A Phenomenological Research Study of Gay Men in Ireland:

From Disrespect to Respect:

The Power of Social Critique for Self-Transcendence

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of DPsych is entirely my own work, that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Signed: _____Gerard Rodgers_____   Date: 23 January 2016

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Abbreviations

AIDS An acronym for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

Amnesty International Ireland Global Movement for the Promotion of Human Rights

APA   American Psychological Association

APA   American Psychiatric Association (1973; 1952).

BACP/IACP/IAHIP/ICP   Counselling and Psychotherapy Organisations

BeLonG To   National Organisation for LGBT young persons aged 14 and 23

BPS   British Psychological Society

CSA   Childhood Sexual Abuse

CDF   Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (Catholic)

Coming Out Term used to describe discovery and acceptance of orientation/identity

EGPA   European Gay Police Association

GCN   Gay Community News

G-Force   Garda Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual & Transgender Employee Resource Group

GLEN   Gay and Lesbian Equality Network

GRA   Garda Representative Association

GRC   Gender Role Conflict

HIV   Human Immunodeficiency Virus

ICCL   Irish Council for Civil Liberties

LGBT   An acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender

LGBT/NXF National Federation   works with organisations and produces print/digital media GCN etc.

LGBT Noise Independent non-party political group campaigning for civil marriage equality etc.

Marriage Equality   Organisation in Ireland working for equal marriage rights

MSM   Males who have Sex with Males

PrEP   Pre-exposure prophylaxis therapy in HIV prevention

PSI   Psychological Society of Ireland

Queer   Has been adopted by **LGBTQ** persons beyond rigid binary/identity
                  definitions

Sexual Orientation   An enduring pattern of attraction, feeling and sense of identity

SIPTU   Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union

STI   Sexually Transmitted Infections

TENI   Transgender Equality Network Ireland

YMSM   A project whose goal is to reduce the risk of HIV and STI infections.

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Abstract   **Gerard Rodgers**

A Phenomenological Research Study of Gay Men in Ireland:

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Research has consistently reported sexual and gender minority persons are more vulnerable to adverse wellbeing experience, often mediated by negative social projections and interactions within high prejudice societies. On a general population level, no health differentials are evident in low prejudice societies. However, qualitative researchers are often critical of an over-reliance on broad macro associations, suggesting person-centered research can deepen generalist understandings. Phenomenology is the research methodology that was chosen for this study, because of its theoretical commitment to exploring the first personal character of everyday lived experiences. For this study, nine gay men, aged 22 to 65 years old, participated in semi-structured one-to-one interviews, with a specific focus on capturing life's triumphs and losses. The key finding that emerged was the appropriation of disrespect to respect. Personal stories toward acceptance were socially mediated, among significant others, as embedded within social repertoires and religious norms. Some of the stories describe life conditions where participants often had to battle with negative forms of self-criticism as the historic social taboo for minority identity often co-occurred with shattered assumptions and challenges in personal and family lives. Navigation of unequal power relations in Irish society often shaped peripheral beliefs and emotions with implications for self perception and self worth. However, for all participants, the positive appropriation of respect within the self-concept is strongly facilitated by participants working for and being touched by wider social struggles of recognition. Psychotherapists need to critically understand the mediation of transformative social contexts for the self-concept by actively supporting the resoluteness and effort required to rework any negative patterns of self-criticism arising from social prejudice of an earlier time period. Ireland is now a strongly affirming social environment for sexual and gender minorities and is conducive to personal authenticity.

Chapter One: **Mapping the Territory**

1.1. Introduction

The key objective of this study is to deepen knowledge and understanding of gay men's lives in Ireland. Arising from the historic context of social discrimination, most of our theories have been deficit based constructions, with little indication of how progressive social change in Ireland interacts with gay men's health. However, recent studies are pointing to diversity of experiences, but without an in-depth contextualist analysis for how personal experiences are mediated in the navigation of social terrains. This chapter begins with the research background; the rationale, aims and objectives of the current study, followed by a brief outline of the remaining chapters of the thesis - the literature review; the research methodology; the findings of the study; discussion and conclusions.

1.2. Background

There are a number of broad patterns that underpin theory on gay men's mental health and wellbeing. The first historic pattern from decades of research is how gay men's psychological health has been negatively impacted through social exclusion, prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination (PSI 2015). A more recent pattern has emerged that points to the influence of the social and political reform agenda which lessens the impact of social prejudice and discrimination (Beetham 2014; Ryan, P. 2014; 2011). For example, the EU and the Council of Europe has been consistent in *"a strong historical commitment to human rights, social integration, equality, and the overcoming of nationalistic prejudice"* (Beger, 2004, p. 1).

The character of a social context creates cultural repertoires/discourses for sexual and gender minorities (Lott 2010; Hall and Lamont, 2009). Old discriminatory and exclusionary laws influenced societal attitudes (Rose 2015). The removal of structural discrimination aims to place a value on sexual minorities, creating contexts that protects against identity threat and stigma, and to enhance personal wellbeing (Johnson

2013; Patterson and D'Augelli, 2013). An exclusionary social context is one that does not sufficiently protect against discrimination/inequality of its minority citizens, thus increasing probabilities for increased injuries to mental health (Hatzenbuehler 2014; FRA 2013).

Ireland's record of 'nationalistic prejudice' in the form of both Victorian laws and Religious tenets were historically legitimated in Ireland's Constitutional Statutes (Long 2015; Ryan F., 2014). These statutes criminalised homosexual behaviour between consenting adults. In the early 1980s, the removal of this discrimination became the subject of a number of unsuccessful challenges in the Irish Courts (Norris 2012; Hug 1999). In 1988, the European Court ruled that the law criminalising homosexual acts was in contravention of the European Convention on Human Rights (Mullally 2015). In 1993, the Irish Government acted on its obligation to the EU ruling, by passing anti-discriminatory legislation through the Irish Houses of Parliament, decriminalising consensual adult homosexual intimacy (Norris 1995/1993). Further evolvement of legislation over the last two decades has increased the scope of legal freedom and parity of esteem for sexual and gender minorities (Mullally 2015; Rodgers 2013; Gilligan and Zappone, 2008; GLEN 2002).

The macro implications of these recent socio-political advancements is beginning to be reflected in psychotherapeutic theory and practice with gay males (PSI 2015; Kocet 2014). On 22 May 2015, further constitutional discrimination was eroded, when by popular vote in a national referendum, Ireland became the first country in the world to legalise civil marriage approving that 'marriage may be contacted in accordance with law by two persons without distinction as to their sex' (Ryan 2015). It was against this backdrop that the current study was situated, when participants were interviewed in the summer of 2013.

1.3. Rationale: Aims and Objectives of the Current Study

Notwithstanding the broad patterns of positive social change, the current research is aiming for a more in-depth understanding of how the reflective capacity for self autonomy and self-transformation interacts with broader societal mechanisms. Current

research still operates at a macro-level of analysis. This generalised pattern does not capture the nuances and particulars of gay men's personal lives in changing social contexts. As each human being is uniquely situated in dealing with the potential of complex challenges and opportunities, psychotherapy research needs to draw much closer to lived experience to gain a stronger appreciation of the implications for mental health. Toward this end, the design of the current research asked questions about the positive, challenging and changing experiences for gay men living in Ireland. In asking these questions, the current research is aiming to deepen knowledge of gay men's experiences that can either enhance or compromise a meaningful life. This study can contribute to psychotherapy practice, identifying implications for psychotherapy training and future research on gay men's lives.

1.4. Outline of Remaining Chapters

Chapter Two critically reviews the literature, evaluating what has already been written on the topic of being gay, focusing on the main themes of gay men's mental health. I draw from an extensive range of research, tracking the changing representations of historic and current themes of gay men's lives. I also draw on cultural narratives, social psychology and critical psychosocial theories. The aim of the search strategy was to ensure the study is situated in the most up to date cultural contexts of experience, without sacrificing the historical engine of social change that contextualises how personal experience is constituted and transformed. This critical strategy is important for grasping what happened in gay men's historic and present personal experiences, what these experience were like, and what experience is like now. At the end of this chapter, I highlight how the rationale and objectives of the current study aims to refine, deepen and improve on existing knowledge of gay men's lives in Ireland. As psychotherapy is an intimate endeavour, committed to positive self-transformation of presenting issues, it is critical that psychotherapeutic knowledge embrace human development as actively mediated in the navigation of the social world.

Chapter Three begins with the rationale for choosing phenomenology as the research methodology. This is followed by a discussion of the historical context of phenomenology and its key theoretical ideas. The chapter then describes the method;

the research design; the procedures; the sample; data analysis; the management of ethical concerns, concluding with an evaluation framework for a phenomenological study.

Chapter Four describes the findings of the study where each participant's personal story of being gay is set within the relational and cultural repertoires of Ireland. The stories highlight each participant's challenging, positive and changing experiences. The chapter concludes with the key findings, research reflection and a further summary of the findings.

Chapter Five critically discusses each of the key findings. I utilise the frames of recognition and critical social theories that resonated with the psychosocial pattern of the key findings from the research. These meta-theories are critically humanist in their orientation, deepening and opening our understanding to contextualist minority experience in Ireland.

Chapter Six concludes with a summary of the study; implications for practice and training; an evaluation of the study's rigor and suggestions for future research, concluding with a reflective summary on the overall study.

Chapter Two: **Literature Review**

2.1. Introduction and Literature Search Strategy

The general patterns of the following review illuminate positive social contexts for gay men living in Ireland and elsewhere (PSI 2015; GCN 2015; Bieschke, Perez and DeBord, 2007). The first main section of this review captures the most up to date research from a burgeoning field of scholarship on sexual minority lives. This first section also discusses how sexual orientation is defined and measured. The review then charts how the discipline of mental health regulation has often mirrored social discriminatory attitudes in its constructions of sexual minorities (PSI 2015; BPS 2012). The next section identifies the guiding clinical concerns for gay men's health, illustrating how discriminatory social contexts can heighten health risks of minority persons compared to heterosexual populations (Institute of Medicine 2011). These sections contain social psychological and sociological studies that measure social exclusion and inclusion, with its implications for gender socialisation, relationships and well-being. Within these sections, I also consider newer social theories of identity that point to more expanded ways of framing personal identity concerns in globalised contexts.

One of the main themes of this review is that some gay men can often internalise social stigma, giving rise to identity shame and negative self-criticism. In effect, the mediation of non-facilitative social conditions may be related to a reaction sensitivity for negative and ruminating self-criticism. Thus, navigating a social world of discrimination and exclusion may create a vulnerability, manifesting as higher statistical probabilities for anxiety or mood disorders, alcohol disorders, depression, substance abuse, homelessness and STI/HIV infection (PSI 2015; Hatzenbuehler 2009; Maycock et al, 2009; Hatzenbuehler, Nolen-Hoeksema and Erickson, 2008). More recent findings point toward an elimination in health differentials between sexual minority and heterosexual persons (Hatzenbuehler 2014; Savin-Williams 2014; Nichols and Shernoff 2006).

The second main section of the review focuses on the historical trajectory of sexual minorities in Ireland up to the present day. Given the dearth of qualitative research on gay men's lives in Ireland, I utilise cultural and social justice narratives (e.g. legal, sociological and cultural/feminist/critical scholarship and autobiographical memoirs). I also draw on Irish studies of LGBT mental health combined with EU/UK surveys measuring changes in social attitudes and its health implications. It is worth noting the achievements of social justice and human rights advocacy for social protection seem largely responsible for the substantive reduction of discrimination in Ireland and elsewhere.

2.2. Defining and Measuring Sexual Orientation

LeVay, Baldwin and Baldwin (2012) defines sexual orientation as *"the dimension of personality that describes the balance of our sexual attraction to the two sexes"* (p. 370). The APA (2014) define sexual orientation as *"an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions to men, women, or both sexes"* (p. 1). As a pioneering study, the much cited Kinsey Scale created a bi-polar continuum with different scales/dimensions of heterosexuality, homosexuality and bisexuality (Kinsey, Pomeroy and Martin, 1948). The measured dimensions included attraction, desire, romantic love, fantasy, sexual relationships and a history of sexual intimacy (Pomeroy et al, 1953).

Le Vay, Baldwin and Baldwin (2012) find *"less than 2% of men and less than 1% of women say they are attracted only to persons of the same sex as themselves"* (p. 370). However, when one includes the question 'mostly attracted to same sex' these figures double (Laumann et al, 1994; Wellings et al, 1994). A further *"common finding…"* is that *"more men than women are exclusively homosexual"* (LeVay, Baldwin and Baldwin, 2012, p. 371). A review by Diamond, Butterworth and Savin-Williams (2010) find that bisexuals *"constitute the majority of the sexual-minority population, despite having been systematically excluded from prior research"* (p. 837). These US based authors express concern about this historic neglect, stating: *"bisexual patterns of attraction and behaviour actually face greater mental health risk than those with exclusive same-sex attractions and behaviour"* (p. 837). In the UK, Bowes-Catton and

Hayfield (2015) and Barker et al (2012) share a similar view that bisexual patterns of sexuality are not adequately addressed in sexuality theory and clinical contexts. A recent YouGov poll (2015) in the UK, found 23% of persons sampled were not exclusively heterosexual *"a figure rising to nearly half of 18-to-24-year-olds (49%)"* (Parkinson 2015). These results from over 1,600 UK adults surveyed are based on responses to the dimensions of the Kinsey scale continuum of measurement.

In a recent Op-Ed piece for the *New York Times*, Stephens-Davidowitz (2013) finds historical estimates from surveys can range anywhere from 2 to 10%, in response to the question of how many American men are gay. Combining six different datasets, including Facebook profiles, the Census by State, Gallup and Internet searches, he found *"consistent evidence that roughly 5% of American men are gay."* He says what is strikingly consistent across the dataset is *"the openly gay population is dramatically higher in more tolerant US States"* (Stephens-Davidowitz 2013). In an Irish study on sexual health and relationships, Layte et al (2006) found 5.3% of the Irish males sampled identified as gay (7, 441 respondents).

2.3. Bio Science and Evolutionary Understandings of Sexual Orientation

The biological sciences focus on evidence for a genetic basis for homosexuality, eroding the old idea that gay orientation is a choice without a substrate in biology (Gazzaniga and Heatherton, 2003; McKnight 1997). Le Vay (2011) says gaps remain in bioscience knowledge, but he still draws the conclusion that sexual orientation stems in large part from biological processes that are already well underway before birth (p. 271), with *"the lead actors being genes, sex hormones and the brain systems"* (p. 271), and further contextualised by how biological processes of differentiation go forward (p. 271). Twin studies show higher estimates of similarity in sexual orientation among identical twins compared to non-identical twins (Langstrom et al, 2010). McKnight (1997) adds that a biosocial view, beyond *"phenotypic variation"* (p. 2) requires *"answers in evolutionary terms rather than social terms"* (p. 2).

The combined knowledge from brain circuitry, genes, evolution, and endocrine function (hormones) are of a very different flavour to the more traditional

psychoanalytic and socialisation theories that stressed internal mental processes or social interactions/dynamics as determining sexual orientation (Moon 2010; Le Vay 1996; Bohan 1996). Regarding some theoretical extrapolations that negative environmental influences is the cause of sexual identity, Frankowski (2004) finds *"there is no scientific evidence that abnormal parenting, sexual abuse, or other adverse life events influence sexual orientation"* (p. 1828). This is a very important point regarding appropriate therapeutic responses to sexual orientation. An APA (2009) Task Force report conclude that *"efforts to change sexual orientation are unlikely to be successful and involve some risk of harm"* (p. v).

2.4. Changing Representation of Homosexuality in Cultural/Clinical Literature

For many centuries in Europe, homosexuality was principally perceived in terms of sexual acts (Aldrich 2006). At different times, and within different cultures, social perceptions and judgments have evolved and changed (Crompton 2003). Officially sanctioned prejudice has been a distinguishing feature of attitudes towards homosexuality in what Crompton (2003) refers to as "*a kaleidoscope of horrors*" (p. 539), lasting more than fifteen hundred years. His research covers the historical period from Ancient Greece to the Enlightenment, singling out Judaeo/Christianity and the Islamic religions as systems of belief that were *"radically"* (p. 536) less tolerant of homosexuality than other religions. He believes this religious intolerance was grounded in the inheritance of the *"lethal tradition of the Hebrew Scriptures"* (p.536). Deceased psychotherapist Carl Berkeley (1936-2004) who practiced in Ireland, confirmed this pattern of historic discrimination in his writings:

> "*Homosexuality has been a part of society from time immemorial. It has been accepted, derided, criminalised. Homosexuals have been scorned, burnt at the stake, herded into concentration camps, imprisoned"*
>
> (Berkeley 1993).

Moving forward to London 1895, David (1997) says at the trial of Oscar Wilde *"no other accusation – of say, excessive drinking, gambling, lying, or marital infidelity – carried such a weight of obloquy as that of sodomy"* (p. 4). Referring to Ireland, Walshe (2011) refers to *"Wilde's visible presence as sexual 'other'"* (p. xiii) acting as

"strategies of normalisation used to police his unnameable sin within Irish media and literary accounts" (p. xiii). During this historic period, Hekma (2011) finds *"psychiatrists began to write about the so-called perversions"* (p. 2). Furthermore, medical and sexology discourses, defined homosexuality as a socially transgressive sexual behaviour (Ellis and Symonds, 1897). Livingstone (2010) says historical norms of heterosexuality were substantively tied to marriage and reproduction and serves as *"a strong indicator of how unacceptable it was is to be beyond those norms"* (p. 7).

The year 1973 is viewed as a significant year that marked a change of direction for how mental health professionals constructed and classified homosexuality. It was the year the American Psychiatric Association declassified homosexuality as a mental illness (APA 1973). Up to this point, homosexuality was classified as a *"sociopathic personality disorder"* (APA 1952). The classification ran counter to experimental evidence which investigated whether gay men were distinguishable from heterosexuals (Hooker 1993). Hooker (1957) conducted a number of psychological tests on a matched non-clinical sample of 30 homosexual and 30 heterosexual males. Her participants were matched in terms of IQ, age, and education. The participants completed a number of *"projective techniques, attitude scales, and intensive life history interviews"* (p. 20). Independent raters of participant results could not reliably predict who the homosexual participants were. This challenged the assumption of inherent pathology and deviance, typical of a homosexual. The results of this pioneering study, among others, meant mental health regulation moved away from the idea of curing homosexuality (Bohan and Russell, 1999; King and Bartlett, 1999; Bohan 1996). However, Silverstein (2008) notes in the direct aftermath of the 1973 APA declassification, the Association's President, Dr. Alfred Freedman still maintained when asked the question:

> *"If it is not a mental illness now, why was it on the list of mental illnesses for the past fifty years and did its declassification mean that homosexuality was normal? 'No... was the President's response "only that it's not abnormal'"*

(Silverstein, 2008, p. 277).

Despite the seminal importance of the 1973 declassification, Warwick and Aggleton (2002) note that in the UK,

"Psychiatrists generally follow The International Classification of Diseases and that homosexuality was not removed as a disorder from this glossary until the production of the fourth edition in 1992"

(p. 137).

The British Psychological Society (BPS) consistently resisted adoption of a proposal for the establishment of a separate research division for lesbian and gay research (Clarke and Peel, 2007). Three separate ballots were voted down in 1991, 1993 and 1994. Eventually, the proposal secured a narrow victory in 1998 with close to 50% of the membership voting against, describing the sectional establishment of a gay and lesbian research division as *"too narrow and too political"* (Clarke et al, 2010, p. 19-20). Within psychoanalysis, Fonagy and Higgit (2007) says its theory of homosexuality amounted to *"malignant prejudices"* (p. 213), within its definition of *"homosexual pleasures as an illness"* (Fonagy and Allison, 2015, p. 129). Hicks (2010) reflecting on the historic pattern finds *"diagnostic manuals are not immune to the prevailing social attitudes of the time and that our concept of what constitutes mental ill-health changes over time"* (Hicks, 2010, p. 254). In a recent set of psychological guidelines for LGBT clients, the President of the Psychological Society of Ireland stated:

"We have a history of treating people who did not comply to dominant social norms punitively, or at the very least with cold indifference. Psychology itself has often been silent on these abuses and in some cases even complicit"

(D'Alton 2015).

Further changes in regulatory attitudes were evident in the BPS (2012) Guidelines for Practice. This document began with an acknowledgement of its contribution *"to the pathologisation of sexual and gender identities"* (p. 12), one where psychotherapeutic disciplines variously asserted that homosexuality did *"not conform to traditional heterosexual standards and fixed and binary views of sexuality"* (BPS, 2012, p. 12). Thus, their current set of guidelines *"aim to promote better understanding of their clients who may have suffered social exclusion and stigmatisation"* (BPS, 2012, p. 3).

From this survey of regulatory attitudes, it would be erroneous to conclude that psychotherapy has not made a positive contribution. For some time, the emphasis has continuously stressed the importance of affirmative practice with sexual and gender

minority clients (GLEN/Irish College of Psychiatry, 2011; Aldorondo 2007; King et al/ BACP/IACP, 2007; Coyle and Kitzinger, 2002; Alexander 1997; 1996; Berkeley 1993). However, Dworkin and Pope (2012) recently assert that training on LGBT issues in counselling and psychotherapy is *"inadequate at best and nonexistent at worst."* (p. ix).

2.5. Structural Stigma and Mental Health

Psychological research on gay men's lives has consistently found increased multiple stressors and resultant health risks when compared to heterosexually identified men (Cochrane and Mays, 2013; Institute of Medicine 2011; Mays and Cochrane, 2001). Those associations have been the subject of extensive meta-analyses (Hatzenbuehler 2009). Meta-analyses provide greater insight into how social discrimination and prejudice impact minority mental health (Hatzenbuehler 2014; Meyer and Frost, 2013; Herek, Chopp and Strohl, 2007; Meyer, 1995). One meta-analysis of prior LGB studies suggests the following psychological mediation framework for minority stress. The analysis finds that sexual minorities:

> *"(a) confront increased stress exposure resulting from stigma; (b) this stigma-related stress creates elevations in general emotion dysregulation, social-interpersonal problems, and cognitive processes conferring risk for psychopathology;(c) these processes in turn mediate the relationship between stigma-related stress and psychopathology"*

(Hatzenbuehler, 2009, p. 707*).*

Traditional social psychological knowledge has been critiqued for its narrow focus on individual and interpersonal factors without measuring broader cultural and institutional discrimination (Link, Phelan and Hatzenbuehler, 2014; Major and O'Brien, 2005). The focus of current research attempts to measure how social policies can influence cultural ideas and beliefs, social attitudes and representations (Schrock, Sumerau and Ueno, 2014; Jaspal and Breakwell, 2014; Major, Mendes and Dovidio, 2013; BPS 2012). While recognising the methodological complexity of measuring the impact of structural processes on individual and group minority identities, these analyses track the specificity of social policies (Hatzenbuehler, 2014) combined with surveys of community level social attitudes (Patterson and D'Augelli, 2013). For

example, some of this research focuses on direct victimisation experiences of minority persons, and direct and perceived discrimination in employment and health care (Balsam and Hughes, 2013; Mohr and Fassinger, 2013). Tracking social policies as indicators of social stigma, Hatzenbuehler et al (2010) examined data from US States that had passed anti-discrimination legal protections in comparison to states that had not passed such legislation. They also sampled the US States that had re-instated discriminatory social legislation. For example, 16 US States had passed bans on same sex marriage between 2004 and 2005. The research team had first surveyed and interviewed participants in 2001 living these states and followed up with further interviews of the same sample in 2005. In their follow up interviews and analysis of all states, they noted in the states that had passed discriminatory laws, there were significant increases among their LGB sample who met the criteria for mood disorders, alcohol disorders and generalised anxiety disorders (Hatzenbuehler et al, 2010). This research also compared these outcomes to nationally representative samples and *"found no evidence for increases of the same magnitude among heterosexuals living in states with constitutional amendments"* (Hatzenbuehler et al, 2010, p. 452). In the US states that passed anti-discrimination laws, they found no differentials in mood disorder criteria between sexual majority and minority identified samples. They conclude that *"these findings lend scientific support to recent efforts to overturn these policies"* (p. 452). Furthermore, Hatzenbuehler (2014) gives brief mention to his earlier research of LGB participants living in the State of Massachusetts. This State was the first to introduce marriage equality by legislation. They found that within one year,

> *"Substantial reductions in several mental and physical health problems including a 14% reduction in depression and an 18% reduction in hypertension - compared with the 12 months before the legalisation of same sex marriage"*

> (Hatzenbuehler, 2014, p. 129).

A previously published finding on this joint authored research also found a general decrease in health care use by gay men in the State of Massachusetts (Hatzenbuehler et al, 2012). In essence, social science research finds structural indices of social discrimination and stigma *"demonstrably contribute to health inequalities…ranging from maladaptive physiological stress responses in a laboratory setting to premature mortality at a population level"* (Richman and Hatzenbuehler, 2014, p. 213). The

combined outcome studies measuring indices of structural stigma deepens knowledge on the social determinants of higher probabilities of psychological distress. To date, psychological literature has had to theoretically infer how social stigma mediated psychological distress. The results of these studies indicate that state policies do play a role in increasing and decreasing minority stress indicators. Thus, a denial of rights, as a form of social exclusion, has a negative emotional impact on minority citizens. Meyer (2007) referring to his 'minority stress concept' (1995) says *"ignoring the social environment would erroneously place the burden on the individual, suggesting that minority stress is only a personal problem"* (Meyer, 2007, p. 259). That said, his research points to the *"rich history of resistance and self-reliance that has characterized the history of LGB groups in the United States"* (Meyer, 2007, p. 260). This may suggest the negative impact of social prejudice influences the motivation for community resilience in advancing social protection for sexual and gender minorities. Thus, the erosion of structural stigma, prejudice and discrimination is now associated with positive patterns of wellness for sexual and gender minorities (PSI 2015). One possible limitation of these combined results is that most health studies of LGBT populations *"comes from studies with non-probability samples, and the field of LGBT health would benefit if more data came from probability samples"* (Institute of Medicine, 2011, p. 3). The authors say one of the main barriers to analysis of minority populations and their subgroups compared to general populations is one of *"cost"* (p. 3). This critique that current studies lack predictive value is one that seems to aspire to correlate particular types of experience as particularly defining of a minority or majority identity. Is such a reductive quantitative design possible? Such an analysis aims to correlate behaviour as identity specific. However to present results as predictive of an identity is a potentially dangerous reification, and one that is best avoided in human science.

2.6. The Decline of Homophobia

The term *"homophobia"* was created by Dr. George Weinberg in 1967 (Friedman and Downey, 2002, p. 175). It describes *"an irrational (phobic) revulsion so widespread that it had gone unrecognised in most people"* (Weinberg, 1972, p. 116). Many authors

have subsequently described homophobia as *"an aversion to homosexuality, and to homosexual persons"* (Friedman and Downey, 2002, p. 175). A further term 'internalised homophobia' (Malyon 1982) explains an introjected self-devaluation of negative self-criticism, arising from social projections/perceptions, creating sensitivity to identity shame from the mediation of discriminatory contexts. Rather, than viewing homophobia as irrational, its rationality is induced and approved in socially legitimated reasoning. Yet, the minority person who carries it, perhaps experiencing direct discrimination in the process, is left shouldering its implications. Like the findings on stigma/minority stress, the themes of homophobia and internalised homophobia are related to health disparities of sexual and gender minorities living in Ireland and elsewhere (Institute of Medicine 2011; Higgins et al, 2011; Maycock et al, 2009; Richardson and Carroll, 2008; Layte et al, 2006; McEvoy and Richardson, 2004). Herek (2008; 2004) says historic socialisation in heteronormative social conventions also creates expectations of fitting into prescriptive norms and roles.

Recent social measurement of homophobia points to a significant decline in homophobic attitudes in societies (Ahmad and Bhugra, 2010). Grey et al (2013) in a systematic review of instruments that measure social attitudes toward homosexual men during the period 1970 to 2012, finds higher levels of homophobia are correlated to conservative religious or political beliefs, authoritarianism, sexist beliefs and bias, and rigid gender ideology (p. 348). These correlations have been reported in a survey of Irish third level students. However, exceptions to the correlation were found among female students, and those students who had gay friends. These participants supported the advancement of LGBT rights despite holding conservative beliefs (Morrison, Speakman and Ryan 2009; Morrison, Kenny and Harrington, 2005). Furthermore, in Britain, social surveys measuring social attitudes of the general population have shown a steady decline of homophobic attitudes since the early 1980s. The only exception within this progressive pattern was the year 1987 *"a time of great concern about HIV/ AIDS"* (Park et al 2013, p. ii). This exception relates to social stigma for HIV and serves as the rationale for an increase of homophobia against gay men. Going forward, Grey et al (2013) says many of the instruments that measure homophobia need updating:

"For instance, in the post–highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) era, correlations between views about HIV=AIDS and homophobia might not be as strong as they were when AIDS was first coming on the scene and perceived as a greater threat"

(Grey et al, 2013, p. 348).

Based on this interpretation, it is extraordinary how at a time of health need for one of the groups impacted by HIV/AIDS that this translated to increased fear and even intolerance rather than societal compassion within the measurement of societal attitudes. This lack of empathy can be explained by a lack of institutional will in the evident lack of responsiveness to the crisis in Ireland and elsewhere (Lawson 2015; Smith 2015; Malti-Douglas 2007; Monette 1988).

In a recent UK study of teenage youths, drawn from a representative sample of three different high schools, and consistent with our theme of a decline in homophobia, McCormack (2012) says his findings indicate: *"It is no longer valid to assume homophobia among young men"* (p. xi). In a reflection on his own UK high school education, the author recalls an image of himself as *"a closeted student in the late 1990s and early 2000s"* (McCormack, 2012, p. xxiii). Aiming for approval among his peers, he further recalls *"one needed to be hypermacho, homophobic, misogynistic, and aggressive"* (p. xxiii). Six years later on, he described what he observed in the UK high school schools he researched:

"I was immediately struck by the physical affection of the male students. These young men weren't only close to each other, they were touching - and they were gently touching their friends with care and affection"

(McCormack, 2012, p. xxiii).

McCormack (2012) acknowledges the school curriculum continues to *"produce heteronormativity through the presumption of heterosexuality… this does not translate into homophobic attitudes or the marginalisation of LGBT youth"* (p. xxi). Of some concern here, is that the author makes no mention of sexual and gender diversity education integrated into school curriculum. However, continuing with the positive tone, within the forward of this study, Anderson, (2012) also found *"inclusive masculinity"* (p.xiii), which encapsulates the findings from his US and UK research studies. He finds *"of the experiences of openly gay male high school and university*

athletes, I have shown that when they come out of the closet, they overwhelmingly play equally alongside their heterosexual teammates" (Anderson, 2012, p. xiii).

US based psychotherapists Nichols and Shernoff (2006) suggest *"for the most part gay men, lesbians and members of other sexual minorities utilise psychotherapy for the exact same reasons as do their more mainstream counterparts"* (p. 388). These authors say *"many self-identified lesbians, gays and bisexuals come out to themselves and others with a minimum of fear, shame or self-hatred"* (p. 390). Scott and Levine (2010) offer a counter clinical insight. They say personal acceptance of gay male identity can still prove stressful, leading to a *"variety of significant problems"* (p. 351-367). This divergence in findings may be influenced by geographical contexts. The first clinicians are based in the more liberal states of New Jersey and New York (Nichols and Shernoff, 2006) while the latter authors practice in the more conservative state of Ohio (Scott and Levine, 2010).

Sociological studies of gay males contest the idea of a representative stereotype. For example, Robinson's (2008) study of 80 gay male living in Australia found no distinct set of identifiable behaviours or character traits or experiences. His qualitative analysis of gay men's stories, ranging in age from 22 years to 80 years illustrated diversity of gay men's experience across the life course. Similarly, Green's (2008) study of 21 rural Australian gay men speaks of resilience, and there being no sense of compromise to autonomy from living in rural areas, meaning, the choices his participants made in their rural settings were freely chosen. A further example on the theme of social resilience is illustrated by Ali Roff (2014) in a film review on the release of 'Pride'. The film tells the story of how lesbians and gays supported striking miners in the UK:

> *"The inspirational story of the Lesbians and Gays Support for Miners (LGSM) group, formed in 1984, to raise money for the struggling, striking mining community. The offer to help was refused at first, but as prejudices were broken down, unimaginable goals were achieved through their solidarity"*

(Roff, 2014, p. 40).

Taken together, this section highlights a steady decline in homophobia. It also points to how social citizenship is increased in reaching out to others and can break down social prejudices. One study found no compromise to autonomy and freedom living in rural areas in Australia. One of the US clinical authors still finds that it is important not to

underestimate that some gay men can still struggle with identity acceptance. This suggests the generalized inference of resilience or vulnerability cannot be assumed. How to interpret this variance in rural contexts of Australia and the USA is to acknowledge that each person is uniquely situated. Thus, each person has a different experience of rural social contexts, perhaps shaped by temperament, personal experiences, access to supports and specific interests and opportunities for a shared sense of meaning with others. A more contextualist account of these experiences is not well elaborated or reflected upon in current knowledge of gay men's lives. What factors seem to buffer or impede personal autonomy that generates resilience/self-transformation or sustained vulnerability in heteronormative and discriminatory social contexts? Current analysis appears to tilt in favour of the premise that less structural determinants of discrimination is more conducive to greater numbers of minority persons as autonomously self-constituted and determined.

2.7. Suicidality and Being Gay

At the end of a recent lecture 'New Developments in Youth Sexuality' Developmental Psychologist Savin-Williams (2014) was keen to refute the idea that gay children and teenagers are necessarily at a greater risk to suicide than their straight peers. His refutation of prior empirical differentials arises in the context of broader representative sampling of 'typical' gay children and teenagers, compared to the limitations of non-representative historic samples mainly composed of 'vulnerable' gay identified youth and adults. This US based researcher with over thirty years of extensive research on sexual minority youth is suggesting that suicide risk differentials between gay and straight youth are now *"zero"* (1:00:34). In the 2012 Youth edition of Ireland's Gay Community News (GCN), the Youth Editor Andrew Martin says from his experience *"there are many ways to be lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender"* (Martin, 2012, p. 3). Martin goes on to talk about young LGBT people *"having such positive qualities and achieve so many great things that it seems a shame not to acknowledge that side of who we are"* (2012, p. 3). What this suggests is that diverse experiences of sexual minority youth are not adequately represented or disseminated. This may create an idea that extensively publicized stories of gay youth suicide are then linked to a central tendency

of LGBT young lives (Cover 2012; Savin-Williams 2011a; 2010; 2008). Counter to these perceptions, Savin-Williams (1998) research finds we can *"recognise many of our gay teenagers as our sons, brothers, nephews, cousins, friends and boys next door"* (p. xii). Savin-Williams is not suggesting that sexual minority persons are somehow insulated from the risk of suicidality. Indeed, Savin-Williams (2011a) recognises that *"About 10 to 15% are fragile gay kids, and they're susceptible to messages of gay-youth suicide.."* (p. 01/04). The figure is a population level estimate of all vulnerable children and teenagers, irrespective of identity, who at any given time, can be presented with complex life challenges which may include suicide risk.

Cover (2012) also refers to the well-published occurrences of minority youth suicide. However, in the wider social context of declining homophobia, he thinks this *"indicates that some of the older ideas, reasons and causes no longer explain why young queer persons would kill themselves"* (p. 16). This is not to rule out homophobia and social discrimination as factors in the cases of gay youth suicide but to look at other contextualist factors beyond broad structural determinants of social prejudice. While studies have shown that the majority of LGBT adult persons are not at risk of suicide (PSI 2015, Bieschke, Perez and DeBord, 2007), an Irish study on LGBT mental health (Maycock et al, 2009) did find a significant minority of LGBT persons interviewed had spoken of suicidal feelings and ideation and had attempted suicide *"at least once in their lifetime"* (p. 21). In particular, these cases arose from the prior experience of repeated victimisation, e.g. verbal insults, physical attacks, feeling silenced, social and interpersonal rejection. The findings *"suggest that self-harm was a coping response to social contexts characterised by invalidation, and the experience of being regarded as different or in some way unacceptable"* (Maycock, 2009 et al, p. 22). The work of Irish psychotherapy researcher Gordon (2010) in response to concerns of the high rates of young male suicides in Ireland, interviewed seventeen young men who had been in contact with mental health services. The outcome of her in-depth interviews sheds light on how her participants had overcome a pained sense of 'death orientation' toward what she described as an *"identity re-configuration, whereby young men emerge as individuals of value who are deserving of life"* (Gordon, 2011, p. 21). This classic 'grounded theory' study entitled 'Re-Vitalising Worthiness' illuminates a psychosocial process of re-orientation toward life. Subsequent publications for this

study offers insight into how psychotherapy can effectively facilitate such transcendence from suicidal thoughts and behaviours (Gordon, Stephenson and Cutcliffe, 2014).

In the current context of social protection from discrimination for LGBT persons in Ireland, these positive interpersonal and cultural mediators may well assist a positive 're-orientation toward life' for vulnerable persons. Thus, psychotherapy can facilitate this process by affirming social change that promotes equalisation of worth and dignity. Social acceptance may undo historic stigma that creates vulnerability to shame and negative self-criticism. However, it is still important to recognise more personal and interpersonal factors that can heighten suicide risk. Such factors are not clearly stated in existing LGBT literature beyond macro indices of social discrimination as mediators of stress and further risks to wellbeing. Integrating knowledge of personal factors with broader factors of positive social change for LGBT persons can potentially deepen understandings of positive potentials and how the therapeutic facilitation of 'identity re-configuration' (Gordon 2011) can enhance meaning, value and worth. Her grounded theory merits application when the 'configuration' of insignificance was socially mediated. Transcending that introjected and/or projected dynamic in the self-concept is important for going forward.

2.8. Current Rise of Sexually Transmitted Infections

A recent health concern in Ireland as reported by the HSE's (2014) Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) shows 377 new cases of HIV were diagnosed in 2014, an 11% increase on 2013, recording the highest rates for new infections in a given year since 2009. For the first seven months in 2015, 168 new cases have been diagnosed (HSE Monitor 2015). Figures are updated at regular intervals. Overall, a total of 7,521 people in Ireland have been diagnosed with HIV since the early 1980s (HSE 2014). Within the overall 2014 figures 'men who have sex with men' (MSM) account for 183 new infections compared to 158 for 2013 (up 16% on the previous year). Since 2005, there has been a threefold rise. Among 25-29 year-olds MSM, the rise has been fivefold (HSE 2014). In almost a fifth of MSM clinical presentations at STI clinics, clients were co-infected with another sexually transmitted disease. Lachowsky et al (2015) based on

quantitative measurement of sexual behaviours in New Zealand from 2006-2011 share similar concern about the rise in HIV/STI infections from their findings. Their results are consistent with overall EU and US trends. These authors state this places an onus on public health *"to provide better and more compelling condom education, training and promotion for YMSM"* (p. 1). Among their health promotion initiatives is rapid-testing which acts as a preliminary screening intervention. This initiative is positively correlated to *"a significant increase in HIV testing among gay and bisexual men, particularly among men at increased risk of HIV"* (Kirby Institute 2015). Over a two year period, in the study of 4,889 participants they find *"men with high numbers of partners"* had a higher number of tests *"2.2 tests in twelve months compared to 1.6 tests among men having only conventional tests"* (Kirby Institute 2015). This finding points to the benefits of rapid/easy access testing for HIV reduction. Dublin is about to launch free easy access testing *"offering a mix of on-site testing in workplaces, bars and other hubs, and a new testing centre"* (health.gov.ie 2015, Press Release). The initiative will provide support to similar services running in Cork and Limerick.

The recently published 'Healthy Ireland Survey' (HI 2015) conducted 7,539 face to face interviews. 87% of this sample were eligible to participate in the Sexual Health module. Within its key findings, this survey found*"69% of 17-24 year olds were most likely to have used a condom"* (p. 58). Their survey also finds higher rates of HIV increase in MSM *"54% of men who most recently had sex with another man did not use a condom"* (p. 58). This figure needs to be compared to a further key finding within the study. Of all participants surveyed *"24% used a condom when they last had sex"* (HI, 2015, p. 56). Taken together, a further interpretive limitation of these findings is highlighted in a sexual behaviours study of 1,427 gay and MSM HIV-negative men in Australia (Jin et al, 2015). This research concludes:

> *"Using all forms of CLAI (condomless anal intercourse) indiscriminately as a measure of HIV behavioural risk is not helpful in understanding the current drivers of HIV transmission in the community"*

> (Jin et al, 2015, p.1).

Further measures to reduce HIV transmission is the availability of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) (Alcorn 2015). This intervention involves prescribing anti-retroviral drugs prior to HIV infection. This protects against the spread of infection

when viral load is non-detectable. Plans to fund this strategy are at an earlier stage and are *"far from straightforward because of the variety of health care systems"* (Alcorn 2015) currently delivered within the European Union.

In summary, prior to the wide availability of random testing and PrEP, the key recommendation from the HSE (2014) suggests the following as best practice:

> *"Effective interventions such as promoting condom use, and peer-led outreach interventions that provide information and support to the MSM community, need to be sustained and strengthened."* (HSE 2014).

2.9. Gender Socialisation and Gay Male Relationships.

While gay men are not characterised as a homogenous group in terms of typical gender expression, Le Vay (2011) contends gender non-conformity or atypical gender traits is evident in children who later become gay adults. Frankowski (2004) defines gender identity as the *"the knowledge of oneself as being male or female, and gender role is the outward expression of maleness or femaleness"* (p. 1827). However, an alternative view is expressed by Savin-Williams (2011) in his finding that young gay minority identity/ies develop in an ecological matrix where any *"presumption that teens have more in common with others of their sexual orientation than with peers in general, simply because of that orientation, is questionable and perhaps implausible"* (Savin-Williams, 2011, p.686; Savin-Williams, 2010). The view that gender traits or behaviour do not act as definitive indicators of a sexual orientation identity enjoys wide support in the literature (Fausto-Sterling 2012; Vrangalova and Savin-Williams, 2012; Morrow 2011; Malti-Douglas 2007). Richards and Barker (2013) view 'gender and sexuality' as *complex, and contested, to the point at which no definition can adequately encompass them"* (p. 1). O'Neil (2011) says more *"critical thought"* and *"conceptual unity"* (p. 378) is required to advance gender theory. His interests lie in understanding *"how men's gender role socialisation occurs, and how it affects men's lives"* (p. 378). For example, O'Neil (2011) says it is important to understand how *"the macro-societal concept of hegemonic masculinity"* is also related to how *"power, societal patriarchy and institutional sexism operate in men's lives"* (p. 384). From his macro-concepts, his research has created the theory of gender role conflict (GRC). The theory has generated

a significant number of studies examining the correlations between GRC and self-esteem, anxiety and depression (O'Neil 2008). To date, this theory of gender has focused on macro intersections of "*race, class, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religious orientation, nationality etc*" (O'Neil, 2011, p. 384), while still aiming to contextually grasp:

> " *.. how ecological factors dynamically operate to shape experience, and how biological, cultural, psychological, interpersonal, spiritual, political, and s o c i a l context affect behaviour…"*

> (O'Neil, 2011, p. 384).

Kenneth Gergen (2009) focuses on more intimate levels of personal meaning grounded in his social constructionist thinking:

> "*Echoing Vygotsky, every means we possess for privately suppressing impulses was acquired from participation in public life. The metaphor of inner dialogue is useful here. Each impulse to "do this, and "don't do that" represents a "voice" from past relationships*"

> (Gergen, 2009, p. 141).

Gergen (2009) thinks of social representations as a process of psychic reinforcement acquired over time. Focusing on early experiences of 'shame or uncomfortable topics' (p. 142) Gergen cites the work of Michael Billig on the Freudian unconscious. He says what may have been initially uncomfortable *"over time we lose consciousness of the dialogic tension itself. We just "don't think of those things"* (p. 142). From a self-psychology and psychodynamic perspective Beard and Glickauf-Hughes (1994) suggest typical gender roles may have been re-enforced in an early lack of *"empathy, mirroring, and* (a lack of) *acceptance for …. differentness"* (p. 21). Riggs (2015) says a masculinity conflict for gay men may manifest as a co-occurring paradox of both privilege and oppression. Studies measuring social perception illustrate how the formation of general stereotypes serves the same function as other cognitive categorisation in thinking:

> "*Structuring and simplifying the vast quantities of things and people we encounter...these basic processes are sufficient to produce stereotypic knowledge, even in the absence of important socio-motivational factors that encourage stereotyping*"

(Sherman et al, 2013, p. 549).

Some gay men living in a society where rigid gender stereotyping is perceived as typical may negatively interact with emotional literacy, relational engagement and duration of relationships (Greenan 2010; Greenan and Tunnell, 2003). From an attachment perspective, Mohr (2008) states the practical advantages of gay relationships as:

> "*Romantic attachment provide adults with reliable relationships upon which they can depend for protection, care, and support during times of greatest need (e.g. sickness, economic hardship, violent attack). The establishment of stable romantic attachments may then increase the likelihood of surviving into old age and enjoying the reproductive advantage this affords*"

(Mohr, 2008 p. 483).

Mohr (2008) says advancing social justice may:

> "*Increase the seriousness with which partners take their commitment and requiring more effort of partners who wish to end a relationship. Such barriers may even lessen the effect of insecure attachment on risk of breakup*"

(Mohr, 2008, p. 495).

Finally, Mohr (2008) argues that state recognition means *"greater visibility of couple role models and increased valuing of same-sex relationships"* (p. 495). The first officially registered gay couple in modern history was in 1989, following Denmark's landmark legislation of civil partnership. On the day of their civil ceremony, Eigel Axgil aged 67 and his long-term partner Axel Axgil at 74 years old, conveyed the meaning of state recognition of their relationship *"We have been together 40 years and in these 40 years we were waiting for this"* (Rule, 1989, p. A8). In 2012, Denmark legislated for civil marriage which extends to the Church of Denmark.

In sum, the meaningful value of visible gay relationships are being stressed within this section. While the social context is emphasised in terms of gender role socialisation and visibility, what is also interesting is how attachment style of the partners and social legitimation of gay male relationships may transact in benefits.

2.10. Critical Social Psychology and Queer Theory Contributions to Identity Studies.

Wetherell (2010) notes how the interdisciplinary study of identity has moved and broadened *"into a more general interest in social subjectivity, the social organisation of memory, narrative, emotion and affect"* (p. 3). Wetherell (2010) refers to processes of globalisation and technology as expanding traditional boundaries of identities *"to configure a sense of self"* (p. 4). She elaborates that identity is *"no longer studied as a solipsistic, solitary and static individual achievement, but has become seen as mobile, flexibly negotiated, practical oriented, and jointly accomplished with others"* (Wetherell, 2010, p. 4). The very concept of sexual identity is being challenged in '*a new post-gay*' era. (Savin-Williams, 2010). Plummer (2011) says *"same sex sexualities are never cut from the same cloth... we have to learn to live with (and love) the varieties, the differences, the hybrid"* (p. 210). A recent sociological study of twenty one gay males in the UK entitled 'Changing Gay Male Identities' argues for the retention of sexual identity as an important category. This researcher argues sexual identity provides a coherent sense of security for constructing and maintaining a sense of self (Cooper, 2013). A further area of significance for identity lies in its import for mobilising social movements, social citizenship and for consciousness raising of important ethical concerns in a society (West 2013; Walker 2007).

Roseneil (2009) finds modern societies have undergone profound changes in the ways personal identities are lived:

> *"More and more people are spending longer periods of their lives outside heteronormative intimacies. Practices of personal life which have historically been socially and culturally marginal to the heterosexual order are becoming more widespread and increasingly socially significant"*
>
> (Roseneil, 2009, p. 398).

Similarly, D'Emilio (2006) argues this social pattern has been evident since *"the early 1960s, the lives of many, many heterosexuals have become much more like the imagined lives of homosexuals"* (2006). Parsons and Grov (2013) review of research regarding gay men's identities, desires, and their sexual behaviour find:

> *"As social acceptance of homosexuality continues to increase we are likely to see a greater number of individuals exploring their sexuality, sexual identity, and*

"coming out" during developmental periods that are on a par with heterosexual peers who are also exploring their own sexuality and sexual identity"

(Parsons and Grov, 2013, p. 27).

Hammack, Mayers and Windell, (2011) from their analysis of sexual minority experience in the US sum up the research trajectory in three master scripts – *"the sickness script.. the species script... the subject script"* (p. 1). In a further paper, Hammack and Cohler (2011) say *"the significant degree of social and political change... possesses profound implications for the life course of individuals with same-sex desire"* (p. 162). Newer directions in critical social theories generally aim to understand how experiences of social exclusion and alienation can jeopardise the potential for positive development, with its consequences for agency, choice, worth, regard and dignity (Pippin 2015; 2008; Jaeggi 2014; Nussbaum 2011). These social philosophies situate the personal and interpersonal within the institutional fabric of cultural and legal repertoires, thus providing a critical grammar for social justice as a historical achievement.

2.11. The Historical Context of Being Gay in Ireland

Rose (1994) recalls in 1977, when Dr. Noel Browne, an Irish politician and medical doctor, asked *"The Minister for Justice to reform the law on homosexuality. As Kieran Rose remarked, Browne's proposal was "literally laughed out of the Dail"* (cited by Lacey, 2008, p. 247). In a recently published autobiography, *Kick Against the Pricks,* Senator David Norris (2012) recounts his experience of growing up gay in Ireland. In a chapter entitled 'The Only Gay in the Village,' he remembers how his sexual identity was constructed for him within 1940's Ireland:

"I was born a criminal. From the moment of my arrival on this planet, my essential nature defined me as such. There was simply nothing I could do about it, since homosexuality is a natural but minority variation of the sexual instinct"

(Norris, 2012, p. 74).

His narrative further informs how the status of gay persons in Irish society was enshrined through a combination of religious church doctrines and politico-legal statutes:

> *"The ecclesiastic instruction that homosexuality was not to be mentioned was slavishly obeyed throughout society. It was a subject that was quite literally unmentionable, and throughout my youth, was not referred to in newspapers, magazines or the broadcast media"*

(Norris, 2012, p. 77).

In 1977, as a Trinity College lecturer, David Norris began a series of legal challenges to Irish statutes which criminalized consensual homosexual relations and stigmatised the identities of homosexual persons in the process. His senior legal counsel was Mary Robinson BL. Robinson went on to become the first female President of Ireland in 1990 (Robinson 2012). The legal challenges were directed at a section of 'Offences Against The Person Act 1861 and Section 11 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885' (Ryan, F, 2014). Their central argument was that the criminalisation of consensual homosexual sexual acts infringed on the right to privacy (Flynn 1995). Representing the Irish State, Rory O'Hanlon SC defended the ban:

> *"Sexual relations outside marriage constituted a violation of bodily integrity, and homosexuality did so in a particularly grave manner as being against the order of nature and a perversion of the biological function of the sexual organs . . . it was important that the State should do all in its power to discourage the spread of homosexuality and in particular should not appear by the laws to condone sexual practices calculated to undermine the institutions of marriage and the family"*

(O'Hanlon, 1980 cited by Sweeney, 2009).

Walls (2008) captures this legal devaluation of minority identities when *"subordinate groups receive a disproportionately large share of negative social values"* (Walls, 2008, p. 21). At the time, support for this legal position was well exampled in Catholic Religious Doctrines. In 1975, *Persona Humana* states:

> *"For according to the objective moral order, homosexual relations are acts which lack an essential and indispensable finality.... Homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered and can in no way be approved"*

(CDF, 1975, Section 8).

The church document goes on to counsel that homosexuals *"must certainly be treated with understanding and sustained hope of overcoming their personal difficulties and*

their inability to fit into society" (CDF, 1975, Section 8). The first judgment in the Irish High Court (1980) ruled to uphold Ireland's traditional statutes as formally stated by Judge McWilliam:

> *"Although I accept that the traditional attitudes of the Churches and of the general body of citizens towards homosexuality are being challenged and may be successfully challenged in the future, it is reasonably clear that current Christian morality in this country does not approve of buggery or of any sexual activity between persons of the same sex... Individual cases of hardship cannot invalidate statutes which can reasonably be considered by the legislature to be desirable for the true social order and the preservation of the public order and morality mentioned in the Constitution"*

Norris v. Attorney General [1984/1980], p.46-7, as cited in Hug (1999, p. 212-3).

In 1981, a year after the defeat in the Irish Courts, the EU Court of Human Rights ruled in favour of 'Jeffrey Dudgeon v. United Kingdom' by a margin of fifteen votes to four votes' to end criminalisation of homosexual acts in Northern Ireland (Mullally, 2015, p. 198). Johnson (2013) says while the Strasburg Judgment:

> *"Marked a watershed in its jurisprudence, as well as in international law, it was followed by a long period in which the Strasburg organs continued to deem inadmissible any complaints about sexual orientation discrimination, except those relating to the criminalisation of private sexual acts"*

(Johnson, 2013, p. 211).

Soon after the first defeat in the Irish High Court, David Norris appealed the High Court ruling to the Irish Supreme Court in 1983. In its ruling by 3 votes to 2, Norris (2012) says the then Chief Justice:

> *"Turned to the bible for justification of the Victorian law, concluding that all organised religions looked on homosexual acts with deep revulsion as being contrary to the order of nature, a perversion of the biological functions of the sexual organs and an affront to Society and to God"*

(Norris, 2012, p. 120).

A Catholic Church document from 1986 declared that being homosexual is not itself a sin, rather *"it is more or less a strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil; and thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder"* (CDF 1986, Point 3). Many legal scholars argue that religious teachings were the basis for many EU States constitutional laws (Daly 2012; McCrea 2010; 2009; Griffin 2008; Crompton 2003). Griffin (2008) finds that the origin for the idea of natural laws and natural rights

in constitutional laws stems from Greek and Roman Antiquity. He highlights 'The Middle Ages as a significant period when the Church elaborated its position on sexual morality (Griffin, 2008, p. 9). Crompton (2003) also finds that the Medieval and Renaissance periods were particularly notable for *"harsh legal sanctions against homosexuality and routinely found their justification in Christian teaching"* (p. 538).

Stigmatising constructions of homosexuality still appeared to have loomed large in the public mind of 1970s Ireland. Intolerance and prejudice towards homosexuals was evident in measurements of Irish social attitudes in a study entitled 'Prejudice and Tolerance in Ireland (Mac Greil 1977). One of its research questions measured social opinions on homosexuality, they found a sizeable 39.9% of respondents in Dublin alone supported the retention of the criminalisation statute (p. 410-14). Some politicians in mainstream politics tried to confront social prejudice. For example, a Fine Gael press release from Roy Dooney (1979) stated *"Just as heterosexuality is a state of mind, so too is homosexuality"* (cited by Ferriter, 2009, p. 500). While some within the political class were working to de-stigmatise gay male identities, historic public attitudes of pathologisation and violent attacks on gay men gained significant media attention during the 1970s-80s. (Mullally 2015; Ferriter 2009; Lacey 2008). Mullally (2015) writes:

> *"In 1982, three separate killings had a profound impact on the gay community. On 21 January 1982, Charles Self, an RTE set designer, left a pub on Duke Street and returned to his home in South Dublin. There, he was stabbed to death. He was 33. His killer was never identified. On 8 September, John Roche, 29, was stabbed to death in room twenty-six at the Munster Hotel in Cork. The hotel porter who killed him, Michael O'Connor, 26, said, 'Your gay days are over,' as he stabbed him, he told Gardai. 'He would have ruined my life. He wanted me to become a gay. I said no way, and I killed him. The jury found O'Connor not guilty of murder, but guilty of manslaughter"*

(Mullally, 2015, p. 168).

In 1983, the same year that the Norris appeal was rejected by the Irish Supreme Court, Mullally (2015) writes of the Dublin murder of Declan Flynn, a 31 year old gay man who had *"left a pub in Donny carney for Fairview Park"* (p. 183). On this fateful evening, Ferriter (2009) writes Flynn was murdered *"by young men who had grown up playing in the same park"* (p. 499). Max Krzyzanowski of LGBT Noise (2014) talks about this incident on the promo footage of an upcoming documentary film 'From

Ireland to Alabama'. He says 'one of these youths admitted to approaching Declan Flynn and subsequently being joined by a gang, brutally beating him to death as he tried to escape. These young men also admitted to the systematic robberies and beatings of other gay men in the Park that summer' (Krzyzanowski 2014). The documentary says that prior to this murder, a local Catholic prelate in Fairview had warned *"that something horrible would happen if the attacks continued"* (Capital Gay, 1983, cited by Merriman, 2014). On sentencing the youths, Judge Gannon gave suspended sentences for manslaughter. His ruling stated *"this could never be considered murder,"* and that these *"vigilantes were cleaning up the area"* (Capital Gay, 1983, cited by Merriman, 2014). Ferriter (2009) cites Magill Journalist Maggie O'Kane's subsequent account of her interview with these young men:

> *"The night they killed Declan Flynn the girls had gone home. The girls always went home when they went queer bashing or bashing people they thought were queer. Sometimes it didn't really matter if they were or not but it was better if they were ..one of the lads thought it would be a good way of getting a few bob – robbing a few queers...Steamers they called them"*

> (Ferriter, 2009 p. 499).

The leniency of the sentences led to a significant public outcry (Mullally 2015). Mullally (2015) says the Fairview murder is a *"night that changed Irish history"* (p. 183), signifying a moment *"in the gay community, where a righteous anger was born"* (p. 55). LGBT rights campaigner Izzy Kamikaze says *"We were the people who organised the Fairview Park march after the killing, which is the thing that people say was "The Irish Stonewall." And perhaps it was"* (Kamikaze, interviewed by Mullally, 2015, p. 168). The reference to Stonewall refers to a key date in LGBT history. In 1969, the Police raided the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar on Christopher Street in Greenwich Village, New York. The police stormed the bar and arrested patrons. As patrons were escorted to waiting vans, they resisted arrest and a full scale riot developed with the support of many others in the LGBT community (D'Emilio 1998). Shortly after Stonewall, a new political organisation was established 'The Gay Liberation Front' (GLF). However, gay political activism in the US predated the Stonewall event, from the *"late 1960s.. by analogy with the struggle for black and women's civil rights"* (Norris, 1995/1993, p. 18). The purpose of the GLF in the US was to provide:

"..a means of expression for a new generation who rejected the post-war political and social order and who were willing to take to the streets to manifest their discontent as had occurred in Paris and in many American cities the previous year."

(Aldrich, 2006, p. 212-3).

Back in Ireland, after six unsuccessful attempts at election over a decade, David Norris finally managed to get elected to the Irish Senate in 1987, becoming the first openly gay Member of Parliament in modern history. His struggle in getting elected meant he had to convince his panel of electors that he was not simply a single issue candidate (Hug 1999). On his senate election Norris (1994) said *I think that the physical presence in the House (Parliament) of somebody who contributed effectively on other issues is very important because it demythologises homosexuality"* (cited by Hug, 1999, p. 217).

A year after his election, in 1988, and five years after the Irish Supreme Court defeat, Norris represented by Robinson BL finally succeeded in the European Court of Human Rights. In 1973, Ireland had officially joined the European Union. The Court ruled that the law criminalising homosexuality in Ireland was an infringement on the right of respect for adult privacy to engage in acts and relations of their own choice (Norris 2012). Duffy and Sheridan (2012) refer to the EU case in 1988 and how the Senator had been *"advised by a psychiatrist to leave Ireland and live in a country where laws on homosexuality had been reformed"* (p. 8). In the Irish Senate, on the second stage reading of the bill abolishing the previous laws in 1993, Senator Norris (1995) mentioned the impact of the psychiatric advise he had previously received:

> *"This well-meant advice I found deeply offensive. I would ask this House to consider how any member of the House would feel if they were professionally advised to leave their own country merely on account of something over which they had as little control as the colour of their hair. This outraged me and propelled me into the moves that led to the foundation of the Irish Gay Rights Movement."*

(Norris, 1993, p. 20).

Rose (1994) says while religious mores/values were on the decline in late 1980s/early 90s Ireland, an embedded conservatism within the institutional social fabric still had the effect of slowing down the social reform agenda in Ireland. He cites some examples:

> *"AIDS initiatives, progress for young people and direct public funding for our community services. This resistance consumed much of the scarce resources of the gay movement"*

(Rose, 1994, p. 41).

Further commentators suggest the historic response to AIDS was further complicated by identity stigma/shame (O'Connor 1995). Back then, in the absence of *"widespread mobilisation"* (p. 191), O'Connor still acknowledges *"the commitment of some gay men to AIDS organisations, and AIDS political endeavours had a number of positive effects for the Irish gay community"* (p. 191).

With decriminalisation signed into Irish law by President Mary Robinson in 1993, a series of equality initiatives soon followed (Ryan, F, 2014; Parker and Coffman, 2012; GLEN 2002). However religious bodies in Ireland were still afforded exemptions from the Employment Equality Act (Ryan, F, 2014). A Catholic Church document issued from Rome by the CDF (1992) raised concern about the trend in individual countries to legislate for equality. The document argued:

> *"There are areas in which it is not unjust discrimination to take sexual orientation into account, for example in the placement of children for adoption or foster care, in employment of teachers or athletic coaches, and in military recruitment."*

(CDF, 1992, Line 11).

Warner (1999) referring to history of religious tenets adopted in laws throughout the world;

> *"Again and again, we have seen that people want to put sex in its place, both for themselves and for others. And the consequence, as we have seen, is not only that they create contradictions for themselves, but also that they create damaging hierarchies of shame and elaborate mechanisms to enforce these hierarchies"*

(Warner, 1999, p. 195).

McCrea (2009) says where mainstream religions have *"significant cultural roots in Europe"* (p. 1) religions *"are capable of reconciling themselves to humanist influences (and) to exercise greater influence over EU law than those faiths which lack such characteristics"* (p. 1). Overall, McCrea (2010) says while religion has to compete for influence over laws *"individual denominations continue to function as parts of the national identity and institutional structures of many European States"* (p. 9). O'Toole (1998) writing towards the end of the last century refers to the historic church/state

relationship as *"undeniable"* (p. 67). He specifies the levels of religious enculturation in Irish society from birth to death:

> *"Likely to be born in a Catholic hospital, educated at Catholic schools, married in a Catholic church, have children named by a priest, be counselled by a Catholic marriage advisors if the marriage runs into trouble, be dried out in Catholic clinics for the treatment of alcoholism if he or she develops a drink problem, be operated on in Catholic hospitals, and be buried by Catholic rites."*

> (O'Toole, 1998, p. 67).

In Ireland, Robson (1995) does acknowledge how 'The National Conference of Priests of Ireland seemed to take a different line to orthodox magisterial teaching from Rome in their suggestion that *"lesbians and gays might have a positive role in the life of the Church. Perhaps!"* (p. 57). Indeed, Crompton (2003) concluded his historical study by singling out Christianity for special praise in terms of its overall debt to humanity:

> *"How can we not be grateful for its works of compassion, its service to education, and its contribution to the world's treasury of great art, architecture, and music? We must recognise those church leaders who throughout the ages have worked for peace and the alleviation of human oppression."*

> (Crompton, 2003, p. 540).

Capturing the dilemma posed by religious ethos exemptions from equality laws within the school sector in Ireland, over 90% of national schools are still under Catholic patronage (Humphreys 2015). Irish secondary school teacher Niall Callan (2014) writes 'And I'm Gay. And It's not Okay:

> *"The vast majority are unlikely to have any issue with my sexuality, but I can't be certain of that. I now work for a religious institution and I am not protected against discrimination. I'm 30 years old and I'm scared of losing my temporary job. I'm 30 years old and I'm scared because I'm gay. I'm 30 years and I'm about to start lying about who I am, for the first time since I came out at 18."*

> (Callan 2014).

Lesbian Equality activist and teacher, Eileen Gamble (2014) stresses the same point:

> *"The very people Section 37.1 affects are often left voiceless and faceless. For so many LGBT teachers, anonymity has been our employment protection because our equality laws have failed us."*

> (Gamble 2014).

A former Irish primary teacher, Barry O'Rourke (2015) writes about the illogical arguments that were often put forward in the context of dominant Catholic patronage of the school system, such as *"Why don't you teach in a multi-denominational school? If marriage is between the two of you, keep it between yourselves."* He adds *"There are schools that have embraced diversity already but there are plenty who don't, or at least felt they could not"* (O'Rourke 2015). In response to the problem of religious ethos exemptions in schools, the current Minister of Justice, Frances Fitzgerald has given a guarantee to end religious exemptions (Kelly 2014). Delivering on this promise, the Irish Parliament passed the bill on Dec 2, 2015. The Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (2015) greeted the legislation saying: *"This bill is the key piece of the legislative map that will allow LGBT people to be themselves, get married and have a family without a threat to their job if they work in a religious run institution,"* said Sandra Irwin-Gowran, Director of Education policy at GLEN (2015).

The purpose of the above section was to grasp the historical context of social discrimination laws in Ireland. In the main, the social and political achievements of Catholic Religion enshrined in laws are central to understanding the historical discourses of Ireland. Further evidence of religious tenets adopted as social norms is elaborated in legal, sociological and community activist writings (Ryan 2015; Long 2014; Share, Corcoran, Conway; 2012; Gilligan and Zappone, 2008; Kennedy 2001). Many of these writings chart the struggle for equal rights, illuminating community pain and resilience. Up to a decade ago, Inglis (2005) held the position that a critical history of sexuality in Ireland was not well elaborated, suggesting Catholic ethos control in key disciplines may have *"dampened any budding interest in the subject… and little will to find a way of revealing the secrets of Irish sexuality"* (p. 10). With the exception of sociological queer theory, non-identity and post-structuralist theories (Giffney and Shildrick, 2013; Giffney and O'Rourke, 2012; Munt 2012; 2010) the criticism that historical scholarship lacks a critical discourse on sexuality still has merit. From my reading, there are exceptions to this pattern (O'Brien 2013; Ryan 2011; Duffy 2011; Ferriter 2009; Hug 1999; Inglis 1998). Within Chapter Four and the following critical discussion of the findings in Chapter Five the aim of the reconstruction is to improve critical understanding of contextualist experiences.

To further situate prior studies on LGBT mental health in Ireland (e.g. Higgins et al, 2011; Maycock et al, 2009), sociological and human rights narratives are critical for understanding the historic challenges of social discrimination which contextualised lack of social acceptance for minority identity in Ireland. The necessity of critically grasping sociological contexts now resonates with the objectives of the 'National Sexual Health Strategy' (health.gov.ie, 2015). The strategy is Ireland's first national framework for sexual health and wellbeing. The authors believe: *"the ability to reach and maintain good health is shaped not only by individual lifestyle factors and genetics, but also by the environment within which we live"* (p. 9).

In keeping with this remit, the next sections of this review track more current contexts for sexual minority citizens. These sections represent a considerable change in tone from the historical context of discrimination.

2.12. Minority Visibility in a Changing Ireland

Rose (2012) remarks in *"a relatively short period of time, Ireland has moved from being one of the most unwelcoming countries for gay people to being one of the most progressive globally."* One of the key findings of recent Irish research of older Irish gay men and lesbian women, aged 55 and over, (Higgins, et al, 2011) finds *"a sense of pride among participants at being the first real generation of 'out and older' LGBT people. They rejoiced at their ability to be true to, or at 'one with their authentic self'"* (p. 8).

A further cultural trend is the increasing visibility of gay men from the world of sport and entertainment who talk openly about their experiences of being gay (O'Neill 2015; 2014). Some years ago in Ireland, former All Ireland GAA Cork Hurling Star, Donal Og Cusack gave his address to the Foyle Pride Festival in Derry in 2012: *"We can't be limited in what we do in life, and in law by our choice of who, if anybody we sleep with or what God, if any, we worship"* (Cusack, 2012, p. 310). Cusack continues *"I'm not just from Cloyne, not just from Cork, not just a hurler. Not just a gay man. Like everybody in this room I'm the sum total of many, many things and that's how I want to be judged"* (Cusack, 2012, p. 310). A further example of visibility was 'Panti's Noble Call at the Abbey Theatre' (O' Neill 2014a). In this famous speech, to a post-show

audience at the Irish National Theatre, Rory O'Neill (aka Panti Bliss) spoke of the disconcerting feel of social insult on the streets of Ireland. These occurrences, combined with pejorative inferences regularly aired in Irish media, O'Neill (2014a) gives critical insight on how these transactions show up as negative forms of self-critique:

> *"Afterwards I wonder and worry and obsess over what was it about me, what was it they saw in me... and I check myself to make sure I'm not doing it this time...to escape unscathed would be miraculous"*

(O'Neill, 2014a).

This speech recorded 772,000 Youtube hits. His message resonated with a vast audience. While, this excerpt may have the feel that it is consistent with historic discrimination, my suggestion is that O'Neill's Nobel Call (2014) and his follow up 'All The Little Things' (O' Neill 2015) examples how national theatres within their transformative remit, facilitate O'Neill to speak his truth to power. By doing so, it allows O'Neill (Panti-Bliss) to transmit his thinking into a public space. The personal and the social dialogue with one other in this transformative process.

The theme of proud visibility is further exampled in the opening dedication of Duffy and Sheridan (2012) study of Sexual Orientation in An Garda Siochana:

> *"I am a Garda. I'm proud to be a member of the force for so many reasons. I'm also comfortable being gay, both as a human being and as a member of the force. It wasn't too long ago that Gardai were responsible for arresting gay men and bringing them to 'justice'. Today, as an openly gay man, I serve with the men and women of the force day by day, night by night, and I try to be the best I can be, both to myself, and the uniform I wear, the badge I swore upon and the honour of the position I hold"*

(Duffy and Sheridan, 2012, Opening section).

In 2014, Sgt. Paul Franey in his role as Secretary of G-Force delivered a speech to the GRA (Garda Representative Association) Annual Conference. He stated that up as far as 2006, in an Irish Police force of over 11,000 people, there was still little or no visibility of LGBT officers in the Irish force. On joining the Garda in 2000, Franey (2014) states *"It was three years before I met another gay Garda"* (p. 1). His paper to

Conference charts the struggle and a lack of support within management structures for addressing these issues (Franey, 2014, p. 2). Franey (2014) outlined how he drew sustenance and strength from European and International LGBT Garda Associations. These EU officers had managed to gain recognition from more supportive management structures within their respective EU countries. Franey (2014) says through these EU LGBT Networks, he discovered *"It was possible to bring your whole self to work... supported by management"* (p. 2). In the same year, Sgt. Franey went on to represent Ireland at a conference of the European Gay Police Association (EGPA), becoming the first Irish Garda in uniform to march with his European colleagues at a Gay Pride Parade in Berlin, Germany in 2014. The year 2014 also marked the first occasion when The Garda Band officially took part in a Dublin Gay Pride Parade (Stephens 2014). Commenting on these developments, Tiernan Brady (2014) a Policy director with GLEN says, *"This is a huge step in comparison to two years ago when the conference was held in Dublin and police were specifically refused permission to march in the parade in uniform"* (Stephens 2014).

2.13. Marriage Equality

In 2013, it was twenty years since homosexuality was decriminalised in Ireland and during these decades, considerable legislative achievements have come to pass that enhance and protect sexual and gender minorities from discrimination and social exclusion (Ryan 2015; GLEN 2002). This pattern of legislative equality is consistent with a growing global movement that regards marriage *"as a fundamental human right to be extended to same-sex couples"* (Chamie and Mirkin, 2011, p. 529). The pathway for the recognition of civil partnerships in Ireland is published in a document entitled 'Civil Partnership in Ireland: How a Minority achieved a Majority' (Parker and Coffman, 2012). This report outlines the trajectory of the legislative achievements since 1993 in an Ireland that *"still had a law on the books criminalising homosexual conduct"* (p. 1). Reflecting on the developments in Ireland in 2006, the then Irish Prime Minister, Mr. Bertie Ahern spoke of his Government's commitment to equality:

> *"Our sexual orientation... is an essential part of who and what we are. Sexual orientation cannot, and must not be the basis of second-class citizenship. Our laws have changed and will continue to change, to reflect this principle"*

(Parker and Coffman, 2012, p. 6).

What the Ahern Government legislated for was civil partnership which took effect in Irish law from January 2011, having received *"an overwhelming vote of support"* in both Houses of Parliament (Parker and Coffman, 2012, p. 13).

One of the first couples to register their civil partnership in Ireland was Barry Dignam and Hugh Walsh (Duncan 2011). At the time, they remarked in an interview *"anything which is not equality is not equal"* (p. 6). Indeed, the legal precursor for the advancement of marriage equality had begun in 2003, when Ann Louise Gilligan and Katherine Zappone (2008) sought to have their Canadian marriage recognised in Ireland. Their case was heard in the Irish Courts in 2006 with a judgment against them. They appealed to the Irish Supreme Court in 2007 (Gilligan and Zappone 2008). The case came before the Supreme Court in 2012 and was then referred back to the High Court on different elements of law (Ryan 2015). Despite the lack of success in the Irish Courts, the momentum for marriage equality continued. Max Krzyzanowski (2011) of LGBT Noise argued that civil partnership amounted to *"a sloped legal playing field where the minority is already discriminated against."* The Advocacy of LGBT Noise highlighted the danger of settling for special arrangements, potentially giving a licence for further discrimination in the years to come, while still acknowledging the legal protections of civil partnerships. For over a decade, LGBT Noise backed up by The National LGBT Federation, Marriage Equality, GLEN and many others created the momentum of not settling for less. Furthermore, LGBT Noise captured the public imagination in mass rallies, active online presence and media debate, providing a public rallying platform for all interested persons and groups on the March for Marriage and Gender Equality in Ireland. Elsewhere too, the momentum for marriage equality continued, something many thought of as inconceivable during most of the last century (Chamie and Mirkin 2011).

Alongside these developments, one of the most high profile Government supporters for marriage equality was the Leader of the Labour Party and Former Minister for Foreign Affairs, Eamon Gilmore. He stated the view that marriage equality was the right to autonomous self constitution calling it *"the civil rights issue of this generation,"* adding *"it is my view that gay people should have the right to marry. I think that is the*

view of most people in this country. Irish society has moved on considerably on this issue" (McGee 2012). In 2012, the Irish Parliament planned a national constitutional convention to discuss proposed amendments to the constitution. In the following year, the Convention had received over 1000 submissions and voted overwhelmingly in favour for a public vote for a referendum on marriage equality (Lord 2015). Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Eamon Gilmore greeted the convention result by saying *"our laws reflect the past, not the future... It's not the role of the State to pass judgment on who a person falls in love with, or who they want to spend their life with"* (Mac Cormaic 2013).

In November 2013, the Irish Prime Minister, End Kenny declared his party's support for marriage equality, committing his government to the holding of a public referendum in 2015 (O' Regan 2014). The then Minister for Justice and Law Reform, Mr. Alan Shatter also announced the preparedness of the Irish Government to tangibly follow through on another of the Convention's recommendations. These changes were *"in relation to parentage, guardianship and upbringing of children"* (Mac Cormaic 2013). Mr. Shatter said *"This is an issue of vital importance that must be addressed in the context of the gaps in our current law and in the best interests of children and those parents parenting them"* (GLEN 2014). Internationally, Pertman and Howard (2011) summarises the context of diverse patterns of family life and its importance for children and equal rights of minority citizens:

> *"Millions of children around the world, including over 100,000 in the United States, need families to raise them. The future for children who grow up without stable families is bleak for them and costly and not only in terms of money but to society as a whole. To make genuine advances for these boys and girls, the social changes taking place in our country need to include the consideration of all qualified parents for them. A transformation of the family, indeed of the very meaning of the word family, is taking place as a result. Whatever we may feel as individuals about this historic shift, both research and experience strongly indicate it is a positive one for children who need permanent homes. Primarily for their sake but also in order to provide equal rights to all adults this social revolution warrants support"*

(Pertman and Howard, 2011, p.32).

When the Irish Government announced the marriage referendum vote for May 22 2015, the Co-Director of Irish Marriage Equality greeted the news saying *"Irish people are*

incredibly fair and have an innate sense of justice which this referendum appeals to" (Griffith 2014). The news was further embraced by the Chairperson of the Irish National LGBT Federation *"Legislative equality essentially paves the way for a society that celebrates diverse identities and empowers all citizens of Ireland to live openly and authentically"* (McEvoy 2014). In 2014, Pope Francis, the Head of the Roman Catholic Church reportedly began a process to welcome gay persons into his Church (Reynolds 2014). However, on the subject of the marriage referendum, a statement from the Irish Bishops Conference (2014) stated that the proposed constitutional changes were a *"grave injustice,"* expressing its *"hope… that the referendum would be defeated"* (D'Arcy 2014). Former Irish President, Mary McAleese previously gave voice to the view that the Catholic Hierarchy in Ireland *"is losing the argument on its teachings"* (Stack 2012) and later admitting *"I am ashamed, frankly, of my church's failure to be a champion of gay rights and of women's rights"* (McMahon 2015).

On May 22 2015, the Irish electorate went to the polls. By a two-thirds majority, Ireland voted in favour of the proposal to legalise civil marriage where *"Marriage may be contracted in accordance with law by two persons without distinction as to their sex"* (Ryan 2015). Brian Sheehan and Gráinne Healy, Co-Directors of Yes Equality welcomed the result *"Today we woke up, smiling, in a changed Ireland. A kinder, gentler, more accepting Ireland"* (Yes Equality 2015). All the key equality groups, GLEN, BeLonG To, LGBT Noise, Marriage Equality, LGBT National Federation, SIPTU, ICCL and Amnesty International Ireland expressed heartfelt gratitude for the positive result. Further reflections on the referendum came from the Executive Director of GLEN, Brian Sheehan. He stated an important precursor for the positive outcome was when almost 2000 minority couples all across Ireland entered civil partnerships since 2010, saying it was *"hugely important in helping Irish people understand that the love and commitment of lesbian and gay couples was the same as that of other couples"* (Sheehan 2015). Sheehan again thanked Irish people for their generosity as exampled in the 62% voting margin in favour of marriage equality. Sheehan made further reference to the largest ever turnout in Ireland for a Pride Parade in June 2015 *"75,000 participants and hundreds of thousands watching"* (Sheehan 2015). Krzyzanowski (2015) described the key role of *"LGBT Noise was about politicising the community to the extent that the equality paradigm became the norm of conversation in*

our community" (p. 26). Dr. Grainne Healy the Co-Director of Yes Equality (2015) in her reflection saw the result as *"transformative because it was about real love, and love is a most powerful truth"* (p. 9). Healy was co-founder and chairwoman of Marriage Equality since 2008 and in a recently co-authored book, the authors give a grounded analysis of the multilayered architecture and strategies for managing and co-ordinating the strongest community campaign ever seen in modern Ireland for a referendum (Healy, Sheehan, and Whelan, 2015). Kieran Rose, Chairperson of GLEN and Executive Advisor to Yes Equality (2015) summed up the trajectory in the context of Ireland's Yes vote for marriage equality:

> *"I began campaigning for the rights of lesbian and gay men in Cork in the early 1980s, when we were almost completely marginalised and faced overwhelming opposition. Since then we have made such fantastic progress in legal terms with gay law reform in 1993, equality legislation in 1998, civil partnership in 2010, and now civil marriage and full constitutional equality. This has been a tremendous and transformative journey for all of us in Ireland, gay, or straight. It sends out a great signal of hope to all those throughout the world who are as marginalised and powerless as we were in the 1970s and 80s"*
>
> (Rose 2015, p. 28).

In agreement, about the international significance of the referendum result, Staunton (2015) wrote Ireland's Yes Vote can:

> *"serve as a beacon of hope not just for LGBT people on the brink of achieving equality but for those millions throughout the world who continue to face persecution, oppression and violence"*
>
> (Staunton, 2015, p. 1).

A further response to the referendum came from The Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, Dr. Diarmuid Martin. He acknowledged the *"social revolution"* in Ireland was *"an overwhelming vote in one direction"* adding that the result served as *"a reality check"* for the Catholic Church in Ireland (Healy and Ferguson, 2015, p. 7). On Saturday August 29th 2015, President Michael D. Higgins signed marriage equality into law which permitted the Irish Government to proceed with the necessary legislation. (Irish Examiner, 2015). Adam Long (2015) an author and activist for the advancement of social justice in Ireland reflected on this journey and suggests, *"historians will no doubt come to look at these early months of 2015 as being pivotal in the evolution of the LGBT rights movement in Ireland."* When the marriage bill was debated in the

National Parliament of Ireland, Anne Ferris Labour Party TD reflected on how the legacy of Oscar Wilde's literary genius could have been even greater if *"he had been allowed to live a long and happy life"* (Ferris 2015). Brian Lacey (2008) in charting the history of Irish homosexuality uses a quote from Oscar Wilde in 1897: *"I have no doubt we shall win, but the road is long, and red with monstrous martyrdoms. Nothing but the repeal of the (1885) Criminal Law Amendment Act would do any good. That is the essential"* (p. 245). Consistent with the evolving patterns of social change, Ireland recently passed the final stages of the Gender Recognition Act (2015) into law: *"This will enable trans people to be formally recognised in their preferred gender for all purposes by the Irish State for the first time"* (TENI 2015). On the 29th October 2015, The Presidential Commission signed the Marriage Bill 2015, paving the way for the first civil marriages in Ireland in November 2015 (Yahoo News 2015).

In summary, I began the Irish section of the review where Senator David Norris spoke of his 'unmentionable' gay identity as constituted by religious doctrines and legal statutes in 1940s Ireland. In the present contexts of being gay in Ireland, and in the aftermath of the referendum on marriage equality, the founding director of Belong To Youth Services in Ireland, Michael Barron (2015) captures the extent of how social and institutional discrimination against gay people in the developed world is now in decline:

> *"We've changed forever what it means to grow up LGBT in Ireland. The Irish people, via the ballot box, have given each and every gay child and young person in Ireland - and across the world - a strong and powerful message that they are loved, they are cared for, and don't need to change who they are"*
>
> (Barron, 2015, p. 5).

The extensive reconstructive impulse at the heart of the literature review gave a concrete picture of how macro social authenticity is struggled for. What we know less about in research studies, compared to cultural and autobiographical accounts, is how social exclusion or acceptance both constitutes and transforms the first personal experiences of challenge toward growth for gay men living in Ireland.

2.14. Conclusion

The key sections of the overall review converge in the broad trajectory of positive societal change for sexual and gender minorities. A key pattern from the literature in Ireland is how the social character of Ireland has undergone profound changes for sexual and gender minority persons (PSI 2015; Ryan, P. 2014; Duffy and Sheridan, 2012; Higgins et al, 2011). As researcher, I was keen to select a multidisciplinary literature which accounts for these concrete social realities. Ultimately, the literature on sexual and gender minorities rests on the premise that social contexts does influence personal meaning, thoughts, beliefs and feelings. External valuations of historic worth within non-facilitative and non-affirming social contexts add complexity to a positive sense of self-efficacy, arising as shame and negative self-critique. However, these experiences can spark the resilient motivation of persons and groups to overturn societal injustice.

As some of the above studies indicate, it is still difficult to create an overarching psychosocial theory that fits all sexual minority experience at any given time. For example, Liddle (2007) says *"experiences vary so widely and are so culture bound that to attempt to make generalisations across countries and cultures is unrealistic ... even within one country LGBTQ experiences vary dramatically"* (p. 120). I concur with the general critique that gay men's lives are often objectified and reduced through generalised measurement, creating homogenous portrayals without a more contextualist picture of gay men's lives. Right now, theory operates from a macro level of reductive correlational analysis. Indeed, the review highlights how reducing human experience to an average serves to diminish and foreclose rich self-understandings of experience. Rather than enjoying a more subordinate role, quantitative correlational methods enjoys a primacy over qualitative methods of inquiry. This pattern has significant implications in that sexual minorities are then conceptualised as a population. Qualitative studies on LGBT experience in Ireland are few and far between. The current study aims to address this limitation. A more personal account of experience may shed some further light on what contributes to vulnerability (risk) and empowerment (resilience) embedded within the transformative cultural repertoires of Ireland. Thus far, psychotherapy regulation and research has depended on interdisciplinary scholarship for its understanding. Leadership has recently self-critiqued and apologised for its biases in contributing to

stigma and its failures to transcend status quo understandings of human sexuality. The objective of this inquiry is to get a better grasp of what facilitates authentic human experience and a deeper appreciation of what account for continuing risks.

The next chapter discusses phenomenological theory and methodology which foregrounds first person experience in context. Informed by a humanistic conceptualisation of the first personal character of consciousness, its methods of inquiry aim for contextualist understandings of particulars, nuances and subtleties of lived experience. This can serve as a way of addressing the gaps of existing research that currently forecloses on an in-depth analysis of gay men's positive and negative experiences and its relatedness to the transactions of broader mechanisms of societal change. Phenomenology as a humanistic research method is interested in how that happens within the creative journey of the self concept, as interpersonally and relationally engaged in changing cultural repertoires.

Chapter Three: **Methodology: A Phenomenological Approach to Psychological Experience**

3.1. Introduction

The chapter begins with a discussion on the rationale for phenomenology as research methodology. Phenomenology is about capturing the essence of experience from those who have lived and shared an experience. The first sections in this chapter focuses on the historical context of phenomenology and then addresses its key theoretical concepts of the lifeworld. The chapter describes the research method: its design and procedures of data gathering, sample, steps of data analysis and managing of ethical concerns. The chapter concludes with an evaluation framework for a phenomenological study.

3.2. Why Phenomenology?

"One of the greatest challenges facing human sciences and service professions is the choice and application of research methods that respect the uniqueness, complexity and meanings of human experience"

(Wertz, et al, 2011, p. 1).

The opening quote is the most succinct way of capturing how the theoretical perspective of phenomenology has become so intertwined with the study of lived experience, as emphasised in the foundational tenet of phenomenology "*to the things themselves*" (Overgaard, 2010, p. 1). The rationale for a back to basics research agenda arises in large part from the dearth of descriptive contextual research of gay male experience. Choosing the theoretical perspective of phenomenology and applying its methods can optimise person-centered knowledge. Exploring the everyday world is primarily understood in phenomenological theory within the dimensions of an experiential self (Zahavi 2014), inter-subjectivity and horizons of the lifeworld (Moran 2012a; 2011). These broad ideas, among others, act as the theoretical heuristics which can allow researchers to reflect in-depth on psychological experience of the lived world. The aim of the method of one-to-one interviews generates significant statements as meaningful units of analysis from each person, aiming to capture the temporal

journey of personal experience (Churchill and Wertz 2014; Smythe 2011). Phenomenology samples individuals because they share the experience and draws on humanistic philosophy in the design of its research methods. Rather than choosing a narrative approach which explores the life stories of individuals, phenomenology goes a step further to capture common/invariant meanings - the essences of experience (Creswell 2013) what Behnke (2010) describes as:

> *"every such pattern or possibility can be seen as a "most generous common denominator" visible in a myriad of individual cases, even where the actual "facts of the matter" are quite different in each case"*

> (Behnke, 2010, p. 224).

Unlike narrative approaches to stories, the intuiting of essences transcends the lived experience. However, this aspect beyond the rigor of social constructivism recognises that *"the transcendental conditions of possibility must be experientially accessible – otherwise the very idea of a phenomenological transcendental philosophy would have to be abandoned"* (Zahavi and Gallagher, 2008, p. 88). A humanistic research project that prizes intimacy of understanding has consistently expressed some disillusionment with positivist, post-positivist or post metaphysical atomism. That said, humanistic research as human science research methodology:

> *"Does not reject hypothetic-deductive-inductive methods, it views them as adjunctive and in need of experiential supplementation… favouring details, complexity, and plausibility over standardisation, linearity, and objectification"*

> (Schneider, Pierson and Bugental 2014, p. 255).

The ideas of capturing essence demonstrates a commitment to ontogeny, a philosophy of human being and potential. Choosing a person-centered approach to knowledge is a necessary supplementation to refine, develop and deepen generalised theoretical knowledge on gay men's lives. In this way, a reflection on the essence of descriptive experience is a grounded *"correlation of subjectivity with objectivity"* (Moran, 2005, p. 7). However, there is difference with objectivist naturalism, in that phenomenology, when used as a qualitative research method aims for deeper contextualism of broader measurements of psychosocial contexts.

Many writers in contemporary phenomenology suggest the foundational assumptions of different branches/schools of phenomenology are more complimentary than is currently acknowledged (Figal 2012; Figal and Espinet 2012; Zahavi 2008). Zahavi (2015) suggests the consistent emphasis of theoretical difference between reflection and hermeneutics *"is utterly artificial"* (p. 192). Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005) also pointed to the convergence, exampling how Hans Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) learned from Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) that *"interpretation doesn't occur as an activity in the course of life, but is the form of human life"* (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 220). Ricoeur (1981) himself emphasised a *"mutual belonging"* (p. 101) of hermeneutics and phenomenology, stating:

> *"Phenomenology remains the unsurpassable presupposition of hermeneutics. On the other hand, phenomenology cannot constitute itself without a hermeneutic presupposition"*
>
> (Ricoeur 1981, p. 101).

Dahlberg, Dahlberg and Nyztrom (2008) also point to phenomenological and hermeneutical philosophy sharing "*a common ground and partly also a common evolution"* (p. 29). For research application, these authors state *"the goal in all lifeworld research is to discover, analyse, clarify, understand and describe meaning"* (p. 96). The authors' adoption of the term 'lifeworld' is an appropriation of Husserl's (*Lebenswelt*). The purpose of both Husserl's lifeworld and Heidegger's *Dasein*, as 'being-in-the-world' is to remind phenomenological researchers to meaningfully engage the everyday world. All these approaches and ideas are consistent with Husserl (1931/2012 Book 1) when he says the method *"operates exclusively in acts of reflection"* (p. 174). Indeed, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) in his preface to the 'Phenomenology of Perception' says reflection on experience is never fixed or dogmatic, but is in constant flux (Merleau-Ponty, 2012/1945, p, xvi). The key purpose of descriptive phenomenology and lifeworld approaches is capturing the intentionality and structure of conscious experience in transparent descriptions. (Landsman, 2014, p. 1384; Ashworth 2008; Giorgi 2007; Ashworth and Chung, 2006). However, an emphasis on existential meaning of the world is more aligned to interpretative/ hermeneutic schools (Van Manen 2014; Smythe 2011; Smythe et al 2008). This research aims for intuitive contact with contextualist experience (Churchill 2014; Wertz

et al, 2011). Again, this arises out of the need for intuitive clarification of meaningful personal experiences beyond macro generalised correlation that can characterise existing research on sexual minority experience.

Two further approaches as research strategies could have been considered for this research. The artistry of the case study approach (Yin 2009; Stake 1995) and the grounded theory approach for developing sociological theory from data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The latter shares many of the features of phenomenological research (Giorgi 2009) through its rigorous focus on lived descriptions. Case study approaches have also been popular in psychology. Case studies, using multiple sources of information (Stake 2006) shares many of the features of phenomenological lifeworld research (Ashworth and Chung, 2006). John Paul Sartre (1936) interprets phenomenological analysis, as one that *"discloses and thematises that which it was already familiar with"* (Sartre, 1936, p. 48 cited by Zahavi, 2003a, p. 9). This last quote captures the difference between naturalism and transcendentalism. The essence of a phenomenological reduction has a structural logic in the different particulars of experience.

3.3. The Historical Context of Phenomenology

Both the origins of phenomenology and its subsequent development is very much a twentieth century innovation and story (Sokolowski 1999). Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) the founder of contemporary phenomenology was particularly focused on the concept of lived experience as the expression of *"experiences intuitively seizable and analysable....which directly make themselves known in intuition"* (Husserl, 1900-1/2001, in Moran 2000, p. 107). The implication of viewing consciousness in this way is one of the main reasons why his philosophy is often viewed as a transcendental epistemology (ways of knowing). Sokolowski (1999) says *"within the natural attitude of everyday life, consciousness is experienced as transcendental"* (p. 58). Consciousness *"reaches beyond itself to the identities and things that are given to it"* (p. 58). In this way, the 'I' is a transcending experience (Kant, 1998, p. 432).

A further context to the development of the theory of phenomenology is where its emergence as a research discipline also arises from a constellation of historical factors and competing trends. One such trend was the growing lack of acceptance for speculative philosophy, where newer trends were attempting to empirically psychologise the very project of speculative philosophy (Landsman, 2014, p. 1384-8). In response, the historical development of phenomenology is often identified with a scathing critique of psychologism (Moran 2005). This critique is part of an impetus for a broader epistemic base for empirical science that critiques the reductive trends of monism and positivism. Many qualitative research approaches in the post-modern tradition dismiss a-priori theories of persons and instead take an atomistic view of persons (e.g. Gergen 1991). These post-structuralist, discursive and narrative oriented approaches express suspicion about a commitment to essentialism/ontogeny and often reject holistic assumptions for anchoring the coherence of psychological experience. (Packer 2011; Crotty 1998; Schwandt 1998). Thus, within this condensed historical pattern, phenomenology forges an identity for itself in creating its unique methodological framework (Giorgi 2014; Zahavi 2012).

The next section focuses on the key theoretical concepts of phenomenology which anchor researcher positioning and analysis. These terms are the broad conditions of experiential possibility.

3.4. Core Theoretical Concepts of Phenomenology

A. The Experiential Self

The self is construed as a minimal and primary self-referent that is constitutive of consciousness. Without acknowledgment of this basic intuition in research, we simply efface the pre-reflective subjectivity of an experiential human being. Phenomenology recognises the self in its first personal mode of givenness as a complex multifaceted phenomenon, one that is not totally determined by social influence while at the same time recognising how self-experience is 'Other and We' mediated in social constructivist theories (Zahavi, 2014, p. 241). Since the beginning of the millennium, phenomenologist Dan Zahavi (1999-2015) have been investigating the nature of

selfhood and self-consciousness, and when referring to self, what he is advocating for is 'a minimal self hypothesis' –*"the self-presentational character of phenomenal consciousness"* (Zahavi, 2013, p. 335). He elaborates on his pre-reflective reference point as having *"a distinct subjective presence... the first-personal self-givenness is distinctive even before, say, a child becomes explicitly aware of it"* (Zahavi, 2011, p. 60).

Zahavi (2011) subscribes to John Paul Sartre's (1905-1980) idea that self consciousness includes *"pre-reflective and non-objectifying form of self-consciousness"* (p. 57). Zahavi (2013) investigates the *"first-personal givenness,"* (p. 335), what he calls the *"for-me-ness of experience,"* (p. 335). Flanagan (1992) sees phenomenology as asking what *"an experience is like"* and what *"happens"* (p. 194). These are methods for thinking about and slowing down with the process of an experiential self, aiming for 'empathic access' to what personal experiences are like (Schechtman 2014; Zahavi 2014).

The philosopher, William James (1842-1910) says *"whatever I may be thinking of, I am always at the same time more or less aware of myself, of my personal existence"* (1892, p. 43). Similarly, Martin Heidegger argues in his early writings that *"Every consciousness is also self-consciousness"* (Heidegger, 2001, p. 135, cited by Zahavi, 2006, p. 274). However, Zahavi (2013) also argues that both Heidegger and Sartre saw the self as *"immediate, non-observational, non-inferential and non-objectifying"* (p. 331). In other words, a phenomenological description of experience should not be foreign or violating of life experience - it ought to be rooted in the very fact (facticity) of life belonging to existence (Heidegger 1999; Heidegger 1927/1962; Sartre 1943/2003). According to Zahavi (2013), it is how the self speaks of its own 'facticity' which is *"self-revealing or self-intimating"* (Zahavi, 2013, p. 330). Zahavi (2005) points to Heidegger's ideas within his early lecture courses entitled '*Basic Problems of Phenomenology*' (1919/20) and '*Phenomenology of Intuition and Expression*' (1920, p. 156, cited by Zahavi, 2005, p. 79). In these courses, Heidegger addresses *"the persistent care of self that is built into the very life stream"* (Zahavi, 2005, p. 79). A related theme is the embodied self, and how the body is the perspectival container of

self experience (Gallagher 2006), how experience is "*intrinsically embodied, embedded in social and historical life-worlds*" (Jensen and Moran, 2013, p. xii).

B. Intersubjectivity

A related concept to the experiential self is what Schutz (1966) succinctly terms "*the primal experience of a 'we-relationship'*" (p. 82). Zahavi (2012a) says intersubjectivity has played a central role in the history of phenomenological writing, "*be it in the form of a concrete self-other relation, a socially structured lifeworld, or a transcendental principle of justification*" (p. 180). The concept also brings into focus the flow of consciousness as mediated within the sociality of the lifeworld, as the self develops its self-reference within proximate relation to others (Rochat 2014; 2013; 2009). The "*by-product of this evolution, is that the gaze of others gained unique power as a social signal*" (Rochat, 2013a, p. 210). Intersubjectivity in phenomenology is a pragmatic reference point for considering relationship to the other and dependence on others, a key site and context of human interaction (Gallagher 2013).

Furthermore, Zahavi (2012a) regards "*subjectivity and intersubjectivity far from being competing alternatives, are in fact, complementary and mutually interdependent notions*" (p. 188). Husserl's contention is that subjectivity/personhood can only make sense in so far it is dependent on "*a community of subjects*" (Husserl, 1964/1995, p. 139). As Husserl (1973) writes *On the Phenomenology of Intersubjectivity*,

> "*The origin of personality lies in empathy and in the social acts which are rooted in the latter. To acquire a personality it is not enough that the subject becomes aware of itself as the centre of its acts: personality is rather constituted only when the subject establishes social relations with others*" (p. 175).

As Husserl was to put it in a famous quote, which Merleau-Ponty later developed in much detail: "*subjectivity is what it is—an ego functioning constitutively—only within intersubjectivity*" (Husserl, 1954, p. 175, cited by Welton, D. 2003, p. 240). Gallagher (2013) stresses interaction in his formulation of intersubjectivity "*we do not simply observe others, we are not just passive spectators. Rather we interact with others, and in doing so we develop further capabilities in the contexts of those interactions*" (p. 260). For Moran (2014) Husserl's "*mature phenomenology is primarily a phenomenology of communal and intersubjective life*" (p. 27).

C. The Lifeworld

Husserl (1936/1970) suggests what is right *"in front of us and around us requires a form of rehabilitation for us to grasp its potential for meaning and evidence"* (p. 126). The lifeworld has become one of phenomenology's guiding concepts constituting the world as we experience it, a world that was there before us, a world we are already in, as situated within our varying stances, deportments and modes of engagement. Phenomenology stresses unfolding experiences in a world *"already there, operating as the meaningful background"* (Gallagher, 2012, p. 2015). The irreducible concept of lifeworld is *"not the world we take as object, as something distinct from ourselves, but is rather a specification of our existence"* (p. 2). The lifeworld may be a more structural element of the social environment, the holding character of cultural repertoires which interact, transact and shape the dimensions of interpersonal relations which creates meaning among individuals. It is the source of *"most of our typical assumptions, expectations and prescriptions"* (Overgaard and Zahavi, 2009, p.93). It is the material out of which personal and social identity are formed *"shaping subjectivity, experience or knowledge"* (Alcoff, 2010, p. 144). It is increasingly recognised that the lifeworld as cultural repertoires is significantly under theorised in the properties of self-experience where social interactions occur (Slaby and Choudhury, 2012; Hall and Lamont, 2009). The following theoretical heuristics add further specificity to the broader dimensions.

D. History/Temporality

According to Moran (2005) Husserl has often been accused of a solipsistic approach to inquiry where he

> *"somehow 'forgot' history. But in fact, he recognises the essentially temporal character of consciousness and subjectivity, and while emphasising its transcendental role as producer of 'being and meaning', also insists on its necessary embodiment, historicity and finitude"*

> (Moran, 2005, p.10).

Moran (2012; 2005) writes Husserl from the early 1920s, expanded his phenomenological theory in a more *"genetic"* direction, *"one that understands how*

meanings and cultural forms gain their historical sense" (2012, p. 50). Husserl (1936/1970) viewed historical constitution of life *"in the most general sense as already been in progress... as a "living productive and utilising humanity"* (p. 404). According to Carr (2012) history is always present, *"History is accessible to us not just through representations or memories of the past, but as an historical world that we directly experience and inhabit"* (p. 501).

E. Habitualities, Affordances, Rules, Conventions, Values, Political

Moran (2011a) says for Husserl *"habit, along with association, memory, and so on, belongs to the very essence of the psyche"* (p. 53) even at "*a perceptual level, ego formation, and at the structure of evolving societies"* (p. 53). Moran (2014) following Husserl, explains consciousness as passive and active where *"experiences hang together and are clustered in an orderly harmonious way temporally, prior to explicit conscious organisation"* (p. 27). In phenomenology, the concept of affordance is expressed as perceptual tendency of the psyche. As consciousness is intentional, outward directed to its environs, the informational transfer of affordances has adaptive value (Rochat 2014; Romdenh-Romluc 2013). However its pre-reflective structure can inhabit the psyche as a *"lasting habitus"* (Moran, 2014, p. 29). This suggests our early outlook on the world is not consciously learned, objectively understood or meaningfully transparent. Moran (2014) referring to Husserl's *"abiding styles of the ego"* (Hua XIII, p. 400) says such life habits *"can be sedimented into layers that encrust the psyche"* (p. 29) even at *"pre-egoic levels"* (p. 29) of organisation. Crossley (2014) while accepting the theoretical value of the term habit for understanding the *"behavioural regularities of social structure"* (p. 179) extends the theory of habit, in how habits overlap with the practices of rules and conventions and *"might be used in conjunction with one other"* (p. 179). A further extension on this analyses is the *"value system in which an agent participates"* (Scalambrino, 2014, p. 208). This can also serve to incorporate the moral and aesthetic dimensions of lived experience (Steinbock 2014; 2012).

The 'political world' is a further context of experience. Held (2012) in his development of Hannah Arendt's ideas says *"phenomenology must thematise the political world.... to*

break the spell of the forgetting of the lifeworld" (p. 451). By omitting the political horizon, phenomenology loses its potential for openness to experience. Waldenfels (2012) gives a particularly incisive insight into this idea of open rehabilitation beyond the natural attitude as a responsive ethics *"What is alien or strange is never a simple failure we should get rid of, but rather a stimulus that is able to wake us up from the sleep of normalisation"* (p. 571). The current research recognises how the political sphere is a highly significant horizon in the evolution of sexual minority experience in Ireland. The 'responsive' ethical researcher for Waldenfels (2012) citing Husserl (1959) *"must cover all acts....and everything in this respect is relevant within the universal practical field"* (p. 550) and not *"glossing over its abysses"* (Waldenfels, 2012, p. 550).

The above theoretical concepts are an attempt at baseline wakefulness to concrete dimensions of lifeworld experience. It is however an incomplete list of concepts, in recognition that there is no complete reductive whole in which parts of experience are lived and played out (Crossley 2010). The next section describes the research method.

3.5. Method

A. Research Design

The epoché and reduction are key terms in phenomenological research, aiding the researcher for mindful thinking of *"the constitutive link between experiential phenomena and the first-person perspective"* (Gallagher and Zahavi, 2012. p. 53), with the aim of arriving at a *"reflective determination and explication of meaning.... of clarifying and making explicit the structure of meaning of the lived experience"* (van Manen, 1997, p. 77). A wakefulness out of our natural ways of seeing is encapsulated in the Greek word 'epoché' (Husserl, 1931/1967). Phenomenology recommends in the practice of 'epoché' the researcher set aside their own experience in taking a fresh perspective on lived experience. In this context I was cognisant of how I as a gay man was situated in the context of social change. I knew the theories of social shame and social resilience that has characterised existing research. Also, during the course of this analysis, there was a significant amount of coverage on LGBT lives in newspapers and

social media in Ireland. I watched television debates on marriage equality, I attended rallies and actively canvassed for equal rights. The positive change in Irish social context is consistent with the results of international social science and human rights discourse research that clearly point to a significant resolution of the conflicts caused by social prejudice and discrimination.

As a backdrop to interviewing Dodd (2009) says social context is important in researching LGBTQ persons. Researchers need to be aware of *"simultaneous social and political improvements"* (p. 474) that inform current lived realities in the developed world. From this, Dodd (2009) suggests concerns *"may vary for LGBTQ individuals"* (p. 474). Her main point is about attending to each person as an individual, rather than a pre-suppositional loading of ethical concerns, as if there is an innate or heightened sensitivity that is particular to minority persons or defining of group identity. In the main, qualitative research interviews are an effective method *"for doing justice to the first-personal character of experience"* (Zahavi, 2013, p. 334). Another related idea in the design of interviewing is in the use of affirming and positive language in the recruitment process and within the interview itself (APA, 2012. p.26-7). My own positioning of trying to grasp the meaning of social change for LGBT persons in Ireland, meant a further commitment to understanding the historical contexts of experience that participants spoke about in the interviews, combined with what was concurrently disseminated in social media. Moran (2005) says the purpose of Husserl's epoché is an openness to all horizons of experience. The spirit of a trans-disciplinary study means the researcher must invest energy in grasping all possibilities of the lifeworld as a way of clearly transcending the data in its analytic deduction (Pippin 2013). Within the literature review, psychotherapy has been subject to the critique that its theoretical ways of knowing were often prejudicial, naive and not critically sensitised or sufficiently aware to its own normative attitudes. There is a sense that existing methodologies are paternalist in both resilience concepts and vulnerability concepts of minority experiences. These dichotomised ideas are in need of contextualist refinement. The key suggestion is we are currently missing the first personal character of the self in its concrete lifeworld context.

This analysis took place during a very unique time for sexual and gender minorities in Ireland. Change involves transcendence from conventional ways of thinking. Within

this, I became more conscious of how my own navigation of the historical world involved a distinct lack of social acceptance for being gay. This added complexity to lived experience, trying to rise above social concretion of invalidation and insignificance. The socially-mediated nature of psychological experience is a work in progress of meeting oneself in reflection.

In sum, Van Manen (2014) speaks of the relationship between the epoché and reduction as a process of critical analysis consisting *"of the attempt not only to clear away (bracket), but simultaneously to confront the traditions, assumptions, languages, evocations, and cognitions in order to understand the existential "facticities" of everyday lived experiences"* (p. 42). Grounding the existential in the facts of the lifeworld also means embracing agency in a rigorous analysis of the weights and joys of meaningful descriptions. Zahavi (2005) remarks *"investigation should be critical and undogmatic...It should be guided by what we expect to find given our theoretical commitments"* (p. 44). Thus, the aim is to *"generate knowledge with a more authentic foundation in lived experience"* (Churchill and Wertz, 2014, p. 276).

B. Procedure

After approval from the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, the task was to recruit participants who met the inclusion criteria. A request to publish the recruitment notice was granted and subsequently appeared in the Letter to the Editor Section of Ireland's Gay Community News (Appendix A). Participants were self-selecting in responding by email, and were then forwarded a more detailed lay language statement outlining what the study was about (Appendix B). Interviews were conducted with each of the nine participants on a one-to-one basis, interviews were audio-recorded and lasted from 45 minutes to 90 minutes in duration. On arrival, the participants were given a secure, comfortable and professional space for interview.

To assist participants in the opening up of their experience, I asked participants for their positive experiences of being gay and what, if any, had been the examples of the challenges/negative experiences they had. A further question asked what changes, if any, had occurred in their lives, and inviting them to share anything else they felt was relevant to the broad research topic. When examples of personal experiences were

described, I often asked what sense/understanding they made of these examples as a way of deepening the experience described (Appendix D). As further methods for talking about experience, I utilised prompts like: 'Can you tell me more about that? What was that experience like for you? Can you give me an example of that?' (Vandermause and Fleming, 2011; Smythe 2011).

C. Sample

The mean age of the nine participants was 42.4 years, the youngest participant was 22 years old, and the eldest participant was 65 years old. All had been professionally employed and had engaged in third level adult education. All the men gave of their time out of a form of civic engagement in recognition of the importance of visible minority identity research. Seven of the participants spent most of their lives domiciled in Dublin, with two participants resident in different rural counties throughout Ireland. This demographic variance in age and location gave access to a variety of experiences.The inclusion criteria for the purposive sample was that the men identified as gay. Participants had to be 18 years old at the time of interview, and willing to reflect on their lived experience. I stopped recruiting participants when the number of participants was in keeping with the requirement of *"a heterogeneous group… that may vary in size from 3 to 4 individuals to 10 to 15"* (Creswell, 2013, p. 78). I felt I had reached a level of data saturation, as themes in the data had started to repeat. However, the heterogeneity of the current sample would have benefited from a broader representation of participants of younger and older age profiles. This type of qualitative research does not control for demographic variation of respondents, in terms of adult age, class, rural or urban location and educational attainment.

D. Analysis

1. The first step in the analysis meant repeatedly listening to each interview after its occurrence, serving to build intuitive contact for the overall sense of the whole interview. Churchill and Wertz (2014) say this first practical step is one where the

"phenomenological approach brings the researcher into direct personal contact with the psychological event being studied" (p. 281).

2. As transcriptions were returned, I checked to ensure the transcripts were an accurate reflection of the interview. This provided me with a further opportunity to listen to each interview. Husserl (1952/1989) recommends imaginatively *"trading places"* with participant stories.

3. For the next step, I also followed Husserl's (1913/1989) suggestion:

> *"We capture the development of a person if we reconstruct the course of his life and make it intuitive in such a way that the entirety of his development as a man becomes comprehensible in an experiential way"*

> (Cited by Wertz, 2010, p. 285).

4. I divided each transcript into three sections, starting with participants' early, mid-life and current experiences of being gay men in Ireland. Within the lifespan division, I paid particular attention to how participants spoke about their positive, challenging, and changing experiences as outlined in the interview schedule (Appendix D). I then shared the temporal lifespan division with my supervisor and supervision panel at regular intervals as the analysis progressed.

5. I highlighted key experiences within the tripartite division of the transcript. I was mindful of getting the balance right for the parts that best captured participant life experience, how they reacted and responded to challenging and positive life events; what were their relational supports; how they supported others; and the actions they took to overcome challenge. In the emotive words of Husserl, it is: *"What the person does and suffers, what happens to him, how s/he stands in relation to his surrounding world, what angers him, what depresses, what makes him cheerful or upset"* (Hua VI, 301, cited by Moran 2011, p. 83). This step of understanding the experiential journey of the self, in relation to others, and their awareness of the social context was applied to all participants. Crowell (2013) captures the findings of phenomenological research as:

> *"Such exemplars are not rules in any sense, but they possess a kind of normative claim that precludes our thinking of them simply as entities that turn up in the world, whether as part of the latter's causal nexus, as social facts, or as elements of the subject's psychological outfitting"*

(Crowell, 2013, p. 2).

The analytic process of analysing transcriptions was shared and reflected upon at regular intervals with supervisor, supervisory panel and in the preparation for examination. The key finding was also shared with participants who took part in the study.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

A. Informed Consent

Participants were provided with clearly written information supplied prior to the interview itself (Appendices A-E). In particular, stating what the aim of the project was, the voluntary time commitment involved, its potential benefits to community and how it will be used for knowledge construction. Participants received a guide prior to the interview, upfront details of potential risks associated with participation, knowing they can withdraw at any time, opportunity to contact an independent person at the research ethics committee, obtaining permission from participants to make contact with them for clarification on transcriptions, and a commitment to make available the key outcomes of the study to participants.

In response to the recruitment notice, as participants expressed an interest in participation by email, I suggested talking by phone to ensure mutual understanding of expectation and provided further information on the interview process itself. These steps served to build trust in clear and transparent consent processes. I gave participants ample time to reflect on their participation in the study. Some respondents did not make further contact after initial contact. I began each interview welcoming participants and enquired if they had time to read through the informed consent form, and if they needed any further clarification prior to obtaining their written consent.

Lee (1993) stresses the importance of being aware of how intrusive personal research can be at all stages of the research. There were moments when some of the participants described very tough personal life experiences. During those times, I had a strong intuitive sense when participants signaled the limits of the distance they were prepared

to go. As consistent with ethical guidelines, my aim was to *"strike for a reasoned balance between protecting participants and recognising their agency and capacity"* (BPS, Code of Human Research Ethics, 2010, p. 9). In practice, participants did not experience a level of stress or intrusiveness during the interviews. The interviews were never stopped and no requests were made for counselling supports (Appendix B).

On debrief, I checked with participants how they felt the interview had been, and if it had been in keeping with their expectations (Appendix E). They all said it was a good experience, and that it was important to participate in research, and in some cases, it had therapeutic value for them to talk. They hoped their interviews were useful to the community and to the project. I assured them their interviews were more than helpful and thanked them for their participation. Finally, they all responded positively to my request to make contact with them by phone in the event of subsequent clarification from transcriptions of interviews.

B. Managing Confidentiality

Participants had the 'right to expect' that the information they provided in the interview would be treated confidentially and when published would not be 'identifiable to them' (BPS, 2014, p. 22). I was the sole researcher who interviewed participants. I exercised my duty of managing confidentiality by listening to recordings privately. No personal identifiers were mentioned in recordings. I informed participants how their interviews would be transcribed, when the recordings are erased and their transcripts shredded. Audio recordings of interviews were transferred to an encrypted and password protected computer and immediately erased from voice recorder. I also backed up recording of data on an encrypted memory key which was secured in a locked cabinet at the researcher location. Only the supervisor had access to anonymised transcripts.

Transcription of data was conducted by a professional dictation company outside of Ireland. This acted as a further mechanism for participant confidentiality and anonymity. The rationale for this step of UK transcription, is that Ireland is a small country and gay men are a small minority. I felt transcription of interviews in the UK would enhance participant confidence in anonymity and confidentiality. This

additionality acted as further *"safety devices"* (Waldenfels, 2011, p. 3) in assuring participants of their confidentiality and anonymity. The transcription service were a quality approved company, using encrypted passwords for online data protection in both the transfer, taking possession of audio recordings and returning transcripts. (Appendix B). All recordings were erased when the analyses were completed. Consent forms were securely stored and separated from transcriptions in the researcher's private office. Consent forms and transcriptions were shredded on study completion. The supervisory panel viewed the anonymised data, containing the key temporal division of significant experiential descriptions from each transcript.

Under Section 8(d) of the Data Protection Act 1988/2003, which relates to exceptions of absolute confidentiality in the protection of individuals from harm (Appendix B), I had to make subsequent contact with one participant for clarification on his reporting to civil authorities from the account he gave of child sexual abuse (CSA) (See P4, p. 76-80). When we spoke by phone, he informed me his life had continued to change and had evolved for the better since I interviewed him. He said he had dealt with the reporting of CSA to the authorities.

C. **Anonymity**

Pseudonyms were created for each participant. Subsequent publication of thesis and professional dissemination ensures information does not contain personal identifying information with participant lives.

3.7. **Evaluation of Phenomenological Research**

"*Good phenomenological research evokes the lived world"* (Finlay, 2011, p. 261).

The rigor of a phenomenological study lies in its capturing the first personal character of lived experience in the relational dimensions of life contexts. The representation of each person's described life journey is captured as an individual, relational and cultural experience. The finding aims to be resonant with the broad trajectory of gay men's research in current literature. However, a phenomenological finding aims for a deepened knowledge of existing research. Wertz, (2010) says *"where knowledge is*

improved is when it demonstrates that it has remained intuitively and extensively grounded in the commitment to the phenomenon being researched" (p. 268). Giorgi (2009) suggests the reader as *"the critical other should also be able to access the transformations lived through by the primary researcher based upon the evidentiary traces that are left by him or her"* (p. 136). Yardley (2008) stresses the importance of transparency *"to show the reader what the analytic interpretations are based on"* (p. 250). Extending this point, Giorgi (1975) says the reader can *"see what the* researcher *saw, whether or not he/she agrees with it"* (p. 96). Churchill and Wertz (2014) in assessing Husserl's overall contribution say:

> *"Husserl's work, and the 20th century intellectual movement to which it gave rise, contributed to the larger ongoing effort to offer a science that is truly humanistic in the sense of being designed with sensitivity to the special qualities of human experience as subject matter"* (p. 276)

3.8. Conclusion

In the next chapter, individual stories form the content of the next chapter. At the beginning of each story, I offer a psychological reflection on the key dynamics that emerged in the evidentiary trail of significant experiences. I conclude the chapter with a short researcher reflection and a summation of the overall findings.

Chapter Four: **The Findings of the Study**

From Disrespect to Respect – The Power of Social Critique for Self-Transcendence

4.1. Introduction

The content of the findings for this study are represented in the form of descriptive excerpts from each participant's life experience of being gay in Ireland, affording the reader a level of empathic access for how the social context shaped and influenced personal meaning in past and present Ireland. The experiential self makes meaning as it navigates its social environs. In each story, each person had different challenges and opportunities in changing social contexts. The stories vary in length as some participant interviews were longer in duration than others, ranging from under one hour duration and upwards to 90 minutes.

The transformative pattern of the experience of being a gay male in Ireland involved a lifeworld change from disrespect to respect. It is an evolving experience of the first personal character of consciousness, in how participants related to themselves, how they felt and thought about themselves among others, and how these experiences where further influenced by the cultural discourses of Ireland's changing heritage. Within what becomes a personal and social transformation, the findings further illuminate how each participant managed to exercise control over their personal destinies. A minority person mired in negative self criticism often involved considerable strength to outdo the manoeuvres of their social conditions in their early lives. The significance and implications of the transformation is that a less burdensome and affirming social context frees up the self to be an authentic human being in the world

I introduce each of the participant's accounts with basic biographical detail. I represent each participant with a different first name to their real names. I introduce each story with the key themes within each story, tracking significant personal experiences within diverse relational and changing cultural repertoires of Ireland. At the end of the chapter, the key psychological findings of the study are outlined with a researcher reflection. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings.

4.2. The Participants

P1: Oscar

Oscar is 33 years old and lives in Dublin with his partner of seven years. Oscar describes his personality as one where he likes being liked by others. His story demonstrates his socially shaped conflict for being gay, being teased by others from an early age, coupled with a negative reception from his father on disclosure of his sexual orientation. The character of Oscar's story can be best be described as one that places a high value on personal relationships. How he is perceived, and being liked by others is very important to him. The paradox of his outward 'sunny' disposition its that it creates heightened sensitivity for rejection within his sense of selfhood. Oscar in 'being liked' likes to fit in. Within the story of his early development of being gay, he stills show a resistance to being constituted by discriminatory ideas, grounding himself in supportive environments, irrespective of his need to be liked by others in the wider culture. At a young age, his authenticity shows in being open and vulnerable with his mother when his peers were teasing him. Oscar is also able to account for his negative self-criticism and how it contains negative evaluation of comparing himself to others, lowering his confidence and esteem. He gives numerous examples for how his sense of self was shaped by interpersonal experience, shaped by negative stereotypes, discrimination and prejudice. This residual disrespect/shame can sometimes complicate his current life, where he finds himself leaning into negative self-criticism rather than transcend it. He strongly advocates for the contemporary contexts of parity of esteem/respect. This very dynamic ties in with his desire to be part of it, and to be valued within current contexts. Oscar recognised how his current relational configuration have moved him in the right direction and how this commitment serves as a positive realisation of transformation and transcendence.

The following are key examples of the transforming dynamic in his life experiences of being gay.

Oscar says of his early experience that *"there was (an) inbuilt sense with me that it was wrong to feel drawn or attracted to... or just drawn toward men"* (00:49). This small segment gives an explicit sense of how the historic social taboo for minority identity introduces negative self-critique within his early social development. He thinks this is

inbuilt, rather than recognise that the social discourses within his social environment is likely to have been the source of his discomfort. Without a critical appreciation of how this might be so, he seems to take on the burden of the social in his thoughts and feelings. Oscar disclosed how participating in dancing classes marked him out for ridicule when he felt his peers associated his dancing with a gay identity, *"it definitely would have been words that my peers used to describe me"* (02:24). However, he says *"kids or bullies didn't stop me doing what I enjoyed"* (07:34). Oscar was able to reach out to his mother when he felt the pressure from bullies. She responded by saying *"ignore them"* (09:46). Yet, their taunts inhabited his thinking going forward.

In recounting this early experience, Oscar was keen to stress his peers *"teasing"* him was not because he was *"a girly little boy"* (13:02) nor was it that he was *"gravitating towards playing with dolls or anything like that"* (13:02). Earlier he said *"I don't think they* (his peers) *were describing my personality"* (00:49). Oscar says *"accepting they were right by calling me gay... for me to actually accept then that I was gay later on. It made me feel I'd lost to them"* (02:24), *"I probably could have come out quicker"* (03:21). The pressure to fit in, to be liked, makes him feel less than them in how he has interpreted their superior script.

Oscar gave further context of how he thought of himself in the context of gender presuppositions. He said his dad and brothers would have preferred if he had been good at 'Gaelic football (national sport) and that his giving *"Gaelic football a good go"* (14:27) was for them because *"dancing to them wasn't... like they'd never say around me"* (14:27). However, Oscar captures the rewards that came from participation in dance shows, *"it was worth putting up with a bit of slagging"* (09:46). He had *"a gang of friends there... like a family you know"* (09:46), and he wanted *"to spend all his time with them"* (03:32). At this time in his life, this is an important relational source of support for his identity development.

Oscar recounted his first attraction at 11 years old to one of the older men in his dance show troupe, *"a crush in a very innocent way* (03:32)*"I just liked being around him I suppose"* (04:33). He also described his excitement as a young boy when he was around his gay uncle, and remembered his uncle being called *"Auntie"* (04:57). Back then, Oscar says *"he wasn't like other men I suppose"* (06:05) and thinks his father, at

the time, did not *"approve of him* (his uncle) *being gay"* (07:03). When Oscar disclosed his own gay identity to his father, his father told him *"not to tell anyone... it's just a phase you are going through"* (48:29). Two weeks later, Oscar heard how his father reacted in a similar way. On this occasion, his sister disclosed that a friend of Oscar's father was *"having an affair on his wife with a man"* (49:36) to which his father responds "*its probably just a phase"* (49:36). Oscar recalled his embarrassment at the time *"Oh my God. Look out the window. Look at that bird... it was just ground, swallow me up now"* (49:36). He left the room and shortly after, his sister came to Oscar's bedroom:

> *"'So, dad says you're gay'... And I think I got...I was probably emotional and started crying. And she was very supportive then, She was like, 'Its fine. Its grand. You're fine' But I asked her, 'Please don't tell anyone'"* (50:12).

Shortly after, other siblings in Oscar's family positively reacted to his coming out (disclosure). Yet, he still felt that within his family home that he was *"sneaking off"* or *"sneaking around... you're not honest"* (49:46). In a later section of the interview, Oscar describes his first gay experience, he says it felt *"so natural kissing each other and ripping each other's clothes off"* (01:05:10). However, the following morning, Oscar recalled:

> *"Even though it had felt so normal and natural. And then, when the sun came up, I just felt dirty... but it wasn't, you know... it wasn't you know, it wasn't full penetration sex. I suppose, its just a bit of fun. I get embarrassed when we're talking about sex.. anyway...I remember getting home and getting in the shower and scrubbing myself. And it was like you know, just wanting to scrub it away... but from that first sexual experience, I ended up going back into the closet"* (01:07:21).

Five years after disclosing to his father, Oscar gives further insight into his self critique at the time (53:38). Oscar remembers an incident at Christmas where his sister revealed to her father "*that was* (Oscar's) *boyfriend who was here* (in the family home) *last night"* (53:38). Oscar's reaction was:

> *"Oh my God, Please don't talk about this now....It's Christmas Dinner. I felt like, I'm going to ruin Christmas dinner because they're talking about the fact that I've got a boyfriend"* (53:38).

Oscar says up as far as 2003, if he had been given the choice where he imagined *"flicking a magic switch and I'd be straight, I probably would have said yes"* (17:28).

These thoughts corresponded to a time when he was *"quite tough on myself and felt negative about myself because I wasn't achieving what I wanted"* (32:30). In living a relational life, to fit in, and his need to be liked by others, it is difficult to see how Oscar could have escaped soaking up negative introjections and inferences within his early experience of being a gay man in Ireland. His struggle in acceptance seems socially mediated and his desire not to stand out as himself was hard on him.

Over the past decade, Oscar said he had been in a seven year relationship with his partner (27:10). He has also enjoyed a very positive turnaround in his father's attitude, and both families fulsomely embrace their son's relationship (00:53:38). Oscar said that up to a few years ago, his father *"may not have voted in favour of gay marriage"* adding, *"I do think now he'd definitely vote for us now"* (53:38). Oscar referred to being the *"glue of the family"* and that *"mum and dad would be totally lost without me"* (52:47). He went on to talk of how he imagines himself as a future parent with his partner:

> *"Like if I was to be a father, I imagine it would be very much...in a family with just me and my partner raising a child or children... all they need is something like love and care and to be nurtured and to be supported and to be able to provide. For me, that's the world we definitely have, me and him. (39:41).*

However, Oscar finds himself negatively comparing his aspiration to parent to his siblings/relations. He says *"they deserve to get married. They deserve to get pregnant and have kids. Like, his parents, they're to be grandparents, you know"* (42:44). He reacts to these thoughts *"It feels kinda sad that it's coming from me"* (42:44). Oscar notes how he would react if he heard something similar coming from others. This is a good example of how his negative self-criticism is projected onto others:

> *"I'd be disgusted with them... I'd say "How dare you?" My relationship is just as important as theirs. But the fact that it's coming from me just makes me sad. Its internal homophobia I suppose"* (42:44).

Perhaps this is something more than internalised homophobia, in that he may be putting himself under increased pressure to fit into a different expectation of what he thinks is expected of him as a gay man. Oscar did say *"being gay is the new normal now* (laughter). *Being gay, there's nothing wrong with it"* (37:09), even though *"I think that there is something in my psyche that will always feel shame. And that is something that*

I work on" (17:28). Can this pressure be experienced as a new pressure to fit in to new expectations?

Oscar spoke of how he works on his old beliefs:

> *"I choose I suppose to be a positive person. And I choose to work on my relationship with my boyfriend. And I choose to work on my relationships with my friends...And like on the outside, I think I like to come across as very happy and very together person"* (17:28).

Finally, referring to his participation in the community and Pride Parades:

> *"So, I suppose there was parts of me that was a little bit embarrassed about why do we feel the need to get out on the streets and...Well, it's fun. What I love about Pride, the day of Pride, it's like...you just see why it's called a gay community. Because there's just a huge sense of family and love and fun. And it's like the best Christmas dinner with the best family ever you had, you know. I do really love it and even in June, when I'm away, I make a special effort to come home for that day"* (56:59). **End**

P2: Edward

At the time of interviewing, Edward was about to celebrate his 50th birthday. He currently lives in Dublin. His interview was the shortest in duration. His story was a concise and striking example of a redemptive storyline where resilience/recovery can manifest at any time throughout the life course (McAdams 2015). He offers examples of how growing up in the socio-historic context of Ireland seemed to prime his motivation to compartmentalise, creating a naturalised front in keeping with societal expectations of his identity and male gender. A further element in this story is where Edward states his father was alcoholic. He described how he felt inside when his father negatively compared him to his older brothers. On a positive note, during his younger years, he highlights how a friendship with another family proved an important source of support for his acceptance of his identity in his late teens to early adulthood. This family had moved from a Nordic country to live in Ireland. Over the past decade, Edward took up the challenge of redirecting his front, a way of being-in-the-world which nearly cost him his life. He shared the emotional turmoil of this period and the actions he took to develop a more sincere mode of engagement with and for others in the world. Edward has succeeded in reclaiming direction, involving significant value

changes, slowing his life down and is very much looking forward to the next chapter of his life. His story is a vivid example of a worked for resilience and security. His deep gratitude for this change toward a much more positive sense of self was so palpable throughout the whole interview, as was his altruism in being visible to help others within the gay community. Within the story, I raise some concern for how he described his therapeutic relationship, while at the same time acknowledging his strong emphasis that this very relationship proved such a positive influence within his redemptive storyline.

At the beginning of his interview, Edward gave a sense of what his life was like ten years ago:

> *"I panicked and I didn't know. I couldn't... I couldn't tell the wood from the trees... I feared for the future, thinking I could not go on... this is just a fecking nightmare... I'd say, I've had some low points in my life but I would say that was the lowest"* (06:05).

Edward contextualises his negative self-critique:

> *"Certainly, centrally to it all, I suppose, and part of it all was, yeah, being a gay man was definitely in this mix, if you like. Because I had some sense I wasn't good enough and that I had to prove myself more"* (27:50).

Edward referred to his early social development in Ireland. He was the youngest of a large family, commenting that his father was *"a good man,"* (27:50) but he remembered being compared to his older brothers as *"lads"* (30:08) and when it came to talking about him, the description was:

> *"Then we have mummy's little boy... the girls have him ruined" (he laughs). That was the way it was. Do they know at that stage, I often wonder? Probably. It was something different anyway. So, you know, I was kind of treated differently"* (30:08).

Edward says his father was *"a very educated fellow, very intelligent man, fairly definite ideas about things and fairly definite opinions and prejudices"* (30:08), *"a man of his generation, you know, and sport"* (27:50). He added as *"a sensitive 15 and 14 year old or whatever and you're told that you're shite on a football field and you couldn't fight your way out of a paper bag"* (27:50). He negatively critiques himself in comparison to his older brothers who *"were great sportsmen."* (33:50). He said his father was *"a*

man's man" (30:08). He further describes his father as *"a bit of rambler… we moved around a lot"* (29:59-30:04).

In the late 1970s, in his late teens, Edward talked about finding acceptance through a friendship he developed with a family from a Nordic country. They had recently moved to Ireland. He described this friendship as 'super,' recalling how his friend disclosed Edward's identity to her father. His friend's father had been quizzing Edward about his relationship with his daughter. On foot of her disclosure, Edward said *"I nearly died a thousand deaths.... sliding under the table in mortification."* (33:50). However, Edward says:

> *"It didn't bother them in the slightest... once it was out in that house, it was out. There was no going back in again, so it was kind of normal there. And I was kind of.... I always felt lucky that I had found them"* (33:50).

As he moved toward young adulthood, the experience served as a bright spot where he could be himself in his friends house, serving as a supportive context in an 1970s Ireland often characterised by fear of discrimination and prejudice for a minority identity (Mullally 2015; Hug 1999).

Later on, Edward lived for a while in the USA *"and that's really when I came out, if you like, roaring out of the closet"* (39:21). In this mix, Edward shared his perceptions of how he thought he should be:

> *"How you live your life as a gay man. So I kind of bought into the scene, if you like, and the image, and the fast, live fast, die young, drink, drugs, sex, rock and roll style… and whatever"* (39:21).

Edward said his *"just let it rip"* philosophy that was guiding his life was *"what I thought was a hard crust… as a way of proving that I wasn't a wimp… As good as any straight man, perhaps."* (27:50). He had a frenetic work schedule *"running on nerves…running on nothing"* (11:14) adding his value pattern was *"materialistic"* (11:14). He ended up *"not giving a shit"* (07:30). However, a comment that seemed to have considerable impact, was when his sister said to him *"I thought we'd lost you"* (13:15). In this segment, Edward showed he was able to register the meaning of cues from loved ones, exampling a conscientiousness that he may have lost touch with. This 'hard crust' armour of saddling up to his perceptions of what being a

man was, seemed to take from him a reflective stance of being with others he cared about.

Edward then reflected on his journey of recovery and reconnection. He went to see his doctor (14:56) and was prescribed anti-depressants for a short time. This doctor referred him for counselling. Edward got help from a female counsellor within a gay community health service (14:56-18:35). Prior to working with this counsellor, he talked of not settling in with a number of other therapists. One was a gay male therapist *"wasn't comfortable with him at all. Just didn't click"* (14:56). The other female therapist, *"I knew there was going to be stuff that I definitely wasn't going to tell her. I knew that from day one. So that wasn't going to work either"* (14:56). This led him to the Community Service where *"I got to see the counsellor there, and we got on great"* (14:56), *"we really got on great"* (18:38). He describes how the counsellor discovered how he liked reading *"so it was almost like a book of the week…. its more like a book club than a therapy session"* (20:09).

Edward said his counsellor *"had me sussed in about 20 minutes. And she just kind of grin at me. 'What you grinning at me for?' She'd say, 'You're a rogue.' So, yeah, we had some great conversations"* (18:38). When Edward said to her that he wished he could come to see her for decades as exampled in his comment *"I'm never going to leave you, you know that'…* she responded *'Not an option'"* (18:38). While Edward was keen to emphasise the 'great relationship', these interventions run counter to practice guidelines where the therapist is using non-affirming language (APA 2012). Firstly, to encourage the idea that he was 'a rogue' seems loaded with judgment. Here, the therapist demonstrated little understanding for why a gay man might have created a persona to manage and cope. Also, she does not handle particularly well his attachment need for long-term therapy. I also wondered if books actually got in the way of a deeper therapeutic relationship in his case. However, these issues seemed not to register with the participant. In the therapist's defence, considering his addictive accesses, the therapist's approach does seem to have steadied him. Edward said himself their relationship proved very important in his turnaround. A question worth considering in this presentation is how he has gotten used of concealing his vulnerability in negative self-critique. It is then possible that when he is negatively judged, it is consistent on

deeper level with how he got used to feeling about himself and why he does not resist such external judgement. Why he hangs back on himself in this way may relate to an interior shame from the past that he needs to work through in current contexts of experience. However, he needs to be aware of this dynamic to transcend old ideas.

Edward also sought support from group therapy relating to his growing up with an alcoholic father. He complimented this work with a gay men's personal development course which served to further enhance his psychological understanding of his identity as a gay man (41:15). Edward has immersed himself in community activities *"getting more involved in things that are real"* (41:15). His higher self-esteem is evident when he credits himself *"I think I bloody worked hard for it, Gerry. I've put in the hours.. I've resilience that I didn't have before"* (03:22).

At the outset of the interview, Edward had posed a question to himself:

> *"So… how is it now living life as an out, fairly proud gay man?.. I would say that its okay, you know, things are alright…I would certainly say that on a scale of 1 to 10, I'm a hell of a lot better than I've ever been before"* (02:22).

Regarding his current life balance of self transforming practices of self-care:

> *"I'm no paragon of virtue, Gerry, I can tell you. But I don't do crazy things. I look after myself a lot better. I'm more measured, I'm more kind of aware… I know when I'm pushing it a bit too far. Like, well, hang on a minute now. I need to step back down, take care of myself a bit and, you know, rest and eat and sleep and, you know, and whatever else"* (41:15).

Edward further elaborates on his efforts and work:

> *"Totally worth it. Like, if you said to me that you could click your fingers now and drop me back to where I was six or eight years ago, I would... I would freak out, you know, at the thought of being back in that place and in that black hole. It's enough to keep me steady, if you like. It's enough to keep me minding myself and enough to keep those kind of checks and balances in place and whatever else because just, I couldn't hack it again, you know.. There's no way. And I'm so grateful for the people I met along the way"* (39:21).

Concluding the interview Edward said *"I'm optimistic now.… I'm kind of looking forward to the future... believe it or not, turning 50 and kind of saying, "Okay, look. I know who I am and I'm alright with it."* (43:27). **End**.

P3: David

David is 44 years old and lives in Dublin with his partner of 20 years. David's early contexts of life were difficult. His story contains many episodes that were the source of significant pain, stress and conflict. Its a complex story of early abandonment and rejection from important others. Within the sociocultural context of stigma, David had to fend off significant interpersonal rejections, producing prolonged anxiety, shame and even an early sense of ostracising rejection from religion and family. He feels indebted to religion for the care he received from them growing up. At a young age, his primary carer, a religious nun, who he opened up for acceptance did not reciprocate his respect for her, which copper-fastens his shame. At a young age, his religious carer's pejorative inferences on his personal identity and her demand that he forego his position as boy scout leader was unexpected and very painful. As I was interviewing him, he mentioned the recent death of one of his siblings. As he reflects and grieves his passing, it seems to create a need in him to reconcile to his former carer, whom he has invited to his home for dinner. He was meeting her shortly after our interview.

To this day, David still feels 'a scratch card freedom' and his acceptance of his sexual identity beyond shame is recent. What has clearly helped him is his personal tenacity, and the stability of his long term relationship to his partner. Their recent civil ceremony was an occasion when their families met for the first time.

At times, in his account, David is highly self-critical, where he seems to carry a disproportionate sense of guilt for how his early beliefs were shaped. He gives vivid examples of how his navigation of the social world impacted upon him. It may be that his proneness to anxious self-criticism and anxiety keeps him from a deeper self-transcendence for how his extended sense of selfhood was experienced in time. He seems, at times, to reenact his early introjections of other-person disrespect and cultural stigma which he projects into current life situations of being gay. His negative self-criticism within his stream of consciousness seems particularly hard on him. The paradox of his self-criticism is how it has held him together and drives his principled mindset. His future work may be to find a deepened compassion for himself.

At the outset of the interview, David said:

"I kind of saw myself possibly going into the church, becoming a religious blah-blah-blah, and then I had to kind reject all of that because I knew that rejected me, well, it rejected what I had become, you know, by the time I was 19, 20" (00.29).

David also gave an insight into his own life philosophy:

"I think if I wasn't... if I hadn't been afflicted with being gay (laughs), to use that phrase afflicted, that I probably would have turned out to be a bit of an asshole... I was very, very closed in my mind and not challenged in the sense that I followed the party line with regards to a religious kind of philosophy if you're not with us, you're against us, this type of thing as regards the Catholic Church" (00:29).

In the early 1970s-80s, he and his siblings were dependent on the care of Irish nuns who ran an orphanage. Re his relationship with the nuns, David said:

"It would not be fair to, you know... rubbing their noses in this kind of.. Ireland was changing but for those of a certain age, it was too late for change. And I loved these people so I wasn't ..just to satisfy some kind of inner ego.... it would not be fair to, you know, to make a point.. " (10:59).

In the nuns care, David said he experienced pre-pubescent sexualisation when he was 8-9 years old with an older teenager of 13 or 14 years of age. He says *"I would say abused by an older male"* (35:58), but then adds *"I wouldn't call it sexual abuse, but it was a sexual... inappropriate sexual activity"* (35:58).

As it was a secret *"my evolving into a gay young adult, there was the huge guilt thing"* (15:19). *"I always just blamed myself or blamed the fact that I was gay, that I was a gay man"* (35:58). He says *"he shut down emotionally…. that made me shy and made me reticent and made me afraid of other people"* (35:58).

David says he was never met with understanding for what he was becoming. He said he there was a prevailing view, *"you were a scumbag, or you're basically.. in some way, you're tainted"* (07:56). David elaborates with a vivid description of his relationship to the nuns:

"They were anguished by the fact that I was gay or I was embracing the fact that I was gay because they basically didn't think it was an actual....they kind of saw it as a choice, and they basically predicted that I was going to end up just a lonely old man living on my own. And that was the view, and that was the role... that was painted for me. If I keep embracing this lifestyle, that's what's going to happen,

that's where you are going to end up. They never said that, "we don't love you."
But they said "We don't understand you" (07:56).

David added:

"I kind of pity their ignorance but that doesn't negate the fact that I lost out…just
because I say "Oh, God, help them for their ignorance.. It doesn't make up for the
fact I was basically cut adrift" (07:56)

David also referred to toleration from his siblings who impressed upon him that they
were doing him a big favour *"by tolerating his lifestyle"* (07:56) He recalls being told
by one of his siblings *"we went out on a limb for you and I allowed you do such and*
such and you had a boyfriend in my house" (07:56).

When David left the care home, he recounts telling one of the nuns he was gay. She had
been:

"My primary carer… It was around '86…'87…I would have left the orphanage at
that stage and I told her that I was gay and she, about two or three months later,
she asked to meet me and I thought that the purpose of meeting was that she was
going…kind of embracing and things like. And basically, the purpose of meeting
was to ask me to leave this troupe that I was leading, and that if I didn't, she was
going to make sure that I leave. So, that was very, very hurtful. And I had…I
hadn't recalled that particular hurt of that happening. It's only …we're having this
meeting today" (10:59).

David said:

"And funny enough, that person who was a nun at the time, she's now left and
she's married in America, I'm actually meeting her next Friday. I invited her here
to my house for dinner. So, there is a kind of a reconciliation, and because life's
too short to…I've got a brother who died three weeks ago and it has totally
changed my mental outlook" (10:59).

It is worth noting, this time period is associated with a reversal of the downward trend
in homophobia in social attitudes because of AIDS and how religious authorities
thought about minority identity. Continuing with the story of his early life, David said
when he started third level college *"that was very traumatic, very little eye contact*
particularly with other males" (06:11), *"the whole gay thing has forced me to hide an*
awful lot in life... there was nobody to identify with - there was no identification figures
around (15:19).

The transacting effects of these early antecedents created shame, anger and social phobia:

> *"men, I noticed that they shied away from you because they found me to be a bit odd or a bit strange, and there seemed to be this kind of...they weren't disgusted by me, but there was a kind of walking away and a kind of distancing, and that led to huge problems during my later 20s and my 30s because I ended up suffering from kind of social phobia"* (03:02).

David added:

> *"...funny enough, ... I ended up throwing myself into jobs where there were a lot of groups of men like....actually crucifying myself.... and I ended up a bit troubled mentally"* (03:02).

David said he found he was:

> *"running away from situations either through alcohol or actually through relocation, you know, moving from a particular job to another job or making myself unemployed"* (32:09).

David's first male partner was HIV (29:06). David adds:

> *"that he tried to save his life, because he was HIV just before the retroviral drugs came in... he's still alive today... that relationship turned out to be quite violent and you know, there were four or five years of being stuck in that and that kind of...... the sense of fear of being on your own"* (29:06)

What is compellingly evident is how David became lost to the social feedback effects of negative prediction of other mediated interpersonal interactions reinforced by the transactions of cultural repertoires. Earlier in the interview, he opened up about the isolation he felt and how he eventually reached out for help:

> *"I realised that I had totally isolated myself in order to kind of protect myself. But then, that isolation led to loneliness and depression. And that's when I kind of faced up to it then and I went to a guy and sought help on that"* (04:54).

In a later section, David stressed that he wants to work beyond the pain and hurt (32:09). In this segment, the intensity of self-criticism come to the fore and how he tries to outmanoeuvre it:

> **"***Through my failings I became an alcoholic and became very disruptive and things like that, and once you stop blaming other people… once I broke that chain happening "Well, actually I did it. It was my fault" And then, you get rid of the word "fault". It was my doing. That's what I did. And forget about the fault. It's*

what you did. It's what I did. Then…well, if there was a sense of giving in" (32:09).

David had earlier referred to picking up a book called 'Coming out of Shame' and *"realised I have an awful lot of shame in me"* (15:19). He elaborated in a later section:

> *"I know I get depressed if I go and see a Pride parade, this kind of emphasis on the kind of frivolity and shallow kind of "let's all get out of our face, anything goes, dandyish kind of thing" that I don't identify with. I nearly reject parts of that"* (32:09).

He referred to the current context of social change:

> *"central elements within the gay community…they're good at gerrymandering or they're good at political connecting and lobbying and all of that, just because they are good at it, doesn't mean that its necessary "* (52:50).

He expanded on this by saying:

> *"If we are going to call ourselves a special group within society, which I think we are, then I don't particularly see a problem with having a special label like civil partnership… equally though, if there's somebody jumping up and down and saying they want marriage, I don't perceive that there's a problem with them voicing that opinion. I wouldn't be shouting from the back to get them to sit down"* (52:50).

Consistent with David's incremental sense of change within himself, he says he likes the approach of a national referendum on marriage equality in Ireland, suggesting *"toleration must come from the masses"* (49:27), rather than legislate through parliament which could end up with gays *"resented"* (51:40). His use of word tolerance may also be instructive of a surface freedom. Earlier in the interview David said *"I'm only opening up to a full acceptance of myself over the last year and a half"* (25:40). David said that while he thinks that things have changed, *"there's a kind of scratch card freedom to society"* (22:18*), "a shallow acceptance"* (23:05). This may reflect his own level of acceptance. However, given the challenges he faced, he has clearly transformed a great deal which is a tribute to his tenacious spirit. Near the conclusion of his interview, David says of his partner *"I'm with Leo now, and we're over 20 years together"* (46:09). The previous year in 2012, David and his partner entered into a civil union. Both their families met for the first time for the celebratory occasion. David says:

"They turned up and they embraced it and they were very nervous, and that was the first time they were meeting all of my family. And it was great. It was low key. There were 20 people at it. It was very small, but that was what Leo wanted and I went through his wishes. And now, he says, looking back on it, he would love to have a big kind of traditional style, you know,…Irish kind of knees up of… you know…. But it was what it was and it's special for what it was, you know" (25:40). **End.**

P4: Jonathan

Jonathan is 48 years old and lives rurally. He spoke of his early invisibility as a gay man because of his fear of others knowing he was gay. He aimed to put across to others he was heterosexual. He joined religious life but left after three years. He spoke of an early sexual abuse experience and described its impact on him. When Jonathan sought personal therapy, his contract was terminated by his therapist. This was despite his insistence that he needed to do more work in separating out the effects of abuse and its negative impact on his minority identity. Like the previous participant, Jonathan is attempting to transcend the stigmatising mediations of religious-legal stigma imposed on his identity. However, in his case, his authentic struggle toward acceptance was poorly grasped by the therapist. His therapist does not seem to appreciate how his historic structural and inter-personal social context are manifesting in his flow of consciousness and how he needs support in unravelling this dynamic. This lack of support leaves him in a vulnerable space, as he tries to undo the negative self-criticism mediated by the prevailing sanctions of social exclusion. His subjectivist struggle for self-transcendence is mediated by a structural logic. What is revealing about this account is how the stigmatising interpretation of a religious confessor at a young age is again repeated in a different form by a therapist in modern day Ireland in his lack of empathic support and insight into the structural burden of his early experience.

More recently, his growth as a gay man is about working against his tendency to isolate and his need to connect with others in life pursuits he enjoys. Over the past while, Jonathan disclosed his orientation to his elderly parents and has started to date another man.

At 12 years old, Jonathan recalled creating distance, not wanting to be identified as *"one of them"* (01:43), *"It wasn't something that most people broadcast.. It was a lot... it was shame or whatever attached to it"* (02:41), and *"lonely"* (03:43). He said creating a *"wall"* was important so that nobody *"would look a bit deeper at me"* (03:52). In his choice of career training, Jonathan says *"I was the first man... to be accepted into* (a female dominated profession) (00:05:03). Jonathan said in the second person *"part of you is trying to embrace what you are actually like. But part of you also wants to... put it across that you're straight"* (00:05:03). Growing up in a fairly religious household enabled him to latch on to the church *"as a kind of means of being good"* (05:44). Like the previous story, religion is both a source of meaning and shame. He joined religious life in another country but left half way through his training (06:11). Jonathan says of his decision to leave religious life:

> *"I'd given religious life a shot, like to the church. The only one thing that I hadn't... part of my life that I hadn't looked at was the gay aspect. So, then, in many ways, my spiritual life, I kind had to put that aside then to actually look at me... the gay life. Trying to look at... I knew who I really was. And embracing that part and incorporating that wholly into who I am"* (06:11).

Jonathan further revealed the obstacles to integration in going to religious confession:

> *"tell*(ing) *him the sins, kind of masturbation or whatever. And you kind of hide the fact that it was all gay thoughts that you were masturbating to, doing all that. And basically, you have to bring that out…And the priest asking me "Was I abused as a child?" I could never answer yes or no. I knew if I answered no I was lying. But I couldn't answer yes"* (26:32).

In his context of social isolation and previous deference for religious mores, Jonathan seems caught in a confused spiral *"was it just something I was looking at as a reason or as an excuse for being gay?"* (26:32).

It took him a considerable amount of time to unravel his pained dilemma in asking for help:

> *"I guess it would have been around five years ago, I knew I needed help…the awareness of how much I disliked myself, what I could no longer push down. It was coming closer and closer to the surface. So, I started going to therapy, psychotherapy"* (24:51).

One of the central issues that dominated his therapy was captured in the comment *"I'm not happy being gay, I don't like being gay. I don't want to be gay. It's something I*

didn't choose, but I'm stuck with it" (24:51). Another reason for going to psychotherapy *"was in relation to abuse when I was a child"* (24:51). After a year of attending therapy, the therapist recommended they finish their work together, *"I didn't think I was ready and I wasn't"* (24:51). Jonathan adds: *"I'd get to there and I'd be like.. like.. jumping up and down, like I want to get out. I just wanted to run…"* (26:32), *"we could go so far, but at that stage, I couldn't go there"* (27:30). In this episode, the therapist seems to have no appreciation of the complex dynamic of Jonathan's experience, how childhood sexual abuse combined with social stigma for being gay re-enforced his shame dynamic in silencing him for a long period of his life. In an earlier time of social exclusion, the therapist's unilateral suspension of therapy could have proved very costly.

Soon after, Jonathan says he *"changed therapist"* (27:39). He does not mention anything directly about his new personal therapy. Rather, he goes into significant detail about two weekend workshops in holotropic breathing techniques. David said *"part of the memories started to come back"* (28:25). He says the holotropic practitioner described the process:

> **"**as a kind of emotional surgery, that's what it felt like…. each of my experiences ended up similarly traumatic… the pain in my jaws and all that was very extreme.. my teeth have realigned in that process.. it came to a stage where I knew I had to draw the line and actually start living and enjoying life… so I haven't gone back in two years"* (27:39).

Jonathan said the work did help resolve his lack of acceptance:

> *"Part of that journey in being gay was actually maybe separating abuse, gay and realising the self-hatred wasn't necessarily coming from being gay. It was coming from the other, from the abuse... and I think I have been able to let go of a lot of that"* (31:45).

However, Jonathan added:

> *"You could be watching a film, reading a book, and suddenly, something hits you. And you realise oh, there's emotions there, there's feelings there....I may work on in the future or I may not"* (33:08).

Jonathan exercising control over his destiny shows itself in knowing and communicating to his first therapist that he was not ready to finish his therapy. Earlier, he exampled the same determination on leaving religious life, when he was able to

shred the default presupposition of being good as automatically connected with religious life. This is a very different person to the boy who was guilt prone and afraid to speak his mind in religious confession. It is this determination, at his own pace, that allows him outsmart the grip of social stigma.

(In the transcript, Jonathan did not mention if his sexual offender was alive or if civil authorities were involved (Appendix C Informed Consent: Section 8(d) Data Protection Act 1988/2003). I subsequently contacted P4 by email with a request to speak with him for clarification. When we spoke by phone, Jonathan informed me he was doing well and that he had dealt with the reporting of his childhood sexual abuse to police authorities).

The next main section of Jonathan's story, illustrates a newer sense of freedom. I think it is also important to further understand his sense of positive change as arising within a changing social milieu of visibility and much less structural critique of minority sexual and gender identities in Ireland (Ryan 2011). These intersections are the sites of an evolving temporal experience in which his personal identity is actively transformed. This self transcendence manifests in Jonathan disclosing his sexual identity to his elderly parents. The following is his description of what happened. He says he started nervously and with sensitivity:

> *"I was apologising a bit too much. It was emotional. It was a warm day. They were sitting outside. And I kind of told them there was something I needed to tell them. And my mother started crying. And she was kind of... she just made a comment or whatever that there were times she would have wondered. But they hoped. And my father just said it didn't change anything because we still love you"* (18:37)*, "and that meant a lot from dad because as I said, we were kind of a religious household"* (19:33)*.*

Jonathan described how he felt afterward:

> *"I was actually driving to my own place afterwards. I live around 11 miles away from my parents. And I'd say I was around three and a half miles down the road, then suddenly it was just the... it was like a weight lifted off my shoulders And it was just.... that happiness that I was free. I was free"* (17:55)*, "I'm not hiding aspects of who I am or what I'm doing"* (19:44)*.*

In the next section, he describes further positive changes in his life and the early development of a new relationship:

"It's one of those crazy things. I guess the last few years, I kind of challenged myself... like I'm going to step out of the comfort zone. And I met a fella one night in Panti Bar. And he was over for three weeks learning English and he had been coming over a few weeks at a time... we had two dates and he suggested coming back and living with me for a few months. And I said "Sure." We get on fine. Sure, what the heck. If somebody had said I would have done that six months before, I would have told him, "You're crazy" (20:49).

Jonathan added: *"currently its long distance. But they've met him* (his parents) (19:44). He says:

"We were back and forth when he was doing consultancy up until a month ago. And now he's got a full time job. So, that in itself, brings further challenges" (21:41).

When he reflects on the gay community, Jonathan said *"I don't really fit in.. I don't feel comfortable"* (47:54). Yet, he said he still *"challenged himself"* (49:03) *"I do things. I do things that I like and like the gay retreat,"* (49:03) referring to a spiritual weekend he had recently attended. Jonathan also likes other social events in the gay community, *"likes going to theatre festivals, film festivals. You get a different people that seem to come out of the woodwork... I go to them because I enjoy them"* (36:05-37:51). A further example of the need to belong among others surfaced when Jonathan said *"it's just a kind of need... like wanting them to know who I am"* (10:19). Living rurally, he expressed a lack of identification with others. He describes being at a loss in the local pub where one heterosexual parent is able to talk to one another *"about their kids – something shared"* (14:07) *"You find yourself not fitting into straight life"* (06:11).

Jonathan said the research interview itself was an opportunity for connection *"I talked more about my journey than I thought I would have"* (50:14) *"and knowing someone is listening rather than just being there... "* (51:25). I was very moved by this last comment of 'someone is listening'. Here, research interviews illustrate their value as therapeutic. Jonathan travelled a long distance for this interview. Jonathan captured his life in the comment *"the journey has brought me to a great freedom in many ways... that of just letting go... I think its right. Life is short"* (22:07). **End**

P5: Andre

Andre is 22 years old and lives in Dublin. Within his story, Andre gave a flavour of how the social context among peers was a source of support and conflict in his journey toward acceptance of being gay. In his late teens, Andre said he was nervous about disclosing to his father. His father, from the Middle East reacted negatively to his son's disclosure. However, prior to telling his father, Andre had already gained acceptance from his mother, school friends. Also, the school authorities took seriously his report of being insulted and discriminated by another young boy. Within this story, while his father's initial lack of acceptance caused anxiety, their relationship has been enriched by his father's transformation and acceptance of his young son's identity. What is striking about his account is how quickly he deals with challenges. This means he does not ruminate for long periods. This resilient dynamic is socially mediated by interpersonal support and an affirming culture. Andre's father and brother grew up in an Islamic culture that frowns on homosexuality and they still retain these beliefs even though they have lived in Ireland for some time. Andre's early development was experienced in Ireland. This brings up themes of cultural integration. This may have much wider implications for migration into Ireland when the country of origin is a non-affirming one.

In his opening description, Andre gives a sense of the early problems he encountered:

> *"And you know the word gay had been thrown at me a few times by older people in the school. But I had never taken it on board as such. But I think subconsciously, it... you know, these moments, this name calling had been having an effect"* (05:49)... *I was definitely more feminine in the way I would talk and the way I would walk. And things I was interested in. And I would be friendly with the guys. But when it came to playing and such, I would always be with the girls and chatting. And they'd have their dolls, and I would want to grab the doll and play with it too. But something inside me said that that's not right. And that thing that was telling me, that's not right with society"* (06:40).

Here Andre is identifying social cues. He knows the 'not right' going on inside him is coming from his society. This knowledge frees him up to transcend. Andre said when *"It came to Christmas... birthdays"* (06:40) a similar pattern of feeling it was 'not right' would repeat itself. The following description examples gift giving and what he has learned regarding prescriptive gender roles:

"I would ask for what I felt was in the middle, which was the Ken... (06:40)... it is her husband...I knew that asking for a Barbie was wrong. A boy can't ask for a Barbie. I'm talking about my parents..because they're the gift givers. And they got me an Action man. You know, I didn't want this" (10:41).

He further recalled an early event from national school when he was confronted by another boy, the son of a teacher whom he *"loved and trusted... I think I might have seen her son as an extension of her"* (06:40). Remembering the incident itself:

"He basically just came up in front of everyone in the class and called me a queer". And I had a moment where I was like, "What is that?" Brushed it off. And then, very soon after, we're talking a few seconds after, I realised, "oh, shit" this is that gay thing that everyone is talking about" (06:40).

Andre reported this boy at school to one of his teachers

"Her face was completely shocked and disgusted by what happened. And it wasn't...there wasn't any brushing it under the carpet. She went straight to the principal. And I never heard anything more about it. So, I don't know if he was punished... But I think her reaction helped me in a way because it made me feel like in fact he was a dick head" (06:40).

The incident occurred in the last decade in Ireland. It examples how his social resilience is being shaped. When his boundaries are transgressed, it serves to further indicate the progress of anti-discrimination policy in schools, realised in concrete and responsive school practices (BeLonG To, 2015). This positive patterning of young minority identity within current social contexts is widely accounted for in existing literature (McCormack 2012; Hammack and Cohler 2009; Savin-Williams 2011; 2005; 1998). More broadly, one can also term Andre's experience as the 'ordinary magic' of resilience when he was confronted with specific challenges (Eichas et al, 2015; Masten 2014; Schoon 2012).

After the incident at school, Andre decided not to tell his parents what happened because he did not want them believing that *"I was that thing they had been calling me"* (6:40). However, in secondary school, *"I don't know what age... post third year, when people start to embrace difference, which is what I found"* (06:40). It was at this stage of the education cycle, he disclosed to his friends that he was bisexual. Later in the interview, he reflected on this:

"I'd seen people in school who were definitely gay because of how they appeared and how they walked and talked, you know. And I think at that point, I was star-

ting to realise that you don't have to be like that if you're bisexual, or if you're gay... if you call me gay that's really mean. Don't call me gay. Like that's a slag... like I didn't want to go from straight to gay like that. That was too quick" (44:22).

Andre also says in secondary school *"There was like a period where I was attracted to guys and girls"* (35:47). At a later point in his interview, Andre mentioned feeling guilt about girls he had previously had *"dates with... you know, I would occasionally see them, or am friends with them on Facebook. And every time I see their name, there's this guilt that I feel, you know"* (33:43)... even though *"it was just a fling that lasted two or three weeks"* (33:43).

Andre experimented and tried to condition his attractions:

"It became the case where I would think about a guy and feel aroused. And then, I'd feel....afterwards, I feel really bad about that. And I would say, next time, I masturbate I'm going to think of girls. And I'm going to...I'm going to try and change myself by conditioning myself to feel attracted to vaginas, to boobs, to the female body. And if I do that enough times, my attraction to guys will go. I will fix myself" (36:33).

In his late teens, Andre says *"the attraction to females became less and less"* (37:10) and *"then when I kind of realised that I was definitely, fully into guys, at one point, I just... came to terms with it"* (00:38:18). However, Andre still disclosed to his mother that he was bisexual. He recalled what he said to her:

"*I thought you prefer that I was bisexual. You know, surely... because then there's still a chance that I might have a wife, and I'll be able to become normal. But she had thought that was just weird. And she kind of knew, she just knew that I wasn't bisexual. But I wasn't letting up. And then... I think I eventually told her I was gay"* (47:04).

At 16 years old (55:05) Andre disclosed to his father when his mother *"out of nowhere said 'Andre, I think its time you tell your dad something'"* (47:04). *"I was completely spooked and panicked. And kind of was ready for the worst reaction possible"* (47:04).

In coming out to his father, Andre says he *"wrote it on a piece of paper.. 'I'm gay'..and then, I slid it across to him... my mouth wouldn't work. It just couldn't make the words happen.."* (47:04).

Andre offers an extended description of what happened:

"... there was a pause of a few seconds. And obviously, for me, they felt like a life time. And then he came over and hugged me. And he gave me a kiss. And he said everything will be fine. And then, pretty soon after that, he just disappeared into the toilet. And just stayed there for a long time, like an hour. And my mother was in there with him. And you could hear mumbling and talking...I think I could hear crying. But I was left in the kitchen by myself, you know. And it just felt like I had no one in the world. I felt so alone. I had no sense of what was going to happen next. And I had no sense of what I would do if it went bad. Where I would go? where I would live? Who I would go to? Because at this point, the only people who knew were my friends and my parents, extended family didn't know I was gay. So, what would I do? I knew my mother would be fine... she had known for a long time (47:04).

In the direct aftermath of disclosing to his father, Andre said:

"*So, my dad kind of had a mental break down after that... I'd never seen him like that before in my life, ever. It was just like someone had flipped a switch and had like...had given him the worst news possible. It wasn't a case of living with it. It was the case of fixing me. Or snapping me out of it, you know"* (47:04).

A few days after Andre disclosed: *"I had time to breathe and realise I did the hard bit"* (01:01:11). He then decides to disclose more to his father **"***it was kind of immature of me but I just had to do it...Its really weird, kind of sadistic"* (01:01:11).

"*I wanted to provoke a reaction in him. But what I was saying was true. I probably could have timed it better, but I didn't want to time it better. I just said that I want to have a husband one day. I want to have a boyfriend one day* (01:01:11)*... and wanting to get married* (01:04:35). *I want to invite my partner here to this house and eat with you ..."* (01:01:11).

When his father heard this, Andre said he:

"*lost it again. And he started crying. And it was just like...I just felt 'Oh, poor you...just do all your grieving'... he was acting like a child. And it was like he even got to the stage where he was like saying... threatening to kill himself, you know. And that he, there's no point, you know, to have a gay son"* (01:01:11).

For the following week:

"*Every night that week, my dad would come home from work, not really doing any work that entire day because his head was so messed up from the news...he wouldn't talk to me. He was sitting in a chair, a patio chair. And I sat in a chair beside him. And he was just looking straight. And it was like I didn't even exist. It was so hurtful"* (01:04:35).

Andre says *"it was down to, what will other people think? It's just his culture"* (01:01:11). Andre says his father *"told his brother"* (00:47:04). Andre's uncle,

"who lives here too is a lot less liberal than my dad" (00:47:04). He said the following plan was considered:

> *"This is what we're going to do. We're going to send him to the Middle East... There's loads of pretty girls over there. We'll find him a wife, an arranged marriage… That's what they do over there. So, you know, there was even talk of me marrying my first cousin who lives here.. it was just bizarre"* (00:47:04).

After his disclosure to his father, Andre recalled going to the Middle East on family holidays:

> *"And yeah....there would always be this weird undertone of trying to do a business deal of some sort between myself and this Eastern family's daughter. And trying to get us to sit together at the dinner table and making like cute little references about the two of us. And she would, this girl, would kind of go along with it...And I was...I would kind of like go along with it because I liked how my dad was. I liked how my dad appeared. And how his mood was. And, you know, he found this girl very attractive, and thought that it would be great that I would have a very pretty, dark skinned, eastern partner. It was just weird, weird, weird. And my mother was never going to let it happen. She just went along with it. Let's play this little game"* (55:05).

Andre stressed how serious this game was, and how *"it made me feel like a piece of meat. And it made me feel like I had no choice in the matter…it felt like a very realistic game"* (57:32-47).

In the next segments, Andre described how his father transformed:

> *"And then he did. And it was such a visual growth. I could see, tangibly, his changing as the months went on. It started by talking to me again. A little bit. Doing activities with me, you know, we might go fishing or spend a family weekend walking somewhere. And then, it would turn into, we'd be watching a television programme, and there'd be a gay character and he might make fun of the gay character"* (01:04:35)

Andre talked of his relief:

> *"It was kind of like a deep breath moment for me. Because it meant that if he can joke about a gay person, knowing that his son is gay, then this is moving in the right direction. And then, it got to a point where he'd kind of... there were loads of moments in between. But he was just, you know, it got to a point where he was openly asking me about if I was on a date, how did it go? What was he like?"* (01:04:35).

A further example of the progress made is when Andre mentioned a guy he is currently dating whom he met while abroad:

"He's like totally fine with this guy coming over. But he wants him to come to the family home, have a meal, to eat together, to do exactly what I told him I wanted to do, that he completely couldn't understand back then. But now, he relishes the idea. And he wants it to happen. And he looks out for me" (01:04:35).

He says his father's care extends to:

"He wants to make sure anyone I see is right for me. And will ask questions about what they do, how old they are? (01:04:35).

Andre welcomed his father's change *"Yeah. Never ever, ever thought it would reach that stage"* (01:09:10).

He concluded his interview:

"I am proud of the community as a whole. I think there are some amazing, unbelievably talented and admirable people... in Ireland, in Dublin who are Gay. And that I would aspire to be like. I... wouldn't change the way I am for the world right now. I love who I am" (01:11:42). **End**

P6: Karol

Karol is 65 years old and he lives in the country. What comes to the fore in this account, coming from *"my kind of background"* (01:31) was his sense of not being treated any differently to anyone else. He has become more aware of the legal discrimination later in life, but any idea of an early lack of reconciliation, on a personal or social level of being a gay man in Ireland, is something *"I've no consciousness of"* (09:02) *"doesn't resonate with me at all"* (10:24). At the outset and latter end of the interview, Karol stated his experience may be *"atypical"* (00:01:31–00:54:35). And in concluding the interview, Karol says, *"since it wasn't an issue in my formative part of my coming to gayness in any form, it therefore, didn't become a crucial issue for me"* (01:25:09). This pattern of internalised security, contentedness, lack of criticism and fun within the boundary of his immediate 'social declension' is something he feels fortunate about, and it is a privilege he protects. His story does not example any major wrestling or struggle in being gay. However, he was certainly not untouched by disrespectful remarks. He recalled one social occasion where his identity as a gay man was foregrounded by a business colleague and he also notes the social hypocrisy/ discrimination within this specific episode. Karol was however conscious and sensitive

to the struggles of other gay men and couples and has supported his friends where he could. He welcomed the evolving changes in Irish society and notes the resultant positive effects within social interaction.

Karol began the interview:

> *"My kind of background where there are always a lot of you know, generations of gay, gay people, gay men and women who would have been working in the area. It wouldn't have occurred to anyone that somebody was different from anybody else. It just didn't"* (01:31).

In response to my question if he were aware of legal statutes criminalising homosexuality, Karol said:

> *"I never knew it was a crime. I never even thought of it…. I think the one and only time the criminal element was to do with Oscar Wilde. I was quite young and I said to my father*
>
> *'What was Oscar Wilde in jail for?*

And my mother said,

> *'It's up to you darling.'*

And my father said,

> *'Yeah, because he had a love affair with a man.'*

And I said,

> *'And he was put in jail for that?'*

And my father said,

> *'Well, yes sort of'* (40:48).

Karol at *"18 going on 19"* (58:08) left Ireland on a university scholarship and during his time away *"I lost my innocence"* (44:39). He found himself having to cover up how he had made the acquaintance of a woman's husband, *"she was trying to get me to reveal how I'd met him"* (44:39). For him, Karol says it was *"the first time I probably consciously lied in that way as an adult"* (44:39). Within his lengthy account, Karol says *"a lot of people lose their innocence through sexual acts"* (44:39). For him, not so. He described his reaction when he eventually realised he was being taken out on dinner date with the lady's husband:

"first time ever that I was really conscious... this man actually is making an advance on me... I had never ... never any reason to notice.... A whole lot of other things fell into place..... It was like a domino effect.... and that was the very first time that I realised that I understood the implication of a man fancying another man" (00:34:33).

Three weeks after the dinner, he remembers his professor sending for him. She said:

"'Has something happened to you?'

'No'.

She said, 'Darling' ...

(His aside) *'I always knew when they started calling you darling, you're absolutely in terrible trouble'*

'But you're dressing very differently'

'I don't think so'

'you're dressing very differently'

And I said, 'In what way?'

And she said 'Well, you've obviously spent a lot of money on new clothes. Why? And who's the girl?' (53:20)

and I said 'There isn't a girl'

'Oh' she said 'and that was how she left it... I didn't know what she meant' (54:22).

Karol described his youthful dimensions at the time (54:35), but he does not appear to make the connection with how his looks, or how his new dress sense makes him the object of attraction. After the meeting with the professor, Karol says another man in the university bar:

"Asked me out.

I go 'Me?'

He said 'Yeah, you' ...

I said 'No, I don't think so. Thanks. My second sort of experience" (54:35).

On this occasion, Karol says he had been with a lady colleague and when she realised that the drinks from the man she considered *"divine"* (54:35) were really for Karol where "*she had to be given a drink for the sake of it… she said 'For fuck's sake' And I'd never heard her use bad language, ever. She stormed out"* (54:35).

After this, Karol said:

> *"The catch up was sharp. So, it wasn't I then, you know, took off. I didn't. But I realised…I'll rephrase that without losing the sense of it. I'd only ever seen myself as either…I'd spent a lot of my growing up as either being my brother's brother, or my father's son"* (58:08).

Back in Ireland, Karol reflects on the class position of his family

> *"That legal sanction for homosexuality or homosexual acts in any public way or private way, affected people like us. It just didn't happen"* (42:49) *"if you were of a certain social group, you were not going to be bothered, unless it was in front of the bishop or something"* (40:48).

He adds *"you might think that's a very odd thing to say now... Ireland was very class driven, even then"* (42:50). Karol talked of his distaste for a foregrounding of sexual identity in social interaction. He refers to episodes within his social circle of an insecure gay male friend *"who pushed it so far to force everyone to kind of constantly affirm that they really loved him"* (15:25).

Karol tells of a further experience *"it must have been... I could nearly give you a date.. I can really remember, June 1998. I was staggered"* (00:03:37). The following accounts for what transpired:

> *"I think I was quite shocked ... I had guests over from the (USA) when I took them out for dinner. (He) I knew very well... (he) had a new partner whom he was about to marry. He was much married... already had a number of wives under his belt plus I'd say about 10 others of everybody else's.... She (the other guest) was well to do, a lot older and rather..., frightfully conservative... Anyway, I took them to a restaurant, and she said to me, and it was the first time I'd ever in my life been asked it. (She) said*
>
> *'Do your employers know your proclivities?'*
>
> *And I, slight misunderstanding. I thought (she) meant my taste in food or something. It really didn't occur to me. I said*

'Sorry?'

And she said,

'Do they know you're gay?'

And I said,

'Yeah. What that's got to do with anything?'

'And they still employed you?'

*And the (*other guest*) at this point was scarlet with embarrassment, and really a bit alarmed by my reaction. I said,*

'I have never been asked that question in my life' (01:31)... He follows up with

'Ye, they do, they know all about it.... I might guess what their personal preferences... but it's absolutely none of my business... what do I care... it's none of my... it's absolutely none of my business' (07:51)

"And I can remember looking at him rather pointedly, somebody who is a serial philanderer... are they allowed to be a serial philanderer if they're heterosexual? And the dinner concluded soon afterwards" (08:24). *"But... I do think it was partly because it was Dublin and Ireland and he thought "Holy Catholic Ireland"* (08:24).

Another memory, Karol recalled:

"I can remember some years ago, somebody working for me was gay and I knew him and his partner very well. And he looked out and there was building work going outside. He was commenting about the builders. I said to him,

'They're builders.'

He said, 'I know, isn't that wonderful?'

I said, 'Ah, for God's sake.'

So, I didn't change very much in that way" (01:00:33).

Throughout his life, Karol said:

"I would never have strayed very far from what I would regard as my natural hinterland of social like declension. I wouldn't have moved very far from it. It wouldn't have occurred to me. I wouldn't have been interested" (01:00:33) *"I've never been to any like gay bar... none of those things were necessary... there were so many gay couples, and so many gay people, men and women in the 'groupage'"* (09:33).

Karol added:

"what I don't like about the gay political movement is this necessity to segment things into gay art or gay theatre. Its a bit like, you know, women painters or female art. It's either art or its not" (17:14).

Karol gave specific examples of the benefits of state recognition of gay relationships where *"they'd be only been friends beforehand, they had no rights. You could be excluded. Absolutely"* (01:18:22) *"I'm very conscious of the civil registration/marriage thing has made a very big difference to a lot of my gay friends"* (01:20:39). He said he often had occasion to *"ring up my friend, the bishop"* (01:17:33) whenever a religious ceremony/blessing was required. He would say to the bishop:

'*Could you do the following... could you do the following?' And he'd say*

'*What exactly are you asking me to do?' And I'd say*

'*Ah for God's sake, I'm asking you to give them a blessing in front of their mummy and daddy and so they can be all happy. That mummy and daddy can go in the photograph of...my darling son's with the bishop in your full frock and best hat"* (01:17:33).

Regarding recent trends, Karol says:

"The one thing I do notice, you know, social life and social intercourse in that sense is easier in that you haven't got to explain the issues about people's partners or any of those things. Or at funerals or any of the things" (01:16:09).

Karol saw the interview as a reflective opportunity *"to explain it* (his life) *to myself... where there must be other people like me"* (01:27:06). As Karol was keen to stress throughout the interview, i.e. the unproblematic nature of his experience, he recognises as his privilege:

"If I had to struggle with this... to prove yourself to your immediate family or friends or circle or whatever, then, yes, you would have had a very different experience" (01:25:09). **The End**

P7: Walt

Walt is 46 years old and lives in Dublin. Not unlike Karol, Walt never experienced any discrimination within his intimate environs. In fact, he talked explicitly of parental support when he came out. However, he did experience direct discrimination from religious leadership through his involvement in a Catholic organisation offering retreats to young persons. Eventually, he left this group, and shortly after, he decided against pursuing a religious vocation. Walt talked of his subsequent involvement in social and political outreach initiatives within universities and the community. Throughout the interview, he stressed the value and importance of visibility as a way of changing social attitudes. In his present life, he loves being a godfather and is guardian to a number of children. He said he would have liked to have been a parent himself. Walt was passionate and articulate in his sustained criticism of religion and spoke of the need for vigilance on fundamentalism. Yet, he has maintained an interest in religion and he noted how his friends ignored or often teased him about his attendance at Catholic religious services in the past. Despite his rejection of his birth religion, mainly because of their history of misogyny, Walt spoke of the value of friendly religions which he encountered while working in the US. Indeed, some of his early social justice work and health advocacy were delivered within the remit of friendlier church sponsored settings. Despite the rejection of Catholic Church teaching, his fair minded and balanced principles came to the fore by acknowledging what he witnessed of the Catholic Church's work in combatting social and economic inequality in South America.

Overall, Walt felt heartened and upbeat and talked of the many positive changes for LGBT persons within current patterns of real acceptance as related to the advances of institutional policies and legislative progress. He did highlight some health related concerns in the community, and pondered how more diverse relational and meaningful opportunities for gay men might be provided for within the community.

Coming out to his parents, Walt says "*I was incredibly privileged… "Just kind of going, A, this can be done and B. Not only did the world not cave in, actually it was absolutely fine"* (29:49).

However, he describes how the social context of religious authority impacted on him as a young boy:

> *"The only kind of difficulty or challenge I had about coming to terms of being gay was the fact that I was very religious and very involved in the Catholic Church. And so for many years that was an issue. And so when I was like in school, I just thought of it as being a sin and I kind of ignored it then"* (00:19).

Referring of his early sexual desires, Walt recalled:

> *"Vivid memories of being in a place where people were paying me attention and 'I'm going oh, fuck', I'm actually afraid of being swallowed up by it... and I wasn't properly integrating who I was you know"* (24:41)

Walt recalled an occasion where a colleague and friend disclosed his sexual identity to a senior cleric in a Catholic Organisation. They both served as volunteers in this organisation. He had never told her he was gay:

> *"She picked up something from I think somebody else...a nosy old bitch.... in fact, she probably and was so conservatively Catholic. She was probably just scandalised"* (02:23).

Her disclosure led to a high level meeting being called:

> *"A crisis meeting where I was hauled in, and the national promoter"*

At the meeting he was quizzed:

> *'What's the difference between what you're describing and having a real close friend?'*

> *'Well, Michael, I have sex with him.'* (Walt's Response)

> *"So I suppose he couldn't deal with that and I guess like technically that was anyway sex outside marriage and the fact that I was... I mean I was part of a team giving retreats to young people and stuff"* (02:23).

After this meeting with the clerical promotor, Walt said *"over a period of a year, I'd been with the group for years, I just pulled away"* (02:23). Shortly after, he also decided not to proceed with joining religious life (04:28). For a time, he continued his lay involvement in Church activities at University and recalled *"somebody complained about that guy who wears pink socks who reads at mass twice on weekends. And that was me"* (29:49).

In relation to Church teaching on being gay, Walt rejects Church teaching:

"... what was the Vatican phrase Disorder?... No?, (38:28) "Intrinsically disordered and just things like this....no moral authority at all... perhaps when it comes to poverty and fighting for the rights of the oppressed they may have some authority" (39:13).

In the absence of any other major challenges, Walt was well positioned to reject the Church's teaching at the time: *"I don't regard myself as a Catholic"* (35:19) and says he*"didn't leave because of the gay stuff...* (35:19) *"thinking like the Church is wrong on so many things. And in that instant, I just thought it was it was wrong like"* (04:28). Within this too, Walt was able to arrive at a deeper level of acceptance with his identification as a gay man: *"Not feeling inferior, or you know, not feeling sinful... and over the years, I found the way of coming to terms with who I was"* (04:28).

Referring to his friends, he says they *"politely ignored the fact that I went to Church you know... or they would tease me about it"* (39:13).

Walt talked of finding alternative ways to embrace spirituality:

"Ways in which we can really celebrate being gay and loving our sexual orientation and saying that is part of God's plan or God's creation and stuff like that. And I can say stuff like that and kind of not cringe of how corny that sounds" (39:13).

On a deeper level of spiritual knowledge of God:

"My sense of understanding of what God could be is tiny.... that's freeing... What I think is important is to try and be true to yourself... just have fun sometimes. So I try to do that" (36:50).

At University, Walt was involved in the LGB societies, saying *"I want to make this easier for other people as well"* (29:49). Over the years, he recalled *"people came up to me to say, "You really, really helped me"* (30:39).

Walt left Ireland for a number of years for the USA. He remarked on his return most of the gay men he knew had subsequently died of AIDS, with one or two exceptions... *"I was in a sense spared from being bereaved for people that I hadn't been friends with for many years, because I was out of distance"* (07:31).

In his professional life, which includes sexual health promotion, he expresses concern about the recent increases in STIs (Sexually transmitted diseases) (12:28). In a later

section of the interview, Walt says *"I would love it if we had even more places where real-like development of relationships... could be fostered"* (57:20).

He says when he was in University he tested the acceptance of his friends in saying *"you think you're great inviting us for dinner. It's when you ask us to babysit... And quite a number took me up on the challenge"* (54:35). Walt is a *"legal guardian"* (54:35) and *"is a very hands-on godfather... picking them up from crèche"* (54:35). Referring to one of the children he is guardian for, Walt said *"I'd take him to badminton, you know all of that.. He'd stay weekends"* (54:35). He says their parents are thrilled, but *"I guess I'm really sad that I haven't had my own kids and I really thought I would"* (54:35). He mentions how one of his nephews had told his friends his uncle is gay *"and actually what I think he was trying to do was say 'don't make anti-gay jokes in front of my uncle'"* (54:35).

Again, he emphasises, how he monitored boundaries in communities he had lived in the past. He says *"this is possibly as much about being a man and as being a gay man, I really police myself around children...* (53:03) in the general community. *"just worried that one of those parents* (non-related persons) *will get some idea, and then there would be war you know… and I find that sad"* (54:35), *I'm just making sure that doesn't happen so"* (56:49).

Walt thinks *"we can never become complacent about our progress or our place in society. Because you know hatred can be stirred all so easily."* (44:23). *"I really believe we have to continuously vigilant about suggestions that we are less than you know, less than other human beings"* (50:58). Here he is referring to fundamentalist thinking that *"could be stoked up"* (53:03).

Over the last few years, Walt has seen a lot of positive changes for the better in Ireland, as exampled in many institutional changes that allow for greater equality and freedom, education, policing etc. He has encountered many positive stories of LGBT visibility being well received in schools, along the lines of *"Yes bring your same-sex partners. It's your debs"* (44:23), *"So I feel very, very encouraged to be honest"* (44:23). Referring to a number of organisations he liaises with, he said their commitment to the ending of discrimination is taken very seriously – *"it isn't about optics"* (44:23). **End**

P8: Harvey

Harvey is 42, lived in Dublin all his life and now lives in London near his family. His story charts the early appropriation of shame and guilt for his gay identity. Negative family experiences within his young adolescent life also caused him significant upset and anxiety. He captures this dynamic in the statement *"While definitely my sexuality and society's attitudes towards that were important, the rest of the context was also very important"* (41:03). As his life has progressed, he has been working through his early experiences. Harvey also demonstrates a strong critical awareness of social injustice. His story is a personal narrative of co-occurring transactions of early challenges involving early betrayal, family turmoil and bullying embedded within the discriminatory sociality of Ireland. The eroding context of social stigma for sexual minorities and gender minorities in Ireland has proved very important for him in lifting the lid on how these socially mediated upsets were housed in his flow of consciousness. He is grateful for his self transcendence and is very transparent in tracking how this has happened for him. The vivid personal pictures he paints of his early life is a very moving account of how the structural logic of social taboos for divorce and sexual identity discrimination are the source of so much pained anxiety and loss in his stream of consciousness from an earlier epoch. On one hand, his story of distress and loss is a story of economic disadvantage and social status, loss of an important attachment figure which he ties to a loss of life goals. On the other hand, he refuses the negative prophecy of this constitution by exerting himself for others as part of his self-transcendence. He is very open about how he is taking charge of his remaining challenges.

Harvey in his final year of national school says he remembers hearing:

> *"..there were homosexuals and lesbians for the first time, but I was lucky I suppose he* (the child) *didn't load the information with any kind of negativity or judgment but I sensed that it was not something that was usual or standard and might entail liabilities and negative consequences"* (03:58).

Regarding his family life at this time, Harvey gave very detailed descriptions of the events in his adolescent life and beyond (Janoff-Bulman 1992). Firstly, when Harvey was seven years old, his father had left the family for work abroad:

"The promise that he would take me and my brother - that if he's there for more than three months, he'll bring us over... didn't, apparently shacked up with a woman" (33:47).

Harvey said his father had been forwarding:

"Photographs of Disney world with him (his father) *at the top of the Empire State Building and I desperately wanting to go over there to see and view this exciting place with him and doing all of these things…I mean he'd say things that would make us happy at the time because making us happy would make him happy. But there was no follow through on it. There was no substance"* (49:57).

Harvey recalled:

"In my first year at (secondary school), completely out of nowhere, my father sent divorce papers and my whole life just shattered. I got a hyper acidic stomach and diarrhoea and the entire kind of academic life totally slid (33.47).

In reference to his education, Harvey said:

"I was lauded for having won a scholarship, a half-scholarship … the emotional chaos of my family life soon eroded that." (37:25).

Harvey contextualises what happened in not being able to go to the prestigious school because of the costs involved:

"*My mother in preference to sending me there, hunted around for another school to send me to…the only way to get into a better school was a scholarship exam because you had to be on the waiting list for years to get into private schools and when I had the half scholarship which was a stretch for her, she got a grant I think from the Presbyterians which we were notionally Presbyterian"* (37:25).

Harvey recalled going to secondary school:

"*Wearing second hand clothes... in a fee paying school... I'm... I have very strong sexual feelings dominating me a lot of the time and I just felt like a complete outsider"* (37:27).

He described his mother's stress at the time and the atmosphere of his home life:

"*Basically she never partitioned her personal feelings of hurt and upset with my father. They all washed over myself and my brother… my mother would compound and ramify them by pointing them out all of the time and projecting all her frustrations and anger at myself and my brother. My grandfather who was very good when we were little became very bitter and controlling. It was his house that we lived in. He never ceased pointing this out. My father came back for a while but was coming and going intermittently, never really stayed, didn't have any job…didn't contribute a lot to the material and well-being of the family and my mother was working part-time. It wasn't a happy, happy context… My family life*

*had melted down completely, just this tsunami of hurt, washing through everybody" (*33:47).

Within this atmosphere he felt *"emotionally bullied...between loving and violent outbursts*" (37:35) and recalled further contexts of bullying and violence when he visited his relations:

> "…I was this squeaky kid who used to get picked on violently when I went there. I was quite singled out for attack on a number of occasions. So I didn't feel safe" (41:03).

Harvey recalled when he was 17 or 18,

> "Writing something down and admitted to myself I was gay... and actually finding writing the words down on the page really painful, really difficult and a struggle... and having to struggle with trying to find girls attractive and trying to fit in.. But, I didn't tell anybody until I was in my early 20's" (03:58), because "to lie, to deceive, to misdirect – all became too much" (06:10), "I really... I really didn't want to be gay. I really didn't want this burden of being different" (06:10).

In this early adulthood Harvey covered up his identity and had a heterosexual relationship for a time.

> "When it came to trying to have sexual relations with Leonie (girlfriend)… all the anxiety, all of the fear, all of the self recrimination and everything else made that an impossibility.. both the lack of interest...and by a fear of being found out for being gay" (08:02)….. I couldn't have sex with her even intensely concentrating and I was an intensely sexual person" (06:10).

Guilt surfaces here because he was *"deceiving"* her (8:53) and she being *"not particularly psychologically well"* (8:53) heightened his guilt and shame.

While noting some *"bright spots"* (09:49) he felt *"hypocrisy"* (21:13) was a *"common ethic in society"* (21:13). Harvey says being gay for him was well captured in the statement *"Don't ask, don't tell, spread society wide"* (22:10). A further context he recalled in 1980's Ireland *"gay equals AIDS equals death"* (12:21). In these contexts he found it *"very hard to anchor my identity"* (12:21), adding *"there were voices of hysteria equating homosexuality with the cause of the disease... a ticket to hell, and you're a vector for disease"* (22:10).

Harvey added the following context of being gay in Ireland:

"The end of the 1980s and start of the 1990s it was still a criminal offence. And the people who I knew to be gay were not people I identified with. We're talking public figures here. I didn't have any personal friends who I knew to be gay but I knew of people like Boy George, Julian Clary, Kenneth Williams, John Inman and I had no sexual interest in any of these people and I didn't see them as role models and the one person who did exist …. what I remember is, seeing David Norris…I do remember hearing him on the radio…not long after I found out that he was gay and I remember the interviewer. First of all, homosexuality wasn't mentioned in the interview. And he was talking about Joyce or some other kind of scholarly thing. But the interviewer treating him with respect and a sense of enjoyment in his voice and that was a beacon of hope because here was somebody who is in the public domain, who is known to be gay, who wasn't being treated as a pariah, or whose opinion was being sought and engaged with, so that was one encouraging bright spot" (09:49).

A further bright spot Harvey referred to was *"a kind of gender nonconformity around me which was a good and healthy thing"* (13:22). This relates to a theatrical show he *"used to go with my straight friends. And that's where he met Leonie* (his girlfriend) *actually."* One evening, after one of the shows, he recalled being *"almost being completely silent"* (13:22) in the company of an *"un-self consciously camp and gay…. sexual nonconformity I was too scared to go there"* (13:22), but it was an experience that acted as a *"cognitive turning point"* (13:22).

Harvey added:

"I tried to examine my feelings about that and I remember going whatever my problem is in this situation, its not his problem. It's nothing to do with who he is and how he is and I made a very conscious decision that I would never externalise my internal fear and lack of acceptance and projected in to animosity toward somebody like him..and that's kind of a sign post that I followed ever since" (13:22),*"making a much stronger effort to engage with him as a friend and we're still friends now"* (15:34).

Harvey adds further insight regarding the men he was sexually attracted to:

"I knew the guys I fancied. I knew how I wanted to see myself but there was no... there were no points of reference" (12:03), *"the martial artists, sports people, movie stars, I mean the kind of people who you do find yourself attracted to, but none of none of them are gay"* (12:21).

Harvey reflected on how he coped with the *"alienation and isolation that I felt"* (25:59), saying it:

"Just upsets me, because I think all of that was completely needless" (26:54), *"I didn't go to any gay bars until I was like 22 or 23. And I remember standing*

across the road from the George many times with my heart absolutely racing, afraid to go in and I went to Shaft nightclub before I started going to the George" (15:56).

His sexual identity at this time was about:

"Having sexual contacts. Random I suppose is the best way I describe it. I'd only gotten to my 20s. And it enabled me to keep my life compartmentalised and I'm glad I made the recognition at one point that this really was part of what was weighing heavily on my emotional well-being and my mental well-being... the sense of shame and concealment and every misdirecting statement, every pretence and all the rest were taking more and more out of me" (18:24).

Later in the interview, he mentions *"I was just driven by my impulses* (58:01), *"I wasn't a bottom* (receiver sexual position) *"and I felt that I wasn't at risk for contracting HIV, there was very little risk of spreading it, at least this was the rationalisation...."* (59:44).

When he eventually went to the gay pub:

"I was quite unlucky as well I suppose in the sense that the very first time I went to the George. And I went home with somebody I got...was it gonorrhoea? yeah and I went to the Mater which was horrific. Well actually I went to Beaumount first and then was sent to the Mater. And I remember going back for the check-up and a woman who is taking a swab, actually injured the inside of my urethra taking the swab. It hurt me badly and reactivated the infection....One doctor said to me because I have a wide urethra that probably accounts for how I have gotten gonorrhoea a couple of times and again from oral rather than anal sex but I'm fortunate I've never got HIV" (01:03:00).

Regarding his coming out Harvey says: *"I told my friends, I told my immediate family, didn't come out in work...until I reached the age of 30"* (18:24). Harvey said:

"The idea of coming out did not hold a pleasant sensation for me and as I said it wasn't until I was into my 30s that it started to ease a bit. But I still had it right up to my mid-30s. Now I do it on my own terms but I don't feel that I'm lying or concealing if I choose not to share it with somebody and I don't get a panic attack at the thought of sharing it with somebody...its taken a long time to get there" (18:24).

Harvey says it took him some time to realise *"that it would help me to have gay friends and I need to see them because I was hiding it from everybody else"* (15:56). At work one day he was asked by a work colleague if he was gay *"I said yes and then it became known in the workplace. And the sky didn't fall in on me"* (25:59). He describes it was

"*like a monkey off my back and the context of an awful lot about self-destructive behaviours that I was indulging in*" (25:59).

Regarding his current life, Harvey says he has problems with goal setting, "*longer term projects, following through*" (49:57). I asked him was this related to self-esteem? He responded:

> "*I think that I learned to sort of not engage with those goals and ambitions to let them slide because they're probably never going to happen anyway and being let down and mislead over and over again…I think is part of the difficulties I've had in framing and pursuing long term goals*" (49:57).

Harvey added "*that both myself and my brother have held on to a load of maladaptive coping mechanisms for dealing with the stress that we had growing up*" (55.54) (Gotlib and Colic, 2014). Specifically, Harvey mentioned that to not "*have sustained a romantic relationship with any individual for long periods of time... and then the feeling of not having that is in some ways, a feeling of a failure*" (51:08). Harvey said his brother also had difficulties in long term relationships, but that "*I really admire my brother because he's made some really good choices in terms of raising my nephew*" (51:08).

He said he played "*a very small role*" in arriving at a solution whereby his nephew could live in an environment that would be better for him (51:08). Having recalled his own young experience of "*being beaten up*" (51:08), he mentions how his nephew could have ended up living in a similar area in the UK to the one he had lived in Ireland:

> "*I was thinking my nephew is such a gentle boy and bringing him up in a fairly quite area is important and so moving to somewhere else is going to be disruptive and possibly dangerous for him*" (51:08).

Harvey said he recently moved to the UK in close proximity to where his mother and brother are now living:

> "*Now, I'm in a place and it's taken a lot of effort where I have a good relationship with my brother and my mother. And I can enjoy on a day-to-day basis those relationships and my mother loves having me close by and it's actually very good for me as well*" (51:08)

Harvey referred to how his interest and involvement in social justice in Ireland and the UK has made a significant difference to his personal and social development:

> "I'm very fortunate now that through activism and through being a bit political I've met some really smart people... and it's wonderful to be in the position to be able to learn from these people and to have conversations with them. And that's kind of where I think a part of my own personal development has happened over the last kind of five or six years." (26:54)

Harvey says "having something to push against is not always a bad thing" (45:27) and "yes, the current context still requires a hell of a lot of work" (01:10:20). He feels fortunate to be living in a country when he compares his experience to other countries where prejudice and criminalisation of gay people is still a reality. Harvey said "you know that you deserve to be alive and do not deserve to be killed or persecuted..." (45:27). **End**

P9: Edmund

Edmund is a 30 year old man and lives in Dublin with his partner. At the beginning of his story he talked of being bullied at school for being overweight. The theme of embodiment is a significant theme in his story. His story charts how he has reworked negative self-criticism with relational support. A very striking feature of Edmund's story is how he is conscious of creating a persona which he hoped would surprise people that he is gay. Edmund draws on the support of his partner to outmanoeuvre his self censorship. He is further able to question and resist the selective disclosure of his father regarding his upcoming civil marriage within the immediate environs of his birth family home. He said "Since I've come out, it's about a kind of a journey of self-acceptance" (03:38).

Edmund recalled earlier events, from school, where he felt excluded as a young adolescent. He talked of being bullied at school for being overweight. He says his self-esteem was so low, that he simply could not have countenanced being further ridiculed for being gay, "If they actually knew the real me who's gay. It seemed like a terrifying thing" (03:38). Around puberty, he says "his sexuality was continuously under wraps. I was kind of like, "Just don't let anyone know that you could be gay or any hints of it,

you know?" (06:58). The early fear of being seen as gay led him to want *"To look like a regular guy, that kind of idea, that kind of a straight-acting gay, if you will,"* (23:13). In general, when he decided to disclose, he had hoped his disclosure would elicit the following reaction from others:

> *"Oh wow, that guy is gay.... it was conditional actually... I was censoring myself for a lot of the time, you know. I mean, this is still something that I do battle with, you know, every now and again"* (23:13).

At 18 years old, Edmund says when he came out to his female friend, it was *"really like this wonderful thing"* (02:05). Prior to her acceptance, Edmund described his emotional state *"literally the table was shaking",* with his friend asking *"What's wrong"* (03:38). Edmund responded to her *"What would you think if I wasn't the person you thought I was?"* (03:38).

He added a further deepened reflection:

> *"When I first came out, for example, my identity as a gay man started out its life as that kind of, "I'm a gay man...but I'm not a flaming queen and I'm not X, Y and Z," ....I wanted to prove to people, "Oh well, the stereotype that you have of a gay person, that's not me"* (23:13).

While Edmund's monitoring seemed to be working against a stereotype, his struggle also resonates with his earlier experience of being bullied. He described the pain of these effects:

> *"It kind of compressed within me...gave me a real complex about rejection and hypersensitivity, it really fed in then to a sense of not being comfortable in my own skin"* (21:01), *"I was kind of like, I think I know what I am but I can't be that. And, is it okay for me to ever be that?"* (23:13).

Of his current experience Edmund says *"I don't view myself that way at all. It is very much a part of who I am now"* (23:13).

Edmund said he has been in relationship with his partner for the past seven years. His partner has been very much embraced within his family and says *"it's really lovely, actually"* (10:44). He recalled a conversation when his mother recently told him of a neighbour who is getting married. However, his mother withheld reciprocating

information regarding Edmund's upcoming civil marriage to his partner. When Edmund asked his mother why, she said.

> "'Because I know your dad is a bit kind of...can be a bit weird about that kind of thing...'

> I kind of hit the roof, actually. I was kind of like,

>> 'What do you mean?'

> Because dad was there. It was like a dinner. And he's like,

>> 'Oh, you know, people don't need to know your business", and I was like,

>> 'If I was a man marrying a woman, you wouldn't have any problem saying this to this person'.

>> 'Well, I suppose I wouldn't'" (10:44)

> "So, I got quite angry. It's little things like that, actually within this kind of broader, social spectrum that kind of everything seems mundane and normal. It's not that I walked away from there feeling like half a person... I stood my ground and to try and make him see why that would be hurtful to me" (10:44).

Edmund said his civil marriage *"that's something to be celebrated, not questioned..."* (15:23). In a later reflection on his changing relationship with his father, Edmund stated *"we're being real with each other. And because there's a dialogue. For many years there wasn't a dialogue at all"* (55:19). Shortly after this, Edmund says his mum shared the news of his civil marriage to the lady she had previously withheld her own son's marriage from. On hearing the news, this neighbour responded:

> "The son of one of the other guys down the road has had a sex change recently, so, you know... its like...this little bubble that people think they live in, you know, it doesn't actually exist, really" (10:44).

Edmund himself again notes his own familiar theme of being *"negatively appraised"* (33:27). This account surfaces on the occasion of tradesmen coming to his apartment, where Edmund contemplated concealing the evidence of his identity. Edmund began thinking what these men might:

> "Read into this.. I like kind of cute, kind of stuffed toys that kind of thing. So I had a big lot of them at the end of the bed... I knew exactly why I was thinking that. I was thinking, I don't like the idea of me being here with this possibly very heterosexual kind of burly, straight guys who are going to be looking at me, with all these soft toys and thinking, this queer or this faggot or whatever. So in my

kind of logic, it was kind of like, 'Oh, if I hide the evidence, then that wouldn't happen'" (33:27).

However, when Edmund opened up his negative projections to his partner, his partner said "*Snap out of it...it is not a healthy way of living*" (33:37). In response, Edmund says "*why should I give a shit if these guys accept me?*" (33:27). By being open, he transcends negative thinking. However, when it "*comes to showing public affection as two men.... I wouldn't know if I could trust it or not... there is still a kind of fear*" (40:19-44:42). Edmund referred to walking down the street with his partner where "*we wouldn't hold hands*" (40:19). He reflected on this further:

> "*And as you know, I don't have much of a conflict about being gay.. unfortunately the experiences I've had, I'm more in tune with the idea of what someone who I don't know will think about us*" (40:19).

Edmund says "*within his world, its not an issue at all*" (40:19), "*mundane is the word, its normal*" (47:27). I wondered about the flatness of the word 'mundane' and thought this may partially account for how he feels constrained in the broader social context. In the next section, he gives a fuller insight of his fears of embodiment in everyday contexts:

> "*You know, I think its the idea that if we're walking down O'Connell St, even if I felt okay, I feel safe now, I think I would still be thinking there's going to be one fucker who's going to come out and start saying something or yell something.. or even people looking....I've seen guys and girls walking around town now and again holding hands. When I pass, I look at them, and I smile because I think fair play to you, isn't that great. I do wish I had the courage in myself actually, to be honest... there is a kind of fear, I suppose, of kind of being judged by someone who doesn't know me*" (44:42).

In a reflection of his life experience he says "*Isn't a shame then that I still have an element within me that might be kind of prone to questioning the validity of what I've earned*" (33:27). However, Edmund said:

> "*When I look at where I am now, and how great things are that I've earned my self, my relationship and life in general, I'm very kind of content*" (33:27), "*to me, I mean, I like being who I am. I like being gay... it's a nice life that I have actually* (40:19). **End**

4.3. Key Findings

For the participants, the study demonstrates how social context constitutes, mediates and transforms self-criticism from disrespect to respect. This is the essence of what unfolded within participant accounts *"shaped by continuous interactions between a developing individual and a changing socio-historical context"* (Schoon, 2012, p. 143).

The following key findings capture this transcendent movement from disrespect to respect.

First Key Finding:

The co-occurrence of Micro (Personal Challenge) and Macro (Societal) Stigma

All of the stories disclosed a socio-historical context of shaming discourses in the public sphere. These non-facilitative conditions were concretised in the first personal flow of consciousness as negative self-critique. Within the study, the awareness of these shaming inferences was felt in varying degrees by all participants. Some of the participants experienced societal prejudice co-occurring with significant personal challenges. These dynamics in young lives caused significant levels of upset, shattering assumptions in key attachment and authority figures. In combination with the wider social context of discrimination, personal acceptance was harder for them. As interpersonal challenges co-occurred within the historical continuum of social stigma/ exclusion, these participants experienced significant levels of identity shame, creating fear, silence/secrecy, concealment, anxiety, emotional and self dysregulation. These accounts highlighted the burdensome nature of co-occurring transactions on self acceptance, generating highly negative evaluations of self in young lives. Participant self-criticism was related to an external locus of evaluation of social discrimination (Barrett-Lennard 2005). Authentic self-understandings were compromised in social stigma. Participants felt pressured to succumb to default presuppositions of sexuality and gender of an earlier epoch. This often created anxiety and invisibilisation just to fit into social normativity. Despite the negative tone of this first pattern, an incremental psychosocial recovery dynamic is evident from within the current trajectory of an accepting culture. Social acceptance was positively related to personal authenticity. Patient self-critique co-evolves with social critique.

Second Key Finding:

Macro (Societal) Stigma without experience of personal challenge.

When the pervasive cultural repertories of stigma were not combined with personal challenges, the self was in a much stronger position in meeting episodic life challenges as they occurred. Relational stability from close others increased resilience and lessened the impact of a stigmatising social context. While dependent and sensitive to social context, they had developed an inter-dependence of structural stigma and were able to separate out negative impact and robustly confront disrespect as it occurred. Indeed, with the security of internalised respect and self love (Neuhouser 2008), these participants were often propelled by discrimination to remedy the injustice in private and public ways.

Third Key Finding:

Changing Gender Socialisation

Many of the study participants talked of going to great lengths to fit in to normative ideas of gender. An implication for aspects of this finding may relate to the stress of males norms/stereotypes and binary roles. Default expectations of gender created anxiety and fears of rejection. A perception of how male gender should be performed in everyday contexts was evident (Way 2011; Butler, 1990). However, this is changing as many participants take action to confront and challenge this social inheritance. Awareness of social change, created new possibility beyond close minded ideas. Emotional literacy is strengthened and father-son relationships were healed. The residue of old ideas as embodiment triggers is still struggled with in some everyday contexts. Conservative and some negative judgments may be related. Open transmission and expression of vulnerability about this pattern with significant others chips away at negativity and creates new choices.

Fourth Key Finding:

Reconciling lack of acceptance within a friendlier and respectful culture.

This finding is set within the repertoires of an accepting social culture where cultural stigma is a much less pervasive factor of the lifeworld. While interpersonal rejection did complicate identity acceptance, the current social milieu lends much more personal power in resolving these personal challenges (Eichas, et al 2015). A less discriminatory social context enables a faster resolve/reconciliation of any relational difficulties experienced within families arising from sexual identity disclosure (Lott 2010). A positive self regard within an accepting culture was positively related to the expression of authenticity.

Fifth Key Finding:

Respect as the power of acceptance

The fifth and final finding relates to a sociality of respect for gay men's identities in Ireland. Within this finding, the current transformation in positive identity appropriation is being realised within current experiences of being gay men in Ireland. The move to respect is a multilevel and reciprocal process involving positive change in self understanding, acceptance among others and an increased cultural acceptance for diversity. All the stories exampled transforming experiences as a steady increase in self-acceptance and one where they acknowledged how important less discrimination is to a satisfying and meaningful existence. It is this finding of increasing freedom, inclusiveness, respect and concern for others that best captures the personal experience of being gay in Ireland today.

Researcher Reflection on the Key Findings

In listening and analysing the stories, I could feel my own history as a gay man and its evolvement, where negativity had dominated at certain points in my own life. I was very conscious and present to the episodes where complex challenges were described. Particularly, the intersections of religious stigma with the simultaneous disruptions of personal contexts, cascading in a negative direction within the historic life contexts of

some participant accounts. Hearing these participants speak so openly about those struggles, reminded me how shame and disrespect had constituted my own thoughts and feelings about being a gay man in Ireland.

I was equally engrossed by the experiences which stated less experiential complexity, and how this seemed to free up the flow of consciousness. These men seemed better equipped in not soaking up discriminatory and stigmatising inferences. This protected them from the experience of prolonged shame or any lack of acceptance for whom they were as persons. This pro-activeness was relationally mediated, creating a robustness where negative self-critique can be externalised, expressed and managed. The job of self-transformation was buffered by privilege. Whereas, the disrespected self can often unwittingly lean into the prophecy of his conditions with bad predictions from others, set within power relations and social norms. However, strength of character and reaching out to available support can out-smart and undo cumulative disadvantages. The transcending self is then more cognisant of what he has survived - this is his authenticity. This is realised as the foundedness of the society persistently critiques its social arrangements that can cause harm.

Taking action, individually and collectively to change life situations proved important. Their transformed experiences required of me to join with participants in their increased sense of value, regard, sense of equality, connectedness, increases in intelligent thought, pride, personal morality, virtue, integrity and trust. As researcher, I too was transformed in tracking how participants related to themselves, their changing relationships and their changing sense of culture. I empathised with the weight of a burdensome sociality and the current contexts of progressive change in the self-concept. I got a strong sense from all participant accounts that self-respect is something that one is working for all the time. As a forty nine year old gay man who has lived in Ireland all his life, the power of being able to transform one's sense of self in the face of very complex challenges had strong resonance for me, my family and my friends. This phenomenon is an incremental process of ongoing insight. When I reflect on my privilege and those of the participants, we must be humble in recognising that others may not have been so fortunate in overcoming the complex interactions of our troubled national heritage of prejudice and exclusion. We should also celebrate how we learn

and improve as we go. As these stories illustrate, self-critique within the self-concept can also be a site of resistance as a powerful propensity that drives personal, interpersonal and institutional social change. Furthermore, an investment in descriptive patterns from concrete social realities means our knowledge is *"transcending the separation between theory and practice"* (Stetsenko, 2015, p.103).

4.4. Summary and Conclusions

The present study reveals how the experience of being a gay male in Ireland is influenced by personal, inter-personal and societal contexts. Despite significant variations in their early experiences, a core experience of self-respect is being realised as less negative self-critique within affirming social contexts. The social character and current repertoires of Irish society is to stress its inclusiveness of diversity, reducing associated health risks traditionally associated with the predictors of social exclusion (Richman, Martin and Guiding, 2015; DeWall 2013). These current affirming contexts were positively related to increased visibility and social freedom. Participants were able to state vulnerability as a way of gaining more autonomy to deal with ongoing challenges. Less pervasive fear of a lack of acceptance arises in a context where sexual and gender minorities are now protected by anti-discrimination laws. The efforts of social justice advocacy are highly significant for self-transcendence (Ryan 2015; Johnson 2013). Where current personal problems persisted, a current vulnerability toward negative self-criticism may be traced to complex personal experiences that undermined self-confidence. However, the transformation of social discourses lends all participants greater opportunity for re-working negative self-critique. Personal and social resilience facilitates sincerity and authenticity. It unearths and erodes the damage of negative self-criticism learned from difficult transactions of social discrimination and personal challenges of earlier epochs.

This change can also be accounted for in changing relationships and changing power structures where civil society leaves behind religious based understanding of sexuality that dominated Irish law (Daly 2012). The next chapter situates the central findings by drawing on theoretical literature that resonate with the findings of the study.

Chapter Five: **Discussion of The Findings**

5.1. Introduction

I begin this discussion with the acknowledgement of the positive nature of this finding from disrespect to respect for the self concept. The current affirming societal context lifts the lid on early challenges, where participants are now freer to give voice to what they had been previously soaked up in a prejudicial society, re-configuring negative self-critique toward pride and restorative frames of self-reference that engender gratitude for personal and social change. I view the idea of the self concept as a transaction within the conditions of sociality of self-determining agents. The self-concept can be also thought of as the habitat for the flow of consciousness, its pre-reflective character and a conscious sense of selfhood (Zahavi 2014). Furthermore, a first personal 'me-ness and mine-ness' (Zahavi 2013) takes possession of lifeworld conditions at pre-egoic and ego levels of self-concept organisation (Moran 2014). This formulation is how the self-concept appropriates, possesses and transcends experience, where experiential growth is characterised as a site of both constitution and resistance, which is its potential for freedom.

For many of the participants, the essence of disrespect in the findings seemed like a highly charged and excessive self-critique, an experience that was so sensitised to interpersonal rejection and social structures of stigma. These non-facilitative social conditions had a painful and debilitating impact on the self concept and often proved difficult to rework in historical time. A normative self deceives and pains himself in the the introjection of social norms and its projection. Personal challenges in young lives in combination with social discrimination made self-transcendence more difficult. Normative social arrangements create negative concretions of thought in a disrespected self-concept, lowering the spectrum of the imaginable (Jaeggi 2014) of human potential. The ill at ease self often believed and succumbed to the normative power and frames of external stigma. This speeded up the self-concept in a defensive and depressive posture that conceals great sadness and loss. At times, some of the stories had a chilling and depressing effect on participant autonomy. Some were very vulnerable to believing what

the non-affirming contexts were saying about them. Feelings of insignificance were related to false selves to gain approval.

However, within a few decades, the scale and extent of social change is a remarkably life affirming psychosocial phenomenon. When current personal experiences are understood within the logic of earlier socio-historic contexts of personal development, what essentially shines forth is a re-appropriation involving self-transformation and social authenticity.

This discussion positions recognition theory as the most appropriate way of capturing the broad trajectory from disrespect to respect in self-transformative and transcendent processes of self-critique. As the chapter progresses, further theories are discussed that resonate with the findings. I mainly utilise critical social theories in the spirit of self-determination and humanism. However, the latter is somewhat naive on the transacting power of wider social structures and default pre-assumptions of cultural repertoires for the self-concept. Any effacement of social power-relations is ethically problematic. This can mean existing theories lack a critical narrative with normative moral intent. Existing normative theories of identity correlate symptoms which can reify minority sexual identity in a generalist way without the grasping the deeper logic of the constituted subject and its modes of resistance. Right now, theoretical constructions are dichotomised in resilience and vulnerability narratives of gay men's lives. The theories I have chosen have a dual intent. The first is to discuss theories that are most contextually resonant with the stories in Chapter Four. The second is to deepen theoretical understanding of concrete social realities for practice.

5.2. Recognition Theory

In 2014, as I journeyed in the analysis of this study, I encountered for the first time the critical social philosophy of Axel Honneth. Honneth is referred to as a third generation theorist of the Frankfurt School tradition of Critical Social Theory (Anderson 2011). He is best known for his influential theory of recognition in the social sciences. Recognition is a theory of social justice. Axel Honneth's (1995-2014) body of work tracks the changing patterns of how personal and collective struggles progress evolving societies (Zurn 2015;

Petherbridge 2013; 2011). His theory provides pragmatic concepts for understanding how claims for recognition are dependent on others and institutions. The theory distinguishes basic forms of recognition as pre-conditions for successful living: e.g. the particularity of love and care, universal respect based on moral worth/regard for the equal rights of others, and social esteem based on recognition for contributions to shared life goals (Honneth 1995). Honneth draws on Hegelian philosophy (1770-1831). Where I found Honneth's writings particularly insightful was how his critical project captured the early contexts of participant experience and their expanded sense of social freedom within the current social zeitgeist. An opening line within one of his essays entitled 'Personal Identity and Disrespect' read: *"Inherent in our everyday use of language is a sense that human integrity owes its existence, at a deep level, to the patterns of approval and recognition..."* (p. 43). It was an opening line that stayed with me as an empathic memory trace of intuitive contact of participant life stories in Ireland. Participants spoke explicitly how personal integrity was often violated from expectations of prejudicial social interactions and conventions. This created struggles in personal acceptance and also illustrates how the patterning of social affirmation defines the current structure for personal meanings as social freedom.

With Hegel's accompaniment, in *The Philosophy of Right* (1991/1820), Honneth (2012) commits himself to the sociality of reason as important, where the early capacity to relate well to oneself requires being proximate to degrees of love, respect and esteem from others. Hegel viewed the development of human consciousness (as a self) moving toward a self-consciousness (a sense of identity), where there is a desire for self-consciousness as distinct and unique among others. Honneth (2012) says these key ideas *"occupy a central position"* (p. 6) for Hegel as a 'being-oneself-in-an-other' and is Honneth's deepest agreement with Hegel (Pippin, 2015, p. 151). Honneth (2009) also combines insights from Kantian philosophy, sociology, anthropology and psychoanalysis for grounding his concrete account of historicity as advancements in social justice and social progress. His theory is an ethical expanse on existing theories for understanding personal and interpersonal experience, and how the social/political sphere impacts psychological development (Zurn 2015; Meehan 2011). His critical humanism has distinct critical value for thinking how a developing person grows in self-understanding, how a relational development is dependent on others, and then to consider the transactions of the broader

social reasoning of cultural repertoires. Consistent with this interpretation, many social science theorists credit Hegel with the broad idea that *"self-definition as something that comes in degrees depending on the scope that is available historically for the fulfillment of human needs and the expression of human capacities"* (Smith and O'Neill, 2012, p. 9). This is a critically important insight of recognition theory given the socially mediated power of social reasoning for the evolving self-concept in time.

I define disrespect as a negative life experience, a a form of negative critique carried in the self-concept. It captures varying degrees of challenge. For some of the participants, negative self-criticism was internalised for long periods, with significant impact on self-esteem. These conditions often involved difficult life contexts for human potential, where some participants had to struggle for their value as minority persons without support. While vulnerability is common for humanity, the social mediation of structural exclusion and discrimination added further weight to negative self-criticism. Fear of disclosure created a propensity for self-criticism and heightened sensitivity to interpersonal rejection. These contexts caused pain, anxiety and isolation. Dominant social prejudices combined with personal challenges cascaded in a direction where self-efficacy as positive identity appropriation was undermined. To overcome the feedback loops of social stigma and bad predictions from others, some participants felt they had to conceal their authenticity in an attempt to fit into prescriptive norms. Within the experience of disrespect, dominant religious ideas on homosexuality, were often combined with interpersonal religious and social rejection. However, social discrimination as disrespect, without personal proximate challenges, created a more secure space for actualising and developing critical resistance. These participants were better able to protect and defend their personal boundaries from social discrimination.

I define respect as a positive appropriation of lived experience. What comes into view from all the participant's experience is that being gay is much less fraught with the fear of socially mediated criticism and rejection. Social acceptance and affirmation is strongly related to self-transformation. The agile transcendent self drives himself to overcome default pre-suppositions that had previously interfered with positive actualisation. Our current social context seems much more open and socially differentiated rather than homogenous and exclusionary. These less coercive conditions empower a more creative

self, whose flow of consciousness is not interrupted in negative introjections from a hostile social culture. There is greater freedom to choose association without the need for concealment. The power of social acceptance is also positively related to reconciliation with others from past hurts.

For psychotherapy, recognition theory has distinct value over shame theory. Shame as an affect is difficult to treat and transcend (De Young 2015; Timulak, 2015; Dearing and Tangney, 2011; Nussbaum 2004). The vocabulary of disrespect to respect may facilitate a deeper insight into how a lack of social acceptance for being gay is related to shame sensitivity and how current contexts are eroding that dynamic. Even within the most pained experiences of social shame within the storied findings, there was a movement away from concealment and toward acceptance of oneself. This is the reverse of the concealing movement of shame. According to recognition theory, resistance to social disrespect can motivate the struggle for legitimate self-respect among others. This authenticity is an inter-subjective accomplishment in the erosion of structurally legitimated shame. This vocabulary captures the context transcendent experiences of the nine gay men interviewed for this study. Their stories are discussed in the following key findings.

5.3. The Findings

First Key Finding

The co-occurrence of Micro (Personal Challenge) and Macro (Societal) Stigma

This finding is about personal and social challenges that undermine the self-concept. In analysing the stories, positive self-understandings were at times sorely tested within the co-occurrence of societal stigma combined with interpersonal challenges in young lives. These periods involved negative self-criticism and increased identity shame. Personal challenges transacting with discriminatory cultural repertories added complexity to participant's lives. How society was organised added insult to the personal vulnerabilities common to our humanity (Fraser 2008).

Automatic behavioural responses were often reactive and fear based. Not fitting in with the normative prescriptions of the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990, p. 206) combined with interpersonal challenges and losses confirmed a lower self status which proved difficult to rise above within young lives. Within this set of challenges, participants described depressive and anxious states (P2,3,4,5,8,9), prolonged negative self-criticism from social conventions (P1,2,3,4,8). Romantic relationships of short duration were sometimes associated with twin taboos of early life contexts (P3,8) and loss of opportunity to be a parent through social discrimination (P7). One other participant spoke of his devalued sense of self-worth as a gay parent when comparing his value to heterosexual parents (P1), narrowing the scope of positive human development (Nussbaum 2011).

A purposive sense of self-efficacy (Bandura 1997) seemed to get mired in co-occurring negative events where the agent's status is concretised as inferior within historic contexts of social exclusion (Teunis and Herdt, 2007; Abrams, Hogg and Marques, 2005; Marcus 2005). With the added complexity of personal challenges, some participants were not able to see societal stigma for what it was as it occurred in historical time. They were not able to rise above negative self-criticism, often retreating, covering up identity, and remaining identified in feelings of shame within historic social contexts of exclusion (Maycock et al, 2009; Fonagy and Higgitt, 2007). The power of religious discourse in Irish society actively shaped social disapproval. Being viewed as morally deviant was a consistent theme (P1,3,4,5,6,7,8,9). All participants in their early development did not want to draw attention for being different.

Further examples of other-mediated shame were a lack of eye contact with others (P3), feeling that one has to prove oneself more (P2,7), staying close to the safety of one's environs (P4,6), wanting to be liked and fitting in (P1,2, 9), trying to re-condition sexual attractions (P5,8) going to great lengths to conceal embodied cues of identity (non-stereotypical representations) (P5,9), high work activity and not taking care of oneself (P2). It was preferable to pretend, to compartmentalise, in an effort not to lose face. Two participants spoke of gravitating towards religious vocation in order to be good, where religion was viewed as a benign force in creating meaning (P3,4). Some other participants were interrogated by Catholic religious authorities (P3,4,7). One participant was offended

by a business colleague in his disrespectful social inferences of his gay identity (P6). Another recalled how his identity was classified as 'a vector of disease' (P8), feeling sinful (P7) and feeling 'dirty' (P1).

Honneth (2008a/1995) says these experiences *"can bring the identity of a person as a whole to a point of collapse"* (p. 43). Jaeggi (2014) refers to these types of experience as *"when she cannot relate to herself and (thereby) to her own preconditions, that is, when she cannot appropriate them as her own"* (p. 37). Honneth (2008a/1995) adds:

> *"The successful integration of physical and emotional qualities of behaviour is, as it were, subsequently broken up from the outside, thus lastingly destroying the most fundamental form of practical relation-to-self, namely, one's underlying trust in oneself"*

> (Honneth, 2008a/1995, p. 44).

There were many vivid examples in this data of how the transcendent principle of God through the transactions of organised religion, the State and important others created a range of experiences from ostracising rejection to inferred disapproval (P3,4,6,7,8). The exclusionary discourse of religion wielded extraordinary power in private and public lives. This is where religion was a legitimated mechanism of social control. Within some of the accounts, religious personnel behave in a self-serving ways in concealing the exact nature of its own historic past (Holohan 2011). In its efforts not to lose face, religious personnel often scapegoated a minority identity. Its pathologising inferences was legitimated in normative frameworks for understanding sexuality adopted in legal and social norms (Daly, 2012; Duffy and Sheridan 2012; Duffy, 2011; CDF 1975; 1986; 1992). The Church was able to operate within a naturalised identity claim creating significant personal upset (Inglis 2012). The logic for this religious activity was institutionalised in social discourses and affordances (Holohan 2011; O'Gorman 2009; Madden 2003).

The transcendent absence of a loving spirit was palpable for considerable tracts of time in many of the participants stories. Religion in Ireland has its imprimatur through the state apparatus for all levels of education and social care. The state subsidisation it currently enjoys and its symbolic presence in the public sphere makes it a force to be reckoned (McCrea, 2010; 2009). Organised religions have been in existence for a long time and

have been a consistent site of controversy for how it understands the transcendent principle of love. It continues to act as an affront to the state in its political accusation of engineering injustice (D'Arcy, 2014). Yet, it has never once acknowledged how its own political engineering managed to create an identity for itself in historical time. It seldom admits how the logic of its own self advancement in Ireland has shaped and curtailed religious meaning in the lives of our minority citizens.

When participants (P2,4) did come forward for therapy, what was striking about some of the described clinical interventions was a lack of sensitivity for the emotional and social isolation that some had experienced from within earlier time periods when social discrimination and prejudice were high in Ireland. This critique may sound over-critical of individual psychotherapists. However, my criticism is aimed more at a lack of visibility of Irish psychotherapy regulatory frameworks on complex themes of social justice/ inequality for sexual and gender minorities in Ireland. While there have been notable exceptions (e.g. PSI 2015; Berkeley 1993), Irish psychotherapy regulation and leadership needs to be more proactive in incisive social analysis/critique of earlier time periods (Aldarondo 2007). The complex mix of personal challenges in young lives in the context of social discrimination, meant many of the participants had to carry a disproportionate weight of historic stigma. Many authors have written about complex vulnerabilities which are not sufficiently recognised or acknowledged at the time of their occurrence (Nussbaum 2011; Butler 2009; 2004). Given that psychotherapy has often been viewed as one of the protagonists of heteronormativity, where some schools of therapy directly contributed to pathologisation of sexual minorities, the issues of vulnerability are undoubtedly complex and require significant sensitivity in how they are handled (Levine, Risen, and Althof, 2010). Fonagy, Bateman and Luyten (2012) emphasise how adolescence is a critical period for identity formation. He stresses the value of interventions to mentalise thoughts and feelings within the continuum of multiple inequalities (Fonagy, et al, 2015). He stresses early interventions can prevent the sedimentation of negative thought patterns (Fonagy et al, 2002). Clinical psychoanalytic writings have recently acknowledged the implications of gay male identity as devalued social citizenship (Lynch 2015). Zahavi (2012) writes how *"prototypical forms of shame provide vivid examples of other-mediated forms of self-experience"* (p. 763). In my view, developmental psychoanalysis has struggled in its socially weightless constructions,

offering an occluded contextualist view of sexual desire. However, social contextualism is now evident in psychodynamic theory (Wachtel 2014; 2008).

Some further clinical literature has stressed how the effects of national prejudice can be intensified when combined with personal challenges (Pachankis and Bernstein 2012; Arreola 2010; Isay, 2009; Teunis and Herdt, 2007). While the languages of shame, homophobia and internalised homophobia grasp social and religious discrimination (Ritter and Terndrup, 2002), a deeper appreciation is certainly required for understanding the complexities of patterned disrespect in navigating the social world. Existing theories that focus on social experiences often place considerable weight on inferring that identity is constituted within social discourses (Bohan and Russell, 1999; Bohan 1996). However, what is less stressed within some social constructionist accounts is how an active person appropriates the experience of the social (Guilfoyle 2014). More psychologically based theories privilege an active person, where agency is constructed as an individual achievement in the context of relationships (DeYoung 2015; Kaufman 1996; Miller 1996; 1985). Both these emphases on the social and psychological are useful frames. However they ought to be combined into a more expanded psychosocial narrative. Cultural heritage repertoires and social justice advocacy themes can be added to existing sociological and psychological understandings. Right now, these knowledge bases, in particular, the language of international human rights are not sufficiently integrated within clinical knowledge (Prilleltensky and Nelson, 2013; Pieterse, Hanus and Gale 2013). However, social psychology empirical research is drawing on environmental psychosocial patterning of social stigma, aiming to understand how multiple disadvantage can potentially transact in creating extra burdens of social inequalities for sexual and gender minorities (Link, Phelan and Hatzenbuehler, 2014; Schrock, Sumerau, and Ueno, 2014; Jaspal and Breakwell, 2014; Major and O'Brien, 2005). The language of critical social theory also interrogates institutional patterns of social and moral reasoning (Allen 2016; Zurn 2015; Honneth 2014; Forst 2014; Petherbridge 2013; McNay 2012; Balbus 2010). As a compliment to personal and interpersonal theory, recognition theory as an interdisciplinary approach for understanding self-determination, takes a wide view of inter-subjectivist recognition as "*sensitive to the changed sociopolitical circumstances of advanced western democracies at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries*" (Zurn, 2015 p. 1).

The key message to take from this finding is that those participants who experienced personal challenges within earlier time periods were more vulnerable to internalising the social feedbacks of wider patterns of social and institutional discriminations. However, participants did survive negative transactions of the personal and the social. It took personal and relational strength to undo social discrimination in combination with difficult personal circumstances that are common to all humanity. More critically, I want to strongly defend against the idea that suffering or victimisation were merely subjectivist experiences in young lives. Rather, I take the position that interpersonal challenge and structural domination/discrimination can remain silent injuries with significant implications for wellbeing. This social pattern is seldom acknowledged. However, a generic vulnerability of minority identity is a misrecognition of the risks involved. Within this, I want to further suggest that quantitive correlations that constitute minorities within associated symptoms may not grasp the contextual specification of other-mediated social and historic disrespect. Without practitioners understanding the psychosocial logic of these transactions, *"individuals may feel unwilling or unable to act as agents of their own interests"* (McNay, 2012a, p. 230). Without a critical discourse of understanding and application, 'objectivist' deficit correlation may further conceal and heighten historic shame and create distrust. The humanistic space of both research and practice has an ethical remit to critically grasp the space of reasoning in studying human emotions and values. Otherwise, the paradox can be in our desire to help, we may end up being unwittingly complicit in apportioning a level of judgement that is not acknowledging the deeper complexity of violations to human dignity and integrity.

The contextualist nature of this pattern is how difficult lifeworld conditions can offend the flow of consciousness in negative self-criticism. While suffering is common to humanity, the structural mediation of exclusion for sexual minorities adds an extra complication in the desire for an authentic existence. For practice, this could manifest as a highly defended or passive dynamic in the client, where a pained and disrespected self cannot create a mindful space for expressing vulnerability, upset, loss and sadness. The therapist has a moral duty and obligation to attune to how the ideas of social intentionality can do its work from socially mediated feedback effects on the flow of consciousness (Zahavi 2013; Honneth 2013). I have given significant attention to this finding because of its importance. For the discipline of psychotherapy, it is potentially the most informative

finding for complex presentation. It is also the most ethically sensitive in an attempt to shift from generic to contextual exemplars of vulnerability. The aim is not to increase toxins in the self-concept, rather unravel it in a positive direction.

Second Key Finding:

Macro (Societal) Stigma without experience of personal challenge.

The second key finding captures how participants managed in the context of social discrimination without significant interpersonal challenge. The first basic insight to be noted is the positive effect on self-control (Bandura 1997). If anything, disrespect was proactively responded to, by transcending the affects of shame as it occurred. Wider social discrimination did not appear to interfere with creative strategies for developing personal and social resilience. Without personal challenge, there was greater room for a reflective agent to tackle and take on what a discriminatory social context entailed. Self-acceptance of personal identity was more robust and internalised. Less alienation meant self-transcendent experiences without significant conflict was a greater possibility in early life. Thus, episodic experiences of rejection or disapproval were not internalised as prolonged pained experiences. The combinations of dependable and reliable relational supports, social class standing, seemed to positively interact in shaping transitions in life without any substantive risks to well-being. The resilient and agile self also seeks help from others, is able to be vulnerable with others and is keen to support others (Kristjansson 2007; Dillon 1995). That said, participants were not untouched by interpersonal slights and losses. Honneth (2007) in charting the history of social change, says citizen struggle for recognition can arise from the experience of being disrespected in the reduction of social freedom. Evidence of this motivational impulse was consistent with this finding. Participants had attained a level of confidence to know that social discrimination did not define them. That level of confidence enabled them to turn the gaze outward, anger was not directed inward in negative self-criticism. They were not derailed, nor did they ruminate. They knew about the social architecture of discrimination but were determined to make it insignificant within what they felt was their legitimate freedom in getting on with the business of their everyday lives. Within this too, all

participants were able to make consistent inroads in tackling macro and micro discriminations in their everyday existence. The reason-governed resolve of the participants suggests a level of internalised esteem and an incremental rise of self-esteem in the flow of consciousness in their navigation of friendly and even difficult proximate relationships. This was strongly evident when they fought back and stood up for themselves and fought for others when confronted with disrespect in interpersonal contexts. A robust sense of self does not ruminate in external constraints, it values its relational support and boundaries and views its rewards as a privilege in the expression of gratitude. Some of the participants did not foreground difference in wider contexts and stays in close proximity to what works for helping others. These are the multifaceted ways in which persons make a contribution.

Third Key Finding:

Changing Gender Socialisation

This finding had a strong social flavour where meanings of one's gender seemed to be very much influenced by the repertoires of social conventions (Hall and Lamont, 2009). The struggle involved feeling that one must perform gender to avoid being stereotyped (P1,2,4,5,9) or a fear that succumbing to a stereotype marks a person out as gay identified in the public sphere (P4,5,9). The younger participants grappled with this dynamic more openly. Older participants with notable exceptions seemed less consciously aware of the influence of gender norms. They were more conscious of sexual identity stereotypes. A globalised context, seems to open up a window on how gender norms were previously taken for granted from an enclosed cultural heritage. Thus, a stronger emotional literacy relating to embodied gender expression and identity is now more evident. What was taken for granted is now questioned, what was internally checked in conflicted thoughts is now brought out into the open (O'Neill 2015). Openness reveals layers of self-critique in what was previously internalised. A further theme within this pattern, was how some fathers were much less supportive of their son's disclosure compared to mothers, siblings and peers. Connell (1992) captures how men can *"face structurally-induced conflicts about masculinity - conflicts between their sexuality and their social presence as men"* (p. 77).

In the case of the youngest participant (P5) he felt pressured by his Muslim father and uncle that he should marry a girl. Ahmed (2007) refers to this as *"the heterosexual couple is "instituted" as a form of sociality through force"* (p. 84) *"for the boy to follow the family line he "must" orientate himself toward woman as loved objects"* (p. 85). This participant talked of the pained anxiety of this expectation and how the current context of Ireland has facilitated his resistance to this pressure. The themes of reconciliation and acceptance were also evident in other father-son relationships where earlier conflict had been evident (P1,2,4,5,9).

Larmore (2010) touches off another important dynamic in his writings on the 'natural self' (p.3-7). The main point is 'the natural self' as the expected self is lost to itself as a pressure to be something that is pre-ordained and outside of one's control. In exemplifying this point, Larmore (2010) cites the French poet Valery *"when we seek to become our natural self, we thus institute, counter to our very objective, a distance between ourselves, and this supposed self"* (p.4). The participants spoke very movingly how they had tried to fit in, to be liked, and trying to be consistent with the perceptions of family expectations and social expectations. The natural self is one that gives in to the social norm for fear of criticism and rejection. In this experience, an authentic mode of engagement is lost to a surface character. Traditional mindsets can even critique embodied identity and expression, or hold conservative beliefs in varying contexts. One participant gravitated toward contexts that mirrored his limited sense of freedom consistent with earlier times. The cues of self-criticism could well be early introjections that provoke critical projections onto others. Rather than being at ease with oneself, mere toleration seemed to block self-compassion. This is a dialectical interplay of the socially extended self in time. Larmore (2010) says the pretence of naturalness is *"pursuing an impossible ideal, we can only put on a show of sincerity in the sense of being natural or authentic"* (p. 4), and citing La Rochefoucauld's famous observation *"Nothing makes it so difficult to be natural as the desire to appear so"* (p. 4).

The valence of social norms within the social theory of recognition, is captured as a social sensitivity where *"it is impossible to conceive of a self arising outside social experience"* (Mead, 1934, p. 140), and intimately linked to *"personal integrity"* (Fraser and Honneth, 2003, p. 133). Gender socialisation placed an expectation on some of the

men to be a certain way. Thus, *"conventions limit the spectrum of the imaginable; they shape and limit possibilities of experience – conventional ways of life encourage the masking of practical questions"* (Jaeggi, 2014, p. 67).

The stories illustrated the ready to hand nature of social gender discourses and their varying effects. In viewing something as 'ready to hand', is an idea borrowed from Heidegger (1927/1962). This extends to his signature idea of 'Being-in-the-world' as something that cannot be switched off. Rather, being-in-the-world is constitutive of being human. What is ready to hand is demonstrated in how participants consistently made reference to others, the reactions of others, and their perceptions of social cues as informative. There is a distinct adaptive value in being able to take in information so readily. Critical theory envisages self determining agents being able to question the wider *"institutional foundedness of a particular type of society"* (Honneth, 2008c, p. 784). Honneth (2014) expands on this in more recent work: *"the power to arrive at one's own judgements, is not just some contingent human quality, but the essence of our practical-normative activity"* (p. 17). How participants interpret this activity and make meaning from social conventions on gender was related to choices participants felt they could make within a diverse range of human situations involving social freedom and freely chosen association. While there was a good level of awareness on social norms, there was still a fear of discrimination in everyday public contexts (P4,9). Embodiment requires conscious expressive practice in moving beyond fear, where choices are consciously made. The patterns of approval and disapproval are still felt at implicit levels of self organisation. The more explicit the thoughts, agents see the habit for what it is. Rather than feeling constituted, changing contexts provide the extended support for conscious appropriation and transformation. Self transcendence recognises how norms are co-constituting and reinforcing.

Fourth Key Finding:

Reconciling lack of acceptance within a friendlier and respectful culture.

This is part of the movement toward respect where it becomes more obvious how an accepting culture for minority identities means negative patterns of self-criticism are

loosened. The finding was evident in descriptive statements of increased self-confidence and esteem. It meant participants are not compartmentalising or covering up identity out of fear. With the passing of time, all participants spoke with a sense of assertiveness and authority in reflecting on their historical experiences, increasing the scope of autobiographical depth and integrity to their lived experience of being gay men in Ireland. There was much less fear for speaking openly and candidly about the past. (Carr 2014; Nussbaum 2011). Old hurts can be transformed within an affirming culture. Within the finding, the theory of recognition expresses the wish that *"every subject is free from being collectively denigrated, so that one is given the chance to experience oneself to be recognised, in light of one's own accomplishments and abilities, as valuable to society"* (Fraser and Honneth 2003, p. 130). This basic premise is essential for what Honneth terms *"autonomous participation in public life"* (1995, p. 107).

Psychological literature on self-determination says one of the functions of identity relatedness is self-esteem, helping to foster connection and belongingness and the development of individual/collective core competencies, *"providing vehicles for self-development and self-expression, as well as outlets for the vital engagement of self in social activities"* (Ryan and Deci, 2012, p. 241-2). Within critical theory literature, Joel Anderson (2013) says integrity is established in the intimate and public sphere where individuals acquire a *"basic sense of belonging and worth,"* (p. 142). Deranty (2009) says *"Subject formation and social integration are intimately inter-linked, this means both an expansion of subjective identity features, and an expansion of recognition at the social level"* (p. 277). This critical insight suggests complex processes of recognition are socially evolving within the *"interplay of identifications, expectations and attitudes"* (Renault, 2011, p. 208).

What became apparent in this pattern is how older struggles are replaced by newer preoccupations, goals in career, relationships, and examining previous losses of opportunity. These stories may be read as redemptive story lines (McAdams 2008), restorative self experiences (Kohut 1977) and recovery oriented narratives (McAdams 2015; Amercing and Schmolke, 2009). In essence, more positive messages from the reasoning of the social lifeworld has reduced the impact of negative/exclusionary ideas of earlier social norms on the self-concept. These newer contexts of affirmation and

acceptance have certainly reduced risks to wellbeing. The significance of being valued transforms a previous sense of insignificance from past hurts.

Some participants within this finding still had residual negative self-critique. These are peripheral rather than constitutive and recent social contexts are now conducive to transforming old cognitions of self-censorship. This means there was an increasing range of experiences where participants found opportunity to view themselves constructively in diverse contexts. Jaeggi's (2014) critical insights has strong resonance with this finding. She talks of:

> "*A broadly understood capacity of knowing and dealing with oneself; having access to or command over oneself and the world. This can be explicated as the capacity to make the life one leads, or what one wills and does, one's own; as the capacity to identify with oneself and with what one does; in other words, as the ability to realise oneself in what one does; the task of becoming oneself through one's own deed*" (Jaeggi, 2014, p. 37).

While participant awareness of this dynamic is important, insight is not enough. Change required taking action by not giving in to old ideas. In other words esteem/respect is built in social actions not just thoughts. A newer power is realised in re-working old ideas. Some participants still talked of their remaining challenges where their own actions, feelings, thoughts were still not congruent with current prosocial realities. In other words, experiences can sometimes be out of sync with current contexts. At the same time, most of the participants were able to identify these feelings and acknowledged where their actions had the effect of short-changing themselves. Some were critical of themselves in being caught up self critical and defeatist patterns. However, social change presents a horizon where there is enhanced opportunity *"to lead one's life as one's own"* (Jaeggi 2014, p. 47). This critical theorist is also influenced by Hegel's phenomenology *"an individual cannot know what s/he is until he has made himself a reality through action"* (p. 205). This is how one becomes the author of one's life (McAdams, and Guo, 2015). Jaeggi (2014) further argues this self-determining principle must *"presuppose identifying with oneself"* (Jaeggi, 2014, p. 202) within life circumstances where action is perceived as doable and achievable (p. 201). Jaeggi (2014) stresses the social agent as *"having the capacity to evaluate critically and reflect on one's own desires as well as taking responsibility for them that corresponds to this reflection"* (p. 203). She expands on how this relates to the function of critical autonomy;

"In order to be able to pose the practical question, 'What should I do? I must (a) see the question as such and be able to identify it as a possibility (b) be interested in it (and in answering it) (c) be in agreement with myself as the one who poses the question"

(Jaeggi, 2014, p. 202).

The participants in the study are well practiced in self-transformative practices of self care (Koopman, 2013; Allen, 2008; Foucault, 1984). Working through the past has worked, with participants pushing forward with their lives. Participants in the study exampled a strong capacity for social critique of social norms and institutions which added an extra dimension, beyond the interpersonal which can also account for the transformation of disrespect to respect (P1-9). What is crucial about this finding is that one begins to see self-realisation involving a multiplicity of co-occurring factors which positions the agent to not feel alienated from their identity, moving beyond negative self-critique within relationships with others and in the wider culture. This is consistent with the Hegelian idea of social freedom as 'being-oneself-in-an-other' (Pippin 2015). However, social differentiation is emphasised rather than conventionalism which may pressure individuals in newer contexts to assimilate to norms that are not personally constitutive of their sense of new social freedom.

Fifth Key Finding:

Respect as the power of acceptance

Alan Gewirth (1998) says *"self-fulfillment is a maximising conception... it consists in carrying to fruition one's deepest desires or one's worthiest capacities"* (p. 3). The fifth finding in the current context of respect is where participants, irrespective of past experiences, spoke of being freer to be who they are; freer to choose and design their own autonomy; freer to be visible or not, and freer to exercise expanded rights and responsibilities. Feeling the power to participate in those realities is constitutive of self-determination, self-realisation as social freedom (Honneth 2014; Tugendhat 1989). In many ways, this change is like living in two different worlds for many of the participants. Coming from a culture where some participants were fearful, they can now connect with others, *"Being valued contributes to a sense of self that is worthy of receiving love, and*

offering it with comfort to others" (Siegel, 2010, p. 135). What shines through in this atmosphere is pride in achievements, new possibility, empowerment, resilience and enhanced meaning. All participants were more hopeful and more content about the current situation of being gay in Ireland. The accounts example how participants felt more in control of their networks of information and are better able to construct a more resilient sense of self to deal with life's challenges in taking on new responsibilities going forward. The importance of others and the social world cannot be underestimated in terms of how a person feels and thinks about oneself, how agency is socially mediated and self-realised. Personhood may not be determined by social context but the lived descriptions within this study are explicit in showing how participants experiences were particularly sensitised to the social dimensions of the lifeworld. The current context is significantly more conducive to internalisation of higher self-acceptance in the lifting of structural discrimination. What is now mirrored back from important others and society are more affirming evaluations. This respect, rather than a denial or a withholding, frees the participants to build esteem, engage in community, to engage in pursuits of particular interest, interests that often extend value and meaning for others. Social affirmation and social critique are positively related to a reduction in negative self-critique for self-transcendence.

This positive finding can be understood as the outcome of a long agile struggle for human rights in Ireland and elsewhere (Ryan 2015; Mihr and Gibney, 2014). The finding can be traced to the trajectory of ethically responsive social justice efforts within communities (e.g. feminists, academics, unions, political, legal/ human rights organisations). Recognition of social injustices serves as an ethical corrective to societies. At an EU level, Ireland has positively responded to the European Directives for effective implementation of fundamental rights and erosion of discrimination. Indeed, Ireland is now viewed as more progressive than many other countries in terms of social inclusion (Ryan 2015). Referring to the EU pattern Johnson (2013) says:

> *"Human rights discourse has become one of the most effective vehicles for mobilising a range of moral and political claims that contest the widespread social and legal discrimination experienced by sexual minorities. Over the past two decades, gay and lesbian human rights have moved from a marginal position once associated with the 'loony left' to gain mainstream acceptance in national and international politics"* (p. 2).

Racism, gender inequality, and sexual minority rights are just some of the recognisable social injustices that have historically motivated individuals and groups to address these social injustices. At grassroots level in Ireland, advocacy/human rights organisations, celebrities, politicians, academics and mental health organisations have been active in this trajectory of respect for a considerable time. This conception resonates with the emancipatory intent and explanatory power of recognition theory, *"built around the history, structure and dynamics of struggles for adequate recognition and increased freedom"* (Zurn, 2015, p. 5). As Neuhouser (2000) explains *"Hegel's belief that a philosophy's aim is to reconcile modern individuals to their social order depends on a logically prior judgement that the modern social order is good and therefore worthy of being reconciled to"* (p. 8).

5.4. Summary

This research captured the lived experiences of nine gay adult males who have spent most of their lives living in Ireland. The study analysed personal descriptions of both positive and negative experiences in the context of social change. Each psychosocial unit of analysis (story) has its own unique character. The shared character of the stories in terms of meaning is the theme of enhanced autonomy/freedom within the erosion of disrespect to respect. The essence of the trajectory captures the power of social acceptance as intimately related to positive self-transformation and transcendence.

The experiential dynamic at work is a psychosocial phenomenon, one that is experienced at a practical level of self-relation where losses and gains are its definitive character. At one stage or another, the men in this study, were confronted with social discourses of disrespect within social and religious mores. These were experienced as stigmatising and exclusionary. The experiential nature of disrespect occurred in the context of social institutions, schools, within family homes, at work, and in their communities. For some, this meant carrying shame and guilt which added complexity to self-determining autonomy. More recently, these participants have been able to re-work these negative experiences within the context of an Ireland that is now applying the principles of social justice for sexual and gender minorities. This has certainly helped to reorient experience in a much more positive direction. In other words, the structural determinants of less

prejudice and discrimination are being realised within everyday experiences. This is always a work in progress. The sense of constitutive marginalisation in a context of social exclusion relates to an earlier time period. The structure of self-respect allows persons to move more freely, with an expanded sense of self transformation, transcendence and belonging. Deepened insights about past experiences are allowing participants to fundamentally realise their authenticity and dignity as unique persons within accepting social contexts. The essence of this finding and the overall literature on gay men's lives points to the power of social context in influencing a deepened acceptance of oneself. With less external fear, less shame and less rejection sensitivity, negative self-criticisms and projections can be overcome. It is the final finding that best represents the current social contexts for the gay men who took part in this study. For the most part, the days of prolonged or intermittent darkened effects of social stigma seem well and truly over. The transformation is the culmination of so many personal, interpersonal, group and socio/legal achievements in Irish, European and world history. However, the transformation is uneven as LGBTQ persons still live in precarious pre-conditions involving pervasively felt stigma as mediated in hostile social terrains. Emigration from these contexts to Ireland is likely to have implications for practice. The next chapter concludes the thesis.

Chapter Six: **Conclusion**

6.1. Study Summary

The research interviews were conducted during the summer months of 2013. The past two years has been a very significant period for LGBT persons in Ireland. Indeed, what the stories illustrate is how self experience is never static and how recent social contexts are conducive to a deepened acceptance of oneself, among important others. A freer self concept is an active agent of his own social transformation and transcendence. In other words, less discriminatory social contexts creates opportunities for individuals to reflectively examine how self-acceptance was compromised in navigating the historic social world. This is an easier task for gay men today and not the struggle that it once was. In this chapter, I will highlight the implications for therapeutic practice contexts, training, further research and conclude with a further evaluation of the study.

6.2. Key Implications for Practice

A. Awareness of Past Hurts

A critical appraisal of the key patterns across all nine participants illustrate that substantive risks to mental health were not evident within current prosocial contexts. In a couple of cases, there were distinct risks within historic experience. However, a personal recovery process within the context of an anti-discriminatory culture has been underway for some time. The participants in the study who came up against co-occurring challenges have demonstrated proactive and generative resilience in building a positive sense of self in current day contexts. Early personal challenges within the timeline of historic social and religious prejudice acted as predictors for prolonged psychological risk. The importance of working through the past has proved important for self-acceptance and self-regulation. There is less negative noise in the ego. Sometimes, the impact of old thoughts and feelings can give rise to peripheral shame and vulnerability. Thus, empathic understanding for distinctive self experience may still be important for some gay male clients in deepening acceptance of oneself. Today's context of less identity shame, ought

to allow gay men to be more open about previous experiences where some gay men may have appropriated negative evaluations and self-criticism in the flow of consciousness from navigating non-affirming social contexts. A psychotherapist needs to create conditions of acceptance for understanding the client's unique frame of self-reference. Being knowledgeable of both the historic and current contexts is important. Shame may be experienced when therapists are not critically attuned to complex historic contexts of exclusion. Disentangling the complexity of presenting issues may be anchored in past experiences of social and religious discrimination. In getting to know minority clients better, it may help to ask from time to time, what were their key moments of negative/ positive and changing experiences and to reflect on its meaning. From this data set, what blocks transformation and transcendence is the internalisation of negative forms of self-critique. However, self-critique may be the attempt of self-determining autonomous agents to move from the continuum of disrespect towards respect. For example, a person who has consistently experienced a devaluation of worth may have lost consciousness of some earlier experiences, and may be caught in a low horizon of self-respect in the present. This may arise from the invasive historic mediation of shame based discourses which continues to show a peripheral affordance in the flow of consciousness. If the introjection of negative self-criticism persists as depression or self-sabotage, this may relate to earlier vulnerability which still needs to be worked through. Therefore, a critical humanistic understanding of such dynamics may prove important for releasing the weight of how such challenges were appropriated arising from socio-historic contexts of structural exclusion and disadvantage. This dynamic may also create an external armoury of defence or passivity, grounded in past hurts.

Compassionate listening may involve the grieving process, dependent on the nature of the described losses from earlier times. An implication of disrespect is a loss of respect. Earlier challenges may have been shouldered in such a way that have limited the creative spectrum of imaginable lived experiences (Jaeggi 2014). For example, some of the participants talked of having been previously been caught up in self-defeating behaviours to cope with anxiety. Another rural based gay man became habituated to isolation and has had to be consciously effortful in not slipping back into comfort zones of isolation. Further patterns, relating to male gender socialisation, e.g. signs of affection in public contexts created some conflict for participants in everyday contexts. While the

participants speak contently of their current situation in the context of an accepting culture, there were tracts of time in which there was loss of opportunity as a transacting effect of earlier historic contexts of exclusion, e.g. Loss of economic opportunity, loss of opportunity to parent, loss of relationships and bereavements.

B. Beyond Hurt - The Success of Struggles for Recognition for the Self-Concept

The participants have reworked negative self-criticism in the social context of respectful understandings, changed meanings, personal and relational development and psychotherapeutic support. The good news is that current social acceptance increases the scope of authenticity and a loosening of the impact of negative self-criticism. This has certainly facilitated a deeper level of identity acceptance, coupled with expressions of gratitude and hope for the future. What was very striking about current contexts is that participants are not constitutively struggling with identity acceptance, and this was strongly related to not having to navigate the default presuppositions of a close minded society. This creates an openness of a human being to the lifeworld. This compares very favourably to the constricted sense of movement within previous epochs. Letting go of internalised negative self-criticism reduces constraints on freedom. The participants are resolute in their commitments to move beyond hurt feelings.

The implication of an emphasis on person-centered experience may have a significant implications for future practice and research. A consistent emphasis on the use of the term 'LGBT populations' has certainly served its value in the context of structural discrimination and the furtherance of human rights. However, moving forward in a post discrimination age, it is now questionable based on the findings of this person-centered experiential inquiry, whether it is still valuable for psychotherapy to continue associating contextually mediated experiences with a population. This is where particular correlations of mental health are viewed as specific to minority identity. Case study research approaches to minority group experiences may be a better solution going forward. Person-centered understandings are in less danger of re-stigmatising minority identity. Critical understanding of how social norms and values interacted within the self-concept beyond macro associations is critical. However, contextualist understandings ought not to be confused with subjectivist accounts of suffering or personal stories of resilience. Empathic social critique needs to move beyond subjectivist or generalist accounts.

Personal experience and social structure are not identical. Each person will have different interpretations of what social freedom means for them personally.

Finally, signposting to community resources is recommended to enhance personal development which promotes social and community resilience (PSI 2015). A further recommendation would be to invest time and effort in social media which is now a significant influencer in lifeworld experience within a borderless and cosmopolitan world.

6.3. Training

For training, an understanding of EU human rights organisations, their policy frameworks promoting anti-discrimination and social justice for sexual/gender minorities is important. The grammar of human rights can be fruitfully engaged with to extend psychotherapy's remit of commitment to social justice where appropriate. Human rights discourses as transformative and legitimate struggles for recognition afford a potent grammar to speak alongside and with others. Resources of support also need to be sensitive to the unique cultural dynamics and what opportunities or challenges this may pose for new social migration and integration of sexual and gender minorities into Ireland.

A key criticism of existing psychotherapeutic regulation is its invisibility in the advancement of human rights for sexual minority persons in Ireland. A more responsive and visible engagement ought to recognise the extent of how the 'political' sphere as struggles for recognition have brought about social transformation (Stetsenko, 2015). Unlike psychological regulation in Ireland, psychotherapy regulation has yet to acknowledge its silence within the status quo. This will be critical to transforming the image of the profession in Ireland. Formulation of justice concerns must take the form of incisive social critique of both past and present experience.

A number of authors have made the call to incorporate strengths based/positive psychology ideas into theory, research, training and practice (Meyer 2014; Lytle et al, 2014; Vaughan et al, 2014; Vaughan and Rodriguez, 2014). I would also suggest person-centered, and social resilience approaches to psychotherapy are appropriate (Raskin, Rogers and Witty, 2014; Masten 2014). Today's practice contexts with gay men can work with creating an internal locus of evaluation that relates to personal growth and

authenticity, while at the same time engaging systemic formulations to contextualise personal experience of losses and triumphs. An understanding of recognition theory is a valuable lens to think about transformative identities and its implications for relationships.

6.4. Further Research

This study covered the broad topic of being gay in Ireland. I noted the freedom that came with participants talking about life experience and how research interviews are an opportunity to re-work personal experience. While the current research affords some insight into gay men's experience of psychotherapy, further in-depth case study analysis of gay men's experience of individual and couple psychotherapy in Ireland would be beneficial to expand knowledge. These research interviews could perhaps focus on positive and negative experiences of attending psychotherapy in Ireland.

6.5. Evaluation

This study was broad and exploratory, aiming for a better qualitative understanding of personal experiences of gay men's lives in Ireland. The rigor of the methodological data collection procedures facilitated the collection of rich descriptive stories from a heterogeneous sample. The key findings are well elaborated within the evidence trail of storied descriptions of challenging, positive and changing experiences. Stories were crafted to give a balanced, resonant and coherent account of personal experiences. This project has achieved its aim which was to provide a more personalised account of the contextualist experiences of gay males in Ireland. Churchill and Wertz (2014) suggests *"what makes phenomenological knowledge "true" is its fidelity to experience as it is concretely lived in the world"* (p. 289). As participants expressed interest in hearing more about the study, all participants will receive a statement containing its key findings. The coherence of the research design combined with researcher reflections illustrate how this research was managed and how the data was systematically worked through in the analysis (Giorgi 2009; 1975; Yardley 2008).

Inevitably, there will be some experiences that are not reflected in these findings. However, the extensive literature review allows us position the integrity of this research on nine men's lives within the broader patterns of sexual minority research. The current research provides a more contextualist account on what is already known. Its unique contribution illuminates how social arrangements interact with the self-concept and its implications for wellbeing. Grounded in contextualised descriptions of lived experience, the stories illuminate what can often thwart and enhance psychological meaning and well-being.

6.6. Summary

The common theme of disrespect to respect within the experiential self is a considerable transformation of lived experience with significant implications for personal and social development. Ultimately, from this study, the key message is that the historic determinants of social and religious discrimination that once shaped many social realities of gay men's lives has lost much of its import in Ireland. Thus, current social acceptance of gays has reduced potential health risks traditionally associated with social discrimination. A transformative self is an active and purposive entity committed to personal and social change. Psychotherapy in Ireland and elsewhere must not remain disconnected in its supposedly neutral stances in struggles of legitimate recognition. Like the men in our stories, the practice of psychotherapy can transcend its old ideas by bringing theory closer to practice. Psychotherapy is uniquely situated to creatively engage transformational processes of social and political change for minority groups.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Notice

Dear GCN Reader,

I am doctoral researcher at Dublin City University. My research topic is the experience of being gay in contemporary Ireland. The aim of this research is to gain an understanding of the issues concerning gay men in Ireland today.

While much has been written before, in particular about some of the historic challenges faced by sexual and gender minorities, surprisingly little research has been carried out on the subjective experience of being gay in contemporary contexts. It may well be the case that social visibility and social acceptance of gay male experience affords more gay persons the opportunity to talk more freely about their past and contemporary experience of being gay. This research inquiry is an invitation to hear your stories and experiences.

At a mutually agreed time and suited location, I am aiming to interview each participant on a one-to-one basis. The interview will be audio recorded and will last about 60-90 minutes. To participate in this study, you must be a gay man over 18 years old, and are ready and able to talk about your experiences. Participant identities and locations are anonymised when transcribed, and treated in confidence subject to legal limitations.

Your participation in this research study will help to inform professional psychotherapy practice and lay persons about the lived experiences of being gay in contemporary Ireland.

You can contact me by phone on (XXXX) or at (xxx email) and include your phone number please.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Gerry Rodgers.

Appendix B: Plain Language Statement

I.   Introduction to the Research Study

The title of this research study is 'The Experience of Being Gay'. The name of the interviewing researcher is Gerard Rodgers. I am a psychotherapy researcher at the School of Nursing and Human Science at Dublin City University. The aims of this study is to understand the experience of being gay and to add to social and psychological understanding of what it is like to be a gay man in contemporary Ireland today. While much has been written before, in particular about some of the historic challenges faced by sexual and gender minorities, surprisingly little research has been carried out on gay men's life stories in contemporary contexts. It may well be the case that social visibility and social acceptance of gay male experience affords more gay persons the opportunity to talk more freely about their past and contemporary experience of being gay. This research inquiry is an invitation to hear your stories and experiences.

The interviewer can be contacted on xxxxx or you can contact me by email xxxxxx with your phone number and I will call you back at a convenient time.

II.   Details of what involvement in the Research Study will require

The study explores your life story/experience of being gay. The interviewer invites you to describe your personal life experiences and the thoughts you have about these experiences/events. The audio recorded interview will last for an approximate time period of 60-90 minutes at a convenient time and location. After the interview, I may need to contact you by phone if I need to clarify anything we discussed.

III. Potential risks to participants from involvement in the Research Study (if greater than that encountered in everyday life)

If you become stressed during this interview, I will stop the recording and restart the interview when you feel ready. If your stress persists, the interviewer will bring the interview to a close and offer you a list of counselling and psychotherapy organisations and community support if required.

IV. Benefits (direct or indirect) to participants from involvement in the Research Study

Sharing your life experiences/stories can be experienced as validating and worthwhile and research studies that focus on personal experience can contribute to challenging generalised ideas and assumptions about gay male lives among psychotherapy practitioners and in society more generally.

V. Anonymity and Confidentiality

Each participant is allocated a pseudonym (fictitious name) to disguise personal and family names and locations. I will use this name in the interview. The recording of the interview, anonymised transcripts and signed consent forms are safely and securely stored. I use a professional transcription service based in the UK that is listed in the Data Protection Register in the UK. In terms of security, this service has put in place suitable physical, electronic and managerial procedures to safeguard and secure the information they collect online. Through the setting up an encrypted account, I submit the audio recorded interviews and download the transcription through this encrypted account. Data is acknowledged by them as highly confidential, neither it, its servants, its agents shall divulge or allow access to the data by a third party. None of the data is retained by them after transcription.

When the interview is transcribed and analysed, the recordings are erased. When this thesis is completed in 2015, all transcripts and informed consent forms are shredded.

Your confidentiality within the research process is guaranteed with exceptions where the individual's right to privacy must be set aside when someone's life is in danger, or to protect someone's health or to prevent property from being destroyed (**Section 8(d) of the data protection act 1988/2003).**

VI. Your involvement in the Research Study is voluntary

You are free to withdraw your involvement with the participation at any stage.

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact: *The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000*

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

Research Study Title: The Experience of Being Gay

Researcher Name: Gerard Rodgers

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to create better understanding of the life experiences of adult gay males living in Ireland. A further aim is to add to social and psychological understanding of what it is like to be a gay man in contemporary Ireland today. While much has been written before, in particular about some of the historic challenges faced by sexual and gender minorities, surprisingly little research has been carried out on gay men's life stories in contemporary contexts. It may well be the case that social visibility and social acceptance of gay male experience affords more gay persons the opportunity to describe more freely their past and present experiences in contemporary contexts.

Participant Requirements

Are you over 18 years of age?   Yes   No

Do you identify as a gay man?   Yes   No

You are ready and able to talk about your personal experiences?   Yes   No

If you have answered yes to all three of the above questions, you are eligible to participate in this study.

Please tick the following that applies to you for each question

1.Have you read or had read to you the Plain Language Statement?   Yes No

2.Do you understand the information provided? Yes No

3.Have you had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the study? Yes No

4.Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions? Yes No

I can withdraw from the interview at any time.

Your confidentiality within the research process is guaranteed with exceptions where the individual's right to privacy must be set aside when someone's life is in danger, or to protect someone's health or to prevent property from being destroyed (**Section 8(d) of the data protection act 1988/2003).**

I have read and have understood the information in this form. My concerns were raised and my questions were answered and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I hereby consent to take part in this research project.

Participant Signature

Name in Block Capitals

Researcher Signature

Date

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact: *The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000*

Appendix D: Interview Guide

1. Can you describe aspects of your life experience that stand out for you as a gay man?

2. What, if any, have been your positive experiences of being gay? Please describe.

3. What, if any, were the challenges/negative experiences? Please describe.

4. What changes, if any, have occurred in your life as a gay man? Please describe.

5. Is there anything else you want to say about your experience of being gay in contemporary Ireland?

F

Appendix E: Debrief

1. How did you find the interview overall?

2. Was the interview in keeping with your expectations?

3. In the event of any discomfort from having talked and reflected on your personal experience, is it okay for the researcher to offer you a list of available professional and free community supports?

4. In the event of needing clarification from the transcriptions of the recorded interview, is it okay for the researcher to contact you by phone?

I