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An existential exploration of the experience of coming out in the Orthodox Jewish community.

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Abstract

This research considers an existential exploration of the experience of coming out in the Orthodox Jewish community. It is grounded in a qualitative, phenomenological and existential methodology. Eight participants were interviewed, all male between the ages of 20-30, who grew up in the Orthodox Jewish community and came out as gay, a minimum of three years ago. The interviews were semi-structured in nature; they were recorded and transcribed. The interview transcripts were analysed using SEA, a phenomenological and existential research tool. It used two specific features of SEA; the four worlds and its paradoxes, and the timeline tool. Accordingly, data was analysed against the four existential worlds, and the four periods of time identified in the timeline tool; with the moments of coming out being the present focus. Key themes, paradoxes and similarities were drawn out from across the analysis. They were then analysed alongside a consideration of relevant literature, also presented in this study. Overall, significant findings were identified, which both resonated with, supported and questioned existing literature. Findings were linked to four particular time periods: before, during and after coming out, and the ongoing state of participants. The findings relating to the time period before coming out mainly linked to matters around identity and findings linked to the actual moments of coming out mainly related to embodiment overall. The findings of the time period immediately after coming out linked to relationships and emotions, whereas the findings linking to the ongoing state of participants were to do with spirituality and meaning. This study concludes by outlining the valuable contribution these findings have made to Counselling Psychology, as well as areas that have been highlighted as ripe for further research.

Key words: coming out, coming out in the Orthodox Jewish community, coming out in religious communities, being gay in Judaism, coming out in Judaism.

Dedication

This research is dedicated to anyone who finds themselves grappling between Judaism and life, for the two should never be mutually exclusive.

Acknowledgements

Adam, my very best friend. Thank you for helping me chase *all* of my dreams, *all* at once! Even when it has been overwhelming for us both, you have always been there for me, and our boys, giving me the grounding and confidence I needed. Compromise on my ambitions was never an option for you. You believe in my through and through and are always there to support me in any way you can. Thank you for giving us your all. For you and your kind-hearted self, I will always be grateful.

Thank you to my two special little boys, who remind me of the true beauty of life and how special humanity really is. You teach me all that with just a smile.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1
Introduction & Reflexivity

This chapter introduces the research, my personal connection to it, my purpose for carrying out this research and some further reflexivity.

As I sat at a traditional festive meal to celebrate a Jewish festival, I was asked in front of the many Orthodox guests: 'so…. what is your thesis on?' I paused. Mumbled a little. Hunched over slightly. Flinched a bit. Then sat up boldly and *came out* with it: 'the experience of coming out in the Orthodox Jewish community'. There was an awkward silence. Intrigue. Shock. Curiosity. The desire to respond appropriately, although by now we all knew it would sound unnatural. When I consider my relationship to my research it is epitomised by this moment. The recurrent, potentially confessional moment I am determined will be a declaration of my research topic. Coming out with a statement of my research topic to the Orthodox Jewish community, in which I am involved in so many ways, is only one side of the coin. The other is coming out to you, the reader, academia, with all the pain that Orthodox Judaism can cause. For it is a beautiful religion, carrying so much value and meaning, which is on a par with existential phenomenology. However, I cannot deny, although it saddens me to say this, that it is sometimes painful. Personally, I associate this more with the Jewish people who live the religion, rather than the Jewish Bible itself. Nevertheless, the pain and conflict are real.

It is this sadness, and this guilt in disclosure, that is so intrinsic to understanding what it means to be part of the Orthodox community. With a global history of anti-Semitism and persecution, Jews have learnt to unite and to survive; indeed, there is a bond simply in this shared heritage of persecution. Jews know that all their ancestors suffered persecution and hatred at some point; most European Jews today have relatives who perished or otherwise suffered during the Holocaust. It is this unified heritage that makes the religion sacred and often a source of identity. It is the knowledge of hatred that unites Jews, but also makes

sharing one's identification with Judaism with others a bold move. Sadly, the hatred did not die with the victims, and identifying oneself as a Jew can make one vulnerable, even today as the rate of anti-Semitism incidents is higher than ever, and still rising (CST, 2020). It is this double conflict that lies at the heart of my identification with this topic. You could ask me, as a heterosexual female Jew, where my passion and identification with this research stems from? It is rooted in the pain I have often experienced as a member of the Orthodox community, of being unable to truly express myself either to fellow-Jews or to secular society, due to societal pressures and expectations. Of course, it is easier to explore this pain through experiences separate from my own, especially in terms of a sense of distance, in order to achieve more objective and effective analysis of a matter that concerns the hope I entertain for myself: to come out as an individual true to my inner essence, regardless of societal expectations, whether Jewish or secular. While this is not an issue of my own sexual orientation, I feel this conflict of maintaining authenticity in the face of others is exemplified by the process of coming out, one to which I am increasingly a witness through my work.

The other key trigger for me to pursue this research is my love for one particular thing: life. I believe life is precious in all its complexities, and my love for life fuels all of the work I do as a teacher and as a therapist. Judaism is, for me, a way of life that is meant to enhance living, to make life more beautiful and meaningful. It causes me much discomfort that there has been such a strong link between homosexuality and a threat to life, especially in the form of mental health issues, dependencies, self-harm and suicide. I am passionate about understanding the role Orthodox Judaism might play in this dynamic. Considering the value of life falls at the crux of Judaism, I think it is important to understand if Judaism were to exasperate this link in any way.

I am responsible for the relationship and sex education of Years 7-13 (pupils aged 11-18) in the Modern Orthodox Jewish school in which I work, and consult for other institutions on this matter. This entails composing a curriculum exploring sexuality and sexual orientation within an appropriate context, which I have shared and discussed with a number of Orthodox Rabbis and other community leaders. Constructing an appropriate curriculum has prompted much discussion and debate and I have been intrigued by the diverse viewpoints and attitudes I have encountered. However, what has struck me most has been the

responses I have received from certain students in my classes, those who have 'come out' in the Jewish community, those who would like to, and those who struggle with their sexual orientation in some way. I have been struck by the deep-rooted struggle many of these students encounter in managing their sexual orientation alongside their membership of the Orthodox Jewish community.

As a teacher, my role is to support the student within the appropriate parameters and refer them to a professional therapist if I consider this would be beneficial for them. A dilemma I have encountered is that these students often want to explore the Orthodox Jewish approach to sexual orientation as part of their therapeutic process, since this is so much a part of their identity. Students therefore often wish to speak with a Rabbi, as well as with a therapist, but it often happens that neither the Rabbi nor the therapist fully understands the significance of the other's role. Hence I think it imperative that both the therapeutic and the Rabbinic communities acquire a fuller understanding of the experience of 'coming out' within the Orthodox Jewish community. Furthermore, I hope this study raises awareness of the close interconnection between sexual orientation and religious affiliation to Orthodox Judaism.

As a member of the Orthodox community myself, I understand the comprehensive nature of identification with Judaism. It is not just a religion, but rather a holistic lifestyle, encompassing a connection to Judaism and the Jewish community, on every dimension of existence. I would say that Orthodox Judaism impacts one's physical daily living through the observance of Jewish law, as so many laws concern relationships. Orthodox Judaism is a communal way of life, encompassing all sorts of intra-communal relationships, through youth groups, faith schools, family and business networks, and so on. Furthermore, there is an emotional dimension of Orthodox Jewish life, as Jewish festivals are celebrated in all but one month of the Jewish year, each requiring emotional engagement, whether sadness through mourning in the Jewish month of Av, or happiness in the Jewish month of Adar. Finally, Orthodox Judaism is a spiritual way of life, demanding complete faith and identification with an ethical monotheistic theology. Although I am of a heterosexual orientation, I identify with the dichotomy of finding myself in a situation that feels at odds with my Judaism. This is an extremely difficult situation to find oneself in considering the all-

encompassing nature of the Orthodox community, and its impact on every level of existence. I have seen this conflict in so many others during my teaching and training, and I feel passionately that heightened understanding of the experience of this dilemma is acquired in order to best develop therapeutic and Rabbinic support for clients.

Consequently, my aim in this study is to explore the experience of 'coming out' specifically within the Orthodox Jewish community, to provide greater understanding of the experience for therapists and for the Orthodox Rabbinic community. Over the years of writing this dissertation my placement was at an organisation in the Orthodox Jewish community, which works with mental health issues. This should provide further insight into the impact of communal life on one's existence, especially within a therapeutic relationship. I also continue to work in the Orthodox Jewish school, providing PSHE education, which covers sexual orientation. I hope to continue developing in understanding and experience within this position. I continue to live within an Orthodox Jewish community, which not only provides ongoing exposure to this lifestyle, personally and communally, but also allows me to balance my relationship with myself and with others within this all-encompassing framework. I must be conscious that my sensitivity and admiration of the nuances of Judaism could lead to a sense of obligation to protect, or defend, its image to the wider academic world. So too, it is important to employ awareness that I am at risk of trying to defend this academic endeavour to the Orthodox Jewish world. On reflection, it is important that I carefully consider and explore, independently, through a reflective journal, in supervision and personal therapy, how best to navigate the boundary between informing and defending. I am aware that my position in the midst of two passions throughout this research could pull me in varying directions, I have invested time into ensuring this work remains ethical, balanced and most of all, academically sound and intellectually honest. I have done this through ongoing, authentic reflection through the means outlined above and have kept this matter at the forefront of my mind throughout this research.

If our relations are all sexual, as Merleau Ponty (1945) and Sartre (1969) suggest, then my passionate intellectual and academic pursuits, despite many obstacles, can be understood as a deep love affair. As noted above, this loving quest for the attainment of harmonious and authentic living within Orthodox Judaism has been difficult, a quest that has led to

shame, judgement and uncertainty in the face of the gaze of the Orthodox community, as depicted at the start of my reflexivity. I hope this study will be circulated among established Orthodox Rabbis, therapists and other leaders, to expose some of the experiences individuals can encounter when confronted with a conflict between their Jewish identity and their inner sense of self. Since this conflict is associated with mental-health issues, including those of life and death, and the value of life is paramount in Orthodox Judaism, I hope that authentic leaders will want to raise this awareness. Orthodox law is above all concerned to avert any threat to existence. If Orthodox Jews wish to live true to this Biblical tenet, it is important that experiences are shared and that potential bad faith among readers of this paper is also reflected upon. This is true of the academic world and the Jewish community, both of which may negatively judge each other, and consequently, me. Indeed, my love of authentic Judaism and of authentic academic exploration, research and therapy, leaves me feeling conflicted, almost afraid to reveal one love to the other for fear of judgement, hostility and potential rejection. Thus, my own dual position requires me to 'come out' to both of my worlds of passion, in the hope that the two can unite and bring some good to the academic, therapeutic, educational and Jewish worlds, all of which have a special place in my heart.

This paper presents relevant literature to this field, the methodology which I employ for this research, relevant ethical concerns and a presentation of the findings from interviews. These findings are considered in relation to the literature review and there is a conclusion outlining areas for further research. There is a further reflexivity section at the end of the study, to specifically reflect on carrying out this research. I include a glossary before the presentation of literature, including any regularly-used terms from the Modern Jewish community.

This chapter includes a glossary of terms, as there are a range of terms commonly and naturally used within the Jewish Orthodox community that feature in the interviews, but are not necessarily understandable to those outside of the community. The words below are a combination of English, with particular definitions that are not general knowledge outside of the Orthodox Jewish community, Hebrew and Yiddish. The definitions given are appropriate to the Orthodox Jewish community, being a member of the community I share in the common understanding of the below terms. However, in other sects of Judaism some of the terms may be understood differently to the definitions given below. For example, 'frum' is highly subjective and looks different in different sects of Judaism.

Bar Mitzvah – a milestone in an Orthodox Jewish male's life, at age 13, it represents to becoming of a man from a boy. This will involve the studying and reading of a Torah portion (the portion that falls on their particular birthday) in synagogue, as well as a party/celebration with the community, friends and family.

Chuppah – A depiction of a Jewish marriage ceremony, the canopy that the bride and groom stand under when they get married.

Frum – religious in observance

Halacha – Jewish law, derived from both Biblical and Rabbinic sources.

Kosher/Kashrut – this is the Jewish dietary requirements, which forbids consumption of food that is not legally classified under the laws of Kosher.

Masorti – A more liberal sect of Judaism, falling between Orthodox and Reform Judaism

Mishnah/Talmud – Oral Law passed down through generations, the written record is compiled in the Mishnah and Talmud

Rabbi – A Jewish leader, and teacher, in the Jewish community, may lead an entire community in both Biblical learning and legal observance.

Shabbat – the Jewish Sabbath, falling each week from Friday sunset until Saturday sunset. During this time, festive meals will take place on Friday night, Saturday lunch and Saturday afternoon with family and friends, and there are many legal constraints of the day, such as no work, no electricity, no driving, no phone, and so on.

Shomer – This means to guard, and is often used in conjunction with the terms Shabbat and Kosher, referring to the fact they keep those sets of laws.

Shomer Nagiah – These laws prohibit all pre-marital physical contact between the sexes

Torah – the Jewish Bible, which includes the written Torah (also known as the Old Testament in Christianity), but also an Oral Law, which includes more extensive reference to Biblical stories and laws.

Torah portion – the Torah is divided into weekly portions across the Jewish annual calendar. One Torah portion is read each week in synagogue on the Sabbath, so that throughout the year the entre Torah is read. On one's Bar Mitzvah, the boy will study and recite the Torah portion in synagogue that falls on the week they were born.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

3.1
Introduction to Literature Review

I sourced the literature referenced below through the Google search engine, Pubmed.gov, Psychlit, as well as the libraries of the New School of Psychotherapy (NSPC) and the University of Middlesex. I browsed on Google Scholar especially, searching for relevant books and journal articles relating to my research. I also spent time exploring the extensive library catalogue of the University of Middlesex, some books I purchased for reference others I explored in the library. Some of the key search terms that I used were: coming out, coming out in Orthodox religious settings, coming out in the Orthodox Jewish community, coming out in Judaism, being gay in the Jewish community, being gay in Orthodox communities, being gay in Orthodox Jewish communities, psychology behind coming out, impact of religion on coming out, impact of communities on coming out. There was much literature surrounding coming out, and some in relation to religious communities such as Islam and Judaism, but there was not much in relation to these latter aspects. It took more digging and browsing to come across empirical research of this nature, although personal blogs of experiences of being gay, or coming out, in religious settings, were easier to find.

I found many current journal articles in the library at NSPC, particularly relating to existential theory. I have a combination of empirical research and philosophical literature. Approximately two thirds of the literature review considers philosophical literature of both an orthodox Jewish and secular nature. This literature serves the purpose of supporting the intellectual rationale for this research; that is the notion of being relational human beings seeking authenticity and the multi-dimensional impact an Orthodox Jewish life can have on existence. The literature around empirical research mainly addresses the impact around coming out and the challenges this may come with. This empirical research literature, combined with the philosophical literature, leads us to the purpose of this research and its place in contemporary existential and psychological arenas. I chose to include literature that was immediately relevant to this research, extensive literature was omitted that was related but not relevant for this particular research. For example, there is much research and

philosophical writing around the origins of sexual orientation, this was not included because how one's sexual orientation developed is not immediately linked to this research.

This chapter presents literature relevant to this study: an existential exploration of the experience of coming out in the Orthodox Jewish community. Literature is first presented around the idea that humans are relational beings, and that it is relating to others that lies at the core of our existence. The notion of wanting to live in an authentic way is then explored, with a particular reference to the varying understanding of what it means to be authentic. This will lead us to question whether living authentically can in fact be achieved for relational beings. The idea of sexual expression, in various forms, lying at the core of relational existence will be mentioned, in particular relation to sexual orientation as an expression of sexuality. The link between 'coming out' and the strive towards authenticity will be made, including consideration of the impact of not 'coming out'. For the religious dimension of this research, literature surrounding the multi-dimensional nature of Orthodox Jewish living will be presented, as well as the impact of that. In reference to the specific focus of this research, the Orthodox Jewish approach to homosexuality will also be considered. The culmination of this literature will lead to a more substantiated and informed position to consider the research topic: an existential exploration of the experience of coming out in the Orthodox Jewish community.

3.2

Relational beings

The notion of being a relational Being lies at the crux of existence and underlies much of existential philosophy. Heidegger (1962), a leading exponent of phenomenology, explores the hermeneutic nature of comprehending Being - *Dasein* - since it can only be explored by one for whom it matters. We can see that this care for another underlies existence; he goes further, positing that existence can only actually come into being when another takes an interest. Sartre explores this concept of relational existence extensively in *Being and Nothingness* (1969), in which he argues that the only way human beings know themselves is through awareness of the gaze of others. Both suggest that you need a relational basis to

understand your Being, thereby emphasising the relational basis of conscious existence. Sartre argues, however, that this Gaze of others hinders one's freedom of existence, in that it is used to falsely objectify ourselves (in terms of another's gaze) as a defined and unchangeable being. He postulates that this strips us of our freedom to identify ourselves as conscious beings that can choose how we 'Be'. Thus, the paradox emerges of others facilitating consciousness while simultaneously hindering its freedom. Furthermore, individuals may start to act in such a way as to influence the 'gaze' of others, in order to influence how they are perceived and defined as a Being. This intrinsically links to sexuality; Sartre explains it is this ongoing desire to Be and to be conscious that arouses within us the desire for another's gaze. He proposes that this desire lies at the root of sexuality so that to be conscious and to be sexual are in this sense inseparable.

Sartre explains how this unity is epitomised in orgasm, whereby relationships with others are largely influenced by how others make them feel about themselves through their Gaze. This can create conflict as an individual can try to influence the other's gaze, developing a system whereby both partners in the relationship try to hold each other's gaze, as opposed to both freely 'Being' in the relationship. Sartre defines this condition as alienation, commonly mistaken for love, and explains how many problems in relationships can develop as a result of this, since each party may go to extreme lengths, due to enslavement to the other's gaze and lack of the freedom they need themselves (1969). Sartre claims that this, rather than biological drives, is the basis of sexual desire and eroticism. He describes individuals' intention to turn themselves into physical, sexual beings, in order to raise the other's consciousness of this physical and sexual being for both their sakes, to raise awareness of their own being and consciousness. He explains that this is epitomised in sex, whereby both partners use their bodies to arouse each other in order to reach a peak of consciousness and being in orgasm:

> 'It is the whole body which advances and withdraws, which carries sex forward or withdraws it. Hands help to introduce the penis; the penis itself appears as an instrument which one manages, which one makes penetrate, which one withdraws, which one utilizes…the ensnarement of consciousness in the body normally has its own peculiar result – that is, a sort of particular ecstasy' (Sartre 1969, p. 397).

However, as soon as this ecstatic illusion is achieved the nothingness at the root of humanity floods back, as Sartre claims, humans can never achieve completion. According to this theory sexual relationships are not a product of biological drives, but of the desire for the gaze of others, suggesting there is no intrinsic sexual orientation; rather, one will be aroused by how the other makes them feel in terms of their being and consciousness, arguably regardless of gender. Essentially, this can be understood as a striving for a bodily experience of authenticity in the form of ultimate Being and Consciousness, but Sartre claims that ultimately, this cannot be achieved on a permanent basis; it is merely an illusion, which, like an orgasm, dissolves into nothingness. It is interesting that Sartre depicts ultimate Being and consciousness in the medium of the physical, evanescent orgasm. However, one might ask whether, with the end of the orgasm, it is indeed nothingness to which one returns, or if, despite the temporality of the orgasm, another relational bond survives.

The theory of human existence defined on a relational basis is also supported by Merleau-Ponty, who explores it from an embodied perspective in his work *Phenomenology of Perception* (Merleau-Ponty, 1945). He claims that the world exists only through its relationship with our humanity as physical beings, corroborating the significance of relational and bodily Being. Merleau-Ponty explains the second aspect of phenomenology as the perceived world, suggesting that there is an ongoing co-existence between the world and the body; it is not just that one could not exist without the other; rather, the world could not exist without the body retaining its being:

> 'our perception ends in objects, and the object, once constituted, appears as the reason for all the experiences of it that we have had or that we could have' (Merleau-Ponty, 2014, p.69).

This is adumbrated in his analysis of the senses, which postulates that we exist only on a reciprocal basis; the body senses only that which it has already facilitated to be sensed in the world. He then explains how this understanding of existence allows each of us to interact with another Embodied being; that is, there is a mutual understanding of two individuals having a pre-conscious bodily format, and sharing an environment which both define through their existence. They share a permanent dimension of their being, which can

allow some form of transcendence through interaction with each other, but this will always remain a paradox as the transcendence exists only as an initial expression of the being.

In this sense Merleau-Ponty considers sexuality to have an impermeable existence in the world and in one's body. He explains that sexuality is an intrinsic part of existence, existing in all dimensions of space. It is thus impossible to define something as sexual or non-sexual, as everything in this sense is naturally erotic, because mankind makes it so, he labels 'the body as a sexed being' (Merleau-Ponty, 2014, p.156), demonstrating the intrinsic nature of sexuality in existence. In this sense the notion of choice of sexual manifestation is limited, as it merely co-exists between the pre-conscious body and the space around the body in the world. It seems that an individual does not develop a sexual schema based on sexual preferences of arousal; rather the pre-conscious sexual schema allows the body to perceive something as sexually arousing. This could suggest that sexual preferences, such as orientation, are free-flowing, since the lived world comprises a constant fusion of bodies and ongoing erotica, regardless of sex and gender. However, whether one lives out their desires is a separate question, one which could bring us back to Sartre's *gaze* (1969) in a particular environment; other people's gaze may not facilitate authentic living. Merleau-Ponty seems to suggest then, that sexuality is ontological, rather than ontic, implying it is something one cannot live without. However, the empirical phenomenon of non-sexual or asexual existence calls this notion into question. One might consider non-sexuality and asexuality as their own expressions of sexuality but this would need further exploration.

It is clear that much of existential theory considers existence to be relational. This literature review now considers another prime feature of existence, that is authenticity.

3.3
Authentic Living

So far it is clear that relational existence is at the crux of what it means to be human from an existential perspective, the question of authenticity is now explored as it is thought to lie at the heart of relational existence by many (Kierkegaard, 1846; Buber, 1934; Nietzsche, 1886; Merleau-Ponty, 1945; Deurzen, 2009). Whilst the understanding of authenticity varies, many scholars agree that it is a state humans should strive to achieve through this relational

existence, but is also not depicted by one end destination, rather it is a journey (Kierkegaard, 1846; Buber, 1934; Nietzsche, 1886; Merleau-Ponty, 1945; Deurzen, 2009). Most existential scholars present views of authenticity that describe a process, whereby steps towards authenticity are made, and these steps are different for each person.

3.3a: Heidegger

Heidegger presents the view that humans are inauthentic so long as they relate to the world in an anonymous form, that is as part of a communal identity, he describes this as a 'They-self' (Heidegger 1962). Heidegger highlights the intrinsic human struggle towards becoming authentic, due to our intimate and inevitable connections to the world around us and all the people and objects that fill it. In Heidegger's monumental book *Being and Time* (1962), he explains how humans fall into the norms of the world around us, in that way the *Dasein* that he describes as being the fundamental awareness of existence, is inauthentic. He describes this as inauthenticity because awareness has become the acceptance of the anonymous influence of society, which ultimately depicts the loss of potential, possibilities and choice. Heidegger explains that a individuals are always making choices, and it is these choices that leave an individual with what he defines as *guilt*, because whatever one chooses, they are then guilty of ruling out something else. This process leaves each individual in an ongoing sense of responsibility for one's choices, whilst also a sense of uncertainty, because they do not truly know the impacts of their choices, or even what all of their choices are. Ultimately, each person is confronted with a lack of control, which he relates to an ongoing sense of anxiety. Heidegger postulates in *Being and Time* (1927a), that if an individual uses this anxiety to make their own choices, and chooses to free themselves from the anonymous lead of society, this is how they can find authenticity. He explains that anxiety 'makes manifest in Dasein its Being towards its ownmost potentiality-for-Being—that is, its Being-free for the freedom of choosing itself and taking hold of itself' (Heidegger, 1962, p.232). In this way, it is the awareness of the unsettled nature of existence, the unknown magnitude of opportunities, and threats, that trigger a sense of anxiety.

Building on from this, the ultimate trigger for anxiety is the awareness of death, and all limitations. Heidegger (1962) explains that it is coming to terms with this looming, and inevitable, reality for all people, that gives rise to an ongoing sense of anxiety, which can

ultimately push one to being free to make meaningful and free choices for themselves. Heidegger highlights a curious thing about death; that it is certain for all people, but also intrinsically uncertain, in terms of how or when death might arrive:

> 'death is understood as an indefinite something which, above all, must duly arrive from somewhere or other, but which is proximally not yet present-at-hand for oneself, and is therefore no threat' (Heidegger, 1962, p. 297).

Whilst death might feel closer, or more distant, depending on personal circumstances, including illness, age, disease, and so on, ultimately it carries a sense of certainty, and uncertainty, all at once. In that way each person can choose to avoid the matter of death, endings and limitations, which Heidegger explains leads to an avoidance of choice, responsibility and freedom. Ultimately, he argues that an avoidance of acknowledging, thinking about and accepting death, leads to inauthentic living. However, if an individual accepts death, the limitations that death implies and brings, then they are forced to confront themselves with real, true and meaningful choices for their finite life. It is this real acknowledgement of death, that gives rise to anxiety, that pushes one to make meaningful choices for themselves and their lives. It is this that Heidegger presents as the path to authentic living. In this way, it is one's consciousness of death that gives rise to the anxiety that leads to authentic living.

3.3b: Kierkegaard

Kierkegaard defines authenticity as having true faith and actualising one's true self (Kierkegaard, 1846). He accuses Christianity of limiting one's ability to connect to their authentic self, experiences and God, as part of a broader criticism of bodies that have been constructed by the masses and are blindly accepted, losing consciousness of the individual and thus of authentic thought. He claims such bodies aim to capture followers who do not think for themselves, and are therefore incapable of making passionate, independent decisions which they then commit to. Christianity instead aims to teach authentic living out of daily existence. Kierkegaard encourages a leap of faith (Kierkegaard, 1846) whereby an individual steps out of society's norms and expectations, and takes a leap. For Kierkegaard this leap is towards God, but it can be interpreted as a leap into one's own passions and decision-making process, even if they do not want to, in the hope of taking a step towards

authentic living and true consciousness – essentially, a more spiritual existence. These steps represent a unique journey for everybody, and represent the notion that authenticity is not just achieved, rather it is an ongoing, personal process.

Kierkegaard describes the anxiety in the moments before taking that leap, since it is a leap into the unknown. He compares this to someone taking a leap off of the edge and over the abyss, which is anxiety-provoking since the individual does not know what grounding lies ahead of him, where his feet might land, if at all. It is extreme anxiety that pushes one to take this leap though, he describes this as a sense of despair, when there is nowhere else to turn, one must leap. He argues that conforming to the known expectations and norms of society, not taking that leap into the unknown, and consequently, failing to achieve authenticity, is leading to mass dissatisfaction and despair. Kierkegaard's message could relate to any religion, and indeed the influence of mass media, whether mainstream or social media, has been linked to mental health problems (Pantic, 2014), potentially stifling the authentic expression of any sort of relational existence. Kierkegaard may have placed sexual expression in the aesthetic stage of existence, but if we are to understand it as an expression of intrinsic spiritual existence, as suggested above, then his theory can be seen to relate to sexual expression, and specifically sexual orientation. This is especially true since many of the world religions have particular laws surrounding sexual orientation, which could impact one's freedom of authentic expression in this area.

Kierkegaard discourages the consideration of oneself in relation to general society; rather, like Heidegger and Sartre, he postulates that we should consider ourselves relational beings. Heidegger suggests that it is through Being that we understand what being really is, whether our own or that of others. Similarly, Kierkegaard proposes that it is through one's relation with oneself that one develops one's authentic self: 'the self is a relation that relates itself to itself' (Kierkegaard, 1849, p.13). This would unfold as follows: individuals identify themselves, and having understood themselves, they could then consider how they wish to continue their life journey, optimising the self they have now encountered. This is a cycle that can repeat over and over, as at each point in life individuals discover different aspects of themselves to relate to. In this way, authenticity can again be considered as a process, a life-long journey.

However, this process is laced with dilemmas of authenticity in relation to acknowledgement, acceptance and how to proceed thereafter. At the heart of Kierkegaard's outlook are tensions of existence between the finite and the infinite. Hence the human dilemma between connecting to one's eternal self after having been thrown into the temporal world, a dilemma depicted in the description above. As this repeatedly occurs throughout life, individuals can continually choose whether or not to manifest themselves in an authentic manner. When considering sexuality as ingrained in our relational existence, we can extrapolate from this that at the heart of authentic relational existence is an authentic relationship with one's sexuality, which can be achieved from a good understanding of this. This is not something that can be achieved in one instance, or is achieved and then completed, rather it is an ongoing journey of discovery, self-learning and understanding. However, since self-awareness is so often intertwined with identification with others, through our relational existence, an honest relationship with one's own sexuality can often be a struggle. Indeed, when considering sexual orientation in relation to the temporal physical world and also to the eternal world of existence and spirituality, both of which entail some form of religion and religious discourses, we can see that connecting to, and sometimes exposing, one's sexual orientation can be a dilemma in itself.

3.3c: Buber

A similar notion is expressed in Buber's I-Thou theory, which also suggests that it is only through truly meaningful and elevated relationships that one can achieve a transcendent and authentic state, leading to true living (1934). Buber highlights the same concerns of society, in which the norm is to engage in less meaningful experiences of objects, as opposed to meaningful encounters with other beings, especially with God. Both warn of the dangers of the inauthentic living that characterizes life due to a lack of meaningful relational experiences. Buber also reiterates that the authentic I-Thou encounter is not something that is achieved and then ongoing, rather it is an ongoing and subjective process of steps towards authenticity.

3.3d: Nietzsche

Nietzsche's views on authenticity draw on Kierkegaard's theory, but omit the influence of God and religion (Nietzsche, 1886). Nietzsche claims that authentic existence requires one to make decisions that transcend conventional, traditional morality; rather, decision-making should discard antiquated notions of good and evil. Nietzsche believed that Christianity was the religion of a resentful slave mentality, trapping the 'herd' into believing that poverty and suffering are virtues so that they will not challenge social norms and structures. However, he does not claim, like Sartre, that authenticity is an unachievable illusion. Rather, he suggests that individuals should rise above religion and make their own transcendent and independent decisions, rejecting the authority of tradition. Nietzsche, Heidegger, Buber and Kierkegaard are united in their belief in empowerment of the individual to make independent decisions regarding morality and behaviour, which will enable one to strive towards authentic living in a gradual process. By contrast, while Sartre's (1969) existentialist belief holds that a human has the freedom to live however they choose, he also believed that as we are essentially nothingness, we can never achieve true consciousness.

3.3e: Merleau-Ponty

Merleau-Ponty agrees that an element of transcendence can be achieved on a relational basis through the natural expression of co-existence with the worlds of language and sexuality. However, this can only be achieved once individuals understand that they exist primarily as a body inhabiting the world around them; through co-existence they can then Become (Merleau-Ponty, 1945). He maintains that inauthenticity manifests when this truth is denied or misunderstood.

3.3f: Authenticity as a gradual journey

It seems that there is a consensus among these major philosophers that all beings seek authentic living, even if they cannot achieve it, through a gradual process of discovery and decision-making. Furthermore, they are in agreement that beings are relational in their existence and it is this fact that plays a pivotal role in their ability to live authentically. It is this relational nature of humanity, which seeks a sense of authenticity across a range of dimensions that leads to the process Deurzen (2009) describes - an ongoing confrontation of dilemmas through the process of getting to know oneself. However, this seems to involve

an anomaly: to Be, we must seek authentic existence, but if we also Be as a relational being, then it is surely almost impossible to reach a place of true authenticity, since others, who impact our existence so deeply, are essentially separate from ourselves and cannot see us in a truly authentic form. Arguably, regardless of how others see us, we are left to make our own decisions, nevertheless it is important to acknowledge that the role of others in that process can be deeply significant, even pivotal. This is especially true of tight-knit communities, including religious circles, whose social, cultural and religious expectations can feel all the more demanding. This problem is epitomised in the dilemma I described in the Introduction and Reflexivity chapter (Chapter 1), reminding us that it is not just religious communities that impose judgements conflicting with our inner selves; I fear that the secular and academic communities could be equally censorious of the Orthodox Jewish world. This dilemma resonates with me as a Jewish researcher exploring 'coming out' in the Orthodox community in an academic capacity, as part of a secular institution.

So far, this literature review has considered two commonly held beliefs in existential theory: first that humans exist relationally, second that humans strive for authentic living through varying processes, even if it is something they do not, or cannot, achieve. This literature review now considers the dilemma that the co-existence of these two features of existence can pose.

3.4
Inevitable inauthenticity through relational existence

Having explored the notion of relational existence and the simultaneous universal strive for authenticity, a dilemma is reached. That is, if it is true that we exist as relational beings, then it is also true that much of our identity will be impacted by others, who may not always see us for who we are. This inevitably leads to hurdles in making steps towards authenticity, as others views of us impact our views and relationships with ourselves. As scholars above outline, it is steps towards an honest relationship with ourselves that lies at the heart of the process towards authenticity. Foucault links this to the fact that society can impose constructed concepts as inalienable truth. He relates this specifically to sexuality, and sexual

orientation, in *The History of Sexuality* (1976), in which he addresses the suppression myth, that is, the belief that sexuality is supressed in society. He points out that it is this very emphasis on the suppression of sexuality that proves its continued salience. Furthermore, the discourse of sexuality coerces individuals into confessing their desires and pleasures, often, purportedly, for the purpose of the greater good of society, including scientific research. He explicitly ties this to the notion of power, which he defines uniquely and specifically, with sexuality, and is one of the most plausible theorists in suggesting that sexual preference, including orientation, is a societal construct. With this in mind, the overriding power dynamics, values and agendas of one's society, community and even family, will directly impact one's sexual identity. This is especially true for how one relates their sexual identity to others. In this way, the struggle of finding an authentic sexual identity is highlighted, because of the influence broader society plays.

This suggests that if an individual senses a sexual identity that is at odds with societal values and expectations, then they might feel the need to hide this. This can relate to Sartre's (1969) notion of the *Gaze*, which explains how one's identity is ultimately defined through other's gaze, that is how others see them. In this way, a person becomes what others see them to be. This is an especially powerful concept in a community set up, since there are so many people watching, gazing, on how one lives their lives, consequently moulding their identity and development. This is even more poignant in a nuclear-family heteronormative society, because from a young age others gaze is that of a heteronormative expectation: if you are male, you are seen as a future husband and father, if you are female you are seen as a future wife and mother. This strong heteronormative gaze of others can significantly impact one's own sexual identity development, namely it can lead to a serious struggle for an individual to come out as any alternative sexual orientation.

The powerful impact of the gaze can also make it very difficult for an individual to see, understand and accept themselves for who they are too. For example, it might not just be hard to share a homosexual orientation with others, but it could also be difficult to acknowledge this orientation privately too, because there is no space for this in the gaze of those around them. This can take the shape of Sartre's notion of Bad Faith (1969), the theory of self-deception regarding one's human reality. He describes this as taking two

forms: first, convincing oneself they are not what they actually are. Second, considering oneself an unconscious being, that is an object or a job, and so denying oneself the freedom within one's grasp. For example, one may consider that their job as a teacher defines who they are as a being. In this way, they are living in bad faith as they have defined themselves as something they are not, an unchangeable object designed to do nothing but teach. Because of this, they do not realise that they can transcend their accidental circumstances to become a conscious being, who is intrinsically defined by nothingness, and so can be whatever they choose to be – they are thus not defined in any concrete sense.

The notion of bad faith relates specifically to self-deception, and so in relation to a hidden gay identity this would mainly relate if they themselves had not acknowledge, or accepted this identity. Hiding their identity from others, but having accepted it themselves, would arguably not be considered bad faith. Since sexuality lies at the root of existence as we have seen, bad faith and the impact of the gaze, in terms of any aspect of sexuality can be a serious hurdle towards authentic identity and expression. As scholars explain authenticity is worked towards through honest self-reflection and identity, this is at odds with the crux of bad faith. This can especially be seen regarding sexual orientation, in particular within religious communities as Kierkegaard observed. As Foucault (1976) highlights, the influences of a societal structure that has biases, prejudices and values surrounding sexual orientation, can lead to an individual living a life of sexual orientation at odds with that to which they are predisposed by pre-consciousness, as Merleau-Ponty holds. When considering this possibility of inauthentic living at the root of human existence, we would expect this to pose a significant threat to existence.

This literature review has explored the common existential understanding that humans live a relational existence, whilst simultaneously striving for authentic living. This poses a paradox, in that the relation with others can interfere with the journey towards authenticity. This is especially true when considering one's sexual identity and the influences of societal structures. This literature review now considers the place of sexuality in this process, as it is an intimate expression of relation to others, and oneself, with a specific reference to sexual orientation.

3.5

Sexual orientation: at the core of existence, but in the closet

After having considered the relational nature of existence, as well as the centrality of the ongoing journey towards authenticity and the paradox this may pose, threats to existence in terms of inauthenticity festering were considered. In particular the role that societal structures can play in this process. This literature review now considers this relation to sexuality as it is an intimate and deep-rooted relation to others, and oneself. This review especially considers how this relational expression ties in with the central concept of authenticity. Sexual expression in relation to others, and oneself, manifests in ranging forms, such as polyamory, bondage, discipline, dominance and masochism, kink and so on. The focus of this research is sexual orientation as a manifestation of sexual relation to others and oneself.

Due to its intimate relational nature, sexual orientation (as well as other expressions of sexuality, not the focus of this research) seems to be at the crux of Being, leaving us to wonder why it is so underexplored in existential phenomenology (Deurzen & Arnold-Baker, 2005; Milton, 2015; Cohn, 1997, Spinelli, 1997). While philosophers, including Deurzen (2009), explore sexuality extensively, sexual orientation is not explicitly addressed. Sexual orientation as a point of wide-ranging discussion, has in modern times been addressed from political, historical, social, sexual, emotional, spiritual, legal and health perspectives. For the purposes of this study, the link between sexual orientation and well-being is notable, with research suggesting that homosexual and bisexual individuals are at more than double the risk of suicide than the heterosexual population; they are also 1.5 times more likely to experience 12 months or longer periods of depression and are 1.5 times more likely to become drug- or alcohol- dependent (Chakraborty, 2011). Negative emotions have been commonly linked with the coming out process, including; loneliness, disconnection, confusion, grief, shame, anger, fear, vulnerability, depression and consequently increased suicidal ideation (Human Rights Campaign, 2013; Lewis, Derlega, Berndt, Morris, & Rose, 2000). Thus, it is surprising that this issue has not been more directly explored within existential philosophy, with a view to it being applied in existential therapeutic processes.

Medina Milton (2015) notes that the concept of sexual orientation causes a potential dichotomy for existential thinkers, a problem echoed by Pickard and Swynnerton (Deurzen & Arnold-Baker, 2005). The main problem is that considering an individual to have a sexual orientation can be seen as unphenomenological, since although the spectrum of sexuality does facilitate some movement, the notion of an ongoing self-recreation in terms of sexual orientation seems meaningless to many, and so not ontological. Deurzen and Adams (2011) present the notion that 'We *are* first and define ourselves later' (p.9), which in relation to sexual orientation has been understood to mean that sexuality is not ontological, rather it is a fixed ontic position: who we *are,* it is what we do with it that defines ourselves later. Medina (2015) points to a clarification of the ontic and ontological in this sense, and how they relate in terms of sexual orientation. When considering the ontological as the potential of being and the ontic as the range of lived experience and potential, we realise that theorising is based on human experience, rather than purely abstract speculation. In this sense, we cannot ignore individual experiences of a fixed sexual attraction, nor of a changing one. It seems that from an ontologically existential perspective one must accept that many individuals consider their sexual orientation to be fixed, yet phenomenologically, there is a notion that sexuality for all is both universal and flexible. However, in building relationships the conscious Being engages with another, or their own, consciousness, which, according to Merleau-Ponty and Sartre, is expressed through sexuality. This can be understood in light of Heidegger's concept of Dasein, as a form of care (1962). Meaningful engagement will accept and respect where the other Being's consciousness feels itself to be, as it is this sense that allows them to Be. With this in mind it is the individual's sense of their own orientation that is significant, even if this is against the backdrop of a phenomenology that is in some way antithetical to that. This further highlights Sartre's paradox - of freedom to exist arising from our nothingness, but essentially being nothing (1969). It seems that although in some fields, determining whether sexual orientation is flexible or fixed is primary, such as in current genetic and scientific research (LeVay, 2016), this is not relevant to existential phenomenology, to the existential therapeutic relationship, or to the relations of conscious beings. When considering sexual orientation in this sense, it is arguable that many existential philosophers did not address sexuality or sexual orientation explicitly, since

it can be considered theoretically within the same framework as any other conscious experience and does not need an isolated analysis or theory.

Whilst Medina's (2015) suggestion why this area is underexplored is of value, and certainly seems plausible, one must consider whether avoidance of the subject pertains to what lies at the heart of the matter itself. Through my own reflexivity I noted that developing as a researcher around coming out as a gay, in the Jewish community as a heterosexual female, has been a tricky process. Sharing my research with others is almost always combined with explaining, even justifying why it is worthwhile, valuable and in line with the Orthodox Jewish values I align with. It is sometimes challenging sharing the nature of my research in some settings, because of the responses I expect to receive. Just as I, the researcher, took time to come out of the so-called closet as a researcher into this topic, I wonder if this is also true for other existential researchers. Perhaps this is just a topic that is difficult for some people to discuss openly, conduct and publish research on, and essentially open up about. That may be due to the difficulties posed by sexual orientation for individuals, but also, in some way, researchers in existential phenomenology may perhaps wish to avoid the gaze of others in relation to this topic. I wonder whether they too are waiting to be allowed to 'come out' with something that is different, diverse and may not be accepted by others? I think that this is a process which has arguably already begun and is being furthered by the present research, and I think that some communities, some academic arenas and some disciplines are more receiving of the coming out of this topic than others.

After having considered the universal relational nature of existence, as well as the ongoing strive towards authenticity, this review considered the paradox this can pose, with particular reference to societal constructs leading to threats to existence depicted in inauthenticity festering. Due to the deep-rooted relational nature of sexuality this review then considered the role of sexual expression, in the form of sexual orientation, in this process. The review then highlighted how sexual orientation is noticeably underexplored in existential literature, arguably representing a paradox at the heart of this research. That is, whilst sexual orientation may be at the heart of one's relational journey towards authenticity, it seems somewhat hidden. After having considered the threats of societal frameworks on the journey towards authenticity, one could derive that it is these threats

that lie at the heart of this paradox. When linking this to one's personal journey of sexual orientation we can consider the dilemma many may face if their inner expression of sexual orientation is at odds with the societal constructs around them. This could be especially true in the form of religious living, which is explored in 3.6.

3.6
'Coming Out': a step towards Authentic living

Seen in this light, the process of 'coming out' seems to be a step towards authenticity and harmony of sexuality across the four dimensions wherein an individual comes to terms with their own consciousness in a relational sense, in hope of achieving the authenticity described by, inter alia, Kierkegaard, Sartre, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Buber, as explored above. In order to relate one's consciousness to another in a harmonious and authentic way, they must first come to terms with their own consciousness. Kierkegaard explains how an individual would identify themselves, and how, once they understood themselves, they could then consider how they wished to continue their life journey, optimising their newly encountered self. As this recurs throughout life, one will accordingly continually manifest themselves in an authentic manner throughout the course of their life.

Ali (2017) explain how this two-tiered process of coming to terms with oneself, and then others, can be found in the process of coming out as gay. As part of the findings the process of coming out was defined, and key to this definition:

> 'All of the participants conveyed that coming out is a two-fold process that involves the intrapersonal aspect of finding oneself and the interpersonal aspect of disclosing to others. Although participants shared that the intrapersonal process of development is influenced by the interpersonal process of disclosure, there was a general consensus that the personal process generally precedes the process of sharing.' (p.4)

Ali (2017) explained that the intrapersonal phase of coming out was a pivotal point at the end of a long, emotive journey. This was presented as a long journey of self-discovery, full of exploration, denial, acceptance, pain, anger and struggle, culminating in a key moment of self-acceptance: I am gay. Following this was the interpersonal phase of coming out, which

was depicted as being true to yourself whilst deepening relations with others. This was presented as a layered process: friends, family, colleagues, acquaintances, and so on. Key themes that emerged during this process were those of trust, loyalty, commitment and relationship building. Participants shared that society, news and media, was particularly unhelpful during their coming out process, as well as some difficult familial experiences and inner mental health struggles. However, some points were identified as being helpful for the coming out process: personal strength, self-care, support, safety, planning and patience, as well as social support, reflection and planning. Ultimately Ali (2015) demonstrates that coming out should not be understood as one particular moment, rather a two-phased process of inner personal discovery, and then a more interpersonal process.

Ali and Barden (2015) carry out research around the process of coming out, and highlight how individuals of sexual minorities endure a more repetitive and cyclical process of coming out, than current research suggests. They explain the cycle of coming out consists of three phases: awareness phase, whereby an individual becomes aware of their own identity, the assessment phase whereby the individual assesses if it is safe to come out to others and the decision phase where they make the ultimate commitment to disclosing or withholding their identity. A key feature of this research is that this is not a one-time process, similar to the process of authenticity presented in the existential literature above, it is a continual cyclical process, whereby it might never truly end, and is consistently called upon in every new scenario. Ali and Barden (2015) speak specifically to therapeutic practitioners to be mindful of this when working with sexual minority clients.

Mondimore (2002) and Davies and Neal (2001) explain how this inner journey of discovery can begin at a young age. Purena (2015) summarises their views: they claim that an individual develops particular sexual preferences at a young age, which, as they are exposed to society, they either express or supress. Mondimore (2002) explains that many adults report feeling different from other children from a young age, but it is interesting that the differences derive from differing play interests from others of their gender:

> 'Boys may find they are less interested in sports than their peers and prefer solitary activities such as reading and music, and girls may find that they are more independent or athletic than other girls. All of this occurs completely outside the realm of sexuality at this age, in what might be called the social world of the child, the world of friends and games and school' (p.163).

Mondimore (2002) is presenting the notion that non-erotic signs of homosexuality can present from a young age in social settings, but still present under the feeling of being different. Troiden (1989) labelled these early experiences of differentness as the sensitisation stage, occurring between the ages of six and twelve. He explains this experience as the children feeling different, but not necessarily labelling themselves as homosexual, or considering themselves as having different future relationships to their parents – that is, they will still become mummies and daddies in the heterosexual sense. It is important for us to note the time context of Troiden's theories, in that when he presented his work times were different, it might be that children aged between six and twelve did not know of, or understand, the term homosexual. It is very different today, where these terms are included in relationship and sex education in schools from a much younger age. However, variation is still relevant, especially across religious contexts of faith schools and home conversations. Therefore, the specifics of his ideas might not be binding, but the general idea that children of a younger age, whilst might feel different, do not actually jump straight to a gay identity, nor will they necessarily consider their future relationships to differ from their parents. The specific ages might vary according to school and home contexts, but the concept holds value. A further dimension of Troiden's theory that holds value as a concept, but might differ in terms of the age it comes about, is what happens post-twelve years old. He claims that it is at this time individuals develop an awareness to sexual signals around them, and consequently develop curiosity, and even confusion around their own sexual identity, this combined with the stigmas they may have encountered through their upbringing can fuel difficulty.

Mondimore (2002) describes how denial can manifest, the avoidance of not wanting to fit into a particular homosexual label, or the avoidance of behaviours and hobbies that they affiliate with being gay. He claims changes in social behaviour can arise, as well as escape into drugs and alcohol, whilst some search for a cure such as reparative therapy:

> 'Many, perhaps even most, homosexuals go through at least a brief period of cognitive dissonance and some psychological gymnastics before they reach a point of acceptance or at least tolerance of the label homosexual as applies to themselves.

But once this point is reached, yet another crossroads presents itself: will the individual allow others to perceive him or her as homosexual?' (p. 169).

Mondimore (2002) explains that the establishment of the personal identity is an inner psychological process, but the next phase of telling the other is more interlinked with external focuses, that of society and culture. Through a deeper consideration of the impacts of stigma, Mondimore explains that a 'homosexual can escape the consequences of being identified as a member of the stigmatised group by controlling other' access to information about him or her' (p.171). So, after having self-identified as homosexual, the next complexity is how to 'fit this information into other aspects of life' (p.171), and it is this question that intrinsically ties into paradoxes or harmonies across dimensions of living as Deurzen describes (2015). Mondimore (2002) highlights the consideration of risks affiliated with sharing this identity, such as isolation, abandonment, loss of job, rejection by parents, and so on. Essentially risks will vary according to context, but the fact that there is a consideration of risk before sharing this identity is important, especially for the fact that risks can cause inner pain, which is often a further matter to avoid:

> 'Some individuals may decide that the consequences of being identified as homosexual are so terrible that no disclosure is possible' (p. 172).

However, Mondimore goes on to explain that as individuals become more familiar and comfortable with their identity, exposure seems more possible. He puts forward that identification with others is crucial during this time, such as through learning about other homosexual individuals and organisations to identify with. It is important to consider the impact of modern day social media and media on this process, as there is an ever-increasing network to identify with globally online. He explains pride and anger might surface at this point, but emphasises this journey is unique for everybody. Davies and Neal (2001) agree that coming out is a pivotal part of developing identity, but also unique to each individual as it is a complex interaction between the particular individual and their particular societal context:

> 'The process of coming out is also heavily influenced by a number of significant variables: gender, race or ethnic group, locale… the extent of sexual variation, the

values and attitudes of society at the time, individual variation…and physical ability or sensory impairment' (p.68).

We can see that whilst the process is unique, it is most certainly tied in to societal context.

Purena (2015) highlights that supressed homosexual tendencies lead to a distance between one's daily living and consciousness; they are living in the world but their consciousness is 'in the closet'. This can lead to a heightened state of isolation, whereby the individual can neither partake in sexual relationships that are meaningful to their inner consciousness, nor relate meaningfully to those around them, such as family and friends, as they are keeping a significant part of their consciousness deeply hidden. This can lead to a sense of alienation, as Sartre (1969) described, and an isolated existence, as they disassociate from so much of what they are, on multiple planes - a very painful experience (Deurzen, 2015). This can lead to the development of a range of promiscuous and unhealthy behaviours and relationships and often pushes one to seek therapeutic help (Purena, 2015). Downs (2012) presents this in his book *Velvet Rage*, whereby the title epitomises the concept he presents. Downs shares how gay men feel a strong sense of shame and pain, which results in a deep-rooted inner rage. He explains that it is this rage that is closely associated with mental health struggles and often brings individuals to therapy. Downs explains that in order to live with this inner rage, gay men form a beautiful exterior that shapes their world, allowing calmer and more peaceful living. He explains that this is why gay men are so greatly involved in all things outwardly beautiful: fashion, interior design, beauty, and so on. This he depicts in the elaborate material of velvet, hence the title depicts this dichotomous living he claims gay men experience laced with velvet rage.

Purena (2015) explains Kon's notion of how this split world can start to become whole through a carefully managed therapeutic relationship, in which an individual will come out (2003). In existential terms, they will tap into their despair to reveal their inner consciousness as it wishes to be expressed sexually. 'Coming out' to family and friends is often a gradual process as trust and resilience is built through careful disclosure and the development of relations. Ultimately one is always aiming for true authenticity and harmony in an honest self-experience and realisation on all four dimensions. This is true

within whatever arena one is exploring, including sexuality, sexual identity and sexual orientation. Shilo and Savavya (2012) carried out recent research around coping strategies and mental health among religious Jewish gay and bisexual males, and they further highlight the importance of social factors. They considered coping strategies for the stress arising from the conflict between religious and sexual identities, and found that positive coping strategies only worked alongside the presence of social resources, such as connections with the LGBT community and friends acceptance of their sexual orientation.

Thus, 'coming out' can be understood as a phenomenological step for many towards seeking authentic living across the four existential dimensions. This step, or leap of faith as Kierkegaard describes it, is a significant process in and of itself, especially in relation to the sexuality that is so fundamental to one's intrinsic consciousness, as we have seen above. Thus, coming out is a process worth exploring from an experiential existential viewpoint. When considering Foucault's notion of societal discourse constructing our existence and the ontological notion of existential philosophy, it is important to note that the process of 'coming out' can range significantly according to societal context. A particular society in the United Kingdom of which an increasing interest into living as a homosexual is developing is the Orthodox Jewish community, depicted in the establishment of the first organisation established to promote inclusion of the LGBT+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender/sexual and other groups) in the Jewish community in 2011 (KeshetUK, 2015). It would therefore be particularly interesting to explore the experience of 'coming out' within this community. In order to do this, it is important to gain some understanding of the role of Orthodox Jewish living in each of the Deurzen's (2005) existential dimensions, and their outlook on sexuality, specifically sexual orientation.

This literature review has presented the paradox of relational living and the strive towards authenticity, in particular relation to sexual orientation as something at the heart of existence, and the journey towards authenticity, but may be hidden. With this in mind it could be the 'coming out' of one's sexual orientation that represents a step towards authentic living. The dilemma of sexual orientation being, or remaining, hidden, can be exasperated by societal frameworks, namely religion. For the purposes of this research the

religion explored is Orthodox Judaism, which is explored next, especially for the way it impacts living multi-dimensionally.

3.7

The multi-dimensional presence of Judaism in Orthodox daily living

After considering the paradoxical nature of relational living, and the strive towards authentic living, this dilemma in particular relation to sexual orientation as an expression of relational existence was explored. A key paradox was highlighted, whereby sexual orientation is thought to be at the heart of relational existence and so key to the strive towards authentic living, but remains somewhat unexplored in existential literature. This can be seen to represent the bigger picture, whereby sexual orientation, whilst key to relational, authentic living, can be deeply hidden. Arguably this could be due to the threats to existence explored above, namely in the shape of societal frameworks. Religion is a key example of a societal framework that can impact daily living in a multi-dimensional way, especially the matter of sexual orientation as a sexual expression. For the purposes of this research Judaism, as lived by Orthodox observers of the faith, is the religion considered.

Orthodox Judaism is an all-encompassing multi-dimensional religion that impacts each of the four dimensions at the heart of modern-day existential philosophy. Deurzen's comprehensive theory of a multi-dimensional existence, elaborated in *Everyday Mysteries* (2005), is based on a ubiquitously held premise: humans are relational beings who live on a range of dimensions, all of which require attention to achieve holistic authenticity and consequential healthy living. She names four specific dimensions of existence, physical, social, personal and spiritual, each of which will be defined. Orthodox Judaism is an ethical monotheistic religion (Leaman, 2010); monotheism refers to the belief in one eternal, infinite, omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent God; ethical refers to the requirement to put these beliefs into practice in daily living. This is epitomised in the core prayer, the *Shema*, taken from Deuteronomy in the Bible, which is recited three times a day, including just before retiring to sleep (Scherman, 2005). The first line of this prayer declares the oneness of God and the prayer goes on to explain that for an individual to truly connect to

God, they must do so on ranging levels of existence, which overlap with Deurzen's four dimensions. This is expanded upon in the first paragraph of the *Shema*, which instructs the individual to 'love God with all of your heart, soul and might . . . And these words . . .You shall speak of them when you sit at home and when you go on a journey' (Scherman, 2005, p. 443). Commentators explain that 'your heart' represents a personal commitment to God, 'soul' represents a spiritual commitment, 'might' represents one's physical capacity, including bodily actions and material possessions. Finally, speaking of these things at home and when going on journey conveys that one must discuss these ideas socially, especially in order to teach and educate others about this holistic attachment to God (Scherman & Zlotowitz, 2000). The next verse of this prayer advises a Jew to bind these as 'signs between one's eyes and on one's arm' (Scherman & Zlotowitz, 2000, p.975). Commentators explain (Scherman & Zlotowitz, 2000) that this refers to *tefillin*; boxes that Orthodox Jews strap on their forehead and on their arms, containing the verses described above. This serves as a physical reminder that the obligations noted above are to be instilled not only in the brain (symbolised by one of the boxes being placed on the forehead), but also through one's actions (symbolised by the box strapped to one's arm, the agent of physical action), and through one's personal feelings (as the box is strapped to the left upper arm next to the heart, symbolising emotion). This exemplifies the multi-dimensional commitment to God, and is further symbolised through the holistic devotion displayed by Abraham, the forefather of Judaism, through his tests of dedication on each of these planes (Scherman, 2005).

Furthermore, the lifestyle of an Orthodox Jew is all-encompassing with regard to living on each of these dimensions. Essentially, the aim of an Orthodox Jew is to attach this physical world to the spiritual dimension of Godliness, by infusing daily living with spirituality (Tatz, 1993). Whereas some religions believe transcendence is achieved through separating oneself from the community and the physical world, Judaism believes this is achieved through communal living and practices. For example, Orthodox Jews live by *Halakah* (Jewish law) in every aspect of life; there are Jewish laws governing food, dress, speech, sexual intimacy, education, prayer, and so on. This is intended to elevate each of these physical processes into the realm of the spiritual. We can see the underlying Jewish value of societal

and relational living through the importance attached to the community. Orthodox Jewish males are obligated to pray three times a day in company with at least ten other Jewish males. Furthermore, the holiest of prayers can be recited only when at least ten Jewish males (a 'minyan') are present. There is also an obligation to build a synagogue in a Jewish community so that Jews can congregate for prayer, socialising, youth programmes, education, and celebration of the weekly Sabbath and other festivals and significant occasions (Leaman, 2010). The various months of the year associated with different personal feelings; for example, in the month of Adar one is obligated to seek an inner sense of personal happiness and harmony and in the month of *Av* Jews are obligated to personally mourn the sadness of Jewish history and life, going so far as to actually *feel* sad (Kitov, 1999). Thus, there is a significant emphasis on the social, personal, spiritual and physical dimensions of existence, and an Orthodox Jew is expected to strive to connect to God meaningfully on each of these dimensions.

After having considered the paradox of relational living and the strive towards authenticity, this review considered the threats to authentic, relational existence, by societal frameworks. These ideas were considered in relation to sexual orientation particularly, for its essence of being an intimate expression of relationality, as well as the role of Orthodox Judaism as a societal framework. Evidently, Orthodox Judaism can be seen as impacting living in a multi-dimensional way, suggesting it could significantly influence relational existence and the journey towards authenticity. This is considered in particular relation to sexual orientation below, through considering Orthodox Judaism's teachings on sexual orientation.

3.8
Orthodox Judaism's teachings on Sexual orientation

Evidently, Judaism addresses the practicalities of each dimension, as it is a holistic religion that expects authentic commitment on each dimension from its Orthodox followers. Orthodox Judaism also acknowledges sexuality as having a significant presence in existence, and is thus a topic extensively explored by Jewish scholars. Just as there are Jewish ideas

surrounding sex, menstruation, childbearing, gender, sexuality, sexual pressures, contraception, and so on, there are ideas and laws surrounding sexual orientation, the expression of relational existence at the focus of this research. As explored above, religion can impact relational existence and the journey towards authentic living. This review now considers Orthodox Jewish teachings on sexual orientation, to aid understanding around this particular religion's impact on this particular expression of relational living. These ideas, combined with the multi-dimensional nature of Orthodox life, make the experience of 'coming out' as defined above, unique.

Rabbi Chaim Rappaport has written one of the few books exploring homosexuality from a strictly Orthodox perspective that has been accepted by contemporary Orthodox leaders. *Judaism and Homosexuality* (2015) has a foreword by the former Orthodox Chief Rabbi, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, who was the British representative of world Orthodox Judaism, together with letters of approval from some of the most highly respected Orthodox Rabbinic leaders and teachers. In this book Rabbi Rappaport explains that Judaism prohibits homosexual acts of sex, but differentiates this from homosexual feelings of attraction or arousal. Thus, the Jewish Bible (the *Torah*) recognises homosexual feelings, and neither forbids nor condemns them; it does, however, forbid homosexual acts. Sexual intercourse is considered an extremely holy act, thought of as a union between man, woman and God, united for the purpose of procreation (Rappaport, 2015). This possibility of unity with God to procreate, considered the peak of Jewish worship, can only be achieved between a man and a woman, since homosexual intercourse cannot lead to procreation. Consequently, an Orthodox Jew possessed of homosexual feelings would be obligated to refrain from acting on them sexually, and if they did not feel they could engage in holistically healthy and sustainable heterosexual relations within marriage, should remain abstinent. Rabbi Rappaport explains that this is indeed a formidable challenge, since it amounts to asking an individual to desist from acting on their physical desires, which is especially difficult at a time such as the present, when there is increasing emphasis on gender rights and sexual liberation. He therefore implores Orthodox Jews, especially leaders, therapists, parents and educators, to internalize a sense of compassion and understanding when considering an individual who faces this challenge.

Rabbi Rappaport also highlights how Judaism forbids individuals to judge others - judging another's sense of morality and lifestyle is prohibited by Jewish law. Therefore, discrimination of any kind is forbidden. He discusses his sadness that Jews do not always practise the ideals prescribed by Judaism - although it is forbidden, discrimination does exist within the Jewish community. Judaism is a religion that places a very high value on life (Scherman, 2005) and every effort should be made to protect one's life and that of others. Therefore, considering the statistical findings correlating mental-health risks to sexual orientation, Orthodox Jews should therefore take even greater care not to exacerbate the risk of causing harm to another by manifesting a critical attitude to their sexual orientation. Rather, Orthodox Jews should do all they can to support individuals grappling with mental-health problems whatever the cause. However, a careful balance must always be struck in order to support individuals, without actively encouraging them to break Jewish law. With this in mind we can see that the Orthodox Jew with a homosexual orientation, whose Judaism permeates every dimension of their life, faces a unique challenge. If this individual 'comes out', their experience is likely to be distinct from others' experiences of 'coming out', and is consequently in need of further scholarly exploration.

Research around this area has slowly emerged, but there is little recent research. Mark (2008) wrote a journal article presenting answers, and further questions, around forging a gay Jewish Orthodox identity:

> 'Until very recently, the notion of a gay or lesbian Orthodox Jew would have been considered an oxymoron. However, today there is a critical mass of gay and lesbian Orthodox Jews' (p179).

This was speaking over ten years ago, today we can expect that there would be even more. She highlights similar issues to the questions this review has pointed towards:

> 'it is useful to understand the unique philosophical, psychological, and social tensions that can arise for Orthodox gay people. How do gay and lesbian Orthodox Jews come to terms with the inherent tensions and internal contradictions posed in trying to balance a traditionally Orthodox lifestyle with one that affirms their sexual identities? How do these men and women attempt to resolve their value conflicts? What factors contribute to their decision to remain in this difficult position? What does a double-life look like?' (p.179)

Mark attempts to address these issues based on her clinical practice, areas she touches upon are intense feelings of guilt, delay in coming out, the added dimension of the impact of the Holocaust, feelings of isolation and the struggle of adapting to secular gay communities after having had an Orthodox upbringing. She also touches upon grief, loss, HIV spreading amongst closeted married men and conversion therapy. She highlights the unique role of the Orthodox Jewish therapist, which is an angle from which I also identify with. Overall this article touches on a wide range of relevant issues, but essentially it is based on her experience of being a therapist and listening to clients. This is very helpful, but has its limitations in that it presents her interpretation of sessions clients have presented. It would be interesting to address the question around this somewhat paradoxical experience of being an orthodox gay Jew through interviews, so that individuals can share their experiences for the purposes of research, as opposed to as a client.

Borowich (2006) shares his research on reparative therapy (also known as conversion therapy) for Orthodox Jewish Homosexuals. The author, an Orthodox Jewish Psychiatrist, spent several decades working with Orthodox Jewish clients, many of whom identified as homosexual. Since his work with those clients initially seemed effective, in that all of them moved at least one point towards heterosexuality on the Kinsey Scale, he worked with an increasing amount of gay Orthodox Jewish individuals who wished to change their sexual orientation. However, what came to light was that this movement on the Kinsey Scale was not unidirectional. In fact, multiple reversions occurred, especially in response to stressful life events, which ultimately resulted in catastrophic consequences for themselves and their extended nuclear families. The author believed:

> 'a nurturing relationship with a straight male therapist, who understood the person's religious sensibilities and feelings, might help detoxify corrosive masculine influences of the past and provide some role-modelling for future identification.'

However, this was ultimately not effective, evidenced by his title: *Failed Reparative Therapy of Orthodox Jewish Homosexuals*. It could be suggested though, that the nurturing, safe and consistent nature of the therapeutic relationship was helpful in some ways, if not a sexual reorientation. Bright (2005) highlights the inadequacy of reparative therapy:

'At the present time, most professional regulating bodies have banned the use of reparative therapy. In addition, reparative therapy is not supported by any reliable quantitative or qualitative studies.' (p.471).

However, there are therapists that continue to practice conversion therapy, based on psychoanalytic theory, and he describes them as crossing social, political and religious boundaries, through the quest to create 'former homosexuals' (p.47). That is, individuals who used to be homosexual, but are no longer. He also affiliates this with faith-based providers, in that particular sects of the faith community will encourage, refer to or support these conversion therapy organisations.

Halbertal and Koren (2006) also consider the conflicts and coherences in holding a Jewish gay orthodox identity in their article depicting the paradox in its title: *Between "Being and "Doing": conflict and coherence in the identity formation of gay and lesbian orthodox Jews."* They claim that Orthodox Jewish gay individuals do not go through the conventional process of identity formation, whereby dual identities are synthesised into one. Rather they put forward that because there is such a strong distinction between the dual identities of being Orthodox Jewish and gay Jewish, they experience the identity dualism as divinely bestowed. They highlight that the struggle of being gay and religious is not a new one, but there is something unique in the process of identification of Orthodox Jews:

> 'Previous studies of religious homosexuals have generally tended to present this identity conflict as moving toward synthesis, with the religious element often exhibiting flexibility in the face of a sexual orientation seen as more intrinsic and therefore less negotiable. For Orthodox Jewish gays and lesbians, however, we find that this is not the case: Religion represents a far more encompassing web of beliefs, values, ritual practices, and social and familial connections that cannot easily be uncoupled from the individual's deepest sense of being.' (p.37).

They claim this difference essentially comes down to the 'profound and pervasive impact of religion on their overall identity formation' (p.37), in line with what was suggested when considering the multi-dimensional presence of Judaism above. This research considers Orthodox Jewish gay individuals as having developed their own sub-culture, a notion that would be interesting to explore over a decade later.

Ariel (2007) also considers the experience around being gay and Jewish Orthodox, he highlights:

> 'The dilemmas and struggles of gays and lesbians who live their lives in Orthodox Jewish communities are indeed real. Orthodox gays and lesbians experience a greater dissonance between their sexuality and the values of their community and therefore face more anxieties and inner turmoil than gays and lesbians who live in more permissive environments.' (p.91)

However, he does point out that this is not exclusive to Orthodox Jewish settings, rather other gay individuals who are a part of a traditional conservative community will encounter similar difficulties, he names Southern Baptists and Mormons for example. He also points out that despite the challenges these gay Jewish individuals face, they do not opt for a more liberal Jewish community, rather they join traditionalist Jewish congregations. Whilst this article is helpful and highlights these relevant matters, it is based on 1970-2000. Therefore, it is time to revisit this matter and explore the issues raised from a more contemporary perspective.

Slomowitz (2017) is one of the few more recent articles published on the matter of Judaism and Homosexuality. Slomowitz explores the conflicts between homosexuality, Orthodox Judaism and mental health, claiming there is still a disjointed viewpoint on the best approach to take. He claims that Orthodox Judaism continues to 'seek a solution to the "homosexual problem"' (p.100), and will often point towards conversion therapy for this solution. It is unclear whether this solution is more for the community, or the gay person. The author claims to bring a new solution, bridging gaps between Orthodox Jewish identity and being gay through a contemporary psychoanalytical understanding. From an existential perspective solutions for being gay is not necessarily helpful, and it is not the focus of this research. However, it is helpful to acknowledge the existence of this research in that it further highlights the resonating paradox found between being gay and being Orthodox Jewish.

Evidently, research exists highlighting the challenges of holding an Orthodox Jewish identity alongside a gay identity. The challenges and reliefs of coming out within an Orthodox Jewish community has also been touched on, which is a key moment identified in this literature review for its link to steps towards authentic living. However, there does not seem to be a

recent piece of research exploring the experience of coming out in the Orthodox Jewish community, especially from an interview perspective, which provides a more insightful first-hand report.

3.9

Summary of Literature Review & Research Focus

This literature review considered the relational essence of existence, and the common strive for authenticity, alongside the paradox this posed, which can be exasperated by societal factors. This theory was examined in relation to sexual orientation, as an inner expression of sexual relation existence, and the way in which sexual orientation can remain hidden, especially due to societal frameworks. This can lead to threats to existence, in that authentic identification and expression of sexual orientation can be difficult to attain. The process of 'coming out' can be seen to depict efforts towards authentic expression of a part of one's sexual self, and research is presented demonstrating this process's intrinsic link to society. The role of religion as a societal framework can be seen to particularly impact one's relational expression, specifically in relation to sexual orientation, as religions often address this matter explicitly. This research focuses on Orthodox Judaism, and so the review continued to explore how Orthodox Judaism can impact living multi-dimensionally, and also the teachings Orthodox Judaism presents relating to sexual orientation. The review strongly suggests that the process of coming out is a significant experience, often laced with multiple challenges. Further, that due to the multi-dimensional nature of Orthodox Jewish living, there are likely to be challenges unique to those that come out having grown up in an Orthodox Jewish community.

This leads to the aim of my paper, which takes the form of: <u>an existential exploration of the experience of coming out in the Orthodox Jewish community.</u>

Chapter 4: Method & Methodology

4.1
Research Question, Aim & Objectives

Research Question:

From an existential exploratory perspective, what is the experience of coming out in the Orthodox Jewish community?

Aim:

To existentially explore the experience of coming out in the Orthodox Jewish community.

Objectives:

To gain an existential insight into the experience of coming out in the Orthodox Jewish community.

To provide insight for others into the experience of coming out in the Orthodox Jewish community.

4.2
Introduction to Methodology & Method

This chapter starts with a consideration of methodology, exploring the justification for research methods employed. Since this research is an existential exploration of the experience of coming out in the Orthodox Jewish community, a qualitative method is employed in an attempt to capture the essence of some individuals experiences of this process. Through analysis key themes, paradox and congruence are drawn out, in an effort to present a more overriding understanding of this experience. This chapter presents key features of the methodology, including the sample, research methods and particular ethical issues that might arise.

4.3

Methodology

Methodology was considered at length before selecting the research tools, as it was important to consider the justification for research first. This research focuses on an existential exploration of the experience of coming out, attempting to capture the fabric of experience. The first important step of determining this research's methodology was highlighting the existential paradigm as its key organisational factor. As Langbridge (2007) highlights, all paradigms lead to beliefs about the world, which lead to certain epistemological positions. The existential paradigm at the crux of this methodology leads to an epistemological emphasis on experience and narrative of the world, as opposed to a distinct scientific knowledge of it. Therefore, a qualitative method seemed most suited, for its personal, in-depth and detailed nature. Qualitative research attempts to understand experience and narrative of the world, as opposed to measured quantities of its features. As Langdrige (2007) explains:

> 'Qualitative methods are the methods concerned with the naturalistic description or interpretation of phenomena in terms of the meanings these have for the people experiencing them. This is in contrast to quantitative methods, which are concerned with counting the amount of the phenomenon or some aspect thereof' (p. 2).

From the perspective of an existential paradigm, this research is phenomenological in nature, which focuses on individual's lived experience, and what that means to them. Phenomenology is a philosophical movement originally developed by Husserl, who speaks of the value of the systematic reflection of the way the world is experienced and perceived by people, and the phenomena that consciousness brings into being (Zahavi, 2003). Phenomenology focuses on human experience as a topic in and of its own right, an interest in meaning and how meaning develops, an emphasis on description, as opposed to interpretation, and relationships, as opposed to causality. Furthermore, the acknowledgement of the role of the researcher in the topic under investigation and the intrinsic nature of context to understanding all experiences (Langdridge, 2007). An essential part of Husserl's outlook is the notion of intention, which considers consciousness. Intentionality specifically refers to the acknowledgement that whenever one is conscious, they are conscious of something, meaning there is value of having a focus on what is

experienced (*noema*) and the way it is experienced (*noesis*) (Zahavi, 2003; Langdridge, 2007). For this research, it was important to focus on the conscious experience of the world, and the way it was experienced, by the participants.

However, it was also important to remember that being conscious myself, I am also an active experiential being. This is especially important as my own experiences of the world could impact the research in ranging ways. It is for this reason that reflexivity, journaling and personal therapy was often utilised for regulation of this. The particular phenomenological tool of bracketing (*epoche*) was also held at the forefront of my mind (Zahavi,2003). This is because my own views, opinions and experiences should be bracketed, especially when carrying out research and analysis, to assist my emergence in the experiences of the participants. Deurzen's (2014) comments that this process of bracketing is not a tool to eradicate the aspects of the self that are bracketed, rather to put them aside to work through separately. Since I am a member of the community it was especially important for me to reflect on my place in the course of interpretation and the impact this subjective status may have had on each stage of the method. Therefore, a phenomenological approach was especially important for this research. In this way, my hope was that my findings would ultimately reflect more of the participant experiences, than my own.

From a phenomenological perspective, it would not make sense to look at the world separately from the people that experience it. Therefore, when considering which methods to employ I kept the relational nature of research at the forefront, with an emphasis on the personal aspect of experience and how it is this subjectivity that I hoped to capture, analyse and report. It was for this reason that the methods employed should not only be qualitative in nature, but also phenomenological. This is because phenomenological research methods are specifically developed to:

> 'elicit rich descriptions of concrete experiences and/or narrative of experiences. These methods are designed to illuminate the lived world of the participant and also, possibly, the lived world of the researcher, along with others who have, or may in the future, experienced something similar' (Langdridge, 2007, p. 5).

The methodology of this research is not only phenomenological in nature, but also existential. Whilst these two outlooks overlap significantly they are not the same thing. Danish philosopher Kierkegaard can be found at the heart of existential philosophy, distinctly highlighting the dual-importance of the human struggle for freedom and the acceptance of this struggle as a necessary part of human-living (1849). Kierkegaard wanted to free his readers from the restrictions of societal norms and expectations, and prompt them to choose freedom. Other philosophers built upon, and differentiated, Kierkegaard's existential basis. For example, Heidegger explored what exists, and presented the concept of *Dasein*, pointing to human subjectivity and the temporal nature of the framework of time (1962). Heidegger also draws on the significant matter of ontic and ontological, with the ontic being facts about existence, and ontological being exploratory, experiential and philosophical. According to existential theory (Heidegger, 1962), the ontic will only get us so far, and not to the really meaningful place that is important for an existential outlook. It is important to acknowledge for this research that the methodology is ontological, in that it attempts to explore meaning from perception and experience, as opposed to an encounter with facts. This again supports the notion that a qualitative approach is most suited to this research, as opposed to a quantitative one which is more suited to an ontic position.

Sartre (1969) emphasises the freedom of choice, emptiness of existence, combined with the power of engaging and being seen by others. Merleau-Ponty (1945) emphasises the necessity of the body in his presentation of embodied living. Evidently the development of existential theory focuses on multi-dimensional aspects of living, whilst all are relational, there is a combined emphasis on the body, social, personal and temporal living. This links to Deurzen's theory of the four dimensions (2009) that explicitly explores how existence occurs across four worlds: the physical, social, personal and spiritual. The physical world of existence refers to all that is physical, the social world refers to all that relates to others, the personal refers to one's inner self and the spiritual world refers to a more temporal state of being. There is of course an overlap across, and between, each of these worlds of living. Deurzen's highlights the struggles and freedoms that the existential philosophers previously referred to (Kierkegaard, 1849; Merleau-Ponty, 1945; Heidegger, 1962; Sartre, 1969) and presents them in a slightly different framework of paradox and passion (2009). This research methodology is not only phenomenological, but also existential, and so it is important that

the research methods selected facilitate a meaningful, experiential exploration on multiple dimensions of living.

4.4

Methods Selected

After careful consideration of methodology it was clear that there were three main criteria for research methods employed:

1. Qualitative
2. Phenomenological
3. Existential

The methods chosen will now be presented, followed by other methods that were considered, but not used.

Semi-Structured Interview

This study used a semi-structured interview format to explore participants' experiences of 'coming out' in the Orthodox Jewish community, even though this meant less participant responses could be considered. For example, a survey could be sent out to tens of participants, but this would not necessarily feedback in-depth and meaningful findings. Therefore, a semi-structured interview tool was selected, for its ability to access a richer understanding of experience, but due to time and resource limitations fewer participant findings were uncovered. This format was selected as it provided a structure to the interview, aiding focus and purpose, while allowing space for personal exploration, specifically through open-ended questions. This would facilitate meeting the first requirement of qualitative research.

Participants were questioned about their experiences of coming out, what these experiences were like for them, and how affiliation with the Orthodox Jewish community impacted this experience (Appendix 1). Semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to explore the experience of coming out in the Orthodox Jewish community for the

individual interviewed. In order to ensure the interviews were existential in nature, the questions developed explored multiple dimensions of existence, in particular relation to the moments around, and of, coming out (Appendix 1). When considering the interview from a phenomenological perspective Langdridge's (2007) observation that the role of the researcher is also recognised as the interpreter of the participant's understanding was considered. Smith and Osborn (2003) refer to this as the *double hermeneutic,* which ultimately refers to the role of interviewer's personal biases in interpretation of what they encounter in the interview and analysis. One cannot underestimate the impact of their personal context in analysis and understanding, whilst it cannot be eliminated, it can be navigated with awareness and understanding. A personal diary, research supervision and personal therapy were used by the researcher for this purpose. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews comprised of open-ended questions, in order to seek maximum understanding of participants' experiences, without any pre-conceived ideas manifesting through 'leading' questions. Interviews were recorded and transcribed; the transcripts were then analysed.

Reflexivity

At first, I was unsure how the interviews would unfold, I wondered how interviewees would find opening up to me and was especially mindful of being an interviewer, as opposed to a therapist. However, once I started the interviews each one of them found a natural flow. The main challenge I found at first was focusing my probes and questions on the four dimensions and the particular time frame around coming out, as I planned to do. However, after having analysed a few transcripts I realised how much smoother analysis would be if I could focus my questions and probes on the four worlds and specific time periods under question. The other challenge I experienced in carrying out interviews was the time frame, naturally there seemed so much to talk about and the earlier interviews were significantly over an hour. However, as I became more familiar with the transcribing process I realised how this was not sustainable and learnt to focus the interviews more carefully. I found that a sensitive introduction regarding my own identification and role in the research largely eliminated any concerns about sharing with me as a heterosexual female. We also discussed community connections and what we would do if we bumped into each other in the future, which was also a helpful part of the introductory interview process. Overall, I found the

interviews a privileged and emotive experience. I felt privileged to have immersed in the worlds of the participants, and it was this that took me on a meaningful experiential journey in which I learnt a lot. For this reason, personal therapy and meaningful reflection were key to the interview process.

Structural Existential Analysis

The process of analysis that seemed to best suit this research was Structural Existential Analysis (SEA) (Deurzen, 2014) as this is not only qualitative and existential in nature, but also has a range of phenomenological tools to choose from. SEA is unique in combining the psychological with the interpretive, and the differing dimensions of existence. These are all key to the methodology of this research and therefore factors I was continually aware of throughout the process of analysing the interview data. According to Deurzen (2014) phenomenology is not just a topic to study, rather it is a way of life:

> 'practising phenomenology teaches you to sharpen your capacity for observation and self-observation. It demands that you immerse yourself in your sensory experience and become reflective about your affective life' (p.70).

In this way, when meeting anything, or anyone, we are able to engage with their essence. This phenomenological approach to analysis was selected because it is in line with the chosen methodology. An ability to raise awareness, sharpen observation of oneself and the interviewee, as well as all other extraneous features, and then the ability to reflect is crucial for a more realistic analysis of experience. Realistic is key in phenomenological analysis, as Deurzen (2014) highlights, it is not about truth, rather about analysis that reflects the reality of that being explored:

> 'This is about grasping the way in which a person is situated in the world and takes account of context, text and subtext of her life, her history, her intentionality, her project and her pathway. It is never just about a 'social construct' or 'schemata'. While we cannot establish the truth of any matter by phenomenological methods, we can approach the truth in a constantly reiterated process of verification' (Deurzen, 2014, p.71).

Deurzen (2014) includes multiple aspects of her research analysis tool:

1. The three reductions

2. Dialogical and hermeneutic interviewing

3. Working with bias

4. The four worlds model and its paradoxes

5. Working with timelines

6. Emotional movement and the compass

Since this research focus is an existential exploration of the experience of a particular moment in time, that is coming out, it was two of these tools that stood out as especially fitting. These were the four worlds model and its paradoxes, and the working with timelines tool. This is because a consideration of the four worlds explicitly considers multiple dimensions of living, a key existential feature of this research methodology for its compilation of multiple existential theories (as discussed in 4.2). The timeline tool was selected because it focuses on specific moments in time and the focus of this research is the specific moment in time of coming out. Both of these tools are now considered in more depth, specifically in relation to how they were carried out. The emotional movement tool was also considered, since the data was emotive in nature. However, due to the extensive and detailed nature of analysis in relation to the time frame and four worlds, which felt explicitly linked to the research question, there was a concern that a further layer of analysis would take away from the depth of these two tools.

The Four Worlds and its Paradoxes

The four worlds tool acknowledges that, although SEA is broad in its analysis, it requires structure to avoid haphazard results. Deurzen understands human space as multidimensional, containing a physical and material element, a social and interpersonal aspect, an inner, private and personal world as well as a spiritual world of ideas, to 'create meanings and organise their understanding of and purpose in the world' (2014, p.77). A summary of the four worlds of existence, as summarised by Deurzen, can be found in her chapter in Schulenberg's work (2016):

Fig. 1: Dimensions of Existence.

Dimensions of Existence

SPIRITUAL — **Good/evil.** Intuitions, values, beliefs, purpose, meaning. Worldview/ideas.

PERSONAL — **Strength/weakness.** Thoughts, memories, identity, freedom. Selfhood/me.

SOCIAL — **Love/hate.** Feelings, relations, belonging, acknowledgement. Communication/others.

PHYSICAL — **Life/death.** Sensations, actions, environment, body, things. Survival/world.
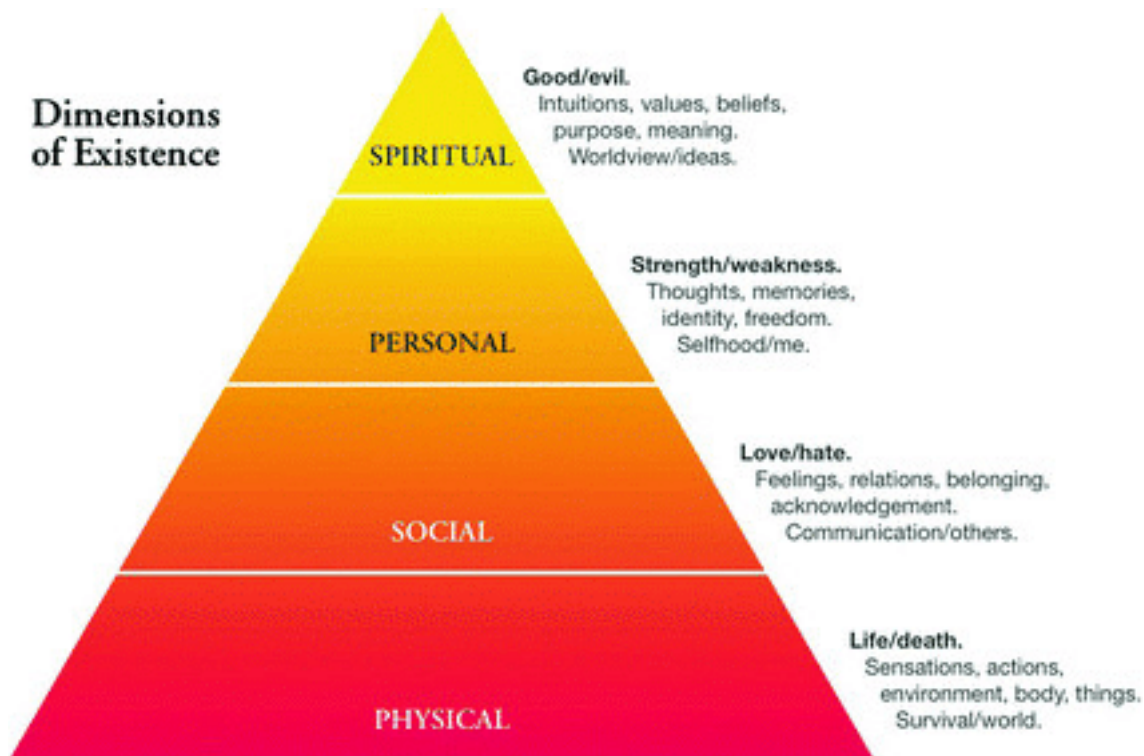
When analysing the data in this research Deurzen's guidance was observed regarding the four worlds and its paradoxes research tool, to carefully and systematically consider at which level the studied phenomena, in this case coming out, took place and what movement the participant made in relation to this. In line with the four worlds model, the interview questions prompted exploration on a multi-dimensional level, asking specifically about physical, social, personal and spiritual experiences.

When analysing the transcript, I questioned each aspect of the interview data in terms of: which of the four worlds each presentation could be located in, and then how it was experienced and further acted upon. Responses relating to each of the dimensions were drawn out; highlighted and then referenced in a table with a grid for each dimension. The transcript was read multiple times to ensure thorough analysis, and the table was consolidated through a few rounds of review. The consolidated table included summaries and direct quotes from the transcript to ensure the participants voice was present. This process occurred for the analysis of each participant transcript. Throughout each round of table completion and consolidation, paradoxes and links, within and between dimensions, were highlighted and referenced explicitly in each summary of each dimension.

Fig.3 of Deurzen's article on SEA (2014, p.79) was used as a prompt for this, as seen below:

Fig. 2: Overview of paradoxes of existence.

World	Umwelt	Mitwelt	Eigenwelt	Uberwelt
Physical	**Nature**: Life/ Death	**Things**: Pleasure/ Pain	**Body**: Health/ Illness	**Cosmos**: Harmony/ Chaos
Social	**Society**: Love/ Hate	**Others**: Dominance/ Submission	**Ego**: Acceptance/ Rejection	**Culture**: Belonging/ Isolation
Personal	**Person**: Identity/ Freedom	**Me**: Perfection/ Imperfection	**Self**: Integrity/ Disintegration	**Consciousness**: Confidence/ Confusion
Spiritual:	**Infinite**: Good/ Evil	**Ideas**: Truth/ Untruth	**Soul**: Meaning/ Futility	**Conscience**: Right/ Wrong

Reflexivity

This was a lengthy and tricky process and took longer than I expected. Dividing the interview data into the four worlds was very difficult, since the natural presentation of material seemed so interlinked for all of the participants. I often had to read particular parts of the transcript multiple times to decipher the different worlds that were presenting. The emotive nature of the transcript material combined with the ongoing and repetitive consideration of multi-dimensional impact, made this an emotionally tiring task. Therefore, it was important that I took regular breaks, sometimes a few days, in between analysis. Having said that, as I analysed more transcripts in this way the process did become more natural to me, and as a result speedier. Whilst the material was no less emotive, and thus breaks were still imperative, the process of identifying the four worlds in the material became easier. Identifying the paradoxes and similarities across each of the four worlds on each table was an intriguing, but difficult process. It was difficult for the vast amount of information that was accumulated in each table. I found it more manageable to identify paradoxes by developing sub-headings for each chunk of data, in each of the worlds in the table. I then found it easier to identify paradoxes and connections across these sub-headings. I found this

an intriguing process because the amount of paradoxes and connections that I identified really gave me an insight into the quality of experience for the participant. For example, when the data seemed very paradoxical, this provided an insight to an uncomfortable, conflicting experience. However, when connections were found this suggested a more calming and harmonious experience.

Working with timelines

The secondary dimension to this analysis is using Deurzen's (2014) timeline tool: 'the timeline of a person's experience is eminently important and dictates the direction in which a person's thinking is proceeding' (p.79). This is especially true when considering the specific experience of coming out, which can be understood as particular moments in time. Deurzen heavily links this aspect of analysis to Heidegger's perception of time, where she summarises that:

> 'we literally stand out of ourselves in past remembering or recollection, stand out of ourselves in re-presenting ourselves in the given moment, engaged or disengaged, and where we reach out more or less energetically towards a future, anticipating possibility as well as the end of possibility' (p. 79).

Deurzen (2014) divides this theory into four dimensions of analysis, see summary below which will serve as a reference for this research:

1. In the past: forgetting, regretting, recollecting, repeating – **'Awareness means that we know we are no longer'** (p.80)
2. In the present: being, waiting, rushing, being there, being with others with concern. **'Awareness means that we become capable of being present in the situation'** (p.80).
3. In the future: going toward, longing, dreading, being with anticipation, possibility, towards death. **'Awareness means we become capable of grasping that we are not yet realised' (**p.80).

4. In temporality: Being eternal or infinite, becoming and letting be. **'Awareness means that we become capable of the moment of vision in which we take ownership of being in time'** (p.80).

These time dimensions were specifically highlighted in the interview questions (Appendix 1), and analysis, as outlined below. The key event under exploration in this research is coming out, and so the past references the time before coming out, the present relates to the moments of coming out, the future links to the time after coming out, and temporality refers to the present state of being and vision in relation to coming out. Questions in the interview explore these four time dimensions, and when analysing the transcript references to each of these time dimensions were highlighted. When reviewing the transcripts at first the data was divided accordingly across the four worlds, as outlined above. Once this has been completed the data was then spread across the four time dimensions. This was done by reviewing the table of the four worlds (Fig 2) and identifying which aspects of data referred to which period of time. A 16-point table template was used as shown here:

Fig 3: 16-Point Table.

	The past (before coming out)	The present (the moments of coming out)	The future (after coming out)	Temporality (present moment of vision)
Physical world (things)				
Social world (people)				
Personal world (self)				
Spiritual world (ideas)				

Reflexivity

Overall, this process felt easier than the division of data between the four worlds. This could be because time periods seemed easier to identify. The most difficult time period to identify was the temporal phase, however, with practice this became easier. Whilst it could have felt challenging to be reviewing the data, yet again, it actually felt refreshing to be examining it with a fresh focus. That is, on the time period the data related to, as opposed to the world. It was intriguing to see how data can be viewed from so many different perspectives, I felt like each time I reviewed the material I could appreciate a different facet of it, highlighting how multi-faceted these experiences were.

Bringing the four worlds and timelines together

Overall, the transcript material was assessed in relation to its appropriate time dimension, and also assessed for its link to each of the four worlds. It's place in the table linked to the time dimension as well as the four-world dimension. For example, if a part of the transcript was thought to relate to the past, it was then assessed for which world dimension it linked to. If it was found to relate to the physical world, in the past, then it was entered accordingly, as seen by the marking **X** below:

Fig 4: Example of completing 16-point table.

	The past (before coming out)	The present (the moments of coming out)	The future (after coming out)	Temporality (present moment of vision)
Physical world (things)	**X**			
Social world (people)				

Personal world (self)				
Spiritual world (ideas)				

A 16-point table was be made for each participant transcript, which was then consolidated several times. This was a lengthy process as each 16-point table for each participant transcript was substantial. First, each part of the information was summarised in as few words as possible, whilst transcript quotes were still included. Then, sub-headings were allocated to each part of the information in each of the 16 points of the table. These sub-headings had to summarise that part of the information in no more than a few words. Using the sub-headings paradoxes and similarities were identified at the bottom of each of the time phase columns. The final consolidated table for each participant transcript contained summaries of each time dimension in relation to each world, which incorporated paradoxes and links between, and within, each section of the table. An example of the tables developed is provided in Appendix 2, where the final compiled table for one participant is presented.

Here is an example of the development of the first box of this 16-point table in Appendix 2. The table below shows an extract from each of the three tables that were formed throughout analysis, each one a compilation of the last. The table below will look at the development of the first box considering the past time dimension against the physical world. It will present what the insert looked like in the first table made for this participant, then the more consolidated insert for the next table for this participant, and finally the summary for the third table made for this participant. Key themes are highlighted as subheadings, as they were in the original tables, for clarity.

Fig 5: Sample consolidation process

	Insert into first 16-point table	Consolidated insert into second 16-point table	Further consolidated insert into third 16-point table
Past time dimension, against the physical world	Religious influence growing up – Physically observant in practice, eating, dress, work, observance of laws, and so on. The milestones mean something different when you are gay. E.g. Bar Mitzvah – when you realise that you are gay, as at the same time as puberty. 'I felt like halacha [Jewish law] was demanding that every part of my body, my, my, my world and experience was planned and executed like meticulously…I wasn't allowed spontaneity…. it justified my lack of spontaneity in some way, so what I did crave at that point, which is just kind of like to throw it…to kind of go and eat non-kosher food, go have sex with someone… it wasn't kind of about God, it was about kind of like just breaking… because I think there were moments of like really wanting to just, to just break but not, not doing it because like, no, no, no, the whole point is like you don't do that. The whole point is that you don't take a break. The whole point is that you can't take a break from it…. This feeling is validated by Judaism.' Awareness of being gay- in puberty became aware through arousal and masturbation. Developed desire to explore men instead of women. In secondary school developed attraction towards other men… 'very scared of it… was terrifying' 'not being able to get out of bed…..[when had thoughts of a man] so overwhelmingly	Religious influence growing up – 'I felt like halacha [Jewish law] was demanding that every part of my body… my world and experience was planned and executed like meticulously …. it justified my lack of spontaneity… there were moments of like really wanting…to just break but …The whole point is that you can't take a break from it…. This feeling is validated by Judaism.' Awareness of being gay- in puberty became aware through arousal and masturbation. Developed desire to explore men instead of women. In secondary school developed attraction towards other men… 'very scared of it… was terrifying' 'not being able to get out of bed…..[when had thoughts of a man] so overwhelmingly painful' Isolation/secrets: 'everything associated with gay identity…became a secret……like what music I liked, what tv shows I watched….' 'I just thought it [masturbation] was something that I had that was like an illness.'	On a physical dimension, before coming out, secrets developed and religion served as an excuse for a rigid daily life, where expression of true feelings was limited, and discussion of sex and masturbation did not exist, leading to such matters feeling shocking and traumatising for the participant on discovery.

	painful….[manifested physically I that he could not get out of bed]'		
	Isolation/secrets: 'everything associated with gay identity…became a secret……like what music I liked, what tv shows I watched….everything….had a value associated with it. Was it like too gay?...could it pass as straight?' 'masturbation….is and interesting….manifestation of that because it was something that was…sexual, sex and….sex was never spoke about at home…..i never had the talk…. I don't think its common for …..people to have the talk with their parents in a Jewish context….the fact that I was masturbating, felt like something….that was incredibly deviant….the whole …psychological, physical, everything, felt deviant, felt wrong, felt secret, felt hidden… I remember that being an important part of that time of my life that like I actually felt that there was something deeply wrong with me because I did not know that's [masturbation] what people did or like was common…., it's that two-way thing of nobody telling you anything, but you also not being able to tell anybody else anything… . I just thought it [masturbation] was something that I had that was like an illness.'		

In the first phase of entry into the 16-point table I copy and pasted whole quotes from the transcript, my main focus was on considering where to put them. First I would think about what sort of time period it linked to, then what world it resonated with most powerfully. This

was sometimes a difficult decision, since it could refer to multiple world of existence. For example, references to religious observance could relate to the phsycial world, for the external nature of observance, the social world for the communal aspect of it, the personal world for how it personally resonated with the individual or the spiritual world, for the connection to a greater power through observance. I chose where to place each quote according to where it felt it linked to most powerfully for that particular individual. For example in Fig 5 the references to religious observance felt very external and mostly physical actions. When consolidating the quotes, and my comments on the quotes, for the second table I tried to remove repetitive aspects of quotes and wording that did not provide especially new or relevant messages. I tried to focus the themes originally identified more tightly and then give just a few quotes for each theme, which inevitably meant cutting some out of the table. My final table was a couple of sentences summarising the key themes drawn out without quotes, to ensure precise explanatory summaries were available for each of the 16-points, for each participant. I would then refer to the more detailed tables of quotes when writing up the findings in full.

This consolidated table was then consolidated again into a concise 16-point grid with only the sub-headings (identified earlier) stating the key themes identified. This was for ease of reference and also to a provide a helpful visual overview for each participant.

Once this had been done for each participant an overriding 16-point table was developed, compiling data from each participant. This was a substantial task, whereby I reviewed each participant table one time period at a time, that is I reviewed all participant data in the *Past* time phase column and drew out the key themes from across all tables and inserted them in the *Past* time period column of the overriding table. I included key quotes that depicted each theme, and was sure to reference who said them in brackets. I then repeated this for each time period column. This resulted in a 16-point table with each of the 16-points containing key findings and quotes from across all participant data, which I then assessed for paradoxes and connections at the end of each time phase, as I did in each of the individual tables. This 16-point table became the main springboard for the written presentation of findings, which was presented according to the time period columns used in

the table. This table was consolidated further in a new 16-point table, containing only the sub-headings from the over-riding 16-point table (Fig.4, in Chapter 5.2).

Reflexivity

This required careful attention to detail, repetitious review, thorough analysis, as well particular note-taking and careful reflection, through my personal journal, supervision and personal therapy. The particular challenges of this method were considering two separate aspects of analysis at once: that of time and worlds. This took time to get used to, but did settle as a natural form of analysis with practice. Furthermore, in order to compile findings into the table several readings of the transcript were needed, which was tiresome physically and emotionally. Regular breaks and larger spaces of time between rounds of consolidation were left for reflection. Specific time was allocated for personal reflection, and consequent expression of this reflection took place in research supervision and personal therapy.

Discussion

For the Discussion chapter the results were assessed in relation to relevant literature reported in the Literature Review. To prepare for the discussion chapter I reviewed the 16-point table, containing only the sub-headings from the over-riding 16-point table (Fig 4, in Chapter 5.2). I then reviewed the literature review with this table at hand and made links at any point I could. I then summarised these links under key themes, which I then saw could all be depicted by particular quotes from interview transcripts. This resulted in the Discussion chapter (Chapter 6) being presented as findings reported under thematic categories headed with transcript quotes, each one was a quote from a participant that I found powerful and effective in summarising the key theme presented.

Reflexivity

I thoroughly enjoyed this stage of analysis, I found it exciting to consider my findings alongside peer-reviewed, renowned and established literature. I was intrigued to see where

my findings supported existing literature, and search for new links and fresh ideas. I found this chapter developed naturally from all of the time spent on the literature review and the findings. It seemed there was much overlap that I could identify, due to the fact that I was so familiar with all of the literature review and findings material.

Conclusion

The study concluded with a summary of the research, its findings, acknowledgements of limitations of the study, ideas for further research and further reflexivity.

4.5

Critique

There is not much critique of SEA in particular, rather of qualitative and phenomenological research overall, which especially links to aspects of SEA. One of the main critiques is that qualitative research does not usually have a tight structure, in terms of specific guidelines of carrying out the research methods. In this way, they are difficult to repeat and monitor how they have been implemented. This diversity of methods can limit validity. Yardley explains:

> 'The unwillingness of qualitative researchers to converge on a unitary set of methods, assumptions and objectives can lead to confusion and scepticism about the validity of their work. But a pluralistic ethos is central to the non-realist philosophical traditions underpinning most qualitative research…But if this is the case, there can be no fixed criteria for establishing truth and knowledge, since to limit the criteria for truth would mean restricting the possibilities for knowledge, and would also privilege the perspective of the cultural group whose criteria for truth was deemed 'correct'.' (Yardley, 2000, P.217)

This critique applies to SEA, since it is so broad and flexible in its use. On the one hand this is an appealing feature of SEA as a research tool, just as I have done in this research, it can be tailored to fit the research. However, this is also a limitation, since it detracts from validity, and some may argue consequent respectability. Deurzen (2014) discusses the need for boundaries and containment in research, and that it should not be an entirely flexible process, yet her process is still flexible in nature. Arguably though, the flexibility is in the

adaptation of the tools to the research, through the flexibility in choice of heuristic tools, as opposed to the application, which should be systematic and rigorous once selected. The validity of SEA can be questioned, but Deurzen (2014) explains that the constant checking of data with reality through the researchers immersion in the process, especially the interviews, serves as an aspect of validity:

> 'The element of careful management of data comes in later, when we consider the descriptions we have gathered in this initial phase of full immersion. At that later moment our tools of observation and scrutiny of the data, that is, the heuristic devices of structural analysis will help us organise the information systematically. But we do not keep aloof during the phase of information gathering. We engage fully in the situation. The more we are able to resonate and the closer we will place ourselves to the new data. Our observations will only be as valid as the intensity of experience we have been able to generate when collecting them.' (Deurzen, 2014)

Here Deurzen is presenting the dual power of immersion into the participant experience, alongside rigorous structured processes of analysis of those experiences. This was a strong focus of this research, whereby I was fully engaged and present for the interviews, I also re-listened to them multiple times through transcription and then re-read them continually for analysis. This full immersion certainly felt like the process of truth-seeking Deurzen refers to here, whereby I absorbed myself in what participants were sharing so deeply, I feel I understood as best I could what it was they were telling me. Simultaneously I focused on the systematic aspect of collection and analysis. I ensured that my questions were geared towards my research, both focused on my research question but also facilitating productive analysis. For example questions considering different time periods, focusing on the different worlds, to ensure I could translate the data into the tools of analysis I planned. Once the data was ready for analysis I followed the rigorous and structured strategy that outlined above. This mostly consisted of consolidation, summarising, comparing paradoxes and harmonies. This was done over and over, for each participant, always considering the technical data analysis process alongside the deep meaning of the data. This latter point was especially important for the decisions around where to put each quote, since they could all potentially relate to many worlds of existence, as mentioned above. For these decisions it was my immersion in the material, and where I understood it to be coming from, that I called on. For the purposes of this research once the two SEA tools were identified for use a clear table was developed to depict findings, which can be re-used in further research. The

completion and consolidation of these tables, recording the analysis process, were completed vigorously and thoroughly. In this way, the there is a structure to the SEA employed in this research, that can be replicated again, ultimately enhancing validity.

A further criticism of phenomenological research, and I think would apply to the use of SEA, is that there can be too much description and not enough interpretation. I would say this critique relates to SEA after having compiled such lengthy findings, that were saturated with description and direct quotes. This relates to the hermeneutic nature of understanding, in that description is an attempt at presentation of what one encounters, which SEA provides plenty of tools for. However, interpretation brings oneself into the process more, as they are not only describing what they encounter, but also interpreting it. This does not have much place is SEA, rather SEA focuses on limiting that process. This is a valid criticism, especially in relation to research that might be more ontic in nature and seeking some overriding answers. It is reassuring though that SEA uses hermeneutic interpretation and dialogue. However, in relation to ontological research the purpose is to understand experiences of others, not interpreted by oneself, but interpreted by them. Therefore, whilst this criticism stands for other methodologies, in relation to this research - it does not.

4.6

Other Methods Considered

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

When considering different techniques of analysis Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was an option, as it is a popular and commonly used phenomenological research tool. IPA focuses on peoples perceptions of experience, and what it means to them, making IPA a phenomenological research method. Smith and Osborn (2003) point out the double hermeneutic nature of IPA, in that it considers the role of the researcher through the analysis of interpretation of a participant's understanding. In this way IPA has a similar methodological outlook as SEA, which was selected for this research, that is they are both ontological in nature. IPA will usually use a small sample size as it's not concerned with general claims about larger populations, rather it tends to be idiographic.

The research method usually employed is that of semi-structured interview. A key feature of IPA is that it uses thematic analysis as the main tool of analysis. This involves a thorough analysis of interview transcripts to identify core themes, through commentary, note-taking and coding, themes are drawn out. The themes are considered in a table, and this is repeated for each participant transcript. Eventually an overriding table of themes will be compiled from all participant transcripts and it will be these final themes that lie at the crux of the findings (Langdridge, 2007).

IPA was seriously considered for this research, but was not selected for two main reasons. Firstly, though there is phenomenological literature and philosophy surrounding IPA, ultimately the main process of research is thematic analysis, which is not phenomenological, nor existential in essence. Therefore there was a real concern that in practice it lacked the space to consider interpretation. Considering my role in this research, that is, as a heterosexual member of the Jewish community addressing an issue of conflicting identities, I required an analytic tool that allows clear space for my personal interpretation of the interview data. The concern that this approach is more cognitive, than phenomenological is also highlighted by Smith and Osborn (2003) and Wiling (2001). Furthermore, thematic analysis does not provide a specific framework for analysis of events in relation to time, which is very useful for this research for its focus on a particular momentous event in time.

Template Analysis

Template Analysis (TA) is a frequently used alternative to IPA, that often involves similar analytical procedures (King, 1998). The key difference is that TA usually uses pre-selected codes to analyse the data, which are essentially themes that were selected before the transcript was analysed (Langdridge, 2007). This code of themes is then used to analyse the transcripts on a quest for meaning. It will also be a hierarchical code, with narrower themes being under the umbrella of broader ones. The development of the coded themes is usually the first task to take place at the outset of research. In this way, there is a continual emphasis of the themes developed throughout research, as opposed to IPA whereby the data is more of the emphasis. Similar to IPA findings are presented in a classic qualitative form, as a display of data supporting, or not, the thematic code. TA was not selected because the notion of pre-determined themes felt uncomfortable. I was going

into this research unclear regarding what I would find, and was very careful not to make any assumptions, pre-judgements or hold biases. Pre-determined themes felt like a slippery slope. It would be difficult to develop these themes for analysis without pre-supposing, or guessing, what might be shared in the interviews.

SEA seemed like a good balance. In that it was phenomenological and existential, had space for identifying key themes, but also for a pre-set framework with categories that directly linked to this research (time and the four worlds).

4.7

The Sample

This study considered participants aged between 20 and 30, since this age group is representative of the current young adult generation. All participants must have 'come out' a minimum of three years before participation in this research in order to meet the inclusion criteria. This study included only male participants, since the prohibition in Orthodox Judaism varies between the sexes. Some Orthodox scriptural sources do address female homosexuality specifically, but this is not addressed here, in order to ensure a specific focus and careful management of variables. Thus, while it would indeed be valuable to research 'coming out' for females, it will require a separate research and literature review. Hence this study will focus exclusively on the male experience. The inclusion criterion is that each participant will be of an Orthodox background, as this research specifically explores individuals who 'come out' in the Orthodox Jewish community. 'Background' is defined as referring to upbringing, up until the age they left home. The criterion for inclusion was thus growing up in an Orthodox home environment, regardless of whether the participant is still affiliated with this community. This is because the research is interested in the 'coming out' of individuals who grew up in the Orthodox community; many who grew up this way distance themselves from the community after 'coming out', so continued membership of the community is not a criterion for inclusion in this research.

Orthodox Judaism was defined according to the standards of the United Synagogue, which represents Orthodox Judaism in the United Kingdom. That is, Orthodox Jews are those who accept and strive to observe all the Jewish laws inscribed in both the Written and Oral Torah. Observance is externally verifiable by observance of the Jewish laws on dress, diet, and observance of the Sabbath and festivals. Thus, all participants must have met these criteria in order to participate in this research. There were 8 participants as this is considered both representative and feasible within the practical limitations of this study (Langdridge, 2007). Participants were recruited sensitively through word of mouth, individuals that I know approached other individuals they knew who fit the inclusion criteria, those approached were given my name and asked to contact me if they were interested in participating. They were given my full name first so that they had the opportunity to assess if they knew me before contacting me. Finding participants was more challenging than I expected, it was a slow and gradual process, I believe due to the discreet and sensitive approach I employed for recruitment. Some people I know advised me to join Jewish LGBT+ Facebook groups in order to recruit, whilst this might have been speedier, I did not feel it was appropriate to enter that community as a self-identified heterosexual. Therefore, I very much depended on word of mouth, for a snowballing approach to recruitment. The way that it unfolded was that each person I interviewed personally introduced me to one or two more participants.

4.8

Special ethical issues that might arise

Sensitive Recruitment

Considering this research was taking place within a small, close-knit community, there were ethical considerations that needed to be taken into account from the early stages of participant recruitment. The inclusion criteria for participants was that they had grown up in an Orthodox Jewish home, with the observance of the Sabbath and Kosher dietary laws. Therefore, it was likely participants might know each other, me as a member of the Orthodox Jewish community and other overlapping mutual connections. It is for this reason that I chose not to approach suggested participants directly, I was cautious that when someone suggested a participant to me it could be that they know me, or a family member, or a close friend, or of me, or another mutual contact. This

can often happen within the Jewish community. As I did not want to risk anyone being in a potentially uncomfortable situation I always asked the individual suggesting the participant to contact the participant and tell them my full name, they could then decide if they felt comfortable contacting me.

I was also cautious about promoting my research matter within the Jewish community in search for participants, since it could make participants, or others, feel uncomfortable. When exploring sensitive topics, especially through personal interviews, I felt it appropriate to recruit subtle, tactfully and carefully. Any Jewish LGBT spaces must be particularly important to those that identify as LGBT and are Jewish. They are spaces that represent a unique space that is safe for that dual-identity, and they are likely to have been worked hard for. Therefore, I did not wish to enter any of these spaces to recruit, such as through joining Jewish LGBT Facebook groups, as it did not feel respectful. Finally, if potential participants chose to get in touch with me about the research I booked in a phone conversation to fully explain the research and expectations of interview, crucially I would also share that I identify as a heterosexual female and explained my purpose for carrying out this research. I felt transparency was important and would not want to lead anyone into participation under false pretences; such as the assumption that I am carrying out this research as a gay female who has shared this experience of coming out in the Jewish community. The careful considerations in the recruitment stage directly link to Yardley's (2000) concerns about sensitivity to context, in specific relation to participants, social context, community and relationship between participant and researcher.

Retrospectively I think that I was sensitive in recruitment to ethical concerns, I was transparent about my intentions of research and careful not to put individuals in an uncomfortable, or awkward, situation.

Informed Consent

As mentioned, I took time to fully explain the nature of the research to all potential participants. This included my relationship to the research, my place in the community, what to expect, where the interviews would be, that they would be audio recorded and other logistical arrangements. I explained anonymity and confidentiality, and also my hopes for the research dissemination and future value to the psychological world and Jewish community. Each participant was given a

research information sheet summarising key points about my research (Appendix 3), had the opportunity to ask questions, and signed an informed consent form before the interview (Appendix 4).

Interviews

When meeting for the interviews I checked in with the participant if they still wanted to go ahead. I explained that they had the right to withdraw without prejudice at any time, including now - before we had started. I reminded them again about the nature of the interview, about my relationship to the research and that it would be recorded. Each participant presented as keen to go ahead and were open and forthcoming in their responses. I was careful throughout the interview process to check if participants wanted any breaks or drinks, as I was conscious that this can feel like a heavy discussion topic. I was also careful to be respectful in my questioning and terminology that I used. For example, I asked each participant how they identified themselves and what terminology they felt most comfortable using in relation to their sexual orientation; each participant said 'gay'. The interviews were navigated with tact, thought, care, respect and consideration. For example, one participant got a stomach ache during it and we had a break, before checking he felt comfortable to continue.

Confidentiality

Ensuring confidentiality and anonymity was, and still is, a top priority of this research. This was particularly important for this study since it concerned a particular, small, close-knit community. Measures taken to ensure confidentiality included keeping all interview transcripts and detailed data analysis in a password-protected computer folder, after being anonymised. Interviews were conducted in the private location of a study room at Middlesex University. These took place out of usual student hours (Sundays or evenings) to limit the possibility of participants bumping into students they might know. I discussed with each participant what we would do if we bumped into each other in the future, deciding if we would act as if we did not know each other, or another alternative. I have been extremely careful in presenting the findings, to not link any identifiable details with a pseudonym. I know there are some accounts in the findings that might have been shared in other places, I have left those references entirely anonymous so as not to jeopardise the

anonymity of the rest of the findings presented by that individual. In discussing my research with others I am very careful not to react to any names mentioned that I may or may not have interviewed and am committed to always guarding my participants anonymity and confidentiality.

Debrief

A significant amount of time was allocated to debriefing participants. This involved checking in with how the participants were feeling after the interviews, and discussing how they found the process. Considering that the topic under investigation is emotive and sensitive, I was especially careful to enquire if the participant was feeling emotionally distressed in any way. No participants reported being distressed, many found it a therapeutic and cathartic process. Each participant was given a debrief sheet (Appendix 5), in which they were provided with appropriate contact details should they wish to seek further support. They were provided with contact details of the community organisation that supports individuals regarding their sexual orientation, and a list of other relevant support groups and organisations. I also messaged each participant a couple of days after the interview to check-in following the interview. No participants reported any concerns.

Quality of Research

Yardley (2000) outlines underpinning critiques of qualitative research, including the limitations of validity and the reluctance to abide by set research methods. These criticisms are addressed above in Chapter 4.4, but also links to ethical considerations. It would be unethical to carry out research that was not robust, reliable and valid. It would be unfair to the participants and undermined their trust in me as a trainee professional, my university and the psychology profession overall. It is for this reason that the research methods employed are all peer-reviewed and carried out meticulously with great care. Whilst there are critiques of the methods employed, there are critiques of all research methods. I have been careful to bring the critiques into the open in Chapter 4.4 and address them accordingly.

Yardley (2000) considers sensitivity to context in particular relation to analysis of data, questioning how immersed the researcher became in data and how much care was taken in

considering reflexivity. I was careful to immerse myself fully into the data collected, with respect, dignity and care. I was vigilant to carry out ongoing reflexivity and self-reflection in order to enhance the authentic quality of the data. I committed myself to high-quality research, under careful supervision of qualified and trained supervisors. I supported myself appropriately academically in this way, but also personally with a reflective journal and personal therapy.

4.9

Summary of Methodology

Further to the identification of this research's aim, that of an existential exploration of the experience of coming out in the Orthodox Jewish community, a qualitative, phenomenological, existential methodology was decided upon. With this in mind the research methods used were: semi-structured interviews and SEA. A critique of SEA was presented, as well as sample information including recruitment and inclusion criteria. Alternative methods of analysis were presented; alongside reasons for why they were not used and then particular ethical concerns were highlighted. The next chapter will present the findings of the interviews conducted and analysed in line with the methods outlined.

Chapter 5

5.1

Introduction to Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the eight interviews in four chronological categories: past, present, future and temporal. Within each category findings are presented under each of the four dimensions used for analysis (physical, social, personal and spiritual). At the end of each section a summary of findings is presented, including key paradoxes and harmonies. For the purposes of anonymity and relatability, participants are assigned pseudonyms: Jason (Participant 1), Alex (Participant 2), Gavin (Participant 3), Dean (Participant 4), Sam (Participant 5), Dylan (Participant 6), George (Participant 7) and Darren (Participant 8). To ensure anonymity all identifiable details, including exact age, were either omitted or adapted, without changing significant content. Considering the insularity of the Modern Orthodox Jewish community, extra precaution and sensitivity has been employed. With findings that might be identifiable and shared in the media or public arena, the pseudonym has not been used.

5.2
Fig 6: Consolidated 16-point table

	The past (before coming out)	The present (the moment of coming out)	The future (after coming out)	Temporality (present moment of vision)
Physical World (things)	• Orthodox Jewish Observance • Journey of Sexual Discovery • Realisation of Being Gay • Suffering	• Stuck-ness • Sexual Exposure	• Religious Restrictions • Shame • Emotional Expression	• Physical Intimacy
Social World (people)	• Jewish Social Scene • Perception of Being Gay • Lack of Gay Role Models • Fear of Rejection & Judgement by Others • Secrets & Isolation	• Comfort of Others • Unknown Response • Strategy	• Relief: Pleasantly Surprised • Gay Community • Improved Relationships • Rejection, Disappointment & Frustration	• Safety of the Environment • Paradox of Orthodox Judaism & Being Gay • Challenging the Silence: Having gay, non-sexual reference points
Personal World (Self)	• Personal Relationship with Judaism • Mental Health & Despair • Realisation of Gay Identity • Alternate Identity/Over-compensation	• Personal Acceptance • Personal Shame and Other Pain • Personal Relief	• Relief • Personal Struggle	• Loss & Discovery • Hopes & Reality • Personal Connection/ Distance to Judaism
Spiritual World (ideas)	• Praying the Gay Away	• Religion as a Challenge • Faith in oneself	• Health • Less Observant • A Distance • Faith in others	• The Problem with Jewish Orthodoxy • Relationship with God • Ongoing Questions • Ultimate Identity Acceptance

The Past

This study takes 'the past' to refer to the time before 'coming out', as defined by the participant.

5.3a

Physical: things

Orthodox Jewish Observance

For all participants, the past represents juxtaposed physical sensations. Each participant spoke of an embodied relationship with Judaism; laws, customs and rituals were carried out rigorously and habitually:

> 'I was Orthodox all my life… all my parents' friends were basically through shul. We would have Shabbat meals every week and I was up for every social activity. I only ever went to Jewish schools. … I went to Yeshiva … after secondary school, before university. In uni I barely…made any non-Jewish friends…Judaism was a big part of our lives.' (Dean)

This summarises the physical lifestyle of most participants; all but two attended exclusively faith schools, and all kept Shabbat, kosher, attended Jewish youth organisations and synagogue weekly. The two who attended non-faith schools were still closely engaged with the Jewish community, both socially and through practical physical observance. Seven out of eight participants increased their religious observance during their adolescent years, praying more often and habitually wearing a skullcap. Four reported observing the laws of *Shomer Nagiah,* which prohibit all pre-marital physical contact between the sexes. Various reasons were given for this increased observance:

> 'that was almost like a coping mechanism … I didn't feel like I was myself in my own skin, so I kind of tried to hook into another identity.' (Darren)

George was 'looking for distractions … and avoidance, because rather than dealing with the issues, you're kind of like let's… busy myself.' Jason's experience was more embodied:

'I felt like Halacha was demanding that every part of my body… was planned and executed like meticulously …. it justified my lack of spontaneity… there were moments of like really wanting…to just break but …The whole point is that you can't take a break from it.'

Dean says he 'was a good boy … I was shomer nagiah, the easiest shomer nagiah in the world, Judaism kind of enabled me… to basically ignore the entire thing.'

Increased physical observance of Jewish law proved not just an escape and distraction from confronting one's reality, but also a justification for the embodied experience of prohibition. All participants seemed to genuinely enjoy their physical observance of Jewish law and custom.

Journey of Sexual Discovery

On the physical plane, juxtaposed to this meticulous Jewish observance, was a counterbalancing discovery of sexuality and sexual orientation. No participant reported conversations around sex at home or at school. Nevertheless, sexual exploration and curiosity were inescapable, leading to a secret journey of sexual discovery. This existed on multiple dimensions, but for most participants was most present on the physical plane and related to their awareness of homosexuality.

All except Dylan explicitly referred to sexual arousal, masturbation and/or pornography as part of their discovery of gay identity. Jason described this as 'terrifying'; he could not 'get out of bed' when he thought of a man, missing school for a week as it was 'so overwhelmingly painful…I just thought it [masturbation]… was like an illness.'

Gavin discovered he was sexually aroused by males through

'watching porn basically… when I was like 11 or 12 … I just realised very early on that I was like gravitating towards like men … but I didn't label myself. I didn't think I was ever going to be gay until I was like in my early 20s. It was like from 11 until like 22 was like intense self-denial and prayer, a lot of religion, hope that it would just go away.'

Combining this silence about sexuality and sexual orientation with sexual curiosity, masturbation and the internet, an understanding of homosexuality arose overwhelmingly through exposure to sexual content:

'I was getting all of my sexual education from like pornography … it was all… very dysfunctional, the way I thought about relationships because … I didn't have a model for it.' (Gavin)

For all but one participant, understanding of same-sex arousal came from this unmediated preliminary experience.

Sam was so desperate for physical intimacy that he went to an area where, he read online, many gay people congregated, and 'ended up actually having sexual intercourse with someone when I was 16 … lost my virginity um and that was quite a wakeup call'. He explains, 'my sexuality has always come first physically, second emotionally' but now physical relationships became

'kind of like my dirty little secret … was a bit of a thrill in it … but it was certainly a replacement for the lack of any real emotional intimacy'.

This response was exceptional; other participants spoke only of physical suffering, as outlined below.

Realisation of Being Gay

Awareness of sexual arousal from gay stimuli was not necessarily correlated with the self-realisation of being gay:

'I knew that on some level like I was attracted to men like … I would never think like, oh I'm gay because … I'm like looking up other men for example.' (Alex)

Only in his early twenties, did he make the connection: 'then there was like the first time that I … met up with and … slept with a guy on [a dating app]… then I was like, hang on, er maybe I'm gay.' This rendered the discovery of his gay identity profoundly physical. Even then, it still took time for Alex to fully accept it:

'the whole time um when I'd been kind of dating girls or looking for girls … I was doing it because it was what was expected of me and not … I was like attracted to them on like a sexual or romantic level… basically I'm kind of coming to terms with it myself in like actually like physically saying to myself, yeah, I'm gay.'

All participants experienced a revelatory moment when they realised they were gay. This was not necessarily linked with the realisation that sexual arousal stemmed from male

stimuli; it was in some way 'compartmentalised'. The notion of realisation is explored below under the heading 'coming out to oneself'.

<u>Suffering</u>

Another prominent feature of the physical world before coming out is the physical suffering experienced by all the participants, often in the form of physical pain and feelings of failure;

> 'the whole process of coming out was just this assumption that there's something clearly very, very wrong and that as long as I work hard enough, it could sort of get better….being gay is a disorder of some sort that can be fixed…. It took a while and I did the things that I was told to do and it, it just wasn't going away'.

Dean was 'horribly depressed for a week. I got very sick. I had a high temperature'.
Dylan also reported physical illness:

> 'I knew perfectly this [being gay] was the main cause of stress in my life … because I was just getting physically ill … I was struggling with illness for a couple of years'.

Remarkably, after coming out his physical symptoms of illness immediately alleviated.

Two other participants reported mental health issues associated with the secret of being gay. These are explored under the 'personal world'. Some of these mental-health problems manifested as physical symptoms, including depression and demotivation. One participant made two near-fatal suicide attempts; another spoke of 'self-harm', in the form of unsafe promiscuity.

<u>Summary</u>

Four main themes arise in the physical dimension before coming out: Judaism as a lived religion, the journey of sexuality and sexual orientation, the realisation of being gay, and the impact on physical health. All participants lived a physically Orthodox Jewish life and discovered their sexuality through solitary physical exploration. Most participants explicitly referenced pornography and masturbation as part of this journey. On a physical plane, they distinguished between sexual arousal by men and self-identifying as gay - for some this realisation came very early; for others it happened many years later. Finally, all participants referenced mental and physical health.

5.3b

Social

Whilst the physical plane was significant in terms of Jewish practice and sexual discovery, the social dimension was saturated with references to the Jewish community. The social influences of Judaism are as pervasive as the physical, and formed the most significant area of Jewish affiliation that surfaced in this research. For all participants membership of a Modern Orthodox Jewish community is pervasive, in synagogue, in youth movements, at university Jewish Societies, and during gap-year programmes in Israel. Until university, later for some, the social circle of participants and their parents was Jewish. The lack of gay presence in this milieu fuelled uncertainty about how their communities would respond to a gay individual, leading to secrecy, social isolation and for many, a split identity.

<u>Jewish Social Scene</u>

All participants expressed a sense of social saturation:

> 'my family was very involved with the shul … They were like …on the board... I was involved with [Jewish youth group] in our shul. Had many, many friends from there who I still am either friendly with or in touch with today.' (Dylan)

Six participants spoke of their Jewish schooling, friends, synagogue attendance and Jewish youth movement involvement; this saturated Jewish social experience naturally impacts the development of particular attitudes, including perceptions of what it means to be gay.

<u>Perception of Being Gay</u>

All participants reported an absence of conversation about sexuality and sexual orientation. However, they absorbed attitudes and perceptions from family, friends and wider social networks at school. Their overriding perception was a lack of understanding regarding what it meant to be gay, which was tacitly assumed to be negative:

> 'I basically didn't like know any gay people … it wasn't something that was like discussed a huge amount … my family's kind of attitude towards like homosexuality were if anything kind … slightly negative…the term gay or the idea of being gay was like overwhelmingly seen as like, not like a, an evil thing, but just like a negative thing… like a kind of um an insult or… something that people would laugh about.' (Alex)

Dean reiterated that the emphasis placed on heteronormative life was especially challenging:

> 'it's not like I sort of thinking gays are evil and … go to hell … What I think was much…more relevant … is all the things I should be doing and should be feeling... Judaism to me growing up, was all about a family, was all about a mother and a father and kids and keeping festivals together and having a family and a Jewish family and a chuppah and you know, all that kind of stuff … this is basically the thing that gives me worth as a human and then I realise I'm never going to be able to do that.'

Considering the high emphasis placed on community, family and communal values communicated in a multi-dimensional way, any holistic value communicated is likely to be powerful. In this case, it is the value of a heteronormative family. It seems that it is this inability to see a space for oneself in this set up that leaves the participant feeling challenged. This sense of isolation and inability to see how one fits into the broader framework of a Jewish community is a theme that keeps arising and is explored in more depth below. Arguable, the pressure to conform might have been all the stronger for being unspoken.

Lack of Gay Role Models

All participants also reported the lack of gay role models in the community:

> 'I didn't really… have any idea of what a gay person was, who they were, what they did, um did they have relationships? … Um so then sort of growing up and realising that I was probably gay, I didn't really realise that because I didn't really have a model to base myself off of… I think that like added to like the confusion that I … had in my early teens of like figuring out who I was.' (Darren)

George commented that: 'I must have thought non-Jews could be gay but Jews can't be gay'. This led him to wonder, 'do you have to completely change and leave the Orthodox community?' George tried to fill that hole with his own version of what his future might look like, such as marrying a gay female, in order to 'have a family …no one would know the difference'. With no vision of what a gay Jewish male might look like, posing as heteronormative seemed a sensible option. Another participant suggested this as a provisional option, and Jason and Dean attempted conversion therapy to strive for a heterosexual life style.

In adolescence no participants could envision a future as a gay Jewish male in any Jewish community. Some could not envision this until their late twenties when they came out, and some still cannot envision this today, despite having come out years ago.

<u>Fear of Rejection & Judgement by Others</u>

This lack of social dialogue and gay role models led to a sense of uncertainty and fear of rejection by others. Two social factors surfaced as significant: family and friends. Within the family, parents were the most significant concern: the fear of sharing with parents for 'fear of… worse rejection… or loss of them', was prevalent. Jason, Darren and George also feared causing tension between their parents; George was so concerned about the impact of coming out on his family, especially his parents that he contemplated suicide:

> 'what I was thinking … [was] the embarrassment of the family, and I know that's crazy … but it was almost like I dealt with a lot of pain … to cause your parents to have that kind of pain …. it's almost like they go into their own closet afterwards. So, it's that kind of tension … now I'm going to be hurting … the parents. … why I didn't think suicide wouldn't be the answer because they would be upset with that, I don't know. You're not thinking rationally at that point. You're just thinking how do you make the problem go away.'

All participants shared this fear of the potential impact on one's family, along with George's awareness of fear clouding his judgement.   A repeated theme is the fear of social judgement which undermined participants' reasoning. Another was the desire to please others, and not upset or disappoint them, leading to a 'constant kind of like trying to jump through hoops to please other people, rather than please myself. I was so much more happy being unhappy, but everyone else being happy with me'. (Darren)

<u>Secrets & Isolation</u>

All participants shared the idea of trying to please others, maintain relationships and avoid coming out. This procrastination led to secrecy and isolation in varying ways with varying impact on participants' well-being.

Gavin's experience was typical:

'So, I went to university and I … never like tried anything in university, which is like a big regret of mine, like I feel like I've wasted a lot of years… I never told anyone I was gay. Like I just acted… straight… I ended up going …[abroad] I'm sure a big part of that was like running away from having to come out …'

Dean believed secrecy was more of an issue than being gay, and it was this that left a lasting impact:

'I think the biggest impact it had on me … and it's huge is that I don't think I can overestimate how, when I say didn't have a friend till I was 20, 21 … there was no one, not a person in the world who I really considered a friend… And that does something… to someone … there's still a part of me that feels very, very fundamentally unlovable as a result of that…. that's not necessarily about being gay, it's just about having a secret more than anything else'.

Sam described how secrecy from an early age put him in a vulnerable and dangerous situation:

'I was just looking for company … It was this constant search just to … tell myself that I wasn't the only one um then I hit the internet…all these sorts of chatting forums and sort of just the desperate hope to try and meet someone who was also gay who I could just, you know, just meet and maybe be gay with, maybe have something intimate. I was very young, looking back now, to be doing this kind of thing. Um because there was no support… the internet is sort of the only place I could turn to'

This quickly led to secret intercourse with many strangers and secret relationships on and off-line, a risky and dangerous situation for a vulnerable teenager.

Darren highlighted the ensuing duality:

'I think I spent probably most of my like teenage years … splitting myself in two um so there was like the person that I knew I was and then there was the person that I kind of like projected to everyone else.'

The notion of overacting a constructed public self to hide the secret identity came up frequently and is explored further in the next section.

The impact of deceiving parents was thought to be particularly harmful, especially by participants who otherwise had close relationships with them: 'it was just like a web of lies', said Sam. This contributed to the many mental health issues explored in the next section.

Summary

On the social dimension, four prominent themes arose: the impact of the Jewish social scene, perceptions of what it meant to be gay, fear of judgement and rejection by others, and lies and isolation. The Jewish social scene influenced all participants significantly, both physically and socially. The attitude presented to participants growing up, towards sexuality and sexual orientation, was either absent entirely, or laced with negativity. The lack of gay Jewish role models left participants uncertain about their future, and prone to negative feelings, from anxiety to deep fear culminating in suicidal thoughts. The lack of gay Jewish individuals in the community triggered fear of judgement, social rejection (most of all by parents) and social ostracism, often leading to isolation and further health issues.

5.3c

Personal: self

The exploration and presentation of the self before coming out was a painful and conflicting dimension of existence. All participants referred to a personal journey of realisation, many referring to this as 'coming out' to oneself. This was associated with further secrets, turmoil and despair and mental-health issues.

<u>Relationship with Judaism</u>

The relationship with Judaism, while manifesting importantly on the physical and social dimensions, presented for only two participants on the personal level. Jason: 'enjoyed intellectual stimulation of Torah study when growing up…[he] Found Judaism and Torah study to be emotionally comforting', a response shared by half of the participants. The others were either indifferent or 'kind of believed in it all [Judaism] … but I didn't kind of feel … a personal connection'. Judaism also offered Dylan comfort in the years before he came out:

> 'religion was like really important to me because … a lot of religion's internal … you do it with yourself and it's like your, it's your way of life … I kind of threw myself into that because it was just a way of coping with being alone as well'.

He describes it as the only 'constant' during this difficult time, an anchor for coping and continuity. It is noticeable that whilst all participants presented a substantial presence of Judaism on a physical plain, in the personal world it presented far less.

<u>Mental Health & Despair</u>

Some participants recounted ongoing mental-health difficulties: 'I used to go through periods of just like feeling really depressed and like not talking to anyone'. This eventually led Gavin to accept that he was gay. Dean had weeks of sleeplessness, despair and isolation, out of fear of exposure, culminating in the recognition that he was gay, and needed to do something about it. Darren experienced a similar 'damning' process.

Dylan's mental-health issues manifested in purely physical ways. He had nothing personal to share from before coming out: 'anything I had I probably buried and haven't accessed for a while.' Repression might be a survival mechanism, explaining his apparent lack of mental-health issues. However, his physical pain suggests the struggle surfaces in the physical world.

George's personal world and mental well-being suffered greatly:

> 'I was literally like on a bridge and I was like oh just maybe I should just jump off… it's that, that view of nothing … there's no place for you in the community…it was also that fear of leaving, having to leave everything you know…'

George's acknowledgement that he could never marry and have children triggered this painful downward spiral before he came out.

<u>Realisation of Gay Identity</u>

All participants described the realisation of being gay as a personal coming out, despite having suspected this for many years: 'I definitely knew that I was attracted to guys. I just never … had a conversation with myself about it that wasn't about like making that go away. Or hoping that it would go away one day' (Jason) Self-acknowledgement was often intertwined with despair that this was not going away. After his ongoing battle with mental health Gavin told his therapist:

> 'Listen, the truth is I am gay and you need to like make me not anymore.'

With more media featuring gay individuals and gay couples, he realised that this was an accessible identity:

> 'I can't really remember exactly when it was, but I remember thinking, I'm definitely going to be gay and like I just need to tell everyone and I can have a family if I want.'

Acknowledgement and acceptance bought relief after a lengthy battle with his mental health.

Jason had a similar but more painful moment of self-realisation; he

> 'felt incredibly, incredibly alone…incredibly trapped and I did not see any solution to the problem….it was pretty horrible…not being able to get out of bed…. so overwhelmingly painful…. a personal kind of like hell inside…It painted all of my encounters…. Everything I did, I was worried'.

For Sam, similarly, physical and social realisation were most powerful; he engaged extensively in secret sexual and intimate relationships with other men, on and off line, but there was little expression relating to his inner self when sharing of his experience of before coming out.

George 'stood in front of the mirror and … said the words out loud, "I am gay." So, that was a big moment', but it was not until three years later that he realised that he would not actually be able to marry and have children. This triggered an array of mental-health issues, including two near-suicide attempts. It was

> 'definitely the worst year of my life … Now [5 years on] I'm coping a lot better … I thought I was definitely not going to be alive [by now]. Like, it's, it's not I was like actively day to day planning like suicide, but … like I could envision no future.'

The experience of other participants was very similar. Darren commented that the 'web of secrets' he lived in was a 'dark underworld' isolated from family and friends, and 'being more truthful to strangers about myself than I was to the people that I loved'.

Dean's secret struggle with despair led to conversion therapy which he calls 'one of the most positive things that happened to me in my life'. He found peace in relations with others and made his first friend:

> 'First time in my life I got to just have a conversation with someone …he's still a good friend…there was nothing romantic … [being] open, accepted, you know it removed a lot of the shame … I now had people to talk to…that really, really helped… eventually… I decided I'm gay. Time to start dating guys.'

Coming out to himself, and accepting it was not going to change, brought the relief that allowed him to come out to his parents and pursuing homosexual dating.

Jason similarly could only accept he was gay with the caveat that he could change this through reparative therapy. Only when he realized this was not the case was he able accept his identity and move on. All participants expressed relief after sharing with others that being gay was not going to go away.

Alternate Identity/Overcompensation

The longer participants kept their sexual orientation hidden, the more they developed an alternate identity. This was often described as overcompensating for their secret identity:

> '[gay people in the closet] have no identity, they can't claim their gay identity and so they have to in some sense create an identity for themselves and that identity can sometimes be to be super-competent at whatever they do … I definitely did that…I was you know Mister Academic Achiever and … I built an aura of perfection around myself… And so, that probably added to the shame.' (Dean)

Darren similarly constructed an over-compensatory alter-ego before coming out:

> 'I just threw myself into loads of stuff around me to try and do the best at everything else to try and make up for the fact that I couldn't do what everyone else was doing, which was the basic stuff like having relationships.'

Summary

Overall, Judaism featured significantly less on the personal dimension; only two participants referred to the comfort it provided, this is in contrast to the overwhelming presence of Judaism for all participants on the physical and social dimensions. However, half of the participants manifested mental-health issues and despair. Those who did not reference

mental-health struggles did note physical symptoms. There was also overwhelming self-realisation in relation to the process of accepting and acknowledging that one is gay. For every participant, this was a discrete and significant process, a first step, although not identified as anyone's 'main coming out'. For some, this brought further despair; for others it brought relief or both feelings. Finally, some participants acknowledged the self-construction of an alternate identity to overcompensate for their secret identity. This resembles using religion to distract or overcompensate within one's inner world.

5.3d

Spiritual: ideas

The most powerful, private and transformative dimension of existence is thought to be the spiritual one, yet only two participants expressed any positive connection to the spiritual dimension of Judaism before coming out, despite all participants' practical and social immersion in the religion. Four participants had only a meagre spiritual connection and two none at all. It is striking that there is an absence of non-religious spirituality too, in that there is no distinct data in the time phase before coming out surrounding matters of authenticity, higher values, a sense of personal meaning, faith, belief or spirit, even removed from Judaism or any religious reference. It could be at this point, where identity was still difficult to navigate, that connecting with a spiritual identity was difficult.

'Praying the gay away'

Some spoke of 'praying the gay away'. Jason hoped 'this feeling [gay] would go away if I devoted myself to religion … would this be healed by God ...'   He could not imagine what it meant to come out at this point:

> 'I just did not think I was going to come out… I didn't want to come out … It wasn't an option. It wasn't an option because I wasn't gay.'

Jason's spiritual connection to Judaism fuelled his belief that God would cure him of being gay hence he need never come out, because he was not actually gay. Darren expressed another positive aspect of spiritual Judaism: 'knowing down, deep down that like no matter what, that God would still love me, was quite important'. However, this was juxtaposed with his perception that his life was not going according to plan, which he considered 'a hundred

per cent the punishment' for being gay. Both Jason and Darren presented a spiritual relation with Judaism that, while not always positive, had not weakened. This was in marked contrast to the experience of the other participants.

For example, Alex had proceeded from coming out to himself by distancing himself from Judaism:

> 'if Judaism thinks … it's a sin to be gay or … to like act on it…then … I feel like I kind of can't believe … in something that says that… my kind of life or, or kind of lifestyle is um is forbidden'.

However, he draws an important distinction between Judaism and God:

> 'I'd say it affected my kind of belief in Judaism more than it affected my belief in God because …this set of like laws … didn't seem to be … compatible with the way that I see the world.'

Although his spiritual connection to Judaism had deteriorated, his spiritual connection to God remained unchanged.

Gavin's spiritual connection to Judaism deteriorated as his self-awareness grew. At first, aged about 15, 'I was like … really religious … I thought sex didn't need to play a big role in like Orthodox relationships … I was like, oh then I'll only have to have sex like twice a month and then who cares? Um, so then I tried that and that didn't work'. As his awareness grew, and he realised that this gay identity was incompatible with marriage, he sought Rabbinical advice, which resulted in poor guidance:

> 'the whole experience was terrible, like the advice I got was to like find a religious lesbian woman and like co-habiting and like have kids… and then they sent me to like speak to this … conversion therapist … I met with this guy a couple of times but … even that was quite bad'.

At the point Gavin was still maintaining his spiritual connection to Judaism, but after that experience 'I was like on a downwards Jewish trajectory. … I was like not doing anything'. As he realized the permanence of his gay identity, and how he had been let down, his spiritual connection to Judaism declined.

Dean also presented a breakdown of spiritual connection after coming out to himself: 'There came a point at which Judaism for me just became this like cudgel to beat myself with… I was

just like, "I'm done".' Sam, who had carried out his gay physical and social explorative journey extensively (less so personally), presented no spiritual expression at this point. This was the same for Dylan.

For George, who was deeply saturated in a religious world, the time before coming out presented crises across all dimensions. There was the challenge of accommodating his sexuality with Torah teachings. Most troubling was the Biblical prohibition against homosexuality, which led George to the brink of suicide:

> 'there is a halachic understanding that rather than commit certain sins, you should give up your life for… so gay sex um probably would come under that category.'

Instead of offering him comfort, spirituality offered George only existential despair.

Summary

Spirituality was in markedly less evidence than the other dimensions. Such references as were made were briefer than previous descriptions of other worlds. Only two participants presented any spiritual positivity; the rest had become spiritually alienated from Judaism. There were no references to a non-religious sense of spirituality in this time phase.

5.3e

Summary of *The Past:*

Overall, the past was the most saturated point of time when exploring the experience of coming out, this is with the exception of the spiritual world. It is intriguing that the spiritual world was referenced less in this time phase, since it is the time in which the closest affiliation to the Orthodox community was highlighted for all participants. This highlights that the relationship with Orthodox Judaism is not necessarily primarily spiritual.

The physical plane was replete with references to Orthodox Jewish observance but also with references to the journey of sexual discovery, the acknowledgement of being gay and the consequent physical suffering. Social factors were equally important, given the close-knit nature of the Orthodox Jewish community. This shaped perceptions of being gay, the lack of gay role models, and the fear of judgement and ostracism, all conducing to secrecy and isolation despite participants' close involvement with the community.

A personal relationship with Judaism was accompanied by mental-health challenges and despair following the realisation of one's gay identity. Constructing sometimes over-compensatory alter-egos was the strategy used to ease the struggle. Intense internal struggles, including 'praying the gay away' typified participants' spiritual conflict.

Evidently there was much material expressed relating to the physical, communal and personal worlds before coming out, which were laced with Judaism and pain. The only evidence of spirituality took the form of praying to God to get rid of this pain, though paradoxically, the pain and conflict were rooted in participants' religious identity.

5.4

The Present

The present is now presented in relation to the four dimensions. The 'present' refers to the period of 'coming out', though this was not a clearly identifiable point in time:

> 'a lot of gay people I've spoken to have said, it's [not] just like [a] magical coming out process. You come out every day of your life … Right, whenever someone at work is like, "Oh, do you have a girlfriend?" and I have to be like, "Oh no, you know, it would be boyfriend" there are still some times when I don't feel comfortable doing that. And so, in those respects, I'm not completely out yet.' (Dean)

Participants highlighted three identifiable moments about their coming-out experience, exemplified by Alex:

> 'technically [coming out to a friend] was when I first came out to another person and then before that I'd come out to myself, but if you said to me tell me about when you came out … the first kind of image that pops into my head is when I told my family … that was always like the big, big one for me'.

The first coming out was inevitably to oneself, hence this is addressed in the *Past* category of findings, above.

The second phase was encapsulated in the words of Gavin:

> 'I'll always remember [telling his friend he was gay] because it was the first person I ever told … but when I think about coming out, my first image is like telling my mum. That, that's my main coming out.'

The two-phase process, after having come out to oneself, was as follows:

1. The first coming out was usually to friends, or a Rabbi, in preparation for the 'main coming out'. It is notable that many participants were able to proceed with this first coming out as they did so with a condition, such as converting to heterosexuality.

2. The subsequent 'main coming out' was to their parents. For many participants, this involved recognising that their previous condition would not be followed through.

Participants spoke of a three-part process:

1. Coming out to oneself
2. Coming out to someone else for the first time
3. The main coming out – to one's parents

The first two steps facilitated the 'main' one. For the purposes of this research steps two and three are considered as part of the *present* time phase, relating to the actual moments of coming out. Whilst the significance differed, as did the time interval between phases, the main coming out was most significant for all participants.

5.4a

Physical: things

Most participants experienced an embodied sense of fear and stuck-ness during the actual moments of coming out in both phases. However, two noted no physical reaction; coming out was an out-of-body experience.

<u>Stuck-ness</u>

Jason's first coming out was triggered after he had:

> 'just broken up with my first girlfriend of a month … I was so overwhelmed with the fact that it didn't work …. I was in a pretty fucking crazy state … that feeling … from the paralysis from the bed, was, was present … I can't remember if I, I think I was crying … I think my mum and dad were there and I think my sister was there.'

Importantly, he felt able to come out for the first time to his parents, only with the 'caveat' that he would pursue reparative therapy and 'get better'. However, when he realised this would not work, after many years, he recognised: 'I'm gay. This is it.' At this point he came out to his parents again, this time explaining: 'I'm going to be frum. That was like the next … caveat to it, it's like, you have to … ooh my stomach.' The pain of this experience, even years later, was sufficient to cause Jason a literal pain in his stomach. The overriding feelings he communicated were of dread, pain, overwhelming sadness, loss and deep fear of losing something: 'it kind of like felt like I'd ripped myself open, um, in a way that I wasn't ready for.' This language of violent physical assault expresses the sharpness of the emotion it represents.

Alex similarly described the anxiety of first coming out to a friend as an out-of-body sensation of being on a cliff edge waiting to jump:

> 'when I actually said I'm gay it was … slightly like an out –of-body moment like I… mentally disconnected for a minute to actually say it and then I kind of … heard myself say it, but it didn't feel like I was saying it …'

Nevertheless, his main coming out was to his parents, and while his nervousness was higher, verbalizing the communication was easier.

Gavin also described a powerful bodily response in his first coming out, which was also to a friend: 'I had like a huge panic attack and we … walked around for ages, talking about it. And I felt much better.' His main coming out also elicited a physical response in the form of a gesture of concealment:

> 'I told …my parents…. I buried my head in my arm, like I couldn't look at them. So, I like just covered my face and my mum was like, "Are you trying to say you're gay?" and I was like "Yes".' Again, the reluctance to verbalize the admission leaves the hope that someone else will guess and spare him the pain.

Dean's experience of stuck-ness was similar:

> 'when I told my rabbi about this … I was so ashamed that I sat in front of him, just tears streaming down my face and my mouth would not move … I kept on trying to say the words and my body was just rebelling and stopping me from speaking and I had to borrow his pen and write it down…'.

The fact that Dean's 'main coming out', to his parents, also took written form, is a token of his difficulty in verbal communication at this point. George also found it easier to 'come out' in a letter: 'I literally couldn't speak, but I could read that letter… Like this is just not gonna be acceptable to them.' Sam also identified a physical sense of stuck-ness when trying to come out to his parents:

> 'I didn't have the courage… I froze and just said something else… I don't really remember how I felt after I failed to tell them … [I was] Scared shitless and then I [told them and then] …didn't talk for the rest of the evening, just went to bed.'

The difficulty was compounded by prior secretiveness: 'it was just the telling them, the very, very, very deep intimate secret of mine and, and also essentially that I'd had sex … which I

was petrified that they'd find out'. Other participants shared this horror of exposure and scandal.

<u>Sexual Exposure</u>

This notion of coming out as primarily an admission of sexuality was the natural consequence of most participants' view of homosexuality as a sexual orientation: 'it was very sexual. Actually, at the time, it was the only thing I could... I could consider, it was ... I like men. I'm having sex with a man.' A subsequent question typically asked of participants was, 'how do you know?' to which the answer was really only sexual discovery as highlighted in the *Past.* `Jason commented: 'but like everyone required proof ... it suddenly becomes like you're on trial and you have to prove that you're gay because you must just be confused'. Gavin felt 'shame, even more because it was like this is so gross embarrassing ... I'm talking about my sex life with my parents...it felt like I was talking about like porn with them and stuff ... '

<u>Summary</u>

Two participants reported no physical response; the rest manifested physical stuck-ness in the form of anxiety, nervousness, fear, panic attacks and speechlessness. For some, the sexual nature of the communication aggravated the painful physical reaction.

5.4b

Social: others

Most participants were concerned at what others would think and by the concept of developing a strategy to come out that involved others. For some participants, it was also the comfort of some others knowing that was an important part of their coming out process.

<u>Comfort of others</u>

Two participants reported reparative therapy as helpful and comforting; two others found it unhelpful. The comfort arose from finding a network of Jewish gay men with whom they could connect, easing their journey towards coming out, though not shifting their sexual orientation. Jason described reparative therapy as: 'an overwhelming feeling of hope and

connectedness and feeling … that made me feel comfortable to share with my parents because it was like, oh see they'll get it.'

<u>Unknown Response</u>

A common social concern was uncertainty how others would react to their disclosure: ' it was just an unknown quantity … my biggest concern was … that they would be completely shocked um and kind of wouldn't know how to deal with it. But … I didn't ever think that they like fundamentally wouldn't be accepting.' This fear was deeper for Sam with friends he had known longer: 'Because it's much harder to tell people you've known the longest than people you've just met. It's the, the fear of what they're going to say and also for me the sort of the cringe, the overly emotional um reaction.'

<u>Sharing a Secret</u>

The idea of sharing a long-held secret led in some cases to an anxiety that translated into physical symptoms. Social anxiety was also acute:

> 'it's just like … someone you've known your whole life and then you're kind of suddenly telling them something that they had no idea about, about you and it's likely to be like whether negative or positive or neither, it's likely to be kind of … shocking.' (Alex)

A big aspect of coming out, was how safe the participant felt to share their secret. For some this was a complex progression. Jason used the analogy of a snail popping in and out of its shell, depending on how safe it felt outside; Gavin echoed this sentiment: 'it was like I poked my head out the closet and then went back in again and it was, that's like not a good situation … Super painful'. Both envisage the process as fraught with danger.

<u>Strategy</u>

Many participants described a staggered approach to coming out; they wanted to tell their families, but since this was so difficult they told others first, which they hoped could ease the process. These others ranged from friends and Rabbis to siblings who could be there to support the parents:

> `the purpose in telling my [siblings], was not just to tell my [siblings], it was, when I tell my parents, it's going to be chaos. You need to be there for my parents. 'Cause I will drop … the bombshell and you need to kind of pick up the pieces …' (Sam)

Another reason for telling others first was to allow the participant space to speak out in a less emotionally fraught context:

> 'I wanted my family … to be … the first people I came out to, but I also wanted to tell someone first … who I'd be more comfortable just having like a completely open conversation with about it.'

Darren feared being excluded from the family home, so he shared with friends with whom he might stay if this were to happen. This apparently reassuring strategy only served to heighten his anxiety by postponing the moment of reckoning with his parents.

Summary

Social factors were overall less significant at the time phase of coming out. The main concern was the impact of confiding a secret with another, the uncertainty of their response, navigating a strategy to help themselves and their parents through the coming out process and the hope of getting comfort from others.

5.4c

Personal: self

Less personal considerations were presented at this time, but that which was shared mainly links to a personal journey of acceptance and shame.

Personal Acceptance

For some participants acceptance came with the realisation that reparative therapy was futile: 'the main coming out … was like I accepted it myself and stopped the conversion therapy and came out…I came out to my parents.'

Shame and Pain

Shame was a major theme for many participants:

> 'I just felt like it was so dirty. Like the whole thing was so grim, I was like, oh this is so, this is such shameful thing to be … and it felt like really, like, like perverted … that's why I hated talking about it… [like there was] something … wrong with me that

was like not nice… like I was telling her like I'm a paedophile or something … And disgust with myself.' (Gavin)

Dean added: 'I think it was that feeling of total inadequacy … I can't have that full life that is involved in being Jewish … that I wouldn't be able to have that family…that was the ultimate admission of inadequacy'. Shame was culturally tied to feelings of inadequacy and failure to meet the heteronormative expectations of his Jewish community: 'it is an uprooting of everything I thought about myself, my entire identity'. This shame was also linked to Dean's desire to please his parents: 'everything I did growing up was to please my parents … They were the hardest you know … ones to tell.' Shame thus intersected with guilt at letting his parents down.

Darren's deep, painful feelings pushed him to come out to his parents in desperation, as he felt it could not get any worse: 'I'd been like clinically depressed for a year and they'd known about it for a few months. I'd like done counselling. I'd done medications and stuff and it was just like I'd literally there is no … it was just so bleak that it couldn't hurt anymore um'.

Relief

However, coming out was also accompanied by glimpses of relief:

> 'it was just like telling someone a secret that you've held inside for like 11 years…... which just feels quite momentous. As well as feeling a bit of shame and feeling crappy about it, I was also just like oh my God, I'm actually just finally talking about this … it was so weird.' Gavin

Dylan, who experienced little physical or social response, felt 'Nervous. Apprehensive. Um, but in a way, excited because I knew that this was the authentic me and that I was, you know, ready to share that with the world and to live an authentic life… so I was excited for the next stage of my life, not really for, for that moment'. This overwhelming relief remained with him as the most significant aspect of the experience; he did not remember much else of this tricky process, having probably 'buried' it.

Summary

Personal responses during the moments of coming out was generally sparser than at the time before coming out. While some feelings of acceptance and relief were reported, this was less central to the collective experiences than in the time before coming out. The most salient feelings reported in the moments of coming out are very emotional responses, such as shame, pain, depression and anxiety.

5.4d

Spiritual: ideas

If social influences decreased at the time of coming out, the spiritual dimension plummeted. Only three participants mentioned spirituality at all in relation to Judaism, and even those references were all brief, and tense. The silence in relation to religion is worth noting. However, there is, for the first time a presence of spirituality that is not related to religion, that is Judaism, rather connected to a sense of faith in oneself.

Religion as a Challenge

The deep intertwining of Jason's family and religion led him to fear that he would lose his family due to the religious stigma of homosexuality, even as he felt that religion could save him when as he came out:

> 'My family like was so inextricably linked with my Judaism …my Judaism was so important and also … I liked Judaism, I liked Torah and, and I really … believed in the power of it to heal, the power to support and guide… it didn't feel like my family would support me as a gay man….that was the message that was kind of being spouted out … that God gives you tests and you can overcome them… that was my, my religious feeling at the point.'

Gavin experienced a similar spiritual conflict:

> '[Through the Torah] using words like abomination and like the way that they would talk about it [being gay in Jewish background] … it's so clinical like the way that people talk about sex and gay sex and like, you know, there was no like relationship, it was like this horrible act between you know sodomites… it's like no wonder… I didn't have anything positive to think about it.'

Both participants felt deeply intimidated by the cultural and spiritual hostility of Orthodox Judaism to homosexuality.

Dean remained deeply committed to Judaism when he came out: 'my Judaism stayed a constant until much later in the story'. Loss of faith was not necessarily immediate.

<u>Faith in oneself</u>

Whilst reference to spirituality in relation to spirituality is limited in the moments of coming out, there is a strong sense of spiritual presence in the form of belief in oneself. All participants presented a process of coming to terms with their own gay identity, that is coming out to oneself, before they were able to come out to others. It was this sense of acceptance and belief in oneself and their own identity, that enabled each person to come out to others. This was depicted by Jason: 'I came out to my parents, um, it was definitely a moment of like accepting it myself which made it easier'. The self-acceptance and belief in who they were as individuals helped all participants come out to others.

<u>Summary</u>

Overall, spirituality featured little during the time of coming out in relation to religion. Only three participants mentioned it, two of them in terms expressing spiritual frustration rather than inspiration or support. However, there was a strong sense of belief in oneself, that can be understood as a spiritual connection, in the present time phase of coming out.

5.5e

Summary of *The Present:*

It is notable that there was the least material presented in the present time phase than any other time phase across the social, personal and spiritual worlds. This is striking since this time phase depicts the actual moments under research. There was most presentation of material in the present time phase in relation to the physical world. Most participants shared a sense of stuck-ness, speechless-ness and the sensation of being removed from their own body. This physical sense of stuck-ness and inability to communicate effectively could explain the lack of material shared in the other worlds. One could postulate that the difficulty in sharing their sexual orientation in the actual moments of coming out, was reflected in the difficulty of sharing content in the present time phase.

In the social world, the concern of sharing a secret, the uncertainty of response and navigating a strategy for coming out were the key themes presented. In the personal world, the inner feelings of shame and pain, juxtaposed with acceptance and relief were communicated. However, in both worlds less material was expressed in the present time frame, than in the past. The spiritual world was not touched on much in relation to religion, there were three references to the spiritual aspect of God, two of which were expressions of frustration, but one was of support. This suggests that on the whole, the present time phase of coming out was not an especially spiritual process in terms of religion. However, there was a strong sense of belief in oneself that surfaced, and took the form of the initial coming out to oneself, and seemed powerful enough to help each individual come out to others.

<p align="center">**5.5**</p>

<p align="center">**The Future**</p>

Having considered the themes and paradoxes that emerged from the past and present experiences of coming out, the future is now presented in relation to the four dimensions. The 'future' here refers to the time after coming out, including the experiences of the aftermath and ramifications of the coming-out experiences identified in the *Present*. However, this research does not presume that the coming-out process is completed. As participants explained, it is an ongoing process.

5.5a

Physical: things

While the earlier phases were marked by a very full presentation of the physical dimension, this is substantially reduced for the time after coming out. Only three participants presented a physical experience in this period.

Religious Restrictions

Participants who attempted to remain observant to Jewish law spoke of physical constraint after coming out:

> 'I think my body still felt trapped in some way because I was religious, so I couldn't hook up with people and have sex with people… I still wanted to be religious. I wanted to save myself for, for like real relationships and deep relationships … that slowly … waned and … I did begin, begin trying to experience um like kind of sexual encounters with various people. … by no means in the same way as other people do when they come out… often people have like a sexual awakening …. I didn't have that… So, physically, it was actually quite difficult still because it was like you, you've chosen to be frum and gay, so that means you don't do that.'

Shame

A sense of physical shame continued after coming out, rooted in a conflict between love and sex:

> 'constantly being told that you should love but you can't have sex messes up how you interact with people that you were going to be in a relationship with … I think it cuts out a part of yourself. You have to still feel shame … I think it comes out in them seeking like sexual interactions with people because you can't seek them out in healthy situations, I think you seek them out in unhealthy situations. So, you have

casual random sex … which is not that safe and also not that, that spiritually fulfilling … sex in Judaism is seen as something that's spiritually fulfilling and physically fulfilling. It's a whole … the most … physical embodied act, I suppose, in Judaism um and you can't experience that. You can only experience quick sexual pleasure or emotional have those two things intertwined without feeling shame.' (Jason)

Emotional Expression

Emotion manifested strongly in physically embodied ways:

'it was a massive kind of mix of feelings, being able to talk about it, like happiness and … relief at being able to talk about it but also … the coming down from the feelings of nervousness… the feeling that you get after there was something that you were massively nervous about and then you get it out of the way. In the same way that…if you like jump off a cliff. Once you land…your heart would still be pounding for like half an hour or whatever.' (Alex)

This demonstrates how the feelings after having come out were so strong that they manifested in the physical world, demonstrating the multi-dimensional expression of relief.

Summary

The physical plane is represented in the period following coming out largely through physical frustration at religious restrictions, shame caused by a splitting of physical relationships, and some embodied experience of emotion.

5.5b
Social: others

By contrast, the social experience of this time was fuller, despite being less salient than in the time before and during coming out. Only two participants had nothing to share on this dimension. The main themes presented on this measure are relief, pleasant surprise at the reactions of others, developing connections with the gay community, improved social relationships overall, but also some social rejection.

Relief: Pleasant Surprise

The experiencing of coming out to more and more people was redeeming for many participants:

'It couldn't have been better. …I was like flying inside. It was …. like my relationships became real somehow, like just miraculously. Like suddenly they became free … suddenly I could just watch what TV I wanted and wear what I wanted … and if

anyone was like that's so gay, I was like yes, it is so gay because … that's who I am and like don't be a homophobic piece of shit' (Jason)

However, this feeling of redemption, though powerful, was not uniformly positive. Difficulties remained; Jason's social experience was marked by rejection as well as acceptance.

Particular relief was communicated about the parental responses:

> 'I think they felt quite a lot of guilt about [negative] things they'd said in the past about gay people but I think they wanted to try and make amends … my dad found it very difficult I know. I know that he cried a couple of times about it … But it felt like … a like a great catharsis of just being able to just be completely open with the people that you love' (Darren).

Relief increased as participants told more people and it became easier to share more widely socially:

> 'like the tenth person I told or something… it just felt completely normal now um and he was like giving me a lift somewhere. I think I told him and he just he like nearly hit the car ahead of him … it was like a massive shock and for me it was just like completely casual.' (Jason)

All participants expressed relief and even surprise, at the accepting response of friends and families:

> 'the fact that all my religious like Jewish friends were like completely okay with it… just like people respected me and just loved me in a way that I couldn't have expected, which was nice.' (Jason)

Furthermore, the social relief of telling friends provided a support system and some space for attention:

> 'it got me a bit of attention in a completely selfish way. … also because I was like happy that my friends were supportive of me um oh maybe this isn't gonna be so difficult after all. … They all asked me tons of questions about myself, if I was having sex, if I had a boyfriend. ... that was almost sort of informal therapy.' (Sam)

Gay Community

For over half of the participants it was only after they came out that they discovered and accessed the gay community, Jewish and non-Jewish, a significant experience for them:

'I was out having a, having a good time … new experiences, new friends, friends who I just didn't meet through the Jewish community. Friends who I had other common ground with. Um and it made me realise about queer culture in general …there were specific spaces that were engineered towards gay LGBTQ+ people…it did give me a sense of community that I didn't feel at that time from the Jewish community in which I grew up…I ended up meeting Jewish people in these queer spaces… It was like I'm not, I'm not the only, only gay in the village sort of thing'. (Dylan)

This discovery of the 'Queer space' was pivotal for many participants. The exploration of a Jewish LGBT space was equally significant:

'it made me feel validated. It made me feel authentic. Um it made me feel that there must have been others before me who have, who have had to address these issues…. I hadn't really thought about what it meant to be, to have, have, have intersecting personalities, intersecting identities of being gay and Jewish'. (Dylan)

This account encapsulates participants' new sense of hope for a future in which they could take their place in a Jewish gay community. For George, who was on the brink of suicide, this proved a lifeline.

Improved Relationships

Some participants reported having no real friends until after they had come out, at least to themselves:

'What was interesting coming out … People let their guard down. People tell me things about them, not necessarily like sexually, but just like do you know what, I've been having religious issues and I don't think I'm going to keep XYZ or I'm dating this non-Jewish person and how are my family going to react? Or actually we're married now but we can't have kids at this moment … actually I would say my friendships increased'. (George)

Jason similarly remembered

'feeling loads of joy and freedom um and acceptance and love… it was like, oh my goodness, authenticity, how exciting.'

Although participants feared the impact on social relationships, some social relationships improved significantly.

Rejection, Disappointment & Frustration

After Jason came out, his mother read daily prayers for a month after, inviting him to join

her in praying for him to be cured:

> 'I can't remember if it felt supportive or not supportive. I think it just felt annoying, aggravating … I think maybe it also felt like somewhat supportive that she was doing something to help along with the process. I don't know…. she was definitely completely a mess'.

As noted above it was mainly Gavin's non-Jewish friends who were very supportive.

Conversely:

> 'I feel as if my [youth movement] friends abandoned me, but maybe that's really unfair because maybe we just weren't that close and like we just drifted apart naturally. It felt like it didn't get a lot of support.'

One participant shared a difficult social experience in the aftermath of coming out, when

none of his male friends

> 'would share a room with me [him] on holiday so I had my own room on holiday. Um which I felt at first was a bit …I wouldn't say it's rejection because they could've said well you know you're not coming on holiday with us, so you know it didn't feel much rejection. I felt it was um misguided caution'.

Dylan and Jason referred to rejection by their Jewish youth movement or synagogue:

> 'I came out and concurrently an opportunity came up to be a leader in my community, but I was not given that opportunity to be that leader then … I could only deduce that it was because I had come …That was really hard. And I think that I got … more of a rebellious streak after that because I thought, well where is my place in the community?' (Dylan)

An especially difficult social experience was being publicly shamed: 'I think that on the worst

end of it, people are disgusting'. He described this as 'psychological abuse':

> 'It's not just like you know the internal thing… like rabbis and leadership and teachers and like, they don't know the effect that the words that they say have on people. Even when they're trying to be good, they don't know the effect that … because they don't have psychological backing and experience to know what they're doing… I think that the Jewish community is psychologically abusing LGBT people, like without realising and sometimes with realising.'

<u>Summary</u>

Overall the social experience after coming out was multi-faceted. Parental and friend

responses produced overwhelming and often surprising relief. Comfort and a vision for the

future came with the discovery of the wider gay community, Jewish and non-Jewish. Also

surprising was the enrichment of existing friendships, but there was also disappointment
and rejection by some friends, synagogues and youth organisations.

5.5c
Personal: self

After coming out there was little shared stemming from the personal world. However, the
bit that was shared was of a more personal sense of relief or of further struggle.

Relief

Some participants shared their deep relief:

> 'On the whole, coming out was very good and has got better…. I felt like enormous
> sense of relief telling everyone… And I felt really happy that everyone knew.' (Gavin)

> 'initially it felt fantastic… I …wouldn't go back for the world, having my first date with
> a guy …. suddenly you're experiencing this thing that everyone's been talking about
> and you never really understood and then suddenly…. discovering that entire part of
> … being human, was… amazing.'(Dean)

After his suicidal depression, George's relief was huge:

> 'That summer [after his main coming out], my mind-set changed and it was literally
> then when I decided I'm not, I hope I'm not going to be alone for life… I'm going to
> have to come out, deal with it all, see what happens … and then, you know, look to
> meet someone in the future'.

Personal Struggle

However, there was also lingering pain in the understanding that this new reality conflicted
with heteronormative Orthodox Jewish values:

> 'on the flip side … it's hard…I don't think I will ever lose that initial um set of values I
> got as a child. That is all about family. It's all about having a partner. It's all about
> having kids.' (Dean)

> 'it's almost like I'd internalised um homophobia without wanting to internalise
> homophobia. Somehow from growing up in a very traditional heteronormative,
> heterosexual kind of arena, you know, where the rabbi doesn't mean it but they get
> up and say when a man marries a woman, you know, every [speech] … It was coming
> out and then you know I need to work on myself to be able to be okay with being
> gay and be in a relationship'. (George)

This created an ongoing tension between personal and social acceptance on the one hand, and the struggle to fit into the heteronormative Orthodox Jewish framework on the other.

Summary

Overall the personal plane was lighter than previous time periods, but the few that presented a personal dimension to their post-coming out experience revolved around an inner sense of relief and/or struggle.

5.5d
Spiritual: ideas

By contrast to the present time period of coming out, when participants spoke little of spirituality, they revealed much more of this dimension in relation to the post-coming out period. Notably, all felt alienated from, or rejected by, Orthodox Judaism, but a sense of non-religious spirituality presented in the form of a sense of belief in others.

Health

Some expressed spiritual ideas in relation to their health. Jason had to drop observance of Jewish law to maintain his mental health:

> 'my line was like my mental and physical health come first before Halacha ... physical health and mental health like mean like a loving physical relationship with your partner and only with your partner.'

Darren linked his spiritual relationship with Judaism and God to his health:

> 'I found it really difficult more with the mental health rather than the being gay... I started to like cut my ties with it [religion] because I thought it would be something that would hurt me more and ... I could understand how... God could make me gay but I didn't understand how God could make me want to kill myself ...I felt completely worthless. I felt completely guilty ... I'd done everything. ... I'd tried to be excellent at everything. I'd tried to help everyone through everything. Tried to not disappoint anyone. Not hurt anyone. And then it was just like well now ... I felt dead'

Darren's painful language and imagery convey his despair, helplessness and exasperation. Judaism conflicted with Darren's well-being so to survive he needed to distance himself from Judaism. Only after coming out did he confront this disjoint; it was as if now he had

exposed his gay identity, realised that was not changing, and could live with that, it was the Jewish identity that needed to change.

<u>Less Observant</u>

All participants reported becoming less observant of Jewish law and customs after coming out:

> 'I think it changed again over like the subsequent few years… not like a sudden thing, but slowly over time becoming less observant and … it's just like a level of scepticism or questioning that kind of started…' (Alex)

Several participants expressed alienation from Orthodox Judaism, but affiliation with other, more liberal sects of Judaism. Gavin

> 'started going to a Masorti [non-orthodox] shul …they really brought me back from like not wanting to have anything to do with any Jews ever again…it's the worst combination when you grow up … Orthodoxy … they were even ruder about people that weren't Orthodox … than they were about gay people… what do I do? I can't become Reform because that's awful and I can't be gay because I'm not allowed to be gay.'

The dichotomy presented here outlines the dilemma of growing up gay and Orthodox; the stigma attached to being gay falls little short of the stigma attached to non-Orthodox branches of Judaism. The result is that that these participants are square pegs in round holes wherever they go.

Further, their Jewish identity made them misfits in the gay community and misfits in the Jewish community because they were gay:

> 'homosexuality and Judaism did not go together at all and there was one night where I just … I couldn't sleep and I just went to my parents and cried. I was like what am I going to do? … how can you be gay and frum because I didn't really know anyone who was gay and frum… and ever since then, I've either been not Jewish enough or not gay enough…my two fundamental identities, but they couldn't mesh. And they were just constantly conflicting…I didn't fit in anywhere'. (Sam)

The shared sense of alienation prompted by rejection was summarised by George:

> 'I've argued with [Rabbis] that being welcoming is all very nice, but if gay people can't celebrate their [celebratory life events] in their shul, how is that welcoming? Don't be surprised if people leave the Orthodox community if they can't have their engagement …in shul.'

George neatly conveys the superficial veneer of acceptance by Orthodox communities that might fear accusations of illegality or homophobia, but at the same time have no intention of officially endorsing the gay way of life.

Dylan was also distanced from Orthodox Judaism after coming out and shifting to a more cultural observance. However, he did not experience the same disconnect between Judaism and being gay, but reached a modus vivendi that could make him proud of both:

> 'I was never ashamed of being either [gay or Jewish] … but yeah it certainly meant that I wanted to explore the gay community, or the queer community, more than I did the Jewish community…I learned there were other ways to … Celebrate having a sense of Jewishness … other ways of doing things that were wholesome and authentic and engaging that were not just traditional practice'.

Belief in Others

There was a strong sense of spirituality that presented in the future time period that was not connected to religion, rather it linked to belief in others. In the present time phase there was a strong sense of spiritual belief in oneself, which helped each person come out to themselves, and then to family. In the future time phase this belief can be seen to be channelled towards others, as all participants were pleased by the acceptance they were shown socially. For some participants this was a pleasant surprise, for others it met deep-rooted expectations, but for all it was discussed as something meaningful for the participants. This was tied into an overriding belief in humanity, and specifically their social context. This link between the acceptance of others and a subsequent deeper rooted sense of belief in others, ultimately influenced the overriding journey towards authenticity for participants. This is well depicted by Jason:

> '[relationships became] So much more authentic…I just became so much more open … [it felt] Just incredible… I didn't think life could get better at that point. It was just like really, really wonderful. I just remember feeling loads of joy and freedom um and acceptance and love. …the fact that all my religious like Jewish friends were like completely okay with it… after I told like 10, 12 people I was just like tell everybody please… And it was great because it just meant that everyone knew. Anyone who cared enough like spoke to me um and … people respected me and just loved me in a way that I couldn't have expected, which was nice.'

Despite some of the disappointments and rejections experienced by some participants, every participant emphasised the value and importance of their social network, for overriding acceptance. This can be seen to not only enhance one's belief in themselves, but also their deep-rooted belief in the people around them.

Summary

Overall there was significantly more spiritual exploration after than during coming out but this deeper spiritual exploration was also more painful. The overriding themes that emerged were a sense of Judaism being a risk to two participants' health, all participants distancing themselves from Orthodoxy, some through lack of observance entirely and some through affiliation with other Jewish sects. There was also a sense of non-religious spirituality in the presentation of faith in others.

5.5e

Summary of *The Future:*

After both coming out phases, past and present, we see a physical presence again, but this time less so. Physically, religious restrictions remained challenging for some, as did the intense shame and physical manifestations of emotion. Socially there was some disappointment, through rejection, but overall, strong relief at improved relationships and the discovery of a gay community. The personal dimension in the future (?) is marked by the paradox, as in the *Present*, of relief and struggle. Spirituality featured rather more after coming out, in terms of distance from Orthodox Judaism, sometimes through reduced observance or for mental-health purposes. There was also a sense of non-religious spirituality presented in relation to a belief in others.

Finally, the temporal state is now considered, also in relation to the four dimensions. Temporality refers here to participants' current stand in relation to coming out.

5.6a

Physical: things

<u>Physical Intimacy</u>

Sam made the only reference to the physical plane:

> 'I'm still very influenced by the fact that my, I primarily associate being gay with physical intimacy. I place very little value on physical intimacy… No emotional value on physical intimacy. Because I've been doing it since [a young age] … That was the only way I identified as being gay for a while.'

This highlights the ongoing impact that so much sexual experimentation had on Sam. Seeking sexual company was the only way he knew how to relate to being gay, and so it was used repeatedly in a desperate search for companionship, with so many different people, in that way it lost its value.

5.6b

Social: others

On the social dimension three main themes surface: the significance of an environment in which it is safe to be gay, or come out; the dualism of a gay - Orthodox Jewish identity; the challenge of the silence.

<u>Safety of the Environment</u>

Jason shares how he now places more responsibility on others in society in the coming out process. He explains it as a mutual collaboration, whereby an individual will come out if they feel the world around them is safe for them to do so. He explains:

> 'it's more … how like a snail comes out its shell when it feels safe and it goes back into its shell when it doesn't feel safe. Like that's what the process is more like than the closet. Like once you're out the closet, you're closed and you're done…. And the closet's a negative space but …you're responsible for being in the closet. You've

chosen to be in there. You're not getting out. No one's kind of like locked the doors or whatever. Whereas, with the snail, it's like you go back in when you're scared…. When the world outside isn't ready for you or isn't open to you.'

Dylan shared his experience of the Jewish world improving in terms of safety and openness for gay men:

'I know is contentious still within Orthodoxy for same-sex couples. Um but do I feel that I could go to shul with a Jewish same-sex partner and feel that we would both be invited to the rabbi for dinner or um that we would still get called up in shul? Yeah, I totally do. In, in certain communities'.

However, this could only refer to non-Orthodox communities.

Paradox of an Orthodox/Gay dual identity

All but one participant shared conflicted feelings that Orthodox Judaism and homosexuality were incompatible and unacceptable on a communal level, especially in the UK:

'[Being gay] it's still not a normal thing. The fact…I still have to come out every day… the fact I can't meet a romantic partner at work. I can't just assume when I go to a Shabbat dinner that everyone is someone I can hit on…all those …make life harder in some sense and so I guess coming out is not … as you might expect. Like everything else in life, it doesn't solve everything. It still sucks …I'm horrified at what it would probably be like in England and I wouldn't set foot back in … its Jewish community.'

Notably half of the participants have moved away from London to live because they think it is easier to live as a gay Jewish male elsewhere.

Sam describes similar feelings of:

'disconnect and… Fear of what's going to happen. Fear of if I have a wedding, let's say I know you can do it with Masorti … but I still think, okay, if I did that, would X come, would Y come? Would these people even come to my wedding? Because I still don't know.'

This fear of future rejection, especially if they were to get married, is shared by Jason, Alex, Dean, Sam and George. Sam expresses the consensus that progress made on a personal level is not reflected on a communal level:

'I think people are now having this conversation within their own homes. On a community level, we don't talk about it'.

This presents as an ongoing social concern, and a source of anxiety.

<u>Challenging the Silence: Having gay non-sexual reference points</u>

Before coming out, many participants did not know anyone of any level of orthodoxy who was Jewish and gay. This left them deeply uncertain about the future. Gay development and exploration remained primarily physical. Some participants mentioned that this is something they would change:

> 'I wish we could start talking about like the gay thing within a context of just relationship, as opposed to sex…from the age of 12 or 13 or whenever people start, you know, going out with people or fancying people, you don't think of sex at that age. You, you think of you have a crush with them and maybe you'll go with him, maybe that or a kiss or a cuddle or whatever, but you don't start thinking about sex necessarily. Whereas …the discovery to, you know, homosexual route is more through pornography, it becomes a very sex-based conversation.' (Gavin)

Communal silence heightened the difficulty of growing up gay in the Orthodox Jewish community: 'we talk about everything else but we don't talk about this… which is one of the hardest things… you just think you're the other because there's that silence'. The silence was pervasive, from the communal level to the intimacy of the family. Even parents remained silent.

<u>Summary</u>

Overall there is less social concern in the temporal phase than previously, though concern regarding how others respond remains significant. Social concerns involved the danger of coming out, the dualism of being gay and Jewish, and communal silence on the subject.

5.6c
Personal: self

Unlike earlier phases, all but one participant presented a personal dimension when considering their temporal state. Instead, participants spoke of paradoxical feelings of loss and discovery, connection and distance, hopes and reality.

<u>Loss & Discovery</u>

Participants communicated a journey of loss, and discovery, which took place at different times of their lives. Jason's experience was typical:

> 'I think it takes gay people and LGBT people longer … to work out their space in the world…because of that delayed adolescence and that delayed development…and sense of self… … I think that there is an element of a loss of something that you need to deal with at a later point because you're too busy trying to like tread water that you can't focus on actually like learning things that normal …teenagers are learning at that point.'

Gavin 'lost 11 years of my life' and still experiences shame:

> 'when I'm talking about… my relationship …there is definitely still this kind of small bit of awkwardness that I feel … I think it's a leftover from the shame… I think it takes a long time to get over those kind of feelings…'

Dean shares this sense of loss, struggle and discovery, together with the comfort of his gay identity:

> 'coming out feels so liberating that you think it will solve everything that now that I've come out…It hasn't been particularly easy … I don't …for a second regret it, but … to be a gay man in 2019, especially a Jewish gay man in a Jewish community is harder than being a straight man'.

Overall, however, he is satisfied in his identity:

> 'if today you told me right now you have this magic wand or this pill that would make me straight… I definitely wouldn't take it.'

He has acquired the maturity to understand that loss and development can co-exist. George expressed a similar sentiment, as did Darren:

> ' it was awful and yeah I wouldn't, wouldn't have gone through it again um but I've gained so much from it um and it's made me a better person and it's made me …it's about … reframing the narrative and just looking at it differently and turning something that was a negative at the time into a strength … you have to forge meaning from it.'

This typifies the balance participants achieved between personal integrity and communal belonging.

<u>Hopes & Reality</u>

Hopes centred on marriage and children:

> 'it's hard because most of the things I would like to see, I know are not compatible with Orthodox Jewish law... like Jewish weddings, for example. Being able to facilitate ... gay people having Jewish kids...and ...if those people in those families want to be part of a Jewish community, they can be.' (Alex)

Although English law permits gay adoption, this would clearly be insufficient to win acceptance within the Orthodox Jewish community.

Personal Connection/Distance from Judaism

Participants described closeness to or alienation from Judaism that was beyond social, but not necessarily spiritual - more in terms of personal identity:

> 'Judaism is still a huge part of my life and important to my identity ... in terms of my values and a lot of that's to do with kind of the family side and the community side... I enjoy doing all of the ... traditional stuff that I did when I was younger, so like Shabbat dinners and festivals and things, but I feel less of the kind of personal... connection to it ... I would like to be involved Jewishly ... when I'm older... it's hard to see how, you know, if I was like gay with a family... how to kind of fit within that.' (Alex)

There is a sad recognition here that the gay member of the orthodox community remains very much a 'stranger within the gates'.

This explain the sadness of some participants: 'I just feel sad for the kids that grow up [in the Orthodox Jewish community] still... And I don't know how it will ever be fixed.' This sadness is paired with a sense of stuck-ness, in lacking a solution.

Sam is also conflicted about where a gay Jewish Orthodox man fits:

> 'I've got to start planning the next stages of my life ... some people are just where am I going to find a job and where am I gonna be happy and live? For me, it's I feel like it's just I have so much more stress and emotional burden on to me because I'm [gay], I feel like I'm going to spend the rest of my life trying to juggle these two ... This massive clash of identity...But I never question my homosexuality. That's the thing. I always question my Judaism.'

The duality of a gay orthodox-Jewish identity remains a lifetime constant – but the biological imperative trumps the cultural and environmental pressure; the latter can be changed, the former cannot.

Summary

For all but one participants, the personal dimension of the temporal phase was saturated with paradoxical accounts of loss and discovery, connection and distance, hopes and reality.

5.6d

Spiritual: ideas

Spirituality dominated the discourse of the temporal state for all participants. Topics relating to religion included the problem with orthodoxy, relationship with God, and ongoing questions. Non-religious aspects of spirituality present, tie into broader matters of inner identity acceptance.

The Problem with Orthodoxy

Almost all participants concluded that Modern Jewish Orthodoxy is inaccessible and unsafe for them:

> 'I've come to the… conclusion that the Orthodox community is not able to give sufficient dignity to LGBT people, maybe in the UK ever, um, which is like quite sad… this place (an egalitarian setting) … was the first place that I could breathe completely as like a unified human being that I was gay and Jewish … most of the rabbis do … gay marriages…like they give dignity to everybody… the shuls … are full of gay families and [they are] accepted. (Jason)

One option for participants was thus to relocate to a more modern, tolerant Liberal Jewish community, though they continue to feel residual unease at the more easy-going attitude of these communities:

> 'this is a shul that's very accepting…it's very liberal…and there's a bunch of gays that go there … I don't resonate with it. It's not what I was brought up with … So, in some ways it leaves me a little in limbo…' (Dean)

'there is no possible path down which to go to remain Orthodox, Jewish Orthodox gay and sort of totally at one and accepted in your community. Um because it's still taboo and you don't see gay people, at least openly gay people, openly gay couples especially at Orthodox shuls.' (Sam)

'Judaism … It's such a rich way to live your life. And I was told that… it's got everything ... all you need to do is to follow the rulebook and then suddenly you're gay and there's nothing.' (Dean)

Sam attempts to maintain his Jewish observance, but others

'found the idea that I was shomer shabbat or shomer kashrut and at a gay bar so fantastical… so why should I bother, no one else is. … there's a reason why there's no big gay community in Jerusalem. There's just one bar because it's, it's just, it just can't be done. So, to some extent, I think why should I bother?'

This leaves him with a deep sense of:

'Resentment… Always feel like I'm the odd one out. The, there's a reason why people make a joke about the only gay in the village because that's an actual, it's how I feel sometimes… even if you can be very Jewish and gay and I am very Jewish. I still keep kosher exactly as I did 10 years ago…and I will for the rest of my life … It's tradition. It's my people. My family. I still feel very Jewish, very strongly'

Sam's strong spiritual connection to Judaism conflicts with his sense of communal rejection and otherness. So it is curious that he seems the most content spiritually of all the participants, when he presented the most explicit sexual content before coming out.

There is a repeated emphasis on the discomfort experienced by participants, who grew up in an orthodox environment, in a more liberal, tolerant community, in that they feel like misfits.

Relationship with God

Dean prays to God on Yom Kippur, doing Teshuva (asking for forgiveness for sins):

'If I stole, I'd do teshuva for that. If I ate [non-Kosher], I'll do teshuva for that…. The gay stuff, it is on you God. Like, I'm just not apologising. I'm not doing teshuva. I mean, you gave this to me and so, you know, deal with it, sort of thing. So, religiously and theologically, it was never that big of a deal.'

Dean accepts that being gay is biologically determined by God rather than a lifestyle choice.

Dylan is also close to God and to his Judaism:

> 'there's nothing wrong with identifying as a gay person. …. That's to do with me and God…That's the way God made me… …there are 613 commandments in the Torah …I don't feel I can keep all of them anyway. … I try and leave the world a better place than I inherited it in and I try and give people a positive understanding of Judaism and Jewish culture through the way that I live … if I fall short on some things, that's life. And I have to justify that to God when I get there …I don't feel that I need to choose between being gay and being Jewish'

Dylan's positive relationship with God and Judaism powers his involvement in the Jewish community. He had little to share on the spiritual plane during the time of coming out, and afterwards but now has much to share, suggesting that perhaps his spiritual connection has grown.

George's spiritual relationship with God has also sustained his turbulent journey, although his relationship with Orthodoxy has attenuated:

> 'for a… long time … the only person I could speak to was God. I had this very deep relationship … because I was basically praying the gay away.'

He was exceptional among participants in the closeness of this relationship with God. But like the others, he believes it is 'the people [who] are the problem… as opposed to God.'

After a 'rough patch', Darren's relationship with God is recovering:

> 'my relationship with Judaism and God isn't what it was, but we're getting there … I think I just needed time to actually be an adult by myself…. we had our little break um but it's still very important to me… I also feel a lot of guilt for blaming God for things when actually I'm really happy with the way things have worked out.'

This demonstrates again that there is a deep connection with God that exists, but it seems as if Darren needed to develop independently into a man he felt comfortable with in order to continue this relationship.

Ongoing Questions

An ongoing question for some participants regarded dating and marrying Jews, or non-Jews:

> 'one constant issue I have …. is do I want to restrict myself to dating Jewish guys?' (Dean)

However, this question calls on a bigger overriding challenge; that when you are gay the question of your place in the Jewish community and the Jewish line of continuity remains more complex.

An ongoing question for Darren is the existence of God:

> 'Why would there be a God if I had such a horrible sort of teen life, you know? But then, you know, there is a God and I'm, you know, I'm going to say you're made in God's image, you know what, I'm gay, is God gay?'

These sorts of questions about God resonated through a few participant responses, questioning the potential reconciliation of suffering with being Jewish and being gay and believing in Judaism.

Ultimate acceptance of identity

Across all participants there was a strong sense of acceptance of identity, specifically of a dual Jewish and gay identity. This points at an inner sense of peace and steadiness, that was less present previously. Jason explains how the first place he felt that he could merge his gay and Jewish identities peacefully was in a more progressive Jewish setting, that is not Orthodox:

> 'it was the first place that I could breathe completely as like a unified human being that I was gay and Jewish. I could focus on things that weren't being gay and Jewish. I could just be Jewish and … I just felt fully accepted and fully embraced… my acceptance wasn't dependent on a rabbi dealing with the halachic verse, halachic content. My acceptance into the community was not dependent on anything… I felt incredible, was my experience.'

This points to the developing beliefs across all participants that in fact they have not found adequate space within Orthodox Judaism for a healthy gay and Jewish dual-identity. Furthermore, it shows how over time each participant has been working towards, and continues to work towards, a united sense of dual-identity in a space that they feel comfortable with. It is notable that over half of the participants felt they had to leave London to find space for their united identity. Each participant presented a sense of peace with their gay and Jewish identity, in some way, even if there were still some concerns about how exactly their future would unfold, in terms of marriage, children and so on. This unified sense of identity was presented as a good and fulfilling feeling for all participants.

Dean also presents a deep sense of acceptance of his Jewish-gay identity, when he discussed his experience of being gay in the Jewish community. He outlines a common notion across participants, that although his dual-identity comes with challenges, ultimately he has accepted the identity as it is, and would not change it:

> 'if today you told me right now you have this magic wand or this pill that would make me straight …I definitely wouldn't take it. Like in terms of my identity, I'm now very comfortable with this …I just know I'm gay and it's a fact about me and that's, that's totally fine. Um, I think it's more just about … it's still not a normal thing. The fact, the fact I still have to come out every day'

Dean presents an overwhelming sense of acceptance around who he is, alongside accepting the challenges it comes with, such as not being 'normal'. He depicts this dual sense of challenge and acceptance of his dual-identity when he explains: 'It still sucks and I wouldn't do it any differently but you know it is what it is.' Ultimately, this realistic acceptance of identity, albeit one that comes with challenges, was present across all participants and points at a deeply spiritual process, even if it is one that is not religious, or Orthodox, in nature.

Summary

Spiritual issues featured most prominently in the temporal state for all participants. The major themes that emerged were the problem with Orthodox Judaism, relationship with God, and ongoing questions. There is also a sense of non-religious spirituality in the overwhelming sense of identity acceptance across all participants.

5.6e
Summary of *The Temporal:*
Physical issues were less of an ongoing challenging dimension. One participant had ongoing physical issues but for the rest, pain, struggle, stuck-ness and shame seem to have eased. Social questions were still laced with challenges and dilemmas, above all, the struggle to place oneself in the Orthodox Jewish community. Issues of safety around coming out were raised, and of challenging the lack of gay, non-sexual reference points growing up.

The personal dimension is characterized by poignant paradoxes: loss and discovery, hopes and reality, connection and distance from Judaism. The spiritual dimension was the fullest of all time phases, especially in the temporal phase. The main topics that surfaced were the

ongoing problems with Orthodoxy, ongoing questions and a continuing, though turbulent, relationship with God. A dichotomy emerged: participants maintained meaningful relationships with God, but not necessarily with the Orthodox Jewish community. There was also a reference to non-religious spirituality in the ultimate acceptance of one's own identity.

5.7

Summary of Findings

Aspects of the summaries throughout the Findings chapter have been compiled below to provide an overriding summary of findings:

Overall, the past was the most saturated point of time when exploring the experience of coming out. This is with the exception of the spiritual world, which presented most powerfully in the temporal time phase. Evidently there was much material expressed relating to the physical, communal and personal worlds before coming out, all seem linked to an external identity, all of which were laced with Judaism and pain. The only evidence of spirituality took the form of praying to God to get rid of this pain, though paradoxically, the pain and conflict were rooted in participants' religious identity. The past has a main focus on identity.

In the present time phase there was most material presented in relation to the physical world. The physical sense of stuck-ness and inability to communicate effectively could explain the lack of material shared in the other worlds in the *Present,* there was a clear emphasis on an embodied experience. The spiritual world was not touched on much, there were three references to the spiritual aspect of God, two of which were expressions of frustration, but one was of support. The present has a focus on embodiment.

After both coming out phases, religious restrictions remained challenging for some, as did the intense shame and physical manifestations of emotion. Socially there was some disappointment, through rejection, but overall, strong relief at improved relationships and the discovery of a gay community. The personal dimension is marked by the paradox, as in the *Present*, of relief and struggle. Spirituality featured rather more after coming out, in terms of distance from Orthodox Judaism, sometimes though reduced observance or for mental-health purposes. In this way the focus on the future was relationships and emotions.

Physical issues were less of an ongoing challenge in the temporal time phase, social questions were still laced with challenges and dilemmas, above all, the struggle to place

oneself in the Orthodox Jewish community. The personal dimension is characterized by poignant paradoxes: loss and discovery, hopes and reality, connection and distance from Judaism. The spiritual dimension was the fullest of all time phases, the main topics that surfaced were the ongoing problems with Orthodoxy, ongoing questions and a continuing, though turbulent, relationship with God. A dichotomy emerged: participants maintained meaningful relationships with God, but not necessarily with the Orthodox Jewish community. In this way, the temporal phase focused on spirituality and meaning.

Overall, the key theme of the past was identity, of the present was embodiment, of the future was relationships and emotions, and of the temporal state was spirituality and meaning. This is depicted below in Fig 7.

Fig 7: Summary of findings through the time-phases
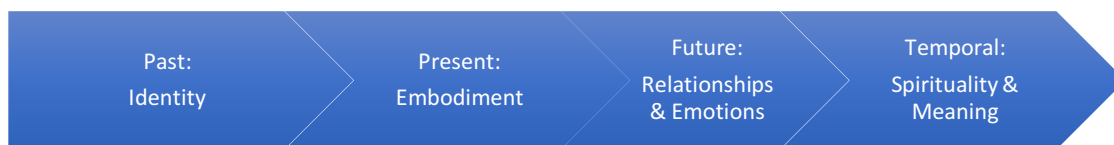
It is noticeable that the process depicted in Fig 7 moves from the outside in, that is the identity of the past was largely focused on external factors, such as religious practices, rituals, school life, and so on. The present then moves to one's own bodily experience, the future shifted focus to meaningful relationships based on internal connections, and emotions and the temporal phase focuses on an inner meaning that transcends oneself.

The key findings are now be explored in relation to the literature presented in the Literature Review (Chapter 3) in the following chapter 6: Discussion.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1
Introduction to Discussion

The findings that were presented in Chapter 5 are now explored in relation to the literature presented in Chapter 3. The format of this discussion chapter will follow the time scale and world dimensions, referred to in the findings. The discussion chapter will first consider the *past,* that is the time before coming out. Under this phase of time, each of the four worlds will be considered in turn: physical, social, personal and spiritual. Under each category key themes have been drawn out that link the interview data with the relevant literature. These themes will be headed under participant quotes, selected for their powerful ability to depict the experience under exploration. This process will then be repeated under the *present* time phase (the moment of coming out), the *future* time phase (after having come out) and then the *temporal* time phase (participants' present moment of vision).

6.2
The Past: Before Coming Out

There is an intimate and multi-faceted overlap between the themes that emerge in the past, with all relevant literature reported in the review (Chapter 3). This discussion considers some of the key themes reported about the past in relation to this literature, through an assessment of each dimension, progressing from the physical to the social, personal and spiritual worlds in turn.

6.2a
Physical world

In the physical world before coming out, the key themes that emerged from the findings were: Orthodox Jewish observance, the journey of sexual discovery, the realisation of being gay, and suffering. These findings link closely with the theories and ideas of Deurzen (2009, 2015), Sartre (1969), Foucault (1976), Troiden (1989) and Purena (2015). This will be

explored in depth below.

<u>'Judaism was a big part of our lives'</u>

This statement depicts the multi-dimensional experience of Jewish living described by all participants, which can be understood in relation to Deurzen's theory (2009) of the four dimensions of existence. This multi-dimensionality manifested not only physically, in terms of observance, but also socially, in terms of school and community. Further, each participant had a strong internal sense of Judaism which on a spiritual level had constituted their primary representation of spirituality from an early age. In this way, Judaism presents as a multi-dimensional religion; Scherman and Zlotowitz (2000) explain that it is indeed meant to be a completely immersive religion, as symbolised by the central Jewish prayer, the Shema, and by the objects used in religious worship: the tefillin. The Shema demonstrates the multi-dimensional nature of commitment to God, through it's reference to serving God with your heart (emotions), soul (spirituality) and all your possessions (physical). Teffillin are small black boxes containing the Shema prayer, that are wrapped daily to one's right arm, next to their heart, and their forehead. This symbolises the holistic nature of worship expectation, that one should serve God with their arms (physical actions), their heart (emotions) and their heads (intellect). Judaism is thus a multi-dimensional religion which aims to infuse every element of daily life with spirituality (Tatz, 1993). The findings of the study show that Judaism has indeed hugely and comprehensively impacted participants' lives, even if the desired effect of enhanced proximity to Orthodox Judaism had not necessarily resulted.

<u>'Judaism kind of enabled me . . . to basically ignore the entire thing'</u>

While their strong sense of Judaism brought participants much pleasure, aspects of Jewish law also enabled some to ignore their sexual orientation entirely. This finding supports Foucault's theory of the suppression myth set out in *the History of Sexuality* (1976). The theory holds that society develops frameworks (discourses) that suppress discussion of sexuality in general, and with particular rigour in the case of aspects of sexuality such as orientation. Foucault argues that this develops a structure in which people model their

pleasures and desires in conformity with the accepted norm rather than their individual preferences. Judaism appears to be one such sexuality- supressing framework; all participants mentioned a lack of open dialogue about anything to do with sex, intimacy or sexuality either at home or at school. This is especially true of sexual orientation; most participants said they did not know what being gay meant, or even whether one could be Jewish and gay. Arguably, this silence is intended to help individuals suppress their sexual desires for the greater good of society, especially in relation to unconventional orientation. Dean, for example, referred to shomer nagiah: the laws strictly forbidding any touch between man and woman before marriage. This illustrates Foucault's theory across two different dimensions: first, this law explicitly enables gay individuals to avoid any heterosexual contact whatsoever until marriage, postponing the confrontation with reality that individuals outside the community may experience during adolescence. This connects to Troiden's (1989) observation that boys become aware of sexual signals at about the age of 12; for those observing the laws of shomer nagiah, this awareness could be postponed. Furthermore, the laws of shomer nagiah relate only to heterosexual contact, the fact there are no laws in place avoiding same-sex physical intimacy before marriage arguably facilities an avoidance of conversation surrounding same sex attraction entirely.

'I just thought it [masturbation] was something that I had that was like an illness'

The absence of conversation around sexuality, and even puberty, for all participants was painful. Sartre (1969) explains that the conflict between the seen and the unseen leads to an underlying sexual tension. Arguably, the balance of seen and unseen, known and unknown, was so unbalanced that the ensuing unhealthy sexual tension was overwhelmingly negative for participants. Sartre (1969) describes how the more individuals are seen by others, the more one becomes; consequently they realise there is more they still do not know, and they may then seek to learn more, to become more, in an endless progression. In this way, there is an ongoing dance between Being, through being seen, and Nothingness, through not being seen entirely, hence Sartre's title: *Being and Nothingness*. He explains that relational existence is an ongoing fluctuation between Being and Nothingness, being seen and not seen, and this fluctuation leads to an overriding sexual

tension. Sartre argues that in some intimate cases this fluctuating dance between being and nothingness arouses one's sexual tension to a peak of climax, epitomised in orgasm, which inevitably collapses back into nothingness as soon as it is reached. When considering this flux between being and nothingness, being seen and unseen, known and unknown, we can more easily understand these Orthodox participants' development of sexuality through private exploration of pornography and masturbation.

While aspects of sexuality are often unknown, being private in nature, hence the inevitable sexual tension, for these participants there was no conversation surrounding sex or sexuality at home in preparation for, or during, their pubescent development at all. In this way, arousal, masturbation and pornography were areas left unspoken, leaving participants confused, concerned and scared when the inevitable unfolded. Due to this sexual arousal, these boys also felt unable to discuss such matters with friends, leading to a greater sense of isolation than might be experienced by their non-religious or non-Jewish peers. This could especially be true since participants also mentioned that they did not know any gay, orthodox Jewish adults, so even living as a gay man was unseen. It is striking that for these boys, there was an overwhelming amount of the unknown, unspoken and unseen, which could have made the tension of their own private discovery and exposure all the more unsettling. Perhaps when there is a disproportionate imbalance of knowledge and awareness, in the face of the unknown and unseen, the tension can be harmful, disturbing, even debilitating, as Jason describes; he was so terrified after having masturbated with male pornography, he could not even get out of bed.

Purena (2015) also mentions the damage that can be caused by suppression; storing so much in the unconscious can lead to painful isolation. This could also explain the struggle participants described as a result of their lack of sexual conversation and education. The harsh paradox of explicit viewing (pornography), in contrast to an extreme sense of not knowing (absence of education/conversation at home), not only heightens tension as Sartre (1969) suggests, but can also give rise to false beliefs. Several participants explained that their sexual education came from pornography, an unrealistic medium; further until this day their view of homosexual relationships continued to be ultimately sexual, as opposed to relational, because of this exposure to pornography. One participant describes the secret,

explicit tendencies that developed in the form of sex with strangers as an erotic secret that provided a 'thrill', but there was only one that presented the sexual tension with this stance.

Jewish writers (Tatz, 1993; Scherman, 2005; Scherman & Zlotowitz, 2000) suggest that Judaism should integrate spirituality into all dimensions of existence, including the sexual, as we see from the fact that there are Jewish texts teaching sex and sexuality. However, participants had had no exposure to this teaching as part of their education, despite the fact that they had been subjected to many heteronormative messages. This could suggest that the education provided by their faith primary schools was not as comprehensive as the religion suggests it should be, and could explain a good deal of the enormous gap in their sexual understanding. This further verifies Foucault's position that a community's discourse suppresses sexuality. It would be interesting to explore whether this is still the case, given the current requirement for all British schools – including faith schools - to offer sexual education as part of the Personal, Social, Health, Economic Education (PSHE) curriculum. This could also impact an individual's awareness of being gay. Troiden (1989) explains that as awareness of sexuality increases at age 12 men can start to identify themselves as gay. However, although all but one participant described being aroused consistently by male pornography from a young age, none related that to being gay until several years later, and for half of the participants, over a decade later. This could be because none had been educated about what it meant to be gay. Perhaps if they had had more information they would have realised this earlier. Since so many felt pain and regret that it had taken so long to discover their gay identity, it is arguable that more thorough sex education could have spared them much suffering.

'Being gay is a disorder of some sort that can be fixed'

This intense sense of pain on the physical dimension before coming out manifested for all participants, such as in the form of depression, temperatures, body and stomach aches and self-harm, all of which were relieved after the participants had come out. This recalls Buber (1934) and Merleau-Ponty's (1945) warnings about the dangers of living in an 'inauthentic' way that is not true to oneself. The findings also support the research into the links between being gay and suicide, depression and substance- dependency issues (Chakraborty, 2011), as

well as the graphic descriptions of the physical pain experienced by homosexual men who have not yet come out in *Velvet Rage* (2012). This further corroborates Purena's (2015) view that as long as the consciousness is hidden, the individual can be in a very painful position. Kierkegaard (1846) would probably describe this state as the despair which could ultimately serve as the springboard to the leap of faith needed to achieve a healthier state of mind.

The notion that being gay is a problem to be fixed voiced by many participants, is also referred to by Slomowitz (2015), who outlines the problems of homosexuality for Jews, and Mark (2008), who describes the internal contradictions that may ultimately push one to conversion therapy in search of resolution. Two solutions were offered to participants: first, to marry an Orthodox lesbian woman in order to fulfil the law of having children, and second, to undergo conversion therapy. This also relates to Foucault's (1976) discourse theory, that is the discourse that develops around the suppressed topic of sexuality is one that serves the greater cause of the framework; in this case, participants were pressurized to have children and/or change their sexual orientation to heterosexual. Four participants mentioned conversion therapy; two dismissed it out of hand and the other two underwent this process for several years. While it ultimately failed to shift their orientation to heterosexual, it did, as Slomowitz (2015) predicts, provide a sense of comfort to both participants in that they did not experience their pain alone. For these participants, this can be seen as the step Mondimore (2002) describes, of allowing others to see aspects of who you are that have previously remained hidden - in this case a gay identity.

6.2b
Social World

In the social world before coming out, the key themes that surfaced were: the Jewish social scene, the perception of being gay, the lack of gay role models, fear of rejection and judgement by others, and secrets and isolation. These will be explored here in relation to the relevant literature presented in Chapter 3.

<u>'I must have thought non-Jews could be gay but Jews can't be gay'</u>

The holistic nature of Orthodox Jewish life has been explored in the section above concerning the physical world. Regarding the social world before coming out, the same principle applies, in that social existence was almost entirely Jewish. Many participants reported having no non-Jewish friends, nor attending any non-Jewish clubs, schools, societies or social events. Foucault's (1976) observations on discourse are clearly relevant in this social context. Furthermore, finding a way to live Judaism, as separate from the Orthodox norms instilled by society, synagogue and schools, was challenging, as there was no part of life that was not Jewish. This highlights Kierkegaard's (1849) position that living outside of the norms and doctrines of religion is very difficult and can lead to inauthentic living. Nietzsche (1886) too believed that authentic living requires stepping out of conventional 'herd' morality, and this is exemplified by the participants' accounts. That is, finding a way of life that may differ from religious norms, but with which they feel comfortable had always seemed a challenge. Essentially this depicts the challenge that Kierkegaard (1849) explains epitomises the human struggle - the fact that we are humans connected to a greater infinite source, thrown into a finite world. Living socially presents this ongoing friction between striving to be one's true self while living in a finite society of boundaries. This dilemma is referenced by Deurzen (2015) too, especially in relation to living in an ongoing state of paradox. Just as Deurzen acknowledges paradox on every dimension of existence, between what is seen and not seen, known and not known, she depicts this paradox by acknowledging and exploring sexuality as a powerful force overall, but without explicit exploration of sexual orientation. This reflects the Jewish environment in which these participants grew up; everyone lived in a body, yet no-one spoke about the developing body. Being fruitful (bearing children) is a fundamental pillar of Judaism yet no-one taught them about sex. There were gay people in the wider society but there were no gay Jews in sight. The literature corroborates and explains participants' anxiety about coming out and addressing their sexual orientation openly.

In this situation, the dilemma is heightened by the absence of any gay role models for the participants during childhood and adolescence. They describe the confusing state of suspecting a gay identity, but having no image of what being gay looks like for an Orthodox Jew. This further highlights the power central to Foucault's discourse theory; homosexuality is entirely suppressed, taboo in discussion, and with a complete lack of role models. All of

this is conducive to Sartre's Nothingness (1969), it is this absence of an image of what these participants' futures could look like that arguably led to the despair that some of them experienced in the personal world. Participants described the despair at not knowing what their futures would look like, if it could not be the heteronormative one taught by Judaism. In Foucault's (1976) terms one could argue that since they could not see themselves fitting into mainstream heteronormative discourse, or in Kierkegaards' theory of religious framework (1849); they did not know where they fitted in, and experienced Kierkegaardian despair, the trigger for the leap of faith into a more authentic future. In this context, that leap could be seen as attending therapy, coming out or internal validation. The leap is subjective, but according to Kierkegaard the despair nevertheless leads to a leap of some sort towards a more authentic future.

'Oh my gosh now I'm going to be hurting . . . the parents'

All participants described a fear of judgement or rejection by others, which resonates with Mondimore's (2002) theory that individuals assess risk before allowing others to see their sexual orientation. Mondimore explains that the first stage is to accept one's own identity; only after that will they consider sharing it with others. In doing this they will analyse the risks associated with disclosure. A significant factor to consider when assessing risk is the pain that can be triggered by the reactions of others; such reaction might include a judgemental attitude, or the fear of rupturing their parent's relationship and causing others pain. Many participants considered strategies before sharing their sexual orientation with family and friends, such as telling siblings first so that they could support their parents or help the participant break the news. One strategy employed to avoid hurting loved ones was to constantly try to please others, manifesting in several participants becoming highly educated, successful, accomplished and overall high achievers. Some explained this was an attempt to please others, even if it did not please themselves, a form of over-compensation referred to extensively in *Velvet Rage* (2012). These revelations indicate that risks are assessed before disclosure to others, and that fear of judgement, rejection and causing others pain is viewed as a considerable risk factor. The strong fear of judgement stands out as being at odds with Jewish teachings about not judging others (Rappaport, 2015). Although judgement of others is prohibited in Judaism, participants still feared judgement

by others, even their own parents.

'There's still a part of me that feels . . . fundamentally unlovable . . . it's just about having a secret more than anything else.'

One of the key findings that arose from the pre-coming out period is the social impact of having a secret. Participants spoke of shame and physical symptoms of being unwell arising from having a sexual orientation that was unspoken, unrevealed and, for them, shameful. However, on a social dimension, secrecy had a completely different array of impacts. This relates to Buber's I-Thou theory (1934), which explains that if individuals do not fully engage in a meaningful Encounter with others, they remain in the more superficial I-It state of experiencing another, or being experienced. In this way, neither party grows from the interaction, no transcendence is attained, so the unfolding relationships lack meaning. Buber explains that if an individual has too many I-It experiences, and not enough meaningful I-Thou encounters, they will suffer in the long run and even turn to more instant, albeit superficial, ways to acquire a sense of meaning or fulfilment, such as drugs or promiscuity. Since sexuality is such a core part of existence, keeping a significant aspect of that sexuality, such as orientation, a secret in meaningful relationships can inhibit meaningful I-Thou encounters. Therefore, according to Buber, in these circumstances most relationships that develop will be surface level I-It experiences, leading individuals to crave meaningful, fulfilling and authentic life experiences. This could explain the promiscuous, high-risk behaviours that Purena (2015) describes, as well as the significant mental-health issues related to a homosexual identity (Chakraborty, 2011).

The notion of secrecy also relates to Sartre's theory of bad faith (1969), which refers to the ways individuals under great social or cultural pressure assume false values, denying their inner freedom and authenticity in an effort to conform. We can see arguably two layers of bad faith in participants' accounts: first, a sense of bad faith to oneself, in which they are not fully open to themselves about their true sexual orientation, leading them to perceive themselves in a way that is not authentic. Second, participants described an experience of bad faith in their relations with all of those around them, in that they pretended to an orientation not truly theirs, in order to conform to the socio-cultural values of their

Orthodox Jewish community. This leads to multiple layers of inauthenticity, consequently multiple layers of struggle and pain. Participants described a social experience laced with secrets and bad faith, with consequences predicted by Sartre: pain and struggle, which can ultimately lead to the despair described by Kierkegaard (1846) and the sense of inauthenticity that Merleau-Ponty (1945) describes as the result of denying the truth. This also relates to Deurzen's (2009) theory of the four worlds: humans strive for authenticity and consistency across the dimensions. A denial of authentic expression on the social dimension, even if honest reflection has been reached in other worlds, will cause tension and suffering. Purena (2015) elaborates on the pain that can arise when an individual cannot be themselves with anybody. They may share parts of themselves with their friends and families, and other parts of themselves in secret intimate relationships, but they are unable to share all of themselves with anybody. This fragmentation of the self can lead to a terrible place of isolation, alienation and eventually dissociation, resulting in tremendous pain. Most participants describe a process echoed in many biographical accounts of the coming-out process and elaborated on by Downs (2012), in which two personalities develop: one the individual knows and one that everyone else knows. This lack of authentic expression and consequent acceptance by others, by anyone, can lead to a strong sense of being unlovable. This unlovable feeling can be affiliated to a struggle in building friendships and other long-standing relationships, unhealthy dependencies, self-harm and suicidal ideation. Downs explores this phenomenon, which is eloquently encapsulated in his title, *Velvet Rage*, in his account of this paradoxical experience of intense pain: inner rage laced with a beautiful, 'velvet' exterior for public consumption.

6.2c

Personal World:

In the personal world the following findings emerged: personal relationship with Judaism, mental health and despair, realisation of a gay identity and the development of an alternate identity, and over-compensation. These findings overlap with the literature explored above, but the discussion below draws closely on Deurzen's (2015) work on the contrasts that surface across the different dimensions.

'I was literally on a bridge and I was like oh, maybe I should just jump off'

While Judaism was powerfully present in both the external physical and social worlds, for most participants it was hardly present in the inner personal world; only two mentioned a personal value of some sort, and even these references were minimal. This highlights the discrepancy between the inner and outer worlds, the paradox to which Deurzen (2015) refers. It could be this powerful discrepancy between the immersive Judaism of the outer world and the almost complete lack of Jewish spirituality in the inner world that accounts for the inner void participants describe. This inner void was filled differently for different participants, but its most powerful manifestation seemed to take the form of mental-health struggles and feelings of despair. Feelings of depression, anxiety, stress and suicidal ideation were present, along with the physical symptoms noted on the physical plane. These strong feelings are arguably the dangerous manifestations Buber (1934) associates with ongoing superficial experiences, the despair Kierkegaard (1846; 1849) describes as the consequence of living in an inauthentic way, the threat of inauthenticity Merleau–Ponty (1945) describes as arising when truth is denied and the hazards of living in a Sartrean (1969) state of bad faith. The threats to authentic existence identified by these existential philosophers can be seen to manifest in the mental-health struggles that have been found to be affiliated with a homosexual identity (Chakraborty, 2011; Downs, 2012; Mondimore, 2002).

A powerful feeling presented in the personal world was the fear of not fitting into their Orthodox Jewish community if they came out as gay, since Jewish community life was such an overwhelming influence in both the physical and social worlds that it was impossible to imagine any other life. As Ariel (2007) mentions, this could be why many gay males wish to remain in traditional communities and why Halbertal and Koren (2006) explain that for gay Orthodox Jewish men a unique sub-culture emerges, still affiliated with Orthodoxy, as opposed to a merging of cultures, which is typical of other coming out processes. It is this fear of the unknown: Where will I get married? Will my children be Jewish? Will my parents' friends come to my wedding? Will my Rabbi come to my engagement? Can I still attend my synagogue? For several participants it was the impossibility of finding any answers to such questions that was so overwhelmingly terrifying. The insolubility of the questions and the lack of resolution led to a helplessness fuelling suicidal thoughts.

'I remember thinking, I'm definitely going to be gay'

After experiencing the lowest depths of mental and physical torment, participants finally reached a personal realisation of gay identity that pushed them towards acceptance. This aligns with the process outlined by Kon (2003), Mondimore (2002) and Kierkegaard (1846): when despair is reached, acceptance and movement towards a healthier state is embarked on. For some participants this took the form of reparative therapy, or other forms of therapy, for some it was disclosure to friends and family, or simply meeting other gay people and speaking to them. It is important to consider the controversy surrounding attending reparative therapy as a sign of acceptance of sexual orientation. Whilst participants presented this as a sign of acceptance, one could put forward that this is better understood as a step towards acceptance, as the question begs: has one really accepted their sexual orientation if they wish to change it? This links to what acceptance means. Perhaps it is a value-judgement to presume that acceptance means they are content, or have no desire to adapt. It would be worth exploring if one can accept something and still wish to change it?

Importantly, each of these steps towards acceptance came after an inner realisation of gay identity, which served as a difficult but very helpful springboard. This may suggest that despite the ontological view of existential living (Medina, 2015), namely that reality can be redefined each moment, actually the ontic experience of these participants was that their sexual orientation felt fixed. In contrast to Merleau -Ponty's (1945) position, that sexuality is ontological rather than ontic, for these participants accepting the fixed ontic nature of their own sexuality was a helpful process. This is in contrast to Deurzen's (2010) perception of sexuality, which is more in line with participant experiences. Deurzen explains how the physical world is the first world that a person relates to, a baby lives primarily in the physical world, interacting for survival essentials such as food, shelter, cleanliness and so on. In this way, Deurzen explains that first people be, and then they develop and become: 'We *are* first and define ourselves later' (Deurzen and Adams, 2011, p.9). In relation to sexual orientation this can be understood to mean that people have a fixed orientation, that they *are,* and then they navigate what to do with that later. Furthermore, pursuing reparative therapy, which plays on the notion that sexual orientation can be redefined, proved ineffective for

these participants, nor has it been found effective elsewhere (Slomowitz, 2015). Acceptance led to preliminary steps towards expressing sexual orientation, as opposed to suppressing it, leading, as Mondimore (2002) claims, to an increased sense of inner comfort. This is a particularly powerful notion in relation to existential theory. Ultimately a commitment to the ontological, as opposed to the ontic, lies at the heart of existential philosophy, and so the findings here, that actually sexual orientation cannot be redefined, undercuts this. Furthermore, it can be considered highly offensive to tell someone who identifies as gay that it is something they can redefine. This is a gaping contradiction in existential theory, one that needs addressing. It could be this dichotomy that prevents sexual orientation being explored extensively in existential works.

<u>'I built an aura of perfection around myself'</u>

The idea that participants developed a public alter-ego to hide, or overcompensate for, being gay has been explored in the physical and social worlds. The notable addition in the personal world is the internal pressure imposed by this alternate identity, highlighting yet another paradox across worlds (Deurzen, 2015). Perfection, over-achievement and extensive voluntary commitments were described as painting a lofty image of the individual in both the physical and social worlds. Paradoxically, however, the inner personal world, replete with a sense of shame and secrets, did not feel consistent with this brilliant exterior. This contrast across worlds can be seen as heightening the pressure on some participants before they came out. Half of them described how the very perfection of their inauthentic exterior made them all the more fearful of disappointing others when they came out as gay. This brought an added dimension to the fear they experienced.

6.2d

Spiritual world:

It is striking that most participants did not share anything of a spiritual nature before coming out, in relation to religion or otherwise.

<u>'praying the gay away'</u>

Despite the fact that Judaism was so central to their physical and social worlds, participants

shared very little in relation to the spiritual world. This highlights the fact that although Judaism is fundamentally a religion, and therefore resonant with spirituality, to some extent at least, for these participants Judaism was almost exclusively a socio-cultural lifestyle devoid of spiritual significance. This relates to Kierkegaard's (1849) distinction between faith and religion, and his insistence that to find faith one must step out of the religious framework in order to build a more spiritual existence. The only main finding that emerged in the spiritual world before coming out was the paradoxical notion of 'praying the gay away'. If Judaism is a religion which forbids judgement of others (Rappaport, 2015), then praying to the Jewish God to change one's sexuality should not be necessary. This explains why some participants voiced a spiritual distancing from Judaism, because it became something that was essentially causing them more pain through restriction and guilt. This presentation of religion across all four worlds recalls an intriguing dimension of Deurzen's (2005) four- worlds theory: the Jewish influence on these participants seem to be very strong in both external worlds, and significantly less prevalent in the internal worlds. This imbalance caused much discomfort; it was experienced by all participants in varying ways, and could provide some explanation of the internal contradictions Orthodox Jewish gay individuals experience, as described by Mark (2008).

It would be interesting to explore if this imbalance is linked exclusively to sexual orientation, or if it is a general imbalance across the Orthodox Jewish community, whereby Judaism might be very much present externally, but less so internally. It would also be interesting to consider whether this is the case for Judaism specifically or whether it is found in other world religions. It may perhaps be a component of modern religion, in which case the impact on individuals living Orthodox lifestyles would be an intriguing area for further research. Although there is far less Jewish presence in the internal worlds, most participants wanted to remain affiliated to Judaism in some way, and almost all struggled with the fact, as Ariel (2007) observed, that they might not be able to remain affiliated with Orthodox Judaism. That is, although the presence of Judaism was disproportionately lower in the internal worlds, it was nevertheless something that was precious, important and desired for the participants.

6.3

The Present: moments of coming out

The discussion of the findings around the moments of coming out in light of the relevant literature is again structured under four headings: the physical world, the social world, the personal world and the spiritual world. First, however, there is a consideration of the comprehensive process of coming out as defined by the participants, in relation to the literature.

‘it’s [not] just like [a] magical coming out process. You come out every day of your life.’

The process of coming out has been divided into three phases, which were found to apply to all participants. The first is the coming out to oneself; then there is coming out to others, such as friends, siblings or a Rabbi, followed by the ‘main coming out’, which for all participants was to their parents. This highlights a point raised by a few participants: coming out is not a one-off, singular, definable process; rather it is a process that can take place over time - months, even years, in multiple phases and steps. This feeling of coming out as a gradual process that starts with oneself and follows with others is echoed in most of the literature referenced in this study. Troiden (1989) explains that there is a gradual realisation that the pace at which one’s process unfolds can be impacted by one’s education and societal context. Mondimore (2002) outlines a phased process that aligns with the participants’ experiences: first comes the psychological process of a personal realisation and acceptance, then once risks have been carefully assessed, they may allow others to see them as gay. Purena (2015) explains that sexual preferences are often suppressed from a young age, but might be expressed later on in life when they come out. This matches Kierkegaard’s (1849) observation that that people first identify themselves, and having understood themselves, can then consider how they wish to continue on their life journey, optimising the self they have discovered. This process can repeat over and over as individuals continue to rediscover different aspects of themselves and actualise these new aspects in different contexts. This is also in line with Ali’s (2017) research, highlighting the two-phased approach of coming out being, first an intrapersonal process, within oneself, and then an interpersonal process, involving the sharing with others. The repetitive and

cyclical nature of the coming out process that participants present is also at the heart of Ali and Barden's (2015) research on sexual minorities, emphasising the importance of therapeutic practitioners being mindful of this cyclical process.

While the process of coming out seems to have some commonalities across participants and in the literature, in that it starts with oneself before being shared with others, it is also a process that is deeply personal and unique for each individual. This ties in with Foucault's outlook of discourse bias, in that the meaning of the coming out discourse is in fact biased to each individual and their own context. Downs (2012) highlights this in *Velvet Rage*, describing coming out as a gradual and individual process towards finding authenticity. This fits in with the account of authenticity in the literature as a gradual and personal process. Heidegger (1962), Sartre (1969), Merleau-Ponty (1945), Kierkegaard (1846, 1849), Buber (1934), Nietzsche (1886) and Deurzen (2005, 2015) agree, through their varying formulations, that authenticity is not a fixed, binary authentic/ inauthentic state. Rather it is a gradual and fluctuating journey, in which steps towards authenticity may be made, and glimpses of authenticity might be captured. But it is not a determined, unchangeable, permanent condition, people can fall back into inauthenticity.

For example, Buber explores how the state of authentic I-Thou Encounters is not one in which one can remain permanently; rather it is through the journey of the I-It Experience that glimpses of authentic I-Thou Encounters can be attained. But this too is a temporary state; only through phasing back to the I-It stage can one achieve the I-Thou Encounter again. This relates to the coming-out process; it might be that a meaningful I-Thou Encounter is achieved at the moment an individual accepts their own gay identity; furthermore, moments of authenticity might be sought in the individual's inner, private world. However, this can only be temporary; for example, when relating to others the I-It Experience creeps back in. It might be that eventually moments of I-Thou authenticity can also be sought there as the individual comes out to others, but this is also temporary, as the next person needs to be told, and the next, and the next, as in the progressive journey Sartre describes of Being and Nothingness: when individuals are seen by others they are able to 'Be' in a more authentic way, but when they enter into this more authentic state of Being they then phase into a sensation of Nothingness, as they realise how much remains

unseen.

Sartre's concept of the Gaze is equally subjective and gradual. This concept explores how identity is heavily carved by what others see of us; in this way if an individual 'comes out' others can then see them as gay, helping their authentic identity to surface. However, this is a fluctuating process, similar to the one Buber describes: what about the next person, and the next, and the next? This perception of steps towards authenticity helps us understand that coming out is a gradual process that, for many, happens over and over again. It also relates to Kierkegaard's theory that discovery of oneself, and the choice of how to express that discovered self optimally in the world around them, happens over and over.

Deurzen (2015) frames this as an ongoing confrontation of dilemmas in which one's quest to live authentically is constantly confronted with relational existence. There is an ongoing disparity between who one is, and how others see them. This relates to Kierkegaard's (1846) observation that each of us has an infinite essence that has been thrown into the physical, finite world. The gradual process outlined above, of coming out to oneself, to others and then to one's parents can be seen as an attempt to navigate this paradox of finding one's authentic self and living in a world with others who may define them as something different. According to Foucault (1976) this would be especially challenging in relation to sexual orientation in an Orthodox Jewish community, as conservative societal discourse often suppresses sexuality, and Jewish religious discourse especially does not have space for living as a gay Orthodox Jew. We see that coming out is a gradual process, beginning with oneself and then expanding to others, relating to the gradual process of seeking authenticity within a relational world.

6.3a
Physical:
The physical world captured two significant aspects of experience in the moment of coming out: a strong sense of physical stuck-ness and a feeling of coming out being a very sexual exposure for most participants.

'I was so ashamed that I sat in front of him, just tears streaming down my face and my

In the moments of coming out we see a strong physical presence of stuck-ness in a range of different forms: being unable to speak, being unable to move, having a panic attack, feeling as though one had left their body and while they were stuck, their body carried on for them without them, and having to write down their thoughts instead of speaking because their mouth would not move. This presents as the struggle of sharing for the first time that which is so deeply private, personal and hidden, and relates to Deurzen's literature on the four worlds (2005). At this point participants had recognised their own homosexual orientation, each in varying ways and to varying degrees, so internally, in the personal world, an acknowledgement of being gay had taken place. However, this initial process of coming out refers to exposing something private from within the personal world into the more exposed dimension of the external social world. It seems there is something physically inhibiting in this process that almost paralyzes the body. This can also relate to Sartre's (1969) theory, in that after one has recognised one's own gay identity, but has not shared it, their way of seeing themselves is very different from the Gaze of others. This is an interesting opposite to Bad Faith (Sartre, 1969), which usually refers to self-denial. In this case, participants have self-truth but are hiding it from others. In this way, instead of self-denial, it is a denial of the self to others. Bridging this gap proves difficult, as it still has a dimension of denial, therefore it is understandable that growth towards authenticity seems physically challenging. This also relates to the stuckness Kierkegaard (1846) describes, whereby an individual knows they must take a step, but finds it hard to do. He describes this initial step as a leap of faith, but to initiate that leap is hugely challenging; in fact one often experiences a sense of stuckness first. He ascribes this to the fact that what lies under one's feet after that first leap is taken is so unknown, it is like nothingness, it is difficult to depend on; Kierkegaard describes it as the abyss. This link to the participants' experiences of uncertainty about what living life as a gay Orthodox Jew would look like; taking a step towards that identity was literally like a step off a cliff hanging over the abyss. One participant used this exact analogy when he said it felt like being on the edge of a cliff waiting to jump. He said that the way he managed to take that leap was by detaching from his body. When considering how little grounding there was for each of these participants for living a life as a gay Orthodox Jew, we can understand why exposing their gay identity would

be so overwhelming; it was like stepping into a world saturated with the unknown. This resonates strongly with Kierkegaard's description of the physical stuck-ness one experiences before taking that leap of faith over ground which is nothing but an abyss.

'I'm having sex with a man . . . it was a very sexual exposure . . . it was a very sexual exposure'

This again relates to Deurzen's four-worlds theory, in that for all participants up to this point their understanding of homosexuality and their own identity was mainly, if not entirely, sexual, usually through pornography, masturbation and maybe some drunk experimentation. This follows from the complete lack of education and conversation around homosexuality, and also from the lack of any modelling of gay relationships, or role models for these participants growing up. Other adolescents watch movies with boyfriends and girlfriends dating, flirting and general heterosexual tension and interaction that are not necessarily directly sexual, but which develop a perception of a heterosexual identity and understanding across multiple dimensions. For these participants, the understanding of a homosexual identity was entirely sexual; their journey to the discovery of a homosexual identity, beyond feeling 'different', was lined with sexual stimulation to homosexual cues, mainly pornography. Troiden (1989) describes this process, adding that it makes coming out a very sexual exposure. For example, many participants' family members asked 'how do you know?', to which the main response was either through masturbation, gay pornography or drunk homosexual sex. Considering that these topics had been taboo when they were growing up, this made answering these questions even more uncomfortable. As Foucault (1976) explains, sexuality is often socially suppressed, so whilst revelations of other sorts might have been more comfortable, a very sexual exposure was not only uncomfortable, but was a step toward uncovering a part of existence that was deeply hidden by society.

This also connects to Orthodox Jewish law on sexuality, which states that it is the physical act of homosexual sex that is prohibited, as opposed to homosexual feelings which are not explicitly explored. In this way, Judaism can be seen as having sexualised homosexuality, due to this, even coming out in an Orthodox Jewish community can essentially be seen as a reference to homosexual sex. This could lead to two places as Rabbi Rappaport (2015)

highlights; either the individual will break Torah law by having homosexual relationships or they are faced with a 'formidable challenge' of abstinence. In either case, they are greatly challenged. To knowingly transgress laws of the religion that has so holistically and multi-dimensionally shaped participants' Orthodox Jewish upbringing, can feel as deeply difficult as a life with no meaningful sexual intimacy at all. Both options can feel as a pursuit of inauthentic living, as both go against an inner pull towards what feels right. Sexual exposure is thus not simply about sex, porn and masturbation, but also about sexual decisions going forward that can deeply impact one's sense of authentic living.

6.3b

Social:

In the present phase of time, the moments of coming out, there was a strong sense of relief in the comfort of mixing with other gay Jewish males, but also some anxiety around an unknown response from those they were close to and the notion of utilising particular social connections as a strategy. This is explored in light of the literature.

 'feeling seen by this organisation . . . made me feel comfortable to share with my parents'

There was a mixed response to reparative therapy. It was mentioned by four participants; two dismissed it out of hand as wrong and unhelpful. The other two engaged with the therapy for many years until accepting that it did not help make them heterosexual. This is in line with Borowich's (2006) findings, describing the failure of reparative therapy for Orthodox Jewish homosexuals. However, both reported a benefit of the process, namely the feeling of being understood by others in the organisation and by those who attended, and being able to meet people similar to themselves. Dean explained conversion therapy as: 'one of the most positive things that happened to me in my life', this is because for the first time he met people that were like him and that understood him:

> 'for the first time in my life, I was meeting people with whom I could talk to about this. And, and you know there's people who understood. Like, I mean, this is the…first friend I had in my life.'

This brings into light to value of having others who are like you available to talk to, this can be tricky in a community where being gay, and in fact anything to do with sexuality, is

supressed in conversation through the overriding power dynamic Foucault (1976) refers to.

Whilst Dean commented that he had never before had a real friend until this experience and Jason explained that if it were not for this process, he would never have been able to come out to his parents. This supports the notion explored in the literature review in relation to Borowich's research, that whilst we see that the reparative therapeutic support did not result in sexual reorientation, the ongoing, supportive, safe therapeutic space could have other positive outcomes for the client.

This relates to Sartre's theory of the Gaze (1969), which explains how being seen by others for who you are can bring comfort and lead to authenticity. It relates also to Buber's I-Thou (1934) theory that meaningful authentic relationships can take place when people connect on a transcendent level, for who they really are. This sense of connection and recognition by others brought a tremendous sense of comfort to these two participants, despite the futile object of the exercise, to alter their sexual orientation. These participants engaged with reparative therapy for several years, building friendships, connections and confidence which served as the stepping stone to an ultimate acceptance that their sexual orientation would not become heterosexual. It was only this acceptance that led to the ultimate coming out for both participants, when they were finally able to tell their parents that they were gay and that this would not be changing. Bright (2004) explains that reparative therapy is no longer acceptable according to most ethical boards, for the fact that it has not been found to be effective in sexual reorientation, moreover it has been found to cause much damage in the bigger picture. Considering the positive outcomes participants have described in terms of finding support, recognition, understanding, and so on, it is important to consider how else these aspects of the process can be provided without reparative therapy. Perhaps these characteristics can be specifically emphasised in therapy surrounding LGBT issues. It seems that the power of a group setting is significant for the participants, for the group recognition and connection it provides. This could link to the extreme loneliness that participants reported growing up in a community with no education around intimacy or any gay role models. This could link to the struggles participants reported around finding one's place in the community and connecting authentically to others. It seems that this is something they gained at reparative therapy. Perhaps this can be given through other

means, such as welcoming gay role models into the community and having more diverse education and open conversations at home, especially surrounding sex, sexual orientation, puberty and intimacy.

'I felt like it was just so difficult. It was so difficult.'

The difficulty of telling others links to the struggle experienced in the physical world in relation to a sense of stuck-ness caused by the overwhelming sense of others' unknowability responses. Participants shared their anxiety around the unknown, because they had never had to share anything of this nature before. Their ignorance of how others would respond to their revelation made the disclosure exceptional and recalls Kierkegaard's description of the boldness needed to take the leap of faith into the abyss, into the unknown (1846). This unknown links to Sartre's theory of the Gaze (1969); participants could not predict or anticipate the post-coming out Gaze of friends, family, and the wider community of which they were so much a part. This element of the unknown is not exclusive to the Orthodox Jewish community, where homosexuality was never discussed; in existential literature we see a silence around sexual orientation too. It is significant that despite participants' strong anxiety about the impossibility of knowing how others would respond, one thing each participant did know was that they wanted to remain a part of the Jewish community; they just did not know how, or more importantly whether, it was possible. This is borne out by Ariel's (2007) research, which also highlights the overwhelming desire of gay Jewish men to remain in traditional communities. Coming out was testing this; the response of others would impact whether and how participants would be able to fit into their much-loved Jewish community post-coming out. The unknown element of this not only highlighted uncertainty around how the individual would be received by their friends and family, but also by their entire community, with implications for whether, or how, they would be accepted going forward. The difficulty therefore links to what Slomowitz (2015) calls the bigger 'homosexual problem for Jews'.

 It is this difficulty that led so many participants to put strategies in place before coming out to their parents, such as telling siblings to support their parents, telling friends with whom they could live if they were abandoned by their families, telling friends to practise the

conversation with, and getting moral support or telling a Rabbi for mentorship or guidance. This can be seen as an attempt to minimize the risks of a very unknown situation. Again, it aligns with Kierkegaard's (1846) theory of taking that leap of faith over the abyss; perhaps participants are trying to find an anchor of security in the abyss, even if it is just knowing that their siblings can calm their parents down, or having a place to stay should they be rejected entirely by their families. It seems the steps taken by the participants were a sensible precaution after having assessed the risks of allowing others to see their identity, as Mondimore (2002) explains often happens.

6.3c

Personal:

Two powerful and paradoxical inner experiences emerge on the personal dimension in the time of coming out: a sense of deep shame and pain, but also relief. This not only ties in with much of the existential literature, but also with Jewish works.

<u>'I can't have that full life that is involved in being Jewish . . . to have that family . . . to me that was the ultimate admission of inadequacy'</u>

For many participants, this sense of inadequacy and consequent shame was overwhelming when coming out, and for most, it was the failure to meet Orthodox Jewish heteronormative standards that triggered these feelings. This relates to several aspects of Jewish religious literature, notably the Biblical prohibition of homosexual sex. For most participants, this was not a prohibition they would be able to, or had been able to, avoid if they were to live healthily as a gay man. This inadequacy was not only the result of failure to avoid this transgression, but was deepened by the inability to abide by the central commandment to be fruitful and multiply through a heterosexual marriage. Hence the failure to meet heteronormative expectations of Orthodox Judaism was two-fold, perhaps triggering a double sense of inadequacy. Furthermore, participants explain that the heteronormative messages of Judaism were overwhelmingly present and powerful. This is characteristic of the multi-dimensional nature of Judaism, which strives to infiltrate every part of existence on multiple levels (Tatz, 1993). In this way, the norms communicated are likely to be deep-rooted, on multiple planes, making any deviation likely to be especially

challenging. In Deurzen's terms, it would not just be a deviation in one world, but on all worlds, as this is how Judaism operated for these participants (2005). Their sense of shame and inadequacy is accordingly likely to be multi-dimensional, and therefore all the more powerful. It can be viewed as the experience of despair Kierkegaard (1846) describes, the sense of not knowing where to go or what to do next, of being able to see only into the abyss, because the expectations and norms on every plane of existence are stunted. This is the painful experience of seeing no way out other than taking a leap into the unknown, the unplanned and undiscovered. Perhaps, therefore, it was this deep sense of despair, born of shame, pain and inadequacy that pushed participants to take the leap and share their gay identity with others. This accords with Kon's (2003) account of despair, which he explains, ultimately pushes people to therapy or other forms of support which eventually aid the process of healing and growth.

'Oh my God, I'm actually just finally talking about this.'

Glimpses of personal relief are revealed about coming out, that paradoxically sit alongside the deep feelings of shame. That relief can be understood in light of the enormous build-up to these significant moments. Carrying a secret - suppressing, resisting, denying and avoiding a part of oneself, especially sexual orientation, which is so core to human existence – can, as Mondimore (2002) says, be exhausting as well as damaging. Creating a facade while covering up an inner sense of pain, as Downs (2012) describes, or putting one's sexuality aside for the greater cause of conformity to Foucaultian (1976) societal discourse, is a relentless process. Living in bad faith, on multiple dimensions, limiting the growth of I-Thou Encounters (Buber, 1934) by not expressing one's identity to another entirely and living in a state of inauthenticity as Merleau-Ponty (1945) describes, when truth is denied, builds up dangerously. When considering the exposure of one's sexual orientation against decades of this painful and conflicting backdrop, we can understand the sense of relief in taking that Kierkegaardian (1846) leap and coming out. This can be related to an aspect of Kierkegaard's 'leap' that is not often explored, but is an essential feature of any leap, namely the sense of lifting one's feet above the ground to soar. While the leap can be frightening, it can therefore also be liberating. This can be understood as the orgasmic moment Sartre (1969) describes, when one is truly seen for all that they are; it is perhaps

this sense of relief that the participants describe as characterising the moments of coming out.

6.3d

Spiritual:

What is most noticeable about the spiritual world in the moment of coming out is participants' silence on the subject. Only three participants mentioned anything spiritually linked to religion, and those references were brief and challenging and relating to religion: one was that God sets tests for people to overcome, such as being gay; the other is that due to Judaism's use of harsh terms such as 'abomination' for homosexual sex, it was very off-putting. The silence is striking and links to Kierkegaard's (1849) theory that in order to step towards authenticity, in this case by coming out, one must step outside the familiar religious framework. This suggests that this is what participants in this study were obliged to do in order to come out as gay. However, there was a sense of spirituality that was not related to religion, which linked to a belief in oneself. This belief in oneself ties into the preliminary step of self-acceptance; the intrapersonal that Ali (2017) refers to. It is this working through of one's own identity, and the culminating belief in one's own self, that gave participants the momentum to push through the difficult moments of actually coming out.

6.4

The Future: after coming out

The time period after coming out in this study refers to the time after the 'first coming out' and the 'main coming out' as presented in the findings. The first link with the literature is the confirmation that coming out is not a self-contained process. As so much of the literature suggests (Mondimore, 2002; Troiden, 1989; Purena, 2015; Downs, 2012), this is an ongoing process, different for everybody, but for some lasting an entire lifetime. Like the past and present time dimensions, the future is now explored in relation to Deurzen's four worlds of existence.

6.4a

Physical:

It is notable that the presentation of experience in the physical world is substantially lighter than in previous time dimensions. Only three participants presented experiences that had a strong presence in the physical world, in contrast to previous time dimensions, where all participants presented a powerful presence. Much of the physical presentation in previous time periods included uncomfortable feelings such as stuck-ness, physical pain and suffering. The findings also show that many of the physical symptoms of un-wellness were eased after this coming out, which would explain the reduced physical presentation in the future time phase. This could relate to Buber's I-Thou theory (1934), Sartre's Gaze (1969) and Kierkegaard's (1846) authenticity, all of which suggest that the more one strives towards authenticity, the more at peace one will feel. This would imply that since coming out was such a great step towards authenticity, the discomfort of living with such a significant secret had been eased. It could also link to Deurzen's (2015) theory that the greater the harmony between the dimensions, the less discomfort there will be for the individual. Prior to coming out the participants felt a strong discrepancy between what they knew about themselves and what their parents, and most others, knew of them; hence their inner world conflicted with their external world. The coming out process can be seen as bringing some harmony across these dimensions, easing the tension between the two, thereby easing the individual's physical discomfort.

<u>'Constantly being told that you should love but you can't have sex messes up how you interact with people . . . you have to still feel shame'</u>

The main physical challenge that presented in this time phase was the physical restriction of the Jewish law prohibiting homosexual sex (Rappaport, 2015). In Jewish law homosexual feelings are not forbidden, but the act of gay sex is, meaning that if one identifies as gay, in order to abide by Jewish law they must remain abstinent. As Rappaport says, this is a 'formidable challenge'. When considering this expectation from the perspective of Deurzen's (2005) four worlds, it can be understood as an individual expressing themselves as gay on all dimensions except the most fundamental physical expression of sex. This

discrepancy can be seen to be a huge paradox, which can explain the feelings of restriction experienced. Furthermore, physical intimacy is considered a deep and meaningful form of connection; according to Merleau-Ponty (2014) the world exists only through the embodied experience of it; according to Sartre (1969), orgasm is the ultimate climax reached when one is fully seen for who they really are. With this in mind we can understand sexual abstinence as a restriction on how individuals connect to each other, and to the world, and how intimate their relationship can really be. This can lead to the sense of restriction and frustration described by the participants in the physical world after coming out.

6.4b

Social:

The social world presented a mostly positive experience. There was a sense of relief and improved relationship with others, including the pleasure of finding other gay people to mix with. A small amount of rejection and disappointment was expressed, but only by two individuals and only in very limited form. Overall there were fewer findings about the social world at this point than previously. Earlier fear, concern, secrets and isolation were no longer present after coming out, suggesting that there was less expression in the social world as participants were more at peace with themselves.

<u>'it made me feel validated. It made me feel authentic.'</u>

This was the overwhelming feeling expressed on the social dimension, a feeling of validation from others and of authenticity. This ties in with Sartre's (1969) theory of the journey towards authenticity: when one is seen and validated by others and their gaze, then one can Be. In this context, we see that as the participants exposed their gay identity to others, and others saw and accepted them, this validation facilitated the process of Being. This also links to Buber's (1934) I-Thou theory, that authenticity can develop through true I-Thou Encounters with others; an individual shares themselves with another and is then accepted by them for who they are. In this way, both can be transformed by the relationship, which becomes an authentic growth experience. This is similar to what participants describe in this research. Many of their social relationships developed and grew more meaningful after coming out. Not only were these relationships described as feeling more authentic, but

participants also explained how others opened up to them more about more intimate meaningful parts of their lives. This supports Buber's notion that I-Thou Encounters lead to more such encounters, as after one experiences sublime authentic feelings one craves them again. This evidence of a sense of authenticity after coming out also links to Kierkegaard (1846) and Nietzsche's (1886) insistence that authenticity is possible if one defies what Nietzsche called 'the herd' conventional norms of morality and religion. In *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), Nietzsche argues that we construct masks for ourselves to hide our real natures from each other; all conventional social life is a charade or pretence. Through coming out as gay in an Orthodox Jewish community we can see that these participants did just that. There was an overwhelming sense of relief on the social plane after having come out, as, to their great pleasure and relief, friends and family were more supportive than participants had expected. This could suggest that the Jewish obligation to not judge others (Rappaport, 2015) was more potent than participants had expected.

'I ended up meeting Jewish people in these queer spaces . . . it was like I'm not the only gay in village'

Over half of the participants explained that they only encountered gay communities after coming out, which represented a significant discovery for them. It was important for them to meet other gay people and find a space to socialise, mix and have fun with other LGBT people. This was especially meaningful for participants when they discovered that there were Jewish LGBT individuals in these spaces too. There was something about the identification with others who were also of a LGBT identity that highlighted the difficulty they had experienced growing up in a community with no LGBT presence, even in conversation and education, let alone in person. This contrast may have highlighted the sense of otherness and difference described by Mondimore (2002), which simultaneously strengthened the heteronormative expectations mentioned by Troiden (1989). Heidegger's (1962) *Dasein* throws light on the importance for participants of encountering an LGBT space; its value to the individual lies in the mere fact that that there are spaces catering for people like them, full of people with whom they can identify. Individuals especially highlighted the value of finding other Jews in these LGBT spaces, probably because they could relate to them not only through their sexual orientation, but also through their shared

Jewish identity. For both, this was a unique experience. The sheer value of an LGBT space represents what Foucault (1976) would call the power of a narrative - LGBT spaces create space not just for socialising, advocacy, and so on, but also for a new, evolving discourse. In relation to this research this is especially true for Jewish LGBT individuals, especially those from an Orthodox or more traditional background. In this way, they can be part of, and identify with, the development of a new discourse, which can be understood as emerging from the unique sub-culture described by Halbertal & Koren (2006), created by gay Jews from an Orthodox background. The deep sense of identification with others, and not feeling like the only gay Jew, stands out, highlighting the power of the social world, as Deurzen says, to impose acceptance or rejection by others.

'I had to go away from the Orthodox Jewish community . . . because . . . I think that the Jewish community is psychologically abusing LGBT people, like without realising it and sometimes with realising.'

While this view was not held by most participants, some difficult social experiences after coming out were presented, and this one referenced 'psychological abuse' not only in his own very challenging experience of public shaming, but also in his view of what Judaism does, often unknowingly, to many LGBT people. He explains that Judaism's acceptance of gay feelings alongside the prohibition of gay sex is a torturous process of acceptance of some parts of a gay individual, but not of others. This refers to the acceptance of a gay man going to synagogue each week, but the synagogue's refusal to host his wedding to another man, even if that other man was also Jewish. He describes the acceptance of some parts of a gay man, but not others, as cruel and sees this as unintentionally abusive. This relates to Deurzen's (2005) dimensions of existence; striving towards authentic being involves striving for harmony across all dimensions of being. In the present context, the Orthodox Jewish community envelops young children growing up, becoming the base of their being, expectations and ambitions. But if they are gay their external existence - marriage, pride advocacy, child-rearing and so on, is difficult to place in Orthodox Judaism. Considered from this perspective this dichotomy of enveloped Jewish development, the acceptance of a gay inner world, but rejection of one's external world, explains where this pain stems from. Two other participants voiced some feelings of rejection on a communal level by their Orthodox

youth movement, inconsistently running alongside acceptance by friends and family. Deurzen explains how this clash of worlds can be anxiety-provoking and distressing for individuals (2015). However, only one participant expressed such strong sentiments, and only two others described any social difficulties after having come out; the rest of the participants did not share these views. Rather, their social experiences were more positive. This is a reminder of the unique nature of coming out; as Foucault explains, this is a personal experience, different for everyone.

6.4c

Personal:

In the personal world a sense of relief presented, along with a small amount of inner struggle prompted by internalised homophobia. However, the presentation was significantly less distressing than for the times before and during coming out. Strikingly there was no presentation of mental- health struggles, compensation, despair, shame or other pain that plagued the earlier time dimensions.

<u>'it felt fantastic . . . I . . . wouldn't go back for the world'</u>

Half of the participants presented this deep sense of relief and joy, echoing the relief experienced in the physical and social worlds. This supports the notion discussed already that coming out represents a step towards a more authentic and consequently more peaceful being, with greater harmony acquired across dimensions (Deurzen, 2015), and participants experiencing a sense of relief on each dimension. Being seen for who they really are (Sartre, 1969) allowed them to develop more meaningful I-Thou encounters with others (Buber, 1934). The consistency of relief across these dimensions represents an easing of being, suggesting that after taking the Kierkegaardian (1846) leap of coming out, it was a relief to land on solid ground. This relief resonates multi-dimensionally and sheds light on the mental-health and physical suffering experienced before coming out, when tension built up. This finding is also substantiated in the evidence associating mental-health struggles with gay identity (Chakraborty, 2011).

<u>'It was coming out and then you know I need to work on myself to be able to be okay with being gay'</u>

Alongside personal relief, two participants described a struggle of 'internalised homophobia'. Down (2012) writes extensively on this subject, describing the inner rage gay men experience due to the internalisation of shame and rejection of their sexual orientation. This links closely to the Sartrean Gaze (1969), which posits that an individual can see themselves as others see them. In this case, it is most likely that participants have internalized the homophobic discourse with which they were brought up, and which was reinforced at every level of their lives, in the family and the wider community. As Foucault (1976) explains, a culture of homophobia and prohibition of homosexuality in the Orthodox Jewish community is bound to shape the world-view even of young gay men, who, under pressure to conform, learn to subsume their personal feelings to the greater social good. This explains the gradual nature of any journey to authenticity; Sartre (1969), Buber (1934), Kierkegaard (1846), Deurzen (2005) concur that authenticity is a gradual process - an individual does not complete their mission by coming out and becoming authentic. Rather, it is an ongoing process in staged phases. The individual must continue their journey through this dichotomous sense of relief in the personal world which remains in conflict with an inner homophobia.

6.4d

Spiritual world:

In the previous time dimensions, participants presented little material relating to the spiritual world. Strikingly, after coming out every participant shared something that related to the spiritual dimension.

<u>'I could understand how God could make me gay but I didn't understand how God could make me want to kill myself'</u>

A common problem participants struggled to reconcile in the spiritual dimension was that of mental health. A few participants explained that they had learnt over time that they must

prioritize their mental and physical health over obeying the Jewish law forbidding gay sex. In this way, Jewish law, which had so firmly structured all aspects of their existence (Tatz, 1993), was now as at odds with their well-being. Furthermore, at the centre of Judaism is the value of life and health (Scherman, 2005), yet it was Jewish law itself that they perceived as feeding their un-wellness. The prohibition against gay sex, the inability to be fully embraced by Judaism, developed underlying difficulties for participants, and in order to live healthily, they explained, they had to let go of Judaism. This placed participants in a paradoxical position. They had to distance themselves from Judaism, a religion celebrated for the value it places on life, in order to sustain their well-being. In the time period after coming out this paradox seemed too great to reconcile, evidenced by the fact that every single participant reported a period of reduced observance of Jewish law and customs after coming out, several explicitly stating this was for the benefit of their health. This exemplifies Kierkegaard (1846) and Nietzsche's belief, as Nietzsche (1886) explains that people should stop wanting to merely agree with the majority, as good is not considered good if it is only defined so by others. However, this doesn't resonate with the Jewish philosophical understanding that Jewish law is intended to spark spirituality into every aspect of one's life (Tatz, 1993); for these participants the Jewish law prohibiting gay sex did not feel like an enhancement of spirituality, for some it was even experienced as a hindrance to their health. This forces a more frank and open discussion around homosexuality in Judaism, since Judaism is not meant to be at odds with life, a paradox that has been explored by Rappaport (2015).

'people respected me and just loved me in a way that I couldn't have expected, which was nice'

In the time after coming out we see all participants commented on the level of social acceptance across the board. Participants did refer to tricky encounters with some individuals, organisations and some family members, but even for these participants there was an overwhelming sense of acceptance by others socially, which all participants describes as feeling good. Some participants were surprised by this, but others shared that deep-down they believed that their social circles would accept them. There was a sense of spiritual connection to others in the time after coming out, in participants belief in those

around them, and the satisfaction they felt in others acceptance of them. For many particpants this pointed at a belief not only in their social circles, but in fact in humanity in general, for that was who these circles represented. Arguably it was this belief in oneself, that developed in the personal acceptance in the moments of coming out, combined with belief in those around them, that facilitated the overriding journey of coming out and the journey into the temporal time phase. This is in line with Ali's (2017) description of coming out first being an intrapersonal process, within oneself, and then an interpersonal process, whereby an individual navigates how to share their identity with the world around them. One could say that it was this belief in those around them that allowed participants to follow their process of coming out. Mondimore's (2002) research also supports this notion. He explains how once individuals have come to terms with their own identity, they continually assess the risk of their environments, to determine if they are safe to come out. Arguably, it is this overriding belief in others, that provides a deep spiritual belief that it is indeed safe to continue on the coming out journey.

6.5

Temporality: present moment of vision

The dimension of temporality, for the purposes of this research, refers to the findings shared by participants that specifically relate to their comprehensive vision and perception of their current existence, and how they live with it. The findings presented on the temporal phase are now be considered in relation to the four worlds considered in this research.

6.5a

The Physical

As time progressed through the process of coming out the presentation of experience relating to the physical world declined. Before coming out the physical world was saturated with references to Jewish observance, sexual discovery and physical pain. These feelings declined as time passed and in the temporal phase, there were the fewest findings relating to the physical world.

'I place no emotional value on physical intimacy'

This is the only reference to the physical world in the temporal phase; it is a struggle to associate emotional value with physical intimacy. The participant explains this is because physical intimacy was so isolated from emotional connections from such an early stage in his journey of discovery, that it is now hard to change. Downs (2012) similarly speaks of the challenge many men face in attaching emotional value to physical intimacy, for the same reason. Downs (2012) takes this further, explaining that due to the isolated nature of gay identity, combined with the shame and the rage, there is a lack of trust in others, hindering the development of an emotional connection, which could lead to getting hurt. Therefore, it is easier for some individuals to connect in a purely physical way, without building emotional connection, to avoid the pain of being hurt. This ties in with Deurzen's (2005) theory of the four worlds, in that the connection between individuals will be more deep-rooted, and thus more painful to sever, if it intersects both inner and outer worlds. Hence less risk is attached to an intimacy that remains a purely external connection. While Downs (2012) describes this pattern of relationship as prevalent, it is notable that it was not the experience of the participants in this study. This could be due to the Orthodox background they grew up in, which discourages any physical relationship without meaningful emotional connection, or it could be because it was a difficult thing to share with me as the researcher. It is important to recognise that it might be easier to share more intimate aspects of their existence from the past as this is no longer their reality; however, it could be challenging to share aspects of their current temporal being of which they are not proud, as it is still very much a part of them. Concern about the researcher's Gaze (Sartre, 1969), how I would see them, and what this would mean for how they see themselves, could put them off sharing aspects of sharing their temporal self.

6.5b

The Social

The social world presented very reflective thoughts on the social context in which the participants were, and continue to be, emerged. While the time period immediately after coming out was full of mostly positive material, the temporal phase contained more

reflections on social issues.

'it's like you go back in when you're scared . . . when the world outside isn't ready for you'

For previous time phases participants shared many concerns about how others would respond, the lack of gay role models, the relief or disappointment at others' responses, and so on. The temporal phase was the first time that the responsibility of others in the coming out process was mentioned. This marks a significant shift. The dialogue up until this point placed responsibility on the participants themselves, such as their responsibility to come out, their fears of being rejected or accepted by others and their concerns about how they could fit Judaism into their futures. This is a lot for one young person to carry alone. In the temporal phase, we see the first recognition of the responsibility of others in the coming out process: that is, how, when or whether, an individual comes out depends on the nature of the context they find themselves in. In this way, the process of coming out is a mutual process, whereby the context needs to feel safe in order for the individual to come out. This is especially important in the context of the Orthodox Jewish community. On the one hand, Orthodox Judaism teaches the supreme value of life (Scherman, 2005), as well as the strong prohibition against judging others, but it also teaches that homosexual sex is not allowed and promotes the social desirability of the heteronormative family, complete with children (Rappaport, 2015). These messages can be seen as confusing and may communicate a mixed message in terms of offering a safe environment for coming out. Mondimore (2002) explains that before coming out individuals assess the risks of their environments, which seems to be validated by these findings, but this also seems to only place responsibility on the individual coming out. The reflections on the temporal phase highlight the importance of the safety of the context, but who is responsible for that sense of safety in the context is difficult to pinpoint. For example, does the Jewish community have a responsibility to cultivate a context that feels safe to come out in, are the Rabbis and teachers responsible for this? This ties into Foucault's emphasis on societal dialogue. Previously we considered how social discourse impacts the individual coming out, but we must also consider the role of those responsible for constructing, continuing and reinforcing, or challenging the social, religious and ethical discourse of the Orthodox Jewish community. Rappaport (2015), an influential figure in the Orthodox Jewish community, recognizes this influence. His book on

Homosexuality and Judaism highlights the Jewish responsibility to build a community that is warm, welcoming and non-judgmental to all, especially those who are gay, because of the significant challenge confronting them in the Orthodox Jewish community. Several participants highlighted that they felt the Jewish community had significantly improved in terms of its acceptance and hospitality towards gay men, with several mentioning that they felt homophobia no longer existed much on a personal level within Jewish homes. Participants shared being able to attend synagogue and Shabbat meals comfortably as a gay man, suggesting that works such as Rappaport's have impacted the community.

This relates to another key theme that surfaced in the social world in the temporal phase, the desire for gay non-sexual reference points. Participants explained that not only would this allow them to model the development of their own identity, but also it would avoid the development of a very sex-based homosexual identity through pornography, which seemed to be participants' main gay reference point through development. When considering that their main exposure to what it means to be gay is through sexual material, combined with the Jewish prohibition against gay sex, the need for non-sexual reference points becomes all the more acute. If individuals know that homosexual sex is forbidden, yet their main reference point of what it means to be gay is sexual, then it makes sense that their assessment of the risks involved in deciding whether to come out (Mondimore, 2002) would be even higher. When thinking about the Orthodox Jewish community's discourse on this matter, it makes sense that participants are calling on the community to shift its discourse to one that includes non-sexual gay reference points. Coming out would then no longer be the mainly sexual exposure forbidden in Jewish law.

'coming out is not as you might expect . . . it doesn't solve everything. It still sucks.'

All but one participants highlighted the ongoing dichotomy of being Orthodox Jewish and also gay, and although none expressed any desire to alter either aspect of that dual identity, the struggle to hold them both was present for most of them in this temporal phase. This highlights the notion that a journey towards authentic living is gradual, not a simple, isolated action of coming out and solving one's challenges at a stroke. Rather, along each step of identity development new challenges surface, each needing to be faced anew, in line

with the existential theories of the journey of authenticity outlined in this paper (Sartre, 1969; Heidegger, 1962; Buber, 1934; Deurzen, 2005; Nietzsche, 1886). This especially supports Deurzen's notion that existence is a continuing paradox (2015). Individuals find themselves in positions of dual identities and challenged to reconcile them. In some ways, she argues, this will not be entirely resolved, but steps towards a passionate reconciliation can be made. The dual identity of being gay and growing up Orthodox Jewish presents as a conflict for most participants, and the ongoing dichotomy they navigate is how to fit into both communities: the gay one and the Jewish one. Participants commented that neither is easy, but all agreed that it is easier for a gay individual to fit into a non-Orthodox community than an Orthodox one, on an external dimension, even if it feels uncomfortable internally. This idea is supported by Ariel's (2007) research finding that many gay men who grew up in the Orthodox Jewish community often want to remain affiliated to it.

6.5c

Personal

The findings that presented in the personal world were all paradoxical: loss and discovery, hopes and reality, connection and distance to Judaism. Every participant except one presented information that resonated with this time dimension in the personal world.

<u>'coming out feels so liberating that you think it will solve everything . . . I don't for a second regret it, but like you know . . . it's . . . disappointing'</u>

An underlying paradox runs through all the material presented relating to the personal world. On the one hand, there was relief and liberation, but also disappointment at the outcome. Some participants share this disappointment in relation to the difficulty of being a gay man generally, or being a Jewish gay man, or the shame that has carried over from years ago, or the fact they cannot get married in an Orthodox synagogue, or adopt Orthodox children. There is a paradoxical intimacy, but also a feeling of distance and disappointment, towards Judaism. There is the gain of a liberated gay identity but the loss of so many years of keeping it a secret, and the loss of a heteronormative future as Judaism prescribes. These conflicts resonate throughout the personal world. The notion of internal contradictions resonates through the literature too; Mark (2008) discusses the

overwhelming sense of internal contradictions for gay Jewish men, Slomowitz (2015) presents the homosexual problem confronting Jews and Rappaport (2015) presents the formidable challenge. Sartre (1969) explores human existence in terms of Being juxtaposed with Nothingness, and Deurzen (2015) presents life as an ongoing flow of paradox and passion. Kierkegaard highlights the conflict of existence through his metaphor of life as an infinite essence thrown into a finite world, a paradoxical state that encapsulates all of existence. In this way, the participants experiences can be understood as ontological, in that how they feel changes moment by moment, representing an ever-changing evolving journey. This relates to the evolutionary, paradoxical and fluctuating nature of an existence striving towards authenticity, as described from an existential perspective, suggesting that these participants are presenting a sense of being in line with just that. Evidently, after having come out, and some time has passed, whilst there is a greater sense of external calm, and less internal pain, a sense of inner conflict remains.

6.5d

Spiritual

In the temporal phase, participants presented the most material that resonated with the spiritual world; every participant shared something. The content ranged from problems with Judaism, an ongoing sense of relationship with God, Judaism-oriented questions and non-religious aspects of spirituality included the ultimate acceptance of one's identity.

'I've come to the . . . conclusion that the Orthodox community is not able to give sufficient dignity to LGBT people . . . which is like quite sad.'

All participants voiced an anomalous admiration for Orthodox Judaism alongside a need to distance from it. Not one felt fully comfortable in an Orthodox Jewish community after coming out, despite the fact that they could attend synagogue and speak to their Rabbi, and so on. All felt compelled to explore other branches of Judaism, and while some willingly embraced the more liberal movements (Reform and Liberal), most missed their Orthodox Jewish roots and said that they had been reluctant to move away. This supports Ariel's (2007) finding that most Orthodox Jews who come out do not wish to leave the community

and really grapple with that challenge. Ariel speculates that this is true not only for Orthodox Jews, but would be found to be true also of other traditional religious communities, such as Baptists and Mormons. Ariel's research is twenty years old but his findings seem as true as ever for these participants. It seems that striving so hard for authenticity on all other dimensions has come at the cost for participants of a spiritual need to distance themselves from Orthodox Judaism. This calls into question whether it is possible for Orthodox Judaism to lead to an authentic journey of existence for gay men. If so, it may be that the claim of Judaism to infuse spirituality into every aspect of existence is made in bad faith (Sartre, 1969), or it may be simply mistaken. Perhaps it is simply not feasible, which could be the reason why gay Orthodox Jews have not been found to merge their dual gay and Jewish identities, but need to carve a new sub-culture (Halbertal & Koren, 2006).

There are a lot of implications to be considered here, such as what does this mean for these participants, others like them, and Orthodox Judaism overall. Of course, the implications will differ for each person, but there seems to be a common struggle to merge the dual-identity of Orthodox Jewish and gay in a harmonious way. If this leads to ongoing effort, followed by ongoing failure to do so, then this can lead to bigger picture ramifications of a sense of failure and inadequacy. One could argue that if individuals were told clearly that you cannot be Orthodox Jewish and gay, it would save them the heart ache of failing to merge these identities. However, Orthodox Judaism is a religion that claims to have a space for everyone. Perhaps it is just this claim that makes the reality even more disappointing for some. Or perhaps, it is this claim that keeps the strive for a healthy Orthodox Jewish gay identity alive. One could argue this is achievable, and it is becoming more tangible, even if the community as a whole have not entirely reached this place, but the participants of this research found that despite trying to merge them, eventually they had to give up the Orthodox Jewish identity.

'The truth is for a long time I was the closest to God, because . . . the only person I could speak to was God'

Over half of the participants presented a strong connection to God, most agreeing that it was not God that was the problem, but the people. Most explained they felt at peace with God, as they knew that God had made them the way they were and that judgement belonged to a God who understood; no-one else's judgement mattered. Participants had clearly internalized the Jewish prohibition against judging others (Rappaport, 2015) and applied it to themselves. Furthermore, there was a sense that although God judged, God also understood and saw them for who they really were: people who did not choose this. This gives rise to a true I-Thou Encounter (Buber, 1934); participants explained that the way they relate to God is authentic and meaningful, compassionate and respectful. It also relates to the notion of the Gaze (Sartre, 1969), as participants present their relationship with God as one in which God sees them for who they really are. This sense of authenticity and security in their relationship with God was powerful, so it is interesting that before coming out there was the least presence of data on the spiritual plane, but in the temporal phase there was the most. This could represent a development over time of the spiritual world through the coming out process, signifying a sense of development and inner growth, as predicted by Kierkegaard's (1846) theory of the liberating leap of faith. It is especially intriguing that while all participants were most distant from Orthodox Judaism in the temporal phase, they also express the strongest spiritual presence. This highlights not just Foucault's distinction between religion and spirituality, but also begs the question that although Orthodox Judaism has not persisted externally, it may retain a strong internal impact which is able to thrive now that the individual has stepped towards their own authenticity.

'If today you told me right now you have this magic wand …that would make me straight …I definitely wouldn't take it…It still sucks and I wouldn't do it any differently but you know it is what it is'

There is a deep-rooted acceptance of a gay, and Jewish, identity that is communicated by all participants. None of the participants present this as being challenge-free, but the spiritual nature of it comes from the essence of inner acceptance of the ongoing paradoxes. Deurzen (2009) shares how all humans live with paradox, and it is the acceptance of these paradoxes that help an individual live meaningfully with them. Each participant accepted the paradox

of having challenges being gay, and Jewish, but also accepting that this was their identity. Though it was not necessarily an easy identity to have, it is one none of them would change. This inner acceptance of one's identity, and the challenges that come with it, was a strong theme present in the temporal phase, suggesting it was a result of a challenging journey, through each time phase and across each world of existence.

6.6
Summary of Discussion

Overall it is clear that there is a significant overlap between the findings of this research and the related literature. It is clear that Judaism plays a multi-dimensional role in all participants' lives, influencing their understanding and attitudes towards being gay and their coming-out journey. Chapter 7 concludes this research paper with key points that can be taken and implemented into psychological practice, as well as ideas for further research. Limitations of the study are also highlighted.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This qualitative research study has conducted an existential exploration of the experience of coming out in the Orthodox Jewish community. The eight participants interviewed were aged between 20 and 30, had grown up within an Orthodox Jewish community, and had come out at least three years earlier. The transcribed interview data was analysed through two particular aspects of the phenomenological research tool of SEA: the four worlds and the four time phases. Data was assessed across the different worlds and time frames on 16-point tables. Key themes that emerged from this analysis were discussed in relation to the literature presented at the outset. This concluding chapter considers some key implications for psychotherapy and counselling psychology practice, as well as the limitations of this study and areas for further research.

7.1
Contributions to the field of counselling psychology

Among the most significant values of this research are the deep and intimate understanding of this unique experience, which participants so generously shared, and the rigorous application of academic research tools. This study not only makes a contribution to filling the vast gap in academic research into the unique nature of coming out in an Orthodox Jewish community, but also provides a deeper understanding of the journey these participants have encountered. The profoundly personal findings provide meaningful understanding for practitioners, which could enhance their ability to understand and empathize with their clients. Comprehending the commonalities of these participants' journeys can contribute to a more in-depth contextual understanding of what it is like to be a gay Orthodox Jewish male. This could be especially helpful for practitioners who already specialise in LGBTQ+ therapeutic work, but have little understanding of the impact of growing up in an Orthodox Jewish environment. The findings of this study may therefore offer a more specialised understanding of the unique challenges of the Orthodox Jewish journey. Although this study has focused on male homosexuality, the multi-dimensional impact of growing up in an Orthodox Jewish community may be similar in many ways for males and females. This element of the findings could thus provide valuable context for working with the Orthodox Jewish community in relation to all LGBTQ+ issues.

This research could also be valuable for practitioners already working in the Orthodox Jewish community, but who have had little professional exposure to LGBTQ+ issues. Transferability of findings from one community to another or even generalizing findings within one's own community is frequently problematic; it can appear difficult to know what should or should not be extrapolated. Some practitioners may be sceptical: 'it is really like that in the Orthodox Jewish community?' This research is rooted within the Orthodox Jewish community, focusing on modern young men, Millennials and Generation Z, who grew up observing the laws of Shabbat and Kashrut. The study's findings are therefore significant and difficult to dismiss as 'not applying to us'. The Orthodox Jewish community lacks therapists specialising in LGBTQ+ matters; my hope is that this research will contribute in some way to bridging that gap. This is not to imply that all LGBTQ+ Jewish people need to see a therapist from within the community, but some may prefer this due to their common experience and understanding of a Jewish upbringing.

This research has highlighted the multi-dimensional nature of the coming out process for someone who grew up in an Orthodox Jewish community. The powerful way Judaism impacted participants on all dimensions of existence may prompt therapists to work in a multi-dimensional way, exploring physical, social, personal and spiritual realms in the therapeutic work. This can raise awareness, in practitioners without an existential background, of the relevance to their work of existential theory highlighting the multi-dimensional nature of existence. It may also benefit existential practitioners by reinforcing and validating the value of the modality in which they work.

This research highlights a strong link between the difficult journey of coming out and mental- and physical-health struggles, which is helpful for a wider range of individuals working in the Orthodox Jewish community, beyond just the therapists. Rabbinic leaders, educators, key workers and mentors play a significant role in helping adolescents and adults navigate the tricky journey of sexuality and specifically sexual orientation. Orthodox Judaism holds the value of life in the highest regard and I hope that my drawing attention to the direct link between homosexuality and well-being will push this issue to the forefront of communal debate. I hope to stimulate healthy conversation in the way homosexuality is

treated in the Orthodox Jewish community, from education to conversation in the home, treatment in synagogues and youth organisations, and of course, the therapy room. All participants shared the thought that they could eventually reconcile being gay with faith in God, but regrettably, many required a very difficult and painful, sometimes risky, journey to reach this point. I therefore hope this research will prompt communal attempts to ease the pain, and length, of this journey.

7.2

Limitations of the study

This research is limited by the smallness of the sample size, which was restricted by constrained time and resources. As the sample size increases, the margin of error decreases; this is an inverse relationship and in the present case it calls into question the representativeness of my sample. However, qualitative research does not aim to generalise, it is concerned with idiographic experience, moreover counselling psychology is interested in the individual and their experiences. Therefore, for the purposes of this research statistics would not have been as helpful.

A further limitation of this study is that I am a heterosexual female, so the participants may have felt limited in what they could share with me as they may have thought I cannot relate to the experience of being a homosexual male. Though this was discussed with participants and they did say they felt comfortable, essentially we do not know the impact this had. It would be instructive to carry out similar research with gay male interviewers. Another limitation is that I live in the Jewish community, which is an exceptionally tight-knit community! Therefore, although participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, there may have been some reluctance to discuss such deep-rooted and private matters with me. It would be interesting to know if interviews carried out by an individual outside the Jewish community would generate any differences in the findings. However, I wonder whether in a way my membership of the Jewish community was also a strength since it meant that participants did not need to feel defensive about their religion, and would not consider me likely to take a judgemental approach to Judaism.

7.3

Areas for further research

It would be very helpful to extend this research by recruiting more participants, as well as participants of other genders. As a female I am especially interested in how experiences might be similar or different for lesbians who come out in the Orthodox Jewish community. If such research were carried out it would also be instructive to compare the two sets of findings, in order to explore the difference for males and females in this coming-out process. It would be intriguing to consider these findings alongside overriding attitudes to males and females in the Jewish religion overall and would be an exciting space for analysis. The journey for individuals across the LGBTQ+ spectrums, that is not just those that identify as gay, is an area in need of further research, especially within Orthodox communities.

Whilst a focus on the London Orthodox Jewish community has strengthened the study by limited other socio-cultural variables, there are Orthodox Jewish communities in cities around the UK, and in other countries, that could strongly benefit from carrying out similar research. There could be differences in findings according to location, socio-economic status, and so on. Moreover, this research focused on Modern Orthodox Jews. Orthodox Judaism is a broad spectrum and similar research of other Orthodox sects, such as the Chassidic community, would be beneficial. It is likely that each sect would provide fresh and novel insights, as they are so varied. All participants were over the age of 20, due to the drastic changes that have taken place over the previous decade in, and beyond, the Jewish community; younger and older people are likely to have different experiences. When working with clients outside this age range it is important to keep in mind that the ability to extrapolate these findings could be limited. This research focused only on Orthodox Judaism. There are many Orthodox communities world-wide that are likely to have similarities and differences to the findings of this research. It would be exciting to investigate how much, or little, the findings can be extrapolated to other Orthodox communities of other religions.

Another limitation of this research is that I live in the Jewish community, which is an exceptionally tight-knit community! Therefore, although participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, there may have been some reluctance to discuss such deep-

rooted and private matters with me. It would be interesting to know if interviews carried out by an individual outside the Jewish community would generate any differences in the findings. However, I wonder whether in a way my membership of the Jewish community was also a strength since it meant that participants did not need to feel defensive about their religion, and would not consider me likely to take a judgemental approach to Judaism.

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7.4

Research Question, Aim & Objectives

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Research Question:

From an existential exploratory perspective, what is the experience of coming out in the Orthodox Jewish community like?

This research question has been answered extensively, through interviews, data analysis and a discussion of findings in relation to literature. Overall, the research remained focused on this research question throughout.

Aim:

To existentially explore the experience of coming out in the Orthodox Jewish community.
This research carried our an effective existential exploration of these experiences, through existentially grounded interview questions and analysis of data, focused around this specific experience of coming out.

Objectives:

To gain an existential insight into the experience of coming out in the Orthodox Jewish community.
Through the existential nature of the interviews and data analysis the insights provided are very much existential in nature. They specifically link to the experiences of coming out in the Orthodox Jewish community due to the participation criteria and the focused nature of interview questions.

To provide insight for others into the experience of coming out in the Orthodox Jewish community.

The findings of this research will be enlightening for the Counselling Psychology profession, as well as the Orthodox Jewish community. Moreover, any religious community will likely gain some further insights into the experience of coming out from this research. This is especially due to the current shortage of related research. I hope to extend this objective through further dissemination.

7.5

Final thoughts

I feel proud that this research represents a modest but valuable contribution to the limited body of research around the experience of coming out in the Orthodox Jewish community. My hope is that it will be a springboard for further research and fuel a meaningful enhancement of psychotherapy and counselling psychology practice, as well as Rabbinic and educational work, in and out of the Jewish community.

Chapter 8: Reflexivity

As I acknowledged from the outset, I hold a dual-identity in relation to this research: a Jew, who needs to come out about my religion to academia, and an academic who needs to come out about the journey of sexual orientation to my religion. Both processes seem daunting.

I started this study with the awareness that I was coming out to the Jewish world with research into a subject it has always treated as taboo. That taboo remains unchanged. Just last night I attended a meeting with a group of Orthodox therapists and mentioned my research. The silence described in my first chapter on reflexivity descended, and the conversation moved on awkwardly, with everyone unsure what to say. On reflection, I would say that what has changed is my confidence in sharing my research in the Jewish community, in coming out with it and with sitting with the awkwardness that follows. This level of comfort is still developing within the academic realm; that is coming out to the academic world with my research that stems from the Orthodox Jewish community. My viva will be the 'main coming out' for me, the place where I present my research and place it under the eyes of others, to be seen, to be Gazed upon; it will be scrutinised and either accepted and validated, or rejected as inadequate. Or perhaps there will be elements of both. I have learnt too much about the suffering and anguish involved in coming out about one's sexual orientation to make a facile comparison with the far less serious experience of submitting a piece of research for academic evaluation. However, if I may speak of this research process within its own framework then I think it would be helpful to remember Merleau-Ponty's (1945) reasoning that all our encounters are sexual in nature. If this is so, as I reflected at the outset, my relationship with my research, with my Judaism and with the academic world I have journeyed through for so many decades, are all love affairs I pursue. I love my Judaism. I love my academic pursuits. I love the psychological world I work in. And I love this research. These are all enduring passions. And so, I cannot pretend there is not some anxiety around completing the process of coming out with this research.

There is something about coming out to the academic world with this research that feels especially daunting. I have presented this many times now to people in the Jewish world,

and engaged in many conversations, including countless conversations with Torah scholars and Rabbis, about this topic, it has become increasingly comfortable in conversation, but no less sad. However, there is still a way to go from an academic perspective, as I hope to publish some, if not all, of this research. This is especially true for some of the painful content. It saddens me that membership of the Jewish community can lead to so much pain for some, perhaps I wish to protect Judaism from being seen in this light, because I find it such a beautiful religion. Nevertheless, beautiful things can still be painful and that is a reality we must all face. It is a paradox of existence. It is something my participants have accepted so inspiringly and while they may struggle with aspects of the Jewish community they all seem to have reconciled themselves to Judaism at their core. I hope that others who read this can do that too.

As my participants took the leap to believe in me and my research, to trust me with their innermost feelings and struggles, to trust I would be caring, compassionate and responsible with my findings, I must believe in myself to take this research forward appropriately. I must take the leap and believe in the power of this research, as they did. Bring it to my viva, bring it to my practice, bring it to my teaching, bring it to my community, bring it to academia and wherever else there is a need for it.

Pursuing this research was a scary feat, the concern of judgement, of tapping into a topic that is taboo and controversial in the Orthodox Jewish community, which requires so much sensitivity. All these things I grappled with, thought about, worked through in the belief that the voices of those who have come out from deep inside the Orthodox Jewish community should be heard by professionals. As my participants so bravely came out, over and over again, and then again to me in our interviews, I feel I am helping bring their Orthodox Jewish voices out in the academic, professional and Jewish world. This leaves me with a feeling of pride. Pride is an interesting thing to feel, since it is so closely affiliated with the LGBTQ+ movements. Nevertheless, I feel proud that I sought out the voices (participants were not easy to find!), proud that I provided a safe, non-judgmental and empathetic space in which to conduct interviews; I feel proud that I spent so many hours respectfully analysing the findings and have given the data dignity, especially by considering it in line with the academic literature. I will feel even prouder once I fully share it with the academic world,

and disseminate it sensitively and carefully among the Jewish communities in which I live and work.

Evidently I am left with feelings that remind me of Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*: whilst I feel so full in writing these final words, I feel so depleted by the knowledge of how much more there is to do . . .

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Appendices

Appendix 1: <u>Interview Questions:</u>

1. How would you describe the influence of Judaism on your upbringing?

  At home?

  Community?

  School?

  Social?

2. What language do you identify with, or would prefer to use, when referring to your own sexuality? (i.e. gay etc., use chosen vocabulary to replace '*gay*' below)

3. How would you describe perceptions you encountered growing up *being gay* (insert chosen language)?

4. How did you come to know of your sexual orientation?

  Were there physical cues? Emotional cues?

  When was this?

  What was it like for you?

5. How did you experience identifying yourself as a *gay male* (insert chosen language)?

  What was this like physically?

  How did you experience this emotionally?

  What was the experience of this identification like as a Jew?

  How was this experience of identification for you from a social perspective?

6. How do you understand 'coming out'?

  What does this mean to you?

  How did you arrive at an understanding of this?

  How did you understand the process of 'coming out'?

7. At what point did you 'come out'?

> How did you arrive at the decision to do so?
>
> How did you experience this moment of existence?

8. How did you experience 'coming out'?

> Can you tell me about what unfolded?
>
> What was this experience like for you as a male?
>
> What was this experience like for you as a Jew?
>
> What was this experience like for you as a family member?
>
> What was this experience like for you as a member of a community?
>
> As a social being?

9. How did you find the aftermath of 'coming out'?

> What was your experience of ramifications of this?
>
> How did you find responses as part of the Orthodox Jewish community?
>
> How did you experience the ramifications of 'coming out' socially?

10. What was your experience of 'coming out' in relation to your relationship with Judaism?

> How did you experience this process spiritually?
>
> How did you experience this process in relation to the Jewish community?
>
> From a social perspective?

11. How did you experience the process of coming out physically?

> What was your bodily experience of this process?
>
> How did you experience this process in terms of physical actions/activity?

12. What was your experience like before 'coming out'?

> How did keeping your sexual orientation 'in the closet' impact you?
>
> Physically? Socially? Spiritually? Emotionally?

Extra prompts if needed:

What does your experience of 'coming out' mean to you?

What does your experience of 'coming out' mean for you as Jew?

What does you experience of 'coming out' mean for you socially?

What does your experience of 'coming out' mean for you on a physical dimension?

What does your experience of 'coming out' mean for you from an emotional perspective?

Appendix 2: Compiled Analysis table for Jason.

	forgetting or regretting *(Gewesenheit)* but also: as recollecting or repeating. Awareness means that we know that we are no longer.	*(Gegenwart)*, but also as being there, and being with others with concern. Awareness means that we become capable of being present in the situation.	longing or dreading *(Zukunft)* but also: being with anticipation and possibility, being towards death. Awareness means we become capable of grasping that we are not yet fully realised.	infinite *(Ereignis)* but also: becoming and letting be. Awareness means that we become capable of the moment of vision in which we take ownership of being in time.
Physical: things	==Religious influence growing up –== 'I felt like halacha [Jewish law] was demanding that every part of my body… my world and experience was planned and executed like meticulously …. it justified my lack of spontaneity… there were moments of like really wanting…to just break but …The whole point is that you can't take a break from it…. This feeling is validated by Judaism.' ==Awareness of being gay-== in puberty became aware through arousal and masturbation. Developed desire to explore men instead of women. In secondary school developed attraction towards other men… 'very scared of it… was terrifying' 'not being able to get out of bed…..[when had thoughts of a man] so overwhelmingly painful' ==Isolation/secrets:== 'everything associated with gay identity…became a secret……like what music I liked, what tv shows I watched….' 'I just thought it [masturbation] was something that I had that was like an illness.'	==At the time of coming out (1ˢᵗ):== 'I had just broken up with my first girlfriend of a month…., I was so overwhelmed with the fact that it didn't work… was that relationship was kind of like a test for me to know if it was right….I was in a pretty fucking crazy state…that feeling …from the paralysis from the bed, was, was present, I'm pretty sure…I can't remember if I, I think I was crying…I think my mum and dad were there and I think my sister was there.' ==‘The Main Coming Out’: accepting that conversion therapy didn't work== I'm gay. This is it. I'm going to be frum. That was like the next … caveat to it, it's like, you have to … ooh my stomach.'	==Post- coming out:== ==Restrictions== - 'I think my body still felt trapped in some way because I was religious, so I couldn't hook up with people and have sex with people? Probably not. I still wanted to be religious. I wanted to save myself for, for like real relationships and deep relationships and that's the whole point and whatever. I think that slowly, slowly kind of just kind of waned and I did, I did began, begin trying to experience um like kind of sexual encounters with various people. Not, but like by no means in the same way, because, this is interesting, by no means in the same way as other people do when they come out. Or at least, other people say they do when they come out. Um, often people have like a sexual awakening when they kind of just, it's kind of crazy, they kind of just go and have sex with everybody and it's very dangerous and quite also liberating in a weird way. I didn't' have that. I still have that halacha in me that was like, "No, that's not you. You don't do that." So, physically, it was actually quite difficult still because it was like you, you've chosen to be frum and gay, so that means you don't do that and hence, you kind of become a little bit homophobic to those people who do do that and judgment, judgmental of those people that do do that, so yes, physically it was quite difficult so a lot of judgment.' ==Shame== - 'constantly being told that you should love but you can't have sex messes up how you interact with people that you were going to be in relationships with, I think…, I think it cuts out a part of yourself. You have to still feel shame….I think it comes out in them seeking like sexual interactions with people because you can't seek them out in healthy situations, I think you seek them out in unhealthy situations. So you have casual random sex and, which is not that safe and also	

			not that, that spiritually fulfilling, like, you know sex in Judaism is seen as something that's spiritually fulfilling and physically fulfilling. It's a whole, the most, the most kind of like physical embodied act, I suppose, in Judaism um and you can't experience that. You can only experience quick sexual pleasure or emotional but you can't have those two things intertwined without feeling shame.'	
Social: others	Religious influence growing up – Socially all friends and schooling was Jewish. No open conversation regarding sex. Awareness of being gay- He was scared to get out of bed …in case someone noticed it [that he was gay] or asked him about it. Isolation/secrets: 'this was something I felt like I couldn't' tell Mum/anyone Fears before coming out: Fear of causing conflict between parents Fear to share with parents for 'fear of… worse rejection… or loss of them' 'it was really scary… I thought I'd lose some long-term friends…. would be uncomfortable around me. People would think I was like kind of like dirty or, or confusing or um not part of the crowd any more.'	Comfort of conversion therapy: 'it was an overwhelming feeling of hope and connectedness and feeling seen by this organisation that made me feel comfortable to share with my parents because it was like, oh see they'll get it' At the time of coming out (1st): 'I just felt like she [mother] knew innately that there was something wrong …. "Oh you know already, why do I have to tell you?" and whatever and I think I said that to her, I said "I'm gay" and I cried and she, she was crying and my dad was like, "It's fine, you're okay." … she was like angry at my dad for saying it was fine.' His Mum read prayers daily for the month after, which she asked him to do with her, praying for him to be cured: 'praying the gay away… With a view to changing my orientation' 'I can't remember if I felt supportive or not supportive. I think it just felt annoying, aggravating, um, in some ways like, yeah. Um, I wonder if it also felt nice? I think maybe it also felt like somewhat supportive that she was doing something to help along with the process. I don't know…. she was definitely completely a mess' 'but like everyone required proof. Everyone's like but have you this, have you had sex with a … like, I don't know, it becomes, it becomes this forced intimate moment where you're like, I'm not going to talk to you about this anyway. Like, I'm not going to talk to you about my sex life and my like sexual	Post- coming out: Redemption – 'an initial phase of telling those people [close 6 friends] and those friendships became better after that and then I think one of the people I told, like basically not forced me but pushed me to tell other people. Like, invite someone into my house and it was like you have to tell him. So I was like I told him and it couldn't have been better. It couldn't have been better. It was, I was like flying inside. It was, it was like my relationships became real somehow, like just miraculously. Like suddenly they became free and suddenly they became open and suddenly I could just, suddenly I could just watch what TV I wanted and wear what I wanted, not that I wear, wore anything like crazy, but like listened to, like just doing thing and if anyone was like that's so gay, I was like yes it is so gay because like that's, that's, that's who I am and like don't be a homophobic piece of shit. Um, so it was like it was so freeing to just be who I was at that point. So like yeah, difficult in general but like that element of it was, was brilliant um.' 'the fact that all my religious like Jewish friends were like completely okay with it…I think the social elements of Jewish culture, I let, I let the gossip mills spread it like wildfire. It was really helpful like after I told like 10, 12 people I was just like tell everybody please. Like begone. And it was great because it just meant that everyone knew. Anyone who cared	Full acceptance by others: 'there's, for me the …psychology of coming out is, is … two things. It's like there's a whole internal trouble we have to deal with, … and then there's the whole once you're out and once you're public, the psychological onslaught of people kind of out there to tell you that you have to be half of yourself or a quarter of yourself or leave that part of yourself at home.' The world being safe to come out: 'book by Jacob Tobia, actually a great quote by him I want to share with you, if you want…He talks about … people will say that like their big coming out to everybody is like they're coming out and it's judgemental because coming out the closet is so kind of like definite and he describes it more as …coming out your shell…And how like a snail comes out its shell when it feels safe and it goes back into its shell when it doesn't feel safe. Like that's what the process is more like than the closet. Like once you're out the closet, you're closed and you're done….And the closet's a negative space but …you're responsible for being in the closet. You've chosen to be in there. You're not getting out. No one's kind of like locked the doors or whatever. Whereas, with the snail, it's like you go back in when you're scared….When the world outside isn't ready for you or isn't open to you.'

		attraction. I've never spoken to you about it. Like and it suddenly becomes like you're on trial and you have to prove that you're gay because you must just be confused…. you have to kind of like prove yourself in some way. It was very uncomfortable, given that like I had never known about masturbation, I'd never known about sex, I'd never like spoken and like I'd never been exposed to it with them in a safe way before….so, like talking about it….was not like a fun experience.' ==The Main Coming Out': accepting that conversion therapy didn't work== 'I was just like a mess. And I was like okay, I, I, have to like, I have to go home and tell my parents I'm gay. So like I booked the train then I went straight home in a much more kind of confident way but like probably also like terrified, but much less terrified than previously. And I felt very like clear about it. This was like after years and years of going back and forth and wanting to come out and wanting to come out and …then telling them, I think all my … I think my sister and my parents and other sister and then telling my brother on Facebook at some point…that like this is it, like no more conversion… I'm gay. This is it. I'm going to be frum. That was like the next … caveat to it, it's like, you have to … ooh my stomach.' 'I um, um, it's interesting that each time I came out to my family, it had to be with a caveat. So it's like I'm having conversion therapy or I'm frum. Like, I'm going to be gay, but I'm going to be religious Orthodox frum'	enough like spoke to me um and, and I became, I became like very, yeah, just like people respected me and just loved me in a way that I couldn't have expected, which was nice.' ==Public (spectacle)== - 'so once I came out it was kind of a public… exhibition of me, working out my gay identity and my Judaism and on show….'	
Personal: self	==Religious influence growing up –== Enjoyed intellectual stimulation of Torah study when growing up. Found Judaism and Torah study to be emotionally comforting.	==Comfort of conversion therapy:== 'the reason I came out at that particular point as well, was because it, was because it was like, I'm coming out but like on the condition that I, I can do conversion therapy and I can resolve this,'	==Post- coming out:== ==Redemption== - '[relationships became] So much more authentic. Um, so much more authentic. So much more real. Like, I was frank and honest before that, to be honest, but like I just became so much more open and maybe too open, but I kind of just like open,	==Loss & Finding yourself==: I think it takes gay people and LGBT people longer … to work out their space in the world…because of that delayed adolescence and that delayed development, that ability to develop your resilience and, and um and sense of self… you have to take time

questions and fears of was he gay because bullies called him that? Was that who he was?

When realised that the psychological thinking about being gay, matched up with his physical experiences 'I felt incredibly, incredibly alone…incredibly trapped and I did not see any solution to the problem….it was pretty horrible…not being able to get out of bed….. so overwhelmingly painful….a personal kind of like hell inside.'

Isolation/secrets:

'trapped and alone sound like words that don't give it enough credit'
'It painted all of my encounters….I policed myself…what I said, what I liked, what I did…. Everything I did, I was worried'

At time of coming out (1st):

'Um, dread, um, pain, er, overwhelmed, um, sadness, loss, um, fear, deep, deep fear that I would lose something, um yeah, it kind of like felt like I'd ripped myself open, um, in a way that I wasn't ready for, um, yeah.'

'The Main Coming Out': accepting that conversion therapy didn't work

'it's a bit of a judgment on it, but that was kind of like I'd say the main coming out because it was like I accepted it myself and stopped the conversion therapy and came out.'

'When I was 21 and I came out to my parents, um, it was definitely a moment of like accepting it myself, which made it easier… if I feel confident in myself, I feel like I can convince people that I'm okay. I think because I felt good, I feel like I'll exude that and my parents would just buy into it.'

you know open book like whatever, like it's okay, like everything was up for grabs now and it's okay…. [it felt] Just incredible. Just like my, I didn't think life could get better at that point. It was just like really, really wonderful. I just remember feeling loads of joy and freedom um and acceptance and love. Um yeah, the whole, the whole, just then the next level came with a whole 'nother set of challenges but like in that moment, it was like, oh my goodness, authenticity, how exciting.'

Shame – I think when you're feeling shame and when you're, when you're feeling um and you're not feeling comfortable to flirt with a guy at kiddush, or like be set up with your family with a friend or whatever and or talk about sex with your friend. Whatever it is that you're not feeling comfortable to be open about, um it, it, it kind of like takes away the life of that part of yourself.

Public (Persecution) - 'I think that on the worst end of it, people are disgusting um like before I left for New York, um Rabbi xxxx …he publicly shamed me in his shul on Shabbat afternoon, …because of the … talk that I did on inclusion. Like, publicly shamed me. Um and that like, that's psych, psychological abuse. Like, we're talking about psychological effects on coming out. It's not just like you know the internal thing, it's kind of the abuse that you get outside. Um, rabbis, when you're talking about … other organisations not having enough kind of psychological or necessarily like, like the content, like the research, like rabbis and leadership and teachers and like, they don't know the effect that the words that they say have on people. Even when they're trying to be good, they don't know the effect that … because they don't have psychological

when you are older and time out of like career development or, or relationship development. Like um I don't like comparing myself to other 27 year olds … in my world, but there is a difference… I think that there is an element of a loss of something that you need to deal with at a later point because you're too busy trying to like tread water that you can't focus on actually like learning things that, that normal in inverted commas teenagers are learning at that point.'

			backing and experience to know what they're doing.' 'the reason I had to do that and go away from the Orthodox community is because of like I think that the Jewish community is psychologically abusing LGBT people, like without realising and sometimes with realising.'	
Spiritual: ideas	<mark>Religious influence growing up –</mark> 'it would be terrible if that [being gay] happened to any of her children.' (mother) Enjoyed Bar Mitzvah learning and classes with Rabbi, became very 'obsessive' about prayer and observance, he thought 'this feeling would go away if I devoted myself to religion, then would this go away, would this be healed by God' In his Bar Mitzvah portion it said that homosexuality is an abomination…'I believed that, that the sedra (portion he read for Bar Mitzvah) was telling me like this is your challenge. This is your thing to overcome.' 'as I got older, it [Judaism] became wrapped up in my vision of like what a future looked like. It's kind of like, it projected like this beautiful Modern Orthodox picture of the future of like a straight family with kids' <mark>Awareness of being gay-</mark> 'a personal kind of like hell inside' – in religious terms hell represents pain, ugliness, punishment, suffering…. 'I felt like there was something wrong with me… I did not know how to deal with it'	<mark>At time of coming out (1st):</mark> 'My family like was so inextricably linked with my Judaism. It wasn't like they were separate. Most of my emotional connection to Judaism has come from my family, like through festivals … my Judaism was so important and also … I enjoyed learning things… I liked Judaism, I liked Torah and, and I really believed in it, like really believed in the power of it to heal, the power to support and guide. So, it was like I don't know what life would be like without it. Like, I'd been to Jewish schools, I'd had Jewish friends, like my whole life was Judaism, socially and also like emotionally… that was what was at stake there… it didn't feel like my family would support me as a gay man' 'that was the message that was kind of being spouted out, left, right and centre, that God gives you tests and you can overcome them… that was my, my religious feeling at the point'	<mark>Post- coming out:</mark> <mark>Health over law -</mark> 'I'm Jewish, like first and foremost. Um, didn't really kind of explore my gay identity in terms of like a gay community or anything like that. Um, they felt very separate, very disconnected… at that point I knew I was going to have to be okay having sex… I, I, I, I accepted that if I was in a relationship, I'd have sex. I'd not like limit myself in that way. … I was like my, my line was like my mental and physical health come first before halacha. Um, so the halacha hasn't changed, but like this trumps it um and physical health and mental health like mean like a loving physical relationship with your partner and only with your partner… so any hookup, any, any sexual encounter felt somewhat deviant um still and because it wasn't, while it was okay to get attracted to men, it wasn't okay to do that outside the context of a relationship.'	<mark>Problem with Orthodoxy:</mark> 'over the past year, I've come to the… conclusion that, that the Orthodox community is not able to give sufficient dignity to LGBT people, maybe in the UK ever, um, which is like quite sad, …I feel like I'm one of those angry gays by saying it but I'm not. I'm saying it like really understanding like the, the deep-seated issues' <mark>A safe Jewish place to be:</mark> 'in this place (an egalitarian Jewish learning institution), which was egalitarian and and Halachic … like everyone kept Shabbat, everyone kept kosher… it was the first place that I could breathe completely as like a unified human being that I was gay and Jewish. I could focus on things that weren't being gay and Jewish. I could just be Jewish and … I just felt fully accepted and fully embraced… my acceptance wasn't dependent on a rabbi dealing with the halachic verse, halachic content. My acceptance into the community was not dependent on anything. … most of the rabbis do kind of like gay marriages, but like the head does not yet, so like they're not perfect by any means, but like they give dignity to everybody… the shuls that they were part of and affiliated with are ones that are full of gay families and accepted…[being gay was] Not something that I had to like constantly be aware of. People, people who are gay and queer and, any identities, minority identities, kind of say how often to you notice

	Understanding what it meant to come out, before coming out:			that you're gay? How often do you
				think about being gay? There, I
	'Um, so my understanding of what it			thought a lot less about being gay in
	meant to come out, um … suddenly			the way that I did in the UK um
	it's hard to know what I felt back			which meant that I could, it was, it
	then about that specifically….Do you			was a moment of kind of realising oh
	know what? I actually don't think it			I like drawing, I like writing, I like
	meant anything to me, to be honest			doing this, I like doing that and I, and
	with you. I just did not think I was			I have so much to give that isn't,
	going to come out… I didn't want to			isn't fighting to people, people, gay
	come out. It wasn't an option. It			people to be good, it's kind of
	wasn't an option because I wasn't			providing the gay voice of Judaism
	gay.'			that isn't heard as opposed to
				fighting against Judaism that doesn't
				have space for gay people. … I felt
				incredible, was my experience.

The Department of Health and Social Sciences Middlesex
University Hendon London NW4 4BT

Participant Information sheet

Date: June 2019

Title: **An existential exploration of the experience of coming out in the Orthodox Jewish community.**

I am currently pursuing a professional Doctorate in counselling psychology and psychotherapy. I would like to invite you to participate in my research, which seeks to explore the experience of coming out in the Orthodox Jewish community from an existential perspective.

What is the purpose of the research?

This research hopes to capture a better understanding of the experience of coming out in the Orthodox Jewish community from a psychological and existential perspective. The purpose of this is to enhance general understanding of the experience within a religious community, as opposed to more generally psychologically and existentially. The findings may also provide further understanding within the community, particularly amongst Rabbinic leaders, educators and therapeutic workers. This is in the hope of improving the level of understanding and empathy of this experience amongst academics and psychologists. This in turn may improve the quality of education provided and support offered.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been asked to participate in this study because you meet the inclusion criteria of being a male who 'came out' over 3 years ago, after having grown up in an Orthodox Jewish family home (who observed Shabbat and Kosher laws).

Do I have to take part?

There is no obligation to participate, any participation is optional and you will have the opportunity to withdraw at any time.

What will happen to me if I take part?

If you choose to participate then you will be interviewed by the researcher for approximately an hour regarding your experience. You will have the option to stop participation at any time. If you consent, then the interview will be recorded and the recording will then be typed up into a transcript. The transcript will be anonymised and kept confidential. You will have the option to read the research on completion, if you wish. The interview will take place at a neutral location, where you will not be seen being interviewed by me and where you will have privacy. The interviewer will be sensitive and mindful that this is a sensitive and emotive topic to explore. The interviewer will anonymise all interviews and assures full confidentiality. You will be provided with contact information of organisations and individuals who offer support in matters relating to LGBT+, in and out of the Jewish community.

What are the possible disadvantages to taking part?

It may be an inconvenience for you to allocate time to be interviewed. The interview will be an existential exploration of the experience of coming out, which could be emotive in some ways or trigger some memories that you would prefer not to explore. The interview may touch on the internal conflict of being gay and being Jewish. It may bring up difficult memories of coming out, perhaps to people who did

not respond in a way that was pleasant. It may stir some uncomfortable feelings that you did not expect to arise. You may need further support after the interview to help process the matters that surface during the interview.

What are the possible advantages of taking part?

It may be interesting to participate in research relating to the experience of coming out, both in terms of being interviewed and reading the project afterwards. Through a semi-structured interview you may have the opportunity to discuss thoughts, feelings and/or memories that you do not usually explore. This could feel relieving in some ways, it may also feel validating to have your experiences heard, respected and contributing to research. Finally, through participating in this research you will be contributing to an effort towards raising awareness of the experience of coming out within the Orthodox Jewish community, which is an underexplored realm. This could have a positive impact on the world of psychological research, relating to the experience of coming out within a range of religious communities. Based on this it could also enhance the quality of education and support provided in the Jewish community.

Consent Your full informed consent will be needed before participation, and you will have the right to withdraw participation at any time.

Who is organising and funding the research?

This research will be organised and carried out by Elizabeth Feigin, who is a student of New School of Psychotherapy and Middlesex University.

What will happen to the data?

The recorded interview data will be transcribed and then analysed qualitatively. Confidentiality and anonymity will be assured through

removal of any identifying details, including using false names for participants in transcripts. Data will be stored in a password protected file and will be deleted 10 years after completion of the research. Findings will be explored in relation to relevant literature and then outlined. Anonymised findings will be shared with Rabbis, educators and therapeutic workers within the Orthodox Jewish community.

Who has reviewed the study?

All proposals for research using human participants are reviewed by an Ethics Committee before they can proceed. The NSPC Ethics Committee have reviewed this proposal.

Thank you for your time in reading this information. If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to be in touch.

Researcher: Elizabeth Feigin

Supervisor: Patricia Bonnici pbonnici@gmail.com

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5 Informed consent

Title: An existential exploration of the experience of coming out in the Orthodox Jewish community.

Researcher: Elizabeth Feigin
Supervisor: Patricia Bonnici - pbonnici@gmail.com

I have understood the details of the research as explained to me by the researcher, and confirm that I have consented to act as a participant.

I have been given contact details for the researcher in the information sheet.

I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary, the data collected during the research will not be identifiable, and I have the right to withdraw from the project at any time without any obligation to explain my reasons for doing so.

I further understand that the data I provide may be used for analysis and subsequent publication, and I provide my consent that this may occur.

_____ _____
Print name   Sign Name

Date: _____

To the participant: Data may be inspected by the Chair of the Psychology Ethics panel and the Chair of the School of Health and Education Ethics committee of Middlesex University, if required by institutional audits about the correctness of procedures. Although this would happen in strict confidentiality, please tick here if you do not wish your data to be included in audits: _____

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6 Debriefing
Title: An existential exploration of the experience of coming out in the Orthodox Jewish community.

Researcher: Elizabeth Feigin
Supervisor: Patricia Bonnici - pbonnici@gmail.com

Thank you for taking part in this research and making a valuable contribution towards the aims of the study. This debrief is your opportunity to talk about your experience of being interviewed. If you feel you would like to talk more about the issues which have arisen in the interview process, or any difficult feelings you have experienced in relation to this, there is a list of organisations at the bottom of the page.*

This research aims to explore the experience of coming out in the Orthodox Jewish community from an existential perspective.

If you have concerns or would like to make a complaint please contact my primary supervisor, Patricia Bonnici, at pbonnici@gmail.com

*Further Support:

KeshetUK (Jewish Gay & lesbian organization in London) – https://www.keshetuk.org

Raphael Counselling (the Jewish counselling service) - 0800 234 6236

Pride counselling (counselling for the LGBTQ community) – www.pridecounselling.com