The teachings of the CJCLDS can lead to tension and even rejection for some LGBTQ+ teens. However, the same teachings may simultaneously provide the basis for positive parent–teen relationships for others. The CJCLDS upholds the family as “central” to God's plan for His children and believes that the family relationships created in this life will continue into the next (CJCLS 1995). The CJCLDS provides many structural supports for families ranging from age-related youth groups (CJCLDS 2021c) to childcare at church services (CJCLDS 2021b) to church-sponsored counseling for couples and families (CJCLDS 2021a). Culturally, the CJCLDS also encourages a “home centered, church supported” viewpoint, encouraging families to study scripture and strengthen spirituality in the home as a family unit, as well as family activities and weekly family home evenings (Cook 2018). These family-centered structural and cultural supports may ultimately facilitate more positive parent–teen interactions for at least some LDS parents and their LGBTQ+ teens.

Some research has highlighted the ways that many LGBTQ+ individuals benefit from the development and maintenance of strong family relationships in the context of the CJCLDS. A study of same-sex-attracted women found that strong and supportive family relationships minimized the negative health outcomes associated with espousing a sexual minority identity as a member of the CJCLDS (Jacobsen and Wright 2014). Research exploring the potential benefits of LGBTQ+ youth's engagement with the CJCLDS noted that many teens reported increased sense of self, acceptance of others, and social support as a result of their experiences in the church (Dahl and Galliher 2012a). Some evidence suggests that LGBTQ+ individuals who are more active in the CJCLDS have similar mental health to those who distance themselves from the church, potentially as a result of the support they receive from their religious communities or by maintaining connection with their families through their shared religious beliefs (Lefevor et al. 2020). In fact, members of the CJCLDS who rated their CJCLDS identity as “more important” reported lower symptoms of anxiety and depression compared to those who were unable to prioritize either their religious or sexual identities (Grigoriou 2014). These findings do not negate the vast literature on the potentially harmful ramifications for LGBTQ+ individuals of engaging with the CJCLDS but highlight some of the motivations for continuing to engage and at least some of the possible benefits of engaging (CITATION WITHHELD).

1.2. Developmental Considerations, Parental Acceptance, and Family Dynamics

As with all teens, LGBTQ+ teens face various age-related stressors and potential threats to establishing positive parental relationships. In the context of teens' evolving developmental needs and the emotional repercussions of puberty (Cservenka et al. 2015), many teens experience an increase in parent–teen conflict (Hadiwijaya et al. 2017). Conflict between parents and teens may be exacerbated by teens' still-evolving emotion regulation skills (Bowers et al. 2011) as well as contextual factors such as a lack of protective resources within the family system (e.g., parental warmth; Silva et al. 2020). Parent–teen conflicts during this stage are considered a normative aspect of adolescent development and can function to renegotiate parental authority. This can ultimately lead to a more egalitarian

relationship as teens move into adulthood (Branje 2018). However, these stressors have also been associated with increased rates of mental health issues among teens and may pose a barrier to developing strong and supportive relationships with parents long-term (Lippold et al. 2018).

Additionally, LGBTQ+ teens must also navigate LGBTQ+-specific stressors such as minority stress, which may be further complicated by a variety of contextual factors. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning teens in general may be more likely to experience certain minority stressors due to their developmental contexts; teens are less likely to have control over their environments, and thus may be less able to situate themselves in contexts that can reduce the likelihood of experiencing distal stressors (e.g., geographic regions with more resources for LGBTQ+ individuals or nondiscrimination laws, areas with more LGBTQ+ or affirming people; Eisenberg et al. 2020). Religious engagement may be a particularly salient contextual factor for LGBTQ+ teens' experiences of minority stress. For example, teens raised in conservative religious environments may be more likely to experience minority stressors such as discrimination and interpersonal rejection, as highly religious individuals tend to hold more negative views towards LGBTQ+ people (Lefevor et al. 2021c).

Conflict between teens' LGBTQ+ and religious identities may have significant developmental implications. Recent research has established that LGBTQ+ teens' experiences of minority stress may be dependent on their social and familial contexts; LGBTQ+ teens raised in religious families frequently experience rejection and discrimination from both family and members of their religious communities due to religious beliefs about LGBTQ+ individuals (Goldbach and Gibbs 2017). This often results in social strain, feelings of inadequacy, and religiously motivated guilt (Dahl and Galliher 2012a). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning teens raised in religious environments frequently develop internalized negative beliefs about their LGBTQ+ identities, which have been associated with an increased prevalence of mental health issues and can complicate teens' identity development (Goldbach and Gibbs 2017; Ream and Savin-Williams 2005). Furthermore, conflict between teens' LGBTQ+ identities and their parents' religious beliefs can lead to conflict in the developing parent-teen relationship, with highly religious parents evidencing an increased likelihood of rejecting their LGBTQ+ teens (Rosenkrantz et al. 2020; Ryan et al. 2010).

Many LGBTQ+ teens experience some degree of parental rejection upon coming out (Savin-Williams and Ream 2003). While this experience may be common, it can also be incredibly traumatic (Savin-Williams 2000). The increased likelihood for religiously affiliated LGBTQ+ teens to face rejection from their family and peers is especially concerning, as interpersonal rejection may partially explain LGBTQ+ teens' increased risk for suicide (Ream 2020). Some LGBTQ+ teens manage to develop external support systems in the absence of parental support through peers, connection with other LGBTQ+ individuals, and online friends and support groups (McConnell et al. 2016). However, the implications of family rejection and other identity-related stressors may be more pronounced for younger LGBTQ+ teens (Ream 2019), who have fewer psychological resources to cope with these stressors and less independence from the home environment, making it more difficult to access external supports (Holland et al. 2017).

Positive relationships between parents and teens may be particularly important for LGBTQ+ teens' development as they are a key protective factor for their mental health (Abreu et al. 2019; Katz-Wise et al. 2016). While approximately only a third of LGBTQ+ teens experience parental acceptance of their LGBTQ+ identities (Rosario and Schrimshaw 2013), the literature is quite clear that parental acceptance and support can mitigate a host of mental health concerns, including depression and suicidality (Bregman et al. 2013; Feinstein et al. 2014; Ryan et al. 2010). Conversely, parental rejection has been shown to be a risk factor for depression, suicidality, decreased life satisfaction, perceived burdensomeness, and general psychological distress (Baiocco et al. 2014; Simons et al. 2013; Swendener and Woodell 2017). For transgender and gender-nonbinary teens, strong and supportive

relationships with parents may be key to facing societal barriers such as discrimination, seeking information and support for one's identity, connecting with other transgender and nonbinary individuals, and accessing life-saving gender-affirming care (Abreu et al. 2019).

These trends may be especially salient in a CJCLDS context. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning youth raised in the CJCLDS often experience anxiety towards coming out to their family due to the potential for parental rejection, alienation, and increased family conflict because of their family's religious beliefs (McGraw et al. 2020; Dahl and Galliher 2012a; Dahl and Galliher 2012b). Because teens' adherence to church teachings has theological implications for family connectedness in the afterlife, parental acceptance may be more complex for CJCLDS parents (Mattingly et al. 2015). Furthermore, a variety of other factors unrelated to religious teachings can influence parents' reactions to their teens coming out, including parents' attitudes toward LGBTQ+ individuals, the strength of the parent-child relationship before disclosure, whether teens feel more allied with one parent over the other, and parents' experience with other LGBTQ+ individuals (Reed et al. 2020). Research exploring the ways that LGBTQ+ teens can develop positive relationships with their conservatively religious parents is critical considering the risk factors associated with these intersecting LGBTQ+ and religious identities as well as the potential for parental support to mitigate the negative health outcomes associated with these risks.

1.3. The Teen's Perspective and the Present Study

Research focusing on the relationship between LGBTQ+ teens and their parents tends to focus either on parents' roles in relationship quality or on teens' experiences of parental rejection and the associated consequences for mental health. Although such research is necessary, research focusing on parents' roles in parental rejection only provides partial insight into parent-teen relationships. In particular, it is difficult to understand (a) the role that the LGBTQ+ teen may play in the parent-child relationship, and (b) what kinds of factors promote acceptance and resilience in these relationships.

The present study addresses these gaps by examining the question, "How do LGBTQ+ teens build positive relationships with their Latter-day Saint (LDS) parents?" We present data from separate interviews with 19 dyads of LGBTQ+ teens and their LDS parents (38 total interviews) that focus on the specific ways the teens contribute to building positive parent-child relationships. Additionally, we highlight teen-related factors that present challenges to the parent-child relationship as reported by study participants. At the outset of this project, we were particularly attuned to understanding the ways in which LGBTQ+ teens build relationships with their parents similarly to other teens and ways that are unique to being an LGBTQ+ teen with LDS parents (e.g., relationship factors specifically related to teens' LGBTQ+ identities).

2. Methods

2.1. Research Team

A deliberately diverse research team was established to minimize researcher bias associated with religious/spiritual ideologies, sexual orientation, gender identity, and personal lived experiences. The five researchers involved in the study espoused a range of religious (Latter-day Saint, agnostic), sexual (heterosexual, bisexual, gay, queer), and gender (cisgender man, cisgender woman) identities. Every stage of the research process involved at least two researchers with different gender and sexual identities and religious beliefs. This allowed the research team to better manage potential biases and engage with the data through the lens of multiple positionalities. For example, coding was conducted primarily by two heterosexual, cisgender, active Latter-day Saint women in conjunction with a queer, cisgender, never Latter-day Saint woman, and was audited by a gay, cisgender, former Latter-day Saint man. Consequently, the coders were able to capture codes that expressed in-group nuances for both Latter-day Saints and LGBTQ+ individuals. The diverse nature of the research team was integral to establishing a method of data analysis that prioritized the

intersectional nature of participants' lived experiences with gender, sexuality, and religion. All members of the research team endorse and abide by the American Psychological Association's (APA) position related to respecting religious practices and working with LGBTQ individuals (APA 2008, 2015, 2021).

2.2. Participants and Procedures

Study procedures were approved by the institutional review board at BLINDED FOR REVIEW. Participants were recruited and interviewed from May to July 2021. Initial recruitment was targeted towards LDS parents of LGBTQ+ teens. The sampling and interview processes were able to be completed in a relatively short time window due to a recruitment strategy that leaned heavily upon the research teams' connections with community leaders who have established relationships with the population of interest. Recruitment was conducted via posts in relevant LGBTQ+ LDS social media groups (e.g., North Star, Affirmation, Mama Dragons), emails to community 'gatekeepers' (e.g., Encircle), snowball sampling techniques, and emails to individuals who indicated they wanted to be kept abreast of the research team's future studies. Where possible, the moderators of social media groups were contacted and asked to post on behalf of the research team. The recruitment methods used in the present study were intended to optimize the number of potential participants reached while simultaneously increasing their comfort with participating in a study about a potentially sensitive topic. Potential parent participants who indicated interest in participating in the study were provided a link to a 5 min screening survey, at which point relevant demographic information and informed consent were obtained. The research team aimed to recruit a parent sample that was diverse in regards to gender; however, it was predominantly mothers who responded to recruitment. To be included in the study, teens must have (a) been between the ages of 13 and 18, (b) been currently living with at least one parent, (c) have come out to at least one of their parents as LGBTQ+, experiencing same sex attraction, or experiencing gender dysphoria, and (d) been baptized in the CJCLDS. In addition, at least one of the parents of the participants must have (a) known their child was LGBTQ+, same sex attracted, or experienced gender dysphoria and (b) self-identified as an active member in the CJCLDS. In the case that both parents responded to the call for participants, fathers were selected for participation to increase representativeness. Teens' references to their relationships with the non-participating parent as well as parents' references to the experiences of the non-participating parent were included in data analysis and coded where appropriate.

A total of 97 participants submitted the initial screening instrument, of which 59 did not meet inclusion criteria (e.g., teens' age, parent was not active in the church, parent or teen was no longer willing to participate) or were lost to follow up. In total, 38 participants (19 teens and 19 parents) were selected and interviewed in order to obtain the optimal sample size for qualitative research (Dworkin 2012) while maintaining a diverse sample in regard to teens' gender (cisgender boy/girl, transgender boy/girl, gender nonbinary), engagement with the LDS Church (active, less active, not active), age (13–15; 16–18), race/ethnicity (White, People of Color), and sexual identity (gay/lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, queer). Parent interviews were conducted first and interviews with teens were scheduled upon completion of their parents' interview. See Table 1 for a comprehensive list of participant demographics.

Table 1. Participant Demographics.

Parents					
Participant	Age	Gender Identity	Sexual Identity	LDS Activity	Race/Ethnicity
Mary-Jo	45	Cis woman	Straight	Active	White
Ashley	47	Cis woman	Straight	Active	White
BreeAnne	46	Cis woman	Questioning	Active	White
Cindy	42	Cis woman	Straight	Active	White
Jared	42	Cis man	Straight	Active	White
Cynthia	44	Cis woman	Bisexual	Active	White
Kathleen	44	Cis woman	Straight	Active	White
Kim	44	Cis woman	Straight	Active	White
Lacy	46	Cis woman	Straight	Active	White
Angie	37	Cis woman	Straight	Active	Latinx
Margaret	47	Cis woman	Straight	Active	White
Riley	41	Cis woman	Straight	Active	White
Remo	46	Cis man	Straight	Active	White
McCarrey	40	Cis woman	Straight	Active	White
Salena	43	Cis woman	Straight	Active	Latinx
Scott	51	Cis man	Straight	Active	European
Shanalee	42	Cis woman	Straight	Active	White
Michele	40	Cis woman	Straight, Bisexual	Active	White
Tyffanie	46	Cis woman	Straight	Active	White
Teens					
Participant	Age	Gender Identity	Sexual Identity	LDS Activity	Race/Ethnicity
Jack	17	Cis boy	Gay	Active	White
Rachel	16	Cis girl	Bisexual	Active	Latinx
Rory	14	Nonbinary	Bisexual	Less Active	White
Kyle	18	Cis boy	Gay	Not Active	White
Elizabeth	17	Cis girl	Pansexual	Less Active	White
Alice	16	Cis girl	Lesbian	Active	White
Hailey	15	Cis girl	Lesbian	Active	Latinx
Abby	13	Nonbinary	Pansexual	Less Active	White
Shelby	15	Cis girl	Lesbian	Active	White
Liam	16	Trans boy	Gay	Less Active	White
Daniel	15	Nonbinary	Bisexual	Less Active	White
Pluto	17	Nonbinary	Bisexual	Not Active	White
Ben	17	Cis boy	Gay	Not Active	White
Kenna	15	Cis girl	Lesbian	Active	Black
Levi	14	Cis girl	Bisexual	Less Active	White
Evan	15	Trans boy	Bisexual	Not Active	White
Kellan	15	Nonbinary	Bisexual	Active	White
Donna	14	Questioning	Queer	Less Active	White
Teagan	17	Cis girl	Pansexual	Not Active	Latinx

Note: Participants were given the option between creating a pseudonym and using their real name; for the sake of protecting the privacy of participants who chose a pseudonym we do not differentiate between these two groups.

Researchers used a 5-question semi-structured interview guide to structure the 50 min interviews while simultaneously allowing for follow-up or clarifying questions (see Appendix A). Each interview question had three corresponding optional sub-questions to be asked at the interviewers' discretion. In accordance with Wertz's (2005) best practices, interviews included broad questions designed to elicit a breadth of responses related to the participants' experiences with their relationships (e.g., *How would you describe your relationship with your parent/teen?*) as well as focused questions addressing topics most relevant to the participants' circumstances to allow for depth of responses (e.g., *How did your parents react to your coming-out to them?; How did you feel as a result of their reactions?*). As the present study was interested in relationship factors related to our participants' intersecting LGBTQ+ and religious identities (e.g., teens' experiences as LGBTQ+ individuals raised

in the CJCLDS with active LDS parents; parents' experiences as active, LDS individuals with a LGBTQ+ teen), interviews included questions regarding experiences related to these particular ontological positions (e.g., Tell us a little about your experience as a sexual or gender minority?; Has your teen coming out affected yours or your family's faith?). Interviews were conducted by two undergraduate researchers who were trained on effectively and respectfully conducting interviews prior to the study. Teens were interviewed separate from their parents to ensure participant comfort and reduce potential bias when discussing parent–child relationships. All participants were given a USD 20 gift card to compensate them for their time. All interviews were conducted virtually over zoom due to COVID-19, which ultimately allowed for a more geographically diverse sample. Interviews were recorded and later transcribed by the research team. Deidentified transcriptions of the interviews were input into NVivo electronic software for data analysis.

2.3. Analysis Plan

Researchers used a six-step approach to thematic analysis as described by [Braun and Clarke \(2006\)](#). The six-step approach involved becoming familiar with the data and noting initial observations, generating initial codes using interview transcripts, identifying overarching themes within the codes, reviewing themes and checking for accuracy, refining and naming each theme, and writing the report. This approach to qualitative data analysis allowed researchers to identify relevant patterns related to participants' ontological positions while simultaneously conceptualizing themes within the data set.

Two independent coders, two auditors, and a systematic consensus-building process of analysis were used to ensure inter-rater reliability, capture participants' attitudes and inner experiences most accurately, and to ensure the credibility of the research ([Hill 2012](#); [Nowell et al. 2017](#)). A graduate student and university faculty member served as the external data auditors and supervised all phases of the analysis. The primary coders included one graduate student and one undergraduate researcher who were trained in qualitative data analysis techniques by the auditors prior to coding. The auditors and two primary coders worked in conjunction to provide feedback throughout the analysis process and ensure accuracy and adherence to coding protocol.

The research team opted to use an inductive approach to data analysis to elicit a rich description of the dataset ([Frith and Gleeson 2004](#)). This data-driven method of analysis involves identifying patterns and drawing conclusions from the dataset without relying on preexisting coding structures or themes that researchers may have previously identified ([Braun and Clarke 2006](#)). To ensure credibility, data analysis involved the semantic coding of participants' reports through an essentialist lens, in which participants' intended meanings, motivations, and inner experiences are prioritized over researcher interpretation and theoretical construction ([Braun and Clarke 2006](#); [Burr 2015](#)). To address transferability of the data, the present study reports specific information about participants' positionalities, frequencies of interviews each theme extracted from the data was mentioned, and the richest descriptions from the dataset in the results ([Nowell et al. 2017](#)). To ensure the criteria of dependability and confirmability were met, data auditors were involved throughout the analysis phase, and all analysis procedures are reported ([Nowell et al. 2017](#)). Taken together, the present study's approach to data analysis was intended to reduce researcher biases related to their own experiences with gender, sexuality, parent–teen relationships, and religion while honoring participants' lived experiences. While this approach may help reduce researcher biases, the research team recognizes that coders are not able to completely free themselves of biases and personal beliefs. For instance, a queer, agnostic coder might engage with and interpret an LGBTQ+ teens' description of a religiously rooted conflict with their parent differently from a heterosexual, Latter-day Saint coder. As such, if a coder noted an emotional response to the data related to their personal lived experiences or identities, the coder would note this reaction and discuss it with the auditors to conclude how data should be coded (e.g., if a religious conflict posed a challenge to the participants' relationship, or if the coders' personal experiences were biasing the coding).

The two primary coders independently read interview transcripts and noted initial analytic observations. The coders met periodically throughout the initial analysis phase to identify and discuss emerging patterns and systematically code the data according to a preliminary list of themes developed concurrent to primary analysis. The auditors and coders met to discuss differences in analysis between the two independent coders throughout this initial coding phase, at which point data were re-coded to enhance accuracy and inter-rater reliability. Upon completion of initial coding, the independent coders and data auditors met to identify and finalize overarching themes and subthemes. The research team identified five overarching themes and fifteen sub-themes relevant to teen-related factors that positively impacted the parent–child relationship, and three overarching themes and eleven subthemes relevant to teen-related factors that presented challenges to a positive parent–child relationship.

3. Results

3.1. How Do LGBTQ+ Teens Build Positive Relationships with Their LDS Parents?

We found five themes related to things teens did that positively impacted the parent–child relationship. These include having authentic and meaningful conversations, engaging in positive casual communication, fostering family connections, giving parents time and grace, and being open about their LGBTQ+ identity (see Table 2). The frequency with which a given theme was present across the interviews is reported in order to orient readers to the breadth of each theme, provide information on the potential transferability of themes, and orient future quantitative research to the most prevalent themes.

Table 2. Main Themes, Frequencies, and Sub-themes of Beneficial Factors.

Main Themes (Frequencies)	Sub-Themes
Having Authentic and Meaningful Conversations (Parent $n = 16$; Teen $n = 3$)	Open Conversations with Parents Go to Parents for Advice
Fostering Family Connections (Parent $n = 12$; Teen $n = 2$)	Spending Time with Parents Affection Valuing Family
Engaging in Positive Casual Communication (Parent $n = 11$; Teen $n = 0$)	Conversations About Interests Joking with Parents
Giving Parents Time and Grace (Parent $n = 3$; Teen $n = 5$)	Giving Parents Time Grace Towards Mistakes
Being Open About LGBTQ+ Identity (Parent $n = 15$; Teen $n = 6$)	Disclosing LGBTQ+ Identity Talking About LGBTQ+ Identity-Related Things Talking About Conflict Between Religious and LGBTQ+ Identity Educating Parents

Note: Frequencies refer to the number of interviews in which the theme was discussed as beneficial by the participant. Frequencies of themes are counted once per interview, regardless of the number of times they were mentioned in that interview. $n = 38$.

3.2. Having Authentic and Meaningful Conversations

Many participants expressed how teens engaging in authentic (i.e., characterized by honesty, genuineness, and realness; Hopwood et al. 2021) and meaningful conversations with their LDS parents helped develop a closer relationship. One aspect of authentic and meaningful conversations between teens and their parents was the ability to have open conversations. Kathleen (parent) shared, “I would say that we have a good relationship with

her . . . and that's what I have to gauge it by, is how open communication [was] with my parents at this age." Kellan (teen) shared their perspective on open conversations with their mother by sharing, "So, we'll have a bunch of different conversations because we're pretty open with each other. We'll just go from talking about something random, to something really in-depth." While many teens expressed anxiety around deeper conversations, many found creative solutions to help foster open communication with their parents. Shanalee (parent) explained, "My son . . . he's very quiet, super introverted, has some social anxiety . . . He even has a hard time talking to me face to face, but he'll text. So, if I ever feel like we need to talk, I'll hand him his phone and I'll say, okay, I'm going to text you, and we'll text back and forth."

When asked about the quality of their relationships with their teens, many parents shared examples of their teens coming to them for advice and felt this was indicative of a strong relationship. Remo (parent) shared, "She asks me for life advice: adulting stuff, help with navigating the work world. I just helped her by her first car. So, I'd say [our relationship is] good to strong." Parents shared examples of their teens coming to them for advice about general life issues such as work or applying for jobs, as well as deeper concerns, such as Margaret (parent), who said, "I think we're pretty close. He tells me a lot of things." Liam (teen) explained how he was able to go to his parents more after he came out by saying, "I go to my parents for a lot of things. They know a lot more than I do . . . I talk to them a lot more than I did, especially before I came out."

3.3. *Engaging in Positive Casual Communication*

Similarly, participants frequently mentioned teens' efforts to engage in positive casual communication. Conversations about interests seemed to be a form of casual communication that parents appreciated from their teens. For example, Ashley (parent) shared, "He really likes to talk a lot about current events. I do too, so we enjoy that." Remo (parent) said, "We talk about everything from fluff stuff like sci fi shows, books that we've read, memes that we've seen." Parents also enjoyed when their teens were able to joke around with them, as demonstrated by McCarrey (parent), who said, "I think we have a fairly good relationship. We joke around. We, you know, text goofy memes to each other." Scott (parent) shared, "Usually . . . we're joking with each other . . . I'll tell her bad dad jokes and sometimes she'll come up and tell me some."

3.4. *Fostering Family Connections*

Numerous participants commented on teens' efforts to foster family connections and the positive impact of these gestures on their relationships. One example of maintaining family connections was teens spending quality time with their parents. Kim (parent) described how her teen spending time with them helped strengthen their relationship: "We hang out together. We go shopping together. He comes up every day and lays his head on my lap and I tickle his back and we just talk about what's going on in his life." Ben (teen) shared how spending time together was beneficial by saying, "Me and my mom have a very strong relationship and we hang out a lot and just spend time with each other a lot."

Parents discussed how acts of affection from their teen helped foster the ongoing parent-child relationship. Shanalee (parent) stated, "Over the years, we're still really close . . . and she'll still sleep in bed with me and cuddle sometimes." BreeAnne (parent) shared, "I'd say we have a very good relationship. He's very affectionate." Parents also shared that when valuing family was a priority in their teens' lives, it led to a stronger bond. Ashley (parent) expressed, "I'm proud of him because he's been resilient, and he's been able to forgive us, too, as a family. And that being a family is important to him, too. We want him close to us, we want him in our nest." Jared (parent) described when his teen decided to carry on a family tradition: "He let us know that he was transgender. He had already chosen a name to go by. He told us that all of our kids in our family had four-letter first names . . . And so he picked [name] because it was a four-letter name."

3.5. Giving Parents Time and Grace

Participants frequently shared experiences of teens giving their LDS parents time and grace while parents were trying to become more affirming, and parents expressed gratitude for their teens' patience. Shanalee (parent) recounted a moment when she asked her teen for time to adjust: "I remember saying, let's take this slow, be patient with me. He is a very thoughtful, introspective person. So, he was OK with that." Evan (teen) described this experience from their perspective: "Well, a lot of this stuff [about my identity] I'd already come to learn and accept, so I just let her do her thing, because I knew that she was mostly talking to herself."

Parents also shared their appreciation for their teens' willingness to show grace toward mistakes. Ashley (parent) shared, "We've said many times . . . 'Thank you for your patience, for helping us understand you better. And he's said, 'You couldn't help it, Mom. You're conditioned to say and think those things.' So he's been pretty gracious . . . I know it could have been better, but I feel like we've done better, like we're in a good place." Lacy (parent) shared, "[My teen] is really good about it. And they were just very patient with us learning pronouns." While parents shared their appreciation for their teens' leniency, teens shared experiences from their perspective. Rory (teen) reported, "When I did start using they/them pronouns, [my parents] did struggle a little, but . . . I don't get frustrated if they mess up pronouns or mess up with anything really about myself because they're getting it."

3.6. Being Open about LGBTQ+ Identity

Participants voiced how teens being open about their LGBTQ+ identity was frequently a turning point in the relationship. Both teens and parents shared that while the teens' coming out may have initially been difficult, their openness about their identity ultimately strengthened the relationship. Angie (parent) described how her relationship improved when her teen came out: "And so our relationship was strenuous for a little while, and then she came out and now our relationship is so much stronger and better." Kim (parent) shared the implications of her teen's coming out by saying, "[I felt] some fear, a little bit of anxiety, but mostly love and relief so that I could better understand my child. And now I can better be her mother because I know." Mary-Jo (parent) shared her feelings after her teen came out: "I wasn't upset or anything like that . . . I was more just happy for him to be able to say that he is." Teens explained how coming out allowed them to have more genuine relationships with their parents. Teagan (teen) demonstrated this by saying, "I think coming out helped, I think it was the fact that now I'm able to talk to my parents more fully." Liam (teen) shared a similar sentiment, saying, "Dad told me that [he and mom] were really happy to figure out what was going on with me, because they felt like I was hiding something from them, which I was; it was pretty big."

Participants also discussed how talking about LGBTQ+-related topics helped foster the relationship. Angie (parent) said, "We listen to a podcast together . . . [My teen] will say, I identify with this, or, you know, I never thought about that. I tell her, you know, I never even knew about this or something. Then it just helps activate that dialogue with us on the LGBTQ topic, since we're both new at it." Elizabeth (teen) explained that as she grew closer to her mom, they were able to talk more openly about LGBTQ+-related topics: "Sometimes they'll just come up or I'll read an article to her... but usually it's not an uncomfortable sense . . . I'm more comfortable with her now."

Conversations about conflict between religious and LGBTQ+ identity led to parents feeling as though their child could talk to them, and vice versa. Cynthia (parent) shared, "We've just had a discussion where she's actually choosing to step away from going to church . . . And I feel like, yeah, when she really feels like something's bothering her, for the most part, I feel like she can come to me." Salena (parent) described how open dialogue regarding the conflict between the family's LDS faith and her teen's LGBTQ+ identity helped strengthen their relationship, saying, "And so our son opened up our eyes about a lot of these things that we were blind to, and I'm grateful for that. My husband and I

grew closer to each other.” Teagan (teen) talked about how these conversations help her connect to her parents by sharing, “My parents talk to me about their experience of being the parent of a kid in the LGBT community while they’re still members of the church. We mostly just talk about life, but sometimes we talk about our shared experiences and how they’ve changed us as people.”

3.7. What Challenges Impede Positive Relationships between LGBTQ+ Teens and Their LDS Parents?

We found three common challenges that hindered positive relationships between LGBTQ+ teens and their LDS parents: communication and connection challenges, general developmental challenges, and avoiding LGBTQ+ and religious topics. These challenges are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Main Themes, Frequencies, and Sub-themes of Challenges.

Main Themes (Frequencies)	Sub-Themes
Communication and Connection Challenges (Parent <i>n</i> = 9; Teen <i>n</i> = 5)	Lack of Open Communication Anxiety Around Conversations Impedes Communication Not Spending Time with Family Dishonesty
General Developmental Challenges (Parent <i>n</i> = 18; Teen <i>n</i> = 3)	Typical Teenage Challenges Mental Health Challenges Difference in Religious Beliefs or Engagement Differences in Sexual Standards
Avoiding LGBTQ+ and Religious Topics (Parent <i>n</i> = 8; Teen <i>n</i> = 3)	Not Disclosing LGBTQ+ Identity Not Talking about Religion Expectations of Discrimination Prevent Open Identity

Note: Frequencies refer to the number of interviews in which the theme was discussed as a challenge by the participant. Frequencies of themes are counted once per interview, regardless of the number of times they were mentioned in that interview. *n* = 38.

3.8. Communication and Connection Challenges

Participants discussed various communication and connection challenges that placed strain on the relationship. Some teens described the negative impact of their lack of open communication, such as with Shelby (teen), who discussed a situation when a friend was trying to contact them after coming out: “He sent me flowers one time, and my mom wanted to know who the flowers were from, and I knew who they were from, but I didn’t want to tell her because she didn’t really know this whole thing was going on. We didn’t communicate anything at that time, so that was probably not very helpful.” Shanalee (parent) shared her perspective on her teen’s lack of open communication, saying, “She tried to do some really, really hurtful things to me and then shut me out and wouldn’t talk to me . . . I was really concerned for her, and I was really hurt.”

Participants also discussed how teens’ anxiety around conversations impeded communication and connection with parents. For example, Michelle (parent) said, “I know my teen, sometimes they have anxiety and so sometimes we have to be a little cautious with how we communicate.” Teagan (teen) described the anxiety she experienced around discussing certain topics with her parents by saying, “After I’d come out, every time they tried to ask me questions about it, I would just brush it off and be like, I don’t want to talk about that right now.”

Another challenge that posed a barrier to connection was not spending time with the family. Kyle (teen) illustrated this challenge by saying, “[The relationship] is just distant a lot. I’m not really home... I am always hanging out, always going out, hiking, doing crazy things, working. I just don’t see them a ton.” Tyffanie (parent) expressed how her teens’

preference for alone time caused distance, reporting, “I think she is going through some a little bit of depression and stuff right now, so I think sometimes that keeps her isolated.”

3.9. General Developmental Challenges

Participants shared how many of the sources of conflict in the parent–child relationship were related to typical developmental challenges associated with being a teenager. Salena (parent) demonstrated this challenge by saying, “Yeah, they could be nicer people, but that’s only because they’re teenagers, I don’t think it has to do with sexuality.” Tyffanie (parent) further reported, “There’s the normal teenager . . . I think more of our issues lately have been more just like being a teenager during COVID.” Pluto (teen) shared this from their perspective: “I’ve definitely gotten, like, mad at her sometimes . . . because teenagers, and I feel like it’s normal to be upset at your parents once in a while.”

Differences in religious beliefs and engagement between parents and teens were also the cause of conflicts in understanding one another. These differences were occasionally rooted in teens’ frustration with religious teachings about LGBTQ+ individuals. However, they were most often related to general disagreements about parents’ expectations that their teen would share the religious beliefs of their parents and want to engage with religion in similar ways, a common experience for many teens regardless of their sexual or gender identities. Kathleen (parent) shared, “We had . . . a few exchanges actually in some of our meetings where she had blurted out, I don’t believe what you believe, and that was a surprise to us. We thought, what don’t you believe? You know, you’re 15. You haven’t had a chance to live your life. What is it you don’t believe? And she cut off conversations.” Participants also described how differences in sexual standards posed a barrier to close relationships. These differences were not related to teens’ LGBTQ+ identities, but instead revolved around sexual behaviors that parents felt were dangerous. As Tyffanie (parent) described, “She was having a relationship online. It got to where it was inappropriate, but not because it was with a girl. It was because they started talking about sexual things. She was 13 or 14 . . . And we said, ‘It wouldn’t matter if it was a boy or a girl. You can’t flirt like that with someone you don’t even know in real life.’”

Participants also discussed mental health and the role it can play in influencing the quality of relationships. For example, Angie (parent) expressed, “She was struggling for a while with depression and anxiety and a lot of self-loathing and hatred and self-harm, so our relationship was strenuous for a little while.” Ben (teen) shared, “I remember in ninth grade, I was having like a lot of emotions. I was getting angry at people a lot more, and our relationship started to dwindle a little bit.”

3.10. Avoiding LGBTQ+ and Religious Topics

Some participants also reported that avoiding conversations that relate to religion and/or LGBTQ+ was straining. Mary-Jo (parent) said, “But he does avoid conversations about how he feels about church and the gospel and where he’s at . . . whenever I bring it up, he changes the subject.” Participants also described the relationship challenges associated with teens not disclosing their LGBTQ+ identities to their parents, such as with Kenna (teen), who said, “I’d always been open and honest with my parents about a lot of stuff, and so, when they found out I had been hiding this from them, I think it hurt some.” When asked if coming out improved the relationship, Liam (teen) shared, “Yeah, I would say it did . . . because . . . I felt like it was really strained.”

Participants described how expectations of discrimination also hindered a positive relationship between teens and their LDS parents. Jared (parent) illustrated this idea by sharing, “I remember that they talked about . . . keeping it secret until they moved out initially . . . they found out that for the most part, you know, parents kick their kids out of the house and things like that. And so that was what they were expecting us to do.” Kim (parent) shared a similar story about her teen’s fears, saying, “He told [a friend] that he was gay, and she just kept it a secret. She filled his head with [the idea that his parents were] going to send him to conversion camp.” Cynthia (parent) commented on how her

teen's expectations of discrimination from members of the LDS church hurt them, saying, "It's painful at times. She builds up a wall of defense against people, especially people that are members of the church, where she doesn't want to tell people, but then assumes that they're going to act in a homophobic way just because they are members."

4. Discussion and Implications

Analyzing interviews with 19 LGBTQ+ teens and their LDS parents, we found that when LGBTQ+ teens had authentic and meaningful conversations with their parents, made efforts to foster family connection, engaged in casual conversations with their parents, were open about their LGBTQ+ identities, and gave their parents time and grace, they were able to develop stronger relationships with their parents. Additionally, we found that barriers to communication and connection, general developmental challenges, and avoiding LGBTQ+ and religious topics made it harder for LGBTQ+ teens to have positive relationships with their LDS parents. We were particularly interested in understanding the ways in which LGBTQ+ teens shaped relationships with their parents similarly to other teens and factors that were specifically relevant to LGBTQ+ teens with active, LDS parents.

4.1. General Teen-Related Factors

Perhaps unsurprisingly, many of the ways that LGBTQ+ teens build positive parent-teen relationships are similar to the ways that teens in general build positive parent-teen relationships. Overwhelmingly, both parents and teens reported that authentic and meaningful conversation helped form a deeper connection and stronger relationship. Participants described instances of teens' authenticity in their interactions with their parents through open conversations about politics, social concerns, or trouble at work or school, sometimes even going to their parents for guidance navigating these issues. Interestingly, multiple participants shared the creative solutions they have found to maintaining communication and connection during this stage, including encouraging teens to text or write down things that they are uncomfortable with or unsure of how to share with their parents.

Regardless of the methods they used to facilitate communication, participants consistently reported that authentic communication from teens led to a stronger and more meaningful relationship. This finding may best be understood through the literature on authenticity in relationships. Psychological authenticity has been associated with more satisfying relationships (Brunell et al. 2010) and better ability to navigate and respond to interpersonal conflict (Tou et al. 2015; Wickham et al. 2016). Teens may feel more satisfied with their relationships with their parents when they engage in authentic and meaningful conversations as it signifies a level of acceptance and intimacy within the relationship (Brunell et al. 2010). Furthermore, parents may perceive teens' authenticity as beneficial to the relationship due to the trust, satisfaction, and commitment that it conveys (Wickham 2013).

Conversations between teens and their parents spanned a variety of topics, ranging from television and applying to jobs to religion, politics, and identity-related concerns. Interestingly, conversations did not need to be particularly profound to be considered beneficial to the relationship. While parents clearly valued the insight gained into their teens' lives through more open and often difficult conversations, they also expressed appreciation for the times when their teen would joke around with them, talk about their favorite movie or tv show, or simply share stories from their days at work or school. This may be particularly relevant considering the popular discourse surrounding communication between parents and their teenage children. As teens begin to distance themselves from their parents during their fight for autonomy and independence, the frequency with which they discuss difficult or personal topics with their parents decreases (Williams 2003). This trend was indeed supported by our participants' reports, with parents and teens frequently expressing that teens' lack of communication and anxiety around conversations presented challenges to the parent-teen relationship. In light of this, it may be reassuring to parents to know that even casual conversations about everyday topics can strengthen the relationship between parents and their teens.

Participants reported that teens' efforts to foster family connections through acts of affection or spending time with their parents led to a stronger relationship. Substantial research has highlighted the importance of quality time in shaping parent–child relationships. It is generally understood that parents who spend more time with their teens develop stronger relationships with them, perhaps due to the increased opportunity for meaningful connection and socioemotional support (Kuehnle and Drozd 2012; Runcan 2012). The relational benefits of affection have been similarly well-documented; affectionate communication (including the verbal communication of affection such as “I love you” and physical behaviors such as hugging) has consistently been linked to increased relationship closeness, relationship satisfaction, and secure attachment (Floyd 2002; Horan and Booth-Butterfield 2010). However, these trends are typically examined through a parent-centered lens, and teens' efforts to foster connection with their parents via affection and quality time have gone largely unrecognized. These findings highlight teens' efforts to develop strong relationships with their parents as well as the need for further research investigating the role that teens play in shaping these relationships.

The most frequently expressed barrier to positive relationship development between teens and their parents was general developmental challenges. When asked about their relationships with their teens, many parents commented on “typical teen” behaviors such as spending most of their time at home in their bedrooms, preferring to keep certain aspects of their lives private, and disagreements about household responsibilities, curfews, and dating restrictions. Similarly, participants described how differences in teens' sexual standards and religious beliefs created conflict in the parent–teen relationship. Religious differences between parents and teens are common; approximately half of teens hold different religious beliefs from their parents, and these differences are a common source of conflict in parent–teen relationships (Pew Research Center 2020). It appears that even when teens share their parents' religious beliefs, they tend to view religion as less important compared to their parents and often participate in organized religion at their parents' behest (Pew Research Center 2020). These trends likely reflect teens' increased need for autonomy and independence, which can lead teens to decrease the amount of time and information they share with their parents as they begin to explore their personal beliefs (Keijsers and Poulin 2013; Williams 2003). As part of a developmental trajectory shared by many teens, disengaging from certain aspects of the relationship can be a strategic way for teens to renegotiate and realign the structure of their formerly submissive role in the parent–child relationship towards something more egalitarian (Branje 2018). It is important to note that this process may be painful and may be perceived as problematic by parents, even though it ultimately allows for positive readjustment. It is likely that many of the teens interviewed in this study were engaging in this process of seeking autonomy and independence as part of their development.

Similarly, participants described how teens' mental health struggles caused conflict in the parent–teen relationship. While LGBTQ+ teens face an increased prevalence of mental health issues (CDCP 2019), research suggests that this stage of development is associated with a heightened risk of psychological disorders even for teens who are not LGBTQ+, and that the prevalence of psychological disorders among teens continues to increase (Twenge et al. 2019). In light of these trends, future research should explore the impact of teens' mental health struggles on parent–teen relationships. Additionally, psychologists should work to develop resources to help parents better support their teens who are struggling with mental health.

4.2. LDS LGBTQ+ Specific Factors

Participants also discussed several practices that helped LGBTQ+ teens build a positive relationship with their LDS parents that were specific to their intersecting LGBTQ+ and religious identities. In particular, when teens were open about their LGBTQ+ experience and when teens gave parents time and grace, their relationships flourished. In contrast,

when teens avoided LGBTQ+ or religious topics, teens had a more difficult time building positive relationships with their parents.

The majority of participants reported that when teens were open about being LGBTQ+, the relationship between parents and teens improved. Coming out—or the act of disclosing one’s sexual or gender identity to others—is a pivotal experience for many LGBTQ+ individuals and holds a position in most models of LGBTQ+ identity development (Cass 1979). Coming out is often stressful for LGBTQ+ teens, and too often is met with non-affirming responses from parents, particularly in conservatively religious households (Etengoff and Daiute 2014; Savin-Williams and Dubé 1998). Many LGBTQ+ youth report significant conflict and worsening parent–child relationship dynamics upon coming out (Mills-Koonce et al. 2018; Watson et al. 2019). Despite these findings—or perhaps because of the vulnerability required of teens in coming out—it appears that coming out may be a central step in building a positive relationship between an LGBTQ+ teen and their LDS parents. Both teens and parents in this study shared feelings of relief upon the teen coming out; parents finally understood what their children were going through or why they seemed to be hiding something, and teens were relieved to finally be able to show up in more authentic ways around their parents. Even when teens’ LGBTQ+ identities were at odds with parents’ religious beliefs or CJCLDS teachings, participants still felt that their relationships improved once teens could be more open and authentic regarding their LGBTQ+ experience.

It is important to note that a teen’s decision to come out to their parents is made in the context of an ongoing attachment relationship and previously established perceptions of parental support and acceptance. Evidence suggests that LGBTQ+ youth with prior positive relationships with their parents come out to their parents sooner and demonstrate healthier sexual identity development and better psychological adjustment (Beatty 1999; D’amico et al. 2015). It could be that the participants who expressed that identity openness improved the parent–child relationship had relatively stronger and healthier relationships prior to the child coming out. We caution against an overly broad application of this finding because the study only examined the experiences of LGBTQ+ teens and parents who had, at least to some degree, already navigated positive relationships.

In contrast to the benefits reported from coming out, both teens and parents reported that avoiding talking about LGBTQ+ or religious topics put strain on their relationship. This trend may best be understood vis-à-vis the literature on concealment. Typically, concealing one’s identity or experience—whether LGBTQ+ or religious—requires cognitive resources and can inhibit forming intimate connections. Perhaps because of this strain, concealment is associated with higher rates of internalizing mental health problems and lower well-being for LGBTQ+ teens (Kosciw et al. 2015; Pachankis et al. 2020; Rood et al. 2017; Shilo and Savaya 2012). The stress associated with concealing one’s identity may be further exacerbated by any conflict between LGBTQ+ teens’ and their families’ religious belief systems (Dehlin et al. 2014, 2015). Indeed, when asked how coming-out affected their relationship with their parents, many teens in our study expressed feeling relieved that they no longer had to deal with the stress associated with hiding their identity from their parents. Further, parents often shared feelings of concern regarding their child’s secretive behavior or visible distress prior to coming out and expressed that they felt closer to their children after they came out as they better understood what their child was experiencing. It should be noted that while no teens in the present study described concealing their LGBTQ+ identities or avoiding LGBTQ+ and religious topics as beneficial, this finding may not be true for all LGBTQ+ teens with conservatively religious parents. Identity concealment may be adaptive for some LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly in the presence of contextual factors such as conservative religious environments that could make openly identifying as LGBTQ+ dangerous or threaten access to socioemotional resources such as family support (Lefevor et al. 2021a; Rothman et al. 2012). This may be especially relevant for LGBTQ+ teens with highly religious parents who are less affirming of LGBTQ+ individuals. In some

cases, concealing one's identity or avoiding LGBTQ+ or religious topics may function to preserve the parent–teen relationship in light of these conflicting identities.

Although coming out ultimately appeared to alleviate stress for many teens, it is clear that coming out also presented new challenges related to parents' behaviors and beliefs. Indeed, one of the most frequently reported ways that teens promoted positive parent–teen relationships was giving their parents time and grace. Many parents were initially confused, uncertain, or struggled to use their teens' names or pronouns. However, many teens gave their parents time to adjust and did not expect them to transform their behaviors or beliefs overnight. Teens appreciated their parents' visible efforts to learn and adapt—even when they missed the mark—and described how their relationships improved as they watched their parents try to be more supportive and affirming. Parents, in turn, were grateful for their teens' patience, and frequently noted that it was their teens' ability to give them time and grace towards their mistakes that ultimately allowed them to grow closer and engage in more meaningful and authentic relationships. While indirect and unintentional forms of discrimination (microaggressions; e.g., accidental misgendering, statements such as “I love you, but . . .”) from loved ones can be more painful, LGBTQ+ individuals may also be more likely to excuse or forgive microaggressions from those they are close to in an effort to maintain and preserve the relationship (Vaccaro and Koob 2018). It could be that these teens were willing to forgive and move past their parents' failed attempts at affirming behaviors, knowing that it would preserve and potentially promote a close relationship in the long run. Many parents of LGBTQ+ teens begin to adopt more affirming behaviors and beliefs over time (Mills-Koonce et al. 2018) and—while research on teens' perceptions of their parents' evolving beliefs is limited—it could be that teens perceive and interpret their parents' attempts at affirming behaviors as movement toward a more accepting and supportive role, even if this growth is gradual.

Although giving time and grace helped build strong relationships between LGBTQ+ teens and their LDS parents, we are quick to note that there may be situations under which LGBTQ+ teens may not have the mental or emotional ability to give time and grace to their parents. There may also be situations where asking for more immediate change may be critical for an LGBTQ+ teen's well-being.

4.3. Limitations and Future Directions

The present study was limited by several factors, including a relatively homogenous sample of predominantly White teens and parents and a parent sample consisting mostly of mothers. Our sample was specific to LGBTQ+ youth and their parents who are LDS and is not representative of LGBTQ+ youth or parents of LGBTQ+ youth from conservative religious backgrounds more broadly. Future research should explore LGBTQ+ teen-related factors that shape the parent–child relationship among families from conservative religions more broadly. While we made efforts to recruit a sample of participants with a wide range of degree of activity in the LDS church and views regarding LGBTQ+ individuals, our sample may not be representative of LGBTQ+ individuals whose parents are non-affirming, as our sample likely held more positive views towards LGBTQ+ individuals by nature of their participation. Similarly, it is likely that participants in our study already had stronger relationships, and recruitment efforts did not include strategies to include parent–teen dyads with a range of relationship qualities in our sample. In light of this, the present study may be limited in its ability to fully characterize factors that may inhibit positive relationships between LGBTQ+ teens and their LDS parents. Additionally, the present study did not gauge how far along our participants were in the coming out process and identity development processes. As initial recruitment was targeted towards parents, our participants were likely further along in these processes as teens had already come out to themselves and their parents, and parents had already taken the time they needed to process and accept their teens' identity enough to be interested in participating in a study of this nature.

The present study focused specifically on ways that LGBTQ+ teens contributed to their relationships with their LDS parents. Future research should explore the ways that LDS parents foster or impede the development of positive parent–teen relationships and more specifically explore how parental rejection may impact these relationships long-term. Additionally, future research should explore how LDS parents navigate conflicts between their religious beliefs and their teens’ LGBTQ+ identity and how these conflicts may impact the quality of parents’ relationships with each other.

5. Conclusions

Through the thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with 19 LGBTQ+ teens and their active, LDS parents (38 participants), we identified several factors that promoted positive parent–teen relationships. We found that when teens had authentic and meaningful conversations, fostered family connections, engaged in positive casual communication, gave parents time and grace, and were open about their LGBTQ+ identity, relationships flourished. Conversely, we found that teens experienced challenges in forming positive relationships with their LGBTQ+ parents related to communication and connection, general teen development, and avoiding LGBTQ+ and religious topics. While many of these factors were unique to LGBTQ+ teens with active LDS parents due to their specific gender and sexual identities and religious beliefs, several factors may be relevant for teens and their parents more broadly. These findings shed light on the previously unexplored role of teens in forming strong, meaningful relationships with their parents and highlight the ways that LGBTQ+ teens manage to foster these relationships despite potential conflict between teens’ identities and their parents’ religious beliefs.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocols

Teen Interview Questions

Note: This interview consists of five questions, each containing subquestions. The subquestions are meant to be prompts that the interviewer may use if the participant is either not divulging much information or has not covered certain aspects of their experience. If the participant is providing sufficiently detailed answers or the interview is going long, the researcher may skip subquestions.

1. Tell us a little about your experience as a sexual or gender minority.
 - a. When did you realize you might be a sexual or gender minority?
 - b. What emotions did you experience during the learning and discovery process?
 - c. How old were you when you came out?

2. How would you describe your relationship with your parents?
 - a. How often do you spend free time with them?
 - b. What kinds of conversations do you have with them?
 - c. Do you go to your parents for advice?
3. How did your parents react to your coming out to them?
 - a. Do you remember what they said to you?
 - b. What emotions did you notice from your parents?
 - c. How did you feel as a result of their reactions?
4. How do you think your parents feel about your being a sexual or gender minority?
 - a. Has this changed over time?
 - b. Do they ever talk about it with you?
 - c. How do their views impact you?
5. Has your coming out affected yours or your family's faith?
 - a. How has coming out affected your beliefs?
 - b. How has coming out affected your engagement with the church?
 - c. How has coming out changed your family's faith?

Parent Interview Questions

Note: This interview consists of five questions, each containing subquestions. The subquestions are meant to be prompts that the interviewer may use if the participant is either not divulging much information or has not covered certain aspects of their experience. If the participant is providing sufficiently detailed answers or the interview is going long, the researcher may skip subquestions.

1. Tell us a little about your relationship with the LDS church.
 - a. Are you an active member?
 - b. Are other family members involved in the church?
 - c. How closely do you believe its doctrines?
2. How would you describe your relationship with (name of youth)?
 - a. How often do you spend time together?
 - b. What kinds of conversations do you have with them?
 - c. How often do they come to you for advice?
3. How did you initially react to (name of youth) coming out?
 - a. What emotions do you remember?
 - b. Do you remember anything you said or did?
 - c. How did you feel as a result of your reactions?
4. How do you feel now about (name of youth) being a sexual or gender minority?
 - a. Has this changed over time?
 - b. Do you ever talk about it with (name of youth)?
5. Has (name of youth)'s coming out affected yours or your family's faith?
 - a. How has (name of youth)'s coming out affected your beliefs?
 - b. How has (name of youth)'s coming out affected your engagement with the church?

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