An Exploration of Six Lesbian and Gay People's Experiences of Organised Religion (Christianity, Islam, and Judaism), and their Implications for Psychotherapy: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

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Middlesex University and Metanoia Institute
Doctor of Psychotherapy by Professional Studies

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Abstract

This qualitative research project uses Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore six lesbian and gay people's experiences of three organised religions (Christianity, Islam, and Judaism), and the implications they have for psychotherapy. A total of six participants, three gay men and three lesbian women, were identified through an initial online survey and successive purposive sampling. Four participants had experiences with Christianity (two were Catholic and two Protestant), one with Judaism, and one with Islam. Participants self-identified with the respective religious institutions, and most were not involved with their religions at the time of the research. Data were collected using unstructured interviews and analysed to determine three major themes: "Religious Tribalism", "Liminal Processes", and "Navigating Relationships".

In a present-day context of widespread heterosexist hegemony, this project has the potential to improve psychotherapists' understanding of the intersection of sexual orientation and religion, and the diverse ways in which this plays out. The research invites therapists to re-evaluate socially constructed positions and encourages a life-course perspective. Recommendations include: providing cultural competence training for therapists, developing an integrative psychotherapy process (dialogical, relational, and interpersonal) that prioritises exploration and asking questions over providing answers, raising awareness of religious abuse and naming it when it is evident, and a call to conduct IPA with soul. Suggestions for future research include exploring heterosexual perspectives from within religious institutions in order to better understand sexual prejudice in this context; exploring religious abuse against non-heterosexual people; and a further exploration of the positive role of religion for some non-heterosexual people.

Keywords

Lesbian; Gay; Organised Religion; Integrative Psychotherapy; Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA); Intersectionality.

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Table of Contents

Contents

List of Tables and Figures

Table	Page	Details
Table 1	90	Profile of Participants
Table 2	107	Recurrent Themes

Figure	Page	Details
Figure 1	97	Stages of IPA Data Analysis
Figure 2	105	The Master Themes
Figure 3	106	Master Theme 1 with sub-themes
Figure 4	106	Master Theme 2 with sub-themes
Figure 5	107	Master Theme 3 with sub-themes

Abbreviations

BACP	British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy
BPS	British Psychological Society
GSD	Gender and Sexual Diversities
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
IPT	Interpersonal Psychotherapy
LG	Lesbian and Gay
LGB	Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender
LGBTQQIA	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual
RIGs	Representation of Interactions that have been Generalised
UKCP	United Kingdom Council of Psychotherapy

Frontispiece

Image associated with the research. Photograph by the author.
"Where Two Oceans Meet and Meet the Sky" (South Africa, 2012).

Chapter 1

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the research by providing relevant background information, introducing the researcher, explaining the reasons for developing an interest in the research topic, and describing how and why the research aims were formulated. The chapter concludes with a brief synopsis of the remaining chapters.

1.2 Background

Without a doubt, over recent decades there have been significant improvements in some societies for people who are gender and sexually diverse, but it is argued there is still widespread intolerance of same-sex attraction and non-binary gender identities (Davies, 2007; Super & Jacobson, 2012). Reinforcing this point is the fact that homosexuality is currently illegal in seventy-four countries of the world, and the death penalty exists in ten of these.

Gender and sexuality remain amongst the world's biggest taboos, and in many places, legislation has been created to punish non-heterosexual people. For example, anti-homosexuality laws were relatively recently passed by the government of Uganda meaning life imprisonment for LGBT+ people, and even several years of incarceration for those who "protect" them. Even in the West, since the inauguration of US President Donald Trump in 2017, the USA has introduced a whole host of actions against LGBT rights, opening the doors to prejudice and discrimination in many of their states.

1.3 Reflexive Account

My formative, developmental years were set in the context of a fundamentalist, evangelical, Pentecostal-Christian family, so organised religion has profoundly influenced my life and development. Growing up in the context of a conservative

evangelical religious community caused me enormous stress, even though I was not "out" in those years, and the prevailing homonegativity resulted in my feeling deep shame, spiritual isolation, and low self-esteem. Around the same time that I was becoming aware of an identity conflict and hoping to gain insight, I consulted a handbook my father had in his library on "Christian Counselling" but, as you might imagine, what I read was derogatory and pathologizing, and simply deepened my self-loathing and guilt.

As a young man, I encountered "The Kinsey Report" (Kinsey, 1948) in the local library, and from this I learned there were other gay people in the world, and I identified London as the place I needed to get to if I was to be liberated. I eventually moved from Wales to London in order to study theology and philosophy in the late 1980s. In choosing theology, I managed to minimise any parental objections to my moving away, whilst at the same time I was heading for "the big smoke" where I hoped to find freedom. It is fascinating to me that, all these years later, I now find myself engaging in my own research exploring the intersection of religion and sexuality.

The heterosexist and rather cruel environment of my formative years paradoxically encouraged altruism to flourish and led to a strong desire to help liberate others who might be oppressed. My experiences motivated me to pursue a career in psychotherapy. Interestingly, there was no cultural competence training in any of the core psychotherapy courses I attended but specific post-qualification training on working with Gender and Sexual Diversities (GSD) helped me to understand that "passing" for the dominant group, which is not always possible when difference is more visible and obvious, had ultimately led to erosion of identity and confidence in myself.

Unfortunately, the sexual prejudice I encountered when initially seeking help in psychotherapy led to further distress. Those challenging experiences ultimately proved to be amongst the most important transformative experiences of my life, because they enabled a depth of reflection that may not have otherwise blossomed.

Over the years, my clinical work with a number of lesbian and gay clients who have been involved with faith communities has stimulated my interest in this topic as a psychotherapist. Additionally, my own and others' less than helpful experiences of psychotherapy training, personal therapy, and supervision convinced me that many professionals in this field, regardless of their sexual orientation, may be unprepared to work with gender and sexual diversities, especially in relation to their faith, and that there is a wealth of unsolicited data to suggest the existence of questionable, ill-informed practice (Bowers, Minichiello & Plummer, 2010).

After relocating back to Cardiff in 2007 to work in an NHS Primary Care Counselling Service, I was shocked to encounter the overtly prejudiced views expressed by experienced counsellors regarding work with people living with HIV, and their alarming views on non-heterosexual clients. After reflecting, I decided that rather than getting into conflict about this in my workplace, it might be helpful to write a journal article that could be educative. I was delighted when my proposal was accepted and the article was published. Fortuitously, after discussing the subject with the Clinical Director at the time, it was agreed to distribute the article throughout the counselling team. It was titled: Meades, P. (2009). Sexual Minority Therapy: An introduction to the basics. *The British Journal of Psychotherapy Integration,* 6**,** 6-14.

Seeking to avoid single-theoretical approaches, my initial psychotherapy training was in Integrative Psychotherapy at Metanoia. I notice in my work with clients there is a consistent focus on the co-creation of relationship as we work as co-participants in the healing dialogue, and also in the service of the change process for the client (Hycner, 1993). Reflecting on my professional practice, I recognise I hold the centrality of relationship at the heart of my work, and I take the view that relationships operate at both the explicit verbal level and at the implicit, non-verbal level of interaction, with a delicate interface existing between the two. My focus tends to be on the immediacy of the encounter and on what is foreground for the client in any given moment.

I have highly valued each of my personal experiences of psychotherapy over the years and have recently engaged once again with personal therapy in relation to my own internalised sexual prejudice, which has been further helped by this research process. I agree with Davies (2007) who highlights the significant problems that can develop through the internalising of negative messages about sexuality, and that many people continue to find it difficult to come to terms with their sexuality, particularly in relation to faith**.**

1.4 Overview of Integrative Psychotherapy Model

As I am a psychotherapist first and foremost, my theoretical perspective provides the lens through which I will approach the research and consider its implications for psychotherapy. This perspective also informs, and is informed by, my broader ontology and epistemology. My integrative process is based on some paradoxical principles whereby I endeavour to find the middle ground through a plurality of perspectives. Therefore, I embrace the intrapsychic, the intersubjective, and 'the between'. I avoid dogmatic, absolute truths but I am not so sceptical to believe that:

> Nothing is real, nothing is true, and nothing is important.
> (Holland, 2000: 3)

I deeply respect the distinctive meanings that stem from the semantic peculiarities of different therapeutic approaches because, being bilingual, I know that:

> Each language creates meaning that cannot be generated by other
> languages. (Ogden, 1986: 6)

I try to bring theoretical, philosophical, and clinical ideas from various psychotherapeutic traditions into dialogue, whilst, I hope, resisting the temptation to produce one unified model of commonalities, complementarities, or eclectic perspectives, as Prall (2004) describes. To my mind, psychotherapy has an intrinsic sense of direction (Murphy & Gilbert, 2000) and is continually

established and re-established through ongoing mutual influence (Aaron, 1990). I value the salient concept of the intersubjective field, in which can be found:

> … interacting subjectivities, reciprocal mutual influence, colliding organising principles, conjunctions and disjunctions, attunements and malattunements – a lexicon attempting to capture the endlessly shifting, constitutive intersubjective context of intrapsychic experience. (Storolow & Atwood, 1996: 181)

I hold the view that "self" *is* relationship and process (Deurzen-Smith, 1990) so for me it follows that a dialogical psychotherapy relationship has the potential to challenge the fixed and limiting ways in which relationships may have been structured (Hycner, 1993).

My approach is technically based on a model of flexible adjustment to the client's own development and I respect the professional issues of assessment, contractual commitment, personal development, and, above all, the therapeutic relationship (Elton-Wilson, 1996). Clinically, I prioritise working in the affective realm, attempting to become:

> … a facilitating regulatory background (not foreground) within the intersubjective field, embedded in the therapeutic alliance. (Schore, 2005: 4)

My search for understanding focuses on what is revealed by the live intersubjective situation and I emphasise description of what is, rather than what would be, could be, was, or might be.

The major challenge of my own integrative endeavour is to continually draw on a broad range of theories and methodologies, and the outcomes of research relating to these, and at the same time, to develop my ambition to think and work contextually. It is an ongoing challenge to hold uncertainties and to allow for an ever-developing integrative process that will naturally shift and change in

relationship with each client, my own developing self, and the changing socio-political context in which I live and work.

1.5 Formulating the Research Aims

When I first embarked upon this doctoral programme, I had an early interest in "reparative therapies", which are offered in many places as a "treatment" for homosexuality, most commonly in the USA (Davies, 2012). However, there appeared to already be a body of academic work on that topic, and further discussions with colleagues at London's "Pink Therapy" led me to reflect on the lack of cultural competence training for therapists. Although interesting (and recommended later as a potential area for further research) I noticed that I felt that this represented someone else's interests and ideas and that it was not honestly emerging from my own academic interests. During the first year of the doctoral programme, while I was undertaking the research challenges module, I began to think more earnestly about the effects of oppressive religious practices and heterosexism on non-heterosexual people, and the implications this might have for psychotherapy.

I had considered carrying out an autoethnographic study into the experience of being a gay man from a faith background and later contemplated doing a heuristic study into how LGBT people manage to reconcile their sexuality and spirituality in the context of widespread oppression and alienation. I kept a research journal including numerous iterations of research topics and became curious as to why I was struggling with the prospect of exploring sexual orientation and faith. On reflection, I think I was somewhat afraid to confront the subject matter, being aware of the potential impact it could have on me personally. However, this reticence also represented a challenge, and it spurred me on. Given the hostility and indifference often encountered in religious communities toward non-heterosexual people and vice versa, I finally decided that lesbian and gay people's experiences of organised religion warranted greater exploration.

From the outset it may be useful to clarify that it is not the intention of this project to generate new conceptualisations or emergent theories, nor to make any

theological arguments for or against religion. It is also not the intention to condemn or judge conservative religious institutions. The main purpose of this project is to sensitively explore the experiences of a small group of six participants using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), and to consider the implications of that analysis for psychotherapy.

1.6 Defining the Main Terms

Although "LGBT+" is an internationally recognized acronym, the difficulty with it in relation to this research is that bisexual (B) and transgender (T) people are not included in this project. It may be argued that selecting only "lesbian" and "gay" people denies many others who identify as being somewhere along the gender spectrum, or who do not identify as being on the spectrum at all (e.g. gender non-conforming), and those who do not identify as male or female and nonetheless experience same sex attraction and love.

"Queer" is one of the broadest, most inclusive terms, and is often preferred over LGBTIQQA by academics, and others who identify as having other alternative sexualities, and essentially everyone whose experience falls outside the hegemony of heteronormativity (Davies, 2007). However, the feedback I received when presenting my Learning Agreement to the Programme Approval Panel (P.A.P.) persuaded me that not all lesbian and gay people identify with the term Queer, nor do they feel comfortable with it. Some older people believe it applies only to younger generations.

The binary terms "homosexuality" and "heterosexuality" represent dichotomies coined from early studies in psychopathology, and, ever since, they have influenced contemporary theories of human sexuality (Foucault, 1978; Roscoe, 1988). Identifying the "right" terminology is challenging, reflecting the complexities of different identities within this research project. However, I am choosing to use the words "lesbian" and "gay" in this project predominantly because this was the language used by the participants, and since they are widely accepted as reasonable nouns and adjectives. Some of the other terms are, relatively, more straightforward to define.

For the purpose of the literature review, "organised religion" refers to religious institutions, and is considered to be:

> A structured system of faith or worship, especially one followed by a large number of people, such as Christianity, Islam, or Judaism. (O.E.D., 2015).

The term "psychotherapy" normally falls under the umbrella of talking therapies and is helpfully understood as:

> The treatment of disorders of the mind, or personality, by psychological methods. (O.E.D., 2015).

1.7 Research Aim(s)

The main aim of this research is to explore six lesbian and gay people's experiences of three organised religions (Christianity, Islam and Judaism), to consider the findings in relation to the wider research literature, and to consider their implications on the field of psychotherapy.

1.8 Why this Research Matters

Reflecting on both practice-based evidence, and an initial reading of the literature, it seems that modern day psychotherapists may still sometimes be caught between a positive affirmative healthy lifestyle model of gender and sexual diversities, and a culturally rooted Western, religious-based heterosexist system of attitudes and constraints (Bowers, Minichiello, & Plummer, 2010). Therefore, psychotherapists that either consciously or unconsciously lean towards socially conservative, religious-based heterosexist constructs, may not be helping clients who request their assistance, and this research could highlight the impact of these less helpful ways of thinking and working.

1.9 Summary and Signposting

In this chapter the research was introduced and contextualised by first outlining the reasons for my interest in the topic in the context of my own personal lived experiences, psychotherapy model, and case work. I described how the research aims were formulated. Through reflexivity, I have shown how my personal and professional development impacted on my role as a practitioner-researcher and I explained why this research matters, being both relevant and timely.

Chapter two examines the literature in the wider field. To ensure a balanced perspective, a thorough, systematic review of the literature was initially carried out. In this chapter, I will outline the methods and procedures used in conducting the literature review, and I will provide an evaluative, reflexive discussion of it.

Chapter three explores the methodology employed by the research. It considers the overall rationale for the design, methodological, theoretical, ethical, and philosophical foundations that have informed the research process. This chapter will consider the overall rationale for the qualitative methodology adopted. I will begin by discussing the wider research paradigm, including my ontological and epistemological stance, as well as the philosophical foundations that underpin the research. Within this chapter I will highlight my own reflexive processes, and I will consider issues of validity.

Chapter four outlines the method and procedures for carrying out the research and reviews the ethical considerations. This chapter will outline the qualitative methods used in conducting the research study, including ethical considerations. I will discuss sampling, the participants, the research aims, research procedure, collecting data, and analysis of the qualitative data.

Chapter five presents the findings of the research. This chapter considers the findings of the research in relation to the central research aims. The main aim of the research was to develop a comprehensive understanding of a small group of lesbian and gay people's experiences of organised religion, and to consider the implications of these experiences on the field of psychotherapy.

Chapter six discusses the findings in relation to the extant literature and the main themes found in the data analysis through a psychotherapy lens, drawing on relevant theory to inform my discussion. Since it could be argued that this research could perhaps be equally at home within the field of sociology, the chapter incorporates in-depth consideration of the findings' implications for psychotherapy, including additional literature that came to light at that stage.

Chapter seven discusses the implications of the research for practice and the major outcomes of the project. The main areas in which the research intends to make an impact includes clinical work, organisational context, presentations, papers, and within the public sphere.

Chapter eight concludes the research project by summarising the overall work from a personal and professional perspective as a psychotherapist-researcher, offering some critical reflections, discussing the strengths and limitations of the research, and proposing recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

There exists a burgeoning body of literature exploring religion and sexual orientation across the academic fields of psychology, sociology, theology, and philosophy. In my search for literature, I encountered articles and reports of hate crimes against lesbian and gay people that included murder, punishments, persecution, prejudice, and discrimination on a daily basis. On the other hand, I also discovered stories of understanding, protection, inclusion, and recognition.

The wider Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodology of this project requires the researcher to keep an open mind, to avoid developing bias, or forming preconceptions. To ensure a balanced perspective, a thorough review of the literature was carried out and I have been guided in this by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) who advocate for a more "evaluative literature review". In this chapter, I will outline the methods and procedures used in conducting the literature review, and I will provide an evaluative, reflexive discussion of my findings.

The discussion will begin with an historical perspective and discuss a significant paradigm shift. This will be followed by discussion of various sub-topics that include: mental health, heterosexism, conflict and anxiety, cognitive dissonance, stigma, intersecting identities, identity integration, empowerment, and a gay ecclesiology.

2.2 Research Aim(s)

The main aim of this research is to explore a small group of lesbian and gay people's experiences of organised religion, to consider the findings in relation to the wider research literature, and to consider any implications for the field of Psychotherapy.

2.3 Objectives of the Literature Review

a) To establish a sound knowledge base and gain a comprehensive understanding of prior research and academic work, pertaining to the research aim(s) above.

b) To compare and contrast, and establish links across, the literature.

c) To locate theoretical and conceptual frameworks that have enhanced or limited progress on this topic.

d) To identify any gaps in knowledge that may be filled.

e) To identify areas for further research.

2.4 Method

After gaining ethical approval through the Metanoia Institute/Middlesex University's Programme Approval Panel (PAP), the literature review was carried out during the same period that the initial online survey was open to potential participants.

The online survey remained open from June 2014 to December 2014. The reason I carried out the literature review at this stage was to identify some of the strengths and weaknesses of key contributions within the field, which, in turn, supported the double hermeneutic. It helped me to develop greater knowledge of the topic, and also supported specificity regarding aspects of the topic that were interesting to me as the researcher.

Since the research is grounded in a phenomenological perspective, my approach to data collection required an open mind. I therefore held an awareness of the hazards of developing preconceptions when confronting the wider literature at this pre-interview stage because participants, when interviewed, needed to be able to express their views independently and without bias. It is for this reason that Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) recommend a more evaluative literature review than may be the case for some other research methodologies.

2.4.1 Evaluative Literature Review

In this section I will describe my intention to combine a systematic approach (Aveyard, 2014) with the more evaluative approach suggested by Baumeister and Leary, 1997. Normally, the purpose of reviewing the literature in an IPA study is to identify any gaps that interview questions could subsequently address, and to help the researcher learn something about the potential participants "even though the interview questions are not themselves theory driven". (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009: 42).

Whilst my review of the literature does not follow the more stringent requirements of a Cochrane or Campbell collaboration style systematic review, I have been committed to a systematic approach using explicit rigorous methods of searching, critiquing, and synthesising the literature in order to expand knowledge of the topic (Aveyard, 2014).

Although I had initially decided to critique articles using a standardised tool and to use thematic analysis for "identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 79), I encountered a sense of incongruence with this type of systematic approach. It contrasted with my genuine desire to read, digest, and fully understand the literature because there seemed to be too great an emphasis on structure and on getting it right, rather than on understanding meaning. This method seems to me to be more relevant when a literature review is the specific research methodology, rather than part of a project that is methodologically broader. I therefore combined a systematic approach (Aveyard, 2014) with a more evaluative approach suggested by Baumeister and Leary (1997).

I am thus honouring the need to follow a careful systematic approach in the earlier stages of searching and identifying the relevant literature while diverging from a rigid adherence to critique using standardised tools.

Silverman (2006) advises researchers to:

Focus only on those studies that are relevant for defining your research problem and organise what you say in the form of an argument rather than a simple (and thus academically tedious) description of other studies. (Silverman, 2006: 341)

In preparing to undertake the literature review, I elected to write a book review on this topic for an established, peer reviewed journal. This was a helpful exercise that enhanced my approach to reviewing the literature, and the resulting article was successfully published in the Journal of Guidance and Counselling (Meades, 2015).

The published paper evidences my professional development in this area and thus represents one of the required Doctoral programme activities.

2.4.2 Terminology

Identifying appropriate terminology is a key challenge of this research project, reflecting the complexity of the topic and related semantics. As discussed in the previous chapter (1.6), I am choosing to use "Lesbian" and "Gay" throughout this project since these were the terms used by participants.

2.4.3 Search Strategy

Since journal articles are normally indexed within databases using keywords, it was necessary to establish keywords that captured the essence of the topic and research aim(s) for undertaking the literature review.

The starting point was determining the keywords that best represent the research aim(s), bearing in mind that the question was likely to be categorised in a multiplicity of ways. Creative methods were used such as asking Counselling and Psychotherapy colleagues to suggest keywords they were familiar with, searching the internet, and identifying as many synonyms as possible.

The search terms I used included:

LGBT* (and variations of this); Queer; Gay; Lesbian; Homosexuality; Sexual Minority; Sexual Diversity; Religion; Faith; Spirituality; Religious Experience; Psychotherapy; Counselling.

Appendix 1 provides an algorithmic representation of the search strategy employed at each stage of the search - "Literature Search Strategy".

2.4.4 Data Sources

As recommended by Greenhalgh and Peacock (2005), I undertook a systematic approach to searching in order to acquire the widest possible range of relevant literature.

I started with free access journals online (e.g. Taylor and Francis Group), and then searched Google Scholar, Google, and, later, specific databases and searching facilities via the Middlesex University Ebsco platform, including PsycNet using the traditional Boolean operators AND, OR, NOT.

2.4.5 Restrictions to Scope

The scope of the literature review extended to all articles that pertained to the search strategy. It was necessary to impose some restrictions to the scope:

Time span
Given the changing cultural and societal climate in respect to the scope of the thesis, articles older than 30 years were not included in the search, in order to keep the literature as up-to-date and relevant as possible.

Transgenderism

The research does not extend to transgender people's experiences of religion and therefore transgender related search terms were not included.

<u>Language</u>
The current study is UK-based with the researcher and participants being English speaking. The literature search was therefore restricted to papers written in the English language.

2.4.6 Hierarchy of Evidence

The hierarchy of evidence (Aveyard, 2014) was determined by the aim(s) of the research and, since the topic is being approached from the point of view of an exploration of participants' lived experiences, interviews comprise the main method of data collection. The hierarchy of evidence is as follows:

1) Empirical qualitative and quantitative research literature
2) Systematic reviews
3) Theoretical literature
4) Practice literature
5) Policy literature

2.4.7 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

I am including research relating to lesbian and gay people and excluding research on the topics of other non-heterosexual identities and transgenderism because these fall outside the scope of the research project aims.

I am including research on this topic that relates to organised, Abrahamic, religious institutions (i.e. Christianity, Islam, and Judaism) but excluding literature relating to all other religions (e.g. Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism).

2.4.8 Managing References

Referencing was managed using a combination of "Endnote" software and manual recording. Endnote was problematic at times, not only because the platform was not always reliable, but also because it required significant online self-study to learn how to use it. It did not seem possible to export references in the format required by the university, so this task had to be completed manually.

2.5 Discussion of the Literature

This section provides an evaluative discussion of the literature, organised around nine salient themes: mental health, heterosexism, conflict and anxiety, cognitive dissonance, stigma, intersecting identities, identity integration, empowerment, and a gay ecclesiology. The rationale for choosing these themes is that they highlight the most salient themes in the literature that directly pertain to the intersection of religion and sexual orientation. Before moving on to explore these themes, I will present an historical perspective and explore some evolving paradigms.

2.5.1 Historical Perspective

It is argued that, in the past, pathological notions of human sexuality combined with powerful prevailing religious attitudes to intensify socio-political censure and control (Bowers, Minichiello & Plummer, 2010). Therefore, religion and sexual orientation were, historically, considered incongruous, as though the two could not co-exist. In fact, the dominant religions often appear to be so powerfully anti-gay that, for gay and lesbian people, choosing to stay within an institution feels tantamount to "sleeping with the enemy" (Yip, 2010, p.42).

A multiplicity of dubious translations of religious texts across theistic religions over the years has resulted in generations of people whose beliefs and values are unreliably informed (Helminiak, 1994). For example, authors frequently point to six isolated passages from the Christian Bible, (Genesis, 19: 1-8; Leviticus, 18:22, 20:13; Romans 1:26, 27; 1 Corinthians, 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10) that are most widely

recognized as the verses that support conservative Christians' contention that homosexuality is a sin (Rodriguez, 2010). Christian doctrine has certainly decreed homosexuality to be "unnatural", a "perversion", and an "abomination in the eyes of God" based almost entirely on those six passages of scripture (Clark, Brown, & Hochstein, 1990; Greenberg & Bystryn, 1982; Keysor, 1979; Scanzoni & Mollenkott, 1978).

There are of course more modern Christian denominations that view homosexuality more positively (e.g. The Quakers), but the vast majority of mainstream Christian denominations do not (Ellison, 1993; Mahaffy, 1996). In fact, Melton (1991) found that 72% of the Christian religious organizations it surveyed condemned homosexuals and homosexuality as being "an abomination". It seems most religions across the world tend to categorise behaviours associated with homosexuality as "unnatural", "ungodly", and "impure" (Yip, 2005). Research into the tolerance of homosexuality among non-Judeo-Christian groups has, according to Adamczyk & Pitt (2009), been minimal, a fact that they put down to the smaller population of non-Abrahamic religious organisations in the West. Yuchtman-Yaar and Alkalay (2008) found that Muslims had more conservative attitudes about sexual morality than Catholic Christians did. Other research on religious contexts (Adamczyk & Felson, 2006; Moore & Vanneman, 2003) has suggested that the influence of religious culture is far-reaching to the extent that non-religious people living in more religious regions tend to have more conservative attitudes, even when they do not consider themselves personally religious.

In Britain, Judaism consists of two main branches – Orthodox and Progressive (Coyle & Rafalin, 2000). The latter branch is subdivided into the Reform and Liberal movements. Orthodoxy includes a range of traditions from the Orthodox mainstream, the United Synagogue, and the Ultra-Orthodox of the various Hasidic groups. According to Cohn-Sherbok (1996) distinctions are often made within Judaism in relation to the extent of belief in "Torah min ha-shamayim" (Torah from Heaven), or to what extent the Torah has been divinely revealed and is therefore immutable. Coyle and Rafalin (2000) suggest that across Judaism and

31

Jewish culture the Torah is widely believed to be clear in its prohibition of sexual activity between men, and by extension, male homosexuality. This is amplified in the Talmud (Jewish Law) and perpetuated throughout Jewish culture and community. This concern has its roots in the historical persecution of Jews through the ages, including attempts to eradicate Jewish communities entirely (e.g. the Shoah). Coyle and Rafalin (2000) acknowledge there are significant divergences between the expectations and responsibilities of men and women within Judaism. It has been suggested that, in the case of men, the failure to marry and produce an heir can often be viewed as a type of "communal treason" (Unterman, 1995: 68). Similarly, there is an emphasis on the successful continuation of Jewish identities to the extent that:

> Sexuality that is not reproductive may be viewed by group members
> as instruments of genocide. (Greene, 1994: 244)

The existence of severe penalties, including death, for people found guilty of "homosexual immorality" in many Muslim countries suggests that the religious authorities in these countries may be particularly likely to interpret religious doctrine as prohibiting homosexuality (Helie, 2004). Adamczyk & Pitt (2009) argue that, where the religious context is more disapproving in Muslim nations, anti-gay sentiment is disseminated through public discourse, public institutions, legal codes, social norms, and family structures.

2.5.2 Evolving Paradigms

Notably, the largest body of literature on this topic has been generated in the USA. It is growing rapidly in the UK but is mostly published in specialist LGBT journals. There is a growing body of both qualitative and quantitative research exploring the conflict that can occur between sexual and religious identities (Barton, 2010), and work in the USA has certainly developed beyond that of assessing conservative religious attitudes towards sexual minorities and moved towards exploring the positive role of faith for LGB people (Rodriguez, Lourdes & Follins, 2012).

Hood, Spilka, Hunsberger, and Gorusch (1996) note that psychological writing about religion and homosexuality increased rapidly from the 1980s onwards, but they also point out that the literature appears to have focussed largely on "conceptual, political, social, pastoral, and clinical issues" (ibid. p.140). They contend that empirical research has been lacking, but Rodriguez (2010) believes the situation is changing within both sociology and psychology. For example, Yip (1997a) identified two major themes in the wider body of research. The first of these themes is a contrast between religious and non-religious lesbian, gay, and bisexual people, and the second is a focus on the relationship between LGB people and the church itself.

According to Rodriguez (2010), lesbian and gay people have predominantly been studied in contrast to other religious individuals and groups, or to other religious ideals. The majority of work has assessed the attitudes of heterosexual religious people and religious organisations towards homosexuality (Brooke, 1993; Fischer, Derison, Polley, Cadman & Johnston, 1994; Gay, Elsion, & Powers, 1996; Mader, 1993; Nugent & Gramick, 1989; Westerfelhaus, 1998; Lindley & Schwarz, 2005; Swank, Eldridge & Mack, 2006), the attitudes of LGB people toward religion (O'Brien, 1991; Yip, 1997), and the impact of religious authoritarianism and prejudice on homosexuality (Herek, 1987; Hunsberger, 1996; Laythe et al., 2001; Whitley & Egisdottir, 2000).

The American Psychological Association (APA) declassified homosexuality as a mental illness in 1973, by which time the Stonewall riots had already occurred, in 1969, creating greater visibility and acceptance. However, it is only relatively recently that researchers have started to recognise that many lesbian and gay people lead active religious lives as well (Barret & Barzan, 1998). Rodriguez (2010) reviewed the literature during a significant paradigm shift, noticing that social scientists were beginning to consider LGB people as "spiritual and religious beings in their own right, rather than needing to be compared and contrasted with religious others" (ibid. p.8). This shift is reflected in the work of several social scientists (Lukenbill, 1998; Mahaffy, 1996; Thumma, 1991; Yip, 1996).

It is worth noting that the vast majority of academic work in this area has been conducted in the West and from Western cultural frames of reference (Rodriguez, 2010) and there is less research from the perspective of other contexts (i.e. non-Western cultures). Yip (2010b) recognizes that a lot of literature emerges from a gay standpoint, and that less comes from a lesbian one. He also observes that the literature by and large covers experiences from Christian, Muslim and, to a lesser extent, Jewish perspectives. Figueroa and Tasker (2013) reiterate this criticism of the literature but note that some studies have, for example, included samples of gay Latino youths in order to study family influences on development and mental health (Dube & Savin-Williams, 1999; Grov, Bimbi, Nanin & Parsons, 2006; Rosario, Schrimshaw & Hunter, 2009).

Adamczyk and Cheng (2014) also acknowledge the dominance of literature with a Western perspective and argue that Confucian countries can be even less tolerant than European countries and the USA. In their research paper they discuss their findings of a unique "Confusion cultural effect", which they partially explain as relating to specific cultural concerns with keeping the family intact. However, they also discuss having found a "Buddhist context effect", resulting in more tolerant attitudes in those contexts. Siraj (2012) also addresses race, culture, and ethnicity. She acknowledges that Islam's depiction of homosexuality is often framed within a rigid discourse of sin and deviation, advocated and supported by a number of Muslim countries that have legalized the punishment of gay men and lesbian women. For her, Islam is often characterised as an extremely homophobic religion that tends to negate same-sex sexual orientation (Siraj, 2012).

Yip (2010b) examined the literature on 'sexuality and religion' and determined three broad categories that he named: "defensive apologetics", "cruising texts", and "turning theology upside down". His first category of "defensive apologetics" is explained as literature that attempts to re-contextualise texts that have traditionally been used as the indisputable basis for the moral exclusiveness of heterosexuality, and the unacceptability of homosexuality. Das Nair and Thomas (2012) suggest that the process of re-contextualising often demands close academic attention to the original (ancient) language of scripts, reading them in

their relevant socio-historical contexts. They argue this is actually a highly cognitive process and, for them, it is both the appeal and the problem. They make an important point, relevant to psychotherapeutic practice, that many clients from religious backgrounds already have a full conceptual grasp of their own and others' interpretations of religious texts. Therefore, they suggest an important challenge for therapists is to work more with the affective components related to client's cognitive integration of their seemingly incompatible identities (das Nair & Thomas, 2012: 40).

In Yip's (2010b) second category, "cruising texts", he identified a shift beyond "apologetics" to a more positive identification of sexualities (including non-heterosexual) within religious texts and characters. das Nair and Thomas (2012) suggest there remains a particularly cognitive driver in this approach but they also recognise it as both affirmative and helpfully provocative.

The third category that Yip (2010b) identified was "turning theology upside down", where spirituality and sexuality are seen as fundamentally interconnected. Importantly, he makes the point that sexuality is not just limited to being conceptualised as "genital acts" (Yip, 2010b: 40). Whilst das Nair and Thomas (2012) appear to fully appreciate the interconnectedness of sexuality and spirituality in this third category, they express a valid concern with which I concur. They argue that the "wholesomeness" of such an inherent connection between spirituality and sexuality risks demoting "genital acts" to something lesser, which could inevitably propagate heteronormativity by offending heterosexual sensibilities, and ultimately creating separations between "good and bad" types of sex (or "genital acts"). das Nair and Thomas (2012) argue that there is an inherent problem with the interpretation of religious texts when they are read as being asexual, or where sex is incidental to the main aim of a committed monogamous relationship. For this reason, they call for more transgressive "queering" of religious texts, which goes beyond "cruising" to actively "sexing them" (Ibid.: 92).

Some years ago, Warner (1995) documented the struggle of gay men and lesbian women within the church over essentialist (being born with it) versus constructionist (learning and choosing it) perspectives of homosexuality in religious doctrine. Lukenbill (1998) also found the use of an essentialist approach useful in supporting the integration of sexual orientation and religious identity in his study of the metropolitan community church (MCC). In a call for social justice in US society Lukenbill (1998) expressed solidarity with the gay community by sharing the more positive view that gay and lesbian people are "made in the image of God" (Lukenbill, 1998: 441).

Adamczyk and Pitt (2009) highlighted some interesting effects of religious affiliation, in addition to their key findings that a country's cultural orientation moderates the relationship between religious importance and anti-gay prejudice. They point out that while Muslims appeared less likely to condone same-sex attraction than Catholics, Orthodox Christians, Jews, Hindus, and Buddhists, and people with no religion, they did not appear to differ too much from Protestants.

Even though Judaism appears to be potently heterosexist, Coyle and Rafalin (2000) warn against broadly pathologizing and demonizing the religion. They argue that, although it may be challenging to understand the orthodoxy and dogmatism inherent in Judaism, it is important to recognise the possibilities for the coexistence of both Jewish and gay identities. Indeed, Brown (1991), a Jewish lesbian feminist and psychologist, makes a salient point that also has relevance for other evolving paradigms:

> To be a Jew is to live with contradictions and diversity. (Brown, 1991:49)

Empirical research, such as that of Wilcox (2003), has shown that the intersection of religion and sexuality plays out in diverse ways and leads to multiple outcomes. This is particularly relevant when framed within a life-course perspective. For example, someone who experiences guilt and shame can gradually learn to transcend and transform themselves from this, developing

spiritual, cultural, and social capital within and beyond religious institutional settings.

2.5.3 Mental Health

It is argued that people often turn to religion to address the unanswered questions of life, appealing to a higher power, or sacred source for understanding and support (Bent-Goodley & Fowler, 2006). However, when this place of sanctuary is turned against lesbian and gay people, or when they feel estranged from it, this can inevitably lead to significant mental distress (Super & Jacobson, 2012), marked especially with increasing feelings of hopelessness, confusion, and condemnation (Pitt. 2010). Halkitis et al. (2009) identified four main positions that different types of religious groups and leaders tend to take on homosexuality: i) full acceptance, ii) qualified acceptance (e.g. if they're not in sexual relationships), iii) rejecting non-punitive ("love the sinner, hate the sin"), and the most abusive, iv) rejecting punitive (homosexuality is a sin punishable by eternity in Hell).

Drawing on autoethnography and data from interviews, Barton (2010) explored the religious backgrounds and experiences of "Bible belt gays". She found that fundamentalist religious dogma – that homosexuals are bad, diseased, perverse, sinful, other, and inferior – can be "cumulatively bolstered in other social environments" (ibid: 477). Participants described living through what Barton describes as "spirit-crushing" experiences of isolation, abuse, and self-loathing. The article highlights the harmful consequences of dogma, including the fear of going to hell, depression, low self-esteem, and feeling worthless.

Sowe, Taylor, and Brown (2017) examined whether opposing lesbian and gay sexuality on religious grounds could be a predictor of detrimental outcomes for both same-sex attracted people and their heterosexual counterparts. They conducted a nationwide (USA) sample of 1600 people, all of whom were recruited online. Analyses showed that a greater exposure to religious anti-gay prejudice predicated high anxiety, stress, shame, greater physical/verbal abuse, and more problematic alcohol use. They concluded that whilst lesbian and gay

people tended to fare more poorly than heterosexual counterparts on almost every outcome measured, interestingly, homo-negative prejudice predicated poorer outcomes amongst all respondents, regardless of their religion. They argue these results are amongst the first to demonstrate that exposure to anti-gay religious prejudice is associated with substantial threats to well-being and, more broadly, that these effects can be observed beyond religious sexual minorities.

Faith groups that affirm gender and sexual diversities are more likely to support the integration of intersecting identities, whereas non-affirming faith groups tend to rigidly oppose differences, sometimes resulting in complete abandonment by the religious community (Lease, Home & Noffsinger-Frazier, 2005). Religious groups that believe LGB people are immoral and sinful also tend to promote messages that contain overtly abusive and threatening language and behaviour that can profoundly affect a person's self-worth, self-acceptance, cognitive development, and gender or sexual identity formation (Barton, 2010). A lifelong process of post-traumatic recovery can follow experiences of religious prejudice, discrimination and abuse (Herek et al., 1999; Ross & Rosser, 1996; McLaren, Belinda, & McLachlan, 2007). The notion of "religious abuse" is complex and seems to have been difficult to define (as with emotional, physical, and sexual abuse), because of various grey areas, ambiguity, and "scarce research on defining the term" (Super & Jacobson, 2011).

Even though a more fluid notion of sexuality or "normalcy" may slowly be emerging in the West (Weststrate & Maclean, 2010), the wider literature still underlines the powerfully negative influences of heterosexism and the impact of homophobia on LGB people's mental health, including increased rates of depression and anxiety (Bernhard & Applegate, 1999; Mays & Cochran, 2001; Lewis et al., 2003), suicide (Bernhard & Applegate, 1999; Faulkner & Cranston, 1998, 1998, 1998; Gibson, 1989; Mays & Cochran, 2001), and alcohol and drug misuse (Cheng, 2003; Faulkner & Cranston, 1998; Garafalo et al., 1998; Jordan, 2000). According to McGeorge and Carlson (2009), these trends have been directly linked to "gay-related stress", which is the stress associated with belonging to a marginalised group. Lewis et al. (2003) found that gay-related

stress appeared to be the major cause of depressive symptoms, arguably a direct result of heterosexism.

According to Rodriguez (2010), there are four main psychological theories in the literature regarding what happens at the intersection of sexual-orientation and religion. These include: Rodriguez's (1997) theory of conflict and anxiety, Festinger's (1957) cognitive dissonance theory, Goffman's (1963) theory of stigma, and Baumeister, Shapiro, and Tices's (1985) theory of identity conflict. However, two concepts that are arguably underrepresented in the literature according to Rodriguez (2010) are Shallenberger's (1996, 1998) notion of integration as a process and Rappaport's (1981, 1995, 2000) concept of empowerment. Internalised homophobia (Herek, 1987) is another relevant theoretical construct that is highlighted.

It is argued that modern-day psychotherapists often appear to be caught between a positive "affirmative" healthy lifestyle model of gender and sex diversities, and a culturally rooted Western, religious-based heterosexist system of attitudes and constraints (Bowers, Minichiello & Plummer, 2010). Therapists who consciously or unconsciously lean towards prevailing (socially conservative and religious-based) heterosexist constructs may well be doing harm to clients who are seeking help. Therefore, improving our understanding of the process of integration and how identities intersect could help improve practice in this area.

In terms of the mental health of lesbian and gay people more generally, King et al. (2008) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of the prevalence of mental disorder, substance misuse, suicide, suicidal ideation, and deliberate self-harm in LGB people and confirmed that LGB people are at higher risk of these than heterosexual people. Bachman and Gooch (2018) surveyed 5000 LGBT people in the UK on behalf of Stonewall and found that 52% of participants experienced depression in the previous year, 13% had attempted to take their own life in the previous year, 46% had thought about taking their life and 31% of non-transgender LGB people said the same, 16% said they had drunk alcohol every day over the previous year, 13% had taken drugs at least once a month over the

previous year, 23% had witnessed discriminatory remarks by healthcare staff, 5% had been pressured to access services to question or change their sexual-orientation when accessing healthcare services, 19% were not out to any healthcare professional about their sexual-orientation when seeking general medical care, and 14% had avoided treatment for fear of discrimination. The report clearly uncovers alarmingly high rates of poor mental health, and the challenges experienced by LGBT people accessing services in the UK in 2018.

The American Psychological Association (1991) recognises heterosexist bias in psychotherapy practice, and a rigorous systematic review of psychotherapy in the UK found clients who are not heterosexual are often misunderstood by therapists who regularly see their clients' sexuality as the root cause of presenting issues (King et al., 2007). A crucial BACP ethical statement affirmed to its members that LGB experiences are entirely compatible with normal mental health and social adjustment (BACP, 2012), recognising that some therapists may hold over-simplified notions of gender and sexuality (Davies, 2012).

2.5.4 Heterosexism

Religion, but more specifically, theologically conservative religion, has been implicated in a number of studies as being a particularly potent predictor of heterosexism and anti-gay prejudice (Finlay & Walther, 2003; Herek, 2004; Hunsberger, Owusu, & Duck, 1999; Johnson, Brems, & Alford-Keating, 1997; Morrison & Morrison, 2002; Schulte & Battle, 2004).

One of the most researched dimensions of religious faith according to Rosik, Griffith, and Cruz (2007) has been Allport's (Allport & Ross, 1967) distinction between intrinsic faith, representing the central organising values of a person's life, and extrinsic faith, in which religion predominantly serves other social and personal goals (Rosik, Griffith, & Cruz, 2007). From my understanding, intrinsic religiosity has not been found to be associated with racial prejudice but does appear to be positively linked to homophobia. However, extrinsic religiosity has related positively to both racism and heterosexism (Herek, 1987; Wilkinson,

2004). Rowatt and Schmitt (2003) found that intrinsic religiousness is related to more restricted sexuality and desire across 52 cultures, claiming that the intrinsic religiosity-homophobia connection may be universal. By contrast, extrinsic religiosity was associated with a less restrained sexuality. Rowatt & Schmitt (2003) suggest that intrinsic believers internalise their religious teachings and values, whereas the attitudes of extrinsically-orientated believers reflect their personal or social needs.

Internalised homophobia, also known as internalised heterosexism (Szymanski & Chung, 2003), happens when anti-gay attitudes are retroflected or directed inwards, resulting in devaluation of the self, internal conflict, and low self-esteem (Meyer & Dean, 1998). Intrinsic religiosity, or strong religious affiliation, was shown to be a strong predictor of internalised homophobia in lesbian and gay people (Herek, 1987). However, Ream (2001) found that strong religious commitment was not, on its own, a risk factor for internalised prejudice but that the homophobic messages often presented and delivered within religious contexts tended to be a more reliable predictor. Wagner et al. (1994) examined the relationship between internalised homophobia and the process of integrating one's religious faith and homosexuality by comparing levels of internalised homophobia in a group of gay men with Catholic backgrounds. They found that nearly 50% felt they should abandon their religious faith, and no longer endorsed a formal religion, in order to accept their sexuality.

Stokes and Peterson (1998) found that amongst their young, male, African-American participants, churches were described as the primary source of antigay messages. It was thought to be the case that exposing young people to these messages resulted in them having a view that homosexuality is "a sin" condemning them to hell, and that they therefore wanted to change their sexual orientation. Kubicek et al. (2009) found that young gay men employed a variety of strategies to manage painful experiences such as avoiding church altogether, seeking alternative churches, or using selective listening to avoid internalising homophobic messages. Ritter and O'Neil (1989) a that Lesbian and gay people in

their sample often moved away from the religion they were raised in and developed a range of different ways to cope with religious homophobia.

It is clear that in the West, the gap in attitudes towards LG people between devoutly religious people and the general culture is growing, especially regarding their views on the morality of sexual behaviour (Altemeyer, 2001; Finlay & Walther, 2003; Linneman 2004; Loftus, 2001; Sullivan, 2003). From psychological therapy's perspective, McGeorge and Carlson (2009) highlight the need for heterosexual therapists to become more aware of the influences of their own hetero-normative assumptions, heterosexual privileges, and heterosexual identities on the therapy process, whilst recognising that not all LGB clients may necessarily understand heterosexism as influencing their presenting problems. They propose a three-step model of self-reflection that could support a more affirmative stance.

Rosik, Griffith, and Cruz (2007) support a growing body of literature that recommends sensitivity when examining the relationship between heterosexism and conservative religion. The authors refer to Wilkinson (2004) when reminding us that the relationship between religion and homophobia is complex and perceived differently by people operating either within or outside the religious framework.

2.5.5 Conflict and Anxiety

Perry (1990) has suggested that there is a tendency for Christians to interpret their doctrine to mean that same-sex attraction is unnatural and perverse, but that at the same time they propose that God is Love, and that all believers will have a place in the Kingdom of Heaven. Such contradictory messages are clearly confusing and can, according to Englund (1991) and Spencer (1994), create self-loathing and despair in LGB people of faith. Rodriguez (2010) suggests it is this kind of duality that creates feelings of anxiety and of a conflict between two identities that are both equally important to the person's sense of self. He supports moving beyond a simplistic definition of conflict as "the tension that can arise between a

gay or lesbian Christian's sexual orientation and their religious beliefs" (Rodriguez 1997, 2006, 2010; Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000) to include "the anxiety that arises in a gay or lesbian person experiencing such conflict" (Rodriguez, 2010).

Cohen (1997) describes a destructive form of duality in religion. As well as highlighting that the black church believes "homosexual behaviour is immoral and in direct contrast to the word of God" (ibid: 284), she asserts that, while it refuses to entertain an inclusive and transformed discourse, outsiders will consider the church's desire to "serve all" hypocritical. Rodriguez (2010) suggests Cohen's (1997) themes address wider issues of inconsistency, intolerance, homophobia, and fundamentalism found within religion. He points out that, based on Cohen's (1997) work, researchers have identified several causes of conflict and anxiety that have both extrinsic (coming from outside) and intrinsic (coming from within the individual) causes. These are thought to transcend the boundaries of the wider society: religious and non-religious individuals, groups, and organisations share beliefs that "gayness" is unnatural, perverted, or a sin. Rodriguez (2010) notes a high proportion of the gay community subsequently harbour anti-religious sentiments, seen as a healthy disdain for anyone or anything having to do with organised religion, which is viewed as homophobic, heterosexist, and patriarchal.

Extrinsic causes of conflict and anxiety include: strict adherence to religious tenets, reportedly promoted by the religious right (Birken, 1997; Grant & Epp, 1998; Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000), acceptance of anti-gay doctrine (Yip, 1997), acceptance of other lesbian and gay people's negative outlooks and experiences (Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000; Shallenberger, 1996, 1998), and contradiction with the religious beliefs of family members and friends (Mahaffy, 1996; Rodriguez, 1997).

Intrinsic causes of conflict and anxiety include: a fear of divine retribution (Ritter & O'Neil, 1989; Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000) and strong beliefs that one's different identities are totally incompatible (Mahaffy, 1996; Rodriguez, 1997). Most interestingly, in his review of the literature, Rodriguez (2010) believes, after

looking across studies, that religious fundamentalism is arguably the single primary cause of both intrinsic and extrinsic conflict and anxiety for LGB people who identify with religion.

2.5.6 Cognitive Dissonance

Scholars from a range of disciplines have used theories of "cognitive dissonance" (Festinger, 1957), "stigma" (Goffman, 1963), and "identity conflict" (Baumeister et al., 1985), to explain the origins of the internal conflict between their sexual and religious identities that LGB people experience. Festinger's (1957) cognitive dissonance theory is said by Rodriguez (2010) to be one of the more popular psychological theories used to explain this experience. According to Festinger's (1957) original theory:

> Cognitive dissonance arises when a person experiences tension between two psychologically inconsistent thoughts or beliefs. (Rodriguez, 2010: 11).

Cognitive dissonance theory received criticism from Bagby, Parker, and Bury (1990) who argued it was "methodologically vague" and "difficult to operationalise", and Rodriguez (2010) points out there are various similar theories claiming greater accuracy in assessing the phenomenon, including self-concept analysis (Aronson, 1968), theory of self-perception (Bem, 1967), and self-affirmation theory (Steele, 1988). Regardless of these alternatives, Joule and Beauvois (1998) proposed a "radical view" of cognitive dissonance theory by calling for a return to Festinger's original theory. According to that original theory, Festinger (1957) suggested that holding two conflicting cognitions is both psychologically and emotionally uncomfortable, producing a negative mental state, and causing people try to adjust or get rid of certain cognitions in order to reduce conflict and anxiety. Achieving such constancy of thought is referred to as cognitive consonance; this is said to be preferred to cognitive dissonance because it results in reduced anxiety (Cooper & Fazio, 1984).

Rodriguez (2010) stresses that, since there can be dissonance between thoughts and beliefs, there can also be dissonance between thoughts and behaviour. Furthermore, Jones (1985) argued that inconsistency between behaviour and cognition is not enough for dissonance to occur, unless the cognitions are rooted in a person's self-concept. When the two cognitions relate to the self-concept then either dissonance or consonance happens. Jones (1985) also believed that if the two cognitions are not relevant to the self-concept then Festinger's (1957) theory does not apply, because there can be no dissonance. Rodriguez (2010) provides a helpful example to explain this:

> Religious people can strongly believe that homosexuality is wrong but can nevertheless engage in homosexual behaviour because this is not a facet of their self-concept. However, if the homosexual behaviour were to impact more directly on the person's self-concept then theoretically, dissonance would occur. (Rodriguez, 2010: 9)

Thumma (1991) and Mahaffy (1996) both carried out research studies assessing religious beliefs and homosexuality using the lens of Festinger's (1957) "cognitive dissonance theory'" as the framework for understanding potential intra-psychic conflict. In a participant observation study, Thumma (1991) showed how a group of eight gay men successfully integrated their feelings of being religious with being gay through their membership of an evangelical group called 'Good News'. An important aspect of the group was that participants considered both their religious beliefs and their homosexuality to be important components of their self-concept. According to Rodriguez (2010) this illustrates the significance of identity negotiation between a person's religious beliefs and homosexuality in alleviating cognitive dissonance. Attempting to understand this process specifically as it occurs in women, Mahaffy (1996) conducted an exploratory survey of 163 lesbians and reported that a fundamental or evangelical Christian identity predicted higher internal and external dissonance. Furthermore, Mahaffy (1996) identified three resolution strategies for alleviating dissonance, namely altering one's religious beliefs, leaving the church, or living with the dissonance.

2.5.7 Stigma

Crocker (1995) conducted a review of the psychological concept of stigma, finding that:

> Stigmatised conditions lead to the rejection of individuals because they have an attribute that compromises their humanity in the eyes of others. (Crocker, 1995: 633)

Crocker (1995) also found that what is considered "stigmatised" changes as public attitudes, knowledge, and tastes evolve over time, and he concluded that stigma originates not just from the circumstances causing the stigma but also from other reactions to that stigma (Crocker, 1995). The centrality of the stigma to a person's identity also appears to be an essential aspect of the stigma theory:

> The more importance that is placed on the stigma by oneself or by others, the more it impacts on one's identity. (Goffman, 1963 in Rodriguez, 2010: 13)

Goffman's (1963) classic work on stigma provides a useful overarching framework, identifying three main types of stigma: body, tribal, and individual character. Body stigma is discussed in relation to physical abnormalities; tribal stigmas relate to race, ethnicity, religion, and nationality; and stigma of individual character refers to convicts, drug and alcohol abusers, the unemployed, mentally ill, and homosexuals, among other groups. Rodriguez (2010) points out that the latter stigma of individual character is not necessarily visible to others, so people in this category must either disclose the stigma voluntarily, or have it disclosed.

Crocker and Major (1989) outlined three major strategies used by people to protect themselves from being stigmatised. These include, attributing negative outcomes they experience to prejudice or discrimination; devaluing those domains in which their stigma makes it unlikely they will excel; and selectively comparing themselves and their outcomes with others who share their stigma rather than with non-stigmatised individuals. Yip (1997a) conducted semi-structured interviews

focussing on stigma management with 60 gay male Christians in the Church of England and Catholic Church, UK. He, perhaps unsurprisingly, found that the Christian church stigmatises homosexuality and homosexuals and that LGB therefore Christians develop various mechanisms to address this stigma (Yip, 1997b).

Yip (2010a) also highlights the four main strategies used by gay male Christians. These include: attacking the stigma; attacking the stigmatiser; the use of positive personal experience; and the use of the "ontogeneric argument". The first strategy, "attacking the stigma" involves challenging the accurateness of the six Biblical passages most commonly used to condemn gay Christians by either invalidating conventional interpretations of scripture, shifting the focus to broader Christian principles of love and respect for all, or challenging the relevance of those verses to today's society (Yip, 2010a). The second strategy, attacking the stigmatiser" is a strategy used to discount the credibility of the church as the moral guardian for LGB Christians by either undermining or ignoring official church doctrine that is negative to homosexuals and homosexuality. The third strategy, "the use of positive personal experience" entails adhering to basic Christian moral values though living in a monogamous relationship with only one partner and avoiding the "sexual promiscuity" stereotypically assumed to be commonplace in gay culture. Interestingly, from an optimistic perspective, the final "ontogeneric argument" proffers that all sexual orientations, including homosexuality, are created by God and are therefore supported and blessed by Him (Yip, 2010a).

Lalich and McLaren (2010) also explore stigmatization by focussing on the conflict between sexual and religious identities, not just in the social world, but also as a major task in participants' inner worlds. They explore the written narratives of a subset of gay and lesbian former Jehovah's Witnesses who were able to comprehend, negotiate and, in most cases, resolve their multifaceted stigmas and conflicts through what the authors describe as struggle, self-determination, and, eventually, connecting with networks and peers who faced similar experiences of stigmatisation.

Vilaythong, Nosek, and Lindner (2010) examined whether priming "Golden Rule" messages (e.g. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you") would influence religious attitudes towards gay people and perceptions that homosexuality is a choice. They included 585 Buddhists and Christians in a priming task. Their results suggested that, although the golden rule has an important influence on believers, the message of compassion produced more prejudice if it came from an out-group than an in-group source.

2.5.8 Intersecting Identities

Baumeister et al. (1985) described identity conflict as:

> … the problem of the multiply defined self whose definitions have
> become incompatible. (Baumeister, 1985: 408).

For Rodriguez (2010), identity conflict occurs when certain developments in a person's life create a sense of being in an impossible situation, and two key components to identity conflict are outlined in his paper. The first is "having a strong personal commitment to two distinct identity components" and the second is "having a multiplicity of identity". According to Rodriguez (2010) this is where identity conflict diverges from cognitive dissonance. He argues that having a multiplicity of identities means a person's identity is comprised of a series of sub-identities, which are dynamic in nature (Marcus & Wurf, 1987; Rosenberg & Gara, 1985). It is therefore suggested that the dynamic interaction of these multiple identities can potentially lead to identity conflict – thus, being LGB and religious can trigger an experience of identity conflict. In support of this, Coyle and Rafalin (2000) report their findings from a qualitative study of 21 Jewish gay males in which all but one participant reported experiences of identity conflict (arising mainly from the perceived incompatibility of Jewish and gay identities) impacting negatively on their psychological well-being.

Rodriguez and Ouellette (2000) offer an in-depth discussion of identity theories including related theories such as identity change (Deaux, 1991), alleviating role

conflict (Stryker and Statham 1985), and identity negotiation (Deaux et al., 1991). Significantly, they propose four different pathways that gay and lesbian people (of strong religious faith) attempt to take to reduce conflict between their homosexual and religious identities: rejecting the homosexual identity, rejecting the heterosexual identity, compartmentalisation, and identity integration.

Rodriguez and Ouellette (2000) interviewed 40 gay and lesbian participants and explored their experiences of identity conflict and identity integration using mixed methods. Participants were defined as having achieved identity integration when they were found to have both a positive religious and a positive gay identity, and they did not experience conflict between the two. In addition to this, the researchers found that the majority of participants did have successfully integrated identities, and that being integrated was related to greater church involvement, having membership of a church, attending more worship services and activities, and having attended church for more than two years. Lesbians were less likely than gay men to report past conflict between their identities and were more likely to report being fully integrated. Finally, the church played an important role in helping people achieve integration.

Of particular interest to me as an integrative therapist is that Rodriguez and Ouellette (2000) developed an understanding of integration as a process rather than a construct. They first measured integration using a cross-sectional design but they found participants talked extensively about identity integration as a process they were still involved in. Rodriguez (2010) argues that considering identity integration as a process is more effective than using psychological theories when explaining the interaction between homosexual and religious identities:

> Assessing integration as a process has the potential to more adequately address the complexity of the phenomena at hand, and the resilience of individuals to be able to live with conflict in their lives. (Rodriguez, 2010: 17).

For me, the findings of Rodriguez and Ouellette (2000) study are important, not least because they challenge any assumption of conflict. In their research, they found that not all gay and lesbian Christians reported experiencing conflict, and that the desire to merge homosexual and religious identities did not follow a period of conflict between the two. This finding is supported by Mahaffy (1996), who also found that not all of her lesbian participants reported experiencing conflict. Rodriguez and Ouellette (2000) found that 12 out of 40 (30%) of their participants reported never having experienced conflict between their sexual orientation and that 9 of these 12 reported having fully integrated identities. The reasons given for this lack of conflict included: never having encountered nor internalised anti-gay religious rhetoric, devaluing church teachings, having come out at a later age, having attended seminary, and God's all-encompassing love.

Levy and Reeves (2011) drew three main conclusions from their qualitative interviews with 15 participants. First, they found that resolving the discord between sexual identity and religious beliefs is a five-stage process of internal conflict resolution: awareness of the conflict, an initial response to the conflict, a catalyst of new knowledge propelling participants forward, steps of working through the conflict, and resolution of the conflict. Second, they underline the extent to which personal and contextual factors affect every aspect of the resolution process. Lastly, they found that faith development and sexual identity development are intertwined and fluid constructions.

There is significant ongoing academic debate regarding the various tensions that exist between scholars of intersectionality. For example, Hancock (2016) identifies a tension between scholars who believe black women are not given enough credit or attention for intersectionality and those who believe black women have been given too much power in this domain. Seeing this as emblematic of a larger question, Hancock (2016) helpfully challenges whether we should think of intersectionality as a form of intellectual property belonging to certain demographic groups, or whether we should think of it as a kind of "meme" among scholars committed to its visibility and inclusiveness. Carbado and Gulati (2013) articulate this dilemma exceptionally clearly:

One can read intersectionality to mean that personhood (or identity) can be separated out into discrete social parts. For example, race can be separated from gender. This is because the notion that two things "intersect" brings readily to mind a Venn diagram within which each thing exists both inside and outside of the intersection. Indeed, this is the conception of intersectionality that our students often articulate… The diagram invites us to imagine social circumstances in which race and gender exist apart from each other as "pure" identities. Although the metaphor of intersectionality conveys this idea, the fuller theory of intersectionality, and Crenshaw's conceptualization of this theory, rejects it. Fundamental to intersectionality theory is the understanding that race and gender are interconnected, and as a result, they do not exist as disaggregated identities. In other words, there are no nonintersecting areas in the diagram. (Carbado & Gulati, 2013: 71)

das Nair and Butler (2012) discuss the concepts of intersectionality, sexuality, and psychological therapies in depth. Approaching these constructs from the perspective of working psychologically with LGB diversity, their academic work examines specific identities and how they intersect. These identities include: gender, race and ethnicity, religion, refugees and asylum seekers, social class, physical health, mental health, disability, and age and ageing.

Even though there continues to be rhetoric perpetuating the notion that sexual-orientation and religion are incompatible identities (Lease, Horne & Noffsinger-Frazier, 2005) many lesbian and gay people do grow up in the context of religious communities and they continue their involvement with these into adulthood. Dahl and Galliher (2009) found in a study of 105 LGBQQ young adults aged 18-24 that 42% of the participants reported to have grown up in a family with weekly attendance at religious services, and another 44% reported growing up in families that attended services less frequently. 80% of the same sample reported having "only somewhat" or "not at all" integrated their religious and sexual identifies. 60% of the participants reported having experiences of conflict. Bartoli and

Gillem (2008) argue that people experiencing conflict at the intersection of these identities can end up privileging one identity over another. This can result in the rejection of the lesbian or gay identity, or in changes to religious affiliations.

Yip (2010b) argues that stereotypical constructs of minority sexualities, which are manifested in controversies such as "the gay debate" within Christianity, feed into the popular notion that religion is out-of-step with social and cultural realities. In liberal democracies where equality and diversity are increasingly recognised and largely respected, traditional organised religious spaces are viewed as antithetical to these values.

2.5.9 Identity Integration

One of the most common findings in social psychology is that higher levels of religiosity are associated with more negative attitudes toward lesbian and gay people (Black, 2008). Hodge (2005) describes two different world views found amongst people within faith groups - the progressive and the orthodox. Progressive people tend to include feminists and humanists who are thought to be more accepting of LGB people (Hodge, 2005). Orthodox people tend to have less relativist beliefs, with a tendency to be more conservative (Hodge, 2005). White and White (2004) consider autobiographical writings of gay Christians' spiritual journeys in their paper and suggest that visibility is a critical step in coming out that has both religious and sexual significance.

In a narrative study of 26 gay and lesbian people of different faiths, Shallenberger (1996) explored the intersection of community and identity and the impact this has on sexual and religious lives. He explored how gay men and lesbian women discover and define their spirituality, what processes lead to the construction of their spiritual identities, and how they evolve and change as gay and lesbian people of faith during the course of their spiritual journeys. It is worth noting that whilst Shallenberger (1996, 1998) discusses the process of identity integration in terms of a "spiritual journey", other writers (Barret & Barzan, 1996; Spencer 1994) refer to a "faith journey" with reference to the same process.

For a number of writers (Shallenberger, 1996; Coleman, 1981; Fischer, 1989; Grant & Epp, 1998), there is broad agreement that one of the most significant events and primary experiences in a lesbian or gay person's spiritual journey, is the process of "coming out", both to themselves and to others. Rodriguez (2009) believes this is not only the point at which conflict between identities first begins, but it also happens when a person becomes more aware of the discrepancies between living a gay lifestyle and remaining actively involved in organised religion. Shallenberger (1996) points out that "coming out" is one of the most widely studied developmental processes in LGBT literature, finding the following key themes relating to the process: deep and often difficult self-questioning, growing self-recognition and self-identification in the face of prolific anti-gay biases from a homophobic and heterosexist culture, sudden or measured disclosure to loved ones, and passage into deeper involvement with the LGBT community (Shallenberger, 1996: 197). Rodriguez (2009) emphasises that, whilst the "coming out" process has been framed in various developmental stage models, it is nevertheless a particularly individual process, which can be positive or negative, but not necessarily both.

Mahaffy (1996), Rodriguez (1997), and Shallenberger (1998) appear to agree that the next stage of a spiritual journey after "coming out", is the task of distinguishing between "spirituality" and "religion". The very word religion is associated with the trappings of traditional churches and official doctrine, while spirituality appears to be more related to personal religious and ethical beliefs. For Rodriguez (2010) making the distinction between the terms "religion" and "spirituality" supports lesbian and gay people who are:

> … attempting to distance and buffer themselves from the negative, anti-gay messages received from many mainline catholic and protestant religions. (Rodriguez, 2010: 19).

Shallenberger (1996) highlights three key issues that gay and lesbian people wrestle with on their continuing spiritual journeys. These are questioning,

reintegrating, and reclaiming. Questioning involves extensive internal conversations with oneself. Reintegrating is an attempt to reincorporate religious identity with a homosexual identity through reading, talking with others, and trying to connect with others. Reclaiming involves seeking out safe places to reconnect with both the gay identity and the religious identity in a supportive community.

Exploration of spirituality is often strongly linked with successful clinical outcomes, well-being, and healthy identity development (Corey, 2001; Harrison, 1994; Love et al., 2005; McQueeny, 2009; Morgan, 2000; Powers et al., 2007). Kocet, Sanabria, and Smith, (2011) argue that practitioners need to be aware of the distinct differences between spirituality and religion, and that it's helpful to explore these meanings with lesbian and gay clients. They remind the reader that religion is often considered to be "extrinsic" and institutional in nature, whereas spirituality is "intrinsic" and personal (Abernethy et al., 2006; Grimm, 1994). Yip (2010b) argues that:

> … religion and spirituality can represent an important resource for the construction of meaningful lives for lesbian and gay people. (ibid: 43).

In trying to discover which factors promote or hinder sexuality and religious identity integration, Kubicek et al. (2009) drew on a longitudinal, mixed methods study on the role of religion in the lives of 526 young men who have sex with men (YMSM). They found that participants who described their religious upbringing as Christian Pentecostal or Evangelical, reported hearing the most homophobic messages in the context of churches, which resulted in distress, depression, and suicidal thoughts. They found a high proportion of participants engaged in self-destructive behaviours (e.g. drug and alcohol misuse, under- and over-eating) in their efforts to cope with the stress of homophobic messages.

Kubicek et al., (2009) suggest that counsellors work on self-acceptance and acceptance/integration of the clients' sexual-orientation and then work towards identifying ways to integrate their religious beliefs. For many lesbian and gay

clients, discovering opportunities for group involvement can be helpful in the process of identity integration, according to Bozard and Sanders (2011).

For Rodriguez and Oulette (2000), there are a number of things that support the integration between sexual and religious identities. They suggest the main "sites of identity integration" are reading relevant literature, finding self-acceptance, talking with others, becoming older and more mature, re-establishing a personal relationship with God, and coping with a life-threatening illness such as HIV/AIDS (Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000). Backed up by reference to other research studies (Thumma, 1991; Wagner et al., 1994) Rodriguez (2010) argues that possibly the single most important mechanism of successful identity integration is involvement with organisations that promote a positive outlook towards both homosexuality and religion. These religious support groups deliver gay-positive messages that Rodriguez (2010) believes are made easier to hear by the emergence of a "Gay Theology" (Englund 1991, Thuma, 1991) that specifically values gay and lesbian people of the Christian faith and recognises their spiritual needs.

Rodriguez and Ouellette (1999) make a distinction between gay-positive and gay-friendly churches. They describe gay-positive churches as "formal Christian institutions that preaches a positive message about homosexuality, and minister specifically to the gay and lesbian community", whilst gay-friendly churches "may welcome the participation of gays and lesbians… but do not typically address the specific religious and spiritual needs inherent in the gay and lesbian community" (Rodriguez & Ouellette, 1999).

In their participant-observer study of the gay-positive Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) in New York City, Rodriguez and Ouellette (1999) identified three main strategies used by the organisation to facilitate an integrated LGB-Christian identity. The authors found the strategies were additional to the use of inclusive and gender-neutral language and a historical-critical method of interpreting the Bible in pro-LGB terms. The three strategies uncovered were: structures that enabled recognition of the legitimacy of the church when it was

simultaneously gay/lesbian and Christian; the preaching of its lesbian pastor, which provided lesbian and gay people with a positive way of thinking about themselves as lesbian and gay Christians; and, finally, documenting the struggles that the church shared with every other moral community, in order to provide a group of people with a strong sense of identity as a valued group, without creating boundaries that might exclude others.

It is worth noting that this work followed the particularly negative findings of Enroth (1974), a sociologist who, through exploratory content analysis, described the same organisation as merely an extension of the gay lifestyle, and the secular gay subculture. He found the aforementioned organisation to be somewhere gay people attempted to cope with their social and cultural alienation from society and a place to receive "positive reinforcement for a deviant lifestyle" (Enroth, 1974 p.356). Rodriguez (2010) dismissed Enroth's (1974) contribution as homophobic and heterosexist but, having said that, his criticisms still carry weight today. For example, Rodriguez and Ouellette (1999) found some members of the MCC believed the sex and body-affirming stance toward Christian doctrine was taken too far by some members, and they expressed distaste for the "cruising" that took place during some services and events.

Wagner et al. (1994) conducted a descriptive survey, looking at the integration of religious beliefs and sexual orientation in gay men belonging to a gay-positive Catholic group called Dignity. They hypothesised that the sample group (n=101) would show lower levels of internalised homophobia as compared to a community sample (n=144) of gay men from Catholic backgrounds who were not involved in any gay-positive organisation. Wagner et al. (1994) found no significant differences in the level of internalised homophobia. They did find the Dignity sample showed significantly higher levels of religious beliefs and behaviour and were significantly older than the community sample when they entered into their first gay relationship, first accepted being gay, and first felt good about being gay.

Researchers and authors have also explored gay and lesbian people's celebrations of their same-sex relationships through marriage and civil unions where it is legal

to do so (Cawman & Saucier, 2004; Walters, 2006), and the effects of anti-gay marriage initiatives on stress and poor mental health (Rostosky et al., 2009)

Barton (2010) points out that, although social science tends to focus on the processes by which LG people integrate what are often assumed to be conflicting identities, for many LG people, rejecting religion may well be the first part of their "coming out" process. Indeed, some queer theorists question the meaning of terms like "the closet" (Barton, 2010). Seidman, Meeks, and Traschen (1999) state:

> We propose to view "the closet" as a strategy of accommodation and resistance which both reproduces and contests aspects of a society organised around normative heterosexuality. (ibid: 185)

Similarly, Durber (2006) explores the non-articulation of a gay identity as a "queering of silence" (ibid., p. 238), suggesting that by not sharing one's sexual identity a person can challenge a homonormativity engendered in LGBT liberation politics. Duber (2006) argues that queering silence may be pleasurable in an environment where heterosexuality and homosexuality are culturally constructed as equally acceptable and desirable. On the other hand, Barton (2010) argues that in certain heterosexist hegemonic geographical areas such as the American Bible Belt, those identities are not equal, and a "queer silence" becomes another variation of "the toxic closet".

2.5.10 Empowerment

Rodriguez (2010) argues that empowerment theory has not yet fully found its way into the psychological and sociological work being undertaken in this field. In his view this is because the concept has been difficult to define. However, for me, the notion is particularly relevant and important to gay and lesbian experiences of religion. As evidence for this belief, I would cite Rappaport (2000) who, in a study of a gay-friendly Presbyterian church in the USA, examined the empowering role of the church in the lives of gay and lesbian members. He found

the organisation refused to condone the exclusion of gay and lesbian members from ordained leadership positions. Additionally, they used inclusive language during services, and included a historical-contextual method of interpreting the Bible. Perhaps most surprisingly for me, they commissioned a set of stained-glass windows to reflect the racial, gender, and sexual diversity of the whole congregation. Rappaport (2000) found that gay and lesbian people who had previously experienced rejection and alienation felt included and involved, and they expressed powerful feelings of belonging and joy.

Perkins and Zimmerman (1995) aggregated the work of other empowerment researchers and they discuss empowerment in this context as being:

> An intentional on-going process centred in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources, gain greater access to, and control over, their lives, democratic participation in the life of their community, and a critical understanding of their environment. (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995: 570)

Rodriguez (2010) defines it perhaps more succinctly as:

> … a mechanism where people take back control over certain aspects of their lives. (Rodriguez, 2010: 23).

Perkins and Zimmerman (1995) identified that empowerment operates on three main levels, including: individual (also referred to as psychological empowerment), organisational, and community. Zimmerman (1996) stated that due to the dynamic interactions that can occur between these levels, empowerment is likely to take on different forms for different people in different contexts, and the concept becomes more theoretically complex because researchers make a distinction between empowerment values, empowering processes, and empowered outcomes. According to Zimmerman (1996),

empowerment values focus on enhancing wellbeing instead of fixing problems, looking for strengths rather than listing the risks, and seeking environmental influences rather than blaming victims. Empowering processes focus on developing skills and resources, and on establishing social connections along the way to empowerment. Finally, empowered outcomes are described as assessments and particular interventions designed to empower people (Zimmerman, 1996).

In a multiple case-study analysis comparing and contrasting religious communities, Maton and Salem (1995) found four key characteristics of empowered organisations: a strength-based belief system that focuses on individual and group needs; dynamic and meaningful role opportunities; an overarching peer-based support system; and talented, inspiring leadership. In fact, Rodriguez (2010) points out that by becoming involved in gay-positive religious organisations gay and lesbian Christians became empowered to integrate their homosexual and religious identities. Therefore, empowerment speaks directly to how lesbian and gay people can potentially reclaim their spirituality in the face of anti-gay prejudice from religious people and communities, and demonstrates how they can reclaim a role for themselves within these faith groups.

Empowerment is a crucial theme and empirical research has repeatedly shown that the intersection of sexuality and religion plays out in diverse ways, leading to multiple outcomes (Yip, 2014). This is especially true when framed within a life-course perspective, for example, someone who starts from a position of guilt and shame can learn to transcend and transform, developing spiritual, cultural, and social capital within religious institutions and beyond.

2.5.11 A Gay Ecclesiology

Writing about the establishment of suitable religious spaces for lesbian and gay people, Spencer (1994) coined the term "gay ecclesiology", and warned about the possibility that individuals and organisations can potentially become too integrated, and thereby alienated from the rest of their own communities:

The danger… is that it can lead to isolation and sectarianism. It can also, in time, lead to conservative tendencies as separated communities eventually build up and acquire their own set of institutional privileges. (Spencer, 1994: 399)

Indeed, Rodriguez and Ouellette (1999) describe the push for inclusiveness potentially becoming so great that anyone not complying or conforming to the norms of the group can be made to feel excluded. They warn that, in the process of creating a safe place for some people, an unintended result may be that boundaries are set up against others.

Yip (2011) argues that "non-believers" often consider religion to be fictitious, a remnant of the past, and associated with rigid, hierarchical, institutional powers. On the other hand, for believers, religion offers something transpersonal, focussed on higher, spiritual matters that transcend worldly desire, material attachments, and physical urges. In an interesting paper, Yip (2010b) pointed out that the dominant discourse in the Abrahamic religions tends to construct the Divine as the sole object of worship to which one must submit. He argues that in this religious context, sexuality is often most closely associated with bodily performances and practices, in other words, it is reduced to sexual behaviour. Therefore, sexuality is normally assessed and understood in these terms and this, according to Yip (2010b), is a dehumanizing view of sexuality. Fortunately, other pieces of theological work and empirical evidence in the social sciences offer a broad and necessary discourse, incorporating constructs such as the capacity for emotional attachment, companionship, and erotic connection (e.g. Machacek & Wilcox, 2003; Robertson, 2006).

In their study of 583 participants involved in organised religious groups Lease et al. (2005) found that for lesbian and gay people who join affirming religious groups, overt and accepting behaviours from the group contrast with negative societal messages, and they encourage counsellors to develop their ability to provide information about "affirming faith groups". However, it is worth noting that Kubicek et al., (2005) found that many participants would not feel

comfortable with attending a church of predominantly LGB people, particularly those from more conservative religious backgrounds. Rostosky et al. (2008) focussed on same sex couples' expressions of religiosity and, somewhat predictably, found that that the more a couple were matched in their religiosity, the higher their relationship satisfaction was.

Bozard and Sanders (2011) suggest it is particularly helpful for counsellors to be aware of other (not necessarily LGB) forms of faith communities that hold an inclusive stance. Similarly, Davidson (2000) reminds counsellors of the importance of considering integration as a process, because a sudden abandonment of valued religious expression can result in isolation and associated mental health problems.

2.6 Summary

This chapter has explored relevant academic literature on the topic of religion and sexual-orientation through a reflexive, systematic review and discussion. The research was guided by an intention to combine a systematic approach (Aveyard, 2014) with the more evaluative approach suggested by Baumeister and Leary (1997) and by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009). The discussion was organised around several major sub-headings, including: an historical perspective and paradigm shift; mental-health and well-being; heterosexism; conflict and anxiety; cognitive dissonance; stigma; intersecting identities; identity conflict; coming out; identity integration; empowerment; and the development of a gay ecclesiology.

Ultimately, the literature reflects wider societal debates and represents the multiplicity of perspectives ranging from conservative fundamentalist views to more liberal theological attitudes that more readily embrace equality and diversity.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the overall rationale for the qualitative methodology I have adopted for this study. I will begin by discussing the wider research paradigm, including my ontological and epistemological stance, then discuss the philosophical foundations that underpin the research (i.e. phenomenology), and consider issues relating to validity.

3.2 Aims

The aim of this chapter is to present and explain the qualitative methodology I have adopted, namely Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), and I will consider its three major theoretical underpinnings: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography.

Over the course of this chapter, I will relate the methodology to my exploration of six lesbian and gay people's experiences of three organised religions (Christianity, Islam, and Judaism), and their implications for psychotherapy. I will discuss the limitations and criticisms of IPA and will demonstrate how I explored a range of other research design options. I will explain my decision to choose IPA instead of any other methodology and offer some critical reflections.

3.3 Background

It has never really been much of an issue for me to understand with which of the two major branches of research design I am most at home. Qualitative and quantitative research serve different purposes, the latter normally being informed by a more realist ontology. For me, qualitative research fundamentally enables understanding of experience and processes (Harper & Thompson, 2012: 5) and was therefore chosen as the most relevant approach for eliciting and making sense

of phenomena as experienced by the participants. Qualitative research can perhaps be more clearly explained as:

> A set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005: 3)

3.4 Ontological and Epistemological Stance

Although "ontology" is not easily defined and the philosophical discourse in the literature is complex it can be helpfully understood as:

> … the field of philosophy that studies and postulates what is ultimately real and fundamental. (Slife & Richardson, 2008: 700)

As an integrative, relational psychotherapist with an interest in interpersonal and existential therapies, I align myself with the relational ontological perspective proposed by Slife (2004), who argues that the general features of a relational ontology contrast with abstractionism, and that it is not possible to understand reality without first considering the context in which the real occurs, and is used. This ontological position helpfully invites researchers to reflect on situatedness in their research, asking:

> Are theorists and researchers willing to acknowledge their own situatedness in history and culture, their own inescapable and self-defining ethical commitments, and their responsibility to engage in open dialogue with others of a different mind? (Slife & Richardson, 2008: 719)

When considering the apparent oxymoronic and conflicting relationship between sexuality and religion, I expected there would inevitably be an emotional charge. I

also anticipated that making sense of these experiences would be complex, and it was unlikely that idiosyncrasies and nuances could be captured by preconceived structures. Therefore, prior to starting the research, it was necessary to consider how the research aim might be best addressed. It was clear that using a qualitative approach would provide an opportunity to go beyond a simple description, given the range of associated epistemologies.

Epistemology is a branch of philosophy concerned with the nature, origin, validity, and limits of knowledge. Epistemology demonstrates *how* we know what we know:

> Epistemology asks: how do I know the World? What is the relationship between the inquirer and the known? Every epistemology implies an ethical-moral stance towards the World and the self of the researcher. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005: 157)

Willig (2012) categorises epistemology into three main branches: realist knowledge, phenomenological knowledge, and social constructionist knowledge. Broadly, I understand "realism" to be a philosophical position that says what we know about any object exists independently of our mind. This stands in contrast with "idealism", which says what is known exists only in a person's own mind. I note the debate and confusion there appears to be regarding the use of the terms "constructivism" and "constructionism" and I have encountered a range of baffling (mis)uses of these terms. Raskin (2002) provides a detailed academic discussion about constructivism in psychology and delineates "personal construct psychology", "radical constructivism", and "social constructionism". Willig (2012) also outlines various branches of constructivist epistemology including "radical constructivism", which maintains all knowledge is constructed rather than perceived, and "contextual constructivism", which embraces the wider contexts that surround learning such as culture, customs, religion, biology, tools and language. I concur with Sexton (1997), who helpfully pointed out that:

The perspective of the observer and the object of observation are inseparable; the nature of meaning is relative; phenomena are context-based; and the process of knowledge and understanding is social, inductive, hermeneutical, and qualitative. (Sexton, 1997: 8)

Larkin and Thompson (2011) emphasise that IPA has an interpretative (or hermeneutic) phenomenological epistemology. Indeed, my psychotherapy perspective, combined with my approach to this research demonstrates my commitment and passion for understanding participants' relatedness to their own worlds through the meanings they make. In support of this view, Willig (2013) clarifies that a phenomenological epistemology aims to produce knowledge about the subjective experience of the participant. However, there are clearly differences in the way in which different phenomenological epistemologies approach meaning-making and, to this end, Willig (2013) described two varieties of epistemology: descriptive and interpretative. Whereas descriptive phenomenology concerns itself with capturing experience more precisely as it presents itself, "neither adding nor subtracting from it" (Giorgi, 1992: 121), interpretative phenomenology does not take quite as much account of face-value experience. An interpretative phenomenological epistemology can be thought of as stepping outside of the reported account and reflecting upon it in its wider social, cultural, and theoretical context (Larkin et al., 2006: 104).

In seeking to generate knowledge about the quality and texture of the participants' lived-experiences and the meanings within individual social and cultural contexts, as well as considering these experiences theoretically in relation to the literature, I align myself with an interpretative phenomenological epistemology.

3.5 Phenomenology

The introduction of phenomenology is widely attributed to Husserl (1893/1964) "the father of phenomenology", who argued that experience is the foundation of all knowledge. However, use of the term "phenomenology" dates from the mid 18th century (Moran, 2000: 6). Historically, there are four overlapping branches of

phenomenology: the first branch is "realist phenomenology", which emphasises the search for the true essence of human actions, motives, and self (Embree, 2001). The second branch, "constitutive phenomenology" extended the range of phenomenology to the philosophy of the natural sciences and focuses particularly on the use of transcendental epoché to remove biases (Embree, 2001). The third branch is "existential phenomenology", which is concerned with action, conflict, desire, finitude, oppression, death, politics, ethnicity, gender, and old age. It is often connected to Heidegger's "Sein und Zeit" (being and time) (Heidegger 1927/1962), an analysis of human beings as a means to a fundamental ontology that went beyond the regional ontologies described by Husserl (ibid.) The fourth branch is "hermeneutic phenomenology" which also emerges from Heidegger's "Sein und Zeit" but is most closely linked with Gadamer's "Wahrheit und Methode" (truth and method) (Gadamer, 1975/2004). Gadamer's aim was to uncover the nature of human understanding and interpretation, and this is the approach that is most relevant to the present research project. Embree (2001) predicted there would be a fifth iteration, "planetary phenomenology", centring on issues like ecology, gender, ethnicity, religion, aesthetics, ethics, politics, and internet communications. Given the topic of this research, it could be argued this fifth branch has indeed emerged, with my research being located on the cusp of this new strand as it evolves.

Phenomenology is essentially concerned with the "what" of experience (i.e. "what is it like?"). In phenomenological research there is an attempt to understand people's unique perceptions in order to make sense of, and interpret, their meaning, enabling insight into the gamut of lived experiences in all their complexity (Wertz, 2005). Studying any phenomenon implies, by definition, phenomenology:

> Phenomenology is best understood as a radical, anti-traditional style
> of philosophising, which emphasises the attempt to get to the truth of
> matters, to describe phenomena, in the broadest sense as whatever
> appears in the manner in which it appears, that is as it manifests itself
> to consciousness, to the experiencer. (Moran, 2000: 4)

In phenomenology, the meaning of the lived experience demands no "outside" interference that could distort the quality of such meaning through the imposition of externality. Where research focuses on the person doing the experiencing, the nature of the observation is direct experiencing. In phenomenology, "bracketing" means to cease or abstain from positing the existence of the natural world around us or to suspend our presuppositions of anything independent of our experience (Moran, 2000: 148). Through a process of "bracketing" biases, described by Husserl as "epoché", it is hoped that a qualitative approach can reveal a phenomenon in its purest form.

Moran (2000) examines the criticisms and counter-criticisms of phenomenology and highlights two broad categories of critique: an internal critique by phenomenologists and an external critique from those outside. Some of the key criticisms include a view of phenomenology as introspective or mystical, irrational intuition, or as "promoting unregulated rhapsodising on the nature of lived experience, and seeking to repudiate science and the scientific world and so on" (Moran, 2000: 14). There are also criticisms of the notion of "bracketing" (i.e. phenomenological epoché), as well as of the use of the word "phenomenology" itself but, for me, this is addressed in Merleau-Ponty's interpretive viewpoint that "enquiry is a continuous beginning" (1960/1964: 161). Adams offers a fresh and liberating opposite view of "bracketing", suggesting that it is essentially an illusion:

> I am now convinced that this wonderful term "bracketing" is simply
> an illusion, a comforting idea that bears no relevance to reality.
> (Adams, 2014: 2).

For me, phenomenological research methodologies closely reflect the values inherent within psychotherapy practice, and I believe that the two make ideal bed-fellows. Attending a professional knowledge seminar by Dr Finlay, I noticed that she started the seminar by discussing "unknowing and phenomenology", and I really enjoyed her exploration of this idea. For her, phenomenology seemed

largely to be about paying careful attention to subjective experiences. One attendee bravely challenged the notion of bracketing, which, for me, was not entirely unexpected because I have noticed criticism of "bracketing" in other training contexts , and this seminar proved no exception. Dr Finlay explained that Husserl (1931) had originally intended it to describe a way of focussing but that Merleau-Ponty (1962) had later interpreted the work within an existential frame. Dr Finlay noted her preference for the language of "openness" and for more fully embracing the phenomenological attitude. We were therefore encouraged to eschew dualisms (i.e. right and wrong, good and bad), and to consider the "lifeworlds" of our participants - the relational, embodied, temporal, and experiential domains.

A key learning from this seminar was the notion of "dwelling" that I'd come across when exploring heuristic research in the Research Challenges module (Moustakas, 1990). Dr Finlay explored the notion of dwelling by including implicit, underlying meanings in dialogue and considering the significance of what often goes unsaid. I appreciated the integration of these ideas, and the introduction of a dialogical research methodology (Halling, Leifer & Rowe, 2006).

The seminar examined the different branches of phenomenological research in depth, with a surprisingly determined distinction being made between descriptive phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology. Dr Finlay expressed a clear preference for hermeneutic phenomenology, which she views as providing both "structure *and* texture". On the other hand, she expressed a view of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as "methodical, systematic, and scientific", and "not poetic or artistic". Dr Finlay said she would recommend hermeneutic phenomenology over IPA in Doctoral level research, but I disagreed with this viewpoint. Discussing this with a fellow candidate, we found that we both disagreed with Dr Finlay's position because we were both able to attest to the fact that IPA can be fully grounded in phenomenological philosophy, and, at the same time offer a powerfully descriptive, explorative, flexible, and textured methodology.

Dr Finlay was proud of her relational-reflexive research approach (Finlay & Evans, 2009), but advocating this appeared to come at the expense of other, arguably more established, research methods. During the seminar I asked the question "Do you think there is space within IPA to integrate a relational-reflexive approach?" but Dr Finlay seemed to maintain her position that IPA is more descriptive and systematic. However, she did helpfully refer to work on relational-centred IPA (Eatough, 2017).

3.6 Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Hermeneutics is a derivative of the Greek word *hermeneuo*, meaning "translate" or "interpret" (OED, 2010: 665). Hermeneutic phenomenology is therefore the phenomenology of interpretation and, although associated with Heidegger, it is more closely connected with Gadamer's "truth and method". Gadamer argued that people have historically affected consciousness, and are thus embedded in a wider context of history and culture that has shaped their consciousness (Honderich, 2005: 236). Gadamer essentially proposed that nothing exists except through language, and he viewed conversation as vital to understanding, so that:

> … the reader and the articulator require a fusion of horizons between subject and object. (Honderich, 2005: 237)

Ortiz-Osés subsequently applied the principles of Jungian symbolism to hermeneutics and proposed a symbolic understanding of the world, namely that meaning is the symbolic healing of the real injury (Ortiz-Osés, 1976/2006).

A central precept of hermeneutics relates to method - the method of understanding a text, and thereby interpreting its meaning. Heidegger saw this as a circular process in which understanding a phenomenon's being/ontology requires the mode of being, yet to be defined, to have already been defined (Blattner, 2006: 22). In other words, to understand the whole also requires an understanding of the parts, and vice versa. Interpretation can therefore only be valid in its cultural and

historical context. Gadamer (1975) developed Heidegger's concept of the hermeneutic cycle, arguing that understanding is linguistically mediated through conversations with others. This reality-exploration resulted in a new and different understanding of the phenomenon, creating a circular process of interpretation, which Gadamer describe as an iterative process. Engaging in hermeneutic phenomenology offers the potential of acquiring:

> … meaningful insights which exceed and subsume the explicit claims of our participants. (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009: 23).

3.7 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Smith (1996), belonging to the hermeneutic school of phenomenology, articulated Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as a new qualitative methodology, in an attempt to address the debate between social cognition and discourse analysis. From the outset, IPA was considered to be:

> … intellectually connected to hermeneutics and the theories of interpretation, combining empathic hermeneutics with questioning hermeneutics. (Smith & Osborn, 2003: 51)

A fundamental assumption of IPA is that human beings self-reflect:

> Human beings are not passive perceivers of an objective reality, but rather they come to interpret and understand their world by formulating their own biographical stories into a form that makes sense to them. (Brocki & Weaden, 2006: 87)

The aim and intention of IPA is to explore this self-reflection and to uncover "how" participants perceive their lived experiences in relation to the phenomenon under investigation. This is achieved by investigating an individual's experience, understanding, perceptions, and idiosyncratic views (Reid, Flowers & Larkin,

2005). It involves attempting to understand a person based on the question, what is an experience like? (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

I agree that IPA is a complex interactive process because accessing a participant's world of understanding becomes challenging by virtue of the researcher's own understandings and biases (Smith et al., 2009). The broader methodology acknowledges the multifaceted responses to experiences incumbent in everyday experiences and, importantly, also recognises that any analysis of these experiences will only be an interpretation (Willig, 2012). For example, Gidden's (1987) cogently explains that the double hermeneutic involves a two-stage process that Smith et al. (2009) refer to as "double hermeneutics". For example:

> As the participant seeks to make sense of their personal and social world, the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their personal and social word. (Giddens, 1987: 40)

A basic assumption of this approach is that people can experience similar objective conditions (e.g. sexual orientation in the context of organised religion) in different ways, relative to their own personal thoughts, feelings, expectations, and judgements. Additionally, IPA recognises that the meanings attributed to experience are powerfully connected with broader social influences. Therefore, whilst IPA is complex, it is also idiographic (i.e. concentrating on the individual participant) and focused on the participant's meaning-making. This careful attention to the individual's unique meaning-making requires cautious, in-depth concentration and therefore usually works best with a small group of participants. In IPA this focus is prioritised above the need for making generalised statements or finding universal meanings (Smith, Hare & van Langehove, 1995). On the other hand, it may be possible to gain understanding of wider systems because:

> … the specifics of individual cases can illuminate dimensions of a shared community. (Shinebourne, 2011: 47).

McLeod (2011) points out that, whilst the majority of psychotherapy research has been conducted from within the discipline of psychology, IPA is increasingly being applied within the fields of psychotherapy and counselling research. As an iterative process, with the results of one iteration used as the starting point for the next, initially emerging themes lead to superordinate and master themes. Combining this with the fact that meaning is of fundamental importance to IPA (Smith et al., 2009) and that it pays close attention to the unique experiences of the individual, these are sound reasons why it is a good match for psychotherapy research.

Smith et al. (2009) argue there is no fixed right or wrong way of conducting IPA. They encourage innovation and creativity and caution against strict adherence to inflexible methodology. They advise that successful data collection and strategies require organisation, flexibility, and sensitivity. Equally, data analysis requires the systematic application of ideas, and methodological rigour as well as demanding:

> … imagination, playfulness, and a combination of reflective, critical
> and conceptual thinking. (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009: 80).

As a relational, integrative psychotherapist with a particular interest in relational approaches and existential psychotherapy, I considered IPA to be ideally suited to tackling my primary research aims.

3.8 Limitations and Criticisms of IPA

Over the course of my Doctoral programme I have encountered a number of criticisms of IPA, especially from key speakers at professional knowledge seminars. Some of these criticisms are more or less reflected in the five key "limitations" of IPA identified by Willig (2012):
- Talking about an experience may not be describing the experience.
- Availability of language for a participant means language precedes an experience and thus shapes the experience itself.

- IPA may result in excluding participants who do not have appropriate language skills and who thus incorrectly point to their experiences being dismissed.
- An exclusive focus on appearances without causal context limits our understanding of phenomena.
- IPA is concerned with cognition and this implies a Cartesian worldview, which is incompatible with some aspects of phenomenological thought. (Willig, 2012: 66-68)

I acknowledge there is some substance to the argument that interpretations can be constrained by a participant's ability to articulate their thoughts and experiences, and that IPA relies heavily on the "representational validity" of language itself (Willig, 2012). Finlay (2011) also returns to the question of a participant's expressive ability to communicate the rich texture of their experiences. However, in my experience, IPA does hold the potential to capture the nuances of both what is said and what is not said, and seeks to stay close to the pre-reflective meanings within the sense-making process. Indeed, IPA does engage with the individual's sense-making through the very language used, and Smith et al. (2009) do not claim that IPA can ever fully uncover "pure experience" (which they see as wholly inaccessible), neither do they claim to focus analysis solely on the language used to describe experience.

Willig (2012) acknowledges that IPA addresses researcher reflexivity in the process of phenomenological interpretation. However, she argues that IPA does not sufficiently theorize the reflexive process, leaving open the question of "how" the researchers' own perspectives have impacted the analysis. Similarly, Wagstaff et al. (2014) have uncovered researchers' struggles with retaining an idiographic focus whilst simultaneously developing themes, again raising questions about the "how" of conducting and maintaining reflexivity throughout the IPA process. In considering these criticisms it is helpful to remember that IPA does not intend to identify "facts", rather, its focus is on capturing and exploring the meanings participants assign to their experiences (Reid et al., 2005). I do concur with Finlay (2009) who describes the reflexive dance that weaves through the entire process:

> … as researchers strive to move beyond the partiality of previous
> understandings. (Finlay, 2009: 239).

Other criticisms include a view of IPA as cold, clinical, and systematic. However, this argument appears to be purported by researchers advancing alternative, and arguably less established, forms of phenomenology (e.g. relational or reflexive phenomenology). Whilst there are numerous ways of carrying out an IPA research project, having been deeply impacted by the whole research process and experienced the depth, intimacy, and potency of IPA first-hand, I find myself disagreeing with these criticisms that do not appear to have a sound theoretical foundation, and in agreement with Shaw (2010) that:

> Reflexivity is not simply an awareness-raising activity that we engage
> in prior to and during data collection. It is a vital component of each
> stage of the research journey. (Shaw, 2010: 239)

To my mind, the main criticisms of IPA could be equally applied to any research that uses language-based investigation.

3.9 Alternative Methodologies Considered

I considered a number of alternative methodologies before deciding to utilise Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. In the initial years of the programme I submitted a draft research proposal (DRP) using Interpretative Analytic Autoethnography, focussing at that time on heterosexism in psychotherapy. Although I enjoyed the creativity inherent within the approach, and the freedom to explore through reflective writing that it offered, after much soul-searching I realised that I agreed with the criticism that the methodology is overly introspective and self-indulgent. For this reason, it would not have been congruent to make further use of it. I also wondered about how useful one autoethnographic account could be to the wider field of psychotherapy.

Faced with the task of choosing the most suitable methodology, I experienced some initial anxiety, as though there was too much choice. Smith et al. (2009) suggest four principal qualitative methodologies: Grounded Theory, Discourse Analysis, Narrative Analysis, and Descriptive Phenomenology, so I explored some of these further.

Originally developed by Glasser and Strauss (1967), Grounded Theory (GT) is widely utilised in the field of sociology and is concerned with comparing accounts of personal experiences from the ground up. The main thrust of grounded theory is to generate theory, which would have been at odds with my aim to explore nuanced, detailed experiences. The much larger participant sample sizes simply would not have generated the depth of data I was seeking.

Having met someone who had completed a PhD using Discourse Analysis (DA) and who told me all about the methods involved, I decided that this approach did not appeal to me. I was impressed by the extremely detailed focus on language and the emphasis on deconstructing experiences. However, using this approach would probably have affected the idiographic aspect of first-person meaning-making and for this reason I did not consider it feasible.

I also considered Narrative Inquiry (Clandinin, 2007) and on reflection, I believe this could have been an equally appropriate and interesting way of approaching the research aim(s). I appreciate the inherent methods of listening carefully to participant's stories and reflecting on them in depth. However, from my understanding, the focus can be somewhat limited to the narrative (Smith et al., 2009). Given the term "narrative" is generally used to illustrate people's ways of organising events and experiences about self and other (Polkinghorne, 1988), I take it to therefore refer to meaning-making in a broader sense. I therefore rejected this methodology on the basis of it being too broad for the aims of my research.

Relational Reflexive Phenomenology (Finlay, 2009) was one of the strongest contenders but, having attended a professional knowledge seminar, and having

bought the associated textbook, I felt that the approach lacked something of IPA's rigour. I admire the underpinning philosophy, and certainly agree that it is perfectly suitable for psychotherapist researchers but, given the highly sensitive nature of my research topic, the structure of IPA offered clearer boundaries, reducing the likelihood of subjective experiences interfering too much with the data coding, and offering an ethical safety that I could not guarantee within Finlay's methods.

Having explored a number of methodologies, I found myself agreeing with Aguinaldo (2004), who argues that research methodologies can often be insufficient for explaining social phenomenon such as racism, sexism, and heterosexism, and I did not want to be too constrained within a methodological straightjacket. This research topic is, in many aspects, an under-researched area requiring new research approaches at all levels. Furthermore, I concur with Chamberlain (1999) who argued against "methodolatory" and rigid adherence to method. This stimulated my interest in the rigorous, adaptable, flexible nature of IPA, and in being able to consider any suggested methodological "steps" as intended guidelines rather than fixed rules.

A fortuitous meeting with a DClinPsych candidate in Cardiff emphasised the flexibility of the IPA methodology, and our discussion confirmed for me how suitable it would be for researching a complex culturally sensitive topic. In addition, the methodological strengths highlighted by Brocki and Wearden (2006) finalised my decision to use the IPA framework:
- It is not considered to be "mysterious".
- It is highly accessible.
- It uses easily comprehendible language with straightforward guidelines.
- It is flexible and inductive.
- It allows for different levels of interpretation.
- It doesn't require a theoretical pretext.
- It is compatible with existing theoretical frameworks.
  (Adapted from Brocki and Wearden, 2006: 100-101)

3.10 Reflexivity

I agree that psychotherapy-based research inevitably requires one to be open to the notion of pre-understandings and the impact that they might have (Finlay, 2009). Self-reflection supports the emergence of presuppositions, providing an opportunity to detach them from participant's descriptions.

> … a reflexive stance enables researchers to be conscious of and reflective about the ways in which their questions, methods, and very own subject position might impact on the psychological knowledge produced in a research study. (Langdridge, 2007: 58)

Given the importance of reflexivity in qualitative research, and even though there is much debate about the extent to which it is or is not possible to "bracket" all suppositions, in the spirit of transparency, it may be helpful for me to disclose something of my own personal experience.

I could summarise my entire formative years as being the Welsh version of *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (Winterson, 1985). My experience of growing up gay in a mining community in the valleys during the miner's strikes, and in a family that was immersed in an acutely homophobic religious organisation to boot, resulted in confusion, spiritual isolation, and unrelenting guilt.

My early developmental years were set in the context of a fundamentalist, evangelical, Pentecostal-Christian family system in which judgment and fear, "fire and brimstone", were the most common messages. We attended church religiously - three times every Sunday and several times throughout the week. I was taught the powerful message from a young age that as Christians we are *in* the world but we are not *of* the world, and this mistrust resulted in my perceiving the world as a dangerous place.

I mentioned in the introduction that I initially encountered heterosexism and ignorance in therapy, but when I eventually found an informed, helpful

psychotherapist, I was able to confront the past and to work on the effects of these challenging experiences.

I think the experience of heterosexist oppression (and my escape from it) accounts for my keen interest in anti-oppressive practice and in exploring the existentialist notion of authentic living (Spinelli, 2005). The on-going challenge for me has always been finding a way to reconcile my own spirituality (that I have come to honour through years of personal exploration) with being a homosexual man who is largely unwelcomed by the Christian faith. Whenever I have tried to be more involved with faith communities I have always experienced rejection upon "coming out". Similarly, when I have tried to be more involved with the gay community I have experienced rejection whenever I "come-out" about my faith. This always leaves me feeling very puzzled and is one of the reasons for my carrying out this research.

Having experienced being marginalised and ostracised by members of my family, religious community, and social group, I now recognise that I developed a spirit of altruism in order to be accepted by others, and the negative, religious script beliefs formed a pole around which all other experiences came to be organised (Moursund & Erskine, 2004). As a result, I became the helper, both consciously and unconsciously sensing a pull into the caring professions. In psychoanalytic therapy we explored the shadow side of altruism and an in-depth analysis of this darker-side proved to be a valuable learning for me, and it continues to be so as I recognise the underlying determinants of my desire to practice.

Over the years, my clinical psychotherapy work with LGB clients who seem to present with similar experiences of religious abuse has also stimulated my interest in this topic. My own and others' experiences of psychotherapy training, personal therapy and supervision has convinced me that many psychotherapists, regardless of their sexual orientation, may be unprepared to work with gender and sexual diversities, and there is a wealth of unsolicited data to suggest questionable, ill-informed practice (Bowers, Minichiello & Plummer, 2010). Unsurprisingly, I am

particularly wary of rigid, inflexible, dogmatism (including that within the fields of psychotherapy and research) and this is another reason why IPA appeals to me.

3.11 Issues of Validity

Smith (2009) argues that the growth in qualitative research over recent decades has prompted debate about reliability and validity. Yardley (2000) therefore highlights four main criteria for addressing these, that some scholars describe as offering a flexible interpretation most suited to qualitative research (Langdridge, 2007; Smith et al., 2009; Shinebourne, 2011). The four criteria put forward are as follows, and I will attend to each of these in turn:

- Sensitivity to context
- Commitment and rigour
- Transparency and coherence
- Impact and importance.
  (Yardley, 2000)

3.11.1 Sensitivity to Context

Yardley (2000) suggests that sensitivity to context relates not only to the main elements informing the research but also to factors such as research setting, researcher-participant relationship (e.g. power), and socio-cultural perspectives (e.g. linguistic, political, or socio-economic factors).

In my attempt to address sensitivity to context, I have set out my epistemological position and provided my rationale for using the chosen methodology. I demonstrated sensitivity to the existing literature in the literature review chapter and also returned to the literature after conducting my data analysis. During the interviews and in my treatment of the data I maintained a compassionate and culturally sensitive attitude that was respectful. I also invited follow-up sessions to the participants, and offered information about organisations at which participants could find help if they needed support after their involvement with the research.

3.11.2 Commitment and Rigour

The notion of commitment and rigour in research appears to relate to the extent to which researchers immerse themselves in the data and develop competence in the methods employed (Yardley, 2000).

The exact methods will be explained in the next chapter but it is necessary to point out that this project benefitted from a pilot interview with a peer supervisee who, whilst not gay, did have experience of organised religion. The purpose of the interview was to practice conducting an unstructured interview and to test recording equipment and so forth. My previous experience of working with clients who presented with problems associated with their experiences of sexual-orientation and religion demonstrates my commitment to the topic. Having worked with these clients, and on turning to the academic literature for help, I discovered there was little material available to draw upon in order to support specialised interventions. This was part of my motivation for conducting the research.

My commitment to rigour is demonstrated by my engagement with two critical research friends. Dr. Julie Dorey, a specialist psychotherapist in traumatic stress, Cardiff and Vale University Health Board, offered constructive feedback and advice throughout the research process. Her knowledge of research methods has been extremely helpful. Dr. Caitriona Ni Riain offered critical feedback and guidance on getting through the writing-up processes.

In my research, I adhered to IPA guidelines regarding participant sample size, selecting six people and ensuring these comprised a sufficiently homogenous group in order to achieve depth. I chose to manually transcribe each interview myself, and deliberately chose to "dwell" with the data as this was carried out. For me, this ensured there was no outside interference with the data (even in the form of computer software), and the process took an entire year. Although this work was labour intensive and not time efficient, it was profoundly impactful, deeply intimate and supported my overall rigour and commitment.

3.11.3 Transparency and Coherence

Yardley (2000) suggests that transparency and coherence can be achieved through transparent presentation of the data collection measures, transcripts, theme creation, and analytical processes. In the writing-up of the research I present clearly presented chapters on my methods (including data analysis) and findings. In these chapters I provide clarity and cogency, enabling readers to get close to the research methods and findings. In the findings chapter I include extensive verbatim quotations from participants in order to ensure a high level of transparency, and I include one full anonymised transcript in Appendix 6.

3.11.4 Impact and Importance

Chapter 7 addresses the impact of the research, as this relates to the requirements of the award being sought. Like Langdridge (2007), I have wrestled with this particular institutional demand. Whilst I appreciate the need to disseminate research, I don't believe that an undramatic impact should in any way invalidate the research. The numerous professional conversations I have had about this research with colleagues in the Psychology and Psychological Therapies Directorate and with the Equality and Diversity team, Cardiff and Vale University Health Board, are no less important to the process of dissemination and I believe that they make a valuable contribution in themselves. I concur with the view that knowledge has an inherent value, even when it does not necessarily have a major impact on the world beyond the reader.

3.11.5 Independent Audit

The importance of independent auditing in research is articulated by Smith et al. (2009). This is the process by which the entire research process can be tracked and made sense of, from the organisation of initial raw data, through to the final report. The presentation of this project is set out in a coherent and logical format and there is evidence of how the research was carried out in the appendices, which

document each stage of the research process. Regular check-ins with my academic advisor also ensured accountability at each stage of the process.

3.12 Summary

This chapter focussed on the rationale for the qualitative research design and set out the methodology I selected. The wider research paradigm was examined in detail, including my ontological and epistemological stance, and the philosophical foundations that underpin the research.

I outlined the qualitative methodology Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), and considered its three major theoretical underpinnings: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography. I related the methodology to my exploration of lesbian and gay people's experiences of organised religion and the implications this has for the field of psychotherapy. I discussed the limitations and criticisms of IPA and demonstrated how I explored a range of other research design options. I explained my decision to choose IPA above other methodologies, including some critical reflections on these, and discussed the salient issues of validity.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4: Methods

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the qualitative methods used throughout the research study, including the ethical considerations. Information herein includes sampling, the participant sample, the research aims, the research procedure, data collection process, and analysis of the qualitative data. The main aim of this research is to explore a small group of lesbian and gay people's experiences of organised religion, and to consider any implications for the field of psychotherapy.

4.2 Aim(s) of the Study

The previous chapter considered the rationale for choosing a qualitative research design. I explained that Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was chosen partly because it rejects formulating hypotheses and offers an open-ended inductive approach to data collection and analysis. IPA predominantly emphasises studying people ideographically, with a view to generating rich and detailed descriptions of "how" people experience phenomena (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

Developing the research aim(s) was an involved process, and reflections were made in a personal research journal. When referring back to early journals, it is interesting to note the multiple iterations of research aims, and the struggle to find the most appropriate way of formulating these. The final research aims were ultimately shaped by considering several factors including my ontological and epistemological positions, my choice of methodology, and advice from my academic adviser to "keep it simple". The final research aim was to explore a small group of lesbian and gay people's experiences of organised religion, and to consider any implications for the field of psychotherapy.

The first part focuses on the "emic" perspective of participants. That is, the account or description meaningful to the participant. The second part allows the

researcher to explore the "etic", considering the findings reflexively, thereby "moving between the emic and the etic" (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012).

4.3 Participant Sample

The main intention of IPA is to engage with and provide a full appreciation of individual accounts of experiences. For this reason, sample sizes are normally kept small, allowing for a highly detailed case-by-case analysis. Langdridge (2007) includes IPA, along with hermeneutic phenomenology, thematic analysis, and narrative approaches, as methodologies less likely to employ maximum variation sampling and more likely to use "purposive sampling" (Langdridge, 2007: 58). IPA researchers normally aim for a relatively homogenous sample, unlike other methodologies such as grounded theory, which seeks constant comparisons and exceptional cases.

Regarding the number of participants, Turpin et al. (1997) pointed out that clinical psychology programmes in the UK recommend that having six to eight participants is appropriate. Smith (2012) argues that a smaller sample size provides an opportunity to examine similarities and differences between individuals in-depth, without being overwhelmed by too much data. Langdridge (2007) also suggests a small sample, with no more than six participants. Most importantly, Langdridge (2007) argues that recruiting research participants should be driven by balancing theoretical and methodological demands with practical constraints.

In my research I chose to focus specifically on the experiences of lesbian women and gay men. I acknowledge that by not including several other stigmatised and marginalised identities within this research (e.g. BDSM), I could, by implication, be adding to the marginalisation of these groups. However, in keeping with the overall research design, and in order to manage a potentially large amount of data, it was considered necessary to recruit participants who share an experience at the heart of the research. This approach enables a more careful analysis of the similarities and differences between people. The recommended homogeneity was

therefore achieved by limiting the variables to same-sex attracted people (i.e. lesbian women and gay men) and those who had experiences of the major branches of the Abrahamic religions (allowing sufficient heterogeneity of religious experience but limiting this to "organised" religions that shared a theological origin).

I chose to use a survey method to recruit participants, partly as a result of advice of my academic advisor who recommended it as a suitable method, and partly because I had a keen interest in mixed-methods at that time. The survey was posted online, and the link was emailed to a number of established LGBT religious groups. This initial method of sampling was maximum variation sampling. It was a speedy and efficient method of recruitment that ensured a high number of responses. I ultimately decided against using a mixed-methods or bricoleur research design and so the quantitative data become largely redundant.

The data were cleaned to create a useful data-set that enabled the identification of suitable lesbian and gay participants with experiences of organised religion of Abrahamic origin, who had fluency in English, and who expressed an interest in being interviewed (indicated by their having provided contact details). Initially, filters were applied to the total of 345 responses, which resulted in 117 reasonable responses. Further filters were then applied, leaving 57 participants who indicated they were interested in being interviewed. A further cycle of purposive sampling was then applied leaving 10 participants: 5 gay men, 4 lesbian women and 1 bisexual woman. To satisfy the requirement to have a clear audit trail of the whole research process for validity purposes, the online survey and survey results are provided in Appendices 2 and 3.

The initial online survey was used purely as a method for selecting participants for the main project. While the results of the survey proved interesting, in order to retain the integrity of the IPA qualitative research design, the significance and meaning of the quantitative data were not interpreted within this project. The complete set of questions is included in Appendix 2, with the statistical

breakdown of responses represented in Appendix 3. The quantitative data are presented in self-explanatory tables and are comprehendible.

The survey contained information about the research and included an important final question inviting respondents to provide their email address and/or contact telephone number if they wished to participate in an interview about their experiences. Ten final respondents were emailed, thanking them for their participation in the survey and providing initial information about the IPA research project and the interviews. Four participants did not reply, which left me with the final sample of six participants - three gay men and three gay women.

The information sheet with consent form was sent to these participants and, subsequently, interviews were arranged. A detailed description of each participant is provided in table format within the findings chapter (5.4) and includes information on gender, sexuality, age, religion, race, and ethnicity.

4.4 Demographic and Relevant Data

An analysis of the initial survey, presented in Appendix 3, provides a detailed breakdown of the demographic data and responses of every participant. As mentioned previously, in honouring the qualitative nature of the chosen IPA methodology, the survey data is only made available for interested readers, and to provide evidence of the earliest stage of the recruitment process.

The demographic information includes: age, gender, sexual-orientation, ethnicity, country of residence, English language fluency, and disability. As well as the demographic information, other data were collected on the following areas: faith, spirituality and religion; experiences of organised religion; positive and negative experiences of psychotherapy; leaving or being rejected by religions; counselling and psychotherapy; and interest in being interviewed.

A total of six participants took part in the research project – three (3) gay men and three (3) lesbian women. The major branches of the Abrahamic religions were

represented, including two (2) participants who had experiences with Christianity/Catholicism, two (2) who had experiences with Christianity/Protestantism, one (1) who had experiences with Islam, and one (1) who had experiences with Judaism. Although four participants had experiences of Christianity, two of these were Catholic and two were Protestant. One of the Catholic participants was Roman Catholic, and the other was evangelical. Similarly, one of the Protestant Christians had experience of the Church of England, and the other had experiences of evangelical Protestantism. I acknowledge that there are multiple inter- and intrareligious similarities and differences across religions, and that attempts to essentialize and generalize religion should be discouraged (Yip, 2014). Therefore, it may have been more helpful to have only included Christian participants. However, when recruiting I was determined to achieve a certain degree of heterogeneity and, given my main research aim was to explore experiences of organised religion (i.e. institutions), and because of the small sample size of the study, having Jay and Cate be the sole voices for Islam and Judaism respectively was considered satisfactory.

For clarity, it is important to note that all participants self-identified with their respective religious institutions and, with the exception of one person, most of the participants were not currently practicing their religion, even though they still identified with it. Note therefore that religious identity in this study is self-declared.

Table 1 contains the combined demographic information for the final six participants of this research project including: identifier, age range, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion and branch, race, and ethnicity:

Table 1: Profile of Participants

Participant and Pseudonym	Age Range	Sexual Orientation	Gender Identity	Religion(s) and Branch	Race and Ethnicity
Participant 1 "Rose"	60+	Lesbian	Female	Christianity Catholicism: Roman Catholic	White Irish
Participant 2 "Cate"	21-29	Lesbian	Female	Judaism: Conservative	White Other
Participant 3 "Mark"	50-59	Gay	Male	Christianity Catholicism: Evangelical	White British
Participant 4 "Pam"	60+	Lesbian	Female	Christianity Protestantism: Evangelical	White British
Participant 5 "Paul"	40-49	Gay	Male	Christianity Protestantism: Church of England	White British
Participant 6 "Jay"	30-39	Gay	Male	Islam: Sunni	Asian Pakistani

4.5 Pilot Interview

One pilot interview was conducted with a peer supervisee (who was not gay but who had experiences of organised religion) lasting just 30 minutes, and this interview was not included in the research. The pilot followed normal procedures regarding consent and information and was conducted in line with normal ethical practices. The brief pilot interview was carried out to allow the researcher:

- to experiment with an unstructured interview format, trying it on for size.
- to interview in real time.
- to test data recording equipment to ensure it was operational and audible.
- to identify any factors that had not been previously anticipated.

The pilot confirmed that the researcher had the necessary interviewing skills to use an unstructured interview format and it was clear this would produce rich data. Thirty minutes seemed brief, but we covered a lot of ground. All data recording equipment was operating as expected and the data could be clearly heard when it was played back. An interesting learning from this experience was to remember to ask participants to turn their phone to silent, if possible. During the practice pilot interview, the participant's mobile telephone went off and this was experienced as intrusive.

4.6 Research Procedures

Josselson (2013) explains that, from her perspective, most qualitative research is grounded in hermeneutics, as discussed in the previous chapter. In line with my relational ontology and interpretative phenomenological epistemology, I regard in-depth interviewing to be fundamentally relational since it is the coming together of two subjectivities shaped by the intersubjective context. Josselson (2013) cogently addresses the mechanics and techniques involved in conducting interviews, and she provides helpful information for supporting researchers in remaining open to all possible aspects of the intersubjective dance, particularly "to hear both the music and the words". (Josselson, 2013: 9)

Interviews were conducted over a six-month period and took place in a location of the participants' choosing. Some travel was involved but this was not problematic in any way for me. In terms of locations, one interview took place in the participant's home in west Wales; three interviews took place in my therapy office in Cardiff (one of the participants travelled from London to take part in the study, combining the interview with a visit to friends); one interview took place in my apartment in London; and one interview took place over the internet using encrypted FaceTime technology.

The single FaceTime interview arose because the participant was unable (and to some extent unwilling) to travel from a rural setting in the far north of England, and he expressed a preference for using this technology. Whilst I was initially reluctant to agree to this, the technology worked extremely well with no breaks in connection, and it was as effective as a face-to-face interview. I checked out the ethics of using FaceTime with a fellow doctoral candidate conducting research into online therapy and, being au fait with the ethics of doing this, they advised it was safe to proceed using this platform.

As a UKCP registered psychotherapist and supervisor, conducting an unstructured interview, dialogical in nature, was not alien to me. However, I had to be careful to remember that my role was to conduct an interview in a research context, and to not veer into the realm of "therapy". I was grateful to have had extensive experience of the fundamental skills of interpersonal communication, listening, eliciting information, and being comfortable with extended silences. It was inevitable that both past and present influences, either in my awareness (conscious) or out of it (unconscious), may have had a bearing on the interpretation of data and the subsequent themes that emerged. It is highly likely that a different researcher would have initially composed the sample differently, and that their subsequent analysis of the data would have resulted in different findings.

I have reflected a great deal on the common criticisms of IPA and have developed a real preference for understanding qualitative research as "soul work"

(Romanyshyn, 2007; van Manen, 1990). I fundamentally disagree with the criticism of IPA as cold, clinical, and systematic and encourage others to promote the flexibility and creativity inherent within IPA, and even develop the notion of "IPA with soul" somewhat further.

4.7 Data Collection

After an initial warm-up conversation to help participants relax and reduce anxiety, the consent forms were reviewed to ensure they had been signed. We went through each item in turn to make sure they understood what was involved and exactly what they had signed, including their right to not answer any questions and to withdraw from the study at any time. I opened each interview with a single expansive question that encouraged participants to begin to talk at length. This initial question varied to some degree depending on the interpersonal dynamic and context but, essentially, the opening question reminded the participant that I was exploring lesbian and gay people's experiences of organised religion, and letting them know I was interested to hear about their experiences and that I was asking "where would you like to start?"

As Smith et al. (2009) suggest, I had some general prompts in mind in case the interview became laboured or we got stuck (see Appendix 5) but, fortunately, participants were particularly forthcoming and the use of the prompts was not necessary. I was careful not to lead participants in any particular direction but, adhering to the idiographic basis of IPA, I stayed close to the participants experiencing, using the techniques of reflection and of checking understanding.

Interviews were recorded using an encrypted digital recorder and the recordings were deleted after the interviews were transcribed. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and, having reminded the participants at the start of each interview how long they would last, in each case I had to bring the interview to a close because we had run over time. It was clear that participants would have been happy to continue beyond the agreed hour, but I was mindful that extensive data

had been collected and, ethically, it was necessary to honour the agreed time boundaries.

Finlay (2016) expounded the notion of embodied research in numerous places, and she describes a theory of reflexive bodily analysis that involves both "bodily empathy" and "embodied intersubjectivity" throughout all stages of the research process. As a psychotherapist, I am accustomed to reflexivity and the concept of embodied intersubjectivity described by Etherington (2004). To my surprise however, I found transcribing one of the participant's interviews particularly challenging and through supervision I became aware of a degree of projective identification in the interview process. Finlay (2016) helpfully describes a process of "empathic dwelling", which uses bodily experiences as a way of tuning-in and gaining a kind of kinaesthetic sensing of the other (ibid. p.23). Although relatively straightforward to describe, my first-hand experience of this empathic dwelling in the research interviews highlighted the intensity and demands of these processes. However, without a contract to work therapeutically, it is necessary to hold the ethical boundaries of the research interview. Indeed, I did not work with the challenging processes in the research interview as I might have done in the context of a therapeutic relationship.

4.8 Transcribing Interviews

Six unstructured interviews were transcribed manually to minimise any external interference and, although this required a significant time commitment, I believe the manual work is essential to conducting "IPA with soul". Transcribing the six interviews took around twelve months to complete, and it was laborious, painstaking work. However, manual transcribing afforded full immersion, and a unique and crucial opportunity for "dwelling with the data" (Finlay, 2014). This period of dwelling allowed sufficient time and space for me to be appropriately impacted by the participants' experiences.

I developed an intimate understanding of each word and sentence spoken (and of the silences between them) and the manual transcription was for me, the most

important reason why IPA is not "cold and clinical", as has been suggested (e.g. Finlay, 2016). Transcribing one interview in particular was so intense that I found myself becoming unwell due to the embodied intersubjective process, and I had to contact my academic adviser for support. A one-to-one discussion with my academic consultant helped me identify an underlying anger being expressed by the participant and, once I was able to relocate this unpleasant embodied experience back with the participant's own experience, I was free to continue working on the data again.

Each interaction on the transcript was coded with a number for reference in the data analysis. Participants' names were replaced with pseudonyms and all identifiers were redacted, as would be the case for a therapist presenting a client in supervision. Having transcribed the interviews myself, I was well acquainted with each one, but I also chose to read and re-read each transcript several times before commencing the formal data analysis.

As suggested by the facilitators of a professional knowledge workshop I attended on creative and academic writing, I maintained a journal of my own personal thoughts, feelings, and body responses to the participants and the data, and noted initial emerging ideas.

4.9 Data Analysis

I appreciate that Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012) promote full immersion in the data with the main aim of analysis being to provide evidence of the participants' making sense of the phenomena under investigation, and at the same time document the researcher's sense-making. Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012) describe this as moving between the "emic" and the "etic" perspectives. I achieved the etic perspective by applying a different lens and employing psychological concepts and theories to illuminate and understand the data. Figure 1 below represents the various stages that were involved in the analysis of data, as outlined above.

Although Smith et al. (2009) provide a useful step-by-step guide to data analysis, they advocate a flexible approach, and suggest the stages are adaptable, according to the particular research objectives. Consequently, there are criticisms that the IPA method may not be sufficiently prescriptive (Giorgi, 2010) so an explanation of the process of analysis is set out in this section.

The research involved a small, purposive, homogenous sample in accordance with the principles of IPA (Smith, 2012; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009; McCleod, 2003). Data was collected using unstructured, dialogical interviews that began with a deliberately open and expansive question. The interviews lasted approximately one hour and were transcribed verbatim and manually. Thereafter, a multi-layered analysis was carried out using the suggested IPA method providing an idiographic impression of each participant individually (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Relationships between the themes were then clustered and connections across interviews were made. This process was repeated up until the final iteration, which enabled the identification of master themes, hopefully capturing the essence of participants' experiences.

I initially made detailed descriptive and interpretative notes on each one of the six interview transcripts, and out of this initial noting the emergent themes were developed. I then moved on to the next case and repeated the process. Themes were compared across transcripts with each new transcript being analysed and from these combined sets of emergent themes, major themes were developed. To establish the process of analysis and provide evidence for the exact procedures used a full transcript is included in Appendix 6, an example of initial noting is provided in Appendix 7, and an example of emergent themes is given in Appendix 8. A table of the clustered themes from an interview is provided in Appendix 9. As mentioned earlier, after analysing each of the interviews individually, further analysis of the connections continued across interviews and an example of combined clustered themes across two interviews is provided in Appendix 10. The process continued across all the interviews and a table of the final master themes for the group was then developed (Appendix 11). The findings from the analysis of six lesbian and gay people's experiences of three organised religions are presented in chapter 5.

It was necessary throughout the research to ensure that the main themes and sub-theme labels were defined as precisely as possible, and a rationale for the choice of terminology is justified at the start of each section in the findings chapter. My choice of terminology for all sub-theme labels could be interpreted as somewhat negative but I believe they honour the lived experiences of the small group of participants as they described them. Of course, there will be numerous alternative ways of interpreting and labelling the interview data.

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┌─────────────────────────────┐
│ Stage 1: Reading and re-reading │
│        the transcript           │
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              ↓
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│    Stage 2: Initial noting      │
└─────────────────────────────┘
              ↓
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│ Stage 3: Developing emergent    │
│           themes                │
└─────────────────────────────┘
              ↓
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│ Stage 4: Searching for connections │
│      across emergent themes     │
└─────────────────────────────┘
              ↓
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│ Step 5: Moving to the next case │
└─────────────────────────────┘
              ↓
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│  Step 6: Looking for patterns   │
│         across cases            │
└─────────────────────────────┘
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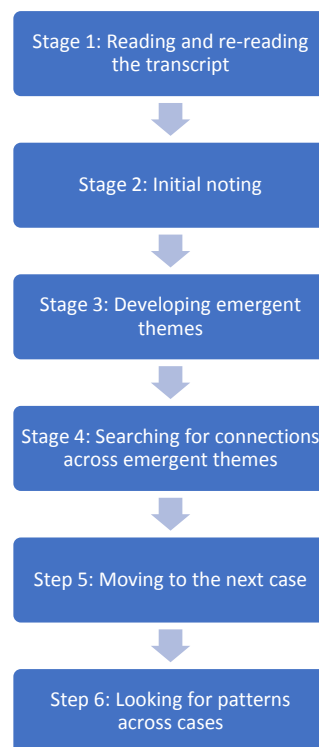
Figure 1. Stages of IPA Data Analysis

As a methodology, IPA provided a rich and detailed vehicle with which to carry out this research study. The methodology and methods employed supported the double hermeneutic, with detailed analysis and interpretation of the participants' own meaning making, which were co-constructed between them and myself as the researcher, with all that I brought to the process (Smith et al., 2009). The depth and breadth of the interview data and the challenge of capturing convergences and divergences through deconstructing and rebuilding the themes was a monumental but rewarding task.

In their thematic analysis involving therapist-researchers, Bager-Charleson et al. (2018) found that participants experienced profoundly challenging physical and emotional responses when conducting research, which were "challenging to the core of one's identity" (p. 10). My experience mirrors many of the themes identified by their research, especially feeling "lost", "lonely", and "unprepared" for the impact it had. On reflection, I wonder if these processes were more exaggerated, particularly in the context of tackling a sensitive research topic that included my own personal process of grappling with the emerging themes.

When I became unwell in 2016 and needed to take a year out of the Doctoral programme, I note musings in my personal research journal around the notion of divine retribution, and I did ask myself if I was being somehow punished for tackling this research topic and, moreover, challenging the church, reactions that confirm that the roots of evangelical Christianity run deep. Turning to my academic adviser for support and having some sessions with a body psychotherapist helped me make sense of what was going on in my body.

4.10 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the research project was sought and granted by the Metanoia Institute/Middlesex University Programme Approval Panel (Appendix 4). I adhered to the main British psychology and psychotherapy professional bodies' codes of professional conduct and ethical practice:
- The code of human research and ethics (BPS, 2014)
- The ethical framework for the counselling professions (BACP, 2018)
- Ethical principles and code of professional conduct (UKCP, 2009)

Josselson (2013) points out that, normally, topics of interest to qualitative researchers often include aspects of life that people find challenging or troubling in some way. She points out that, although the interviewer is "doing research", they are also entering a human relationship, and there is a desire for participants to finish the process feeling valued. I agree with Josselson (2013) that the ethics of

conducting interviews are generally framed in terms of damage control and not doing harm, and rarely in terms of the ethical value of speaking to and being heard by an accepting, attentive other person (Josselson, 2013). It was therefore incumbent upon me to operate within the interviewer role ethically, remembering the research interview is essentially a human relationship. On reflection, I believe my background and training as a psychotherapist equipped me for this.

I was aware of new General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR, 2018) regarding the handling and storage of data. I fully complied with these regulations, not only for ethical reasons, but also because I was mindful that there are heavy penalties for breaches. Therefore, all information was initially stored in a locked filing cabinet. Data stored on a computer were password protected and encrypted on a memory stick. Protecting the privacy of others was a primary ethical issue in the research. In order to reduce risk, I ensured all transcripts were anonymised and removed identifiers, names, places, and references to specific organisations connected with the participants' experiences.

Informed consent to participate was ensured through provision of a Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form (see Appendix 4), setting out information about the study, the purpose of the research, what taking part involved, who might have access to the data, and how it would be stored.

When meeting participants I was careful to check they had read and understood the contents of the information sheet, and ensured they had given signed consent before being interviewed. A signed copy of the form was provided to all participants. I clarified, prior to commencing the interviews, that participants were under no obligation to take part, and could withdraw from the study at any time, without needing to provide a reason for doing so.

Participants were fully informed about confidentiality and the limitations of this. They were advised that professional transcription services would not be used, but any other external services (e.g. proof readers) would only receive "cleaned" data with identifiers removed. I was clear that, although quotes would be used in the

write-up, all identifying information about the participants, including names and places, would be removed and replaced with a code. I was clear that I would work with an academic adviser and academic consultant, and that they, along with academics from Metanoia/Middlesex University could read anonymous transcripts.

There was an initial "warm-up" discussion with each participant to reduce any anxiety or apprehension, and to prepare them to discuss more sensitive and personal issues. Interviews started with a broad expansive question and were unstructured in style.

I included a de-brief period following each interview in which I checked-out how the participant found the interview. I used this opportunity to highlight the availability of further support and de-briefing as indicated on the information sheet. Josselson (2013) discusses endings of interviews specifically within her scholarly work on the ethics of interviewing. I agree with her that the research interview is deeply intimate, and the participant has risked sharing a lot of highly personal information and so saying goodbye must be handled carefully. At the end of each interview I asked the participant if there was anything else they wanted to add before we finished, and I shared something of the impact they had on me (e.g. "Thank you for sharing your story with me, I've felt very moved when listening to you."). As a mark of respect, I gave each participant a small box of *Hotel Chocolat* chocolates in a "Thank You" sleeve at the end of the interviews to thank them for their time and participation.

It was important to remember that there was a small risk that taking part in the research might cause distress. However, my training and experience as a psychotherapist gave me a level of expertise that not every researcher has. I felt confident that I would be able to use my knowledge, skills, and experience to work sensitively, and minimise any undue distress. However, I made participants aware that they could take a break at any time, and that they had the right not to answer my questions if they preferred not to. I also provided information about

services they could contact afterwards if they needed further support or wanted to talk more about the issues the interview might have raised for them.

Wider generalisations were not possible given the idiographic nature of the research and due to the smaller number of participants (Smith et al., 2009). However, Caldwell et al. (2008) emphasised that "theoretical dialogue" resulting from IPA studies can provide a broader context which contributes to the wider literature and body of knowledge. I took the advice of Smith et al. (2009), who promote the notion of "theoretical transferability" rather than "empirical generalizability".

A reflexive approach to IPA research methods helped me maintain an awareness of the motivations, interests, and attitudes that I brought to the process and which may have impacted on its interpretation in some way. Normally, as a psychotherapist working in both the NHS and in private practice, I am able to manage myself in terms of interpersonal impact. I do this mostly by making good use of consultative supervision but also through my experience, and my own internal supervisor.

The depth of my connection with the participants and the impact that they and their material had on me, took me very much by surprise. As well as contacting my academic adviser to talk this through, I decide to recommence personal therapy and in addition, on the advice of a friend, I started regular Reiki practice. Integrated body energy therapy helped me realise I had been profoundly impacted by the research, particularly in relation to my own lived-experiences and, whilst this was a difficult time, the process has been extraordinarily enlightening for me and helped me move from a state of liminality through to the post-liminal, in much the same way as I found that the participants had. I will expand on these liminal processes in the next chapter.

4.11 Summary

This chapter provided a methodological account of the research process, focussing on methods. The chapter began with a reflection on the aims of the study and how these were formulated, looking at the participant sample and demographic information, the pilot interview, research procedures and data collection method, the process of transcribing the interviews and data analysis, and, finally, reflecting on the salient ethical considerations. The next chapter will consider the findings of the research.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5: Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the findings of the research in relation to the main research aim(s): to explore lesbian and gay people's experiences of organised religion, and to consider the implications these experiences have on psychotherapy. The following is an account of the identified themes in detail. Three master themes emerged from the data analysis, each having distinct but interrelated sub themes. The master themes that were determined in the analysis are:

1) Religious Tribalism
2) Liminal Processes: pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal
3) Navigating Relationships

Considerable thought was given to the choice of major theme labels, and an explanation is provided at the start of each section to justify the choice of terminology. This particular endeavour certainly led me to reflect on the potential tyranny of language and, to honour the double hermeneutic, I chose labels that most closely reflected the content of data as it was presented to me. The master themes are illustrated with extensive verbatim extracts from the interviews throughout this chapter. The themes are presented in such a way as to provide a logical narrative of the findings rather than the order being indicative of their importance. The themes are interdependent and not mutually exclusive.

My intention in this chapter is to provide insight into the participants' experiences and share my interpretation of how they appeared to make sense of their experiences of organised religion. It is necessary to point out that it has not been possible to represent the whole data corpus due to its size, so I have endeavoured to provide plentiful salient extracts that most suitably represent each given theme. Further analysis and deeper interpretative work on the findings continue in the discussion chapter, where connections are made with existing literature.

All small hesitations, stutters, stammers, minor word repetitions, and utterances such as "um", have been removed. In most instances, quotations have been grammar checked and corrected to improve readability, without changing the meaning of a sentence. Any material that has been removed is represented by an ellipsis (...), and any material added is represented by square brackets [ ]. Names of participants have always been replaced with pseudonyms and where feasible all identifying information relating to third parties or places has been removed or changed.

5.2 The Master Themes

Themes were interpreted through a careful analysis of the interview data that resulted in the identification of three overarching master themes. These are represented in Figure 2 along with the related sub-themes that are represented in Figures 3, 4, and 5, which group the master themes with sub-themes. The presentation of the master themes and their sub-themes forms the basis of the rest of this chapter.

One complete transcript is provided in Appendix 6 as an example. Appendix 7 provides examples of coding with extracts from one analysed data set. Appendix 11 contains a summary of all the themes that emerged from the interview transcripts across the six participant interviews. In keeping with the IPA methodology, extensive verbatim accounts are presented in this findings chapter to provide clear evidence of the data as it was presented, and to clarify the themes identified.

Figure 2: The Master Themes
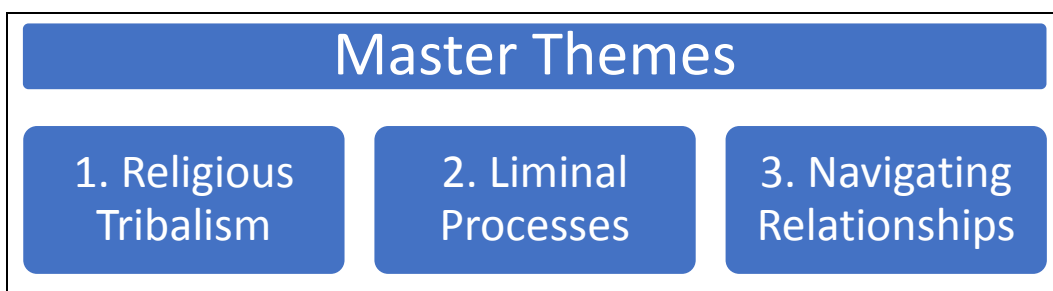
Figure 3: Master Theme 1 with Sub-Themes

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                          ┌─────────────────────────┐
                          │     Indoctrination      │
                          └─────────────────────────┘

                          ┌─────────────────────────┐
                          │   Orthodoxy and         │
┌──────────────────────┐  │   dogmatism             │
│                      │  └─────────────────────────┘
│ Religious Tribalism  │
│                      │  ┌─────────────────────────┐
└──────────────────────┘  │   Patriarchy and        │
                          │   hegemonic masculinity │
                          └─────────────────────────┘

                          ┌─────────────────────────┐
                          │       "The Book"        │
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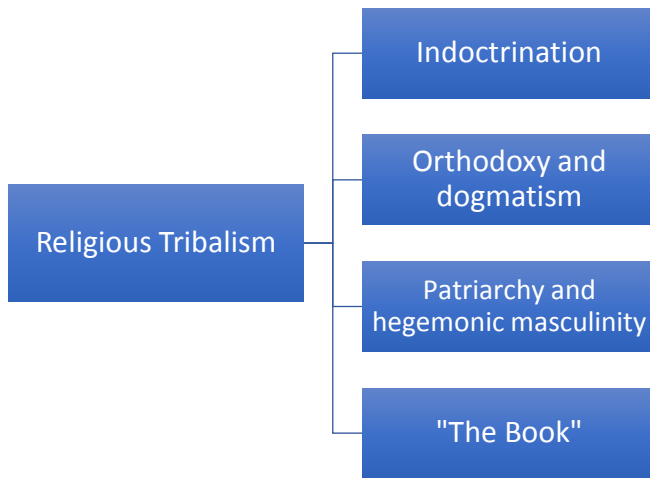
Figure 4: Master Theme 2 with Sub-Themes

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                                                    ┌──────────────────────┐
                                                    │    Heterosexism      │
                          ┌──────────────────────┐  └──────────────────────┘
                          │ Pre-liminal:         │  ┌──────────────────────┐
                          │ encountering         │  │ Words and silence as │
                          │ the problem          │  │ weapons              │
                          └──────────────────────┘  └──────────────────────┘
                                                    ┌──────────────────────┐
                                                    │      Othering        │
                                                    └──────────────────────┘

                                                    ┌──────────────────────┐
                                                    │     Coming Out       │
                          ┌──────────────────────┐  └──────────────────────┘
┌──────────────────────┐  │ Liminal: ontological │  ┌──────────────────────┐
│                      │  │ and epistemic shift  │  │ Betwixt-and-Between   │
│ Liminal Processes    │  └──────────────────────┘  └──────────────────────┘
│                      │                            ┌──────────────────────┐
└──────────────────────┘                            │ Intersecting         │
                                                    │ identities           │
                                                    └──────────────────────┘

                                                    ┌──────────────────────┐
                                                    │     Empowement       │
                          ┌──────────────────────┐  └──────────────────────┘
                          │ Post-liminal:        │  ┌──────────────────────┐
                          │ transformation       │  │ A quest for          │
                          └──────────────────────┘  │ authenticity         │
                                                    └──────────────────────┘
                                                    ┌──────────────────────┐
                                                    │    The Uberwelt      │
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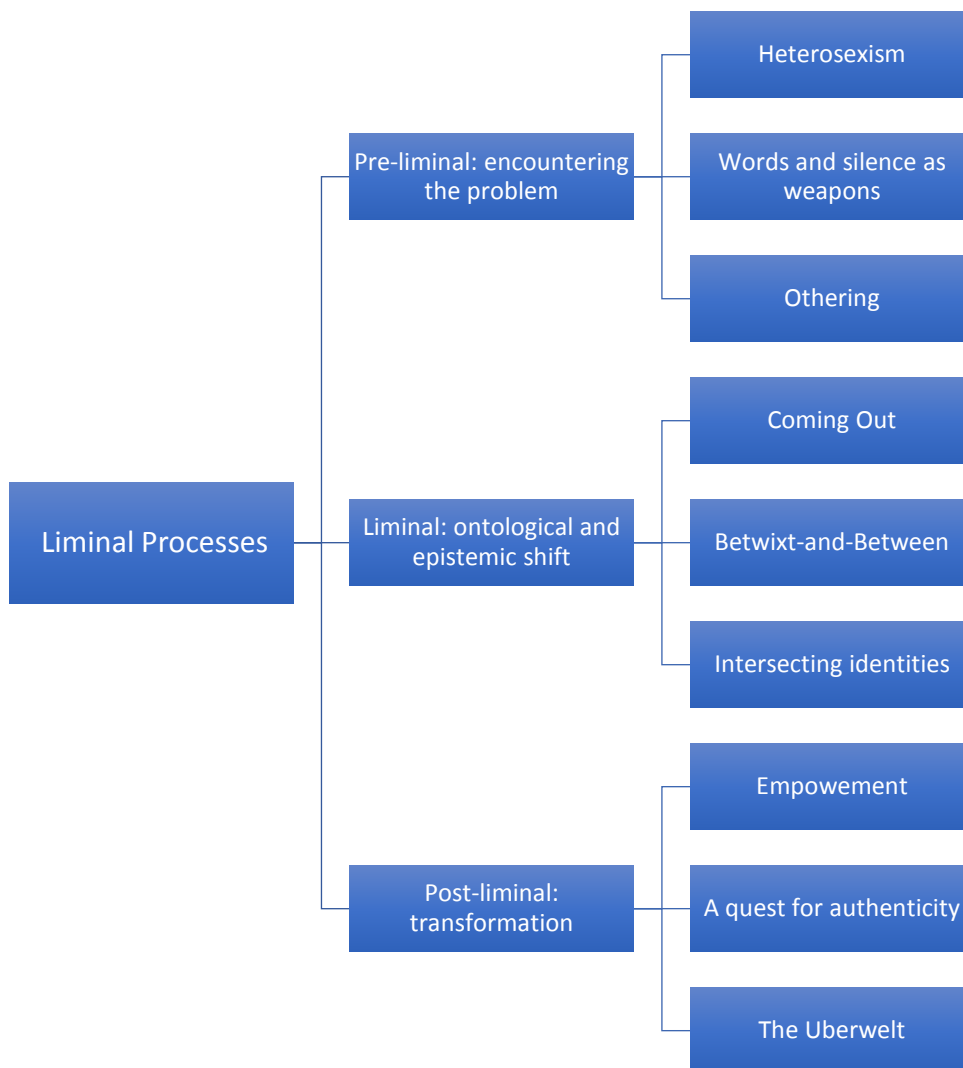
Figure 5: Master Theme 3 with Sub-Themes

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                              ┌─── Attachments
                              │
                              ├─── Family systems
Navigating Relationships ─────┤
                              ├─── The Socio-cultural
                              │    context
                              │
                              └─── Intimacy
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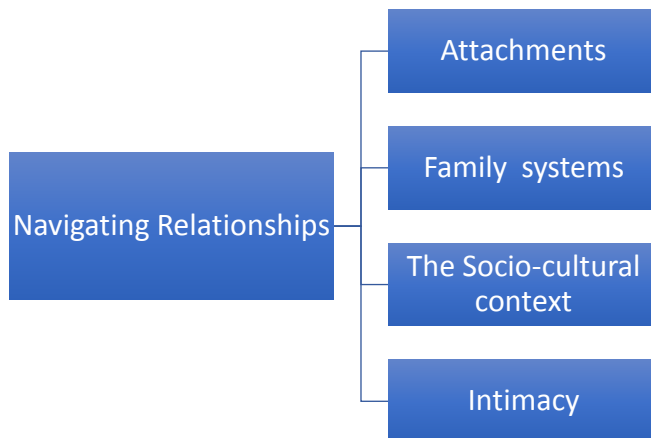
Table 2. Recurrent Themes

Master Theme	*Rose*	*Cate*	*Mark*	*Pam*	*Paul*	*Jay*	Present in over half the sample?
Religious Tribalism	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	**Yes**
Liminal Processes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	**Yes**
Navigating Relationships	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	**Yes**

5.3 Master Theme 1: Religious Tribalism

This section depicts the participants' experiences of organised religion as being tribal. The reason for choosing this label as opposed to, for example, "religious community" is because the religious institutions discussed were experienced by the participants as being comprised of powerful kinship groups - consisting of people who shared a specific view of the world, combined with an explicit theology. Inclusion and exclusion criteria, along with codes of conduct, appeared to be determined by the nominated leaders and an administrative hierarchy, and the systems were governed by rules and regulations interpreted from what I am

calling "The Book". Tribal norms and taboos were also structured around particular interpretations of religious doctrine and all of the "tribes" had internal, patriarchal hierarchies and processes of indoctrination.

Arguably, the first master theme could be found amongst a great many people within organised religious communities, including heterosexual people. However, it is important to bear in mind that this research is focussed specifically on the experiences of six lesbian and gay participants, and it is therefore not possible to generalize beyond this group of people. The first master theme provides the background and context for subsequent themes, which are perhaps more unique to non-heterosexual experiences of religion.

Four sub-themes were identified within the master theme of religious tribalism: i) Indoctrination, ii) Orthodoxy and dogmatism, iii) Patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity, iv) "The Book".

5.3.1 Indoctrination

All participants described a process of early indoctrination into a religious community and none of them had come to religion later in life. The reason for choosing this label centred on the degree to which socialisation was taught critically or uncritically. It was clear that from an early developmental age, participants were inculcated with doctrine and, being dependent on their care-givers for life itself, compliance was more or less inevitable. The data suggested that when one is indoctrinated from infancy that indoctrination becomes deeply embedded, as described by Rose:

> *It's kind of in your DNA if you've been reared on it… I would have been in church regularly at [the age of] two. (Rose)*

Indoctrination was described as a form of rote learning, and it was apparent that early indoctrination took the form of a recitation of the rules more than encouraging critical thinking:

... In Catholicism you parrot, from being tiny. You know, you have
learnt every page of your catechism by the time you're about seven
years of age. You can recite a whole string of laws and prayers.
(Rose)

Pam described early indoctrination and being rewarded for attendance at the
tribe's events with literature that supported the associated doctrine. The notion of
brainwashing passed through my mind as I listened to her describing being
rewarded with a book:

I was taken to church by my mother... almost soon after I was born...
I was christened in church, and went to Sunday School, and remember
Sunday School attendance was rewarded by gifts once a year... on
one occasion, I had a book given to me for very good attendance
called "Follow Me"...It was the story of Jesus, and I thought, "Yeah,
okay, this is a good thing to do." So, I would probably say that I've
been a Christian since the age of probably about seven or eight.
(Pam)

The indoctrination of participants when they were children mostly took place at
"Sunday School". Even when the religion's holy day did not fall on a Sunday (i.e.
if the holy day was Friday), it was still called Sunday School. The notion of
"school" implied a place of education and, for the participants, Sunday School
was the place where they, and other children and young people, were schooled in
the doctrines of the religious tribe they had been taken to without their volition.
For Cate in particular, the sites of indoctrination also involved distant travel to
Israel, to reinforce and locate the doctrines within a religious-political context:

... We would go to Synagogue, learn Hebrew and things, and when I
grew up I actually became a Sunday School teacher – unwillingly...
when I was sixteen I went to Israel for a month... when I was eighteen
I went on my gap year again to Israel, and it's more intense. (Cate)

Even though participants had been indoctrinated from an early age, they began to question more and think more critically as they got older:

> *I can remember as a young teenager, and certainly as a university student, having debates with my father, and they were debates about politics, but I would often draw an analogy with organised religion... and the gaps between what people profess to be their values, and actually how they then live their lives. (Rose)*

There were positive aspects to early indoctrination insomuch as it provided core moral guidance that might be usefully applied in the wider social context, which resulted in a degree of social responsibility. However, it might equally be the case that these moral values don't need to be taught because, as Rose pointed out, they occur naturally:

> *Church created a kind of moral compass, and it had associated with it a set of values that, broadly, anyone would want for living in a civilisation. For me, they're so obvious – why do you need some organisation to kind of hand them on to you? (Rose)*

The kinship groups that form religious tribes had a named identity and this was a necessary aspect of indoctrination. For some this was learning the wider values of the world religion, as was the case in Judaism and Islam for example. Within the Christian religion it seemed important that sub-tribes were denominated and their particular doctrines were ingested. In the following extract, Pam explained how membership followed a process of indoctrination:

> *… If you wanted to become a member, you were invited to do classes, relevant classes… and you received "the right hand of membership".*
> *… We were going to a Baptist church which was Congregational Baptist. They'd closed the Baptist church and joined with the*

Congregational Church, so it became the Congregational Baptist
Church. (Pam)

Participants talked about denominations joining forces with other denominations within a particular branch of religion in order to form a new community and new denomination. The following extract depicts the merger of tribal kinship groups and their new denomination:

The Congregational Church in England and Wales joined together
with the Presbyterian Church and the Church of Christ, and they
became the United Reformed Church. (Pam)

Indoctrination contained rules about the merger of sub-tribes. For example, within the same religious group tribal merger was acceptable, but tribes belonging to different branches of the Abrahamic religions were incompatible. Furthermore, there appeared to be hostility between them. Loyalty to one's tribe within a particular branch of religion was to be expected and "crossing-over" was frowned upon. Mark dared to begin to desire to switch from the Baptist tribe to the Catholic tribe, but eventually settled for a happy medium in order to avoid parental disapproval:

Now Baptists and Catholics don't particularly get on… so I found [a]
church that's very Anglo-Catholic, and I thought "…my mother
doesn't want me to become a Roman Catholic, here's an Anglican
church, so a halfway shop". (Mark)

This was a potent statement about the indoctrination of "belonging" and who's in and who's out, even before factoring in sexual-orientation. Pam described the high degree of antagonism between tribes:

… I grew up in a time when a lot of Catholics and Protestants were at
each other throats… and I actually had experience of that in my own
family, where my maternal grandma had been a chapelgoer, and one

of her brothers had married a Catholic, and in those days, they had to
agree the children would be brought up Catholic… If Catholics and
Protestants saw each other on the road, you know, they'd cross the
road deliberately to avoid each other. (Pam)

Participants were indoctrinated into the various configurations and constitutions of their tribes. The tribes were all found to have a nominated leader and hierarchical structure. Learning one's place was an essential component of the functioning of the tribal systems:

The way they're organised is, you tend to have the minister or priest,
you know… and the next administrative roles or pastoral roles… are
elders in some churches, deacons in other churches. (Pam)

All the participants found there was a degree of negativity in the overarching world view of the religious tribes they were indoctrinated into. For example, Rose spoke powerfully about the way in which Catholicism tended to construct negatives, especially around sex and sexuality:

You know, the length of your skirt was measured in order to make
sure that it was long enough… you were literally lined-up and a ruler
was (gestures)… so there was a lot of obsession around anything that
may vaguely verge on sexuality… it was an obsession with
constructing negatives… I'm fortunate I'm a person who has always
tended to operate in the axiom of the positive. (Rose)

An important aspect of socialisation was learning the specific rites of passage and adhering to the rituals and traditions. Each different tribe had significantly different rituals and norms. For example, Cate spoke movingly about her Jewish mother and non-Jewish father debating Christmas. I heard this as a metaphor for the tension of intersecting identities:

My dad, who isn't Jewish, wanted a Christmas tree... my mum obviously being Jewish [and] stubborn, she didn't want a Christmas tree... and in the end we didn't have a Christmas tree. I guess my father was disappointed... but my mum was trying to instil Judaism in us from early on... I guess she wanted us to know we're Jewish, and to speak Hebrew, and that kind of stuff. (Cate)

I was moved by this example of indoctrination and not only the family dispute it generated but also the internal conflict it presented. Cate was regretful as she talked more about her father's death and felt remorseful about denying him the pleasure of a Christmas tree because of her own allegiance to the Jewish tribal norms that she held in order to please mother.

5.3.2 Orthodoxy and Dogmatism

Orthodoxy in the form of traditional, unquestioned beliefs within religious institutions was closely linked with dogmatism and was a frequently occurring component of religious tribalism in the data. This was described humorously by one of the participants:

Orthodoxy is whichever bully-boy group is stronger than the others. So, if you're a heretic, it means you just weren't strong enough. (Mark)

As a result of indoctrination, the participants were acutely aware of traditional religious values and rules for living according to their tribe. These were expressed in different ways in the interviews. For example, Jay talked about the orthodoxy of prayer in Islam and his resulting self-definition as "non-practising", which was a consequence of his non-compliance:

I wouldn't judge anyone else but... looking at myself specifically, I would say that I'm "not practising", where I don't pray five times a day... I go through points where my belief and faith are stronger, and

at those points yes, I will pray more often, and there are other points in my life where I'm not as "practising". (Jay)

The tribal "laws" were reinforced and perpetuated not only by designated religious leaders but also by members of the religious tribes. Inflexibility was strongly depicted and there was an awareness that this rigidity of thought extended out into the wider cultural context:

… it's strange because a lot of people who aren't even religious or believe anything, when it comes to homosexuality; they've already made their mind up. This is the way it is – Islam forbids it, there's no way around it. (Jay)

There was something of a sense that religious dogmatism is profoundly deep-rooted, and the participants had little hope that things will change from within the religious tribes as a result of orthodoxy:

… Religion will not change. It's there in concrete… someone could be having this debate in fifty years, a hundred years from now, and I suppose because religion sets it in stone, and "the way it should be". (Jay)

The consequences of non-conformity to the rules were experienced powerfully. This was especially apparent across all the interviews:

Because the messaging of exclusion, if you didn't follow the order, the consequences of exclusion were so powerful… it's an organised religion which is doctrinaire… I was taught that if you'd been shown the way… and you rejected it… well, you were a bad lot and bad things would follow. (Rose)

Although there were clear orthodox and dogmatic beliefs around sexuality and expressing this within the tribes, there was also much ambiguity and selective interpretation of doctrine in some cases:

> *And if they want to justify polygamy in their religion, they'll justify it.*
> *If they want to justify no sex after marriage, they'll do it. (Mark)*

I appreciated participants' humour on the subject of ambiguity, and this left me curious about the use of humour in the therapeutic relationship, which I will discuss further in the next chapter. Cate and I laughed together when discussing how her mother strictly adhered to religious doctrine in some ways but on other occasions, she selectively disregarded major doctrine in favour of her personal preferences:

> *… like my [Jewish] mother enjoys bacon, a cheeseburger, or*
> *something… I guess she's conservative with a small "c". (Cate)*

She humorously took ownership of her own partial commitment to Judaic doctrine:

> *I sometimes say that to people, I'm Jew "ish!" (Cate)*

Tribal chieftains were described as having something untouchable about them and a number of examples were given demonstrating that they too would selectively disregarded aspects of tribal doctrine, especially when behaving in cruel or sadistic ways:

> *I was there for twenty months with a priest… who's often on television*
> *whenever there are programmes about child sex abuse in the Catholic*
> *church… he was absolutely evil towards me. Not in a sexual way at*
> *all, but mental cruelty. (Mark)*

Participants found themselves increasingly questioning traditional doctrine and doubting the credibility of the "truth" that had been instilled in them. They increasingly noticed the contradictions within religious orthodoxy, and grew to dislike religious dogma and the wider problems it can lead to:

> *… my experience of it was that to some extent it's kind of anti-education because there are these bits called dogma… if you look at civilisation, people defending bits of dogma has created such trouble and strife. I think it's a kind of weird thing to subscribe to. (Rose)*

There were numerous examples of psychological manipulation and abuse of power resulting in humiliation. Mark gave a detailed example of religious abuse within the clergy that triggered a depressive episode:

> *Talking about mental cruelty, there was a young priest who'd been sent [for treatment] for alcoholism and the JL said to the archbishop "When this one's out send him to me because I'll be able to help him." But he meant "control him". One day he cooked a dessert and there was alcohol in it and this young priest said "Oh I can't have that if there's alcohol in it." JL went ballistic and had such a temper tantrum, and he might not speak to you for the next five days, so you will always obey thinking that to obey is better than to suffer five days of his moods and slamming doors and windows. So, he'd said to this priest, "It's not alcohol it's flavouring" … and afterwards he brought a bottle of Cointreau out of the cupboard and with a big smile over his face said "I'll pour this all over it." (Mark)*

Religious abuse was not only limited to the internal ranks of the religious tribes it was also extended to lay members for whom organised religion was a part of their lives:

> *I cycled seven miles and when I got to the church, the old lady that used to have keys to open up the tabernacle, she said "Oh father it's*

you! He's [the priest] taken my keys off me so I have no keys to get the
chalice out of the safe or anything at all." So, I had to cycle seven
miles back and he's waiting there dangling the keys, "Oh, you wanted
these?" (Mark)

Even subjectively well-intentioned experiences could be experienced as abusive. These were also traumatic and had long-term effects, including body shame:

I was a boarder in this "classic" boarder school thing, you only had
one bath a week - "unclassic". In order to get in a bath, you had to
put a shroud over your body because you shouldn't be able to be in
contact with your body. (Rose)

The data shows that there were inconsistencies and contradictions within tribal orthodoxy and that dogmatism that ranged from being punitive to abusive. A growing awareness of these concerns led to the development of a more mature critical perspective and, ultimately, a rejection of fundamentalist perspectives that were essentially ego-dystonic.

5.3.3 Patriarchy and Hegemonic Masculinity

The examined religious communities were, on the whole, found to be systems in which men held the primary positions of power and leadership, hence this sub-theme label. Even where women were included in leadership roles, men were the ultimate source of moral and religious authority. They had a distinct social privilege, as well as control of the tribe's finances and associated properties. The dominant position of men was legitimised by the whole tribal system and the subordination of women was endemic, as was the subordination of any alternative expressions of masculinity:

… the way that men have silenced women over the years, and it's the
male gods that have won-out [and]men's understanding of their gods.
(Mark)

117

All participants encountered power and control to varying degrees. The following extract from Mark provides a key example of the degree of power and control exercised over subordinate others in the tribe:

He [the priest] would shout, especially at women. He was completely misogynistic. He would scream at women in church, in front of everyone. People would see it, and then the women would come to me, maybe crying and upset, and they'd say "maybe it's the time of the month" or "maybe I was oversensitive"; they'd always blame themselves for having caused his bad mood. (Mark)

Patriarchy also came into play when there was a threat to established notion of masculinity:

I used to do a lot of youth work... and it was fine, until I "came out". And at that point it was "rabbit in the headlights" kind of thing, and he suddenly fought, very much... It was straight up rejection... suddenly the game had changed and you're no longer the same person you were before. (Paul)

I was moved by Pam's account of moving abroad to work for a church mission after several years of training and preparation. This was prior to her coming-out as a lesbian woman. Even though she was highly qualified and the equal of her husband in this respect, she experienced hegemonic masculinity first-hand. The following is a salient example that is representative of all the participants' experiences of being either female or "not male enough":

… the children and I were seen as the backup team and, despite the fact that we had this intense year of academic education, when we actually got to the island, nobody could give two hoots about how we'd been educated... really. (Pam)

There was evidence of positive progress in some Christian religions (e.g. Protestantism). Pam managed to secure the first female elder position within her church, even though this was a lesser role for which she had to fight. She felt stifled, that the role affected her mental health, and that taking the role had only been possible at a time when she was hiding her sexuality and "passing" as a heterosexual woman. She felt that she exchanged domesticity in one place for domesticity in another:

> *I did a lot of voluntary work and I became the first woman elder in that church... in hindsight I could have probably done a lot more... I became very disillusioned... I spiralled into depression really. (Pam)*

There were numerous examples in the data of male privilege in organised religion, and this interlinked with the perpetuation of hegemonic masculinity. Even male participants had experiences of being reminded of the "real male" status quo, especially when expressing masculinity in an alternative way. Some of the examples I've used in this section were chosen as key depictions of this.

5.3.4 "The Book"

All religious tribes had a Holy Book, a primary text of doctrine, around which their systems were organised. Frequent and significant reference was made by all participants to the primary text as being a major locus of evaluation. People involved in organised religion were seen to derive meaning from it, and structured their lives around "The Bible", "The Torah", "The Qur'an", or "Scripture" – essentially what I more broadly label "The Book" in this chapter:

> *... there's an onus on you to pray, read the Qur'an, and not just read it but interpret the Qur'an and understand it, and act upon it as well... I mean, even now, a lot of children will go to school, finish at 3.30pm, go home, have a quick bite to eat, and then they'd be sent straight to mosque, and that would be to learn the Qur'an... that's exactly how I*

> *learnt - you'd come home and you'd go to the mosque from 5 till 7*
> *Monday to Friday, you spent two hours there. (Jay)*

Knowledge of the primary text was seen as important, and all participants had been educated in it, studied it, and bought into it as being, in one way or another, the primary text of their tribe. Pam found that it provided a clear sense of structure as well as offering a degree of intellectual stimulation:

> *I like the structure of it, I like the structure of the church year, and I*
> *like the fact that it's grounded in history and it's grounded in the*
> *liturgy... so much of it makes sense to me, whereas a lot of Protestant*
> *denominations, you know, they haven't got a clue... with my*
> *background in RE [Religious Education], and I've got a Theology*
> *degree, I realise I've got a distinct advantage over a lot of people who*
> *have never been educated in their faith. (Pam)*

There was a deep-seated respect for and cherishing of "The Book" found in the data across all experiences, even though it proved ultimately to be (mis)used as a basis for discrimination and as providing the permission for enacting tribal rejection:

> *Certainly, if anybody's looking at the homosexuality stuff in scripture,*
> *it's very negative. (Mark)*

In the data analysis, "The Book" was found to provide a meaningful connection to childhood experiences and, within groups, it offered predictability, identity and consistency, and an anchoring to a shared document. It also appeared to provide a form of secure base, being a kind of solid, reliable "other" that provided boundaries.

Approaches to "The Book" differed across religions and denominations. For example:

I like the Word being preached and in the Catholic Church you always have an Old Testament reading, you always have a New Testament reading, you always have an Epistle, and you always have the Gospel. Now to my mind that's important. The preaching of the Word is important because I grew up with the preaching of the Word. So, I've got... my ideal structure in my head and in one sense the Catholics come closer to the structure I like... but then you find more friendship and familiarity, more fellowship in the non-conformist churches. (Pam)

There was a tension between an historic respect for "The Book" and a broader acknowledgement of significant bigotry within the (mis)interpreted religious texts:

I mean... the Catholic church to this day is one of the most doctrinaire on the subject of its non-tolerance of the non-heterosexual. (Rose)

"The Book" was cited as the main source of information that heterosexual members of the various organised religions used for making judgements and it provided a convenient, albeit uncritical, rationale for this practice:

Because it's like they're not judging you just [by] themselves. They're judging you, you know, "from above" so to speak, and they've got this Book, which they use as a reason, which is absolute nonsense. (Cate)

The key texts used by the religious tribes were widely considered to be male dominated, and the need to maintain this male dominance within organised religions was apparent, as shown in this extract from Mark:

... I think the Holy Books of all the different religions have been written by men. It's a very hegemonic, patriarchal institution and therefore they want to protect their procreative heterosexuality. (Mark)

Female participants were aware the religious texts were silent on same sex attraction between women but, being interpreted by men, the forbidding of male homosexuality within religion was seen to represent a forbidding of female homosexuality by default:

> *As far as I know there's no reference to lesbians in the Torah, but for men it's not allowed. Some people interpret that if men aren't allowed then women aren't allowed. Other people say well there's no reference to women so it's fine, and there's a whole thing around wasting sperm, and you shouldn't waste sperm because it's life. So, in terms of women that's not a problem. (Cate)*

Participants were not always satisfied or comfortable with some of the interpretations of the content of "The Book" or the ways in which these interpretations had been acted upon by religious leaders:

> *I think John Paul II and Benedict XVI should be prosecuted for crimes against humanity. The condom lark should have been solved all those years ago. (Mark)*

The fact that some religious tribes interpret certain texts in a conservative way and others are more liberal also seemed to contain within it the theme of patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity:

> *… contraception is only an issue for the Catholic Church. The others don't even think about it… so if they're believing in the same religion, the same Bible, the same God, how can one lot think differently? So, has someone got it right and someone got it wrong? So, therefore, it's men! (Mark)*

Misinterpretation by men in power was particularly emotive for some participants because not only did their own lived experience jar with what was being imposed

but they also felt a sense of disempowerment. This was sometimes dealt with by discounting or ridiculing the masculine power:

> *… there's lots of interpretation from Rabbis and famous Rabbis, and that kind of stuff which, again, I think is ridiculous because, you know, they're just… men, who write about their own opinion, and people follow it… I think it's ridiculous. I've been quoted this Rabbi and that Rabbi, and this guy and that guy. (Cate)*

In summary, "The Book" was significant within the theme of religious tribalism and mixed feelings were expressed. On the one hand there seemed to be a respect for "The Book" because it was a crucial aspect of the participants' personal history and formative education within their religious tribes. The structure and grounding it provided was highly valued. On the other hand, the way in which "The Book" was seen to be misinterpreted, often by men, created an internal tension both intellectually and emotionally. In the process of recognising this tension, it was apparent that a form of healthy critical thinking emerged.

5.4 Master Theme 2: Liminal Processes

This section concentrates on the liminal processes experienced by lesbian and gay participants within the context of organised religion. The complexity of this master theme, having several sub-themes, reflects something of the intricate, complicated, and nuanced lived experiences found within the three states of liminality. Land et al. (2010) describe threshold experiences as involving recursiveness and oscillation instead of a linear, predictable journey and this is reflected in the themes presented in this section. The three major sub-themes identified were: i) Pre-liminal: Encountering the problem ii) Liminal: Ontological and epistemic shift iii) Post-liminal: Transformation and change.

5.4.1 Pre-liminal: Encountering the Problem

There was emergent incongruence upon the participant discovering that being gay or lesbian within their organised religious communities was, for the most part, perceived as oxymoronic. The starting point was realising the religious groups had a major problem on many levels with any sexual-orientation other than heterosexuality and that, subsequently a powerful transition process was initiated. The sub-themes connected with this first pre-liminal state include: i) heterosexism, ii) words - and silence - as weapons, and iii) othering.

A significant experience for all the participants was the realisation that there was something profoundly problematic in their lived experience of organised religion because their emergent sexual orientation was inconsistent with their religion's tribal norms and doctrines. Encountering this momentous problem was complex and multifaceted. Through the awareness that something would have to be left behind, this experience represented a metaphorical "death" and led to a new awareness of the need to break with previous practices and routines.

As early awareness of same-sex attraction developed, there was initial confusion around sexual and religious identity, but sexual-orientation itself was not found to be ego-dystonic; participants tried to make sense of the contradictions between the norms of the religious tribe and their own experiences:

> *… at first it was difficult because I still thought being gay was wrong, you know, "How am I like this?", there was all sorts of questioning going on because of the tradition I'd been brought up in, because there was no mention of being gay. Well then "Did God create me?", "Did God create me gay?", you know, "Why has God created me gay?" All those sorts of questions. (Mark)*

5.4.1.1 Heterosexism

As an inescapable social ideology, heterosexism was experienced within organised religion by all the participants and they described experiencing it in a variety of ways that showed it to be both implicit and explicit. It can be seen to

interweave throughout all the themes and subthemes in this chapter in one way or another. Further academic discussion of this phenomenon is provided in the next chapter. The term "heterosexism" is being used instead of "homophobia" because it more precisely denotes:

> … an ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any non-heterosexual form of behaviour, identity, relationship, or community. (Herek, 1990: 89)

Additionally, the term highlights the many parallels between antigay prejudice and other forms of prejudice such as racism and sexism, and it signifies how pervasive this theme was found to be within organised religion.

Chieftains, normally male, played a key role in maintaining heterosexism and they appeared to be somewhat blinded by their bigotry, and apparent need for power:

> *The reason why I dislike the man-made religion is because of that heterosupremacy side of it. See, even when it's to do with contraception for example, the number of women throughout the world who suffer horrible lives because they've got no control over their reproductive rights, and its man who's made that rule, you know? (Mark)*

Perceiving same-sex attraction to be abhorrent and a threat to the heterosexist norms led to heightened stigma, and male leaders often normalised the marginalisation of gay and lesbian people both overtly and covertly:

> *… that's why that response hurt so much I think, because, suddenly, one of those aspects of community was being denied… it was a betrayal in a way. I think I can put that word to it… because this was a person in charge of a church… with a message of acceptance… and suddenly saying "but not for you". (Paul)*

Heterosexism was so deeply entrenched that participants were compelled to find out about their own sexual orientation through a dominant heterosexual lens rather than having any obvious role-models, or messages of love and acceptance, within organised religion or even wider society:

> *I remember very often watching a film on television, I was about the age my parents would go out on a Sunday afternoon, and I would sit and watch black-and-white films, and I knew that I didn't fancy the guys, I fancied the women. (Pam)*

This produced a sense of powerlessness in participants, who unwittingly reinforced the heterosexist ideology through their compliance with it. In their subjugation, they conformed to the majority expectation that they'd remain invisible, which perpetuated the subjugation. The alternative was to become radical or politically active in some way, which often appeared unpalatable or undesirable:

> *When we were walking near the pub she would say "Don't hold my hand because I don't want customers knowing" so I kind of got that as well… she values her personal life. She doesn't want her colleagues or customers knowing and asking questions, and I guess I'm quite the same – like going to SH, I don't want people knowing, seeing, and judging, you know, because they will judge. (Cate)*

Specific anti-gay prejudice frequently operated through a dual process of invisibility/silence and attack. When their same-sex attraction remained culturally invisible, participants were not specific targets for attack, even though the doctrines they were exposed to were more broadly prohibitive. However, when their sexuality was identifiable and/or became visible, participants then became vulnerable:

> *… I always knew there were homophobic elements in the church anyway. Everyone knows that it's there – you just don't expect it to be the people you feel that you know. (Paul)*

Ubiquitous sexual prejudice meant participants were never in doubt about the religious tribe's inclusion and exclusion criteria. This was particularly evident in the experience of Islam, where more reference was made to the notion that same-sex attraction is taboo:

> *From a young age, all you hear about is that homosexuality is forbidden within Islam, so there is a real taboo to it. And more than anything else, all you hear about in Islam is "homosexuality is forbidden." You go straight to hell for it… If you look in the Qur'an about homosexuality nothing is mentioned… except in the context of Sodom and Gomorrah [and] that is about rape. It's got a real taboo associated with it. (Jay)*

Participants found that anti-gay prejudice and discrimination was expressed in different ways, but it was always inescapable:

> *… it was both verbal and non-verbal… certainly after [coming out] he would post things on his Facebook wall, and this was when the same-sex marriage debate was going on. (Paul)*

The stigmatising heterosexist ideology was modelled and preached by religious leaders who had a powerful platform, often quite literally, to communicate it. Participants often felt like passive recipients of homonegative messages and felt powerless to respond. However, on one occasion, after many years of wrestling with her identity, Pam was able to take a stand by walking out of a church service. Although this was a relatively small protest, for her it was significant:

It was one of the lay preachers… going on about how awful gay
people are, and I got up and walked out and two elders followed me
and asked me why I'd walked out, and I told them. (Pam)

It appeared that responses from people within the religions were informed by a
heterosexist ideology rooted in interpretations of ancient texts. There was often
evidence of a view that "some are more equal than others" expressed in a variety
of ways. Having age and theological authority on her side, one participant queried
this but the unapologetic response of exclusion from membership of the religious
group was confirmed:

So, I said to the minister "So you're telling me that if I was to say to
you, well a person is living an active gay lifestyle…" and he said "No,
I would bar them from membership." As I say, he didn't know that I
was talking about myself because I had R there who was wanting the
main questions answering. (Pam)

A critical finding related to the participants' experiences of being further
marginalised when they sought help. Indeed, the counselling that took place
within the context of organised religion, which apparently came from a
fundamentalist Christian and unhelpful heterosexist ideological position, was
inevitably damaging and, in fact, led to a deterioration in mental health. The first
time Pam named her sexual orientation and "came out" to someone else in her
entire life was after being referred for counselling. She laughed nervously as she
told me this, but I was aware the laugh was incongruent, and it appeared she was
re-experiencing distress. We explored this further and I shared with her the impact
her story was having on me, which allowed her to continue:

Well, I think because there was, in my head, there was so much
shame, and guilt, and impossibility attached to it, I think it was, you
know, "Oh, thank God I'm not!" even though he persuaded me during
the course of this time that everybody has those feelings and that I
wasn't. (Pam)

Sadly, Pam went into a deep depression and "fell apart". However, the break-down was a turning point, when she realised she had to escape the oppressive tribe. It took another fourteen years after that before she was able to choose to live her life as a gay woman. It was intensely sad to consider that, after becoming aware of her sexual orientation at the age of twelve and experiencing a lifetime of deeply oppressive heterosexism and religious abuse, she came out to a counsellor at age thirty-eight. This coming out itself proved harmful and she was only able to come out fully at the age of fifty-two.

To summarise, heterosexism within organised religion was rampant and upheld by the appointed leaders. It was rooted in doctrinal orthodoxy and on the whole anti-gay prejudice was so legitimised that it was conveyed without compassion or regard for the psychological impact on those being marginalised.

5.4.1.2 Words - and Silence - as Weapons

Both words and silence were found to be key mechanisms of heterosexism, enabling its continuation. Instances of name-calling appeared frequently in the data and, notably, it most often started with other children, who recognised something different in their peers, and who, empowered to point this difference out with words, did so cruelly. It seemed that these children were often at such a young age that they did not fully comprehend the words and language they were using:

> *Children in school used to call me "queer", and it was because I*
> *didn't like all the sporty games and everything, so, typically, the way*
> *kids use "you're so gay" in a negative way now, when I was a child it*
> *was "Queer"… and even though they called me queer I used to think*
> *"But I don't know what that means". (Mark)*

More subtly, words were used in the context of power play. In this example, Cate explained how some stigmatised topics normally warranted a switch to the Hebrew language, especially when gossiping was involved:

…there have been quite a few comments I've heard, or kind of whispered, in Hebrew… (Cate)

Gossip within religious groups was often homonegative and participants described their recollections of derogatory labels being used:

… well it's said in such a way that it's negative obviously, that they disapprove… and they talk about things like "Oh, she's a lesbian" or "He's a homo", that's' the words they use, so it's not very positive words. (Cate)

The following example illustrates the tyranny of language, which will be discussed further in the next chapter. In this example, the word "family" was seen to represent heterosexist language for "straights only":

It got to the point where I'd go past that church and it would say, "This is a Family Church!", and you would think, "Yes, family means… the traditional unit." (Paul)

This was an example of a heteronormative church sign that may not have been given a second thought by its inventor. However, it provides a good example of heterosexism as it contains the veiled threat of exclusion (written between the lines). Based on his experience as a gay man, the participant took the sign outside the church to mean "You're not part of this community":

… the word "family" meant "not you". "Family" means "only if you have kids… or are going to have kids". "This is a Family Church! All Families Welcome!", "All welcome but especially families". (Paul)

There was frequent reference to the heterosexual majority selecting words from favourite religious texts to judge and to condemn. This was a significant part of processing in the pre-liminal stage, and all participants ultimately realised the conservative interpretations and punitive use of words was unreliable:

> *… I've studied the religious side of it loads and loads and I know all those words in the Bible are completely and utterly wrong, because the term homosexuality wasn't even invented then, and the concept of being gay did not exist. So, especially with all the religious people who come out with quotes from the Bible, completely and utterly wrong! (Mark)*

When referring to same-sex attraction, Powerful, contemptuous words such as "abomination' and "taboo" were often used by those in power. "The Leviticus Code" was the primary source of pejorative words on this topic across all Abrahamic religions:

> *… she said "I believe [it] because it's the Word of God and the Word of God can't change" and, actually, I said "Do you mind me asking, do any of you eat shellfish? You know shrimps, clams, prawns?" and some hands would go up. "Have any of you ever shouted at your parents?" and a few other things like that, and I said "Look, in that holiness code it says if you've eaten shellfish you should be taken outside and stoned to death" and I said "It's the same thing for all of them. How come it's only this one, and then you'll eat your prawn crackers?" (Mark)*

The place and power of language was evident in the Catholic notion of confession, and this was present in various guises across the religions. Words in this context were understood as verbalising remorse in order to obtain forgiveness:

… every time I would have sex I would feel terribly guilty about it but at least with the Catholic tradition you could go to confession then… you say a little prayer and it's the act of contrition, and you promise in there that you'll try to do better next time. (Mark)

Intellectualisation, and over-intellectualising, was linked to choosing and framing words in such a way as to form a standpoint and create debate:

A large part of the religious debates about homosexuality appeared to centre around a form of intellectualizing and over-thinking the language, and how to frame it. A lot of it came down to semantics. (Cate)

Language and meaning, interpretation of language, studying words, and framing arguments, was so much a part of Cate's religious heritage that it was highly likely to have influenced her decision to study law in university and then become a barrister. We identified that an intense focus on language and interpretation of meaning in Judaism actually led to a particular skill:

… I like reasoning, language, standing-up and talking, so that's why I took the barrister route as opposed to the solicitor route. It just seemed natural for me. (Cate)

Participants noticed the hypocrisy that existed when members of organised religions selected certain words with a broad range of possible interpretations and chose which ones to apply or not to apply to themselves and others:

They're just ordinary people but they've been kind of conditioned. They're in this really closed society. I mean, on my street it's really hidden but there are these Yeshiva boys, and they come there and smoke because they're out of the way. And lots of people do things. They just want to test and break the rules and see what they can get away with to be honest. (Cate)

Silence was found to be a particularly potent part of the heterosexist armoury in organised religion. It denoted something unspeakable, the unacceptability of a gay or lesbian sexual-orientation for example, and it was often used within organised religion to maintain heteronormativity, especially when conveying disapproval:

> *… as I said, in those days, you didn't, people didn't talk about it, about gay issues… just unspoken. Yeah, totally unspoken. (Pam)*

A more sinister use of silence extended in one instance to the harassment and intimidation perpetrated by one heterosexual woman, who would drive past the home of a participant lurking and staring but saying nothing. This led to a feeling of being harassed and resulted in paranoia. It was evident that a sexual-orientation that differed from the majority was dangerous and participants were aware of a burden, from a heteronormative position, and that they had something to declare. Interestingly, there was no reference to heterosexual people needing to disclose their sexual orientation, which supports a view that heterosexism is both unfair and pervasive:

> *I kind of had "a secret" to speak. (Cate)*

There were numerous examples of homonegative responses to participants' coming out experiences, with numerous ignorant, heteronormative platitudes:

> *I think the biggest element was, with both my sisters, it was straight away "What's going to happen to the family name?", "You're not going to have children!", and of course they were issues I'd thought about. At the end of the day, this is who I am… and I know for a fact I could never be happy with a woman because there's no physical attraction there. (Jay)*

Normal everyday conversations were loaded with prejudice. Participants even noticed this in early childhood, recalling memories of particular words that were used to reinforce heterosexist hegemony:

> *Just the things she said growing up, you know like "Man and woman", "Adam and Eve". She thinks that every woman should have children. (Cate)*

Pam recalled the title of a book that struck a chord with her and she emphasised how unspeakable her sexual-orientation was to the heterosexual religious majority:

> *Unspeakable, yeah. I mean there was always that title "The love that must never speak its name" or something. I never had anybody at all, I never talked about it with anybody… so I decided "well okay, I have to suppress this, and accept the convention route". (Pam)*

The theme of not being able to confide in anybody occurred frequently and I felt deeply moved by the narratives depicting the isolation and segregation that resulted from the unspoken, the silence:

> *Obviously being homosexual there's an element that you've got to discover about yourself and, I suppose, coming from a Muslim family, I could never confide in anybody. So, you just feel "No, I'm the only person that's gay, and this is wrong." Growing up gay it always did feel wrong. (Jay)*

For Rose, the silence and withdrawal of support she experienced at the age of fourteen after talking to others about her struggle was confusing:

> *… no-one asked me about it, no-one gave me support, no-one was kind of caring of me… it was like I shared the information and then I wasn't sure about where that left me, or how I was perceived. (Rose)*

134

In summary, the tyranny of language was acutely highlighted across the interview data. Both words and silence were used as weapons in the religious and heterosexist armoury and served to ostracise those who dared to make their same sex attraction visible, in violation of their religion's doctrines.

5.4.1.3 Othering

All participants experienced the reductive process of being labelled as "not one of us" and as belonging to a subordinate social category that was not hetero-normal. For this reason, the sub-theme was labelled "Othering" and it is discussed further in the next chapter.

Othering was always a painful experience and, when first encountering it, participants attempted to find ways to divide sexual-orientation and religion intra-psychically. This was expressed powerfully by Cate, whose non-verbal communication was perhaps more significant than her words. I noticed Cate was expanding and contracting her hands as she described this experience:

> *I don't know if that's kind of a way of trying to repress what I was feeling? I'm not sure. But I guess it kind of felt like (gesturing) I was trying to repress that and to get more religious... but that wasn't working. (Cate)*

The experience of being branded "other" when same-sex attraction and love became visible was a frequently occurring theme. There was a bizarre shift in how participants were perceived by the heterosexual people to whom they came out. The heterosexual people came to view the participants as being marred, and no longer saw them as they had previously:

> *... I thought he was a friend. I think if you can turn on a dime like that, towards one of the people who worships, who has led worship, has*

had that much involvement, then there's obviously not much to you.
(Paul)

When a gay or lesbian identity was uncovered by others, the participants were deemed to be "not us", and there was a palpable change to the quality of interactions - it was as though the participants were thereon deemed to be "mad, bad, and dangerous to know". Exclusion from the religious group was extended by being designated a "persona non-grata" and, with this, the illusion of love and friendship in the tribe disappeared.

As part of the process of being ostracized, there was tangible fear of the wider implications of this "othering" because, being on the margins of a religious tribal group and having a gay identity also meant being on the margins of the gay community and having a religious identity. Thus, being judged and marginalised for being "other" could come from multiple directions:

> *... I was at Heaven nightclub a few years ago and I saw this religious guy, Jewish, standing outside, and you know, with his beard and his clothing, and it was a Saturday night and I went to speak to him... I was a bit inebriated and I was asking him "What are you doing here?" and he was like "Oh you know I just came" and it was Saturday night so after Shabbat, and he was like, you know "I want to go in" and I said "Just go in!" But he was worried that people would judge him! So, it was really funny that it was the other way around.*
> *(Cate)*

There was some acknowledgment that significant social change is underway in some quarters. There were geographical variations in where this othering occurred as well as a distinct split between the liberal and conservative perspectives within religious tribes:

> *In North London there is a synagogue where a gay couple were married recently... but then there's this whole range where at the*

other end of the spectrum there are people who are really suffering.
(Cate)

5.4.2 Liminal: Ontological and Epistemic Shift

The liminal theme depicts participants' experiences of coming to terms with the conflicts they encountered with organised religion and sexual-orientation, and their asking the question "when am I going to be real?" This state represented passing through a threshold and was found to signify a profound ontological and epistemic shift for the participants. The threshold experience included the integrating and discarding of different aspects of identity. Paradoxically, the somewhat destructive nature of the transition in this stage enabled the participants to make considerable changes and so it was therefore also re-constitutive (Land, Meyer, & Baillie, 2010).

5.4.2.1 Coming Out

"Coming out" is an abbreviation of the colloquial phrase "coming out of the closet" which is a metaphor representing the psychological process associated with gay and lesbian people's self-disclosure of their sexual-orientation. The interview data supports the view that "coming out" is more precisely a process of "inviting in", and this will be discussed in the next chapter. However, to reflect the terminology used by the participants and to follow common usage I will use "coming out".

All the participants talked about an inner, embodied knowing that they were different, beginning at a prepubescent stage of development. A more specific awareness that their difference was linked to their sexual orientation normally emerged between the ages of 10-14 years. Although they each knew they were different from the heterosexual norm, the period of coming to terms with the exact nature of that difference varied between participants:

I suppose that, for me, I knew from a young age that I was attracted to men, and didn't quite know what it was about men, there was an attraction to men, and then as you grow up you think "I prefer their company", and then you think to yourself "No, it's not just about company, it's about feeling passion and so forth for a man rather than a woman". (Jay)

Participants were found to have given considerable conscious thought to their sexual orientation, which is understandable given its enormous significance and them/us positioning. Participants had to ponder if and how to talk about their difference in the context of their religion and wider lives:

It's hard. I just knew. I knew I was "different", you know? I think I made the realisation maybe two years before [aged 14] that I probably did like girls, but I wasn't ready to say. (Cate)

Given that same sex attraction was not much spoken about in the context of organised religion, apart from it being framed in a homonegative way, participants were left to discover information about it for themselves, and they learnt in differing ways. For example, one participant knew he was different from a young age, but it was only after happening upon a chapter in a book that he discovered the social and cultural language assigned to that difference:

I knew I was different from other kids from an early age, but it wasn't until I was about thirteen that I read a book called, "Everything you ever wanted to know about sex but were afraid to ask." … and there was a whole chapter there on homosexuality, and I thought, "Oops, that's me!" … So that's how I could put a name or a label to how I was feeling at that time. (Mark)

Frequently, there was a variable period of suppressing one's sexual-orientation before coming out. For some, this process took several years, even decades:

Although I'd felt myself to be gay from probably about eleven or twelve, it was never talked about, I never had anybody to talk about it with so I made the decision to suppress that side of myself. (Pam)

All participants experienced an urge or drive to come out because they felt their homosexuality was a vital aspect of their true self and they needed to come out of hiding. In all cases, careful consideration was given to "who, when, and how" to tell. Participants had to weigh up the risks involved in any given situation:

I think I do that a lot. I think about what could be, before it actually happens. So, for example, we used to live in SN and my girlfriend also lived in SN, and whenever we would walk down the road we would kind of let go of our hands – because I might see a rabbi or a rabbi's wife that I know. (Cate)

There was clear evidence of stereotyping and stigmatising of gay and lesbian identities:

… there is still a big stigma attached to homosexuality and being gay, and I think a lot [of it] is the lack of knowledge and "ignorance is bliss" to a certain extent. I suppose for a lot of people the perception is [that] somebody who's gay likes to dress up like a woman and likes to act a bit effeminate and be camp. I think that's the stereotypical image people have. (Jay)

Social norm stereotyping within the religious context had a significant element of masculine hegemony connected to it:

Concentrating more on people within Islam, so when I look at close friends that I've told, I suppose an initial thing from a few of them was, "I did think it once but no, you're just too masculine", "You don't carry yourself in a gay way". And you're thinking, "What is a gay way?" (Jay)

There were varied responses to participants' coming out. There was particular divergence for one participant, who experienced both positive and negative responses from two different church leaders, one of whom was liberal and the other more conservative:

> *In terms of coming out within religion, I suppose I have the two conflicting stories of the two particular vicars where I was living… the one, which was my home church, was brilliant, and it didn't faze him at all… but he was more sort of liberal and thought more about the messages that he gave. He always put things in context, in a Biblical context and in a modern, social context. (Paul)*

More commonly, the process of coming out did not free the participants from oppression but instead exacerbated it. There were frequent examples of rejection and ostracism:

> *… My oldest son is a fundamental Christian. He doesn't accept, he doesn't accept at all. So, I have a very estranged relationship with them. I have a grandson who I hardly ever see, well, never see. (Pam)*

The coming out process took many years in some cases, and was sometimes met with disbelief:

> *Now I'm a lot more confident with myself and I know I'm a gay man and that's who I am but growing up it took me years to tell any of my siblings – it was just not the "done thing". Even when I did confide in my siblings they said "You can't be gay!", and "Are you sure?" (Jay)*

When rejection came from the chieftains or leaders of the religious tribes, it had the potential to completely alienate the person from their religion, as was the case for Paul:

… it was the vicar that just put me off religion entirely. (Paul)

There was evidence of identity comparison in the coming out process, but this was often multifaceted and also pertained to religious, racial, cultural, and political differences. I found myself deeply impacted by the enormity of the interpersonal tasks confronting participants when they were faced with the painful psychological and emotional challenge of navigating a powerful identity transition (coming out) in a heterosexual world, while simultaneously finding themselves at a threshold within their religious tribe. The notion of "passing" was a common theme for all participants, not only in their religion but also more widely:

> *I had deep paranoia about people knowing my sexual choice and that*
> *deep paranoia was around having a young child... I mean, social*
> *services did remove children because of people's sexual choice and I*
> *was a member of social services department, so it was very difficult*
> *for a few years... making extra special efforts to pass really. I suppose*
> *I was fortunate that I'd been practicing for a few years. (Rose)*

"Passing" was often employed in order to avoid severe consequences:

> *I just kind of thought my mother could kick me out or she could hate*
> *me or she could be really upset, and one thing I didn't like doing was*
> *upsetting my mum, I knew she wouldn't like it so I put it off for as long*
> *as I could. (Cate)*

Since extensive silence about gay sexual orientation was the norm and conveyed acute condemnation of it, "passing" supported conformity to the norms and to what was expected. Sometimes the threat of coming out was so great that it resulted in a heterosexual marriage cover-up.

> *… I suppose I thought, "Well, this isn't talked about and can never be*
> *talked about", and I wasn't aware of anything happening in the world*
> *as such, you know, "there's no future in this", so then I got married. I*

had three children and didn't really deal with it. I don't think I was in
love with my ex-husband but a form of love grew between us [but] I
never talked about it with him at all… when I went to PNG it surfaced
because there was a woman there that I was attracted to, and she was
attracted to me… and she was married as well. (Pam)

In Muslim communities the hegemonic masculinity was a particularly potent aspect of this, so that, strikingly, a gay man marrying and producing children was less stigmatised than a heterosexual woman divorcing:

It [marriage] represents a possible solution for some gay men, that
they might feel so much pressure to produce an heir and to marry…
because they come out the other end of it having ticked all the boxes,
and there's not a stigma around that actually. (Jay)

The fact that the four younger participants did not feel obliged to find refuge in a heterosexual marriage of convenience could be seen to be evidence of significant social change. It also pointed to the possibility that experiences could perhaps be different for some lesbian women if they came out later in life. This may be an area for further valuable research. Although Pam talked about things being different fifty years ago, we've seen that younger participants also referred to silence, and this is explored in the next section:

… I was born in 1950 and I grew up in that time when, as I said to
you, it wasn't talked about. Nobody ever [talked], I experienced
discrimination in a form but it was never overtly talked about. My
family never talked about it. (Pam)

There was found to be a holding back period of varying lengths, during which participants were aware of their sexual orientation but chose to carefully observe within the religion to see if and how they might have a place. During this time, full contact with the religion was diminished, because energies were redirected to observation and processing:

I was just kind of going through the motions and soaking it up really,
but a bit detached. So, if I could be a fly on the wall I wouldn't have to
participate and feel like a fraud in a way. You know, like with a skirt
and with long sleeves and that kind of stuff... but I wanted to see if
that was me. (Cate)

All participants found the coming out process to be somewhat inevitable, however long the process took or in whatever form it would eventually take, with sexual orientation being thought of as basically irrepressible:

... I mean, I just don't think you can repress things like that. And you
can't be who you're not. (Cate)

Taken in the wider context of the participants' lives, the realisation that their sexual orientation was the element that marked their difference from the heterosexual majority represented an epiphany, and coming out was a key feature of this pre-liminal state. Paradoxically, coming out involved a process of reflexivity, self-acceptance, and a quest for authenticity:

I think you get to that point where there's that element of trust... and
you've matured in your way of thinking, and there's almost that
element of feeling you need them to know who you really are. (Jay)

In summary, coming out was a salient liminal experience for lesbian and gay people in the context of organised religion. The process was found to be complex and multifaceted with experiences being unique to individual circumstances yet at the same time there were several common themes such as suppressing, passing, disclosing, stereotyping, identity confusion and comparison, and the experience of a drive towards congruence. Heterosexism featured significantly within and across all coming out processes.

5.4.2.2 Betwixt-and-Between

The experience of finding oneself in a no man's land, of belonging *and* not belonging, was shared by all the participants. For this reason, this sub-theme was labelled betwixt-and-between. As an earlier, more certain, identity dissolved through a growing self-awareness of sexuality, there was initial disorientation but also an awareness of new emergent possibilities. This experience was described beautifully by Pam, who related it to the plight of "The Velveteen Rabbit":

> *I suppose all through those years I kept saying to the Lord, you know, "When am I going to be real?", "When am I going to be real?". I don't know if you know that story of the Velveteen Rabbit? It's a children's story. It's about a toy rabbit that wants to be a real rabbit, and eventually does become a real rabbit. And that's been a constant prayer of mine, "When am I going to become real?" - when am I going to be able to marry these two things, you know, my gay life, or wanting to be a gay woman, with my faith? (Pam)*

In this state of between, the theme of the search for meaning and authenticity occurred frequently across the interviews:

> *… I found a wonderful thing… I read a lot of Rumi, the Sufis, Idries Shah, which is very, very antithetical to putting oneself in a box. It's not overly religious but, there we go – Shams of Tabriz, "Only commit yourself to learning 'Who am I?', 'Where are my roots?', 'What is my purpose in life?'" I liked that because all the rest of this construct that we have of society is froth. (Paul)*

Participants reframed important constructs from a more critical perspective, rooted in their experiencing. Being betwixt-and-between, they were able to explore new possibilities for themselves. However, the roots of religious doctrine ran deep and so this was often accompanied by a worry about not being whole or complete:

I can understand for example, sitting in a beautiful church and that feeling peaceful, but I don't have any of those feelings when I go to those places... Being in a religion, being part of that organisation a) it doesn't feel a great need although sometimes it's felt it would be nice b) it doesn't feel it does it for me, and I suppose I'm a bit sad about that really (cries) because you think "Well, am I a proper person?", "Am I a complete person?" (Rose)

The pull towards being true to oneself in this stage frequently included grappling with experiences of shame and guilt:

… because in my head, there was so much shame, and guilt, and impossibility attached to it. (Pam)

Internal conflicts were often intense and there was considerable soul searching and internal debate. Jay describes this in relation to sexual intimacy and internal chastisement:

There was an element of "Oh my God, what have I done?", you know, "Am I going to bring shame on the family?" But then there's another part of you that's kind of saying "You were happy about it, so why are you re-evaluating what you've done?" (Jay)

There remained a sense that participants could, if they chose, maintain the status quo, but this rarely felt right. Pam explained her reflections on one's capacity to control sexuality in favour of chastity:

I've never discussed with contemplative nuns how they feel about their sexuality, whether it's very difficult to hold on to this idea of chastity. I mean, I could do the obedience and the other bits alright, but you know, what do they do about their sexuality? Or is that a calling? (Pam)

There was steady recognition that the struggles were the result of prejudice and stigma within organised religion rather than of a faulty self. There was a range of emotions associated with this key finding, including sadness and anger:

> *It's not a straight road, it's a gradual process I suppose. For me, it's one of those processes where you meet a few twats along the way, and those experiences with certain people just make you that much stronger... I've been through some strange experiences and when I look back on them I think "How did I let myself become so vulnerable?" from that point of view where it's because there is that stigma within religion... of not speaking out if you're homosexual. (Jay)*

The subjective nature of the rules became more apparent in the liminal stage and participants felt more empowered to makes choices. All of the participants decided, in one way or another, that an oppressive, orthodox form of organised religion was "not for me":

> *It's all subjective, you know. People say things because they're meant to be objective and because a rabbi said it, or the Torah says it, and apparently that's objective and fact, but actually it's an opinion, or that's just what they want to believe, and if that's what they want to believe for them, that's fine, but it's when people start saying that's what you should be doing, that's what you should believe, then I just switch off. (Cate)*

The notion of choice was frequently explored and there was recognition that religion was a choice, as opposed to sexual orientation which was presented as innate:

> *... I mean, people don't choose to be gay but people can choose to be religious, and they can choose how they treat people - that is a choice. (Rose)*

The transition in this liminal state evoked powerful feelings about organised religion and, for Paul, the discarding of previous ideologies instigated discussion about the death of the church:

> *… if the church was a family pet, it would have been put down by now. I still do believe that. The church is, well it's got an average age of sixty-two? It's dying! (Paul)*

Reflections on the relevance of religion and religious institutions were common. Paul likened the continuation of organised religion to empires that rise and fall:

> *… it's tried to keep itself going, as with empires, you have this period where they grow and they're relevant and they speak to people, and then they get institutionalised and they keep going, and the message gets diluted and they become more irrelevant, and they decay and die. The church has been trying to keep itself going for far too long, and far longer than it should have been, because its time has passed. I suppose I had to be outside the church to see that really (Paul)*

All except one of the participants had discarded the formal aspects of religion but maintained associated identities. However, the struggle with belonging and not belonging continued to be evident:

> *I still feel I'm Jewish and, for example, in December there was a big Hanukkah party in Trafalgar Square… When I was there I felt kind of part of everything, and part of everyone, but at the same time I was there with my girlfriend, and we didn't hold hands because I knew there would be people there I would recognise, but I still felt like I'm Jewish, and these are my people – that's really weird. (Cate)*

The experience of being betwixt and between allowed participants to reframe religious and political constructs, and to discard previously learned oppressive

doctrine. Their increased self-awareness and growing reflexivity at this stage of their lives allowed them to identify heterosexism and prejudice as being the problem in religion, although there was also some disorientation and a longing to be whole. Overall, the participants discarded their previous ideologies and even wondered about the survival of religious institutions. The sense of belonging and yet not belonging permeated their experiences.

5.4.2.3 Intersecting Identities

It was clear from the data that multiple social forces were at play in the formation of the participants' identities. The interaction of race, gender, class, religion, and sexual orientation created the lens through which each participant experienced life and reality. This sub-theme was thus labelled intersecting identities.

For some participants, their experiences involved a complex negotiation between more than one marginalised social group, and this presented a complexity of internal tensions. For example, dealing with being in a racial minority in a white majority school context meant that Jay's religious identity took a back seat and he hid his sexual orientation:

> *I suppose for me the main difference I felt in school was not from a religious point of view but from a racial point of view… you had darker skin than everybody else that was there, your culture was different, there were a lot of things you couldn't do that other children could do. (Jay)*

The formation of identity was unique to each person's own narrative, although there were commonalities. As a lesbian woman and an adoptee, Rose struggled to make sense of the notion of original sin imposed on her by organised religion, finding it to be ludicrous:

> *I grew up in this extraordinarily Catholic household but I was what's called a "crusade of rescue" baby - my Catholic birth mother had me*

out of wedlock. She would have removed herself from the body of the
church by her act of becoming pregnant before marriage, and I was
"born in sin" as far as the church was concerned… You know, as a
"bastard" you can put up with a lot of things but on top of that, being
told you were "of sin" the minute you arrived, I just think "What?"…
My adoption gave great joy to the people who adopted me, so I
suppose my own narrative early on told me that this idea that we are
all sinners, and women will always be lesser, and the only way to have
sex is to procreate, just made it ludicrous, frankly. (Rose)

The fluidity of identity was apparent, and the capacity to move in and out of different aspects of the self when required was found to be helpful. Jay, for example, described himself as a Welsh speaking, South Asian, Pakistani, gay male, and Cate explored the distinct differences between her Israeli and Jewish identities, and how they combined with her female and lesbian identities:

I was kind of leading a double life. Yeah, I guess I was, or a triple life
if you include the Jewish thing. (Cate)

Making sense of these different intersecting identities proved a significant task within the liminal state and it was linked with a sense of belonging. Participants with multiple intersecting identities could theoretically belong to a number of tribes, albeit while remaining on the margins:

When I see gay people holding hands on the street, I like it. And when
I see Jewish people walking around, I like it too. I smile to myself…
that's kind of me saying, "Hey, I'm one of you!" (Cate)

The existence of sub-tribes within tribes could helpfully support the integration of identities. It became apparent from the interviews that participants were aware of various groups that supported the different aspects of self, yet finding a place and becoming part of these groups was not always an easy endeavour:

… at Pride in London there's always like a Jewish group, and I never [got] involved with them. Actually, a few years ago at the end I just followed them and started talking to them, but I haven't immersed myself in that, yet. I don't know if it's because I'm in a relationship and feel like I don't need to… but I'm quite disappointed in myself actually, there's a whole world. There's Tel Aviv Pride and even a Jerusalem Pride, and there's lots of gay Jewish people out there, and I just haven't spoken to them for some reason. (Cate)

The findings support the view that there is a powerful interconnection between identity and wider culture. The identities that had been denoted as "unacceptable" within a given organised religion directly translated to family norms and wider cultural patterns. For Jay, family and cultural norms were unequivocally informed by religious norms. He described the interplay between elements of culture, religion, family, and community but, most significantly for him, he'd learned the importance of being respected in the community, whatever the cost:

I'll give it from an Islamic point of view – where in Islam we're told "It's totally against Islam" so when you get the cultural point of view it's like "No, it's not acceptable within the religion, it's not acceptable in the culture, it's definitely not happening in my family, I don't care what you say but you can't be gay, you can't be attracted to men"… You can't let anybody know - so you've got to put on a front, you've got to get married, you've got to produce an heir. (Jay)

Intersecting identities led to a heightened awareness of threat. As a result of this, there were some examples of the development of hypervigilance. The need to be more or less "out" about different aspects of one's identity, depending on the context, was a highly creative solution to a problem. Cate described what she thinks Jewish people experience when completing forms that ask for demographic information, and highlighted how complex defining identity can be:

I feel Israeli and, at the same time, I don't. I'm a Londoner, but I
don't feel English. It's quite complex. I mean, I don't hesitate when
someone asks me my religion, never. If I'm filling in a form I'll always
tick the Jewish box... but lots of people either leave it blank or tick
they don't want to provide the information. Some people think if you
say you're Jewish then people associate that with lots of negative
images, and they link it to Israel, and people living in the UK have a
really negative image of Israel generally. (Cate)

The recognition of intersecting identities seemed to come about after the participants had discovered or met other people with whom they could identify. For example, Jay was involved in a diversity project at the BBC and when he was researching the project for an article he discovered a gay group for Asian people; this led to the realisation that there were other people with similarly complex identities:

... I was looking through some documents and I Googled it and it was
all about gay Asians, and I thought "Wow! Wow! What's this?" and I
kind of I logged onto it and looked at this thing and I thought "Oh my
God, I'm not the only gay, South Asian, Pakistani male around." (Jay)

In summary, the interaction of multiple social forces in individual narratives resulted in complex intersecting identities. There was clearly a potent interplay between aspects of culture, religion, family, and community. When these identities became visible within different social systems, it created experiences that challenged personal power and increased threat, but which also provided opportunities for making meaning and revising perspectives.

5.4.3 Post-liminal: Transformation

"Post-liminal" implies movement from one state to another, in which new aspects of identity have formed. Across the data, transformation and change occurred for all participants and these changes were highly significant. Land, Meyer, and

Baillie (2010) point out that transformation at this stage is irreversible due to the crossing of conceptual boundaries and the creation of a significantly altered discourse. The transformation processes found in the analysis of data can be understood within three main sub-themes: i) empowerment, ii) a quest for authenticity, and iii) the Uberwelt.

5.4.3.1 Empowerment

Arguably, the findings thus far all relate in one way or another to the psychology of power, authority, and the abuse of power, either systemically or individually. Sometimes, against the odds, participants found a way to reclaim power and control over certain aspects of their lives. This sub-theme was therefore labelled empowerment.

A key aspect of empowerment for participants was the process of developing a curious mind and thinking for oneself. Encountering a broader range of possibilities resulted in sharper critical thinking amongst participants and a loosening of previously held rigid beliefs. Paul gave a good example of how this took place for him:

> *It was a gradual peeling away from the faith... I saw a film, a BBC4 documentary, called* The Science of Chaos*. Essentially, it was an investigation into the mechanisms behind evolution and stating the case very clearly and scientifically. This was beyond the usual Richard Dawkins rant... it very much said there is no case for a Creator. (Paul)*

Crossing over the carefully guarded boundaries of religious doctrine led to a more pluralistic perspective, and the reintegration of individual identities fostered a new outlook. In traversing liminal states, the participants developed a more flexible understanding of the notion of belonging, and they learned to recognise and appreciate this concept. For example, when I reflected back to Cate her own description of her interconnectedness and embodied sense of belonging, she

152

demonstrated an openness and awareness of different identities that was accepting and non-defensive:

> *I kind of felt really good, and I was happy that my girlfriend got to experience [the Jewish festival], and at the same time I knew she's not Jewish and she wouldn't know how I was feeling... for example, she's Spanish and if I went to a Spanish festival she would feel integrated, and I would feel like the outsider, I imagine. It's that kind of thing. (Cate)*

Empowerment often signalled a shift in political perspectives, with numerous examples of feminist and pluralistic perspectives emerging:

> *I've done a lot of reading about feminism. Have you come across Camille Panya? She talks a lot about female god religions but also how the male god religions have gone in and pretty much suppressed them all. (Mark)*

Paradoxically, the pervasive intolerance within organised religion produced greater tolerance and liberalism amongst participants. Rose provided an example of this:

> *A former partner lived in a Dharma Centre without taking Holy Orders - that's like being a lay person living in that community. I felt some benefit from being included in services there, and the opening of the temples... but my reflection over the years is that I think I'm very tolerant of people who have a belief and... almost attracted to what might feed an individual. (Rose)*

Empowerment related closely to participants feeling that they had already confronted "the worst" (i.e. abuses of power, rejection, and humiliation). Out of these painful experiences, hope had emerged, and humour was a frequent

153

occurrence across the interviews. It was a highly evident component of post-liminal empowerment:

> *Yeah, I think it's interesting, and it's different, it's just I think, I was born this way (laughing), "Born this Way" Lady Gaga, (singing) and it's born this way – Jewish, and this way – lesbian. So, I know people change their religion obviously, but I'm not inclined to do that. (Cate)*

In addition to developing resilience and humour, all the participants demonstrated a sharpness of intellect and a capacity for reflection and making sense of different, often opposing, socio-political perspectives. This type of critical thinking demonstrated their intellectual empowerment:

> *Oh, I'm very sure that "otherness" is what's informed my thinking. And you know, it's a bit like I feel fortunate because I began to grapple with otherness very early, and so I think that was advantageous to me... I think I was better able to cope with the tensions. (Rose)*

Ultimately, empowerment is a process of integrating previously disowned aspects of oneself. For the participants this often took place after many years of being in denial or at a loss to understand aspects of their own identity as these related to their religious context. In a manner of speaking, the transformative process that includes empowerment is akin to individuation and self-realisation:

> *I think for many years you're almost in limbo where you're in denial about yourself, it's almost fear of being "outed" to the community, and then you just think "No, there's more to life", and you kind of slowly but gradually, it's a slow and gradual process, where you are slowly more accepting of who you are, I suppose again, getting stronger within yourself. (Jay)*

Empowerment was hard-won, emerging out of often painful experiences of oppression and disempowerment. A significant sub-theme, empowerment related to a greater sense of autonomy, personal power, and self-determination. There were several salient aspects within the theme, including changed personal politics (e.g. a shift towards feminism and pluralism), a well-developed sense of humour, and, more broadly, a process of self-realisation or individuation.

5.4.3.2 The Quest for Authenticity

The participants exhibited a distinct reverence for authenticity, or the degree to which one could represent one's true nature and be congruent and genuine. Given the high regard in which this idea was held, across all the interviews, the sub theme was labelled as the quest for authenticity. As a starting point within the theme, the participants frequently displayed an attitude of embracing the range of human diversity:

> *I suppose my belief is that people are born, they've got very different*
> *circumstances as a result of their birth, and they all have different*
> *attributes, predispositions, and many of them have gifts, right from*
> *being tiny. My core belief is that as human being it's our duty to kind*
> *of nurture those, and then if they're developed, to somehow use them*
> *in the interests of other people. That's what I believe in. (Rose)*

Out of suffering in the pre-liminal and liminal states (i.e. depression, stress, and anxiety), all the participants decided at some stage to dare to be visible, and this required courage. The experience of eventually finding a way of being true to oneself, and of being visible, was found to be profound and often life-changing, bringing about inner peace and a growing self-confidence:

> *Because I'd say that for the first time ever, you feel that you've been*
> *truthful with yourself. There's that element of discovering who you*
> *really are again, and the satisfaction you get from it and to know that*
> *being gay isn't just about sex but it's about being with somebody,*
> *enjoying their company, and being attracted to somebody of the same*

sex... From that point of view, it was humbling for me to finally be honest with myself, more than anything else. I'd probably go even further than just saying it's humbling - it's almost peaceful, an inner peace. With that, you gradually get more confident to be who you are. (Jay)

All participants realised that not finding a way to live authentically, could have serious, negative consequences on mental health and well-being:

... if you're going to live your life in total denial, then sooner or later you are going to go crazy. (Jay)

It was empowering for participants to discover through the earlier liminal states that their views were not always best represented within organised religions and, in fact, their stance on many things often emerged as positively harmful:

When the church says "our standpoint is... this", that sends a clear message, especially if it's not of love and inclusion. (Paul)

Participants' wider socio-political views were also found to be more authentic and considered in the post-liminal state:

When it comes to religion in general, the equal marriage debate that raged a couple of years ago was excessively damaging to religion because you heard the conservative views, and it didn't matter that a human being was saying "actually, I just want to be treated like everyone else" – this was very damaging for religion. (Paul)

Although authenticity involved a process of self-acceptance, the need to be "political" continued. For example, challenging others' use of language continued and, often, clever reframing helped turn negativity on its head. Participants described their sexual orientation as "a blessing", something they prized, and even as "a gift":

Sometimes, I might be teaching nurses or midwives, maybe there's
two hundred in a class, and if we're exploring language I'll say
something about the way kids say "You're so gay!" If anyone says to
me "You're so gay", I say, "Thank you! It's a gift!" (Mark)

Authenticity was thus an important theme. It related to the participants' sense of
being real and true to themselves and of not complying with tribal expectations or
unquestioningly subjugating to the thoughts and behaviour of others, especially
those encountered within organised religion. Authenticity, being the opposite of
self-alienation, was found to have profound therapeutic, social, and political
consequences that will be discussed further in the next chapter.

5.4.3.3 The Uberwelt

Although there was a plethora of meanings that could be associated with the
Uberwelt and there was no one typical experience, participants made a clear
distinction between spirituality and religion. Regarding belief in a deity, there was
heterogeneity: one participant had become an atheist, one was agnostic, one
remained a full member of an organised religion albeit of a more liberal
denomination, and most participants continued to refer to a belief in some form of
higher power or force. All the participants acknowledged acceptance of their faith
communities to varying degrees and retained aspects of their religious/cultural
identity (e.g. Muslim, Jewish, Catholic). Spirituality was normally understood in
terms of compassion for others, love (divine and/or human), and connectedness.
All the participants described having discovered a different, more evolved
spirituality post-liminality.

Spirituality was often regarded as something deeply personal, such as a personal
life journey or peregrination that involved connectedness, compassion, and a
commitment to helping others. Across the interview data there were detailed,
poignant descriptions of altruism that supported reconstruction of meaning. For
example:

... on Christmas Eve of the year I was working in that hospital, it was the first Christmas since about age fourteen that I'd not been to midnight mass... they asked me to work a night shift and I thought "Oh no, I'm going to miss midnight mass" but I said I would do it. I remember at midnight this bloke rang his buzzer, so I went to his room. He had terrible diarrhoea, needed a bedpan, needed a bottle, and as I'm walking out of his room with a bottle of urine and a bedpan of diarrhoea I'm passing the television and at that very moment was the consecration – it's "the body of Christ, the Blood of Christ". Here I am, solids and liquids from a dying person, and that was a huge, huge change for me... (Mark)

This altruistic attitude contrasted sharply with earlier descriptions of inflexible, doctrinaire rituals and the cruelty within authoritarian religion that stemmed from bigotry and dogmatism:

I do notice there's a huge difference between spirituality and religion, and I feel that I do lots of good. Spirituality is about helping others and that's where my spiritual home is. (Mark)

Participants reflected on some of the "benefits of suffering", as with the notion of "redemptive suffering" in many religions, or "post-traumatic growth" in psychology. Transformation in the Uberwelt was often the direct result of challenging experiences, and not in spite of them:

... if I was to be drawn on what my standpoint is, it's that society at large is full of tribes, and all of those are simply distractions, they're simply distractions. I don't think you'll find "the path" because of a group. I certainly found "the path" through having been rejected by groups. (Paul)

Ironically, the painful experiences of overt prejudice and rejection often served as a trigger for deeper reflection and soul-searching, ultimately leading to independent thinking:

> *When the boot was put in [at the church], that provided the straw that broke the camel's back. (Paul)*

Essentially, through their lived experiences, participants came to recognise that spirituality was not limited to, and did not necessarily require, the formal construction of a hierarchical institution or religious tribe:

> *Because I guess I'm talking about feelings, so I don't feel like I need to participate, and I don't feel like I want to pray three times a day, and all that stuff. (Cate)*

When participants no longer felt obliged to conform to the dogmatic and oppressive structures within heterosexist organised religions, a spiritual peregrination transpired. Sometimes, this involved an exploration of alternative spiritualities, albeit with some remnants of guilt associated with disobeying the rules of their faith community. Explorations of alternative spiritualities led to discoveries that enabled greater authenticity:

> *When I left the priesthood and I was living with G, who'd been a nun for ten years (and she left as well), we were out walking and there was this psychic fair. Neither of us had ever done that sort of thing before, Catholics aren't supposed to do that sort of thing (laughs)… People were doing reflexology, tarot cards, this, that, and the other… I sat down with someone doing tarot cards, and in my mind I was thinking, "Oh God! The Catholic Church! I shouldn't be doing this!" As I was walking away she said "There's an aura around you", I think she said purple and green, and she said "one of those colours means you're in a lot of pain, the other one is to do with spirituality", she said "you've got a very, very strong spirituality", and she said "Now*

you're going to do things. You're not going backwards at all.
Whatever you've come from it's not that at all" and she said "You're
doing something about healing. Lots of people are going to be
healed". And I think now when I go into a classroom of two hundred
people, if I can get each of those to walk out and do one bit of good,
that's two hundred people doing good! (Mark)

One participant described replacing fear with faith, and finding spiritual courage and strength. She illustrated her understanding of the importance of being spiritually uncluttered and not carrying responsibility for people's ignorance. She described this poetically in terms of "walking on water":

Well, it's something I'm unpacking really because going from the
Biblical story of Peter jumping out of the boat and walking on water
to Jesus, when he was afraid he started to sink, so that's a spiritual
discipline I adhere to. (Pam)

Overall, participants framed spirituality in diverse ways: faith in people, human connectedness, doing lots of good, faith in the divine and not a single religious tribe, being "with" others, and being altruistic.

It was evident that the lesbian and gay participants' experiences of organised religion were predominantly associated with testing experiences. However, these experiences were found to prompt the transition from a liminal to a post-liminal state, and they represented a powerful spur for development and growth. Perhaps above all, this transition was not just a matter of learning to deal with particular painful experiences but, instead, of gaining strength, discovering what is important, and developing a renewed spiritual attitude to life.

5.5 Master Theme 3: Navigating Relationships

This section depicts the participants' experiences of navigating interpersonal relationships. Unsurprisingly, this theme weaves all of the other themes and sub-

themes together. The significance and frequency of its appearance across the data corpus necessitated careful attention.

Four main sub-themes were identified within navigating relationships: i) Attachments, ii) Family systems, iii) Socio-cultural context, iv) Intimacy.

5.5.1 Attachments

The need for attachment relationships was evident across all of the participants' experiences. Regardless of sexual orientation or religious tribe, participants both needed and desired attachment relationships. They sought interpersonal support throughout each of the liminal states described above. Indeed, participants framed their understanding of organised religion as being basically a need for community. Consequently, negative community experiences were particularly harmful to psychological well-being:

> *People are just there for community. So that's why the response hurt*
> *so much I think, because suddenly one of those aspects of community*
> *was being denied. It was shattered in that moment. (Paul)*

There was insight into the interpersonal nature of many of the problems that participants encountered because they saw that it was invariably the people within organised religions that represented the root cause of their suffering, and not necessarily the organisations themselves:

> *There's a very destructive kind of impact of some people. So, it's the*
> *people in organisations that have such an impact, depending on how*
> *they behave. (Mark)*

There was some evidence that people in the religious communities paid lip service to the notion of acceptance but ultimately demonstrated their prejudice through the withdrawal of relationships:

> *I got messages of support from people within that church but they kept*
> *their distance. Having not gone back I haven't seen them. (Paul)*

There were some particularly shocking examples of interpersonal ruptures that occurred around the time of participants "coming out". Not uncommonly, there could be immediate silence and withdrawal by certain members of the faith group, who offered no possibility of dialogue or repair. On the other hand, where there were interpersonal disputes (i.e. when people remained in relationship sufficiently to at least dispute), they tended to reach an impasse extraordinarily quickly, due to immovable stereotyping and prejudice. When a religion's designated "helpers" demonstrated ignorance, and showed little or no kindness, the effects were serious, leading to symptoms of depression:

> *I remember going for a month's counselling on the mainland and*
> *telling the guy there, the counsellor... That was the first time I'd ever*
> *admitted it to anybody, I must have been probably about thirty-eight,*
> *and I said "I think I might be gay"... It took everything I had to do*
> *[it], but during the course of that month he persuaded me that I*
> *wasn't. (Pam)*

Unsurprisingly, the participants often described their cautiousness in relationships with others and they developed hyper-vigilance to the threat of judgement and/or rejection. They also showed relational ambivalence deriving from experiences of rejection by friends and family members, and their ongoing fear of this occurring again:

> *You've got to be careful. There's a strange balance of where you've*
> *got to put on a face for the community and society in general, and I*
> *suppose it's a lot more about not being seen, and nobody talking*
> *about it, definitely. (Jay)*

The cumulative effect of religious bigotry could be seen to be social withdrawal, isolation, sadness, hopelessness, and a chronic sense of not belonging:

… but whether I can actually be fully me. I mean, I've lived on my own now as I said since 2002, but in one sense I feel that I've been on my own all my life. (Pam)

Even though the withdrawal of relationship had represented significant personal loss, once this had been worked through and there was a new interpersonal network, there was real concern expressed about the loss of opportunity for the faith community they had belonged to:

There is a feeling of just such a missed opportunity for the church - not for me, but for the church - to change. (Paul)

It has been demonstrated above that heterosexism maintains its power through "othering", discounting through silence and silencing. However, finding a confidant, support, and acceptance was crucially important in crossing the liminal states and it was notable that support and validation often came from unexpected sources. In making new positive connections and developing their interpersonal network, participants could normalise their experiences and become better able to integrate previously disowned aspects of their identity:

And I suppose then, once I did discover others, and I started making friends and was able to chat to people, I slowly-slowly met more people. I remember the first time I actually went to a gay Asian event that happens once a month – I was just looking around me in this club and just thinking "There are hundreds of people here, if not thousands!" and they're all in the same situation as myself. (Jay)

The fundamental need for relationships was prominent in the data corpus, with descriptions of attachment-and-loss permeating it entirely. Making new connections and developing the interpersonal network was therefore highly significant. As participants encountered more and more people with whom they

could identify, and who shared similar experiences, the more normalised their experiences became, and the greater their confidence grew.

5.5.2 Family Systems

Participants frequently referred to their families and family relationships, and they all had experiences to share regarding their families' powerful influences and expectations:

> *My dad did the family tree, and it was very much "This is the family tree", "This is the history". He traced it back to the seventeenth century. I'm on that direct line down from the first son of the first son kind of thing, and the feeling that I wouldn't be carrying this on was, back then, a mark of shame - I haven't taken on the family business either. (Paul)*

The nuclear family was often regarded as a fundamentally heterosexist institution. Indeed, the use of the word "family" itself was laden with meaning in the data, and the participants were aware at times of how much their experiences differed from heterosexual people. For example, there being a certain meaning to the word family affected Paul:

> *They [heterosexual people] can use "family" in the church, or "family tree" without thinking about the massive impact of that on some people. (Paul)*

Having talked about his church putting up a sign saying "This is a Family Church! All Families Are Welcome!", and about how much of a half-truth this was, Paul later referred to "family" in a different context, but one that once again involved an element of not-belonging:

> *... to me, my family is my sister, niece and nephew, and my brothers-in-law. That's family to me. The idea of "community" and that idea of*

"family" in that way has been coloured I suppose by those
experiences of, well, they will probably reject you after a time. (Paul)

Respecting and venerating one's parents/primary care-givers, as well as "the family" and family relationships, was a common finding. Participants longed for acceptance and dreaded family rejection or disapproval. Both maternal and paternal figurers appeared equally formidable in this context:

I thought my mother could hate me or she could be really upset, and
one thing I don't like doing is upsetting my mum... I kind of knew she
wouldn't like it so I put it off for as long as I could. (Cate)

For the female lesbian participants who had children, there was an added layer of family and social expectation that they would retain their mothering role and provide security and stability within the family, at least until the children had grown-up. Both Rose and Pam felt that they had "lost" many good years as a result of this:

So okay, I had promised in 1972 to stay in this marital relationship for
ever. I would probably never have said anything. I would have still
kept it under wraps because I didn't know any gay people. I didn't
have any outlet. (Pam)

Ultimately though, the notion of family evolved and its meaning was reconstructed – "family" was redefined. Participants frequently referred to the existence of an additional "family", comprised of close friends and partners within their post-liminal interpersonal network, which became their "family", a family through choice rather than birth:

... and the lady leading the worship whom I'd never actually met, and
this is a couple of ministers down the line from anyone I remembered,
she said "Is this someone that you um? ... We will pray for your

family." So, I said "This is P. He is my family." I'm probably persona
non grata there now too. (Paul)

The family was a powerful system that exerted life-changing influences on
participants. Influence came not only from the people within those systems but
even the wider social meaning attributed to the word "family" could result in
decisions being made about how to live one's life. The remarkable social norms
pertaining to respecting the family system meant there was often a high price to
pay for disloyalty to it. Although there was some distancing from the family in
some cases, through the formation of families of choice, the participants could
still have close family and kin networks that they valued highly, regardless of the
challenges they faced.

5.5.3 Socio-Cultural Context

The participants' religious and cultural identities were strongly interconnected but
they were also quite separate and distinct entities. It is noteworthy that culture was
particularly significant for the Pakistani Muslim participant, for whom the
perniciousness of cultural norms resonated more than most:

> *… homosexuality is forbidden… because those are cultural norms*
> *within society… and because they're mentioned in some context in*
> *religion then we must live by them, we must abide by them, and it's*
> *strange because a lot of people who aren't even religious or believe*
> *anything, when it comes to homosexuality, they've already made their*
> *mind up, this is the way it is, there's no way around it. (Jay)*

Jay was aware that being gay was not permitted within the religion of Islam nor in
Pakistani culture, and that this also extended into family and individual values.
Over time, though he did meet other Pakistani gay and lesbian people, this robust
allegiance to cultural identity continued to be observed:

166

It's scary because you're feeling "is there something wrong with
me?" and society telling me as a Muslim I can't be gay, as a
Pakistani, I can't be gay, I can't be attracted to men. But as you grow
older you know there's a lot more Pakistanis out there that are in the
same situation but the lid's put on it so much, there's so much taboo
around the subject that you grow up thinking that you're the only one
- but there's a lot more people around you than you actually know.
(Jay)

As a result of the shame and guilt imposed on the participants by the heterosexual majority, it was necessary for all of them to, at different times, and for differing periods of time, "pass" as a member of the dominant social group (i.e. heterosexual "normal"). Hiding one's sexual orientation was important for survival, particularly for older participants who lived through a very different political climate and cultural context in the early part of the second half of the twentieth century. This resulted in the participants developing a false self and living inauthentically:

… you focus on keeping everything kind of under control, so you're
not as straightforward with other people as you want to be, and I find
that particularly difficult because it doesn't feel honest. I think it was
harmful to a couple of close relationships. (Rose)

There was no one single experience of culture, but rather a complex interplay of particular cultural norms and religious values that were interconnected:

Because the more you grow up, the more you're aware, and there are
elements of religion within it, but then I suppose there's a lot more of
a cultural point of view as well because it comes down to being
respected in the community, and it doesn't matter at what cost. (Jay)

There were clear social expectations regarding acceptable social presentation, which were particularly striking in some ethnicities:

There's a cultural taboo there… it's a lot more about keeping the family happy, keeping the family name going, and being like everybody else and fitting in to society. Then again, I'd say it's not just the South Asian society but Asian communities in general. It's a lot more about "showing face", and family honour, and the reputation of the family. So, everything that happens behind closed doors stays behind closed doors and you've got to put on a front, you've got to put on a show for the rest of the world, and I suppose from that point of view people are living a double life. (Jay)

The earlier finding presented under the heading of heterosexism above, shows evidence of the existence of some unhelpful practices within the counselling and therapy worlds. In the struggle to make sense of their identity, people sometimes seek, or they are forced to undertake, conversion therapies. Conversion therapy has been strongly denounced within professional psychotherapy and counselling organisations. One participant understood conversion therapy to be predominantly informed by the heterosexist and religious notion of "Original Sin":

… I think it's a profound belief to say "We are all born in sin" … I think we are all born innocent. I think it has fed the whole kind of re-education therapy… the conversion therapy – "They've just gone wrong somewhere along the way." … I think it's a really unhelpful view. (Rose)

Although there was recognition of significant social progress, the memories of more cruel times surfaced:

… the revolution that's occurred in my lifetime is phenomenal… I mean, I had deep paranoia about people knowing my sexual choice, and that deep paranoia was around having a young child. I feared for… it's a very different time… I mean, social services did remove children because of people's sexual choice, and I was a member of

> *social services department, yeah, so it was very difficult for a few*
> *years. (Rose)*

One participant drew on his knowledge of history and likened religion to other empires, and their inevitable rise and fall. Paul had mixed feelings about the impending death of the church. On the one hand he expressed some delight but on the other he seemed genuinely sad to think that religion might have shot itself in the foot through its lack of openness and acceptance of diversity:

> *It's tried to keep itself going, as with ideas and empires, you have this*
> *period where they grow and they're relevant and they speak to people,*
> *and then they get institutionalised and the message gets diluted and*
> *they become irrelevant and they decay and die. The church to me has*
> *been trying to keep itself going for far longer than it should have*
> *because its time has passed. It's very much passed, but I suppose you*
> *have to be outside the church to see that really. (Paul)*

In a changing Western cultural context, participants reflected on the future of religious institutions and the long-term effects of rejecting people. Paul considered the Christian church to be dying:

> *... if the church was a family pet, it would have been put down by now.*
> *Things go in cycles [and] and I wouldn't mourn its passing because*
> *I've already mourned it. (Paul)*

Religion and culture were inextricably linked for all of the participants, with each element informing the other. However, not all cultural groups were the same, and it was obvious that these experiences were context-dependent and influenced by a complex interplay of unique cultural specificities.

5.5.4 Intimacy

The realisation that previously significant interpersonal relationships were actually quite fickle and unreliable, triggered symptoms of depression in the participants. The loss of intimacy due to a sudden indifference or withdrawal of intimacy was experienced as interpersonally catastrophic at the time, although healing was possible later:

> *You just don't expect it to be the people that you feel you know... It mattered very much. And I think, I'll say it again, that it's because I counted him as a friend. (Paul)*

The punitive withdrawal of intimacy could be expressed both verbally and non-verbally, as described in the earlier sub-theme of silence:

> *... it was both verbal and non-verbal. Although the verbal was simply "Oh!" the non-verbal was a very palpable sense of turning away, even though he didn't quite turn away. It was... yeah, his energy turned away. (Paul)*

There were several descriptions of the regrettable failure of love relationships due to anxiety, preoccupation, guilt, and shame. For one participant this led to such a sense of hopelessness that isolation was preferential:

> *… I mean, I could probably fairly easily be a hermit, or a contemplative nun. (Pam)*

There were numerous moving descriptions of intimate, same-sex love relationships developing within the context of organised religion but these were described as being secretive or forbidden. Love relationships were spoken of as highly risky, "a love that dare not speak its name". However, on the plus side, this secrecy created an intensity of experience that seemed curiously romantic:

> *… we were in this sort of society under a microscope really, you weren't really anonymous. You couldn't be anonymous. People would*

know what you were doing so, I mean, we knew there was an attraction, but it was very difficult... the only thing that was physically manifested was kissing, when the opportunity arose, which wasn't very often, and she didn't want to go any further than that. (Pam)

Where same-sex intimacy simply could not be achieved or expressed through physical or sexual contact, there was a huge sense of frustration and loss that, again, resulted in depressive symptoms:

... she went back to NZ and I felt completely frustrated. She subsequently divorced her husband, but I lost touch with her, she didn't want to be in touch. I got to the state where I was just at rock-bottom really. (Pam)

The fact that same sex intimacy was so forbidden in some cultural contexts meant participants were more vulnerable to abuse and were unable to get any help because of the taboo nature of their relationship in the first place:

I suppose my ex-partner knew I couldn't confide in other people... I was in a relationship and I wanted to make the best of it, and again, I couldn't confide in anybody... I think I was afraid almost to put an end to it, because I was thinking "What if he tells my family?" or if he does this or does that, there's a million things but I suppose for me then it was again, the lack of confidants around me or people I could confide in. (Jay)

On the other hand, there were more hopeful descriptions of intimacy in the post-liminal state. Furthermore, details of inclusive religious groups on social media and representation at national Pride events opened up more possibilities for meeting people:

There's TA Pride and there's even a J Pride, and there's a lot of gay Jewish people out there, and I just haven't really spoken to them for

some reason. I have a sense that if my relationship ever broke down, I would start getting into that world, but at the moment I don't feel that I need to. (Cate)

One participant preferred to think about intimacy wholly in relation to other people and did not associate intimacy with religion in any way. For her, intimacy was the preserve of interpersonal relationships:

The church doesn't do it for me. For me, it's not got an intimacy. People often talk about religion, and talk about an intimacy, but it's never had an intimacy for me, never. Intrusiveness, yes, yeah? Public accountability, yeah right? But it's never held intimacy for me, no, never. And you know, possibly it would only be if I found something that did that, that would begin to help me sort out the question of do I have a faith or not. In the agenda of my life, I don't know if it's an item for this lifetime. (Rose)

Intimacy within interpersonal relationships was a sensitive theme that contained moving accounts of challenges and opportunities. There was no one right or wrong way of navigating the specific problems encountered in organised religion but there was evidence of changing attitudes and hope, with various religious groups offering opportunities for anyone with knowledge of them.

5.6 Thematic Divergences

There were a number of notable thematic divergences that need to be highlighted. Although there is probably no one type of Muslim gay experience, or Jewish lesbian experience, participants broadly shared experiences of religious tribalism, liminal processes, and navigating relationships, and these were idiosyncratic. Experiences were nuanced, set within cultural and family systems, and always dependent on context.

Most notably, there were divergences within the subthemes. There was a particular type of shame associated with Islam, a particular type of judgement

associated with Judaism, a particular type of power associated with Catholicism, a particular use of silence associated with Protestantism, and a particular type of betrayal associated with the Church of England.

5.7 Summary

This Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis explored lesbian and gay people's experiences of organised religion with openness, sensitivity and reflexivity. A total of six participants took part in the research including three lesbian women and three gay men, and their recounting of their experiences produced a rich data corpus. Each of the Abrahamic religions of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity were represented. Three main themes and related sub-themes were determined through detailed data analysis.

The participants' experiences were dependent on a number of influencing factors, including: time-and-place, type of religion and denomination, political and cultural context, personal characteristics, quality of interpersonal networks, and nature of available support. The next chapter will discuss these findings in more depth and relate them to the extant literature.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of the research and articulates their position within the context of the broader literature. The main aim of the research was to explore six lesbian and gay people's experiences of three organised religions, and to consider the implications they have for psychotherapy. Three major themes were determined in analysing the data: i) Religious tribalism, ii) Liminal Processes, iii) Navigating Relationships.

In conjunction with my critical research friends, I decided that, given the large amount of data, in order to maintain clarity, accessibility, and succinctness, the findings and discussion chapters should be approached separately rather than as one combined chapter. This offers a better opportunity to articulate the position of the findings within the context of the literature and ensures that key points are not lost within excessive amounts of text. The findings are positioned within a growing corpus of literature that explores lesbian and gay people's lived experiences of religious institutions. It is accepted practice within IPA research to return to the literature after data analysis has been completed in order to add depth and breadth to the discussion:

> It is in the nature of IPA that the interview and analysis will have taken you into new and unanticipated territory. (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009: 113)

6.2 Background

In chapter two, the literature review strongly supported the view that lesbian and gay people frequently experience prejudice and discrimination in the context of organized religion (Bent-Goodley & Fowler, 2006). From a psychotherapy perspective, I agree that that people live within a stream of time and that experiences are a product of who they have been and what they have learned

throughout that stream of time in relationship with others (Moursund & Erskine, 2004). Therefore, my view is that human beings are fundamentally interactive rather than monadic, hence the well-known adage:

> There is no such thing as a baby… A baby cannot exist alone but is essentially part of a relationship. (Winnicott, 1960: 586).

It follows then that I consider human motivation in non-static terms, recognising it is multifaceted and context-dependent. As an integrative psychotherapist, I maintain an interest in a range of developmental constructs that underline the power of the relationship as the primary motivational force, and as the way in which core beliefs about self and others are cultivated (Fairbarn, 1954; Winnicott, 1960; Stern, 1985). I therefore place the relationship at the centre of my view of human beings:

> In the beginning is relation. (Buber, 1958: 18)

I recognise that all needs, and therefore motivational forces, are inseparable from the overarching and fundamental need for relationship:

> All through our lives, in one way or another, this need and search continues. (Lapworth, Sills & Fish, 2001: 38)

Although different types of therapy emphasise different aspects of the relationship, integrative psychotherapy recognises that all psychotherapies to some extent acknowledge the centrality of the relationship as the primary motivational force, and vehicle for change (Norcross & Lambert, 2011).

Upon closer examination, it is apparent that the major themes emerging from this study are greater than the sum of their parts, and a dynamic relationship exists between them. I agree with Riggs and das Nair (2012), who caution against reducing the issues faced by non-heterosexual people to simple, essential, pre-determined characteristics. Similarly, I suggest that it is helpful to recognise the

complexities lying between the major themes, being as they are also context-dependent.

Exploring the intersection of religion and sexual orientation is complex and can often be perceived differently depending on one's position within or outside any given religious and/or psychotherapy framework. On reflection, I wholeheartedly agree with Rosik, Griffith, and Cruz (2007), who recommend particular sensitivity when exploring these intersecting identities, especially that of heterosexism and conservative religion.

I acknowledged earlier that omitting a number of different types of stigmatised and marginalised identities within this research (e.g. BDSM) could, by implication, be seen as contributing to the marginalisation of these groups. However, to maintain a certain degree of homogeneity, as required by the research design for a detailed interpretative phenomenological analysis of the data, only lesbian and gay participants were included. It was apparent from reading widely and simply asking people, that gay men and lesbian women largely embrace the terms "gay" and "lesbian" respectively, and so this was the terminology used.

6.3 Terminology and Language

As discussed in the introduction, finding the right (e.g. "homosexual", "gay", "gay and lesbian", "LGBT", "queer", "sexual minorities", "minority sexualities", "sexual diversities", "non-heterosexual") terminology was often challenging, with convincing arguments being made for and against the use of each of these in different contexts. I agree that the contemporary term gender and sexual diversities (GSD) is particularly helpful and inclusive, but it is often used unwittingly to mean lesbian, gay, and bisexual. In fact, Davies' (2012) intention in promoting GSD was to encompass the entire gamut of sexual and gender identities.

The complex dance of language and terminology adds further support to arguments against definitively pinning-down identities and in favour of adopting

greater fluidity in understanding diverse sexualities and genders identities (das Nair & Butler, 2012). As a practising psychotherapist I am often most helpfully guided by the language clients use to refer to themselves and their own identities, and I attempt to open up dialogue around this, considering it "grist for the therapeutic mill" (Yalom, 2001).

The process of grappling with terminology that took place throughout the data analysis highlights the potential tyranny of language, and was rarely straightforward. This complexity was especially evident in my caution when labelling themes whose titles could be seen to lean towards the negative. However, participants did describe experiencing frequent homonegativity, and they themselves tended to interpret their experiences of religious institutions negatively. As previously discussed, in a dualistic conception of the human being, the mind and body are seen as polar opposites where the mind is more often closely associated with the spiritual and the divine, and the body is viewed as a repository of corrupting desires – a vehicle for sinfulness that must be controlled by the mind (Ellingson & Green, 2002). In attempting to stay close to participants' lived experiences, I have therefore labelled themes in a way that attempted to capture the music behind their words, and something of the negative tone that was communicated.

6.4 Religious Tribalism

The theme of "religious tribalism" depicted the participants' psychosocial and political contexts, and portrayed organised religion as essentially tribal. The theme represented the religious, socio-political backdrop of the participants' lived experiences. Invariably, choices have to be made when labelling themes and I am aware that an alternative way of thinking about this major theme might be "religious community". However, religious tribalism was thought to be a more accurate depiction, due to the distinct presence of powerful kinship groups that shared explicit theological world views. Within the theme of religious tribalism, it became clear that boundaries existed to demarcate who, and what, was permitted, and equally, who, and what, was not permitted.

The religious tribes all had clear inclusion and exclusion criteria and codes of conduct, which were determined by nominated tribal leaders. These systems were governed by rules and regulations set out in what I referred to as "The Book", from which all religious doctrine was interpreted. Yip (2014) points out that for many nonreligious people in secular societies, religion is perceived as a constraining and restrictive force, antithetical to values such as personal liberty, diversity, and pluralism. From this perspective it appears that the intersection of religion and sexuality brings tension and conflict and non-religious people are often mystified as to why anyone would choose to align themselves with institutions that restrict the full expression of one's true self and humanity. However, it is helpful to note:

> This is of course a simplistic and exaggerated account of the intricate relationship between religion and sexuality, underscored by the "secularism-democracy-choice" ideological nexus. (Yip, 2014: 119)

The empirical basis for the negative discourse is undeniable, as seen within my own findings, but, since integrative therapists normally take a more pluralistic perspective in their own processes of theoretical integration, it is important to be aware that there are other narratives that encapsulate expressions of assimilation too. The discussion that follows, especially regarding post-liminal transformation (6.5.3), highlights the potential that does exist for powerful and positive trajectories away from conflict and tension and towards integration and growth.

6.4.1 Indoctrination

The participants described having been indoctrinated (i.e. socialised) into their faith groups from an early age, and compliance with doctrine was therefore necessary to their survival. It was clear that indoctrination took the form of rote learning and a recitation of the rules that discouraged critical thinking or freedom of thought. It was apparent that education took place both informally (e.g. within the home), and in more formal settings (e.g. "Sunday Schools"). Learning the

rules was rewarded and positively reinforced through literal rewards (e.g. prize-giving days) and psychological ego strokes (e.g. affirming or silencing). It could be argued that this type of cognitive programming represented a form of early "brainwashing".

Over time participants became increasingly independent and began to think for themselves, often questioning dogmatic thought. Kubicek, et al. (2009) discuss the challenges of emerging adulthood and highlights that the main foci at this stage are self-development, the beginnings of self-sufficiency, and the achievement of greater independence. On the other hand, there was a positive aspect to indoctrination in that, for some participants, it seemed to provide helpful moral guidance that could be usefully applied to a wider social context, resulting in a sense of enhanced social responsibility. Having said that, the participants did point out that perhaps, when seen from a more humanistic perspective, such moral values do not need to be understood in terms of religious constructs because they occur naturally in human beings. Linked to this point, it has been well established in the United States, for example, that many young people who attended religious services frequently, reduced their participation in the late teens and early twenties (Gallup & Lindsay, 1999; Hoge, Johnson & Luidens, 1993).

On the other hand, religious participation can be seen to increase again in an individual's late twenties, as young people settle down geographically and socially (Stolzenberg, Blair-Loy & Waite, 1995). Arnett (2002) argues that in the West today emerging adults view religion with greater scepticism and place greater value on personal beliefs and individual experiences - this is often termed "a congregation of one". Exploration is considered central to one's development during emerging adulthood (Erikson, 1968). According to Arnett (2002) the focus for most emerging adults is on forming a distinctive set of beliefs about religious issues. Several studies suggest that deciding on one's own beliefs and values is viewed by young people as one of the most important criteria in becoming an adult (Arnett, 2002; Greene, Wheatley & Aldava, 1992; Roof, 1993).

"Belonging" and "not-belonging" are stark features of indoctrination within religious tribalism. Even before the issue of sexual-orientation is considered, there

appears to be antagonism between different denominations within tribes. Denominating one's own particular tribal group appears to play an important role in establishing identity. There are rules about which denominations (or sub-tribes) are or are not compatible with each other, based on their particular doctrines. Loyalty to one's own tribe is highly regarded and crossing-over to join a different one is frowned upon. Interestingly, research in the social sciences itself has tended to perpetuate "otherness" by studying lesbian and gay people in relation to how they contrast with other religious people and groups (Rodriguez, 2010). It is only relatively recently that researchers have begun to take a more pluralistic perspective, recognising that many lesbian and gay people also lead active religious lives (Barret & Barzan, 1998).

The findings of this research project support the view that members of organised religions tend to construct negatives around sex and sexuality, in some cases almost to the point of obsession. Melton (1991) found that 72% of surveyed Christian religious organisations condemned homosexuals and homosexuality as an abomination. This type of anti-gay prejudice resulted in lesbian and gay people believing that their difference was shameful and sinful. More recent research suggests the situation has not much improved, and that the process of positive LGB identity development is significantly challenged when LGB youth are exposed to invalidating messages or intolerance (Meyer & Dean, 1998). Messages can be homonegative, including rejecting content, or homophobic, including both rejecting and fear-based content (Mayfiled, 2001; Meyer & Dean, 1998; Newcomb & Mustanski, 2010). Although religion is generally associated with positive psychosocial outcomes, sexual minorities may feel rejected by their religion or may cease involvement with them, entirely due to the conflict with their sexual minority status (Cotton et al., 2006).

The struggle that lesbian and gay people have encountered as a result of the essentialist versus constructionist debate on homosexuality has been well documented (Warner, 1995), and Lukenbill (1998) further a call for social justice (in the USA) by sharing the affirmative view that gay and lesbian people are people equally "made in the image of God". Given society itself continues to be

influenced by many religious values, psychotherapists, being part of this wider social system, may be somewhat unaware of how these influences play out in a therapeutic context.

There are clear parallels between the development of heterosexism in religious and psychotherapeutic training (i.e. indoctrination) and the continuingly apparent lack of attention being paid to LGBT cultural competence within core training courses. This is cause for concern. A salient UK-based research study found that 17% of counsellors would actually agree to help a client supress their same sex attractions (Bartlett et al., 2009). Bowers, Minichiello, and Plummer (2010) argue that psychotherapists often position themselves somewhere between an affirmative healthy lifestyle model of gender and sexual diversity, and a culturally-rooted, religious-based heterosexist system of attitudes and beliefs. Therefore, psychotherapists who lean towards prevailing heterosexist constructs could arguably help lesbian and gay clients more by improving their understanding of intersectionality and identity integration.

6.4.2 Orthodoxy and Dogmatism

In this research project, religious orthodoxy was strongly connected with dogmatism and rigid rules for living that were prescribed by the religious group. Tribal laws were reinforced and perpetuated by both the leaders and members of the various tribes and the consequences of not conforming to the rules were unambiguous, representing a real threat to the self-in-relationship. Invariably, the academic work I have consulted was carried out in the West and therefore comes from a Western cultural frame of reference (Rodriguez, 2010). Notably, other, non-Western, cultures can be even less tolerant in cases when, for example, concerns about keeping the family intact add an additional dimension of pressure (Adamczyk & Cheng, 2014). Islam certainly frames homosexuality within a more rigid, negative discourse of deviation, but, at the same time, more tolerant attitudes, such as those within Buddhist social contexts, can be found (Siraj, 2012).

There was a significant degree of selective interpretation and ambiguity within organised religion regarding religious doctrine. Even though tribal chiefs were seen as authoritarian and powerful, they all too often appeared to hold a degree of ambiguity, and would selectively disregard aspects of doctrine whenever convenient. In some ways, this helped participants begin to question "the truth" that had been instilled in them and, as they observed the possibility for re-interpretation, the intrinsic flexibility of interpreted meanings became more apparent.

Ultimately, dogmatism and orthodoxy were found to be inconsistent and often contradictory - different people at different levels of authority selected and used scriptural texts for their own convenience. This aspect of organised religion was perceived as punitive and, as discussed later in section 6.7, could result in relational trauma, poor mental health, and body shame. For most participants, a growing awareness of these consequences over time led to the development of a more mature critical thinking perspective, and to a rejection of rigid fundamentalism that was largely ego-dystonic. As Super and Jacobson (2012) point out, when a place of perceived sanctuary is turned against lesbian and gay people, or when they are rejected, the inevitable result is significant mental distress.

Perhaps as a direct result of my own experiences of both religious doctrine and core psychotherapy training, I have often reflected on the many commonalities between the two institutions. I would therefore encourage therapists to hold a healthy intellectual wariness of all theoretical dogma and reject single-model approaches in favour of a plurality of perspectives. The developments in psychotherapy are positive, and the profession appears to increasingly balance art, science, and philosophy in order to avoid being too dogmatic, and the shift towards plurality is encouraging.

Schmidt (2011) is especially critical of psychotherapy and uses rather archaic analytic texts to argue from a conservative, religious perspective that:

> Psychotherapy fits more reasonably into the category of religion. Those who look at psychotherapy from an analytical and research point of view have long suspected the religious nature of psychotherapy. (Schmidt, 2011: 361)

Taking a radical stance, he accused Freud of attempting to destroy the spirituality of man by reducing religion to illusion and neurosis (Schmidt, 2011). However, some equally antiquated quotes from the work of Carl Jung do certainly provide food for thought, especially in the context of this research project that invites therapists to be aware of the similarities between psychotherapy and religion, and to reconsider positions that may, potentially, be socially-constructed:

> Religions are systems of healing for psychic illness… That is why patients force the psychotherapist into the role of priest, and expect and demand of him that he shall free them from their distress. That is why we psychotherapists must occupy ourselves with problems which, strictly speaking, belong to the theologian. (Jung, 1933/1969: 246)

Cormier-Otano and Davies (2012) point out that almost all developmental models and most counselling and psychotherapy theoretical models privilege heterosexuality, both as a social norm and as a sign of psychological health. It is also the case that most counsellors and psychotherapists are unlikely to be specifically trained to work with gender and sexual diversities (Davies, 2007). Good practice requires subtle curiosity and an exploration of the nuances of a client's lived-experience. Lesbian and gay clients often present with experiences that are not so different from those presented by other clients, but the social context does create a different dimension, with a multiplicity of complex associated aspects.

Unfortunately, when one of the participants sought the help of a counsellor she experienced stigma within this professional relationship and, rather than being helped, she felt further marginalised. It seemed this was the consequence of the

counsellor maintaining an unhelpful heterosexist perspective. This kind of ill-considered approach can have dire consequences for lesbian and gay clients who have already experienced stigma in organised religion, and, if therapists can reflect on the potential consequences of perpetuating socially conservative norms this could improve clinical outcomes. The most common recommendation in the literature appears to be for heterosexual therapists working with lesbian and gay clients to learn about models of LGBT identity development (Worthington et al., 2002).

6.4.3 Patriarchy and Hegemonic Masculinity

On the whole, religious tribes are systems in which men held the primary positions of power and are privileged over women in this respect. There was no doubt that men held a distinct social advantage in the lives of participants, controlling the finances of community estates and associated properties, and being the primary source of moral and religious authority. In fact, a notable finding of the present study was the extent to which patriarchy was connected with hegemonic masculinity, and gay male participants noticed the threats associated with not being "male enough", as they were frequently reminded of the "real man" status quo.

Ellis (2012) discussed hegemonic masculinity as being an idealised and culturally dominant form of masculinity in which men are strongly encouraged to embody characteristics such as aggressiveness, strength, drive, and ambition. In addition to this, they often appear to be required to dominate other males whilst subordinating females. Connell (1987) argued that rather than being a description of "a real man", these characteristics reflect an aspirational goal expressed through a set of social norms. It is not difficult to see how these norms are then perpetuated and reinforced by representations in the media of the male hero (Speer, 2005). Although the field of gender theory has moved beyond simply examining hegemonic masculinity, and scholars now discuss the multiplicity of masculinities and femininities, Ellis (2012) pointed out the archetypal form of masculinity (i.e. the strong, dependable, stoic man) remains the most highly valued type.

Although patriarchy and male privilege were prevalent across the particular organised religions included in this research, there was evidence of some progress in the evangelical Christian denomination in which one female participant had secured a leadership role as an elder in the church. However, even this participant felt stifled by the powerful patriarchy that existed, and she certainly had to "pass" as heterosexual, projecting a false impression of female domesticity to ensure acceptance. Furthermore, she had to demonstrate subservience to her husband, who was not an elder, in the traditional way. He could assume authority over her simply by virtue of his being male.

Reflecting on the principal role of scripture within organised religion it seems that, as much as the selective and interpreted text can be seen as perpetuating "textual violence" against lesbian and gay people, it could similarly be argued that the same principle applies to its attack on women. According to Yip (2011) feminist, black, post-colonial, and liberation theologies have each attempted to contest boundaries previously legitimized by patriarchal, sexist hermeneutics. Siraj (2012) pointed out that, whilst there is a growing interest in the lives of Muslim homosexuals, they have tended to focus exclusively on the lives of gay men, with only a few studies including Muslim lesbian women.

6.4.4 "The Book"

Every religion had a primary text of doctrine or a Holy Book around which their systems were organised. "The Book" provided a fundamental locus of evaluation and source of meaning. Yip (2011) described the Abrahamic religions as scriptural religions with written texts operating as the main source of teaching on sexual morality. He suggests that religious texts constitute the foundations of censure on homosexuality, though they are not the exclusive source of this. The fact that radical lesbian and gay theologians refer to certain selected pieces of scripture as "texts of terror" that commit "textual violence" against non-heterosexual believers, subjecting them to "Biblical terrorism", is somewhat predictable and, based on the findings of my research, not at all inaccurate.

It was obligatory for participants to have a thorough knowledge of their primary religious text ("The Book") and, perhaps surprisingly, there was found to be a deep respect for and cherishing of the book amongst them. The book had profound significance for participants, having provided a meaningful connection to many childhood experiences. It provided a kind of security in its predictability, creating the base from which identity was formed, and it offered consistency in an uncertain world. The book itself could be seen to provide a form of "secure base" because it provided clear boundaries, and was a kind of solid reliable "other". However, the religious texts were found to be (mis)used as the root of prejudice, and the interpretation of the books' contents appeared to give permission to discriminate and reject those who were perceived to be non-compliant. Some religious groups chose to interpret key texts in particularly conservative ways whilst others took a more liberal position. Helminiak (1994) highlights the multiplicity of doubtful translations of religious texts over many years and across theistic religions. This, it is argued, has resulted in generations of people whose beliefs and values are unreliably informed (ibid.).

Female participants could not help noticing the Holy Books' booming silence on the topic of same sex love and attraction between women at the same time as they explicitly forbid it between men. The fact that religion interpreted lesbian sexuality solely in relation to the rules regarding male sexuality was seen as patriarchal and as reinforcing male dominance. Yip (2010a) noted this in the literature too, suggesting the majority of research literature emerges from a gay standpoint and much less from a lesbian one. The ways in which texts were seen to be misinterpreted, often by men, created something of a tension for participants, both intellectually and emotionally. In the process of realising this, they developed healthier critical thinking and their approaches to the primary texts matured.

Overall, the participants involved in this project held deep respect for the Holy Scriptures within organised religion while, at the same time, they acknowledged the potential bigotry stemming from widespread misinterpretation. Das Nair and

Thomas (2012) make an important point for psychotherapy practice in highlighting the fact that many clients from religious backgrounds already have a sound conceptual grasp of their own and others' interpretations of religious texts. They suggest the challenge for therapists is to work more with affect as it relates to the process of cognitive integration of alleged incompatible identities.

6.5 Liminal Processes

This labelling of this main theme was chosen because the concept of "liminal processes" accurately depicts threshold, or transitionary, type experiences. Land, Meyer, and Baillie (2010) describe liminality as a "suspended state" or "stuck place". Their discussion of liminality referred specifically to learners but, to my mind, there are sufficient similarities with the participants' experiences to make use of this construct. Taking a sociological perspective, Land, Meyer, and Baillie pointed out that, as people cross thresholds there can be not only exhilaration but also a strong sense of being unsettled and of shifting identity, or paradoxically, a sense of loss. Cousin (2006) likens the liminal space to the transition from childhood to adulthood (i.e. adolescence): an unstable space in which a person oscillates between old and emergent understandings/identities, and this is a helpful example of a threshold experience.

Cousin (2006) argued that when a person enters the liminal state, they are engaged in a "project of mastery", unlike those individuals who remain in a state of pre-liminality in which understandings can be described as being, at best, vague. Land, Meyer, and Baille (2010) proposed a relational view of liminality and described it as a journey through pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal states. They emphasised that, rather than being linear and ordered, "these threshold concepts have a degree of recursiveness, and oscillation" (ibid.). However, for the purposes of this discussion, these liminal processes are presented sequentially.

From a therapeutic perspective, I agree we can never absolutely know the subjective world of the infant, since what we know is based on observation (Moursund & Erskine, 2004). However, I recognise the consensus regarding what

infants do appear to experience in their formative months of life. Most striking is the task the infant has to discover the difference between what is and what is not self, both physically and psychologically (Stern, 1988). At around six months old, the infant is said to begin to recognise that they are a separate being from their mother, that there are other individuals in the world, and that they need to learn how to interconnect with them. This process of "separation-individuation", or what in my opinion should more accurately be called "separation-connection" (Moursund & Erskine, 2004: 36), is the basic building block in the formation of personality and the sense of self (Bowlby, 1969; Stern, 1985; Mahler, 1975). From this perspective, as the infant increasingly experiences itself as being separate, it also increasingly experiences itself as being in contact. However, I agree that this view of early object relations takes us only so far:

> … to the point of recognising that where the ego is, objects must be. (Benjamin, 1995: 1).

Merleau-Ponty (1962) highlighted the alienating consequences of over-valuing objectivity and presented a vision of human relations rooted in a cooperative intersubjectivity. For me, phenomenology from this perspective can be understood as:

> … an expression of surprise at the inherence of the self in the world
> and in others, a description of this paradox and permeation, and an
> attempt to make us see the bond between subject and world, subject
> and others, rather than to explain it. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 58).

Stern (1985) described how the infant builds up over time a "representation of interactions that have become generalised" (RIGS) from the repetition of similar experiences in a relationship. I recognise that these become a blueprint for certain expectations of future experiences within relationships. As an integrative relational psychotherapist, I equally value the idea of the core interpersonal schema (Beitman, 1992) because this concept captures how human beings internalise significant relationships throughout their lives, and form patterns of

beliefs and fantasy about themselves in relation to others. Murphy and Gilbert (2000) point out that the core interpersonal schema shapes our subjective experiencing and, furthermore, the quality of the affective tone between people.

Having set out these constructs, I will continue to discuss them in relation to the sub-themes within the context of participants' wider threshold experiences.

6.5.1 Pre-liminal: Encountering the Problem

The "pre-liminal" state depicted participants' experiences of encountering the "problem" of being gay or lesbian while living within organised religion. In this state there was mounting awareness of a dissonance between innate same-sex attraction and the learned perception, existing within the faith community, that this attraction was wrong and prohibited. Recognising that other people viewed homosexuality and religion as oxymoronic created incongruence, stress, and internal psychological tensions. This in turn presented participants with a major existential dilemma – i.e. "Who am I?" and "What does this mean for me?"

Herek and McLemore (2013) pointed out that despite shifts towards greater acceptance in some societies prejudice against sexual minorities persists and lesbian and gay people continue to be widely stigmatized. They argue that heterosexuals' negative attitudes are better understood in terms of "sexual prejudice" than as "homophobia" because the latter implies an individual's irrational fear rather than something that is a manifestation of cultural stigma. It is intriguing, as Herek and McLemore (2013) also note, that whilst many other forms of prejudice have been addressed in society, sexual prejudice remains pervasive.

The impact of experiences for participants upon their interpersonal relationships should not, in my view, be underestimated. It may be helpful to recall the work of Mitchel (1988) who said:

> At the core of the repressed is not a trauma, a memory, or an impulse, but a relationship… which could not be contained in awareness and in continuity with other experiences of self. (Mitchell, 1988: 27)

I hold the view that human beings are powerfully motivated by a need for recognition and our capacity to recognise others in return makes mutual recognition possible.

6.5.1.1 Heterosexism

Heterosexism was found to be a substantial sub-theme within the pre-liminal state and it appears to be something of an inescapable social ideology. Herek (2004) pointed out that religion, and more especially conservative religions, have been shown across numerous studies to be highly potent predictors of heterosexism. Participants described their experiences of heterosexism in a number of ways that demonstrated it being acted-out both implicitly and explicitly. Male leaders within organised religion were found to be principally responsible for propagating the heterosexist position, propelled as they were by their need to maintain power.

The danger of heterosexism and heteronormativity is that it invariably leads to the stigmatising and ostracizing of gay and lesbian people. Rosik, Griffith, and Cruz (2007) expand upon Allport and Ross's (1967) work in distinguishing intrinsic and extrinsic faith and they argued that both forms are positively linked with heterosexism. Rowatt and Schmitt (2003) claim that intrinsic "religiosity-homophobia" is a predictor of restricted sexuality across multiple cultures because members of organised religions tend to internalise their teachings and values, as opposed to these just reflecting personal or social needs, as is the case with extrinsic religiosity.

Heterosexism in organised religion was inescapable and the participants were left with no doubt about their religious institution's position. This heterosexism operated largely through a dual process of invisibility/silence and attack, and it was expressed in a multiplicity of ways. Essentially, as long as their same sex

attraction remained invisible, participants were safe from overt attack. However, when their sexuality became visible and known, participants became more vulnerable and the interpersonal dynamics changed. The empirical research continues to show that the preoccupation with carnality persists not only within the Christian church but across other religious faiths too, highlighting a tension between the dominant sexual discourse and lived experiences (Machacek & Wilcox, 2003; Morgan & Lawton, 2007).

In my research, participants were often only able to learn about their own emerging sexuality through the lens of heterosexism and heterosexual people. There were no obvious LGBT role-models for them, and no messages of love or acceptance coming from within organised religion. This induced a sense of powerlessness, which left them compliant with majority norms. In subjugating themselves to the dominant powers, participants surrendered to anti-gay prejudice and the expectation that they would remain silent, which perpetuated that prejudice. Herek & McLemore (2013) pointed out that since it is possible to remain "silent" and conceal sexual-orientation heterosexual people can often form relationships with sexual minorities without knowing about it, and this perpetuates prejudice. Sowe, Taylor, and Brown (2017) found that a greater exposure to religious anti-gay prejudice predicated greater mental health problems. They concluded that exposure to anti-gay religious prejudice is strongly associated with threats to wellbeing and that opposing lesbian and gay sexuality on religious grounds is a high predictor of detrimental life outcomes including increased stress, shame, anxiety, and dependencies.

Festinger (1957) suggested that holding two conflicting cognitions is both psychologically and emotionally uncomfortable, producing a negative mental state. Cooper and Fazio (1984) claimed that people try to get rid of dissonance in order to achieve their preferred state of consonance. This is particularly the case when dissonance is rooted in a person's self-concept (Jones, 1985). Szymanski and Chung (2003) point out that internalised heterosexism takes place when anti-gay attitudes get retroflected, leading to low self-esteem and internal conflict. As a consequence of this, many lesbian and gay often people abandon their faith

entirely and can no longer even endorse religion in order to internally accept their sexuality (Wagner, 1994).

The stigma surrounding same-sex attraction was inescapable for the participants because it was preached by religious leaders from powerful platforms. In many cases, particularly in Islam, same sex attraction was designated to the realms of taboo, and this ideology was difficult to challenge as it was inextricably linked to interpretations of "The Book". Crocker (1995) pointed out that being stigmatised by a social group inevitably results in rejection because the stigmatised person is seen to have an attribute that compromises their humanity. Again, the centrality of stigma to a person's self-identity directly relates to the extent of the impact this stigma has upon them. Yip (1997b) found strong evidence that the Christian church stigmatises lesbian and gay people, and describes the main strategies that people use to manage it, including: attacking the stigma, attacking the stigmatiser, use of positive personal experience, and using the "ontogeneric argument" (i.e. being made in the image of God).

Worthington et al. (2002) and Mohr (2002) have argued that therapists could focus more on the therapist's own heterosexual identity development. McGeorge and Carlson (2009) suggest that this approach shifts the focus from examining the identity development of the marginalised group to an examination of the identity development of the dominant, socially-sanctioned group instead. This encourages heterosexual therapists to reconsider their taken for granted positions and to reflect on heterosexual privilege, which, in turn, invites them to learn about how they came to develop a heterosexual orientation (see Appendix 12). McGeorge and Carlson (2009) have proposed a three-step process of self-reflection that encourages a more affirmative stance when working with lesbian and gay clients.

One of the more widely recognised psychological models that focusses on the effects of homophobia in the lives of lesbian and gay people is Meyer's "minority stress theory" (Meyer, 1995). This model proposes that various forms of stress related to being gay or lesbian have a deleterious effect on mental health and well-being. Combined with research into the process of internalised homophobia,

especially when linked with intrinsic religiosity (Herek, 1987), it is understandable that participants invariably moved away from religion and developed ways to cope with, and grow from, their encounters with anti-gay prejudice.

6.5.1.2 Words, and Silence, as Weapons

Westrate and McLean (2009) point out that wherever the heterosexual narrative prevails, the gay narrative is silenced. They present a theoretical framework of "voice and silence" which is based on the dynamics of place and power, emerging as a function of these, both historically and in the present. They found that people with personal narratives that matched the "canonical narrative" had a voice, and those who did not identify with it were silenced. Lesbian and gay narratives unavoidably subvert and resist dominant conservative narratives, and are therefore often silenced. Westrate and McLean also noted more subtle ways in which majorities can silence minorities. For example, by emphasising the expression of one thing (e.g. sadness) and thereby silencing another (e.g. anger).

Words and silence were found to be key mechanisms for perpetuating sexual prejudice and heterosexism: name-calling, homonegative gossip, and pejorative language were all used in the context of stigmatising power-play. An ill-considered church sign provides a good example of the tyranny of language in this context. One participant talked about a sign that, for him, contained an excluding, heteronormative message: "This is a Family Church! All Families are Welcome!" Although this signage may not have been intentionally excluding (although it may well have been), from the perspective of a gay member who had recently been excommunicated after coming out, family meant "not you", "not gays". For him the use of the word "family" was taken to mean "heterosexual", even though, of course, many gay and lesbian people now have families of their own.

Silence was exceptionally potent and often indicated something that was unspeakable or taboo. It was used effectively to covey disapproval and to reinforce heterosexist norms and it seemed to be a commonly used technique to

maintain the status quo and keep homosexuality in its place. To counter this phenomenon, some queer theorists propose "queering silence" (Durber, 2006) and argue that "not coming out" can helpfully challenge heteronormativity, which they argue is engendered in LGBT liberation politics. "Queering" is a technique that emerged out of queer theory in the 1980s and 1990s and which is used to challenge heteronormativity and binary thinking by analysing places in texts that utilise and assume heterosexuality as the norm (Young, 2012). However, I concur with Barton (2010), who cautions against the suggestion of queering silence, noting that, in reality, queering silence could only be possible when there is real social equality, and therefore a queer "silence" could become a variant of "the toxic closet", which would be counter-productive.

There were numerous examples of members of organised religions selecting words and sentences from their key religious texts to justify their prejudice. Although these were destructive and rejecting, participants ultimately came to realise these interpretations were unreliable because they knew they had not chosen their sexual orientation. Sometimes referred to as "The Leviticus Code" in Christianity, all Abrahamic religions appeared to have their own version of this creed. These key verses, often cited out of context, include powerfully contemptuous words such as "abomination" and "forbidden" to reinforce the heteronormative rules. Rodriguez (2010) makes the point that the same isolated passages are frequently used to support conservative views that homosexuality is "a sin". Language within organised religion can often be highly judgemental and condemning, with a tangibly negative impact on participants. In Judaism in particular, there was an intense focus on language in the religious debate about homosexuality, which took the form of intellectualising, interpretation of meaning, and how this should be framed.

It was concerning to find that normal, everyday conversations were loaded with sexual prejudice and heterosexist reinforcers. Even from an early age, participants remember conversations that bolstered heterosexist norms (e.g. "Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve"). One of the problems with pervasive heterosexism is that it isolated the lesbian or gay person to such an extent that they felt there was no-one

else like them in the world. Participants simply did not know anyone they could confide in or trust with their experiences of emerging identity.

The fact that no-one seemed to care about them increased the participants' isolation and their mental health deteriorated as a result. On this theme, Cohen (1997) highlighted a destructive form of duality in religion, particularly in the "black church", which, on the one hand believes homosexual behaviour is immoral, and on the other hand promotes the notion of the church existing for and serving all. Rodriguez (2010) expanded on this when discussing the psychological construct of conflict and anxiety. For Rodriguez (2010), anxiety is framed as a consequence of the internal conflict generated in the individual as a result of dualities, being both extrinsic (coming from others) and intrinsic (from the individual). Ultimately, both words and silence were weapons in the heterosexual and religious armoury that served to ostracize those who dared to violate the social norms.

6.5.1.3 Othering

All participants had the experience of being designated "not one of us", and were reduced to being "other". On coming out, participants had to confront the shock of almost instantaneously being assigned to a subordinate social category that was "not hetero-normal", and therefore "mad, bad, and dangerous to know" (Davies, 2013). This re-assignment was something that participants initially struggled to comprehend because, up until the point of coming out, they had been fully included, involved, and accepted by the group. Interestingly, there was a palpable change in the quality of interpersonal relationships noted by participants when being othered, and interactions became charged with suspicion and grew colder.

Even though participants had not fundamentally changed at the point of coming out and were, in point of fact, inviting people to know them more intimately, heterosexism was clearly so potent a phenomenon that they were perceived to have betrayed the tribe, and were thus branded "other". The illusion of love and friendship quickly dissolved and there developed a growing fear of the wider

implications of this process of othering. These experiences were likened to being designated a "persona non-grata" and led to participants experiencing self-doubt and questioning their own sanity. For me, these experiences resemble the psychological concept of "gaslighting" and represent an aspect of religious abuse, described more commonly in the literature on emotional abuse (Ni, 2017).

In the findings there were a range of responses to homosexuality within organised religions depending on doctrine and denomination. Halkitis, et al. (2009) identified four main standpoints that religious groups and leaders take on homosexuality. These include full acceptance, qualified acceptance, rejecting, and rejecting punitive. They describe the last of these as the most abusive, although, for me, all but the first have the potential to be abusive, being founded on a view that homosexuality is a "sin" punishable by eternity in hell. Participants described a stressful kind of two-pronged marginalisation whereby they knew that, as well as being marginalised by the religious tribe, they could also find themselves marginalised by the lesbian and gay community because of their faith, which can be seen as anti-gay and therefore unwelcome.

For Baumeister (1985) identity conflict is the problem of the multiply-defined self whose definitions have become incompatible. Rodriguez (2010) argues that having a multiplicity of identities means a person's identity is compromised. For participants in this research project, the experience of "othering" was emotionally and psychologically painful and participants inevitably attempted to separate religion and sexual-orientation intra-psychically. This resulted in a deepening crisis of identity that was difficult to resolve in isolation.

Kubicek et al. (2009) point out that lesbian and gay people may often approach psychotherapists in the hope of changing their sexual orientation. When British therapists were asked if they had engaged in attempts to help reduce same-sex attraction, one in six revealed that they had agreed to do this and a startling 4% admitted they had attempted to "cure" homosexuality (Bartlett et al., 2009). Rather than agreeing to collude with clients' internalised heterosexism in this way, Kubicek et al. (2009) suggest that the most helpful strategy to support

clients' long-term well-being is to help them accept their sexual-orientation and explore ways to more fully integrate their religious/spiritual beliefs with their sexual identities. They highlight the common problem of dissociating from intense negative emotions in order to cope with repeatedly encountering homophobic attitudes, and they suggest therapists should not only offer an "affirmative approach", but also focus on helping clients work through feelings that are repressed or difficult to identify. Lastly, they recommend engaging gay-friendly religious leaders to explore ways of supporting the client within their communities.

6.5.2 Liminal: Ontological and Epistemic Shift

The "liminal" was a state in which participants adjusted to the conflicts they encountered within organised religion as gay and lesbian people. Essentially, this state depicted experiences of passing through a threshold and it marked a profound ontological and epistemic shift. In the liminal state, participants were integrating and discarding aspects of identity, which paradoxically became a reconstructive process.

From a psychotherapeutic perspective, I think a particularly helpful nomenclature, which highlights the relational origins of psychopathology, is Johnson's (1994) description of characterological expressions. I appreciate this work because he recognises how tragedies in human development can lead to painful psychopathology. Johnson (1994) explains how the most basic existential issues often underpin severe pathologies of personality disorders, the symptoms of neurosis, and the more functional adaptation of character styles. He names the experiences of the hated child, the abandoned child, the owned child, the used child, the defeated child, the exploited child, and the disciplined child. I appreciate the fact that this model provides a detailed description of character structures on a continuum of psychic structure, as well as honouring the internal experience of phenomenology.

6.5.2.1 Coming Out

"Coming out of the closet" or "coming out" is a widely accepted metaphor for the psychological process of self-disclosure of one's sexual-orientation. White and Kendall (2004) suggest that, socio-politically, the notion of visibility is a critical step for LG people. They argue that many heterosexual members of organised religions are often unaware that they worship, pray, commune, and fellowship with gay and lesbian people. Therefore, the ignorance of heterosexual people predominantly depends on the silence of lesbian and gay people. For this reason, White and Kendall (2004) strongly encourage sexual minorities to develop "public visibility" that can counteract negative representations of them. Undoubtedly, this is easier said than done and achieving visibility in the context of organised religion can be challenging to say the least, as can be seen within the themes in the findings chapter.

Davies et al. (2012) argue the notion of a universal "coming-out" is mostly a Western concept with little relevance for people from other social and ethnic groups (e.g. black and other minority ethnic groups). Beckett (2010) powerfully described the process of "inviting-in" rather than "coming-out" in the context of her work with a young Muslim man, demonstrating how significant people were selectively "invited-in" to know more about his life and sexuality. The notion of "inviting-in" provides an alternative perspective to the heteronormative notion of "the closet". For example, Moore (2012) highlights that where "coming out" is a process dependent on a person publicly exiting "the closet" as an act of resistance or protest, "inviting-in" is a process that focusses on the person as part of a wider community, and on their own self-agency.

Based on their case study research, White and Kendall (2004) demonstrated that gay and lesbian people actually experience multiple "comings-out" in the context of religion. These include coming out to oneself, coming out to God, and coming out to one's religious community. They described these types of coming-out events as "multiple transformations" whereby personal internal lives are changed, the divine is rediscovered in the context of social action and interaction, social

relationships are irrevocably altered, and religious communities are presented with unexpected challenges and opportunities (ibid.).

Remarkably, there was simply no information available to participants at the stage of their initial "coming out" to themselves, except for the prejudice and biased conservative doctrine within their religious group. One participant described encountering information in a secular book he found, and this allowed him to put a name to his experience and to understand it better. Shallenberger (1996) argues that coming out is one of the most significant life events for lesbian and gay people, with several major intrapsychic and interpersonal themes involved in this developmental process. It took participants varying amounts of time, but it always took time, to understand their sexuality, and they were, in effect, forced to give it a great deal of contemplation. For some participants this process took several years, even, in one case, decades.

Perry (1990) pointed out the confusing and contradictory messages within religion, which states on the one hand that "God is love" while at the same time arguing same-sex attraction is "unnatural" and "perverse". Spencer (1994) suggests these conflicting messages produce self-loathing and despair in lesbian and gay people of faith. Rodriguez (2010) also argues that these rigid dualities cause conflict and subsequent anxiety because these two core identities are often of equal importance to a person's sense of self. He therefore proposes that stress and anxiety arise in lesbian and gay people as a direct result of their experience of this internal conflict. These seemingly contradictory dualities meant that the participants in this research project had to seriously ponder if and how they could ever talk about their sexual-orientation with anyone else. However, even though they experienced conflict and anxiety, all the participants experienced a notably strong urge to "come out" and this was framed as something inevitable and irrepressible, a force toward greater freedom of self-expression. In all cases, careful consideration had to be given to "whom" to come out to, "how" to come out, and "when" to come out. It was never the case that one episode of coming out sufficed, and this is discussed further in a later section.

Stereotyping and stigmatising were clearly evident in participants' experiences of coming out. People's responses and reactions varied widely but in the majority of cases the experience of coming out led to more oppression. There were multiple examples of non-acceptance/disbelief from others and of being ostracised. The participants experienced a great deal of mental torment as a result of this. When rejection came from the religious leaders themselves, this appeared to result in more complete alienation of the person by the religious group, which damaged the participants' relationship to their faith. Kubicek et al. (2009) found that young people in this context reported a high risk of self-destructive behaviours such as turning to drugs, alcohol, or over/under eating, in order to cope with the stress of homophobic messages within the religious communities.

"Identity comparison" appeared to be another inevitable consequence of the coming out process and, furthermore, it was multifaceted as it related to religious, racial, cultural, and political identities. There was a variable period of the participants holding back on coming out to others after coming out to themselves. During this time the participants were aware of their sexual orientation but chose to observe from within to see if and how they might find a place, and how their difference may be interpreted. In this period, full contact with the organised religion was reduced while energies were redirected towards understanding what their difference meant within their religious tribe. Upon realising that their difference was due to same sex-attraction, participants experienced something of an epiphany that involved a process of deep personal reflection, gradual self-acceptance, and a newly discovered quest for further authentic living.

The notion of "passing" for the dominant group was a common experience for the participants not just in their religious communities but also more widely within the heteronormative societies in which they lived. "Passing" is the ability of a person to be regarded as a member of an identity group or category different from their own (Sanchez & Schlossberg, 2001). Although it can be used to gain certain privileges, increase social acceptance, and help deal with stigma, it can also represent a denial of authenticity and lead to depression and self-loathing (Sanchez & Schlossberg, 2001). For participants, "Passing" was employed to

avoid the potential severity of reactions from people who were imagined to have the capacity to reject, ostracize, and punish them. It was an effective way of at least appearing to conform to the social norms, and this conformity created time to think and plan a way forward. In Islam, passing was thought to be preferable and the gay Muslim man was encouraged by his siblings to appear to be straight, to marry, and produce heirs. This was seen as being more acceptable than a heterosexual woman divorcing, for example. Two of the older lesbian participants had married and had children themselves and even though they were aware of their same-sex attraction, their "coming out to others" occurred considerably later in life. The fact that the younger participants did not feel this obligation could be seen as evidence of some positive social change.

Coming out was a salient liminal process for participants in the context of organised religion. The process was multifaceted and included a period of initially suppressing one's identity, then passing for the dominant group before disclosing the truth, experiencing stereotyping, identity confusion, and compassion, and finally accepting a drive towards greater authenticity and congruence. Heterosexism was a potent social force in participants' coming out experiences that interfered not only with their acceptance by others but also their own self-acceptance. Mahaffy (1996) and other theorists (Rodriguez, 1997; Shallenberger, 1998) agree that, often, the next stage of a spiritual journey after coming out is the task of making a distinction between spirituality and religion. Shallenberger (1998) suggests this process involves questioning, reintegrating, and reclaiming. To my mind, all of these aspects of the process involve, to some extent, a search for meaningful interpersonal networks, and this is especially relevant to therapists integrating interpersonal approaches to their work (Weissman, Markowitz & Klerman, 2018).

Regarding the spiritual journey that one goes on after coming out, Kocet, Sanabria, and Smith (2011) suggest that therapists need to be aware of the significant distinctions between religion and spirituality, and they recommend exploring these different meanings overtly with clients. Yip (2010b) offers a balanced and helpful reminder that religion and spirituality can be important

resources for the construction of meaningful lives for many lesbian and gay people, and therefore an open mind is helpful when exploring individual meanings. Indeed, Langdridge (2008) provides a rigorous queer critique of the dominant lesbian, gay, and bisexual "coming out" models, arguing against the notion of fixed dualities, and suggesting that lesbian and gay people should engage more with a radical queer hermeneutic of suspicion, and that the endpoint of coming out:

> … should not be quiet contentment with one's self and one's social world with but appropriate and justifiable anger at the endemic heterosexism and homonegativity in the late modern world. (Langdridge, 2008: 23).

6.5.2.2 Betwixt-and-Between

Even though it does seem that a more plural notion of sexuality may now exist in the West, the negative effects of heterosexism on lesbian and gay people's mental health continue to be felt (Westrate & Maclean, 2010). In the process of coming out, the previously existing, more certain, sense of self-concept begins to dissolve. For me, the experience of finding oneself "betwixt and between" can equally be thought of as "belonging/not-belonging". As awareness of same-sex sexual attraction emerged, and as the participants realised what this could mean for them, there was at first a period of disorientation, but this feeling was combined with a sense of new possibilities, and there was evidence of ambivalence in this state.

Finding themselves betwixt-and-between, the participants expressed worries about not being whole or being incomplete if their religious identity was spoiled. These internal conflicts were often intense, and one participant described one part of himself feeling elated by the prospect of being able to be more fully himself while, at the same time, another part was worrying about bringing shame on his family. In this state of "between" the participants' searches for meaning and quests for authenticity was marked. One of the participants beautifully described

this liminal experience as the plight of "The Velveteen Rabbit" and the following extract gives a sense of why that story was meaningful:

> He said "you become". It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't happen often to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand. ("The Velveteen Rabbit" - Margery Williams, 1922: 48).

Within the liminal state, participants recognised that the personal struggles and pain they experienced were essentially due to heterosexism and anti-gay prejudice. A range of emotions was associated with this state but the predominant ones were sadness, anger, and despair. However, out of this misery, a greater understanding of the subjective nature of rules became apparent, and along with it the liberating insight about the potential freedom to choose one's own path. Interestingly, there was also insight into the fact that religion for most people represented a choice, as opposed to sexual-orientation, which did not. Therefore, if anyone were to be rebuked, perhaps it ought to be the group that had chosen a religion that caused suffering instead of those who have not chosen to feel same-sex love and attraction and who are innocuous. All the participants decided in one way or another that oppressive, doctrinaire religion was "not for me".

For one participant, the discarding of his previous, limiting ideologies prompted him to reflect on the health of the Christian church and draw the conclusion that the church is, in fact, terminal. There was a fascinating parallel between his notion of the death of the church and the death of a previous aspect of his own identity. There was a sense of sadness about this kind of ultimatum, the hopelessness and the lack of possibilities. Rodriguez and Ouellette (2000) pointed out a number of helpful ways to support the successful integration of different identities, including: reading relevant literature, self-acceptance, talking with others,

becoming older, coping with illness, and re-establishing spiritual meaning. For Rodriguez (2010) the single most important mechanism of identity integration is interpersonal involvement with groups that support a positive outlook for both sexual diversity and religion.

The process of reframing religious and political constructs occurred for all participants in the threshold experience of betwixt-and-between. After some initial identity confusion, an increased self-awareness and reflexivity enabled participants to identify heterosexism and prejudice as major problems within organised religion. The sense of belonging, and at the same time not-belonging, permeated their experiences. McGeorge and Carlson (2009) stress the need - for heterosexual therapists in particular - to become more aware of the particular influences of everyday heteronormative assumptions, heterosexual privileges, and the impact of heterosexual identities on the therapy process, and they offered some tools to help explore these issues further (see Appendix 12).

6.5.2.3 Intersecting Identities

The concept of intersectionality has existed for some time, the term being first coined by Crenshaw (1991). In offering a helpful framework for applying intersectionality to psychology research, Cole (2009) poses three questions: who is included in this category? what role does inequality play? and, where are there similarities? Firstly, she challenges the perceived homogeneity of groups, and invites consideration of diversity. Secondly, she introduces the issue of power and points out that people often exist within fluid hierarchies consisting of different levels of privilege and power. Finally, she invites a consideration of commonalities between people that may ordinarily be seen as major differences. Although this concept was first articulated from the perspective of gender studies, the concept of intersectionality is applicable to any academic pursuit attempting to understand individual and social phenomena holistically (das Nair & Butler, 2012). Davis (2008) underlines the importance of intersectionality, stating:

Any scholar who neglects difference runs the risk of having her work viewed as theoretically misguided, politically irrelevant, or simply fantastical. (Davis, 2008 p.68).

In the research data, it was apparent that multiple social forces were at play in the formation of identity. das Nair and Butler (2012) highlight the numerous challenging aspects of intersectionality, sexuality, and psychological therapies, placing a particular focus on the interaction of race, gender, class, religion, and sexual-orientation. They suggested that for many people there is a particularly complex negotiation between aspects of the marginalised self; for example, one participant negotiated being a gay Pakistani Muslim in a white majority, Welsh-speaking school; another participant was an adopted Irish lesbian who attended a London Catholic boarding school. das Nair & Butler (2012) suggested the "project of intersectionality" will always be incomplete, whether that is in scholarship, activism, or service provision. They argued that this is not only the case because of the endless possible permutations and combinations of identities and social positions people can have, but also because of the amorphous and changing nature of these identities and positions.

The findings support a view that there is a powerful interconnection between the various aspects of culture, religion, faith, family, and community. When the participants' lesbian and gay identities became visible within different social contexts, it sometimes created an increased sense of threat and challenged personal power, but this also created opportunities for making meaning and revising perspectives. Being able to identify with similar people seemed to offer the participants the greatest hope, and developing an interpersonal network in a positive, supportive way seemed to be key to increasing confidence in the developing sense of identity. According to Lease, Home, and Noffsinger-Frazier (2005), faith groups that affirm gender and sexual diversity are more likely to support the integration of diverse, intersecting identities. Conversely, they argue that religious groups that believe lesbian and gay people are immoral and sinful promote perspectives that can profoundly harm a person's self-worth, and identity formation.

We have seen that seeking out and participating in community groups that represent and support diverse aspects of identity (e.g. a Jewish LGBT group) can helpfully support the integration of previously disowned aspects of self. Although the participants did seem to be aware of various groups that could potentially support them, finding a place and becoming part of those groups did not appear to be an easy or straightforward endeavour. The gradual formation of identity was clearly unique to each participant's own set of circumstances and their narrative, although many commonalities were found. Developing fluidity of identity was an important feature of survival for some participants and making sense of the different intersecting identities was a major task of their development. While Lease, Horne, and Noffsinger-Frazier (2005) argue that many lesbian and gay people who grow up within organised religions continue involvement with these into adulthood, Bartoli & Gillem (2008) contend that conflict at the intersection between sexual-orientation and religion often results in the complete rejection of either the lesbian or gay identity, or in changes to religious affiliation. Rodriguez and Ouellette (2000) explored identity integration as a process and, importantly, found that not everyone experiences conflict. Additionally, Rodriguez and Ouellette (2000) defined people as having achieved identity integration when they no longer felt any conflict between their religious and gay identities. They argue convincingly that the notion of identity integration as a process is more helpful than psychological theories explaining the interaction between different identities (ibid.).

Bartoli and Gillem (2008) recommended that therapists see the thrust of their work as supporting clients to find points of connection between their religious and sexual identities. This includes an exploration of the attachments to each identity and the individual meanings that clients hold about those identities that may be contributing to inner conflicts. Further to this, Bozard and Sanders (2011) believe it is imperative for therapists working with lesbian and gay clients to make sexual and religious identity central to the process of therapy. This inevitably requires therapists to attend to their own cultural competence and proficiency in being able to hold these two identity development processes together in therapeutic dialogue,

with a view to identifying factors that may further help clients in the process of integration.

6.5.3 Post-liminal: Transformation

In the findings, the "post-liminal" theme depicted participants' transitions from one state of being to another, where new aspects of identity were discovered through transformative learning (Bager-Charleson, 2010), and a process of integration transpired. The themes depicted in this project could be seen to represent a trajectory or journey from a place of tension and conflict to one of integration and growth towards greater authenticity. Yip (2014) conceives this as a journey of spiritual growth, in which people mature in their relationship with themselves, others, and the divine:

> From a sociological and psychological perspective, this process could be seen as the development of a positive identity, often leading to a heightened politicization or religious faith and sexuality, as well as to better social adjustment. (Yip, 2014: 120).

As the participants began to develop a curious mind and to think for themselves, in place of ingesting doctrine whole, there was a loosening of previously held beliefs and an increase in independent thought. The crossing over from the boundaries of rigid, religious doctrine appeared to lead to more flexible and pluralistic perspectives, which also included a different understanding of the notion of what it might mean "to belong".

In this post-liminal state, participants reflected on their interconnectedness with others in the wider world in a mature, non-defensive way. There was also a shift in political perspectives, with multiple examples of feminism and pluralism being exhibited that ran counter to the insidiousness of intolerance that the participants had encountered within organised religion.

Thinking about this from a psychotherapeutic perspective, I concur with the intersubjectivists who argue that in a relationship one has to eventually be recognised as a separate "other" for one to fully experience one's own subjectivity in the other person's presence (Benjamin, 1992). Embracing the unique identity that is also formed by such a meeting of subjectivities, I am drawn to a dialogical psychotherapy approach (Hycner, 1993) that, to my mind, represents a clinically purposeful and applied intersubjectivity:

> At the core of a dialogical therapy approach is an overriding concern with the rich and variegated nature of the whole person. (Hycner, 1993: 43)

A dialogical perspective recognises an ontological dimension in the meeting between people that I believe Buber (1958) called "the between". To my mind, the process of psychotherapy is therefore not about what to do for the client or what to say, rather, it is how to be with the client that is paramount. This way of being with the client is described cogently by Schore (2005):

> My mental posture, like my physical posture, is not one of leaning forward to catch the clues, but of leaning back to let the mood, the atmosphere, come to me – to hear the meaning between the lines, to listen for the music between the words. As one gives oneself to being carried along by the affective cadence of the patient's sessions, one may sense its tone and subtleties. (Schore, 2005: 9)

In my clinical experience, these intersubjective approaches can help support the transformation of shame into pride, and pain into hope.

6.5.3.1 Empowerment

Power, authority, and the abuse of power (either individually or systemically) are all themes that ran throughout my findings and these themes also formed the dominant discourse in the literature. For Rodriguez (2009) the notion of

empowerment is principal, and it is indeed a key theme in this project. I agree that it directly addresses how gay and lesbian people have reclaimed their spirituality in the face of sexual prejudice and anti-gay bias from those in religious communities, and also how many have reclaimed roles for themselves within organised religions. The notion of empowerment is important in the context of the findings because, as Rappaport (2000) points out, when lesbian and gay people who may have previously experienced rejection become included and involved, they expressed powerful feelings of belonging and joy. Their research was carried out within an inclusive religious organisation that refused to condone the exclusion of lesbian and gay people, and used inclusive language during services, which this was ultimately empowering.

Perkins and Zimmerman (1995) describe empowerment of lesbian and gay people as an intentional and ongoing process within communities, involving respect and inclusion, in which people are encouraged to actively share resources and increase control over their lives. Similarly, Rodriguez (2010) describes empowerment as essentially a mechanism whereby people reclaim control over aspects of their lives. Ultimately for participants, re-empowerment was hard-won and something that emerged gradually out of painful experiences, disempowerment, and suffering. It included processes of realising their own right to autonomy, personal power, and self-determination, all of which were often accompanied with a good sense of humour about life.

Paradoxically it appeared that being the recipients of intolerance within organised religion produced a greater individual tolerance of equality and diversity. Having confronted the worst (e.g. abuses of power, humiliation, rejection, and ridicule) it seemed that the participants emerged with a sense of hope, resilience, and humour. This was a significant aspect of empowerment in the post-liminal stage. Additionally, there was evidence of a sharpened intellect and a greater capacity for reflecting on situations – for example, when making sense of opposing socio-political perspectives. The theme of empowerment included the integration of previously disowned aspects of the self that had been rejected. Yip (2014) also

focusses on the less audible stories of transgression and transformation that offer hope and optimism while, again, warning against essentialising such narratives:

> The marginal space is no doubt a space of oppression and alienation, but it also contains the seed of productive and transformative energy. (Yip, 2014: 131).

Bozard and Sanders (2011) developed a model for therapists working with lesbian and gay clients around religious issues. They offer the Goals, Renewal, Action, Connection, Empowerment (GRACE) model. Although the context for this model is Western and Christian, they argue it can be adapted for clients of other religious faiths and backgrounds. The authors caution however, that religious identity may not always be a topic that arises for lesbian and gay people of faith, and it may sometimes be an unnecessary factor in therapy. It is also necessary to note that this model does not appear to have been empirically validated, but it is based on practice-based evidence and can therefore helpfully support therapists' clinical work in this field.

As I mentioned earlier, I believe that, through a dialogical psychotherapy relationship supporting affect regulation, a person can dare to face the range of human emotions, and that healing can take place through meeting. Within a process of mutual recognition, a reparative relationship is co-created, existing within the person's wider relational matrix, and this facilitates the development of personal power.

6.5.3.2 The Quest for Authenticity

The quest for authenticity was evident across all of the participants' experiences. The starting point for this was a wholehearted enthusiasm for the range of human diversity, including the lesbian and gay experience. Many years of hiding and "passing" for the dominant group had resulted in the participants having poor mental health, so they all felt a newfound confidence and a new daring to be visible. However, to be seen, and to be one's authentic self, having previously

been beaten down, required courage. Realising that they could live more authentically was described by the participants as life-changing, and even as having the potential to bring about inner-peace and self-confidence.

Levy and Reeves (2011) pointed out that, historically, identity has often been understood as unified and authentic, suggesting that in "finding ourselves" people seek an essential core identity that is waiting to be uncovered. In their research, which holds a more fluid, flexible, and pluralistic perspective, they concur with Clark and Dirkx (2000) who proposed that in a postmodern world the idea of a unified self is no longer relevant, since it does not capture the diversity of personal experiences and plurality of voices.

There are a number of theories and models that attempt to explain sexual identity development, with Cass's (1979) theory of gay and lesbian identity development being arguably the most well-known and influential. Cass (1979) proposed six stages that have to be navigated: identity confusion, identity comparison, identity tolerance, identity acceptance, identity pride, and identity synthesis. Although especially helpful as a description of the "coming out" experience, there has been a great deal of debate about this and similar models, with some theorists arguing that they risk being interpreted as linear and can be prescriptive in nature (Rust, 2003).

Levy and Reeves (2011) proffered queer theory as an alternative lens through which to consider religion and sexual-orientation because it offers flexibility and a more nuanced view, considering subversive sexualities to be socially constructed. They proposed a helpful five-stage process that includes: awareness of the conflict, an initial response to the conflict, a catalyst of new knowledge propelling forward, steps of working through the conflict, and resolution of the conflict. They argue that the entire process of conflict resolution is affected by other personal and contextual factors. One of the interesting findings from their research, which was reflected in the experiences of the participants within this project, was that faith development and sexual identity development are often intertwined and fluid constructions, and that there was an increase in the authentic

alignment of political views outside the confines of organised religion (Levy & Reeves, 2011).

In the post-liminal state, it became apparent that participants felt more able to explore a range of different perspectives (e.g. the equal marriage debate), and they felt more able to challenge other people's rigid, conservative perspectives. Challenging the pejorative language used by heterosexual people helped reframe negativity by turning it on its head, and participants described the emergence of a more positive view of their sexuality as something they could prize as "a gift" and "a blessing".

6.5.3.3 The Uberwelt

In existential psychotherapy, the "Uberwelt" refers to the spiritual domain of existence where, it is argued, people attempt to relate to the unknown (van Deurzen, 1984). This sub-theme was salient in the post-liminal state and participants made a clear distinction between the notions of spirituality and religion. Kocet et al. (2012) encouraged therapists to be aware of the distinct differences between religion and spirituality, and a number of authors (e.g. Abernathy et al., 2006; Grimm, 1994) suggest religion is "extrinsic" whereas spirituality is "intrinsic".

Kocet et al. (2012) noted that for some people spirituality is nurtured and expressed within a religious framework but for others it is constructed in a particularly individualised way. Supporting this view, Helminiak (2006) proposed that spirituality may be more about identifying a deeper existential understanding of the self and how that self relates to the world. Drawing comparisons between psychotherapy and spirituality, Lynch (1997) argued that, in a quest to understand the source of the client's pain and its cures:

> I must affirm on the most profound level that wholeness, holiness, and
> fullness of life can come to the individual through an understanding of

213

God in their life. This approach I call psychospiritual growth. (Lynch, 1997: 199)

Interestingly, all participants acknowledged the important place of their faith communities in their lives, and they retained a respect for some aspects of their earlier experiences within organised religion. However, there was a different, more mature understanding of spirituality for them in the post-liminal stage, which was expressed further in terms of having discovered the importance of compassion for fellow human beings, giving and receiving love (divine or human), and the importance of human connectedness.

Spirituality was regarded as something deeply personal, or a personal life journey, and altruism appeared to be a crucial aspect of their understanding of it in this state. The relishing of altruism was a surprising finding given it contrasted so sharply with the earlier descriptions of bigotry and cruelty associated with authoritarian, patriarchal religion. However, previous suffering appeared to have led to deeper reflections and independent thinking, and participants reflected on the "benefits of suffering", which were not dissimilar to the religious notions of redemptive suffering or the psychological idea of post-traumatic growth. Much debate has been generated since Nietzsche (1997/1889) stated:

What doesn't kill you makes you stronger.
(Nietzsche (1997/1889) cited in Haidt (2006: 135)).

According to Hanson (2010), the adversity hypothesis suggests that people actually require adversity, trauma, and setbacks in order to grow. The notion is discussed in the literature under various terms such as "benefit finding", "post-traumatic growth", and "stress-related growth" (Park & Helgeson, 2006). After examining the literature, Hanson (2010) concluded that the body of literature on post-traumatic growth (PTG) refers to three principal benefits that people report following adversity: finding strength and abilities, improving good relationships, and a positive change in priorities and philosophies. Mancini (2016), on the other hand, cautions against automatically assuming post-traumatic growth occurs

following adversity and recommends distinguishing between "perceptions of change" and "actual change". For him, there is little empirical evidence of actual change and more evidence that, no less importantly, people simply perceive they have grown through the experience. Therefore, he suggests that conflating "actual growth" and "perceived growth" can be perilous.

There were significant divergences amongst participants regarding belief in a deity and they all appeared to have different constructions of this; one participant was an atheist, one was agnostic, one retained a strong belief in God and others referred to an unknowable higher power or force. Yip (2010a) noted that some academics turn theology on its head by connecting gay and lesbian sexuality with spirituality. In this theoretical context, it is worth noting that Yip (2010a) also described sexuality more flexibly, as breaking free from restrictive notions of sexuality as pertaining to "genital acts". While fully appreciating this idea of an interconnection between spirituality and sexuality, das Nair and Thomas (2012) expressed caution that the "wholesomeness" of this viewpoint may risk consigning "genital acts" to something lesser, which could in turn perpetuate heteronormative perspectives about sex and sexuality.

Indeed, das Nair and Thomas (2012) called for much more transgressive queering of religious texts that challenge the status quo. For me, this latter queer theory perspective is intellectually stimulating and avoids splitting sexuality into "good and bad" types of sex. However, based on the findings, I also fully appreciate the view that one's sexual-orientation is much more than just physical behaviour and that, for the participants of this research, it was undoubtedly connected with the Uberwelt, and an evolving spirituality.

One thing that the participants had all come to realise is that spirituality did not require the formal construction of hierarchical institutions or unquestioning membership of religious tribes. Yip (2010b) pointed out that the dominant discourse within the Abrahamic religions constructs the divine being as the sole object of worship to whom one must submit. In this religious context, he argued that sexuality becomes regrettably reduced to physical, sexual behaviour, and this

is a dehumanizing view of sexuality. When the participants no longer felt obliged to conform to the dogmatic and oppressive structures of organised religion, their own individual spiritual journeys began.

Davidson (2000) reminded counsellors of the importance of considering integration as a process, because the sudden loss of religious community and expression for lesbian and gay people can result in isolation, which can have a significant impact on a person's mental health. Sometimes the process of integration involved an exploration of alternative spiritualities, not without first working-through the reported sense of guilt around "betraying" the former faith community. One participant described this positive transformation process as reconstructing her idea of faith - "replacing fear with faith".

Overall, the participants' exploration of alternative possibilities outside the framework of religion further increased authenticity and self-discovery which, in turn, increased their sense of freedom. In this post-liminal state, participants were able to frame spirituality in diverse ways, including having faith in people, human connectedness, altruism, faith in a divine being rather than a religious tribe, and "being with" others.

To support therapists who may want to improve their ways of working with lesbian and gay clients in this context, Kocet et al. (2012) outlined a useful framework to communicate more effectively. Their framework again appears to be rooted in a Western perspective but it could be applied across different religious traditions. The main focal areas of the framework include: understanding the importance of religion and spirituality to developing identity, exploring unresolved feelings about religion and spirituality, integrating the client's spiritual and sexual identities, and, finally, connecting with resources in the community to support a positive self-identity.

6.6 Navigating Relationships

Moursund and Erskine (2004) point out that our earliest learning involves connection and individuation (i.e. the self develops in ongoing relationship with other individuals). They pointed out that close relationships support and nurture psychological growth. However, they also suggest that in the absence of relationships where relational needs are acknowledged, and particularly in cases involving trauma, self-protective script patterns are developed (Moursund & Erskine, 2004).

Internalisation of religious norms is often strengthened by cultural norms that perpetuate heteronormativity, and this can lead to self-policing that complements wider institutional and social policing (Yip, 2014). The combination of self-policing with a belief in the omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent power of the divine makes this experience even more impactful:

> This multi-layered surveillance and policing [produce] a "panoptic gaze" from which no one can escape. Thus, one feels that one is constantly being watched and judged, which creates the need to be "proper" or "respectable". (Yip, 2014: 122).

However, Yip (2014) also points out that religious people are not necessarily "cultural dupes" who conform without thinking, and suggests that responses to the panoptic gaze are often diverse and varied. In a positive and transformative way, such experiences could be said to provide additionality:

> … under certain conditions, disciplinary power may expand the possibilities of the self. (Green, 2010: 331).

As seen earlier, Rodriguez (2010) identified four overarching psychological theories that support a better understanding of the impact of what happens at the intersection of religion and sexual-orientation, suggesting that there can be: conflict and anxiety, cognitive dissonance, stigma, and identity conflict. It is perhaps unsurprising then that a number of researchers (Herek et al., 1999; Ross & Rosser, 1996; McLaren et al., 2007) have suggested there can be a lifelong

process of post-traumatic recovery following experiences of religious and sexual prejudice, discrimination, and abuse.

6.6.1 Attachment

Contemporary attachment theory argues that from the moment we are born until the instant we die, we have a need for close, dyadic relationships with significant others. At the heart of this is a need for attachment relationships including the need for intimacy, open communication, reciprocity, and frequency and regularity of contact (Diamond & Marrone, 2006). It can be helpful to think about attachment as a behavioural system that is activated under certain circumstances serving the primary attachment motivation. This means that the feeling of being securely attached to someone remains a constant feeling, so one does not need to be with close attachment figures all of the time in order to feel secure, as long as there is a "secure base" (Diamond & Marrone, 2006).

There was strong evidence in the findings that interpersonal trauma and rupture without repair led to suffering and despair. I have discussed how "coming out" often triggered unexpected interpersonal disputes that tended to rapidly reach an impasse as a result of inflexible anti-gay prejudice. Participants reeled from traumatic experiences and described becoming overly cautious in relationships, perhaps mistrusting others and suspecting criticism and rejection. I agree with Davies et al. (2013) who suggest that "hypervigilance" is a key concept for gender and sexually diverse clients who have a long history of being considered "mad, bad, and dangerous to know". Caroll (2010) also argued that difficult interpersonal histories result in sensitivity and hypervigilance against pathologisation or negative judgments, with lesbian and gay people often anxiously scanning their environment for hostility and threat.

The fundamental need for attachment relationships was evident throughout the research data. The participants sought support and attachment across all stages of their development and framed their understanding of organised religion as essentially people's basic need for belonging and community. This is supported

by Graham et al. (2001) who stated that religious institutions often foster a deep sense of community and family amongst their members and provide a sense of identity through shared beliefs, rituals, symbols, and traditions. For this reason, the interpersonal rejection and trauma the participants encountered was particularly injurious.

When participants reflected on the interpersonal problems they had encountered, they recognized that members of their organised religions tended to pay lip-service to the notion of acceptance but were in fact judgmental and rejecting. They determined that it was the behaviour of the people in their religious communities that had caused suffering rather than the theological constructs themselves. The leaders of religious tribes were often central to this yet, of course, as Super and Jacobson (2012) point out, the common perception of religious leaders is that they are nurturing. It can therefore be difficult to imagine those same leaders intentionally or unintentionally abusing a member of their faith community. Whitely (2009) says that in extreme cases religious abuse affects the key components of a person's spiritual and religious life such as questioning beliefs, altering practices, and challenging ideas on participation in faith communities.

In the post-liminal state, in order to break free from the oppressive power of heterosexism that was maintained through the process of "othering", it seemed to be crucial that participants could find a confidant, an "accepting other" they could confide in. The interpersonal network is therefore of particular relevance and use in preventing mental health problems. Developing the interpersonal network in a positive way and highlighting possible withdrawal from others appeared to help normalize the participants' experiences. Furthermore, fostering supportive relationships and increasing contact with others in the interpersonal network also helped participants integrate previously disowned aspects of self and identity. This is where psychotherapy can serve a particularly helpful purpose.

6.6.2 Family Systems

The family system was found to be especially powerful and it exerted significant influence over all of the participants. McQueeny (2009) suggested the traditional family is at the heart of conservative Christianity and similar religious groups, all of which consider acceptance of same-sex relationships to be a threat to core family values. Indeed, the word "family" itself was laden with heterosexist meaning for participants, and the nuclear family was seen as a fundamentally heterosexist institution. However, there was also found to be a deep, ingrained, respect for family and family relationships, even when these had caused pain and suffering. The participants fundamentally longed for familial acceptance and there was a real fear of rejection or disapproval. Notably, both maternal and paternal figures were equally revered. Lalich and McLaren (2010) suggest that families with a strong emphasis on traditional family values were less accepting of homosexuality than families who rated low on traditionalism. They also argue that a family's religion has a profound effect on parental attitudes towards sexual minority offspring. This is likely to be a significant stressor for lesbian and gay questioning youth.

For the older female lesbian participants who went on to have families of their own, there was an extra dimension of family and social expectation associated with their own role as "mother". Social expectations caused further oppression and additional responsibilities that resulted in "many good years [being] lost". These same women had experienced sexual-prejudice as young people within their own families so it seems that they had been oppressed at all stages of their lives. Thumma (1991) states clearly that rejection from family creates a troubling form of social ostracism that has a serious impact on those battling with this kind of identity crisis.

The problems encountered in relationships were, to some extent, unsurprising, as suggested by Henrickson (2009), who argues that the belief that same-sex attraction is unacceptable is one of the most divisive issues in religion, often to the point of tearing families and people apart. Davies et al. (2013) point out the importance of considering the power of external oppression regarding sexual

orientation, gender, and ethnicity deriving from heteronormative, patriarchal, Eurocentric social influences that, in turn, lead to internalized oppression. For example, a young boy pressured to conform to stereotypical male expectations of behaviour (e.g. having short hair, wearing blue, or reducing gesticulation) can internalise beliefs that feminine aspects are wrong and socially unacceptable. For families within a religious context, communicating that sex should be limited to heterosexual procreation activity and remote from consensual experimentation can lead to intense feelings of guilt and shame. As mentioned above, Davies et al. (2013) have pointed out that the internalization of sexual prejudice messages commonly results in self-loathing, low self-esteem, isolation, fear of rejection, and other psychological difficulties.

Figuero and Tasker (2014) emphasise that traditional family values are strongly related to heterosexist and rigid gender role expectations and stigmatization. They call on psychologists and teachers working with young people to be mindful of the influence of parents' religious values on sexual identity development. They suggest that therapists could focus on the internalization of negative religious messages transmitted by parents from childhood in order to help young people deal with feelings of self-rejection and self-recrimination. Additionally, they recommend that family and systemic therapists also try to sensitise parents to the importance of family acceptance for the well-being and mental health of their offspring.

In the post-liminal state, participants referred to an evolving understanding of the notion of "family". Some argued they had two families, one their family of birth/adoptive family, and one that comprised their most supportive friendships.

6.6.3 Socio-Cultural Context

Religion and culture were strongly interconnected in the findings. Davies et al. (2013) point out that, historically, people with diverse sexual orientations were included amongst European witches and their rites and, over a four-hundred-year period, several million witches were burned on piles of "faggots", which as Grahn

(1990) points out, included piles of human bodies, many of which were strangled gay men. Conversely, lesbian and gay people were often counted amongst shamans and celebrated by Native Americans, where many tribes sanctioned same-sex love and attraction.

It was only as recently as 1992 that the World Health organization (WHO) removed homosexuality from their International Classification of Diseases (ICD9), two decades after the American Psychiatric Association declassified homosexuality from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM III). According to Bartlett, Smith, and King (2009), there are still many practitioners working in the mental health sector who still believe that to be lesbian, gay, or bisexual is an illness or perversion.

Clearly, for participants of this research project, not all cultural backgrounds were the same and each individual's socio-cultural experiences were context-dependent and influenced by the complex interplay of religious, family, cultural, and political factors. The profound impact of culture and cultural norms was experienced by all participants but highlighted most prominently in the experiences of the Pakistani Muslim participant. He felt that Muslim culture was as powerfully influential (if not more so in his experience) in maintaining the taboo of same-sex attraction as was the religion of Islam. This is perhaps unsurprising given that pathological ideas of human sexuality have often combined with powerful prevailing attitudes to intensify socio-political censure and control (Bowers, Minichiello & Plummer, 2010). Indeed, cultural shaming was inseparable from religious shaming and there was a complex interplay between the two.

Vilaythong and Lindner (2010) undertook to investigate how priming with a tolerant religious message, which they referred to as "the golden rule" (e.g. do unto others as you would have them do unto you) could influence attitudes towards a religiously stigmatized social group (i.e. gay people). Rather than decreasing negativity towards gay people, the priming had no effect when communicated by one of their own religious leaders. More surprisingly, when the

golden rule was attributed to someone from an out-group (e.g. the Buddha for Christians) people became even more explicitly negative. Their research has certainly added to our understanding of prejudice reduction because their results suggested that when a tolerant message comes from a religious out-group figure it decreases tolerance toward another out group. It is therefore unhelpful for someone from "outside" a particular organised religion to encourage people within that religion to be more tolerant by suggesting "the golden rule". Translating this to the culture of psychotherapy, it is important to recognize that the main professional bodies have issued clear guidelines against "conversion therapy" and warn against practice that could be counter-therapeutic. Davies et al. (2013) point out that sexual-orientation change efforts (i.e. "reparative therapy", or "conversion therapy", as mentioned by one participant) are mostly practiced by conservative religious groups, and represent a lucrative "cashing-in" on people's mental health distress and identity confusion.

Although there is evidence of significant social change in the West, the impact of culture on acceptance of sexual diversity cannot be underestimated and I agree that psychotherapists should take time to consider these influences on their own practice. The talking therapies are now an established part of Western culture and, in their struggle to make sense of their experiences, lesbian and gay people can often seek professional help.

Adamczyk and Pitt (2009) found that, despite harsher penalties for people found guilty of homosexuality in Muslim countries, residing in a Muslim nation did not encourage any more disapproving attitudes than residing in a Buddhist, Protestant, or Orthodox place. On the other hand, living in a Muslim-majority country did appear to encourage disapproving attitudes even for people who were not religious. The influence of religion on culture therefore differs depending on context.

Adamczyk and Pitt (2009) point out that, unlike Islam, the Catholic Church in Europe has experienced a sharply declining membership that they argue may have reduced the power of the church to influence laws, policies, media, norms, family

structures etc. In contrast, the number of conservative Protestants and Muslims was seen to have grown across the world and it is therefore argued that religious influence is not declining overall (ibid.). One participant held little hope for organized religion when he likened it to other forms of empire, pointing out their propensity to rise and fall. He had mixed feelings about this and, although his gladness about it seemed to stem from a place of remembering the hurt he had suffered, he also expressed regret that the church itself had dug its own grave by rejecting people and failing to embrace diversity.

6.6.4 Intimacy

There was a sad realisation for most participants that many of the most significant interpersonal relationships they had within their respective organised religions were fickle and unreliable. The sudden loss of intimacy and the punitive withdrawal of relationships upon coming out had been interpersonally traumatic. Barton (2010) points out that when religious leaders and religious groups condemn or reject lesbian and gay people, this negatively affects their self-esteem, stifles development, and damages self-acceptance.

There were multiple examples of the wider impact of this on interpersonal relating, including unsuccessful love relationships and a mistrust in friendship due to perceiving others as unreliable and untrustworthy. Although Super and Jacobson (2012) acknowledge that religious abuse is difficult to define, they suggest that it occurs when an individual uses a position of power or leadership to gain control over an individual or a collective group. They believe abusers use their power to manipulate others in order to meet their own needs at the expense of their victims. Furthermore, they suggest that religious doctrine or the concept of a higher power is used as a mechanism to coerce, and to instil their own values and interpretations.

When powerful leaders set up same-sex attraction as something to be considered taboo, this results in sexuality and intimacy coming to be perceived as dangerous. Linked to this, Super and Jacobson (2012) point out that, when religious leaders

deliver messages that homosexuality is wrong, the lesbian or gay person hears derogatory language and condemnation. They point out that common messages include "Homosexuality is a sin and God abhors it", "There is a war on homosexuality", "God hates fags", and "Fags will burn in hell" (Rodriguez 2010).

As one participant found, in some religions lesbian and gay people are excommunicated and denied community. Some of the participants really struggled with intimacy as a result of this kind of discrimination, and knowing how to get close to others again became particularly challenging. This resulted in deep frustrations and a sense of loss that culminated in depressive symptoms. In working with clients who have experienced religious abuse, Super and Jacobson (2012) propose taking a similar approach to working with other types of abuse. This includes identifying and naming the abuse, assisting clients to define their sexuality within a spiritual framework, and helping them to alleviate their conflict and symptoms through specific techniques.

6.7 Religious Abuse

When considering the findings in relation to the literature from a psychotherapeutic perspective, it is striking to note the extent to which some of the participants' experiences could be suggestive of "religious abuse". Although it is not the aim of this research to theorize, as would be the case in psychotherapy practice, it is nevertheless important to name abuse when it is evident:

> Religious abuse occurs when a religious group or leader misuses their
> power to oppress or manipulate their victim with their own beliefs.
> (Rix, 2010: 181).

Rix (2010) explains that religious abuse profoundly damages lesbian and gay people's spirituality, creating incongruence and dissonance relating to religious and sexual identities. I acknowledge this is possibly a contentious interpretation of the findings as they relate to the academic literature, but I believe this key concept deserves attention.

Within the interview data, there were multiple examples of abuses of power that resulted in humiliation, depression, and mental suffering. The examples given by participants showed religious abuse to be endemic and pernicious. In fact, this type of abuse damages lesbian and gay people's spirituality, creating incongruence, and cognitive dissonance relating to their religious and sexual identity (Rix, 2010; Rodriguez, 2010; Sherry et al., 2010).

Both psychological manipulation and the abuse of power (coercive control) were particularly sinister aspects of orthodoxy and dogmatism in the research data, and numerous disturbing examples were given that could be formulated as abuse. Barton (2010) found that fundamentalist religious dogma included notions of lesbian and gay people as being "bad", "diseased", "perverse", "sinful", and "inferior" that could be more broadly bolstered in other social environments. King et al. (2008) also confirms there is a significantly higher prevalence of poor mental health, substance misuse, and risk of suicide amongst lesbian and gay people.

As Super and Jacobson (2012) highlight, there is often great difficulty in defining "abuse" of all types, due to the grey lines that exist within these concepts. For example, they note the question "when does spanking become abusive?" as something hotly debated in relation to the intentionality to cause physical harm, versus punishment as correction (ibid.). I agree that the notion of "religious abuse" can be equally ambiguous and contains many grey lines. Although physical abuse causes harm to a person's physical body, Super and Jacobson (2012) argue that religious abuse "harms the spirit", and they encourage psychotherapists to clearly identify the abuse, the behaviours of an abuser, and the psychological effects it has on the victim.

Certainly, many religious leaders and lay members would vehemently deny abusing people for the sake of a higher power. This form of abuse can be particularly tricky to define because people attempting to advocate for the victim can be seen to be speaking out against God Himself. The sensitive issue of

emotional abuse is discussed in the wider literature on domestic violence, but what is especially relevant here is when perpetrators may be church leaders and pastors, and victims are encouraged to endure or remain in abusive relationships in order to work things out as (they may be told) God expects them to (Bent-Goodley & Fowler, 2006). Taking a broader perspective, it is necessary to ask questions regarding the extent to which individuals who inhabit other secular spaces such as education, employment, politics, and psychotherapy in which heterosexism, hegemonic masculinity, and silence are also deeply entrenched, may suffer abuse too.

6.8 Intersectionality

Some of the academic literature on intersectionality was reviewed earlier in chapter two (2.5.8) and this construct is explored further in relation to the findings here. The participants shared positive and hopeful narratives of intimacy that they experienced as they moved into the post-liminal state, and experiences of finding inclusive groups and allies were encouraging. The role of intimacy in interpersonal relationships was a highly sensitive sub-theme comprising moving accounts of threats, challenges, and opportunities. The evidence of changing attitudes in the West, combined with evidence of inclusive community groups generates the hope that there are possibilities for healing through relationships and intimacy.

In a clear and helpful paper, Butler (2015) acknowledges that, in her work with clients, psychotherapists embrace the multiplicity of human existence and explore the interplay of power relations. She recommends that practitioners be aware of the privileges and oppressions created at the intersections of social locations, and advises that therapists should be ready to initiate conversations with clients about intersecting identities and their influence of.

Riggs and das Nair (2012) elaborate on the idea of an intersectional and relational approach to therapeutic practice with non-heterosexual people and, rather than provide a negative picture of certain communities, they highlight the importance

of showing that there is infinite diversity and that this can be a great source of strength and growth. Although they acknowledge there can be a lot of negativity, especially for people who have experiences of being from "meta-minorities" (Butler et al., 2010), they support adopting an alternative approach, assessing how norms function within communities.

Burnham and Harris (2012) encourage practitioners to consider how different aspects of identity are in reflexive relationship to each other. They suggest that as one aspect is foregrounded another become background. Burnham (2012) uses the metaphor of a "collide-scope":

> … a non-symmetrical, sometimes colliding vision of relations
> between socially produced differences. (Burnham, 2012: 144)

Although this is a helpful metaphor, I concur with Seedall, Holtrop, and Parra-Cardona (2014) who invite therapists to go further and to move beyond a framework that treats social inequalities as mutually exclusive. They cite Harley et al. (2002) who draw attention to the fact that:

> People of color, women, and the working poor do not separate these
> issues. (Harley, et al., 2002: 232).

This perspective more accurately represents a theory of intersectionality that promotes the idea that different aspects of identity actually combine to create something unique and new. Chandler (2005) emphasizes that by attending to the multiple ways in which people may be oppressed at the same time, rather than considering oppression as existing within separate aspects of identity, intersectionality avoids creating a false hierarchy (e.g. religion over sexuality) or setting up an either/or dimension (e.g. religion or sexuality). Butler (2015) points out that in this way, intersectionality allows for a both/and position (e.g. both religion and sexuality) providing a richer, multi-dimensional, and dynamic perspective.

6.9 Summary

This chapter discussed the research findings in relation to the existing literature, addressing each major theme in turn. Although the uncomfortable relationship between sexuality and religion that is documented in the literature was widely discussed as it related to the findings, it is important to reiterate that therapists are encouraged to avoid essentializing religion, homogenizing religious lesbian and gay people, and totalizing the relationship between religious people and their religious institutions, cultures, and communities. To support this, a range of psychotherapy literature was discussed in relation to the findings, supporting a plurality of perspectives, and this is discussed further in the next chapter.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7: Implications and Major Outcomes

7.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises the main implications of the research for psychotherapy and outlines the major outcomes of the programme with regard to project activity. The aim of the research was to explore lesbian and gay people's experiences of three organised religions (Christianity, Islam and Judaism), and to consider the implications of those experiences for psychotherapy. The main areas in which the research intends to make an impact include clinical work, organisational context, presentations, papers, and in the public sphere.

7.2 Practice Implications

As an integrative therapist who adopted IPA for this research project, it would not be consistent with either the phenomenological research methodology (IPA), nor my commitment to pluralism and theoretical integration, to attempt to theorize or compose a set of guidelines for professional practice based solely on the data from six interviews, regardless of the depth of analysis.

I mentioned in the previous chapter that I maintain a healthy suspicion of dogma, and this includes single theoretical models as well as prescribed and manualised approaches to psychotherapy. For me, psychotherapy integration is an ever-evolving process, not a fixed, unified model. Prall (2004) sets out a cogent explication of integrative psychotherapy as an ongoing "project" and frames psychotherapy as an approach that raises questions rather than providing any certainty or definitive answers:

> The opening up of reductionist accounts is more important than the substitution of one account by another, which is supposedly (why?) "better". (In this I am with Freud: analysis takes precedence over synthesis.) I suggest that we take a step back from our quest for a theory which answers our questions and a practice which answers the

questions of our clients (including, of course, our own questions when we are the clients). Instead we need a method of raising the important questions (usually the ones the clients/we do not want to think about). (Prall, 2004: 29)

Inevitably, it requires a plurality of perspective to escape reductionist accounts that appear to be so popular at the moment, and to respond with integrity to the complexities of clients' experiences. It would therefore be incongruent of me to pretend to somehow know what other therapists "should say" or "should do" with their individual clients. I fully agree with Prall (2004) who opposes the notion of psychotherapy integration as a unification of theory but sees it as both the construction and deconstruction of (personal and theoretical) identity.

The unique contribution of my research to guiding good practice in the light of these findings (and based on my own clinical experience) lies in a developing process of psychotherapy integration (dialogical, relational and interpersonal), which can be combined with knowledge of existing guidance for working with LG clients (Appendix 13) and adherence to established professional and ethical guidelines for "good practice" (UKCP, 2009; BACP, 2018). As mentioned in chapter six, relational and dialogical perspectives recognise an ontological dimension in the meeting between people: "the between". The process of psychotherapy from this perspective is therefore not so much about what to do for the client, or what to say, but instead, it is how to *be* with the client that is paramount.

Phenomenology underpins both my research design and current approach to psychotherapy integration and, as such, it is helpful to highlight some philosophical ideas pertaining to practice. King (2015) helpfully explains the notion of "the clearing" from his own discoveries in research, setting out the overlapping notions of "alethia, mystery, and letting be". He suggests that where these three aspects meet "openness" can be found. I appreciate these constructs, especially the respect for ambiguity and complexity of meaning in clients' experiences. It is helpful therefore to remain curious, and honour mystery in

therapy – therapists can helpfully then ask themselves: What is being uncovered? What is being concealed?

> Whatever comes, receive it; whatever moves, follow it. (Jung, 1963)

Ogden (1999) gives a salient description of therapy as a process of simultaneously creating and undoing meaning. This is highly relevant to the consideration of the implications of my research for psychotherapy. The therapeutic language that attempts to convey the best possible understanding of the patient's experience in the present moment must:

> Embody in itself that there is no still point of meaning. Meaning is continuously in the process of becoming something new and in doing so, is continually undoing itself (undercutting its own claims to certainty). It is essential that the analyst's language embody the tension of forever being in the process of struggling to generate meaning while at every step casting doubt on the meaning "arrived at" or "clarified". (Ogden, 1999: 219)

Of course, psychotherapists are expected to abide by their professional body's codes of ethics and professional practice. Normally, these require that therapists possess the necessary knowledge and training to work competently with clients from a broad range of backgrounds. Indeed, a central aspect of "best practice" is having the appropriate cultural competence to facilitate assessments and interventions with a diverse range of clients in various social contexts. The guidelines developed by das Nair and Thomas (2012) help therapists who might be considering how to work with clients with experiences of religion and sexual orientation (Appendix 13), and I will not regurgitate these here. To my mind, the message entailed in these guidelines stresses the importance of neither essentializing religion, homogenizing religious lesbian and gay people, nor totalizing the relationship between religious people and their religious institutions, cultures, and communities.

The legacy of decades of heterosexist and homonegative beliefs that can be found in some psychotherapeutic traditions continues to resound and an important outcome of my research is therefore the contribution it makes to challenging the pathologizing of non-heterosexual identities. The concept of intersectionality is at the heart of this endeavour. As das Nair & Butler (2012) argue, intersectionality's principal accomplishment is in its potential to resist the complacency of accepting various categories as predetermined, objective truths and it proactively challenges the limitations of these categories and "truths". Butler (2015) stresses that patterns of oppression are both cultural and intersecting, and that attending to these allows the therapist to work with the diversity of structural differences and inequalities. The debate over who is justified in being attributed an intersectional identity was discussed above (2.5.8), and Butler (2015) highlights a plethora of literature from black feminist studies on the intersection between race and gender. Butler (2015) aligns herself with scholars who use intersectionality to examine all subject positions and associated privileges (Nash, 2008) and I also support this position. Riggs and das Nair (2012) model the potential for us to move away from "matrices of oppression" to "conditions of possibility" (ibid.: 25).

On reflection, I fully agree with Butler (2015), who argues that teaching students about intersectionality early-on in their therapeutic careers can stimulate curiosity regarding the ways in which aspects of social differences can interact to create new meanings and lived experiences. Although the complexities of working with intersectionality may appear challenging, I concur with Davis (2008) who argues:

> … it is precisely the vagueness and open-endedness of intersectionality [that] may be the very secret to its success. (Davis, 2008: 68).

Moving to the subject of religious abuse, discussed previously in 6.7, the dearth of academic research on this topic was noted. Super and Jacobson (2012) approach the construct of religious abuse boldly, and describe its effects, as well as delineating the implications it has for counselling clients. For me, these scholars are direct and to the point when helpfully formulating religious abuse within the

lexicon of coercive-control and emotional abuse. Rix (2010) explained that religious abuse occurs when a religious group or leader uses power inappropriately within a religious context to oppress or manipulate others with their own beliefs. It happens when a set of religious rules or doctrine are misused in a way that is harmful and damages spirituality, creating incongruence and cognitive dissonance regarding religious and sexual identities (Rix, 2010; Rodriguez, 2010, Sherry, et al., 2010). I consider it good practice to always be alert for the signs of abuse and to openly discuss these processes with the client when they are apparent. Religious abuse, linked in this project as it is with processes of indoctrination, could also appear within other social institutions, including psychotherapy training institutions. I believe that there are alarming parallels between the development of heterosexism and homonegativity in religious institutions and some psychotherapy training organisations (i.e. through "indoctrination"). Senior colleagues positioned within universities and training schools are ideally situated to raise questions about these processes and their far-reaching consequences.

In summary, it is important to note that the findings of this research relate only to a small group of participants, and cannot sensibly be generalised more widely without further research. Although my findings support the burgeoning corpus of literature that captures the more negative experiences of lesbian and gay religious people (i.e. tension and conflict), the literature shows that therapeutic management strategies are, indeed, diverse, and that religious practice can represent a source of positive personal transformation for lesbian and gay clients despite their history of suffering.

7.3 Project Outcomes

An important aspect of the professional doctorate is the wider communication of findings and the influence they can have on the field of psychotherapy. As I mentioned in the methodologies chapter, I, in agreement with Langdridge (2007), continue to wrestle with the particular institutional demand for "products". Whilst fully appreciating the need to disseminate research in order to make it vital and to

avoid having just another thesis gathering dust on a library shelf, I do not believe that a doctorate having a less dramatic impact should in any way invalidate the research that has been conducted.

Numerous professional conversations I have had with colleagues in the Psychology and Psychological Therapies Directorate of a large university health board, as well the discussions I have arranged with the equality and diversity team about this research, are no less important in the process of dissemination of my findings, and I believe that they make a valuable contribution in and of themselves. I concur with Langdridge's (2007) view that knowledge has an inherent value, even when it doesn't necessarily have a major impact on the world beyond the reader. Having said that, it is my intention to disseminate the research in my own client work and organisationally through presentations, papers, and public impact.

7.3.1 Client Work

As well as continuing to work with lesbian and gay clients in private practice and in the NHS setting, where there is some experience of faith communities and organised religion, I decided it was important to take the opportunity to further develop my integrative psychotherapy model by undertaking an accredited training in interpersonal psychotherapy. The primary reason for this followed on from identifying the significance of the major theme "navigating relationships" in the findings. I wanted to learn more about how IPT might be helpful as a clinical intervention for clients with the range of experiences of organised religions and, more importantly, those who may have survived coercive-control and religious abuse within religious institutions.

Therefore, at the same time as undertaking the doctoral research programme at Metanoia, I have attended to my clinical and professional development by pursuing an accredited practitioner training in Interpersonal Psychotherapy (IPT). As I've mentioned, the Surrey University IPT training was particularly relevant to my research and I would argue that it represents a significant development of

professional knowledge. In the NHS context, in which therapists are normally expected to offer a time-conscious approach, IPT could be ideally recommended as a helpful psychotherapeutic approach for clients presenting with clinically diagnosed depression emerging from major transformational experiences, such as those identified in this work.

I thoroughly enjoyed the theoretical aspect of the training and found it was a good fit with my own integrative, relational project. IPT is positioned within the framework of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1973) and essentially views people as social beings influenced by the social roles they occupy. From this perspective, family systems and social networks are seen as vital to healthy interpersonal and intrapsychic functioning. I thoroughly enjoyed the accredited IPT training but, above all, I was excited to consider the relevance of it to my doctoral research findings and recommendations. As a result of my potential recommendations, I have been invited to present my research at the next international IPT conference in 2019. I'm looking forward to this challenge, which represents a key product of my research.

7.3.2 Organisational Impact

In my professional capacity as Head of Counselling and Psychological Therapies within Cardiff and Vale University Health Board (UHB), I am in a privileged professional leadership position and able to disseminate the research within my team. We are a large NHS service commissioned to provide psychological therapies to the population of Cardiff & the Vale of Glamorgan. I lead a team of 45 counsellors and psychological therapists working across 75 different sites, liaising with the whole multi-disciplinary team. We receive several thousand referrals each year from GPs and allied health professionals and, although waiting times are unreasonably long at the moment, our clinical outcomes are excellent. We have five in-house training days each year and I will be presenting my findings at a training day later this year.

I have been committed to developing a number of condition-specific pathways and up-skilling therapists in the associated clinical interventions, including IPT, trauma, and self-esteem group. Within these clinical disciplines I regularly discuss my research and ensure equality and diversity is at the forefront of therapists' awareness.

7.3.3 Presentations

Throughout the doctoral programme at Metanoia, I have presented at various research challenges seminars and peer presentations, which are now regular events.

Together with my academic adviser, Dr Sofie Bager-Charleson, we are discussing a separate presentation about my research topic for the Metanoia Research Academy in 2020.

I am delighted that I will be working alongside Dr Rupert King in March 2019, who will be presenting a workshop on Heuristic Phenomenology at the Metanoia Research Academy. I have accepted the invitation to present the afternoon workshop on IPA and to share my research. This workshop will be held at the Metanoia Research Academy on Tuesday 19th March, 2019.

Facilitators at the University of South Wales' Annual Counselling and Supervision Research Conference previously invited me to present my research, and I intend to take up this excellent opportunity once my work has been formally assessed.

It has been suggested that I approach the UKCP and BACP to suggest a presentation at their conferences, and I will be pursuing this additional opportunity once I am confident the exam board is satisfied with my work. These events would be a great opportunity for me to discuss my research with the wider community of counsellors and psychotherapists.

7.3.4 Papers

I was delighted to have an article published, but this happened before I became fully aware of the debate about using the language of minorities, and how restrictive this could be. However, the article (Meades, P. (2009). Sexual Minority Therapy: An introduction to the basics. *The British Journal of Psychotherapy Integration,* 6, 6-14) was written with counsellors and psychotherapists in mind and was intended to offer some basic information about working with sexual diversities.

As explained in the introductory chapter, I wrote this article after encountering anti-gay prejudice in the workplace and, rather than getting into conflict, I thought it might be useful to write an article. I was delighted to receive complementary emails following its publication, with people genuinely appearing to request further articles on the topic. After completing the professional doctorate, I intend to take up the challenge to do this.

I also had an article published that I wrote in preparation for the task of conducting the literature review and as a constructive way of understanding the process more fully (Meades, P. (2015). (Book Review). Doing a Literature Review in Health and Social Care: a practical guide. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling,* 43, 1).

The process of reading and carrying out a book review gave me insight not only into doing literature reviews but also the process of publishing in a peer reviewed journal. I thoroughly enjoyed the process and, as it is a reputable academic journal, I am keen to write another article for British Journal of Guidance and Counselling, this time based on my doctoral research.

I am delighted to have been invited to contribute a section on IPA (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis) in a forthcoming book (Bager-Charleson, S. & McBeath, A. (2020). *Enjoying Research in Counselling and Psychotherapy*. London: Palgrave), and will pursue this invitation in 2019.

Additionally, I am in discussion with Dr. Bager-Charleson regarding the submission of an article based on my research that will contribute to a special issue of the Counselling and Psychotherapy Journal (CPR) concerning therapists and knowledge (Bager-Charleson, McBeath, & DuPlock, (2019). In press). This contribution would be subject to peer review.

The editor of The Journal of Integrative Psychotherapy has recently expressed a keen interest in my writing another article based on this research topic. She has requested a draft outline by 1st February, 2019 that will summarise the literature, methodology and methods, findings, and discussion and conclude with a summary of the project as a whole.

7.3.5 Public Impact

My intention is to ultimately author a book exploring the intersection of sexual-orientation and religion and integrative psychotherapy. This will be based on my research, and is intended to raise questions and share some of the knowledge I have gained throughout my doctoral journey. I am considering contacting either Routledge Publishers or Sage Publishers to discuss a book proposal because these are both highly reputable companies and publish widely within the field of psychotherapy. I am confident that I will be keen to disseminate the work as widely as possible after this thesis' completion.

7.4 Summary

This chapter summarised the implications of the findings of the research for psychotherapy practice and outlined the major outcomes of the programme regarding project activity. The main areas in which the research has an impact include clinical work, organisational contexts, presentations, papers, and the wider public impact.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the research with a summary and concluding remarks. The aim of the research was to explore lesbian and gay people's experiences of organised religion, and the implications these experiences have for psychotherapy. Three major themes were determined: i) Religious Tribalism, ii) Liminal Processes, and iii) Navigating Relationships.

8.2 Reflections

My doctoral journey prompted an extraordinary depth of self-reflection and transformational learning. Initially, I was ambivalent about taking-on such an exposing, charged, and politically sensitive topic because I feared the challenges it might pose but, after developing the research aims for the initial proposal (Learning Agreement), I found I had a real passion for the many questions this research topic raises for psychotherapists, and I fully engaged with these questions as part of my personal and integrative project.

Some of my initial reservations related to a concern that I was not politically motivated enough to tackle this topic, but my sense of needing to contribute something significant in relation to non-heterosexual people's experiences did not abate. This is a topic that always held deep personal significance for me and my experience working with clients from different faith backgrounds over the years confirmed the need, and my desire, to explore the subject further.

Admittedly, the research focussed predominantly on the religious elite (i.e. institutional power structures) and religious teaching (e.g. systematic theology). However, the intersection of sexuality and religion was seen to play out in diverse ways, leading to multiple outcomes. Although there appear to have been improvements for non-heterosexual people in the West, the political situation for lesbian and gay people internationally remains fragile, and the relative safety

found in the West has more recently gone into rapid reverse. Therefore, even where positive stories do exist, they are no indication of conditions elsewhere in the world. For example, validated reports about young gay men being bound and thrown from buildings, or tortured and beheaded in the name of Islam are deeply disturbing. In Chechnya gay men are reportedly being routinely rounded up and tortured with a violence reminiscent of Nazism. In Africa, a gay couple were stripped and forced to re-enact their sexual behaviour in front of jeering crowds. In Pakistan, gay men are imprisoned before being stripped and whipped in public as punishment.

Socio-political processes that are rooted in organised religion are clearly reflected in wider social systems, including in the field of psychotherapy. It is therefore helpful if therapists are aware of these social and religious influences, and reconsider their socially constructed positions in the best service of their clients – they can do this by asking themselves, and their clients, some difficult questions. As Bozard and Sanders (2011) have pointed out, some theological expressions and religious traditions continue to remain influential in perpetuating homophobic and heterosexist ideologies, so encountering a degree of conflict between religious messages and personal experiences of sexuality is inevitable. My research raises important questions and highlights the need for heterosexual therapists to become more aware of the influences of their heteronormative assumptions, heterosexual privileges, and heterosexual identities on their personal, but more importantly, their professional lives.

Although therapists should avoid assuming that lesbian and gay religious clients are necessarily dealing with religious/sexual orientation identity conflicts (Sherry et al., 2008) it is worth reflecting on how to be with clients experiencing such conflicts when they are presented in the consulting room. For many lesbian and gay people, navigating the conflicts that arise at the intersection of multiple identities can result in significantly altered religious beliefs and even in abandoning religious identities entirely. For others, successful identity development can lead to integrating these equally important, diverse parts of

oneself (Bozard & Sanders, 2011). An awareness of a plurality of perspectives regarding sexuality and religious identities is imperative for therapists.

It became evident that religions that affirm non-heterosexual people typically support the integration of a person's sexual and spiritual identity. On the other hand, religious communities that condemn lesbian and gay people can inflict psychological pain and distress. Conservative religious views were found to be most closely associated with condemnation and negative judgement and this was seen to be a fertile context for religious abuse to occur. Religious abuse happens when religious leaders use coercion, manipulation, or threats, to gain control over non-heterosexual people, as well as other individuals, with the sole purpose of forcing their values onto them. Given that the effects of religious abuse include shame, guilt, and low self-esteem, it can be helpful for psychotherapists to look out for this and name it when it is evident, inviting questions and avoiding predetermined answers.

Psychotherapists are encouraged to foster the kind of therapeutic process that will help clients become aware of their identities and of how these intersect, being as they are more than the sum of their parts. It is vital to recognise that religion and sexual-identity is an important intersection for many lesbian and gay people, and that religion has certainly been seen to have a positive role in many lesbian and gay people's lives. Bozard and Sanders (2011) suggest that a major part of honouring lesbian and gay people's religious diversity comes from having the willingness to discuss matters of religious importance, as does having the competency to do this, which more helpfully supports the process of integrating different parts of the self.

My research explored a small group of six lesbian and gay people's experiences of three organised religions, thereby providing a deeper insight into their lived-experiences. It can be helpful if we, as therapists, continue to examine our own religious and spiritual beliefs and reflect on how these beliefs can influence perceptions. It can also be helpful to be aware of the growing number of inclusive faith communities, and the leaders therein, that clients can turn to for support.

Learning about intersectionality more broadly during psychotherapy training could foster curiosity and greater self-awareness, and, if this more frequently formed a part of the core training of therapists, it could help to expose trainees to alternative cultural viewpoints that are different from their own.

Overall, the project has reflected on the intersection of religious belief and sexual orientation, which no longer need to be viewed as two separate, oxymoronic identities. To my mind, it is crucial that therapists continue to learn about intersectionality and reflect on socially constructed positions. They could helpfully do this by drawing on the various models and frameworks developed by scholars in the field, combining this knowledge with their own developing processes of psychotherapeutic integration, as it raises questions and supports sound ethical practice.

8.3 Limitations of the Research

Perhaps the most significant limitation of this research is the small sample size, which restricts the potential for making generalisations beyond the specific group of participants. However, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is generally adopted by small studies aiming to contribute to a deeper understanding of unique lived experiences and attempting to offer depth rather than broad conclusions about commonalities or thematic, universally-shared differences and similarities.

As highlighted earlier when discussing the challenges of language and terminology, using the dual and relatively limited categories of sexual-orientation (i.e. "lesbian and gay") probably limited the findings because other - more fluid - expressions of subversive sexualities were missed. On reflection, I could have chosen to explore "non-heterosexual" people's experiences of religion but, having discussed this with the university ethics programme approval panel, it was thought best to avoid covering too many populations in order to honour the relative homogeneity required by the IPA methodology. For me, the issues of a broader group of "non-heterosexual" participants could be better covered in research focussing on "queer" identities.

Transgender issues were not included, since they were considered to be beyond the scope of this project. Gender and sexual orientation are different constructs that deserve specific research to do justice to the many idiosyncrasies involved. Having said that, I recognise that many aspects of this research will have relevance for some transgender people who also identify as lesbian or gay and/or also have experiences of organised religion.

I acknowledged earlier that there are multiple inter- and intrareligious similarities and differences across religions, and I agree that attempts to essentialize and generalize religion is unhelpful (Yip, 2014). For this reason, it may have been more constructive to have only included participants from one religion. However, when recruiting participants, I wanted to achieve a degree of heterogeneity and, given my main research aim was to explore experiences of organised religion (i.e. religious institutions) and because I already had a small sample size, including a single voice each for Islam and Judaism was considered satisfactory.

Conversely, other religions that were not included in the study, could have offered a perspective that was broader still. I am thinking particularly of Hinduism, being as it is one of the largest religions currently in the UK, but also of alternative contemporary "religions" such as the Quakers. However, for the purposes of this project it was important to maintain a certain degree of homogeneity in order to achieve the depth of analysis required by the IPA methodology, and therefore only the main branches of the Abrahamic religions were included.

Finally, an inherent limitation of most phenomenological research is the heavy reliance on description and interpretation. Of course, the same data corpus analysed by a different researcher would have resulted in different interpretations, and subsequently the themes would have been organised differently. To mitigate against this, two critical research friends gave me ongoing feedback. While immediate claims from the findings are bound to the particular group of participants studied, it is possible for the reader to extend findings for themselves insomuch as they might be transferrable from person to person, or group to group:

… the reader is able to assess the evidence in relation to their existing professional and experiential knowledge. (Smith et al., 2009: 4)

8.4 Suggestions for Future Research

I agree with Butler (2010) in her specific criticism of mainstream gay and lesbian organisations and events that fail to adequately address racism. She called for a critical reconsideration of "cultural competence" when it comes to working with non-heterosexual people, with a better understanding of the concept of "intersectionality" as it is applied to a broad range of non-heterosexual communities, and more engagement with the work of culturally diverse ethnic minority academics and activists. I fully support this call for a re-evaluation of cultural competence programmes and recommend training for psychotherapists on "intersectionality", including on the vital issues of gender, race and ethnicity, and non-heterosexual people.

There was found to be a dearth of literature in support of understanding lesbian women's experiences, and the majority of existing research appeared to emerge from, or predominantly focus on, gay men in the West. Literature "by women about women" is notably sparse. Ellis (2012) pointed out that within mainstream psychology men and women have been presumed to be fundamentally different and this is in itself is problematic because, she argues, for both men and women subjectivities are constructed within a framework of gender differences. For Ellis (2012), the social construction of gender as binary directly impacts the lived-experiences of lesbian and gay people, and she argues that "sex, gender, and sexuality are inextricably linked." (ibid.) Additional research exploring the interconnectedness of these identities could open up further dialogue about these important constructs for the field of psychotherapy.

Given how commonly power appeared to be misused by leaders in religious institutions, and the extent of suffering that has emerged from coercive control, relatively little research appears to have been carried out into the concept of

religious abuse against non-heterosexual people. Furthermore, qualitative research in this area is recommended in order to enhance psychotherapists' understanding of the concept of religious abuse and to understand the impact this has on non-heterosexual people.

Equally, further research into the experiences of transgender people in religion would be helpful. This project did not include a study of the trans experience, but many trans people do identify as non-heterosexual too, and these findings could therefore be of interest. Specific, culturally sensitive research that is able to take account of the nuances of transgenderism when it intersects with religion could, if current social trends continue, shed light on a rapidly developing area of interest for the future.

From a clinical psychotherapy perspective, I agree with das Nair and Thomas (2012) who suggested there is further work to be done in order to explore how non-heterosexual and non-religious, agnostic, atheistic, or secular therapists negotiate their sexuality and their non-religious stance with clients who are religious and, more specifically, with clients who struggle with their religion and sexual-identity.

Yip (2010b) found in his own experience, that the LGB community and LGB academics are generally indifferent, and even hostile, towards religion. He argued this is often because religion, like the nuclear family, is perceived as the most heterosexist social institution and therefore bound to be oppressive and anti-gay. Yip (2010b) therefore calls for a more nuanced understanding, and I agree that further "insider" research, exploring perspectives from within religious organisations, could be helpful in better understanding sexual prejudice from a heterosexual perspective within organised religion. Additionally, further research exploring the positive role of religion for some lesbian and gay people is necessary, not least because of the growing body of literature suggesting it can be a source of great strength and support (Yip, 2010b).

8.5 Summary

Ultimately, the findings of this research project are best thought of as a collaboration between the researcher and the participants. The research focussed on the participants' perceptions and descriptions of their lived experiences and also the researcher's attempt to make sense of the participants making sense of their experiences (i.e. the double hermeneutic). These findings were combined with a review of the wider literature on this topic in order to further inform the discussion. Although the empirical findings of my research support the burgeoning corpus of research on the tensions and conflicts at the intersection of religion and sexual orientation, it is vital to remember the importance of not essentializing religion, homogenizing religious lesbian and gay people, or totalizing the relationship between religious people and their religious institutions, cultures, and communities. Psychotherapy that prioritises "the between", with a focus on how to be with clients rather than on what to say or do, on exploring experiences in the spirit of curiosity, and on asking the difficult questions that we tend to avoid, supports the constant process of construction and deconstruction of meaning, and sound ethical practice.

Word Count: 68,073.

Little Gidding.

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know that place for the first time

~ T S Eliot (1942)

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Literature Review Search Strategy

3350 initial papers identified through:
AMED; CINAHL; Medline; PsycARTICLES; PsychINFO; E-journals; E-book collection; Humanities International Complete; Google; Google Scholar.

2800 papers rejected

550 Abstracts identified and sorted.

368 papers: LGBT* and Religion and Psychotherapy/Counselling
31 papers: Queer Theoretical articles
124 papers: Gay Affirmative Therapy articles
27 papers: Queer Research Papers

375 papers rejected against inclusion criteria
30 duplicate papers rejected

145 abstracts screened against inclusion criteria

52 rejected

93 full text copies of articles obtained, and read. These were further screened against inclusion criteria and sorted by hierarchy into **56** papers for analysis:
Qualitative Research 13
Quantitative Research 14
Mixed Methods Research 3
Systematic Reviews 2
Theoretical Literature 12
Practice Literature 10
Policy Literature 2

Theoretical Literature for enhancing discussion **23**

14 rejected

79 full text papers included in final literature review

Appendix 2: Example of a completed online survey

#217

PAGE 2: Some demographic information about you, the participant.

Q1: Which category below includes your age?	50-59
Q2: Which of the following best describes your gender?	Female
Q3: Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?	Lesbian
Q4: Which of the following best describes your ethnic group?	Other (please specify) White Jewish
Q5: In what Country do you currently reside? (UK options also appear first)	UK: England
Q6: Do you speak English fluently (ie. enough to participate in an interview about your experiences)?	Yes
Q7: Do you have any long-standing physical or mental health condition, impairment or disability that has lasted or is expected to last 12 months or more?	Yes

PAGE 3: Faith, Religion and Spirituality

Q8: Which statement comes closest to expressing what you currently believe about God or a Higher Power:	I have some doubts, but would say I believe in God
Q9: In your opinion, is there a difference between 'Religion', 'Faith' and 'Spirituality'?	Yes
Q10: Please select the statement that best describes your current position regarding religion, faith and spirituality:	I identify with a religion and I have a faith and spirituality

Q11: Have you ever belonged to, or identified with, an organised religion or denomination?	Yes
Q12: In the past, which of the following religion(s) have you identified with?	Christianity - Protestant
Q13: Currently, which of the following religion(s) do you identify with?	Judaism

Q14: Have you ever belonged to a religion that affirmed, or was positive about, your sexual-orientation?	Yes
Q15: Have you ever belonged to a religion that condemned your sexual-orientation?	Yes
Q16: Have you ever experienced prejudice in a religion on the basis of your sexual-orientation?	Yes
Q17: Have you ever experienced discrimination in a religion on the basis of your sexual-orientation?	Yes
Q18: Have you ever experienced 'religious abuse' in a religion on the basis of your sexual-orientation?	Yes

Q19: Have you ever felt rejected by a religion/religious group because of your sexual-orientation?	Yes
Q20: Have you ever been asked to leave a religious group because of your sexual-orientation?	No, because I left myself
Q21: Have you ever chosen to leave a religious group because of prejudice, discrimination or abuse relating to your sexual-orientation?	Yes

Q22: If you have ever left a religious group because of your sexual-orientation (either being asked to leave or leaving yourself), did you have any support from anyone within the religious group?

No

Q23: Have your beliefs, faith and/or spirituality ever been damaged because of experiences you've had in relation to your sexual-orientation within organised religion?

Yes

Q24: Have your beliefs, faith and/or spirituality ever been strengthened because of experiences you've had in relation to your sexual-orientation within organised religion?

Other (please specify) Yes, I'm beging to feel that

PAGE 7: Counselling and Psychotherapy

Q25: Have you ever sought the help of a counsellor or psychotherapist directly relating to your experiences of organised religion and sexual-orientation, and the effects of this on you?

Yes

Q26: Have you ever sought the help of a Counsellor or Psychotherapist, for any other reason, unrelated to your experiences of organised religion and sexual orientation?

No

Q27: Overall, are you satisfied with your experience using Counselling and Psychotherapy, dissatisfied with it, or neither satisfied or dissatisfied with it?

Extremely satisfied

Q28: Overall, do you feel positively, negatively, or neither positively nor negatively about Counselling and Psychotherapy?

Positively

Q29: How likely are you to recommend Counselling and Psychotherapy to someone who has faced difficult and/or challenging experiences of religion because of their sexual-orientation?

Probably yes,

Other (please specify)
It would depend on knowing a suitable therapist

PAGE 8: Next research phase: Interviews

3 / 4

Appendix 3: Combined Survey Result

LGBTQQIA People's Experiences of Organised Religion

Q1 Which category below includes your age?

Answered: 345   Skipped: 0
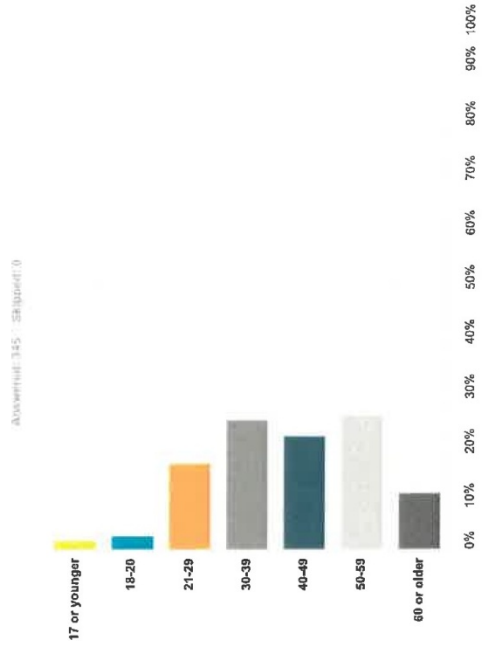
Answer Choices	Responses	
17 or younger	1.74%	6
18-20	2.61%	9
21-29	15.94%	55
30-39	23.77%	82
40-49	20.87%	72
50-59	24.64%	85
60 or older	10.43%	36
Total		**345**

LGBTQQIA People's Experiences of Organised Religion

Q2 Which of the following best describes your gender?

Answered: 345   Skipped: 0

Answer Choices	Responses	
Androgynous/Third Sex	0.58%	2
Cis Female	8.41%	29
Cis Male	8.12%	28
Crossdresser	0.00%	0
Female	25.80%	89

Gender Non-conforming	1.74%	6
Gender Queer	5.22%	18
Intersex	0.00%	0
Male	44.93%	155
Trans (F2M)	1.16%	4
Trans (M2F)	0.29%	1
Transgender	0.29%	
Rather not say	0.87%	3
Other (please specify)	2.61%	9
Total		**345**

Q3 Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?

Answered: 345   Skipped: 0
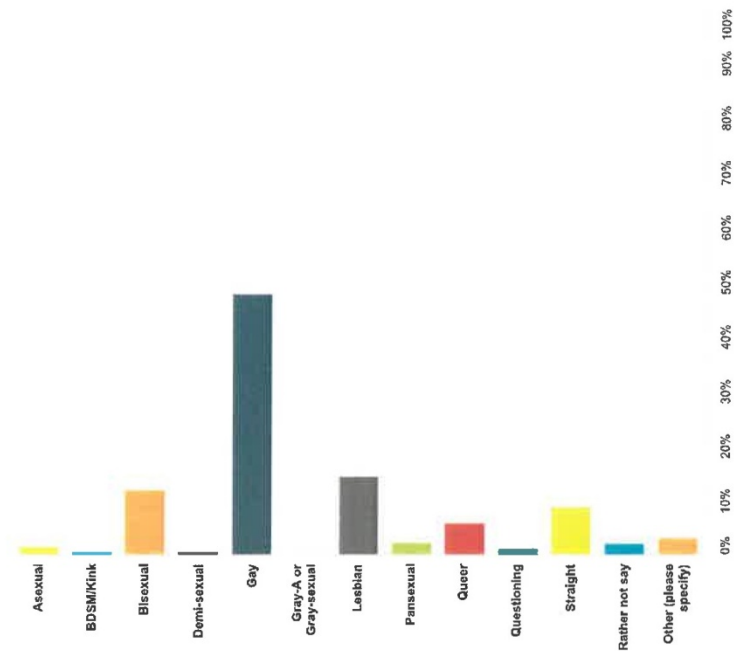
Answer Choices	Responses	
Asexual	1.45%	5
BDSM/Kink	0.58%	2
Bisexual	11.88%	41
Demi-sexual	0.58%	2
Gay	47.83%	165
Gray-A or Gray-sexual	0.00%	0

LGBTQQIA People's Experiences of Organised Religion

Lesbian	14.49%	50
Pansexual	2.32%	8
Queer	5.80%	20
Questioning	1.16%	4
Straight	8.70%	30
Rather not say	2.03%	7
Other (please specify)	3.19%	11
Total		**345**

LGBTQQIA People's Experiences of Organised Religion

Q4 Which of the following best describes your ethnic group?

Answered: 345   Skipped: 0

Answer Choices

Responses

	%	Count
Arab	0.58%	2
Asian or Asian British – Indian	1.16%	4
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	0.58%	2
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	0.00%	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	0.58%	2
Black or Black British – Caribbean	0.29%	1
Black or Black British – African	0.29%	1
Black or Black British – any other Black background	0.58%	2
Chinese	0.58%	2
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	1.16%	4
Mixed – White and Black African	0.00%	0
Mixed – White and Asian	0.29%	1
Mixed – Any other Mixed background	0.58%	2
White – British	52.75%	182
White – Irish	3.48%	12
White – any other White background	35.94%	124
Other (please specify)	5.22%	18

Total Respondents: 345

Q5 In what Country do you currently reside? (UK options also appear first)

Answered: 345   Skipped: 0

UK: Scotland
UK: England
UK: Wales
UK: Northern Ireland
Afghanistan
Albania
Algeria
Andorra
Angola
Antigua & Barbuda
Argentina
Armenia
Australia
Austria
Azerbaijan
Bahamas
Bahrain
Bangladesh
Barbados

Belarus

Belgium

Belize

Benin

Bhutan

Bolivia

Bosnia & Herzegovina

Botswana

Brazil

Brunei

Bulgaria

Burkina Faso

Burundi

Cambodia

Cameroon

Canada

Cape Verde

Central African...

Chad

Chile

China

Colombia

Comoros

Congo

Congo Democratic...

Costa Rica

Cote d'Ivoire

Croatia

Cuba

Cyprus

Czech Republic

Denmark

Djibouti

Dominica

Dominican Republic

Ecuador

East Timor

Egypt

El Salvador

England

Equatorial Guinea

LGBTQQIA People's Experiences of Organised Religion

Eritrea

Estonia

Ethiopia

Fiji

Finland

France

Gabon

Gambia

Georgia

Germany

Ghana

Greece

Grenada

Guatemala

Guinea

Guinea-Bissau

Guyana

Haiti

Honduras

Hungary

Iceland

LGBTQQIA People's Experiences of Organised Religion

India

Indonesia

Iran

Iraq

Ireland

Israel

Italy

Jamaica

Japan

Jordan

Kazakhstan

Kenya

Kiribati

Korea North

Korea South

Kosovo

Kuwait

Kyrgyzstan

Laos

Latvia

Lebanon

LGBTQQIA People's Experiences of Organised Religion

Lesotho

Liberia

Libya

Liechtenstein

Lithuania

Luxembourg

Macedonia

Madagascar

Malawi

Malaysia

Maldives

Mali

Malta

Marshall Islands

Mauritania

Mauritius

Mexico

Micronesia

Moldova

Monaco

LGBTQQIA People's Experiences of Organised Religion

Mongolia

Montenegro

Morocco

Mozambique

Myanmar (Burma)

Namibia

Nauru

Nepal

The Netherlands

New Zealand

Nicaragua

Niger

Nigeria

Northern Ireland

Norway

Oman

Pakistan

Palau

Palestinian State*

Panama

Papua New Guinea

LGBTQQIA People's Experiences of Organised Religion

Paraguay

Peru

The Philippines

Poland

Portugal

Qatar

Romania

Russia

Rwanda

St. Kitts & Nevis

St. Lucia

St. Vincent & The Grenadines

Samoa

San Marino

Sao Tome & Principe

Saudi Arabia

Scotland

Senegal

Serbia

Seychelles

Sierra Leone

LGBTQQIA People's Experiences of Organised Religion

Singapore

Slovakia

Slovenia

Solomon Islands

Somalia

South Africa

South Sudan

Spain

Sri Lanka

Sudan

Suriname

Swaziland

Sweden

Switzerland

Syria

Taiwan

Tajikistan

Tanzania

Thailand

Togo

Tonga

Answer Choices	Responses	
UK: Scotland	2.90%	10
UK: England	54.78%	189
UK: Wales	8.41%	29
UK: Northern Ireland	0.29%	1
Afghanistan	0.00%	0
Albania	0.00%	0
Algeria	0.00%	0
Andorra	0.00%	0
Angola	0.00%	0
Antigua & Barbuda	0.00%	0
Argentina	0.29%	1
Armenia	0.00%	0
Australia	1.74%	6
Austria	0.00%	0
Azerbaijan	0.00%	0
Bahamas	0.00%	0
Bahrain	0.00%	0
Bangladesh	0.00%	0
Barbados	0.00%	0
Belarus	0.00%	0
Belgium	0.00%	0
Belize	0.00%	0
Benin	0.00%	0
Bhutan	0.00%	0
Bolivia	0.00%	0
Bosnia & Herzegovina	0.00%	0
Botswana	0.00%	0
Brazil	0.00%	0
Brunei	0.00%	0
Bulgaria	0.00%	0

LGBTQQIA People's Experiences of Organised Religion

Country	%	
Burkina Faso	0.00%	0
Burundi	0.00%	0
Cambodia	0.00%	0
Cameroon	0.00%	0
Canada	1.45%	0
Cape Verde	0.00%	0
Central African Republic	0.00%	0
Chad	0.00%	0
Chile	0.00%	0
China	0.00%	0
Colombia	0.00%	0
Comoros	0.00%	0
Congo	0.00%	0
Congo Democratic Republic	0.00%	0
Costa Rica	0.00%	0
Cote d'Ivoire	0.00%	0
Croatia	0.00%	0
Cuba	0.00%	0
Cyprus	0.00%	0
Czech Republic	0.00%	0
Denmark	0.00%	0
Djibouti	0.00%	0
Dominica	0.00%	0
Dominican Republic	0.00%	0
Ecuador	0.00%	0
East Timor	0.00%	0
Egypt	0.00%	0
El Salvador	0.00%	0
England	0.00%	0
Equatorial Guinea	0.00%	0
Eritrea	0.00%	0
Estonia	0.29%	1

LGBTQQIA People's Experiences of Organised Religion

Country	%	
Ethiopia	0.00%	0
Fiji	0.00%	0
Finland	0.00%	0
France	0.00%	0
Gabon	0.00%	0
Gambia	0.00%	0
Georgia	0.00%	0
Germany	1.16%	4
Ghana	0.00%	0
Greece	0.00%	0
Grenada	0.00%	0
Guatemala	0.00%	0
Guinea	0.00%	0
Guinea-Bissau	0.00%	0
Guyana	0.00%	0
Haiti	0.00%	0
Honduras	0.00%	0
Hungary	0.29%	1
Iceland	0.00%	0
India	0.00%	0
Indonesia	0.00%	0
Iran	0.00%	0
Iraq	0.00%	0
Ireland	0.00%	0
Israel	0.00%	0
Italy	0.58%	2
Jamaica	0.00%	0
Japan	0.00%	0
Jordan	0.00%	0
Kazakhstan	0.00%	0
Kenya	0.00%	0

Country	%
Kiribati	0.00%
Korea North	0.00%
Korea South	0.00%
Kosovo	0.00%
Kuwait	0.00%
Kyrgyzstan	0.00%
Laos	0.00%
Latvia	0.00%
Lebanon	0.00%
Lesotho	0.00%
Liberia	0.00%
Libya	0.00%
Liechtenstein	0.00%
Lithuania	0.00%
Luxembourg	0.00%
Macedonia	0.00%
Madagascar	0.00%
Malawi	0.00%
Malaysia	0.00%
Maldives	0.00%
Mali	0.00%
Malta	0.00%
Marshall Islands	0.00%
Mauritania	0.00%
Mauritius	0.00%
Mexico	0.29%
Micronesia	0.00%
Moldova	0.00%
Monaco	0.00%
Mongolia	0.00%
Montenegro	0.00%
Morocco	0.00%

Country	%
Mozambique	0.00%
Myanmar (Burma)	0.00%
Namibia	0.00%
Nauru	0.00%
Nepal	0.00%
The Netherlands	0.29%
New Zealand	0.00%
Nicaragua	0.00%
Niger	0.00%
Nigeria	0.00%
Northern Ireland	0.00%
Norway	0.58%
Oman	0.00%
Pakistan	0.00%
Palau	0.00%
Palestinian State*	0.00%
Panama	0.00%
Papua New Guinea	0.00%
Paraguay	0.00%
Peru	0.00%
The Philippines	0.00%
Poland	0.00%
Portugal	0.00%
Qatar	0.00%
Romania	0.00%
Russia	0.00%
Rwanda	0.00%
St. Kitts & Nevis	0.00%
St. Lucia	0.00%
St. Vincent & The Grenadines	0.00%
Samoa	0.00%
San Marino	0.00%

LGBTQQIA People's Experiences of Organised Religion

Country	%	Count
Sao Tome & Principe	0.00%	0
Saudi Arabia	0.00%	0
Scotland	0.00%	0
Senegal	0.00%	0
Serbia	0.29%	1
Seychelles	0.00%	0
Sierra Leone	0.00%	0
Singapore	0.29%	1
Slovakia	0.00%	0
Slovenia	0.00%	0
Solomon Islands	0.00%	0
Somalia	0.00%	0
South Africa	0.87%	3
South Sudan	0.00%	0
Spain	0.58%	2
Sri Lanka	0.00%	0
Sudan	0.00%	0
Suriname	0.00%	0
Swaziland	0.00%	0
Sweden	0.29%	1
Switzerland	1.16%	4
Syria	0.00%	0
Taiwan	0.00%	0
Tajikistan	0.00%	0
Tanzania	0.00%	0
Thailand	0.00%	0
Togo	0.00%	0
Tonga	0.00%	0
Trinidad & Tobago	0.00%	0
Tunisia	0.00%	0
Turkey	0.00%	0
Turkmenistan	0.00%	0

LGBTQQIA People's Experiences of Organised Religion

Country	%	Count
Tuvalu	0.00%	0
Uganda	0.00%	0
Ukraine	0.00%	0
United Arab Emirates	0.00%	0
United Kingdom	0.00%	0
United States of America	22.90%	79
Uruguay	0.00%	0
Uzbekistan	0.00%	0
Vanuatu	0.00%	0
Vatican City (Holy See)	0.00%	0
Venezuela	0.00%	0
Vietnam	0.00%	0
Wales	0.29%	1
Yemen	0.00%	0
Zambia	0.00%	0
Zimbabwe	0.00%	0
Total		**345**

LGBTQQIA People's Experiences of Organised Religion

Q6 Do you speak English fluently (ie. enough to participate in an interview about your experiences)?

Answered: 345   Skipped: 0

| | 0% | 10% | 20% | 30% | 40% | 50% | 60% | 70% | 80% | 90% | 100% |

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	98.84%	341
No	0.58%	2
Other (please specify)	0.58%	2
Total		345

LGBTQQIA People's Experiences of Organised Religion

Q7 Do you have any long-standing physical or mental health condition, impairment or disability that has lasted or is expected to last 12 months or more?

Answered: 345   Skipped: 0

| | 0% | 10% | 20% | 30% | 40% | 50% | 60% | 70% | 80% | 90% | 100% |
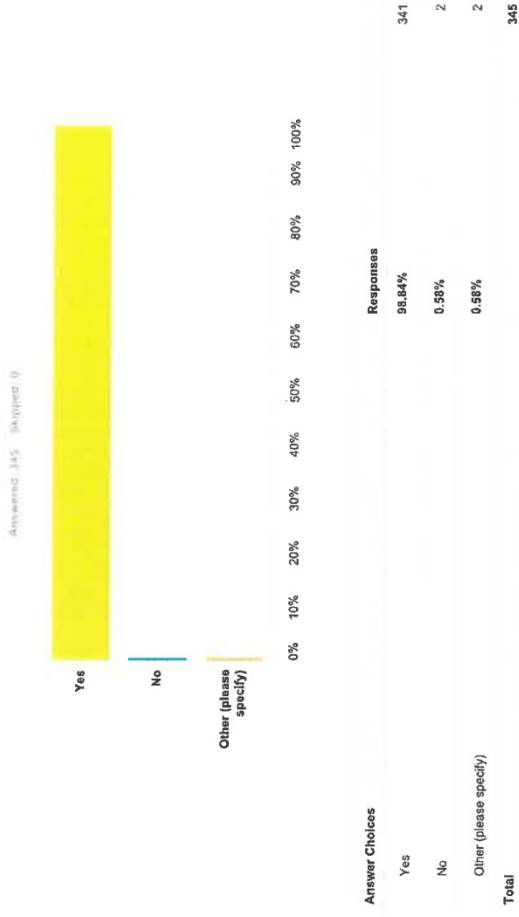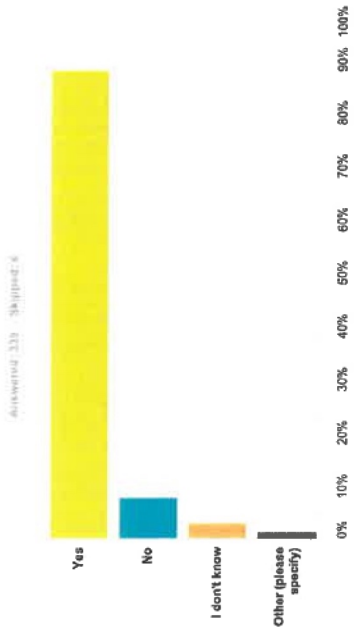
Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	25.51%	88
No	67.54%	233
Rather not say	2.90%	10
Other (please specify)	4.06%	14
Total		345

Q8 Which statement comes closest to expressing what you currently believe about God or a Higher Power:

Answered: 339   Skipped: 6

Answer Choices	Responses	
I do not believe in God or a Higher Power	22.71%	77
I believe in God	33.04%	112
I believe in a Higher Power	6.49%	22
I don't know if there's a God or Higher Power, and there's no way to find out	12.98%	44
I have some doubts, but would say I believe in God	9.44%	32
I have some doubts, but believe there is a Higher Power	10.32%	35
Other (please specify)	5.01%	17
Total		**339**

Q9 In your opinion, is there a difference between 'Religion', 'Faith' and 'Spirituality'?

Answered: 339   Skipped: 6

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	88.20%	299
No	7.67%	26
I don't know	2.95%	10
Other (please specify)	1.18%	4
Total		**339**

Q10 Please select the statement that best describes your current position regarding religion, faith and spirituality:

Answered: 339   Skipped: 6

Answer Choices	Responses	
I identify with a religion and I have a faith and spirituality	40.41%	137
I do not identify with a religion, and I do not have a faith, and no spirituality	14.75%	50
I identify with a religion but I do not have a faith and have no spirituality	1.47%	5
I indentify with a religion and I have a faith, but I do not have spirituality	2.06%	7
I identify with a religion and I have spirituality, but I do not a faith	6.19%	21
I have a faith, but I do not identify with a religion and I have no spirituality	1.77%	6
I have a faith and spirituality, but I do not identify with a religion	14.75%	50
I have spirituality, but I do not identify with a religion and I do not have a faith	16.81%	57
Other (please specify)	1.77%	6
Total		339
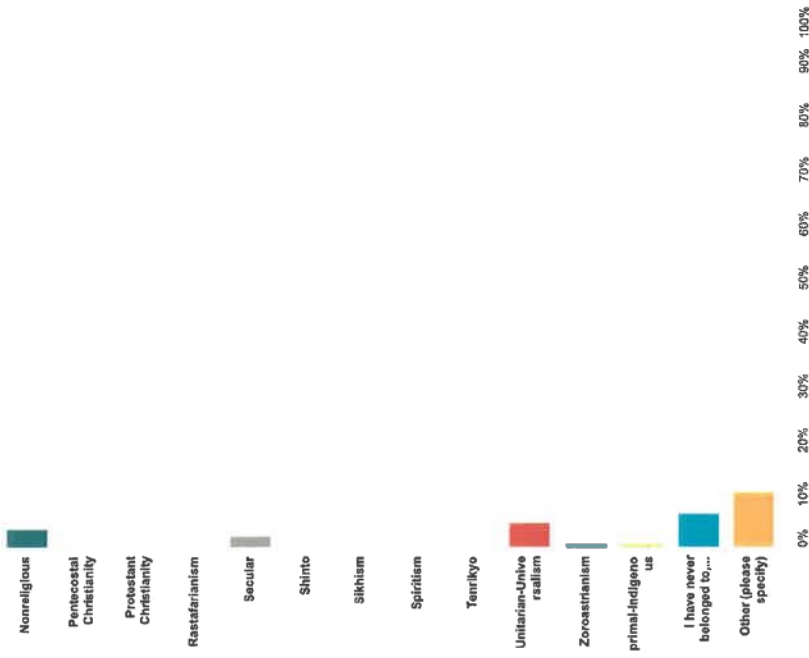
Q11 Have you ever belonged to, or identified with, an organised religion or denomination?

Answered: 334   Skipped: 11

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	88.32%	295
No	11.68%	39
Total		334

Q12 In the past, which of the following religion(s) have you identified with?

Answered: 334   Skipped: 11

31 / 55

Answer Choices	Responses	
African Traditional & Diasporic	0.00%	0
Agnostic	6.59%	22
Atheist	6.89%	23
Baha'i	0.30%	1
Buddhism	4.79%	16
Cao Dai	0.00%	0
Catholicism	0.00%	0
Chinese traditional religion	0.30%	1

32 / 55

LGBTQQIA People's Experiences of Organised Religion

Christianity - Catholic	23.95%	80
Christianity - Protestant	53.59%	179
Church of England	0.00%	0
Church of Scotland	0.00%	0
Church of Wales	0.00%	0
Hinduism	1.20%	4
Islam	0.60%	2
Jainism	0.90%	3
Juche	0.00%	0
Judaism	12.57%	42
Neo-Paganism	6.59%	22
Nonreligious	3.29%	11
Pentecostal Christianity	0.00%	0
Protestant Christianity	0.00%	0
Rastafarianism	0.30%	1
Secular	2.10%	7
Shinto	0.00%	0
Sikhism	0.30%	1
Spiritism	0.30%	1
Tenrikyo	0.00%	0
Unitarian-Universalism	4.49%	15
Zoroastrianism	0.60%	2
primal-indigenous	0.60%	2
I have never belonged to, or identified with, a religion	6.29%	21
Other (please specify)	10.18%	34
Total Respondents: 334		

33 / 55

Q13 Currently, which of the following religion(s) do you identify with?

Answered: 334   Skipped: 11

34 / 55

LGBTQQIA People's Experiences of Organised Religion

Answer Choices	Responses	
African Traditional & Diasporic	0.00%	0
Agnostic	5.09%	17
Atheist	10.48%	35
Baha'i	0.00%	0
Buddhism	3.89%	13
Cao Dai	0.00%	0
Chinese traditional religion	0.30%	1
Christianity - Catholic	9.28%	31
Christianity - Protestant	28.14%	94
Hinduism	0.90%	3
Islam	0.30%	1
Jainism	0.90%	3
Juche	0.30%	1
Judaism	9.88%	33
Neo-Paganism	3.29%	11

LGBTQQIA People's Experiences of Organised Religion

Nonreligious	3.89%	13
Rastafarianism	0.00%	0
Secular	1.20%	4
Shinto	0.30%	1
Sikhism	0.30%	1
Spiritism	0.90%	3
Tenrikyo	0.00%	0
Unitarian-Universalism	2.99%	10
Zoroastrianism	0.00%	0
primal-indigenous	0.30%	1
I'm not sure	3.29%	11
I do not currently belong to, or identify with, a religion	28.74%	96
Other (please specify)	9.88%	33

Total Respondents: 334

LGBTQQIA People's Experiences of Organised Religion

Q14 Have you ever belonged to a religion that affirmed, or was positive about, your sexual-orientation?

Answered: 287   Skipped: 56

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	46.69%	134
No	47.39%	136
Don't know	5.92%	17
Rather not say	0.00%	0
Total		**287**

LGBTQQIA People's Experiences of Organised Religion

Q15 Have you ever belonged to a religion that condemned your sexual-orientation?

Answered: 287   Skipped: 56

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	75.26%	216
No	21.25%	61
Don't know	3.48%	10
Rather not say	0.00%	0
Total		**287**

LGBTQQIA People's Experiences of Organised Religion

Q16 Have you ever experienced prejudice in a religion on the basis of your sexual-orientation?

Answered: 287   Skipped: 58
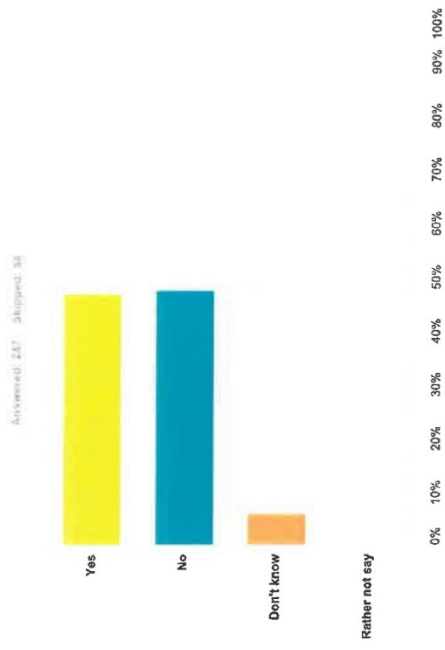
Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	68.99%	198
No	25.44%	73
Don't know	3.83%	11
Rather not say	1.74%	5
Total		287

LGBTQQIA People's Experiences of Organised Religion

Q17 Have you ever experienced discrimination in a religion on the basis of your sexual-orientation?

Answered: 287   Skipped: 58

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	54.01%	155
No	36.93%	106
Don't know	8.01%	23
Rather not say	1.05%	3
Total		287

Q18 Have you ever experienced 'religious abuse' in a religion on the basis of your sexual-orientation?

Answered: 287   Skipped: 52

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	32.75%	94
No	54.36%	156
Don't know	11.15%	32
Rather not say	1.74%	5
Total		287

41 / 55

Q19 Have you ever felt rejected by a religion/religious group because of your sexual-orientation?

Answered: 274   Skipped: 71

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	71.17%	195
No	24.09%	66
Don't know	3.65%	10
Rather not say	1.09%	3
Total		274

42 / 55

LGBTQQIA People's Experiences of Organised Religion

Q20 Have you ever been asked to leave a religious group because of your sexual-orientation?

Answered: 274   Skipped: 71
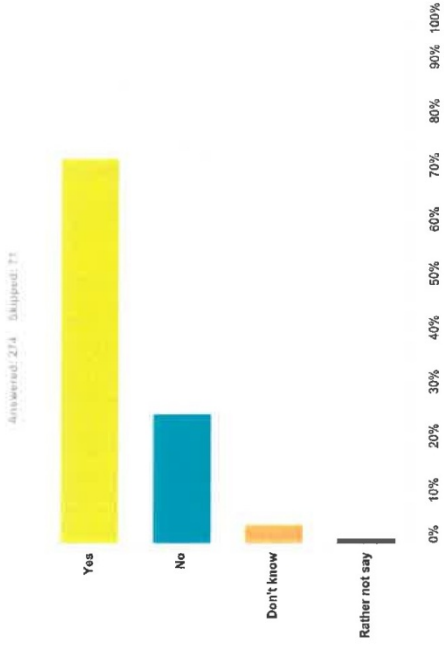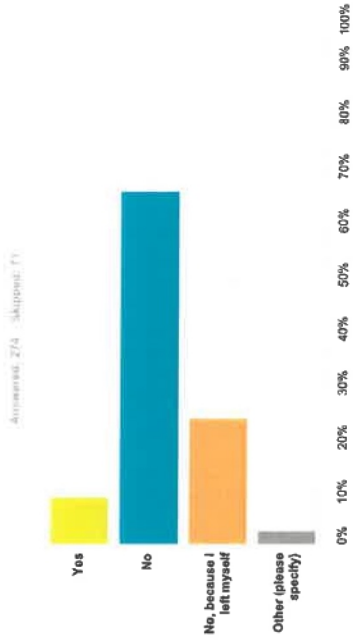
Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	8.76%	24
No	65.33%	179
No, because I left myself	23.36%	64
Other (please specify)	2.55%	7
Total		274

LGBTQQIA People's Experiences of Organised Religion

Q21 Have you ever chosen to leave a religious group because of prejudice, discrimination or abuse relating to your sexual-orientation?

Answered: 274   Skipped: 71

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	47.81%	131
No	46.35%	127
No, because I was asked to leave	2.19%	6
Other (please specify)	3.65%	10
Total		274

LGBTQQIA People's Experiences of Organised Religion

Q22 If you have ever left a religious group because of your sexual-orientation (either being asked to leave or leaving yourself), did you have any support from anyone within the religious group?

Answered: 274   Skipped: 71
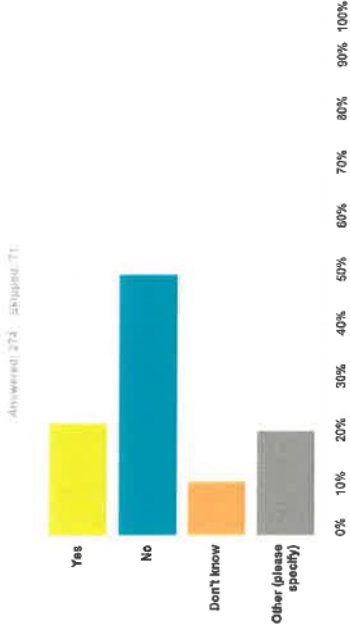
Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	21.17%	58
No	48.91%	134
Don't know	10.22%	28
Other (please specify)	19.71%	54
Total		274

45 / 55

LGBTQQIA People's Experiences of Organised Religion

Q23 Have your beliefs, faith and/or spirituality ever been damaged because of experiences you've had in relation to your sexual-orientation within organised religion?

Answered: 274   Skipped: 71

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	48.91%	134
No	43.80%	120
Don't know	2.92%	8
Other (please specify)	4.38%	12
Total		274

46 / 55

Q24 Have your beliefs, faith and/or spirituality ever been strengthened because of experiences you've had in relation to your sexual-orientation within organised religion?

Answered: 274 Skipped: 71

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	44.89%	123
No	46.35%	127
Don't know	6.57%	18
Other (please specify)	2.19%	6
Total		274

47 / 55

Q25 Have you ever sought the help of a counsellor or psychotherapist directly relating to your experiences of organised religion and sexual-orientation, and the effects of this on you?

Answered: 267 Skipped: 78

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	29.96%	80
No	68.91%	184
Rather not say	1.12%	3
Total		267

48 / 55

LGBTQQIA People's Experiences of Organised Religion

Q26 Have you ever sought the help of a Counsellor or Psychotherapist, for any other reason, unrelated to your experiences of organised religion and sexual orientation?

Answered: 267   Skipped: 78
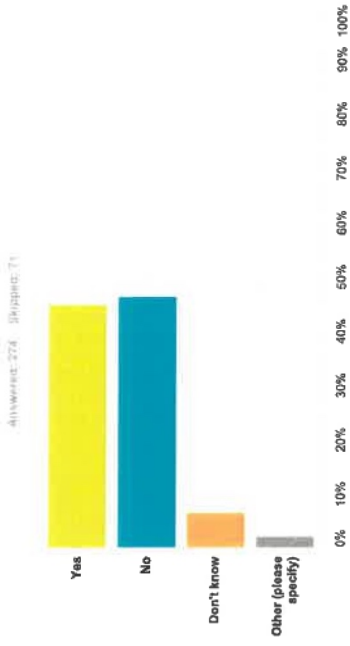
Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	70.79%	189
No	28.46%	76
Rather not say	0.75%	2
Total		**267**

LGBTQQIA People's Experiences of Organised Religion

Q27 Overall, are you satisfied with your experience using Counselling and Psychotherapy, dissatisfied with it, or neither satisfied or dissatisfied with it?

Answered: 267   Skipped: 78
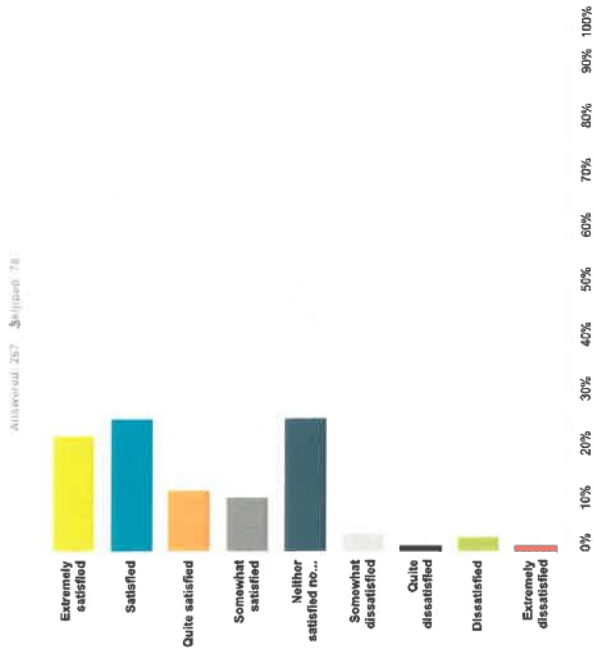
Answer Choices	Responses	
Extremely satisfied	21.35%	57
Satisfied	24.34%	65
Quite satisfied	11.24%	30
Somewhat satisfied	10.11%	27
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	24.72%	66
Somewhat dissatisfied	3.37%	9
Quite dissatisfied	1.12%	3
Dissatisfied	2.62%	7
Extremely dissatisfied	1.12%	3
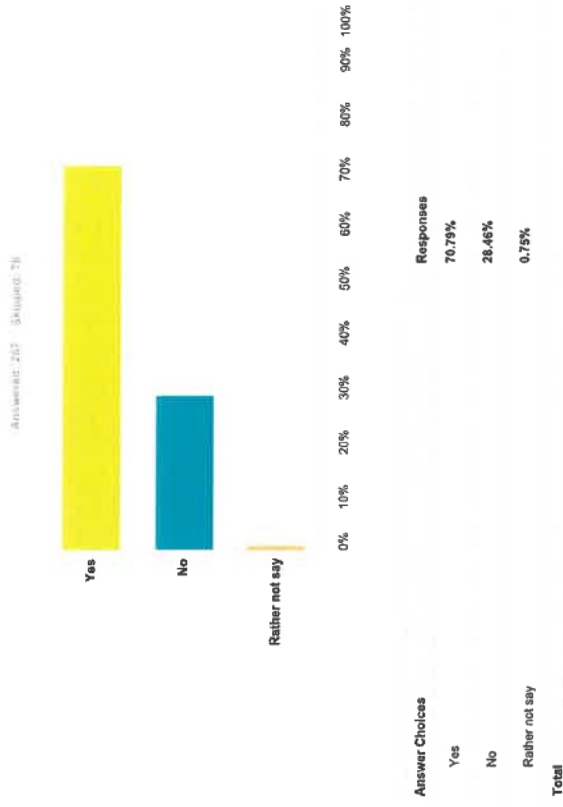
Total

267

Q28 Overall, do you feel positively, negatively, or neither positively nor negatively about Counselling and Psychotherapy?

Answered: 267   Skipped: 74
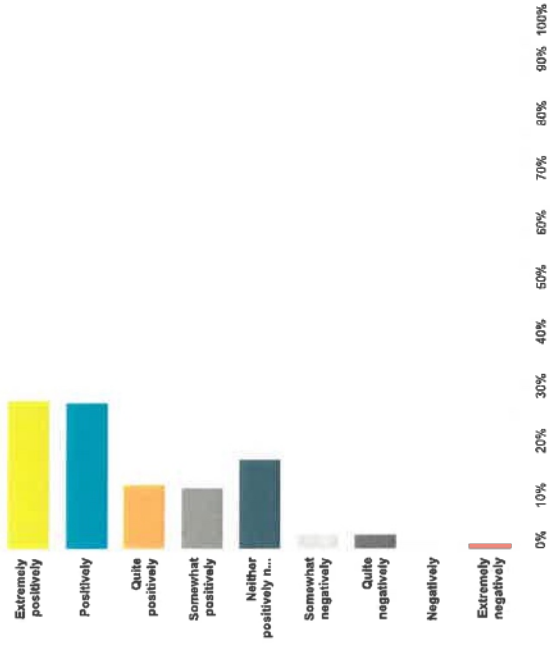
Answer Choices	Responses	
Extremely positively	27.34%	73
Positively	26.97%	72
Quite positively	11.99%	32
Somewhat positively	11.24%	30
Neither positively nor negatively	16.48%	44
Somewhat negatively	2.62%	7
Quite negatively	2.62%	7
Negatively	0.00%	0
Extremely negatively	0.75%	2

Total

267

Q29 How likely are you to recommend Counselling and Psychotherapy to someone who has faced difficult and/or challenging experiences of religion because of their sexual-orientation?

Answered: 267   Skipped: 78
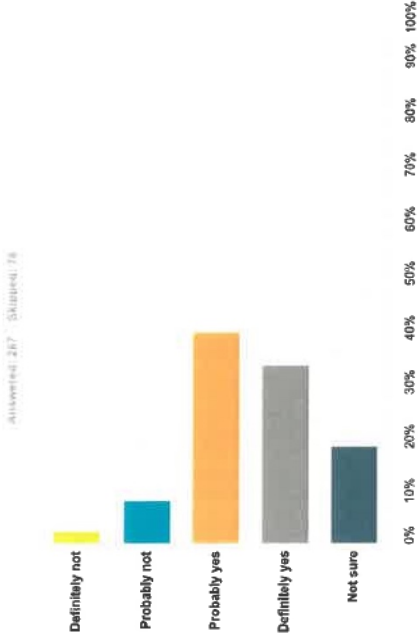
Answer Choices	Responses	
Definitely not	2.25%	6
Probably not	7.87%	21
Probably yes	38.95%	104
Definitely yes	32.96%	88
Not sure	17.98%	48
Total		**267**

LGBTQQIA People's Experiences of Organised Religion

Q30 If you would like more information about participating in an interview about your experiences of organised religion, please provide some details and I will make contact with you after the online survey has closed.

Answered: 123   Skipped: 222

Answer Choices	Responses	
Name	100.00%	123
Company	0.00%	0
Address	0.00%	0
Address 2	0.00%	0
Town	0.00%	0
County	0.00%	0
Post Code	0.00%	0
Country	0.00%	0
Email Address	100.00%	123
Phone Number	71.54%	88

55 / 55

311

Appendix 4: Information Sheet and Consent Form

INFORMATION SHEET

LGB people's experiences of organised religion, and implications for Psychotherapy: A relational-reflexive IPA.

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information and take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

1. What is the purpose of the study?

I am carrying out this research as part of a Doctorate in Psychotherapy that I am undertaking at The Metanoia Institute, London.

The aim of this qualitative research is to develop a comprehensive understanding of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) people's experiences of organised religion, and to consider the implications of these experiences for the field of Psychotherapy.

2. Why am I being invited to participate?

I hope to interview a total of ten Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) people who have had experiences of religion. Following the online survey, I have selected participants for interview on the basis of people able to provide a perspective on the phenomena under study.

I am not including people who identify as heterosexual, transgender, questioning, intersex, or asexual because inclusion of these identities risks making the project too broad. Participants will not be excluded on the grounds of social class, disability, or ethnicity but due to this type of research relying heavily on language it is necessary for participants to be English-speaking since nuance and meaning could be lost if interviews involve an interpreter.

3. Do I have to take part?

It is entirely up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and will be asked to sign a consent form when we meet. Even if you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not go against you in any way.

4. What will happen?

I would like to record an unstructured conversation/interview with you lasting approximately an hour about your experiences of religion. By doing this, I hope to answer my research question:

Research Question: **What are LGB people's experiences of organised religion, and what are the implications for Psychotherapy?**

5. What do I have to do?

Through your participation, I hope to gain an in-depth understanding of all aspects of LGB experiences of organised religion. I will invite you to talk with me about your experiences. If you wish, you may also wish to share some of the ways in which you have recorded your experience – letters, writing, poems, or artwork.

We will need to arrange a mutually convenient time and place to meet together, where we will not be disturbed for an hour, and I would like to digitally record an unstructured interview so that I can transcribe it later in full detail.

As part of the research I will analyse the interview for themes and meanings, and I would be happy to send you a copy of the transcribed interview for you to keep, if you request this.

6. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

If you find that you are affected by the issues you talk about during the interview, or become distressed, the following organisations may be helpful:

Pink Therapy: www.pinktherapy.com

United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy: www.ukcp.org.uk

British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy: www.bacp.co.uk

Samaritans: 08457 90 9090 or www.samaritans.org

London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard: 0300 330 0630 (Daily 10am – 11pm) www.llgs.org.uk

7. What are the possible benefits of taking part?

I hope that you find participating in this project helps you in some way. However, this cannot be guaranteed. The information and learning from doing this research may help psychotherapists in their work with LGB people who have had similar experiences.

8. Will my taking part in this research be kept confidential?

All information that is collected about you during the course of this research will be kept strictly confidential. Any information about you that is used will have identifying information removed so that you cannot be recognised from it. All data will be stored, analysed and reported in compliance with UK Data Protection legislation. Data will not be stored longer than 12 months after the end of the research.

9. What will happen to the findings of the research?

The research will be published as part of a Doctoral dissertation at The Metanoia Institute, London, expected approx. 2017. A copy of the published findings will be available for you on request. You will not be identified in any report or publication that may be generated as a result of the research and codes will be used in place of people's names and organisations.

10. Who has reviewed the study?

The Metanoia Institute/Middlesex University Research Ethics Committee has reviewed this research in advance, and has been approved by the Programme Approval Panel (PAP).

11. Contact for further information:

Information removed

Information removed

If you decide to participate, you will be given a copy of this information sheet and a signed consent form to keep.

1st June, 2015

Thank you very much for your interest in this project

CONSENT FORM

Participant Identification Number:

Title: LGB people's experiences of organised religion, and implications for psychotherapy: A relational-reflexive IPA.

Name of Researcher: Peter Meades MA, MSc, Clin Dip, BSc (Hons), RGN

*Please **initial** box*

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 1st June 2015 for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason. If I choose to withdraw, I can decide what happens to any data I have provided.

3. I understand that my interview will be taped and subsequently transcribed

4. I agree to take part in the above study

5. I agree that this form that bears my name and signature may be seen by a designated audtior

....
Name of Participant   Date   Signature

....
Name of person taking consent   Date   Signature

....
Researcher   Date   Signature

Appendix 5: Interview Prompt Sheet

PROMPT SHEET

- ➢ **How do you describe your sexual orientation?**

- ➢ **How did you come to be involved with an organised religion?**

- ➢ **What were your reasons for joining?**

- ➢ **What do you see as 'the good, the bad and the ugly' aspects of your experience?**

- ➢ **Have you experienced anti-gay prejudice in religion? Tell me more?**

- ➢ **Have you ever experienced religious manipulation and control?**

- ➢ **What have been the effects of these experiences for you?**

- ➢ **What do think about those experiences being described as 'Religious Abuse'? What would you call it?**

- ➢ **Are there any positive outcomes of having those experiences?**

- ➢ **What do you think would have helped you most at the challenging times?**

- ➢ **What *did* help you most?**

- ➢ **Have you ever seen a counsellor or therapist about your experiences of organised religion?**

- ➢ **How was therapy helpful and not helpful?**

- ➢ **Is Religion important to you now, and in what way?**

- ➢ **How do you think about faith, spirituality, and religion?**

- ➢ **Is there anything else you'd like to add?**

Appendix 6: Full Transcript of an Interview

R: Okay, so I'll just place that, place that there so we can pick up what you're saying…

P: Okay. Mhm

R: So, wherever feels an important place to start for you really; I'm interested in your experiences of, of religion.

P: …Of religion. Okay, well I guess it's uh, it's best to start sort of like 'way back when' then (Laughs).

R: Yeah, at the beginning.

P: Yeah. Um, I was taken to church, um, by my mother, when I was, well I think almost soon after I was born. Um, my uh, my, my paternal grand… my maternal grandparents were a church going family, um, my father, um, really only went to church on sort of special occasions, although they were both married in church and I was christened in church, um (Tut), and went to Sunday School, um, and remember Sunday School attendance was rewarded, um, by gifts, once a year, during which, on one of the occasions I had a book given to me for very good attendance called "Follow Me". This was a, this was a Congregational Church. …Um, so it was called "Follow Me" and it was the story of Jesus, and um, I thought, "Yeah, this is a, this is a good uh…" you know, I enjoyed the book and thought, "Yeah, okay this is a good thing to do". So, I would probably say that I've been a Christian since the age, probably of about seven or eight.

R: Right.

P: Then in my particular Church, um, which was the (removed) Church in (removed) um, if you wanted to become a member of the church, uh, you were invited to do classes, relevant classes, …then at the end of that if you decided that you wanted to be invited into the membership, you received 'the right hand of fellowship' from the minister, which happened then when I was about fifteen. Um, then when I finished my A' levels I went to college in (removed), um initially I did three years of teacher training with my main subject being Religious Studies, and then stayed on for a fourth year to do a B.Ed. degree in Theology and Education, and went to church, went to a church in Leeds during that time, um, (removed) (Coughs). Um, (Tut) when I left Leeds I came back to (removed) and got married - to the minister's son, would you believe? (Laughs) Um, and lived in, just outside um, P., um, until we went to (removed), during which time, um, (Tut) we were going to um a Church in (removed), which was a (removed) church. Um, they'd closed the local (removed) Church, so that had joined with the (removed) church and uh, they called ministers alternately, so one time it was a (removed) minister and the next time it was um, a (removed) minister. Um, during that time also I had three children, um (Tut) and because it was a, well before we went to that church, we had a short time going to our home church in (removed) where my older son was christened and then when it came

time for my daughter to be christened, um, we had a (removed) minister who only believe in adult baptism, they don't believe in infant christening…

R: Mhm.

P: So, she was just received into the Church but by the time it came for my uh…

R: I notice you're looking at something then (notices a religious image of Jesus and a Dove on the wall).

P: (Laughs loudly)

R: I wondered what you were noticing as you were talking.

P: By the time it came for my um, younger son to be christened or whatever, there was a (removed) church…

R: Right

P: It stayed a (removed), there was a (removed) minister there (coughs). So, he was um, he had infant christening.

R: Right

P: Um, but in the early seventies, the (removed) Church um in England, and Wales, joined together with the (removed) and the churches (removed) and they became the (removed).

R: Oh right. I see.

P: So now, that stayed the (removed), ever since.

R: Ah, right.

P: Um, in the… I mean, I've always been very active in church life, I've always been… I've done loads of voluntary work, and um, in that Church I was asked if I would be an elder of the Church which, um, churches tend to be… the way they're organised is you tend to have the minister, um, or the priest, you know, whatever, um and then the sort of, the next administrative roles and pastoral roles, if you like, are uh, elders in some churches, deacons in other churches. So, I was asked to be an elder, which I was…

R: And those positions were open to women at that time?

P: Yes. They weren't… yes. Yeah, in the um, in the (removed), which became the (removed) Church has always been open to um, yes, women in those roles, and, and women in the ministry. Um, so then after um, so I, completed the first few years of that, and then um, we had offered for the voluntary, not the volunteer, we'd offered for (removed), um, primarily it was motivated by me, because um, a) I wanted to um, I felt I wanted to give *back,* um in service, in my Christian Faith, and I also wanted to

serve people in the third world. (Tuts) So, through the Church, um, we applied to the (removed), which was, at that time was a body of twenty-eight-member churches around the world, which sent and received personnel according to the need. (Tut) So um, (Tut) we were accepted, for that, and we were asked if we would do a year's mission training in (removed). which at that time was *the* International hub of mission training. All of the major denominations had a college there um, (Tut) so we went to (removed) which was the (removed) College, and spent a year there in quite intense academic training. We had to achieve something called the certificate in mission, um (Tut) before we went out, and when we were accepted we were asked, we were originally going to go to one of the African countries, I think it was (removed) on my job as an R.E teacher um, but during the course of that training, we were told that the church in (removed) uh, wasn't pulling its weight as a member church, so would we be prepared to go to (removed) with Finance, which was my husband's job, my ex-husband's job, um (Tut) he uh, he had worked in the (Removed) (Tut), so that's what happened, we um, we were both awarded the certificate in mission um, and we went out to (removed) in the August of 1986. And we were on (Tut) (removed) in the middle of the (removed) was, at that time, was the Western part of (removed) called (removed). And then (removed) going into the (removed) as it were, so we were on an Island called (removed), and um, my husband, my ex-husband became the accountant for the (removed) in (removed). Um, (Tut) and the children and I were seen as the backup team, and despite the fact that we had had this intense year of academic um, education, when we actually got to this island um, nobody could have given two hoots about um, you know, how we'd been educated or what really.

R: Mm. Mm.

P: Um, and on (removed) um, were some of the major institutions of the (removed) church, so in other words there was um, (Tut) there was a ministers' training seminary, there was a communication centre, there was a teachers' training college, and (cough) and despite the fact that (cough) you know I had been told that, obviously the job was my ex-husband's, but the children and I were seen as the back-up team. I'd thought that I would be used, you know, I had gone to be active, um, and, it basically never happened. It was, so I was never actually given any sort of, for want of a better word, an official role, um, the only thing that I did do off my own back was I did some tutoring in the university of (removed) on religion, which was again based on, there was a section of it based on (removed). Um, (Pause) I did a lot, I did a lot of obviously voluntary work and I became the first, the first woman elder in that, in that church. Um, and I had talked to other mission personnel from my, our church here and said, you know, "where can I be useful?" um, you know "it will be discussed at the next National assembly", and as I said, nothing ever happened. So, I became very disillusioned really because what, I mean, in hindsight (Tut), I could have probably done a lot more but what I achieved was um, as I said I became very, very disillusioned, um, although I was doing a lot of voluntary work, and sort of, I mean I've always suffered with depression but I sort of like, I spiralled into depression really. Um, because it was, as I said, I wasn't doing what I thought I might be doing. I mean really what I'd actually done or seemingly done, was exchange domesticity here for domesticity there, because I had my (removed) children, were young, and obviously it was a lot more difficult there for a variety of reasons (Tut). Um, so I eventually got to the point of um thinking, "I'm going to have to leave this situation", and I said, I told my family, because when I got married um, to me it was for life.

Although I had had um (Tut), although I'd felt myself to be gay from um, probably about eleven or twelve um, it was, it was never ever talked about, I never had anybody to talk about it with. Um so I made the decision to *suppress* that side of myself, um…

R: Could you say something about that decision? Was it a *conscious* decision?

P: It *was* a conscious decision. Um, because as I said, I had, you know I, I felt different, um, but as I said, in those days, you didn't, people didn't talk about, about gay issues.

R: "gay issues". It was just unspoken.

P: "just unspoken". Yeah totally, unspoken.

R: Unspeakable.

P: "Unspeakable", yeah. I mean there was always that title, "The love that must never speak its name" or something. …Um, so I never had anybody at all, I never talked about it with anybody, um, so I decided, "Well okay, I don't know anybody". I hadn't had any, any real, real experience. Um, I thought, "Well okay, I have to suppress this …and accept the conventional route".

R: And you say you knew you were different around the age twelve or thirteen. Did you know what that difference was?

P: (Pause)…Yes. I knew that I liked, I preferred women to men.

R: Right. You knew that.

P: Yeah (Tut), because… I've always been passionate about the movies. I remember um, very often, watching a film on television, um it used to be, you know when I was about that age that my parents would go out on a Sunday afternoon, and I would sit in and watch black-and-white films, and you know, I *knew* that I didn't fancy the guys, I fancied the women. So, um (Tuts), I mean as I said, I never told anybody. Um as I said I decided to suppress all that side of myself.

R: And what was that like? Realising that you had to suppress that aspect of yourself?

P: (Pauses) "What was it like?" Um, I suppose um, I thought, "Well okay, this um, this isn't talked about, can *never* be talked about", I wasn't aware of anything you know, happening in the World as such, um you know, "There's no future in this" um, so yes, I went (touches head)…

R: You went up into your head, and sort of had to rationalise, to intellectualise about it.

P: Yeah. Mm. Mm. So then, so then I got married. Um, (Tut) and, and as I said, had three children and didn't really deal with it. I mean I knew it was as it was there, I wasn't …I don't think I was *in love* with my ex-husband um, but, but a form of love

grew between us - never talked about it with him at all, um (Pause). But as I said, but when I went to (removed), it surfaced because there was a woman there that I was attracted to and she was attracted to me but, she didn't want to do anything at all about it, so um …she was from (removed) and she was going to and from (removed). She was married as well, her hus… and they were (removed) as well and uh, (Tut) but as I said, she didn't want to do anything about it, so…

R: Could I ask you something about that? Because there's this sort of "unspeakable thing" that you couldn't speak out, or talk to anyone about, but then you meet someone…

P: Mm.

R: …I'm curious then about that, that sort of attraction, and how, how you found each other in that sense, how you both found a way to communicate what you were feeling.

P: It was, it was a *frustrating* time really because um, I was, she was, her husband was, we knew her husband first because, they were, they were from (removed) and, um, he was on, he was there, she, she, she was back at home, and then she came, um, and at first, I wasn't awfully *keen* on her because she used to use quite bad language and I wasn't you know, keen on that, and I wasn't awfully keen. But slowly but surely, I found myself becoming attracted to her and her attracted to me, um, …but as I said she was, well I suppose it was very difficult because well, we're both married you know, I'd got young children, we're in this very um (Tut), um, …sort of 'society under a microscope' really, you know, you weren't really anonymous. You couldn't be anonymous in that society, you know. People would know what you were doing, so it was um, I think the only, I mean, we knew there was an attraction there but I think the only thing in which it was physically manifested was kissing, you know, when the opportunity arose, which wasn't very often you know, she didn't want to do, go any further than that. And as I said, she didn't, she went back to (removed), and I felt completely sort of frustrated, you know, because she didn't really want to do…I mean, she told me that she'd had more love from me in the very short time she knew me than she'd ever had from her husband. Um, but she went back to (removed) and subsequently divorced her husband. Um, and I lost her, she didn't want to be in touch. Um, so as I said, I got to the state when, I was just completely at rock bottom really. I just sort of basically fell apart in (removed) and I said to my husband, I didn't ever really talk to my husband, I didn't really, I never told anyone, I couldn't really discuss it with him because it was so much shame and guilt involved, and all the rest of it, so I just said to him, he, he seemed so totally bound up in the job, and there was never any time and, …so I eventually went to the Doctor and um, I think I'm getting the sequence of things right… I went to the doctor, I didn't ever tell the Doctor what the problem was, but she could see that I was depressed and she had me go to her office um, every day, for a, I used to go, she wasn't necessarily there with me you know but she'd give me a cup of tea you know and say, "Right stay here" and it was sort of like an hour out of my schedule which, you know, was, was time apart. And I remember going for a month's counselling at the (removed), which was on the (removed), and telling the guy there, the counsellor there um, it was like a mini (removed) set-up there with the um, with the (removed), they'd initially gone in as the (removed), and then the Institute for (removed)and they'd set up a mini, as I said, a small sort of …they had like a whole village there, and I remember telling the chap there, and that

was the first time I'd ever admitted it to anybody, this was, I must have been probably about thirty-eight…

R: Wow!

P: …and I said, "I think I might be gay".

R: What a huge moment!

P: Yeah. Yeah, it took everything I had to um, but during the course of that month, I stayed there, and I lived in the (removed) there and during the course of that month …he persuaded me that I wasn't! (Laughs)

R: (Silence)

P: Um…

R: It's interesting, that you know, you laugh sort of thinking back, and my heart sinks…

P: Yeah…

R: …just to think of how unbearably painful that must have been. (Pause) What was it like? What was that experience like?

P: Well, I think because there was, in my head, there was so much shame, and guilt, and impossibility attached to it, I think it was oh, you know, "Thank God I'm not". Even though, he, you know, as I said he persuaded me during the course of this time that, that everybody has those feelings and that I wasn't.

R: "Just a phase!"

P: "Just a phase!" Yeah.

R: Was he affiliated to the church in any way?

P: He was um, it was, as I said it was the (removed), so it was an (removed) but it probably, I think looking back, I think it was probably one of these fundamental type um, which is ironic when I, when I move a bit further into the story. Um (Tut), so I went back, and I thought, "Okay, everything is fine" um, but it wasn't! Um, I had been on, …the Doctor had given me antidepressants, and I hadn't realised that you can't come off antidepressants, and I think she'd gone on leave then by the time I'd come back from the counselling, she'd gone on leave and I, I didn't realise you can't come off antidepressants you know like that (Clicks finger), you've got to… so I did, I came off them quickly and then, of course (Cough) I was really back to square one. (Inhales deeply) So I eventually (Cough) thought, "I've got to get out of this situation" you know, "I'm just …" as I said, I'd just fallen apart, and I said to a friend of mine um, (Pauses) "I've got to get out of this situation" and she said, "Well, you know, what, what would you like to do?" and I said, "Well, I'd like to travel"…

R: What happened then? You had a moment where you sort of…

P: Yeah. (Laughs) Yeah, I did…

R: …remembering something?

P: I did. Because (Laughs) …um (Tut) I had been part of a local Bible study group (Tut) and there, we'd had it in our house a number of times and unbeknownst to me, the husband of one of my friends had fallen in love with me (Pause).

R: (Silence)

P: So, that was an added complication.

R: Yeah. Yeah.

P: Um, there was a woman …so this was made known in the Bible study group that I was somehow luring this guy away from his wife, and I mean they didn't have a clue really of what was going on, but, but I was ostracized as the *woman* taking this guy away from his wife. Whereas, in fact, it was he was doing all the… and there was this one woman in particular who persecuted me. She, she was, she um, she would come into town and she would drive past our house to see if his car was outside, my house. Um, my husband, my husband got to, well, my husband knew, knew about it because I'd told my husband about it, and um (Tut), on one occasion, when it, when it was supposed to have been all sort of like come, cleared, um, she…he had come to the house but my husband knew about it, fortunately my husband knew about this, on that occasion, and um, she had actually gone and told my husband that this guy…(removed) car was outside the house, and he could say to her, you know well, "I know", "this is what's happening today" kind of thing, um, so that was an, an added complication (Pause). So, um, so as I said, you know I thought "I've just got to get out of this situation", "I can't deal with it anymore", so this friend said to me, "What would you like to do?", "I'd like to travel", "Where would you like to travel?", "I'd like to travel to (removed)". So, I think that was a, no I can't quite remember the sequence…that was the September I think. Anyway, in the April, oh that's right, we came home on leave and went back and it was, because we had leave every two years…sorry this story's becoming very complicated! (Laughs) Um…

R: You're being very clear actually…

P: But …Good! But um, to leave the situation I decided I was going to um, take myself on retreat, to the (removed) for about a month and a half, I think it was. Because my whole intention was to go, and find a place where I could be on, in retreat, and sort, try and sort something out. Because as I said, I knew I was married. I knew I had three young children. And I don't think if my husband had ever shown me any sort of like, any real kindness (Pause), you know he wasn't a bad husband don't get me wrong, he was, but he, he never seemed to be able to, you know, we never seemed to be able to talk. As people, you know, as you hear young people talking today, we never talked. That was a generation that didn't really communicate (Laughs). Um (Tut), So, so I subsequently went, and um, (Tut) I'd been given, by this friend I'd been given a couple of addresses, so I spent the first week with

her…some friends in (removed), and then um, the second week I'd had an address of friends in (removed), so I went there, and then it was "Right, okay. What am I going to do now?" so I applied to go to um, a retreat centre in (removed) a (removed) centre. And I thought, "Okay, I'll spend the rest of my time here, trying to sort out you know life, and life's issues", and all the rest of it. Um, but what actually happened, there was a nun there. They weren't in um (Tut), the nuns there, they weren't in um, it was, there was a main Priest, some Priests and some nuns, but the nuns weren't in habits, they were in ordinary civi clothes. And when I got there on the, in the middle of the week, she said, "Well you can't actually stay here as a primary retreat until the weekend. She said, "You can be here in the week, but not at the weekends", so it thought "this is…" but she said "I need to…" um, "I need to, um, I'd like to sort of counsel you for a while" so she said, "what I'll do.." she said, "I'll take you back to some friends of mine in (removed)" which, as it were, is where I'd just come from, and she said "You can come back here for next week". Her advice was, I mean I'd told her the, the story. I mean I didn't tell her about being gay, but I told her the story, and she said, "Well my advice is that you divorce your husband". Um, that was…but I was taken, she took me, um to friends of hers who were a Catholic family, (Tut) and they were a large family, and um, the, her friend (removed) who was living with her brother (removed), she took me to them, um for a couple of nights, because unknowing to me, another of these um, one of (removed) sisters had agreed that I would stay with her, her name was (removed), so they were a Catholic family. So, this was my first, as it were, exposé to Catholicism. Um, because I'd been in Protestantism obviously, and after two or three nights with (removed), (removed) came to collect me because she was on jury duty…

R: Did that feel quite radical at the time? I'm just thinking about the relationship between Protestantism and Catholicism. What was that like for you?

P: Yeah, it was. It was a bit. I was apprehensive about it because I grew up in a time when a lot of Catholics and Protestants were at each other's throats, and I actually had experience of that in my own family, where um, my maternal grandma had been a chapel goer, and one of her brothers had married a Catholic, and in those days, you, they had to agree the children would be brought up Catholic. So, my grandma had um a niece and a nephew who were Catholic, but always blamed for the nephew um converting from being protestant to being Catholic. And he eventually became, he was trained in (removed), and became a Protestant minister.

R: Mm.

P: Um, but it was the days when apparently, you know, if Catholics and Protestants saw each other on the road, you know, you'd cross the road deliberately to avoid each other, so yeah, it was my first sort of, although I'd been …I'd always been Ecumenical um, in my young days, I mean, I've always been Ecumenically minded. The denominational barriers aren't difficult for me. Um …it was my first sort of like *real* encounter with Catholics. And I remember in the room I was given to sleep in that night, there was a *huge* fluorescent rosary (Laughs), rosary on the wall, and I thought, "Oh Lord, what have I gone and gotten myself into here?" Anyway, so I went to stay with (removed) for the weekend and then the nun came back to collect me and took me back to (removed) for the next week, and it was you know, "You can't really stay here as a single retreatant', so I thought, "Well okay, I don't really

know anybody". Well, I didn't know anybody at all, apart from the family I'd been introduced to. So, I phoned (removed) and I said, "I haven't got a clue what to do" um, "Can I come and stay with you for a while, while I figure out what it is I'm going to do?" because I had a return ticket for about six weeks down the line, or something like that. So, she said "Yes". Um, so I went to her and stayed with her and um, took myself off on a coach trip, (Tut) for about two weeks, which was very enjoyable, and took myself back to her, and as it were, just stayed with her for the remaining time, and then realised … and I went to church with her and so on and so forth, and then realised that I was actually falling in love with her, um and she with me, um, and that was the beginning of a nineteen year relationship.

R: Oh wow!

P: (Laughs) Which was very difficult because, um, I was… during that period of time, for nineteen years, I was basically… because I couldn't stay in (removed)… when I initially applied for a visa I had an indefinite visa, which meant I could go in and out for, you know…indefinitely. And that was excellent because I could go in, and I think you could stay for three months at a time, but nobody asked any questions if you went out and came back a month later, because you had this indefinite visa. But all of that went by the board when the AIDS scare started. They cancelled all those indefinite visas…

R: Oh, right…

P: …and started becoming completely paranoid about people going to (removed), so I had that Visa cancelled. So, I could only go in there for three months at a time. Um, she could come here for six months at a time, um, but of course I was still married with, with three children, so um, so for a, until, that was 1989, so until about 2002, um, I was basically commuting between (removed) and (removed) where my, my oldest son was in boarding school, and the (removed). Um, and I tried very, very hard to get a job there. Because when I met her and realised that um, you know, we'd fallen in love and wanted a relationship, I thought, "Finally! I can *be* who I always thought I am" you know, "I'll tell my husband, I'll tell my children, and everything will be, you know, hunky dory". Well, …it didn't work out like that! (Laughs). Um… (Tuts)…

R: You look sad.

P: Yeah. I was sad, because… I am sad. Because, yeah, sad because I think as it were, until this point, she's been like, sort of the *love* of my gay life …um, which has ended. Um (Tut) during that time I became a Catholic because they were a Catholic family and I was living with her, um, I mean obviously it was in the days before civil partnerships and gay marriage and so on and so forth, um but I decided that I would become a Catholic, and found in the Catholic church a lot of what I'd been searching for, you know, a lot of people will say well, you know, um (Sighs), well let's put it this way, I'm glad I know both sides, but the Catholic church to me has a lot going for it, which appealed to me. You know, obviously a lot against it, but a lot, which appealed to me. I think at the heart of it, you know in its ideal form, Catholicism is getting it right. Um and I like the structure, I like the structure of the church year, and I liked um (Tut), I liked the fact that it's grounded in History and it's grounded in the

Liturgy, and as I said, so much of it makes so much sense to me whereas a lot of Protestant denominations, you know, they really haven't got a clue. Um (Tuts), and of course with my background in R.E and a Theology degree, I realise I've got a distinct advantage over a lot of people who have just, who have never been educated in their Faith…

R: Yeah, mm.

P: So, that was basically my life. I mean obviously I'm cutting it very short but um, and I used to, I came, we, it was decided that we would um, or …I would come back with the children from (removed) in 1992. I mean, in the meantime, it was, it was a very difficult situation in so far as I was a mother with three children and *loved* my children, *still* love my children, so being away from them was horrendous. But missing her, and then when I was with them, it was trying to maintain a relationship with her which was, I mean, you know, the two did come together on a number of occasions but, my, my husband never ever asked me anything. You know, which to this day I find very hard to believe because I mean, you know I would come and go. I mean I would be away for three months at a time, and he never ever said a word. Um, and then, by the time (removed), by which time I was 52, came around, I thought to myself um, I'd finally made the decision, "Okay, I'm going to live my life as a gay woman" (Pause). (Tut) So at that point, I needed to come out to my children, because ironically, I have a gay nephew. I've got one sister five years younger than I am, and a nephew who is gay um, and somehow, it's always been alright for my nephew to be gay but, with my mother, but it's never been alright for me to be gay. Um, because my mother and I have quite a difficult relationship even to this day. Um, so I thought, "Okay", I made the decision that I was going to spend my life with her.

R: So again, there's something about the gender differences. There's something about the differences you've experienced in your life that men seem to have this kind of privilege, in different ways…

P: Mm.

R: …and as a woman, your experience is that as a woman you've somehow, you've had to fight so much harder?

P: Mm.

R: Yeah.

P: So, as I said, so then in (removed) I decided um, that I was going to spend my life with her. Okay, I wasn't entirely sure how, but I owned a house with my husband, my ex-husband, just outside (removed) and I thought Okay, my children were, my children by this time were grown, and C was on the verge of being married, and um, my oldest son is two years older than her so he was out on his own, and my youngest son was in university. So, I had waited, all that time really, to…because I realised there was, because there was never ever going to be a right time to tell them because I'd lived this double-life really, my entire life. (Sigh) So, anyway, I, I, I did. I …because I'd made the decision to live with her, um, obviously I had to tell them. So, I told them individually. Um, and again to, to cut that story short, two of my children

329

today -my daughter and my youngest son are accepting of me but my oldest son isn't. My oldest son is a, a fundamental um, Christian who doesn't accept. He doesn't accept it at all. So, I have a very estranged relationship with them. I have a grandson who I never see, well, who I hardly ever see. Um (Tut) …and I was going to take my share of the house and, my idea was to, buy a mobile home in (removed) and then still come in and out because it was still, as I said it was in the days before civil partnership. Um, she came to live here with me for six months. I rented a house um, I didn't get half of the house immediately because my ex-husband wouldn't sign the correct paperwork, um, so that eventually dwindled to about half of what I should have had um and, …so she and I were living together here, just outside (removed) just outside (removed) and um, in um going in um, going together with the depression, I was just completely um overwhelmed by the whole thing. I just felt *so much* guilt and *so much* shame, and um, I didn't have the money that I was meant to be having, I was renting a very expensive house, um, I was trying to teach, and I just couldn't cope. Um, so in the end well no it didn't stop but she, she, we just…couldn't get on, couldn't sort of get on together, and then um she, she went back to (removed) (Sighs) (Tuts) …um, and stayed um, lived with her sister for some time. I then decided after I'd um been through all this anguish and whatever, I didn't have any help from anybody, I didn't see, I didn't go to a Doctor or anybody and I was trying to teach. I was doing supply teaching. Um, and eventually decided, "Okay I've got to move my life on". (Pause)

R: But it looks like it's something that still pains you.

P: Mm.

R: You look really sort of sad and troubled by the fact that she went.

P: Mm. Yeah.

R: You loved her.

P: Yeah.

R: Yeah. I've no idea what happened…which I'll tell you.

R: But you said it was something relating to the deep shame and guilt that you were experiencing.

P: Yeah, Yeah, Yeah.

R: That resulted in depression and interfered with your ability to relate, with…

P: Yeah, Yeah. And you know, you couldn't be open. You know.

R: Right.

P: Because it was still (removed) society.

R: What a price you paid.

P: Yeah.

R: "(removed) society".

P: (removed) society. We didn't have any gay friends so we were in isolation really um, and it was basically, I'd felt that basically that I'd left my marital home. I'd left my children. Um, you know, although they've never said it to me …I think um, it's probably still with me the fact that *I* broke up the home. Um,

R: (Coughs) Right.

P: Even though, even though my daughter subsequently got married in the, well virtually yes, it was virtually the Christmas that I'd started living with (removed). here you know, my daughter got engaged, so that sort of, and she got married in the following September so, so she was doing her thing…

R: So, you were in a completely impossible situation.

P: Yeah. Yeah.

R: Your choice was to live inauthentically and to be …and to fall apart, which you did, …or to, you know, live authentically and honestly, and then suffer the consequences of that, with as you say, the blaming, the guilt, the shame…

P: Yeah. I mean I had, I had no real help, from no one. I mean, my mother basically didn't want to know; my daughter was getting married, you know; my youngest son was at university and probably could only see, well you know, my parents have now split up and are now divorcing, which you know, most children don't expect that.

R: Mm.

P: Um, so, so, so there was all of that. So okay I had promised, you know, in 1972 to stay in this marital relationship for *ever* um, which I think *if* I had had, I think if my husband had been of a different temperament, um, and had talked with me, and been, and been, and been kind, I probably would have stayed in the relationship. I would probably never have said anything. I would have still kept it under wraps um, (Tut) because I didn't know any gay people. I didn't have any outlet to go, so um…

R: That's such a tragedy. There's something very tragic about that.

P: Mm.

R: A sort of sense of loss of, of your Lesbian identity in a way.

P: Mm, mm, mm.

R: That it's been sat on and suppressed, your whole life really.

P: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

R: And yet, you did find somebody you loved. You risked expressing that aspect of yourself, and there were further problems with that, and it didn't go…it wasn't a happy ending.

P: No, it wasn't a happy ending. No.

R: No.

P: No, so um so after she, she went back to the States and… (Pauses)

R: Your son's problem with it… your eldest son's "issue" with, with your um sexual-orientation, is religious based? sort of, fundamentalist Christianity…

P: Yeah. Yes.

R: So that informs it.

P: Yes.

R: It blinds him. He can't see beyond that.

P: Yeah, that's right.

R: That's very sad, very sad. I'm really sorry to hear that.

P: Thanks, yes (Laughs). Yeah, um (Pauses)

R: Actually, I feel sad but I feel quite angry as well? I feel very angry with him. I don't know him, but I feel very angry that someone would behave like that towards their mother who's being very honest.

P: Mm. Mm. But ironically, to come up to the present moment, I mean ironically, I actually go to a (removed) church that thinks the same.

R: Hmm!

P: Um, but, but the, the problem is that um, the majority of churches *are* against gay people. You see, you've got, you've only got some (removed) churches who will *say* they're open…

R: Yes, right. "Who will *say* they're open"…

P: "Who will *say* they're open". Um, you've got um…

R: It sounds like you're making a distinction between them *actually being* open.

P: Well, it, it…I mean, I've got um, friends who, a gay couple in (removed), and they were going to um… There were two local churches here, (removed), and (removed) URC, which is also in (removed) Um (Tut), They've since joined and become

(removed). So, they're still there. So, they were going to (removed), and wanting to…they've been together for some time, that's how I met them, through the (removed) Movement (removed), um and they wanted to, when civil partnerships were introduced they had a civil partnership, and they wanted um a Minister called (removed) who was the (removed) minister, they wanted him to administer a Blessing. Their own church wouldn't administer a Blessing. They wanted a blessing in the (removed) church, and um, the minister was all for doing it but …the church had to vote on it. And although that church would have said it was an open church, they voted *against* it. So, they couldn't have a blessing. I mean their story is, that they've since got married and um, they actually had a Thanksgiving service um, in the church. The two churches came together some months ago.

R: Ah, right.

P: So, there are some (removed) churches, including (removed) church (removed), which is probably the most well-known church for being open, and then you've got the Quakers? and the Liberal Jews. And that's about it.

R: So, you find yourself now in a (removed) church, which is anti-gay.

P: Which is anti-gay (Laughs). But the, eventually when I…

R: How do you make sense of that? …I'm trying to make sense of that and I mean, I can understand it, but I suppose it would be helpful to hear from you what drives that because it sounds like being part of a religion, or a community, or a church sort of supersedes your, your need to be out…

P: Yeah, yes, I think it does really.

R: "It does"

P: I think it does really because in 2007, um I came back to this, I'd been to (removed) because the relationship went on a bit longer but, so in 2007 when I came back I had absolutely nothing. I, I had no money, no job, no house. I was basically homeless yeah. So, I was um…there was some special event for my daughter and I was at that special event. I've forgotten now what it was but it was a birthday or anniversary or something, and I thought to myself, "I don't know where I'm going to go tonight!" yeah? So, all my three children sort of like looked and me and said, "Well where are you going to go?" and I said, "I don't know!" My eldest son basically didn't want to know. My daughter and her, my son-in-law, um didn't say anything, and eventually my youngest son who was in (removed) University said, "Well, you'd better come with me mum" …which I did. He and his girlfriend, he was, he was in a relationship at that time, and so I came to (removed) with them and I spent two nights in a hotel in the (removed). um, and then went and stayed in his student room with him, and I think that was the first weekend, and his girlfriend was there, and um, on that Sunday morning I thought, …because they were doing their student thing of lying in late so I thought, "I'd like to go to church", and there was a church literally two doors away from where my son was, was in digs. So, I thought, "Okay, I've got to get up and go out, and I'll go to church". So, I went to church, the (removed) Baptist church in the (removed) and during the service I thought, I was

praying, and I was saying, "Please Lord. Please let someone invite me to lunch. Please let someone invite me to lunch" (Tut). So, at the end of the service I went in for tea and coffee and um, was you know like, reading the walls you know, reading all the literature and all that on, and started a conversation with a couple called (removed) and during the course of that conversation she said to me, "Oh would you like to come for lunch?" She said, "We'll only have beans on toast because we've just come back from (removed)" but it was like "Thank you Lord!"

R: Yeah, so that really felt like an answer to your prayer.

P: Yeah. Yeah. And I went to them and I stayed with them most of the day and obviously I was brand new to them so they found out something about myself. Um…

R: How come your faith has remained so, so strong? Because I can hear when you're saying "Thank you Lord" you know there's a real sense of relationship with, with God…

P: Mm. Mm.

R: Um, how come that's so strong and so meaningful to you even though you've experienced such oppression in your life?

P: (Pause) I think probably because committing myself to the Lord when I was very young at seven or eight, despite everything that's gone on, has remained a constant in my life. And I believe that um, that even though …you know there's so much um, hatred and bitterness and whatever, you know, I firmly believe He made me *as I am* but I had to get myself to that point, which was in my late fifties, you know. You know there's that verse, "He knew me and knitted me together in my mother's womb". Therefore, if I believe that okay God doesn't make mistakes, this is how He wants me. (Pause) Isn't it?

R: Mm.

P: So, I carried on going to that church, and people were very welcoming. And I started off going to two home groups. They have home groups in the evenings, and I thought to myself eventually, "Okay, I'll um…I'll find the one that I prefer" but in actual fact I stayed with both of them for quite some time because the people were very friendly, and slowly but surely, as you do, I started building a friendship base. Um, and of course they all see me as a single divorced woman. Um, I have, there are a few people that know but it's not talked about because after a little while of me being there they obviously had some sense of who I am and that I could be in leadership in so on, and so they started pushing me to be a member. And they'd said, "Why won't you be a member?" and I said, "Because I've got issues." Um, and I've always steered clear of the …and I won't be a member because of the, of the attitude to gay people.

R: Cor. Once again that's so sad…

P: (Cuts across) And um,

R: Right…

P: Quite a long way down the line, I mean, I've got a friend now and um, he, he came to me one day and he said um (Tut), "Oh I think I'm going to have to leave the church", and I said, "What do you mean you're going to have to leave the church?" and he said um, I hadn't actually heard it but the year that Concita won the Eurovision Song Contest one of the elders in the church went on a rant the next day in the service and my friend (removed) was very concerned about it, and I thought to myself "I think (removed) is gay" but he came to me and said " I'd like to have a chat with you", and I thought, "Okay fine!" because he's in my home group, and he told me what was troubling him and I outright asked. I said, "Are you gay (removed)?" and he said "No!" He looked at me and he laughed and he said, "No!" and I thought, "Well I can't beat about the bush here" and I said, "Well, I *am* actually". Um, so from there we eventually went to see the Pastor and tell him, because the Pastor hadn't been there, he'd been preaching somewhere else about this, and I actually, although (removed) didn't know I was talking about myself I eventually pushed and I said, you know "because obviously he believes that man and woman are meant to be together" and so on…Um, so I said, "So you're telling me (removed) that…" You know, I can tell you in that congregation who is probably gay but it's never ever discussed. Because as long as you're not living a gay lifestyle…

R: Right, okay…

P: It's kind of, well it's alright but don't ever talk about it? So, I said to (removed) the minister, I said "So you're telling me (removed) that if you um, if I was to say to you well a person living an active gay lifestyle um…" and he said, "No, I would bar them from membership". (Pause) As I say, he didn't know that I was talking about myself 'cause I had (removed) there who was sort of wanting the main questions answering. So, after that I thought, "Okay, well I'll go over and help (removed) to wind down from that" so um…

R: Is that his right? Or, is that Biblical or Theological? Is there a Theological basis for that decision to "bar" people from membership?

P: I think that uh, I think it's based on *certain* Biblical passages that "man shall not lie with man" and you know, all the usual ones, um (pause). So, after that I said to (removed), "Would you like a coffee?" (Laughs) so we went to a local café and had one and he said to me, he said, "I've never told anybody this (removed) my entire life", he said but um, "although I'm a guy I feel I like I want to live the life of a woman" (Tut). So, and we've established a good friendship, and I think, "Well, if nothing else" you know um, "I'm a support to him in that congregation". I mean I have walked out of... I did walk out of one of the services, um some years ago when one of the lay preachers was trashing gay people. Um…

R: You walked out.

P: Yes. It was one of the lay preachers who was, was you know, going on about how awful are gay people, and I got up and walked out and two of the elders followed me and asked me why I'd walked out. And I told them. But *again*…you know, they're

quite friendly, you know. No um, no animosity. But, they never ever talked about it with me from that day to this. Um (Tut)…

R: I was trying to think. It must take *enormous* strength just to sit and tolerate, you know, when you're in the congregation and you're hearing messages like that I mean, my blood would boil!

P: It does! (Voice raised) Yeah. But as I said, you know - Where do I go and worship?

R: Yeah.

P: You know I mean probably if I lived in (removed) I would probably go to the (removed). Um, but here in (removed)… as I said, I did try the Quakers at one point, um…

R: Yeah

P: But, but, you know, their form of service is very different from…and I didn't find them as welcoming. I must confess I didn't find them as welcoming as people in P.

R: Oh really?

P: Um, but I know a number of people in the various churches but again…

R: So, there is a form of service that's important to you as well.

P: (Pauses) I like, I like the, I like the church service to be structured um, it isn't as structured as I would like it in (removed) because it's Protestant but not Catholic um, yes I mean I like um, you know I like The Word being preached and in the Catholic church you always have an Old Testament reading; you always have a New Testament reading; you always have an Epistle; and you always have the Gospel. Now to my mind, that's important. The preaching of the Word is important because I grew up with the preaching of the Word. So, I've got, I've got a, you know, my ideal structure obviously in my head and, in one sense the Catholics come closer to the structure I like um, but then you find more, you find more friendship and more familiarity, more fellowship and welcome in the non-conformist churches because they're smaller. You know, you can't really be anonymous in a Protestant church whereas in a Catholic church you can easily be anonymous - you can walk in Sunday after Sunday and, you know.

R: Yeah. (Pause) Would you say that you have successfully integrated your, those different identities? Your spiritual/religious identity and your sexual identity - Do you think you've integrated those, would you say?

P: In my head I have.

R: Okay.

P: But not in practice no. I mean, I'm not an openly gay woman worshiping in (removed). No. I could probably be an openly gay woman worshiping in (removed)

well, the (removed) because that's where (removed) go. (Sigh) In one sense it does involve some difficult practicalities because I don't have a car. I choose not to have a car because um, I'm, some years ago I became very interested in the discipline of what does "walking on water" mean? (Pause) Um…

R: (Laughs) What *does* it mean? I'm very curious to ask you that (Laughs).

P: Well, the thing is…Yes, it's something that I'm unpacking really. Um, because obviously, you know, going from the Biblical story of, of Peter jumping out of the boat and walking on water to Jesus, and when he was afraid and he started to sink, um, so that's a spiritual discipline that I adhere to.

R: Yes.

P: Um, and obviously if you're walking on water you can't be cluttered by anything. You can carry…you can't carry anything basically. So, I've tried to um…

R: Well that's certainly something that comes across in meeting you. You have enormous spiritual courage. You've got enormous strength spiritually. There's no doubt about that, yeah.

P: (Silence)

R: Yeah. And to, to worship in the churches that you go to, I mean, I was going to say that takes balls.

P: Mm. Mm.

R: It really does take some courage! Yeah.

P: (Silence)

R: And I suppose that's a result of all those years of, of "passing' in some way? Or not "passing" but, I was going to say "passing", or "hiding", or just was it more "choosing to keep secret" an aspect of yourself?

P: I think, I think it probably developed from, it being um (sighs), I mean, okay I suppose in one sense one could say it *is* a secret. It's a secret but in one sense that's quite a basic version of it because…

R: Yeah

P: Because I grew up in, I was born in 1950, because I grew up in that time when, as I said to you, it wasn't talked about. Nobody ever, I mean I experienced discrimination in a form but um, it was never overtly talked about. My family never introduced it, never talked about it.

R: More like *indifference*.

P: Yeah!

R: Dealing with indifference.

P: Indifference and sometimes positive, because I remember I used to go to the Guides, and okay I had a teenage crush on um a friend in church and I used to, I never wanted to try to do anything at all about it. I didn't touch her or anything like that at all. I was just happy to be in her company. I used to cycle and was quite happy to, her house was in between the church and mine, it was quite heavy to push my bike to go home to (removed), we'd walk home with her and then go on to mine, so I had a very…one night she said to me, "My parents don't want you walking home with me" um, so it was, you know I never had the courage to say "Well, why?" it was okay I know why. They've obviously sensed something um, you know years later when I became a missionary it was absolutely fine, these people were absolutely fine with me, and even then, I wished I'd had the courage then say, "Well I'm okay now, why wasn't I okay then?" you know?

R: Mm. Mm.

P: But I had that happen a couple of times. And I thought, because I knew, as it were, *what* I was hiding, I thought, "They've somehow tuned into, …to me".

R: Mm. You've said a couple of things that have made me think about that as you've been talking about a sort of sensing. Almost an embodied sense, of that for example, but also the love attraction as well. It's like, although you've had to really intellectualise and go into your head to, to resolve a lot of this stuff for yourself, you haven't 'numbed off' your body.

P: No.

R: And your felt sense has remained quite acute. You can sense when there's love, or when there's a problem and, you know, that's quite amazing.

P: Mm. Mm.

R: Because I was wondering why, why a person's, how come you're, that capacity, that felt sense, wouldn't get lost in that sort of context.

P: I think that goes back to my faith because I think because I think the Lord loves me therefore you know, because I love Him, then it's my love for other people.

R: Right. Right. Right. Okay.

P: Yeah. I've always had that um, as you say that sense of, try to be sensitive to other people, and these days in a way, in the church, if not having said anything, you come to understand where, how other people feel about, you know.

R: So, it's a real gift in some ways. In a very almost perverse way being a gay woman or a lesbian woman has been a gift to you. It might have sharpened your love, or your sensibilities for other people.

P: Mm. Yeah.

R: In a way it may never had been had you not been…

P: Yeah!

R: Mm. But it just seems like such a cross you've had to bear. It's been such a cross.

P: (Silence) Well, it's…Yeah. It has. Yeah. Because even today I can't tell you, you know, I suppose all through those years I kept saying to the Lord you know, "When are you going to, when am I going to be real?" It's like the Velveteen Rabbit: "When am I going to be real?" (Laughs) Um, I don't know if you know that story of the Velveteen rabbit? It's a children's story. It's about a toy rabbit that wants to be a real rabbit, and eventually *does* become a real rabbit. Um and it's, that's been a constant prayer of mine, "When am I going to become real?" "When am I going to be able to marry these two things, you know, my gay life, or wanting to be a gay woman, with you know, my faith?" Um (Pause)

R: And you really shake your head because there doesn't seem to be an answer to that.

P: Well, I mean, I'm in a, I met someone a few years ago who lives in (removed) and who is, who works in the (removed), and again I thought, "Okay this is the time" um, you know, "I'll volunteer in the (removed) and she'll come to church" and *again*, it hasn't it hasn't happened you know because she said to me, because I was happy to sort of, I thought how it would happen was that she would come to (removed) with me, and slowly but surely the people in (removed) would, would sort of like suss us both out, suss the fact that okay there's something happening here, um but she said to me in the very beginning um, "Oh I don't think (removed) is ready for this" and it's like well…and you know, she didn't want me in the (removed) because she wasn't out in the (removed), so *again* it's a very difficult, a very difficult um…

R: That takes its toll on your personal relationship.

P: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

R: Yeah

P: (Pause) So apart from (removed) in (removed), who as I told you, has been the love of my gay life um…(Pause)

R: It's interesting you say "My gay life" as opposed to "My life"

P: (Laughs) "My life" yeah!

R: …and you separate those two lives.

P: Yeah (Laughs). Well I suppose once…because I haven't had a sort of (laughs) because I was married for thirty years um, okay yeah um, okay yeah one could say she was "The love of my life" um, but, and I've said why to the Lord, "Well, you

know, why did it fall apart?" And I don't know what happened because up until the Christmas of 2008, I came here in 2007 and got a job in (removed) um,

R: Wow!

P: (Tut) Um, and um, it seemed to me then that I was doing all the phoning and eventually thought, well okay, "What sort of effort is she actually making to understand any of this?" and I stopped, and in the Christmas I thought, I didn't think anything of it, and I sent a Christmas card and gift, as I usually do, or as I usually did, and there was nothing, nothing from her at all. And I've heard nothing from her from that day to this. And so, I don't know whether she's died, she was ten years older than I am, so I don't know whether she's died or whatever you know. The family have never made any, any contact.

R: That's sad.

P: I mean the family weren't too thrilled about it. I mean, you know, they were okay with me. They were fine with me. Particularly her oldest sister (removed) who was gay as well, I eventually realised. Um, so I've no idea what happened, um.

R: Yes, and it sounds like you are accepting of that. That, that's not the first time you've said, you just, "I can't make sense of that", "I don't know what happened".

P: No. (Pause) No. Well because it seemed to me when I went to (removed), and as I said, I started a relationship with her, it seemed to be that it was right. And I've prayed about that and I've said, "Why didn't that materialise?" you know it was sort of like, what um, or asking the Lord what His purpose is for my life. Um…(Silence) So (Laughs) so that's how it is (Laughs)

R: (Silence) I suppose I'm just taking a moment to digest that and you know it's, there's really, I'm really sort of struck by the tragedy. There's real tragedy in there and yet there's enormous sort of strength of belief as well, that, through all of that, none of what you've talked about has dented your faith. So, I wonder if you could just say something about how, do you think there's a difference between religion and faith and spirituality?

P: Yes! I do. Definitely I do, yes. I mean I, I would consider myself a spiritual person and because of the context in which I grew up I'm a Christian. If I'd lived in another part of the world I'd probably have been a you know, a whatever… I mean it's played a part you know. Religion has played a part in my life and I have thought about it from time to time. I mean I could probably fairly easily be a hermit, or a contemplative nun, or um, I wouldn't necessarily need organised religion because like I said, it's got so much like *in* it, but I think it's our responsibility, or I see it as *my* responsibility, because of the context which I've been given in which to live, um not just to be private but also to worship with other people.

R: Right

P: I think, you know, I've laughed about it and I've said, "I think maybe if I'd been born into an Irish Catholic family I probably would have been a contemplative nun".

R: Really?

P: Um but then obviously, would that have...I don't know, because obviously if, I've never discussed with contemplative nuns how they feel about their sexuality. I mean whether it's very difficult to hold on to this idea of chastity. I mean I could do the obedience and the other bits all right but (Laughs) you know, what do they *do* about their sexuality kind of thing? Or is that a calling? Um, I don't know. Um, but yeah, I mean as I said I could quite easily.

R: You said something about the (removed) and um …so how come? That must have been quite a step for you to become involved with them at first.

P: Yeah, it was because um, again, you know, in (removed). I thought, "Well, I need to do something. I need to be identifying with gay people. How do I identify with gay people?" um, so I saw this (removed) um, and I thought okay, I mean it took me a long time to pluck up the courage to phone um, and I did eventually phone and I started going to the meetings, yeah. Um, and it's through that movement that I met (removed), the person I'm in a relation with now um, she, she lives in (removed). But I don't…um …it's not how I would have it be! (Laughs) put it that way.

R: I'm not sure I understand. What did you mean there? Could you say something…?

P: (Pause) (Tut) …I think she probably feels a lot more than I do. I think she probably feels a lot more for me than I do for her, and I don't feel right. I mean I'm in the relationship, um, but I don't necessarily feel right, feel right about it.

R: That sounds like a repetition of something for you. That's a familiar place.

P: Yeah. Yeah.

R: Mm.

P: Mm, and I do wonder sometimes whether um, you know, whether I could ever be with somebody full time, as it were. I mean obviously I had um, you know when I was in my marital relationship um, yes, I mean obviously there was another, this other person, my husband in my life, but when I met (removed). that was 17 years into a thirty-year marriage, I ceased all physical relations with my husband. He never asked why um (Tut). Um, but whether I can ever actually be, as I said, full time. I mean I've lived on my own now for, as I said for since 2002, but in one sense I feel that I've been on my own *all* my life.

R: Yeah.

P: So, whether I could actually commit to another person I, I really don't know. Um, you know, apart from her, from (removed) I've never felt that I've wanted to um (Pause) to commit to, to commit another person. It's never been right …and I'm running out of time! (Long Laugh).

R: I suppose I was wondering…And I'm noticing the time!

341

P: No! I didn't mean here! I meant my life span! (Laughs)

R: I know! But you drew my attention to the time as well.

P: (Laughs)

R: Because we said an hour and it's now…

P: No! That's okay! No, I'm happy with this! I wasn't talking about that. I was talking about, because I'm 65 now and it's like "Is it ever going to happen Lord?" you know? (Laughs)

R: Do you think that that's, that it is a kind of um, a consequence of your experience of being a lesbian woman during the time that you were a lesbian woman, when it was the unspeakable, the unspoken love, "the love that couldn't speak its name"? Do you think that that sort of, that sense of um …wondering if you ever really can share fully your life with someone is a consequence of that life you've lived? And that's been imposed on you? Or is it something you think is sort of your personality or is your, you know? Do you see what I'm getting at?

P: Yeah. I, I had the…I don't know whether it's an illusion or what, but I still think to myself, "Oh, if the *right* person came along…" um.

R: Right, yeah.

P: (Pause) So, I've never felt *right* with another person for a variety of reasons. I mean she – (removed). and I got the closest to it. Um, because I would say because of all the people in my life, she understood me the best. Um (Pause)

R: You felt most deeply understood by her.

P: By her, yeah. Yeah (sigh). And you know, almost twenty years, it's um (pause) it's not easily um (Tut) …It's not easily, you don't lightly let go of it, as it were. Um, inevitably when you've put such…I thought, as I said, that she and I would be together for life then um, and I suppose the not-knowing was um, …but that's how it is.

R: Yes. That's your acceptance - "that's how it is" - Resignation.

P: (Long pause) Yeah, I did try and um, once after, a few months after I hadn't heard anything I did try and phone um where she was living but um, there wasn't any response and um, and as I said, there was no response um either by her or her family, and I suppose in one sense uh (Tut) I suppose it was an apprehension then really as to discover um you know, exactly what had happened. And I suppose as time goes, time passes very quickly (Tut), and I've thought in the last few years, "well do I want to know that she's died? I'm not really sure I do" Um, because I mean I had power of attorney over her affairs but I mean, whether the family, you know if she has died, then the family have obviously got around that which they probably could do because I mean I think the bottom line was that um (Tut), they were okay with it but um, I was

342

still outside the family because as I said there was no civil partnership or marriage so I was still an outsider, you know they were a very tight-knit family.

R: And that phrase really stands out for me because I was thinking something very similar in a lot of situations when you described her earlier, what that must be like? To have always felt in some ways and to still feel even in the church that you're in that you're just okay and you're fine and you're "in" but you're somehow just outside the family. You're not part of the membership. You're not fully welcome in the family.

P: Yeah. No. No. And the person that I'm in a relationship with now, her mother doesn't want to know. Um, her mother, yeah, although she's had a few partners before me her mother doesn't want to know and I feel again outside the family and I can't explain. She doesn't understand it because she goes…I mean, I've got a reasonable relationship with my mother now. My mother lives in (removed). but it's still a relationship where we don't live in each other's pockets by any stretch of the imagination, and it's always me that does the phoning to find out how she is and so on and so forth. Um, but (removed) goes to her mother week in week out and says to me "I'm going now to see my mother" and every time she says it, I feel myself you know, and it's like "how can you go and be"…and I've talked about it with her to some degree, and I've said "well, how can you go to, you know, your parents week in and week out and they still won't accept you? And they certainly don't want to know about me and…" and again it's like, you know well, I'm looking, I'm looking for the right person and the right family (Laughs) where you know, much along the lines of "Philadelphia", you know Tom Hanks (Laughs), where although he was a gay man you know, and as that film portrayed him, he was totally accepted by his family, and his partner was accepted, and you know that sort of scenario, you know. I'd love to be with the right person in the right family.

R: To be really embraced and welcomed into a family.

P: Yes. Yeah.

R: Yeah. And it doesn't sound like too much to ask.

P: No.

R: I am mindful of the time and it's an hour and a half now so I'm just wondering if there's anything left unsaid or if there's anything else you want to say about your experiences of religion.

P: Well, It's, I mean in one sense I'm surprised it's gone like this because I thought you'd be asking questions um, to help structure me because I've probably rambled on to you. I mean, what else would you have expected me to touch on?

R: I think for me, I really appreciate everything you've said and I haven't had a sense of you rambling at all. You've been really coherent and very thorough, and very detailed in your description of your experiences and uh, I think it is very rich data from a research perspective, so that's been very helpful. It was never intended to be a

structured interview at all um, because I'm a therapist and the Doctorate is Psychotherapy so the interview is a dialogical interview and talking as we have done.

P: Right, okay. Right.

R: So, it's fantastic, and I really appreciate your time. So that gives me the opportunity to just say thank you and to give you a little token of my appreciation (passes a small box of thank you chocolates).

P: Oh, thank you! How lovely! Brilliant! Aw, thanks.

R: Just to say thank you.

P: Oh, thank you.

R: It's a big thing to share your experiences like that so really, thank you. I can send a copy of the transcript to you too. Now do you want me to send it in the post or to email it to you?

P: Uh, send it in the post. You've got my address, haven't you? Yeah, yeah.

R: If there's anything that comes to you and you think you wish you'd said that, or you want to add later, then let me know.

R: I'll switch this off…

Appendix 7: Example of Initial Noting

Initial Noting with exploratory comments: extract from interview 3 "Pam".

Emergent Themes	ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT	EXPLORATORY COMMENTS
	P: It *was* a conscious decision. Um, because as I said, I had, you know I, I felt different, um, but as I said, in those days, you didn't, people didn't talk about, about gay issues.	She had previously been talking about having had a very early awareness of her sexual-orientation but "chose" to suppress it. Also included the notion of women and domesticity. Is this part of her coming out process? "gay issues" – what exactly is she meaning by this?
	R: "gay issues". It was just unspoken.	I echo "gay issues" because it feels broad and safe. I reframe it to unspoken. Is there an underlying struggle to express how unspeakable this issue was and so resorts to saying it was unspoken?
	P: "just unspoken". Yeah totally, unspoken.	Shakes her head in a kind of disbelief and recalls the time context in which she lived, and the climate of anti-gay prejudice and prohibitions. She repeats it in a different way and it changes from "just unspoken" to "totally unspoken". She really seems to want me to hear that it was absolutely not spoken about.
	R: Unspeakable.	I reflect back, and use the word "unspeakable" here because I have a sense e this is what she's trying to tell me. I'm aware it's a more loaded word but I wanted to frame it in a way that seemed to capture the way in which she was telling me this too.

	P: "Unspeakable", yeah. I mean there was always that title, "The love that must never speak its name" or something. …Um, so I never had anybody at all, I never talked about it with anybody, um, so I decided, "Well okay, I don't know anybody". I hadn't had any, any real, real experience. Um, I thought, "Well okay, I have to suppress this …and accept the conventional route".	The word "unspeakable", as I used it, appears to resonate with her. She agrees and it prompts awareness of related issues. She refers to a title of either a book or film that seems to capture the essence of this issue further. She mentions first that she didn't have anybody and I hear that she was isolated, alone, that relationships had been affected by her difference. She brushes over it and returns to talking about not having "talked about it with anybody". The combination of not being able to talk about it and being alone with it resulted in a conscious decision to suppress this aspect of her identity. She knew the only way to survive was to deny this aspect of her being. She refers to "the conventional route" - is she referring to "passing" for the dominant social group here? Does she mean pretend to be heterosexual?
	R: And you say you knew you were different around the age twelve or thirteen. Did you know what that difference was?	I interrupted the flow here and rather than exploring what she meant by passing I was aware that she was giving me so much information that I didn't want to miss anything. What I heard was her mentioning something about how old she was when she first became aware of her difference and I wanted to clarify that.

		I think I was doing this in the context of her saying she would "accept the conventional route" because I wanted to be sure she was aware of being lesbian and consciously chose to "pass" as opposed to having become aware of sexuality later in life.
	P: (Pause)…Yes. I knew that I liked, I preferred women to men.	She stops herself completing the sentence "I knew I liked women" and changes it to "preferred women to men". This seems a less committed stance and perhaps indicative of her hypervigilance, still "minding her language"
	R: Right. You knew that.	Without thinking too much about it, I make a bolder, committed statement. I think I wanted to let her know it was safe to speak with me about the unspeakable.

	P: Yeah (Tut), because… I've always been passionate about the movies. I remember um, very often, watching a film on television, um it used to be, you know when I was about that age that my parents would go out on a Sunday afternoon, and I would sit in and watch black-and-white films, and you know, I *knew* that I didn't fancy the guys, I fancied the women. So, um (Tuts), I mean as I said, I never told anybody. Um as I said I decided to suppress all that side of myself.	I noticed numerous "tuts" throughout the interview that were almost like a tick. Were these tuts the sound of her self-criticism? She seems to start remembering an experience of "coming out to self" and gives me the context for this. Again, I'm struck by how the isolation. In the safety of isolation, she could watch a black and white film (not colour - which seems to say something about the austerity of the time) and she enjoyed "knowing" that she didn't fancy the guys. As she tells me this I have a sense she trusts me with very intimate information about her experiences. Again, she tuts and repeats that she never told anybody. It's interesting she uses the word "anybody" and not "anyone" - what was going on in her body? She repeats that she had to suppress "all" that aspect of herself and the word all stands out for me: there wasn't even an aspect of her sexuality she could reveal to another body.
	R: And what was that like? Realising that you had to suppress that aspect of yourself?	I want to know more about this process of denying an aspect of her identity here.

	P: (Pauses) "What was it like?" Um, I suppose um, I thought, "Well okay, this um, this isn't talked about, can *never* be talked about", I wasn't aware of anything you know, happening in the World as such, um you know, "There's no future in this" um, so, yes, I went (touches head)…	She asks herself the question I asked her, as if she's addressing that part of her that she earlier described as suppressing, like she's checking-in with that part and inviting it into dialogue. It's as though the disowned part is now in the room and engaged with me in the interview. She recalls knowing the rules of the religious tribe and in society that this aspect of her experience just isn't spoken about and she determines from that fact that it is therefore "bad" in some way and can "never" be revealed. When she says "never" I get a real sense of the serious risk involved and never suggests absolutely not, forbidden. She was cut off from the wider world, not aware what was happening out there and as she wrestled with it, became aware "there was no future in it". Does this phrase suggest a downplaying of the risk? Does she mean she knew the consequences could be catastrophic for her?
	R: You went up into your head, and sort of had to rationalise, to intellectualise about it.	Given her use of the word "anybody "earlier I think I was more aware of her body after that and when she touches her head in the context of explaining what happened, I notice she touches her head, as though showing me where she went in her body.

P: Yeah. Mm. Mm. So then, so then I got married. Um, (Tut) and, and as I said, had three children and didn't really deal with it. I mean I knew it was as it was there, I wasn't …I don't think I was *in love* with my ex-husband um, but, but a form of love grew between us - never talked about it with him at all, um (Pause). But as I said, but when I went to (removed), it surfaced because there was a woman there that I was attracted to and she was attracted to me but, she didn't want to do anything at all about it, so um …she was from (removed) and she was going to and from (removed). She was married as well, her hus… and they were on the island as well and uh, (Tut) but as I said, she didn't want to do anything about it, so…	My interpretation about going up into her head doesn't land. Maybe she doesn't know what I'm talking about.

She continues with her story of "passing" - she had 3 children and "didn't really deal with it. Is she minimising this?

Did she experience post-natal depression?

She moves on to talking about her husband but I'm left wondering what she meant and felt moved that she felt forced to become a mother when this wasn't her natural inclination.

Is the love she describes for her husband "agape"? as opposed to erotic love? - A friendship that grew.

Again, the theme of not talking about things, suppressing and hiding her true self (incongruence).

The part of herself she had suppressed is described as "surfacing" - does this mean it was irrepressible?

Talks about mutual attraction between herself and another woman but doesn't call this falling in love or sexual attraction.

The language seems Victorian and as though she's learned how to make these experiences more palatable for the heterosexual ear?

Another tut denoting self-criticism? |

351

	R: Could I ask you something about that? Because there's this sort of "unspeakable thing" that you couldn't speak out, or talk to anyone about, but then you meet someone…	
	P: Mm.	
	R: …I'm curious then about that, that sort of attraction, and how, how you found each other in that sense, how you both found a way to communicate what you were feeling.	I'm picking up on the use of the word "attraction" and that it felt like dumbing something down. I want to know more about how they discovered this feeling between themselves especially in the climate of it being "unspeakable".
	P: It was, it was a *frustrating* time really because um, I was, she was, her husband was, we knew her husband first because, they were, they were from (removed) and, um, he was on, he was there, she, she, she was back at home, and then she came, um, and at first, I wasn't awfully *keen* on her because she used to use quite bad language and I wasn't you know, keen on that, and I wasn't awfully keen. But slowly but surely, I found myself becoming attracted to her and her attracted to me, um, …but as I said she was, well I suppose it was very difficult because well, we're both married you know, I'd got young children, we're in this very um (Tut), um,	The frustration is emphasised. Both parties were in the act of "passing" and having to be secretive. A sense of them breaking the rules because they were both married. Noticing the "gradual attraction" that conveys caution and having to be careful. When she talks about "society under a microscope" I wonder if this is a reference to the control within her religious tribe.

…sort of 'society under a microscope' really, you know, you weren't really anonymous. You couldn't be anonymous in that society, you know. People would know what you were doing, so it was um, I think the only, I mean, we knew there was an attraction there but I think the only thing in which it was physically manifested was kissing, you know, when the opportunity arose, which wasn't very often you know, she didn't want to do, go any further than that. And as I said, she didn't, she went back to (removed), and I felt completely sort of frustrated, you know, because she didn't really want to do…I mean, she told me that she'd had more love from me in the very short time she knew me than she'd ever had from her husband. Um, but she went back to (removed) and subsequently divorced her husband. Um, and I lost her, she didn't want to be in touch. Um, so as I said, I got to the state when, I was just completely at rock bottom really. I just sort of basically fell apart in (removed) and I said to my husband, I didn't ever really talk to my husband, I didn't really, I never told anyone, I couldn't really discuss it with him because it was so much shame and guilt involved, and all the rest of it, so I just said to him, he, he seemed so totally bound up in the job, and there was never any time and, …so I eventually went to the Doctor and um, I think I'm getting the sequence of things right… I went to the doctor, I didn't ever tell the Doctor what the problem was,	She clearly felt that there was nowhere to hide from those who policed the religion, a sense of having to comply or be found out.

There was no anonymity so she couldn't be her real self, there was no privacy. The sense of frustration is palpable here. Left feeling frustrated.

The attraction between them could only be expressed in kissing - what would have happened if they'd gone further? The prohibition of sexual intimacy was internalised? Neither would allow it to go beyond kissing even though there was opportunity to do so.

The description of real, authentic love is clear, and a sense of them both realising what they were being denied bit the religious tribe - resulting in frustrations, and leading to completely "falling apart".

Emphasising the intensity of forbidden love.

Was depression the inevitable consequence of "passing" and the frustration of not being able to express their true affections for each other?

Not talking to husband about it - more "silence". She couldn't even tell the Doctor - the prohibition of same sex love and attraction permeated all aspects of her life - was this projected or a real prohibition even into the GP consulting room and extending beyond the norms of the religious tribe? |

	but she could see that I was depressed and she had me go to her office um, every day, for a, I used to go, she wasn't necessarily there with me you know but she'd give me a cup of tea you know and say, **"Right stay here"** and it was sort of like an hour out of my schedule which, you know, was, was time apart. And I remember going for a month's counselling at (removed), which was on (removed), and telling the guy there, the counsellor there um, it was like a (removed) set-up there with the um, with the institute for um, they'd initially gone in as the (removed), and then the (removed) and they'd set up as I said, a small sort of ...they had like a whole village there, and I remember telling the chap there, and that was the first time I'd ever admitted it to anybody, this was, I must have been probably about thirty-eight…	The Doctor could see she was depressed but unable to name the cause. She moves on quickly here to tell me about going for a month's counselling on the mainland and telling "the guy" there – There's something about the use of "the guy" that suggests her weariness with the male hegemony, even in a place where she sought help. This was the first time "speaking" the "unspeakable" at the age of 38. I'm aware of feeling shocked, frustrated myself and angry at the inhumanity of this. Frustration is palpable in the room and I feel it in my body.
	R: Wow!	I'm unable to withhold my response to what she's telling me. It feels important to let her know the impact on me, and that I'm shocked.
	P: …and I said, "I think I might be gay".	This is her first experience of "coming out" to another person. There was a sense of it being a big reveal, putting words to something that had previously been unspeakable. The statement is hesitant because she says "I think I might be…" when in fact, she knows she is. Testing the counsellor response?

	R: What a huge moment!	
	P: Yeah. Yeah, it took everything I had to um, but during the course of that month, I stayed there, and I lived in (removed) there and during the course of that month …he persuaded me that I wasn't! (Laughs)	It's as though there are two different parts of her in dialogue here - the suppressed art and the acceptable part? One part begins to tell me just how difficult it was to "come out" to the counsellor. It took "everything" - underlines the enormity of the task. I feel anxious as she describes this. The jump to telling me about staying in a guesthouse seemed to jar, and I wonder if this was a different part of her taking her out of the painful memory to a safer memory - is this a way of grounding herself? The coming out in counselling story continues and she reveals that the counsellor "persuaded her" she was not lesbian. Is this abusive therapy? Why has this happened? What was going on? I think the fact she laughs at the end of telling me this, could be testing me - how seriously will I take this? I choose to remain silent.
	R: (Silence)	I remain silent here and I'm aware this is a deliberate choice. I don't want to respond in the way one might in a normal social conversation because I want to elicit more.

		My face is serious and I look intently at her to indicate I am listening. I don't smile or react to her laughter because it strikes me as a test of trust.
	P: Um…	She doesn't seem to know what to say next. Does her "um" invite me to respond?
	R: It's interesting, that you know, you laugh sort of thinking back, and my heart sinks…	I'm attempting to be empathic in this response. I tell her I noticed her laugh and I share my genuine reaction to what she revealed: My heart sank.
	P: Yeah…	She looks reflective and her "yeah" is more serious. She agrees.
	R: …just to think of how unbearably painful that must have been. (Pause) What was it like? What was that experience like?	I'm drawing on my embodied sense of the pain now and it feels important to share that. I inquire what this experience was like.

	P: Well, I think because there was, in my head, there was so much shame, and guilt, and impossibility attached to it, I think it was oh, you know, "Thank God I'm not". Even though, he, you know, as I said he persuaded me during the course of this time that, that everybody has those feelings and that I wasn't.	Shame. Guilt. "in my head" - was she cut off from her body? She uses the work "impossibility" which is a tremendous defeat after coming out for the first time. Have the counsellor's reactions left her feeling even more that her sexual identity is impossible? Another part of her expresses relief - "thank God" - reference to the Divine and thanking God that she's not gay after all. The counsellor trying to normalise the experience by saying everyone has these feelings? This strikes me as ill-informed and responding from his heteronormal stance.
	R: "Just a phase!"	Paraphrasing what she had been told - thinking this is Heterosexism. Her very being is reduced to a phase.
	P: "Just a phase!" Yeah.	
	R: Was he affiliated to the church in any way?	I'm curious if the Counsellor was religious himself - checking back.

	P: He was um, it was, as I said it was (removed), so it was (removed) but it probably, I think looking back, I think it was probably one of these fundamental type um, which is ironic when I, when I move a bit further into the story. Um (Tut), so I went back, and I thought, "Okay, everything is fine" um, but it wasn't! Um, I had been on, …the Doctor had given me antidepressants, and I hadn't realised that you can't come off antidepressants, and I think she'd gone on leave then by the time I'd come back from the counselling, she'd gone on leave and I, I didn't realise you can't come off antidepressants you know like that (Clicks finger), you've got to… so I did, I came off them quickly and then, of course (Cough) I was really back to square one. (Inhales deeply) So I eventually (Cough) thought, "I've got to get out of this situation" you know, "I'm just …" as I said, I'd just fallen apart, and I said to a friend of mine um, (Pauses) "I've got to get out of this situation" and she said, "Well, you know, what, what would you like to do?" and I said, "Well, I'd like to travel"…	She confirms this was a Christian Counsellor affiliated with a religious organisation.

"Fundamental types" implies religious conservatism. Is this religious abuse?

Her sense that the expert had pronounced she was "normal" but for her, it was not. Return to depression.

Back to square one - something within her was telling her the counsellor was wrong and she had this profound drive to get out of the situation.

A need to escape. Some relief when doctor asks her "what would you like to do?" |
	R: What happened then? You had a moment where you sort of…	I'm attending to more than just the words and notice whilst she was talking she was also remembering something else.

	P: Yeah. (Laughs) Yeah, I did…	Her laugh indicates she appreciates my attentiveness to her and she lets me in by acknowledging she was thinking about something important.
	R: …remembering something?	
	P: I did. Because (Laughs) …um (Tut) I had been part of a local Bible study group (Tut) and there, we'd had it in our house a number of times and unbeknownst to me, the husband of one of my friends had fallen in love with me (Pause).	Tuts twice in this part. The tutting becomes apparent to me and I wonder what it's revealing. Is she being self-critical or regretful? A friend's husband had fallen in love with her in the Bible group. Interesting goings-on - it seems this was permitted but being gay was not? Selective rules that suit the majority? Heterosexism? Hypocritical heterosexual man.
	R: (Silence)	
	P: So, that was an added complication.	
	R: Yeah. Yeah.	
	P: Um, there was a woman …so this was made known in the Bible study group that I was somehow luring this guy away from his wife, and I mean they didn't have a clue really of what was going on, but, but I was ostracized as the *woman* taking this guy away from his wife. Whereas, in	Blamed for "luring" the married man - victimisation. The woman's fault. Women as seductress of the innocent man (makes me think of Adam and Eve).

	fact, it was he was doing all the… and there was this one woman in particular who persecuted me. She, she was, she um, she would come into town and she would drive past our house to see if his car was outside, my house. Um, my husband, my husband got to, well, my husband knew, knew about it because I'd told my husband about it, and um (Tut), on one occasion, when it, when it was supposed to have been all sort of like come, cleared, um, she…he had come to the house but my husband knew about it, fortunately my husband knew about this, on that occasion, and um, she had actually gone and told my husband that this guy…(removed) car was outside the house, and he could say to her, you know well, "I know", "this is what's happening today" kind of thing, um, so that was an, an added complication (Pause). So, um, so as I said, you know I thought "I've just got to get out of this situation", "I can't deal with it anymore", so this friend said to me, "What would you like to do?", "I'd like to travel", "Where would you like to travel?", "I'd like to travel to the (removed)". So, I think that was a, no I can't quite remember the sequence…that was the September I think. Anyway, in the April, oh that's right, we came home on leave and went back and it was, because we had leave every two years…sorry this story's becoming very complicated! (Laughs) Um…	Ostracized for being "Eve" even before they knew she was a lesbian woman. Prolific persecution within the tribe and paranoia. Stalking and use of silence to bully - abusive? More use of silence this time in an overtly sinister way. A sense of having had enough and being unable to deal with it. Needing to escape. Needing to travel. Relationships within the tribe were complex and toxic.

	R: You're being very clear actually…	Reassuring her that I understand her.

Appendix 8: Example of Developing Emergent Themes

Emergent Themes: Interview 3 "Pam".

EMERGENT THEMES	ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT	EXPLORATORY COMMENTS
Having to suppress aspects of self Identity Conflict Relating to a particular epoch	**P: It *was* a conscious decision. Um, because as I said, I had, you know I, I felt different, um, but as I said, in those days, you didn't, people didn't talk about, about gay issues.**	She had previously been talking about having had a very early awareness of her sexual-orientation but "chose" to suppress it. Also included the notion of women and domesticity. Is this part of her coming out process? "gay issues" – what exactly is she meaning by this?
	R: "gay issues". It was just unspoken.	I echo "gay issues" because it feels broad and safe. I reframe it to unspoken. Is there an underlying struggle to express how unspeakable this issue was and so resorts to saying it was unspoken?
Heterosexism Pathological view of lived-experience Something Taboo	**P: "just unspoken". Yeah totally, unspoken.**	Shakes her head in a kind of disbelief and recalls the time context in which she lived, and the climate of anti-gay prejudice and prohibitions. She repeats it in a different way and it changes from "just unspoken" to "totally unspoken". She really seems to want me to hear that it was absolutely not spoken about.

	R: Unspeakable.	I reflect back, and use the word "unspeakable" here because I have a sense this is what she's trying to tell me. I'm aware it's a more loaded word but I wanted to frame it in a way that seemed to capture the way in which she was telling me this too.
Something Taboo An unacceptable expression of feelings Not belonging Isolation and loneliness Having to suppress aspects of self Relationships problematic	**P: "Unspeakable", yeah. I mean there was always that title, "The love that must never speak its name" or something. …Um, so I never had anybody at all, I never talked about it with anybody, um, so I decided, "Well okay, I don't know anybody". I hadn't had any, any real, real experience. Um, I thought, "Well okay, I have to suppress this …and accept the conventional route".**	The word "unspeakable", as I used it, appears to resonate with her. She agrees and it prompts awareness of related issues. She refers to a title of either a book or film that seems to capture the essence of this issue further. She mentions first that she didn't have anybody and I hear that she was isolated, alone, that relationships had been affected by her difference. She brushes over it and returns to talking about not having "talked about it with anybody". The combination of not being able to talk about it and being alone with it resulted in a

		conscious decision to suppress this aspect of her identity.
		She knew the only way to survive was to deny this aspect of her being. She refers to "the conventional route" - is she referring to "passing" for the dominant social group here? Does she mean pretend to be heterosexual?
	R: And you say you knew you were different around the age twelve or thirteen. Did you know what that difference was?	I interrupted the flow here and rather than exploring what she meant by passing I was aware that she was giving me so much information that I didn't want to miss anything. What I heard was her mentioning something about how old she was when she first became aware of her difference and I wanted to clarify that. I think I was doing this in the context of her saying she would "accept the conventional route" because I wanted to be sure she was aware of being lesbian and consciously chose to "pass" as opposed to having become aware of sexuality later in life.

Otherness Careful use of language Hypervigilance for judgement and attack	**P: (Pause)…Yes. I knew that I liked, I preferred women to men.**	She stops herself completing the sentence "I knew I liked women" and changes it to "preferred women to men". This seems a less committed stance and perhaps indicative of her hypervigilance, still "minding her language"
	R: Right. You knew that.	Without thinking too much about it, I make a bolder, committed statement. I think I wanted to let her know it was safe to speak with me about the unspeakable.
Self-criticism and judgement Coming out to self The relative safety of isolation Relationships being problematic Internalised prejudice Embodied experiences Hiding the real self	**P: Yeah (Tut), because… I've always been passionate about the movies. I remember um, very often, watching a film on television, um it used to be, you know when I was about that age that my parents would go out on a Sunday afternoon, and I would sit in and watch black-and-white films, and you know, I *knew* that I didn't fancy the guys, I fancied the women. So, um (Tuts), I mean as I said, I never told anybody. Um as I said I decided to suppress all that side of myself.**	I noticed numerous "tuts" throughout the interview that were almost like a tick. Were these tuts the sound of her self-criticism? She seems to start remembering an experience of "coming out to self" and gives me the context for this. Again, I'm struck by how the isolation. In the safety of isolation, she could watch a black and white film (not colour - which seems to say something about the austerity of the time) and she enjoyed "knowing" that she didn't fancy the guys.

		As she tells me this I have a sense she trusts me with very intimate information about her experiences.
		Again, she tuts and repeats that she never told anybody.
		It's interesting she uses the word "anybody" and not "anyone" - what was going on in her body?
		She repeats that she had to suppress "all" that aspect of herself and the word all stands out for me: there wasn't even an aspect of her sexuality she could reveal to another body.
	R: And what was that like? Realising that you had to suppress that aspect of yourself?	I want to know more about this process of denying an aspect of her identity here.
Different aspects of self Identity conflict Rules and norms of the Religion Something Taboo Relationship to the world problematic	**P: (Pauses) "What was it like?" Um, I suppose um, I thought, "Well okay, this um, this isn't talked about, can *never* be talked about", I wasn't aware of anything you know, happening in the World as such, um you know, "There's no future in this" um, so yes, I went (touches head)…**	She asks herself the question I asked her, as if she's addressing that part of her that she earlier described as suppressing, like she's checking-in with that part and inviting it into dialogue. It's as though the disowned part is now in the room and engaged with me in the interview. She recalls knowing the rules of the religious tribe and in society that this aspect of her experience just isn't spoken about and she determines from that fact that it is therefore

		"bad" in some way and can "never" be revealed. When she says "never" I get a real sense of the serious risk involved and never suggests absolutely not, forbidden. She was cut off from the wider world, not aware what was happening out there and as she wrestled with it, became aware "there was no future in it". Does this phrase suggest a downplaying of the risk? Does she mean she knew the consequences could be catastrophic for her?
	R: You went up into your head, and sort of had to rationalise, to intellectualise about it.	Given her use of the word "anybody "earlier I think I was more aware of her body after that and when she touches her head in the context of explaining what happened, I notice she touches her head, as though showing me where she went in her body.

Internalised prejudice Passing for the dominant group Conforming to the rules and expectations Relationships problematic A drive to be real Relationships problematic Language and pleasing others Self-criticism	**P: Yeah. Mm. Mm. So then, so then I got married. Um, (Tut) and, and as I said, had three children and didn't really deal with it. I mean I knew it was as it was there, I wasn't …I don't think I was *in love* with my ex-husband um, but, but a form of love grew between us - never talked about it with him at all, um (Pause). But as I said, but when I went to (removed), it surfaced because there was a woman there that I was attracted to and she was attracted to me but, she didn't want to do anything at all about it, so um …she was from (removed) and she was going to and from (removed). She was married as well, her hus… and they were (removed) as well and uh, (Tut) but as I said, she didn't want to do anything about it, so…**	My interpretation about going up into her head doesn't land. Maybe she doesn't know what I'm talking about. She continues with her story of "passing" - she had 3 children and "didn't really deal with it. Is she minimising this? Did she experience post-natal depression? She moves on to talking about her husband but I'm left wondering what she meant and felt moved that she felt forced to become a mother when this wasn't her natural inclination. Is the love she describes for her husband "agape"? as opposed to erotic love? - A friendship that grew. Again, the theme of not talking about things, suppressing and hiding her true self (incongruence). The part of herself she had suppressed is described as "surfacing" - does this mean it was irrepressible? Talks about mutual attraction between herself and another woman but doesn't call this falling in love or sexual attraction.

		The language seems prohibitive and as though she's learned how to make these experiences more palatable for the heterosexual ear? Another tut denoting self-criticism?
	R: Could I ask you something about that? Because there's this sort of "unspeakable thing" that you couldn't speak out, or talk to anyone about, but then you meet someone…	
	P: Mm.	

Language and pleasing others Heteronormativity	**R: …I'm curious then about that, that sort of attraction, and how, how you found each other in that sense, how you both found a way to communicate what you were feeling.**	I'm picking up on the use of the word "attraction" and that it felt like dumbing something down. I want to know more about how they discovered this feeling between themselves especially in the climate of it being "unspeakable".
The frustration of not being real Passing for the dominant group Breaking the rules of the religion Having no privacy Having to comply Embodied experiences	**P: It was, it was a *frustrating* time really because um, I was, she was, her husband was, we knew her husband first because, they were, they were from (removed) and, um, he was on, he was there, she, she, she was back at home, and then she came, um, and at first, I wasn't awfully *keen* on her because she used to use quite bad language and I wasn't you know, keen on that, and I wasn't awfully keen. But slowly but surely, I found myself becoming attracted to her and her attracted to me, um, …but as I said she was, well I suppose it was very difficult because well, we're both married you know, I'd got young children, we're in this very um (Tut), um, …sort of 'society under a microscope' really, you know, you weren't really anonymous. You couldn't be anonymous in that society, you know. People would know what you were doing, so it was um, I think the only, I mean, we knew there was an attraction there but I think the only thing in which it was physically manifested was kissing, you know, when the opportunity arose, which wasn't very often you know, she didn't want to do, go any further than that. And as I said, she didn't, she**	The frustration is emphasised. Both parties were in the act of "passing" and having to be secretive. A sense of them breaking the rules because they were both married. Noticing the "gradual attraction" that conveys caution and having to be careful. When she talks about "society under a microscope" I wonder if this is a reference to the control within her religious tribe. She clearly felt that there was nowhere to hide from those who policed the religion, a sense of having to comply or be found out. There was no anonymity so she couldn't be her real self, there was no privacy. The sense of frustration is palpable here. Left feeling frustrated.

	went back to (removed), and I felt completely sort of frustrated, you know, because she didn't really want to do…I mean, she told me that she'd had more love from me in the very short time she knew me than she'd ever had from her husband. Um, but she went back to (removed) and subsequently divorced her husband. Um, and I lost her, she didn't want to be in touch. Um, so as I said, I got to the state when, I was just completely at rock bottom really. I just sort of basically fell apart in (removed), and I said to my husband, I didn't ever really talk to my husband, I didn't really, I never told anyone, I couldn't really discuss it with him because it was so much shame and guilt involved, and all the rest of it, so I just said to him, he, he seemed so totally bound up in the job, and there was never any time and, …so I eventually went to the Doctor and um, I think I'm getting the sequence of things right… I went to the doctor, I didn't ever tell the Doctor what the problem was, but she could see that I was depressed and she had me go to her office um, every day, for a, I used to go, she wasn't necessarily there with me you know but she'd give me a cup of tea you know and say, "Right stay here" and it was sort of like an hour out of my schedule which, you know, was, was time apart. And I remember going for a month's counselling at (removed) which was on (removed), and telling the guy there, the counsellor there um, it was like a (removed) set-up there with the um, with the	The attraction between them could only be expressed in kissing - what would have happened if they'd gone further? The prohibition of sexual intimacy was internalised? Neither would allow it to go beyond kissing even though there was opportunity to do so. The description of real, authentic love is clear, and a sense of them both realising what they were being denied bit the religious tribe - resulting in frustrations, and leading to completely "falling apart". Emphasising the intensity of forbidden love. Was depression the inevitable consequence of "passing" and the frustration of not being able to express their true affections for each other? Not talking to husband about it - more "silence". She couldn't even tell the Doctor - the prohibition of same sex love and attraction permeated all aspects of her life - was this projected or a real prohibition even into the GP consulting room and extending beyond the norms of the religious tribe?
Limitations to self-expression		
Striving for authenticity		
Wanting to love and be loved		
Something Taboo		
Depression and psychological pain		
Silence conveying something unacceptable		
The extent of heterosexism		

	institute for um, they'd initially gone in as the (removed), and then the Institute (removed) and they'd set up a mini, as I said, a small sort of ...they had like a whole village there, and I remember telling the chap there, and that was the first time I'd ever admitted it to anybody, this was, I must have been probably about thirty-eight...	The Doctor could see she was depressed but unable to name the cause.
Unhelpful talking therapy Conservative religion and heterosexism Religious abuse? Something unspeakable or taboo Coming out to self and others		She moves on quickly here to tell me about going for a month's counselling on the mainland and telling "the guy" there – There's something about the use of "the guy" that suggests her weariness with the male hegemony, even in a place where she sought help. This was the first time "speaking" the "unspeakable" at the age of 38. I'm aware of feeling shocked, frustrated myself and angry at the inhumanity of this. Frustration is palpable in the room and I feel it in my body.
	R: Wow!	I'm unable to withhold my response to what she's telling me. It feels important to let her know the impact on me, and that I'm shocked.
Coming out to others Careful use of language	**P: ...and I said, "I think I might be gay".**	This is her first experience of "coming out" to another person. There was a sense of it being a big reveal, putting words to something that had previously been unspeakable. The statement is hesitant because she says "I think I might be…" when in fact, she knows she is. Testing the counsellor response?

	R: What a huge moment!	
Different aspects of identity Coming out to others Self-preservation Unhelpful talking therapy Ill-informed professionals Religious abuse? Minimising effects of prejudice	**P: Yeah. Yeah, it took everything I had to um, but during the course of that month, I stayed there, and I lived in the guesthouse there and during the course of that month …he persuaded me that I wasn't! (Laughs)**	It's as though there are two different parts of her in dialogue here - the suppressed art and the acceptable part? One part begins to tell me just how difficult it was to "come out" to the counsellor. It took "everything" - underlines the enormity of the task. I feel anxious as she describes this. The jump to telling me about staying in a guesthouse seemed to jar, and I wonder if this was a different part of her taking her out of the painful memory to a safer memory - is this a way of grounding herself? The coming out in counselling story continues and she reveals that the counsellor "persuaded her" she was not lesbian. Is this abusive therapy? Why has this happened? What was going on? I think the fact she laughs at the end of telling me this, could be testing me - how seriously will I take this? I choose to remain silent.

	R: (Silence)	I remain silent here and I'm aware this is a deliberate choice. I don't want to respond in the way one might in a normal social conversation because I want to elicit more. My face is serious and I look intently at her to indicate I am listening. I don't smile or react to her laughter because it strikes me as a test of trust.
Lost for words Tyranny of language	P: Um…	She doesn't seem to know what to say next. Does her "um" invite me to respond?
	R: It's interesting, that you know, you laugh sort of thinking back, and my heart sinks…	I'm attempting to be empathic in this response. I tell her I noticed her laugh and I share my genuine reaction to what she revealed: My heart sank.
	P: Yeah…	She looks reflective and her "yeah" is more serious. She agrees.
	R: …just to think of how unbearably painful that must have been. (Pause) What was it like? What was that experience like?	I'm drawing on my embodied sense of the pain now and it feels important to share that. I inquire what this experience was like.

Experiencing shame Experiencing guilt Over-thinking Being cut off from body as a way of coping The impossibility of difference Being other Religious doctrine	**P: Well, I think because there was, in my head, there was so much shame, and guilt, and impossibility attached to it, I think it was oh, you know, "Thank God I'm not". Even though, he, you know, as I said he persuaded me during the course of this time that, that everybody has those feelings and that I wasn't.**	Shame. Guilt. "in my head" - was she cut off from her body? She uses the work "impossibility" which is a tremendous defeat after coming out for the first time. Have the counsellor's reactions left her feeling even more that her sexual identity is impossible? Another part of her expresses relief - "thank God" - reference to the Divine and thanking God that she's not gay after all. The counsellor trying to normalise the experience by saying everyone has these feelings? This strikes me as ill-informed and responding from his heteronormal stance.
	R: "Just a phase!"	Paraphrasing what she had been told - thinking this is Heterosexism. Her very being is reduced to a phase.
Sexuality as just a phase	**P: "Just a phase!" Yeah.**	
	R: Was he affiliated to the church in any way?	I'm curious if the Counsellor was religious himself - checking back.

Conservative religion and prejudice External locus of evaluation Not able to accept ill-informed view Psychological pain Depression Drive towards authenticity Wanting to escape	**P: He was um, it was, as I said it was the (removed) so it was an (removed) but it probably, I think looking back, I think it was probably one of these fundamental type um, which is ironic when I, when I move a bit further into the story. Um (Tut), so I went back, and I thought, "Okay, everything is fine" um, but it wasn't! Um, I had been on, …the Doctor had given me antidepressants, and I hadn't realised that you can't come off antidepressants, and I think she'd gone on leave then by the time I'd come back from the counselling, she'd gone on leave and I, I didn't realise you can't come off antidepressants you know like that (Clicks finger), you've got to… so I did, I came off them quickly and then, of course (Cough) I was really back to square one. (Inhales deeply) So I eventually (Cough) thought, "I've got to get out of this situation" you know, "I'm just …" as I said, I'd just fallen apart, and I said to a friend of mine um, (Pauses) "I've got to get out of this situation" and she said, "Well, you know, what, what would you like to do?" and I said, "Well, I'd like to travel"…**	She confirms this was a Christian Counsellor affiliated with a religious organisation. "Fundamental types" implies religious conservatism. Is this religious abuse? Her sense that the expert had pronounced she was "normal" but for her, it was not. Return to depression. Back to square one - something within her was telling her the counsellor was wrong and she had this profound drive to get out of the situation. A need to escape. Some relief when doctor asks her "what would you like to do?"
	R: What happened then? You had a moment where you sort of…	I'm attending to more than just the words and notice whilst she was talking she was also remembering something else.
The joy of contact and intimacy	**P: Yeah. (Laughs) Yeah, I did…**	Her laugh indicates she appreciates my attentiveness to her and she lets me in by

		acknowledging she was thinking about something important.
	R: …remembering something?	
Unwanted male attention Being self-critical Shame	**P: I did. Because (Laughs) …um (Tut) I had been part of a local Bible study group (Tut) and there, we'd had it in our house a number of times and unbeknownst to me, the husband of one of my friends had fallen in love with me (Pause).**	Tuts twice in this part. The tutting becomes apparent to me and I wonder what it's revealing. Is she being self-critical or regretful? A friend's husband had fallen in love with her in the Bible group. Interesting goings-on - it seems this was permitted but being gay was not? Selective rules that suit the majority? Heterosexism? Hypocritical heterosexual man.
	R: (Silence)	
	P: So, that was an added complication.	
	R: Yeah. Yeah.	
Patriarchy Being victimised Selective religious rules Women as dangerous Being victimised	**P: Um, there was a woman …so this was made known in the Bible study group that I was somehow luring this guy away from his wife, and I mean they didn't have a clue really of what was going on, but, but I was ostracized as the *woman* taking this guy away from his wife. Whereas, in fact, it was he was doing all the… and there was this one woman in particular who persecuted me. She, she was, she um, she would come into town and she would drive**	Blamed for "luring" the married man - victimisation. The woman's fault. Women as seductress of the innocent man (makes me think of Adam and Eve). Ostracized for being "Eve" even before they knew she was a lesbian woman.

Persecutory relationships Relationships are problematic Silence Sinister use of silence Not being able to tolerate any more judgement Needing to escape Relationships as problematic	past our house to see if his car was outside, my house. Um, my husband, my husband got to, well, my husband knew, knew about it because I'd told my husband about it, and um (Tut), on one occasion, when it, when it was supposed to have been all sort of like come, cleared, um, she…he had come to the house but my husband knew about it, fortunately my husband knew about this, on that occasion, and um, she had actually gone and told my husband that this guy…(removed) car was outside the house, and he could say to her, you know well, "I know", "this is what's happening today" kind of thing, um, so that was an, an added complication (Pause). So, um, so as I said, you know I thought "I've just got to get out of this situation", "I can't deal with it anymore", so this friend said to me, "What would you like to do?", "I'd like to travel", "Where would you like to travel?", "I'd like to travel to the (removed)". So, I think that was a, no I can't quite remember the sequence…that was the September I think. Anyway, in the April, oh that's right, we came home on leave and went back and it was, because we had leave every two years…sorry this story's becoming very complicated! (Laughs) Um…	Prolific persecution within the tribe and paranoia. Stalking and use of silence to bully - abusive? More use of silence this time in an overtly sinister way. A sense of having had enough and being unable to deal with it. Needing to escape. Needing to travel. Relationships within the tribe were complex and toxic.
	R: You're being very clear actually…	Reassuring her that I understand her.

Appendix 9: Clustered themes for an interview

Clustered Themes - Interview 6 (#045)

Clustered themes from initial themes and meaning units:

Indoctrination/Tribalism

rules, the book interpreted and misunderstood, misperceptions, faith and belief versus religion, the Qur'an, religion and "practicing", defining "Muslim", individualism, prayer and definition of Muslim, tribalism, Ramadan, Alcohol and abstinence as a marker of difference, "feeling Islamic", a lot of the rules are cultural rather than religious, "not for me", "not me", using women to keep face, dishonesty, doing your duty, ruining others' lives, living a double life, religion-culture-family-individual, forbidden, tribal rules forbid it, it's forbidden, tribalism – never for Muslims, fear of being outed, high numbers of Muslim men in same situation, surrender to essentialism – always will be taboo, distinction between beliefs and religion, making a comment about judging in Islam, leaders' views (prejudice), avoidance/denial within Islam, individual responsibility within Islam, taboos and silence, importance of honesty, pointing out selective use of text/teachings, hypocrisy, essentialism – absolutes – selective, pointing out contradictions, finding a loophole, explaining his own understanding, language, fear, isolation, families and control/pressure.

Coming out/inviting in

disbelief, not fitting stereotypes, "too masculine", carrying yourself in a gay way, individualism, coming out to self, coming out to others, post-graduation freedom/independence, school and early years experiences, pursuit of authenticity, wanting to discover own identity, risks, confiding in others, trust in others, inviting in, need for authenticity, an inner need to be known, being open about lifestyle, concern about maintaining the family line, threatening the family line, congruence, physical attraction, a breach of trust, taboo, reputation of the family, got to face certain things, coming out external to religion, "knowing" intrapsychically, "a feeling" against religious and cultural norms, denial leads to craziness, fear of being outed, relief of coming out, modern technology opening doors to access others, information helpful, early awareness, being questioned, others needing to know, those who can know and those who can't – a private matter/personal, choosing between family honour and honesty with self, could not live a lie, choosing the right moment to come out, advises independence first to other Muslims, thinking it through before coming out, losing control of coming out and accepting that, father's suggestion declined (to move away).

Heterosexism, homophobia and Prejudice

taboo, misunderstanding, expectations, stigma, ignorance, lack of knowledge, misinterpretation, stereotyping, feminizing, preconceived ideas, assumptions, male/female (binary thinking), gender and sexuality, threat to the family line, having the right attributes to be a father, "not me", family honour, family name, stigma of divorce, truth versus lies and ruining lives, gay men in the closet could ruin a woman's life, strategies employed to pass, using woman's lower status, a big taboo, compelled to pass, not seen and not heard, denying existence - invisible other, abusive personal relationship, domestic abuse, no confidants, Always will be a taboo – resignation and surrender to essentialism, heterosexism, explaining the reasons – lack of education/understanding, others not wanting to deal with it, unspeakable – skirting around the subject "almost saying it", hypocrisy, overexcitement of others on the subject, self-denial, defending self, fighting, standing up to others, denying, having to be strong, strategies to deny/pass – marrying, always costs someone, families and control and pressure, father's suggestion declined (to move away), the unspoken/hidden communication, homophobia – religion used to forbid it,

Liminality

wanting to discover the truth, wanting to find your own path, self reflection and thinking it through, conflicted, experiencing tension, a split, torn self, being humbled by the experience, the humbling truth, finding a way to be stronger, requires strength, years to resolve this, being happy with real self, denial = craziness, a gradual process over time, vulnerability and becoming a target for abuse, isolation and no support led to domestic abuse, couldn't speak out – isolation, being pushed towards being open, happening across information about others like him, many others like him in the Muslim community, not so other, feeling faulty, self-denial "I can't be gay", suppressing sexuality, meeting others like self, modern technology opening doors to access others, unable to confide in anyone, information helpful, aware of otherness at a young age, importance of honesty, judging back regarding being judgemental, being judgemental described as equally as bad as being gay, stressing the need for self-examination, pointing out selective use of text and teachings, defending self, angry at hypocrisy, denying own sexuality, defending/fighting, making a choice about how to live, describing confusion, choosing between family honour and honesty with self, strategies to deny experience or pass – marrying, not wanting to judge, thinking it through, rejecting option of living a lie, finding loopholes and contradictions, explaining his own understanding, misunderstanding of the religious text, misinterpretation, language, understanding context, humility presented as central, fear, expressing pride in Islamic identity, progressing (post luminal), finding interpersonal support, accepting the limitations of others humbling and fits with Islam, experience fits with Islam – the purest form of Islam,

Sexism

differences between men and women, using women to hide/pass, ruining women's lives, stigma of divorce, closeted men could ruin a woman's life, using woman's lower status to pass,

Society, Culture and Religion

cultural influences, ethnicity, identities and expectations, ethnicity and prejudice, a lot of rules are cultural rather than religious, increasing awareness, things are changing, society changing, Taboo, passing, reputation of the family, keeping the family happy, isolation and abuse, modern technology opening doors to access others, culture or religion?, intermingling of religion and culture, the place of family honour, linking societal norms with Abrahamic religions, culture and society not the same,

Intersecting identities

ethnicity, languages, culture, society, "feeling Islamic", wanting to discover own identity, need for authenticity, ethnicity and expectations, Gay South Asian Welsh and English speaking Pakistani Muslim, feeling faulty, understanding own intersecting identities, families and power influence,

Authenticity

truthfulness in place of doing your duty and being dishonest, irrepressible, constant pull, wanting to discover more, to discover 'the truth', wanting 'truth', humbling to discover the truth, inner peace and being happy with real self, abuse pushed him towards being open, summarising own understanding of Islam, humility fits with Islam, self-acceptance,

Relationships

longing, stigma, domestic abuse, no support, isolation, the abuser exploited his isolation – couldn't speak out, isolation, no confidants, meeting others like himself, belonging and not belonging, modern technology opening doors to access others, unable to confide in anyone, power of the family – influence and control,

Unanticipated learning and growth

finding peace through honesty and developing confidence, inner peace, becoming stronger, knowing yourself, knowing what makes you happy, learning from experience, meeting others like himself, doing good to others being honest and authentic and truthful with self, expressing pride in identity,

making a distinction between belief and religion, relationship with the Divine a private matter, own understanding of Islam, humility central, not judging, humility and Islam, experiences resulted in the purest form of Islam,

Final Table of Themes: Interview 6

Master Themes: interview 6
1. Indoctrination/Tribalism
2. Coming out/inviting in
3. Heterosexism and anti-gay prejudice
4. Liminality
5. Sexism
6. Society Culture and religion
7. Intersecting identities
8. Authenticity
9. Relationships
10. Unanticipated learning
11. The uberwelt

Appendix 10: Clustered themes across cases

Clustered themes across cases 1&2

Initial Themes and meaning units:

Depicting a Process of Development– started from an early age, journeyed through, having travelled/passed through something, born into it – context she's been given/no choice,

Indoctrination – early age indoctrination, parental tribe, denominational education/training in the doctrine, certificate in mission work, indoctrinated, longing for community, immersion in the religious tribe, a duty to be private about her real self and to worship with other people,

Religious Tribalism and Denomination –parental introduction, rewards for participation, "A Book", specific tribal names/identity – denomination, membership and rites of passage, becoming missionaries, distinction of tribal leaders and riles in denominations, distinguishing tribal rites of passage eg Baptism, what happens we there's a reformation of a new tribe/tribes combining (united reformed), Active participation and voluntary service, becoming an elder, volunteering to go overseas to do missionary work, altruism/desire to "give back", Patriarchal, disillusionment, "a society under a microscope" and tribal control, couldn't be anonymous, no help within tribe, Damage done by Christian Counsellor, needing to get away from/escape, hypocrisy, prejudice, judging, increased need to escape, retreat, found no kindness, no dialogue, turning to a different religious tribe (Catholicism), tribal differences, Dogmatism in the religious tribes and blaming others, Tribal "crossing to the other side of the road", being ecumenically minded, appreciating the structure of religion, the appeal of traditions and history of a religious tribe, being educated versus uneducated in a particular faith, inconsistent rules, religious fundamentalism and son rejecting her, punishment, alone, losing everything, consequences of non-conformity, no options, return to prejudiced tribe due to need for others and lack of options, churches are against gay people in deed if not in word, distinction between saying they're open and what actually happens, tribal vote and tribe refusing a gay couple a religious blessing, aware of some tribes who say they are "open", the anti-gay church, turning to an alleged place of safety, more acceptable to be a divorcee than gay, rejecting membership of a denomination, avoids rocking the boat for fear of being outcast again, unwelcoming other tribes, maintaining the status quo, chastity, obedience, resignation and surrender, family tribe also closed ranks,

Patriarchy and Sexism – main lead roles are male, women elders in some denominations, the role of women, role centred around husband's profession not hers, male lead with wife and kids as "back up team", being a "back up team" repeated, not used/profession disregarded, redundant woman, lesser role, found a role off her own back, first woman elder, women and expectation of domesticity, husband caught up in his job, need to get away from, hypocrisy, gender and male hegemony, male priviledge – being a woman and fighting much harder, outcasts, consequences of non-compliance with the rules,

Relationships and belonging/not-belonging – contact, didn't ever talk to husband, doctor tried to help with depression (external help from tribe), tea and time, seeking help from a doctor and a counsellor : counsellor prejudice and return to despair, alone, effect of contact and attunement - remembering something, complexity of experiences, needed to retreat to sort things out, no

kindness, meeting a nun, love relationships, advised to divorce, aloneness, falling in love and secret 19 year relationship, loved her children and being forced to choose, her mother's inconsistent rules, double life and coming out to children –timing of this and responsibilities to them, facing rejection/punishment, resistance to acknowledging toll on relationships, alone, sadness, interviewer seeing and acknowledging her pain, love and loss, deep shame and guilt, paying a high price for the "crime" of being gay, need for others and relationship has drawn her back into the same heterosexist tribe, reduced options, belonging at any cost, longing for community, seeking relationship, finding a confidant, they "knew", the love of her "gay life" (2 lives), trying but failing to maintain relationships in an impossible context, was aware of what would help (inclusive accepting community and belonging) but required courage and limited choice in home town, repeating patterns in relationship, 30 years married and ceased sexual intimacy but they never spoke about it, doubts capacity to commit to another person and running out of time, Inquiry and effect in dialogue (in interview), painful separation from lover – resignation and surrender, her heart's desire is to be loved and accepted, surprise at what emerged in the interview – warmth and appreciation, saying goodbye

Otherness – aware of being other at an early age, no-one to talk to, suppressing otherness and that side of herself, sent to an island in the Pacific, New Britain Island, unspeakable, conscious decision to suppress because people didn't talk about "it", having "gay issues", totally unspoken, "the love that must never speak its name", irrepressible, Forbidden feelings, Frustration, breaking the rules, people "knew", need to get away, need to escape, increased need to escape, secrecy of love, living a double life, rejection, being an outcast, liminality, losing everything, being in an impossible situation, a gay couple in her current religious tribe (invisible), abandoned and left with nothing, homeless, avoids rocking the boat - some conformity, settling for what's available, being other and impact on relationships, outcasts, maintaining the staus quo, betwixt and between – walking on water, on the margins and liminliaty, her heart's desire is to be loved and accepted,

Coming out –early awareness of sexual orientation around 12/13 knew she preferred women, recognised through film, movies (external to tribe) supported self awareness, "knowing", had to think it though so unspeakable was it, intellectualising and safety, married and 3 children, agape love with husband, irrepressible, fear, "attraction to each other", gradual attraction to another woman, kissing, authentic love, depression and falling apart – no one to help, unspeakable, saw a counsellor and revealed identity first time in 26 years taking everything she had to so – persuaded that she wasn't, Shame, guilt, heart sinking moment, urge to escape, retreating to sort things out for herself, never talked, generational differences, unexpressed feelings (minus the "gay"), advised to divorce, secrecy of love, Came out aged 52 (40 years after own awareness, 40 years in liminality, coming out to children, a double life, rejection, dreams and hopes/longing for normalisation, punishment, working through it on her own, deep shame and guilt, an impossible situation, consequences of her "crime", risked living authentically but shame and guilt destroyed freedom, sadness of suppressing the Self, Self-denial for her whole life, risked self-expression and it was not a happy ending, homeless, finding a confidant, "walking on water" – out and not out in current tribe, intellectual integration of religion and sexual orientation versus what really is, "passing" and hiding, choosing invisibility. "A secret" would be too simplisitic – 1950 and context, "A gift", the cross she had to bear, longing to be real – "The Velveteen rabbit", current family rejection,

Heteronormativity and Heterosexism – heterosexual marriage and having children, heterosupremacy – married and had 3 children due to context, only kissing, left frustrated, didn't ever talk to husband, counsellor and experiencing rejection, heterosexism in a "safe" therapeutic relationship, heterosexism forced her to choose between children and own sanity, Unspoken/no dialogue, silence and passive aggression, couldn't be open, could have survived the heterosexual lie if he's "talked", could have stayed hidden, tragedy and loss, loss of identity and all that was meaningful, churches are against gay people in deed if not in word, distinction between saying they're open and what actually happens, invisibility, anti-gay church, confusion, forbidden, unspeakable, blood boiling against heterosupremacy, indifference, hatred, a duty to be private about her real self and to worship with other people, chastity, duty, self-denial/invisibility preferable to being alone,

Religious Abuse and Effects – prejudice, Sexism, Minimising role, spiralling into depression, depression, falling apart, Cristina counsellor and prejudice reinforced, unacceptability of sexuality and return to depression/despair, Alone, ostracized even before they knew the truth, persecution, paranoia, hopelessness, no kindness, meeting a nun and a love story, tragedy and sadness, forced to choose between sanity and children, unspoken, no dialogue, punishment, feeling so much guilt and shame, depression, secrets and the cost of no dialogue, cruelty, cruel silence (?passive aggression), paying a high price for the "crime" of being gay, being an Outcast, prejudice and power, blindness, sadness, anger, drawn back to a similar context because of need for community/belonging - the known, abandoned and left with nothing, abandonment and homelessness, children's rejection, absolute rejection, oppression, making sense of experiences, can have community if in the guide of a divorcee, find a way to leave/escape, the ranting of a patriarchal heterosexist leader, threat of ostracism, the Leviticus code and rules, consequences of non-compliance, walking out but not speaking out – silence, masochism? The familiar and the known preferable to no worship community, "Walking on Water" and not fearing liminality, vigilance, can't make meaning of it, not-knowing,could have been a contemplative nun, chastity, 30 years married and ceased sexual intimacy but they never spoke about it, isolation, alone for all of her life, doubting capacity to commit to another person now, running out of time, a life ruined, time that she can never get back,

Identity – Identifies as Christian from age 7 or 8, education external to religious tribe, altruism and desire to "give back", LGCM, "gay" versus "living a gay lifestyle", teh love of her "gay life" (2 identities), need for structure,

Attachment and Loss – indefinite visa impacted by onset of HIV/AIDS in 1980's – visa cancelled, impact on relationship,

The Uberwelt – speaks to the Divine/Deity, "prayer", relationship/faith even in the face of absolute rejection, distinction between her commitment to the Divine and not to a religious tribe, being ecumenically minded, needs communal worship at any cost, no choices – settling for what's available to her, preaching of The Word, ideal structure is another tribe but more friendship (albeit conditional) in "non-conformist" (theologically) tribes, could be anonymous and worship but seeks relationship/community, spiritual courage and strength, Divine love and connectedness, Love, trusting Divine meaning, tragedy and strengthening of faith,

Gains – Global travel, cross-cultural perspectives, self-determination, finding her own way, stories of falling in love, tribal barriers aren't difficult for her, becoming, authenticity, plurality of

perspective, openness to others, stronger faith, self-acceptance, making sense of experiences, intellectual – resolving things in her head, human sensitivity, "A gift", humour (eg. Could have been a contemplative nun - and sexuality), holding on to hope, tolerance of other's prejudices, humility, altruism and helping others , thinking through beliefs, certainty/confidence in beliefs

Clustered Themes

1. **Religious Tribalism**
   parental introduction, rewards for participation, "A Book", specific tribal names/identity – denomination, membership and rites of passage, becoming missionaries, distinction of tribal leaders and riles in denominations, distinguishing tribal rites of passage eg Baptism, what happens we there's a reformation of a new tribe/tribes combining (united reformed), Active participation and voluntary service, becoming an elder, volunteering to go overseas to do missionary work, altruism/desire to "give back", Patriarchal, disillusionment, "a society under a microscope" and tribal control, couldn't be anonymous, no help within tribe, Damage done by Christian Counsellor, needing to get away from/escape, hypocrisy, prejudice, judging, increased need to escape, retreat, found no kindness, no dialogue, turning to a different religious tribe (Catholicism), tribal differences, Dogmatism in the religious tribes and blaming others, Tribal "crossing to the other side of the road", being ecumenically minded, appreciating the structure of religion, the appeal of traditions and history of a religious tribe, being educated versus uneducated in a particular faith, inconsistent rules, religious fundamentalism and son rejecting her, punishment, alone, losing everything, consequences of non-conformity, no options, return to prejudiced tribe due to need for others and lack of options, churches are against gay people in deed if not in word, distinction between saying they're open and what actually happens, tribal vote and tribe refusing a gay couple a religious blessing, aware of some tribes who say they are "open", the anti-gay church, turning to an alleged place of safety, more acceptable to be a divorcee than gay, rejecting membership of a denomination, avoids rocking the boat for fear of being outcast again, unwelcoming other tribes, maintaining the status quo, chastity, obedience, resignation and surrender, family tribe also closed ranks

   Indoctrination, early age indoctrination, parental tribe, denominational education/training in the doctrine, certificate in mission work, indoctrinated, longing for community, immersion in the religious tribe, a duty to be private about her real self and to worship with other people,

2. **Relationships, Otherness and belonging/not-belonging**
   contact, didn't ever talk to husband, doctor tried to help with depression (external help from tribe), tea and time, seeking help from a doctor and a counsellor : counsellor prejudice and return to despair, alone, effect of contact and attunement - remembering something, complexity of experiences, needed to retreat to sort things out, no kindness, meeting a nun, love relationships, advised to divorce, aloneness, falling in love and

secret 19 year relationship, loved her children and being forced to choose, her mother's inconsistent rules, double life and coming out to children –timing of this and responsibilities to them, facing rejection/punishment, resistance to acknowledging toll on relationships, alone, sadness, interviewer seeing and acknowledging her pain, love and loss, deep shame and guilt, paying a high price for the "crime" of being gay, need for others and relationship has drawn her back into the same heterosexist tribe, reduced options, belonging at any cost, longing for community, seeking relationship, finding a confidant, they "knew", the love of her "gay life" (2 lives), trying but failing to maintain relationships in an impossible context, was aware of what would help (inclusive accepting community and belonging) but required courage and limited choice in home town, repeating patterns in relationship, 30 years married and ceased sexual intimacy but they never spoke about it, doubts capacity to commit to another person and running out of time, Inquiry and effect in dialogue (in interview), painful separation from lover – resignation and surrender, her heart's desire is to be loved and accepted, surprise at what emerged in the interview – warmth and appreciation, saying goodbye

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3. **The "Coming Out" Process and identity**
early awareness of sexual orientation around 12/13 knew she preferred women, recognised through film, movies (external to tribe) supported self awareness, "knowing", had to think it though so unspeakable was it, intellectualising and safety, married and 3 children, agape love with husband, irrepressible, fear, "attraction to each other", gradual attraction to another woman, kissing, authentic love, depression and falling apart – no one to help, unspeakable, saw a counsellor and revealed identity first time in 26 years taking everything she had to so – persuaded that she wasn't, Shame, guilt, heart sinking moment, urge to escape, retreating to sort things out for herself, never talked, generational differences, unexpressed feelings (minus the "gay"), advised to divorce, secrecy of love, Came out aged 52 (40 years after own awareness, 40 years in liminality, coming out to children, a double life, rejection, dreams and hopes/longing for normalisation, punishment, working through it on her own, deep shame and guilt, an impossible situation, consequences of her "crime", risked living authentically but shame and guilt destroyed freedom, sadness of suppressing the Self, Self-denial for her whole

life, risked self-expression and it was not a happy ending, homeless, finding a confidant, "walking on water" – out and not out in current tribe, intellectual integration of religion and sexual orientation versus what really is, "passing" and hiding, choosing invisibility. "A secret" would be too simplisitic – 1950 and context, "A gift", the cross she had to bear, longing to be real – "The Velveteen rabbit", current family rejection,

Depicting a Process of Development– started from an early age, journeyed through, having travelled/passed through something, born into it – context she's been given/no choice, Identity – Identifies as Christian from age 7 or 8, education external to religious tribe, altruism and desire to "give back", LGCM, "gay" versus "living a gay lifestyle", teh love of her "gay life" (2 identities), need for structure,

4. **Heterosexism, patriarchy and sexism**
heterosexual marriage and having children, heterosupremacy – married and had 3 children due to context, only kissing, left frustrated, didn't ever talk to husband, counsellor and experiencing rejection, heterosexism in a "safe" therapeutic relationship, heterosexism forced her to choose between children and own sanity, Unspoken/no dialogue, silence and passive aggression, couldn't be open, could have survived the heterosexual lie if he's "talked", could have stayed hidden, tragedy and loss, loss of identity and all that was meaningful, churches are against gay people in deed if not in word, distinction between saying they're open and what actually happens, invisibility, anti-gay church, confusion, forbidden, unspeakable, blood boiling against heterosupremacy, indifference, hatred, a duty to be private about her real self and to worship with other people, chastity, duty, self-denial/invisibility preferable to being alone,

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5. **Religious Abuse and Effects** – prejudice, Sexism, Minimising role, spiralling into depression, depression, falling apart, Christian counsellor and prejudice reinforced, unacceptability of sexuality and return to depression/despair, Alone, ostracized even before they knew the truth, persecution, paranoia, hopelessness, no kindness, meeting a nun and a love story, tragedy and sadness, forced to choose between sanity and children, unspoken, no dialogue, punishment, feeling so much guilt and shame, depression, secrets and the cost of no dialogue, cruelty, cruel silence (?passive aggression), paying a high price for the "crime" of being gay, being an Outcast, prejudice

and power, blindness, sadness, anger, drawn back to a similar context because of need for community/belonging - the known, abandoned and left with nothing, abandonment and homelessness, children's rejection, absolute rejection, oppression, making sense of experiences, can have community if in the guide of a divorcee, find a way to leave/escape, the ranting of a patriarchal heterosexist leader, threat of ostracism, the Leviticus code and rules, consequences of non-compliance, walking out but not speaking out – silence, masochism? The familiar and the known preferable to no worship community, "Walking on Water" and not fearing liminality, vigilance, can't make meaning of it, not-knowing, could have been a contemplative nun, chastity, 30 years married and ceased sexual intimacy but they never spoke about it, isolation, alone for all of her life, doubting capacity to commit to another person now, running out of time, a life ruined, time that she can never get back,

6. **The Uberwelt** – speaks to the Divine/Deity, "prayer", relationship/faith even in the face of absolute rejection, distinction between her commitment to the Divine and not to a religious tribe, being ecumenically minded, needs communal worship at any cost, no choices – settling for what's available to her, preaching of The Word, ideal structure is another tribe but more friendship (albeit conditional) in "non-conformist" (theologically) tribes, could be anonymous and worship but seeks relationship/community, spiritual courage and strength, Divine love and connectedness, Love, trusting Divine meaning, tragedy and strengthening of faith,

7. **Rewards** – Global travel, cross-cultural perspectives, self-determination, finding her own way, stories of falling in love, tribal barriers aren't difficult for her, becoming, authenticity, plurality of perspective, openness to others, stronger faith, self-acceptance, making sense of experiences, intellectual – resolving things in her head, human sensitivity, "A gift", humour (eg. Could have been a contemplative nun - and sexuality), holding on to hope, tolerance of other's prejudices, humility, altruism and helping others, thinking through beliefs, certainty/confidence in beliefs

Final Table of Themes: Interview 1 and 2

Theme
1. **Religious Tribalism** - Indoctrination and "a book" - Denominating/denomination of religious tribes - Rites of passage/membership of tribes - Formation of new tribes when combined - Participation/volunteering for the tribe - Promotion and rank within a tribe - Disillusionment with the tribe - Under a microscope/tribe control - Needing to escape and retreat - Hypocrisy of the tribe members - Prejudice within the tribe

- Others Judging
- No dialogue/non-communication
- Dogmatism of the tribes
- The upside of structure in religious tribes
- Being educated v uneducated in a faith
- The inconsistency of rules and fundamentalism
- Consequences of non-conformity
- Being against and negative constructs
- An alleged place of safety
- Some are more equal than others
- Choosing to Outcast/ostracize
- The unspoken/unspeakable
- Maintaining the status quo
- Chastity and Obedience
- Resignation and surrender
- Tribes closing ranks

2. **Relationships, Otherness and Belonging/not-belonging**
   - The Unspoken/Unspeakable
   - Needing others to help her
   - Shocking rejection from "helpers"
   - Complexity of experiences
   - Retreating from and getting away from
   - No kindness shown
   - Love relationships and loss
   - Advised to divorce
   - Isolation, sadness, pain, separation
   - Being forced to choose
   - Living a double life
   - Facing rejection and punishment
   - Deep shame and guilt
   - Paying the price for her "crime"
   - Needing others at any cost
   - Finding a confidant
   - " They knew"
   - Struggling to maintain relationships and repeating patterns
   - An impossible context
   - No Sexual intimacy
   - No dialogue/not speaking/no one to talk to/unspoken
   - Aware of her "otherness"
   - Making a conscious decision to suppress
   - "The love that dare not speak its name"
   - Forbidden "Otherness" - tabboo
   - Consequences and losses
   - Betwixt and between: "Walking on water"
   - Longing to be loved and accepted
   -

3. **The "Coming Out" process and identity**
   - Depicting a process of development
   - Context we're given/born into
   - "Gay" versus "gay lifestyle"

- How awareness came about
- "knowing" and self suppression
- The Unspeakable and unsaid
- Self-determination and self-support
- Irrepressible and yet invisible
- Betrayed by "helper"
- Alone and isolated
- Consequences of otherness
- Shame and guilt destroyed freedom
- Unexpressed feelings and frustrations
- Generational differences
- Once i had a secret love: passing and hiding
- 40 years in liminality
- Coming out to children and rejection
- Punishment for her "crime"
- Indifference/haterd
- Walking on water: betwixt and between
- "The velveteen Rabbit": a duty to be private about her real self
- A "Gift"

4. **Heterosexism, Patriarchy & Sexism**
   - Heterosupremacy and marriage
   - Limitations on self and relationships
   - Heterosexism within a counselling relationship
   - Being forced to make a choice
   - Silence and passive aggression
   - Tragedy and loss
   - Losing all that was meaningful
   - Anit-gay church and chastity
   - Forbidden diversion from heteronorms
   - Main lead roles are male
   - The role of women- "back up team", lesser roles, domesticity,
   - Male hegemony
   - Woman have to fight much harder consequences of non-compliance with the rules
   -

5. **Religious abuse and effects**
   - Prejudice, persecution and power
   - Spiralling into depression and falling apart
   - Counsellor's rejection and her despair
   - Alone and ostracized
   - Deep guilt and shame
   - Cruel silence and being silenced
   - Paying the price for her crime
   - Her children's rejection of her
   - Absolute rejection and homelessness
   - The Leviticus code and consequences
   - Finding a way to leave/to escape
   - Ranting of a leader
   - Walking out but not speaking out
   - Cruelty preferable to no community
   - Walking on water
   - Hyper vigilance and being alone for her whole life

	- Doubting capacity to commit again
	- Running out of time
	- A life ruined
6.	**The Uberwelt**
	- Prayer and speaking to the Divine
	- A relationship and faith even in the face of absolute rejection
	- Distinction between relationship with the divine and a religious tribe
	- Being ecumenically minded
	- Needs communal worship at any cost to the self
	- Settling for what's available to her
	- Preaching of the Word is necessary
	- Ideal structure is another tribe but friendship (albeit conditional) preferred
	- Seeks relationship/community
	- Spiritual courage and strength
	- Divine love and connectedness
	- Trusting divine meaning and love
	- Strengthening of faith in tragedy
	-
7.	**Rewards/unanticipated gains**
	- Global travel and cross-cultural perspectives
	- Self determination
	- Independence and finding her own way
	- Love stories
	- Tribal barriers aren't difficult for her to surpass
	- Authenticity
	- A plurality of perspective
	- Openness to others
	- Stronger, more certain faith/beliefs
	- Self acceptance
	- Intellectual development and making sense
	- Human sensitivity to others
	- Humour (contemplative nun)
	- Holding on to hope
	- Tolerance and understanding of other's prejudices
	- Humility
	- Altruism and helping others

Appendix 11: Master Table of Themes for the Group

Table of Master Themes and Associated Themes for the Group

Master theme and associated themes for interviews:	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Religious Tribalism						
Indoctrination						
- Early introduction to a tribe and indoctrination	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	-
- Denominating religious tribes/Denominations	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Religions that constructing negatives -Cognitive Distortions	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Rites of passage, rituals and traditions	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Religion being terminal	Y	-	-		Y	Y
Orthodoxy and Dogmatism						
- Describing Tribal rules and enforcement	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Ambiguity of the Rules and openness to interpretation	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Consequences of non-conformity to the rules and norms	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Some are more equal than others (selecting/hypocrisy)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Becoming disillusioned with the Religious tribe	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Patriarchy and hegemonic Masculinity						
- Encountering Power and Control	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Encountering Patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- The tyranny of language	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Using silence to denote the unacceptable	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Being marginalized and ostracized	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
"The Book"						
- Living by "The Bible", "Qur'an", "The Torah", "Scripture"	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Being aware of selective use of texts	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Heterosexism and Homophobia in Religion: explicit, implicit and effects						
- Anti-gay prejudice, stereotyping and labelling	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Maintenance of Heterosupremacy	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Experiencing anti-gay Prejudice and discrimination	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Selective punitive use of Scriptural text	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Use of Silence to condemn/unspeakable – taboo	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- The tyranny of language: Words as weapons	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- The experience of being Judged and betrayed	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Hypocrisy - Some are more equal than others	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- "Othering"	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Designated a Persona Non Grata	-	Y	-	Y	-	Y
- Abuse of power and humiliation	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- The Leviticus Code	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	-

- Encountering Religious abuse in some form	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Acute and cumulative effects of relationship problems	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Betrayed by friends and official "helpers"	-	-	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Survival and coping	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Escaping and leaving the environment	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

2. Liminal Processes

Pre-Liminality: Encountering the problem

- Depicting an inevitable Process or journey	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Indoctrination into a Tribe	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- The velveteen Rabbit effect - real self	Y	Y	Y	Y	-	Y
- Maintaining the status quo	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Judgement and Criticism	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- The Unspeakable	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Punishment: rejecting and ostracizing	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- A love that dare not speak its name	Y	-	Y	Y	-	Y
- An irrepressible, uncontainable truth	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Embodied knowing	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- On being "Other" and between tribes	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Real Self versus False Self	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- "Passing" and "Coming Out/inviting in"	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Shattered illusion of love and friendship	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Liminality: Ontological and epistemic shift

- Threat, danger and developing vigilance	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Betwixt and Between: Belonging/not belonging	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Intersecting identities and fluidity of identity	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Confusion and Ambivalence	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Significant Shame about Self	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Guilt and self-blame	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Separateness: it's "not for me" positioning	Y	Y	Y	Y	-	-
- learning/Growth/transitional space	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Reassessing relationships in the liminal	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Post-Liminality: Transformation and change

- The quest for Authenticity and Genuineness	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Individuation	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Having a curious mind and thinking for oneself	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Gradual process of Self-acceptance	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- A changed Political perspective	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Hiding and daring to be visible	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Emergence of clarity around Core Values	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Developing Resilience and humour	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Identifying important Relationships	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Having confronted the worst	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Pleasure in developing, and respect for, critical thinking	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

- Being Queer -Plurality of perspective	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Experience informing choices/career/direction/places	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Realising "Gay is a gift"	Y	-	Y	Y	-	Y

3. Navigating Relationships

Relationships: Attachment and Loss

- Needing and longing for relationship	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Respecting and honouring parental/family relationships	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Desiring/needing social and interpersonal support	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Forming attachments and loss of significant relationships	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Relational ambivalence	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Withdrawal as a defence	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Being cautious and hyper-vigilant	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Re-discovering Intimacy and Contentment	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

The Uberwelt

- A Personal life journey/process/peregrination	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Spirituality as distinct from religion and faith	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Not limited to, and not needing, an institution/tribe	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Finding "The Path" through suffering	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Death and dying	Y	-	Y	-	Y	-
- "The Gay Gift"	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
- Love, compassion and altruism	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Divergences

- A particular Shame (1)	Y					
- A particular Judgement (2)		Y				
- A particular Power (3)			Y			
- A particular Silence (4)				Y		
- A particular Betrayal (5)					Y	
- A Particular family influence (6)						Y
- Spiritual Meaning: faith in people (1)	Y					Y
- Spiritual Meaning: connectedness (2)		Y				
- Spiritual Meaning: doing lots of good (3)			Y			
- Spiritual Meaning: Faith in a Deity not Religious Tribe (4)				Y		
- Spiritual Meaning: Being "with", demonstrated behaviourally (5)					Y	Y

Appendix 12: Exploring Heterosexism

Heterosexism and the Self of the Heterosexual Therapist: 3-Step Process (McGeorge & Carlson, 2009).

Step 1: Exploring Heteronormative Assumptions:

Self-Reflection Questions to Explore Heteronormative Assumptions.

- What did my family of origin teach me about sexual-orientation, bisexuality, and same-sex relationships?
- Were sexual-orientation and same-sex and bisexual relationships talked about in my family? If so, what values were communicated? If not, what did that silence communicate?
- Are there any members of my family who are LGB? If so, how were and are they talked about and treated in my family?
- If appropriate, what did/does my religious or spiritual community teach me about my sexual orientation and same sex and bisexual relationships? What do the religious or spiritual texts of my particular faith teach me about sexual-orientation and same-sex and bisexual relationships?
- What are my beliefs about how a person "becomes" gay, lesbian, or bisexual?
- What are my beliefs about why I did not "become" gay, lesbian, or bisexual?
- What are my initial thoughts or feelings about children who are raised by LGB parent(s)?
- What would my initial reaction be upon learning that an LGB person will be working as a teacher or in another profession working closely with children?
- What are my experiences of hearing phrases like "that's so gay" or "fag" during my growing up years and today? What values are associated with these terms?
- When I first meet someone, how often do I assume that he or she is heterosexual? What values and beliefs inform this assumption?
- What is my initial reaction when I see a gay or lesbian couple expressing physical affection?
- What is my initial reaction when I see heterosexual couples expressing physical affection?
- If my child came out as to me, what would my first reaction be?

Cont. Heterosexism and the Self of the Heterosexual Therapist: 3-Step Process (McGeorge & Carlson, 2009).

Step 2: Exploring Heterosexual Privileges:

Self-reflection questions to explore Heterosexual privilege:

- How has your involvement in heterosexual relationships been encouraged, rewarded, acknowledged, and supported by your family, friends, and the larger society?
- As a child, how were you encouraged to play according to heterosexual norms?
- Have you ever had to question your heterosexuality? Has a family member, friend, or colleague ever questioned your heterosexuality?
- Have you ever had to defend your heterosexuality in order to gain acceptance among your peers or colleagues?
- Have you ever worried that you might lose your job because of your heterosexuality?
- Have you ever wondered why you were born heterosexual?
- Has anyone ever asked you to change your heterosexuality?
- Have you ever worried about being removed from a spiritual, religious, civic, or social organisation because of your heterosexuality?
- Have you ever worried that a therapist would refuse to see you based on your heterosexuality?
- Have you ever worried that if you sought therapy your therapist might try to change your heterosexuality?
- Have you ever worried that you might be "outed" as a heterosexual?
- Have you ever been afraid that your work accomplishments would be diminished because of your heterosexuality?
- Have you ever feared that you would be physically harmed based solely on your heterosexuality?
- Has anyone ever assumed that you are unsafe around children based solely on your heterosexuality?

Cont. Heterosexism and the Self of the Heterosexual Therapist: 3-Step Process (McGeorge & Carlson, 2009).

Step 3: Exploring the Development of Heterosexual identity:

Self-reflection questions to explore heterosexual identity:

- How do you describe your sexual identity? How do you explain how you came to identify as heterosexual? Why do you think you identify as heterosexual?
- What role does your sexual identity play in who you are as a person?
- What factors were most important or influential to your development of a heterosexual identity?
- What societal beliefs or norms influenced your development of a heterosexual identity?
- What spiritual or religious beliefs influenced your development of a heterosexual identity?
- What family beliefs or norms influenced your development of a heterosexual identity?
- When did you have your first opposite-sex attraction? What meaning did you assign to that attraction? If you experienced that attraction as natural or normative, where do those beliefs come from?
- Have you experienced attraction to members of the same sex? If so, how did you make sense of those attractions? If not, how do you make sense of not having attractions to members of the same sex?
- Do you understand your own heterosexual sexual orientation as a stable factor in your identity or do you perceive your sexual orientation as fluid and changeable? Why?
- Do you understand your own heterosexual sexual orientation as existing on a continuum or do you perceive your sexual orientation as "either/or" (i.e. either I'm straight or I am gay)? Why?
- How does your identification as a heterosexual influence how you make sense of how a person comes to identify as an LGB individual? How does your identification as a heterosexual influence how you perceive LGB-identified individuals?
- How does your identification as a heterosexual influence the way you do therapy with all your clients (regardless of their sexual orientation)?

Appendix 13: Guidelines for Good Practice

Guidelines for Good Practice (das Nair & Thomas, 2012 p.108).

"In thinking about how religion and sexuality interact, therapists should be mindful:

- That some non-heterosexual clients are religious and their religion is important to them.
- That for some religious non-heterosexual clients, their psychological problems need not be related to a conflictual relationship between their sexuality and religion. For such clients, their religion and their religious affiliations may be a source of support for them, which therapists could harness.
- Not to ignore the affective components of the client's experience, when they are cognitively attempting to negotiate their sexuality with their religious beliefs.
- Of their own religious prejudices and how these can affect the therapeutic interaction and the manner in which support is offered.
- Of their own religious beliefs and how these relate to non-heterosexual sexualities. Therapists are reminded that it is not appropriate to attempt to modify the client's sexual orientation to bring it in line with the therapist's or client's understanding of their own religion(s).
- That many religious non-heterosexual clients may have felt some rejection or may still be experiencing rejection by the religious community to which they once belonged or belong.
- That religious non-heterosexual clients may be facing prejudice and discrimination from multiple areas of their life because of their religion *and* their sexuality, and this may affect the support they receive from their family, friends, and other social networks.
- That the client may feel more comfortable in discussing religious and sexual issues if the therapist has some basic understanding of their client's religion and its doctrines, particularly how they relate to non-heterosexuality. However, such information should not be used to essentialise the experience of *all* clients who come from the same religious background."