GAY MEN COMING OUT LATER IN LIFE

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY INTO DISCLOSING SEXUAL ORIENTATION IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

QUENTIN ALLAN

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Abstract

Despite the passing of significant legislation in the late 20th century ("Homosexual Law Reform Act, 1986," ; "Human Rights Amendment Act, 1993") homonegativity remains an issue in Aotearoa New Zealand. For example, in the second decade of the 21st century, many gay people do not feel able to disclose their sexuality. The process of acknowledging and disclosing one's sexuality is complex, and has been researched from various perspectives, with a focus in this country, on younger people. Limited research has been conducted into the experiences of older gay men. Using hermeneutic phenomenology, this is one of the first studies in Aotearoa New Zealand to investigate the lived experiences of gay men who have come out after the age of 40.

In the thesis, I initially consider the historical background in terms of attitudes towards homosexuality from various perspectives: religious, healthcare, educational, and legal. I then examine the processes of disclosure, taking into account the barriers and enablers identified by research participants. These participants were invited to reflect on salient aspects of life *before* coming out, in contrast with their current experience of living openly as gay men in contemporary society. They also shared advice for gay men who are having difficulty in acknowledging and/or disclosing their sexual orientation. Given the epistemological challenges inherent in phenomenological research, the focus of this study is on gay Pākehā/European men; however, the findings may have implications for gay men and women of other ethnicities.

Interviews from 12 participants were transcribed, and the subsequent narrative data were analysed with four key themes emerging. The first theme relates to the society in which the participants grew up, a society characterised by heteronormativity, heterosexism and homonegativity. One particularly striking finding relates to the historical and residual homonegativity apparent in various denominations of the Christian Church. The second theme relates to the processes involved in coming to understand one's sexuality. Some participants displayed strong self-awareness from an early age, while for others, self-insight was comparatively limited, and in some cases, impeded by a mechanism which I term 'protective ignorance'. Participants became aware of their sexual orientation at different stages, in different ways: one participant knew at the age of five; others became aware during adolescence; for some the

catalyst proved to be a sexual encounter with another man much later in life. The third theme relates to the types and intensity of psychosocial pain associated with acknowledging and disclosing one's sexual orientation against a backdrop of homonegativity. The final theme relates to the sense of fulfilment associated with having worked through the coming out process, and the quality of life associated with living life openly as a gay man in contemporary society.

The research argues that despite the multiple advances on many fronts, including the passing of legislation and concomitant softening of negative attitudes towards same-sex issues, there is, nevertheless, evidence of persistent homonegativity throughout contemporary society. This impacts people throughout their life course, and has serious implications for gay people of all ages.

Dedication

This is for my partner, Raymond, with all my love.

Acknowledgements

My first debt of gratitude is to Auckland University of Technology (AUT) for financial and logistical support in completing this study. When I resolved to embark on a PhD I was determined to enjoy the process; and it *has* been more enjoyable than not, partly due to the absorbing nature of the research, but also thanks to the stimulating discussions I have had with so many interesting people. I would like to thank all of the individuals who have helped me along the way, either through formal involvement or simply by asking periodically, 'How is it going?'. In terms of getting the project started, I first acknowledge my friend Michael Richardson for moral support and practical suggestions, for inducting me into AUT's LGBTIQ staff network 'OUT@AUT', for his generous gift of various scholarly texts, and for being an outstanding role model.

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Finally, I would like to thank the participants, whose generosity and honesty has made this project so worthwhile. In particular, I would like to thank my friend and colleague William Keung, whose story does not appear in this thesis, but who, nevertheless, provided invaluable support in making himself available as a guinea pig for the pilot interview.

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Attestation of authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed

Date   25th July, 2017

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Aim of this inquiry

The title of this thesis is: *Gay men coming out later in life: A phenomenological inquiry into disclosing sexual orientation in Aotearoa New Zealand.*

The primary aim of this research project is to examine the *lived experience* of older gay men who have come out later in life, with a particular focus on the journey itself, and the *processes* of disclosure. A key consideration is the *social attitudes* which have either constrained or enhanced the likelihood of an individual feeling able to come out. The study also considers the experience of living life openly as an older gay man in the 21st century. In doing so, this thesis acknowledges the courage and integrity of the men whose stories form the heart of this study; more importantly, this thesis emphasizes the value that these men place on their decision to come out. From their narratives, each participant today can be seen to be living a life of inner peace and emotional fulfilment, a life of fresh purpose, underlaid with a sense of pride in the decision that each made to move on from the existence they had led before coming out.

A complementary objective of this research project is to produce an evocative text in the form of this thesis, a text that encourages individuals *who are not themselves gay* to consider the experiences of gay people and in doing so, to examine their own cognitive and emotional response to gay issues.

1.2 Terms used in this thesis

One of the foundational principles of phenomenology is that all language, including every-day, taken-for-granted terms should be examined, and used cautiously. The terms which we use to make meaning of our everyday lived experience tend to be familiar, and they are not usually held up for close scrutiny. However, even the most innocuous-looking word or phrase can yield layers of meaning, and these meanings change subtly or dramatically from one generation to the next, and from one discourse community to another. Gadamer (2007) warns that terms and definitions are inherently unstable: "As soon as one acknowledges that one's own perspective is utterly different from the viewpoints of the authors and the meanings of the texts of the past, there arises the need for a unique effort to avoid misunderstanding …" (p.

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236). Perhaps the best we can do is to remind ourselves of the inherent instability of language, and to pause periodically to examine the form, meaning, usage, or provenance of a word. In the context of this study, and bearing in mind Gadamer's caveat, I provide working definitions of the following key terms:

Aotearoa New Zealand - Given that Te Reo Māori is one of our official languages and in acknowledgement of the Māori people as the first settlers of this country, I choose to use the full name 'Aotearoa New Zealand'.

Coming out – this is an idiomatic term that is widely understood to refer to the act of acknowledging one's sexuality, first to one's-self, and then, progressively, disclosing this sexual orientation to others. Coming out is an iterative and life-long process. The term 'disclosure' is a more formal synonym.

Gay – appearing in the 1970s, this term has been universally adopted in English-speaking countries in order to convey a positive social identity both individually and collectively. In this thesis, the non-clinical term 'gay' is used (in preference to 'homosexual') because this label has been adopted by the gay community for itself.

Gender – this has traditionally been seen as a naturally occurring binary, with male/female, masculine/feminine options. However, current thinking views gender as a social construct, and acknowledges a complex array of gender positions and expressions (Davies, 2007). Any discussion of sexuality has to take into account gender:

> 'Masculinity' and 'femininity' are relational terms, given meaning only through the existence of the other. But this means that inevitably normative definitions of sexuality are structured by this relationship, and by the privileging in particular of heterosexuality. Sexuality is, in complex but inextricable ways, locked into the structuring of gender, and both are locked together by the heterosexual norm. The binary divides between masculinity and femininity, and between heterosexuality and homosexuality (with the first term in each couplet as the dominant one), still positions sexual subjects and organizes sexual desire and gender norms in contemporary societies, in ways which … marginalize the sexual transgressor. (Weeks, 2017, pp. 66-67)

Hermeneutic phenomenology – the second of these terms 'phenomenology' is a philosophical approach which is used in sociological research to understand obdurate

aspects of lived experience. The adjective 'hermeneutic' refers to the careful process of interpretation, typically of text produced through research interviews. In the context of the present study, 'hermeneutic phenomenology' is the methodological approach which aims to help you, the reader, understand what it might be like to walk in someone else's shoes during key moments in their life. For example, this may be to feel the fear of a small boy being tormented by bullies, to experience the confusion of being attracted to the 'wrong' sort of classmate, to imagine being a closeted gay man who happens to be married to a loving wife, and is determined to raise a happy family.

Heterosexism – this term is attributed to American gay rights activist Craig Rodwell (1971). Heterosexism is a form of individual and societal prejudice against gay people which manifests as a power differential, with heterosexuals in a dominant position, and non-heterosexuals as marginalised. Heterosexist attitudes and behaviours can be mapped on a continuum with mild, unstated, (often unconscious) individual biases at one end. At the other extreme, can be seen state-sanctioned murder, physical violence, and incarceration. A good example of this is the homonegative legislation which was carried on the statute books of Aotearoa New Zealand for much of the colonial history of this country (see Figure 2.1). A useful way of understanding heterosexism is through the concept of 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Rich, 1982/2007). Two influential authors who draw attention to the hegemonic status enjoyed by heterosexuality are Katz (2007), who refers to the 'invention' of heterosexuality, and Blank (2012), who develops the theme.

Heterosexual privilege – this is closely associated with heterosexism and heteronormaitivity; obliquely put, it can be understood as an individual never having had a negative experience relating to their sexual orientation. Viewed historically, the privilege can be seen as the automatic, hegemonic right of an individual to fall in love, get married, and live without fear of persecution. With heterosexual privilege, there is never a need to 'come out', or disclose one's sexual orientation. Sexual role-models are celebrated, and omni-present in popular culture; furthermore, (provided other tacit rules are obeyed) identity-affirming, positive value judgements are *always* likely to be associated with one's choice of partner. Insights from intersectionality studies have enhanced understanding of heterosexual privilege (Sumi, Crenshaw, & McCall,

2013); Hurtado (1999, cited in Feigenbaum, 2007) points out the "irony of structural privilege: the more you have, the less you have to fight for it" (p. 34).

Heteronormativity - this term is attributed to early queer theorist Michael Warner (1991). According to Warner, heteronormativity is the default (and typically unstated) position assumed by individuals and institutions in contemporary society, that everyone is heterosexual, unless otherwise indicated. This position assumes, for example, that boys will grow up to marry girls. In everyday language, it includes the understanding that being straight is 'normal' and being gay is 'abnormal' or 'other'. In the same way that fish are not aware of the watery medium they inhabit, so too, (until they are 'conscientized'), most heterosexuals appear to be unaware of the concept of heteronormativity, and of the power structures which maintain heteronormativity. Formative conditioning begins in the home and continues at school. In considering the influence of early childhood contexts, Gunn (2015) observes that heteronormativity "may be overt, unintentional, sustained or fleeting" (p. 24). In examining the term more closely, she notes that the semantics of 'normative' carry twin meanings: firstly, the default is based on a norm, or ideal model, and secondly, a sense of moral obligation – what ought to be the case – is understood.

Homosexual – the commonly used term 'homosexual' is a late 19th century invention which foregrounds the 'sexual' component, and evokes the medicalising discourse within which same-sex attraction was framed by 19th and 20th century sexologists. As sociologist and historian Jeffrey Weeks explains, "From the mid-nineteenth century 'the homosexual' … was increasingly seen as belonging to a particular species of being, characterized by feelings, latency and a psychosexual condition" (2017, p. 59). In this section, the word is listed because it continues to be widely used in common parlance and appears in historical phrases such as 'homosexual law reform'. When I employ the term 'homosexual' or 'homosexuality' in this thesis, it is either in a historical or academic sense; otherwise it is used ironically, and understood to carry connotations of negativity.

Homonegativity – this term captures all nuances and manifestations of negative energy in the form of thoughts, utterances and behaviours, which have in common the

sense that homosexuality is bad (Herek, 2004; Herek, 2009). 'Homonegativity' is used in this thesis in preference to the more commonly used term 'homophobia'.

Homophobia – this term was coined by an American psychotherapist, George Weinberg (1972), and popularised in the early 1970s. Weinberg argued that the mental health issue was not homosexuality per se, but people who had a strongly negative approach to same-sex issues and gay people in general. The noun 'homophobia' and adjective 'homophobic' are readily understood and continue to be widely used in everyday language. However, from an academic perspective, the terms are problematic, given that the suffix '-phobia' denotes a psychological disorder, which in turn, would pre-suppose a professional, clinical appraisal. For this reason, the term 'homonegativity' is used in this thesis.

Later in life – this term incorporates the period of midlife, which we might consider as the years between the ages of 30 and 70, moving into older age.

LGBTIQ – lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer - numerous variations are used in different contexts; for a consideration of appropriate terms used for Pacific peoples, see Brown-Acton (2011). In acknowledgement of the challenges of covering every marginalised group, the overarching term 'rainbow' is sometimes used in preference.

Pākehā - te Reo Māori term 'Pākehā' means a non-Māori, normally a person of European descent living in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Sexuality – expressed through physical, emotional, and psychological mechanisms, human sexuality can be seen as a site of tension between individuals and society because of differing cultural, moral, and religious values. Despite decades of sexological and sociological research, much remains to be learned about sexuality. What is increasingly clear is the dominant role that sexuality has in the life of every mature person: "our sexuality is the most spontaneously natural thing about us. It is the basis for some of our most passionate feelings and commitments. Through it, we experience ourselves as real people; it gives us our identities, our sense of self, men and women, as heterosexual and homosexual, 'normal' or 'abnormal', 'natural' or 'unnatural' (Weeks, 2017, pp. 30-31).

Sexual orientation – According to the American Psychological Association:

> Sexual orientation refers to an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions to men, women, or both sexes. Sexual orientation also refers to a person's sense of identity based on those attractions, related behaviours, and membership in a community of others who share those attractions. Research over several decades has demonstrated that sexual orientation ranges along a continuum, from exclusive attraction to the other sex to exclusive attraction to the same sex. (n.d., p. 2)

Sexual orientation appears sometimes to be confused with three other dimensions of sexuality. Firstly, 'biological sex', which focuses on sex organs, chromosomes and genetic heredity. Secondly, 'gender identity' has a focus on an individual's personal sense of being male, female, third gender, etc. Finally, 'gender expression' focuses on an individual's expression of femininity/masculinity/androgyny (Rainbow Youth, 2017). Sexual orientation is *not* a matter of choice; individuals do not choose to be born gay or lesbian.

1.3 What called me to this inquiry?

The primary motivation for conducting this research is a concern with the subtle, but ubiquitous homonegative attitudes of heteronormative contemporary society. The corollary, internalised homonegativity, often manifests in homosexually-oriented men unable or unwilling to acknowledge their sexual orientation. Many men do not come out until later in life; some never do. The delayed development of a gay identity in older, self-identified gay men has received limited attention, both within this country and overseas. Given the dramatic changes in attitudes towards same-sex issues since homosexual law reform was enacted in 1986 in Aotearoa New Zealand, it is likely that future generations will experience fewer problems relating to sexual orientation than the participants in this study. Therefore, one of the reasons why I wanted to do this research was because in decades hence, people will not realise just how difficult it has been for gay men to come out. These stories and the accompanying commentary will provide a historical reference point for future generations. In the meantime, current issues with homonegativity need to be examined and addressed.

In terms of personal horizon, my interest in this topic stems from the lived experience of having sublimated my sexual orientation (towards a more socially acceptable

heterosexuality) until coming out as a gay man at the age of 29. My academic interest is piqued by curiosity relating to the taboo of homosexuality – a concept mediated historically through the language of sin, criminality and illness. The very word 'homosexuality' carries a complex range of semantic prosodies depending on the point of reference (Louw, 1993). Charting the various associations of this term from a heterosexual perspective, it can be noted that earlier reactions of ignorance, anger and revulsion are being increasingly replaced by tolerance, acceptance and understanding (Baker, 2005). From a personal perspective, I can characterise my early engagement with this word in terms of shame, fear and avoidance. Following my own experience of coming out in 1990, these negative associations have been supplanted by intellectual curiosity and a growing sense of pride. Underpinning this curiosity is a disquiet that such a study should be necessary in the first place.

A further concern is the residual prevalence of negative attitudes towards same-sex issues in Aotearoa New Zealand, the impact of which can be seen in the increased risk of suicide for gay youths, which is up to seven times higher than for their heterosexual counterparts (Semp, 2006). Reliable figures are difficult to ascertain for a variety of reasons (Lucassen et al., 2011; Rosenstreich, 2013). Despite logistical challenges, a point of interest is that the most recent release of suicide statistics by the Ministry of Health (2016) contains no reference to LGBTIQ populations. Also of concern is that despite awareness of the disproportionate rate of suicide for LGBTIQ people in Aotearoa New Zealand, according to a series of prominent academics and community groups, (including Rainbow Youth, OUTLine NZ, GenderBridge, Intersex Trust Aotearoa New Zealand, New Zealand AIDS Foundation, Affinity Services, Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand, Dr Mathijs Lucassen, Associate Professor Mark Henrickson, Dr John Fenaughty, and Warren Lindberg), the New Zealand Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2013-2016 lacks initiatives designed to address suicide within New Zealand's LGBTIQ populations. In April 2017, the Government called for submissions in response to its draft strategy to prevent suicide in New Zealand (Ministry of Health, 2017).

1.4 Background to the research

The first published references to homosexuality in Aotearoa New Zealand reflect the disapproving, pathologising attitudes of their time, and were evidently not written

from an insider's perspective. To redress this imbalance, researchers since the 1980s have concentrated on developing more nuanced socio-historical understandings of homosexuality (Brickell, 2005, 2008; Eldred-Grigg, 1984; McNab, 1993; Neville, Kushner, & Adams, 2015). The last 40 years have seen an increasingly wide range of themes receiving attention. Of these, a preoccupation with physical health and especially HIV-related issues, is understandable given the arrival of the global AIDS pandemic in the 1980s. Only within the last two decades, however, has qualitative research been conducted into ways in which Aotearoa New Zealand's public mental health service addresses the specific needs of men who have sex with men (Semp, 2006). For much of the 20th century, research into same-sex issues was non-existent. Pivotal issues such as homosexual law reform generated multiple arenas for analysis and commentary (Atmore, 1995; Guy, 2000; Laurie, 2004; Pritchard, 2005); subsequently, researchers have explored aspects of homosexual, gay and queer identity from an increasingly diverse range of perspectives (Alice & Star, 2004; Allan, 1996; Brickell & Taylor, 2004).

The first significant strengths-based, multi-disciplinary study of homosexuality within the Aotearoa New Zealand context was the Lavender Island Research project (Henrickson, Neville, Jordan, & Donaghey, 2007). The study examined, amongst other issues, identity and self-definition with reference to a four-axis measure of sexual identity, using the dimensions of sexual behaviours, same-sex attraction, fantasy and emotional attraction as outlined in Coleman (1988). In line with similar international identity development surveys (reviewed in Ritter & Terndrup, 2002, as cited in Henrickson, Neville, Jordan, & Donaghey, 2007, p. 236), it was found that 83% of males felt that their sexual orientation "had always been this way" (p. 236). The average age at which males came out to themselves was 18.7 years, well into adolescence and some seven years after the average age when males "felt different", which is at 11.16 years old (p. 236). With reference to coming out publicly, the findings from the Lavender Island Research project suggest that, despite the introduction of anti-discrimination laws and changes in societal attitudes towards homosexuality, at the beginning of the 21st century, members of Aotearoa New Zealand's LGB community are still strikingly closeted: only 34.9% of the 2, 269 male and female respondents indicated that they had disclosed their sexual orientation to everyone in their lives.

Fewer than half had disclosed to their parents or siblings (44.4% to their mothers, 33.7% to their fathers, 46.3% to their siblings) (Henrickson et al., 2007).

Of interest are the 65.1% who self-identified as gay, but, for whatever reason did not feel comfortable about disclosing their sexual orientation to the people in their lives. Of even greater interest are those individuals who, at the time of writing, know that they are attracted to men but have difficulty coming out, even to themselves. The Lavender Island Research project has generated a considerable amount of data, yielding often unexpected insights into aspects of gay identity in Aotearoa New Zealand. However, its focus is wide, and there is a need for more tightly concentrated, qualitative research into the development of gay identity in males within the Aotearoa New Zealand context. Early consultation within the target community confirmed a need for this research. Given the marginalised status and historical 'invisibility' of gay men, the findings of this study may contribute towards redressing the imbalance of heteronormatively oriented research within the academy.

1.5   Research questions

The research questions can be summarised as follows:

1. How do gay men experience coming out later in life?
2. What are the barriers which have prevented gay men from coming out earlier?
3. What are the 'enablers' which have made it possible to come out?
4. What is the experience of living life as an older gay man in the 21st century?
5. What advice can be passed on to others who have not yet come out?
6. What advice can be passed on to people who have issues with homosexuality?

1.6   Out of scope

Given the complexity of human sexuality, and given the methodological focus on lived experience, it would be inappropriate for me, as a gay man, to include lesbians in this inquiry. Following the same logic, it would be inappropriate for me as a Pākehā man, to include non-Pākehā in this inquiry. Also out of scope are gay men who are new immigrants to Aotearoa New Zealand, given that their experience of growing up, and coming out will have been influenced by different cultural, linguistic and geo-political variables. Given that the focus of this inquiry is explicitly on Pākehā gay men who have

come out later in life, the experiences of gay men who came out at an earlier age are likely to be significantly different. Finally, given the role of religious conditioning in constraining individuals' acknowledgement of sexuality, I made a decision to exclude participants from religions other than Judaism or Christianity.

The eligibility criteria were carefully considered taking into account my personal experience of coming out as a gay man and the desirability of establishing epistemological solidarity with the participants. In line with contemporary thinking (e.g. Honeychurch, 1996; Kanuha, 2000), this study has been designed by an 'insider', an important consideration, given the sensitive nature of the topic. In order to encourage the sharing of frank and revealing narratives, I believe it is crucial that a sense of trust, mutual respect and reflexivity be established and maintained between researcher and participants, as outlined by Tolich and Davidson (1999).

Some observations about trust

This is a long thesis, and if I expect a reader to engage with the output of this study, then it seems only fair that I should start by providing some sense of my own subjectivity; therefore, I have chosen to share some reflections on my own journey with a focus on my growing awareness of my sexual orientation, and my personal experience of coming out.

1.7   Positioning the researcher

To see a world in a grain of sand
and a heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,
And eternity in an hour.
Blake (1868/2002).

I first encountered these lines from William Blake's 'Auguries of Innocence' in my first year at university. As a sensitive and idealistic 18 year old, I was struck by Blake's railing against injustice and hypocrisy; as a repressed homosexual, I was alert to the symbolism in the poem, suggesting as it did a profound sympathy with vulnerable and oppressed members of society. The reference to a flower might also have resonated with me because I had been called 'Pansy' for a couple of years when I was 11 or 12 years old; the nickname didn't follow me into adolescence and it didn't bother me at

the time because it was used in a jocular manner mainly by three close friends with whom I spent most of my time. But why *this* nickname? On reflection, I suppose I must have stood out in a number of respects. I revelled in beauty and nature, and was, perhaps, overly sensitive to coarseness and ugliness. For instance, I recall derisive comments from team-mates when I commented on the rough, unfinished, cobwebby nature of the public changing sheds when we went to play (compulsory) rugby in the nearby town on a Saturday morning.

In contrast to the sporting ethos of the school, I played the violin, sang in the choir and didn't show much interest in sport, preferring to read a book rather than spend my free time at the cricket nets. At an age when my classmates were assembling model replicas of 2nd World War fighter planes, I instead was preoccupied with antiques and *objets-d'art*. I recall carrying in my pocket (for the best part of my Form 1 year) an exquisitely carved miniature rose-wood horse from China – slightly unusual behaviour for a boy at that time, perhaps. This was a very innocent time, and despite the inevitable horseplay and sexual experimentation that goes on in any boys' boarding school, the nickname 'Pansy' did not carry associations with homosexuality – in fact, I didn't become aware of my homosexual inclinations until some time later.

The realisation in early adolescence, at the age of 14, had the force of an epiphany. I retain a vivid memory from an evening during the summer holidays. I remember lying in bed and thinking yearningly about a classmate to whom I was attracted, and it struck me with absolute clarity at that moment that I was a 'homo' – to use the then-current vernacular. This was not a happy thought, not a positive insight. This first real blast of self-awareness was followed immediately by another thought: nobody must *ever* know about this; it would be something I would *have* to keep secret. And with that consciousness came a sense of fear.

The following day, pedalling my way through the leafy Waikato countryside, I had the disconcerting foreboding that my life was not going to be straightforward. This worry was in the forefront of my consciousness that day and has never quite left me. At that stage still a devout Christian, I was determined not to act on my desire, and I decided that if I concentrated more on finding girls attractive, then I would eventually get over what I assumed to be 'a phase'. Another strategy was to apply myself to more 'manly'

pursuits, such as sport. And so, in early adolescence, I decided that I needed to take more of an interest in rugby. Although never particularly talented, I played for our First XV for my last two years of school; I was a fast runner and I discovered unexpected pleasure in the *physicality* of tackling.

For me, growing up in New Zealand in the 1960s and 1970s was a generally positive experience. Family life was stable, characterised by warmth, laughter and good times, interposed with the occasional episode of naughty behaviour and,(in adolescence, my deliberate cultivation of a slightly antisocial persona as a semi-conscious attempt to distract attention from my sexual orientation. Discipline within the family was firm but relatively relaxed, and I enjoyed a great deal of personal freedom. My family did not appear to me to be particularly religious, although we had a strong sense of right and wrong instilled in us from the earliest age with positive role modelling from both parents, punctuated by pithy homilies inherited from my father's Presbyterian upbringing. This moral code was echoed at boarding school where we attended chapel daily. But in adolescence, I gradually became aware of a new element in the high church Anglican liturgy. This was a nebulous awareness of something we had to resist: being 'impure in thought, word or deed', i.e. thinking about sex, masturbation, or – that great mystery - sexual intercourse.

So where did I learn that homosexuality was bad? An intriguing question, because nothing was ever made explicit. Perhaps the first clue was in denigratory or insulting language – terms of abuse such as 'homo', 'poof', 'queer' had reasonably wide currency. At home, I detected a more subtle sense of homonegativity – terms such as 'Nancy boy' might occasionally have been offered, referring to someone who didn't quite fit the heteronormative mould. The most confounding aspect was the invisibility – I simply was not aware of any gay individuals or couples in our community when I was growing up. Gay characters were not evident in films or on TV, except as objects of derision or humour, particularly as depicted by British comedians such as Kenneth Williams ('Carry On' films), Benny Hill, Dick Emery (playing an effeminate character named Clarence), and John Inman on 'Are you Being Served?'. I didn't identify with any of these characters. The only positive role model might have been Quentin Crisp if I had made an effort to watch 'the Naked Civil Servant', but whenever it was screened

on TV, I made a point of not watching as I wanted to forestall any discussion of homosexuality; I recognise this now as an unfortunate omission.

I clearly remember the day I learned that being a homosexual might be dangerous. It was during the school holidays following Form 5 when I had a summer job working on a Waikato dairy farm. I have a disturbing memory of being invited to participate in a gay bashing in a nearby town. One of the senior farm hands invited me, along with my best friend. We did not go; but the older boys did. They returned (in a bad mood) without having found any victims. I was always pleased that we had declined to go, and my estimation of my friend increased; he had taken the initiative to indicate clearly that he had no intention of going. The fact of this invitation troubles me still. Why was I invited? Perhaps it was intended as a cautionary gesture. Despite my attempts to cultivate and present a heterosexual persona, these older teenagers may have surmised that my orientation was other. In any case, I discovered that some members of society were capable of inflicting violence on gay people.

Back at school in the following year, the conversation seemed to revolve around girls and girlfriends. Despite my lack of experience, I came to realise it was necessary to show some interest and enthusiasm.This was not difficult as I was looking forward to losing my virginity - sooner rather than later. When this occurred, in the August holidays of my Form 6 year, I was euphoric, (mistakenly) believing that if I could perform with a woman and enjoy the experience that must mean that I wasn't gay. And because so many of my peers boasted of their heterosexual exploits with girlfriends, finally I was now able to participate as an equal.

At university I spent two enjoyable years at an all-male hall of residence, conceived on the Oxbridge tradition, although Selwyn College, Otago probably had more in common with the American college fraternity experience as depicted in National Lampoon's comedy film 'Animal House' (Landis, 1978). My fellow students worked hard and played hard; we enjoyed an intensely social existence with an emphasis on partying and the pursuit of heterosexual trysts. Other preoccupations included competitive sporting engagements with our arch-rival, Knox College and more relaxed social rugby during the winter. By this time, I had let the violin lapse and was taking a keener interest in rugby – all part of the cultivation of my heterosexual persona. Although

nothing was ever said, it was understood there would have been no tolerance of homosexuality at Selwyn College in the early 1980s. But that awareness did not affect me because as far as I was concerned other people were gay, not me. On campus, I was aware of a student gay and lesbian support group, and once, I even casually walked past and observed what appeared to be a small, disconsolate group sitting in the middle of a large meeting room. They did not appear to be having any fun. I was not at that stage in any way politicised, and it did not occur to me to investigate further. Such things held absolutely no interest for me, and people who might have gone along were beyond the pale, to me and to my friends.

After graduation in 1985 I ventured overseas and could easily have explored gay possibilities whilst travelling in Australia, Asia, North Africa, or Europe. But the prospect of actually visiting a gay venue was too alien, so deeply entrenched was the horror of such places which I had built up in my mind, and so committed was I to pursuing a heterosexual identity. On reflection, I think I could have come out years earlier, if only I had met the right person, and if I had found myself in a different, less homonegative environment. It was not a question of courage: I simply did not want to be gay; I refused to accept that persona.

So what made me decide to come out? I was approaching my 30th birthday and reflecting on my life. At this point, I had been living in Hong Kong for three years, with a number of good friends and settling into an enjoyable and successful teaching career. Over the previous decade I had had a small number of not-very serious relationships with women in New Zealand, Australia, England and France. Since arriving in Hong Kong, I had a not-very successful six-month relationship with a Scottish woman. Judging by the lack of sexual chemistry with women, it was becoming clear that my attraction to men must be more than a passing phase; I also suspected that being gay and closeted would be intolerable. Subconsciously, I had a sense that if I began the process of coming out, then I would ultimately be out to everyone, so, I decided that I would explore my sexuality. It sounds easy when expressed like that, but in fact, it was a slow process, played out over two years. At the age of 29, I decided that I was going to stop living as a heterosexual i.e. I would stop trying to have girlfriends, and I would actively seek out gay partners.

I still remember my first visit to a gay bar in Hong Kong: it was New Year's Eve 1990, and I had spent the evening carousing with a group of heterosexual friends. Then, having said goodnight, I made my way up the hill to a gay nightclub (*Disco Disco*) which I had seen advertised in the newspaper. I was exceptionally nervous, and it helped that I had spent the evening drinking – I couldn't have gone in sober. Inside, I was befriended by a good-looking young Chinese man, and we spent the next couple of hours talking. We met up again the next day, and over the course of the next fortnight I fell head over heels in love with this man and I remember feeling (for the second time in my life) *euphoric*! Euphoria on having found the real me, on discovering the joy of sex as it is supposed to be, and experiencing the intensity of being in love for the very first time. The strength and depth of my feelings suggested that this was something other than 'a passing phase': that this was genuine there was no doubt. I resolved to come out to everyone in the sense of either volunteering information at an appropriate point or by responding in the affirmative if I were asked the question, 'Are you gay?'. I may have hoped people would *not* ask but I was mentally prepared to respond if they did.

The context for coming out to my parents involved a holiday in New Zealand some six months later, visiting my family home in the Waikato. My father was dying of lung cancer, and on this particular day, I was having a discussion with my mother in the family room outside his bedroom, probably a couple of metres away from his open bedroom door. I forget how it started, but somehow, the conversation moved on to homosexuality and the 'gay lifestyle' with my mother asserting, somewhat dogmatically, I felt, that being gay was a lifestyle choice. Arguing against this position and feeling that I was speaking from a position of some authority, I observed that "nobody in their right mind would choose to be gay – and I should know". At this, with wide-open eyes she said "Are you telling me you're gay?" and I replied, "Yes, I am". Her immediate response was to give me a big hug, whispering, "I wish you'd told me earlier". So this discussion was her way of eliciting from me what she had suspected, I suppose, for many, many years.

Meanwhile, my father was in the next room listening to this conversation, but he didn't say anything then. He arose later on that evening, and as he handed me a tankard of home-brewed stout, he said, "I overheard your conversation with your

mother this afternoon, and I just want you to know that it's *all right*". Incidentally, this was one of the last things he said to me before he died. I will be eternally grateful to both of my parents for their understanding response. I am aware (anecdotally, and from my reading) that not everyone has such a positive reception, and I imagine that it cannot be easy for parents to hear from their offspring that they're gay. But my parents received the news very well, as did my siblings and all of my cousins, aunts and uncles.

Although I came out to my family and to friends from student days, I remained in the closet for every job I had until the late 1990s. Hong Kong struck me as a deeply conservative place, and the gay people I met were firmly in the closet. Despite homosexual law reform having been enacted in 1991, there was no concomitant human rights protection, and it was not safe for most gay people to come out. We referred to each other as 'members' and I did indeed relish my membership of what I discovered was a most interesting and rewarding 'club'.

Throughout the 1990s, my colleagues were mainly Chinese, and it was very clear to me that they would not have been comfortable with a gay member of staff. In 1999, I eventually came out to my colleagues at Hong Kong University. The ground was prepared by an openly gay acquaintance talking quite casually, in a very relaxed way about his 'flatmate' whom I knew to be his boyfriend, and that was the first indication that it might be okay to introduce the concept of the person I was living with into the conversation. I worked there for four years before deciding, on a whim, to come out to my immediate colleagues. Four or five of us were in a Chinese Dimsum restaurant – a lot of buzz and clatter and positive energy. I knew one colleague to have previously expressed homonegative sentiments – the others I had a hunch would be fine. It had occurred to me that if I was going to be working with these people for another three years, I would prefer them to know that I was gay. At some point during the meal, again, an opinion was expressed that homosexuality was a lifestyle choice. I stated vehemently that it was *not* a lifestyle choice – that nobody in their right mind would choose to be gay given the intensely homonegative insults and attitudes that were evident all around. Why would someone choose to be insulted and abused in this way? At that moment there was an intense focus and concentration on what I was saying. The colleague whom I felt to be homonegative (all respect to him, especially taking

into account his strong religious views) said, "Well, thank you for saying that – I didn't really think about it like that before, and I'm fine with you being gay". And we became good friends. I found coming out to my immediate colleagues at this university a very positive experience, and since then I have made a policy of coming out to everybody in every job I've had.

But there were many situations when I could have come out and chose not to. The staunchly heteronormative world of sailing is one domain in which I have not generally volunteered the information. I remember being conflicted as to whether or not I should come out when crewing on a yacht during my first off-shore passage, a six-day race from Darwin to Ambon in 1997. At dinner, perhaps on the second night at sea, the subject was homosexuality and one of the crew mentioned ('confessed') that his son was gay. That was my opening, but I opted to remain silent because I was very aware that six days would be a long time in the confined space of a yacht and, apart from the skipper, the other crew members were an unknown quantity.

A year or so later I crewed on another yacht on a three-month circumnavigation of the British Isles, and again, early on the voyage, I could have come out, but chose not to. I suspected that to do so would have created a somewhat tense dynamic given that we were all strangers and were going to be living in very close quarters for the next 90 days. Interestingly, at the end of the trip, one of the female crew invited me to bed with her in London. When I declined, explaining that I was gay and that I had a partner, she refused to believe me. Twenty years later, back in rural New Zealand, I realise I have not come out at the local dinghy sailing club. I assume they know, but perhaps they don't, and I suspect they would not be quite as friendly if they knew I was gay.

I have been living as a gay man for over 25 years. Even after all this time I can vividly recall the huge sense of relief I felt at coming out. People commented on the changes they discerned in me because, certainly, I became more relaxed and was able to divert all of that negative energy into actually living. I enjoyed reinventing myself as a gay man and discovering a new circle of gay friends. Two of these friends saw themselves as 'match-makers', and six months after coming out, I was introduced to the man who has become my life partner. Raymond and I have very different interests, but we share a sense of humour, an appreciation of beauty, and the deep love we have for each

other. The years have flown by, and we celebrated our 25th anniversary together in 2017. Having found myself, and the strength which comes from being in a strong relationship, I developed greater confidence in interpersonal relationships. I have reconnected with old friends from student days, and I feel that coming out has enhanced these friendships. I recall thinking that if people were unable to accept me for who I am then they were probably not worth bothering about, yet I can't think of any friend from my student days who has not been completely relaxed about my being gay.

So now, as I reflect on my life as a middle-aged gay man, I am aware of being at peace with myself and the people around me. I no longer live in fear. And I am more politically attuned; through the reading that I have done for this study, I am aware of the huge debt we all owe to the courage and determination of the early gay activists. I recognise that the liberal laws and attitudes that we enjoy in Aotearoa New Zealand are a beacon of hope for many people around the world, and it behoves each of us to do what we can to build on the work of the past to secure a stable future. This thesis is my contribution.

Postscript

I drafted this personal profile in 2014 soon after having conducted my self-interview. As a footnote, I would observe that when I joined another sailing club in 2017, I made a point of coming out in the first few minutes of conversation. It was surprisingly easy and unremarkable.

1.8   Assumptions and pre-conceptions

Here is a summary of the assumptions and pre-conceptions with which I started this study:

- Coming out is traumatic
- Coming out is transformative
- The fear and worry associated with being in the closet (living a lie) can be paralysing
- I attribute my (slightly) antisocial and untoward behaviour in adolescence to overcompensating for my awareness of my sexual orientation
- I was clearly aware of my sexual orientation at puberty, and I assumed that every other gay man was similarly aware of his sexuality

- Before beginning this research I had a strong preconception that men who had not come out would have been very aware of media and popular culture constructs of homosexuality while they were in the closet
- The expression of sexual orientation is socially constructed; however, the orientation itself is innate; in other words, I tend more towards an essentialist understanding
- Coming out may be painful; however, in retrospect, it may be seen as a positive experience
- Working through the process is essential for personal fulfilment
- Individuals who express homonegative attitudes can change after meeting with confident 'out' individuals, or through a process of education
- There is no room for complacency: the present climate of acceptance and tolerance could possibly be supplanted by a regime of repression and intolerance

1.9   Contribution to research and significance of this study

This is one of the first in-depth studies that examines the coming out experiences of older gay men in Aotearoa New Zealand. Through the lens of hermeneutic phenomenology, this research provides insight into a complex and little-researched aspect of contemporary life. The findings from this study have significant implications for understanding how individuals navigate the unfamiliar process of coming to terms with aspects of their own sexuality. These findings also elucidate the extent to which homonegativity is present in contemporary society.

In terms of countering heteronormative hegemonies, this research enables historically marginalised voices to be heard, and allows unknown (or traditionally unheard) stories to be shared – a counterpoint to the silence and invisibility that has impacted the lives of gay people for many years. This inquiry is a contribution to the "counter-discourse based on experience, intimate knowledge and social interaction and struggle in which people in their thousands have voiced their own truths against the truths laid down for them" (Weeks, 2017, p. 206). Ideologically, the study consciously conspires against what Kinsman (2010) calls "the social organization of forgetting" (p. 19). In the process of researching and writing up the results I have striven to acknowledge the social and historical significance of ongoing struggles and to articulate practical lessons to be learned. Given the generally marginalised status gay men have generally been accorded in the recorded history of Aotearoa New Zealand, the findings of this study will go some way towards redressing the imbalance of heteronormatively oriented research within the academy.

1.10 Schematic overview of thesis structure

In considering the most effective structure for this thesis, I pondered the following key questions:

- What will speak to the participants?
- What will speak to closeted gay men?
- What will speak to heterosexuals who have limited understanding of same-sex issues and challenges?

Given the moral panics and distortions of the 20th century, this third point is one of the most critical to my mind. From my research, it appears that when people are able to meet gay men personally and to discover for themselves that gays are not actually evil, perverted monsters, then slight adjustments in understanding pave the way for future re-appraisals of the social order. In this way, the attitudinal and cultural shifts in Aotearoa New Zealand over the last three decades are more easily understood. As Weeks put it, "[w]e are in the midst of a genuine social transformation where what was once unspeakable has become ordinary" (2017, p. 184).

Historical context

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the homonegative discourses which were evident in Aotearoa New Zealand throughout the 20th century from the perspective of five different vantage points:

- the Christian Church
- healthcare
- formal education
- media and popular culture
- law

Literature review

In this chapter, I begin considering ways of understanding and framing homonegativity. I then provide an overview and critique of some influential 'coming out' models; the final section examines the process of coming out in midlife.

Methodology

In this chapter, I outline the thinking behind my decision to use hermeneutic phenomenology as the methodological framework for this study. I indicate the nature of the inquiry, then I outline the philosophical origins of hermeneutics and

phenomenology, and introduce the three philosophers whose thinking has informed this research project: Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Max van Manen. I consider the role that I am assuming as phenomenological researcher, identify logistical and theoretical challenges and foreshadow the reflexive approach which I have adopted. Finally, in order to provide the reader with a conceptual framework, I introduce the key phenomenological notions which I envisage as a foundational aid to reading and understanding this thesis.

Methods

In this chapter, I begin by outlining the context of this study and, before introducing the 12 participants, I summarise the inclusion criteria. I outline the ethical considerations, and underline the importance of safety for the participants. I summarise the reflexive approach that I have adopted throughout the research process, and I outline the thinking behind the various phases of research, with a focus on interviewing as a data collection technique and phenomenological writing as a key component of data analysis. This chapter concludes with an outline of the criteria against which phenomenological rigour can be considered.

Findings chapters

The research findings are presented in four chapters, with an orientation towards the participants' lived experiences of growing up, and eventually coming out as gay men. The first chapter is 'Hearkening to the Messages'; the second chapter is 'Coming to Know'; the third chapter is 'From Knowing to Out'; the final findings chapter is 'On the Other Side of Out'.

Discussion

In this chapter, I provide my own interpretation of the findings, and draw together some of the key themes arising from the research. I affirm the significance of this research, then outline both limitations and usefulness of this methodology and draw sociological and methodological conclusions. I conclude this chapter by opening the discussion outward, looking to the future and suggesting practical recommendations for action.

1.11 Chapter review and summary

In this chapter, I have provided a rationale for the project (including a statement of what called me to the inquiry), and outlined the overall objectives of the research, together with a summary of the research questions and a scoping profile of the participants. I have provided a glossary of key terms. In order to provide the reader with a clear sense of my own positioning as researcher, I have outlined key assumptions and pre-conceptions with which I entered the study; I have also provided a brief autobiographical account of my own coming out experiences. In terms of foreshadowing the contribution to research and significance of this research, I draw attention to the need and likely impact of this study. The chapter concludes with an overview of the contents of the thesis.

Chapter 2 Historical Context

2.1 Heteronormative environments: Aotearoa New Zealand

In considering the socio-cultural environment of Aotearoa New Zealand in the second half of the 20th century, Pearson (1952) drew attention to the conformity that characterised life in a country still recovering from the effects of the depression and the Second World War:

> … the ideal world of the New Zealander, one that 'runs by clockwork'. You get up at a regular hour, go to work, you marry and have a family, a house and garden, and you live on an even keel till you draw a pension and they bury you decently. The New Zealand way of life is ordained, but who ordains it? (Pearson, 1952, p. 203)

In charting the contours of heteronormativity in Aotearoa New Zealand, it is useful to invoke what John Thompson refers to as 'symbolic power', a concept derived from Mann (1986) and informed by Bourdieu's (1986) notion of 'cultural capital'. By symbolic power, Thompson is referring to the pervasive influence of cultural institutions (juridical, religious, educational, and mass media), which concern themselves with the production, diffusion and transmission of symbolic content (Thompson, 1995). In examining the influence of heteronormative institutions in Aotearoa New Zealand, through the lens of symbolic power, three themes emerge with salience.

Firstly, even in a nominally secular country such as Aotearoa New Zealand, the subtle and enduring effects of the Judeo-Christian tradition can be seen to influence attitudes and behaviours even at the time of writing. Secondly, the socialising impact of family and formal schooling in an individual's formative years has a profound and enduring effect on most people; Rubin (1984/2007) notes that "families play a crucial role in enforcing sexual conformity" (p. 168). The conditioning influences of home and school are extended later in life to recreational and social networks, and eventually to workplace environments (Cohler & Hammack, 2006). Finally, transcending the symbolic power of religion, home, school and the workplace is the ubiquitous presence of mass media communication mediated through a constantly changing array of technologies. Arguably, mass media began with radio and cinema in the early 20th century, followed by television and, since the late 20th century, digital media,

comprising Internet networks and mobile mass communication systems (Fairclough, 2000; Kress, 2000; McLuhan, 1962, 1964/2001). And underpinning all facets of existence, is the cultural institution of law, which regulates how we may live our lives. If a gay man contravenes juridical laws, he faces practical, legal consequences; if he happens to be a Christian, and transgresses religious laws, he faces social and spiritual consequences.

2.2 Church-based homonegativity

The following discussion provides some background relating to the influence of the Christian Church on attitudes towards same-sex relations in the 20th and 21st centuries. The Christian Church is a supremely powerful institution, and one of the explanations for its continuing influence involves the control and dissemination of information, the framing of stories, and the foregrounding of lessons to be drawn from the Holy Scriptures. Part of my motivation for writing this section is to share with the reader some of the scriptural background which gay Christians may not have known during their formative church-going years, but which are increasingly public knowledge. It is revealing to learn, for example, that the original story of Sodom (which is widely interpreted as evidence of God's wrath at homosexuality) has been spuriously distorted and manipulated for rhetorical effect over two millennia. Also of interest, is a consideration of the pre-schematizing role of scriptural language as identified by Gadamer (1975/2013). The penultimate section examines the tensions which are evident in many Christian denominations, while the final section invites the reader to ponder the question of future directions which the Church may take.

In order to gauge the influence of the Judeo-Christian tradition in Aotearoa New Zealand, it is instructive to consider Christianity from a historical perspective. The first point to emphasise is the negativity directed towards sex in general: "most Christian tradition, following Paul, holds that sex is inherently sinful. It may be redeemed if performed within marriage for procreative purposes, and if the pleasurable aspects are not enjoyed too much" (Rubin, 1984/2007, p. 158). So what has been the attitude of the Christian Church to homosexuality?

Apologists and revisionist historians, such as Boswell (1980), have attempted to argue that the Christian Church did *not* originally harbour animus towards homosexuals.

Boswell was writing as a gay Christian, and his central argument, that the early medieval Church could be characterised by its lack of animosity towards homosexuals, was popular when first published, with numerous favourable reviews of the book. However, subsequent scrutiny of the research and analysis has discredited some of Boswell's findings as inconsistent and inaccurate. Lauritsen (1998/2013) argues that "[in] his effort to marry the gay liberation movement to the Christian Church, Boswell is too often required to compromise the former while becoming complicitous in the historic crimes of the latter" (para. 8). The Pink Triangle Trust have published an extensive annotated bibliography of reviews of Boswell's 'Christianity, social tolerance and homosexuality' (Pinktriangle, 1985); for more recent and comprehensive critiques, see Crompton (2003); Kuefler (2005); Clark (2016).

A historical survey of attitudes towards and treatment accorded to homosexuals in the name of the Christian Church reveals systematic oppression and persecution over the last two millennia. Far from having demonstrated a benign and tolerant attitude towards homosexuals, as argued by Boswell, the Church can be seen to have been relentlessly malign and intolerant. According to polymath, linguist and scholar Warren Johansson,

> The behaviour of the Church can only be likened to that of a criminal psychopath, incapable of appreciating the objective consequences of its own actions, oblivious to the suffering and injustice that it has caused, devoid of pity or empathy for the victims that it has tormented. (Johansson, 1998/2013, para. 31)

At first sight, this accusation appears hyperbolic, yet genealogical investigations (in the sense suggested by Foucault, 1972) reveal a litany of suicides, mutilations, and disrupted lives that can be attributed to the Christian Church.

Crompton (2003) recounts, with precise attention to historical detail, how Church-initiated communal violence directed towards homosexuals reached a peak in medieval and Renaissance Europe with public executions of alleged 'sodomites', who became convenient scapegoats, "blamed for disasters [such] as plagues, earthquakes, floods, famines and even defeat in battle" (p. xii). The unfortunate individuals who were accused of sodomy were invariably found guilty and executed in obscene public ceremonies, which involved the possibility (sometimes a combination of) burning,

beheading, drowning, hanging, and castration. It is worth noting that the Christian clerics who instigated these anti-sodomy laws (invoking Leviticus 18-20) stood to gain financially when the property of the 'guilty' parties was claimed, half by the state (or accuser), and half by the Church.

The homonegative attitudes that have moulded western culture can be traced back to 6th Century BCE Judea (ancient Palestine), where "a law was incorporated into the Hebrew scriptures which was ultimately to have far greater influence and, indeed, to affect the fate of homosexuals in half the world down to our own day" (Crompton, 2003, p. 32). This law is the oft-quoted reference from Leviticus Chapter 18 verse 20 which declares: "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination" (*King James Bible*). The far-reaching consequences of this law, traditionally understood as having been handed to Moses by God, are incalculable. From a historical perspective, however, it is clear that this seemingly innocuous verse (amongst a lengthy list of guidelines relating variously to personal hygiene, preparation of food, and rules for sacrificial offerings) achieved an immoderate status as the reference point for laws and punishments against homosexuality. As Crompton observes, "The Levitical statute thus became the model for laws decreeing capital punishment for homosexuality in Europe, and in as much of the world as came under Europe's sway, down to the end of the eighteenth century" (p. 34). Despite the illogicality and inconsistency of applying stone-age 'moral' precepts to modern life, the 'moral authority' of Leviticus, nevertheless, continues to be invoked in discussions concerning homosexuality.

2.2.1   Reappraisals of Biblical authority

For much of the last two millennia, the Bible has been unquestioningly accepted as the Word of God, but during the Enlightenment, theologians began to challenge this orthodoxy. Gadamer (1975/2013) acknowledges Dilthey's studies of the origins of hermeneutics, and traces the influences back to

> the eighteenth century, when men like Semler and Ernesti realized
> that to understand Scripture properly it was necessary to recognize
> that it had various authors – i.e., to abandon the idea of the dogmatic
> unity of the canon. With this "liberation of interpretation from
> dogma" [as expressed by Dilthey], the collection of the sacred
> Christian writings came to be seen as a collection of historical sources

that, as written works, had to be subjected not only to grammatical
but also to historical interpretation. (p. 183)

Such interpretation foregrounds the importance of historical context, and sheds light on the various approaches to translation and on the rationale behind decisions to use one term or another. For gay Christians who feel in some way persecuted by, or alienated from the Church, understanding how the Bible came to be written, translated, interpreted and promulgated can be empowering.

2.2.2   Biblical references to 'homosexuality'

Readers of the Bible may encounter familiar terms such as 'homosexual' and 'sodomy' or 'sodomite'. Six verses of the Bible contain some sort of disapproving reference to 'homosexuality':

- Genesis 19:1-9 (the story of Abraham, Lot, the angels, and the city of Sodom)
- Leviticus 18:22, 20:13 (the Holiness Code)
- Romans 1:26-27 (Paul's epistle to the Romans)
- 1 Corinthians 6:9 (Paul's epistle to the Corinthians)
- 1 Timothy 1:10 (Paul's epistle to St Timothy)

The first point to note is that the term 'homosexual' is a recent invention, coined by Kertbenny in 1869 (Foucault, 1976/1981). The original Biblical texts (in either Greek or Hebrew) had no word that equates to the modern English words 'homosexual' or 'gay'. As Cannon (2009) observes, the first English translation of the Bible that used the word 'homosexual' was an American publication, the 1946 Revised Standard Version. The term 'sodomite' in modern English has come to mean a 'homosexual'. However, the original meaning of a 'sodomite' was an inhabitant of Sodom. And according to Ezekiel 16:49-50, (written in approximately 590 BCE) the sins of the Sodomites were a combination of inhospitality, greed, and arrogance. Crompton (2003) explains that the modern association of homosexuality with the sins of the men of Sodom is due to an inventive re-interpretation by Philo of Alexandria, a contemporary of Jesus, who added certain details to the story, which were subsequently adopted as the standard exegesis by the Christian Church. A careful reading of Genesis 19:1-9 identifies the crime as homosexual *rape*, not homosexuality per se; however, Philo's commentary "much

enlivened by a vivid imagination" became the standard version which was adopted by Christian theologians:

> Increasingly as the centuries passed, Christian moralists came to identify homosexuality as the sin of Sodom. Eventually 'sodomy' was to mean, primarily, same-sex relations, and someone who engaged in homosexual behaviour became, simply and generically, a 'sodomite.' This new interpretation had a fateful effect. For eventually homosexuality became the unique cause of Sodom's destruction and hence a dire threat to any community that condoned it. To the homophobia of the Hebrew Scriptures Christian superstition added a hysterical fear that was to justify much cruelty. (pp. 136-137)

In the 14th Century Wycliffe undertook an unauthorised translation of the Vulgate Bible into Middle English. Despite some controversy, this translation was widely distributed, and influential. Cannon (2009) observes that Wycliffe translated the Greek word *arsenokoites* (ἀρσενοκοίτης) as 'synn of Sodom'. Significantly, the term '*arsenokoites*' appears in only two verses of the Bible: 1 Corinthians 6:9 and Timothy 1:10. Given that this is a neologism coined by the Apostle Paul, it is interesting to consider the homonegative agenda behind the various ways it has been translated, loosely as 'sodomite' or 'homosexual', and then, taking into account the historical context, to consider the more likely intended meanings. Cannon argues that the condemnation was not intended for loving, mutually consenting same-sex relationships, instead, it is more likely intended for what we would now term paedophiles and/or men who took advantage of young temple prostitutes. Similarly, in Romans 1:26-27, Cannon argues that the reference is not to homosexuality as we understand it today, but to lustful, drunken orgies.

It is easy to see how distortions, mis-translations and mis-readings, deliberate and accidental, become accepted over time as 'the gospel truth'. Accretion of understandings over centuries becomes solidified and provides a firm foundation for all manner of arguments, including opposition to initiatives such as homosexual law reform on the grounds of 'a long established Biblical tradition'.

2.2.3 Changing attitudes towards homosexuality since World War Two

In the decade following World War Two, the Church of England commissioned an extensive study on homosexuality, the first such investigation undertaken by an

ecclesiastical body. In this bold and timely initiative, the research team, under the leadership of Christian theologian Derrick Bailey, examined Biblical sources as well as contemporary research output from medical, psychological, and sociological perspectives. This was a praiseworthy attempt to understand homosexuality, and resulted in Bailey providing expert testimony to the Wolfenden Committee in support of homosexual law reform in the United Kingdom (Carey, 1992). In addition to the privately released interim report commissioned by the Church of England, Bailey published, on his own initiative, a book called 'Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition' (Bailey, 1955). While this book did much to remove some of the taboo associated with homosexuality, it has, nevertheless, been criticised for its indulgent ignoring of the wrongs wrought by the Church, and for Bailey's somewhat eccentric and naïve explanations of homosexuality. As Johansson summarises, Bailey's attempts

> may be fairly characterized as the all-time high-water mark for complete, grotesque and well-nigh invincible ignorance of the subject, joined with the singular thesis that the ungrateful invert has compounded his monstrous crimes against Nature by wronging the innocent Church. (1998/2013, para. 2)

Since the publication of Bailey's well-intentioned book, numerous studies and critiques have emerged from a variety of perspectives, revealing insight into the different concerns of various denominations. Clearly the Christian Church, viewed as a whole, has less influence in the second decade of the 21st century than in previous eras, with attendance at religious services declining in Aotearoa New Zealand since the 1960s (Ward, 2006). The 2013 census indicates a continuation of this trend: in 1961, 90% of the population identified as Christian, in 2006 the figure was 56% and in 2013, 48% (Ward, 2014). However, the Christian Church in its various denominations remains a presence, and its influence should not be underestimated. Homonegative representatives of the major Christian denominations continue their efforts to educate New Zealanders about the inherent sinfulness of homosexuality (Owen, 2016).

2.2.4   Church involvement in homosexual law reform

Church involvement was conspicuous in the Coalition of Concerned Citizens' opposition to homosexual law reform in 1985 (Guy, 2005). The Reformed Churches of New Zealand published their views of homosexuality as "a gross evil behaviour pattern

which is worthy of criminal sanctions and yet can be broken by the power of God"
(Flinn and Steenhof 1985, as cited in Burke, 2007, p. 32). A supporter of the Coalition,
National MP Norman Jones invoked Old Testament fears of fire and brimstone when
he drew attention to a group of gay rights protesters in 1985. He invited his
mainstream heterosexual audience to gaze at the homosexuals and contemplate the
sinners' ultimate destination: "You're looking into Hades!" (Homosexual law reform in
New Zealand, 1985). Intensely homonegative rhetoric that invoked religion had the
effect of causing many New Zealanders to question their Christian beliefs, and the
years leading up to homosexual law reform saw a "divergence opening up within
and/or between church denominations" (Guy, 2000, p. 200). Some denominations,
(e.g. the Methodist Church) presented a united front in exhibiting significant
adjustments to their views of homosexuality; in contrast, the more fundamentalist
denominations (e.g. the Baptist Church and the Catholic Church) remained united in
their opposition to homosexual law reform, and in the middle were those
denominations (such as the Presbyterian Church) where rifts and divisions began to
open up (Guy, 2000). It is appropriate to acknowledge at this point the support of
those Christians who stood up in solidarity with gay activists in the years leading up to
homosexual law reform: "In the 1970s on the first public marches we had, the Quakers
marched with us, well before any politicians" (Welby Ings, personal email).

Few issues have been as polarising as homosexuality, and decades later, the Anglican
Church provides a useful case study to illustrate how a major denomination remains
divided on the issue of homosexuality. Lightfoot's (2011) research into the experiences
of gay Anglicans who have recently come out reveals that while some had "more
positive experiences", the overwhelming pattern was of pain and frustration: "Their
stories illustrated the painful and long-lasting damage that coming out in the Church
can have on one's psyche" (p. 8). Part of the frustration expressed by Lightfoot's
research participants related to their sense of not being listened to: "There is in [the
Anglican Church] a deep resistance to what we perceive as unpalatable truths about
ourselves. It seems we resist with greatest passion and desperation in this area"
(p. 216).

An ongoing controversy relates to the blessing of same-sex relationships. Around the
time of civil union debate, research was conducted into the attitudes of Anglican

clergy. The official Anglican position: "rejecting homosexual practice as incompatible with scripture" and "not legitimising or blessing … same sex unions" is outlined in Lambeth (1998). A representative cross-section of New Zealand's Anglican community, (including senior clerics) were interviewed, with many arguing in favour of blessing (Ashford, 2007). Still, a significant cross-section of respondents were opposed. See Table 2.1 for a sample of homonegative quotes from clergy who indicated their *opposition* to the Anglican Church blessing same-sex relationships.

Table 2.1 Quotes from clergy who were opposed to the Anglican Church blessing same-sex relationships at the time of the civil union debate (Ashford, 2007)

" ... in the broadest biological sense, such relationships do not make sense" (p. 172)

"... as Christians, we come into a world where we are part of an order, male and female, so the blessing of committed same-sex relationships is a defamation of created order..." (p. 173)

"... I think that same-sex attraction has some hormonal aspects, some congenital aspects, it is something that has gone wrong, a manifestation of the fallen nature of humanity" (p. 174)

"... Society is preoccupied with sex. Homosexuality is all about sex, but there is more to life than that ..." (p. 175)

"... the homosexual lifestyle appears to be a culture of eroticism and promiscuity, which is unhealthy for people, families and the community. ... We need to be cautious of allowing a minority group to gain tyrannical power over the majority" (p. 176)

These quotes provide a glimpse into a significant discourse of Church-based opposition, and appear to be representative of homonegativity in other denominations. While many individuals were supportive overall, there was a distinct *lack* of sympathetic support. In terms of public profile, the evangelical Destiny Church was the most vociferously opposed, but as Lineham (2013) observed: "Destiny gave vocal expression to the views of most churches. The churches as a whole were predominantly unsympathetic to the [civil union] legislation" (p. 135).

Most denominations were opposed to the prospect of civil unions, although within each denomination, there was not necessarily unanimity. At the time of writing, the rifts and divisions that are increasingly apparent within the Anglican Church attract media attention, which does not always show Christianity in a good light. For example, in 2016, the Anglican Synod, after a two-year consultation process, announced that it had declined to approve the blessing of gay marriages. This decision angered many gay Anglicans who reacted to the news with "fury and resignation" (Collins, 2016 May 13). It has also caused embarrassment for the more liberal members of the Anglican Church. One of the observers at the General Synod, Reverend Helen Jacobi, said: "Today I hang my head in shame." Ecclesiastical homonegativity remains an issue for many gay Christians, and some (like Paul Day, quoted by Collins, 2016 May 13), have chosen to leave the Anglican Church in protest "over the ongoing hatred they show".

In terms of the wider Christian Church's influence in Aotearoa New Zealand, Ward (2016) refers to the "obvious decline of both churchgoing and Christian identity, both here and in other western societies" (p. 186). A variety of explanations might be considered for this decline: one consideration is that many denominations of the Christian Church appear to be out of touch with aspects of modern life, including same-sex relationships. Another explanation is rooted in anger at the Church's historical role in persecuting homosexuals (Crompton, 2003; Vines, 2017). Acknowledgement of these wrongs is occasionally forthcoming; for example, following the General Synod held at Waitangi in early May 2014, the Anglican Church officially acknowledged and apologised for the historic wrongs done to the LGBT community in Aotearoa New Zealand.

2.2.5   The Christian Church: Looking to the future

Are there signs of hope for the Christian Church in terms of its ability to reach out to gay Christians? Compared with other countries around the world, Aotearoa New Zealand appears relatively liberal, and the sorts of sensationalist headlines linking gays with natural disasters tend to induce eye-rolling rather than anger ("Bishop Brian Tamaki blames gays, murderers and sinners for earthquakes," 16 November 2016). While such negativity does indeed make headlines, it is important to note that extreme evangelical Churches such as Destiny receive disproportionate media coverage, as

Lineham (2013) has observed, "Destiny has in effect become a fiction – a fiction far stronger than the actual reality of the church" (p. 77).

It is also necessary to acknowledge the voice of moderation and tolerance expressed by numerous individuals in all denominations, particularly in the last half-century. A number of Churches in cities such as Auckland welcome gay Christians to worship with their congregations (*NZ gay Christian resource directory*, n.d.). Moving from a local to an international perspective across all denominations, there are encouraging signs of hope for gay Christians. For example, since the election of Pope Francis, the Catholic Church appears to have adopted a slightly more tolerant, less judgemental stance, with the Pope famously asking: "Who am I to judge?" (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2013 July 29). And, in the Anglican Church in England, it is encouraging to read post-modern interpretations of two great love stories from the Bible as presented by senior clerics, such as the Rt. Rev. James Jones, Bishop of Liverpool, in his Lambeth Essay (2007). Before exploring the relationship between Jesus and the disciple whom he loved, Jones invites Christians to consider first the celebrated 'friendship' between David and Jonathan:

> Their friendship was emotional, spiritual and even physical. Jonathan loved David "as his own soul". David found Jonathan's love for him, "passing the love of women". …Is it not possible to say that here are two men with the capacity to love fully, both women and men? The intimacy between David and Jonathan is also evident in the relationship between the Son of David and his beloved John. We find the two at one with each other during the supper when Jesus washes the feet of his disciples. The beloved disciple is found reclining next to Jesus. Translations are not adequate to the text. … No English word or phrase fully captures the closeness of the liaison. … That this word is used of the relationship between Jesus and John is a remarkable expression of the love between the two men. Here is energising love, spiritual, emotional and physical. (paras. 15-17)

This explicit focus on the message of love from a senior Anglican cleric is in contrast to the more familiar messages of intolerance and judgment from the past, and provides optimism for the future. In the same way that Church-based understandings of sexual orientation have moved from a preoccupation with 'sodomy' to a focus on love within mature, committed, same-sex relationships, so too have understandings of sexuality from a healthcare perspective.

2.3 Homosexuality: Medicalising language of the 19th and 20th centuries

What is homosexuality? It is now axiomatic that answers to this question only become meaningful when given a clear context and, as Plummer (1992) notes, academic writers are "reluctant to impose contemporary ethnocentric meanings around 'the homosexual' on to the past or other cultures" (p. 8). In fact, this everyday word, which we take so much for granted, is fraught with prosodies and multiple layers of meaning and, as Simon Watney observes, to use the term 'homosexual' is "to inhabit a pseudo-scientific theory of sexuality which more properly belongs to the age of the steam engine"(1992, p. 20, as cited in Jagose, 1996).

Although it seems reasonable to assume that humans have engaged in same-sex activities since time immemorial, the actual term 'homosexual' is relatively new, having been coined by Kertbenny in 1869 and introduced into English medical discourse by von Krafft-Ebing in 1887 via Westhphal's 1870 *Archiv fur Neurologie*. Foucault (1976/1981) refers to this period as the birthdate of the modern homosexual, stating that with this label, the homosexual "became a personage, a past, a case history, [with] a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology" (p. 43). Kraft-Ebing and Westhphal both had medical backgrounds, and it is no accident that Foucault's description employs terms such as 'case history', 'morphology', anatomy' and 'physiology', signalling, as he does, the beginning of the medicalising language which was to characterise 19th and 20th century understanding of this phenomenon. Alluding to the change in emphasis, from behaviour to identity, Foucault (1976/1981) observed that whereas "the sodomite had been a temporary aberration, the homosexual was now a species" (p. 43). According to Foucault, the 19th century studies published by sexologists such as Havelock-Ellis (1897/2008) and von Krafft-Ebing were pseudo-science writ large and saturated with lies, distortions and obfuscations, a point further developed by Connell and Dowsett (1992/2007). However, Oosterhuis (1997) cautions against judging too harshly from the vantage point of the present day; he notes that "*Psychopathia sexualis* was … written for lawyers and doctors discussing sexual crimes in court. Krafft-Ebing's main point was that in many cases perversion was

not a sin or a crime, but a disease - a common position of liberal physicians of the period from 1870 to 1900" (p. 70). The 'disease model' of homosexuality provided the conceptual approach which would enable theorists and practitioners to problematize homosexuality and to establish interventions aimed at fixing the 'problem' which had been identified (Weeks, 2017).

In order to consider healthcare approaches to sexuality in Aotearoa New Zealand, it is necessary to take a historical perspective. The problematizing/medicalising tradition, which had been established in the late 19th century, continued to dominate discourses relating to homosexuality well into the 20th century. Given the hegemonic influence of established medical authority, early attempts to explore alternative understandings of human sexuality were routinely challenged, denigrated and marginalised. Nevertheless, pockets of activity in Europe, the United Kingdom and the United States of America resulted in studies and publications examining homosexuality from psychological, sociological and political perspectives. A significant milestone in understandings of homosexuality from a healthcare perspective came in 1973 with the removal of homosexuality as a diagnostic category from the American Psychological Association (APA) Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM).

So, how well-equipped were healthcare authorities in Aotearoa New Zealand in terms of responding to same-sex issues in the 20th century? Answers to this question depend very much on which decades are considered. One way of coming at this question is to consider representative comments made by two medical professionals (who were Members of Parliament) when debating homosexual law reform in the 1970s. For example, Dr Gerard Wall supported Venn Young's Bill, but proposed an Amendment according to which any communication to a young person under the age of 20 years old suggesting that homosexuality is normal would be punishable by two years imprisonment; Dr Wall's amendment "aimed at protecting teenagers from proselytism … [in order to] protect a section of our community, not just from physical violation, but from … [a] distorted attitude of mind" ("Crimes Amendment Bill - Second Reading," 1975, p. 2788). Dr Wall's Amendment, and his statements in the House, suggest that he saw homosexuality as a choice, and that proselytising behaviours could be effective in inducing young people towards homosexuality. He also appears to have understood homosexuality as some sort of psychological dysfunction. In insisting that Parliament

had "a duty to establish a norm, a standard for those who need protection against involving themselves in homosexual behaviour", he betrayed a common tendency to frame sexual orientation in terms of 'behaviour' and 'sexual acts' (p. 2788). Dr Wall was knighted in 1987, for services to medicine.

In 1975, during the same debate, Dr 'Rufus' Rogers also supported the Bill, but he declared that in his professional opinion, "Like all forms of self-indulgence [homosexuality] is a moral problem" ("Crimes Amendment Bill - Second Reading," 1975, p. 2790). Seen from the vantage point of the 21st century, these statements are indicative of what McLaughlin (1976) described as the sorts of "crazy, unreal snippets of information [that members of the public are subjected to] from doctors at home and abroad (p. 110). In critiquing the medical profession, McLaughlin perceived doctors, on the whole to be defensive and ultra-conservative:

> The narrow educational background, the unhealthy social status and the growing introversion of the profession have left the community responsibility and social conscience of the medical profession etiolated, shrivelled. Because the community has absolved them from the need the rest of us have to justify ourselves, doctors lash back bitterly at criticism and will brook no innovation from within or without. (p. 110)

If McLaughlin is correct in his appraisal, this would help to explain the use of medical interventions such as electro-convulsive shock therapy to restore 'normal' sexual desire. In spite of ground-breaking research conducted by American sexologists in the 1940s and 1950s (Ford & Beach, 1951; Hooker, 1993; Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948), the approach of healthcare professionals in Aotearoa New Zealand was in line with the prevailing 'disease model' which identified homosexuality as an 'Ego-Dystonic Disorder'. In other words, it was a mental illness "in a similar category with schizophrenia and manic depressive disorder" (Blumenfeld, 2012). According to a retrospective survey conducted by the American Psychological Association Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation (2009), it was considered that homosexuality could be cured through

> a variety of aversion treatments, such as inducing nausea, vomiting, or paralysis; providing electric shocks; or having the individual snap an elastic band around the wrist when the individual became aroused to same-sex erotic images or thoughts. Other examples of aversive

behavioural treatments included covert sensitization, shame aversion, systematic desensitization, orgasmic reconditioning, and satiation therapy. (p. 22)

Research conducted by Flentje, Heck, and Cochran (2014) indicated that such treatment was ineffective, and resulted in iatrogenic side effects:

These negative side effects included loss of sexual feeling, depression, suicidality, and anxiety. (p. 1242)

It would appear that historically, healthcare authorities in this country have not been particularly effective in terms of addressing same-sex issues. As Kirkman (2005) notes, a stigmatising, medicalising approach to same-sex relations has been evident in medical school training throughout the 20th century: "up until the 1960s, if homosexuality was mentioned at all in the curriculum it was in the context of illness, and a condition that required a cure" (p. 123). While the removal of homosexuality as a psychiatric disorder from the DSM in 1973 was a positive step forward, the fundamentally homonegative character of healthcare discourse in Aotearoa New Zealand re-emerged and intensified in the early 1980s with the arrival of HIV. In the absence of an effective response from the Health Department, "[g]ay communities led the New Zealand response to AIDS" (Brickell (2008 p. 349). The arrival of HIV may have also prompted a re-framing of understandings in medical schools [where, at least up until 2005] "some students may have been prompted to think about homosexuality only in the context of HIV/AIDS" (p. 123).

Despite the numerous improvements in attitudes and behaviours over recent years, one key area of concern remains in the form of disproportionately high suicide levels for LGBTIQ, and what appears to be a historical lack of response from the Health Department. It is encouraging to see the government's request for submissions in response to its draft strategy to prevent suicide in New Zealand (Ministry of Health, April 2017).

2.4   Conformity and conservatism: Educational influences

In public morality the New Zealander's guiding principle is: Do others do it? I doubt if a New Zealander has any other moral referee than public opinion. (Pearson, 1952, p. 207)

Writing in 1952, Pearson mused on the unusually conformist nature of the national character, and on the power of fear to guide personal and public morality: "It's not a pleasant thought; but it is true how afraid we all are of 'public opinion', 'what people will say' (p. 207). Writing a quarter of a century later, and mindful of the racist divide between Maori and Pākehā (European) society of that era, McLaughlin's incisive analysis of the Pakeha-oriented national identity, 'The Passionless People' (1976) explored the themes of conservatism, conformity, and fear of diversity:

> The time has come now to see ourselves as we really are – a racially and culturally homogeneous group of people who have nurtured in isolation from the rest of the world a Victorian, lower-middle class, Calvinist, village mentality, and brought it right through into the 1970s. We have established a society in which we have been spared the disgusting sight of the poor and the sick, the dirty and, particularly, the different. (p. 1)

And, at that time, what could have been more different than 'the homosexual'? For most of the 20th century, New Zealanders were spared the sight of sexual deviance: homosexuality was invisible, and the topic ignored. When it *was* discussed, it tended to be misunderstood and seen as problematic. Homonegative messages, through antilocution, were established in the context of the family home, and reinforced through formal educational channels, education serving to affirm the values of society (Hofstede, 1994). From an educational perspective, the message was clear: homosexuality was *not* approved of.

For most of the 20th century, and in some cases, continuing to the present time, society's disapproval of homosexuality has been transmitted in educational contexts in three main ways: Firstly, by allowing/encouraging/tolerating homophobic bullying (Adams, Dickinson, & Asiasiga, 2012; Fortune et al., 2010; Lucassen et al., 2011; Riches, 2014; Suicide Prevention Information New Zealand, 2013). Secondly, through subtle institutional proscriptions against expression of anything but conservative sexual values by teachers (Rubin, 1984/2007). Thirdly, by the simple (often unconscious) expedient of not mentioning same-sex relations in curriculum planning or allowing references in approved textbooks. As Town (1999) observes, this has had the effect of invisibilising homosexuality as an acceptable possibility of human sexuality. Brickell (2008) notes that an earlier educated elite would have had knowledge of same-sex

relations in classical Greek and Roman culture (literature; philosophy; drama; homoerotic art; *erastes-eromenos* relations). But for most New Zealand students, much of this content would have been bowdlerised or removed in a school setting. Bowdlerisation of sensitive narratives has proved an effective strategy, with numerous instantiations in academic settings. For example, generations of school students have been deprived of the love story between Tutanekei and his *takataapui* (close male companion), Tiki, (as outlined by Laurie, 2001). Instead, the more acceptable heterosexually oriented 'Tutanekei and Hinemoa' version was the one popularised, and still current (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2013). This story (in its original form) was related to Parliament by MP Te Ururoa Flavell during the final reading of the Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Amendment Bill ("Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Amendment Bill - Third Reading ", 2013). Crompton (2003) makes a telling point about the pedagogical consequences of invisibility: "It is a fact that an English schoolboy in Shakespeare's day would have learned far more about homosexuality from his classroom reading than a student in the age of Kinsey" (p. 367); see also Hansen and Jensen (Der lille rode bog for skoleelever/1972), Donnelly (1978), Logan (1988), and Town (1999). Plummer (1975) emphasises the importance of balanced sex education, at the same time reflecting that educational materials at that time were "invariably negative. … Each source reinforces the 'abnormality' of homosexuality and the normality of heterosexuality. By evasion or by devaluation, the homosexual experience is always shown to be inferior" (p. 143).

For students and staff in educational institutions, invisibility and the lack of role models resulted in a sense of individual isolation (Adams et al., 2012). Furthermore, this lack of explicit reference to the topic of homosexuality, together with a reluctance to engage in informed debate, resulted in widespread and pervasive ignorance. Misconceptions include association of homosexuality with paedophilia and the continuing misperception that AIDS is a gay disease. National MP Norman Jones, famously alluded to these understandings when he spoke against legalisation in 1985: "we do not want our children to be contaminated … you might catch HIV" (Homosexual law reform in New Zealand, 1985).

Given the entrenched invisibility and lack of clear references, it is sobering to reflect that not until the early 1970s could New Zealand school children read frank and

positive comments about homosexuality in a book written expressly for that age group. This was 'The Little Red Schoolbook' (Hansen & Jensen, Der lille rode bog for skoleelever/1972), a subversive publication avidly sought by students, but popular with neither parents nor teachers. In pocket-book format, factual, non-judgemental information was provided about such taboo subjects as sex and recreational drugs. The section on homosexuality starts by emphasising human and sexual diversity, reassuring readers that "at least 10% of the male population has homosexual tendencies". Homosexuals are discussed in terms of love and feelings which are "just as real and genuine and natural as anybody else's"; difficulties are attributed to Christian culture, "outdated laws and ill informed public opinion". The authors note that "many homosexuals live together in stable relationships", and the authors also anticipate homosexual marriages some forty years before the passing of legislation allowing them. The section concludes with the observation that young people who are struggling with their sexual orientation may feel they have nobody to turn to except their doctor. This was probably sensible advice - certainly preferable to seeing a clergyman - but advice deeply embedded in the medicalising discourse which was to persist for some decades to come.

Published four years later was 'Down Under the Plum Trees' (Tuohy & Murphy, 1976), an explicit sex guide for young people written in graphic language with frank photographs; a useful point of reference for young people wanting factual information. This book too was controversial when published. Under the leadership of Patricia Bartlett, The Society for the Promotion of Community Standards, which had 22,000 members at the time, campaigned unsuccessfully to have it banned (University of Otago, 2010). The situation in 2017 is slightly improved; for example, Rainbow Youth has an Auckland-based educational outreach programme for schools (Rainbow Youth, 2017). However, the situation with respect to sex education is a long way from where it needs to be. An 18-month enquiry conducted by the New Zealand Parliament found sex education in schools to be "... inconsistent and sometimes non-existent " (Davison, 2014 March 7, para. 3).

Universities do not emerge unscathed from close scrutiny. Kirkman and Moloney (2005), in the introduction to their groundbreaking review of sexual research from an Australasian perspective, observed that "the university is not immune from the

intolerance, ignorance, and fears around sexuality that pervade society at large" (p. 27); and Vance (1991/2007) pointed to the dearth of graduate departments which provide training in the study of human sexuality. The situation is improving in terms of programmes which are available to students, and universities are beginning to see the potential for sexological research. From a sociological perspective, increasingly stories emerge of gay-friendly initiatives at tertiary level.

Five examples from Auckland University of Technology: first university to sign up for the 'Rainbow Tick' (Rainbow Tick, 2014 April 8); creation of a new Diversity Manager role in 2013; historic decision of AUT's Council to explicitly recognise lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender staff and students in the Strategic Plan (Auckland University of Technology Council, 2012-2016); existence of active and dynamic staff and student networks 'Out@AUT' (Tipuna, Richardson, & Allan, 2011); establishment of a permanent, full-time staff-student LGBTIQ coordinator in 2013; establishment of a Professor of Diversity in 2017.

2.5   Attitudes shaped by the media, literature and popular culture

Even as recently as the final years of the 20th Century, Aotearoa New Zealand historian Jock Phillips (1999) was able to talk of the "many silences in the historical record" pertaining to homosexuality, noting that "knowledge about homosexual history is utterly dependent on oral history" (p. 58). Chris Brickell (2008) has woven some of these narratives into the first homosexual history of Aotearoa New Zealand, drawing additionally on court records, newspapers, diaries and other resources in public and private collections.

In the 21st century, publication of oral histories and private photo collections has enriched and strengthened our understanding of the homosexual subcultures, which were urban based, and to a large extent, invisible and unknown to mainstream New Zealanders (Beehre, 2010; Brickell, 2005, 2011, 2014; Kirkman & Maloney, 2005). Given this invisibility, it seems interesting to consider how New Zealanders might have become aware of homosexuality as a concept. For the focus of this research, a key question is this: for an individual conflicted with a sense of personal identity, contaminated by messages of sin, crime, and sickness, what hope might there have

been for affirming messages from print and other mass media outlets, such as radio, television and cinema?

From a consideration of newspaper content from the late 19th century up to the present day, a clear pattern emerges: firstly, initial reticence, i.e. a reluctance to refer directly to homosexuality; for example, as noted by Brickell (2008), newspaper reporting on the Oscar Wilde case skirted euphemistically around the facts of the matter employing terms such as 'vile', 'bestial' and 'unprintable' practices (p. 73); then, through the 20th century, still disapproving but increasingly frank references to same-sex behaviours; then, from the 1970s onwards, can be discerned a gradual relaxation of attitudes and space for consideration of gay rights. In very broad terms, this pattern of editorial positioning can be summarised as progressive movement on two continua: from inexplicitness towards explicitness; and from disapproval, through grudging toleration, to positive affirmation. From the literature which appeared in the years following World War Two can be discerned incipient indications of homosexual possibilities, this literature becoming "a site of cultural exploration and resistance" (Burke, 2007, p. 25).

Marshall McLuhan wrote, during the infancy of television, of "new media and technologies by which we amplify and extend ourselves" (McLuhan, 1964/2001, p. 70). Phillips (1999) has characterised the conditioning potential of media in Aotearoa New Zealand as "a very, very determinative force" (p. 50). The power of media in shaping not just attitudes but also gender roles can be seen with respect to the normalising influence of cinema and television "to keep little girls and boys on their predestined rails. For boys, education in masculinity is particularly provided today by television (thanks to which the art of murder, as a masculine speciality, can easily be learned by the age of three)" (Hansen & Jensen, Der lille rode bog for skoleelever/1972, p. 78). In order to ensure that members of the viewing public were only exposed to positive (i.e. clearly heterosexual) role models, Hollywood's chief censor introduced guidelines via the Motion Picture Production Code in 1930. Amongst other things, this had the effect of rendering gay characters invisible (Russo, 1981, 1987).

Some thirty years later, in 1961, the 'Code' was revised to allow filmmakers to at least *represent* obviously homosexual characters. However, these characters tended to be either two-dimensional stereotyped buffoons, or psychologically disturbed villains, invariably destined for an unfortunate demise by the time the final credits rolled. According to Russo, "Homosexuality had come out of the closet and into the shadows, where it would remain for the better part of two decades" (p. 122). Institutional regulations, such as the 'Code', undoubtedly impacted gay visibility, although there were little pockets of sedition and resistance, as exemplified by Gore Vidal's revelations from his time as screenwriter for 'Ben-Hur' (Russo, 1981, 1987). For an insightful exploration of popular television and cinema content as perceived by gay baby boomers growing up in the post-World-War-2 years, see Cohen, McWilliams and Smith (1995).

In considering how New Zealanders might have discovered homosexual themes in their cinema and television viewing and radio listening, it is useful to consider Clark and Berry's (1969) framework, which established four stages of media representation for minority groups such as gays. They are: non-representation, ridicule, regulation, and respect. Participants in the research for this present study have experienced all four stages. In terms of ridicule, numerous examples are evident in cinema and television (Russo, 1981, 1987). On Radio New Zealand the British comedy radio programme 'Round the Horne' introduced New Zealanders to a form of gay underground slang called Polari. This programme was broadcast on Saturday nights between 1968 and 1970, and listeners would have been well aware of the homosexual subtext from the humorous exchanges between two characters, Julian and Sandy, (Ings, 2010). In explaining the decline of Polari as a gay argot, Ings observes that "many of New Zealand's emerging gay liberationists viewed Polari's often 'bitchy' nature as degrading, divisive and politically incorrect" (p. 60). In terms of respect, an ever-increasing array of films and programmes are available which depict gay people as sympathetic, three-dimensional characters (McKinnon, 2015; Soukup, 2016).

2.6 Juridical constraints: Historical overview

Sexual acts between consenting male adults were illegal in Aotearoa New Zealand for a 146 year period, from 1840 until 1986. Penalties for men who were convicted in a court of law were unnecessarily brutal. See Figure 2.1.
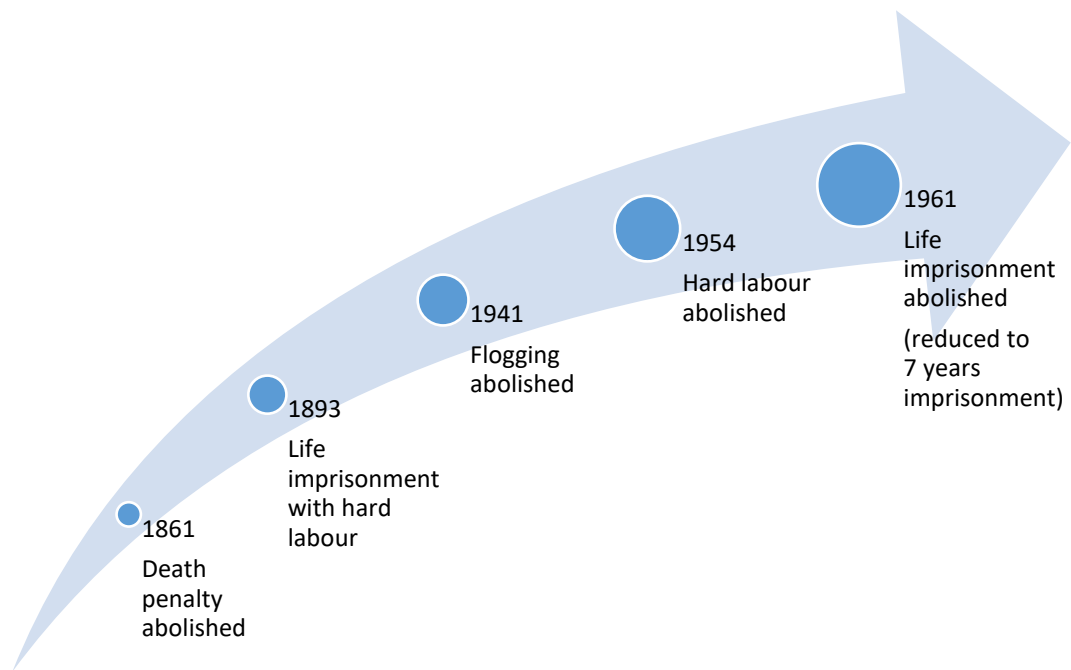
Figure 2.1 Penalties relating to homosexual acts in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Future generations may struggle to understand the moral conservatism that resulted in legislationsuch as is outlined in Figure 2.1. Yet, from the 19th Century through to the present day, a clear trend is evident, indicating a reduction in severity and an increase in tolerance and understanding ("Civil Union Act 2004," ; "Homosexual Law Reform Act, 1986," ; "Human Rights Amendment Act, 1993," ; "Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Amendment Act 2013,"). See Figure 2.2. From a contemporary perspective, writing at a time when the Minister of Justice has made a formal apology to men convicted for homosexuality (Emotion as Parliament apologises, 2017 July 06) and while Parliament is considering legislation to expunge criminal convictions for gay men (Criminal Records [Expungement of Convictions for Historical Homosexual Offences] Bill, 2017), it may be difficult to imagine or remember the intensity of the homonegativity before homosexual law reform.
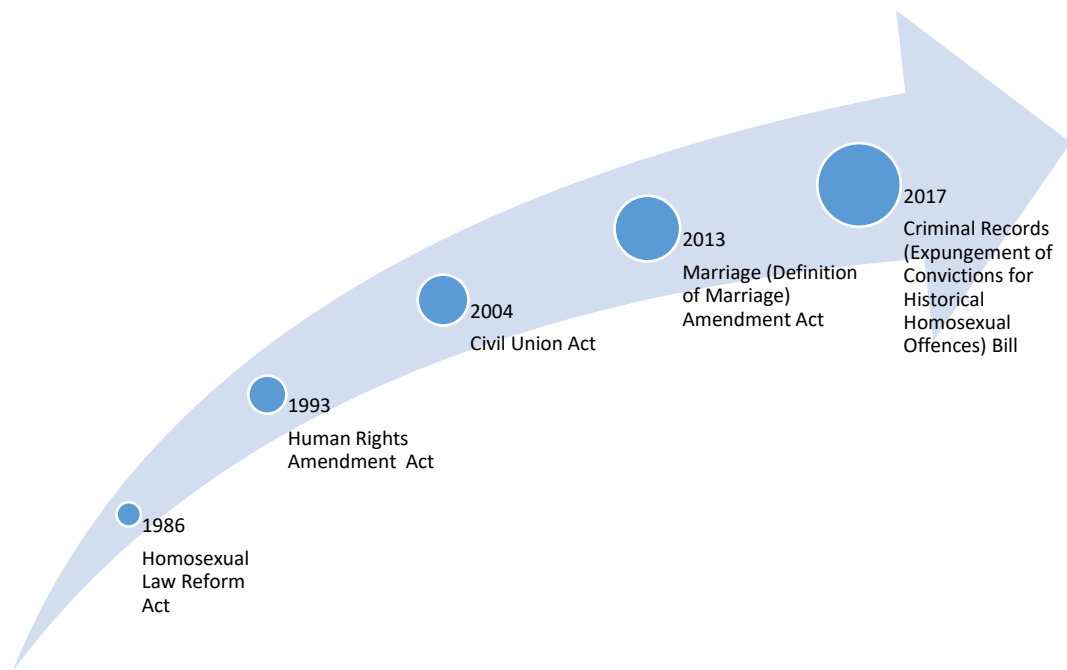
Figure 2.2 Relevant legislation in Aotearoa New Zealand.

2.7   Homosexual law reform

In stark contrast to the silence and invisibility of previous decades, the 1970s and 1980s were characterised by the vociferous exchange of ideas relating to homosexual law reform. Following the defeat of National MP Venn Young's Crimes Amendment Bill of 1974/75, Labour MP Fran Wilde's Homosexual Law Reform Bill of 1985/1986 was fiercely contested, with feelings running high on both sides of the debate. The strongest opposition to the proposed legislation came from community groups, often Churches, and significantly, from the newly formed Coalition of Concerned Citizens. These law reform opponents clashed with the various Gay Task Force groups and other pro-reform activists. Intense media scrutiny focused on details from both parliamentary debate and community action. For many New Zealanders, homosexual law reform was a critical period of consciousness raising and opening of minds. Without necessarily taking a public position either way, individuals were able to think through the various arguments, assessing the claims and counter-claims, and sift through the rhetoric to try to make sense of the issues. For some people, these new understandings raised awareness of personal possibilities, along with a heightened sense of the potential ramifications inherent in adopting a gay persona.

2.7.1 Arguments in favour of Homosexual Law Reform

To provide balance, it would seem appropriate to reprise the fundamental arguments in support of various law reform initiatives. Articulation of these arguments dates from the time of the Wolfenden Report (1957/1963). Arguments in favour of homosexual law reform have tended to be based on the following five grounds: humanitarianism, equity, consistency, justice, and utilitarianism (Brickell, 2008; Guy, 2002; Instone, 2009; Laurie & Evans, 2009; Laurie & Evans, 2009; McCreanor, 1996; Parkinson, 2009; Pritchard, 2005; Street, 2009). Arguments on humanitarian grounds have cited disproportionately high rates of suicide; instances of inappropriate marriages; and the reality of gay men living in constant fear of blackmail, 'gay bashing', or social consequences, such as ostracism. It has also been noted that homosexual law reform would remove the stigma of criminality. Arguments on equity grounds have referred to the 'Labouchère amendment' of 1885, underlining the illogicality of a law which discriminated between male homosexual acts, which were considered criminal, and lesbian acts, which were *not* considered criminal. Arguments on the grounds of consistency have pointed out that the police did not consistently enforce the existing laws, while penalties were inconsistently applied, leading to an undermining of the judiciary. Arguments on the grounds of justice have sought to differentiate between Church-based morality on the one hand, and Parliament-enacted laws on the other. It has been noted, for example, that Parliament does not legislate against adultery; therefore, neither should Parliament legislate against consensual same-sex acts. Arguments on the grounds of utilitarianism have pointed to public health considerations, noting that law reform would do much to reduce the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases in creating a climate of trust whereby gay people would feel encouraged to seek help.

2.7.2 Language used to oppose Homosexual Law Reform

In considering the attitudes and values which were presented in support of their argument, it is useful to consider how certain MPs portrayed same-sex relations, and to examine the language used to characterise gay men in debating three parliamentary Bills:

➢ Crimes Amendment Bill of 1974/75
➢ Homosexual Law Reform Bill of 1985/1986

> ➢ Human Rights Amendment Bill of 1992/1993

The language displays a tendency to revert to emotion rather than logic or evidence. This resulted in a homonegative discourse based on ignorance, bigotry and moral anxiety. The New Zealand parliamentarians who were opposed to homosexual law reform characterised 'the homosexual', and framed their arguments, in overwhelmingly negative ways; see Figure 2.3
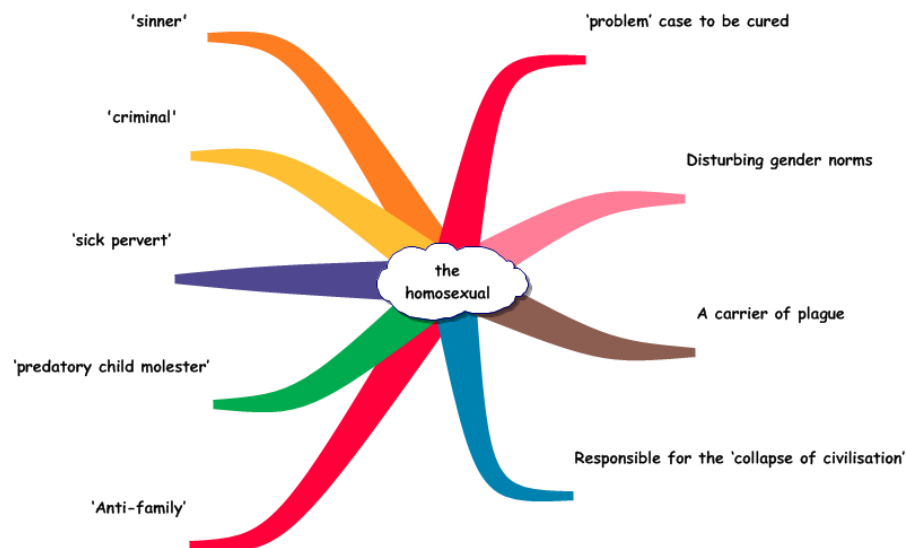
Figure 2.3 Parliamentary discourse: Homonegative framing of 'the homosexual'

Numerous books and studies have focused on the political machinations of homosexual law reform and the sociological consequences (Atmore, 1995; Barnett, 2009; Guy, 2000, 2005; Laurie, 2004; Laurie & Evans, 2009; McCreanor, 1996; Parkinson, 2009; Peters, 2016; Pritchard, 2005; Street, 2009); my interest in this study has been to consider the actual language used by MPs during parliamentary debates in order to shed some light onto the attitudes which would have been prevalent in Aotearoa New Zealand during the 1970s and 1980s. For a collection of homonegative statements made by MPs during the first two readings of the Crimes Amendment Bill of 1974/1975, and the three readings of the Homosexual Law Reform Bill of 1985/1986, refer to Appendix F: Parliamentary discourse: Homonegative statements.

2.8 Chapter review and summary

In order to provide the reader with a clearer sense of the homonegative discourses which were evident in Aotearoa New Zealand throughout the 20th century, this chapter

has considered the socio-cultural landscape from the perspective of five different vantage points:

- the Christian Church
- healthcare
- formal education
- media and popular culture
- law

This background helps to provide texture and context against which the participants' narratives might be better understood. These were significant areas of social and cultural influence that characterised the society into which these participants were thrown, and it is likely that many of these discourses were incorporated into the attitudes and behaviours of individuals who find themselves attracted to the same sex.

Chapter 3 Literature Review

As a subject for research, homosexuality did not invite significant interest until the second half of the 20th century. It has been estimated that as recently as 1969 a mere 500 English language books dealing with various aspects of homosexuality could be identified and by 1989, this number had increased to 9,000 (Gough & Greenblatt, 1990). In 2017 an inestimable number of books, articles, theses, essays and blogs are available, dealing with multifarious aspects of homosexuality, written from an increasingly wide range of perspectives and with differing underlying agendas. Research into this topic has explored such dimensions as aetiology, identification of a 'gay gene', medical cures for homosexuality, and postmodern understandings of sexual identity. From this vast and protean field, the following themes have been identified as being of critical interest for this study:

- Homonegativity
- Coming out models
- The process of coming out later in life

While this research is situated in Aotearoa New Zealand, contemporary understandings of sexuality owe a considerable debt to sexological and sociological research from Anglophone countries, such as Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. As an indication of what has been written (and published), the available literature reflects a diverse range of epistemological approaches and understandings with respect to the topic of homosexuality.

Cognizant of the many different approaches to literature reviews (Grant & Booth 2009), and the importance of tailoring the review of literature to the needs of the research, I undertook a comparative exercise: I first examined the 'literature review' sections in a variety of doctoral theses from different academic disciplines, and then systematically compared these with the approaches in phenomenological theses. I gradually became aware of a sense of distrust on the part of phenomenological researchers towards the perceived primacy of the 'literature review', in the sense of foreclosing understanding of particular issues, for example, Buckley (1992/2013) draws attention to what he calls the "the 'sedimentation' (*Niederschlag*) of meaning" (p. 87).

And in the same way that phenomenology is suspicious of the primacy of 'method', so too is there a concern that too close an engagement with the literature might "compromise our openness to what we might learn from the inquiry" (Vagle, 2014, p. 72). So, while I was aware of the need to familiarise myself with the literature, I was also mindful of the dangers of establishing any "a priori explanation of what the phenomenon 'is' or 'should be' according to empirical explanations" (Vagle, 2014, p. 72).

Therefore, in the interests of providing an 'audit trail', I outline here the process by which I approached the literature review, guided initially by Hart (1998; 2001). My first task was to define the topic through general reading, noting key concepts used and seminal authors cited. Throughout this process, I compiled an organic list of terms for further searching, and I mapped out emerging topics with a view to shaping the rhetorical structure of both the 'Literature Review' and 'Historical Context' chapters. In delimiting the scope of the review, I decided to include only those texts that were available in English, and to concentrate primarily on 20th and 21st century publications, at the same time keeping my options open for earlier texts. In terms of 'housekeeping', I maintained a research journal, and a dedicated search diary in which I recorded search queries and findings. Before embarking on the formal review, I attended a number of library workshops and consulted with the postgraduate liaison librarian.

The texts for this review are drawn predominantly from the second half of the 20th century up until 2017, and they represent a range of authors from diverse discourse communities including law, philosophy, history, sociology, sexology. Texts consulted include research reports, academic theses, single- and multi-author books, chapters in edited volumes, websites, and peer-reviewed journal articles. For the initial review systematic search techniques were applied (Hart, 2001). As each text was read, it was reviewed for key concepts, historical perspective, methodology, findings and conclusions; a critiquing tool was developed following Hart (1998). Summary data was recorded on a series of tables in Microsoft Word, before being transferred to an Excel spreadsheet. As each new text was considered, its key findings were compared with previously read texts, and a subjective rating scale applied to determine perceived strengths and limitations. The review of literature continued throughout the life of the research project, with additional searches suggested by findings from the interview

data. As the research progressed, the literature review was revised to more closely reflect the themes emerging from the findings. My reading of the literature has been wide-ranging, interdisciplinary and recursive. Findings from and interpretations of the literature are deployed throughout this thesis, in the present chapter, the 'Historical Context' chapter, the 'Methodology' and 'Methods' chapters, and throughout the findings chapters.

3.1 Homonegativity

One of the main explanations for gay men feeling unable to acknowledge their sexual orientation relates to homonegative discourses as outlined in the Historical Context chapter. However, negative attitudes towards homosexuals are not universal, nor do attitudes remain constant over time. In Asia, historical records reveal an openness and naturalness relating to same-sex relations, for example, in imperial China (500 BCE - 1849) and in pre-Meiji Japan (800 – 1868) (Crompton, 2003). In the Twentieth century, Ford and Beach (1951) examined homosexual practices in 76 different societies and found some form of homosexuality to be socially acceptable in over 60% of the societies surveyed. Yet in western cultures since the time of the ancient Greeks, there has been considerable antipathy to same-sex relations. Foucault (1984) notes that the 19th century stereotypical image of the effeminate homosexual, with the "repulsive aura that surrounds it, has come down through the centuries. It was already clearly delineated in the Greco-Roman literature of the imperial age" (p. 19).

Foucault identifies the 19th Century as a period when sexuality came under unprecedented scrutiny and, as others have noted, "the consequences of these great 19th century moral paroxysms are still with us", including negative reactions towards homosexuality (Rubin, 1984/2007, p. 150). Harvey (1978, as cited in Weeks, 1981/2007) explored the degrees of toleration in a range of societies and observed that "societies which grudgingly tolerate homosexuality probably have a higher incidence of homosexual activity than societies where it is viciously persecuted" (p. 944). So, as we discern different degrees of homonegativity, at different times, in different countries, we might well ponder the nature and origins of this antipathy.

The non-clinical term 'homophobia' was coined in the late 1960s by US psychologist George Weinberg and popularised in the early 1970s (Weinberg, 1972). However,

given the pejorative clinical connotations carried by the suffix 'phobia', some people prefer the term 'homonegativism' or 'homonegativity' (Hudson & Ricketts, 1980) or 'heterosexism' (Herek, 1986; Rodwell, 1971) or 'sexual prejudice' (Herek, 2004), or 'structural sexual stigma' (Herek, 2009). While these terms are relatively recent, the concepts are not new, (*pace* Sapir, 1949; Whorf, 1942). The literature provides a "very early expression of intense negative reactions and of forms of stigmatisation that will extend well into the future" (1984, p. 19). For the reasons outlined in the introduction, this thesis will use the term 'homonegativity '. Herek's research into homonegative attitudes reveals interesting gender differences in term of the emotional valence and strength of attitudes towards gay people:

> (a) women tend to express more favourable and less condemning attitudes than men toward gay people;

> (b) in the aggregate, attitudes toward gay men tend to be more hostile than attitudes toward lesbians;

> (c) the most negative attitudes are those expressed by heterosexual men toward gay men. (2007, p. 912)

So how are we to understand the concept of homonegativity? Before considering the aetiology and typical manifestations of this phenomenon in Aotearoa New Zealand society, it is useful to first consider the related concepts of heterosexism (Herek, 1986; Rodwell, 1971) and heteronormativity (Warner, 1991). Heterosexism operates at the level of culture and society. It refers to an ideological "value-system that prizes heterosexuality, assumes it is the only appropriate manifestation of love and sexuality and devalues homosexuality" (Herek, 1986, p. 925). Unreflective heterosexuals are unaware that they inhabit a privileged, heteronormative hegemony. Their worldview relating to sexuality is characterised by an understanding that sexuality is a fixed, biologically-determined essence: human beings are born with sexual genitalia in order to procreate; men and women are complementary genders so heterosexual marriage is the 'norm' and one of the foundational institutions of society. Another consideration is that gay men may be perceived as 'betraying' the power and privilege traditionally enjoyed by males in a patriarchal society. Following this logic, homosexuality is abnormal and antisocial. As Padgug (1979/2007) observes, gender roles "tend to be

normative, and ideological, in nature – that is, they are presented as the categories within which members of particular societies ought to act" (p. 25).

Writing from a scripting perspective, Simon and Gagnon (1984/2007) observe that individuals' failure to conform to the norms of heteronormativity results in "anomie, personal alienation and uncertainty" (p. 32). From a societal perspective historically, "those who transgress gender norms are particularly likely to be targeted for violence" (O'Flaherty & Fisher, 2008, p. 209). The violence need not be actual or physical; a climate of menace and unease can do useful work in maintaining conformity and heteronormativity. Such an atmosphere becomes normalised to those living within it, but is readily discernible to an observer arriving fresh from another culture. As McLaughlin (1976) observed, "English poet Fleur Adcock revisited New Zealand … and said she felt here an atmosphere of suppressed violence. She's not the first or only one to sense it" (p. 64). The sense of violence can be conveyed eloquently through words or gestures - even facial expressions. Reflecting on the intensely conformist character of the New Zealand male in the 1940s and 1950s, Pearson (1952) drew attention to the non-verbal communication mechanisms through which disapproval is transmitted, identifying one facial expression in particular, the self-preserving sneer:

> He has made the grade by doing violence to himself, by sneering at
> his impulses and sensibilities so he can't help keeping that sneer
> always at hand ready for emergencies. From his experience he senses
> all the pitfalls that threaten the youngster patterning himself after
> the almighty norm so he is ready to warn other comers. 'Don't go
> that way, mate.' What is *that way*? Perhaps he said something about
> a sunset or the Alps – that way is effeminacy. (pp. 214/215)

Certain behaviours were acceptable for males, and other behaviours, such as revealing a sensitive side of one's nature, were less acceptable. This societal sense of right and wrong evidently extended to sex. Writing a quarter of a century later, McLaughlin (1976) emphasised the conformist nature of heteronormative gender roles, and in drawing attention to the paralysing fear of sexuality in general, and homosexuality in particular, he quoted Father Felix Donnelly, Catholic priest and social activist:

> We are ill at ease with our sexuality. We are afraid that other people
> will make assumptions. If I touch a male then I'm homosexual and if I
> touch a female then I'm trying to set up a sexual relationship with

her. These are great fears and we're so hung up on them that we're unable to communicate in non-verbal ways. (p. 33)

Throughout society, and especially in educational settings, there appears to be an inextricable mixture of heteronormativity, heterosexism and homonegativity. Based on his research with ten young gay men reflecting on their schooling in Aotearoa New Zealand in the 1990s, Town (1999) remarked on the strength of heteronormativity to reinforce 'hegemonic masculinities' – "heteronormativity is so overwhelming that it denies other possibilities" (p. 149). At the time of writing (2017) the influence of heteronormativity in schools remains largely un-acknowledged; that issues are not being addressed is of concern to numerous commentators (Allen, 2015; Burford, MacDonald, Orchard, & Wills, 2015; Carpenter & Lee, 2015; Fitzpatrick, 2015; Gunn, 2015; lisahunter, Futter-Puati, & Kelly, 2015; Sexton, 2015). Also of concern is the low standard of sex education in schools, along with the lack of professional development for teachers in terms of teaching human sexuality: according to Graham (31 March, 2017), "A decade ago, ERO (The Education Review Office) found one in five schools was doing a poor job of teaching sex education" (para 3). This continues to be a concern for a variety of reasons, and the teaching of sexuality education in schools is in the process of being reviewed by ERO (Graham, 31 March, 2017). The issues evident in schools are also apparent in the wider society. With a change of government in October, 2017, guidelines for improved sexuality education have been prioritised as part of a revised health curriculum (*Labour's policies*, 2017).

Homonegativity: Continuing influences in 20th and 21st centuries

So how are we to understand fear of homosexuals, both as internalised homonegativity and as sexual prejudice? What is it about homosexuality? As Hocquenghem (1978, p. 35) asks: "Why does the mere mention of the word trigger off reactions of recoil and hate?" (p. 35). Etiological explorations of homonegativity take as their starting point negative attitudes towards sex in general, or 'sex negativity', an ideological formation apparent in contemporary western society as outlined in Weeks (1981/2007) and further developed by Rubin (1984/2007) who sees sex in general as "a vector of oppression" (p. 168).

Rubin explored western sexual variations and ideology through a series of binaries (e.g. heterosexual/homosexual, married/in sin, monogamous/promiscuous), and through delineation on a continuum of contested behaviours, with, at one end, socially acceptable sex, and at the other, extreme 'abnormal', 'unnatural', unacceptable sex. Extending Weeks' (1981/2007) advice to examine the 'social conditions' of a given epoch, we may find it helpful to consider that the social conditions for the emergence of homonegativity in Western societies, are closely aligned with modern capitalism, as outlined by d'Emilio (1983/2007), who sees gay men as "scapegoats for the social instability of the system" (p. 256). With the historical role of the family as an economic unit, for a variety of reasons, homosexuality has been seen as a threat to traditional family values. As Plummer (1975) observes:

> classification systems surrounding the family and marriage come
> under threat – the 'natural order' takes it for granted thtat the family
> is universal, that the family is the only appropriate context for
> childbirth and child-rearing … The existence of homosexuality is an
> anomaly which threatens these institutions. (p. 119)

These threats, occasionally intensifying as moral panics, are articulated and recycled through a complex discursive interplay between multiple cultural institutions, including the family itself (Rubin, 1984/2007). Writing some 30 years later, Weeks (2017) observes that the fiscal dynamics of globalisation have helped to weaken traditional structures, such as the nuclear family, and conspired to "encourage the process of 'individualisation'", which has enabled individuals to pursue alternative life trajectories in the interests of living fulfilling lives as gay men (pp. 161-162). With an increase in disposable income and greater choice in accommodation, gay men often choose to settle in similar areas, in large cities. The desire to reside in a neighbourhood of like-minded people can be explained in many ways: perhaps in terms of a search for excitement, or a pragmatic motivation in seeking partners, often satisfaction in the richness of a community experience, and contentment in a sense of belonging. Another aspect, perhaps unconsciously, has to do with safety in numbers. In considering the experience of violence, either psychological or physical, in Aotearoa New Zealand, as reported by Henrickson (2007c), 18% of the male respondents in the Lavender Island study indicated that they had been physically assaulted and 77% "verbally assaulted because of their sexuality" (p. 73). And so we might revisit the

question: why do some individuals have such intense feelings of negativity about homosexuals? And how might we understand this negativity?

From a western perspective, heterosexism and heteronormativity have long been and will probably continue to be, the dominant paradigm. From this perspective, we can discern two clear positionings: on the one hand, explicit affirmation of gay people and consensual, loving, same-sex relations, and on the other, a continuum of negative attitudes relating to homosexuality as a concept and to homosexuals as people. On this spectrum, we can discern subtle homonegativity at one end, and undisguised hatred of homosexuals at the other.

Homonegativity: Exploring 'stigma'

One of the most influential theorists to explore this phenomenon, is US social psychologist Gregory Herek (Herek, 2009; Herek, 1984, 1986, 1997-2013, 2004; Herek, McWhirter, Sanders, & Reinisch, 1990). In order to consider homonegativity from both a personal and a cultural perspective, Herek (2009) proposes a theoretical framework tied together by the central concept of stigma. The three main domains are 'enacted stigma' (individual and group behaviours, such as verbal abuse and gay-bashing); 'felt stigma' (associated with stereotypes; an individual's – either heterosexual or homosexual - awareness of stigma and its consequences); and 'internalized stigma' (internalised homonegativity).

Manifestations of enacted stigma in Aotearoa New Zealand range from mildly offensive teasing, through to verbal abuse, bullying, and gay bashing, sometimes leading to murder; see Franklin (1998) for an analysis of hate crimes from a forensic psychology perspective. If it is true (following Freud) that all human beings are inherently bisexual, then it may be that homonegative feelings stem from anxiety about a person's own orientation. Hocquenghem (1978, as interpreted by Weeks, 1981/2007, p. 138) argues that "sublimated homosexuality is the basis of the paranoia about homosexuality which pervades social behaviour". Jock Phillips (Schick & Dolan, 1999) makes a similar point about New Zealand men for whom, when at various points in history they are thrown together in "exclusive male communities … whether in the rugby scrum or in war, the taboo against homosexuality is especially strong" (p. 58). This would help us to understand why so many Members of Parliament, who were also

returned soldiers from the Second World War, spoke so vehemently in the House against the fear that homosexual acts might be legalised in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Insights into individual and collective attitudes can be gleaned from an examination of the discourses and behaviours associated with the passing of this controversial legislation ("Homosexual Law Reform Act, 1986,"). The years leading up to this legislation saw vigorous debate, characterised by homonegative insults and "a Kiwi version of a Nuremberg Rally" (Herkt, 2014, p. 69). McCreanor provides a useful discussion of heterosexist and homonegative attitudes drawing on a corpus of public submissions to the New Zealand Government Select Committee on Homosexual Law Reform of 1985 (McCreanor, 1996). Similarly, in the 1970s, the Hansard transcripts reveal strikingly homonegative content in many of the speeches ("Crimes Amendment Bill - First reading," 1974; "Crimes Amendment Bill - Second Reading," 1975); see Appendix F. And even since the passing of the various pieces of gay-friendly legislation, evidence of homonegativity remains. In the first decade of the 21st century, the Lavender Islands research project began to examine homosexuality in Aotearoa New Zealand from a variety of perspectives, touching on aspects of internalised homonegativity in terms of decisions to continue in formal education (Henrickson, 2007a), homonegative bullying in educational settings (Henrickson, 2007c), and perceptions of homophobia, and estrangement, in religious settings (Henrickson, 2007b; 2009).

The ubiquity of fear, ignorance and misinformation relating to homosexuality can be examined with reference to Herek's domain of 'felt stigma'. This includes persistent stereotypes, such as confusing homosexuality and paedophilia: "Now they've got them on TV ... and in the schools!. Talk about the proverbial chicken in the henhouse ... These homosexuals can't reproduce themselves, and so they go into the schools and try to recruit our young people" (Sedaris, 2004, p. 213, as cited in Cobb, 2006, p. 154). The foregoing discussion about heteronormativity underscores the irony implicit in the fear of homosexuals recruiting heterosexuals. As noted by Cohen et al (1995) "the truth is, homosexuals do not recruit; heterosexuals do" (p. 120); see also Rich (1982/2007) regarding compulsory heterosexuality. 'Felt stigma' is simply an individual's awareness that homosexuality is negatively valued by some members of society. In considering the time frame of this study (1939-2017), a considerable shift

has occurred in private and public attitudes towards homosexuality. Since the passing of the Homosexual Law Reform Act in 1986, the fear of homosexuality has gradually diminished, to be replaced with greater understanding and increased visibility. Manifestations of and reductions in homonegativity have been explored in terms of various sociodemographic variables, such as religion, education, gender, age and personal contact with gay people (Herek, 2007). Other approaches, from a cultural sociology perspective argue that cultural capital can be seen as a determinant (Slootmaeckers & Lievens, 2014); the researchers conclude that individuals with more cultural capital, as outlined by Bourdieu (1986), generally display less homonegativity in terms of attitudes and behaviours. This finding has important practical implications for educational practices in Aotearoa New Zealand.

In conclusion, this section has examined homonegativity through Herek's (2009) conceptual framework, which is underpinned by the central concept of stigma: 'enacted stigma', including verbal abuse and physical violence; 'felt stigma' (awareness of stigma and its consequences); and 'internalized stigma' (internalised homonegativity). We have seen that, in 2017, homonegativity is gradually decreasing, although throughout most of the 20th century, homosexuality was feared and misunderstood. As a result, life for an openly gay man was challenging in many respects. The nature of these challenges is further elaborated in the 'Historical Context' chapter. A later chapter ('Mixed Messages') will explore the lived experience of both felt stigma and internalised stigma from the perspective of gay men who were not able to identify or acknowledge their sexual orientation in early adulthood.

3.2 Coming out models: Background, overview and critique

The literature relating to the coming out process is extensive, and characterised by a lack of agreement about the nature of the process itself. However, this literature is relatively recent; the first theoretical models in the English-speaking world date back to the 1970s and 1980s, and in certain respects, they were very much of their time, reflecting the unique socio-cultural and historical era in which they emerged (Eliason, 1996). For example, in an energised spirit of highly politicised activism, gay liberationists exhorted all homosexuals to come out publicly, and this ethos was reflected in some of the models. As Jagose (1996) observed, homosexuality became recognized as "potentially a transformative identity that must be avowed publicly until

it is no longer a shameful secret but a legitimately recognised way of being in the world" (p. 38). So, in order to better understand these early coming out models, it is necessary to consider the socio-cultural, and academic context in which they emerged.

The post-WW2 years were characterised by a clamouring for new approaches, and an increasingly vocal critique of positivist, pathologising research into homosexuality from a heterosexist perspective; Plummer (1975) drew attention to the dearth of reliable research into sexual orientation, noting that:

> these problems are surrounded by such a veil of emotion, dogma, ignorance and blind prejudice that informed debate and humane help remain scarce, while personal suffering and public confusion remain abundant. While in other areas of life, the search for understanding through research is seen as a *sine qua non* of progress, in sexual matters it is decried as irrelevant, dehumanizing and pernicious. (pp. 4-5)

And when it did appear, much of the research into homosexuality appeared to be asking the wrong sorts of questions, in the wrong sorts of ways; "the plethora of clinical aetiological studies on homosexuality are open to a number of serious limitations: methodological, theoretical, substantive, applied, ideological, sociological and philosophical" (Plummer, 1975, p. 130).

Into this largely unexplored terrain ventured researchers who were open to new and different ways of understanding social reality, using methodological frameworks such as social constructionism, as outlined by Berger and Luckman (1966), symbolic interactionism, with a clear focus on meanings (Blumer, 1969), and scripting theory (Gagnon & Simon, 1973). Reflecting on the impact of sexological research which emerged from this era, Gagnon and Simon (2003) conclude that "[t]he history of sexual discourse in the two decades (1965–1985) that provided the originating images and metaphors for the development of a 'scripting approach' is among the most dramatic and immediately transformative in Western history" (p. 496). Both Gagnon and Simon had worked in the Kinsey Institute, and their ground-breaking work inspired researchers such as Kenneth Plummer, whose 1975 framework provided the foundation for much of the work which followed. Plummer's four-stage model outlined

> the stages through which some homosexuals pass in adopting homosexuality as a way of life. In summary these are depicted as

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> sensitization, signification, 'coming out' and stabilization; and
> together they may be taken as an 'ideal type' of career route for that
> homosexual who lives his life primarily as a homosexual in contact
> with other homosexuals. (p. 134)

One of the most often cited models (which drew on Plummer's model) was developed by an Australian clinical psychologist, Vivienne Cass (1979). From an epistemological perspective that combined social constructionist psychology and the psychology of knowledge, Cass' model rejected essentialist understandings of homosexuality as "an inner or 'true' self that lay dormant within the individual, just waiting to be revealed" (2015, l. 309). Instead, the model works from the assumption that the development of sexual orientation is a complex combination of biological, psychological, and sociocultural factors. According to this model, coming out involves a process of initial confusion followed by acknowledgement of, and coming to terms with, a homosexual orientation. Cass' model also draws on the social constructionist 'interpersonal congruency theory' of Secord and Backman, (1961), a theory which foregrounds the processes of interpersonal interaction as determinative of self-identity formation and stability. Throughout the process of coming out, the individual, according to Cass' (1979) model, is seen as striving for congruence between their perception of their own behaviour, their perception of how other people view them, and their own self-identity through a complex interplay of affective and cognitive dimensions in the 'intrapersonal matrix'. Cass proposed a six-stage process: identity confusion; identity comparison; identity tolerance; identity acceptance; identity pride; identity synthesis. One of the features of this model is the notion of 'identity foreclosure' in that a gay individual may 'foreclose', or forestall the process of identity formation from proceeding to a further stage. Reflecting on this model in 2015, Cass offers the following definition of gay identity as "a typological identity that is represented by a relatively constant understanding (perception, feeling and experience) of self as someone who fits in to a specific sexual orientation category such as 'a gay man'" (l. 394).

In 1982, American psychologist and sex therapist, Eli Coleman proposed a five stage model: pre-coming out; coming out; exploration; first relationship; integration (Coleman, 1982). In the mid-1980s, American sociologist Richard Troiden conducted research with 150 gay men which led to the development of an age-specific four-stage

model which was labelled 'an ideal-typical model of gay identity acquisition': sensitization; identity confusion; identity assumption; commitment (Troiden, 1988).

In 1999, the models of Troiden, Coleman, and Cass were taken by American educator Arthur Lipkin, and incorporated into a five-stage mega-model: pre-sexuality; identity questioning; coming out; pride; post-sexuality (Lipkin, 1999). In subsequent years, these (and other) models have been critiqued, and a number of problematic issues identified (DeCecco & Elia, 1993a; Eliason, 1996; Heng, 2007; Jagose, 1996; Mosher, 2001; Stein, 2004). These issues can be briefly summarised under the headings of linearity, the unique socio-cultural context of early gay liberation, essentialist vs constructionist approaches to sexual identity, and postmodern issues with the very concept of identity.

One problem with an ideal, linear model is that the stages were often assigned after the analyst had reviewed the data, but not always validated afterwards, although Eliason (1996) observed that Cass and Troiden were notable exceptions, and Cass has continued to research and finesse her model (Cass, 1984, 1990, 2004, 2015). More worryingly, an ideal, linear model fails to account for the diversity of actual human experience, including the possibility of bisexuality. Given the cited difficulties of recruiting participants from diverse backgrounds, many of the early models lack an intersectionality approach, and appear to be based on individuals who are "white, middle-class, and well-educated" (Eliason, 1996, p. 53). Sophie (1985), referring to empirical research, notes that "the more specific the stages or steps were in a given model, the less likely the stages matched the experiences of the different individuals under study". This mismatch is hardly surprising given firstly, the diversity manifest in the social world around us, and secondly, an awareness of the inchoate nature of reality as it is experienced by any given individual; it is only retrospectively that a narrative sense of coherence is able to be constructed. Cass (2015) summarises the critiques of her model, and suggests that some criticisms stem from an incorrect understanding" of the theory; in fact, she agrees that "the narrative is not applicable to all people" (l. 588).

Another problem with a linear approach relates to the assumption that sexual orientation is "a binary construct, existing only in two opposite, discrete forms:

heterosexuality or homosexuality" Bettinger (2010, p. 44). This assumption ignores the fluidity and dynamism of human sexuality (Eliason, 1996). Not all of the models followed a strict linear progression; for example, Troiden's model does not insist on a linear progression; instead the process can be seen as 'spiral' in that individuals can progress through the stages in backward as well as forward directions. With respect to the linearity critique, Cass (2015) draws attention to the linear nature of certain "cognitive processes and associated emotional changes that are involved in the translation of cultural knowledge about homosexuality and homosexuals into self-knowledge about self as a … gay man" (l. 588). Cass goes on to explain that some cognitive shifts *can* be mapped on to a linear coming out process, noting, for example, that self-awareness expressed as *'I am gay'*, will follow a more tentative expression such as '*I may be gay'*; however, these two statements are unlikely to occur in the reverse order. In this sense, Cass concedes that hers is a linear theory, but emphasises, "only where linearity rests on cognitive processes, not life events" (l. 588).

In critiquing the original 20th century models of homosexual identity development, the second point refers to their limited applicability for gay individuals of the 21st century, given that these early models were developed in a historical era characterised by overwhelmingly negative attitudes relating to same-sex issues. In order to understand the stigma associated with homosexuality in the 1960s and 1970s, it should be remembered that in many countries homosexual acts were still a criminal offence and, from a medical, 'disease model' perspective, homosexuality was still classified as a mental disorder (Weeks, 2017). Our 21st century vantage point reveals quite strikingly the evolution of theoretical models that reflect the preoccupations of their eras. Heng (2007) refers to these theories as "time capsules containing clues as to the social conditions of the time" (p. 116). For all its problems and uncertainties, contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand is a considerable improvement on the shame-ridden decades which were a key contextual feature of the earliest models. Any models which emerge in this immediate context need to take into account a relatively more tolerant and increasingly diverse society, the increased visibility of gay role models in popular culture and public life, and the existence of laws such as New Zealand's Homosexual Law Reform Act of 1986, the Human Rights Amendment Amendment Act of 1993, the

Civil Union Act of 2004, and the Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Amendment Act of 2013.

Some observations about identity

Perhaps the knottiest issue associated with these models is the differing ways in which the concept of identity is construed and understood. In considering the various perspectives of hermeneutic phenomenology on identity, or 'being a person', Guignon (2012) considers a number of philosophers, starting with Aristotle, and focusing in particular on Heidegger. He refers also to Charles Taylor's characterization of a person as being partly constituted by self-interpretation and partly through social interaction. In considering identity, Taylor (1989) draws on Heideggerian notions of being, and emphasises the "inescapable temporal structure of being in the world: that from a sense of what we have become, among a range of present possibilities, we project our future being" (p. 47). Heidegger himself tends to avoid terms such as 'human being', 'person', or 'identity'; a later publication (1957/1969) with the promising title 'Identity and Difference' proves to be a metaphysical essay on the nature of being and relationality, so if we seek insight into how Heidegger understands human identity, we need to start with the 1953 publication, 'Being and Time' in which he proposes the term '*Dasein'* (literally, 'being there' – 'there' being the life-world). For Heidegger, each individual is born with the potential to develop a unique and distinctive personality or character; however, realising this potential is not straightforward, and requires that individual to remain open to the 'call of conscience', and to be mindful of the demands made on each *Dasein* by others in the social world. The concept of sociality is fundamental to a phenomenological understanding of individual identity. Having carefully distanced his argument from Cartesian notions of the self, Heidegger explains that the being of *Dasein* "does not have and never has the kind of being of what is merely objectively present within the world" (p. 42); in other words, an individual only develops an identity (as *Dasein*) through the ongoing process of interacting with other *Dasein* in the social world; this suggests that identity is determined through what we *do* in the 'life-world', how we respond emotionally, and how we think about this. According to Guignon (2012), Heidegger's "most enduring and influential innovation has been his conception of humans as essentially being-in-the-world" (p. 101). For Heidegger, the question of identity can only be understood with reference to the ontology of 'being', which brings into play certain key concepts, such as that of 'being-

in-the-world', 'average everydayness', and 'temporality'. The first point to emphasise is that each individual exists in a social world of meaningful relationships with others. These others "are those who *are there* initially and for the most part in everyday being-with-one-another" (p. 123). Heidegger argues that the essentially social nature of our lives results in an average "*levelling down* of all possibilities of being" (p. 123). In helping us to understand this principle of 'levelling down', Heidegger introduces the concept of the 'dictatorship' of the 'they' (das *Man*): "[w]e enjoy ourselves and have fun the way *they* enjoy themselves. We read, see, and judge literature and art the way *they* see and judge. … [W]e find 'shocking' what *they* find shocking. The they, which is nothing definite and which all are, though not as a sum, prescribes the kind of being of everydayness" (p. 123). From this we can observe that the default mode of being is living inauthentically by way of being lost in the 'they-self'. In terms of developing an 'authentic' identity, an individual can be summoned by the 'call of conscience' away from the 'they-self' and towards Dasein's own-most-potential-for being': "Conscience calls the self of Dasein forth from its lostness in the they" (p. 264). In considering the relationship between authenticity and identity, Guignon (2012) emphasises the importance of mindful attention to the 'they-self':

> [t]he authentic person owns and owns up to being an entity that is engaged in a constant activity of self-construction. In owning itself, the authentic Dasein is for the first time genuinely responsible for itself: it is capable of being a respondent and responding to questions about what it is doing and why. (p. 102)

In terms of temporality, the first point to note is that at birth, each individual is born (or 'thrown') into a socio-cultural and physical world which is not of their choosing; this means that (at least initially) we have no choice in terms of language, cultural norms, or values. As we grow up, we are socialised into meaningful social world(s) which we understand, conform to, and for the most part, accept. Heidegger observes that in each moment of the present time, *Dasein* is characterised by 'attuned understanding'; by this he means that at any given moment, we can catch ourselves as being in some sort of mood, and each mood indicates our response to the things that matter to us, as we understand them, at that moment; Wisniewski (2012) sums this up as follows: "Dasein always has a mood, and … this mood is a condition for the possibility of experiencing the world" (p. 64). The notion of possibility is important for Heidegger,

and he argues that our lives are essentially 'futural', i.e. characterised by possibilities and choices that are constrained and conditioned by the socio-cultural context of our life-world,: "Dasein always has understood itself and will understand itself in terms of possibilities" (p. 141). Heidegger goes on to observe that *Dasein* "takes its possibilities … in accordance with the interpretedness of the they. This interpretation has from the outset restricted the possible options of choice to the scope of what is familiar, attainable, feasible, to what is correct and proper" (p. 188). For Heidegger then, identity can be construed as a reflexive, relational process, a dynamic production arising from an ongoing state of tension between the dictates of the 'they-self' and *Dasein's* mindful awareness of future possibilities. In reflecting on Heidegger's understanding of an individual's identity, Taylor (1989) emphasises both the dynamic sense of movement and the narrative coherence that derives from an individual's reflection on how their comportment appears to others: "my sense of myself is of a being who is growing and becoming. My self-understanding necessarily has temporal depth and incorporates narrative" (p. 50).

Cass (2015) observes that prior to 1970, the term 'homosexual identity' was not widely used, either in popular culture or in academic publications; however, from the 1970s onwards the term and concept became rapidly established as part of the coming out discourse. However, according to Cass, by the mid-1980s, "the field was already awash with poorly considered notions of identity, with researchers and theorists defining … gay identity inadequately (or in many cases not at all), and confusing identity with other concepts such as self-concept and sexual identity" (l. 374).

Essentialism and social constructionism

In terms of identity formation, one aspect that has been highlighted is the essentialist assumptions underpinning many of the models. John De Cacco and John Elia drew attention to this with their provocatively titled book 'If You Seduce a Straight Person Can You Make Them Gay?' *(*1993b*)*. In terms of public opinion, Haider-Markel and Joslyn (2008) conducted empirical research and concluded that homonegative attitudes decrease where an essentialist, genetic attribution for homosexuality is assumed; an ironically encouraging trend is revealed here: public interest in 'scientific' research seeking evidence of a 'gay gene' has resulted in "a significant shift in perceptions [resulting in] a warmer affect toward gays and lesbians and [a tendency]

to be more supportive of expanding homosexual rights" (Overby, 2014, p. 570). Rubin acknowledges the powerful and pervasive nature of essentialism: "For many of us, essentialism was our first way of thinking about sexuality and still remains hegemonic" (p. 49). Writing from a social constructionist perspective, Cass (2015) observes that each gay person's sense of their sexual orientation and gay identity is experienced "*as* psychological realities that feel 'natural' and 'real' and a stable part of themselves, and as such, should not be dismissed as examples of *essentialist* thinking" (l. 240).

Within western academic and folk traditions, essentialist modes of thinking have exerted a powerful epistemological influence. One of the first thinkers of the modern era to posit the view that homosexuality was inborn, or innate, was a 19th century German writer, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, who according to Rosario (1997), was "the first to formulate a scientific theory of homosexuality" (p. 26). Rosario observes that Ulrichs had both an elucidatory and an emancipatory agenda which was

> a major departure from previous and subsequent theories that saw the practice of homosexuality/'sodomy' as an acquired vice. In this Ulrichs was the first in a long and continuing line of researchers who believe that a proof of the 'naturalness' of homosexuality, that is, the discovery of a biological basis for it, will lead to equal legal and social treatment of hetero- and homosexuals. (p. 26)

Ulrichs (1994) proposed an essentialist, or biological, argument that homosexuality is innate, and he coined the term '*Urning*' to refer to a man who is sexually and emotionally attracted to other men. Ulrichs was one of the first theorists to explore the connection between homosexuality and effeminacy, and to consider the role of masculinity in providing a point of reference against which '*Urnings*' might be considered.

Marc Stein explains that "for essentialists, who believe that sexual and gender identities are biological, innate and fixed, coming out generally represents the discovery and disclosure of an internal essence. One way of considering this essence is to consider the actual properties and characteristics associated with this process, such that coming out would no longer be the same phenomenon if one were to change these properties and characteristics (Manen, 1990/2007). Coming out in this sense signifies a coming to terms with an authentic, genuine, and true self" (Stein, 2004, p. 3). This self is characterised by Heidegger (1953/2010) as an individual's "ownmost

possibility for being" (p. 158). For a gay man, at some point in his life, his inner voice will 'call' him to be his authentic self, and from a phenomenological perspective, this can help us understand a gay man's motivation to acknowledge and disclose his sexual orientation. However, somewhat problematically, from an essentialist perspective, an individual's sexuality is sometimes construed as a fixed, unchangeable part of each person. From this more extreme perspective, which can be designated 'categorical essentialism', sexuality is reified as a 'thing', an essence, closely associated with the sexual organs (Padgug, 1979/2007). This perspective enables essentialists to speak of homosexuals as "distinct categories of people" (p. 24). Rubin (1984/2007) notes that "sexual essentialism is embedded in the folk wisdoms of Western societies, which consider sex to be eternally unchanging, asocial, and transhistorical" (p. 156).

In contrast, social constructionism, as outlined by Berger and Luckman (1966), holds that an individual's identity is conditioned by a complex interplay of interpersonal relationships including family and friends, socio-cultural *milieux* encountered, and the historical era in which an individual is located. From this perspective, terms and concepts are not 'transhistorical'; on the contrary, the semantics of a word such as 'gay' or a phrase such as 'coming out' would need to be considered in the historical context in which they originated, and in which they are used at any given time. According to this logic, for example, it is inappropriate to use a contemporary term such as 'gay' to refer to same-sex relationships from an earlier historical era, such as ancient Greece.

The suggestion in the 1960s that gender roles are socially constructed informed discussions about sexual orientation: "the homosexual should be seen as playing a social role rather than as having a condition" (McIntosh, 1968, p. 184). The social constructionist model that McIntosh drew from had been introduced by Berger and Luckman (1966), and this model influenced gay rights discourse in the late 20th century. Building on this constructionist platform, and writing from a feminist perspective, Butler (1990) has elaborated understandings of gender roles by refusing to take conventional terms at face value, and by introducing the concept of gender as accomplishment, or 'performativity'. This is a notion that has been further developed by others, notably Wilchins (2004), writing from a transgender perspective. Rubin (1984/2007) was one of the first to theorise sexuality and gender as distinct systems,

each requiring a different analytical approach. Work in this area has challenged traditional heteronormative classifications, leading to new understandings of biological sex, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation. An indicative list of theorists and commentators includes the following: Jagose (1996); Butler (1990, 1995); Seidman (1997; 1996); Kirsch (2000); Centre for Lesbian and Gay Studies (2003); Plummer (2005); Morland and Willox (2005); Ahmed (2006). Underscoring the significance of social constructionist thinking in creating transdisciplinary approaches to understanding sexuality, Vance (1991/2007) noted that while different social constructionist writers have varying academic interests and preoccupations, they are united in their common rejection of "transhistorical and transcultural definitions of sexuality" (p. 45), which are a common feature of essentialist approaches to sexuality.

A striking feature of the gay-oriented literature reviewed in this section is the polarising nature of the debate, with some commentators rejecting essentialist thinking, and others rejecting social constructionist approaches. In contrast, somewhat confusingly, it is possible for an individual to hold both essentialist and constructionist views concurrently, particularly for strategic purposes. An examination of the equal rights literature, for example, reveals the irony of essentialist arguments of *homosexuality as biological determinism,* being able to successfully rebut fundamentalist Christian assertions of *homosexuality as a lifestyle choice* (Pritchard, 2005). The political agenda in play may have obscured for some people a clear understanding of what is intended by the concept of 'essence'. Writing from a phenomenological perspective, van Manen (1990/2007) explains that:

> [e]ssence is not a single, fixed property by which we know
> something; rather, it is meaning constituted by a complex array of
> aspects, properties and qualities - some of which are incidental and
> some of which are more critical to the being of things. The term
> essence derives from the verb to be - by definition a profoundly
> existential notion. It asks what something 'is' for the one who asks
> the question. Essence asks for what something is, and without which
> it would no longer be what it is. And it asks this question while being
> aware of context, (inter)subjectivity, language, and so forth. (p. xv)

van Manen also acknowledges the dangers of the more extreme kind of essentialism, noting that "this categorical variety shares with positivism the reification of experiential phenomena into external objects. Categorical essentialism is dangerous in

that it tends to see things in absolute terms and from these fixed properties one derives moral convictions" (p. xvi). The highly politicised nature of this debate, with notions of morality as a subtext, further complicates an already complex subject. One key aspect underpinning Cass's (2015) notion of a 'typological identity' is an explicit desire to put an end to unproductive arguments between essentialist and constructionist schools of thought; Cass sees her model as bringing together "the essentialist qualities of identity, [i.e.] the individual's lived experience of 'being' a lesbian, gay man or bisexual, [which] are able to be accommodated within the notion of homosexual identity as a socially and culturally constructed concept. (l. 394).

The related concepts of selfhood, identity and subjectivity are far from straightforward. As Jagose (1996, p. 78) notes, identity is "probably one of the most naturalised cultural categories each of us inhabits: one always thinks of one's *self* as existing outside all representational frames, and as somehow marking a point of undeniable realness" (p. 78). Since the first coming out models appeared in the 1970s, psychological and sociological notions of identity have been increasingly questioned, contested and problematized, leading to the prevailing postmodern rejection of any notion of a stable, coherent, rational unified self. In the context of delineating the development of queer theory as it began to emerge at the end of the 20th century, Jagose (1996) cites the theoretical influence of such luminaries as Althusser, Freud, Lacan and Saussure on the development of Foucault's theories of power and individual subjectivity. Resonating with social constructionist approaches, Foucault (1976/1981) argues that human sexual identity can more usefully be construed as a discursive production that is implicated by complex networks of power relations. The discursive production of sexual identity starts with the bonding and rearing behaviours of the immediate family, and continues through socialisation processes at school, and on through increasingly complex networks of power relations over an individual's entire life span. In considering the interplay between power relations, individual agency and multiple discourses, it is also necessary to take into account the social, cultural, and historical influences which impact the development of a gay man's identity over the course of his life. This is particularly true, when it is *later in life* that an individual acknowledges his sexuality, and comes out.

3.3 The process of coming out later in life

Of all the life stages, the period of midlife, which we could consider as the years between the ages of 30 and 70, appears to be the most taken for granted, and therefore, ignored. From a research perspective during the 20th century, this period is characterised by a dearth of research literature: "[m]idlife […] is perhaps the least studied and most ill-defined of any period in life" (MIDMAC, n.d. para. 2). Until the turn of this century, when the first studies did appear, midlife and gerontological research appeared to ignore LGBTIQ participants. It is ironic that MIDMAC, the Harvard based MacArthur Foundation, supported the publication of an important study called 'Successful Aging', the results of an important ten-year study on this topic (Rowe & Kahn, 1997). According to Kooden (2002, p. 2, as cited in Bettinger, 2007), "the words *gay* or *lesbian* or *homosexual* are not to be found in the index" (p. 5). From this we can presume multiple *lacunae* in knowledge, and conclude that much research remains to be done in domains of LGBTIQ sexuality with a midlife or gerontological focus. So, since the late 20th century, what sort of research has been conducted with respect to disclosure? In Aotearoa, New Zealand, an academically oriented study with a clear gerontological focus is Kushner (2012); using narrative methodology informed by critical gerontology, Kushner explores the ageing experiences of 12 gay men aged from 65 to 81 years old. Written from a nursing perspective, this study considers areas of support that gay men might need as they age, and the implications for professional health practice. Kushner emphasises the need for resilience in the face of homonegative environments in which gay men are likely to find themselves, and he concludes by highlighting the importance of maintaining independence, and of cultivating strong social networks during the ageing process.

The process of coming out later in life has been explored from a variety of perspectives by researchers in the northern hemisphere, particularly in the USA and in the UK. This research has considered themes and perspectives such as internalised homonegativity (Herek, 1997); the development of a gay identity, (Moreau, 2001); contrast with a heterosexual lifestyle (Yokley, 2004). Also considered has been the degree of stress involved in coming out in midlife (Preston, 2006); from a counselling perspective with strategies for counsellors based on various models (Hunter, 2007); from a developmental psychology perspective in terms of human development over the life

span (Patterson, 2008); and with reference to the role of social context in sexual identity disclosure (Orne, 2011).

In terms of coming out experiences with respect to family, the literature reveals studies from a range of perspectives. An early study of the coming out process of parents from the children's point of view is Deevev (1989). This theme has been further explored by a range of researchers from various angles (Lynch & Murray, 2000; Covelluzzi, 2008; McCann, 2010; Lytle, Foley, & Aster, 2013). An indicative study of the coming out process of grandparents from the grandchildren's perspective is Fruhauf, Orel, & Jenkins (2009). A study of changing family dynamics with a focus on a sibling coming out is Hilton and Szymanski (2011). A more recent study about coming out to siblings (with a focus on internalized sexual stigma) is Salvati, Pistella, Laghi, Baiocco, and Ioverno (2017). A study of gay or bisexual men's experiences of coming out to wives is Pearcey (2005). A study of psychological adjustment of gay or bisexual men who exit their primary heterosexual relationship is Malcolm (2008). An important collection of coming out narratives from a New Zealand context is Allan (1996). However, despite the undoubted value of this book as a "portable encounter group" (p. 11), it does not provide any analysis or discussion.

 The process of coming out in the workplace has been explored from a variety of perspectives, such as strategies for coming out (Creed & Scully, 2000); organisational attitudes towards gay employees (Ward & Winstanley, 2005); consequences of disclosing in the workplace (Bouzianis, Malcolm, & Hallab, 2008); and reactions of co-workers to gay or lesbian workers (Griffith & Hebl, 2002). Another common theme is coming out in educational settings (Rasmussen, 2004; Willman, 2009), which includes implications for the tenure track in higher education from a lesbian perspective (Tyler, 2010). From a pre-tertiary perspective, Connell (2012) examines some of the considerations which are involved when teachers contemplate coming out. Then, in terms of actually *being* out in an education context, from a New Zealand perspective, using Acker's 'inequality regime' as a framework, Giddings and Pringle (2011) examine the nature of heteronormative practices in academia, and consider how these impact their work and identities as openly gay academics at Auckland University of Technology.

Also at Auckland University of Technology, Tipuna et al. (2011) describe how the LGBTIQ staff network 'OUT@AUT' creates opportunities for networking and socialising, and provides support and advice to staff members at the institution. The network acts as a consultative group for professional development programmes, conducts research into LGBTIQ issues, and lobbies elected representatives in local and national government. Moving from academia to religion, Lightfoot (2011) provides a collection of narratives of people who have come out in the Anglican Church of New Zealand. The process of coming out later in life and negotiating life as an openly gay individual has generated considerable research interest, along with practically oriented conclusions in terms of suggestions for professional practice and public policy. This research output, limited though it is, has been of value in framing and conducting the present study, although questions remain concerning the applicability of the early coming out models. What other, more recent models (and related studies) might be considered relevant to this study?

One intellectually persuasive approach to the development of sexual identity, particularly in later life, is Hammack's (2005) 'life course' model. In keeping with my own observation and intuition, Hammack eschews a radical partisan need to embrace an 'either/or' essentialist or constructionist position, arguing instead for a more reasoned 'integrative approach', while noting that an essentialist perspective provides a more convincing 'fit' with the experience of male homosexuals. Hammack's model arose partly out of a sense of frustration with fragmented approaches to research on sexual orientation and a lack of interdisciplinary collaboration. Hammack's integrative approach explicitly seeks to "reconcile divisions" and to "synthesise diverse intellectual perspectives" from a wide range of academic disciplines ranging from 'natural sciences' through to the humanities (Hammack, 2005, p. 268). More ambitious than a model, the 'paradigm' is designed to provide "a new articulation of the genesis of human sexual orientation within individuals, in consideration of the biological, historical and cultural forces that create the social ecology within which human development occurs" (Hammack, 2005, p. 268). In considering the evolving social ecology of the 20th century, one of the salient historical developments involved unprecedented numbers of gay people acknowledging and disclosing their sexual orientation, often in a spirit of activism, and in defiance of laws and mores. This

process of coming out affected individuals across all stages of the life course, and proved fertile ground for sociological research into the process of disclosure, with a focus on the earlier adult years, and less interest in the experiences of gay men who come out later in life.

One of Hammack's key collaborators, Cohler (2005) points to the dearth of research featuring middle-aged gay men, especially those who were married and who became parents, and the evolving relationships these men have with their adult offspring. He observes that "[w]e know very little about the relationship among these parents identifying with an alternative sexual lifeway" (p. 71). The value of the life course model appears to be the focus on the unique social and cultural context into which an individual is 'thrown'. Cohler and Hammack draw attention to "the importance of generational and sociohistorical change in constructing an identity" (2006, p. 168). So what are some implications and applications of this life course approach for research in contemporary society?

Writing from an antipodean perspective, Henrickson and Neville (2012) consider the sociohistorical context of Aotearoa New Zealand in their exploration of the reciprocal relationship between satisfaction with life and sexual identity over the life course; they asked a range of participants (gay, lesbian, bisexual) over a wide range of ages (adolescents to over 60 years old) whether and to what extent this might change over time and with differing circumstances. One of the key findings from their study is that gay men appear to have a positive experience of aging for a number of reasons, partly because of the resilience that they had developed through the course of their life in negotiating predominantly heteronormative environments, and partly because of their acquisition of multiple skill sets, including the ability to socialise and maintain positive relationships. The study concluded that "the majority of participants were satisfied with their sexual identities and appeared to grow more so with age" (p. 92). This study is important in terms of having yielded findings relating to the relationship between satisfaction with life and sexual identity in general, but what about studies which focus explicitly on mid-life and older LGBTIQ experiences?

Studies from an Australasian perspective, with an explicit gerontological focus on LGBTIQ individuals, are few and far between. As Neville, Adams, Bellamy, Boyd, and

George (2015) observe, research in this area "remains in its infancy and more is needed to ensure the healthcare needs of this group are met in a culturally safe and appropriate manner" (p. 75). Research studies which have explored lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals' expectations of retirement, reveal similar themes, including fears of encountering homonegative attitudes and behaviours in retirement homes (Kushner, Neville, & Adams, 2013; Neville & Henrickson, 2010; Neville et al., 2015; Robinson, 2016). That these fears are well founded is confirmed through qualitative research with care staff who work in residential care homes. Findings from the study conducted by Neville et al (2015) indicate that residential care staff do not feel that they have received adequate professional training or preparation in providing adequate care for older LGBTIQ residents. Furthermore, some of these caregivers admitted that they feel personal homonegativity, which is likely to impact the quality of care. Recommendations include "the implementation of principle-based guidelines, opportunities to participate in ongoing education and partnering with non-heterosexual community organisations in order to provide culturally appropriate care to older lesbian, gay and bisexual people" (p. 73).

3.4   Addressing a gap in the literature

As can be seen from this review a considerable volume of research relating to coming out has been published, representing a wide range of disciplinary perspectives and arising from diverse agendas. With respect to the first theme explored in this review, homonegativity has been explored from both historical and sociological perspectives, bringing in the related concepts of heterosexism and heteronormativity. However, findings from these studies do not constitute a significant resource for understanding a gay man's lived experience of sexual stigma. Limited research has been conducted from a hermeneutic phenomenological perspective exploring the lived experience of gay men who speak candidly about their experience of homonegativity as personally experienced in Aotearoa New Zealand in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. With reference to coming out publicly, middle-aged and older gay men are under-represented in the literature, both internationally, and locally. From a local perspective, the strengths-based Lavender Island Research project has yielded valuable understandings into facets of gay identity in contemporary society. However, given its wide focus and the quantitative nature of the research data, there is a need for

qualitative research using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to examine the lived experiences of gay men who have come out later in life.

3.5   Chapter review and summary

In this chapter I have briefly explored the related concepts of homonegativity heteronormativity and heterosexism, and noted the subtle, ubiquitous and powerful influence of these social constructs in everyday life. As a precursor to considering the coming out process, I outlined some of the early coming out models, and identified issues which were discussed under the headings of linearity, socio-cultural context of late 20th century, and conflict between essentialist as opposed to constructionist approaches to sexual identity. The final theme in this chapter related to the process of coming out later in life, and noted the relative lack of research literature. This chapter concluded with an articulation of the gap that the present study is filling.

Chapter 4 Methodology

Using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, the aim of this research project is to examine the lived experience of gay men who have come out later in life. In this chapter, I outline the thinking behind my decision to use this methodological framework. I indicate the nature of the inquiry, then outline the philosophical origins of hermeneutics and phenomenology, and introduce the three philosophers whose thinking has informed this research project: Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Max van Manen. I consider the role which I am assuming as phenomenological researcher, identify logistical and theoretical challenges, and foreshadow the reflexive approach which I have adopted. Finally, in order to provide the reader with a conceptual framework, I introduce the key phenomenological notions which I envisage as a foundational aid to reading and understanding this thesis. I will consider these using van Manen's (2014) framework of existentials.

4.1 The nature of the inquiry

At the heart of this inquiry is a question about meaning – the essential meaning of being gay and learning to live in a world that is not always welcoming to and understanding of gay people. Gadamer (1975/2013) observes that for a question to be posed in the first instance, the questioner must already have some background understanding of the topic. My primary research question seeks to explore the meaning of coming out later in life, and this question arose from my personal experience of coming to terms with my sexuality in adulthood. In order to establish the project within a robust epistemological framework and to formulate a precise research question, it was necessary to clarify my objectives and to invoke what Gadamer calls 'historical consciousness' (p. 312). This involved a careful consideration of the historical, cultural and social context in which the study is located, the multi-cultural world of Aotearoa New Zealand in the second decade of the 21st Century. The groundwork or sense of the scale of the phenomenon in question is indicated in quantitatively oriented studies, such as the Lavender Island project (Henrickson et al., 2007).

4.2 Philosophical assumptions

In a qualitative research project such as this the choice of a methodological approach will be suggested by the research question, and constrained by the paradigmatic positioning of the researcher (Creswell, 2013; Grant & Giddings, 2002). Before undertaking this project, I evaluated a range of options in order to identify a methodological approach which would resonate with me as the primary researcher, and which would provide robust foundation for a study of this nature.

Given my relative lack of familiarity with qualitative research methodologies, my first step was to identify and critique the dominant paradigms. I did this through a series of research methods courses and a self-directed programme of reading, with Crotty (1998) as an initial guide. See Figure 4.1 for a glimpse of the summary notes taken from Professor Lynne Giddings' Qualitative Methods Masterclass, which helped me to make sense of the methodological possibilities. Broadly speaking, epistemology refers to the ways in which we acquire knowledge and make sense of the world. My first major understanding was that three broad epistemological approaches were available: objectivism at one extreme, and subjectivism at the other, with constructivism positioned between these two. Constructivism is an epistemological approach which recognises the influence of disciplinary discourse, and is suspicious of the notion of 'truth' or 'objective' knowledge. Constructivism foregrounds the importance of researcher perspective, emphasising "the meaning-making activity of the individual mind" (Crotty, 1998, p. 58). Epistemologically, I subscribe to a broadly constructivist view of social reality. Below epistemology, at the next level down in Crotty's schema is 'theoretical perspective', where the focus is on the philosophical underpinnings of any given methodology. At this level, under the heading of constructivism, is located the theoretical perspective labelled 'interpretivism', where the emphasis is on "culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world" (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). In terms of theoretical perspective, this study has adopted an interpretivist lens.

When I began considering options within human science, I was consumed by questions relating to same-sex attractions and relationships throughout history, particularly in modern society. In terms of research options, I felt overwhelmed by the possibilities. Initially, a number of methodologies appealed on superficial grounds; for example, grounded theory seemed attractive because of its clear cut method, and the logical,

step by step approach; also, I was intrigued at the prospect of generating mid-range theory. And narrative inquiry appealed because of my interest in Labovian structural theory from my previous study of linguistics. However, these are not strong reasons for selecting a methodology, and neither approach was likely to provide sufficient insight into the lived experience of the phenomenon of interest.
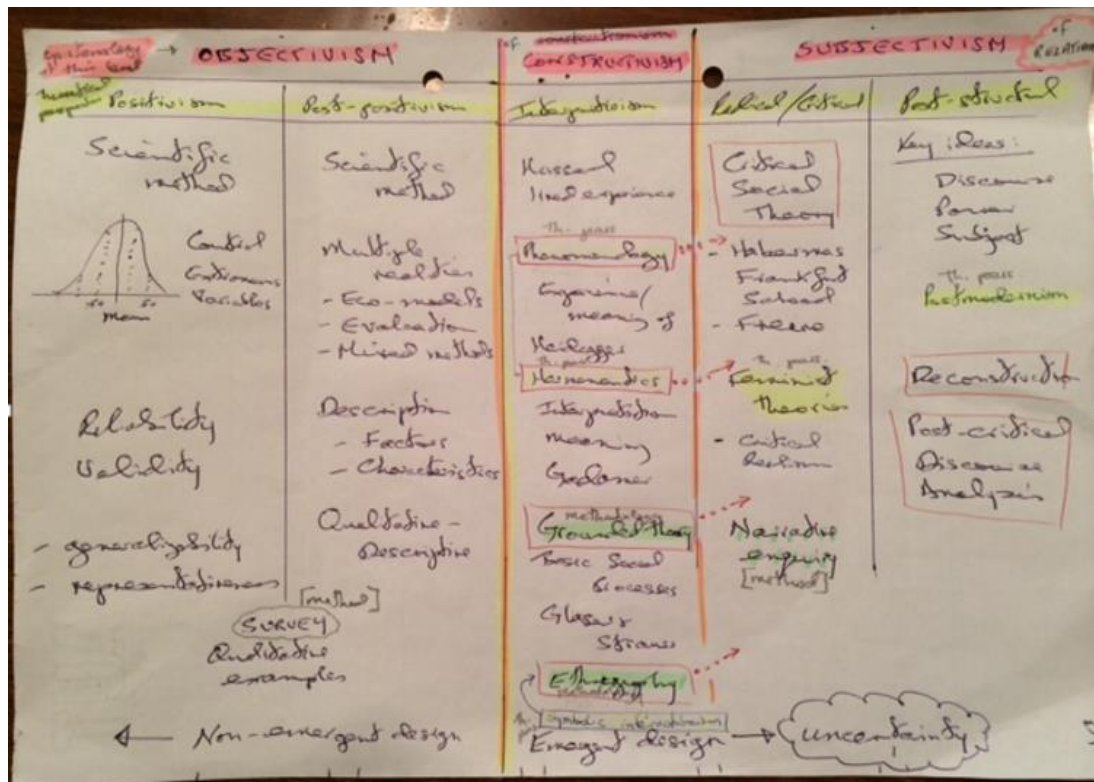
Figure 4.1 Epistemological positioning: Summary notes.

4.3   Search for a methodology: Hermeneutic phenomenology

In my search for a methodology that would lend itself to knotty questions relating to being gay, hermeneutic phenomenology gradually revealed itself as the best fit. The explicit preoccupation with questioning characterises this approach, and points to the potential for researchers to experience "opening, understandings, insights" (van Manen, 2014, p. 29).

From my initial, exploratory reading, I had become aware that until the late 20th Century, the dominant research paradigm in both physical and social sciences, was positivism. This was characterised by an emphasis on quantitative data, along with (what appeared to be) a misplaced sense of confidence in the scientific method. From our perspective, almost half a century after Kuhn (1970) published his influential work,

it is a useful exercise to contemplate the 'paradigm wars,' which were waged over polarisations such as quantitative versus qualitative approaches; or cause-effect ways of thinking versus symbolic interactionism, with its focus on meaning-oriented thinking (Blumer, 1969), or distrust of the scientific method (Feyerabend, 1993).

Since the 1960s a paradigm shift has meant that for many human science researchers, a deep mistrust has emerged with respect to conventional taxonomies, classifications, codifications, and theoretical abstractions, which appear to do little more than perpetuate hegemonic mechanisms of explanation, prediction, and control. In contrast, a methodology such as hermeneutic phenomenology has a research focus on understanding the primeval experience of the individual. As van Manen (2014) explains, "phenomenology does not offer us the possibility of effective theory with which we can now explain and/or control the world; rather, it offers us the possibility of plausible insights that bring us in more direct contact with the world" (p. 66). Phenomenology is not interested in aetiological explanations, nor concerned with cause and effect. The focus is not on finding answers or discoveries so much as identifying questions and dwelling for a prolonged period in the questioning mode. Another objective is to critique the assumptions, presumptions and comfortable certainties that tend to determine how we approach aspects of living in the physical and social world of our daily life. So how do things in daily life appear to us? Heidegger (1953/2010) distinguished between the notions of phenomenon, semblance, appearance and 'mere appearance' (i.e. illusion), and drew attention to what remains hidden, covered over, and unseen. For phenomenologists, appearances are deceptive: "what 'appears' is not at all something apparent or clear-given. If it were, then phenomenology would not be necessary: we would simply see what it is that 'appears'" (van Manen, 2014, p. 61).

In order to engage with what is covered over, or hidden, the researcher must first identify the "presumptions and suppositions that shape our understanding of the world and understanding of life" (van Manen, 2014, p. 55). This requires the researcher to adopt a questioning, reflective and distrustful attitude towards established truths, to probe the taken-for-granted understandings and certainties that characterise our everyday mode of being, and to constantly query whose interests are being served by accepting any given explanation. Another objective is to "return to

the beginnings, to the things themselves as they give themselves in lived through experience … as an openness that invites us to see them as if for the first time" (p. 43). The practical means of achieving this objective require the researcher to focus on the 'pre-reflective' experience of an individual, in other words, to consider the meaning and significance of a person's experience as it is lived, rather than as it is recollected and related. This is more easily said than done. The challenge for the phenomenological researcher is to describe or capture the pre-reflective, 'living now' as opposed to the 'mediated now', which is often re-invented and re-interpreted. van Manen (2014) refers to the 'impossibility' of being able to retrieve a vanished moment in time:

> This 'impossibility' makes phenomenology so compellingly fascinating and ultimately necessary. Without the realization that human experience is related to an absent present that can only be accessed through an unrecoverable past, phenomenology would not be what it is: the most radically reflective and most demanding approach to the study of life as we experience it. (van Manen, 2014, p. 60)

In resolving to embark on this research project using hermeneutic phenomenology, I have to accept that while I will endeavour to provide carefully considered interpretations of the findings, each interpretation remains open to re-interpretation from a different horizontal perspective of time, place, or ideology. There is no ultimate interpretation.

4.4   Hermeneutic phenomenology: Objectives

In attempting to understand what phenomenology is and how it operates, it may be instructive to consider first what it is not and what it does not do. According to van Manen (2014) phenomenology does not provide neat answers and conclusions. It is not designed to make empirical claims, nor does phenomenology generalize from an actual case to a wider population: "empirical generalization is not the aim of phenomenological research" (p. 250). Instead, having engaged with individuals' lived experience, a phenomenological study aims to produce an evocative text which describes, narrates, and interprets key episodes in an individual's life, and thus helps the reader to understand what it was like to be there, to feel the emotions, to grasp the import of an event. Through judicious use of experiential detail, phenomenological descriptions evoke a sense of the experience as it was actually lived, at the same time

holding the reader in an open, questioning mode. In addition to raising further questions, this phenomenological text provides insight into complex aspects of life which may be lacking in theoretically-oriented research outputs. A phenomenological study can inform public policy and direct professional behaviours and attitudes, involving questions of "how to act in certain situations and relations". van Manen refers to this 'pragmatic-ethical concern' as the 'phenomenology of practice' (p. 69).

Research findings can be applied in a range of disciplines and professional arenas, particularly education and health sciences such as psychology, nursing, aged care, and counselling. In these domains, interpersonal relationships are of considerable importance and practitioners do not always have access to research output that has prioritized understandings of lived experiences. Phenomenology has an axiological orientation firmly directed towards ethical considerations and in professional domains seeks to enhance the quality of life of participants through raising awareness of temporal, spatial, corporeal, and relational dimensions, aspects which are often forgotten or ignored in the busyness of professional interactions. Phenomenology aims to promote sensitivity, thoughtfulness and tactful awareness and to equip practitioners with practical knowledge and insights which will enhance their effectiveness. van Manen draws attention to the practical significance of phenomenological knowledge, which he identifies as formative in nature: "It enhances our perceptiveness, it contributes to our sense of tact in human relations, and it provides us with pathic forms of understanding that are embodied, situational, relational and enactive" (van Manen, 2011 para. 3). Finally, as Crotty (1998) observes, in addition to being "an exercise in critique" (p. 83), scrutinising, and calling into question aspects of life that tend to be taken for granted, phenomenological research also has at heart a critical agenda, an interest in challenging the status quo, and seeking to "bring about change" (p. 113). In terms of foregrounding this critical agenda, Singh (2015) suggests that "[a] social justice lens even shifts how phenomenological researchers handle findings after data analysis" (p. 123). This suggests a need for carefully considered publication strategies which are designed to reach clearly identified groups of readers.

4.5   Critiques of hermeneutic phenomenology

In this section, I identify the critics of phenomenology, I outline what their criticisms might involve, and I respond to those criticisms in the context of the present research. I conclude this section with some observations about 'method'.

The critics of phenomenology fall into three categories, the first being researchers who are themselves more comfortable with positivist approaches to knowledge which emphasise observation, measurement, explanation, prediction – and ultimately, control; this group seeks empirical truths through, for example, randomised controlled trials involving hypothesis testing, analysis of quantitative data, and statistical modelling. A typical criticism from this first group would be directed at the qualitative, anecdotal nature of phenomenological research data, and of the explicitly subjective approach of the researcher. From this perspective, phenomenology would be criticised for its lack of objectivity, its inability to make empirical claims, or its failure to generalize from a given case to a wider population. However, the paradigmatic incommensurability of these two modes of enquiry would suggest that such criticisms are fundamentally misconceived. The ontological foundation of positivist research is the confident assertion of an objective (and knowable) reality, independent of any observer. For positivists, the social world is revealed (rather than constructed) and is "relatively stable and based on pre-existing patterns or order" (Grant & Giddings, 2002, p. 14). In contrast, for a phenomenologist, reality is subjective and relative, socially constructed, and mediated through language; the lifeworld is made manifest through a dynamic process of intentional interaction with others, and with the 'ready-to-hand' objects of average, day-to-day existence. Accordingly, a radically different approach is required, along with an explicit rejection of positivist convictions; eschewing the comfortable certainties of the scientific method, the phenomenologist researcher (when in bracketing mode) consciously adopts a sense of openness and questioning wonder which resonates with Feyerabend's mischievous reference to 'anarchy' and Dadaism (1975, p. 21).

Researchers from paradigms which are more sympathetically aligned with phenomenology (for example, social constructionist psychology) sometimes appear to be preoccupied with idealised models, theoretical frameworks and abstract taxonomies, all of which remain at one remove from the primordial, visceral lived

experience of the event(s) they aim to represent: "Even in the domain of qualitative human science, it is disappointing how it often seems to result in reality constructions that become more real than real" (van Manen, 2014, p. 17). A characteristic reproach from this second group would be directed at the lack of robust theory underpinning any phenomenological findings. From this perspective, phenomenology would be open to criticism for 'essentialist' thinking, and for an inability to reach neat conclusions. Both charges are certainly true: Husserl (1980) established phenomenology unequivocally as a science of essences; with respect to the second charge, Gadamer (2007) observes that "[t]he first guiding insight is to admit the endlessness of [the] task" (p. 242). Any phenomenological investigation aims to keep the research open and to remain in questioning mode, suspended in that liminal state of wonder between questioning and knowledge; the foreclosure of certainty is to be sedulously avoided, with an appreciation that no final interpretation is ever possible. It is acknowledged that the prospect of having phenomenological findings "endlessly deferred" (Vagle, 2014, p. 31) is likely to unsettle many theorists. However, rather than reject phenomenological research out of hand, it makes better sense to examine ways in which phenomenological findings might complement existing models and theories, bearing in mind that phenomenology promotes sensitivity, thoughtfulness and tactful awareness, aiming to equip practitioners with phenomenological insights which are likely to enhance their effectiveness. Speaking of psychological research, van Manen (2014) speaks respectfully of the "abundance of fascinating and influential theories that have contributed to human understanding"; however, he goes on to observe that "these theories may actually leave their central concepts impoverished of experiential and phenomenological meaning" (p 67). A clear example of this can be seen with the influential coming out model proposed by Cass (1979), and subsequently refined and finessed through almost four decades of clinical practice and observation (1984; 1990; 1996; 2004; 2015). Indeed Cass herself appears to recognise this complementary role for phenomenology in observing that "a sociologically driven version of constructionist thinking is inadequate when one is attempting to understand and explain all the complexities of what we call sexual orientation"; Cass goes on to argue for the role of "clutch-at-the heart" experiences in filling out the wider picture of sexual orientation (1999, p. 108). Accordingly, it is argued that the phenomenological findings of the

present study serve to add flesh to the bones of an idealised, academic coming out model such as Cass (1979).

The final group of critics do not fit neatly into any particular paradigm, but share a concern that phenomenology appears to be methodologically challenged, and therefore, potentially, lacking in effectiveness. In considering foundational tenets underpinning the philosophy of education, for example, Pegues (2007) asserts that "methodology determines effectiveness" (p. 320). This position harks back to the 'paradigm wars' of the 1980s, which sometimes appear to be raging still; as Lather (2017) observes, "Every field is heavily fractured and contested in terms of moving beyond the capture of a narrow scientism and reduction to an instrumentalism that meets the demands of audit culture" (pp. 327-328). A preoccupation with mechanistic techniques, systems, and procedures has been critiqued by a variety of commentators, notably, Barthes (1986) who famously decried researchers' "sterile" fixation with method, bemoaning the effect this has on the text: "everything has been put into the method, nothing remains for the writing … the text never comes: no surer way to kill a piece of research and send it to join the great scrap heap of abandoned projects than Method" (p. 318).

Phenomenology resists description as a 'method' in the sense of an agreed set of actions as might be encountered in, for example, grounded theory. Gadamer (1975/2013) argues that the research methods which are used in the natural sciences need to be carefully distinguished from the interpretive role of hermeneutics in the human sciences. With its orientation to meaning, hermeneutic phenomenology cannot be easily reduced to "a methodical schema or an interpretive set of procedures" (van Manen, 2014, p. 22); van Manen goes on to warn that the unthinking reliance on "procedural schemas, simplified inquiry models, or a series of descriptive-interpretive steps" will vitiate the quality of the research, and perhaps remove the impetus for the researcher to engage in primary phenomenological texts. Along with a resistance to method, phenomenology is ever alert to the seductive appeal of theoretical frameworks, given their propensity to "frame and constrain our understanding of the world" and their tendency "to gloss the existential meanings of life as we live it" (van Manen, 2014, p. 66). This concern with 'glossing' or distorting meanings was a preoccupation of Heidegger (1953/2010), and he draws attention to the dangers of

'average understanding', which serves us well to get through the day to day business of living, but tends to obscure deeper truths and realities. From a research perspective, van Manen (2014) explains that theory is essential, not necessarily in its interpretive function, but "as a foil for examining what it glosses" (p. 66).

Having clearly identified some of the issues relating to 'method', it remains necessary to indicate how, in practical terms, the researcher might actually proceed with the logistics of the project. In an earlier work, van Manen (1990/2007) outlined six research activities (pp. 30-31):

1. Turning to a phenomenon of interest and commitment
2. Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it
3. Reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon
4. Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting
5. Maintaining strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon
6. Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole

In exploring this research question, I have been guided by the 'dynamic interplay' of these six research activities, each of which is, in turn, interwoven with phenomenological notions from Heidegger, Gadamer, and van Manen. These research activities are open to interpretation and a range of creative approaches are possible. Therefore, the findings of a phenomenological study are related to method as well as to the topic (Kleining & Witt, 2001). It is envisaged that the methodological approach applied to the present study will be of interest and value to future phenomenological researchers.

4.6   The role of the phenomenological researcher

Given the strong philosophical grounding of this methodology, van Manen (2014) poses the question: "Is it possible to be a phenomenologist without being a philosopher?" (p. 23). Reassuringly, he replies in the affirmative, but with two clear provisos: firstly, that the researcher needs to engage with the primary literature of the great phenomenological thinkers, "developing a pathos for the great texts"; secondly (and simultaneously), that the researcher needs to be able to reflect "in a phenomenological manner" on the phenomenon of interest (p. 23). With respect to van Manen's first proviso, I have read (in translation) various writings by Heidegger,

including his magnum opus, 'Being and Time' (Heidegger, 1953/2010). I have also read Gadamer's magnum opus, 'Truth and Method' (Gadamer, 1975/2013). Given my desire to follow best practice, and cognizant of developments within phenomenology over the last century, I have engaged with van Manen's practical guidebook 'Researching Lived Experience' (van Manen, 1990/2007), together with his more historically oriented 'Phenomenology of Practice' (2014) which he presents as a synthesizing, agogical project of making phenomenology "understandable and do-able" (p. 30). In order to clarify key concepts, I have spent time reading phenomenological texts, both introductory and interpretive and during this research project, have participated in regular workshops with two phenomenology special interest groups, including AUT's 'Heidegger Reading Group', convened by Professor Liz Smythe. The concept of the hermeneutic circle, particularly as outlined by Gadamer (1975/2013), serves to illustrate how my understanding of key phenomenological notions has deepened and strengthened through a process of reading, thinking, observing, discussing, writing and re-writing, and re-engaging with phenomenological texts. As a researcher, I have resolved to adopt a mindful, reflexive, phenomenological attitude at all stages of the process. van Manen (2014) reminds us that this requires "heuristic attentiveness, creative insight, interpretive sensibility, linguistic sensitivity and scholarly preparedness and tact" (p. 228).

4.7   Philosophical origins of hermeneutics and phenomenology

Part of the appeal of hermeneutic phenomenology is its distinctive philosophical pedigree with roots extending back through to Enlightenment philosophers, such as Kant (1724-1804), and 19th Century philosophers, such as Hegel (1770-1831) and Nietzsche (1844-1900). Husserl (1859-1938), who is often claimed as the father of phenomenology, wrote that "philosophy … is essentially a science of true beginnings, or origins, or rizomata panton [the roots of everything]" (Husserl, 1981, p. 196, as cited in van Manen, 2014, p. 53). One of Husserl's preoccupations was with transcendental phenomena, which are "experiential entities that may become the objects of our reflection in regarding the meaning of objects we encounter in the world" (van Manen, 2014, p. 90). Husserl's philosophical orientation was epistemological in that he was interested in examining the ways that human science researchers investigate the objects of both the real and the social world, as they appear to us in consciousness.

One of Husserl's students, Heidegger (1889-1976), re-oriented phenomenology towards the ontology of 'being'. Of all the original phenomenologists, Heidegger's contribution has been, arguably, the most important in terms of his influence; (see, for example Greaves, 2010; Harman, 2007; Inwood, 1999; King, 2001; Malpas, 2006; Sheehan, 2015; Wrathall, 2005). However, Heidegger's involvement with National Socialism indicates the need for me as a researcher to address his politics as well as his philosophy. Heidegger's involvement with Nazism in 1933-1934 is deeply disturbing, although I do not believe that this involvement detracts from the value of his philosophical legacy. In passing, I would share Harman's (2007) observation that "some of his greatest interpreters have been Jewish philosophers, such as Hannah Arendt, Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas" (p. ix). And in mitigation, perhaps it is as well to recall Heidegger's own words: "He who thinks greatly must err greatly" (1971, p. 9). In my own exploration of Heidegger's work I have been impressed by his critique of the hegemonic scientific method, by his insights into mankind's relationship with modern technology and his call for a return to a simpler and more thoughtful mode of existence. I have felt myself drawn to aspects of Heidegger's writing that open up thinking, that focus attention on language and that underline the importance of practical and mindful engagement in our everyday world.

One of Heidegger's students, Gadamer (1900-2002) foregrounded the interpretive, or 'hermeneutic', aspect of phenomenology and following van Manen's practice, when I speak of phenomenology, it is understood to be 'hermeneutic phenomenology'. For Gadamer, the focus moved from an ontological preoccupation with interpreting the lived experience of being, towards textual interpretation. In 'Truth and Method' (Gadamer, 1975/2013), he traced the historical development and application of hermeneutics in domains such as scriptural, legal, and philological interpretation. Key concepts for Gadamer's hermeneutic phenomenology include the role of tradition in historical consciousness, the role of prejudice in meaning making and understanding, the importance of play, and the central role of language in everyday life.

Phenomenology has grown and developed in numerous different directions: for example, Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) phenomenology of perceptions, and Sartre (1905-1980) existential phenomenology. One of the most important writers in the field of phenomenology from an agogical perspective is contemporary educator, Max van

Manen. In his 'Phenomenology of Practice' (2014), he draws together key themes from a diverse range of historical and contemporary theorists and practitioners, leaving us with practical guidelines including an existential framework for inquiry and interpretation.

4.8   Illuminating the core phenomenological notions

Heidegger's re-orientation of phenomenology towards the ontology of 'being' has implications for how I approached this research, and for how this thesis might be read. In this section, I introduce and briefly outline the key phenomenological notions that I have used to interpret the findings. I will consider these using van Manen's (2014) framework of existentials, which he defines as "helpful universal 'themes' to explore meaning aspects of our lifeworld and of the particular phenomena we may be studying" (p. 303). I will use these existentials as a framing device to introduce central concepts from Heidegger and Gadamer as appropriate. Space precludes in-depth exploration here, but further discussion will be integrated within the findings and discussion sections.

4.8.1   Relationality

The existential theme of relationality helps us to understand Heidegger's (1953/2010) notion of 'being-with' others in both a public world and in the everyday domestic world of the home. Heidegger argues that for the most part we are absorbed in a world of other people: "[t]his absorption ... mostly has the character of being lost in the publicness of the they" (p. 169). When we go about our daily life, our natural mode of being is a concern for other people and we live our lives in an attitude of 'average everydayness'. This means that we can accurately anticipate the likely actions of other people, and predict likely responses to everyday situations, based on our observation of behaviour patterns from the past. This helps us to understand Herek's (2009) notion of 'felt stigma', which refers to an individual's awareness of the concept of homosexuality and of societal responses to same-sex orientation. This study pays close attention to the situatedness of participants in their everyday world of family, friends, and colleagues. When one individual interacts with another, two perspectives come into play, and Gadamer (1975/2013) refers to the understanding which results as a "fusion of horizons" (p. 317). Sometimes, genuine conversation is the result of this interaction, but much of the time, our sociality is characterised by inconsequential

'idle' talk. Furthermore, to protect the privacy of our inner thoughts, we don a mask of conforming agreeableness, which promotes comfortable interaction, but not necessarily genuine conversation (Gadamer, 1975/2013). One aspect of non-genuine conversations of relevance to this study is the role of silence in daily discourse; in other words, when the inner-world thoughts of an individual remain private and are not shared in conversation with outer-world participants. Rich (1979) draws attention to the close connection between lies, secrets, and silence.

4.8.2   Corporeality

The existential theme of corporeality invites us to contemplate our physical body and the various senses, in particular hearing and seeing. The sense of seeing is passive and involuntary, but closely associated with the intentional action of 'looking' or 'gazing' at the objects of attention and the social consequences of doing so. This theme also covers the domain of sexuality, and the physical manifestation of emotions, and moods.

4.8.3   Spatiality

The existential theme of spatiality invites us to contemplate not so much the ontic spaces of the physical world which we measure and control, but the ontological spaces of our daily life as we consider *Dasein* in average everydayness as 'being-in-the-world'. In examining the being of *Dasein*, Heidegger (1953/2010), invites us to consider the dynamic interplay between the ontological and ontic dimensions of our existence. When we interact with the physical space of our life-world in our average, everyday mode, the objects, animals, and people around us are 'ready-to-hand' and taken for granted; this then is our primeval, pre-reflective state of being in the world, a world in which we typically understand and interact with other people and things smoothly and without conscious effort. In contrast, in ontic mode, when we are given pause to consider something out of the ordinary, or if we deliberately adopt an analytical stance, we shift perspective so that people and things become 'present-at-hand', and the focus is clearly on location, dimensions, shapes, structures, materials, and purpose (all of which can be measured with the tools of scientism and instrumentalism). In this study, when considering spatiality as a phenomenological existential, we are concerned not with the precise latitude, longitude, or altitude of an individual, but more with the ontological dimensions of participants' daily life as they interact with

others in their social worlds, and their immediate environment of home or work-place, in an average, everyday mode of being. The 'da' of '*Dasein'* is usually translated as 'there' or 'in the world' and it is this taken for granted social space that can be so productive for phenomenological thinking and research. Possibilities for consideration include proxemics, aesthetics, orientation, distancing, directionality, and intentionality. Sheehan (2015) emphasises the world "as a realm of meaningfulness" (p. 125), and draws our attention to a slightly different interpretation of 'da' as being open to possibilities: "the *Da* should always be interpreted as 'openedness' or 'the open' in the sense of … being thrown-open" (p. 137).

4.8.4   Temporality

From a phenomenological perspective, time is predominantly conceived in ontological terms. For example, time appears to be dynamic, speeding up or slowing down. Time also plays tricks and can deceive. Our focus constantly changes, from dwelling in past memories, to anticipation (or dread) of future events. The present moment is mystifyingly elusive – try to capture it and it has already gone. In language, temporality is understood and articulated through modality, grammatical tense, aspect and time adverbials, yet language always seems somehow inadequate to express the ineffable quality of time.

For Heidegger (1953/2010), the mystery of time was a life-long pre-occupation and 'temporality' was one of the organising concepts for understanding human life ('*Dasein'*) in terms of the 'care' structure. According to this framework, life has a threefold structure of past, present, and future. The past is characterised by the notion of 'thrownness' in that when we are born, we are 'thrown' into circumstances beyond our control and not of our choosing, although we can choose how we respond. For the participants of this study, as babies, they were thrown into the historical context of 20th Century western society along with cultural standards, values, attitudes and understandings. These were predominantly homonegative, and mediated by a complex network of religious, legislative, and educational institutions, including the family unit.

Heidegger argues that our lives are essentially futural, and that we are constantly ahead of ourselves in anticipation of future events. Our future is characterised by

possibility, and we are our most 'authentic' when we hear the 'call of conscience'. This often happens at moments of extreme stress or anxiety, especially when we authentically consider our mortality. At such moments, we glimpse a possible future and live towards our deepest likelihood for being ourselves, or our "ownmost possibility for being" (p. 158). However, our natural mode of being is 'inauthentic' in that we are constantly 'falling' away from the possibility of being authentic, or our true self. This is due to the constant presence and influence of other people in our lives. When Heidegger refers to the 'they' (*das Man*), the term is not necessarily to be understood as simply other people, rather as "a neutral abstraction, something like 'one' in the English phrase 'one doesn't do that', or 'they' in 'they say it will all be over by Christmas'" (Bakewell, 2016, p. 78). The 'they' points to an abstract understanding of what people in general think and say and believe, and our natural mode of being can be seen as a desire to conform to the attitudes, values, and behaviours of the people around us. Heidegger associates the notion of 'falling' into the 'they-self' with the present and he insists that there is no value judgement intended in the concepts of 'falling' or 'inauthenticity'.

4.8.5   Meaning and understanding

Phenomenology is concerned with meaning, how we (as 'Dasein') understand ourselves and the world(s) we find ourselves in. The 'da' of 'Dasein' translates as 'there' or 'in the world', and this is usefully understood as "a realm of significance" (Wisnewski, 2012, p. 61). What this suggests is that we already understand the things of the world as we encounter and engage with them in our everyday dealings. Heidegger observes that we always see things in the world '*as*' something, in terms of the functions they serve: "What is disclosed in understanding, what is understood, is always already accessible in such a way that in it, its 'as what' can be explicitly delineated" (Heidegger, 1953/2010, p. 144). Despite the unwieldy syntax, the significance of this insight cannot be overstated. What it means is that we do not encounter the world, and *then* try and understand it; rather, the world which we encounter is already understood and available for interpretation.

As Heidegger explains: "Interpretation is not the acknowledgement of what has been understood, but rather the development of possibilities projected in understanding" (p. 144). So, we encounter every situation with presuppositions already in place, and

these presuppositions can be elaborated through Heidegger's framework of the 'fore-structure':

- 'fore-having' [the general understanding or gist]
- 'fore-sight' [the aspect under consideration]
- 'fore-conception' [the conceptual framework; something understood *'as'* something]

When we encounter a situation, our understanding is always 'attuned' according to the mood we find ourselves in; this means that we interpret a particular situation depending on our mood at the time and as Heidegger (1953/2010) observes, we are "always already in a mood" (p. 131). This notion of 'attunement' helps us to understand emotions, such as fear, which is outlined in a tri-partite structure: "what we are afraid of [futural projection], fearing [emotion/process/affect], and that about which we are afraid [the thing itself]" (p. 136). Another important aspect of understanding, in terms of the gay men in this study feeling a compulsion to come out, is what (Heidegger, 1953/2010) terms "[c]onscience as the call of care" (p. 264). This is not to be understood as 'conscience' with its familiar ethical and moral connotations; rather, Heidegger suggests that each of us has an inner voice which 'calls' us to be our authentic self: "Conscience calls the self of Dasein forth from its lostness in the they" (p. 264). The final component of understanding is the role of language to articulate our thoughts and to communicate these to others in our world. Gadamer's view of the relationship between language and thought is one of linguistic determinism; he posits the thought that "everything depends on the way we grow into the pre-schematization of our future orientation to the world when we learn a language and grow into everything we learn by way of conversation" (1975/2013, p. 570).

4.9 Chapter review and summary

In this chapter, I have outlined the philosophical and methodological approach to this study; in anticipation of criticism from opponents of this approach, I have provided a rationale and justification for the use of hermeneutic phenomenology. I have introduced the phenomenological notions that have been used to guide my reflection and to inform my interpretations.

For a research study to have rigour, it is essential to clearly indicate the context within which the project has been framed and developed and within which the study's findings are located. The next section summarises the key aspects of the method – what I did, how I did it, and why I elected to do it that way.

Chapter 5 Methods

The method of phenomenology involves 'hermeneutic' interpretation of a phenomenon as revealed through the conversation of participants in a research interview. The process of interpretation is necessary because the various aspects of a given phenomenon are not necessarily apparent and according to Heidegger (1953/2010) they are "covered up, … submerged, or disguised" (p. 34). The phenomenon under investigation in this research study is the process of coming out later in life. Twelve participants gave permission for their stories to be recorded, transcribed and interpreted.

5.1 Context of this study

The initial thinking for this study began to emerge in 2011, and formal enrolment on the PhD programme commenced in April 2013. Data collection involved an ongoing review of published literature, as well as semi-structured interviews with 12 research participants throughout 2015. When the study began, the researcher and all participants were based in Auckland; three participants have subsequently relocated to other towns.

5.2 Recruiting participants: Inclusion criteria

My intention was to recruit a homogeneous group of participants who share broadly similar characteristics:

- Male
- New Zealand residents for most of their life
- Pākehā (of European ancestry)
- Self-identifying as gay
- Men who have come out after the age of 40
- Men who have lived most of their life as ostensibly heterosexual
- Brought up with familiarity of Judeo-Christian tradition

The eligibility criteria were carefully considered, taking into account my personal experience of coming out as a gay man, and the desirability of establishing epistemological solidarity with the participants. I identified an initial group of seven

gay men through personal and professional networks. An additional five participants were recruited using the 'snowballing' (non-probability) sampling technique. In these cases, I asked participants and others to pass on my contact details to third parties if it was felt that:

a) they would be interested, and

b) they would meet the eligibility criteria.

When considering the participants, I was also guided by a desire to engage with thoughtful, articulate individuals "who are acute observers and are well-informed. One such person is worth a hundred others who are merely unobservant participants" (Blumer, 1969, p. 41). I decided to cap the number of participants at twelve in order to do justice to each participant. Even with just twelve participants, I have had to make hard decisions regarding which stories to leave out.

5.3 Ethical considerations

Before embarking on this research project, I consulted a range of texts relating to ethics (Bettinger, 2010; Denzin, 2005; National Oral History Association of New Zealand, 2001; Tolich & Davidson, 1999). I also sought professional advice and considered a number of ethical issues pertaining to the participants, as well as to myself as the primary researcher. Potential ethical issues were discussed with my supervisors; no 'alarm bells' rang, and no conflict of interest was identified. Bearing in mind the sensitive and deeply personal nature of the research, I took the initiative of consulting with the Head of Counselling at AUT Health Services to ensure that potential for psychological harm to participants was minimised. An ethics application was made to AUT's Ethics Committee (AUTEC), and ethics approval was granted on 12th May, 2014 (see Appendix A). Ethics approval included the *Participant Information Sheet* (see Appendix B), and *Consent Form* for the audio-recorded interview (see Appendix C); this form indicated that if participants preferred to remain anonymous they would be given the opportunity to choose their own pseudonym. This was extended to include pseudonyms for names of places and organisations in cases where participants were concerned that they might be identified. Of the twelve participants, ten agreed to use their real names and two preferred to use pseudonyms. Participants were provided with the opportunity to read their transcripts, and each participant

approved their transcript. Each participant had the option to withdraw from the project at the completion of the data collection phase and to request that information would be deleted. None of the participants withdrew from the project.

5.4 The research question

Of critical importance to the success of the project is identifying and articulating "an appropriate phenomenological question" (van Manen, 2014, p. 297). This means that the primary and subsequent questions need to be formulated in such a way that they elicit concrete detail rather than abstractions, vividness rather than bland generalisations, and a sense of providing access into *actual* as opposed to theoretical lives. The primary research question asks what it means to come out later in life. Here are the questions which I asked:

1. So the first area I want to explore is your own experience of coming out. How did you come out?
2. What were some of the barriers which may have prevented you from coming out earlier?
3. What were some of the 'enablers' which have made it possible for you to come out?
4. What is it like to live life as an older gay man in the 21st century?
5. What advice do you want to pass on to others who have not yet come out?
6. What advice do you want to pass on to people who have issues with homosexuality?

I also asked participants to explore with me in conversation what they understood by the concept of 'being gay' and the concept of 'coming out'. At the end of the interview, I invited participants to revisit any aspect that they felt had not been adequately covered, and to raise any topic of interest to them.

5.5 Introduction to the participants

Of the twelve participants, nine were born in Aotearoa New Zealand, and three overseas (one in England, one in Ireland, one in Holland). Their ages at the time of interview ranged from 55 – 76 years old. Eleven of these participants came out publicly after the age of 40; one participant (Grant) started the process of coming out in his late twenties, but returned to the closet until his early 40s. In terms of coming out to themselves, one was aware at the age of five, three were aware during adolescence, three in their twenties, one in his thirties, three in their forties, and one in his early fifties. All participants had university level education. One unexpected discovery which emerged in the course of interviewing, was that six of the participants had in-depth

understanding of Biblical scripture, four having graduated with degrees in theology. In terms of marital status, seven had been married to women, and of those, six had reared children. One of the single men had also raised children, but through sperm donation after having come out as a gay man. Three of the participants had considered suicide around the time of coming out; for a summary, see Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 Participant profiles

Name	Born	Age in 2015	Year when first knew	Age when first knew	Age at coming out	Year out	No of years in closet	Married		Children	Suicidal ideations Y/N	Theology
Bevan	1960	55	1987	27	42	2002	15	N		N	N	
Chris	1955	60	1995	40	45	2000	5	N		N	N	
Edward	1959	56	1977	17	48	2007	30		Y	Y	N	studied
Mark	1939	76	1952	17	49	1984	32		Y	Y	N	degree
Grant	1953	62	1958	5	~40	~1993	35	N		N	Y	
			1981	28			12					
Peter	1951	64	~1970	~20	~50	~2000	30	N		N	N	degree
Gordon	1948	67	1991	43	44	1992	1-2	N		Y	N	studied
Graham	1940	75	~1955	~15	~58	~1998	43		Y	N	N	degree
Berend	1945	70	~1985	~40	40	1985	1-2		Y	Y	Y	degree
Ross	1939	76	1965	~26	48	1991	22		Y	Y	Y	
Alan	1958	57	1994	36	49	2007	11		Y	Y	N	
John	1949	65	1999	50	53	2002	3		Y	Y	N	

5.6 Reflexivity and the *epoché*

A key feature of phenomenology is the caveat concerning 'common sense' presuppositions and assumptions that individuals bring to any investigation of a given phenomenon. van Manen (1990/2007) warns that hegemonic understandings and so-called 'scientific knowledge' tend to predetermine an observer's attitude towards phenomena, adding that "the problem of phenomenological inquiry is not always that we know too little about the phenomenon we wish to investigate, but that we know too much" (p. 46). In order to reduce the likelihood of prior knowledge contaminating the research, Husserl, whose background was in mathematics, proposed the concept of 'bracketing' (also known as the '*epoché*') in order to "make explicit [any] understandings, beliefs, biases assumptions, presuppositions, and theories" (Husserl, 1970, p. 33, as cited in van Manen, 1990, p. 47). The *epoché* (from the Greek word for 'restraint') also carries the sense of a meta-reflection, or reflecting on its own

reflectivity. According to van Manen (2014) "The basic idea of the *epoché* is to return to the world as we live it in the natural attitude" (p. 222). One useful way to consider this is through the concept of 'abstemious reflection' which van Manen elaborates "in the sense that reflecting on experience must, as much as possible, be open and abstain from theoretical, polemical, suppositional, and emotional intoxications" (p. 222). van Manen's advice with respect to theoretical meaning is not to ignore, or bracket it, but to examine it for "possibilities of extracting phenomenological sensibilities" (p. 226). Another aim of the *epoché* is to induce a sense of wonder and absorption in the phenomenon of interest.

The Husserlian concept of 'bracketing' is somewhat contentious, and not considered consonant with a Heideggarian approach (Koch, 1996): Heidegger did not believe that it was possible to bracket out personal beliefs, biases and assumptions, and on the contrary, it is held that these are carried into the research along with the researcher. However, van Manen's re-appraisal of the *epoché* is in light of over 100 years of phenomenological practice in a diverse range of domains and applications. My interpretation of the *epoché* is therefore more aligned with van Manen than Husserl. I see the *epoché* as an aspect of reflexivity, promoting a mindful awareness of other approaches, theories, and frameworks, combined with a sensitivity to my own pre-occupations, prejudices, biases, and assumptions. In terms of this research, I perceive coming out to be a desirable end; I assume also that reluctance or failure to come out indicates resistance, shame, and embarrassment, along with the likely result of psychological disequilibrium.

Reflexivity is a tool to enable the researcher to develop a mindful, attuned awareness of self and others throughout the process. Remaining reflexive ensures that my horizon as a researcher is fused with the horizon of the literature, and the horizon of the research data (Koch, 1996). Finlay (2002a, 2002b) identifies a number of advantages from enabling a researcher to reflect on their personal responses to emerging findings and to considering the nature and quality of the interpersonal dynamics in play during the research interview. Reflexivity can uncover underlying psychological motivations, and reveal unconscious biases in the researcher's questioning technique. Willig (2008), points out that 'personal' reflexivity, with a focus on values, experiences, interests, beliefs, political commitments, wider aims in life,

needs to be balanced by 'epistemological' reflexivity, i.e. articulating assumptions, together with the implications these may have for the study and the data generated. Van Manen (1990/2007) observes that phenomenological projects and their methods often have a "transformative effect" on the researcher (p. 163). This observation is echoed by McAdams (2007) who has explored the concept of a "redemptive self" in studies conducted over a 15 year period. He notes consistent findings that adults in midlife, who score highly with respect to measures of Erik Erikson's concept of generativity "tend to see their own lives as narratives of redemption" (p. 23-24). With respect to the transformational potential of phenomenological research, I note the personal significance this study has for me in terms of cathartic release from the anger I have experienced in reviewing much of the literature, particularly relating to heterosexism and homonegativity. For example, as a result of respectful interaction with some of the participants, my attitude towards the Christian Church has modified. I have come to a more nuanced understanding of the issues, and discovered a willingness to acknowledge ongoing progress in some denominations.

5.6.1   Keeping a reflexive journal

In 2011, I started keeping a thesis journal in order to process ideas as they emerged, to reflect on interesting concepts from my reading and to articulate my emerging understanding of complex issues. On a very practical level, I have used it to record key points from supervision meetings and summaries of logistical developments relating to, for example, setting up interviews. Entries are regularly reviewed, and where necessary, acted on, for example, suggestions for follow-up reading, or re-considering my approach to interviewing participants. An enjoyable annual ritual has been to re-read every entry for the year over the summer break. The journal has been a constant companion, and I have relished the space for expressing emotional responses, for cultivating the habit of writing, and for experimenting with different rhetorical approaches. Some of the text has made its way into the thesis; the remainder serves as an audit trail of my thinking.

5.7   Phenomenological interviewing

One particular difficulty with interviews, using phenomenology as methodology, is related to the observation that participants usually prefer to talk *about* events in their life, rather than to simply narrate them as an accurate account of lived experience. van

Manen (2014) warns that phenomenological researchers often underestimate the "unique challenge" of attempting to elicit rich experiential narratives: "It is extremely difficult to get interviewees to actually tell an experiential account in pre-reflective terms" (p. 315). My response to this caveat was to devise a mind map indicating the sort of detail which I wanted participants to share during their interviews. I took a copy of this with me to each pre-interview meeting, ran through the rationale for this, and left a copy with each participant; see Appendix D. I believe that investing time on this paid dividends, as the quality of the interview data was uniformly high.

A major objective in setting up this research was building solidarity and trust, so before each interview I arranged to meet the participant for 'a cup of tea' and a familiarisation chat. During this preliminary meeting, I recapped the objectives of the research and the likely dynamics of interaction during the interview. Each participant had previously been sent a copy of the *Participant Information Sheet,* so this meeting provided an opportunity to ask questions and clarify any issues or concerns. I also made a point of sharing some of my own stories and experiences, at the same time making it clear that during the recorded interview it was *their* stories I was interested in, and that I would do very little of the talking. I left a copy of the AUT Consent form with each participant, and indicated that they could fill it out before the actual interview, which was typically scheduled a week or so later. I offered participants the opportunity to have their audio recordings lodged with The Lesbian and Gay Archives of New Zealand (LAGANZ) housed in the Alexander Turnbull Library of the National Library of New Zealand, in Wellington. Of the twelve participants, nine agreed to make their audio recordings publicly available; three declined permission. Participants were invited to choose the venue, and ten of the twelve chose their own home, one chose his workplace, and one chose to be interviewed in one of the university's meeting rooms. During the actual interview, I used a high quality Zoom H5 digital recorder with lapel microphones.

5.7.1   Preparation: Pilot interviews

In anticipation of the interviews, I undertook training in oral history interviewing techniques offered through the National Library. This hands-on course (run over three weekends) provided guidance in preparation, including development of logistical checklists, and familiarisation with audio recorders and transcribing software. It also

provided opportunities to practise interviewing – and being interviewed – with professional debriefings and round-table discussions to explore issues emerging, and to identify best practice.

Before I went out into the field, I followed the advice of my supervisors and conducted a pilot interview on myself. This process helped me to rework the order of questions and amend confusing or non-productive items. I found this a very useful exercise, although after transcribing and reading the interview, I was disappointed at the superficial nature of my answers and the lack of experiential detail. For a phenomenological study, my own self-interview was not a good start. I raised this with my supervisors at the next meeting, and the advice was to repeat the interview with two changes: a) reduce the number of questions, and b) arrange two chairs, and actually change seats when answering. The second time around, with these changes, the quality of the transcript was markedly improved and I felt confident about conducting a pilot interview with a friend who was supportive of the research, but who did not fulfil all eligibility criteria.

From my journal entry for 28/08/14, I made notes about this pilot interview and debrief, noting that "I felt euphoric after the pre-interview discussion on Tuesday, partly on account of having actually made a start, but mainly because it was so interesting hearing William's stories and getting a privileged glimpse into part of someone else's life." I made a number of observations about my interviewing style, the seating, proxemics, body language and distractions, and after a further period of reflection, I felt confident about embarking on the substantive interviews for the project.

5.7.2   The interview process

Interview questions and probes were formulated with reference to the literature (Tolich & Davidson, 1999; van Manen, 1990/2007, 2014; Wengraf, 2001) and refined with reference to pilot interviews conducted in 2013 and 2014. When I met with each participant for our pre-interview discussion, I indicated that they were welcome to speak for as long as they liked, and I offered the possibility of a follow-up interview if required, or requested. In effect, the time for each interview ranged from an hour to 90 minutes, and follow-up interviews were only necessary in two cases. Participant

interviews were recorded in line with National Oral History Association of New Zealand guidelines (National Oral History Association of New Zealand, 2001) using a Zoom H5 audio recorder. I transcribed each interview personally using Express Scribe software, and applying formatting conventions as outlined in Silverman and Marvasti (2008, p. 505) and guided by Hutching (2004).

5.7.3   Reflecting on the interview process

The interviews were conducted over one year, and after each interview, I reflected on the effectiveness of my questioning technique along with other aspects of interpersonal communication. I also engaged in a mid-field reflexive exercise during which I recorded a conversation with colleagues on the topic of 'how phenomenology is serving me in the field'. During this discussion, I was encouraged to discover how comfortable I was becoming with phenomenology as a methodology. But I was also somewhat disconcerted to note the extent to which my anger, at the injustices experienced by my participant, suffused the conversation. This was very evident when listening to the recording. I came to realise that there was a danger of this personal response becoming an undue bias, and I resolved to monitor it. Monthly supervision meetings were used to discuss aspects such as the role of silence in the interview, with the suggestion that pauses did not need to be filled by the interviewer. During the course of the interviews, a number of issues emerged for me to consider. For example, with respect to seating, I contemplated the effect of seating arrangements, and noted the change in dynamics of interaction, depending on configuration. In one supervision session, we experimented with a range of positions, coming to the conclusion that sitting at 120 degrees to each other is preferable to having the participant sitting directly opposite the interviewer.

In the interests of not contaminating the research, it was suggested to me that as interviewer, I do not need to contribute to the discussion, and that a useful strategy in phenomenological interviewing is to adopt a naïve, culturally ignorant attitude. In order to maintain a neutral stance on controversial issues, I was aware of the need to avoid sharing value judgements, or conveying personal attitudes, indicating neither approval nor disapproval. In practice, I experienced some difficulty maintaining professional impartiality as an interviewer. For example, after I had shared an interview transcript with my supervisors, it was pointed out that at one stage, I had

inadvertently conveyed a sense of surprise through my use of the interjection 'wow'. This prompted an exploration of the tension between aiming for neutrality and the desire to be engaging in a 'genuine conversation' (Gadamer, 1975/2013), and I resolved to be on the lookout for moments like these when interviewing in future.

One practical outcome to this was that I embarked on a reflexive question analysis exercise. I wanted to better understand the extent to which my own biases might be intruding on the interview dynamic. So, I engaged in a discursive introspection activity (inspired by Finlay, 2002a, 2002b), which involved working through each of the first 10 transcripts and removing all participant responses, looking only at the interviewer 'discourse acts' in terms of questions and responses (Tsui, 1994). See Table 5.2 for the coding system which I devised. This process provided me with greater insight into my control of the interactional dynamics of the interview and my approach to questioning in particular. I also noted in practical terms how I attempted to maintain a degree of neutrality. The key learning point for me here was that, on occasion, I am prepared to justify my decision to sacrifice neutrality to interpersonal solidarity in order to serve the research, not to maintain an ideological position, or to slavishly follow a set of guidelines.

5.8   Hermeneutic phenomenological analysis: Dwelling with the data

Having identified the phenomenon of interest, which involves the lived experience of gay men coming out later in life, I undertook an extensive review of the literature relating to this topic. Then, in the interests of applying the phenomenological *epoché*, I reflected at some length on the theories and frameworks which I had encountered, as well as my own assumptions and biases. Then, I resolved to embark on the programme of phenomenological interviews in a spirit of openness to the lived experience of the participants as they told their stories and shared their experiences.

The next step in my journey was to spend time becoming familiar with the interview data which I did by choosing to transcribe the interviews myself. I had given myself a year for the process of listening to the recordings, typing what I heard, revising and checking the transcripts, then listening to the recordings once again. I can touch-type, and I was not in a hurry. My trust in the process of spending time meant that I was in a relaxed state of mind, and receptive to hearing and seeing what might emerge from

the interviews. I saw this as a "dialogic … process of question and answer and new question based on the answer etc. until all aspects are explored and all data structurally incorporated", all the time searching for themes (Kleining & Witt, 2001, p. 9). So, what were the essential themes which would characterize this phenomenon? How would I recognise them? How might I describe them in a way that would be respectful of the participants and useful for the research? Packer (2011, p. 70) cautions that "a theme never simply 'emerges'; it is the product of interpretation. … themes that 'stand out' tell us more about the researcher than about the interviewee, and they should not be the starting point for analysis" (as cited in Saldana, 2013, p. 181).

Table 5.2 Coding system: Reflexive question analysis

Function	Short-hand
Display question	DQ
Genuine (referential) question	RQ
Invitation to explore	Inv
Probing question (explicit/echo)	PQ
Leading question	LQ
Confirmation	Conf
Clarification	Cl
Comment (neutral)	Com
Comment (value judgement)	VJ
Comment (solidarity)	S
Comment (reassurance)	Re
Comment (encouragement)	Enc
Sharing (minor)	Sh
Sharing (anecdote)	Sh/Anec
Re-orient	Reo
Switch to new topic	NT
Request for rich experiential detail	RED
Technical (e.g. batteries)	Tech
Thanks	Th

Cognizant of Packer's warning, I set about cautiously identifying themes and applying codes to the transcripts. Whilst recognising that the use of qualitative data analysis software such as NVivo is not commonly associated with phenomenology, I was interested to find out for myself how the process of coding and applying visualisation

functions might add texture and depth to the research. After completing a training programme and working through guidebooks, such as Saldana (2013) and Bazely and Jackson (2013), I entered the transcripts into NVivo 10, and coded the themes into a hierarchy of nodes. This enabled me to see relationships and connections that might otherwise have remained covered over. In framing these nodes, I employed concepts from two key theorists. In the first instance, drawing on Herek (2009) I began by devising a framework for conceptualising cultural, societal, institutional and individual reactions to homosexuality from both stigmatised and non-stigmatised perspectives; this resulted in the first three nodes which I labelled:

1. 'Enacted' stigma
2. 'Felt' stigma (awareness)
3. 'Internalised' stigma (acceptance)

See Figure 5.1 for an illustrative sample of the NVivo navigating screen containing a partially expanded view of the node structure (nodes 1-3).
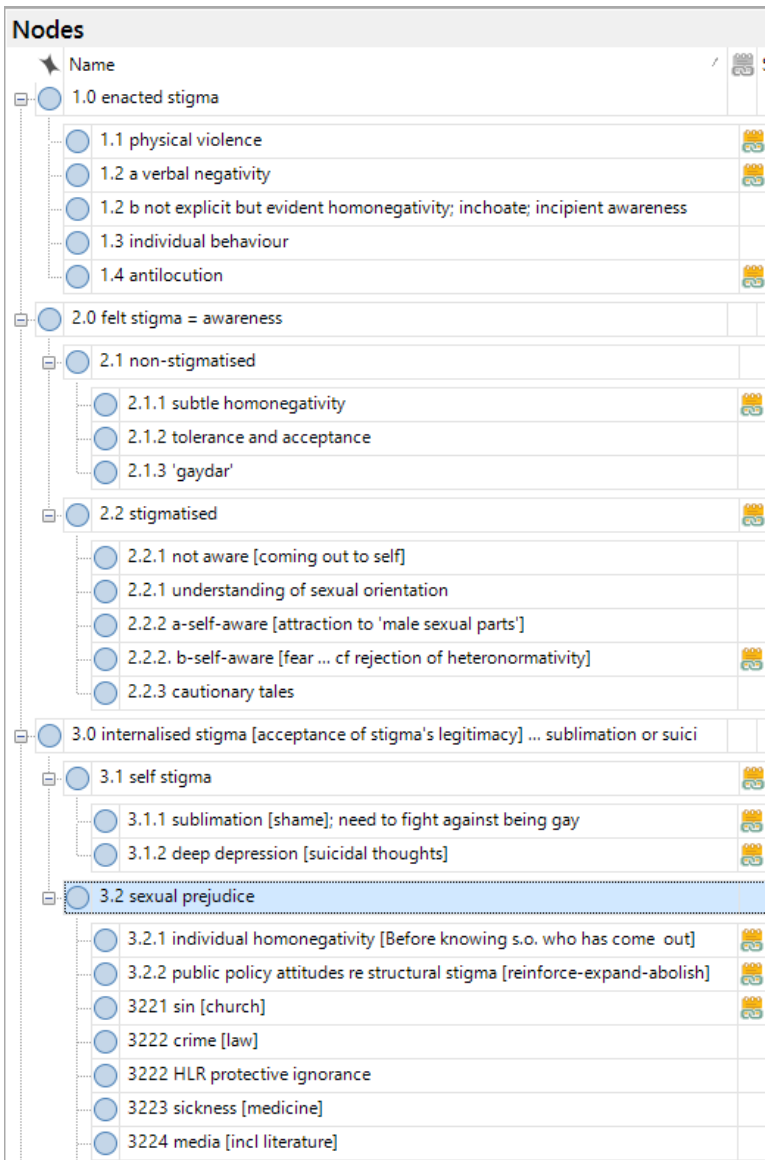
Figure 5.1 NVivo node structure [Illustrative excerpt: Nodes 1-3].

The next step was to consider a framework for the node dealing with the logistics and dimensions of coming out. After having considered a number of possibilities, I decided to use Cass (1979), partly because her model had emerged from the review of literature as a robust and enduring framework, but more importantly, because my participants' stories mapped onto the six stages, and I wanted a framework that would allow me scope to explore the three inter-related dimensions of cognition, emotion, and behaviour. See Figure 5.2 for an illustrative sample of the table, which I prepared in Microsoft Word.

Stage	behaviour	affective	cognition
4.1 confusion	**4.1 confusion** 4.1.1 B = ok; S = gay = ok 4.1.2 B = not ok 4.1.3 B = redefined Overt behaviour eg kissing or experimenting Physiological response eg arousal Masturbation/ masturbatory fantasies in Stage 1 it is rare for P to disclose inner turmoil to others	Curiosity Bewilderment Discomfort Turmoil Degree of significance attributed to awareness Intensely personal experience Feeling different Tergiversation [inconsistent, contradictory statements]	Confusion: immediate task is to resolve question of 'who am I?' 3rd person >> 1st person Conscious awareness that homosexuality has relevance to self and behaviour = awareness of sexual orientation = sense that P is potentially homosexual Language; ability to articulate awareness Erotic dreams Ignorance >> awareness [slow/immediate] Cf denial >> 2.2.1 Lack of gay role models
4.1			*MH – father died – recurring dream: murder and Jungian interpretation: awareness of feminine component*
4.1		BW - *No sexual attraction to females*	BW - *'I had shown no interest in having a relationship with a female'*
4.1			**BW - I guess it's been there all my life, except I've lived in denial of this and it wasn't until in my 40s when I was re-examining my life that I started to think that maybe this is a reality that is true for me*

Figure 5.2 Cass coding reference [Illustrative excerpt: 4.1].

By 22nd February, 2016, some ten months into the coding process, and after having entered in illustrative quotes from 11 interviews, the table ran to 68 pages, and 20,395 words. Before entering any text into NVivo, (and inspired by the 1992 documentary film 'Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media', in which column inches are compared of The New York Times' coverage of the Indonesian occupation of East Timor (minimal) with the more extensive coverage of Cambodia), I collected several metres of brown paper and undertook a process of cutting out, applying Blu-Tak and organising the quotes in mindmap format in order to better visualise the spread of positive versus negative quotes across each stage, and within each stage, across each dimension (cognition, emotion, behaviour). This proved both interesting and productive, revealing patterns and texture that were finessed with even greater delicacy when I began entering text into NVivo. See Figure 5.3 for an illustrative sample of the NVivo navigating screen containing a partially expanded view of the 4.0 node structure.

Nodes

	Name	/	⊞
⊞ ○	1.0 enacted stigma		
⊞ ○	2.0 felt stigma = awareness		
⊞ ○	3.0 internalised stigma [acceptance of stigma's legitimacy] ... sublimation or suicide		
⊟ ○	4.0 coming out [Cass, 1979]		
○	4.1 confusion [no language; need for distance]		⊞
○	4.2 a- comparison		⊞
○	4.2 b- coming out for the first time [or significant]		
○	4.2 c- first gay love; first gay sex		
○	4.3 tolerance [this node not used in 2015]		⊞
○	4.4 a- acceptance [strategies]		⊞
○	4.4 b- avoiding coming out		
○	4.5 pride [confidence - courage]		⊞
○	4.6 a- synthesis		⊞
○	4.6 b- advice for questioning individuals [closeted gays]		
○	4.6 c- irritated by categories		
○	4.6 d- present reality - looking to the future		
○	4.7 complexity of coming out to different individuals		⊞
○	4.8 High cost - loss of heterosexual privilege [regret]		
⊞ ○	5.0 reactions [non-stigmatised individuals]		
⊞ ○	6.0 gay community as de-stigmatised		
⊞ ○	7.0 non-stigmatised communities - cultural change & reduction in sexual prejudice		⊞

Figure 5.3 NVivo node structure [Illustrative excerpt: 4.0 expanded].

As I developed the node structure, I was reflecting on the meanings which emerged from participants' accounts of their lived experience, and in the process, identified essential themes which appeared to characterize this phenomenon. I was also 'listening for the voices', looking for stories and remaining open to flashes of insight, or 'inception', which van Manen (2014) describes as "that fragile moment of a heuristic event. This may be the coming upon, being struck by, or suddenly grasping of an original idea, experiencing a fundamental insight, realizing the depth of meaning of something" (p. 237). One such epiphany was the realisation that participants' delay in coming out could more accurately be framed in terms of 'integrity' as opposed to 'cowardice'.

Through a routine of 'memoing', which Bazely and Jackson (2013) describe as a reflexive process of "keeping track of emerging ideas" (p. 42), I kept an audit trail of my thinking, as well as a growing collection of salient narratives and interpretations, which would be written up, re-worked and finessed, and ultimately incorporated into the findings chapters. The use of memos was useful also in maintaining a considered balance between parts and whole, in keeping with the concept of the 'hermeneutic circle'.

5.8.1   Crafting the narratives

After two years of 'dwelling with the data' I felt ready to start crafting narratives. The power of narratives to convey complex meanings has been applied in a range of research methodologies, including narrative inquiry and ethnography (Creswell, 2013; Sandelowski, 1991). The approach in phenomenology exploits a particular type of narrative that we recognise from everyday life as a simple anecdote. van Manen (2014) observes that "anecdotes bring things into nearness by contributing to the vividness and presence of an experience" (p. 251). Anecdotes are employed to communicate aspects of life that are unusually complex, or difficult to understand using "ordinary propositional discourse". van Manen argues that anecdotes can help a reader to consider and even in some way 'experience', aspects of life that cannot be apprehended in "an intellectual sense" (p. 253). Given the multifarious taboos associated with human sexuality, there are many aspects of same-sex relations, such as ethical dilemmas, that remain obscured, having been ignored throughout history, or distorted by other agendas. It is argued that shared anecdotes from participants who have insight into their own lives can be used to illuminate or explain what is happening in a way that theoretical or scientific explanations fail to achieve. In phenomenological research, van Manen (2014) argues that the anecdote assumes a special status on account of its compelling nature and evocative power. He identifies the following characteristics:

- The anecdote is succinct
- The focus is on one discrete incident occurring at one moment in time
- This incident carries special meaning for the participant and observers
- The story begins *in media res* (in the middle of the action)
- Vivid, concrete details provide context
- Direct speech makes the anecdote come to life

- A strong ending (or punchline) creates *'punctum'* (a disturbing or surprising point or effect)

When working from the interview transcripts, my task, as guided by phenomenological experts such as Caelli (2001) and Smythe, Ironside, Sims, Swenson, and Spence (2008) was to identify potential stories, then to summarise and edit each one, re-ordering details from the transcript in order to re-create a coherent, compelling account, which conveys the essence of the lived experience of the participant. I then provided an interpretation, or phenomenological reflection about the nature of the incident, noting that an anecdote would frequently assume greater poignancy in retrospect, given that the person to whom the events happened may not have been aware of the significance at the actual time of the incident. One challenge which I encountered during the analysis phase was drilling down and isolating a discrete event or incident. Why was this important? van Manen (2014) observes that the anecdote "can make the singular knowable" (p. 256). "[T]he phenomenological example is a philological device that holds in a certain tension the intelligibility of the singular. … [T]he example mediates our intuitive grasp of a singularity, which is exactly the project of phenomenology" (p. 260). It helps to remember that a central objective of phenomenology is to identify and understand singularity, bearing in mind the tension and dynamic between particular and universal.

Once I had identified possible episodes or incidents, and crafted the narratives, my next challenge was to find a way of framing the findings chapters. My approach was to first create a grid with column headings as 'participants', row headings as 'themes', organised in order that they might be covered in the chapter. I then considered a coherent order, and decided which narratives stood out as salient, or essential, in terms of needing deep phenomenological interpretation. Next, I mapped out the themes by way of establishing a textual macro-structure, and at this stage, I inserted the micro-narratives. Finally, I wrote up the interpretive commentary, weaving in phenomenological notions as appropriate. When I started, one perplexing concern was the issue of narrative length. After struggling with this, I decided to let each narrative develop without being unduly concerned about the word count – some were very long.

When I felt ready, I started to interpret key parts through a process of free writing; then I stood back to observe what had emerged, before re-crafting the text. This process of writing and re-writing was an intensely rewarding part of the process, and I let myself by guided by intuition. Finally, when I felt ready to start drafting the findings chapters, the initial narrative was naturally chopped up into smaller fragments as appropriate. Inevitably I had too much text, given the constraints of a thesis word limit. My strategy was to wait, and give myself some psychological distance. I then revisited the draft, and re-read it from the perspective of the intended reader. This focus on coherence and overall narrative arc helped me decide what would be cut, and what retained.

5.9   Phenomenological research report

Attempting to distil over six years of dwelling with this phenomenon into a coherent doctoral thesis I found to be exigent and rewarding, in equal measure. The challenges are multiple: they include logistics, aspects of rhetorical style and the need to maintain a balance between participants' voices, and my interpretation. With respect to crafting text, van Manen (2014) refers to "the expressive method of the vocative", which he rates as "probably the most challenging dimension of the phenomenological inquiry process" (p. 240). The objective is to produce a textual account which is true to the phenomenon being examined, and which resonates with the reader, resulting in what is sometimes referred to as 'the phenomenological nod' of recognition. In producing this thesis, I have experienced an ongoing sense of temporal disjunction from dwelling in the past time stories yielded by the research,and at the same time, projecting myself forward in anticipation of multiple readers whose varying perspectives and expectations I can scarcely imagine. At all times, my objective has been to produce an accessible, meaningful report, yet to allow transcendent meanings to emerge. I have striven to write a thesis that will be true to the participants, that will disturb readers, and that will contribute to effecting changes which are necessary in contemporary society.

5.10 Phenomenological rigour: Trustworthiness

Good phenomenological research is extraordinarily demanding of its practitioners; van Manen quotes Heidegger in warning that phenomenology "never makes things easier, but only more difficult" (Heidegger, 2000, p. 12, as cited in van Manen, 2014, p. 69).

So, given the difficulties and complexities inherent in this methodology, what quality control is in place to assure the reader of the trustworthiness of this research? The inappropriateness of qualitative researchers employing quantitatively oriented notions such as 'validity' and 'reliability' is now well-established (Denzin, 2009; Koch, 2006; Koch & Harrington, 1998). There remains considerable debate in the research literature concerning the criteria for establishing and assessing rigour and trustworthiness in phenomenological research. From my reading, I have chosen to be guided by White (2011), whose framework includes the following concepts: credibility, transferability, dependability and auditability. To these, I would add de Witt and Ploeg's (2006) notion of actualisation.

5.10.1 Credibility

Findings are credible when the researcher has established congruence between data and interpretation. Multiple interpretations are possible; however, I wanted my interpretations to be grounded in the 'concreteness' of the participants' lived experience (de Witt & Ploeg, 2006). In an attempt to maintain credibility and to remain true to the voices of my participants, I monitored my interpretations through regular journaling, ever alert for intrusion of my personal prejudices and biases. I shared my interpretations with my supervisors and other colleagues, and together, we scrutinised any dissonant readings. With respect to rigour of interpretation, van Manen (1990/2007) emphasises Geertz' (1973) notion of "thick description", and draws attention to the importance of "precision and exactness [in] interpretive descriptions" (p. 17).

5.10.2 Transferability

The notion of transferability relates to different research contexts, given that phenomenological research does not aim to generalize from an actual case to a wider population. It instead "permits a researcher who has read other qualitative accounts to extrapolate and 'transfer' aspects of the research settings described in those accounts to that of their own" (White, 2011, p. 237). While this places the responsibility for extrapolation on the reader, my role as phenomenological researcher is to make the reader's job as easy as possible by ensuring that I have provided evocative descriptions, together with sufficiently concrete detail, along with persuasive interpretation in the findings section. It is also envisaged that the design of this study

will prompt other researchers to conduct similar studies in domains in which they have epistemological solidarity; for example, into the lived experience of Maori, and Pacific Island participants.

5.10.3 Dependability and auditability

Dependability refers to the transparency of the decision-making process as it impacts the theoretical, philosophical, methodological, and interpretive choices which are made in the course of the research (Koch, 1996). One practical way to achieve this transparency is through an 'audit trail' from which "readers, from the outset of a study, might follow the interpretive process and understand the findings derived from it" (White, 2011, p. 236). Another component of dependability involves the researcher's axiological engagement and ethical comportment. In this study, I have striven to maintain the confidentiality of the participants and to respect the integrity of the research process. van Manen (1990) argues that the rigour of a phenomenological study resides partly in the extent to which the text "distinguishes itself by its courage and resolve to stand up for the uniqueness and significance of the notion to which it has dedicated itself" (p. 18).

5.10.4 Actualisation

In drawing attention to the impact of a research report on practice in the real world, de Witt and Ploeg (2006) observe that a phenomenological study is open to multiple interpretations, which will depend on the historical and ideological context of the reader. So, the final criterion for considering the phenomenological rigour of this study cannot be assessed at the time of writing. Actualisation is a forward-looking consideration, and refers to ways in which the research findings may be applied in the world beyond academia. I envisage that the significance of this study will be seen in multiple domains, as outlined in the Discussion section. To extend the concept of actualisation, I introduce the notion of 'direct reader address'. I, therefore, offer the findings of this study as a challenge to you, the reader of this thesis, to contemplate your possible complicity in perpetuating homonegative behaviours and attitudes.

5.11 Chapter review and summary

In this chapter, before providing a summary table of participant profiles, I began by offering some comments relating to the study participants in terms of inclusion criteria

and the importance of ethical guidelines which are designed to keep both participants and researcher safe. One of the key characteristics of a phenomenological study is explicit consciousness of the researcher's role in the research, and so some discussion of reflexivity and the *epoché* was offered; this discussion provided a foundation for considering the logistics of phenomenological interviewing in terms of preparation, the role of pilot interviews and the dynamics of the actual interview process. Another important characteristic of a phenomenological study is the notion of dwelling with the interview data, and I have outlined the process through which I employed NVivo as a tool to add texture and depth to my understandings of the narratives. I then outlined the process of actually crafting the narratives, and outlined the approach to establish how these would be deployed throughout the findings chapters. I concluded this chapter with some observations about the role and nature of the phenomenological research report, and a summary of the criteria against which this report will be appraised.

Chapter 6 Hearkening to the Messages

The research findings from this study are presented in the next four chapters; each chapter is oriented towards the participants' lived experiences of growing up, and eventually coming out as gay men. This chapter is called 'Hearkening to the Messages', and the focus is on the messages relating to homosexuality that participants might have encountered while they were growing up. The word 'hearken' with its antique flavour derives from "Middle English *herknen*, from Old English *heorcnian*; akin to Old High German *hōrechen* to listen, Old English *hīeran* to hear" ("hearken", n.d.). The scrambled semantics of this word reveal a combination of listening (an active, conscious process) together with the involuntary and perhaps unwilling process of hearing. The significance of 'hearkening' for this study resides in the fact that the messages which were received from society, by participants in this study, were not always welcome. Heidegger (1953/2010) observes that "[o]nly when the existential possibility of discourses and listening are given, can someone hearken [horchen]. He who 'cannot hear' ['hören'] and 'must feel' can perhaps hearken very well precisely for this reason" (p. 159).

Contemporary understandings of communication are indebted to Shannon and Weaver's (1963) 'mathematical theory of communication', with the 'message' a key component of the model. In this section, we will consider the conflict between some of the messages communicated by society, in contrast to an individual's 'inner speech' (Morin, 2011). The inner speech messages, which indicate each individual's sense of their own self, are sometimes incongruent with culturally transmitted messages. This study is concerned with one message in particular, the gist of which is that *homosexuality is bad*. This message finds itself in a dynamic state of tension with the intrapersonal inner speech representing each participant's interests, desires, needs, and emotional orientation to other males. With the onset of puberty, for some participants these messages became increasingly overlaid with a sense of erotic possibilities. The intrapersonal messages manifested as invitations, suggestions, calls, and commands to look at other males, to fantasise about other males, to respond emotionally and sexually to other males, in a manner which was counter posed with the seldom-voiced, but ever-present societal message of proscription.

Some participants had a clear sense of their sexual orientation from an early age, whereas others had limited understanding of even the concept of homosexuality, let alone their own sexuality. This lack of awareness was due in large part to the ubiquitous and seemingly tacit agreement that homosexuality was a taboo so great that it could not be spoken of in conservative western society; hence, the silence and concomitant ignorance associated with the subject. Given the 20th century's heteronormative hegemony, together with the obloquy meted out to known homosexuals, positive role models were virtually non-existent until the 1960s, when a new generation began to question the status quo. Increasingly after the Second World War, occasional glimpses of an alternative reality were possible through media or foreign travel. Gay historians, such as Brickell (2008) and Ings (2010) provide an illuminating account of the growing counterculture, increasingly visible to those who knew where to look. Even so, it was not until the homosexual law reform debates in the mid-1980s that many New Zealanders began to consider the issue of sexual orientation in terms of their own society and their personal response. As opposition to the proposed legislation mounted, it threw into salience the intensity of homonegative feeling from a legal perspective, from a healthcare perspective, and from two millennia of deeply entrenched Judeo-Christian tradition. The overwhelmingly negative messages which were transmitted from all quarters of society were sufficient to ensure that the young gay men in this study stayed firmly in the closet until well into middle age. Reasons for remaining in the closet range from fear, through to ignorance and denial. Motivation and strategies for denial will be explored systematically through these findings chapters, but first we meet five of the participants for whom attraction to other males was apparent earlier in life, and acknowledged as such.

6.1   Strong self-awareness from an early age

Although this awareness was typically covered over and denied, some participants indicated a strong self-awareness of their sexual and emotional attraction to other males from an early age. For example, even as a very young boy Grant was aware of a strong emotional attraction to men and, at the same time, he was somehow aware that acknowledging this attraction would not be safe:

> Even at the age of five or six I knew I liked boys (men actually, 'cause
> they were better). I was aware of my attraction to other males

because my dreams told me. I remember at the breakfast table one morning, and the family was having breakfast and Dad was talking about his dreams and he said, 'What dreams do you have?' and I was thinking of the dream that I had and I must have been about seven at the time and I don't know if you'd say it was a *sexual* dream - but it was about being very close and intimate and snuggling with the man across the road. And then when I was asked to tell the family about my dream, I said, 'I can't remember', and I was really embarrassed about the situation but said nothing.

The sense of self-awareness comes through clearly, as does the sense of embarrassment, which proves to be the harbinger of shame and subsequent guilt. Some sense of self-preservation suggested that it would have been in Grant's interest to keep quiet about his dreams, this initial denial becoming established as a typical pattern of behaviour. Denial aside, Grant's strong attraction to men was evident to onlookers as well. Later, he shared another vivid memory of a time when his aunt and uncle were visiting his house, and they had with them a good-looking youth:

> He must have been about 16 and I would have been about 10, or 12. We were sitting at the table at lunchtime and I just kept looking at the guy. I just kept *looking* at the guy, and eventually, I think it was Dad asked me, 'What's wrong Grant?' and I replied, 'No, I'm fine'. I didn't realise that what I was doing was so obvious, but I did have this feeling: I thought this boy was gay. So there was a strong sense of attraction at that age and a growing sense of awareness which got stronger and stronger, but this was complicated by the fact that with my parents' attitude, I was trying to be straight as well; I needed to survive in my family.

In this case, Grant's father remarked on his behaviour at the dining table. Grant's fascinated staring was noted and commented on as indicating something "wrong". On this occasion, where an aspect of daily life such as looking became a topic of interest and scrutiny, a series of unspoken messages were communicated: a) if you look at someone for too long, other people will notice; b) the gender of the person being

looked at is of interest and concern; c) if you look at the 'wrong' person for too long, you can expect to be questioned about your behaviour. On this occasion, Grant became aware of the transgressive nature of his looking, an awareness which manifested as the beginning of a guilty realisation that he would need to monitor the direction and duration of his gaze more carefully. From a phenomenological perspective, the gaze has been explored as a means of communication as well as a means of discovery and making sense of the world. "It is through my relation to others … that I know myself," says Merleau-Ponty (1962, p. 383), cited in van Manen (2014, p. 129). Intricately tied up with Grant's gaze, was a sense of guilt. Fuchs (2003) describes shame and guilt as "the reflexive emotions", and draws attention to their role in the development of self-consciousness and intersubjectivity (p. 240). On another occasion many years later, Grant's friend Maria drew attention to the direction of his gaze:

> And I was trying to be straight with other people, for example, I
> remember I was looking at people and my friend said to me, 'You
> keep looking at men', and I said, 'No I'm not!', but I was. So this
> denial was a big part of my life, and I was confused.

Grant's response in each case was repudiation, which appears to have been internalised as well. From a sociological perspective, Grant's behaviour can be seen as an example of 'selective behaviour-matching' (Secord & Backman, 1961), i.e. in each case Grant could be seen to adjust his behaviour in such a way that it was congruent with his perception of how others expected him to behave, a principle which "reflects William James' … notion that each person has as many 'social selves' as there are are classes of persons whose opinion he cares about" (p. 25). Grant remained in denial until he came out to himself in his late twenties.

As a young boy, Graham was excited by the sexual possibilities suggested by virile, hyper-masculine motor-cyclists:

> My first awareness of sexual attraction, I was 11 or 12 when I
> remember being very excited by young men in boots on motorcycles;
> and going to school, if I was using the bus, I was always quite keen
> when we passed mechanical places where there were likely to be
> young men on motorbikes. I was aware that I found them attractive.

For Graham, this pre-adolescent attraction remained merely an awareness which was tempered by a strong sense of self-discipline. Graham was career oriented, and aware that exercising self-discipline would be in his long-term interests while pursuing a career as a minister in the Anglican Church. Graham remained in denial until he came out in his fifties.

Some participants were aware of being attracted to males rather than females, not necessarily sexually, but in terms of aesthetic appreciation. For example, Chris reflected on this preference during adolescence:

> I was aware from way back in my teens that I enjoyed looking at men more than the woman but from an admiring perspective really.

As a teenager, Berend was aware of his preference for the male form over the female:

> As a teenager, I guess that sexually, I was always attracted to the male form rather than the female form.

Berend also indicated his involvement in adolescent same-sex exploration:

> I had lots of male friends and there were circle jerks and incidences like that; incidences of me actually meeting up with other guys in order to sexually explore, basically masturbation, nothing else. And me not thinking a great deal about it except that it obviously meant more to me than it did to the other party. I was never able to discuss this with any of the other guys. It was clandestine, hidden, not acknowledged to the general public, probably not to each other as well. And anybody whom I would have had that sexual contact with would have been quite embarrassed to think that it might have something to do with homosexuality.

When he reflected on these sessions, Berend noted that the sexual component obviously carried more significance for him than it did for the other party. Because of the taboo and heavy sense of proscription associated with such behaviour, he was never able to discuss any aspect of these encounters. Some tacit understanding ensured that the encounters would remain "clandestine", indicating a sense of guilt

and danger "unacknowledged", a refusal to accept the facticity of these behaviours. Sexual exploration sessions remained a source of guilty pleasure for Berend, and might have hinted at the possibility of a different reality. But for social and religious reasons, same-sex episodes could not continue, so they stopped when Berend entered adulthood and began to date girls. In terms of psycho-sexual response, Berend came to realise that girls triggered a different level of sexual intensity; when considering sexual fantasy, the possibility of non-consensual sexual congress only became apparent when considering same-sex relations:

> … there was always the [pause] it's very hard to say really, but the thought of rape or of having to have sexual intercourse on a non-mutually consenting situation was never there, whereas that *could* be there for a *man* [laughs].

Awareness of his attraction to other males was a source of confusion for Berend in adolescence. Then throughout the next two decades of his adult life, when the same-sex activity stopped, he "lived in denial". Reflecting on his sexual orientation in the interview, Berend realises that he has always known that he was sexually attracted to males, but for all sorts of reasons, he did not accept the label of 'gay' until middle age:

> I guess it's been there all my life, except I've lived in denial of this and it wasn't until in my forties when I was re-examining my life that I started to think that maybe this is a reality that is true for me.

For Ross, his sense of being attracted to other males was not yet sufficiently strong for him to accept unequivocally that he was homosexual, irrespective of the label applied; he was clearly in denial:

> So whether I just blotted it out in my mind, I don't know, but I didn't think I was gay or homosexual.

In his twenties Ross had two same-sex experiences which were significant indicators of his sexual orientation. Finding himself far from home in London in the 'Swinging sixties', Ross discovered from gay bookshops in Shaftesbury Avenue that Hampstead Heath in London was a likely place to experience a same-sex encounter. This discovery and the awareness of his raised interest was a cause of profound disquiet:

> And part of me was hating myself for even considering that
>
> possibility and the other part of me was just building up an
>
> excitement level that I wanted to do it.

Ross experienced an inner tension between acting on the possibilities of his attraction to men, and the guilt and shame at even entertaining such thoughts. If he acknowledged having had these thoughts, the next logical step was to question his sexual orientation and to consider the unthinkable – that he might be gay. This fear was highlighted when he experienced his first homosexual encounter, which was a mixture of enjoyable sexual release and self-doubt:

> I knew that I liked him, and I knew I liked what was happening to me.
>
> This was a new experience for me, and I still had this fear and
>
> excitement going on and on in my head. The fear was that I was gay;
>
> it was psychological: Is this the truth? Am I gay?

After they had each climaxed, what Ross experienced was not a joyous sense of having discovered his essential sexual orientation; instead, he experienced a heightened sense of emotional turmoil. He says:

> Then when I came, he came, and I just wanted to get dressed and get
>
> out of there, and he said, 'Don't go - please don't go – I don't even
>
> know your name'. I had only told him my first name, and I just
>
> couldn't speak; I ran in tears from his home. I had my car there and I
>
> drove away. I never ever saw him again.

Ross's response at that time was to flee from his gay sex partner, and to flee from himself. He did not seek out any further same-sex experiences in London, as he was consciously trying *not* to be gay. However, despite these intentions, he did find himself having one further gay encounter when returning to New Zealand via the Middle East, during an unscheduled 24-hour stopover in Beirut. With a combination of exotic locale, sense of anonymity, and an overwhelming awareness of good-looking, friendly young men, on this occasion the temptation proved too great:

> I don't know what it was but I just saw all these men on the streets of
>
> Beirut, local people round about my own age and they looked

attractive and they looked at me and they wanted to meet me and

talk to me on the street. Anyhow, I asked somebody where would I

find a bath-house, and looking back it was a crazy thing to do because

it was not in a very nice part of town. I remember the excitement of

it all … Anyway, that was that night, and then I came back to

New Zealand.

During the remainder of the flight back to New Zealand, Ross had plenty of time to reflect on his sexual experiences in London and Beirut. Perhaps rationalising these encounters as aberrant experiments, which could be dismissed as merely an interesting aspect of the exotic travelling life far from home, he resolved to commit himself to a life of heterosexual marriage and to avoid any same-sex encounters in future. This strategy proved successful initially. He subsequently married, began to raise a family, and concentrated on establishing himself in a successful career. In terms of his sexual orientation, Ross remained in denial until he came out in his early fifties.

Edward acknowledged his sexual orientation around the time of puberty. However, despite saying that he clearly *knew* in his own mind that he had this attraction to other males, Edward could not reconcile that possibility with a gay identity and full awareness dawned remarkably slowly. Edward somehow knew that this same-sex attraction was problematic and he was conscious of deliberately concentrating on women as a strategy to re-calibrate his sexual orientation: "But I was always trying to suppress that and maximise any sense that I found women attractive as well". Edward remained in denial until he came out in his late forties.

From this section, we can see that five of the participants in retrospect, were able to identify a clear awareness of their sexual and emotional orientation to other males in childhood or adolescence.

6.2   Weak sexual attraction to females

It is one thing for a man to have a clear sense that he is sexually and emotionally attracted to other males, but it is quite another for a man to realise that, in terms of sexual attraction, he is less interested in females. Four of the participants who knew that they were attracted to males at an early age also had a sense that they were not sexually attracted to women: Chris, Grant, Ross, Edward.

Three of the participants who were not sexually attracted to women did not know that they were gay until later in life: Bevan, Peter, and Alan. An awareness that a man is less interested in females may become a useful pointer to sexual orientation, but in and of itself is not sufficient a clue. For some participants, the heteronormative imperative was so powerful that individuals would find themselves seemingly powerless to resist the pressures of friends and family - inducements to have girlfriends, to get engaged, to marry and raise a family. The ability of gay men to navigate the treacherous waters of heterosexism was a significant rite of passage in the journey to self discovery.

Bevan was not aware of being gay until much later in life. He wanted to discover the joys of a heterosexual relationship, but it was not to be:

> What I knew was that I *wasn't* interested in a sexual relationship with
> a woman – I had lots of friends but no relationship. I did struggle a lot
> with the thought that 'maybe if I get over this I could have a
> relationship', and interestingly I had a number of girlfriends who
> would willingly have had a relationship and had children, but I
> thought, 'I can't do this to them', nor could I do this to any children
> we might have because I'd be living a lie.

Along with the growing awareness of his sexual orientation was a sense of relief that he had not compromised his (or anyone else's) future, by embarking on an inappropriate relationship with a woman.

Chris grew up with a strong sense that homosexual relations were wrong, and he struggled with his consciousness of being attracted to other males. He was aware of the importance of heterosexual marriage as one of the foundational principles of society, and as a result of his societal and familial conditioning, he was predisposed to finding girlfriends. However, as he discovered, the chemistry was not right:

> I did have a number of girlfriends but they pursued me and the sexual
> side of things was not greatly interesting; it was more a friendship
> and there wasn't sex involved. If there *was* sex involved it was not
> really my choice; I didn't *really* want to be close.

For Chris these relationships were more friendships than passionate love affairs and the sex was not inspiring. Rather than consider other possibilities, he was able to rationalise his lack of interest in women by suggesting to himself that he was waiting for the right person. After he had come out, Chris realised that he had "protected" himself for the future by avoiding matrimonial entanglement.

With adulthood, Grant's awareness of his attraction to men grew increasingly stronger, and as the intensity of his attraction developed, so too did his efforts to counteract this attraction. He observed that the need to be "straight" was paramount in order to "survive" in his family and wider social circle, and this heterosexual imperative necessitated Grant's finding a female partner. Grant was keen on amateur theatricals, and he recounted an experience of being involved in a play in a provincial theatre in the early 1970s. He particularly liked the female producer as a friend, and through his involvement in the play, he came into contact with this lady's daughter. Despite the lack of sexual attraction, Grant allowed himself to be coerced into a relationship with this younger woman:

> We were the two people who were unattached and we kind of got
> thrown together and I went along with it, kind of like playing a game.
> But what was strange was that I was having trouble grappling with
> the feeling that every time we went dancing, she would be trying to
> seduce me; and I just felt really grubby. Just like this isn't right and
> something in me is having a lot of trouble with connecting with
> someone who is trying to seduce me.

Eventually, against his natural inclinations, Grant ended up by submitting to pressure from those around him and he reluctantly proposed marriage:

> It was like having my hand forced; because I was the nice guy and I
> tried to please everyone, because that's what I was doing to survive. I
> don't know why I *got* engaged but I had no excuse to say, 'No', to *not*
> get engaged; I didn't have the strength to put a stake in the ground,
> to say, 'No this is me and I'm not doing it'; I hadn't actually built up
> that because I was still the nice boy trying to keep everyone happy.

Eventually, the absurdity of the situation became too much for Grant, and he broke off the engagement after only three weeks. This was a difficult period for Grant because his fiancée was "*really, really* angry", as were her parents, so he had to deal with the psychic pain of knowing that he had hurt other people, as well as the embarrassment associated with the broken engagement. Grant did not continue to see his ex-fiancée after this, but he did meet her again some years later, and "she still wanted to get into *our* relationship". Despite the lack of physical attraction, Grant continued to have other relationships with women but these proved to be unfulfilling, and did not endure. Grant's response was to remove himself from his immediate surroundings and to go travelling overseas.

Whereas for some participants, the heteronormative imperative exerted a powerful motivation to find girlfriends and eventually to marry, for other participants, there was no such impulse. Peter, for example, while maintaining a great deal of respect for the institution of marriage, at no point contemplated a life of heterosexual marriage for himself:

> I never *ever* was remotely tempted to marry; the thought would have
> never entered my mind. I was single and that was fine.

Peter enjoyed being with women and found himself frequently in the company of single women who sometimes misinterpreted his friendship and close attention:

> They misconstrued what I was doing and waited for the proposal
> which I had absolutely no intention of giving and one woman indeed
> came out from England for a trip around New Zealand which [smiles]
> was always mockingly referred to by many friends as 'my
> funnymoon'; I had to take this friend around until she reached the
> point where she was so furious that she stopped the trip.

Some participants were confused about their emotional and sexual response to women. For example, Gordon clearly derived some pleasure from heterosexual relationships as a young man; then in later life, in response to a suggestion from a counsellor, he decided to explore his sexual orientation. One of his strategies was to

find himself a prostitute. While he was waiting for her to appear, he was invited to peruse some heterosexual pornographic magazines:

> That didn't titivate me at all, then the woman walked in, in her
>
> lingerie - quite a well-rounded woman - totally unattractive to me.
>
> Well, I think she picked up the situation very quickly and had a long,
>
> non-threatening chat with me. She didn't interact with me physically
>
> or sexually. She offered to go to a nightclub with me, which was very
>
> good of her. She must have known that I was definitely gay.

At this point, Gordon was already pre-disposed to consider the possibility that he was gay, and his lack of attraction to either the heterosexual pornography or to the prostitute herself were indicators which formed part of the foundation of his eventual self-awareness.

Ross too was confused about his lack of sexual response to women:

> I liked girls. I had relationships and friendships with girls but I was
>
> never particularly attracted to them *sexually*. Perhaps that was the
>
> first sign that it was the male person I was attracted to more.

The discrepancy between the strong sense of attraction to men and the weaker sense of attraction to women was an ongoing source of confusion and stress for Ross. He was aware in retrospect that this might have been a "sign", but his efforts to ignore such indicators were strenuously applied, such that he was unable to acknowledge his orientation until later in life.

Edward indicated a conscious desire to "maximise" his sexual response to women, but he recognised that his sexual response to men was stronger:

> It's not as if I was ever repulsed by women in any sense but I was
>
> aware of feelings for men being much more dominant.

Alan knew that he "definitely liked women", and from an early age he had looked forward to finding a girlfriend, and eventually getting married, However, he did not find success in heterosexual relationships and despite his enthusiastic endeavours, he remained a virgin until the age of 24. In retrospect, one clue which might help to

explain his lack of success in finding a girlfriend can be glimpsed in his memories of engaging with heterosexual pornography during adolescence:

> I do remember occasionally having the opportunity to see
> pornography: some mates would have some old Playboy or
> something but the breasts did nothing for me; my classmates were
> getting something out of that that I wasn't: "What is it that they find
> so appealing?" It was beyond me, what the attraction was.

In terms of facticity, each of these participants was "thrown" into a world not of their choosing (Heidegger, 1953/2010, p. 272); this world was one in which hegemonic, heteronormative assumptions of heterosexuality prevailed. From the very earliest age, each participant was aware of the imperative to take an interest in girls, to conceal any sexual or emotional interest in their own gender, to find a girlfriend, and ultimately to get married and ideally raise a family. For some participants, emerging awareness of their lack of sexual interest in females was a clue which clearly pointed towards their underlying sexual orientation. For other participants, sexual attraction in any direction remained a murky, unresolved source of confusion for many years. In examining the historical background against which participants' understandings emerged, it is useful to consider the extent to which messages about homosexuality were evident or obscured.

6.3 Silence; invisibility

With respect to their sexual orientation, whereas some of the participants clearly knew they were gay from childhood, not all had such clarity of understanding from an early age. Many of the participants had limited understanding of their sexual orientation until much later in life. How could this be so? Surely each participant had the same awareness at puberty and were all merely in different states of denial? Perhaps not.

One way of understanding this is to consider the lack of readily available and reliable information about all aspects of sex and sexual orientation. Given the taboo nature of sex in general throughout much of the 20th century, the concept of homosexuality was quite alien to many people, including some of these participants. As Bevan noted, "Homosexuality was never talked about". When reflecting on their experience of

growing up, several of the participants noted that they had no language for articulating any sort of understanding relating to homosexuality. As Gordon explained:

> Until I was in my forties, I had no concept of 'gay' at all. I don't think I even knew the word. I had never thought about the meaning of the word 'homosexual', or 'gay'. I wasn't conscious of homosexuality, that it existed even, that there was a term for same-sex attraction.

Similarly, when reflecting on his experience of growing up in Ireland in the 1940s and the early 1950s, Mark noted the repressive and rigid self-censorship of unpalatable subjects:

> Homosexuality wasn't talked about; if it ever occurred it would be a horror story; it was the kind of thing that people talked about in hushed voices and, although I was aware of it, it was almost like something from another planet. It simply was beyond my comprehension; it was unusual - unreal - so children did not speak about it. We didn't learn anything much about homosexuality from the papers. It was only really in the 1980s I'd see articles and news stories.

One effect of this silence was that ignorance reigned: gay role models were not apparent and information about sexual orientation was lacking. From a child's perspective, the concept of two men loving each other was impossible to apprehend, an alien concept belonging to "another planet". Yet while children did not speak of such things, Mark was aware that the topic held a horrified fascination for adults, whose fear and condemnation was subtly conveyed by their "hushed voices". Whereas children would often devise strategies for discovering things that parents did not consider appropriate, such as scanning newspapers, in this case the search was futile; there was nothing to be found. The practical effect of this invisibility and virtual silence was that Mark's awareness of his sexual orientation towards other men was limited, and to some extent, sublimated. As a boy, then as a young man growing up with a confused sense of his own sexuality, the lack of language with which to articulate a fundamental aspect of his existence was problematic.

A similar self-censorship prevailed in New Zealand. When reflecting on his experience of growing up in Auckland in the 1950s and 1960s, Graham recalled quite different preoccupations:

> Homosexuality was never mentioned. My mother never talked about it. This was New Zealand in the 50s and 60s; one talked about three things: rugby, food, and how awful the Labour government was.

The widespread avoidance of the topic had sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic consequences. At the heart of phenomenology, is the sense that language brings (and constrains) meaning; as Gadamer (1975/2013) observes, "language influences our thought" (p. 569). In linguistics, the concept of "linguistic determinism", also associated with the "Sapir-Whorf hypothesis", as outlined by Crystal (1997, p. 15), suggests that the way we think is determined by the language we use. In other words, if we haven't got the language, then our understanding is constrained. From the testimony of these participants, we discern a constant tension between primordial understandings of their essential identity, and the linguistic resources available to articulate and understand their sexual orientation. For example, Grant knew he was attracted to men because his dreams told him so, but he was unable to put that into words in his head. At the age of five or six years old he did not have the language to articulate this awareness:

> I didn't know a word that I could use to acknowledge who I was.

Reflecting on his adult life, and on his inability to recognise himself as a gay man, Peter indicated that he 'lost' the capacity for talking about being gay:

> And I've sometimes said to myself that somewhere along the way I lost the terminology for being gay. Somehow, I think I lost that phraseology, probably *deliberately* lost that language.

In retrospect, Peter was aware that within the university community, there would have been awareness of gay issues, and even a limited culture of acceptance of gay colleagues. Yet, within his discourse community, he avoided any discussion, and even inside his personal headspace, he had somehow managed to stifle any consideration of homosexuality through 'inner speech'. Whatever his feelings might have been, they

remained buried: unarticulated feelings, unexpressed emotions, inchoate desires. Peter emphasised the unconsciously intentional "losing" of the troublesome terminology: in other words, he arranged his thought processes in such a way that disturbing or inconvenient thoughts remained inaccessible, unavailable for scrutiny through contemplation and reflection.

Again, according to the principles of 'linguistic determinism', if we haven't got the language, then the concept doesn't exist, which would help us to understand such behaviour as an ostrich-like avoidance strategy. If we avoid something, then it might go away; similarly, if we are unable to name something, then it does not properly exist. If language does bring meaning, as Heidegger argues, we might then ask what was it that eventually drew men such as Peter into understanding? What aspects of the changing social background enabled language to emerge in a way that brought the concept of homosexuality to light? It was significant that Peter was out of New Zealand during a time of intense media scrutiny of gay issues during the first and second homosexual law reform debates in the mid-1970s and mid-1980s, and so he did not have to confront the issue during this critical period in New Zealand's history.

Silence and invisibility go hand in hand. When reflecting on their experience of growing up, several of the participants commented on the dearth of gay role models and the disproportionate emphasis on heterosexual relationships in all domains of life. As Chris observed, the only exception appeared to be mysterious family members who, for some reason remained unmarried:

> Unless in the background there might be some members of the
> family that *didn't* marry, but you didn't hear whether they were gay
> or not. You could only guess or wonder.

Bevan too referred to the sexual ambiguity of unmarried family members, and the impossibility of exploring this through discussion:

> There was always reference in the background to some strange aunt
> (or whatever else), but it was never in the context of their sexual
> orientation – it was just that they were 'different' and they were
> 'outside' the family circle: they had been ostracised.

Although their sexual orientation was never made explicit, it was clear to Bevan that for some reason, their "difference" entailed a punitive social response, one of exclusion and ostracism. Not only was homosexuality an unfit topic for discussion, there were few points of reference in daily life. Homosexuals were invisible in the Christchurch that Bevan grew up in:

> I had no experience of any counterculture; through adolescence
> there was no gay culture that I was exposed to, no gay role models,
> no people that would identify as gay, no gay couples in society.

Chris also noted the heteronormative and heterosexist dynamics evident in family life, an emphasis which was echoed in popular culture:

> It was all heterosexual relationships in families, in the movies and on
> TV. I remember it was a huge thing when Coronation Street had the
> first gay couple. Before then, there was just the reinforcement of the
> model of heterosexual families: Mum and Dad and children.

Chris' characterisation of Coronation Street's first gay character as a "huge thing" is not an overstatement when considering the power of media to change perceptions. Numerous analysts have written perceptively on the steadily increasing gay visibility in popular culture. Following on from Russo's (1981, 1987) ground-breaking research into on-screen depictions of gay characters, subsequent analyses have emphasised the positive role of gay characters to alter attitudes, not only towards gay people, but also to the social issues associated with being gay (Bond & Compton, 2015; Levina, Waldo, & Fitzgerald, 2000). Following Raley and Lucas' (2006) development of Clark's (1969) four-stage model of media representation for minority groups, it can be seen that the appearance of a gay character and exploration of gay themes on a popular British soap opera has moved on from 'non-representation' and 'ridicule' and is operating at the levels of 'regulation' and 'respect'.

Given the "culture of silence" (Freire, 1972, p. 30) that predominated for so long, gay people lacked role models and clear understandings about their own sexual orientation; *faute de mieux,* they adopted without question the subliminal messages of

homonegativity. These homonegative messages became more clearly articulated during the debate surrounding homosexual law reform.

6.4   Homosexual Law Reform: Noise and visibility

In stark contrast to the silence and invisibility of previous decades, the 1980s were characterised by the vociferous exchange of ideas relating to homosexual law reform and comprehensive media coverage of rallies, marches, and public meetings. Following the defeat of Venn Young's Crimes Amendment Bill of 1974/75, Fran Wilde's Homosexual Law Reform Bill of 1985/1986 was fiercely contested, with feelings running high on both sides of the debate. The strongest opposition to the proposed legislation came from religiously-minded community groups, which clashed with the various Gay Task Force groups and other pro-reform activists. Intense media scrutiny focused on details from both parliamentary debate and community action. For many New Zealanders, this was a critical period of consciousness raising and opening of minds. Without necessarily taking a public position either way, individuals were able to think through the various arguments, assessing the claims and counter-claims, and sifting through the rhetoric to try and make sense of the issues. For some people, these new understandings raised awareness of personal possibilities, along with a heightened sense of the potential ramifications inherent in adopting a gay persona.

As an ostensibly heterosexual married man, Ross maintained a low profile during these years. He didn't actively campaign for homosexual law reform, but neither did he oppose it; on the contrary, he felt that the actions of certain groups such as the Salvation Army were inappropriate. The topic was freely discussed at home, with both Ross and his wife agreeing that the Bill deserved to be passed into law. However, through these discussions, Ross developed, with some trepidation, a prescient sense that the passing of the Bill into law could prove to be a catalyst for his own coming out:

> The pace quickened about my own feeling of dissatisfaction that I'm
> living a lie. I had a certain nervousness about it because I sort of
> sensed that this could be the day of reckoning for *me* – that I might
> have to face up to who I really am, and it was a scary thought given
> that I was married with children. So I was sort of ambivalent; I

wanted reform, but I also realised that this could be the beginning of
the end of my life as I knew it.

Berend also developed a keen interest in the media coverage, and for him, this was a turning point in his understanding: a contributing factor leading to his self-acceptance, indeed the main catalyst for his own coming out around that time. However, not all participants chose to engage in the new understandings which were emerging with increasing salience and clarity through the debates. Some participants deliberately, or unconsciously, chose to distance themselves from this new topic of discussion which had preoccupied New Zealand for almost two years. With daily news and commentary in newspapers, magazines, national radio and television, the issue was difficult to ignore. The media coverage in the mid-1980s could have been a turning point, but for many of the participants, it did not feel that this was their struggle as they had not yet acknowledged to themselves that they were gay.

Gordon saw the possibility of new legislation as merely another item of news, of no special interest to him:

> And during the time of homosexual law reform I watched the news, I
> would have seen *that* in the media and it was just another piece of
> news that was neutral and had no particular significance to me.

Likewise for Alan, despite having a curious mind and a keen appreciation of current affairs, he 'switched off', both literally and figuratively. For Alan, the news was inherently interesting, but potentially dangerous, so his disengagement was a consciously made strategic decision. Chris was determined to consider himself as a heterosexual, and a strategy toward that end involved distancing himself from thinking about homosexuality, effectively ignoring the debate. While some participants consciously chose to distance themselves from this topic of news, other participants were not necessarily so deliberate or calculating in their detachment. For example, John had numerous interests, but this was not one of them. It is significant that these participants reported that they have "no memory", "no recollection" of these events, that they had "no interest" in the topic; the issue was "just another piece of news". This unwillingness to engage with the debate can be seen as a form of *protective ignorance*: the participants deliberately or subconsciously chose to ignore the issues

under debate in order to protect their fragile sense of self; deliberate ignorance of the issues provided a sense of protection from having to engage with disturbing thoughts and disquieting possibilities. So, given the ubiquitous coverage and the strong emotions generated by the debate of 30 years ago, precisely what was being so studiously ignored by participants?

In order to throw this concept of *protective ignorance* into sharper focus, it is useful to remind ourselves once again of the language which had been used to characterise gay men through parliamentary debate, how certain MPs portrayed same-sex relations and how they framed their arguments. Opponents to law reform drew on a variety of discourses and framings. As outlined in Figure 2.3, 'the homosexual' was characterised variously as:

- A 'sinner'
- A 'sick pervert'
- A 'predatory child molester'
- A carrier of plague/contamination/contagion
- 'Anti-family'; disturbing gender norms
- Associated with a 'twilight world of crime'
- Responsible for the 'collapse of civilisation'
- A 'problem' case to be cured

In light of the overwhelmingly homonegative attitudes which Members as a microcosm of society represented in the House of Parliament, it is not surprising that some people tuned out of the debate. They disengaged from discussions, and sought to protect their fragile sense of self from the intensely homonegative rhetoric which characterised New Zealand society up until the mid-1980s and beyond. The homonegative framings indicated above were also prominently deployed through the most popular weekly newspaper of that era, the sensationalist tabloid *Truth*, New Zealand's only national paper, which mid-20th century, enjoyed a circulation rate of 50 per cent of the population. As Yska (2010) observed, for "over three-quarters of a century [*Truth*] became a trusted and relevant touchstone for hundreds of thousands of New Zealanders" (p. 11). Pearson (1952) could well have been writing of the mid-1980s when he observed that the primary purpose of newspapers like *Truth* was to "enforce conformity" (p. 207), noting that public opinion (as influenced by *Truth,* for example) appeared to be a guiding principle for public morality.

6.5 Intensity of homonegative feeling

As participants became aware of their sexual orientation, to a greater or lesser degree, they also became increasingly attuned to the one unmistakably hostile message communicated by the world around them: *homosexuality is bad*. Traditionally, this communication has been transmitted in a myriad of subtle and unsubtle ways, mediated through formal institutions of family, education, religion, law, media, and through informal networks of influence and association. From the previous section we have seen clear evidence of a range of homonegative sentiments which were evident throughout New Zealand society during the 1970s and 1980s as articulated through the voices of MPs in parliamentary debates, and through homonegative journalism. In short, this is a good example of sexual prejudice in action. Similarly negative sentiments were evident in multiple domains of life: law, medicine, religion, media outlets, education, family, and the peer group. This current section (6.5) examines an indicative range of homonegative messages which were received, and internalised, by participants before they came out.

6.5.1 Intensity of homonegative feeling: Law

Following the formal colonisation of Aotearoa New Zealand in 1840, homosexual acts between consenting male adults were illegal until 1986. Men who were convicted in a court of law, were punished by a range of penalties which were designed to act as a deterrent and to signal society's disapproval of homosexuality. Long before the passing of this legislation, each of the participants in this study was aware of the legal consequences for engaging in same-sex relations. These legal proscriptions and penalties constituted New Zealand society's most powerful and influential form of sexual prejudice in the form of 'structural stigma' (Herek, 2009). The presence of statute laws signalled unequivocal public policy attitudes towards homosexuality, and in a circular manner, they indicated societal acceptance of the legitimacy of institutional homonegativity.

Underpinning an awareness of juridical significations was a discourse of heterosexism and heteronormativity with a clear message that marriage and raising children were basic tenets of society, and therefore *homosexuality was not a good thing*. Through conversations, Chris learned that homosexuality "wasn't normal", nor was it natural, and he also learned that individuals could expect consequences for breaking the law.

Chris shared a cautionary tale told by his mother of a cousin who had escaped prosecution in the 1960s. This cousin had been found *in flagrante delicto* in the back of a car with another man, and rather than put the case through the law courts, the policeman handed the youth over to his uncle, who was so unhappy with his nephew that he threw the boy out of the home. Chris reflected on the reality of the law, the consequences of being apprehended, and the awareness of the anti-social nature of the charges:

> It was not nice; this wouldn't have been a pleasant experience with
> the law acting against you. You don't want the police to be
> apprehending you for a crime, or for something that's not accepted
> as being right.

The possibility of public opprobrium, of police prosecution and exposure in the daily newspaper was a powerful deterrent to coming out, or indeed, to indulging in any same-sex behaviour. Graham recalled how he learned that one of his schoolmates was gay:

> One of my school friends had an experience which meant he ended
> up in a magistrate's court; and I knew instantly because of the report
> in the Herald, what it was all about.

Despite the reticence with which homosexuality was treated in media reports of the 1950s and 1960s, Graham was, nevertheless, sufficiently worldly to identify the nature of the charges. Simple awareness of the penalties has been sufficient deterrent for countless gay men throughout history. With reference to the "normalising power" of the "carceral network", Foucault observes that "judges of normality are everywhere" (Foucault, 1975/1977, p. 304).

6.5.2   Intensity of homonegative feeling: Medicine

The pathologising discourse which prevailed for most of the 20th century characterised homosexuality as a psychiatric disorder, a mental illness in need of treatment. Mark outlined his awareness of the likely institutional response to a homosexual who, for example, found himself in police custody:

He was likely to be offered three options: a jail term, chemical

castration or a mental hospital; those were the options.

The third of these options, incarceration in a mental hospital, was liable to result in invasive procedures which included, but were not limited to, lobotomy, and electro-convulsive therapy (ECT). Elaborating on these remarks, Mark related an account of a university friend who came out to his father:

> The father, who was a medical doctor, had Brian committed to a
> mental hospital where he was to receive electric shock treatment
> that would cure him. Brian's father asked me not to attempt to
> contact Brian, ever, and I didn't. Ah, that stayed with me for quite a
> long time; it's still with me. I know what mental hospitals were like,
> even in the 1960s. We had in New Zealand Janet Frame's story; that
> sort of thing was common enough you know. I also had background
> experience of the suicide of gay men, men that I knew were gay.

The experience of ECT as outlined in Janet Frame's autobiographical (and fictional) writing makes for harrowing reading (Frame, 1961). In a later interview, Frame recalled that "the ECT treatments were ghastly. We'd be lined up a dozen at a time and had to watch as the others were done on the floor" (Frame, Harold, & Gordon, 2011, p. 126). New Zealand cinema-goers would have been familiar with the concept of electric shock therapy from the 1975 film 'One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest' *(*Forman, 1975 ; Sienaert, 2016*)*. Irrespective of the degree of artistic licence which is involved in representing ECT, a common understanding was that ECT was a painful, humiliating experience. If a gay man was aware that homosexuality was seen as a mental disorder, with ECT a possible scenario, it is easy to see how fear of such treatment might be understood as yet another psychological barrier preventing a gay man from coming out.

Although homosexuality was formally removed as a diagnostic category from the American Psychological Association (APA) Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) in 1973 (De Block & Adriaens, 2013; Drescher, 2015; LGBT Issues Committee of the Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry (GAP), n.d.), the public perception of gay men being in some way mentally ill endured, to a greater or lesser degree, depending on levels of

education and open-mindedness. It was certainly a common theme in the parliamentary debates conducted in New Zealand during the HLR debates of both the 1970s and the 1980s:

> '… problems … should be solved medically…' Mr Gordon Christie ("Crimes Amendment Bill - First reading," 1974, p. 3168)

> '… homosexuals … need both medical and psychological treatment. They do not need a change in the law. …' Mr Geoffrey Braybrooke ("Homosexual Law Reform Bill - First Reading," 1985, p. 3524)

From a political and historical perspective, homosexuality can be seen as a site of intervention and control (Foucault, 1975/1977; Foucault, 1976/1981). An approach which problematizes homosexuality from a healthcare perspective, draws on an outmoded 'disease model' (Weeks, 2017). An older tradition of regulating same-sex relations can be seen in the Christian Church.

6.5.3   Intensity of homonegative feeling: Christian Church

A key role assumed by the Christian Church is to provide believers with spiritual support and moral guidance. For young men growing up with an uncertain sense of their place in the world, and troubled by unfamiliar thoughts and desires, the Church, in any of its many denominations, would be a logical place to seek succour. Each of the 12 participants grew up in a home environment in which, to a greater or lesser degree, the Christian religion featured as part of the cultural backdrop. Seven of the participants grew up in homes where their Church was of central importance; although, for some participants, and for varying reasons, the Church ceased to have such a profound influence in later life.

In terms of denomination, Bevan, Mark, and Alan were raised in Roman Catholic families; Berend grew up in a Dutch Reformed Church family; Peter grew up in a Brethren family; Edward and Ross grew up in Anglican families. For the other five participants, religion was a more peripheral influence. Chris, Graham, and John also grew up in Anglican families. Grant attended a Presbyterian Church until the age of 12. In their search for meaning, some participants took an extraordinarily deep interest in scriptural teachings and different interpretations through a range of denominations. For example, Gordon started with the Anglican Church, and he recalls going to the

Evensong service with his father who was a member of the vestry. Later he had contact with the Baptist Church which also organised Boys' Brigade and where "they had God stuff". Then he explored the Pentecostal Church where he was encouraged to "speak in tongues", and as a result of this experience, he developed a growing sense of cynicism and the first "undermining of that whole Church stuff". He continued his interaction with God through a range of other Churches including the Methodist Church, then the Mormon Church. For Gordon, the more he read the Bible ("and I read it a lot at the time") the more he found fault with the Churches until eventually he discovered he no longer had any need to pray for guidance, and his need to thank God for things in prayer diminished as well, to the point where he wondered if God was actually "a figment of Man's imagination". Finally, he "put the whole package together, and God faded from my life completely".

When I asked each participant about their Church's stance on homosexuality in their formative years, the answers were unexpected. Some individuals were taught that homosexuality was a mortal sin, involving concepts of hell and damnation, whereas others were only vaguely aware that somehow their Church disapproved of sexuality *per se* and by extension, homosexuality. Yet despite this vagueness, everyone was very clear about the existence and the power of the disapproval. Edward reflected at some length on the subtle, indeterminate manner in which the message was communicated:

> What really strikes me about that period is that I knew that wasn't
> *right*, yet I don't really fully understand how and why I knew that; it
> wasn't as if I was getting explicit messages about that.

Edward had no sense as a child growing up that his denomination, at the evangelical end of the Anglican spectrum, was anything other than a warm, loving, inclusive Church. In terms of explicit messages, he struggled to recall any occasion when he could specifically remember any "hellfire and brimstone" messages from the pulpit. Even during the mid-1980s, when law reform was a prominent issue, he could not recall the topic of homosexuality ever being referred to at the church that he attended. Yet despite this silence, he was somehow aware:

> It wasn't like I heard any sermons about this 'dreadful, dreadful, evil',
> but it was sort of hovering around.

Members of other denominations such as the Dutch Reformed Church, recalled that the message was unequivocal, and in hindsight, Berend criticised the Church for its disproportionate emphasis on "judgement rather than love". For Peter, too, speaking about the Brethren, there was no doubt about the explicit messages relating to the sin of homosexuality:

> The Brethren had *very* strong views on the teachings of the scripture.

Bevan referred to "the ingrained doctrine of the Catholic Church", and a "rigid framework" which provided guidance as to behaviour and guidelines as to what was right and what was wrong, noting that this framework was imposed on Catholic children from a very early age. Despite the lack of explicit teaching, Bevan nevertheless clearly understood the import of his teachers with respect to homosexuality:

> It's a sin and it's not acceptable and you need to address yourself.

Alan had a strong Catholic upbringing, involving attendance at mass every Sunday and he remembered the priests in the pulpit preaching sermons which "touched on homosexuality", and which "painted it in a bad light really". He also remembered the priests at grammar school being preoccupied with sex and masturbation:

> They weren't *too* bad, but they were a bit 'fire and brimstone'. I remember the priest standing up in our boys' class, and saying, 'Does any boy masturbate in this class? Stand up!' and one boy, who was 14 or 15 stood up and said, 'Yeah, I do, and there's nothing wrong with it', or whatever. The priest was incandescent with rage, quoting the Bible, and saying, 'You mustn't do this; you mustn't lose your seed', and all this kind of thing. And even when I was 14, at the time I was thinking 'well, what do you do with it then?' [laughs]

Mark also had a strong Catholic upbringing, and he described a childhood experience of picking up the catechism and finding the bottom half of one page was dramatically boxed in with thick black borders:

> In that box was a statement of 'the four sins crying aloud to Heaven for vengeance': masturbation, homosexuality, and I think the other

two were abortion and murder. I was probably quite young when I

read that but I did know, or at least I found out very quickly (because

we had a dictionary in the house) what those words meant. And

when you're quite young, statements of condemnation if they're

highlighted, if they're boxed in, they register very deeply because

you've no life experience to fit it into, and it slams down into your

consciousness. And it's there in the way as background knowledge of

how the Church views homosexuality.

For a child, the related concepts of abortion and murder would be reasonably easy to
comprehend. However, sexual concepts such as masturbation and homosexuality
would have been more challenging. Nevertheless, having "slammed down into his
consciousness", these words were merely biding their time, waiting for some sort of
life experience to give the concepts shape and clarity. It was only a matter of time
before Mark came to appreciate what these words might portend for him personally.
With the arrival of puberty, the concept of masturbation, for example, would have
taken on a fearful aspect. Mark described a traumatic experience when he went to the
priest, the local canon, to confess this particular "sin of impurity" with himself:

He looked at me through the grille, and in the most matter-of-fact

way you could imagine, he said: 'If you continue to do that you will go

insane!' [pause]. I remember coming out of the box frozen solid with

terror. And then, to make matters worse, he came out of the box and

walked up and down, looking at me, and that made it even worse.

Now, after that, I began to have nightmares.

Heidegger says that, in terms of understanding, "Dasein projects its being upon
possibilities" (Heidegger, 1953/2010, p. 144). In Mark's case, one clear possibility was
that he would go insane if he continued to masturbate. In making sense of his growing
understanding, Mark would have been aware of another probability, that Heaven
would seek vengeance on homosexuals. The lesson from the Catholic Church *vis-à-vis*
homosexuality was unmistakably, unambiguously, homonegative. This message was
delivered subtly, and unsubtly, in the form of sermons from the pulpit, warnings in the
classroom, and explicit declarations, boxed in ominous black in the catechism. For a

young, impressionable boy who was slowly coming to understand himself as a sexual being, to have a nascent sexual identity underpinned by this web of homonegative signification must have been difficult.

Edward's experience of his warm, loving, inclusive Anglican Church began to change from his teenage years, and in his early twenties, he became aware of a "very sort of different God" which started to appear; as he put it "the Old Testament God" replaced the loving God of his childhood. This new understanding of a homonegative God coincided with his awareness of his sexual orientation which naturally resulted in a certain amount of confusion. For Edward, a key aspect of being a good Christian was seeking to *know* God's will and *doing* God's will, which meant being constantly on the lookout for a "sign":

> So I didn't do all sorts of things because I was waiting for the sign that
> it was God's will for me, and that never really happened. I remember
> being very haunted by this prayer that went something like this: I was
> trying to be the person that God made me to be and being vaguely
> aware that there was this extraordinary tension in that prayer that
> because, maybe, God had made me this way and what were the
> consequences of that?

Edward experienced an inner conflict between the rigid, homonegative teaching of the Church, and the emotional and sexual attraction he felt for other males, which logically would be part of "the person that God made him to be". This conflict resulted in a "tension" which has continued throughout his life, and which is also a point of conflict for other gay Christians. According to Subhi and Geelan (2012), the intrapersonal struggle typically involves emotions such as shame and guilt, which in turn lead to anxiety, depression, and alienation, and in some cases, to suicidal ideation.

The message from the Christian Church was clear: *homosexuality is a sin, and sinners go to hell*; however, Christians believed in the possibility of salvation if only the homosexual repented, and turned away from his sin. Many New Zealanders would have been aware of organisations such as 'Exodus' which claimed the ability to cure homosexuals through prayer. MP John Banks made reference to such organisations during the second reading of the Homosexual Law Reform Bill in 1985 (see Appendix

F). And so, from the Church, to the family.

6.5.4   Intensity of homonegative feeling: Family life

As they grow up, children look to their family for love, emotional security and moral guidance. With reference to "socialization", Gadamer emphasises the role of language and conversation (1975/2013, p. 570). Social mores are established and ethical frameworks co-constructed through dialogue and role modelling, and through explicit reference to institutional orientation points such as Scripture and juridical legislation. Children learn from a very early age which topics of conversation are appropriate and which are taboo; they also learn which behaviours are anti-social and to be avoided.

Identity development is a complex process which starts when the child first develops a sense of self. An individual's sense of self is constructed through linguistic and paralinguistic interaction with other people, firstly in the immediate home environment, and then as the child grows older through a rapidly expanding social network. From an early age Grant began to realise that the love and emotional security inherent in his family was contingent on certain conditions being met. For example, he was aware that certain aspects of his intrapersonal inner life had to remain secret in order for him to feel safe within his immediate family circle. He experienced embarrassment and shame about the subject matter of his dreams and thoughts, but lacked the terminology and life experience to explore this through language. As he explained, he didn't know a word that he could use to acknowledge who he was, and then, in later years, when he did learn the term 'homosexual', this did not seem a suitable label to apply to himself because his mother used it in a very "angry and derogatory" manner. This caused Grant a certain amount of confusion because he was also aware of being his mother's "favourite"'. Grant was aware of the intensity of his mother's feeling towards homosexuality, partly because of her tone of voice and also because of an incident he remembered from the early 1970s. One of their neighbours had a son who came out, and when people in the street heard about this, the responses were not entirely sympathetic and understanding. Grant remembers his mother receiving the news very badly:

> I was aware that my mother found homosexuality quite disgusting,
> that two men could do things to each other. I remember her shaking

like when you're shivering or you're cold; she was just horrified about someone being gay. Oh yeah, that was a genuine response; she was just horrified at this sort of behaviour. Mum had grown up with a Presbyterian upbringing, and the thing around homosexuality was not really in her thinking; it was right outside her sphere of understanding.

Grant's mother's reaction appears melodramatic. One interpretation is that she recognised her son's sexual orientation and as a mother, was all too aware of the difficulties facing her favourite son. Therefore she was desperately trying to protect him, albeit with a strictly limited understanding of sexuality, and was using a form of "emotional blackmail" to prevent him from adopting a "homosexual lifestyle". The moral guidance implicit in this scenario was unstated, but its import was clear. So for Grant, observing his mother's reaction of horror at the thought of someone from another family being gay was a clear indicator of the sort of reaction he might expect if he were to come out to her. His understanding of the undesirability of homosexuality was further strengthened by hearing one of his father's cautionary tales:

> My father told me a story about his time during WW2 when people were court-martialled for same-sex offences, and they were shot on the grounds of maintaining morale. So for me, hearing that and realising that *I'm one of them* was a shock; it clearly was not *safe* for me to say anything, so that was the underlying worry. So the effect this had on me was to make me afraid: the people that were my parents, I wasn't safe with them.

This combination of homonegative language, histrionics, and a single cautionary tale had a cumulative effect on Grant, such that the moment of realisation was not an uplifting epiphany. Instead, it had the force of an unpleasant "shock". The abiding memory was fear for his emotional safety in a homonegative family environment. As Wisnewski observes, "When we fear — when this is our way of understanding our environs — we become aware of things in a new manner: the projects we have are made explicit, as well as the fact that we have these projects" (2012, p. 67). This fear

became the dominant emotion associated with his sexual orientation, which helps us to understand why Grant did not feel able to come out earlier than he did.

From an early age Chris became aware of the toxicity and stigma of homosexuality and its ability to contaminate an entire family. He began to realise that certain family members, who for some reason remained unmarried, or who were caught flouting societal or juridical laws, found themselves in a state of tension with the heteronormative and heterosexist dynamics insisted on as a foundation for family life. At some point during his childhood, Chris had been told by his mother that she had a first cousin who was gay. During the 1960s, such an admission was fraught with embarrassment and negativity. The language that was used by Chris's mother conveyed a clear sense of disapproval, to the extent that the social circumstances of visiting this relation had to be carefully navigated with due care for the proprieties:

> 'Homo' is the word that Mum would have used; hmmm, and that still carries an unpleasant sort of meaning to me. 'Gay' sounds quite accepting, quite ok, but 'homo' is an unpleasant sounding word. If we visited him in Wellington we wouldn't meet his partner; his partner wouldn't be there, and so I guess I was brought up with that understanding, so if you were gay it wasn't something that you would publicly show.

For some participants, their moral training was more explicitly aligned with Church and scriptural teaching. Berend's family life was very closely tied up with the Dutch Reformed Church, one of the stricter denominations. He observed that "right from very young" he had been getting explicitly homonegative messages, not only from the Church, but reinforced from within his family. The fundamental importance of the nuclear family as a heteronormative model underpinned the literal interpretation of the Bible as a text by which life should be lived, both in wider society, and within the family. According to this script, homosexuality was a non-negotiable sin. Berend conformed to these messages as a conscientious Christian and as a family member with a keen sense of integrity and responsibility. He was a well-behaved child, and earned the respect of his family, seeing himself as someone his siblings would have looked up to:

Even though I was the second eldest of eight kids, I was probably the leader in the family, if I may be so bold, and always the 'Mr Goody Two-Shoes', who was always there, and always had everything sorted.

For participants whose moral training was Church oriented, the teachings were reinforced to an unusual degree when they found themselves in an extended family situation. Peter grew up in a big family which he described as "a household of boys, with innumerable cousins". From his early years in Karamea, where he grew up with a very close set of cousins, through to the years in Christchurch where he had 30 or 40 cousins, all of whom "the family knew very, very well", he experienced "a *rich* intimacy" which meant that in practical terms, opportunities for solitary past-times and contemplation were constrained. Furthermore, this extended family life was inextricably involved with the Brethren, who "had *very* strong views on the teachings of the scripture", and for whom the Biblical literalists assumed a far greater importance than for other denominations. As with the other stricter denominations, the homonegative messages from the Church were echoed and reinforced in all aspects of the home environment. As Peter ruefully observed, "I think you see the trouble", referring to the impossibility, in this very close family context, of exploring any interpretation of homosexuality other than it being a mortal sin.

6.5.5   Intensity of homonegative feeling: Peer group bullying

An individual's sense of self is an evolving, dynamic process which is unconsciously monitored through interaction with other people. A sense of identity emerges partly in response to other people's reactions to one's appearance, disposition, mode of language and other behaviours, starting in the home, and continuing through socialisation with other children at play centre, kindergarten, school, and beyond. In his ground-breaking work on stigma, Goffman (1963/1968) observes that the socialisation process, for example, in early childhood involves a phase where "the stigmatised person learns and incorporates the stand-point of the normal, acquiring thereby the identity beliefs of the wider society and a general idea of what it would be like to possess a particular stigma" (p. 45). Goffman goes on to explore the phase through which an individual learns that he or she is different, and eventually, that this difference may be associated with a particular stigma, such as being homosexual.

For some participants, starting at school, the price paid for being different was the experience of being bullied, which ranged from physical intimidation to name calling. Edward recalled with a sense of bemusement the viciousness with which he was treated by one of his tormentors:

> I don't think he physically attacked me ever but he was really, *really* vicious; it came very close. I never really worked out what I did to provoke that.

Edward was not aware at this point of why he was singled out for persecution although other participants were more aware of why they attracted attention. Peter noted in retrospect that he inadvertently challenged the sporting ethos of his school:

> I was name-called: I was called '*Mary'* at school, you know, the classic sorts of things that lead you to be aware that you are somehow different. I was a freak because I didn't like *sport*, I didn't like *mud*, I was *particular* and *fussy* and *bookish.* When we went to Christchurch I was in the school *choir*, the school *orchestra*, school *librarian*; I ticked all the boxes.

Failing to conform to gender stereotyping was a common theme. John's experience of school at Westlake Boys High in the 1960s was "brutal and quite horrible". His lack of sporting ability, together with his interest and talent in music was resented by his sports-oriented classmates, and he was bullied for being a "sissy". His response was to retreat into the sanctuary of the library, and to seek refuge in his music.

However, the library was not always the haven it might have appeared. Graham recollected an occasion when he was on duty as a school librarian at Auckland Grammar:

> I was in the 3rd Form, aged 13 or 14. I can remember this boy coming up to me and sort of leaning over me and saying, 'You're a fucking little fruit, aren't you?'

Graham reflected on possible ripostes, one of which was to suggest that individuals who engage in homonegative verbal abuse are in some way over-compensating for their own sexual insecurities; however, he recalled being too frightened to actually say:

> 'Oh how perceptive of you! Good on you – takes like to recognise like' – which would have been – I would probably have been beaten up outside the school gates at 4 o'clock. But I was neither quick-witted enough nor bold enough to acknowledge that what this lout was thinking was unfortunately, indeed true [chuckles].

In exploring homonegative bullying, McLaughlin (1976) quotes Father Felix Donnelly's observation: "I think there still is a tremendous hostility towards homosexuals among a certain type of person and incredibly enough from people whom I myself know have had homosexual experiences. … I think a lot of it is a fear of their own sexuality. In most men there's a fear of 'That could be me too' or 'There could be this in me', and they're so afraid of it that they lash out" (p. 165). Gordon recalled being teased right through primary school, partly because he had a bladder problem which his classmates couldn't help but be aware of at times, and partly because of his lack of enthusiasm for sports. He remembered being called "Pansy", which was "the *in* word, the ultimate put-down". In particular, Gordon's lack of sporting prowess resulted in negative attention from classmates. The mockery and derision he experienced made him reluctant to participate:

> They told me I looked like a girl when I threw a ball. I couldn't practise those skills because I was mocked every time I did, so I avoided those activities as much as possible. And one of the successes of my life is having gone right through the school system and never having played rugby. It was a very rugby-centred primary school, and I hid every time there was sport. Occasionally I was found, and hid somewhere else. There was another boy who hid with me; he was possibly gay too [laughs].

For Gordon to have managed to traverse the state school system of the 1950s and 1960s without having played rugby is no mean feat, given New Zealand's reverence for the game. There is a curious equation between lack of sporting ability and sexual

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orientation. Phillips (1999) explores the traditional role of rugby to reinforce hegemonic patterns of masculine behaviour and concomitant homonegativity, noting that particular types of insults were part of this patterning. Twentieth century notions of masculinity can be seen to have derived from a Victorian ethos of masculinity and 'muscular Christianity' as outlined in Redmond (1978). It would appear that generations of New Zealanders have colluded in framing weakness, (eg moral weakness, physical weakness) in terms of homosexuality. According to this mythology, gay men are not proper men because they are unable to engage in rough and tumble activities in the same way as red-blooded heterosexual men. This was certainly the understanding prevalent in Aotearoa New Zealand for most of the 20th century.

In some cases, the bullying tended to be violent, and occasionally resulted in victims being hospitalised. At his grammar school in England, Alan was "bullied mercilessly", but was lucky to escape the more extreme torment. He attributed his treatment to being seen as "effeminate" as well as being academically bright. He remembered "a lot of talk of poofters and a lot of gay innuendo". His response was to "just shrug it off". The language used to insult people who were more academically inclined, or who did not conform to gender norms, or who do not subscribe to the dominant sporting ethos, or who appeared different in some way, appears strikingly homonegative . The following terms were recalled by participants:

> *poofter, homo, poof, queen, faggot, woolly woofter, fucking faggot,*
> *fucking little fruit, sissy, pansy*

These terms had wide currency in the time frame of this study, but for some participants, the meanings were not immediately clear. Edward, for example, remembers being called a "poofter", but not understanding what this signified:

> And for me, that was kind of confusing really; I can remember stages
> of not really knowing what a poofter was but knowing that it was
> deeply insulting and something to be horribly ashamed of.

This lack of understanding can be attributed in part to the concealed nature of homosexuality: the subject was taboo and shrouded in mystery, and this gave homonegative insults a certain zest and barely understood power.

For Grant, high school, like his home environment, was not an emotionally safe space. He recalled a constant fear of being outed, which would have resulted in social ostracism:

> The reason I didn't like school was it was unsafe. I guess that was because I was so scared to come out, or to be outed. I wanted to be accepted; I'd do anything I could to be accepted.

For some participants, the socialisation process, which intensified through the school years, was a sometimes painful experience because it was a time when any perceived difference was likely to attract unwelcome attention, and in many cases, this attention manifested in 'enacted stigma' in the form of verbal abuse such as name calling, mockery, and the use of homonegative insults. It was through this process that most participants would appropriate a sense of 'felt stigma', in their growing awareness that family members, schoolmates, and members of the wider community disapproved of homosexuality. For those participants who were aware of their sexual orientation at this early stage, the beginnings of 'internalised stigma' were taking root in the form of their own 'self stigma'. However, for some participants, the incongruity between the stereotypical image of a homosexual, and their individual sense of self was so great that they had difficulty in making the connection.

6.6   Chapter review and summary

This was the first of four findings chapters. In this chapter, I began by introducing five of the participants who expressed strong self-awareness of attraction to other males from an early age; this strong attraction was then contrasted with weak sexual attraction to females. The next section built on the 'Historical Context' chapter; in order to provide the reader with a sense of the historical background against which participants' understandings might be explored, I systematically examined participants' awareness of the extent to which messages about homosexuality were evident in a range of socio-cultural contexts ranging through homosexual law reform and juridical penalties, medicine, and religion, through to family and school life. A unifying theme was the intensity and pervasiveness of the homonegative message throughout society.

The ubiquitous negative messages which were received by the participants in this study contributed to their remaining closeted until well into middle age. Reasons for

remaining in the closet included fear, ignorance, and denial. Some participants indicated awareness of their sexual orientation from an early age; others appeared to be ignorant or confused about their sexuality. The barriers to coming out, including strategies for denial, will be explored in the next chapter, 'Coming to know'. Also to be explored will be the enablers, psychological, sociological and sexual.

Chapter 7 Coming to Know

This is the second of four research findings chapters; this chapter is oriented towards the participants' various experiences of growing up, and becoming aware of their sexual orientation. Some participants were aware of their emotional and sexual attraction to other males from an early age; others became aware much later in life.

7.1 Feeling different

Although not having anything to say about sexual orientation, a unifying theme involved early hints of something amiss, which in retrospect could be interpreted as an augury of issues to surface in later life. For some participants, this was an inkling that their way of seeing the world differed from those around them. For others, a suspicion lingered that creative and artistic sensibilities were in some way exceptional; this was coupled with an uneasy foreboding that there might be social consequences for this difference. Heidegger's (1953/2010) notion of the 'they' helps to elucidate the awareness of an individual feeling in some way distinguished from the comfortable conformity of the people around.

Reflecting on their early years from the vantage point of middle age, four of the twelve participants indicated that they had felt different from other children; this was expressed in terms of "*not quite* fitting in" (Edward), or of being "laughed at" or "ridiculed" for being uncoordinated. Grant, for example, recounted an experience of being made to feel inadequate at a friend's fifth birthday party:

> The game was to hammer in a nail as best you could. They went 'hit, hit', and the nail would sink into the timber. And then it came my turn: I'd pull my finger away, let the nail fall, and miss it; the hammer wouldn't get it. I tried this several times, and I was the one that was incapable of doing it. I was scared I was going to hit my fingers - hey!

At the age of five the gender role stereotyping was already firmly established, and for a young male to fail to perform a task with such archetypal symbols of masculinity as a hammer and nail was, arguably, to commit in New Zealand society of that era, a special type of social solecism. This nascent sense of being different was coloured by a sense of shame and awareness of somehow being the target of humour. For Grant, this was

an early experience of the societal effects of prejudice and a foretaste of the stigmatising behaviours that would later in life be associated with reactions to homosexuality. Even at the age of five, Grant was beginning to understand his world. With reference to understanding the everyday world, Heidegger (1953/2010) talks of "fore-having", and so Grant, through this experience, was developing a keen awareness with respect to behaviours which are either valued or denigrated (p. 145).

Some participants explored their sense of being in some way set apart from their peers through having different interests. Gordon's lack of interest in sport, and rugby in particular, together with his enthusiasm for "making things, fixing things, pulling things to bits, and cycling" was a point of difference which created tensions with his schoolmates, and made him aware that he was seen as somehow "different".

John also talked about viewing the world differently, having a wide range of creative interests and of being unusually curious:

> I was a very exploratory child, I ventured into lots of thing; I was
> hyperactive, very creative, full of life, and I had a different
> perspective on things. I'm a very visual person, and I had a highly
> developed aesthetic sensibility: my earliest recollections were being
> very attuned to nature, and I loved being in the garden with flowers
> and vegetables; other visual concepts would be lovely homes, old
> clocks; things like that pleased me from a very, very early age. I liked
> dressing up, I liked theatrical roles, playing games, putting on shows.

Discovering that the rigidly conservative, heteronormative, (and somewhat intolerant world) of post-World War Two Takapuna did not appreciate his creative energy, John retreated into an inner world of aesthetic appreciation and artistic endeavours, finding outlets for his exuberance in music and theatre, and seeking solidarity with other children who shared his refined sensibilities. The response from his parents is interesting:

> I think my mother coped with this exuberance well; she knew I was
> creative, and she probably nurtured it, and was protective of me. My
> father, on the other hand, was a very conservative man, brought up

> with the 1950s ethos to be a good mate, 'straight up and down', a
> 'rugby, racing, and beer' sort of personality, and I don't think he
> coped well at all.

Numerous signs of John's likely sexual orientation were evident to other people, triggering a range of responses, ranging from protective support through to exclusion from social functions:

> My aunt and uncle often talked about my 'strangeness', and how I
> was different, and how they were concerned that I would not
> develop in the normal way. And because my father was a
> businessman, when my parents had parties at home, I would often
> be locked in my room so that I would not interfere, or come out and
> embarrass them by asking too many questions of the guests; maybe I
> was too flamboyant in their eyes.

John was something of a social liability, given his interests and inability to conform to the behavioural standards of his day. An attitude of conformity was deeply entrenched in suburban New Zealand of the 1950s. As Phillips (1999) noted: "In the traditional New Zealand value system, homophobia had kept men suspicious of any 'poofterish' activity, such as going to concerts or flower gardening or recreational cooking" (p. 227). A number of writers have explored New Zealand culture of the immediate post-World War Two era. A visiting American academic, David Ausubel, wrote of his perceptions of the New Zealand character from a sociological perspective. Noting the twin ideas of conformity and egalitarianism, he observed that "[s]ince everyone is theoretically equal and equality connotes sameness, differences in beliefs, values, and behaviour, as well as in aspirations and achievements are threatening and therefore suspect" (1965, p. 125). McLaughlin (1976) came to a similar conclusion, and quoted Auckland community advisor, Peter Harwood: "The emphasis … is on control rather than emotion, conformity rather than people expressing themselves" (p. 147).

7.2 Varying degrees of self awareness

Six participants indicated strong awareness of their sexual orientation from an early age: Grant, Graham, Chris, Berend, Ross and Edward.

The other participants in this study indicated quite different degrees of awareness, impacted variously by ignorance, confusion and denial. For some participants, this awareness emerged gradually over a period of decades. Until they came out in later life, all participants were in some sort of denial. Different forms of denial can be seen as falling along a continuum ranging from naivety, genuine ignorance and lack of awareness at one end, through to deliberate strategies to avoid acknowledging to one's self at the other extreme.

Bevan observed that the barriers to coming out to himself would have been primarily psychological, deriving partly from a conservative boarding school education and the strict teaching of the Catholic Church. Other barriers included invisibility and lack of exposure to the counterculture. When awareness came, it was gradual rather than sudden:

> I would struggle to identify a moment – I say it wasn't an epiphany, it was a slow unveiling – and the fog started to lift around the age of 27.

Alan also reflected that coming out to himself had been a "very long slow process". This observation is backward looking, and reifies the process of coming out as an 'event', which in this case, had a long duration. For Heidegger, temporality is at the heart of understanding Dasein, and he emphasises that the 'now' of the present, is constantly disappearing into an undifferentiated past (Heidegger, 1953/2010). Taking the enigma of temporality forward, van Manen (2014) introduces the concept of the "future latency of past events", to illuminate the concept of an experience, such as coming out over a prolonged period, that carries significance only in retrospect (p. 57).

When asked about the time that he first disclosed his sexuality, Chris observed that he had not thought about the question in terms of coming out to himself, although growing up he had felt "quite mixed up" and "confused". He recollected that he had a preference for looking at men rather than women, however this behaviour could be rationalised:

> I would have lots of explanations for that, and thought, 'Oh well, that's what happens, that's not an unusual thing'.

Mark found it very difficult to come to terms with his sexuality. He was, as he puts it, "uptight sexually" as well as in his daily relation, and his emotional repression was commented on by colleagues:

> I kept a very rigid control over my emotions. I remember one monk said, 'You drink tea – that's the only sign you're human!' which was probably quite accurate. There was a lot of inhibition in me.

When reflecting on his life, John described himself as "naïve" although he acknowledged a latent awareness, a dormant sense of the possibility that he was gay:

> I think I've been aware of it throughout my life but never realised it; it was just ignored.

He noted that that other people such as colleagues in the bank might well have harboured suspicions concerning his sexual orientation, but in his own mind, he knew he *wasn't* gay, because he "didn't do things". He didn't feel attracted to other men so he was not tempted to explore gay sex. Furthermore, he was married, and he loved his wife:

> We had a perfectly normal life. It was a happy life: we had a normal sexual relationship, and my wife was also involved in the theatre.

Throughout most of his marriage John did not feel attracted to other men, but he did identify some "early awareness of gay possibilities". He recounted one incident, some years before he was married, at the time when he was working in the bank. He was on the bus, and someone tried to pick him up by engaging in casual conversation, which led to an invitation to attend a party. John's response was non-committal, and he sought advice from his father:

> Dad said, 'He's one of *those* people; don't ever ring back or do anything', which is what I did; I obeyed my father, and didn't follow it up.

Then John described being "happily married" for over 25 years with both he and his wife involved in an intensely artistic world of operatic societies, singing societies and amateur dramatics. Inevitably, with creative people around he was eventually going to

encounter gay people, and it was through his encounters with some of these gay men, that he gradually became aware of his own response:

> So that's when I started to know: 'Oh, that's interesting!'. Anyway, I
> didn't do anything, of course, with any of my friends or things like
> that. There was one occasion when I saw a young man; I thought,
> 'Oh, you're very attractive!', but nothing came of it; that was it. Later
> on, somehow I bumped into him when we were going to the theatre,
> and he made a pass at me, and I sort of was embarrassed but nothing
> ever happened. But obviously he had seen my look, and I had seen
> *his* look, though again I didn't do anything.

From these accounts, we have seen that an individual's awareness could be slow in arriving, and even then, understanding and awareness could be covered over and obscured by psychological mind-games, avoidance strategies, and rationalisation. Irrespective of the difficulty, or otherwise, of considering the possibility of being gay, it is clear that most of the participants had either a strong sense of awareness, or at least some limited sense of awareness. However, two participants indicated that they had extremely limited self awareness, despite numerous indications, (some of which would have been obvious to an objective observer), and other clues, which should have been obvious to themselves, at least in retrospect.

7.3   Limited self-awareness

Both Peter and Gordon were unusual in that they were unable to articulate any awareness of same-sex attraction to themselves. In order to understand what this lack of awareness might have looked like, we can explore their recollections and consider the strategies which they employed to prevent themselves from acknowledging the import of their attraction to other males.

When asked about his first awareness of his sexual orientation, Peter replied:

> *That* bit I struggle with. I think I played a psychological game in my
> own head; I had *intense* fantasies about boys and men, and I *diverted*
> them in a kind of religious way, and in a world of *imagination* which I

think involved plenty of erections and plenty of masturbation, but in

that kind of way which, the next morning it's just the next morning.

A key strategy for Peter in denying his sexual orientation was to distance himself from the concept of homosexuality by deliberately "losing" the language. As he explained, if he did not have the phraseology or the terminology to articulate his psycho-sexual behaviour, then he was able to "divert" any same-sex fantasies from conscious examination and reflection. For many people, the nature and intensity of recurrent masturbatory fantasies would be a clear indicator of same-sex orientation. But, for Peter, the ability to ignore and rationalise these signs was so deeply established that denial became the *modus operandi*. Another successful strategy for Peter was to occupy himself with numerous projects which ensured that he was so "busy", he would simply not have time to dwell on matters of a pscycho-sexual nature:

> This was almost a self-deception that enabled me to gain my
> significance from keeping busy in other contexts, so I didn't have to
> *deal* with my sexuality. And it was as simple as that I think: a simple
> matter of not dealing with something.

In retrospect, Peter acknowledged the "self-deception" that he engaged in as a series of diversionary activities. These avoidance techniques, combined with his deliberate suppression of sexual desires, enabled him to remain not only closeted but essentially *unaware* of his sexual orientation until he came out in his early fifties.

Likewise, Gordon indicated that he had no awareness of his sexual orientation, despite numerous indicators which pointed in this direction. These indicators were obvious to other people, but steadfastly ignored by Gordon, who, for a number of reasons, was unable to accept the possibility that he was gay. Until the time he came out, he disregarded these "hints" and "clues":

> I didn't entertain them. They felt awkward, uncomfortable, so I just
> dismissed them from my mind.

Despite numerous recollections of same-sex attraction throughout his childhood, Gordon claimed ignorance of the concept of homosexuality and even for some time, of the word 'gay'. Despite being the butt of homonegative teasing as a schoolboy, and

later as a teacher, Gordon was a stranger to the meanings: even as a young man, the concept of same-sex attraction remained an alien concept; camp and effeminate behaviour seemed merely "different":

> I watched 'Hudson and Halls' on TV, a weekly show which featured
> two rather affected, flamboyant chefs, who were obviously gay to
> anybody except me; I just saw them as different. I remember
> somebody telling me years later that they were gay, and I thought,
> 'Of course, why didn't I know that?'

If Gordon was unable to discern the likely sexual orientation of these television personalities, then logic would suggest that he might have difficulty in perceiving the similarities with his own "difference". Gordon did not understand why he was the target of homonegative teasing, not only at school, where he was mocked for being "hormonally deficient", but later when working as a teacher at intermediate school:

> Everybody in the school knew that I was gay except me: students and
> teachers. There was mirth in the school when the Form 2 kids (that's
> Year 8) were given dancing lessons, and one of the dances they were
> taught was the Gay Gordons. They knew my name was Gordon so
> they were obviously chuckling about me as much as anything, and
> *still* it didn't register.

The protective strategies which Gordon had perfected from his early experiences of being teased and bullied at school were so deeply ingrained that he would automatically brush off such laughter, dismissing the insult and not actually engaging with the substance of the mockery. This substance can be construed as others' awareness that Gordon was gay. The "hints" and "clues" for his colleagues and students would probably have been mannerisms and general demeanour, bearing in mind his avowed distaste for rugby and other 'heterosexual' preoccupations. The "hints" and "clues" that were avoided by Gordon would have included his awareness of the intense attractions to at least three of his school-fellows:

> All through school, my real closeness was with other guys: in the 3rd
> form I was *very* attracted to a certain guy in my class; it was more

than just friends. He didn't know it. I didn't dare say anything. Later,

my palpitations were associated with another boy – that was secret –

a Welsh boy. And when I was about 14, the school had an exchange

programme with students from France, and there was a boy called

Alain, and I was *so* excited about him, I couldn't take my eyes off him.

Looking back it was definitely sexual attraction, and if my memory

was a bit better he was probably in my mind when I was

masturbating. So that was a clue that I didn't realise was a clue.

Despite his lack of awareness, Gordon was nevertheless alert to the dangers inherent in such "secret" attractions as indicated in his recollection that he "didn't dare" to say anything. For Gordon, the physical response suggested by increased heart-beat rate ("palpitations"), his evident excitement and inability to control his gaze ("I couldn't take my eyes off him") provide a sense of the power of his responses emotionally, psychologically and sexually. In another account, Gordon recalled falling in love with a fellow musician:

I must have been about 16, and I was playing in an orchestra, and

there was a boy who played a clarinet solo, very difficult to play with

the emotion that it needs, it requires a lot of skilled phrasing and

control of volume, and this boy played it absolutely beautifully. It can

be the smallest things that trigger love, and I think it was that. I

resonated with him. There was a very emotional side of me that I

don't think anybody understood, and I knew from his playing that he

had a strong emotional side as well, so, looking back, I realise I was in

love with him. He gave me some of his cast off reeds, and I was

thrilled to have them. I took them home, and put one on my clarinet.

My heart was beating so fast; when I put that in my mouth, I came.

That's why I know absolutely that I was in love with him; that's what

he meant to me: just that connection because that reed had been in

his mouth. It was an extraordinarily intense experience, and I should

have known I was gay from my feelings for him, but I had absolutely

no idea. It was just so obvious, and still, I had no concept.

Two narratives can be seen running concurrently here: Gordon's lack of awareness of his sexual orientation, contrasted with other people's very clear awareness. The first narrative is an account of Gordon's coming to terms with his attraction to males. His starting point is ignorance (*no concept, didn't realise, wasn't conscious, didn't register*). At times during his interview, he revealed that he *was* aware of his orientation, but he deliberately chose to avoid thinking about these feelings, because they were scary and inconsistent with the heterosexual persona that he had been conditioned to adopt (*a secret, didn't acknowledge, didn't entertain them, put them aside, dismissed from mind*).

Emerging from adolescence into adulthood, Gordon remained firmly in denial and cultivated relationships with girlfriends which involved plenty of heterosexual exploration. So why did Gordon find it so difficult to a) recognise his sexual orientation in terms of his own strong feelings, and b) relate to other people's awareness of his likely sexual orientation? Throughout his interview, Gordon expressed a sense of amazement and bemusement that he could have been so blind, so oblivious to the hints and clues that appeared, especially when these clues were so evident to other people around him.

7.4   Tension between self and stereotypical images

Some participants did not acknowledge their sexual orientation because of the discrepancy between their self-image and the negative stereotypical images of homosexuals which were promulgated formally, and informally (especially in popular culture) throughout the 20th century. These stereotypes were neatly summed up by anti-reform politicians as indicated in Chapter 3. One popular misconception equated homosexuals as sexual predators. As Bevan explained:

> The negative concepts didn't tend to be framed as in gay: they were
> always framed as paedophilia, which was just the way it seemed to
> be.

Graham, too, referred to this stereotypical understanding when discussing his parishioners' attitudes towards homosexuals:

I am a clergyman. I had a parish in England, and so I did not come out
because that would be very difficult in a small rural area; they would
have probably thought I was a paedophile, that being the popular
thing at the turn of the century; so they just knew me as 'artistic'
[chuckles]. People who might have found it difficult were the 'Strict
and Particular' Baptists who would immediately think I was going to
rape their children.

Another popular misconception characterised homosexuals as effeminate. As Edward
noted:

The only real awareness of gay people was very effeminate
comedians on television, like John Inman. So that was what gay was:
to be gay meant you had to be outrageously, flamboyantly camp. I
didn't want to be part of that, which meant I could safely assume I
wasn't gay because I wasn't like that, and didn't want to be. I suppose
it dawned remarkably slowly on me.

Edward's distorted understanding of homosexuality and ignorance of any viable
counter-culture, was a contributing factor to his confused sexual identity: if there were
no role models other than flamboyant, effeminate comic characters then it is
understandable that he would reject this identification. Edward indicated his sense of
confusion when discussing his process of acknowledging to himself that he was gay.
Edward somehow knew that this same-sex attraction was problematic, and he was
always trying to suppress that, but it was a mystery to him how he knew that. One
clear indication might have been the bullying he received, bullying which included
being called a poofter. Although at first he didn't understand what this meant, he
would have eventually made the connection, and this might have contributed to his
depression, which appeared at various points throughout his life. Another contributing
factor to his confusion would be his lack of awareness of the counter-culture or any
sense of a community in which gay people could live productive, fulfilling lives.

Similarly, for Alan, a key issue throughout his childhood and into his teens was the lack
of exposure to positive alternatives:

> There wasn't much visibility. I mean I do remember, when I first went
>
> to Durham University in 1977 there was a support group or whatever
>
> (I don't know if they called them gay students or homosexual
>
> students), but I remember seeing a poster about it and thinking, 'Oh,
>
> that's weird.' But that's the only thing that I ever saw at university
>
> relating to gays.

For Alan, awareness of homosexuality was steeped in an aura of negativity, with schoolboy memories of verbal abuse and at university, "weird" new associations of a scarcely glimpsed, isolated, marginalised, support group for gay students. This lack of visibility also meant a lack of positive role models. The only visible role models were effeminate comic buffoons on television whose antics he found offensive. He felt no affinity with such people, and if camp "poofters" were the only visible representatives of the gay community, then Alan wanted no part of that world. This meant denying or somehow rationalising to himself the attraction he felt for other boys.

Labels are important, and the label of 'gay', together with the limited understandings associated with the word did not necessarily mesh with an individual's sense of his self and his attraction to other males. This sense of finding the male body attractive did not mean that Berend felt himself to be gay; on the contrary. One of the key pointers here is the language used and the sorts of (mis)understandings that were associated with the concept of 'gay' in certain contexts. From the perspective of his rigid, fundamentalist Christian background, being gay was equated with negative and socially proscribed behaviours such as paedophilia, transvestism, effeminacy, and sexual excess. These stereotypes are wholly negative and constitute a form of early childhood indoctrination from Berend's family and from the Church. So there is this dissonance between awareness of same-sex attraction and acceptance of the labels and stereotypes which were common in the 1970s and 1980s. It was not until the time of increased visibility associated with the homosexual law reform debates of 1985/86 that Berend was able to examine and challenge these misconceptions:

> I was finally hearing the other side of the gay story, that they weren't
>
> all cross-dressers or child molesters; they were ordinary people like

myself. And that, of course put things in a quite different light so that

was a real catalyst for my own coming out.

From the media coverage, Berend was able to observe gay activists, to listen to pro-reform spokespeople, to read cogent critiques of pseudo-science and misinformation and to reconsider for himself the actual reality of gay lives. From around this time Berend gradually developed an awareness that gay people were not automatically transvestites, paedophiles, sissies or sex maniacs. Heidegger refers to "the development of possibilities projected in understanding" (Heidegger, 1953/2010, p. 144). For Berend, this dawning understanding of possibilities was an important factor leading to his self-acceptance.

7.5   Interested in girls; marriage

My impression from having spent a considerable number of hours in conversation with these participants is that each of them derived pleasure from the company of women. Irrespective of this pleasure, some participants had no intention of getting married while for others, marriage was an important objective. These latter participants fall along a continuum: at one end were those whose interest in women stemmed from a sense of family expectations, or because it was the 'normal' thing to do, or who consciously decided to engage in heterosexual pursuits as a deliberate strategy to distract themselves from same-sex preoccupations. At the other end of the continuum are those participants who genuinely did feel, at least initially, a strong sexual and/or emotional attraction to women. Seven participants in the sample married: Edward, Mark, Graham, Berend, Ross, Alan, John.

Edward became increasingly aware throughout his adolescence that it was men to whom he was attracted. However, this attraction did not mesh with his ideal of the person he wanted to be, and so he was conscious of an ongoing need to manage this:

> I was always trying to suppress that and maximise any sense that I
>
> found women attractive as well.

Edward's marriage and family were very important to him and at various points throughout his interview he expressed an ongoing sense of tension between the Church's stance on marriage and his sense of the right thing to do in coming out and

separating; also, tension between his love for his family, and the sense of it not being fair for his wife to be married to a gay man:

> The very conservative Christian view would be that I did absolutely
> the right thing, and I married,and had children, and that's what God
> wanted for me; but the opposite, the other view, is that that was a
> very selfish thing that I did, and that I dragged somebody else into
> that.

Graham experienced physical and emotional attraction to women, and he evidently enjoyed the sexual exploration that was considered appropriate for New Zealand in the 1950s:

> I liked girls, and I recall with pleasure my first sexual experience with
> a female. We were in *Romeo and Juliet* together, and we got on quite
> well; yes, she was very sweet my girl. We didn't actually fuck, but we
> certainly had a jolly nice time under the bean frame in her mother's
> back garden, and I must have also enjoyed her in the car too, my
> father's car, which I borrowed. I'd have been 18 then. When I went to
> Otago University I had quite a close relationship with a girl who,
> having been brought up a good Presbyterian, had decided that
> touching the male member was *not* permitted, though she was as
> randy as all get out, really. So, we just cuddled. I had no conflict in
> terms of feeling attracted to men, rather than women. I *enjoyed* the
> company of women, and because I wasn't expected to fuck them,
> being a trainee clergyman, that didn't really arise.

Given the social mores of the 1950s and 1960s and conservative attitudes towards heterosexual intercourse before marriage, there was less pressure on gay men to perform sexually. This may help to explain why some gay men were comfortable to stay with the status quo for a longer period. Graham remained single until the age of 40. He explained how his future wife took the initiative:

> I was proposed to by a very attractive woman; I was 40, and I was
> lonely, and had the feeling that nobody was going to cry when I died,

and this woman leant across an English railway carriage and said, 'I'm going to marry you!', and she did, and that lasted for four years.

Graham had not experienced heterosexual intercourse before he was married, and it was at this point that he was able to make a comparison:

> My first copulation with a woman was when we were married. And, on reflection, I was aware that certain things were lacking. I enjoyed the sex on the whole but it wasn't quite the same as what I felt it should be, and indeed had experienced before. But I foolishly thought you could change, and you can't.

Despite his interest in, and attraction to women, Graham realised through this experience that he was not wired for heterosexuality. He had been honest with his wife about his previous sexual experiences with men; he had shared this information with her on the (mistaken) understanding that being married would bring about a change of orientation:

> She knew about my past but I thought I could say: 'That's all over and done with' and 'I'm very happy with you, and I enjoy you sexually', which was true, but not quite as true as it would have been if she was a bloke.

In terms of sexual preference, Berend indicated that as a teenager he knew he was attracted to males rather than the females, but he nevertheless fell in love, and experienced positive relationships with different girls. Although never consummated, these relationships involved a certain amount of sexual exploration including 'petting, playing with breasts' and 'kissing', which was enjoyable and involved strong emotion. Speaking of these adolescent girlfriends, Berend said:

> I really enjoyed being with them, I loved them, in my own way.

Later, when he met his wife, he again experienced a strong emotional response in the initial courtship, a love which endured throughout and beyond his marriage:

> Yes, I fell in love with her, and we had a lot of things in common. I
> was really in awe of her; basically, in my frame of mind, I guess that I
> lived my life for her and for the family that we produced.

When he got married, he was deeply in love with his wife, and committed his life to their relationship. This love did not diminish when he came out as a gay man. Berend was at pains to explain that his love for his wife transcended his sexual orientation.

Ross knew that he wanted to be married, to have children, and to enjoy family life. He "dismissed" any doubts he had had about being gay, which was not particularly difficult, at least in the first half of the marriage which was an intensely busy and happy time:

> We did a lot of things with our children – boating, sailing with the
> children and all their sport and interests – we both of us involved
> ourselves heavily, and it was glorious.

He referred to that time as "the golden years". He found being a father "rewarding", and observed that he was so "intensely focused" on his family that he did not entertain homosexual fantasies, and if he did, "they were fleeting and not really an issue".

Alan knew that he "definitely liked women" and, frustrated by his lack of success in finding a girlfriend, he remained a virgin until the age of 24. For Alan, success in life included heterosexual marriage with children so he was receptive to an enthusiastic courtship with his future wife:

> She kind of threw herself at me, and I was just bowled over; and it
> was wonderful, and all felt very natural, and so I started dating
> Janine, and it was fantastic. I definitely was interested in women
> then, and I remember on my wedding day saying to my best man,
> "You know, if anything happens in the future, Pete, at this point in
> time I'm 100% sure that this is the right decision for me, and that I'm
> marrying for the right reasons," and that kind of thing. And it *was*
> good for years, apart from the sex.

Despite the pleasure he derived from his marriage, for Alan, the one crucial component that was lacking was the sex. Initially, sexual dysfunction was attributed to premature ejaculation, then to his wife's tiredness after breastfeeding. In hindsight though, a contributing factor can be seen to be Alan's sexual orientation.

John was happily married for over 20 years. He met his wife when he was a young man, and still living with his parents. At that time he found the home situation "very stifling", and his father "very controlling":

> He would not allow me to develop my individuality. I wasn't allowed to decorate my room the way I wanted it, or even furnish it the way I liked it, and everything had to be done according to his rules, even though I was an adult and earning money.

For John, getting married would not only provide an escape from a constricting home life, it would also provide him with a companion and soul mate who shared the same interests in music and antiques, and who had more extensive experience of life. They met during rehearsals for a musical show, for which his future wife was the rehearsal accompanist. John was impressed with the musicality of her playing and, discovering a number of shared interests, they struck up a "very pleasant" friendship:

> She sort of manoeuvred things to, 'Oh wouldn't it be nice if we got married!', and I thought, 'Oh it seems to me it would be lovely; she's a lovely person, and I'd get on really well with her'. She was also very sexually experienced; I had had no sexual experience at all.

John observed that he loved his wife, was devoted to his family, and for most of his marriage, he was not interested in or attracted to men.

For those participants who married, irrespective of their motivations, the marriage proved to be the ground against which their sexual orientation had to come under scrutiny, sooner or later.

7.6 Approaches to avoid acknowledging

The distinction between strategies to avoid acknowledging and strategies to avoid temptation is somewhat artificial given the absence of a neat line separating the two.

Strategies to avoid acknowledging can be seen as largely unconscious, and reveal themselves as 'strategies' only through retrospective introspection. These strategies included maximising any interest in the opposite sex. For some participants this was a genuine interest, whereas for others, it may have been to some extent conforming to heteronormative societal expectations, but irrespective of the motivation, for many of these participants, relationships with women were seen as genuinely desirable.

Many years after he had come out as a gay man, Ross reflected that his refusal to acknowledge his sexual orientation was not necessarily a conscious, deliberate, decision:

> Being gay is part of my whole being which I had denied, and clearly
> hidden, perhaps not deliberately; I just embarked on a life that I
> thought I was happy with. So I dismissed whatever doubts I may have
> had before I was married that I was gay; so whether I just blotted it
> out in my mind, I don't know, but I didn't think I was gay or
> homosexual.

For some participants, the fact of being in a heterosexual relationship automatically precluded the possibility of identifying as gay. For example, Gordon expressed surprise that one of his students might be confused on this point:

> Ah, I remember a child in my class asking me if I was gay, and I said,
> 'Of *course* not, I've got a girlfriend!'

Gordon's continuing confusion rested partly in the pleasure he derived from these heterosexual relationships, including the sexual component: "The sex was fun so we had it".

Despite Graham's early sense of the erotic potential of leather-clad motorcyclists he had no desire to deviate from societal norms and expectations and, as a model student at school and career-oriented thereafter, he unconsciously recognised that it would be in his interests to exercise self-discipline:

> I never did do anything about my sexual orientation until I was in my
> thirties. At school nothing happened, and I really didn't *want* to

because I was meant to be a good boy; and having your willy played

around with was *not* part of being a good boy.

Suppression of one's sexual orientation might manifest as a rationalisation, or a refusal to accept the possibility, for example, because to do so would pose barriers to a successful career. Graham was initially aware that he found men attractive, but to acknowledge and act on this attraction would jeopardise a successful ministry in the Anglican Church, especially bearing in mind the strongly homonegative attitudes and laws which were prevalent in the 1950s. Graham's response then was to deny this sexual orientation:

So I didn't acknowledge to myself that I was attracted to men.

Graham's denial of his sexual orientation in early adulthood was made easier partly because he enjoyed the distractions of female company, and also because when he was at university, he did not find any of his fellow male students attractive:

I don't remember being attracted to any men at Otago, and none of

my friends who turned out to be gay *ever* made any overt advances

to me. I didn't actually find any of them sexually attractive anyhow.

And I must have been busy in my subconscious or wherever else we

hide things, to ensure that this was not a possibility for me. Anyhow,

it would have been so difficult to organise. I knew that gentlemen's

conveniences were a place, and I had *no* desire to go and explore

there. It just never occurred to me.

In retrospect, Graham was aware of the power of his subconscious processing to "hide things", such that he successfully averted the possibility of any same-sex encounter until later in life. Recalling the context of Otago University in the late 1950s and early 1960s as conservative and heteronormative, it is easy to understand how Graham was pre-occupied with women but it also helped that he was not attracted to other men, and that no man made a pass at him. Given his mind-set at that time, it would not have occurred to Graham to seek out any same-sex encounters, and so his time in Dunedin passed without him having given any significant thought to his sexual orientation.

For some participants, no particular mental effort was required to avoid confronting themselves with their sexual orientation. Berend, for example, was brought up in a Dutch Reformed tradition to live a life of Christian service to others in his Church community:

> I lived my life for others rather than specifically for myself. You could see whatever problem somebody else had, you could see they're having problems with weight or smoking or with whatever else, and you were there for them for that. But it was too selfish to think about what was wrong with your *own* life, and so you used helping others to not confront yourself, and not come to terms with who you were, and what *you* needed to look at.

In retrospect, Berend was able to understand how an emphasis on service and worship might provide a convenient pretext for avoiding self-contemplation. He acknowledged the evasion as a "cheapie escape" from honest, rigorous self-examination.

7.7   Boundaries; strategies to avoid temptation

It is an interesting phenomenon for a man to discover that he is sexually attracted to other men, and disturbing to know that such an attraction is unwelcome, or inappropriate, and to be avoided for all sorts of reasons, such as the illegality, irreligiosity, or immorality of homosexual acts, especially if he is married. And yet, the attraction is there, and does not go away; for some men, the feelings get *stronger* with age. So, what is to be done? Strategies to avoid temptation are more variable because they involve a conscious decision to suppress thought processes, impulses and desires, as well as to control concomitant behaviours. An individual can try to resist the temptation, through self-discipline. He can divert attention from unwelcome thoughts and temptations by concentrating on his marriage, and raising a family. He can focus his energy on his career, or keep busy with projects by way of distraction. When these strategies have been tried, and found wanting, then there is always recourse to professional counsellors or psychologists, or spiritual guidance through religion.

Peter exercised a degree of self control which enabled him firstly to avoid analysing his own thought process through a long-running "self-deception" (i.e. to divert unwanted thoughts), and secondly, to prevent himself from engaging in undesirable behaviours:

> I think that I deliberately diverted myself from risky encounters,
> other than in my imagination. Over the years many boarders had
> stayed in my house, and I had had crushes on some of these people
> who had wandered in and out of my house. But it had never reached
> the stage of sexual experience. There was a certain amount of
> intimacy but it was as though I had set a *boundary* that would enable
> me to kid myself that I hadn't gone over the line.

In reflecting on his self-control and the setting of boundaries, Peter identified strong theological, cultural, and community "inhibitors" which were "*powerfully* operating" to prevent him from going too far, and which ensured that his embraces did not stray from platonic to sexual. This boundary maintenance proved to be a successful strategy until 1998 when he moved to Auckland:

> I think just the sheer physical move in some ways *was* it; those
> inhibitors *didn't* operate, and left a space of puzzlement.

As with some of the other participants, Peter discovered that a change of location was a key factor in setting in train a re-appraisal of the boundaries.

For Ross, getting married was the realisation of a life-long ambition, and he recalled with pleasure the first 12 years of marriage. With the focus on his family during those "golden" years, Ross was not distracted by any homosexual thoughts. He exercised self-disciplin,e and he assumed that he would be able to continue married life unperturbed by sexual orientation worries and concerns. However, after some time he found himself becoming increasingly preoccupied with unwelcome dreams and fantasies which no amount of self-control could prevent from intruding on his mental space. It was only a matter of time before he acted on those impulses. In his mid-forties, he ended up frequenting Auckland's gay bath-houses for sexual encounters. The guilt and shame he experienced as a result took a serious psychological toll, and Ross ended up seeing a psychiatrist, who was evidently unable to reverse Ross's sexual orientation.

Eventually Ross confided in his wife, and told her that he had been to a bath-house. The visits to a psychiatrist and anti-depressants did not seem to help, so they discussed

the situation together, and in desperation, Ross decided to see if he could overcome his affliction through the power of prayer. He had heard of a Church based organisation called Homosexuals Anonymous (popularly known as HA), an offshoot of a global organisation called Exodus. Their mission was to save sinners from homosexuality through God. In retrospect, Ross expressed surprise that he ever "bought into that", but he was experiencing great guilt, and "clutching at straws". As he explained, he just wanted someone else to "solve his problem". He attended meetings every Thursday for the best part of a year, and each week the procedure would be the same: someone would share his story, then the congregation would get up, and say 'Alleluia', and they would pray together to rid this man of his sin. Ross expressed scepticism of the evangelical approach, and he did not actively participate, but he listened, and thought, "Ok, the power of prayer, that might help us through this thing"; they hoped that eventually they would all be delivered of their burden. One week Ross attended a special meeting with a lay preacher who was reputed to have a special gift; he was certainly very religious, and he had clear views on the evils of homosexuality. Six of them went along to a session in a church building in West Auckland in which they ended up watching some sort of exorcism being performed on one of the young men. The lay preacher's name was Keith Hay, a philanthropist, well-known businessman, and a former Mayor of Mount Roskill. With a tremendous sense of occasion, Keith Hay began the prayer ritual, invoking the glory of God to rid this man of his sin, and beseeching the Lord to cure the sinner of his evil ways. After some time, the young man became so emotional he ended up on the floor crying, with Keith Hay towering over him, triumphant in prayer. Ross's response was one of anger and concern:

> I just wanted to scream. I didn't scream, but I was angry to see this
> young man in tears, grovelling on the floor, evidently distraught. So,
> after speaking my mind, I left HA, and I didn't return. Not long after
> that I was visiting somebody up in Ward 10 - the psychological ward
> of Auckland Hospital - and when I walked in I recognised the same
> young man whom I had seen on the floor crying while Keith Hay was
> ridding him of his wickedness through the glory of God. He was there;
> he was a patient; he had been admitted to Ward 10 of Auckland

hospital. But he called out to me by name when he saw me there. I don't know what became of him. I never saw him again.

The coda of this story, featuring the 18 year old who had been committed to a secure mental hospital reminds us of the numerous cases of attempted suicide and psychological scarring of gay men who found themselves unable to express their sexuality without the State, the Church, or Medicine taking an interest. Painful as this experience was, it finally made clear to Ross that no amount of self-control, counselling, medication, or prayer was likely to change his sexual orientation. For Ross, this experience was a salutary reminder that he had been existing 'inauthentically'. In Heideggerian terms, he had been listening to the 'they' and defaulting to the dominant discourse of heteronormativity. His sense of anger and voluntary disengagement from HA provided him with an opportunity to authentically glimpse his "ownmost potentiality-of-being-a-self" and live towards his destiny as a gay man (Heidegger, 1953/2010, p. 293). However, this process would take some time; it was not until Ross fell in love with another man that he understood the nature and depth of his attraction to men, and felt ready to come out.

7.8   Awareness through sex /love

Ten of the participants in this study finally accepted their sexual orientation as the result of a relationship with another gay man. For some participants the encounter was the result of a careful search for some such experience while for others, it was an unexpected, but life-changing encounter, which typically (but not necessarily) involved sex.

Peter reflected on a *number* of occasions where he deliberately avoided having a sexual encounter because he was aware that to do so would be a turning point, a point of no return. Always in the background was a sense of boundaries, and a scarcely articulated understanding that sexual activity was out of bounds:

> It was almost as though I was asking myself, 'What am I doing
> exploring sexuality?! … Because I really can't *do this* because of these
> responsibilities that I have'. Yet the interesting thing *was* that – well I
> was never going to be free of those responsibilities – it's almost as
> though I had *never* given myself any time to discover myself.

With the onset of middle age, Peter began to recognise that in terms of actualisation, he had to weigh up his professional and clerical responsibilities against his own self-fulfilment. He then contemplated his choices, and questioned his motives, asking himself what was preventing him from exploring his sexuality, and from taking the logical next step:

> What was I holding back from? Why was I holding back from this? And so there was a real decision – I think I made knowingly, that a) it was time to discover myself sexually, and b) this is me – to follow the *logic* of that. I had moved to Auckland at the beginning of 1998, and in this new context I came into contact with new people but it was not until the Christmas holidays of 2000, I did what I often do, and that was people who were in need would come, and stay the night on the couch or something like this, and this was an individual who came and stayed on my couch, and then we had a sexual encounter.

So for Peter, after many years of abnegation and procrastination, the turning point involved experiencing the reality of sex with another man. This confirmed his prediction that the only logical and honest course of action was to accept his sexual orientation:

> Having done that, having explored, I thought, 'Of course, this all clicks into shape now; this is a part of me'. The other part clicked in, and you can call it overdeveloped guilt, but I'd say it was overdeveloped, a *very strongly* developed sense of integrity.

And having decided to accept his sexual orientation, the next step was to come out, irrespective of the consequences; as he explained:

> I did not hesitate to do that; it was like I made a kind of life-changing decision at that point.

He also conveyed an awareness that many people in that situation would have experimented sexually, "taken that step, and then carried on with two lives". However, for Peter, that would have not been true to himself.

For Edward too, there was a clear sense of deliberately avoiding gay sexual encounters because he was aware that to submit to temptation would mark a definitive point at which he would have to address his sexual identity. Always in the background for Edward was his religious conditioning, and his sense of homosexuality being fundamentally wrong. However, on one occasion Edward *almost* succumbed to temptation. He recounted a memory of driving up from Hamilton to Auckland to spend a few hours at a nudist beach:

> I would sometimes get in the car, and drive to Auckland for the day - and I remember going to Ladies Bay, and scrambling down the cliff, and seeing all these men - these naked men - and knowing that things were going on in the bushes there, and I remember walking along the beach, and seeing this guy walking along in the other direction - he was older and very attractive, just wearing a towel around his waist, and I sort of turned and looked behind as he walked past then I sort of went into the bushes behind the beach, and he followed me, and he came up to me and - something was about to happen, and I just took fright and went away, and that was the end of that.

Edward has guarded this memory as a precious token of possibility – what might have developed if he had been willing to "let nature take its course". The sexual orientation was clearly evident, but held in check by a moral framework which impeded exploration.

For Chris, the process was gradual, but in retrospect, the turning point can be traced back to the mid-1990s when he was retiring from farming, and moving away from the familiar home environment to a large, anonymous city: "I guess I came out to myself when I formed a relationship".

For Mark, given his strict self-discipline, underpinned by a rigid Catholic upbringing and the confused sense of his own sexuality, the arrival of same-sex love in his early fifties was unexpectedly gratifying, undeniably powerful, and fundamentally "life-changing":

> Then I fell in love with a man called Peter: he was tall, very beautiful, and quite lovable. This was the real thing. It was *incredibly* marvellous. I was on cloud nine nonstop, and I could feel it in my entire being. I have had *three* life-changing experiences in my life, and that was one of them. That was an enabler.

When Grant was asked how he finally came to know that he was gay, he replied that a "turning point" for him occurred through a chance encounter in the late 1970s when he was travelling in the USA, and needed accommodation in a remote wilderness location. A kindly park ranger offered him a bed for the night, and they unexpectedly ended up sharing a double bed:

> And then, through just his touching me, it was enough. Anyway, we won't worry about the details of that, but it kind of blew me sideways: being there with someone who was interested in me, and who was very attractive. It just felt right. Ah, it felt amazing! And again, it's like that first time you fall in love, and here was someone that I fell in love with. We were together for about three or four days, then, because I was a visitor I had to move on. So I left, but I felt quite *completed*. I knew that I was actually gay, and this is what it feels like when you fall in love with someone: you absolutely, passionately love them, and something inside just makes you so *different*. I don't know what it is. It's because I was being real with myself, that moment. I was in love with this guy, and you can't hide it when you're in love; I just felt like I was walking on balloons [laughs], and suddenly it felt like I was real, 'cause up to that point I didn't feel like I knew fully.

It was not until he had his first sexual encounter with another man, and experienced strong feelings of love that he realised what it was to be a gay man. As he put it, the realisation "kind of blew me sideways". The adjectives and metaphors which he uses are revealing: he felt "right", "completed", "different", "real", "walking on balloons", "unable to hide it".

Later in life, Gordon carefully considered the possibilities raised by two professionals (a counsellor and a prostitute) who expressed an opinion regarding his sexual

orientation. Yet, despite the evidence to the contrary, Gordon resisted acknowledging what was obvious to most others. Even when he was experiencing gay sex for the first time, awareness of the consequences of coming out continued to be a psychological hurdle to acknowledgement. Gordon was reluctant to jump to any conclusions. He had to be "really confident" of his sexual orientation before he acknowledged to himself (and others) that he was gay, largely because of the likely problems that would ensue:

> I didn't know that being invited home for coffee meant sex. I was so
> naïve. We were sitting on a couch, and he started the thigh stroke,
> which excited me; I was very excitable at the time sexually, and that
> led to him telling me that I was gay. He knew I was gay; no question
> about it: 'Of course you're gay, Gordon!'. He was so nice about it, so
> accepting and so definite. And that was scary because I hadn't
> accepted it yet.

What makes this recount so interesting is the persistent refusal to acknowledge what should have been obvious to most people and the highly articulate and reflective way in which Gordon explores this self-denial. So for Gordon, the sexual encounter was a critical component, as was his gay partner's confident assertion that Gordon was gay. However, the final piece of the puzzle fell into place a short time after this encounter when Gordon caught a glimpse of a life that he felt had been denied to him:

> What finally confirmed for me that I was gay was soon after,
> probably a few weeks or months after that at a nightclub – I came
> across a young man – he was probably a teenager - sitting on another
> teenager's lap on a bar stool, and they were embracing, and I was
> very sad because I realised that that's what I had wanted all my life
> and hadn't had [emotional], and that confirmed for me that I was
> gay. That was like finding – that final acknowledgement was like
> finding the last missing piece of a jigsaw puzzle – the picture didn't
> make complete sense until the last piece was found. Once that piece
> was found there were so many aspects of my life and personality that
> all made so much more sense, and it all fitted together, and very
> quickly I was confidently out because that was the real me; and I had

in my past not endeavoured to hide the real me – except obviously

that gay part which I hid from myself even.

For Alan, initially married life was "wonderful" and felt "very natural" and "was good for years". Alan appears to have quite deliberately cultivated avoidance strategies for thinking about homosexuality or engaging in discussion. He "just repressed it" or "closed that off" in his mind and "kept it away". And when sensitive issues such as homosexual law reform become public topics of conversation, he was very conscious of "shutting down any discussion" with his wife. These avoidance strategies were effective until 1994 when a combination of marital sexual dysfunction, coupled with the experience of viewing a documentary about gay saunas prompted Alan to consider the possibility of visiting such a place himself. In retrospect, he appears to have rationalised his visit as being oriented purely towards the pleasure of the spa facilities, and he mentally prepared himself to rebuff any unwelcome sexual overtures:

> I thought, 'I don't care that it's gay; I'm not going to do anything; I
> don't need to involve myself with anybody there; I'll just be on my
> own, and I can repel anyone who comes near me; I just want to be on
> my own.' So I went there intending to just be completely on my own
> because I was pretty nervous about it. And sure enough I relaxed and
> sat in the spa pool; I hadn't been in a spa pool in about five years so it
> was fantastic. And there was a wet sauna and a dry sauna; you can't
> see anything anyway so that was nice. I showered and watched TV,
> then I went back in the spa pool, and then someone, some guy
> stepped in and started stroking my thigh and my leg and stuff like
> this, and I felt, 'Oh shit - what goes on now?' [laughs]

His overwhelmingly negative preconceptions are revealed in the adjectives he used to recount his anticipation: he expected gay sex to be "seedy", "just terrible", "horrible", "anathema", something "you shouldn't go near"; and prospective partners as "greasy", and "not appealing at all". The contrast between these negative forebodings and his actual experience of gay sex is striking. The physical and psychic reality was: "wonderful", "absolutely fantastic", an experience that would provide "a buzz and a high for *days* and days afterwards". The erotic sensations and unexpected sights were

a source of ongoing fascination and pleasure, his sense of wordless amazement captured succinctly in the repeated interjection: "wow, wow, wow". However, despite engaging in regular anonymous gay sex encounters for a five year period, Alan was still not entirely convinced that he was gay. Alan was leading a "double life", yet remained in denial, a phenomenon that is not uncommon in 'heterosexually' married men (Lee, 2016).

As Berend approached middle age, he began to entertain the possibility of having a sexual orientation other than heterosexual, but he was aware of a strong inner sense of caution around mental and physical exploration of his sexuality:

> When I started to explore in my mind the possibility that I was gay, I realised that I was on tricky ground and should not explore this sexually, because it might mean the end of everything. But at the time my wife wanted to explore *her* sexuality more, and so she *did* explore things sexually with another man, and that really sent me into a spin because I said to her if you do that then I sort of feel that *I* should explore *my* sexuality, and it's not going to be with another woman, but it will be with another man. The first same-sex encounter was a complete let-down. I thought, 'Well this is no different to sex with anybody else'. My emotional response was relief that I could actually explore that, that I wasn't going to vomit if I kissed a man, that it wasn't as horrendous as I *thought* it was going to be. But nor was it as exciting as I thought it was going to be. But it got better. The first strong reaction was with a man who obviously had feelings for me, and I started to explore that with him, and fell madly in love with him. I became very passionate with him, and that really opened my mind to how sexually I could be much wilder than I was within a heterosexual relationship.

The transitional process from not knowing one is gay to gradual dawning awareness that one is attracted to men, to eventual exploration is one of the more interesting aspects of this research. Each participant experienced the process differently. In John's case, the shared experience of watching pornography with his wife and two mutual

friends began to raise interest, but the turning point was a chance encounter in the street. At the age of 52, on an otherwise unremarkable day at work, John was walking between branches on an errand when he glanced up and saw an extremely handsome Latino:

> Our eyes met, and it was quite amazing; absolutely like that! [Clicks fingers]. He was extreeeemely handsome [smiles]; extremely, as Latinos are, and he approached me. He had this lovely American wide smile; he had this wide smile, and he came up to me, and he said: [American accent] 'Hello, my name's Ron', and I said, 'Oh yes?', and he said, 'Would you like to come back to my hotel with me?'; and I did [laughs]. So off we went, back to the hote,l and that's where it happened. And it was just amazing, just completely bizarre: I had never experienced anything like that before. He was very urbane, very handsome, very knowledgeable, and very predatory; and I was completely overcome because he liked chubby men; that was his thing.

John explained that the visitor was in New Zealand for a conference, and during the short time he was in Auckland, they managed a number of meetings. In stark contrast to the rigidly conservative life as a responsible family man, husband, father, and trusted bank employee, John embarked on an affair, discovering a "second adolescence" and behaving in ways that he would not have predicted previously:

> He was here for about a month, and during that time we had this incredible, torrid affair. I would do anything for him: I'd get up early in the morning; I'd go and see him. I don't know how I worked it; after work, any time at all, and I would go to his room. And I followed him: I stalked him, I did anything possible and manipulated the situation, and that's what happened. After some time, he took me to the opera; I remember him in the opera doing things like feeling me up and I said, 'You can't do things like that!' And in the middle of the *Swan Lake* ballet, I remember him whispering to me, 'When are they going to sing?' [both laugh], and I can still remember that. And he

took me to dinner; he was highly urbane, highly sophisticated. So anyway, I used to make these tapes; it was sort of like a background to my feelings, how I felt at the time; and I'd play them in the car on the way back from assignations; the soundtrack made it like being in a play. It was incredible, and I don't know how I got away with it.

John observed that the affair was having an impact on his work, and on his marriage: "My poor wife at the time must have known something was going on". On the day of Ron's departure, John went to his hotel to help him pack:

Going through his stuff I noticed all these things indicating what he had been up to while he had been here; obviously playing the full game; but I could see no wrong in him, so I packed everything away, took him to the airport, and he said to me, 'You're going to cry when I leave', and I said, 'Yes, but so are you'. And he did. So off he went to his other life in the other country. When he was gone I felt good, and then I absolutely went to pieces, sort of like, almost a mini-breakdown.

In John's case, eye contact was enough to spark a passionate, illicit love affair, the end of which elicited an unprecedented emotional and psychological response. This experience marked a decision point; as John put it, "I opened Pandora's box, and once that was opened, that was it".

Ross knew from an early age that he found men sexually attractive, and on two occasions, in his twenties and far from home, he went out of his way to experience gay sex. These sexual experiences were exciting, but at the same time frightening, and Ross remained in denial for many years as he did not want to be a homosexual. He wanted to be heterosexually married and to raise a conventional family. Also, homosexuality in New Zealand at that time was illegal, anti-social, and against the teachings of the Church, and Ross was a devout Anglican. So he exercised strength of character and self-discipline and, for the next 20 years, remained faithful to his wife. But he could not prevent unwanted thoughts and dreams from intruding on his mental space:

> When I got into my early forties I started to have these depressions
> which were related to my attractions to men and my gay feelings.

It was only a matter of time before Ross acted on those impulses, and he ended up frequenting Auckland's gay bath-houses for sexual encounters:

> There were several in Auckland. I didn't know about this until I
> explored. There was one in Beach Road, Parnell: the Countrymen's
> Institute it was called. It was upstairs, which was convenient because
> I could park my car up there and not be seen off the street. I'd go up
> there, and more often than not I'd have no contact with anybody
> there because I still had this fear and the guilt. The guilt was
> paramount really: the betrayal of my wife and family and everything.
> I just thought, 'Who am I? What am I doing? Why am I here? I'm
> happy; I've got everything in the world'. Around this time I found
> that, whether it was because I was suffering or in pain internally,
> psychologically, I guess I wasn't performing as well in my work. I was
> self-employed through most of that period; I had a PR consultancy
> which was very successful. But when things got on top of me I'd go to
> the sauna and hope that some man would put his arms around me
> and love me and comfort me. And the excitement levels of going
> there and going up the stairs and getting my clothes off and going
> into the sauna: it's very hard to explain; I can't begin to explain the
> mixture of excitement and horror and guilt that would follow; all
> these things.

Despite the guilt and shame he experienced, Ross continued to patronise the saunas. The awareness of his betrayal took a serious psychological toll, and Ross ended up experimenting with a range of strategies, including seeing a psychiatrist, confiding in his wife and attending prayer meetings. Despite his best endeavours, Ross could not see a way out because he seemed unable to stop visiting the sauna, while at the same time, he did not want his marriage to end or his family to be broken up:

> Clearly my wife must have known something was wrong from my lack
> of affection and my lack of touch; we still had sex but it wasn't very

successful sex, and I think that she was rarely satisfied, so that was another feeling that added to the guilt, me thinking, 'How can I do this to her?'. I was spending so much time going to the saunas regularly, and it was affecting my work; it was affecting everything. I'm sure I wasn't easy to live with; all those things were happening, and yet I didn't want my marriage to end; I wanted this thing to go away.

The situation was generating a lot of stress which impacted his marital relations, and had a detrimental effect on his productivity at work. It was not until 1991 when one particular encounter had a significant effect on Ross:

I went to the Countrymen's Institute, and I was sitting in the spa pool, and I met this young man; I think he was 29, and I was 51. He put out his hand, and he said, 'My name is Matthew' and I said, 'I'm Ross', and I fell for him; I thought I was in love. I don't know whether I was or not but the excitement was just *enormous,* and so I kept seeing him. He was everything I'd dreamed about, and I couldn't withdraw from it; I couldn't pull back from it. Within the space of about two months I decided to leave my wife, and he said he'd live with me, and we got a flat in One Tree Hill; the craziest thing I've ever done, not in the sense that I found myself, but in how I handled it. So I came home from wor,k and I told my wife that I was leaving her – that I was gay – that I was leaving her for a man. At the age of 51 I discovered who I was, and I decided that to continue the life I was living would be to live a lie.

It was not until Ross fell in love with another man that he understood the nature and depth of his sexual orientation.

It is interesting to contrast Graham's childhood attraction to virile, booted motorcyclists with his ability in later adolescence to deny or suppress this awareness. His successful denial may be attributed to three quite salient factors: self-discipline, an interest in women and a concomitant lack of interest in men. Firstly, while at school and at university, Graham had a clear sense that homosexuality was socially proscribed

in the society that he grew up in ("illegal, irreligious and *not popular*") and incompatible with a career as a clergyman in the Anglican Church. This awareness underpinned his self-discipline in not seeking out same-sex encounters. Secondly, Graham experienced physical and emotional attraction to women, and he evidently enjoyed the sexual exploration that was considered appropriate for New Zealand in the 1950s. Thirdly, given the lack of openly gay men in Dunedin, he would not have had exposure to the sort of men he might have found attractive. The only obviously gay men in his social circles at university were effeminate thespians, and he felt no sense of sexual attraction to such men. So for these reasons, he successfully managed to avoid coming to terms with his sexual orientation in these early years. The sexual possibilities which had been foreshadowed in early adolescence were not acted on until he was in his thirties, significantly, on the other side of the world, 12,000 miles away from home. Without him necessarily being aware of it, this temporal and spatial distance enabled his first same-sex exploration. Graham did not talk much about these encounters, which would *not* have been considered appropriate behaviour for a clergyman, but he hinted that such same-sex liaisons would have been enjoyable, given the right ambiance: "I quite liked dark corners – the right sort of atmosphere – especially if there were boots." There is a suggestion of mutually satisfying sexual release, with no need for the complications of emotional commitment. Comparing these early forays into same-sex exploration with the reality of the conjugal bed, he realised that his sexual orientation was not conducive to a long-term heterosexual marriage. Graham concluded his reflection with a philosophical acceptance of his fundamental nature as a gay man.

7.9   Chapter review and summary

This was the second of four findings chapters. In this chapter, I have explored the different ways that participants came to be aware of their sexual orientation. Some were aware that they felt different from their peers, without necessarily being able to equate that with a sexual identity. Some participants revealed varying degrees of self awareness, with some harbouring secret suspicions, but not recognising themselves in the limited range of stereotypes available through popular culture. Others engaged in complex forms of denial. Given the heteronormative and heterosexist impulses which characterised social life, some of the participants developed an interest in girls and

eventually married; and for some, being in a stable heterosexual relationship provided a buffer against having to contemplate sexual orientation issues – at least for a while.

For some participants, those secret suspicious of their earlier years became more insistent, and the temptation to explore became too strong to resist. For a number of participants, any lingering doubts were dispelled through same-sex encounters. So, by the end of this chapter, each participant was clearly aware of their sexual orientation, in the sense of having acknowledged this to themselves. This awareness, and the process of coming to terms with their sexuality was not always straightforward, and in some cases, it exerted a psychological toll. Despite the psychic cost, this proved to be a necessary stage in the coming out process. The next step was disclosure.

Chapter 8 Knowing to Out

This is the third of four findings chapters. In this chapter, I focus on the process of actually coming out as a gay man, beginning with an examination of both barriers and enablers, and a consideration of salient turning points in each participant's journey.

Increasingly, since homosexual law reform in 1986, gay men have felt enabled to come out earlier, either in adolescence, or in early adulthood. However, for the participants in this study, historical circumstances, and their own life trajectories conspired to discourage them from acknowledging and disclosing their sexual orientation until much later in life. These men had spent most of their adult life in the closet before coming out so they had had decades in which to anticipate the consequences. For the more self-reflective participants, their inner thought processes were characterised by fear and confusion while for the less aware, future possibilities of same-sex liaisons were occasionally glimpsed, and always quickly averted, at least until a time when doubt and puzzlement gradually morphed into certainty. Then, associated with this more secure sense of their sexual orientation, was an inexorable logic of exploration, followed by a compulsion for honesty and openness. As Grant explained:

> I think I knew that I *had* to come out, and it was partly because I
> wanted to be really honest and open.

This desire to be "honest and open" was a unifying theme, and for each participant, involved a long, tortuous process of self-discovery and self-doubt, culminating in a decision to make public what had been up to that point, a private process of pain and privation. As Alan explained, "at some point you *have* to start telling other people". In phenomenological terms, this decision to come out can be seen as a type of 'anticipatory resoluteness' which Heidegger refers to as "the understanding that follows the call of conscience"; this suggests that in following the call, each participant becomes aware of the need to reject the demands of heteronormativity that are made on each *Dasein* by others in their social world. Heidegger goes on to observe that "together with the sober anxiety that brings us before our individualized potentiality-of-being goes the unshakable joy in this possibility" (p. 296). For most participants, the 'joy' took some time to become salient, and more immediately, the 'sober anxiety' had

to be addressed. For many gay men who were coming out during this period there was no readily accessible 'how-to' manual for guidance. Unless they were in professional counselling, these participants lacked easy access to practical lists of do's and don'ts. For some participants, the process was reasonably straightforward; for others, it was more complex. For some, being able to tell people brought immediate relief, and the news was well received; for others, the process was traumatic, and involved considerable pain, which was not unanticipated, as Peter acknowledged:

> The logical step was to come out, and I proceeded to do so in a fairly blunt and direct kind of way which produced *extraordinary crises*. Of course.

At some point in middle age, the participants in this study each made a decision to come out to somebody else. So why might they have waited until later in life to come out?

8.1 Barriers

For participants whose self-knowledge was clearer, the barriers to coming out earlier in life were too many and too extreme to contemplate surmounting. The risk-reward balance was 'out of kilter'. For example, some participants were worried about the likelihood of losing their family and being alienated from familiar social circles. They were also concerned at the prospect of discrimination at work and the likely impact on their career path; as Alan mused:

> Why rock the boat? What would be the advantage? Why *would* I want to come out? Because there's all these negative things likely to happen, and what are the positive things that are going to come out of it? And I couldn't see much positive coming out of it.

For many participants, their involvement in the Church, and their sense of religious duty was a significant barrier. From a Christian perspective, homosexuality was a mortal sin, involving the flames of everlasting hell and eternal damnation. Consequently, being gay and being a Christian were mutually exclusive. The barriers appear to have been greatest for Christians belonging to the stricter or more evangelical denominations. Given his close family ties with such a rigidly homonegative

and judgemental denomination, his deep grounding in Reformed Church theology, and his status as a role model and 'leader' within the Church community, Berend experienced unusually obdurate barriers to coming out.

For Mark, growing up as a Catholic, homosexuality had been demonised as one of the four sins "crying aloud to Heaven for vengeance". For most of his life, the doctrine of the Church could not be challenged, and had to be accepted, at least until such time as Mark had studied scriptural texts and exegeses in sufficient depth to critique both theology, and commentary, and to find some of the sexological components wanting. In Mark's case, his early indoctrination by the Church was complicated by two experiences of sexual trauma in childhood:

> They were violent and sordid and *utterly* disgusting. That is my memory of them, and I think I transferred that experience onto homosexuality because I thought, wrongly I'm sure, that these men were homosexual; well, they were paedophiles, or crazy, so that was another barrier.

Not only was Peter influenced by the strict teachings of the Brethren, an added complication was his high profile within the Church and beyond, through regular appearances on radio, television and the lecture circuit:

> I would be probably one of the best known members of the Brethren: I was a regular columnist in the Brethren magazine, I was being flown around various parts of the country to speak at events.

Also, for Peter, his life in the Brethren was not entirely his own:

> That's the way the Brethren works – there is no private space.

Graham's career as a minister in the Anglican Church was not the ideal environment in which to come out as a gay man, given the misconceptions and ignorance associated with homosexuality. However, this was not a particular issue for Graham in his early years as he was not fighting any personal demons at this point:

> I was ordained, and went to Bristol as a curate, and behaved, and felt
>
> no temptation *not* to behave; yes, it was rather more amusing going
>
> to the pub.

During his last three years as a vicar before retiring and returning to New Zealand, Graham had a boyfriend who would stay sometimes at the vicarage but as Graham was not yet out, this had to be done discreetly due to the likelihood of problems if someone in the Church had disapproved. Despite the impossibility of coming out in this context, Graham conducted the relationship on his own terms:

> I am a natural optimist; it would never strike me that this might be
>
> dangerous – it probably was in some ways – but if people did cause
>
> trouble, I would say, 'What do you intend to do about this?', and if
>
> they said they were going to write to the Bishop then I would deny
>
> that: 'He's just a good friend – and mind your own fucking business'.

For New Zealanders growing up in the 20th century, the heteronormative imperative was a pervasive and powerful force which permeated all aspects of society, reinforced by the invariant storyline from popular culture which ran along the predictably familiar lines of *boy meets girl, falls in love, and gets married*. Even for people who were unlikely to marry themselves, marriage was seen as an important institution. As Peter said, 'I think I put heterosexual marriage and faithful marriage on a very high pedestal'. One of the main barriers for many participants was a sense of duty, or of not wanting to disappoint parents' hopes. This was either implicitly understood or communicated explicitly through comments from influential family members. Chris recalled his mother's aspirations:

> Her wish was always for me to be married, and she communicated
>
> that strong desire of a woman for grandchildren.

In some cases, the expectations were even more pronounced; for example, Bevan's sister had recently come out as a lesbian, and so he had a heightened sense of his responsibility not to disappoint family expectations. He remembered a constant stream of subtle, and not so subtle, hints:

> I was under huge pressure as the sole surviving male in the family to
> continue the family line. My mother was always looking to me for
> grandchildren, and just dropping that into *way* too many
> conversations, and saying, 'This is a nice girl; why haven't you
> married her or proposed?', or, 'Don't let that one get away!'. And she
> was still running her agenda right through until when I was nearly 40.

Some participants resented this constant coercion, and interpreted it as a form of emotional blackmail. Grant expressed a sense of frustration at the practical nature of his mother's request:

> I remember my mother saying, 'When you decide to get married, and
> have a son, I'd like him to be called Peter'; hey, [angrily] what sort of
> expectation is that?!

Grant's expression of emotion during the interview was in stark contrast to his docile amenability as a younger man, even though he did, ultimately, resist the coercion to get married; however, a number of other participants succumbed to societal and familial pressure. Once married, their sense of responsibility to wife and children became paramount, and the thought of abandoning their family, anathema.

Subscribing to this heteronormative pressure to do the right thing and get married can be seen as living "inauthentically". From the earliest age, each participant has been listening to a constant stream of messages from the 'they', defaulting to the 'they-self', and ignoring the call of conscience to live towards his destiny as a gay man (Heidegger, 1953/2010, p. 293).

The greatest barrier for John was his solid marriage of over 25 years; he was content in his relationship with his wife and family, engaged in stimulating theatrical and musical endeavours, and happy with the status quo, so why would he want to come out as a gay man? The sense of being attracted to other men was slow in making itself felt, and it took an intense love affair to signal to John the nature and depth of his sexual orientation.

The greatest barrier for Gordon was his personal confusion and ignorance about sexuality in general, compounded by the evident pleasure he derived from

heterosexual relationships, and his intransigence in acknowledging his emotional and sexual response to males. Even when he was experiencing gay sex for the first time, he was reluctant to accept that he was gay.

Some participants were worried about the likelihood of being alienated from familiar social circles on disclosure of their sexual orientation. Alan was concerned at the prospect of being ostracised by his family and friends:

> My father and my brother might never speak to me again; you know, your social situation is bound to change, and you lose some friends along the way because of it. Telling someone your sexual orientation just seems to have such a massive effect on everything else on your life.

The barriers which stood in the way of gay men accepting (and sharing) their sexual orientation appear quite straightforward when written about in an academic context, calmly analysed and dispassionately set out as text on a page. However, the actual experience of living with these barriers, which would not necessarily have presented themselves as such, required an expenditure of psychic and spiritual energy which in many cases led to depression.

8.2 Psychic pain associated with having to hide sexual orientation

For some participants the process of avoidance was relatively straightforward: the effort required was minimal if there was no attraction to men, no temptation to explore; or, if there were, for example, strong career incentives against being gay. In contrast, for other participants the effort required to conceal their sexuality exacted a psychological toll.

Throughout his life, Grant had experienced psychic stress attributable to a number of factors, including tension within his family, fear of homonegative bullying from his schoolmates and a sense of not knowing who he was. Beginning in childhood, Grant experienced problems with low self-esteem, which was of concern to his parents. In later life, Grant experienced a traumatic episode when he broke off an engagement after three weeks. In this case, Grant was dealing with the psychic pain of knowing that he had hurt other people, as well as the cognitive dissonance of involving himself in

unfulfilling, unproductive heterosexual relationships, compounded by an awareness that he was attracted to men. However, he did not feel able to explore his sexuality due to an omnipresent sense of danger and a nameless, scarcely-articulated fear:

> Basically all this time I was not out, not out to anyone because it was
> dangerous, absolutely dangerous.

Grant had known from early childhood that he was attracted to men but in the absence of positive role models, or language to articulate this awareness, he felt alone and confused, especially bearing in mind the homonegative atmosphere of avoidance and antilocution which prevailed not only in the home, but in wider society. This confusion and frustration continued into adulthood, with his mother unable to discuss any aspect of homosexuality: "Even up until she died it was just not talked about". It was not until Grant was able to discuss his sexual orientation with a professional counsellor and to identify barriers to coming out that he experienced a gradual adjustment of his self-esteem:

> It's when those sorts of things are in place to keep building me up,
> and get me another inch above the ground and another inch above
> the ground and another inch above the ground …

Lacking any sort of positive role models and feeling "unsafe" with his parents, together with the accumulated fears of being bullied and worries about disappointing others, Grant inevitably developed confusion about his self-identity, which in turn led to psychological disequilibrium. His response to the negativity was to retreat inside himself, to his "own space because it's safe and comfortable, and it's the world which we can hide in". As a child, reflecting on his inner confusion, and knowing that he was his mother's favourite, but also aware that "there were things she didn't like", Grant became desperate, and cast about for solutions:

> I thought about suicide, starting in Form 2, Form 3. I just hated my
> world.

Although aware of suicide as a possibility, Grant did not want to upset his parents, and he valued his life too greatly to follow through with any practical plans. However, he did indicate an ongoing battle with depression, which "went on for a long time", and

continued into adulthood. Grant spoke of multiple pressures from various sources, and a constant battle to maintain equilibrium. Speaking of these pressures, Grant observed:

> I was doing everything I could to keep those other things down to a minimum. If they had risen to a level that was shouting at me in an emotional sense then it would have got really unbearable for me; I wouldn't have been able to cope. And then I would have been in so much pain I would have thought, well fuck this, I couldn't survive.

For some participants, the psychic pain of having spent so many years in the closet is an enduring feature of their life. Edward had known since puberty that he was gay and this awareness, coupled with denial and repression, resulted in psychological disturbance:

> It caused me some grief: I'd had episodes of depression which I was very aware of as a teenager. Being gay and suppressing my sexuality; you can't unlink those two things.

Edward identified the possibility of depression being part of his psychological make-up and not necessarily having anything to do with his sexual orientation. He characterised this as "a chicken and egg thing". He also mused on the possibility that his depression might be related to his sense of being different and to the conflict he experienced in being a gay man who was also a father, noting that he had "an episode" when he became a father for the first time.

Depression was, for Ross, associated with a constant fear that somehow, he might be that very person he had been brought up to despise – a 'homosexual' and something that every message he had received from early childhood told him was wrong. He was frightened of all that being gay entailed, realising that life would not be easy "given the attitudes of society". Reflecting on his early adulthood, Ross recalled his inner dialogue:

> I *had* had fears, and I have to call them fears because that's what they were. The fear was that I was gay; it was psychological: is this the truth? Am I gay? I'm not a gay man, I'm a heterosexual, and I want to get married and have children. And it wasn't so much a fear

of anyone knowing or finding out; it was just myself. I couldn't, or wouldn't, let myself countenance the feeling that I was gay at that point.

The issue became more urgent as Ross reached his early forties, and started to experience severe depressions which he ascribed to his increasingly intense "gay feelings". Confused, and alarmed, Ross sought help, thinking there must be "something wrong" with himself. Initially, he approached his doctor who referred him on to the counselling service. Ross ended up seeing a psychiatrist and taking anti-depressants, but nothing appeared to help either the depression, or the sexual orientation.

For a number of reasons, Mark's awareness of his sexual orientation towards other men was sublimated; he was, as he puts it, "uptight sexually". He was also emotionally repressed, and had difficulty acknowledging and responding to his feelings. A turning point appears to have been the death of Mark's father, the catalyst for an unprecedented unleashing of powerful emotions:

> I denied my emotions, and it wasn't until my father died that I experienced the pain of grief; suddenly all the emotions that had been denied or squashed simply exploded: they were there on the surface. I had *no* experience of pain until that point; I did not realise that the pain of grief can be terrifying. I have tried sometimes to articulate what that pain was like, and the only way I could think of it was as if someone took an axe to you and started to crack through your backbone: it was that kind of breaking open of my life; well it broke open my life, and that was therapeutic for me: very, very important.

Coincidentally, around this time Mark began to explore analytic psychology, which helped him to make sense of a recurring dream, a disturbing nightmare which would have been profoundly unsettling, but which he was eventually able to reinterpret with reference to Jung's notion of the anima and the integration of the anima (Young-Eisendrath & Dawson, 2008):

I began to understand a recurring dream I had had for years and years and years. In the dream there is this beautiful woman who is close to me, and I feel very close to her, and find her incredibly attractive, very beautiful. And then I strangle her. I bury her deep in the ground, and I cover over the entire area where she is buried with concrete, and I construct a building on top of it. And when I started to read Jung I suddenly realised what this was all about: yes, I do have a very strong feminine component in my personality, and this was what I was destroying. I strangled it; I buried it deep; I covered it over; I built another structure on top of it. Well, the combination of the emotional impact of my father's death and this sudden revelation gave a huge impulse to me to accept my own feminine component and love it and realise how beautiful it is.

This interpretation revealed to Mark an inner truth that he had avoided acknowledging and helped to pave the way for eventual acceptance of his sexual orientation. But the journey was not easy. Mark found it very difficult to come to terms with his sexuality, describing the long confused process of coming out as "sheer hell". Compounding the invisibility and silence was the psychic pain of social isolation, and he recalled feeling "very frightened and alone":

Honestly I do not know how I managed to get through those years.

Mark did not ever feel suicidal himself, but he well understood what it was to feel "pushed to the edge" as a result of the pressure to renounce his sexual orientation.

8.3 Enablers

For some participants, a turning point was becoming aware of the presence and extent of a counterculture. Bevan recalled that once he had self-identified as gay, he was fortunate enough to meet a gay colleague who invited him to a social function in Wellington:

It blew my mind away, attending a dinner at which I think there were only a dozen men in attendance; most, if not all, were in steady relationships and to me that was something that I had never even comprehended had existed or was feasible.

Bevan shared his impression of discovering gay bars in Wellington for the first time, in the late 1980s, noting that in those days gay bars were predominantly male domains, also that patrons tended to arrive later in the evenings than he was accustomed to:

> What was the real surprise to me is that I'd arrive – God, at 10 or 11
> pm - then people just kept coming, and so I realised they were on a
> different time clock to me [laughs]. They started later, and by the end
> of the evening I was just gobsmacked because the place was full, with
> another dance area, and probably in one evening I'd encountered
> more gay people than I'd encountered in my entire life. They had far
> better taste in music than most of the others [laughs]; so I'd go and
> *attend* and observe.

Coming to discover the unfamiliar world of the gay community involved a number of adjustments. For Bevan, one of these was understanding the different temporality associated with gay bars because at a time when many people would be getting ready for bed, the gay patrons were just beginning to arrive. Another adjustment was a clear sense of a different 'they' – a new, previously un-encountered group against which a self-identifying gay man might consider himself. As King (2001) explains, "It is for the sake of the they-self that Da-sein in the first place and for the most part exists" (p. 83). The concept of a new 'they-self' underlines the potential for a fundamentally different mode of being; in this case, a new-found gay community can be seen to provide an altered point of reference in contrast to the familiar heteronormative role models of Bevan's previous life.

The catalyst for Chris' acknowledgement was finding himself in a gay relationship a few years after he had retired from farming, and left home in the late 1990s. For many participants, leaving home and family and moving to a big city appears to have been a necessary stage in this journey of self-discovery and eventual realisation. The increased distance – both ontic and ontological – can be explored with reference to van Manen's notion of 'spatiality' (van Manen, 2014, p. 305). The physical distance provided practical opportunities for exploration, and the sense of freedom from familiar home environments enabled the next steps to be taken. This distance also

resulted in significant relational adjustments to influential family members as understood with reference to van Manen's "existential of lived relation" (p. 303).

For Peter, a change of location and moving from a provincial town to Auckland was a key factor which led to same-sex exploration, and very soon after, a process of coming out. More importantly perhaps, and a necessary condition, the theological arguments had been rebutted:

> I had recognised that much of the scriptural interpretation of the
> taboos reflected a very particular social and cultural context of
> homosexual behaviours in the classical world in which the kind of
> Christian – I'd always accepted the need for cultural interpretation of
> the scripture – I'd simply pushed that on a step further to leave room
> for a more nuanced interpretation.

In Peter's case, a new-found sense of freedom from familiar environments included both physical distance and a fresh perspective on scriptural exegesis.

For Gordon, his involvement with the gay community was an important component. However, before coming out, he had to be absolutely sure in his own mind, so his first gay sexual encounter was a critical rite of passage, as was the endorsement and encouragement of his first gay partner.

Graham had experience of both heterosexual and gay sex and, after four years of marriage, he concluded that he was, in fact, a gay man. Particular catalysts for coming out were his retirement after 30 years as an Anglican minister, falling in love with his partner, and returning to live in the country of his birth.

For Edward, it was not until he was in his late forties that he met someone who was sympathetic and in whom he felt he could confide. Edward noted the difficulty of coming out, even to another gay man, and also the significance of actually saying those words "for the very first time". It was the first step in a long, slow process of finding sympathetic mentors within the church to whom he was able to talk freely about his sexual orientation.

For Berend, a key aspect was discovering that the conceptions he had grown up with concerning gay people were incorrect. Then, as he approached middle age, he began to explore the possibility that he might actually be gay. On discovering that his own daughter was probably a lesbian, he decided that he had to become a role model for her.

After years of repression, a turning point for Mark was the death of his father and the possibility of exploring previously unfamiliar emotions. Another catalyst was the 'life-changing experience' of same-sex love in his early fifties. The adjectives and metaphors which he used suggest the intensity of the emotions: "*incredibly* marvellous"; "on cloud nine nonstop"; "feel it in my entire being".

In order to stay true to his marriage vows, Ross had sought counselling, been prescribed medication, and in desperation, had spent a year praying with the Exodus-inspired Homosexuals Anonymous prayer group, all in a vain attempt to change his sexual orientation. When he fell in love with another man, Ross came to understand that the nature and depth of this attraction was such that could not be altered. This understanding provided him with the moral courage to come out as a gay man.

For Grant, it was not until he had his first sexual encounter with another man and experienced strong feelings of love that he realised what it was to be a gay man. As he put it, the realisation "kind of blew me sideways". The adjectives and metaphors which he used are revealing: he felt "right", "completed", "different", "real", "walking on balloons", "unable to hide it".

John's journey traversed naivety and ignorance, taking in curiosity and an innocent contemplation of same-sex possibilities, all underscored by a strong sense of contentment at being happily married. The catalyst for coming out was an intense love affair following a chance encounter in the street with a handsome Latino man.

Despite extensive counselling, the process for Alan had been long and slow and even after five years of anonymous gay sex in bath houses, it was not until he overcame his fear, and experienced anal sex for the first time that he realised that he was not bisexual. His enthusiastic response to anal sex was a defining point in his journey to self-discovery:

I thought, this is bloody good; this is fine; there's nothing wrong with

this after all. And I have to say that the first time of experiencing anal

sex was a turning point for me.

This was a critical development in Alan's understanding of his sexuality: from that experience in 1999, Alan observed that his interest in women had "waned completely", to the extent that by 2002 he was unable to perform sexually with his wife at all. Heidegger talks of understanding in a number of different ways; King (2001), with reference to Division One of 'Being and Time' reminds us that "understanding … discloses possibilities by throwing them forward and throwing itself into them" (p. 159). One way to interpret Alan's growing understanding of his sexual orientation is with respect to van Manen's (2014) notion of 'corporeality'. Alan's body understood his sexual arousal better than his intellect, and as he reflected on his body's response, so he was better able to interpret this correctly as a manifestation of his sexual orientation.

8.4   Coming out: The process

Although some participants did have a strategy in mind, in many cases what unfolded was challenging, a brutal ongoing process that had a lasting effect on their sense of identity. The men who had been married developed a heightened sense of the heterosexual privilege that they were leaving behind. None of the participants had any previous training or experience in handling the reactions to their news; none was prepared for the emotions and new experiences that were waiting. Especially in the early days, each experience of coming out to a new person was significant. This section will explore how that was for the participants.

8.4.1   Seeking therapeutic talk

Gadamer (1975/2013) refers to the understanding which results from constructive dialogue as a "fusion of horizons" (p. 317). Talking is important, and talking to the right people, at the right time was an essential component of self-discovery for many of the participants. When an uncertain, questioning gay man is able to interact with a sympathetic professional (doctor, counsellor, psychologist, therapist) the professional is able to undo a great deal of the psychological damage that has been achieved

through internal processing of homonegative messages, consciously and unconsciously absorbed over a lifetime.

For Gordon, one of the catalysts for coming to consider his sexual orientation was a conversation which he had with a counsellor, who suggested that Gordon should "explore the possibility" that he was gay. This counsellor also provided practical advice in suggesting gay bookshops and nightclubs, recommendations which Gordon found useful in his journey of self-discovery.

Soon after his first gay sexual encounter in London, Ross sought help from his doctor, and was referred on to the counselling service at St Martin-in-the-Fields. This was in the 1960s, and Ross recalled the doctor as non-judgemental, "pretty open-minded and supportive". The counsellor was similarly supportive:

> His position was it was up to me; I needed to explore myself a lot
> more and decide just who I was, and then be comfortable with it.
> They weren't trying to tell me what was right or wrong, and 'you
> must do this' or 'you must do that'.

Ross was not yet ready to accept that he was gay, and so the counselling was of limited value at this time.

For Alan, the involvement of a counsellor was critical in helping him to accept the possibility that he was gay, and then instrumental in helping him to come out. At his wife's request, Alan asked the counsellor for sex therapy "to get us back on track so we'd be a happy loving couple again". However, after the second counselling session the counsellor announced that in his professional opinion, Alan was gay, and it would therefore be unprofessional to attempt any sort of sex therapy. Acknowledging Alan's shock at this news, the counsellor said he would be happy to continue with free, monthly consultations, which continued for two years until Alan was ready to come out. At this point, he requested his doctor to tell his wife on his behalf.

The process of coming out for Peter involved a great deal of unfamiliar self-reflection. Having observed that he had spent so much of his life helping others, at the expense of his own personal and sexual development, it occurred to Peter that he owed it to

himself to explore his own sexuality. But this was not without a certain amount of guilt, which he was able to work through, partly with the help of a psychologist:

> It was almost as though I was asking myself, 'What am I doing exploring sexuality?! Because I really can't *do this* because of these responsibilities that I have'. Yet the interesting thing *was* that I was never going to be free of those responsibilities. It's almost as though I had *never* given myself any time to discover myself.

Peter was introduced to a form of narrative therapy which helped him to explore different ways of understanding his own thought processes and sexual desires:

> It is actually *how* you frame things. And having done that, having explored and thought, 'of course, this all clicks into shape now; this is a part of me', the other part clicked in.

For Peter, the process of self-discovery involved not just dialogue with himself, but consultations with a psychologist and intense conversation with other gay Christians.

For Mark, an important aspect of his coming out process was participation in a series of "weekend therapeutic self-discovery workshops", which were led by a psychologist. He also participated in transactional analysis workshops. In contrast to his first experience of coming out in a Roman Catholic discussion group, Mark found these workshops very worthwhile:

> Well that kind of work is generally as good as the people who are on it, as well as the facilitator, so I made some good friends at that time who are still good friends. And we did a *huge* amount of work about anger management and self-discovery and all the other stuff that was current then; those would all be enablers, yeah.

The therapeutic value of talking to the right people, at the right time, stands in stark contrast to the psychological damage wrought by the absorption of homonegative messages over a lifetime. Some of these counselling professionals facilitated the wider coming out process. In some cases, they were the first person that a participant came out to and in others, counselling professionals were a 'one-off' strategy. For some,

involvement with counsellors has been part of an on-going process of helping participants to self-understanding and healing.

8.4.2   Coming out within the Church

From these testimonies, it is clear that gay men who are also Christians faced a singular challenge. The experiences of coming out to fellow Christians ranged from reactions of positivity and support, through embarrassed silence and avoidance, to criticism, rejection and exclusion.

Graham felt unable to come out during his curacy, given his parishioners' attitudes towards homosexuals, although when he retired, and was preparing to leave the vicarage, he held a garage sale with his partner serving behind the table. Graham's attitude was, "This is my partner, and he's going to live with me in New Zealand"; "Oh, fine!" was largely the response, although Graham suspected that "there were one or two who disapproved".

Edward was acutely aware of his need to talk to someone about his sexual orientation. However, finding a sympathetic listener was not easy, given the limited and homonegative nature of his social circle. For Edward, it was not until he was in his late forties that he was able to take the first step. His strategy was to make contact with the vicar of St Matthews-in-the City in Auckland, a Church which was known to be gay friendly, whereupon he was given the names of several possible contacts. Eventually he made contact with an openly gay Anglican priest who had insight into the particular issues facing Edward, in that he too had been married with children. Edward was well aware of the significance of being able to say the words "I am gay" to another person. As he reflected, the very fact of being able to talk freely to a sympathetic listener brought "a tremendous sense of relief". Edward's first experience of coming out within the Anglican Church was very positive.

Mark's experience of coming out was rather different. At the time, he was undertaking a two-year human development course which was run by the Roman Catholic Church. The course was facilitated by an experienced priest, and was run over weekends, with a residential component, which provided an opportunity for members of the group to

get to know each other very well and to explore challenging issues through robust debate and discussion. One day, the discussion topic was homosexuality, so Mark decided that this would be an opportune moment to come out to the group, and an ideal forum in which to explore in some depth his own experience and the Church's position; perhaps there would be some useful and empowering discussion?

> The man on my left said absolutely nothing; the man on my right –
> the priest – his response was brilliant really: it was clever, it was
> skilful, and he said: 'But that's not an issue for you, is it?', and with
> that, the subject was swept under the carpet; it just disappeared.
> There was no discussion, no comments, nothing was said; it just
> disappeared; I feel it went under the carpet; I was going to say it
> vanished into the ether.

For Mark, this response of silence and avoidance was "painful" and frustrating for two reasons: firstly, he felt that his contribution had not been acknowledged at all, and secondly, he was aware of a missed opportunity for discussion within the group based on "something real and practical" whereas previously everything had been second-hand theory, and conjecture. In terms of reaction from other group members, Mark noted that the men said nothing at all; like the priest, they preferred to ignore the issue. However, the women had a more interesting set of reactions, and one of them refused to speak to Mark at all for the remainder of the course. "She looked at me occasionally, and scowled". Another woman found Mark's coming out "hilariously funny, and on hearing Mark's statement, she laughed "quite scornfully" in disbelief. She later explained that her only previous experience of gay people was with "political lesbians". A third woman later derisively opined "all gays are a bit dumb" in that they talked about nothing except gay issues. Another woman expressed concern about the effect that this was going to have on Mark's marriage. The fifth woman was "a delight". She engaged with Mark without dramatizing or over-reacting, and she made a point of correcting the woman who had laughed about it, "putting her in her place". Since that initial self-outing, Mark has written a number of letters which have been published in the New Zealand Catholic press:

> So that's a good way of telling everybody [smiles]; not everybody, but
>
> all the Roman Catholics who buy the papers.

For Berend, coming out to friends within the Reformed Church was "upsetting" and "pretty awful", and the rejection by two of his best friends was unusually painful:

> The best man at my wedding was also a Christian guy who no longer
>
> wants anything to do with me because he feels that I've let the side
>
> down. And the guy for whom I was best man, we were really close
>
> buddies, he just refused to associate with me any longer; he sent me
>
> a letter to say being gay was just like being a kleptomaniac, and
>
> provided I was not willing to curtail my kleptomania, then he didn't
>
> want to know anything about me.

Frustrated and disappointed at the lack of understanding, Berend wrote back to his former best man, and said that he did not want to continue their friendship unless he could "find some more acceptance". Berend also pointed out that many young people commit suicide because they are unable to cope with the judgemental attitudes and homonegativity prevalent in the Christian Church. The friend did not reply. The consistent response of criticism and rejection left Berend "raw, crying a *lot*, just completely devastated". He found it painful because so many of these former companions appeared not to value Berend enough as a person to actually *listen* to him, to hear his side of the story; nor could they see how devastated he was by the moral struggle which he had undergone, compounded by the ordeal of coming out. Rather than expressing sympathy or empathy for his pain, they criticised what they saw as his perversion, his selfish behaviour and what they perceived to be lustful seeking for carnal gratification. Berend felt frustrated that people in his Church would leap to judgment rather than seeking to understand. He felt particularly upset that these same people would accuse him of living his life "as a lie", an asseveration that was hurtful and untrue. Berend acknowledged that his coming out would have been a great shock for many of his former Church friends, but was unable to understand why they have made no attempt to build bridges and restore the relationship:

> They've had 20 or 30 years to come to me and apologise and say,
>
> 'Look, we didn't realise what a deep thing this was, how important it

was for you and how hard it was for you to come to terms with it'.

They've never made any move towards me whatsoever, because it's

more comfortable for them not to, and if they can think of me as a

demon then that fits in with their religious values much better than if

I'm a genuine person.

Berend has indicated a willingness to restore the friendships, and in some cases there has been some communication, but this has tended to be superficial:

I have talked to them since, and it's polite conversation; there's

nothing deep and meaningful there anymore. As far as they're

concerned, I've sold out to the devil, and that's how it is for them. If I

haven't sold out to the devil they would have to question their

Christian beliefs.

Alan experienced a similar reaction when he came out to friends in the Catholic Church. He observed that a typical response was for people to support his former wife, and to cut off contact with him, which he felt was understandable, given that "she's the one aggrieved". He also expressed frustration at the superficial nature of the interaction on occasions when they did meet, when only phatic communion was forthcoming: "One friend said, 'We can talk about anything, but just don't talk about anything gay; I don't want to hear about anything like that'." Since coming out and separating from his wife, Alan has had virtually no contact with these former friends, and on reflection, he acknowledged the pain of that rejection: "That hurt a bit"; although to compensate for the loss of valued friends from his former life, he has since established solid friendships within the gay community:

But then all of a sudden I'm socialising now almost exclusively, or

mainly, with gay people, and they're much more supportive and

friendly and stuff than my old straight male friends were, so it's

swings and roundabouts.

Edward's next experience of coming out within the Anglican Church was less positive. In a proactive attempt to avoid misunderstandings and "Chinese whispers", he decided to come out to people in his Church "en masse", explaining that he wanted "to control

the messaging" in the sense of deciding precisely what people heard about him being gay and separating from his wife, when they heard it, and how they heard it. So, with the help of his wife, he wrote a letter which he sent simultaneously to approximately 30 people in the Church. Some of the responses were positive. For example, one woman, despite confessing to being shocked, acknowledged that until that point sexual orientation had been a purely academic notion, and she had accepted the Church's teachings unquestioningly. But now that she had been "actually confronted with a real live gay person", she was inclined to re-appraise her position.

Other responses were more disappointing, typically because individuals withdrew:

> When it came to *me*, this person, who was a pillar of the Church,
> actually didn't offer me anything at all; she had no acknowledgement
> of me. I had a sense of her avoiding me; she had nothing to say to
> me, and it didn't really make sense.

Rather than embracing an opportunity to enhance and deepen her understanding, it appears that this woman deliberately chose to ignore the *testimonio* of an openly gay person. Ironically, this individual happened to be actively engaged in the Anglican Church's discussion of same-sex issues, and had a reputation for being "forthright and assertive" in academic discussion. However, she was not interested in discussing the lived experience of being gay with any individual personally. She maintained superficially cordial relations, "but absolutely ignored the subject", including any discussion of Liz Lightfoot's book, which incidentally, includes a profile of Edward (Lightfoot, 2011). Edward expressed surprise and frustration at what he found to be a common reaction within the Anglican Church:

> It astonishes me that the Anglican Church is supposed to be having
> this conversation with itself about gay people, their place in the
> Church and how the Church responds to them; and yet, given an
> opportunity to talk to a real live gay person in their midst, these
> people completely ignored that opportunity.

Historically, the Church's lack of understanding can be ascribed to a lack of information about the counter-culture; however, there is now no shortage of information. The

motivation for *continuing* in ignorance is not difficult to discern; it is tactically advantageous for an institution to ignore arguments that are not congruent with its own frame of understanding. Linguist George Lakoff provides us with a useful way of understanding that the framing of same-sex acceptance is incompatible with the conservative Christian's 'stern parent', patriarchal 'black and white' morality, and so it is in their interest to avoid engaging with *testimonio* which challenges this frame (Lakoff, 2004).

For Peter, having decided to accept his sexual orientation, he "did not hesitate" to come out to the elders in his Church. Since moving from a provincial town to a large city, he had been increasingly frustrated with aspects of the big city "mode of being. He had observed a preoccupation with superficial appearances, or "wanting the Church to look good", at the expense of the focus on community, and that this had led to a degree of "*falsity* in the way people related". As he put it, the Church needed a way to "*connect*" better, and what better way than having to engage with his story. Peter had hoped that coming out would encourage the Church to reconsider their position; at the very least, it might promote some useful and empowering discussion. Peter expressed a degree of bemusement at the response:

> I got a phone call from one of the leading elders of the Church, and
> he said: 'Don't do it Peter; it's not too late; stop; go back; we all knew
> you were gay; all you have to do is just not say anything about it; all
> you have to do is just *keep quiet*, because you'll just destroy an
> *extraordinary* ministry by which you've helped so many people, and
> you've *changed* so many of these people's lives; you'll *undo* it; you'll
> *muck people up*; I've seen this sort of thing happen in the past; we
> *mustn't* allow this to happen.'

Having hoped to challenge some of the "falsity" which appeared to characterise this denomination, this response merely reinforced the preoccupation with superficial appearances. Again, the reaction signalled a complete lack of interest in engaging in substantive discussion on an important issue, and a continuation of the Church's deliberate ignorance, an attitude which has resulted in significant numbers of people leaving the Christian Church and from all denominations. Peter noted that he had

"paid a very high price" in that he had been excommunicated, and had had to "reconstruct" his world. But despite the challenges, he had no doubts about the rightness of his actions, for himself, and for his Church: "I had a very strong sense of mission that this is what I owed it to my own self to do". As a result of his coming out, Peter has observed some confusion among his Christian friends:

> Almost all the conservative theologians are friends of mine, and they
> are a bit perplexed about how best to approach this issue so I think
> I've made it impossible.

A number of participants felt moved to challenge aspects of Church orthodoxy; for example, soon after Gordon had come out he attended a gay support group which was run by a practising Catholic priest. In one of the early sessions, Gordon openly conjectured that the Messiah was unlikely to have been heterosexual, noting that certain aspects of his behaviour appeared to be "not uncommon with gay people", and citing Christ's preference for the company of men, the fact that he did not marry, and that he had a favourite man for whom he held "a special love". This suggestion was not well received by the priest:

> He was utterly furious that I had blasphemed. Well, I don't see it as
> blaspheming at all! Why should it be derogatory? [laughs]. No reason
> at all. I think he had a very serious problem that he had to deal with
> before he could become a support group leader for gay people.
> [laughs]. He didn't want me to attend again.

8.4.3   Coming out to wife

Marriage as an institution was taken very seriously by the participants who married, and they expressed a keen sense of responsibility to their wives and children. For each participant, being married was one of the main barriers to coming out. Having acknowledged his sexual orientation, at some point it became inevitable that each man would have to tell his wife, no matter how painful this was for either party. In every case, the participant first had to explore this with another person. In one case, another person was asked to do the actual coming out. For Alan, this person was the doctor who had provided counselling:

He told my wife that I was gay, and there was nothing I could do

about it, and it didn't mean I loved her any less.

Alan was grateful that the actual 'outing' could be done by a medical professional, who was able to bring an objective element into the discussion, and who was better prepared to handle the emotional response, given the likelihood of both parties being upset. Alan's wife indicated that "she had kind of suspected", and after a period of adjustment, they worked through an amicable separation. They remain friends.

Edward had sought guidance, and after some months of preparing himself mentally and emotionally, he "plucked up the courage" to sit down with his wife to tell her that he was gay. He remembered that occasion vividly:

A beautiful sunny day, in Wellington in the middle of winter, an

absolutely gorgeous day. The children weren't round; our daughter

was playing with a friend, our son was asleep on the couch. I made a

cup of tea, and we sat on the bed, and I remember saying that I loved

her very much; it wasn't that I didn't want to be married to her, but

that I had come to the realisation that I was fundamentally gay.

Edward remembers his wife taking in the news very calmly, even though it was "an enormous shock" to her. She also realised that so many things she didn't understand "suddenly made complete sense" to her. Despite his wife's calm acceptance of the situation, they both found the experience "pretty traumatic", and Edward recalls his wife "shivering", and clearly in a state of shock when she went to bed that night. Edward too was in a state of shock at the enormity and finality of what he had just done:

I have a very clear memory of walking through Wellington the next

day, and just saying to myself over and over again, 'I've just told my

wife that I'm gay and I can't take that back; I can't change that, and

it's going to have, presumably, *huge* consequences', you know I

didn't really understand what they would be yet.

Edward was at this point only dimly aware of "the cost", and of how much he would have to give up in terms of family life, heterosexual identity, status in the Church, and

respect in the community. After getting over her shock, his wife explained that notwithstanding the strong love they still had for each other, she did not want to be married to a gay man, and that they "both deserved better". He noted that despite the amount of pain his revelation had caused his wife, she responded with a generosity of spirit, a practical sense of wanting to maintain cordial relations and a fierce sense of loyalty in the sense of being his "staunchest ally and supporter".

As a happily married heterosexual man, Berend had always been very open and honest with his wife about how he felt and how he thought, and he had confided in her his feelings "towards the male sexual parts". So she was aware that he was "turned on by men in that sort of sense sexually", even though he had never acted on any of these feelings. Berend's wife was a psychologist. One day, in the mid-1980s she attended a sexology lecture delivered by a gay man, and in the course of the presentation she recognised the likely sexual orientation of her husband. She arrived home after the lecture, and said to her husband, "I know what you are: you're gay", to which Berend was "pretty aghast". He was not receptive to hearing that opinion: "That was the last thing I wanted to be". The immediate aftermath of that discussion was that Berend became "more open to looking at the situation" given that the mid-1980s were a time of sexual liberalisation, and that one day his wife announced that she wanted to explore her sexuality more via relations with another man. With homosexual law reform debates circulating in the background, and a societal reappraisal of homosexuality, Berend replied that if she did that, then he would explore *his* sexuality, "and it's not going to be with another woman, but it will be with another man". Having indicated his intention to explore same-sex relations, Berend discovered, with dismay, that his wife felt that she could not remain married to a gay man:

> We had a good relationship; we had a good sex life; it's the person
> you're in love with, and that's the most important thing, and whether
> they're male or female is not so important.

Berend felt that with commitment and understanding on both sides, that the marriage could have endured; however, the practical effect of coming out to his wife was that they ended up first separating, then divorcing. Separation and divorce was the logical outcome for each participant, although there was not any great sense of urgency for

some of the participants. John's wife recognised the inevitability of separating, but not immediately:

> However, we managed to talk our way through it, and sort it out, and
> remain together as a family, even though we were going to separate,
> this was after a length of time; eventually it was agreed: my wife said
> to me, 'I think we should now split the house, and go our separate
> ways', so that's what we did.

For a participant with children, having acknowledged his sexual orientation to his wife, the next step was to tell the children.

8.4.4   Coming out to children

Coming out to children provoked a range of different responses, ranging from surprise, amusement and affirmation through to shock, anger and tears. These negative reactions derived, in some cases, from concern that the family would be broken up, and in other cases, from anger at what was perceived as betrayal.

For some participants, the experience of coming out to their children was relatively straightforward. Mark came out to his two sons when they were about 10 or 11 years old, very shortly after the focus group meeting. His elder son replied in a way that affirmed his love for his father: when told that his father was gay he said, "No you're not – you're my Dad!" The younger son responded with amusement:

> He smiled, and he didn't say anything at that point; he was amused;
> he didn't say anything then, but we have since talked about being
> gay, quite openly, and he has brought up the subject from time to
> time, and he is completely relaxed about it.

They were children at the time of this discussion, and it was highly gratifying for Mark to reflect on how well they accepted the news on that occasion, and on how well they have adjusted since. However, not all children accept the news with equanimity. The experience of having to tell their children that their father is a gay man is one of the most difficult discussions a man is likely to have, and the impact on those interpersonal relationships can be long-lasting.

Ross did not want his wife to have to tell the children, so he told them himself, arranging to see his son and daughter separately. He first spent some time with his daughter (who was then 17 or 18), and on receiving the news she cried for three hours. Ross attempted to explain to her what his sexual orientation meant, and that he had no control of this. But his attempts to console her were in vain as she (rightly) suspected that this announcement prefigured the end of her parents' marriage and a constrained family dynamic thereafter. Next, Ross spent some time with his son who was slightly older, and at first he said nothing. Then he became distraught, crying at length, and refusing to be placated. Eventually he became uncommunicative, saying that he did not want to talk about this topic at all, and finally he shouted, "Get out! Get out of our house!" and, "How could you do this to us?!". From that time on, Ross's son has refused to have any contact with his father:

> It sort of hurts a bit that he's taken such a hostile attitude to me and doesn't want to know me all these years later. It saddens me, that I don't have a relationship with my son because I still love him dearly, and it hurts, but there's nothing I can do about that, and he's got to live his life the way he wants.

Ross recognises that there is nothing which he can do at this point to improve the dynamic. He has written to his son on a number of occasions since that day in 1991, however father and son remain estranged.

In the lead-up to coming out, John's sons were aware that "things were going off", and they had expressed surprise at their father having brought home a couple of people who were "just a little odd", not people John had had relationships with but, from the sons' perspectives, an indicator that something had changed in their parents' relationship. "Just the fact that they were there made them think". By the time John came out, both his sons were adult, and one son did not react at all positively to the news:

> He was very protective of his mother, and he had severe doubts; he was horrified. He didn't really want to have anything to do with me, or speak to me. He was courteous but very, very hurt and upset at what I'd done.

The other son's reaction was more accepting. He was living overseas at the time, and involved in the theatre, where, John observed, it was likely that he would have had interactions with gay people in the theatre he worked with, and was therefore more tolerant.

It is possible that the difficulties of adjusting to the news of a gay father are greater for older children, given that the shock is more pronounced. Younger children might have been distraught on first hearing the news, but, with less experience of life, they more quickly accommodate to the new arrangements. Older children who are less tolerant have had longer to build up their own framework of sexual prejudice, and for these people, the sense of hurt and betrayal is more profound.

Alan found that coming out to his two sons was relatively straightforward, although "there were a lot of tears to start with". Alan's wife insisted that they tell the boys as a pre-emptive strategy to avoid "word of the grapevine, gossip, all these kinds of things". So they arranged to go away to a nearby town for the weekend, and over dinner on the first night, Alan made the announcement:

> 'Oh, we've got something to tell you: You've got a gay Dad', and my
> 14 year old immediately burst into tears, and said, 'Are you going to
> get divorced?'

Alan recalled being stunned at this response, indicating surprise that his sons would be so aware of the implications, and he hastened to reassure the boys that their parents still loved each other, that they would "sort something out", and that they would remain good friends. However, the boys were obviously upset in contemplating how this news might impact their day to day life and ongoing security as a family unit.

After having come out to his wife, Edward knew that the next step was to tell his children, who were aged about 9 or 10. He remembers the family group sitting at the kitchen table on a Sunday evening and a sense of solemnity as he announced that he had something to tell them. Both children became "quiet and very tearful, upset and not saying very much at all". The atmosphere was unusually tense and the whole experience "awful really – it was dreadful". Part of the difficulty was not knowing how much or how little would be appropriate to share with them, bearing in mind that

they were children and that discussions about sexuality tend to be uncomfortable at the best of times, given the cultural taboos and sensitivities in place. Edward recalls that the communication was relatively one-sided:

> They're not comfortable any more than I am talking about personal
> stuff, and so I wasn't barraged with questions or anything like that,
> and it's just been a little bit difficult to know. I don't talk about it a
> great deal because parents don't talk to their kids about their
> sexuality; I mean most parents don't ever have to talk about that
> stuff with their kids, and so – yeah I have struggled a little bit with
> how much or how little to say to them.

Edward was aware of "the enormous impact" that this news has had on his children, and of the possibility that they may have issues that they will have to deal with in the future. However, he also observed that his children are growing up in a different generation where sexual orientation does not carry all the negative connotations of previous generations and for their friends it may be "a point of difference to have a parent who is gay". He has been impressed with how well they have adjusted to having a gay father: "it is just not an issue with them, and as far as I know not for any of their friends either". Edward expressed a cautious note of optimism for the future:

> So let's hope that my generation is just about the last generation
> ever where people feel that they have to suppress their sexuality and
> end up having to tell their children as I had to.

Berend expressed concern about coming out to his children because he was unsure of the response and worried about losing them, but they have both been very supportive:

> An 11 year old daughter who says: 'I don't care what you are or who
> you are; I'll always look up to you' is just [laughs] really soothing to
> hear.

For Berend, one of the catalysts for coming out was an instinctual awareness of his daughter's likely sexual orientation, and his sense that coming out to her would be effective role-modelling, given her persona as "a real tomboy", inclined to more physical activities and struggling to behave "like a girl":

> I didn't know where she was at or what was going on in her life but I
>
> did feel at the time that whatever *I* was going through would help her
>
> if I was open and honest about it.

Berend noted that the discussion he had with her about being gay was "very positive from her angle", and he noted that she had always been very confident of who she was, not worrying about stereotypes or of what society expected of her:

> I mean whether she ever came out or not is another matter [laughs];
>
> she was always herself, so in some ways it was not an issue for her.

Given the differing dynamics of interaction, participants approached the coming out to their wives and to their children in a variety of ways. The approach to coming out to their parents was different again.

8.4.5   Coming out to parents

For some participants, the process of coming out to their parents was extraordinarily challenging; for others, relatively straightforward. Some participants did not feel comfortable coming out while their parents were alive, and waited until after they had died. Some participants lived their lives as openly gay men, but did not volunteer the information in explicit terms. In such cases, either a parent would ask a direct question, or the issue would be left hanging, as an embarrassing topic to be avoided. The responses also varied, ranging from sympathetic understanding, through to expressions of confusion and disappointment. In some cases, parents broke off contact with their gay son, at least for a time.

Gordon found that coming out to his parents was very "straightforward" because he had always endeavoured to be frank and open with people, and he felt that he was presenting "just the real me that I had tried to be all along". The catalyst for coming out was having attended one of Auckland's first Pride marches and realising that his parents might see coverage of the event on the evening television news. His mother's immediate reaction was to blame herself, and to ask: "Was that something we did?". To which Gordon replied, "No, not at all". But on reflection, he realised that his parents' marital relationship was dysfunctional, and he pondered on the possibility

that he might have recognised his own sexuality earlier if they had provided him with a clearer point of comparison:

> If they had given me an example, a model of a working, loving,
>
> sexual, emotional, heterosexual relationship I would have known
>
> earlier that that wasn't quite me.

The reaction of Gordon's father was very different: some days later, in an attempt to show his son that he understood, he confided "very embarrassedly" that he had had "a gay encounter" with another soldier during the Second World War. Gordon acknowledged that this disclosure was a generous gesture on his father's part, in that it was obviously difficult for him to reveal, for the first time, such intimate details of his personal life. Gordon felt slightly uncomfortable about this discussion, and later wondered whether his father might not also have been gay, but unable to come out given the societal proscriptions of his era.

Grant's father died before Grant was able to come out to him, but he was determined to come out to his mother, despite her "homophobia" and her resistance to discussing his sexuality. Grant referred to the "armour that she had" which ensured that they "never talked about this whole thing". Grant decided that the best practical way to initiate a discussion was to write her a letter explaining how he felt, the struggles he had undergone and how important it was that she should accept him for the person that he was. Aware of the life-changing impact this announcement would have on his mother, Grant hesitated before posting the letter:

> It took me a few days to mail it [smiles]; I had it sitting around: got to
>
> mail it – can't mail it – got to mail it – can't mail it - got to mail it –
>
> can't mail it – and then finally I put it in – put it in the mail, and it
>
> took a few days to arrive. Mum would usually write every few days;
>
> I'd get a letter from her every few days. And then there was a gap.
>
> Eventually, I did get a letter, and, [pause] her response was, 'I don't
>
> understand'; that was all she could say.

Far from being the catalyst to initiate a discussion, this announcement receded into the background, and his sexuality remained an embarrassing topic, by tacit agreement

to be avoided. As Grant observed, "even up until she died it was just not talked about", even when Grant was openly living with his first gay partner. The only oblique reference to his sexuality came some time afterwards when Grant left this partner:

> I kicked him out. Now, part of the thing was that when he left, my
> mother said, 'Well, now you've got that out of your system!', and I
> thought, 'I wonder where that came from?', so she obviously saw this
> as something that I'd like to try, and it didn't work so that was ok, she
> could breathe a sigh of relief now that everything was ok. According
> to her, this was a phase I was going through.

Despite his evident love for his mother, Grant found her reluctance to engage in discussion intensely frustrating. However, when he was in his late forties, Grant started a long-term relationship with a man named Ray, and he observed that the strength of this relationship heralded a new dynamic with his family. After getting to know Grant's new partner, Grant's mother did eventually moderate her attitude:

> Mum and I never really talked about the *gay stuff,* and in some way it
> was like sticking your head out of the closet all the time with her
> [smiling]; and it wasn't until I was involved with Ray (and then Ray
> became 'my special friend') that – she never actually said that she
> accepted the whole thing, but she totally accepted Ray as my
> partner.

Grant expressed surprise that his mother could so dramatically adjust her stance, but she trusted Ray, and while she remained unable to discuss sexuality, she was comforted that her favourite son was being looked after and happy in a stable relationship.

Chris recalled that coming out to his mother was in response to a direct question from her. He had started a relationship when he was 44, and over the next two years following that, his mother came and visited and stayed with the couple on several occasions. Then, in 2000, his mother had come up for a week's holiday, and stayed with them. It was the Saturday morning phone call a day or two after she had gone back that Chris came out:

> It was really more her asking me if I was gay, and me saying I was. I
> guess she had been aware of it for quite a while but it just hadn't
> been discussed. From her point of view I think she had a hope that I
> would *change*, and so it was better for her not to discuss it, because
> her wish was always for me to be married and that strong desire of a
> woman for grandchildren.

She was unhappy, and Chris remembered that his coming out resulted in a certain cooling of relations: "We didn't have many phone calls for the next seven or eight months; in a way we fell out". Chris did not want to cause his mother any unhappiness, and he was aware of her disappointed expectations, but he was relieved "to be saying the words" and to have established clear understanding of his relationship, on his own terms.

Bevan's parents had had 14 years to absorb the shock of his sister coming out as a lesbian, and were somewhat surprised when he, too came out. Bevan had known for some years that he was gay, but decided that he was not going to inform the rest of his family until he was in a stable relationship with someone whom he could introduce to the family as his partner. The actual coming out was in response to a medical emergency which required Bevan to rush off overseas to the bedside of his boyfriend who had been put on life support:

> So, when the family saw me drop everything, leave a career behind,
> and disappear halfway across the globe to South America, they knew
> that it was something important. They then realised very quickly
> what the situation was, and wanted to learn about *who* this person
> was, what they meant to me, and everything associated with that.

Bevan reflected on the immediate response of each parent, noting first the unrestrained acceptance of his father, in contrast to the more measured reaction of his mother:

> Dad was really, really pleased for me that that I had found someone
> in my life that I could be intimate with, share with, and be myself
> with; yeah, and it wasn't words, it was just emotion and

understanding and empathy, and his facial expression and, you know,

putting his arm on my shoulder, and it was business as usual; that

was him to a tee. And I'd say that my mother was more analytical:

'Woops that's three grandchildren that I'm not going to have'

[laughs]; you could see her mulling through the consequences of this.

Berend's experience of coming out to his family was overwhelmingly negative. His father had already died by this point, but one practical consequence of coming out was not being invited to his mother's wedding when she remarried.

Alan's father was approaching his 80th birthday when he received the news, and he did not take it well: "He was in tears straightaway", his initial concern being for Alan's wife and family - "And oh, what's happening with her and the boys - and how are they going to manage?". And then some weeks later he rang Alan back, expressing consternation about his [in]ability to explain the situation to his extended family in England:

> He was even more upset because he realised he'd been put in a
>
> position over there at having to tell all the aunts and uncles and
>
> other people who will be ringing in to say, 'What's happening with
>
> Alan, and why are they splitting up? Why? What's happened?'

Alan's response was to arrange a trip to England for a joint birthday celebration, and then at the end of the trip he travelled around and told all his family members that he was coming out and living as a gay man. At this point, he asked each person not to speak to his father about it because it would upset him: "He's got nothing else to add to it, and he doesn't know any more than you do". Alan's father was relieved that he did not have to do any explaining, but his initial response was bemusement and bewilderment at this strange news:

> He had never mixed with anyone in the gay world so he couldn't
>
> believe it; he said, 'You know, we thought you were the perfect
>
> couple'; and, 'Why would you choose to do this?'. But although he
>
> asked me all these questions, he wasn't prepared to talk about it; he
>
> didn't *want* to hear about it, and so he shut down.

Alan did not return to England for another three years, and on his next visit, he was pleasantly surprised to discover that his father had come to terms with having a gay son. He had had three years to discuss this with various family members, and had seen how Alan's ex-wife and boys were coping: "He was *completely* ok with it".

Graham made a decision to come out to his family in his late 50s when he fell in love with his German partner, and was about to retire. He told his siblings, but decided not to tell his mother ("it seemed no point"). However, she met his partner at various social occasions including going out to lunch or coffee, and she appeared to be well aware of the nature of the relationship without it having been explicitly discussed:

> She referred to him to other members of the family as 'that man that
> Graham goes around with' [laughs].

John was cautiously optimistic that his mother would not be particularly fazed by the announcement, but having observed his father's attitude towards homosexuality over the years, John had an intuitive sense that coming out would not be received with a positive reception. In fact, he described the process as something of a non-event:

> It was very informal. I did not come out to my father at all; my father
> did not really acknowledge - and still doesn't really acknowledge -
> that I am gay in any other way. He sort of has the illusion that I was
> going to live with my partner now in this house, and we are just very
> good friends.

In contrast, John's mother went to visit him, and listened sympathetically to his explanation as to why he and his wife were separating, and conveyed that she *did* understand. She was very good about it, and discussed the situation calmly and frankly.

Mark did not feel able to come out to his father:

> I could *not* come out while he was alive because I knew that he would
> have been shocked – horrified; the term that was used in Ireland at
> that time was 'Nancy boy', and it would have bothered him.

Peter's parents died at the time in his life when he was coming out, and at the request of his siblings he did not come out to his parents. As he described it, his brothers "forbade" him to tell them. One complication was that his mother had Alzheimer's, and understandably, Peter did not want to further burden his parents at this time.

8.4.6   Coming out to siblings

Grant's siblings were neither interested, nor particularly sympathetic. His younger brother had the attitude that Grant's sexuality was none of his business:

> He didn't really want to know; he didn't care: 'If that's your choice, that's your choice; it's fine with me'.

At least his brother's response was not directly hostile while in contrast, Grant's sister expressed disappointment and withdrawal:

> My being gay wasn't something she looked on as being very favourable; she referred to people as 'poofs' and all the derogatory terms you can think of, and the fact that her brother was one! She didn't want that, so her attitude was, you know, 'Don't really want to know about this'. I guess in some ways it felt like I was in a hostile family [laughs].

Graham told his siblings by email, and noted that the responses were slightly different for each of them:

> My elder sister lived in London, so it was easy enough to arrange an introduction by way of coming out. I just said to her, 'I've got a very nice German friend and I'm bringing him to lunch, and we may well be living together'; and so we had lunch, and she was perfectly accepting of it, no problem; after all, it was bloody London in the late 90s [laughs]. Then I wrote to my younger sister, who had more difficulty with it, I think. Then to my brother and his wife; I said, 'Oh by the way, I've fallen in love with a German, a man; now sit down and have a nice cup of tea' [laughs]; and back came an email very quickly: 'Fuck the tea, we've opened a bottle of champagne!' so that

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was good. And when we came back in 2004, the day after we landed

there was a big family party so all the extended family met him.

Mark came out to his siblings by letter in 1989, receiving replies from six, of which two were written in a positive way, and three less so. One brother, who was 73 at the time replied by saying, "Well I've known that for 20 years, so no big deal for me". Then a younger brother, 64 at that time, wrote an unusually long letter:

> I think there were five pages; he was very affirming and positive and
> supportive and sympathetic and brotherly; I found that letter very
> comforting because he *wasn't* a great letter writer; he has since died.

One of Mark's sisters, then 69, wrote in a similarly understanding way; she had been a hospital nurse for many years, and would have had to come to terms with a number of issues that perhaps the other sisters had not. Three of Mark's sisters did not respond positively to the news:

> One of my sisters simply didn't believe it. Another (who was 60 at the
> time) treated it rather like a joke – she was inclined to treat serious
> things humorously. And another, well, she had all her life remained in
> Ireland; she was a very good, traditional, Roman Catholic, and she
> had the traditional, Roman Catholic reaction, which is probably
> indescribable [smiles]. Perhaps she was concerned that I might have
> been engaging in homosexual activity, and usually this would mean
> something appalling, like I'd go to hell – along those lines.

For Mark, coming out to his family was important because he wanted to be a positive role model; he was aware that of his 30 nephews and nieces, there was a good likelihood for at least one to be gay, and Mark wanted them to know that "it was all right – that their Uncle Mark was also gay". In fact, Mark knew of at least one nephew who *was* gay, and whose life "unfortunately, has not been a happy one", partly because he was separated from his sisters.

Berend knew that coming out to his siblings would be difficult, and indeed, they were "shocked", partly because "they didn't move in the sorts of circles that accepted gays". Some of the responses were well-intentioned, but mis-informed; one brother

appeared to think that for Berend, this was a temporary aberration. He promised to send an airfare for Berend to travel to Queensland to see a psychiatrist:

> This would 'help sort me out'. Perhaps I was just going through a
> phase, and if I didn't 'do too much' then I would come out of it again;
> he appeared to assume that this is the latest trendy thing to be and
> do, so a complete non-understanding of the trauma and the terrible
> change that I had to make in my own life in order to accept myself;
> no acceptance of that at all. It was all about sex and an assumption
> that perhaps I had lost my way - when coming out had *nothing* to do
> with sex.

On another occasion, he was travelling to Holland to see his sister, and relieved because "she understood gays"; but when Berend mentioned that his partner was in Holland at the same time, and was hoping to visit, she showed another side of her personality:

> She was completely freaking out and saying there was no way I was
> allowed to do that, and it would traumatise the children, and she was
> trying to bring them up in a good Christian way, and this would just
> turn their world upside down, and they couldn't cope and accept
> that, and I'd be showing them the way not to go – the way that she
> had sort of made up for her kids.

This episode was particularly unsettling for Berend as he had confidently assumed that the dynamic between him and his sister would "come right" given the strength of their relationship in the past. Eventually, the familiar dynamic *was* restored, but "it was certainly quite awful at the time". Another issue which irritated Berend was when he was participating in a men's group, and somehow, his sister came to the conclusion that the personal growth meetings were a front for something quite different:

> She thought that we were just meeting to swap keys, and then we
> would have sex with whoever's key we had. *Why* would she come to
> that conclusion? It's a men's group who were talking about their
> difficulties in life, their difficulties in relationships, their difficulties

with *themselves*; it had absolutely nothing to do with sex. Why

suddenly come to this sort of conclusion? I mean what is *wrong* with

people like this [laughs], that they immediately they think that

there's something sexual going on?

Berend well knows the answer to these rhetorical questions: the demonizing of

homosexuality is a big part of why it took him until his late middle age to come out

himself. Over time, Berend observed that relations with his siblings have improved,

and that they accept his partner, and are "very loving and caring".

The first person whom Bevan came out to was his elder brother. The occasion was

slightly unusual in that his brother had been diagnosed with terminal cancer, and had

come back to New Zealand for treatment. Bevan recalled an evening ("doing the

bedside duty") when they started to discuss a number of issues, including the fact that

his brother had known a number of gay people while living in England. Bevan recalled

the conversation in Christchurch hospital at 4 o'clock in the morning:

> It was the first time I'd mentioned it, and I sort of had a feeling I
>
> might not have another chance; and he just looked at me, and knew
>
> exactly what I wanted to say, and said, 'You don't need to go any
>
> further; I understand, and no issues'. And so that was the first person
>
> I'd actually raised it with, and he was dead six hours later; so I
>
> suppose for me it was a no-risk coming out [laughs].

The first sibling whom Peter came out to was his youngest brother, who had

incidentally come out himself as gay, some years previously. Peter, having experienced

his first gay sexual experience, decided to broach the topic by asking his brother a

technical question:

> I was puzzled by the fact that the full extent of arousal sort of didn't
>
> kind of work as tidily as I'd have thought it would; anyone with any
>
> sexual experience knows that you can't always guarantee that kind of
>
> thing, so I had a very practical issue that I wanted to ask him about,
>
> and then just explore some of the context. I think he was initially a
>
> little bit *bemused* by this very strange direct question that I wanted

to ask, but it was *part* of the whole puzzle of coming out, almost as if I found it easier to deal with the technical side of it initially, in order to think through the implications – before I could start thinking of the bigger meaning of what had happened.

Ross came out to his brother, "a conservative farmer", by letter:

My brother's reaction was to get into the car and drive to Auckland to comfort my wife, but he made no contact with me. I don't think he has *ever* mentioned the issue. Later, all he said to me – and he wasn't a religious man – he said, 'Have you forgotten your wedding vows: "… for richer, for poorer, 'til death … in sickness and in health …"; how can you do this? It doesn't matter who you are, how can you do this to Anne and to the children?'

Ross's sister-in-law "who was also very conservative" wrote "the most beautiful letter" in which she said that his being gay made no difference to her, and she hoped that they would continue cordial relations, which they have. Ross's brother has never since raised the issue of his being gay.

8.4.7   Coming out to extended family members

Gordon developed increasing confidence about being gay, and quickly saw himself as a role model for his nephews, given that he comes from a large extended family with only one other openly gay member out of over 100. However, this coming out was not universally well-received. For example, Gordon recalled receiving a visit soon after from one of his nephews, whom he described as "very strongly religious in a fairly fundamentalist way". This nephew saw this visit as a form of religious outreach "that he felt compelled to do for the sake of God". He told Gordon why he disapproved of homosexuality, and started quoting the scriptures. However, by this stage of his life, Gordon was much more assured of his position:

I'm very well versed with the Bible, and its origins, and put him in his place fairly quickly – and gave him some more to think about. This nephew had a fundamentalist indoctrination of the Bible, and I had much broader background knowledge. So the discussion was fairly

short actually, and I think I had undermined his security of what the

Bible meant to him, and he went away with that to think about.

Ross described a painful episode when he came out to his parents-in-law. They lived in a different town so he wrote to them to announce that he was leaving his wife, and why. In return he received a letter from his mother-in-law which expressed her shock and sadness, but beyond that Ross did not feel it was an unkind letter:

> Eventually, on the odd occasion when I met her mother, she was very
>
> nice to me, and polite to me; she never turned on me, or attacked
>
> me, or criticised me, or anything like that.

In contrast, his father-in-law was furious, and effectively "disowned" him:

> He just thought I was the lowest life form ever, and he would not be
>
> in the same room; in fact, they threatened not to come to my
>
> daughters' wedding, but they did come to the church. They didn't
>
> speak to me, and then they just left; they wouldn't go to the
>
> reception. Her mother wanted to, but her father just couldn't forgive
>
> me for what I'd done to his daughter.

8.4.8 Coming out to friends

When Ross decided to come out, he took a week to write out a list of the people who were important to him in his life – apart from his family – and he telephoned each person: "male, female, couples, single people, told them who I was". He recalled visiting one of his oldest friends, a man who had been his best man at their wedding, and Ross at *his* wedding. They arranged to meet in town, and by this stage Ross described himself as "a nervous wreck", especially bearing in mind the response he had received from his father-in-law. Ross was comforted to be told: "Don't worry, we still love you; you must do what you must do, and you must be who you are". He observed that whilst people were understandably sad that the marriage was ending, his friends were "generally, without exception, all quite supportive". Ross also mentioned that when he came out, "nobody knew", which he found surprising: "Almost without exception nobody ever suspected I was gay".

Grant finished his degree in the early 1990s, and went back to his home town to live with his mother for a year, and around that time he visited friends in Hawkes Bay:

> I came out to Peter and Tina and said, 'Well I'm gay'. Peter is what one would call a rough diamond, but with a heart of gold; just a really nice guy. I told them I was gay, both of them together, and their reaction was: 'Well, we'd still have you as a babysitter'. And afterwards I thought that had interesting connotations because the thing about paedophiles – which are not gay men - but the fact that they said that they'd still be willing to have me as their babysitter was like – they saw things. And then, Peter mentioned that when he was at school – or had just left school – they would beat up homosexuals [pause] so this is gay bashing stuff, and he told me about this, and he said he actually is really sorry that he *did* that – but – [laughs] 'and you turn out to be gay' [laughs], and it turns out to be very interesting; it's quite ironical, from his perspective.

In addition to casting light on a common misconception, equating gay men to paedophiles, this was an interesting discussion on a number of counts. Firstly, the news came as a surprise to Peter and Tina; secondly, Grant discovered that his friend had been involved in gay bashing. Peter's motivation remains unclear, and this topic was not explored beyond Peter having expressed regret for his action. Being able to talk frankly and in a safe environment was an important aspect for Grant: "I needed to talk to someone so I was safe" and, as part of the process, he needed to come out to other friends. Emboldened by this positive response, he visited other former school friends in Hawkes Bay:

> I came out to Kerry and Kathy one evening when we were about to go to bed; I dropped the 'H bomb' [laughs], and they said, 'We've never come across anyone who's gay – we've read about it in our reading for work and so on', because they're both school teachers. And so they started asking all sorts of questions: 'How did you know?', 'When did you know?' I don't think they asked what we actually did, but it was really interesting; they wanted to find out as

much as they *could,* and then, for a long time I was the only gay

person they knew [laughs]. In some ways, for both Peter and Tina

and for Kathy and Kerry, it opened up their minds and their eyes.

Grant was reassured to discover that these people had a positive response to his revelation, and that they still cared about him as a friend, in spite of his sexuality. He was also pleased to reflect that by coming out he was helping to enrich *their* understanding of diversity, especially since as teachers, their sphere of influence would be wider.

Although Berend found that his Christian friends were harshly judgemental, his experience of coming out to non-Christian friends was mostly unproblematic: "They were fine, they were open and accepting - most of them anyway". Berend took care in coming out to explain that his sexual orientation was not some self-indulgent experiment, but an essential part of his fundamental nature:

This is who I am. And sexually I wasn't a rampant homosexual

[laughs]; it wasn't about doing all sorts of things sexually; it was an

exploration and acceptance of my own gay status, and that was the

hard thing: it was accepting who I was, how I was created, how I was

made, and who I was meant to be; and not to live my life according

to some plan that somebody else had for me. This is *not* just the

latest trend, and this is *not* just because I want to get my rocks off.

This is because of who I am, and I need to accept myself. You don't

choose to be straight, and it's not something you *learn* to be [laughs],

like I don't choose to be gay; it's just who I am, and what comes

natural for me doesn't come natural for you.

Gordon has made a point of coming out to people he knows in groups that he associates with, which he sees as a part of his "mission". For example, he plays badminton with a group of mainly Indians:

I don't come out in groups like that straight away but I'll wait until

I've earned respect as a person, and then I have no qualms about

telling, especially young people, that I'm gay, with the intention of

shattering their stereotypes (if they've got them); that somebody
that they've come to like and know is gay, so they can't just dismiss
me; they've got to come to grips with the reality that there are gay
people who aren't just a lot of nasty reptiles out there somewhere.

When coming out, the reception has invariably been positive, typically involving a
sense of surprise, although the revelation has not usually resulted in discussions. As
with so many participants, the experience of coming out is followed by an
embarrassed reluctance to discuss the issue in any depth.

8.4.9   Coming out to colleagues

It is one thing to come out to friends, and to lose the friendship as a result, but coming
out to colleagues at work presents the possibility of being marginalised and
undermined, and possibly manoeuvred out of a job. This was especially so before the
passing of legislation ("Human Rights Amendment Act, 1993,") put legal protections in
place to render it illegal to discriminate against a person in employment on the
grounds of sexual orientation. However, even with these legal protections, it is still
possible for employers to make life difficult for openly gay employees, as noted by
Alan:

The last job I had, I didn't tell anybody that I was gay because it
would have been detrimental in getting established in this work
environment; and so I didn't.

Grant recalled a need to exercise caution and judgment when coming out to
colleagues, especially in the precarious days before human rights protection was
established in 1993:

In 1989 or thereabouts I started a new job, and I thought I'm going to
come out right when I go there. On the first day at work I told my
new employer that I was gay, and if that was a problem I would
leave, whatever, and he said, 'No, not a problem', he said, 'As long as
you can do the job then that's fine', so no negative reactions then,
no, but I was really careful about that 'cause I knew there was a lot of
hostility around.

Some participants found it difficult to come out to colleagues until some years had passed. John was not out to colleagues during his banking career:

> When I started to come out and lead my 'teenage years' so to speak, I never came out to anybody. Considering the environment that I was in, and I'd been there for so long, I thought no, no, it's just not worth it - too scandalous. I felt it was really nothing to do with them. I never socially really mixed with anyone in the bank bar one or two really close people whom I bonded with; now even with *them*, I did not come out.

Some years later John worked as an accountant in a department store in the city where he described the environment as "extremely *gay*". However, despite the more relaxed environment, he did not come out to anyone there either, because he did not consider it anyone's business:

> As far as I was concerned, I was there to work and do my job. I just observed and saw what went on, but obviously I was very fey, and I may have reacted against certain things which amused certain people, and I'm sure they knew that I was gay. But as far as they were concerned, I was married as well, so people think, 'Well he *may* be or he may *not* be, but he's married so he *can't* be', which is always what seems to happen.

Some years later, John left that job and went to work in another job where he was openly out:

> My boss knew, and he was really good, very gay-friendly, so that worked; he was fine, and I never had a problem with it. And likewise my colleague whom I worked with; she knew as well, and that was absolutely fine; she had gay friends.

Gordon developed confidence about being gay, and decided that he would be out to everyone in his life, including in his work, which is run from home. Gordon put a little gay badge – a *rainbow* badge - on his front door so that any gay customers would more easily break the ice if they wanted to talk about gay issues with him. Not all people are

gay friendly, and somebody removed the sticker as an act of protest, so Gordon simply stuck it on more firmly so it couldn't be plucked off again.

8.5   Reflections on the process

Alan described the coming out process involving family, friends and colleagues as being "like a tsunami", and also commented on the iterative nature of the process and on the ongoing need for caution:

> It's not as though coming out is a 'once and only'; it happens repeatedly when you move into new social circles, and you get that surprise and stuff from people. It was people at the squash club and my work environment, and every now and again I meet someone new, and then for a while I don't tell them my situation until I get a feeling of how they are, and then I might tell them; or I might keep quiet.

For each gay man in this study, the preparation for coming out was accompanied by an awareness that the first disclosure would mark a point of no return: for better or worse, life would be different in ways that could not be anticipated before-hand. And in general, the experience has been an enriching and rewarding one. Each participant has come to accept his sexual orientation, and in coming out has opened himself up to a life of honesty and openness, emerging on the other side with a sense of authenticity and of having addressed a longstanding difficulty.

8.6   Chapter review and summary

This was the third of four findings chapters. In this chapter, I have explored the process of coming out, beginning with a summary of the barriers, both societal and intra-personal. The next section examined, from a participant's perspective, just what it felt like having to hide his sexual orientation – a process that inevitably caused a certain amount of grief. This exploration of the inner turmoil and psychic pain was then contrasted with a considerably more positive account of the enablers, and the awareness of salient turning points in each participant's journey. The lived experience of coming out was considered from a variety of perspectives including the role of therapeutic talk, and the challenges of disclosure within a Church community; then

coming out variously to wife, to children, to parents, to siblings, to extended family members, to friends, and to colleagues. The chapter concluded with some reflections on the iterative nature of the process, and the foreshadowing of a new life of openness and authenticity.

Chapter 9 The Other Side of Out

This is the last of the findings chapters. The title of this chapter might give pause for thought: 'the other side' evokes some sort of barrier, or obstacle, perhaps some difficulty that has been surmounted; however, 'out' is not usually considered as having another 'side'. Part of the difficulty resides in the limitations of language; if we choose to employ a metaphor such as 'the closet', then we are forced at some point to engage with the metaphor itself (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). In exploring the metaphor, Kushnick (2010) considers the contrasting perspectives, firstly from within, in terms of deliberately concealing one's sexual identity: "difficult, unnatural, dark, precarious, isolating, and probably doomed to failure"; then she observes that being in the closet might also be "safer than the outside—enclosed and controllable, the closet protects its contents from exposure and harm" (p. 679). Having indicated the sense of security suggested by the familiar enclosed space, the focus of this chapter is on life *outside* the confines of the closet. And, having made the momentous decision to leave the comfortable familiarity of the closet, each participant has discovered a new mode of being, and a fresh purpose in life; the discoveries about self and society have informed relationships, and in some cases, have resulted in insightful critiques of institutions such as the Christian Church.

9.1   Reflections on character development

For many participants, their early awareness of being different was the beginning of a process of character building that would provide strength and resilience later in life. Throughout their childhood, some participants experienced a sense of something amiss with their interpersonal relations, through being bullied or of being singled out for not viewing the world in quite the same way as their peers. Having negotiated a way through this difficult interpersonal terrain and having traversed much of adulthood as a 'heterosexual', each participant has then engaged in a singularly unusual life experience, that of reinventing himself as a gay man. Some participants have observed that the process has made them more thoughtful and more considerate of others. For example, Gordon reflected on the opportunities for introspective thinking provided by a hostile, rugby-oriented school environment:

> You're forced to get to know yourself, to study yourself more than
>
> other kids do; you become a somewhat special person in that way;
>
> you come to understand people better than the mob do.

In making this comparison, Gordon has identified a phenomenon whereby marginalised individuals are provided with opportunities for self-examination and contemplation of other people, opportunities which are less available to those who enjoy the hegemonic advantage of heterosexuality. If each participant has indeed emerged from the experience with a more finely nuanced sense of himself, and perhaps, greater sensitivity towards other people, then at what price has been this character development?

The process of coming out was not straightforward for any participant; indeed for some it proved extremely traumatic. Some of the particular issues have been identified through the Lavender Island research project (Henrickson, 2007a, 2007c; Henrickson & Neville, 2012). This chapter will examine the psychological disequilibrium experienced by participants in the process of coming out. Their psychic unease is closely related to participants' awareness and experience of homonegative attitudes and behaviours in the community. One significant site of homonegativity appears to be the Christian Church. For all participants, the process of coming out has provided a unique perspective from which their life can be viewed. The final Findings section contains ruminations on aspects of modern life as a gay man, including thoughts about gay partners, and advice for men who might still be coming to terms with their sexuality.

9.2   Psychic pain associated with coming out

A common theme associated with coming out was the psychic pain of social isolation, of being ostracised, abandoned, excluded, or marginalised, and of feeling alone; Mark described his experience of coming out as "sheer hell". For some participants, this experience resulted in suicidal ideation. Mark did not ever feel so desperate that he personally entertained thoughts of ending his life, although he knew of people who *had* committed suicide, people who had been "pushed right over the edge" as a result of the pressure to renounce their sexual orientation. The issue of suicide is important, and too often avoided as a topic of conversation. Mark indicated the importance of bringing a taboo subject into the open:

There is a custom at the present time that people do *not* talk about suicide, and that may be a mistake.

Two of these participants did talk about how their feelings of desperation in the process of coming out led to thoughts of suicide. Berend found the upheaval of his family life difficult enough, but it was the reaction of his closest friends that was most distressing. Feeling emotionally vulnerable, Berend sought solace from his friends but instead of a compassionate, empathetic response, he discovered an unwillingness to listen and a harshly judgemental attitude:

> I was raw, sort of on the edge of suicide, crying a *lot*, just completely devastated; and all they could pull me up on and correct me on was that I'd sworn a few times in talking about myself.

Emotionally, Berend felt himself to be "in a *really,* really bad place". He acknowledged a degree of self-loathing, conditioned by a lifetime of intensely homonegative rhetoric within his Church: "The homophobia wasn't just from the outside, it was from the inside as well". In terms of personal development, a seemingly insurmountable challenge was the attempt at self-discovery and acceptance of his sexuality, at the same time knowing that nothing he could do would mitigate the stigma his family would have to bear:

> It would bring shame on my family, it would destroy my family, it would bring shame on my children, my Christian circle, and it would bring shame on myself.

Berend talked about the sense of utter desperation, of hopelessness and of going down to the beach at Piha, standing at the water's edge and entertaining dark thoughts of ending it all:

> I thought it would be easier to opt out of life and commit suicide than it would be to actually accept who I was, and come out to the rest of the world and to myself. I was a good strong swimmer – I was a life-saver – it seemed easier to swim out to sea and just keep swimming than it did to come to terms with who I was and accept myself.

Berend's inner struggle to accept his sexual orientation, and to live through the process of coming out, in full awareness of the difficulties this would pose for his

family and for his Church community, he rates as "probably the biggest and hardest decision I've had to make in life". Heidegger argues that for Dasein, reminders of mortality (such as suicidal ideation), make salient the possibilities for living an authentic life: "With death, Dasein stands before itself in its ownmost potentiality-of-being" (Heidegger, 1953/2010, p. 241). From the perspective of over three decades since he struggled with those thoughts of suicide on the beach at Piha, Berend acknowledged that coming out has brought "the biggest benefits" in numerous domains; however, at that time, he was in no doubt about the enormity of the decision.

Ross also shared an account of his sense of desperation. Reeling from the shock of coming out in his early 50s, with his marriage over, his son estranged and his first gay relationship a failure, Ross was living a transient lifestyle. He was also experiencing issues at work, which stemmed from an inability to focus. His feelings of "hopelessness and disconnect" seemed overwhelming:

> My emotions were a mess. *I* was a mess, no question about it. One year in particular, in the late 1990s, I literally cried every day of the year: I'd be driving across the harbour bridge going to work or going somewhere, and I'd just cry and cry and cry. It got very tough. I used to think, 'What's the point in carrying on?' I'd walk up and down Takapuna Beach, look out and say, 'I'm just going to go out and swim and swim, and then I'm going to drown; this is the way to go'.

Ross's abiding memory of this time is of the emotional pain that had him in tears for a seemingly endless period, with no hope of respite. The brutal realisation of having lost everything was too stark a reality to endure. Ross had difficulty concentrating. Painful memories intruded: himself as a successful, high-profile professional busily engaged in a flourishing career, backed up by his stable, happy family. Suicide seemed an option, but Ross held back because he was able to think rationally and recognise that his death would not achieve any useful outcome. On the contrary, it would add to the misery of his family and friends. Coming out had caused a rupture in the narrative of his former life, and from this, Ross began to see there was a new way of being himself, as a gay man. For all its pain, this experience proved to be a turning point. Ross simply needed

to work through the pain in order to find his way. Having made this decision to live life as a gay man, he resolved to have no "shame or regrets".

Having contemplated and rejected death in such an intimate way, these men were able to consider the possibility of living authentically. Heidegger (1953/2010) says when we face our own mortality we are better able to address the dictatorship of 'they', and in living authentically, we are free to be who we essentially are. Instead of killing themselves, each of these participants sought ways to live through the pain and to live an authentic life, true to himself. *Dasein* looks ahead to possibilities and in his mood of openness to the future, each man glimpsed the possibility of a life of productivity and fulfilment.

Edward was not suicidal, but he experienced severe depressive episodes both before and after coming out, particularly in relation to the complexities of being a father. For example, when his youngest child was preparing to leave home to go to university, he felt the pain "incredibly keenly", not only because it signalled a transitional stage in his child's journey to adulthood, it was also a poignant reminder of the loss of his heterosexual identity:

> it was that thing about the youngest child leaving home for the first
> time, but it was also another stage in leaving behind my old life and
> my marriage.

Peter described aspects of coming out as "*particularly* brutal", a process which "took five years to unfold". What made this unusually difficult was Peter's active involvement and high profile within the various national and international Church organisations that were so much a part of his life. For example, as an executive member of a committee which met annually in different countries around the world, he was summoned to a meeting in Budapest and told that he would have to stand down. The actual process and subsequent humiliating loss of status Peter found challenging, and he needed to draw on reserves of character and spiritual fortitude to get through the next five years. The sense of isolation and exclusion he felt at this first expulsion was made more poignant by his vivid awareness that this experience of having been "kicked out" marked only the first in a series:

I've never felt so alone I think. Yeah, so that was a *really* traumatic

experience and, you know, coming back in the plane, feeling very

very alone, and realising that that was going to start happening with

other organisations.

The irony of the betrayal of his Church was not lost on Peter. For an organisation which purportedly provides spiritual support and succour, the wider implications of this abdication of care and responsibility were especially painful to contemplate.

Mark, too, talked despairingly of the large numbers of gay Roman Catholics who experience psychic pain on coming out, feeling themselves alienated from their Church, and from God:

I also had background experience of the suicide of gay men – men

that I knew were gay. They are driven to suicide because of the

attitude of the Church and the teaching of the Church and the

hopelessness of the teaching of the Church. It is tragic because we

have one of the worst records in the world of suicide of young men

between 17 and 24.

9.3 Reflections on homonegativity in the community

Homonegativity manifests in many subtle (and unsubtle) ways, ranging from spiritual violence meted out by the Church, to physical attacks on gay people. The threat of violence in the form of gay-bashing was referred to in passing by some of the participants. Grant recalled the possibility of anti-gay violence when he was a student at Auckland University, and when I asked him what sort of comments he would hear, he replied:

'Oh, fucking faggots! Why don't they get off the planet!', that sort of

stuff; and I'd just sort of slowly move out of that space because I

knew that was not a safe space to be.

Some decades later, that kind of extreme comment was less commonly encountered. However, Edward indicated awareness of residual homophobia in contemporary society, and observed the need for caution: "I think we still all have to tread

reasonably carefully". A number of participants encountered milder homonegativity, which ranged from irritating comments to more serious gestures.

Alan is a keen tennis player, and he observed that occasionally he will be "outed" when he does not particularly want to be:

> I was at a tennis tournament; there were three of us all called Alan,
> and so right across all the tennis courts: 'Which Alan am I playing
> with?' Answer: 'Oh the gay Alan on Court 5!' [laughs]. Not that tall,
> good looking English guy - oh no - he's the gay guy!

Chris noted that his brother and sister-in-law were not particularly happy about Chris coming out as a gay man. He recalled their reaction to his mother wondering aloud if there might be a gay gene in the family:

> They were very defensive in maintaining to my mother that none of
> their three sons was gay. If Mum made any comments, or mused,
> and wondered whether one of *their* boys might be gay, they would
> respond very firmly. She would not be shouted down exactly, but
> they would be very upset with her.

Bevan noted that in his social circle he has sometimes observed a subtle change in the dynamics of interaction when he has come out to people. The response is understated, but unmistakable; there is no open challenge or aggressive language "or damning of your situation". Instead:

> It's more that they make a mental note, and all of a sudden the
> relationship has changed, and you're not in the same social network
> as you thought you were, so they're just putting in a bit of distance.
> It's the body language, and reaction, and basically just a step back
> (rather than a look of surprise and interest and delight that you've
> shared something with them that was quite intimate). It's very
> subtle, and that's just how you read it; and again my approach (now
> that I've got the years under the belt), I can afford to be in the
> position of thinking: 'Well, if that's your attitude, fine, I can move on';

but, like I say, it *is* hard: you don't get the same social invitations that you might have otherwise received.

The act of disclosure results in a relational adjustment as understood with reference to van Manen's (2014) "existential of lived relation" (p. 302).

John recently moved to live with his gay partner in a small provincial town where, he observed, the gay couples seem "a lot more repressed than the Auckland scene". His explanation for this touched on a sense of small town conservativism and "parochialism". He commented on subtle homonegative reactions to his being gay:

> They don't invite you back to their homes because I don't think they can cope with it; maybe they *really* can't quite cope with it. '*It's not for me, thank you very much!*'

Ross told a story about retiring and moving to live with his gay partner in a small provincial seaside town where everyone in the community knew that they were a gay couple. They did voluntary work, both working fortnightly at the charity shop in the town. They enjoyed the work, attended the various staff parties, and they were treated "very well" by the management. However, despite their attempts to engage with the community, for the most part, Ross observed that they were "kept at arm's length", particularly by the men:

> Socially we didn't fit in; if we were ever invited to anything where there were couples there none of the men spoke to us. We always spoke with the women. Never, ever, would a guy walk over and say, 'Hi, my name's John Brown, and you're new to the town?'. No, but the wives did - yes the wives did.

The men in this community had difficulty accepting an openly gay couple, but one man in particular over-reacted. Ross described an extreme example of homonegativity which involved a neighbour who resented living next door to a gay couple. This man ignored friendly waves, and rebuffed a neighbourly invitation for a Christmas drink:

> He made it very clear from the start when he moved in that we weren't welcome. He made it very clear he didn't want to *know* us.

Ross outlined the details of an altercation over a boundary issue which involved a clear violation of council regulations. The neighbour resented Ross's stance, and decided to make a protest in an unusually dramatic fashion: he sprayed weed killer on their front lawn and on various specimen plants in their garden. When Ross discovered a burned lawn and dying trees, he did not confront the neighbour himself. Instead, he rang the police, who sent an officer to investigate:

> Well, he went up there, and the neighbour denied having had anything to do with it. Oh, the other thing I should have mentioned was, a noose had been erected on a pole sticking out over the fence by the shed, just hanging down on our property. The noose was erected the same weekend as the spraying was done, and I actually forgot to mention it to the policeman. He said, 'What's that noose doing there?' [laughs]; and I said, 'A good question'. Anyhow he went up, and he confronted the guy who denied doing anything; but eventually he did admit doing it. His wife did actually, and she apologised, and said that she wasn't responsible for him; but she told me he was a very conservative guy, and he was anti-gay, and he's anti- this, and he's anti-that, and he just couldn't stomach …

This was an extreme incident, and it "horrified" a number of people in the community who thought such behaviour "appalling". Ross observed that while this was a very unpleasant end to their time in the community, they have maintained friendships with some of the people there. Soon after this incident, their house sold, and they were able to move to Auckland.

A number of participants related first-hand experiences of homonegative bullying from their own time at school. This prompts a question as to the extent to which the situation might have improved at the present time in 2017. Gordon observed that schools in Aotearoa New Zealand are so often unsafe places for gay students:

> Young gay people can't come out – it's just too risky until they are fairly certain of some support. My son had a friend whom I met at a holiday weekend. He was definitely gay, and I saw him as much like I was at that age. Obviously a lot of emotional stuff in getting to know

himself going on inside and being unable to share with anybody; he should have had fellow students to share it with; he should have had staff he was comfortable to share it with. And no, he was living life in a vacuum. I saw him as quite possibly a candidate for suicide because of that. I think he's managed to move on happily, but every so often there is a suicide, and we don't hear about them – so that's the school.

Gordon noted that the Education Department has an obligation to make schools safe places for students, and he suggested that there is much-needed work to be done as they are "not carrying out their obligation".

9.4   Reflections on the Christian Church

A very strong theme, which emerged with some clarity early in the research process, was the sense of anger directed against the Christian Church, irrespective of denomination. This anger is occasioned by awareness of what appears to be the Church's dishonesty, hypocrisy and the continuing undermining of gay people. In terms of perception, Edward observed that, for most non-Christians, "the first thing they think about is the Church hates gay people". In reference to this homonegativity, Peter identified a very evident "nasty streak out there in the wider Christian world", and observed the supreme irony of conservative Christians now being viewed as "immoral" and as operating "against the good of gay people". Six of these participants speak from a unique position, given that they have chosen to study Biblical scripture in depth, four of them graduating with degrees in theology (Mark, Peter, Graham, and Berend). The fusion of horizons represented by combining their understanding of the sacred writings of Christianity, together with their lived experience of being gay, presents the reader of this thesis with a unique set of tools with which to critique the teachings of the Christian Church.

9.4.1   Language of the Christian Church

Speaking of the modern Christian Church in general, Gordon took exception to the attempt to distinguish between "loving the person and hating the act", and he expressed concern about "the damage the Church does to gay people – setting young people up for suicide".

Also speaking of suicide, Peter referred to a presentation he made to the Baptist
Commission in relation to the marriage equality debate of 2012/13. Peter drew
attention to the powerful role of language in official reports, the need to speak frankly,
and the importance of providing realistic answers to difficult questions:

> I said, 'You know, *you're* going to be accountable if you don't do
> something in your report to stop Baptist youth suicides'. Because as
> long as the Church does not address realistically sexual issues, then
> Christian young people are going to be caught in a paradox, and
> they're going to be given *ridiculous* answers that *don't* work. And that
> was very interesting because shortly after this, one of the members
> of the Commission got up and wanted to *hug* the three of us who
> were there.

A Roman Catholic, Mark is an academic who has been studying theology for over half a
century. He is fluent in a number of European languages, including Greek. During our
interview he produced a series of folders in which he has carefully archived
correspondence with bishops, submissions for Synod, notes from a lifetime of intense
scrutiny of, and engagement with, the published writing of the Catholic Church. He
takes issue with the illogicality of the Church's position, as well as the overwhelmingly
negative language which is used to make the case:

> It's the language that is used that appals me: homosexuality is a
> '*disorder*'; it's a '*deformity*'; it's a more or less strong '*tendency*'
> ordered towards '*intrinsic evil*'. If there's any '*lapse*' into homosexual
> activity, that is a sign that you had already rejected God. Now, if you
> take all of that on board, really there's very little left to do except
> either leave the church so that you'll stop hearing that kind of junk; or
> yes, the alternative is quite frequently taken up, and it is suicidal. The
> language that the Church uses to refer to homosexuality is
> *depressing*, it's unreasonable, it has no authority. It is *un-Christian*
> because it is not offering people hope. It is theologically unsound,
> and I know it is theologically unsound because I have been reading
> theology for 60 years so I *know* the language that the Church should

be speaking, and that the Church is *not* speaking. Let's take the statement from *1986*: 'Homosexuality is a more or less strong tendency *ordered* toward intrinsic evil'. Now, within a Christian theology one *cannot* justify a claim that an innocent person, prior to any personal choice, and for no reason, can be burdened with an inclination that is going to lead them away from God; and obviously that is the implication of the statement. Well, what this statement is saying is '*ordered* towards intrinsic evil', and God - a God of love - cannot possibly be linked to evil; so, [sighs] well, that is for me the *main* block; that is for me the one area that is impossible. The second one is about the rejection of God. For me, my life experience is based on the conviction that a human being cannot reject a God who is love – unconditional love – who is of infinite mercy; you know, it's humanly impossible to reject love itself; we are made for love. John Paul II made that quite *clear*; he said: 'Our sexuality', (he uses the word '*sexo*' which in fact means genitals), 'Our genitals are a constant sign to us that we were made for love'; so, if it is so obvious that we are made for love, and we were created by God – a God of love – then the whole idea of rejection of God is humanly impossible, because interconnectedness is what the whole universe runs on. You see, the Church's teaching does not make *sense*.

In outlining the illogicality and theological unsoundness of the Roman Catholic Church's official position on homosexuality, Mark emphasises the connection between the intensely and unequivocally homonegative attitude of the Roman Catholic Church, and the number of gay Catholics who are driven to desperate measures, including suicide.

The reluctance of some Christians within various denominations to discuss homosexuality in an open-minded manner is a source of ongoing tension, and contributes to the perception that some Christian leaders are out of touch and ignorant about issues which are of concern to gay Christians. Speaking in reference to the public posturing of conservative Church spokespeople, Peter characterised this ignorance as disingenuous:

I think quite a lot of conservatives are actually aware that their

arguments are very thin in this issue, and that it poses very serious

issues of interpretation, and so the best solution is to duck them.

From our exploration of 'mixed messages' in Chapter 6, it would appear that there are two kinds of ignorance: the first involves a genuine lack of knowledge or information; the second involves a deliberate, or wilful, avoidance of sources which might provide enlightenment.

9.4.2   Wilful ignorance of the Christian Church

A number of participants expressed exasperation that the Christian Church remains extraordinarily ignorant on many aspects of human sexuality, especially homosexuality. For Mark, it is frustrating that so many Church representatives and theologians make inaccurate and damaging statements about gay people in "*total ignorance"*, basing their understandings on scriptural writing, interpretive commentary, theory and conjecture, without reference to the testimony of men who have personal, primeval experience of being gay. As Mark observes, aetiological inquiries into the development of homosexual inclination have proven to be inconclusive in terms of origin or cause, and the sorts of qualitative research studies which are more likely to provide rich insight into sexual orientation have been marginalised and ignored by many Church commentators:

> Gay men and women are the only persons who have first-hand
>
> experience of homosexuality but up to the present their experience
>
> has been ignored, dismissed. So 'experts' theorize about
>
> homosexuality on the basis of comments made almost 2000 years
>
> ago by Saint Paul. Yet, in spite of our uncertainty and ignorance of
>
> Paul's real meaning, people want to base absolute prohibitions and
>
> condemnations on Paul's comments. Does that make good sense?
>
> What has been lacking up to the present time is the *stories* of people.

While these stories might have been lacking in the past, there is no shortage of them now. However, the problem appears to be a reluctance on the part of senior Church representatives to engage with these stories, to listen sincerely to the first-hand accounts of gay Christians in order to deepen their understanding and to adjust their

homonegative stance accordingly. Mark cited an example of a recently published volume of essays that has been distributed throughout the world by the Vatican publisher (Belardinelli & Livio, 2012). All 15 essays are on homosexuality. They are all negative and, according to Mark, some of the essays have the clear aim to "propagate and promote the most negative views of homosexuality possible". However, the most disturbing aspect of these essays is that every single one is based on theory, on the doctrinal wisdom of 2000 years ago, and the authors proceed as though these grounds remain valid for the present time. Mark took particular exception to an essay by an American theologian, Professor David Schindler:

> Some of the statements he makes in his essay are impossible; they're
> impossible because they could only be based on first-hand research
> with gay people, and he has done no such research, so I think on that
> ground alone I can dismiss him, although I haven't dismissed him.

Berend too expressed frustration that the Reformed Church wilfully continues in ignorance, ignoring the opportunity to engage in constructive dialogue with someone (like himself), who has a solid reputation as a highly respected member of the Reformed Church community, an individual who has studied theology in depth, and who has, moreover, considerable insight into the lived experience of being a gay man:

> They would rather believe what the Bible told them, what they
> *thought* the Bible told them, than listen to someone who said , 'Well,
> this is not what it's like for me; for me it has been a struggle
> accepting myself, and I haven't lived my life as a lie. It's just that I
> couldn't actually come to terms with who I was, and Christianity is
> part of the reason why I couldn't come to terms with who I was'.

A number of participants commented on the rigid, literalist approach of conservative clergy who enjoy a public profile. When writing and preaching, a common tendency is to propagate misinformation as part of a disingenuous attempt to undermine gays in the eyes of other people. Edward drew attention to an opinion piece in the New Zealand Herald, (Hewat, 2014 July 15) which casually associates gay sexual relations with "incest, rape and bestiality", all of which "are deemed unnatural and are offensive to the God who created us" (p.1). Peter also discussed the homonegative

stance of its author, Anglican vicar, Reverend Michael Hewat, who, as an ultra-conservative Christian commentator, appears to see the world in black and white, and whose moral judgements have a detached, academic flavour which has little to do with the actual lives of gay people:

> The Hewat approach has no theological credibility; I mean he's an extreme conservative. Personally, I think the gay issue he's using as a litmus test for his pure world, and at the moment it's quite a useful test. So, you can divide up the world into the *baddies* who are soft on homosexuality, and that shows that they're generally soft on *everything* that he's hard on, and I think that is the way in which the homosexual issue is being used in many Churches at present. It's a kind of litmus test. The trouble is, I don't like being a litmus test. I object to that, and I say, 'I'm not a litmus test; I'm *me*, and I want you to tell me what would you recommend to me?', and at that point they're stumped, generally.

Peter's criticism here is of a perceived reluctance to move beyond antiquated dogma and the conservative Church's manifest inability to engage with the actual human being whose spiritual welfare is at issue. This inflexibility is one of the reasons why commentators perceive the more fundamentalist Christian Churches to be out of touch with the lives of modern people, and as a result, becoming increasingly irrelevant in the lives of so many. Extremely conservative theologians are not as common as they once were. But they still get media exposure and their opinions continue to be taken seriously by certain sectors of the community, particularly the less theologically analytical, who perhaps lack critical thinking tools with which to challenge the logic and theological underpinning of homonegative scriptural commentary.

The Church's preoccupation with sex also occasioned comment. (See Table 2.1). For example, Berend expressed intrigued bemusement with Christian friends who appeared to have a prurient mistrust of any gay person's intentions:

> They immediately thought because I had a friendship with them that
>
> I wanted them sexually; well there's nothing like that involved at all,
>
> so what they were frightened of, I don't know.

The fear and ignorance go hand in hand. It is one thing for a state of ignorance to have prevailed for historical reasons such as lack of research evidence, but quite another for the ignorance to endure as a result of the Church's deliberate, calculated avoidance of gay *testimonio*, a refusal to engage in constructive, authentic dialogue which might lead to greater understanding. Speaking of the Anglican Church community, Edward expressed frustration that:

> They're all too polite to actually talk about it; they won't actually
>
> come out and engage in discussion. The Church is just talking and
>
> talking and talking, but not *really* seriously thinking about gay people;
>
> it feels like an *academic* exercise, an *academic* discussion.

As a result of this continuing avoidance and concomitant ignorance, Edward and his family have felt increasingly alienated from his Church. His prognosis is not optimistic:

> I don't really see any signs of hope; it looks as though the Church is
>
> hiding its head in the sand, and the reasons why it does that alarm
>
> me.

The continuing reluctance to understand homosexuality is perhaps because to do so would deprive the Church of an easy target, bearing in mind the role of 'the homosexual' as a convenient scapegoat, victimised through two millennia of Christianity (Crompton, 2003). A number of participants suggest that if the Christian Church were to engage sincerely with the critiques of its homonegative stance, such a gesture might be seen as a move towards making itself relevant and perhaps more in line with the direction its eponymous founder would have wished. To reach such an understanding through dialogue would involve "being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were" (Gadamer, 1975/2013, p. 387).

9.4.3 Hypocrisy of the Christian Church

Some participants expressed anger and frustration with the Christian Church because of its relentless victimisation of gays. Edward drew attention to the inconsistency between Christ's teaching and the modern enactment of his teaching:

> The poor and the vulnerable appear to be defined as absolutely anybody who's poor and vulnerable except if they're gay [laughs]. It's like this extraordinary exception that people make even though Jesus never once referred to gay people. Jesus didn't have a single word to say on the subject. I mean the whole point of Jesus is to love everyone equally and to break down barriers and stereotypes.

So much of that energy could have been utilised more profitably in addressing other social ills, a charge that has been levelled at all denominations, although the Roman Catholic Church appears to have garnered a particular notoriety in terms of media coverage (Krondorfer, 2005). In this respect, Mark noted that:

> Cardinal Ratzinger, as Head of Vatican Congregation for Doctrine of the Faith (C.D.F.) intervened on the subject of homosexuality more frequently and more negatively than any previous Head of C.D.F. Why was there no intervention to condemn and put a stop to the sexual abuse of children by priests? Why did the Church tolerate and thus encourage a policy of concealment and cover-ups of horrendous criminal activity? Why the double standard? On the one hand we have concealment, over decades, of criminal abuse of thousands of children; on the other hand, the homosexual inclination itself, prior to even the thought of sexual activity, is in church documents repeatedly and publicly vilified, degraded, and inextricably linked to 'intrinsic moral evil'. How can you possibly get your head round that level of contradictory non-sense?

Referring to this double standard, Edward drew attention to the Christian preoccupation with homosexual sexual activity and wilful ignorance of the same sexual activities by heterosexual people. He also expressed dismay at the illogical stance of the Anglican Church towards homosexuals:

At the moment I'm feeling like I'm in a spiritual desert, and I'm
struggling with why that is, but I certainly have no sense that in any
way I have done the wrong thing; in fact, I've had periods since I
came out of being very clear that that was the right thing to do. I
think I'm struggling a little bit because I just cannot - do not -
understand the conservative Christian view of the world anymore; it
just baffles me now, and yet it is still so very prevalent. I don't really
think the Anglican Church is a very safe place to be any more; I mean
it never really was I suppose.

Edward feels that the issue will not be satisfactorily addressed until straight men who
are members of the Church challenge the status quo: "Actually stand up and say it is
not acceptable for the Church to treat gay people in this way". He also drew attention
to the two-faced approach he has encountered in the Anglican Church where he used
to worship:

It's all very civil, and all very polite, and all very lovely, and it appears
on the surface to be *completely* accommodating of me being a gay
man; but in practice it's quite the opposite behind the scenes. I just
see and hear things; there are undercurrents of people in the
Anglican Church working against the interests of gay people still.

Edward's sons have become alienated from the Anglican Church in sympathy with the
un-Christian way in which their father has been treated: "They've seen me, how I've
been treated by the Church".

Berend has been more than willing to leave the communication lines open to anyone
from the Reformed Church, but after numerous attempts he realised that there was no
common ground and little likelihood for any meeting of minds. With his new
understanding of his sexual orientation, he feels dismay at the lack of Christian charity
shown by members of his former Church towards gay people, especially those who are
young and therefore particularly vulnerable:

I certainly cringe when I see other Church families struggle with sons
who are either trans-sexual or gay, and the lack of acceptance and

the judgement that occurs with that; and it's no wonder the suicide

rate for these young people is so high: they just *cannot* be at peace

with being Christian and being at peace with who they are.

Some participants expressed frustration with the Christian Church because of its role in encouraging gay men to fight their natural sexual orientation and to engage in heterosexual marriage, irrespective of the cost to the man himself, the cost to his (often unwitting) partner, and the cost to any children which might ensue from the marriage. Peter, in his professional capacity as a counsellor has encountered a number of gay men who are "trapped" in a heterosexual marriage:

> The Church is actually encouraging lies and hypocrisy; sadly, the
> 'furtive-sex' people now are mostly people with strong religious
> inhibitors, you know, which is pathetic, just pathetic. I still find it
> troubling and sad and I just *wish* that gay people didn't have to go
> into these pretend marriages to hide the fact that they are gay. And I
> think that that's one of the great tragedies of the way the world was,
> which I hope will be less so in the future.

9.4.4   Disengagement from the Christian Church

According to census figures, the proportion of the New Zealand population attending regular Church services has halved since the 1960s (Ward, 2016). Ward has identified a number of cultural and social explanations for this steady decline in worship and allegiance. My research adds to this understanding a nuanced appreciation of the growing cynicism towards formalised homonegativity and general dissatisfaction with what appears to be the more conservative elements within the Christian Churches.

Some participants rejected organised religion when they reached adulthood. For example, Alan left the Roman Catholic Church while he was at university in his early 20s, and he has since become increasingly atheistic, although he enjoys the meditative experience of being in a church. But without the religious aspect predominating, in particular, the concept of sin is no longer significant: "I've cleansed myself of that".

For other participants, disillusion with the Christian Church has been a result of their negative experiences through the process of coming out. Edward fears for the future

of Anglicanism which he sees as "increasingly irrelevant" to New Zealand society. Graham, as a former Church of England clergyman no longer attends the Anglican Church. He now describes himself as a "non-believer". When discussing the decline of the Christian Church, he observed that many of the churches will be deconsecrated and effectively, "empty shells in 60 -70 years". When considering the homonegativity within the Christian Church, Graham echoed Lloyd Geering, concluding, "The Churches are all dying; it's not going to be an issue in 50 years' time". Gadamer (1975/2013) suggests that the beginning of this decline can be traced back to the guiding concepts of humanism and the application, beginning in the 17th Century, of hermeneutic principles towards the scriptural tradition, the results of which have been "catastrophic for Christianity" (p. 18).

Some participants have questioned or modified their fundamental Christian convictions. In most cases, the process of coming out has required each participant to negotiate a new spiritual path; for example, Berend reflected on the need for a gay man to redefine his relationship with God:

> I had come to the conclusion that if God had made me the way I was (being attracted to men rather than women) then He either expected me to act on it, and live my life as He had *made* me, or else He was an absolute bastard, and you know, somebody who was not worth respecting whatsoever; if the God that they believed in (and that I believed in) was the sort of God who condemned you for who you were, then He wasn't worth knowing.

Either from an impulse of solidarity, or through having critically reappraised the homonegative stance of certain denominations, some people close to Berend have distanced themselves from the more excessive aspects of their religion. With reference to the Reformed Church, Berend observed that as a result of his coming out, six of his eight siblings have had to question their conscience, giving "a slight cause for hesitation and rethinking their values". Having left the more extreme end of their Church,

> It has been much easier for them than it has been for the ones that have stuck to the basic religion that they were brought up in. The

others, it's still the case that what I do is not ok, and I shouldn't talk

about it, but they still love me as a person and, you know, they just

over-ride their religious beliefs for that reason.

While some gay men have withdrawn from their Church of their own volition, others

were excluded, or excommunicated; for example, Peter from the Brethren, and Berend

from the Reformed Church.

For participants who were Christians, coming out has involved a reappraisal of

priorities, sometimes involving a change of denomination; in others, it has resulted in

greater activism.

9.4.5   Accommodation of gay people within the Christian Church

Despite having been excommunicated by the Brethren as a result of his coming out,

Peter maintains a high profile as an academic (Professor in History at the University of

Massey), as an author, as a theologian and as a gay spokesperson, appearing regularly

on radio and television. As a result of the pioneering work being done by gay activists

such as Peter, some progress has been made in a variety of domains. However, he

identified ongoing challenges within the Church:

It's still very difficult trying to walk in two worlds; I've had to give up

the Brethren world, which I *deeply* miss, you know; and everybody's

amused that I now belong to three churches (because nothing in any

Church could quite meet the need for an all-encompassing world the

Brethren had): so I'm an Anglican, and I'm a Baptist, and I'm very

involved with the Rainbow Church. But it's intriguing, and I think

interesting that I don't need to construe being gay as being on trial all

the time. I just am. That's their problem really.

Peter commented also on the challenge which some of his conservative Christian

friends experience in reconciling their views with their friendship of him, as an openly

gay and outspoken man. Their friendship places them "in an invidious position,

because, like it or not, they're compromised because they like me". This tension

presumably is a good thing because it brings the contradictions to the surface, and

suggests a likely adjustment of attitudes within the Church:

But you see they're compromising themselves, and I *like that* because
I feel as though I – I don't mind being the paradox that they can't
explain because in the end they'll have to change.

Peter sees his new role as challenging the *status quo*, and he frequently addresses
groups, and talks to individuals within the Church on aspects of homosexuality and the
Church response. As a slightly provocative gesture, his telephone number for the gay
Christian group at Ponsonby Baptist Church is prominently advertised:

I get a range of people who ring up; parents sometimes ring up; other
people who are furiously angry at our advertisement ring up, so I just
tease them, and it's quite interesting actually; it's like a – it's not like
a safety valve, it's a touchstone that clearly drives some to see very
red.

Despite upsetting some of the more conservative members of the Baptist Church, the
posting of this number is a gesture towards homonormativity, and affirms the
presence of gays in the Church community. At a practical level, it provides a much-
needed point of contact for questioning gays (and their families) within what has been
one of the more strictly homonegative denominations.

For gay Christians in Auckland who feel less than welcome in their previous Church,
one possibility is to worship at the explicitly gay-friendly St Matthews-in-the-City or at
Rainbow Community Church, which is the Catholic version. The regular services are
well attended and a popular feature of inner-city life for many gay Christians.
However, not all participants are enthusiastic supporters. For example, Gordon
expressed a degree of irritation with what he characterised as "the little gay service
ghettos", and instead outlined his proposal for a Christian outreach initiative, which
would involve a group going regularly to worship instead, at a mainstream Church:

Say a traditional church in Remuera, going there en masse, perhaps
20 of them, and so their presence can't be ignored at that Church.
And so you turn up next week, and then the week after, and the
week after, and the week after to give them a really good dose of
facing reality. But then you move on to the next church, and keep on

doing it. And that would be a real Christian gay outreach rather than hiding in a closeted service.

Gordon acknowledged that while the practical implications are clear, the proposal is unlikely to gain any traction given that the attendees "want a Christian gay comfort zone, and what I'm suggesting would be just a little less comfortable".

Some participants and their families have embarked on an activist pathway, with various degrees of success; for example, one of Edward's sons wrote an opinion piece which was published in a mainstream newspaper. He subsequently wrote to all of the Anglican bishops in New Zealand, and sent them a copy of his article. But "only two of them had the courtesy to reply - or even to acknowledge receiving it - and the replies that he did get were kind of patronising". Mark has also engaged in a programme of letter writing to Catholic bishops and to 'Tui Moto InterIslands Magazine', a national Catholic newspaper. For example, in 2013 when the same-sex marriage equality law was being debated, he "managed to infiltrate three or four" of the issues. Mark has also drafted submissions to various Catholic Synods. The response from the bishops has been, on the whole, more encouraging:

> I wrote a letter to each one of the six bishops in New Zealand; I sent
> them a copy of the submission, and I had very positive responses
> from four of the bishops. I had no response from the fifth one, and I
> had a short note from the secretary of the sixth one.

Partly as a result of gay activists insisting on dialogue, there are some positive signs of hope for *rapprochement*. Despite the evidence of homonegativity within some denominations, a number of participants revealed an optimistic outlook for the future of the Christian Church. Mark, for example, referred to the positive example of New Zealand's Catholic Archbishop John Dew. One of his first public acts on assuming his leadership position was to write an article in which he critiqued the kind of language used by the Catholic Church, and to emphasise the importance of hope:

> He said the Church *must* offer hope to people; it is not the job of the
> Church to destroy hope; that's one of the things the Church *must*

offer: Christian hope, and an assurance to everyone no matter who they are that God is infinitely merciful. He doesn't give up on people.

Peter interacts with a wide range of Christian groups in his professional capacity, and he is well placed to discern encouraging developments within the wider Church. In acknowledging this progress, Peter observed that he has sensed "a bit of a shift in our society" in terms of changing attitudes towards gay people.

9.4.6   Advice from gay men for the Christian Church

I concluded my interview with an invitation for each participant to provide advice where appropriate. Some participants questioned the point of this. Reflecting on a decades-long career as an Anglican vicar, Graham highlighted the futility of attempting to engage in meaningful discussion with bigots:

> It's pointless arguing with them! Absolutely pointless! I think they're wrong, and they think I'm wrong, and they think they're going to the authority that tells them that I'm wrong, and I think they're *misusing* this authority, so that's *all* you can do; there is *no* arguing, because the *last* thing you can do with a prejudice is argue anybody out of it; so you just have to make sure they don't get too much power, anywhere.

Berend pointed out the problem that in attempting to reason with fundamentalist Christians, there is little common ground:

> How would I engage with them? It's really difficult, because, for them, the books in the Bible are not authored by different people; they're all authored by God. This is a thing that has been handed down from God to them.

However, Berend wanted to emphasise the more mainstream understanding of Biblical authorship and concomitant issues of translation:

> When you start translating the Bible you realise that you can translate it in 100 different ways, and it depends on what context you take the Bible; so they don't go out and stone people who

blaspheme, they don't send women outside the camp when they're

having their menstrual periods, yet all of these things are in the Bible,

so they take sections out of context, and then ladle them on to you –

and it's just not on. They need to have a much broader view of

things, and realise that the Bible was written in the context of that

particular generation, and that God didn't hand a book from heaven

to people, but he inspired – obviously he inspired prophets and

others to write; but we should take all that with the salt it is a

mixture of: heavenly inspiration and human interaction with it.

In considering Biblical authorship, Gadamer (1975/2013) draws attention to the work of 18th Century theologians such as Semler and Ernesti who argued that for Christians to correctly understand the Scripture it was essential for them to recognize that the various books of the Bible had different authors. In other words, Christianity was exhorted "to abandon the idea of the dogmatic unity of the canon" (p. 183).

Peter acknowledged that some fundamental Christians will never be able to reconcile the Bible with acceptance of gay people but he argued that the fight is a worthy one:

I like to think that we can make it *easier* for them by helping them to

see that the world does not fall in when you acknowledge people

who are gay, and respect them, and accept them.

Edward wanted to address the misconception that being gay is a choice:

One of the most important things for me is, I think, to knock on the

head the idea that people will *choose* to be gay, because I don't for

the life of me understand why anyone would choose this path.

Berend echoed these sentiments:

It's not a lifestyle, or choice. It's who you are, and there's an

enormous difference between the two. Who would choose to be gay

in this society if they didn't have to be? Who would choose to be gay

within a Christian circle if they didn't have to be - when you hear

again and again what they think of gays?

A common theme was the plea for understanding, tolerance and an awareness that the homonegative stance of the Church contributes to the suicide of gay people. Mark put it this way:

> I'd want to ask them to back off a bit. Sexuality is a very sensitive area where lots of people get hurt, both gay and straight. Often they are just barely coping, or may not be coping at all. So I'd ask those with issues about homosexuality to go easy on the pressure. Extra pressure at the wrong moment can push people right over the edge, and that is tragic, and it's cruel and unnecessary, and unfortunately it happens, too often. So yeah, I'd say, go easy.

Another theme was the suggestion that the Christian Church should get its own house in order rather than being judgmental. Grant pointed out the irony of Christians ignoring Christ's lesson about throwing the first stone in John 8:7. It was suggested by a number of participants that Christians might benefit from putting less energy into being negative about gay people and more energy into trying to love everyone equally. Instead of the intensely homonegative focus on gays, Christians might instead use their energy to address the many problems in society, to focus on fighting poverty and injustice. And finally, homonegative Christians should consider the implications of continued ignorance, and actually listen to the *testimonio* of gay people. On behalf of the participants, I extend the following challenge for each homonegative, heterosexual Christian: put yourself in the shoes of a gay person; avoid treating same-sex issues as a dry, academic debate. Instead, you could start thinking about the live person whom you know, the individual who has been through a moral struggle, who has endured emotional pain and heartbreak. You could think critically about the attitude and behaviour of the Church you proudly belong to, and acknowledge that your continuing homonegativity is indirectly responsible for the suicides of further generations of gay Christians; you might reflect on the likelihood that closeted gay Christians will end up in inappropriate 'heterosexual' marriages, with all the personal and societal dysfunction that such unions entail.

9.5 A lingering sense of regret

After having come out, some of the participants shared their sense of having lost access to their previously unremarked heterosexual privilege, as well as sadness at having lost their wives and families. John reflected on how life might have been if he had remained married:

> In many respects I regret having done this. I've thought, 'What would it have been like if I had have just left things the way they were?'. And it would have *worked*; it would have been really good because we would still have had that bonding; although I would never have known what it was like, we would have had a *better* life.

Edward was clear that as a gay man he could not have remained married to his wife; however, he expressed keen regret for what he had lost:

> In fact, you know, I still sometimes question whether it *had* to be that way; and I know - I guess I *know* it had to be that way, but I certainly often wish that it didn't have to be that way – hmmm.

In particular, he was sorry not to have had a closer relationship with his children. He also reflected on the "paradox" of having "these two wonderful kids", given the price he has had to pay in terms of disruption to his life and his remorse at the lack of honesty involved:

> I have these kids because I suppose I wasn't honest with myself and the woman I married, about who I was.

Berend felt the loss of his marriage keenly; he was adamant that his marriage was built on a solid foundation, and that it *could* have endured:

> Why blow away a good relationship when you've got good communication and all the other things that make part of it?

For Gordon, his main regret was not having come out decades earlier, and he also expressed a sense of disappointment at not being able to have a regular heterosexual family:

> I'd always been very fond of children, and a big hole in my life was
> *not* being a parent.

One rather surprising finding was a sense of nostalgic regret for the era before law reform; for example, Graham observed that something has been lost with the normalisation of homosexuality:

> I don't know that I want to be normal [smiles]; you see one of the
> things I like about old-fashioned gays is that they sometimes say, 'Oh,
> it was much *better* when we were all in the closet; all this up-front
> and carrying on about it and so on, the old ambience of the secret
> society has gone'. And why do people join the Masons? Not just to
> get jobs from their friends but because there is this *mystique*, I
> suppose, of belonging to something that is an inner circle. And there
> ain't no inner circle now at all, is there?

9.6   Reflections on aspects of modern life as a gay man

Difficult as the first-time coming out was, it marked a significant mile-stone in each participant's journey of self-acceptance, and their endeavour to lead an authentic life of integrity and fulfilment. Coming out as a gay man was, for these participants, an act of courage, and before taking the first step, appeared to be an impossibly difficult task. However, as an iterative process, it did get easier; each successive coming out made the next more manageable. It was also observed that coming out provided *entrée* into a very select group. Being out as a gay man provides validation, a sense of wholeness, and an exhilarating sense of having emerged "on the other side". Some participants found partners while others have remained single. Each participant has observed that attitudes towards gay people have generally become more relaxed in the 30 years since homosexual law reform, in this country, at least. Chris observed that it made a difference if people personally know a gay person.

Reflecting on life as an older gay man, Grant cherishes his existing gay friendships and, after the death of his beloved partner Ray, is especially grateful to those friends who have nurtured him ("kind of pulled me into their world"). He is also open to new relationships, aware of the importance of remaining connected with the wider world. While noting that "libido is not quite as good as it was before", he identified,

nevertheless, an ever-present need for sex: "the need for love, just to be held". In terms of homonegativity, his previous fears have been replaced with a new-found sense of security and confidence:

> The fact that homosexuality is actually within the law makes life so much *nicer* 'cause I can go out onto the street and know that if anyone attacks me because I'm gay the law's against them not me.

Berend's experience of life as an older gay male is overwhelmingly positive:

> It's good; things have improved very much in society. I'm at ease with myself; I'm comfortable with myself. I don't have to deny and pretend I'm straight. I still perform the same sort of work I did before as a member of society – a *responsible* member of society.

Graham is relaxed about being gay and very open; he has not encountered negative responses:

> Whenever at the bridge club or in other meetings something crops up and I will say, 'Well, I'm gay', and my attitude is, 'So stick it up your jaxie and accept it'; and they do. No-one ever says anything to challenge me. One doesn't go around, as it were, with a large sign saying 'I am gay, and you had better be careful', no, but it's quite obvious I'm a gay man: I live with another man and I'm *artistic,* so there [laughs].

Mark feels positive about himself:

> All the anxiety and other stuff has provided the background. I've waded through it, struggled uphill, and now I'm free, yes.

Mark observed that the challenges of coming out have provided a rich context for his activism within the Church, and that his endeavours in recent years had been "fruitful"; he has made a point of raising gay issues in every group discussion, and he has found people increasingly receptive. He feels positive about the future:

There is so much going on in society, marriage equality, in schools, in teaching – youngsters come out at 15 at school. The feedback I was getting was that the Catholic schools are presenting homosexuality as a normal development for a minority of people in a completely accepting healthy way, and consequently youngsters are able to come out at 15 or 16, and it's so much easier.

Alan reflected that on balance he has made the right decision to come out:

I've no regrets at all; just living a gay life is great. It's fine and much more satisfying and natural for me completely. People have said, 'Do you regret Alan the path that you've taken?', and I say, 'Well, there's downsides from making those decisions and going down this path, for sure, but generally, it's the right decision for me, and it's been the right decision for my ex-wife, and so we've come through the other side.

John enjoys his life of retirement in a provincial town, and appreciates the time to pursue his leisure activities:

I just feel like an old matron. I do my own things. I'm self-motivated; I do my music practice; I go onto the Internet to learn about things; I go outside and develop my garden which gives back to nature; I look after my parents.

John compared his present life with the 'teenage years' of his early coming out which was "dangerous but probably exciting and sort of interesting in its shallow way". He remains critical of the negative social aspects of certain gay communities, particularly around the "club scene":

Coming out made me realise how cruel and fickle and transitory gaydom is; there's a lot of misery there. If you go to the clubs and see it, it's sort of sadly tragic. Yes, these desperate, *desperate* individuals - like recently - it was sort of like a *deja-vu* thing: I went to a concert with my partner, and on a whim after the concert we went in to see some nightlife. You saw sad, older men fawning over younger

opportunists there, sort of like a dance of desperation really. I

thought, 'Thank goodness I'm not involved in that any more'.

Despite feeling convinced that coming out was the right thing to do, Edward finds

aspects of life as a gay man challenging. In particular, they are the intensely social

aspects of what is sometimes caricatured as the "homosexual lifestyle": "the

stereotypes of what it means to be gay: the night-clubbing, parties, drugs". He is also

aware of other socialising opportunities such as Auckland's gay choir GALS (Gay and

Lesbian Singers), The Fifth Season gay gardening circle, various sporting groups, and a

gay tramping club. However, these seem inadequate compensation for the lost social

life he enjoyed previously:

> I think it's a lot easier to be gay if you're naturally extrovert, and
>
> you're going to meet a lot more people a lot more easily, and find a
>
> new community and all that sort of thing; whereas I'm conscious that
>
> I've lost the connections with the more traditional communities that I
>
> was part of through Church and school and neighbourhood when the
>
> children were growing up, when I was ostensibly 'normal' and in a
>
> heterosexual marriage; and I haven't - for whatever reason - I haven't
>
> fully replaced those things.

Another consideration for Edward is that he is in a relationship with a man who has

not yet come out, "who's way less comfortable than I am with all of that

paraphernalia", and so he finds the social aspects somewhat "restricting". Edward also

reflected on the lessons which he has learned from his personal experience of being

part of a marginalised group. From his leadership role in the public sector Edward

challenges his colleagues to think about those who are less likely to speak up for

themselves. But, he notes that to do so publicly is challenging for most people:

> Whenever you take a stand, and put up your hand, and say, 'This is
>
> not right', or, 'We need to think about these people' - and I'm talking
>
> about the poor, the disabled, any form of not white, male,
>
> heterosexual, middle class - is to potentially make yourself a little
>
> *unpopular*, or open yourself to *ridicule*, or to be looked at *askance*.

This insight helps to explain why homonegativity has endured as a sociological phenomenon: the very act of standing up and denouncing homonegative behaviours, or championing gay causes necessarily positions the non-marginalised speaker apart from the comfortable, default position of 'the they'.

Peter finds himself "richly engaged in all sorts of things", so he did not have to face the issue that he has observed in some older gay men, especially those without partners, who have lost family support through the process of coming out, and who therefore lack the emotional support. Peter feels that they *need* a strong gay community around them, but expresses concern because it sometimes appears as if the gay community is "obsessed by the young and the pretty and the beautiful; and let's face it, you know, we can't all be young – we probably never were young and beautiful but certainly we're not now". His concern is that people can feel isolated, and there is a clear need to build communities of support.

Communities of support do exist, and they are continually expanding. Gordon observed that he socialises predominantly with gay groups, including GALS (the Auckland gay choir) which he observed, "has close on 60 members now, and quite a few of those have had families and have come out later in life". He is also a keen member of a gay badminton club. Gordon works from home, and does not often encounter issues with homonegativity. He suggested that "there are lots of workplace environments which are still very uncomfortable for gay people; I think probably the worst environment in New Zealand still is some secondary schools".

Ross has been able to rationalise the guilt he still carries, given the number of people whom he has hurt in the process of coming out: "If by living a lie I could change that, well, I'm not prepared to live that lie". He and his partner derive a great deal of pleasure from his grandchildren, although a recent comment made by his partner, gave him pause for reflection:

> He said to me, 'I think we'll find a bit of a change when the girls get
> into their teens, and they're starting having boyfriends and things -
> they might be embarrassed when their friends are coming around
> and they've got to introduce their grandfather and his partner to

their friends; they might find that difficult'. And I don't know whether
he's right or wrong.

Ross also observed the likelihood that his family might possess a 'gay gene':

> Well, there's me [laughs], my sister has a lesbian daughter, and both
> my cousins have gay sons - there's five of us, I think – right up close
> [laughs]; on my father's side of the family, his sister never married,
> and I just wonder now whether she may have been lesbian.

Ross also observed that of his numerous nieces and nephews in the next generation, there is a very good chance of more gay family members emerging: "We'll see what happens there".

9.7 Reflections on gay partners

For most participants, one of the undoubted benefits of coming out was discovering the joys of a gay soul mate. When I visited Grant in his Auckland home for our interview, the first thing that struck me was the photographic collage in his hallway of Ray, his deceased gay partner. Grant reflected on their time together:

> My relationship with Ray was the most amazing relationship - the fact
> that I did so much growing in the relationship. We covered a lifetime
> together; we talked about everything, so I knew about his life – his
> entire life – who the people were, all this sort of stuff. He knew about
> *my* world, and we were together 15 years, but it was like we'd known
> each other for much longer; it was like we'd known each other for
> *years* – 20, 30, 40, 50 years. Being in a relationship like that is totally
> an enabler – that support – the things that make you feel stronger. It
> was around knowing there was someone that would love you, and
> even if things weren't going right, we'd sort this out; we never
> argued – we'd talk and discuss things.

At the time of our interview, Bevan and his partner had been together for 16 years, and despite various logistical issues relating to the nationality of his partner, who is from South America, he is very positive about the relationship and optimistic about the future:

> I really enjoy the company of my partner. We have our moments and
> whatever else but it doesn't define my life. We have the boundaries
> and understandings as to how the relationship works; we are
> comfortable with that, but still trying to work out what the routine is,
> and I dare say we'll be trying to do that in another 20 years,
> hopefully.

For Chris and his partner, "life is good" on a number of counts, in particular, the sense of acceptance he feels for himself and his partner. For example, in community activities such as street BBQ evenings, he described a recent event as "just lovely to be openly out there as a couple, sharing, helping and accepted". Chris contrasted the homonegativity and loneliness of his earlier years with his present situation:

> I couldn't be happier now. We've got our little family of cat and dog,
> and generally quite accepted by family and at work and neighbours.
> It's a very different world from when I was young. I'm married to my
> partner, and my world changed with him. We live a quiet life but we
> love life, and we just enjoy being together; we communicate lots, and
> there is also a strong sexual attraction, right from the start. And like
> any relationship, you go through times of reacting and
> accommodating the other and changing. It's all worth it because it's
> great to share your life with someone whom you so respect and love.
> I'm so grateful that I'm living at this time when New Zealand is
> accepting, and makes it easier for us to be openly a married couple.

Peter gets a great deal of pleasure from his relationship:

> I have quite a young partner who's about 40 and Chinese and with a
> particular character and – you know, as everybody has, and at
> present we have his mother living with us which is extremely funny
> [smiles] and full of interest.

Ross observed that his partner came out at 41 when they met; he commented on the strength of their love for one another, and of their sense of place in the world:

He'll never know how much I love him; I think I know how much he

loves me. And this is who we are; this is the real thing. We are these

people, and that's the face that we show to the world, and we've had

a pretty good reception by and large from people who know us.

In considering the phenomenological theme of relationality, the importance of having a soul mate who has epistemological understanding of the challenges faced and overcome cannot be overstated. Equally important is the need for positive and affirming relationships with others in our daily sphere. Heidegger's (1953/2010) notion of 'being-with' others in both public and private worlds, reminds us that *Dasein* exists essentially for the sake of others. The others with whom we interact form an essential part of our daily context, and the quality of these interactions conditions our psychological and emotional well-being.

9.8   Some reflections on men who might still be in the closet

Each of the participants in this study eventually became aware of their sexual orientation, to the point where there was absolutely no question. But how is a questioning individual to know for sure if they are gay or not? In this section, I share some thoughts (and advice) from the participants.

I asked Berend about his understanding of the concept of integrity, how it has shaped his life, and what this might suggest for people who might find themselves in the situation that he was in for so many years:

Integrity to me is being true to yourself: living your life according to

your own inner guidance. I think we all know what's right, and what's

wrong, and we don't need the Bible to tell us, or friends to tell us.

You know within yourself that what you're doing is the right thing,

and the good thing, and you need to be true to that. I mean we all

have this inner voice, and I think listen to it, and be true to it, and be

brave about it, and do what it says.

However, as Berend observed, the decision regarding when, how and even *whether* to do this, belongs to each individual:

You've only got one life; it's your life; you need to live it how you feel
you should live it. And you're the only expert on your own life: you're
the only one who knows what you think, what you feel, what your
desires are. Nobody else knows; nobody else is an expert in this, and
you must be true to yourself: live life according to what best guide
you have within yourself, and do not listen to other people's
opinions.

Alan's advice was for people who think they might be gay to explore their sexuality:
"You've only got the one life; do you really want to live repressed all your life?". His
practical advice included visiting the saunas:

'You don't have to do anything you don't like - just sit in the sauna, sit
in the spa, then just go home after that if you want'. Because most
people are just shaking with fear, or whatever, I say, 'Don't worry; it's
not really a threatening experience, you know. If anyone does start
putting their hand on your shoulder or whatever you can just brush
them away if you're not interested. And so I have talked men through
sexual experience at a sauna so that they can be prepared if that
happens to them, and I said, 'Basically, it's just mutual masturbation -
how bad can it be?', and I try to allay their fears, and I say, 'It's fine,
and when you get into it, it's very enjoyable'. But I give them the
warning: 'Don't go down that path and think that your existing
straight relationship is going to be intact, because it will affect your
straight relationship; so just be aware of that'.

Alan followed up his advice with his observations from his own experience, about
bisexuality:

It's very rare, someone who can be 50/50 bisexual; I find it very hard
to believe. I've only ever met a very few men who say they are still
significantly attracted to women and yet are regularly having sex with
men, or are living gay lives. We're all on a spectrum - but I think most
gay men are well into the '80/90% attracted to men' end of the
spectrum, and I very, very rarely meet anyone who is truly bisexual.

These comments resonate with research into married men who have sex with men. Lee (2016) concluded that bisexual men who live behind a "façade of being married 'heterosexual' men, have resulted in their leading a wistful and not fully realised existence that is compromised by lies, deceit, shame, guilt, fear and anxiety for a prolonged period of time" (p. 72). In other words, to live such a life Lee suggests, is to compromise one's integrity.

Ross observed that "the climate is pretty good" for people to come out now, and he emphasised the sense of satisfaction and fulfilment that emerges when people are "honest with themselves". He suggested that staying in the closet – "it may sound tough – is fraudulent". Ross concluded with some heartfelt advice for gay people to come out as early as possible:

> Just be yourself, and the sooner that happens the better. In so many
> ways it's a lot easier to live that life if you're honest with yourself.

Some of the participants commented on the challenges facing an older gay man in terms of finding a compatible partner, even in a large city, and in terms of establishing a support network, Peter drew attention to the emotional challenges:

> The pool is actually quite small here in Auckland, and that *is* the risk
> you take: that you step out into the greater personal space, into a
> personal sort of freedom but you don't necessarily step into
> emotional space; it's quite difficult at an older age range.

Mark observed that "sometimes it is a mistake to come out too soon", and he emphasised the importance of choosing the time "carefully" and selecting the right people to come out to.

Many of the participants commented on the value of setting up some sort of support network. Edward emphasised the value of having a mentor for an ongoing period:

> You do need support; I think that's important. If you possibly can, you
> need to find someone who can be there for you; someone you can
> talk to, and somebody who can be there for a reasonable length of
> time too.

Bevan observed that the process of coming out might be easier with a gay partner to provide moral support. However, he emphasised the need to be engaging with the gay community in order to find someone compatible: "The chances of finding Mr Right are *pretty slim* if you're not *out* there". So it is necessary to take a step out of the comfort zone: "You've just got to take a risk at some point". Bevan emphasised the importance for each individual of finding their own "moral compass" and staying true to it.

Underlying this advice is an awareness that by acknowledging their sexuality, each participant has the sense of living with integrity and of being at peace with himself. The one abiding message is that, notwithstanding the challenges, it is undoubtedly better to be out and to live an authentic life as an openly gay man.

9.9   Chapter review and summary

This was the last of the findings chapters. In this chapter, I have provided space for participants to reflect on contemporary society as they perceive it, beginning with the challenges and rewards of life outside the confines of the closet. When considering the challenges of learning to life as a gay man - which at times appeared insurmountable, and in three cases led to contemplation of suicide – a unifying theme was the potential for character development, together with an enhanced sensitivity towards others. When considering aspects of homonegativity in the community, participants had a great deal to say about the un-Christian-like behaviour of the Christian Church, which was explored under three headings: a) the language, b) the wilful ignorance, and c) the hypocrisy of the Christian Church. Participents then talked about a common response of disengagement from the Christian Church, as well as the possibility of gay people being accommodated within various denominations of the Christian Church. This section concluded with advice from gay men for the Christian Church. When reflecting on living openly as a gay man, despite lingering regrets in some cases, the unifying theme was one of positivity and acceptance. This chapter closed with a clear message to men who might still be in the closet, that no matter the challenges, it is undoubtedly preferable to live openly and authentically as a gay man; coming out provides a means of discovering a new-found sense of integrity.

Chapter 10 Discussion

Beginning of the end …

To make an end is to make a beginning.

The end is where we start from (Eliot, 1943).

As an epigraph for this final chapter, these lines from the final stanza of T.S. Eliot's final poem in his 'Four Quartets' resonate with the cyclical dynamic of the hermeneutic circle, which has driven this study. So now, let us return to the beginning in order to reprise the objectives and re-state the foundational argument. The starting point for this research was the assertion that, despite multiple advances on many fronts, including the proliferation of legislation and the softening of attitudes towards same-sex issues, homonegativity remains a powerful force in contemporary society. This study set out to examine the lived experience of older gay men who have come out later in life, taking into account the social discourses which initially constrained the likelihood of each participant feeling able to come out. It then considered influences which contributed to the possibility of an individual acknowledging and ultimately disclosing his sexual orientation. The study has also considered the development of social discourses and attitudes towards same-sex relations in contemporary society.

In this final chapter I begin by drawing together the themes emerging from the research, and then I relate key findings to relevant literature. Before outlining the key contributions, I reflect on the methodological approach, indicating the strengths and limitations of the study. Then, looking to the future, I consider some of the implications for public policy, for education, for aged care, and for the Christian Church. These implications provide a foundation for explicit recommendations for action and suggestions for further research. The final section contains advice for readers of this thesis, followed by some closing reflections.

10.1 Journeying to disclosure

When I turned to the challenge of drawing together the various themes from the findings chapters, I was faced with the multiple and overlapping tasks of selecting, prioritising and presenting the various aspects in a coherent discussion. In order to make sense of the process, and keeping the reader in mind, I cast around for possible

representations, deciding on balance to employ the 'quest' metaphor, as outlined by poet and literary critic, W.H. Auden (1969).

Starting with the *dramatis personae*, all participants can be seen as travellers who (in response to some mysterious summons) have set out on a long and arduous journey – in this case, to disclosure. Some of them made the journey in full knowledge of their sexual orientation, others travelled in the garb of 'protective' ignorance. Passing through unfamiliar terrain, without a map, they are in pursuit of an uncertain but 'precious' goal: the ultimate acknowledgement of their sexual orientation. Along the way each wayfarer encountered a series of trials, challenges and setbacks, which we can interpret as malign manifestations of homonegativity and heteronormativity. We observe that, in pursuit of their objective, they have been aided by a variety of helpers in various guise: counsellors, mentors, partners, supportive family and friends. According to Auden's model, after a series of adventures the hero returns home victorious with the prize. It is also observed that the protagonist has been transformed in some way. In this study, the twofold victory involves confirmation of each participant's sexual orientation, along with the confidence to disclose this in a public way. The transformation in each case requires the assumption of a new identity, discarding the remnants of his former, ostensibly heterosexual persona, and living life openly as a gay man. Not just anyone can undertake such a quest; the hero must possess the right qualities. In this case, an essential requirement is that he be gay.

10.1.1 The quest: A mysterious summons

If we unpack the metaphor *seriatim*, the first component is the mysterious summons. Heidegger (1953/2010) suggests that each of us has an inner voice which 'calls' us to be our authentic self. In this study each participant hearkens to the call of thinking, and is summoned to question his sexual orientation. For some, the call first manifested as an inkling that something was not right, perhaps in the sense of feeling different from their peers, often by being unusually creative, or blessed with an acute aesthetic sensibility. Think of John, for example, with his musical ability, interest in theatre and outstanding collection of antiques. For others, it arose from reflecting on the intensity of homonegative bullying meted out by other children, as in Edward's case. For some participants, the call might have come at the time of puberty in the form of sexual attraction which seemed somehow to contravene the expectations of other people.

No matter the source of the call, it led to thinking, and the posing of questions, possibilities at first scarcely articulated, perhaps the merest suggestion of a query. But eventually, after many years, as a result of this inner interrogation, each participant eventually became aware of a compulsion to come out, driven by what Heidegger (1953/2010) terms "[c]onscience as the call of care"; with reference to the inner voice which 'calls' forth the authentic self, Heidegger observes that "[c]onscience calls the self of Dasein forth from its lostness in the they" (p. 264).

Bringing this back to the quest metaphor, we note that not just anyone is called on to undertake such a quest; the hero must possess the right qualities. In this case, a fundamental requirement is possessing the 'correct' sexual orientation, which would suggest an essentialist understanding of human sexuality. In phenomenological terms, according to van Manen (1990/2007) an essence "may only be intuited or grasped through a study of the particulars or instances as they are encountered in lived experience" (p. 10).

The findings of this study support the contention that sexual orientation is innate. As Mark observed: "my own conviction now is that people are born either gay or straight. That's where our stories really begin". Participants were at pains to insist that being gay is *not* a lifestyle or a matter of choice; as Berend put it, "It's who you are". This would appear to be consistent with other research into sexual orientation. For example, according to findings from the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study, a large scale birth cohort study (Dickson, Paul, & Herbison, 2003), the researchers found that enduring same-sex attraction does suggest "a basic biological dimension to sexual attraction" (p. 1607). Also in support of an essentialist understanding of sexual orientation, findings from the Lavender Islands study (Henrickson et al., 2007), indicate that 83% of the males surveyed "felt that their identity had 'always been this way'" (p. 236).

10.1.2 A long and arduous journey

And so, in response to the summons, each participant set out on a long temporal journey beginning in infancy, continuing through childhood and adolescence and on to adulthood. In journeying towards understanding and eventual disclosure, some participants displayed strong self-awareness from an early age while others had

limited degrees of self-awareness. Each participant became aware of their sexuality at different stages, in different ways. However, this awareness grew against a backdrop of homonegativity which characterised the society into which they were born. For Heidegger, (1953/2010), each individual's past is illuminated by the notion of 'thrownness' in that when they were born, each was 'thrown' into aleatory circumstances beyond his control, and not of his choosing. The participants of this study, as babies, were 'thrown' into a world which did not understand or appreciate their sexual orientation. Most people of this world, through a variety of (mainly invisible) mechanisms, were determined to prevent the participants from realising their sexual orientation. These mechanisms can be seen to operate through a complex interplay of legislation, healthcare practices, religious teaching, and social conditioning. The arduous nature of the journey can be seen as a result of each participant coming up against these mechanisms of prevention at multiple points throughout their lives.

In terms of the coming out process, there are similarities between the responses expressed by participants in this study and those described by theorists such as Cass (1979). In critiquing some of the early coming out models, (Eliason, 1996) observed that "[f]or an identity formation theory to ''work', it must make sense to the people whose identities are at issue (p. 57). Cass' (1979) model emerged with some salience during the initial literature review, and has proven to be a useful framework, primarily for organising my analytical notes during the NVivo stage of the research, and additionally, for reflecting on the themes which have emerged from this study. At the point where I was dwelling with my interview data, I found that I was able to map my participants' stories onto each of the six stages (identity confusion; identity comparison; identity tolerance; identity acceptance; identity pride; identity synthesis), and to follow the pathways (including foreclosure) for each stage that were subsequently outlined in Cass (1996). Although this is a phenomenological study, it has nevertheless been interesting to examine the extent to which participants' narratives might add texture to an idealised model, constructed from a foundation of social constructionist psychology. Consistent with Cass' model, each participant can be seen as having striven for congruence between their perceptions of their own behaviour, and of how other people might view them. For each participant, his emerging self-

identity as a gay man can be seen to have developed through a complex interplay of cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions in accordance with Cass' 1979 'intrapersonal matrix'. For a visual representation of the node structure which emerged during the data analysis stage, see Appendix E.

The metaphorical journey being referred to here is understood in ontological terms, although it is also relevant to consider the ontic journey through space experienced by some participants. For example, Graham referred to the distance necessary for him to come out, in terms of relocating to England: "I needed to put 12,000 miles [laughs] in my background".

10.1.3 Travelling in the garb of 'protective' ignorance

My reading of Gadamer (1975/2013) encouraged me to re-consider the concept of 'play' in its various uses, and to think for example about the ebb and flow of waves, and the play of shadow and light, with a focus on contrasting shades. So when I re-read Heidegger, including his later work, I became aware of the significance of such 'twofold' dualisms as concealed/revealed; sheltering/clearing; shadow/visibility (Heidegger, 1953/2010, 1977). Harman (2007) points to the significance of this insight, observing that for Heidegger "the world is an ambiguous duality. Visible surfaces conceal a hidden depth that can be brought to light only gradually, and never completely" (p. 180). This sense of interplay between knowledge and ignorance provides a useful way of exploring the phenomenon whereby some of the participants were able to avoid acknowledging their sexual orientation for so many years; this knowledge was hidden from themselves as much as from others; at times, each participant would catch a glimpse of the horrifying possibility, but this was quickly covered over, to remain hidden for prolonged periods. Gordon, for example disregarded any "hints" or "clues" as soon as they appeared: "They felt awkward, uncomfortable, so I just dismissed them from my mind." For these participants, it felt safer to remain ignorant about their sexuality, this ignorance providing a form of psychological protection.

However, this protective ignorance had to be cultivated and maintained through various mechanisms of avoidance, referred to as 'foreclosure' in Cass (1979). One way of avoiding the issue can be seen in Peter's deliberate "losing the language", together

with his strategy of keeping himself so busy that he did not have time to think about any possibilities. He also maintained strict boundaries in terms of behaviour, so there was never any question of having crossed a line. When the homonegative discourse of homosexual law reform was at its most intense, Chris, Gordon, and Alan avoided engaging with the news and any discussion by "switching off". This meant that they were able to continue in comfortable ignorance of the issues that others were so passionately debating. In making sense of their world, participants had to present themselves as acceptable to the 'they'. And one aspect of this involved adopting, either consciously or unconsciously, a heterosexual persona in line with the culturally sanctioned template that heteronormative society had mapped out for each individual. From a clinical psychology perspective, Cass (2015) distinguishes between 'presented identity' and 'perceived identity', and draws attention to the dynamic interplay between an individual's self-concept and the typological identity options available through the language.

So, perhaps the most widespread response was default to a heterosexual identity. Heidegger's notion of the 'they-self' helps us to understand ways in which our natural mode of being is oriented towards the attitudes, values, and behaviours of those closest to us. King (2001) reminds us of the comfortable appropriation of everyday discourses such as heteronormavity: "Dasein in advance measures his own self by what the others are and have, by what they have achieved and failed to achieve in the world" (p. 81). So, given the high value accorded to heterosexual marriage, it is not surprising that so many gay men have rejected a homosexual identity. We saw this with many of the participants, Ross, for example, insisting to himself, "I'm not a gay man, I'm a heterosexual, and I want to get married, and have children." Some participants arrogated this heterosexual identity more comfortably and convincingly than others. According to Heidegger, one means of understanding our way of 'Being-in-the-world' is through the notion of 'comportment' (1953/2010). Comportment is concerned with how we 'are' in the world, not so much how we see ourselves, but how others see us. For example, Gordon's colleagues and students indicated that they thought he was gay, yet this awareness was not evident to Gordon himself. As Lingis (2017) observes, "[t]here is an irreducible difference between one's observations of oneself and the observations others make of one's body and one's mind" (p. 806). So

comportment is associated with our public self, which is clearly visible to others, but not necessarily to our own self. Gordon's inability to recognise his sexual orientation can be seen as a form of 'protective' ignorance. For each of these participants, their awareness of their sexual orientation was constantly looming near the surface, but whenever it showed signs of breaking through, it was quickly covered over, and permitted to lie undiscovered until a later time.

10.1.4 Passing through unfamiliar terrain

Hic sunt dracones!

Medieval cartographers decorated maps with fanciful depictions of dragons, and other terrifying monsters to signify uncharted territory (van Duzer, 2013). In this study, unfamiliar terrain can be equated with ignorance and unfamiliarity. And given the aura of horror which shrouded the topic of homosexuality, why would you want to explore there? Homosexuality appears *awfully dangerous*, for all sorts of reasons. If grown-ups can only refer to it in horrified whispers, it must be pretty appalling. While the participants were growing up, this sense of danger was paramount; and along with the danger was a profound silence; it appeared that not much was known about this dreadful topic – *and better not to inquire too closely, just in case*. And yet, somehow, despite any intention or willingness on their part, these participants found themselves already having embarked on this journey of discovery.

If we consider a map as a helpful means of finding our way through unfamiliar territory, then the lack of a map could be problematic. Problem upon problem, because the journey itself is beset with mystery and uncertainty; consider the questions our traveller might ask: *Where am I going? What is the destination? How do I get there? What are the landmarks? How do I find my way without a map, or compass, or guidebook?* The wayfarer experiences a heightened sense of being very alone without any sort of guide. To add to the oppressive, doom-laden atmosphere, let us now imagine that a dense fog has settled over the landscape; silence, save for the muffled sound of distant wailing - *and could that be gnashing of teeth?* When lost in fog, perhaps the best advice is to remain safely where you are, and wait until you can see where you are going. If, for example, you find yourself travelling along a precipitous mountain pass, it is all too easy to stumble and go hurtling down into the

abyss. So what do you do? Bringing the metaphor back to the study, we can see the logic of staying on 'the straight and narrow'; it makes no sense to deviate from the well-worn path which appears in front of you. If this is a journey through life, and if you are expected to be a heterosexual man, then the logical thing to do is find a nice girl, get married, settle down, and raise a family. *Presumably everything will be all right in the end.* For a wayfarer travelling through uncertain terrain without an adequate map it makes sense to take what appears the safest way through.

The path under consideration here is the path which each of us makes through life, and the terrain is primarily social. The existential theme of relationality helps us to understand Heidegger's (1953/2010) notion of 'being-with' others in both a public world, and in the everyday domestic world of the home. When we go about our daily life, our natural mode of being is a concern for other people, which suggests that our behaviours and the decisions we make are conditioned by the anticipated responses of other people in our social world. We are socialised to do 'the right thing', and we can accurately anticipate the likely actions of other people, and predict probable responses to everyday situations, based on our observation of behaviour patterns from the past. Heidegger also observes that we live our lives in an attitude of 'average everydayness'; in the comfortable familiarity of the everyday environment, where our lives are primordially experienced in relation to other people. Heidegger refers to this communal dimension of life as 'Being-with', which is a fundamental aspect of 'Being-in-the-world' (1953/2010). The consequences of this fundamental relationality for these participants can be seen in their conditioned response to the dominant discourses which surround them.

10.1.5 The prize

Given that so many aspects of this journey are shrouded in mystery, including the uncertain nature of the prize itself, we can see that the precious goal of understanding, leading to personal knowledge and self-fulfilment, can only be perceived as such in retrospect. For Heidegger (1953/2010), 'understanding' (*Verstehen*) was a key concept, and he used the analogy of a traveller emerging from the murky depths of a forest into a 'Clearing' to provide a striking image of how we might visualise the transition from ignorance to enlightenment. For some participants, their understanding equated to

awareness of their sexual orientation; for others, this understanding was already partially in place, but had not yet matured into acceptance and acknowledgement.

For Bevan, the awareness emerged gradually as "a slow unveiling – the fog started to lift around the age of 27" whereas for other participants, the realisation came later in life, and had the force of an epiphany; what Heidegger referred to as *Augenblich*, a sudden insight or revelation. For example, John's moment of truth came at the age of 52 in the heart-stopping moment when he made eye contact in the street with a charming Latino visitor. This realisation provided the motivation for John to re-invent himself as a gay man. Cass (2015) explores the question of motivation from the perspective of a clinical psychologist, asking: "what motivates individuals to engage in a process that requests them to make significant changes to their self-image, behaviour and relationships with others?" (l. 331). The answers form an integral part of her theory of gay identity formation, and can be summed up under the headings of 'self-consistency motive' (with a focus on cognitive processes), and 'self-esteem motive' (with a focus on affect, and emotional experiences).

When each participant had accepted in his own mind that he *was* gay, then the next step in the process was to consider the implications of sharing this knowledge with others. Then, once an individual had resolved to come out, the final step was to actually tell someone. However, this was not straightforward; the risks could be considered, but anticipating reactions was still a venture into the unknown, and the sense of uncertainty had a certain quality of foreboding to it.

Some of the participants were horrified by the enormity of the task facing them, acutely aware that this marked a point of no return. Yet in spite of the fears and the uncertainty, each participant ultimately arrived at a decision, resolute and convinced that coming out was the only possible course of action. Heidegger (1953/2010) associates resoluteness with truth and 'disclosedness', asserting that "the call of conscience does not dangle an empty ideal of existence before us when it summons us to our potentiality-of-being, but *calls forth to the situation* [original emphasis]" (p. 287). From a temporal perspective, Inwood (1999) observes that being resolute suggests being at a critical "intersection between the past and the future" (p. 187). Heidegger (1953/2010) observes that our lives are essentially futural, and that we are

constantly ahead of ourselves in anticipation of future events. We are also at our most 'authentic' when we hear the 'call of conscience' – a call which prompts future action. This call arrived for each participant at different times and in different ways, but in each case, the call provided a glimpse into a possible future, one that allowed the possibility of living towards an authentic self, one's "ownmost possibility for being" (p. 158). In retrospect, we can discern not only the uncanny accuracy of the 'call', but we note that the prize was well worth the effort: the rewards are unmistakable in terms of personal fulfilment and enhanced sense of well-being. However, that judgement is with the benefit of hindsight, and the actual journey towards enlightenment was fraught with peril.

10.1.6 Trials, challenges and setbacks

Each participant throughout their journey encountered a series of trials, challenges and setbacks, which we can interpret as malign manifestations of homonegativity and heteronormativity. The barriers which stood in the way of gay men acknowledging their sexual orientation to themselves, and coming out to others were broadly similar to those encountered by gay men in other developed countries (Cass, 1979, 2004; Eli Coleman, 1982; Eli Coleman, 1988; Grov, Bimbi, NanÃn, & Parsons, 2006; Herek et al., 1990; Troiden, 1979, 1988).

However, the particular experiences related by these participants were unique to Aotearoa New Zealand in the 20th and early 21st centuries. Given the dominant discourse framing of homosexuals as sinners, criminals, and mentally ill perverts for much of recent history, it is understandable that these participants would resist identifying as 'gay'. Quite apart from juridical impediments in the form of criminalizing legislation, barriers included psychological considerations such as ignorance and confusion, sociological hegemonies such as heteronormativity and heterosexism (with concomitant expectations of conformity), a strong sense of family duty and deeply inculcated respect for religious conventions. In terms of conformity, Heidegger (1953/2010) observes that we are each constantly being pulled away from our authentic selves due to the pervasive influence of others' attitudes, values, and expectations. For the most part we are absorbed in a world of other people: "[t]his absorption ... mostly has the character of being lost in the publicness of the they" (p. 169). Given the subtle and ubiquitous power of the 'they' (whose disapproval we seek

to avoid), it would seem that one of the key reasons for gays avoiding disclosure is because we inhabit a relational world where approval matters, and where the need to conform is deeply entrenched from the earliest age. But conformity is only part of the picture; underlying all of these constraints was the unifying theme of personal integrity in the sense that many of these participants did not believe it appropriate to be homosexual. They therefore diverted all available psychic energy into fighting, suppressing, sublimating, and denying their natural sexual orientation.

10.1.7 Helpers in various guise

Throughout their journey, and especially as they neared the end, participants were aided by a variety of helpers of various kinds, including people such as counsellors and mentors whose professional expertise and life skills were able to inspire and direct participants towards self-acceptance. This study has paid close attention to the situatedness of participants in their everyday world of relationality at various points throughout their lives. As a consequence, the thesis has traced a narrative arc moving (in general terms) from intense and unrelenting homonegativity towards increased understanding and acceptance. In terms of relationality, when one individual interacts with another, two perspectives come into play, and Gadamer (1975/2013) refers to the understanding which results as a "fusion of horizons" (p. 317). After so many decades of having felt misunderstood, the fusion of a gay man's personal horizon with a professional who not only understands, but is professionally trained can be seen to have a powerful effect on his self-esteem. Remember Grant's experience of feeling himself growing in confidence, gradually rising "another inch above the ground and another inch above the ground and another inch above the ground". In helping each participant in their journey, numerous people provided assistance and not only of a specialist nature. The value of moral support from ordinary people in the realm of the everyday cannot be overstated. For example, acceptance by people in the neighbourhood and being included in social events was described by Chris as "just lovely to be openly out there as a couple, sharing, helping and accepted."

Gadamer's fusion of horizons can be extended to include horizons of literature and media awareness. Generally speaking, enablers included the removal of barriers such as the disappearance of criminal convictions following homosexual law reform in 1986. They also included, from a sociological perspective, increased visibility, for example, in

the form of Gay Pride Marches on television, and more subtly, they included, perhaps unconsciously, awareness of adjustments in attitudes as a result of enhanced knowledge and understanding of sexuality. And since the passing of various Acts of Parliament, the language of MPs and other commentators has moderated remarkably (see Appendix F). From a private, intra-personal standpoint, we can see multiple horizons merging with the personal horizon of each participant, leading to new understandings, awareness of possibilities and increased ability to listen to that unmistakable inner voice which 'calls' each to be his authentic self. So the helpers on this journey were not all from the outside; some came from within, and from an individual participant perspective, we can see that the concept of enablers includes the maturity and greater confidence that comes with middle age.

Gadamer's fusion of horizons can be extended to include temporal horizons. From a historical perspective, we see that the various mechanisms of prevention worked so effectively to suppress homosexuality, in large part because they operated invisibly and with tacit support from both stigmatised and non-stigmatised alike (Herek, 2009). Heteronormativity for example, is a relatively recent concept, coined only towards the end of the 20th century (Warner, 1991). Now that the phenomenon has been identified, named, and explored, it loses much of its potency. And the power of homonegativity depends to a large extent on ignorance, underpinned by the concerted efforts of juridical, religious and educational institutions, including the family unit.

Ignorance is slowly being replaced by knowledge, as research outputs continue to disturb traditional understandings, promulgated and disseminated through an unprecedented array of media channels. As a consequence, all sorts of institutions ranging from governments, through to churches and schools are challenged to address homonegative and heteronormative frameworks and behaviours, accompanied by close media scrutiny. As we would expect from a quest narrative, this story *does* have a happy ending when we consider that so many of the mechanisms of prevention, which had proven to be so successful for so many centuries, have been effectively dismantled in our own life-time through the concerted efforts of activists, legislators, theorists and sociological researchers.

10.1.8 Return home of the victorious hero

In the prototypical quest epic, the hero returns home victorious with a hard-won prize, which can be interpreted here as confirmation of each participant's sexual orientation, along with the confidence to disclose this in a public way and the intention to begin living authentically. As Chris related, "I'm married to my partner, and my world changed with him. We live a quiet life but we love life, and we just enjoy being together." In order to gain a sense of the value of this prize, it is helpful to contrast the sense of personal fulfilment with the emotional turmoil and logistical challenges which led up to this achievement. Heidegger's (1953/2010) characterisation of "fear as a mode of attunement" helps us to understand the intensity of emotion which was inherent in the process of coming out (p. 136). Overcoming this fear, in the face of subtle, but pervasive homonegativity in society is no mean achievement, especially when we recall that the Lavender Island study (Henrickson et al., 2007) found that only one third of the respondents were out to everyone in their lives. Interestingly, these findings are similar to those of a recent Norwegian study (Malterud & Bjorkman, 2016) which found that, despite relatively liberal attitudes "no more than 37%-41% of the [lesbian/gay] participants responded that they never made efforts to conceal their sexual orientation" (p. 1340).

For the gay men in this study, the enormity of the realisation that they were not heterosexual was (sooner or later) replaced by an awareness that what had, for so long been secret, must eventually become public knowledge. The fear was ameliorated by practical considerations: the process of coming out required considerable preparation, in the form of considering practical strategies: who to come out to first; the appropriate time and place; what to say, and how to say it; then anticipating responses and likely scenarios, rejoinders and retorts. This planning was accompanied by a sense of uncertainty, contrasted with the certain knowledge that coming out would mark a point of no return. The closet, for all its claustrophobia, was at least familiar. And finally, after the planning (i.e. a prolonged state of *Dasein* 'being-ahead-of-itself'), came the execution.

Whether the reception was positive or negative, invariably, the first coming out was highly memorable. One practical consideration that did not always occur to participants was the iterative nature of coming out: it does not stop, although the

intensity changes over time; however, it certainly *does* get easier. Despite the similarities, no two experiences of coming out were ever alike. Having decided to make public what had previously been private, brought relief, either immediately or after some time. For every participant, the experience of coming out has been transformative: self-acceptance and a refusal to compromise have led to a newly found sense of honesty and openness, a need to share with others their authentic self. Despite the turbulent interpersonal dynamics, concomitant pain and perception of a life disrupted, participants have emerged on the other side with a feeling of wholeness and, in most cases, a heightened sense of inner peace.

10.2 Counting the costs

The costs of learning to live an authentic life can be calculated across the lifespan, beginning well before an individual actually came out. For some participants, considerable mental effort was required to project a convincing heterosexual persona, with a price to pay in terms of psychic, spiritual and intrapersonal equilibrium, as well as the impact on interpersonal relationships. The strategies and psychological processes of avoiding coming to terms with their sexual orientation were many and varied. To think the unthinkable (i.e. consider the possibility of actually being gay), was, for some participants, extraordinarily difficult, and the effort required to deny, suppress or sublimate this, exacted a psychological toll.

We also need to consider the emotional cost of coming out, which for some participants meant engaging with unrelenting homonegativity, particularly for those participants who were heavily involved in the Church. For Mark it was "sheer hell", for Peter, "*particularly* brutal", and it took Berend to the brink of suicide. For others, such as Ross, the pain was associated with the trauma of family upheaval and a sense of being disconnected from a previously stable and rewarding life; (remember his sense of pain at recalling how his estranged son refused to shake his hand). van Manen (1999) explores the pathic dimension of touch and suggests that estrangement and disconnection from loved ones can be seen most vividly in deficit mode, given that "touch is the primordial medium to overcome separation and relational distance" (p. 13). The costs of coming to live authentically need to take into account such varied experiences as social ostracism, long-term estrangement from loved ones, emotional upheaval, and psychological stress - not to mention the loss of heterosexual privilege.

The costs were also borne by other people, especially close family members, some of whom were hurt in the process of coming out. This pain was a source of deep regret to participants, although it was acknowledged by Ross as a non-negotiable price of living with integrity: "If by living a lie I could change that, well, I'm not prepared to live that lie".

In spite of the considerable costs involved, all participants concurred that it is preferable to be out and to be living an authentic life as an openly gay man.

10.3 Contributing to a more inclusive society

As role models, each of these participants, through their courage and integrity, has contributed to a more inclusive society. An under-appreciated aspect of their coming out is evident in the role each plays in demonstrating what it is to live an authentic life as an openly gay man. The intensely personal narratives shared by participants reveal aspects of lived experience, as opposed to theorised or conceptualised reconstructions, which have not featured as part of the grand narrative until very recently. Plummer (1995) suggests that "humankind cannot bear very much abstraction or discursive reasoning" (p. 6). Instead, what is needed are "'human interest stories' that may ultimately bring about greater understanding or social transformation" (p. 175). Gradually, these insights and understandings will become woven into the historical and social fabric of society in a way that will enable future generations to view sexual orientation very differently. Already, it would appear that we are progressing in this direction; as (Weeks, 2017, p. 166) observes, "[d]espite all the horrors that persist in large parts of the world, a concept of toleration based on mutual respect has been advancing on a global scale" (p. 166).

The reframing of understandings around sexual orientation depends partly on stories being heard and partly on the actual experience of meeting and getting to know gay people. The power of personal interaction to change attitudes can be seen in MP John Banks' speech during the 3rd reading of the marriage equality Bill; Banks (an outspoken opponent of homosexual law reform in his early parliamentary career; see Appendix F), reflected on the difference that knowing gay people has made on his outlook: "After three decades and 10 Parliaments, I have had time to reflect—to reflect on what I said, and to reflect on what I did. If I knew then what I have since learnt, I would have

acted differently" ("Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Amendment Bill - Third Reading", 2013).

Given the historical and residual homonegativity apparent in various denominations of the Christian Church, a positive way forward is for more Christians to engage in genuine dialogue with LGBTIQ individuals and groups. Having established that the reframing of understandings around sexual orientation depends partly on stories being told, the corollary is that individuals within the Church need to be prepared to adopt a willingness to hear the stories. Gadamer (1975/2013) emphasises the value of 'genuine conversation' from a number of angles and suggests that genuine progress can be made when partners in a conversation enter into dialogue with an open mind, willing to be persuaded to other viewpoints. The Christian Church, working together with people from the LGBTIQ communities could do a great deal to atone for the homonegative evils of the past two millennia, for example in acknowledging ongoing complicity in driving people to suicide. In practical terms, this would include what Riessman (2008) refers to as a "close reading" of relevant texts (scriptural, exegetical, and testimonial) from a contemporary perspective (p. 153). As (Charon (2006), cited in Riessman, 2008) observes, "[w]hat texts 'do', we all ultimately realize, they do in the resonance achieved between the words themselves and the worlds that surround them, elicit them, and are reflected and transformed by them" (p. 113). In considering *which* relevant texts, a good start might be with LGBTIQ *testimonio*. As Mark observed: "what has been lacking up to the present time is the stories of people". We should not underestimate the power of stories to change perceptions and attitudes (Squire, 2008).

Moving the focus from this country to a global outlook, we can identify multiple sites of tension and oppression, some of which call to mind the historical injustices of the past, and others which can be read as warnings of what we might face in Aotearoa New Zealand in an uncertain future. Weeks (2017) points to numerous examples around the world where sexual issues are cynically used

> to advance or consolidate a political agenda – whether President Mugabe mixing anti-colonial and anti-gay messages to shore up his crumbling support in Zimbabwe, or President Putin endorsing anti-gay legislation in Russia to strengthen his nationalist base, or

fundamentalist regimes such as Iran or Saudi Arabia asserting their
purity by stoning adulterers and executing homosexuals. (p. 56)

I would argue that there is little room for complacency: here in Aotearoa New Zealand
the present climate of acceptance and tolerance could conceivably be supplanted by a
regime of repression and intolerance.

10.4 Critiquing the methodology

At the heart of this inquiry lies an ineffable question relating to identity and the
expression of that identity, a phenomenological question about the meaning of coming
out and publicly acknowledging one's sexual orientation. Given the primary
researcher's explicit preoccupation with questioning and probing beyond the visible
layers of daily life, it was necessary to employ a methodology which yielded insights
into the lived experience of the phenomenon in question: hermeneutic
phenomenology emerged as a good fit. I trust that readers of this thesis will find its
"meaningful revelations […] existentially compelling" (van Manen, 2017, p. 779)

Given the critical agenda which lies behind this research, one of the study's strengths
lies in the quality of the data. If we seek to challenge the heteronormative and
homonegative status quo, then it is first necessary to provide first-person, substantive
accounts of the phenomenon under consideration. Having established a bond of trust
with the primary researcher, twelve participants willingly narrated intensely personal
accounts of their everyday lived experience, of living 'in the closet', and of ultimately
heeding Heidegger's (1953/2010) 'call of conscience'. Bearing in mind the caveats
relating to sensitive topics (Hyden, 2008), for the research to have credibility it was
essential that these narratives include intimate thoughts, confessions and personal
feelings relating to aspects of life which most people prefer to remain hidden. Without
this generosity of spirit, and willingness to share, the study would not have yielded
such rich phenomenological data for interpretation. Another strength relates to the
reflexive nature of the research process. Having adopted a reflective and reflexive
attitude from the outset, I was determined to approach the interviews in such a way
that would more likely encourage rich experiential narratives. One practical outcome
of my thought process was the development of an interview prompt in the form of a
mind map, showing the level of detail which I encouraged participants to share while
recounting their stories; see Appendix D. I was also intent on monitoring the quality of

my interviewing, and so I developed a coding system (see Table 5.2) which provided a degree of insight into the interactional dynamics of the interview, and my approach to questioning in particular.This resulted in greater awareness of the extent to which my own biases might be intruding. Another strength relates to the quality controls which were established in order to ensure the ultimate rigour and trustworthiness of the research. These include an 'audit trail' which enables readers to track the interpretive process, and critique the decisions relating to the theoretical, philosophical, and methodological choices which inform the findings and interpretations.

With regard to the research methods, some limitations also need to be acknowledged. Firstly, given that this is an interpretivist study, there has been an emphasis on depth at the expense of breadth, hence the relatively small number of participants. Secondly, the generalisability of these findings is limited, given the inclusion/exclusion criteria and the small, unrepresentative nature of the research sample. Futhermore, the participants in this study may differ from other gay men who did not participate and any such differences remain unknown.

Thirdly, in terms of readability, one limitation relates to the male-oriented nature of the text; this has the unfortunate effect of removing females from the frame. However, this is unavoidable given that the focus of this study is gay men as opposed to lesbians. While acknowledging the need for research which will compare and contrast the later development of gay identity in men and women at a similar period of New Zealand history, this study was not an appropriate vehicle in which to explore the coming out processes of women, given the differing ontological, experiential and historical issues at play in the construction of human sexualities (Guy, 2000; Jagose, 1996).

Similarly, another limitation relates to the Pākehā-oriented nature of the text; here, the rationale for focusing on Pākehā participants is that I, as a Pākehā male, would lack the cultural sensitivity to do justice to participants of non-Pākehā background.

Fifthly, given the nature of hermeneutic phenomenological research, any interpretation of the lived reality of these participants is provisional, and in this case, limited by my epistemological and ideological positioning; as Andrews (2008) puts it: "our interpretations of our data are always, and can only ever be, connected to the

vantage point from which we view the world" (p. 86). So, while I have taken great care with my analysis, each interpretation remains open to re-interpretation depending on other researchers' temporal, geographical or ideological perspectives.

Finally, phenomenology does not aim to generate theory for purposes of explanation, prediction, and control; nor is phenomenology interested in aetiological explanations, or issues of cause and effect. The focus is not on finding answers or solutions, although implications are identified, and recommendations proposed.

Despite these limitations, this study has nevertheless responded to an obdurate question relating to sexual identity and the expression of that sexual orientation, a phenomenological response to the lived experience of coming out and publicly acknowledging one's sexual orientation. Taking into account the researcher's cautious consideration of theoretical models and frameworks, it has still been possible to remain in questioning mode, with a focus on probing beyond the discernable layers of daily life. The next section will outline the nature of the study's significance.

10.5 Reflecting on the study's key contributions

This thesis provides a clear articulation of the philosophical grounding and a detailed account of the research process which can act as a complementary guide for the neophyte researcher (of any academic discipline) who intends to use hermeneutic phenomenology as a research methodology; this account (in Chapters 4 & 5) is supplemented with two practical exemplars designed to help with the phenomenological interview process: a) an 'experiential detail' mindmap – an interview prompt device designed to elicit rich experiential detail (see Appendix D); and b) a 'question-type' table – an interactional dynamics check designed to promote a reflexive approach to questioning in interviews (see Table 5.2). There is no substitute for reading foundational philosophical works, but it is envisaged that the present thesis will provide a useful companion to other researchers who are interested in exploring this productive methodology.

From a historical perspective, this study serves to preserve a snapshot of experience from a unique period of Aotearoa New Zealand's developing history. Complementing the thesis, and in terms of placing the narratives in the public domain, nine of the 12 participants have provided consent for the recordings of their interviews to be lodged

with the Lesbian and Gay Archives of New Zealand (LAGANZ), a Trust housed in the Alexander Turnbull Library of the National Library of New Zealand, Wellington. This thesis is accessible through AUT Library's Scholarly Commons, and freely available to readers all around the world, including people who currently live under repressive, totalitarian regimes of control. The ideas, stories, and commentaries in this thesis may engage and confront some readers. My sincere hope is that some of the readers in such countries will use their influence and authority to initiate discussions which question the status quo, which challenge the received wisdom of tradition, and which explore possibilities for a more humane world.

From an academic perspective, this research makes a significant contribution to understandings of gay identity in Aotearoa New Zealand in 2017. Designed to complement other approaches (such as social constructionist psychology, strengths-based surveys, and inferential, statistics-based research), this study has used hermeneutic phenomenology to generate a text which is rich in texture and experiential detail. Without attempting to generate theory, this study provides rare insight into the lived experience of actual individuals who have talked candidly and eloquently about their sexual orientation and their sexual identity; the end result is a carefully crafted text which enables readers to understand in new ways this complex and little-researched aspect of contemporary life. These findings also elucidate the extent to which homonegativity is present in contemporary discourses, with New Zealand schools and Christian Churches being two salient sites of concern.

Indirectly, it is hoped that the research findings will ultimately inform social policy and be of value to a wide range of professionals (e.g. educators, social work practitioners, health and aged care administrators with responsibility for admissions procedures and staff training), as well as to (incipient) members of the gay communities and their families.

The final contribution can be seen in the form of a salutary warning: the findings from this study provide clear indications as to what we need to do as a society if we want to nurture future generations of people who can grow up feeling safe and valued in their sexual orientation. The implications are clear in terms of what needs to be done, and equally, the consequences are clear if the recommended actions are not followed.

10.6 Looking to the future: ways forward

The 20th century was characterised by intense and explicit homonegativity; for example, as we have seen, until 1973 homosexuality was classified as a psychiatric disorder (American Psychological Association, n.d.), and in Aotearoa New Zealand, until 1986 homosexual acts between consenting adults were a criminal offence ("Homosexual Law Reform Act, 1986,"). Since the 1970s attitudes towards same-sex issues have been steadily improving, partly due to the establishment of legislation and also thanks to more globally informed understanding of human sexuality.

Homosexuality, while not exactly 'normalised', is less of a taboo in contemporary society, which means that in Aotearoa New Zealand, same-sex issues are openly discussed in a range of contexts, and participants in discussions have access to more nuanced terminology. In terms of visibility, popular culture is replete with positive role models in the form of characters in television and cinema, as well as openly gay celebrities and high-profile public figures. As a result of these legislative and societal developments gay people are encouraged to acknowledge their sexuality and to disclose their sexual orientation to others without the fear of legal or societal consequences. These are all positive developments, although in 2017 not all gay people feel comfortable about coming out. It would appear that homonegative attitudes do not automatically disappear with legislation; in some cases, they merely go underground. A related problem and arguably more problematic because of its invisibility is heterosexism and the related concepts of heteronormativity and heterosexual privilege.

10.6.1 Implications for public policy

The present study has yielded insights into the lived experience of gay men who have spoken frankly about their perception of certain heteronormative and heterosexist aspects of contemporary life in Aotearoa New Zealand. Whilst hermeneutic phenomenology has at heart a critical agenda, it is not in itself a critical methodology. There is evident scope for further study employing a more critical lens and looking at discourses of power and marginalisation in public institutions, with a particular focus on LGBTIQ communities.

The New Zealand Suicide Prevention Action Plan must include initiatives designed to address suicide within New Zealand's LGBTIQ populations. The government's request for submissions in response to its draft strategy to prevent suicide in New Zealand (Ministry of Health, April 2017) is a positive step forward.

10.6.2 Implications for education

As has been noted from the Findings section, the Education Department has a duty to make schools safe places for students. Gordon has made the suggestion that they are "not carrying out their obligation", and this observation would appear to be supported by evidence from a wide range of sources (Allen, 2015; Rainbow Youth, 2017; Suicide Prevention Information New Zealand, 2013). The homonegative atmosphere evident in many schools may well be a contributing factor to this country's high suicide rate for young people.

This study has focused on gay men, but it is possible to extend the focus at this point to consider implications for all people. There is an urgent need for surveillance of homonegative bullying, together with improved sex education in schools. The work of Rainbow Youth is of critical importance, especially bearing in mind that suicide rates are disproportionately higher for gay students. It is recommended that Government should fund educational programmes such as those currently run by Rainbow Youth. Schools need to be aware of the needs of LGBTIQ students as well as students who have LGBTIQ parents, and they need to be aware of the very real difficulties which non-stigmatised students face in overcoming their prejudices. For Maori people who love others of the same gender (*Takatapui*) an ongoing challenge has been to articulate and represent the lived experience of coming out within the world of Maoridom (with its overlay of Christianity), and navigating the very different terrain of the Pākehā (Blank, 2007). For Pacific students, a major challenge lies in confronting the homonegative attitudes which are prevalent in many Christian Churches. For immigrants from countries where homosexuality is a capital offense, a challenge is evident in the need to provide students with critical thinking tools and awareness of different epistemological lenses through which they might interpret the world around them. For transgender students an empathetic stance would be a good start, together with an explicit focus on understanding and communicating the issues. At the risk of subscribing to deficit-model thinking, "one way forward for trans* studies of education

in New Zealand would be to begin to curate what Ann Cvetkovich (2003) calls 'archives of trauma', to make visible what is for many trans* people, the daily grind of education" (Burford et al., 2015, p. 169).

Following the 2017 election, the Labour-led government has indicated that it will address these issues as follows:

- ensure intensive intervention and adequate levels of support for Rainbow youth in the compulsory education system
- support schools to develop comprehensive policies and actions to deal with bullying on the grounds of actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and intersex status
- implement the Ministry of Education's Sexuality Education Guidelines as part of the Health curriculum
- strengthen the Education Review Office's remit to include looking at Rainbow student well-being and anti-bullying reporting requirements as indicators in their review of schools. (*Labour's policies*, 2017)

10.6.3 Implications for aged care

Organisations such as Age Concern should ensure that rest homes have in place educational programmes which aim to inculcate a zero-tolerance approach to homonegative behaviours from staff and residents.

Political correctness may cause contemporary 'homophobes' to moderate their language in certain situations, but the underlying sentiments are likely to become manifest in other situations. Given the prevalence of homonegative attitudes in many sectors of the community, especially in older generations, there are practical implications for older gay people who enter retirement homes where they are likely to encounter the same people who, as childhood bullies, tormented them in the primary school playground. A related issue concerns the homonegative attitudes of some residential care workers who may experience conflict between their religious teaching and the daily presence of gay residents. There is a need for training and awareness raising (Henrickson & Neville, 2012; Neville, Kushner, & Adams 2015; Neville, Adams, Bellamy, Boyd, & George, 2015). Best practice is suggested in Longmore (2016). A list of organisations which need to be aware of these issues are indicated in Table 10.1

Table 10.1 Organisations with responsibility for aged care

- New Zealand Ministry of Health

- The New Zealand Association of Gerontology

- New Zealand Aged Care Association

- AUT Centre for Active Ageing (ACAA)

- Collaboration of Ageing Research Excellence (CARE)

- Age Concern

- Excellence in Care (NZACA)

- Health Navigator

- Super Seniors

- Grey Power

- Support Services for Older People

- Older People Statistics

- ElderNet

- Age Well

10.6.4 Implications for the Christian Church

There is much to celebrate, and as Peter observed, there has been "a bit of a shift in our society" in terms of changing attitudes towards gay people. It is important to acknowledge the excellent work being done to break down barriers and to emphasise that many Christians go out of their way to make LGBTIQ people welcome in their Church communities. However, it would appear even greater efforts are needed to address perceptions that "the Church hates gay people", as suggested by Edward.

Given the findings of this study, there is a clear need for the various denominations of the Christian Church to acknowledge and address residual homonegativity, both overt and covert, particularly in light of its contribution to suicide. Part of the problem appears to be the preference for silence and avoidance, given that so many Christians evidently feel profoundly uncomfortable engaging with the concept of homosexuality, and would apparently prefer for it to remain taboo. However, this silence and avoidance is a large part of the reason why gay people feel unable or reluctant to come out. Historically, the Church's ignorance can be ascribed to a lack of information about the counter-culture; however, there is now considerable information available, and it

is inexcusable for Church authorities to remain in a state of ignorance *vis-à-vis* same-sex issues. There is a clear need for Christians of all denominations to engage with *testimonio* of gay people, and seek to critique the literalist interpretations of scripture with reference to a wider range of research, including that conducted by and with gay participants. Recommended reading includes this thesis.

10.7 Building on this study: Suggestions for further research

In observing that "so much research sits on dusty shelves", Singh (2015) exhorts phenomenological researchers with an interest in social justice to "connect findings with recommendations for policy change and other systemic-level interventions" (p. 124). This study can be seen as a springboard to new contestations and synergies. Given the provisional nature of any phenomenological interpretation, the additional questions emerging can be seen as an "impetus" to revisit the phenomenon in question, to re-examine the temporal complexities, to shift the focus and change the lens: "the more vantage points from which we view phenomena, the richer and more complex our understanding of that which we observe" (Andrews, 2008, p. 87). Much remains to be researched, with suggestions offered as follows:

Public policy

Aetiology of homonegativity is an important issue for future research. A number of participants shared recollections of friends and family members who initially revealed aspects of prejudice who then later transformed in some way, for example, Grant's gay-bashing friend and Alan's father; we might additionally reflect on MP John Banks' dramatic change of stance. The point here is that each of these people appear to have changed their attitude towards gay people partly as a result of getting to know a gay person. This suggests a need for research that engages with individuals who have changed from being homonegative to gay friendly. Research questions might include what specifically helped them and what advice they might proffer for a public relations campaign.

Sadly, many people around the world lack LGBTIQ rights, and it is suggested that this lack and associated abuses, could be a focus of Motu's Human Rights Amendment Measurement Initiative (HRMI) which is currently "working to produce a free easy-to-access database of thematic measures of Human Rights Amendment " for a range of

countries around the world (Brook, Clay, & Randolph, 2017; *Motu: Economic and public policy research*, n.d.).

There are still many unanswered questions about bisexuality, which according to (Pond, 2016), "is predominantly not acknowledged as a separate identity to homosexuality" (p. 16). Despite the vast body of literature relating to bisexuality, there appears to be limited research from a hermeneutic phenomenological perspective. For example, a recent study conducted by Macey, Morris, Hamlin & Cravens (2017) claims to be 'phenomenological'; however, the approach appears to be more in line with thematic analysis, and while such research is certainly useful in building up a composite picture in support of the argument that bisexuality may be a valid sexual orientation, such a study fails to engage with a comment such as Alan's about '*bisexual men being merely closeted gays*'. Given the 'invisibility' and lack of understanding relating to bisexuality, it would appear that a Heideggerian or Gadamerian research approach would help to fill a gap.

Findings from this study suggest that sexual orientation is an essential component of individual identity. In considering the diversity of sexual attraction, further research is needed to gain a better understanding of sexual orientation, particularly with reference to a longitudinal study. For example, the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study could revisit the 2003 study through a phenomenological lens. Given the lack of qualitative research relating to sexual orientation, there is a need for longitudinal studies which follow the lives of gay individuals over their lifespans.

Educational research
Findings from this study were that LGBTIQ students experienced disproportionate bullying from other students last century. Further research is needed to establish the extent of homonegativity in schools in present-day Aotearoa New Zealand. Research is also needed to ascertain the connection between homonegative bullying in schools and teenage suicide.

Given the hegemonic and largely unremarked heteronormative and heterosexist discourses in Aotearoa New Zealand, there is also a need for research employing a critical lens to examine discourses of power and marginalisation in educational institutions, with a particular focus on LGBTIQ communities. In terms of raising

awareness of dominant ideologies, and conscientising new generations of students, there is a need to explore ways in which students can be taught critical thinking skills. Citing Kincheloe (2011) and Freire (2000), Parry and Johnson (2015) emphasise the need for research into a "new critical pedagogy" (p. 290), an approach which ensures that students will be taught to 'read' differently, adopting a multi-literacies approach.

Aged care research

The literature suggests that older gay men who enter retirement homes may encounter homonegative attitudes from other residents, as well as from staff. A related issue concerns care for disabled LGBTIQ residents. As a dedicated research group, the AUT Centre for Active Ageing (ACAA) is well placed to build upon the research which it has already undertaken in investigating the extent and intensity of homonegativity in residential care facilities (Henrickson & Neville, 2012; S. Neville et al., 2015; S. J. Neville et al., 2015).

10.8 Advice for readers of this thesis

Any text is available to multiple readers, each of whom will have a unique set of prejudices and assumptions. As the writer of this thesis, I am unable to predict precisely who might be reading these words, and what agendas will be in play as the text is being processed. However, I *am* able to anticipate three clearly identifiable groups of target readers, and so, throughout the writing of this thesis, I have pondered the following questions:

- How can I most effectively be true to the *participants*?
- How can I reach out to *closeted gay men*?
- How can I persuade *heterosexuals who have limited understanding of same-sex issues and challenges*?

My first responsibility is to honour the trust extended me by the twelve gay men who participated in this study, each one of whom shared sensitive and private aspects of his life, in the hope that by telling their stories they might help others to understand lives that are usually not discussed in polite society. Each one of us is a role model: every person who is living life openly as a gay man is a beacon of hope to those people in our communities who are struggling with their sexual orientation.

And I presume that these narratives may be read by people who are somewhere on their own journey through times of confusion and pain. I hope that if you *are* gay, you are advancing through the process of coming to understand what your sexual orientation means for you; I trust that you will be able to draw strength from these accounts, and from the interpretations. And if you are struggling, believe the mantra: *it does, indeed, get better* (Savage, 2010-2016).

My final challenge is to adjure non-accepting individuals to *reconsider* what you know about same-sex issues, especially given that some educational and religious frameworks often condition a particular response. Many people do not understand, or accept, homosexuality; some may feel threatened at the prospect of interacting with gay people. In light of the moral panics and distortions evident in Aotearoa New Zealand in the 20th century, the prevalence of residual homonegativity is understandable, yet remains one of the most critical issues to address. A critical thinking approach is called for, a critique of 'knowledge' that aims to differentiate fact from opinion, to scrutinise agendas, and to dispassionately assess empirical data based on sexological research, and *testimonio* from lived experience. The human factor is also important: from the research, it appears that when people are able to meet gay men personally and to discover for themselves that gays are honourable and worthy human beings, then slight adjustments in understanding pave the way for future re-appraisals of the social order. In this way, the attitudinal and cultural shifts in Aotearoa New Zealand over the last three decades are more easily understood. As Weeks put it, "[w]e are in the midst of a genuine social transformation where what was once unspeakable has become ordinary" (2017, p. 184).

If the primary challenge is raising awareness we might pose the following question: How can members of the wider community be conscientised with respect to hegemonic heterosexism and made aware of (subtle) and pervasive homonegativity? In addition to the concept of "conscientisation", it is useful to invoke Freire's (1972) notion of "praxis", in the sense of promoting opportunities for "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (p. 28); in other words what is needed is ultimately action, possibly activism, but firstly (and more importantly), creating awareness and space for reflection. In all domains where homonegativity resides there is clearly a need for discussion and dialogue in order to challenge the default position

of avoidance: "the only valid approach, Freire believes, is the way of dialogue" Crotty (1998, p. 155).

10.8.1 Advice for men who are questioning their sexuality

All participants endorsed the benefits of living an authentic life as an openly gay man, particularly given that the social attitudes have improved considerably in the decades since homosexual law reform. Emphasis was placed on the importance of being true to your self and embracing life to the full; as Berend put it: "You've only got one life; it's your life; you need to live it how you feel you should live it." Alan's advice was for people who think they might be gay to explore their sexuality, cautioning at the same time that doing so might mark a point of no return. Ross emphasised the sense of satisfaction and fulfilment that emerges when people are "honest with themselves". Each participant had useful advice to offer, focusing on different aspects of the process. The over-arching message is that by acknowledging your sexuality, you start living with integrity and have a very real chance of being at peace with yourself.

In light of the inevitable challenges of undertaking such a life-changing process as coming out, it is vital to establish a support network; a useful starting point is **Outline**:

http://www.outline.org.nz

According to their website, Outline offer a specialist free (and confidential) telephone support and counselling service for people who might be questioning, or who might have sexual orientation issues:

> OUTLine specializes in issues that are not heterosexual, not cisgender and not assigned sex. If you are questioning issues about gender identity or sexual orientation, you can with a trained LGBTI+ volunteer who understands something of what you are questioning. You may be asking for yourself, your whanau or someone for whom you care professionally. … If you need to talk, OUTLine strongly encourages that: isolation and loneliness can become dangerous. (Outline, 2017, para. 1)

Another useful point of contact is **Rainbow Youth**:

https://www.ry.org.nz

According to their website, Rainbow Youth is a charitable organisation that provides a range of support services for young people who identify as "queer & gender diverse" (Rainbow Youth, 2017, para. 1). Common themes include providing support for LGBTIQ individuals at school and in the workplace, and helping people to access health services.

Feedback from people who have used OUTLine and Rainbow Youth counselling and support services is extremely positive.

10.8.2 Advice for heterosexuals

The homonegative attitudes which have been identified in this study are alive and well in numerous domains in Aotearoa New Zealand at the time of writing, and there is every reason to believe that such attitudes will remain an insidious and persistent factor in preventing gays from coming out at the present time, and in future. The implications are clear: homonegativity is not always readily apparent to heterosexuals. However, to an individual who is not a member of the heteronormative hegemony, every subtle homonegative comment, innocent joke, raising of an eyebrow, looking askance at the mention of gays, carries a far greater import than is perhaps intended. The cumulative weight of such language and behaviours conveys a consistent message, the gist of which is that:

- homosexuality is bad
- homosexuals are bad people
- it is not good to be gay

Therefore, every thoughtful person has a role to play in addressing an ongoing problem. If you, as the reader of this thesis, believe that, for example, '*gays should get over themselves*', and that '*while you have nothing personal against gays, but you wouldn't want your child to be gay*', then you are a part of the problem. This attitude will be subtly communicated in your speech and in your body language. And the subliminal messages you send out will be picked up, and interpreted, by the gay people in your sphere of influence: your son, your daughter, your brother, your sister, members of your extended family, friends, colleagues, neighbours. Your homonegativity will be indirectly responsible for the 'internalised stigma' or 'self stigma', which acts as a psychological barrier to an individual developing a positive self image in terms of being comfortable with their sexual orientation. If you are a parent,

you need to affirm from the earliest age that your children will be loved irrespective of their sexual orientation.

10.9 Final reflections

This thesis is a celebration of the courage and integrity of 12 gay men who have joined the relatively small percentage of those who are living as role models for others who have not yet found their way to coming out; while each story has its share of painful episodes, in each case the decision to come out has been vindicated by the subsequent quality of life in terms of inner peace and emotional fulfilment.

In Aotearoa New Zealand in 2017 we have much to be thankful for. From this vantage point, I am mindful of the huge debt we owe to the bravery and vision of the first wave of gay rights activists who began making their presence felt in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. The legislation that has been passed *has* helped to change attitudes and behaviours. However, much remains to be done; and we are increasingly aware of new sites of tension and struggle, particularly relating to transgender issues. It is encouraging that initiatives such as gender-neutral bathrooms for transgender students are appearing as a practical step towards normalisation in this country. In an increasingly networked planet, such developments are of interest to people observing from less enlightened parts of the world.

So now, at the conclusion of the thesis, in revisiting Eliot's lines, we might pause to reflect that "the end of all our exploring, will be to arrive where we started, and know the place for the first time" (1943). So where did the project start? It began with an awareness that homonegativity remains an insidious and largely unremarked, yet still powerful force in contemporary society. Following on from this consciousness, emerged the desire to explore an aspect of modern life which has hitherto received little attention: the *lived experience* of older gay men who have each journeyed towards a deeper knowledge of their inner self, an understanding and acceptance which would enable them come out to the people in their lives.

The investigation involved a consideration of the *processes* of disclosure, first to self, then to others. The project began with a reconnaissance of the *social attitudes* and viewpoints which have in turn constrained and then enhanced the likelihood of an individual feeling able to come out. And now that we have arrived back at our point of

departure, perhaps we are able to see what was always there, but merely covered over. Perhaps our understanding at the conclusion of the study was already in place at the beginning, only now this understanding has been articulated. Let me put it like this: if we genuinely desire a society in which people are enabled to grow up feeling safe and valued in all aspects of their life - *including their sexual orientation* - then each individual, each institution, each discourse community has a shared responsibility to acknowledge the extent of heteronormativity and heterosexism, and to consciously monitor manifestations of homonegative behaviour in their individual spheres of influence. Failure to do so will result in yet another cycle of oppression and repression: people growing up confused about, and afraid to acknowledge, their sexual orientation; *these people will include your loved ones, possibly your own sons and daughters, possibly your grandchildren*.

The social consequences of individuals remaining in the closet are evident from the findings of this study. Therefore, in search of a better future for marginalised minorities – and hence for society as a whole - each one of us has a role to play. And on that note I leave you with a final invitation to consider the changes in *your* thinking, attitude, and behaviour - changes that might make a difference for future generations.

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Appendix A: AUT Ethics Committee Approval

AUT UNIVERSITY
TE WĀNANGA ARONUI O TĀMAKI MAKAU RAU

AUTEC SECRETARIAT

12 May 2014

Marilyn Waring
Faculty of Culture and Society

Dear Marilyn

Re Ethics Application: **14/09 Coming out later in life: A narrative inquiry into delayed acquisition of homosexual identity in Aotearoa, New Zealand.**

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 28 April 2017.

As part of the ethics approval process, you are required to submit the following to AUTEC:

- A brief annual progress report using form EA2, which is available online through http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics. When necessary this form may also be used to request an extension of the approval at least one month prior to its expiry on 28 April 2017;

- A brief report on the status of the project using form EA3, which is available online through http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics. This report is to be submitted either when the approval expires on 28 April 2017 or on completion of the project.

It is a condition of approval that AUTEC is notified of any adverse events or if the research does not commence. AUTEC approval needs to be sought for any alteration to the research, including any alteration of or addition to any documents that are provided to participants. You are responsible for ensuring that research undertaken under this approval occurs within the parameters outlined in the approved application.

AUTEC grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval from an institution or organisation for your research, then you will need to obtain this.

To enable us to provide you with efficient service, please use the application number and study title in all correspondence with us. If you have any enquiries about this application, or anything else, please do contact us at ethics@aut.ac.nz.

All the very best with your research,

Kate O'Connor
Executive Secretary
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: Quentin Allan qallan@aut.ac.nz

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet

AUT
UNIVERSITY
TE WĀNANGA ARONUI O TAMAKI MAKAU RAU

Date Information Sheet Produced: 17ᵗʰ April, 2014 [amended 22ⁿᵈ October, 2014]

Project Title

Coming out later in life: An inquiry into delayed acquisition of homosexual identity in Aotearoa, New Zealand

An Invitation

This research project is interested in the actual coming out process, and asks *how* older gay men have negotiated the process of coming out, later in life.

My name is Quentin Allan. As a staff member at AUT University I am undertaking research for a PhD. I would like to invite you to participate in this research. This research project aims to explore the personal experience of gay men in NZ who have 'come out' later in life. The main focus is on the social environment which affects the likelihood of an individual feeling able to come out. A related objective is an investigation of the experience of living life as an older gay man in the 21ˢᵗ century.

Your participation would involve one pre-interview discussion and probably two interviews which will be audio-recorded. I will ask you to tell your coming out story and to explore aspects of your life before and after coming out.

Your participation is voluntary and you do not have to answer any question if you prefer not to. After the interviews you will have an opportunity to read and amend the transcript and of course, you may withdraw at any time prior to the completion of data collection.

What is the purpose of this research?

The primary motivation for conducting this research is a concern with homophobia in Aotearoa New Zealand. As a result of this homophobia, many men do not come out until later in life; some men never do. Coming out takes a great deal of courage and the consequences are not always predictable. The findings from this research will help us to understand a complex sociological process. Further benefits are outlined below.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

The intention is to recruit as participants gay men who have come out later in life.

Additionally, I may ask you to refer other individuals who fit this profile; in such cases, I would ask you to pass on my contact details to any third parties. Please note that all participation is confidential and I would ask you to respect that confidentiality.

What will happen during and after the interviews?

At the pre-interview discussion I will outline the research agenda and ask you some background questions; this will also provide you with an opportunity to ask me any questions, and to raise any concerns you may have. At this point I will also ask if I may take a photograph of you; of course, if

This version was last edited on 23 April 2013

you prefer *not* to have your photograph taken, that is absolutely fine. However, if you *do* provide permission, this photograph would then be used in the thesis to help personalise your story. Additionally, I will be presenting aspects of the research at conferences and I may wish to use photographs as part of my presentation. Another possibility is that, in addition to the thesis, I hope to produce a book (or other publication) for mainstream readership, and again, the use of photographs will help to personalise the stories for readers – a reminder that this research is about real people who have experienced a life-changing experience.

Following this initial discussion there will be (probably) two interviews which will be audio-recorded. The interviews will typically last one hour each and can take place either at AUT or at a place which is convenient for you. After I have transcribed the interviews, I will send you a copy which you can check for accuracy and coverage. If you would like to add, delete or amend any details, you are most welcome to do so at this point. When the thesis has been examined and lodged with the University, I will send you an electronic pdf copy of the thesis.

What are the discomforts and risks?

It is very likely that some of the issues explored during the interview process may be sensitive; additionally, you may find yourself reliving painful memories and so there is a slight possibility of psychological or emotional risk.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

You can be reassured that the researcher is also a gay man (and one who came out relatively late in life, at the age of 29), and therefore, I am able to empathise with many of your experiences. As the primary researcher, I am concerned to establish an atmosphere of mutual trust and I undertake to treat all participants with the utmost respect. If you find that revisiting painful episodes in your life has been traumatic and requires follow-up counselling, this can be confidentially arranged through the Burnett Centre in Auckland [09 309 5560] or through AUT Health and Counselling. Contact details as follows:

City Campus: 09 921 9992
North Shore Campus: 09 921 9998
South Campus: 09 921 9303

What are the benefits?

You will be contributing to important research which I will publish initially in the form of a PhD thesis, accessible to the academic community and to the general public through the Scholarly Commons of AUT Library.

This research will enable marginalised voices to be heard and encourage unknown stories to be told – a counterpoint to the silence and invisibility that has been associated with homosexuality (especially in popular culture such as cinema and television) for so many years. From an academic perspective, this research will make a significant contribution to the discourse relating to gay identity; it will also preserve a snapshot of experience from a unique period of this young country's developing history.

At a practical level, one potential use of the findings will be to develop educational resources which enable gay men to come out more easily. Indirectly, it is hoped that the research findings will ultimately inform social policy and be of value to social work practitioners, public hospital administrators with responsibility for admissions procedures and staff training, curriculum

developers in medical schools and departments of health science, as well as to (incipient) members of the gay communities and their families.

An additional benefit will be the addition of high-quality interview recordings to the Lesbian and Gay Archives of New Zealand (LAGANZ), a Trust housed in the Alexander Turnbull Library of the National Library of New Zealand, Wellington. Your permission for this will be sought in a separate proposal.

How will my privacy be protected?

The privacy and confidentiality of participants will be maintained throughout the research. This means that I undertake not to use or divulge any private information which has been entrusted to my care, for any purpose other than the proposed research. Furthermore, if you prefer to remain anonymous, you will be given the opportunity to choose your own pseudonym; this can be extended to include pseudonyms for names of places and organisations in cases where there is a concern that you might be identified.

If you prefer to remain anonymous, I will ensure that your details are coded in such a way that you cannot be identified by anyone who reads the final thesis. I will also ensure that consent forms are securely kept in a different location from transcripts and other identifying material.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

The most significant cost will be your time.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

I would request that you confirm your willingness and availability within one week.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

Please send me an e-mail or call me - my contact details are listed below.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

I will make available to you an electronic copy of this research when the thesis is passed by the external examiners. This should be in 2018.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Professor Marilyn Waring

E-mail: _m.waring@aut.ac.nz_ Telephone: 09 921 9999 ext 9661

Or to the Project Co-Supervisor, Professor Welby Ings

E-mail: _wings@aut.ac.nz_   Telephone: 09 921 9999 ext 8621

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEC, Kate O'Connor

E-mail: _ethics@aut.ac.nz_   Telephone: 09 921 9999 ext 6038.

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Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Researcher Contact Details:

Any further queries relating to this project should be addressed to the Primary Researcher, Quentin Allan

E-mail: gallan@aut.ac.nz   Telephone: 09 921 9999 ext 7843

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 12ᵗʰ May, 2014

AUTEC Reference number: *Waring1408_12052014*

Appendix C: Participant Consent Form

Consent Form

For use when interviews are involved.

AUT UNIVERSITY
TE WĀNANGA ARONUI O TAMAKI MAKAU RAU

Project title: Coming out later in life: An inquiry into delayed acquisition of homosexual identity in Aotearoa, New Zealand

Project Supervisor: Professor Marilyn Waring

Researcher: Quentin Allan

○ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 17/04/14 [amended 22/10/14].

○ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.

○ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.

○ I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.

○ If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant information including tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.

○ I agree to take part in this research.

○ I agree to have my real name used in this research (please tick):   Yes○   No○

○ I agree that my photograph can be used in conferences, in the thesis

    and in other publications (please tick):   Yes○   No○

○ I agree that my audio recordings will be made publicly available (please tick):   Yes○   No○

○ I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick):   Yes○   No○

○ I agree to allow my interview recordings to be housed in the Lesbian and Gay Archives of New Zealand (LAGANZ), Te Pūranga Takatāpui o Aotearoa, under the auspices of the Alexander Turnbull Library [refer to separate agreement]; (please tick):   Yes○   No○

Participant's signature: ....

Participant's name: ....

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

....

....
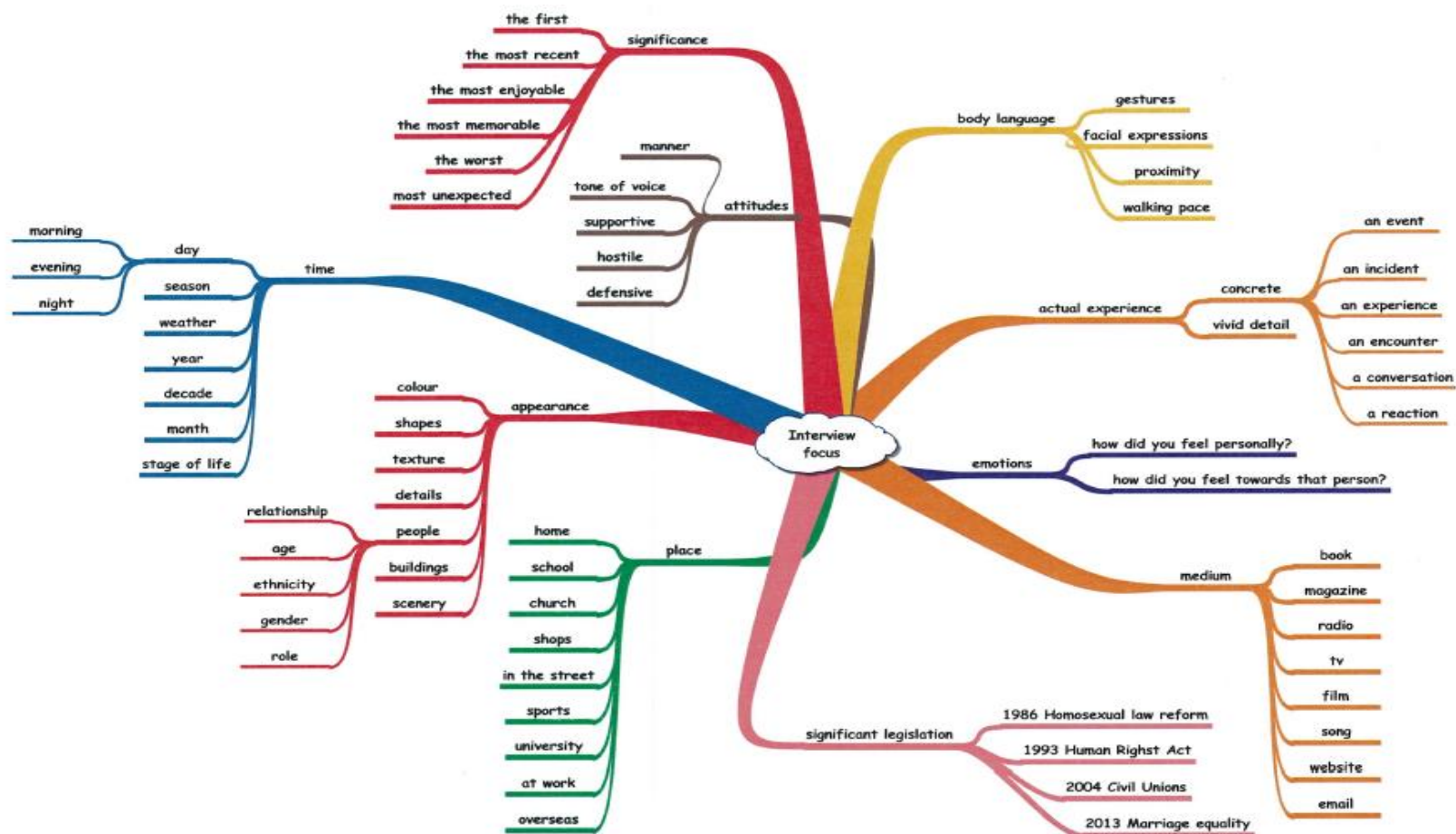
Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on *12th May, 2014*
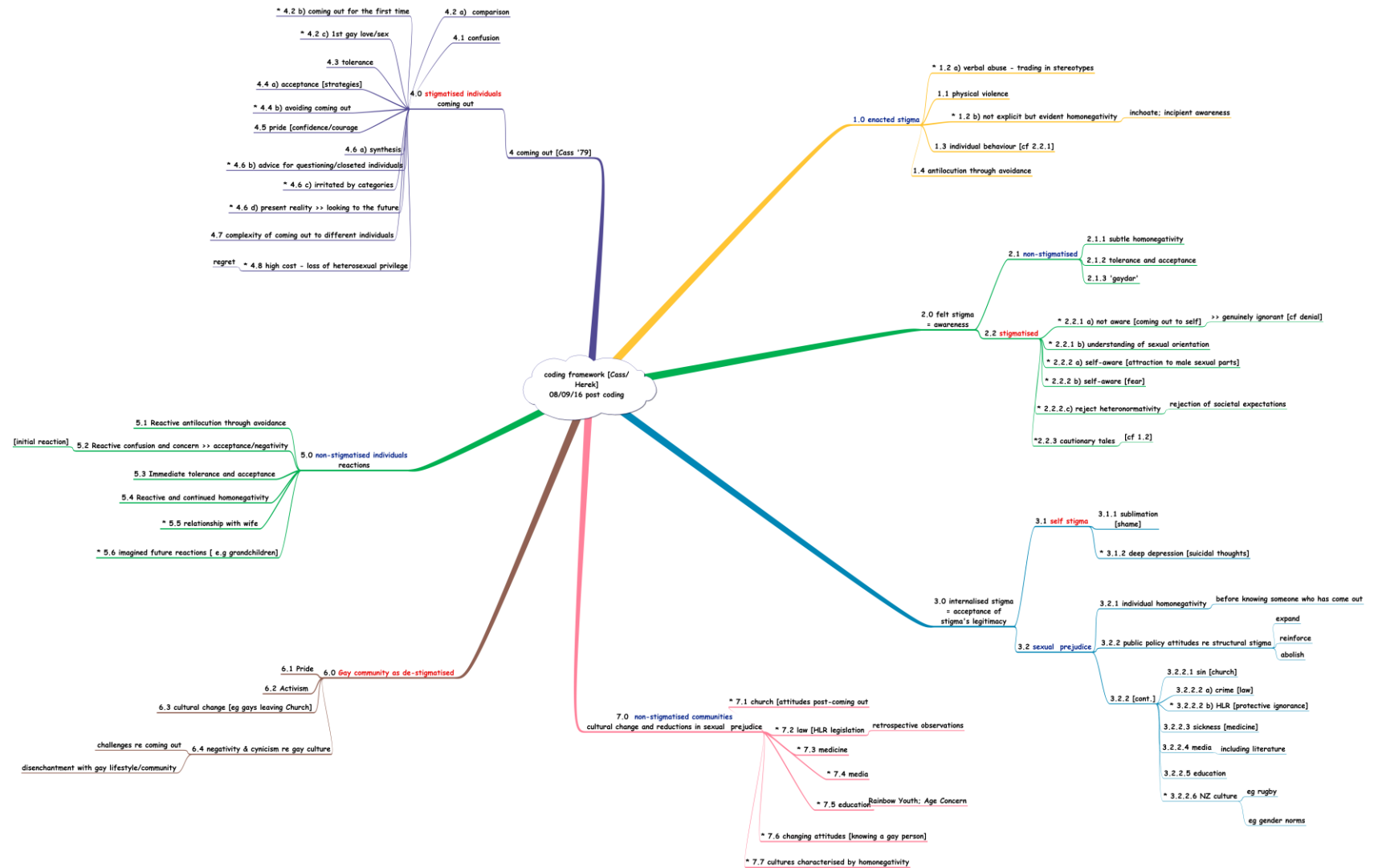
AUTEC Reference number *14/09*

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

Appendix D: Mind Map to prompt experiential detail

Appendix E:
Node structure

coding framework [Cass/ Herek] 08/09/16 post coding

4 coming out [Cass '79]

4.0 stigmatised individuals coming out
- 4.1 confusion
- 4.2 a) comparison
- * 4.2 b) coming out for the first time
- * 4.2 c) 1st gay love/sex
- 4.3 tolerance
- 4.4 a) acceptance [strategies]
- * 4.4 b) avoiding coming out
- 4.5 pride [confidence/courage]
- 4.6 a) synthesis
- * 4.6 b) advice for questioning/closeted individuals
- * 4.6 c) irritated by categories
- * 4.6 d) present reality >> looking to the future
- 4.7 complexity of coming out to different individuals
- * 4.8 high cost – loss of heterosexual privilege   regret

1.0 enacted stigma
- * 1.2 a) verbal abuse – trading in stereotypes
- 1.1 physical violence
- * 1.2 b) not explicit but evident homonegativity   inchoate; incipient awareness
- 1.3 individual behaviour [cf 2.2.1]
- 1.4 antilocution through avoidance

2.0 felt stigma = awareness
- 2.1 non-stigmatised
  - 2.1.1 subtle homonegativity
  - 2.1.2 tolerance and acceptance
  - 2.1.3 'gaydar'
- 2.2 stigmatised
  - * 2.2.1 a) not aware [coming out to self]   >> genuinely ignorant [cf denial]
  - * 2.2.1 b) understanding of sexual orientation
  - * 2.2.2 a) self-aware [attraction to male sexual parts]
  - * 2.2.2 b) self-aware [fear]
  - * 2.2.2 c) reject heteronormativity   rejection of societal expectations
  - *2.2.3 cautionary tales   [cf 1.2]

5.0 non-stigmatised individuals reactions
- 5.1 Reactive antilocution through avoidance
- 5.2 Reactive confusion and concern >> acceptance/negativity   [initial reaction]
- 5.3 Immediate tolerance and acceptance
- 5.4 Reactive and continued homonegativity
- * 5.5 relationship with wife
- * 5.6 imagined future reactions [e.g grandchildren]

3.0 internalised stigma = acceptance of stigma's legitimacy
- 3.1 self stigma
  - 3.1.1 sublimation [shame]
  - * 3.1.2 deep depression [suicidal thoughts]
- 3.2 sexual prejudice
  - 3.2.1 individual homonegativity   before knowing someone who has come out
  - 3.2.2 public policy attitudes re structural stigma   expand / reinforce / abolish
    - 3.2.2.1 sin [church]
    - 3.2.2.2 a) crime [law]
    - * 3.2.2.2 b) HLR [protective ignorance]
    - 3.2.2.3 sickness [medicine]
    - 3.2.2.4 media   including literature
    - 3.2.2.5 education
    - * 3.2.2.6 NZ culture   eg rugby / eg gender norms
  - 3.2.2 [cont.]

6.0 Gay community as de-stigmatised
- 6.1 Pride
- 6.2 Activism
- 6.3 cultural change [eg gays leaving Church]
- 6.4 negativity & cynicism re gay culture   challenges re coming out / disenchantment with gay lifestyle/community

7.0 non-stigmatised communities cultural change and reductions in sexual prejudice
- * 7.1 church [attitudes post-coming out
- * 7.2 law [HLR legislation   retrospective observations
- * 7.3 medicine
- * 7.4 media
- * 7.5 education   Rainbow Youth; Age Concern
- * 7.6 changing attitudes [knowing a gay person]
- * 7.7 cultures characterised by homonegativity

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Appendix F: Parliamentary discourse: Homonegative statements

This appendix contains excerpts from Hansard transcripts illustrating how certain MPs portrayed same-sex relations, and characterised gay men in debating two parliamentary Bills in Aotearoa New Zealand during the late 20th century:

- *Crimes Amendment Bill [CAB] of 1974/75*
- *Homosexual Law Reform Bill [HLRB] of 1985/1986*

I have taken excerpts from the debates and placed them under indicative headings; in order to draw attention to particular aspects, I have highlighted certain words in bold.

Here is a summary of the themes:

1. *Ignorance/lack of familiarity with gay people*
2. *Biblical proscription*
3. *Understandings of the homosexual and the homosexual community*
4. *Distaste*
5. *The act/habit/conduct/behaviour/practices*
6. *Fear that homosexuals will recruit children*
7. *Fear that tolerance will lead to permissiveness*
8. *Fear that homosexuals will spread disease [plague/contamination/contagion]*
9. *Fear for the safety/wellbeing of the homosexual*
10. *Fear for the sanctity of the family unit [breeding; disturbing gender norms]*
11. *Fear for the stability of society (and for the bedrooms of our nation)*
12. *Fear for the nation in general*
13. *Association of homosexuality with twilight world of crime*
14. *Fear for the future of civilisation*
15. *Aetiology – preoccupation with cause*
16. *Need for research*
17. *Ways of addressing 'the problem'*

Allan, Q. (2017). *Gay men coming out later in life: A phenomenological inquiry into disclosing sexual orientation in Aotearoa New Zealand [PhD thesis].* Institute of Public Policy, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand.

1 Ignorance/lack of familiarity with gay people

'… I am not a homosexual, and as far as I am aware I have not even met one …' Hon L Gandar (CAB, 1R, NZPD, 1974, p. 3162) [voted in support]

2 Biblical proscription

'… the act is **condemned in the Scriptures**, both in the Old and the New Testament …' Hon Lance Adams-Schneider (CAB, 2R, NZPD, 1975, p. 2781) [voted against]

'… The great moral laws of the Christian world have their foundations in teachings that have come down to us over thousands of years. They have set standards that are **not severe, bigoted, or censorious**, but are basically and fundamentally decent. …' Mr John Banks (HLRB, 2R, NZPD, 1985, p. 7264) [voted against]

'… Anglican parsons, Presbyterian parsons, Methodist parsons [who condone sodomy] … will have more **trouble with the Lord on Judgment Day** than I will. I would like to be a fly on the wall when they are making their excuses. …' Mr Norman Jones (HLRB, 2R, NZPD, 1985, p. 7811) [voted against]

3 Understandings of the homosexual and the homosexual community

'… the homosexual community … is a **promiscuous** community …' Mr John Banks (HLRB, 2R, NZPD, 1985, p. 7270) [voted against]

'… a homosexual will have **a multitude of partners** during his lifetime …' Mr McTigue (HLRB, 2R, NZPD, 1985, p. 7606) [voted against]

'… the homosexual within the community is **a predatory being**. …' Mr McTigue (HLRB, 2R, NZPD, 1985, p. 7605) [voted against]

4 Distaste

'… The mother who discovers suddenly that her son is a homosexual will **still feel that chill** from now to the end of time. …' Hon Peter Tapsell (HLRB, 2R, NZPD, 1985, p. 7603) [voted against]

'… people who find **homosexual acts totally repugnant** – as I do – are entitled to **shun homosexuals** if they want to do so. …' Hon Frank O'Flynne (HLRB, 2R, NZPD, 1985, p. 7608) [voted against]

'… **this evil Bill** …' Mr Graeme Lee (HLRB, 3R, NZPD, 1986, p. 2584) [voted against]

'… This day will be remembered as **a sad and sickening day for New Zealand**. A very **black cloud hangs over Parliament** tonight, and those members who wheel themselves through the doors of the Ayes lobby … should be **thoroughly ashamed of themselves** …' Mr John Banks (HLRB, 3R, NZPD, 1986, p. 2812) [voted against]

'… wide range of homosexual manifestations … effeminate attitude, a mincing walk, the typical fairy … at the other extreme are the sodomites, and I do not believe that the majority of New Zealanders wish to be **forced by law to accept a sodomite** into houses that they own or even into their workplaces. …' Hon Peter Tapsell (HRB, 2R, NZPD, 1993 July 27) [voted against]

5   The act/habit/conduct/behaviour/practices

'… homosexuality is **an unnatural habit** …' Hon Michael Connelly [Minister of Police] (CAB, 2R, NZPD, 1975, p. 2779) [opposed]

'… the thought of homosexual acts is absolutely **abhorrent** and **repulsive** to me … homosexual acts are **obnoxious** to me …' Sir Keith Holyoake (CAB, 2R, NZPD, 1975, p. 2818) [voted in support]

'… an **unnatural act** … the human body is made for sexual relations between a man and a woman, not for a man with another man …' Sir John Marshall (CAB, 2R, NZPD, 1975, p. 2825) [voted against]

'… If two homosexuals wish to **carry out their disgusting act** in private there is nothing whatsoever to stop them …' Mr Christie (CAB, 1R, NZPD, 1974, p. 3168) [voted against]

'… the actions of homosexuals are both **evil and perverted** …' Mr Geoffrey Braybrooke (HLRB, 1R, NZPD, 1985, p. 3525) [voted against]

'… homosexuality is … **a learned, deviant activity** …' Mr McTigue (HLRB, 2R, NZPD, 1985, p. 7604) [voted against]

'… I … regard homosexual conduct as **wrong, immoral, and … sinful** … it is impossible to argue that the act is either normal or natural. …self-evident, simply because of the

linking of man's sexual urge with an obvious biological necessity … ' Hon Lance Adams-Schneider (CAB, 2R, NZPD, 1975, p. 2783) [voted against]

'… **normal behaviour** is based on the **correct use of those organs** … ' Mr Talbot (CAB, 2R, NZPD, 1975, p. 2809) [opposed]

'… it is about **sodomy** … if the good Lord wanted us to procreate the race through the rear he would have put the womb down there. …' Mr Norman Jones (HLRB, 1R, NZPD, 1985, p. 3522) [voted against]

6   *Fear that homosexuals will recruit children*

'… parents of teenagers – Are they satisfied with the knowledge that their son, at the age of 16 years could be approached and **recruited by the homosexual community**? …' Mr Graeme Lee (HLRB, 1R, NZPD, 1985, p. 3526) [voted against]

'… **child molesters** … would be encouraged by the green light that … this Bill would give to homosexual relations …' Mr Blanchfield (CAB, 2R, NZPD, 1975, p. 2773) [opposed]

' … the evidence shows that those who practice this perversion have the sort of mentality that could incline them to **passing on their perverted and disgusting practices on to young boys** …' Mr Christie (CAB, 1R, NZPD, 1974, p. 3168) [voted against]

'… it will not stop with 20-year-olds or 16-year-olds; **it will be boys next** …' Hon Michael Connelly [Minister of Police] (CAB, 2R, NZPD, 1975, p. 2779) [opposed]

'… Homosexuality will not stop at the age of 16 but **will spread to 10-year-olds and 12-year-olds.** …' Mr Norman Jones (HLRB, 1R, NZPD, 1985, p. 3522) [voted against]

'…amendment aimed at **protecting teenagers from proselytism** … will protect a section of our community not just from **physical violation** but from … distorted attitude of mind …' Dr Wall (CAB, 2R, NZPD, 1975, p. 2788) [supported Bill, but proposed Amendment]

'… organisations such as the **boy scouts will be required** to accept into full-time employment **active, visible, practising homosexuals** …' Mr Paul East (HLRB, 2R, NZPD, 1985, p. 7805) [voted against]

'… **Maori boys are choice targets for cruising gay predators**, whether Maori or non-Maori. …' Mrs Whetu Tirikatene-Sullivan (HLRB, 3R, NZPD, 1986, p. 2819) [voted against]

'… The **monstrous evil of paedophilia** is growing. …' Mr John Banks (HRB, 2R, 1993 July 27) [voted against]

7   *Fear that tolerance will lead to permissiveness*

'… if we changed the law at present we would give an air of respectability to something which I think is **not respectable** …' Air Commodore Gill (CAB, 2R, NZPD, 1975, p. 3164) [voted against]

 '… **only one of a series sought by many permissive groups** in our society. … includes the abolition of religious education in schools, easier abortion, removal of censorship or control of pornography, easy divorce, permissive laws on soft drugs, and even the introduction of euthanasia …' Mr Talbot (CAB, 2R, NZPD, 1975, p. 2807) [voted in support]

8   *Fear that homosexuals will spread disease [plague/contamination/contagion]*

'… a vote to legalise the **spread of AIDS** throughout New Zealand. … If the Bill is passed it is likely that more New Zealanders will die of AIDS in the next 10 years than would die of a nuclear explosion. …' Mr Norman Jones (HLRB, 1R, NZPD, 1985, p. 3522/3) [voted against]

'… The **argument about AIDS being overcome** or ostensibly controlled by the measure is **totally fallacious**. …' Mr Geoffrey Braybrooke (HLRB, 1R, NZPD, 1985, p. 3525) [voted against]

'… Homosexuality is not only an unnatural act but also a very dangerous one. With the **epidemic spread of AIDS almost upon us**, I will not be responsible for passing legislation that will place my fellow New Zealanders at greater risk to this deadly disease. …' Mr Wallbank (HLRB, 1R, NZPD, 1985, p. 3525) [voted against]

'… it is illogical, insane, and irresponsible to continue with the Bill in the light and knowledge of the **threat of AIDS**, which is a world epidemic in the making and a

terrible health threat to the nation. …' Mr Graeme Lee (HLRB, RJLRC, NZPD, 1985, p. 7212) [voted against]

[quoting Rev. Sheldon] '… **people with AIDS should be in colonies** …' …' Mr Graeme Lee (HLRB, RJLRC, NZPD, 1985, p. 7212) [voted against]

'… I have studied considerable documentation by medical researchers for identifying the promiscuous gay community as a **reservoir of disease** for the rest of society. …' Mrs Whetu Tirikatene-Sullivan (HLRB, 2R, NZPD, 1985, p. 7275) [voted against]

'… if medical science does not find **a remedy** for what we face … the principle I am talking about tonight is **survival**. …' Mr Winston Peters (HLRB, 2R, NZPD, 1985, p. 7444) [voted against]

'… New Zealand has the **capacity to escape the scourge of AIDS**, but will not do so if the Bill is passed …' Mr Winston Peters (HLRB, 3R, NZPD, 1986, p. 2817) [voted against]

9   Fear for the safety/wellbeing of the homosexual
'… I have personal knowledge … of the mental and spiritual torture that those people went through … and … are … still going through. I am not saying that they should *not* have some mental torture because … homosexual acts between males, and females for that matter, are **abhorrent** … **obnoxious**, **unnatural**, and **abnormal …'** Sir Keith Holyoake (CAB, 2R, NZPD, 1975, p. 2820) [voted in support]

10   Fear for the sanctity of the family unit [breeding; disturbing gender norms]
'… Homosexuality is the **total rejection of the normal love patterns** between man and wife that lead to procreation and bring the family into being. …' Mr McTigue (HLRB, 2R, NZPD, 1985, p. 7604) [voted against]

'… **incompatible** with the preservation of family life … **undermine** a normal family relationship…' Sir John Marshall (CAB, 2R, NZPD, 1975, p. 2826) [voted against]

'… an acceptance of their actions as a normal variant of human behaviour **degrades heterosexual relationships** to the serious detriment of the family and society in general …' Mr Blanchfield (CAB, 2R, NZPD, 1975, p. 2773) [opposed]

'… It **takes away**, and indeed, it **compromises** – more specifically, it **attacks** – the integrity, the whole purpose, and the welfare of the **family unit**. …' Hon Graeme Lee (HRB, 3R, 1993 July 27) [voted against]

11 *Fear for the stability of society (and for the bedrooms of our nation)*

'… If we took this to its logical conclusion, the bedrooms of our nation could become **dens of iniquity**, where anything could be done …' Hon Alan McCready (CAB, 2R, NZPD, 1975, p. 2789) [opposed]

'… the Bill … gives licence … to **perverts** and the curious excitement hunters. It will encourage adult males to become interested in **abnormal sexual practices** .. it opens the floodgates for all males to commit these **indecent acts** …' Mr K Allen (CAB, 2R, NZPD, 1975, p. 2784/5) [voted against]

'… If one accepted the concept that **homosexuality is an alternative expression of sexuality**, one would have to accept that the same principle applied to **sadism**, to **bestiality**, and to **incest** …' Mr McTigue (HLRB, 2R, NZPD, 1985, p. 7605) [voted against]

'… live and let live … practices such as **orgies**, **prostitution, pornography, polygamy, adultery, incest, sodomy of animals, drug abuse**, and so on …' Mr McTigue (HLRB, 2R, NZPD, 1985, p. 7604) [voted against]

'… What will be **rubber-stamped** by Parliament next – **bestiality**?…' Mr John Banks (HRB, RJLRC, NZPD, 1993 July 22) [voted against]

12 *Fear for the nation in general*

[quoting a detective superintendent from Christchurch] '… a **nation of queers** …' Mr Christie (CAB, 1R, NZPD, 1974, p. 3168) [voted against]

'… in relation to overall permissiveness … once a country drops its moral standards it **ceases to exist as a nation** …' Hon H May (CAB, 1R, NZPD, 1974, p.3174) [voted against]

'… it is the indulgence in homosexual acts that **destroys human dignity** … if the Bill is passed it will be the beginning of a long road of **weakening society's defences** …' Hon David Thomson (CAB, 2R, NZPD, 1975, p. 2774/5) [opposed]

'… his acts must be discouraged lest **moral and social corruption** in our society increases …' Hon Michael Connelly [Minister of Police] (CAB, 2R, NZPD, 1975, p. 2779) [opposed]

'… **social breakdown** … a society darting here and there on the vacillations of intellectual claptrap. We have had an undermining by these people. When will we see the **collapse**? …' Mr Kirk (CAB, 2R, NZPD, 1975, p. 2780) [opposed]

'… we lay the **foundation for our own collapse** … the forerunner of the **cancer that will destroy our community** …' Mr K Allen (CAB, 2R, NZPD, 1975, p. 2785) [voted against]

'… protect the community from the **spread of practices which are unnatural**, … the spreading of this **unnatural perversion**, in my view, has in it the **seeds of national degeneration** …' Sir John Marshall (CAB, 2R, NZPD, 1975, p. 2826) [voted against]

'… If [this Bill] is passed it will have **an evil and insidious consequence for future generations** of New Zealanders. …' Mr John Banks (HLRB, 2R, NZPD, 1985, p. 7264) [voted against]

'… **to ensure that the fabric of society is not torn apart**. … **degeneration** of the family, … **degeneration** in the form of violence among members of society … **degeneration** in the home and family life …' Mr McTigue (HLRB, 2R, NZPD, 1985, p. 7604) [voted against]

13   Association of homosexuality with twilight world of crime
'… It encourages those **people on the fringe of a twilight world of crime** …' Mr K Allen (CAB, 2R, NZPD, 1975, p. 2786) [voted against]

'… In 1969 the age of consent between males was lowered to 16. I was in Amsterdam in the 1970s, and that area has become **notorious for its pimps, sex shops, and drug addicts**. We do not want that to happen in New Zealand … ' Mr Sloane (CAB, 2R, NZPD, 1975, p. 2817) [voted against]

14   *Fear for the future of civilisation*

'… if this style of life grows, the natural idea of procreation could go by the board and we will get **near to zero population growth** …' Mr Blanchfield (CAB, 2R, NZPD, 1975, p. 2773) [opposed]

'… [unnatural practices] which, if they were to spread, would **threaten the future of the race** …' Sir John Marshall (CAB, 2R, NZPD, 1975, p. 2826) [voted against]

'… history has demonstrated that the official recognition and encouragement of this practice has led to the **eventual decay of great nations and civilisation**s.' Hon Lance Adams-Schneider (CAB, 1R, NZPD, 1974, p. 3167) [voted against]

[quoting a detective superintendent from Christchurch] '… if homosexuality were allowed or made legal, condoned or encouraged, the danger would be **as disastrous as a hydrogen bomb** …' Mr Christie (CAB, 1R, NZPD, 1974, p. 3169) [voted against]

[quoting Merivale Christian Fellowship] '… once the family unit is broken down, then so is our nation. History tells us that **great civilisations have crumbled** because of **perverse moral standards** …' Hon Lance Adams-Schneider (CAB, 2R, NZPD, 1975, p. 2782) [voted against]

'… so-called democracy can be allowed to go so far that it **destroys itself**. We could finish up with a **society surviving on the laws of the jungle** …' Hon Alan McCready (CAB, 2R, NZPD, 1975, p. 2789) [opposed]

15   *Aetiology – preoccupation with cause*

'… whether homosexuality is a **sickness, a disorder, a disability, a mild nuisance, or an alternative lifestyle**. … left-handed or right-handed … is it the same as a person who cannot control his consumption of alcohol? Certainly it has to be a **dysfunction** …' Mr Ian Peters (HRB, 2R, NZPD, 1993 July 27) [voted against]

'… Like all forms of self-indulgence it is **a moral problem** …' Dr Rogers (CAB, 2R, NZPD, 1975, p. 2790) [voted in support]

'… Homosexuality is a **disease of the mind and body** …' Mr Christie (CAB, 1R, NZPD, 1974, p. 3168) [voted against]

'… **psychological factors** are the most significant in causing homosexuality …' Hon Michael Connelly [Minister of Police] (CAB, 2R, NZPD, 1975, p. 2779) [opposed]

[according to 'a leading child psychiatrist in this country'] '… approximately two-thirds of psychiatrists regard homosexuality as being either a **neurotic symptom** or an **inversion of normal development** … other tendencies are for the male homosexual to have had a **dominating, overprotective and basically male-hostile mother** … a **weak, absent, or affectionless father** …' Hon L Gandar (CAB, 2R, NZPD, 1975, p. 2804) [voted in support]

'… there is much evidence, including medical evidence, to rebut an old idea that homosexuals are born that way. … many, both male and female, **become homosexuals by events, environment, and example** …' Hon Lance Adams-Schneider (CAB, 1R, NZPD, 1974, p. 3167) [voted against]

'… no scientific evidence … to suggest that homosexuals are born. There is not such genetic, hormonal, or biological evidence. Indeed, considerable weighty evidence shows that **homosexuality is a learned behaviour**. …' Mr Geoffrey Braybrooke (HLRB, 1R, NZPD, 1985, p. 3525) [voted against]

'… homosexuality is **a result of conditioning** … perhaps … **the result of bad family experiences.** Perhaps it is the result of **peer pressure**. Perhaps it is the result of the **environment** in which a person is nurtured …' Mr McTigue (HLRB, 2R, NZPD, 1985, p. 7604) [voted against]

'… nearly all modern analysts support the conclusion that **homosexuals are not born that way**; they learn to be that way …' Mr Angus (HLRB, 2R, NZPD, 1985, p. 7794) [voted against]

'… People become homosexuals for a variety of reasons. Some are **corrupted**, some are **conditioned by parental behaviour**, and some may be brought to it by **hormonal malfunction** … ' Hon D Highet (CAB, 2R, NZPD, 1975, p. 2815) [voted in support]

16   *Need for research*

'… a wise law should **recognise the roots of homosexuality** and **strive towards prevention** … the key to the problem of homosexuality lies in **a disturbed pattern of family relations** … ' Mr Talbot (CAB, 2R, NZPD, 1975, p. 2808) [opposed]

'… the needs of homosexuals should be explored with all compassion, to seek ways in which they can find **a satisfactory adjustment** … ' Mr Talbot (CAB, 2R, NZPD, 1975, p. 2808) [opposed]

'… devoting more resources to an attempt to **understand the influences which bring about homosexual behaviour**; much better to **devote our efforts to correcting something which** the House, I believer, has agreed **is not a normal human situation**. … ' Mr Birch (CAB, 2R, NZPD, 1975, p. 2821) [voted against]

17   *Ways of addressing 'the problem'*

'… problems … should be **solved medically**…' Mr Christie (CAB, 1R, NZPD, 1974, p. 3168) [voted against]

'… homosexuals … need both **medical and psychological treatment**. They do not need a change in the law. …' Mr Geoffrey Braybrooke (HLRB, 1R, NZPD, 1985, p. 3524) [voted against]

'… compassion for the homosexual comes from treating him as **a responsible moral being who can and must change his behaviour** …' Mr Angus (HLRB, 2R, NZPD, 1985, p. 7794) [voted against]

'… I feel that sometimes a bit of **strength of character** or **personal discipline** at the right time might have resulted in a different end product …' Air Commodore Gill (CAB, 1R, NZPD, 1975, p. 3164) [voted against]

'… a number of people who are homosexuals **live with the problem and keep it to themselves**. For them there is no condemnation, but there should be understanding and commendation for the **restraint** they show …' Sir John Marshall (CAB, 2R, NZPD, 1975, p. , NZPD, 1975, p. 2826) [voted against]

'… a certain number of these people can be **counselled and helped through what is often a very difficult time** … ' Mr Comber (CAB, 2R, NZPD, 1975, p. 2825) [voted in support]

'… investment has been made in the lives of people to allow the formation of internationally acclaimed bodies such as **Homosexuals Anonymous** and the **Exodus Organisation** that will help the homosexuals of this country. …' Mr John Banks (HLRB, 2R, NZPD, 1985, p. 7269) [voted against]

'… Recent evidence has shown that **the homosexual can be changed**, and they proved that to me …' Mr Angus (HLRB, 2R, NZPD, 1985, p. 7795) [voted against]

'… There no denying that it is **possible to change one's sexual orientation** …' Mrs Whetu Tirikatene-Sullivan (HLRB, 3R, NZPD, 1986, p. 2818) [voted against]

'… some 50,000 ex-gays can attest to the fact that they have been **totally changed to a heterosexual orientation**. …' Mrs Whetu Tirikatene-Sullivan (HRB, 1R, NZPD, 1992 December 15) [voted against]

'… we have **a duty to establish a norm**, a standard for those who need protection against involving themselves in homosexual behaviour …' Dr Wall (CAB, 2R, NZPD, 1975, p. 2788) [supported Bill, but proposed Amendment]

'… there is **no indication that imprisonment has cured this deviant state of mind** that results in homosexual attitudes … ' Sir Roy Jack (CAB, 2R, NZPD, 1975, p. 2814) [voted in support]

'… provide for other forms of **punishment – for periodic detention, for fines, for probation**, or for requirements as to **treatment** …' Sir John Marshall (CAB, 2R, NZPD, 1975, p. 2827) [voted against]

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