

DUBLIN BUSINESS SCHOOL

**‘AN EXPLORATION OF THE EXPERIENCE OF INTERNALISED
HOMOPHOBIA AMONG GAY IRISH MEN: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL
APPROACH’**

BY

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**SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT FOR THE AWARD OF B.A.
(HONS) COUNSELLING & PSYCHOTHERAPY.**

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APRIL 2011

“There came a time when the risk to remain tight in the bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.”

Anaïs Nin

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DECLARATION

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of BA (Hons) Counselling & Psychotherapy, is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for assessment for any academic purpose other than in partial fulfillment for that stated above.

Signed:

Date:

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Ms. Susan Eustace for her support and guidance during the course of the research. I would also like to thank the staff at the libraries of Dublin Business School and those persons who assisted me at Outhouse, Capel Street, Gay Switchboard Dublin and Trinity College Dublin. Most importantly I would like to offer my appreciation to the individuals who took the time to participate in the research.

On a more personal note, I owe a debt of gratitude to my fellow students for their support and encouragement throughout the research. I would also like to thank my family members, and my friends Kevin, John, Mike, Peadar and Joseph, for their wonderful support. I would like to dedicate this work to my mother Carmel, who recently passed away. Her gentle and kind nature was a huge inspiration to me, and this work would not have been possible without the support and love she showed me through the years.

ABSTRACT

This study concerns the issue of internalised homophobia among gay Irish males, and seeks to develop an insight in to the experience and impact of the phenomenon. Research participants were five gay males between the ages of thirty-one and fifty-seven, from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds across various regions of Ireland. The concepts of homophobia and the internalisation of homophobia, are discussed, with particular reference to attitudes to homosexuality across time, and the impact of internalised homophobia. Theory and research relevant to the topic are also reviewed, and the lack of empirical work in the Irish context is emphasised. A phenomenological approach was utilised in the research in order to attain a description of the experiences and consequences of internalised homophobia. Appropriate ethical issues, such as confidentiality and the right of withdrawal, are addressed. Three specific themes emerged on analysis of the participants exploratory interviews: the process of internalisation of homophobia, the development of strategies to cope with the negative introject, and subsequent attempts to integrate sexuality into identity. The study adds to the current literature and research findings on the experience of internalised homophobia and provides an insight into the phenomenon in the Irish context.

Chapter One:

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Anti-gay and lesbian prejudice is endemic in our culture and most gay people cannot avoid the pervasive negative sentiment which exists in our society. Having been socialised in a heterosexual world, lesbians and gay men frequently possess negative feelings towards themselves and their sexuality. Although significant progress has been made recently towards improving the quality of life for gay people in Ireland, the repercussions of growing up in a culture which is disapproving and sometimes hostile towards one's very existence, must be explored. The psychological phenomenon of internalised homophobia has attracted little systematic research, despite its destructive impact on the mental health of gay people. There is still little known about what predicts or precludes internalised homophobia. (Williamson, 1998)

1.2 Motivation for the Study

To understand the health-related experiences and behaviours of sexual minorities, it is necessary to examine this stigma and prejudice, to explore how it is experienced, and to evaluate its consequences. The objective of the research is to attain an insight into the phenomenon of internalised homophobia among gay men. To this end, the research aims to explore the experiences of homophobia among Irish gay men, and how it is internalised. The research will examine the consequences of internalised homophobia and explore how it affects the identity formation process. The findings of the research are intended to serve as an aid to counsellors, working with internalised homophobia in the therapeutic relationship. It seeks to provide a knowledge base from which to assist gay males, in achieving their innate potential for positive development.

Chapter Two:

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 What is Homosexuality?

Anthropological studies have found that homosexuality occurs in all cultures across the world. (Weinrich and Williams, 1991) It is understood and observed in different ways throughout the world, with certain cultures having approved or even encouraged it. (Davies & Neal, 1996) The concept of a 'gay identity' has developed in the western world, representing a collection of beliefs, values, institutes and support networks, which assist in the creation of subcultures to which gay men and women identify. Davies and Neal (1996) have distinguished between homosexual behaviour (having sex with someone of the same sex) and homosexual identity (seeing oneself as homosexual). This dichotomy is of importance when examining the incidence of homosexuality. Kinsey and colleagues (1948, 1953) observed that 37% of males and 13% of females, had engaged in sexual contact with a member of the same sex as adults. In the same findings, however, only 4% of males and 0.3 to 3% of females, reported themselves as exclusively homosexual. Other studies have reported similar levels of exclusive homosexuality (Gebhard 1972, Meyer, 1985). Davies and Neal (1996) argue that individuals are likely to underreport same sex behaviour, due to social pressures. Kinsey (1948) found a similar number of exclusive heterosexuals as homosexuals, indicating a greater proportion of individuals who were bisexual in behaviour and fantasy, but not in identity.

2.2 Attitudes to Homosexuality

Frazer and Waldman (2003) write that attitudes to homosexuality have not been consistent but rather have varied across cultures and epochs. While sanctioned in

cultures such as the native American 'Berdaches' and the 'Hijras' of India, it has been reviled in countries such as those practicing *Sharia* law. Traditionally, all forms of homosexuality have been viewed as pathological within the field of mental health. Until 1973, homosexuality was labeled a disease in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 1973). It was removed from the disease classification after research by Hooker (1968) documented that, as a group, homosexuals showed no greater pathology than did the general population. Despite declassification of homosexuality as a mental illness and increased visibility of gay communities, widespread public acceptance remains elusive. (Gough, 2002)

Herek (1986) describes a "world-view, a value system that prizes heterosexuality, assumes it is the only appropriate manifestation of love and sexuality, and devalues homosexuality and all that is not heterosexual". This belief system reflects the larger societal attitude towards homosexuality. (Bobbe, 2002) Recent literature has argued that homosexuality does not in itself indicate pathology, but rather society's response to homosexuality – 'homophobia' - creates significant problems for gay people. (Bobbe, 2002) In surveys, as many as 92% of lesbians and gay men report that they have been the targets of anti-gay verbal abuse or threats, and as many as 24% report physical attacks because of their sexual orientation. (Herek, 1989)

It was following the work of Dr. George Weinberg in the early 1970s, that the word homophobia was first introduced to the public (Kitzinger, 1997). Weinberg (1972) defines homophobia as "the dread of being in close quarters with homosexuals – and in the case of homosexuals themselves, self-loathing". Weinberg observed that "the person who from early life has loathed himself for homosexual urges arrives at this

attitude by a process exactly like the one occurring in heterosexuals who hold the prejudice against homosexuals” (Weinberg, 1972). The increased visibility of gay communities and the emergence of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s have both contributed to homophobia in contemporary society. (Gough, 2002)

2.3 Gay Identity Formation

Cass (1979) proposed a model for explaining how gay identity forms. She posits six successive stages, representing a broad explanation of how most gay people progress:

Stage 1: Identity Confusion

Confusion and doubt over one’s sexuality. Possible denial or anti-gay feelings and opinions. Rationalising of gay experiences with explanations such as “I was drunk”. Gradual erosion of resistance and seeking further information.

Stage 2: Identity Comparison

Conscious acceptance of homosexuality but devaluing knowledge. Concealment or denial strategies, possible heterosexual relationship or marriage, possibly a secret gay sex life. The individual may emphasise macho characteristics.

Stage 3: Identity Tolerance

Acceptance of truth of own sexuality and seeking out other self-defined homosexuals. Possible alienation from heterosexual peers but confidence grows if support available, facilitating further exploration.

Stage 4: *Identity Acceptance*

Resolution of confusion over sexuality but may still remain private about sexuality.

Positive experiences increase likelihood of 'coming out' to family and friends.

Stage 5: *Identity Pride*

More involved with the gay community. Anger at injustice and disillusionment with heterosexual lifestyle. Less likely to hide sexuality.

Stage 6: *Identity Synthesis*

Modification or abandonment of idea of gay persecution. Less hostility to heterosexuals and positive experiences with supportive heterosexuals. Sexuality no longer causes internal conflict.

2.4 Internalised Homophobia

“The socialization of every homosexual involves internalization of the social animosity he experiences.” (Isay, 1989)

Internalised homophobia arises when homosexuals themselves come to fear and loathe their sexuality. (Davies, 1996) This represents taking in and owning the dominant culture's attitude towards homosexuality. (Dreyer, 2007) Individuals participate in the transmission of homophobic narratives, often before they know exactly what they mean. (Russell, 2007) Gay people become aware of their sexual orientation later in life, and may have internalised the negative attitudes toward

homosexuality, learned from the culture (Malyon, 1982). Thus, before a gay man identifies himself as gay, he often holds negative associations and beliefs, similar to those of many heterosexual individuals. Allport (1954) argues that stigmatised individuals utilise defensive reactions, as a result of the prejudice they experience. These mechanisms may include exaggerated concern with the stigmatising characteristic, self-denigration and identification with the aggressor. Research suggests that many gay men and lesbians adopt negative attitudes towards homosexuality early in their development. (Isay, 1989, Davies, 1996) Malyon (1982) postulates that through the socialisation process, the homosexual individual internalises the opprobrium, which characterises social attitudes towards homosexuality. In this process, internalised homophobia manifests as unconscious introject, and a conscious system of attitudes and affects. In order to deny and suppress the self-concept, the psychological defences manage chronic anxiety by the emergence of a brittle, false identity. The maturation and integration of erotic and intimate capacities are impeded by the individual's socialised predisposition.

2.5 The Impact of Internalised Homophobia on the Individual

Internalised homophobia can lead to guilt, shame, depression, and feelings of worthlessness (Meyer, 1995). The homosexual individual lacks the peer group validation that Erickson (1950) posits as so crucial in the development of autonomy and self-esteem. The only route to obtain peer-group validation in this context is for the alienated individual to develop a false identity. (Malyon, 1982) Malyon (1982) argues that, as a result, the ego fragments, and psychological defences are utilised to

bind the chronic anxiety inherent in this process. The coming out process necessitates a re-emergence of these issues and a consequent “second epoch” of identity formation. (Malyon, 1982)

Lewis (1984) describes the coming out process as a series of stages beginning with an initial awareness, through to dissonance, grieving, and inner conflict, followed by the gradual emergence of a gay identity. Neisen (1993) has posited that the impact of homophobia on individuals hinders their growth and development by an internalisation of the experience, instilling them with a sense of shame. The individual is forced into hiding their identity and feelings and this has damaging psychological consequences. Research suggests that social prejudice towards homosexuality has a significant effect on the individual. (Rivers, 2002) Sanderson (1994) observes that homophobia experienced in the family by individuals, contributes greatly to why many homosexuals have such a poor self-image and low self-esteem. He believes that if parents and siblings communicate that being gay is wrong or evil, however well intended their opinion, it makes it extremely difficult for the young gay adult to become a well-adjusted human being later in life. This negative discourse is pervasive throughout our society, communicated through the media, in the school playground, in the youth club, the church or at home. The internalisation of profound doubts over one’s deepest feelings can manifest in social or emotional maladjustment. Sanderson (1994) suggests that hearing this message counteracts later attempts by homosexuals at loving another being of the same sex, due to the ingrained belief that their love is corrupt. Cabaj (2000) describes the process by which this sense of shame becomes unconscious. Feeling different leads to pain and confusion and not being accepted leads to the denial of natural feeling. Such individuals cope by learning to disconnect

and dissociate from their true selves and sexual orientation, adapting to parental expectations and societal conventions, through the construction of a 'false-self'. To protect themselves, such individuals continue in adolescence to "split off awareness of affect and behavior related to his or her homosexuality" (Cabaj, 2000). Plummer (1995) highlights the impact of stigma upon an evolving identity:

“The awareness of stigma that surrounds homosexuality leads the experience to become an extremely negative one; shame and secrecy, silence and self-awareness, a strong sense of differentness—and of peculiarity—pervades the consciousness”.

2.6 Research into Internalised Homophobia

Research has found that internalised homophobia is one of the single greatest impediments to gay mental health (Gonsiorek, 1993). Results from multiple studies have indicated that internalising negative societal attitudes towards homosexuality, is associated with risk for a range of mental health problems and poor self-care. (Meyer, 2003, Williamson, 2000). Using Orthogonal factor analysis, research by Ross and Rosser (1996) revealed four dimensions of internalised homophobia: public identification as gay, perception of stigma associated with being homosexual, social comfort with gay men, and the moral and religious acceptability of being gay. Several instruments are currently available to assess internalised sexual stigma. One commonly used measure is the 'Index of homophobia (IHP) scale', which was originally developed by John Martin and Laura Dean (Meyer, 1995). The scale consists of nine items derived from the diagnostic criteria for ego-dystonic

homosexuality contained in the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* of the American Psychiatric Association (1980).

IHP Scale Items: (Men's Version)

1. I have tried to stop being attracted to men in general.
2. If someone offered me the chance to be completely heterosexual, I would accept the chance.
3. I wish I weren't gay/bisexual.
4. I feel that being gay/bisexual is a personal shortcoming for me.
5. I would like to get professional help in order to change my sexual orientation from gay/bisexual to straight.
6. I have tried to become more sexually attracted to women.
7. I often feel it best to avoid personal or social involvement with other gay/bisexual men.
8. I feel alienated from myself because of being gay/bisexual.
9. I wish that I could develop more erotic feelings about women.

(Herek et al, 1998)

Qualitative research exploring internalised homophobia has provided evidence of consistent and coherent narratives of the phenomenon (Stokes and Peterson, 1998). An ethnographic study of rural gay men by Cody and Welch (1997) illustrated how participants speak frequently of having experienced intense shame and guilt. However, internalised homophobia has not proven to be an easy concept to validate as an acceptable theoretical and research-orientated concept, particularly for larger scale

quantitative research. Research has explored the effect of internalised homophobia on gay people engaging in substance use (Amadio & Chung, 2004) or experiencing depression, anxiety and suicide (Igartua et al, 2003) Igartua et al's study (2003) found that the period of greatest risk for both suicidal ideation and suicide attempts, was the period of disclosure of one's homosexuality to one's immediate family.

2.7 Internalised Homophobia and Mental Health

The available data suggest that higher levels of internalised homophobia are associated with lower self-esteem and greater psychological distress (Herek et al, 1998). Research by Herek et al (1998) found that higher levels of internalised homophobia were associated with less openness about one's sexual orientation, and less sense of belonging to the gay community. In this study, individuals with the highest scores on an internalised homophobia scale also manifested more symptoms of depression and lower self-esteem than low scorers. Herek et al's (1998) findings emphasise the likelihood that clients who have negative feelings about their homosexuality, are also likely to be less open about their sexual orientation and less integrated into the gay community

A study by Herek and Glunt (1995) found that a strong sense of identity and community was important for the mental health of gay and bisexual men. Men tended to manifest higher self-esteem and less depression, when they had a positive gay/bisexual identity and did not perceive that their personal setbacks were attributable to anti-gay prejudice. Higher levels of dissatisfaction with one's own homosexuality were significantly correlated with lower collective self-esteem, lower community consciousness and involvement, less disclosure to heterosexual friends,

higher dissatisfaction with the local gay community, and a greater tendency to attribute personal setbacks to prejudice. Frost and Meyer's (2009) research findings suggest that internalised homophobia is associated with greater relationship problems, independent of 'outness' and community connectedness. Depressive symptoms were found to mediate the association between internalised homophobia and relationship problems.

Research by Dew et al (2005) explored whether there was a statistically significant relationship among internalised homophobia, general self-disclosure, self-disclosure to parents and wellness among adult gay men. They found that the strongest predictor of total wellness in homosexuals is internalised homophobia. Their findings demonstrate that the internalisation of negative societal attitudes towards homosexuality negatively affects the gay male's overall mental health and wellness, with increased depressive and psychosomatic symptoms, and higher likelihood of loneliness, guilt, shame, and anxiety. Gay males who show low levels of internalised homophobia appear to experience greater wellness. (Dew et al, 2005) A study by O'Sullivan (2004) found that generalised self-disclosure was related to personal wellness. The results of such studies support the contention that self-disclosure is an important route to achieving personal well-being.

2.8 The 'Minority Stress' Perspective

Research has found that internalised homophobia has a deleterious impact on the mental health, well-being and self-concept of gay and lesbians. (Herek, Cogan, Gillis, & Glunt, 1998; Meyer & Dean, 1998). The minority stress perspective has been

utilised in research on internalised homophobia and mental health. (DiPlacido, 1998; Meyer 1995, 2003). This theory observes stressors as factors that result in change and necessitate adaptation by individuals (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Meyer (2003) has discussed minority stressors as strain placed on individuals who attempt to adapt to an inhospitable social environment. (Meyer, Schwartz, & Frost, 2008). In a meta-analytic review of mental health disorders, Meyer (2003) demonstrated differences between heterosexual and homosexual individuals, and attributed such differences to minority stress processes. Meyer (2003) argues that the challenges of coping with manifestations of sexual orientation stigma can be viewed as part of an ongoing minority stress process, and shows evidence that minority stressors are linked to poorer psychosocial functioning in individuals. Coping efforts are a central part of the stress model, with individuals turning to other members of their minority communities in order to cope with minority stress. Meyer (1995) found a significant relationship between internalised homophobia and five measures of psychological distress. These were demoralisation, guilt, sex difficulties, suicide and AIDS-related traumatic stress response. Meyer found that whilst both stigma and experience of prejudice events were also significantly related to most of the measures of distress, internalised homophobia was reliably the most powerful predictor.

2.9 Internalised Homophobia in the Irish Context

Very little research has been undertaken to explore the experience of homophobia in Ireland. Studies by GLEN/Nexus (1995) and the Equality Authority (2007) showed that gay men and lesbians experience prejudice and discrimination, which causes distress, and has negative implications for overall health. Young gay men and lesbians

are subjected to homophobic bullying (Minton, Dahl, O'Moore & Tuck, 2006) and often experience depression and low self-esteem as a result (GLEN/Nexus, 1995; Gay HIV Strategies/Nexus, 2000). A study by Kelleher (2009) demonstrates an association between minority stress and psychological distress. These minority stressors were shown to significantly predict negative mental health outcomes among the young participants in the research. These findings demonstrate that homophobia is significantly related to feelings of distress and suicidal ideation, among gay Irish youth.

2.10 Justification for the Study

Little qualitative research has been undertaken into the experience of internalised homophobia among Irish gay men. This study seeks to append to similar studies exploring the phenomenon, and provide a foundation for further research and a guide for working with internalised homophobia in psychotherapy. It also seeks to explore the phenomenon from an Irish perspective.

Chapter Three: **METHODOLOGY**

3.1 What Constitutes Qualitative Research?

Despite the fact that many authors have attempted to define the distinction between the qualitative and quantitative research method, Mason (1996) reports that there exists no general consensus regarding this question. She admits that this is not particularly surprising, given that qualitative research represents a whole array of techniques or philosophies, which can by no means be considered a unified set. Mason (1996) posits that qualitative research is often associated with what has been termed as the interpretivist sociological tradition, and specifically the schools of phenomenology, ethnomethodology and symbolic interactionism. Psychologists, anthropologists, postmodernists, feminists, and so on, are observed as having very different concepts of our social realities and therefore different requirements and expectations of qualitative research. Hence, we cannot observe qualitative research as “a simple and prescriptive set of principles” (Mason, 1996)

However, despite this, Mason (1996) highlights the following key points concerning what qualitative research can, and should, be.

- It should be rigorously conducted. However, rigid or structured approaches are usually inappropriate in such research.
- It should be strategically conducted yet flexible and contextual.
- The research should involve critical self-examination, or ‘active reflexivity’, by the researcher. This explains the process whereby the researcher constantly acknowledges their own actions and role in the process.

- The research should produce social explanations to intellectual problems.
- It should produce social explanations that have wider resonance.
- It should not be seen as a unified set of principles and methodologies that can be combined unproblematically.
- It should be conducted as an ethical practice, and with regard to its political context.

Bryman and Burgess (1999) have explained the upsurge in the practice of qualitative research by identifying the following factors:

- The emergence of disillusionment with quantitative research output and its accuracy in delivering a precise account of the social world.
- A growing awareness of epistemological alternatives concerning how social reality should be investigated.
- The emergence of key methodological texts including Glasser and Strauss' (1967) 'Explication of grounded theory', which provided the prospect of a viable methodological framework for the qualitative research process and data analysis.

- The writings of Alfred Schutz, who emphasised the importance of developing an interpretative understanding of the social world, while criticising the application of a natural science approach to social investigation.

3.2 The Concept of Phenomenology

The term phenomenology was first to appear in texts in the eighteenth century, in the work of Lambert, Herder, Kant and Hegel. Johann Heinrich Lambert employed the term to signify the science of appearance, enabling us to proceed from appearance to truth. (Moran, 2000) Phenomenology was seen as reviving our living contact with reality.

Moran explains that the immediate inspiration for Edmund Husserl's use of the term was Franz Brentano, who first employed the term in 1889. Husserl took the conviction that philosophy is a rigorous science from the outset. He stressed phenomenology's 'principle of suppositionless', which was to claim to have discarded philosophical theorising in favour of careful descriptions of the phenomena themselves. (Moran, 2000)

Moran (2000) observes that phenomenology claimed to offer a holistic approach to the relationship between objectivity and conscience, stressing a mediating role of the body in perception. Schmitt (1972) explains that by the middle of the 19th century, phenomenology became what it is associated most commonly with in contemporary usage – a purely descriptive study of any given subject matter.

3.3 The Research Procedure

This process involved gathering of relevant material and secondary data, as presented in the literature review. The intent was to develop a body of information and thus an understanding of the topic in question, without constraining the work by theory. Therefore, at the outset of the interviewing process, the objective was to describe participant's experience relevant to the topic, rather than confirming theoretical hypotheses. In accordance with the phenomenological approach, unstructured interviews were utilised in order to permit the emergence of themes, towards an understanding of internalised homophobia.

3.4 The Inductive Mode of Research in a Qualitative Study

Researcher gathers information



Researcher asks questions



Researcher forms categories



Researcher looks for patterns



Researcher develops a theory or compares with other theories

(Creswell, 1994)

3.5 Sampling Procedure

Sampling techniques have been classified into two broad categories: probability sampling and non-probability sampling. (Malhotra, 1996) The latter category is more often used in qualitative methods as it permits the personal judgement of the researcher, rather than relying on chance. Within this category, the technique of judgemental sampling was selected, where population elements are selected based on the judgement of the researcher. Participants are representative of the population of interest. The respondents in the research were all known to the author and were selected on the basis that they would be appropriate respondents for an understanding of this topic. The author took the approach of selecting respondents previously known to him for the following reasons:

- To mitigate time constraints imposed on the research, in addition to obtaining a suitable sampling frame.
- To permit free-flowing conversation and assist the non-structured approach to the interview.
- To mitigate the author's lack of experience in conducting depth interviews.
- To facilitate an understanding of the respondent's perspectives and interpretations.

- To permit the interviewer to ask questions about relevant aspects of respondents' lives and experiences.
- To mitigate the guilt, stigma and embarrassment still associated with speaking about homosexuality.

3.6 Number of Informants

As Mason (1996) has pointed out, the concern with the purposive approach to sampling strategies is not whether the sample is large enough to be statistically representative of the population sample. It was decided to recruit five informants for the purpose of the study because of the time limits imposed on the research. Similar studies have used such numbers of informants. The following is a brief introduction to the informants recruited for the purpose of the study:

3.7 Profile of Participants

3.7.1 David: David is a thirty-six year old software engineer who originates from a small town in the midlands. He now lives in Dublin, and is open about his sexuality. He has a partner and socialises on the gay scene. He prefers not to describe himself as gay because of negative connotations he associates with the word. Instead he refers to himself as homosexual.

3.7.2 Patrick: Patrick is forty-one years old and currently lives in Dublin. He is a single health professional who hails from the south of the country. A breakdown in

his early twenties forced him to confront issues concerning his sexual orientation. Although he is open about his sexual orientation to family and friends, he prefers not to socialise on the gay scene and dislikes camp or feminine representations of homosexuality.

3.7.3 Thomas: Thomas is a fifty-seven year old single office worker who has lived all his life in a rural community, in the south-east of the country. He remains in the 'closet' and has only acted on his sexual feelings in recent years. As a result, he now feels somewhat more at ease with his sexuality. Despite this, he does not envisage ever revealing his sexuality publicly for fear of the reaction of his friends and relatives.

3.7.4 Al: Al is a fifty-year old community worker who originates from the east of the country. He is single and resides in Dublin. Al entered the priesthood in his twenties, partly to assist in concealing his sexuality. After a period of personal therapy, Al left the priesthood in his late thirties and he is now open about his sexuality and enjoys socialising on the gay scene.

3.7.5 Francis: Francis is a thirty-one year old civil servant and originates from the north side of Dublin. After a long process of personal therapy, he is now at ease with his sexuality and 'out' to everybody. Despite this, he rarely socialises on the gay scene and is currently single.

3.8 The Interviewing Process:

Each of the five interviews took place at the place of residence of the respondent. The interviews were carried out during the period from 19th February to 13th March, 2011. Prior to commencing each interview the participant was informed of the nature of the research and assured of absolute confidentiality. The duration of the interviews ranged from sixty-five to ninety minutes and generated verbatim transcripts of sixty-seven pages. Each interview followed the conventions of phenomenological research as outlined by Thompson et al (1990). The interviews were undertaken solely by the author and proceeded with an initial question concerning experiences of homophobia. The ensuing dialogue was largely set by the client with follow up questions and probes implemented where necessary. The author acknowledges his prior awareness of each participant's sexuality but not of their individual realities, and therefore imposed a loose structure on the interviews.

The author has previous experience of carrying out extensive qualitative research but cannot claim to have mastered completely the skills required. As a result, attempts to overcome any limitations were made by the sampling technique undertaken and through extensive research into relevant theory. Although it is impossible to eradicate interviewer influence entirely from the process, the author's feels that, on reflection, his constant awareness of this concern helped to mitigate its occurrence.

3.9 The Interpretation Process

Once each interview had been completed, a verbatim transcript from audiotape was prepared. This served as the primary text of interpretation. The interpretation proceeded by means of hermeneutic logic which entails an interactive process which consists of reading, documenting and synthesising transcripts. (Thompson et al, 1990) Analysis involved grouping and summarising the respondents' descriptions relating to a particular theme. This provided a coherent framework containing aspects of the social world which the respondents portrayed. (Gubrium & Holstein, 1995)

3.10 Ethical Procedures

All participants were informed about the nature and purpose of the research prior to their participation in the study. All participants reserved the right to refuse to participate in the study and to withdraw from the study, even after participating in an interview. Participants received assurances of confidentiality, including the assurance that their name or other identifying information would not be mentioned in any of the research findings. The author was also aware that the nature of the research may touch on subjects which are uncomfortable or distressing for the respondents. With this in mind, a list of relevant support services and their contact details was provided to each respondent, and it was made clear that the interview could be terminated at any point.

Chapter Four:

DISCUSSION

4.1 Theme One: The Internalisation of Homophobia

The first emergent theme which I will discuss, looks at the pervasiveness of the experience of homophobia for the informants, and how it is internalised. Each respondent describes how anti-gay sentiment persisted throughout their development, coming from numerous sources. The continuous negative messages they are bombarded with, are internalised into their psyche, resting uneasily alongside their sexual feelings.

4.1.1 David:

Although David doesn't remember much direct homophobia, indirectly he experienced it in numerous ways. In particular, his experience at school is recounted as being extremely difficult. David became increasingly paranoid about concealing his identity and ruminated on the potential consequences of being found out.

“.....I thought I would lose all my friends, I would have no friends whatsoever, probably thought I would get beaten up and I would have to leave the town straight away.”

This frightening internal process leaves him feeling traumatised. He contemplates how difficult his life will become if his cover is blown. This thought process leaves him feeling nervous, and it reinforces the importance of not having his sexuality discovered. He describes worrying constantly and wondering if anybody notices him looking at men. He evaluates others for how they perceive him and he surveys his environment constantly for potential threats. He becomes very wary of certain

individuals who may suspect he is homosexual. This continuous rumination has an adverse effect on his mental well-being.

“There was one guy in my class who I thought had an inkling that I was gay.... we were playing football....and he was shouting at me “up his arse” when I was marking a guy, things like that...I used to be always very nervous around him.”

David describes how this constant pressure drove him “a bit nuts” and he considers quitting school and leaving his town, in order to resolve his crisis. Although looking back, he now assesses the situation as being blown out of proportion, at the time it was huge for him. He remembers wondering whether others would pick up on the fact that he didn’t have a girlfriend. He describes a continuous internal struggle in order to keep attending school and finish his leaving certificate.

What he observes from society towards homosexuality confuses him. He hears this at home, in the schoolyard, at church, in the media. He knows he is doing nothing wrong but the level of anti-gay sentiment causes him great mental torture. He is unable to deal with this mental anguish and bottles everything up. He internalises the negative messages he receives.

Nowadays, this internalisation manifests as an inability to confront homophobia for fear of the consequences. He describes a recent work situation and the possible ramifications if he comes out and challenges the workplace homophobia.

“.....this guy is actually somebody who helps me a lot at the moment and if he turned out to be homophobic in anyway to me, then that would be kind of dangerous for my job....”

Although David has come a long way in accepting his sexuality, remnants of the impact of homophobia in his life are still evident. He over-analyses the consequences of his behaviour, and surveys his environment for potential threats. Nothing can be done naturally or spontaneously, he is still cautious and restricted.

“....I’d like it just to be completely normal.....I have to go through a thought process over it, it’s not instinctive and natural....it’s the same as, like, holding hands with someone on the street...and the fact of mentioning a partner at work, I have to have this big internal dialogue with myself whereas for these people [heterosexuals] they never have to think of it, and that’s just so unjust.....”

4.1.2 Patrick:

Patrick describes his childhood experience of homophobia as being extremely upsetting for him and it greatly affects his development. He remembers his father’s explosive reaction to homosexuality on television and this hugely impacts his self-image. Homosexuality was presented to him as something “disgusting” and “horrible”.

“I can remember when there was a gay... storyline on Eastenders..two gay guys and they eventually kissed, and my father just went mental, he just said how disgraceful it was and how disgusting it was and turned it off and walked out the door, which I felt really crap about because I knew I was gay at that stage....”

In another incident, he recalls being taunted by a friend for being homosexual and he remembers retracting into himself. This is how he deals with the consistently negative messages he receives regarding his sexuality. He recalls feeling anxious and depressed as a result with a strong feeling of disgust at himself for being so wrong in other’s eyes. With each homophobic message he withdraws further in to himself and he constantly guards against his sexuality being found out. Reflecting on his reaction to homophobia Patrick states:

“I would have retracted further, I wouldn’t have said anything, I would have become more insular about it and make sure that nobody was ever going to know....”

With nobody to speak to about his dilemma he begins to research homosexuality and is terrified by what he finds.

“I remember looking up the world book..... and it was scathing ...it was a mental disorder, it shouldn’t be encouraged....electric shock therapy, how impressionable young people can be indoctrinated in to it by older men...it was absolutely horrific reading it, [I was] disgusted, I just felt really, really evil....”

He resolves to keep these huge fears to himself and begins to internalise the opprobrium. As a result, he feels that he is evil and “the worst possible thing”. He describes being constantly nervous and rarely going out as it is too risky for him. He remembers contemplating the possible consequences of having his secret revealed.

“As far as I was concerned if I was found out I would have been kicked out of the house, ostracised, sent to prison, I mean, whatever, everything and anything, parents would have rejected me...”

He develops a subsequent self-hate because of his sexuality and this internalised homophobia is evident when he first comes out and starts to frequent gay venues.

“...I went to one gay night in Limerick...they were as gay as Christmas....which put me off completely, I hate it. I’m homophobic in that way...it actually disgusts me.”

Logically, he knows there is no reason to hate a gay man who is very effeminate but he describes this hatred as being more deep seated in him and a threat to his own masculinity.

“I don’t like it [gay pride events]...even still, I’m just embarrassed by it, I’m quite homophobic about it, I’m quite dismissive of it, quite disgusted by it, I find it sexually cringeable...I get quite angry about it.”

These very strong homophobic views appear to replicate the messages he received when he was young. Although he has come out as a gay man and realises there is no

valid reason for his dislike of camp gay people, he instinctively is threatened by them, in a sense he is still guarding against being identified as gay, or having his cover blown. He is still rooted in that earlier terror.

“...Anything gay would be a danger to me at that stage...even now at forty-one years old ... there’s a deepset fear of that I suppose....”

Patrick wants to have nothing to do with camp or effeminate men and dismisses out of hand the possibility of having any type of relationship with such a man.

“...It’s awful, I kind of write people off before I even know them, if they are very feminine or very gay and limp-wristed I just write them off....”

He cares greatly what ‘straight’ people think about him, and he likes when people cannot tell that he is gay. This appears to mirror his desire not to have his “cover” blown when he was growing up. He describes his recurrent depression as emanating from the feelings of disgust and self-hatred that still remain from his early negative experiences. When he is confronted with homophobia nowadays, he immediately goes into a similar withdrawal process he described when he was younger.

“Unfortunately, when I experience homophobia, I’m quite quiet about it. I don’t do much about it, again I feel the same sense of stay in there, don’t make a big deal about it....”

4.1.3 Thomas:

Thomas speaks of growing up in an environment where he was completely unaware of what homosexuality was, and as a result his emerging sexual feelings were at first not considered strange. It is only through observing the attitudes that other people express towards homosexuality, that he begins to question his feelings and internalise his negative experience.

“Well not knowing that I was different. I just thought it was normal and then realised it wasn’t.

Thomas recalls not feeling guilty about his sexual desires for men but he subsequently realises that his sexuality is something that he must keep very much to himself. Thomas imagines having to leave the country or at the very least his county if his secret is discovered. He remembers contemplating the possibility of losing all his friends and family and everything he knows.

“.....In those days, em, I think I’d have to be very brave to do that [come out as gay] and literally leave the country or leave the county. Certainly, I wouldn’t have been accepted among my friends or family ...”

As a result of this rational process concerning his sexuality, he decides to make a conscious decision to hide this part of himself from others. Thomas compares it to being a criminal and acknowledges that, in those days, it still had not been decriminalised. Whenever references to homosexuality are made in company he

“ducks for cover” and tries to show no reaction, as this could compromise his secret. He does not challenge homophobia as it would be “showing my colours”. He experiences homophobic comments directed at him but reckons that this must mean others don’t realise he is gay, and in his own words, is “getting away with it!”. He has no outlet to speak of his sexuality and what little knowledge he possesses he learns from television, newspapers and magazines. On a couple of occasions his own sexuality has been questioned by others but he swiftly dodges any discussion.

“Then I remember a new girl started in the office one time and very early on she was talking about something and she said “Well, I’m not sure which way you bat” I just said “What do you mean?.....So I left it at that, I pull back”

Thomas describes being terrified of disclosure and uses phrases like being “found out” or being “caught”. He must constantly negotiate his environment to ensure that this part of his identity is not uncovered.

“I remember one time a card coming into the office.....I can’t remember exactly the comment but it left me as being....there was the lads and the girls and then there was Thomas. They weren’t sure which way I was..... I was thinking..oh Jesus, I’m caught!”

Despite this double life, he asserts that he has no problem with homosexuality. For Thomas it is rather that “everybody else might have a problem” and that is why he prohibits this aspect of himself. On the rare occasion he has frequented a gay venue, he has felt terrified and contemplates catastrophic scenarios.

“ I was afraid if a fire breaks out here and I die in this place and I will be secretly outed, or if I’m injured and taken away to hospital how am I going to explain what I was doing there?”

Living a double life for Thomas is the “killing part of it” and he now regrets how his life and development have been “stunted”, and how he has not had a “full life”. Despite his regrets, he still can only contemplate having this other life in another country and leaving behind everything he knows. Thomas demonstrates his internalised homophobia when imagining that coming out to his friends and relatives would be like confessing a murder.

“....To me it would be like a murder, I would have done something that nobody would have suspected I would do. Like if I went out and murdered somebody tomorrow...”

4.1.4 Al:

Al recalls very little mention of homosexuality, as a child, but what he does remember is extremely negative. Homosexuality is viewed as something dangerous and something to be wary of. It is something suspicious and obscure, so obscure that there is not even a vocabulary for it.

“...With my uncle I don't know whether he'd be a little more open, he'd been in England and came home...he had the word homosexual, my father didn't seem to have that word at all, it was just “keep your arse to the wall”.”

As a result of his very negative early depictions of homosexuality, Al is on edge anytime the topic comes up, as he is unable to deal with the subject. In his teens, Al begins to learn a little bit more about homosexuality, through current affairs shows on the radio, but even then it is minimal and it is something very unknown to him. At fifteen or sixteen, Al realises that these feelings are in him and he feels terrified. He partly attributes this to his strict Catholic education, where any notion of sexuality is denounced. His sexuality is described as a chasm which opens up before him and which he has no assistance in negotiating. He is terrified by these feelings inside him and with nobody to speak to, he ruminates about his dilemma constantly. For Al the possibility of his sexuality becoming public is too terrifying to even contemplate, it would be a crime.

“.....At that time I wouldn't have even thought ahead of what would happen [if he was found out] It would have just been anathema, you couldn't mention it.....the word criminal comes in to my mind.”

Despite this the “criminal” thoughts persist and as a result he internalises his experience, hiding this aspect of himself from others. Al withdraws from others and becomes introverted, hiding his sexuality from others with great skill. He recalls not being able to understand these feelings and describes this time in his life as like being in a “dark room”. Whenever the subject is mentioned, he closes up and tries not to

give any hint of his secret. When he enters the priesthood in his twenties, the church's vilification of homosexuality serves to further repress his sexuality. He recalls utilising his well developed skills of switching off, in order to get through his time as a priest, and describes shutting off his emotions to the extent that he becomes "a machine". Eventually, after becoming sexually active for the first time, the rupture between the two disparate parts of his identity becomes too great to tolerate. This culminates in Al experiencing a breakdown.

"There was a big split, a big division in me. I had one public persona and had to do all I had to do in public life, then there was the hidden side of me that sneaked out at night occasionally, to try and find whatever was out there, that I hadn't a way of finding otherwise.

Despite coming out eventually, and feeling great relief in this process, he still is cautious about expressing his sexuality and must assess whether his behaviour is socially acceptable rather than showing spontaneity in his affection for others.

4.1.5 Francis:

Francis recalls the disgust his parents expressed for homosexuality when he was younger. As he is already aware that he is attracted to men, this very negative attitude to homosexuality has a significant impact upon his development. Francis and his siblings are warned against the dire consequences of turning out "this way" and as a result he is plunged into a deep personal crisis.

“...the message was out loud and clear that this was something that was absolutely horrific, their response was so strong, I was left with no doubt, this was one thing that you could not even contemplate being.”

Observing his environment as being unanimously hostile towards homosexuality, he struggles to incorporate his emerging sexuality into his identity. He describes his sexuality as the absolute worst thing you could be according to his school friends.

“...I remember all the terms...gaylord, faggot, queer, puff...they all just came out so readily in the schoolyard, anybody who was at the end of another’s vitriol or hate or anger, well that would be the first word out....”

Because of the existence of feelings deemed to be so wrong by so many people, Francis describes feeling immense shame and guilt.

“I had those feelings and felt really, really awful. I felt like a murderer, even in the act of desiring someone or fancying someone, it was almost as bad as killing someone, that was the message I was getting.....”

The only option available to Francis is to keep this part of his identity deeply hidden from others, for fear of the imagined devastating consequences. He recalls being preoccupied with these fears and where once he was full of joy and adventure he becomes anxious and withdrawn. Eventually, he feels compelled to give up his beloved sports and his studies begin to suffer due to the fear of being found out.

“I felt if anybody found out I was one of ‘them’ I would have been...I don’t know, I would have been killed, set upon, humiliated, abused, I couldn’t show my face again. It didn’t even bear thinking about ...”

This time of great confusion is further exacerbated by the terrifying messages he recalls in the media about AIDS: “the gay plague”. Having nobody to speak to about his fears, and after a health scare in his early teens, he begins to believe that he has contracted the disease. Francis remembers considering that the disease is his punishment for his sexual desires, and he contemplates the possibility of dying and disgracing his family in the process.

“...I was pretty sure I would be dead by the time I was 15 and I really now attribute all this to how the AIDS scare was presented in the media: “the gay plague”. I suppose it was also just my own self-hatred, fear and guilt.....”

By his early teens, Francis has internalised the message that he is “something completely wrong, completely evil, completely perverted” and this makes every day a nightmare for him. He describes his only escape as fleeing into his imagination and withdrawing from the world. Frightened, isolated and full of guilt and shame, he recalls trying in vain to extricate himself from these feelings. Alternatively, he decides to assiduously hide his sexuality from others and cut off this part of his identity from the world. Whenever the subject surfaces in conversation, he desperately tries not to give any hint that he is gay. It is only after meeting his first boyfriend, in his early twenties, that he begins to express his sexuality for the first time. He almost collapses with relief.

4.1.6 Summary:

The first theme which emerged, as a result of the analytical process, concerned the internalisation of the experience of homophobia. The theme was explored by looking at the respondents experiences of homophobia, and the affect it had on each of them. The pervasive negative attitude towards homosexuality leads to a process of internalisation of the opprobrium. Respondents describe being fearful that their sexuality will be revealed and this impacts their lives in various ways. They use words like ‘criminal’, ‘horrific’, and ‘disgusting’ to describe how homosexuality is portrayed to them by others. This pervasive opprobrium is internalised and the inner conflict that ensues, manifests in various ways. David becomes paranoid and nervous, Patrick starts to despise gay people, Thomas feels like “a criminal”, Al withdraws from others and becomes “a machine”, while Francis imagines that he is being punished for his desires by means of a fatal illness. This provides a foundation to enable the reader to understand where each respondent is coming from in relation to the subsequent themes which developed.

This theme is consistent with the writings of Malyon (1982) (See Chapter 2, page 9) who posited a socialisation process, in which the homosexual individual internalises pervasive negative social attitudes towards their sexuality. In this process, internalised homophobia manifests as unconscious introject and a conscious system of attitudes and affects.

4.2 Theme Two: The Development of Coping Strategies

The second theme which emerged as a result of the research, concerns the respondents efforts to cope with the negative messages they receive about their sexuality, and how this experience is internalised. Adaptive and maladaptive coping mechanisms are utilised, in order to provide some relief from the internal conflict that they are experiencing. Consistent with the observations of Cabaj (2000), a recurrent strategy towards this end is attempting to disconnect and dissociate from the experience. All the respondents describe switching off, withdrawing, becoming introverted, or replacing their harsh external reality with a fantasy inner world.

Francis: “I couldn’t really think ahead, I suppose I dealt with it by switching off, daydreaming, getting lost in my imagination, it was the safest thing for me to do, to just withdraw from the world.....”

This process is mirrored by the other respondents:

David: “...it made me kind of introverted and nervous and kind of scared to be found out...”

This is described as part of the process of concealing one’s sexuality from others. Safety is gained by withdrawing from the world.

Patrick: “I suppose it was to avoid interacting with people and being found out or something...”

This withdrawal from the external world and detachment from the experience is exacerbated by the sense of isolation that the respondents feel as a result of not having anyone to speak to about the dilemma.

Al: “. It was basically hidden, I was in my own world..... I was observing, I was looking but never talking at all, only thinking and I suppose desiring or admiring.”

Another way of dealing with the inner conflict, and concomitant anxiety, is through compartmentalisation. All the respondents describe a process whereby they cut off their sexuality from their more socially acceptable personas.

Al: “....Part of being a perfectionist as well, but a very important part was not perfect at all and not integrated, leaking outside of me and acting out fantasies. I had learned a long time ago to divide my life into segments, so I was very skilled at that and very used to doing that and compartmentalising bits of me....”

Francis: “....I had to remove that part of my personality from the rest of my persona with everybody. I didn't rationalise it at the time, I felt I had no choice....”

The respondents must also guard against the constant threat of being discovered and potentially ostracised by family and friends. As a result, they become people pleasers, workaholics and perfectionists, in order to conceal what they perceive as their inadequacy.

Al: “That’s what I ended up being like – a machine. That’s how I treated myself, I wanted to be ‘Mr.Perfect’....”

Patrick: “I became everybody’s friend, I became the best brother in the world, I became the best son in the world, became everybody’s friend, became “real nice Patrick”, because I had to have that for the fear of being ostracised....”

This is part of a process whereby the respondents cope with the threat to their being, by assuming, or attempting to assume, a false identity, one which is more acceptable socially and assists in concealing their sexuality. In response to a question concerning whether he assumed a false identity David states:

“Yes, while I was at school completely, I even had a girlfriend.”

Patrick: “..so I became a ‘lad’ going to matches and avoiding any sign of femininity or gayness...completely on guard or high alert the whole time.”

Thomas: “....I was considering religious life, and I saw that as maybe a way of not having to face marriage or not having to prove to anybody...”

Another technique for coping with the internal struggle is to attempt to extinguish the feelings. The individual makes a conscious effort to remove the offending part of their identity by blocking thoughts and avoiding images which may provoke sexual feelings.

David: "...I gave myself six months to kind of try and not to be, and I said to myself if I can't...If I hadn't succeeded in fixing myself, I'll accept it..."

Francis: "...I really put a ban on it, looking at men on television, around me, anything like that..."

But these efforts to hold back such strong and natural feelings are futile and the respondents soon realise that they cannot so easily dispose of their sexuality.

Francis: "...I knew at that stage that I couldn't keep these feelings at bay. I knew that by keeping them at bay I would really...it would be too difficult..."

4.2.1 Summary:

All of the respondents have described specific coping mechanisms for dealing with their internalised homophobia. In theme one, the author observed that the experience of homophobia among the respondents was internalised, and this impacted upon the well-being of the individuals. In the second theme to emerge, the author observes a gradual adaptation to the internal conflict, which exists between respondents sexual desires and internalised societal opprobrium. Respondents withdraw from others, compartmentalise their offending feelings and develop false identities, in order to compensate for their perceived inadequacies. The next theme to emerge follows on from this defensive process by exploring the success of the respondents attempts to integrate their sexuality in to their identity, and how internalised homophobia thwarts this process.

4.3 Theme Three: Respondents Attempts to Embrace their Sexuality and Integrate it into their Identity.

David describes how he observed homophobia everywhere around him and as a result he becomes introverted and afraid of disclosure. Following a brief attempt to get rid of his sexual feelings he completely accepts that he is gay. He becomes depressed in his teens and eventually this forces him to confront his sexuality and come out to his family.

David: “..I was probably depressed from when I started internalising all this when I was fifteen or sixteen but I didn’t actually realise that I was seriously depressed until I was about twenty ...”

David’s experience of depression compels him to reflect on his experience and his sexuality. As a result of this inner process, he eventually manages to integrate his sexuality into his identity and he now feels “fantastic” about being homosexual. However, some remnants of the homophobia he experienced are evident. He does not directly challenge homophobia for fear of the possible consequences. David also rejects being associated with certain types of gay people but doesn’t believe they should be discriminated against.

David: “...If people have the idea that gay means camp and dressing up as a woman then I’m going to say then “well I’m not gay”, because I don’t see how there’s any need for the word gay when the word homosexual describes it perfectly.”

Patrick describes how he became a “professional liar” in order to avoid being found out. He conceals any characteristics or interests deemed to be feminine or gay and instead adopts a macho persona. As a result, his sensitivity is replaced by toughness and his sexual feelings are prohibited. A bout of depression and a subsequent breakdown in his early twenties forces him to confront his sexuality and he comes out to family and friends. Despite their support, he feels that he has not progressed much in terms of accepting his sexuality. He describes himself as homophobic, with a self-disgust deep set in him. He has yet to overcome the negative consequences of the internalisation of the homophobia he experienced in earlier life. His deeply entrenched negative self-concept has prevented him from integrating all aspects of his identity. He is terrified of his own feminine feelings and guards against them coming to the surface. As a result, he avoids intimacy or any behaviour where he is submissive. It is almost as if the extreme negativity he observed, in relation to homosexuality and sensitivity in males when he was younger, is still restricting his ability to integrate those elements of his personality.

“It’s too risky and emasculating, is that the word? To be passive in a relationship, to me I cringe, I feel it absolutely weakens me as a person, weakens me, makes me kind of pathetic....”

Patrick continues to work towards integrating his sexuality into his identity in personal therapy. He is in the process of reassuring and parenting his “inner child” which he once abandoned.

Thomas describes how in order to appear normal to others he made a decision to live a “double life”. In order to keep his double life intact he continues to constantly disavow certain interests and not appear gay in any of his mannerisms.

Thomas: “..some off the stuff in your conversation or your body language too I suppose, to a certain extent you have to be careful that it is not read by straight people as a gay thing. ”

An identity emerges whereby Thomas selectively removes those aspects of his personality which may reveal his secret. In place of this disowned part of his identity, a ‘false-self’ emerges to assist in the concealment.

Thomas: “trying to live a straight life you know, and sound normal while not being into all the things that straight men would be into..”

Recently, through meeting gay people on the “same wavelength” as himself, he has become “more at ease” with his sexuality. He has considered coming out to people he trusts but has, as of yet, not taken that leap. As a result, he often feels lonely.

Thomas: “You’re very isolated, you really are on your own, you’re living a double life and that’s the killing part of it...”

He desires the freedom that embracing his sexuality would bring, but the fear of possible losses from revealing his identity, overrides this inclination. He resolves to continue to repress his sexuality and has not integrated his sexuality into his identity.

Thomas: “I suppose I never will come out to people but like I said earlier on if they choose to think that of me and that’s the way they pursue it then so be it, but I’m not going to tell them they’re right.”

Al describes how as a priest, he began to act on his sexual desires and as a consequence he is plunged into a personal crisis. As a result of this crisis, he decides to confide in a bishop and first reveal his dilemma. After a difficult time in a residential therapy centre in England, he embraces his sexuality for the first time. This process is recalled as being extremely painful for Al.

Al: “The report that my therapist eventually gave up was that I was dealing with facing up to the issues as time went on, but with great personal cost to myself. The hardest time of my life.”

However, this difficult process eventually allows Al to start to integrate parts of his identity which had been previously separated, and this has had a huge impact on his well-being.

“...I had found a huge freedom in myself having dealt with my sexuality, so it was ok to be me. Homosexual Al wasn’t being beaten over the head anymore by Catholic Al.”

After returning to Ireland following therapy, Al begins his ‘coming out’ process, realising that real friends will accept him. After a further period of group therapy, he

eventually decides to leave the priesthood, and one Sunday departs for a new life in Dublin. He immerses himself in the gay community, with the emergence of a very different Al.

“I was very happy and it was delightful, it was lovely to be around other people and it was lovely to be there. I had spent most of my life in the closet, a very strict closet. Now I was in a bar and these people were all gay aswell. I was like the child in the proverbial sweet shop, so a massive change....completely, outlandishly different.

This freedom to be who he is in his entirety leaves Al feeling liberated and exhilarated.

“Hugely positive about it now, it was a seismic change, an incredible change.”

However, remnants of his internalised homophobia linger and he describes situations where he feels in danger because of his sexuality, and therefore in such situations he once again must deny his sexuality.

“I was asked directly was I gay one evening in a social setting and I hadn’t the guts to come out and say I was because the guy who was asking me I felt him very threatening. I erred on the side of caution.”

Francis describes that as a consequence of the extremely anti-gay sentiments he observed in his environment, his sense of fun, adventure and joy was “drained” from

him. Instead he becomes anxious, scared and preoccupied with thoughts of being found out. He decides to give up sports and cannot concentrate on his studies.

Francis: "...I couldn't think about the future, I couldn't concentrate on studies, I didn't enjoy my sports anymore. I was just paralysed with fear. Such a dark time and I was paralysed with the fear."

Following an unsuccessful attempt to "destroy" his homosexuality, he resolves to be vigilant in ensuring that nobody establishes that he is gay. However, in his early twenties, Francis begins to meet other gay people and this provides him with immense relief. For the first time he is able to express this part of his identity and no longer feels he must keep it all to himself.

"...even the act of being able to show that side of myself to somebody else and get a warm or positive reaction. I just remember one night almost kind of fainting because the years of repression and years of self-hate, years of keeping it all to myself was shattered..."

This sense of liberation provides the catalyst for Francis to begin a "long and arduous" process of self-acceptance. The eventual acceptance of his sexuality and subsequent integration into his identity, leaves him feeling whole and reawakenes his sense of spontaneity and joy.

“...I think it was only later in my twenties or my early thirties, after a lot of personal therapy, that I felt, this is me and I like who I am, and I like my sexuality. It wasn’t until then, that I started to feel good about myself and I feel a huge difference now.”

“..The fact I am being true to myself, I love that, it’s really important to me. It makes me enjoy life more, I feel integrated, no obstacles in my way, nothing to hide behind. I feel whole now, there is not a part of me I have to cut off from the rest.”

Despite the hugely positive changes that have occurred in this process, remnants of the internalisation of homophobia are still evident in Francis. He describes feeling not completely comfortable in the presence of very camp or feminine gay men. He also finds it difficult to address homophobia when it occurs in his environment.

“...I go into that place where I was a teenager and keep quiet and try not to rock the boat. It’s that old message that you’re constantly sent that what you are is wrong.”

4.3.1 Summary:

The final theme which emerged, concerned the informants attempts to embrace their sexuality and integrate it into their identity. It is evident from the findings, that this process is fraught with difficulty, and some respondents have not, as of yet, been successful. Each respondent has described how internalised homophobia forced them into concealing their sexuality and the negative impact this had on their development. Prompted by a period of depression, David eventually managed to resolve his internal struggle and come to terms with his sexuality. Patrick still continues to attempt to

integrate his sexuality into his identity in a satisfactory way. Thomas has resolved to never reveal his identity for fear of the potential consequences. Al has finally managed to accept his sexuality after a long struggle and feels exhilarated by his liberation. Through personal therapy, Francis has learned to challenge his internalised homophobia and has integrated his sexuality into his personality. Consistent with the findings of previous research (Dew et al, 2005, O'Sullivan, 2004) self-disclosure may be observed as an important route towards personal well-being. The process of integration of one's sexuality is described as a difficult process but ultimately extremely liberating. Respondents describe how internalised homophobia has thwarted or, in some cases completely impeded this integration process.

Chapter Five:

CONCLUSION

5.1 Conclusion

As Mason (1996) has pointed out, the intention of exploratory research is not to produce findings which are considered conclusive in nature. The primary objective of such research is to gain an insight in to, and an understanding, of the problem the researcher is faced with.

As a result of the analytical process undertaken, the author has identified three specific themes in relation to internalised homophobia among the respondents.

- Theme one: the internalisation of the experience of homophobia.
- Theme two: the development of coping strategies.
- Theme three: the impact of internalised homophobia on attempts to integrate sexuality into one's identity.

The findings of the report contribute to current literature on internalised homophobia. The research serves to reinforce much of the quantitative data which has been collected on the subject. (Dew et al, 1995) The work also serves to complement the findings of qualitative data on the subjective experience of internalised homophobia. (Herek & Glunt, 1995, Herek et al, 1998, Meyer & Dean, 1998, Kelleher, 2009) As Dehspande (1983) has pointed out, qualitative data is necessary in the process of verification and authentication of such quantitative data. The findings also enhance such research in that it observes the phenomenon from an Irish perspective.

The author concedes that certain factors have limited the research and therefore its contribution to current literature. The prescribed timeframe for the research, in particular, was unfavourable for the development of truly exploratory research, particularly when considering the inexperience of the author in undertaking such research. However, the author believes that the findings of the research would provide a useful body of knowledge for understanding the phenomenon of internalised homophobia and working with it in the therapeutic context. The research findings would also provide a valuable basis for further research into this important contemporary phenomenon.

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APPENDIX A

David:

I: "Can you tell me about your experience of homophobia growing up?"

David: "I don't think I really experienced much directly, it was more indirectly. Well more what I heard about homophobia, what people think of as homophobic, talking about 'queers' and that affected me and made me go introverted and just realising that I was gay and then realising how society seems to see that, and how frustrating it was....it made me kind of introverted and nervous and kind of scared to be found out..... I remember, I think was about fifteen when I first thought I was gay and I gave myself six months to kind of try and not to be, and I said to myself if I can't...If I hadn't succeeded in fixing myself, I'll accept it....so at fifteen and a half I completely accepted it myself...I had two more years at school, so they were very difficult."

I: "How would you fix yourself?"

D: "Try and not think about men and try and think about women....pray aswell....my parents were very religious, I was very religious then aswell...it was before I rejected the church and all religion, when I was about fifteen I did pray....and I thought about becoming a priest as a way to run away from having to come out to people."

I: "You were looking at ways to cope with the problem?"

D: "Yeah something like that and I didn't want to be 'it', I just thought....I can't remember exactly.... I didn't know anything about homosexuality, no more than anyone else did, it just happened to me so I didn't know whether you can work on it or you can change it, back then I didn't know, so all I could do was try, and then like now I know you can't do anything about it, because I tried...it was just a period

of adjustment basically.....Eh, It was my way of coping and it was my way of being....like I didn't want to...like I said, at the start of the six months ...if I can't, if I'm still the same after the six months, after trying, then I would fully accept it myself, so I wanted to be in the position that I wasn't unsure, kind of wasn't confused...I wanted to know for sure after the six months and then accept it fully myself, and then at the end of that period I was completely sure. To myself I accepted it... I suppose I was accepting it, in that, at that point, I wasn't going to try and change myself anymore...so I knew whatever life I was going to lead, whether it was em..... a life alone or moving to some big cities, I knew I wasn't going to lie to myself and reject myself....so that was very important...I was very clear at that stage.”

I: “What about the two years in school, that was difficult?”

D: “Yeah, just because I was always scared somebody was going to find out even though I didn't have a sex life with men or anything, but I was kind of very paranoid of what people would think, I didn't have a girlfriend...even though nobody really..well looking back now, nobody really would have thought it..but in my head everything became huge...just nervous and I probably came across as being tense but then I suppose people probably thought that was just adolescence, but yeah I was introverted and probably thinking about things too much...now I don't know whether I would have been like that anyway, these are the questions you don't know - how much it affects you?...I wouldn't have been as traumatised as much I suppose.”

I: “You felt traumatised?”

D: “Yeah, it felt like.....it was more the difficulty of understanding why society had this hatred towards me and people like me when...I didn’t want to do anything bad...it was more that, which really drove me a bit nuts, well not nuts...I couldn’t understand why this thing was so frowned upon and why was it frowned upon? I didn’t think it was wrong...I knew it wasn’t wrong...just the fact that the church saw it was wrong, I would have thought at first it was wrong but then when I thought logically about it there was no way....there was no logic whatsoever that could say that it was wrong.....”

I: “But everybody else has a problem with it?”

D: “All I could think was I just wanted to get out of my school, my small town in the midlands and move to Dublin and be anonymous or whatever...so that was all I could think of for those two years and I think even at the end of fifth year, I remember I was going to run away, I was going to move to England...and I remember sitting down with my mother and telling her and she was crying and I was crying..I didn’t tell her I was gay or anything just that I wanted to move away.....I remember fighting the internal battle with myself saying “oh just one more year, do your leaving cert and then you’re free”, which I managed to do.”

I: “Anything directly towards you?”

D: “There was one guy in my class who I thought had an inkling that I was gay, but I’m not sure if he did or not...he made snide comments, well which I thought were snide, but I don’t know....one example was when we were playing football and I was a defender and he was shouting at me “up his arse” when I was marking a guy, things like that...I used to be always very nervous around him.”

I: "Why were you nervous?"

D: "I thought he knew and I thought I would lose all my friends, I would have no friends whatsoever, probably thought I would get beaten up and I would have to leave the town straight away. Just nervous about it and nervous about even looking at a guy or seeing a guy I fancied and nervous anyone would see I was looking at him, so it got to that stage, I was completely nervous....so even though there was no direct homophobia towards me it was just my....what I saw of the world's attitude towards homosexuality that caused me to get fucked up mentally."

I: "What did you see?"

D: "It was mostly among friends, kind of just hear them talking about queers...mainly that, yeah mainly just your general attitude from people around, aswell as probably ...my.....father...although he wasn't.... I didn't hear anything in particular from my dad, but I know he was big into the church like....he could even be gay himself because there's so many gay married men...tonnes of them....for all the ones that come out at some stage there must be tonnes that never will come out. My two brothers and two sisters - nothing from them. My mother never spoke about anything related to sex, but my parents were deeply religious, it was more that it wouldn't be mentioned, yeah.....like I have a brother now who is gay aswell and he's probably homophobic in the way that a lot of homosexuals are homophobic in that they can't accept themselves. It's more that he just doesn't accept it himself, he never told me it was wrong or wasn't friendly to me, he wasn't homophobic towards me."

I: “What were the consequences of the negative messages you received about your sexuality?”

D: “Em, well....I don’t know..... the fact that I had to bottle so much stuff up and be introverted and internalise stuff, I couldn’t talk to anyone about it, I don’t know if that led to me thinking too much in general about everything and led to me becoming depressed.....I was probably depressed from when I started internalising all this when I was fifteen or sixteen but I didn’t actually realise that I was seriously depressed until I was about twenty, and I didn’t recover from it until I was about twenty four or twenty five....so I don’t know if that was caused because I was having to think so much and not being able to talk and not being able to have a normal adolescence...and it’s such a huge thing in your life and you can’t talk to anybody about it because you’re scared of the consequences, so I used to write a lot of stuff down to cope with it, my mother probably read some of it, I didn’t have it locked.”

I: “Not having an outlet contributed to your depression?”

D: “Eh...I had a best friend at school and I came out to him the day we finished the ‘leaving cert’, I did then because I knew that if he reacted badly I could have left and gone anyway. I was pretty sure his reaction would be ok because we were such good friends and he was a sensitive man I guess. But I couldn’t say one hundred percent if his reaction was going to be ok. I was out of school then, which was the worst, the horrible fear of having to go to school everyday and have no friends and feeling alienated, and everyone not talking to me and calling me names....if it had of happened I probably wouldn’t have put up with it and I wouldn’t have gone to school, I would have gone away. Looking back there’s no way I could have been found out though.”

I: "Were you conscious of not appearing to be gay?"

D: "Mannerisms? No not really, I didn't really know too much about this gay world and camp gay people or stuff like that, and actually that was one of the things I could never understand why a man would be camp if he was attracted to men and wanted men to be attracted to him, but I was never like that anyway. It was more just being caught looking at men that I was nervous about?"

I: "How did you feel about gay people?"

D: "I probably didn't really like the ones who were camp but luckily there was always ones who were non camp or normal behaving, so.....I don't even use the word gay anymore because to me gay means camp whereas homosexual just means attracted to the same sex."

I: "Do you have a problem with the word gay?"

D: "Em, I do now to a certain extent. When I came out to my sister she was saying "but you don't look gay, you don't act gay" so by those very words she was saying what her understanding of gay was and I think that's an understanding of a lot of people. Like how can you look like you are sexually attracted to a certain type of person? but you can look gay though if you're wearing a certain outfit or something."

I: "Do you have a problem with being associated with that?"

D: "I reject it, because I don't like being thought that I am something I'm not and I don't like being represented as something when I'm not that.....I don't think it's a good example, but it's like saying that if you're from Belfast and you're Catholic then

you're in the IRA. If people have the idea that gay means camp and dressing up as a woman then I'm going to say then "well I'm not gay", because I don't see how there's any need for the word gay when the word homosexual describes it perfectly."

I: "It's something you don't identify with?"

D: "I have to identify with it somewhat, I play on a gay soccer team, I've played for them in the gay games, I go to gay bars. I seem to be the only person with a problem with that word, and most people who are not camp describe themselves as gay... I did some research and one of the reasons the word gay came into being was because back in the 1950's homosexuality was illegal in England so you couldn't say you were homosexual but you could say you were gay. So I completely understand that another word would be used."

I: "How do you think homophobia has shaped you?"

D: "It made me have an abnormal adolescence so I don't know if I'm trying to relive a normal adolescence later in life, but once you come out - and I came out properly when I was around twenty to my family - even after that it takes a few years for everything to be normal...it caused me to think more about life and morality....the whole injustice of me having to go through this, the soul searching and not being able to talk about it led to me thinking a lot about life...I wasn't really angry towards other people more depressed than angry, I never felt like hurting anybody, I always felt like hurting myself before hurting anybody else because it's not their fault really either, they're not gay themselves and they don't have to think about it."

I: "Is it easier to be homosexual nowadays?"

D: "Very hard to know whether the world has changed or if I've changed. I suppose the world is such a different place...I'm sure it is easier because homosexuality is more accepted with the introduction of civil unions, and you hear of gay pupils in schools and anti-bullying campaigns...maybe not in Ireland though.....the Stonewall campaign "some people are gay, get over it!" But there's still tonnes of people who wouldn't accept the whole gay thing.....kids who are just normal kids who realise they're attracted to men and they'd think I'm not gay because what gay is to them, probably still remains among all ages.....probably still lots of bad stuff in the media and coming from the church and that makes people find it difficult to accept themselves. I've always thought things would improve if the church stopped making homophobic comments, even though they have less and less of an influence, but they still shouldn't be making stupid comments they make, saying it's a disorder or whatever. More people like Gareth Thomas and Donal Og Cusack coming out would help...people who are at the top of their sports are breaking the stereotypes big time...although I'm not sure really how much, it takes a lot of people to break the stereotypes."

I: "Do you feel like you have to challenge the stereotype?"

D: "Yeah I'd always think that. I don't know though there shouldn't be any prejudice against people whether their camp or not, there should be room for everyone, there's nothing wrong with being camp and being gay, it just doesn't represent me though. I only have a problem with it to the extent that it seems to be the idea that straight

people have of homosexuality. You see a lot of straight people think that they've never met a gay person but they've probably met hundreds, they just don't know that they are, they see them walking down the street and just because they look normal they don't think they're a gay person. But then why would a straight person even try to understand what its like to be a gay person? It just wouldn't enter their heads or be part of their lives unless their sibling or their best friend came out to them. To some extent I don't think people will ever change, I don't know how much it ever will become better."

I: "Would different representations of gay men have helped when you were younger?"

D: "I think so yeah, its hard to say, it makes sense that it would have made a difference. I didn't have any role models that I could think of...maybe Morrissey, but he was never out..the lyrics of 'The Smiths' music seemed to be talking directly to gay teenagers but then Morrissey was never out so.....no there wasn't any role models."

I: "How do you respond to homophobia nowadays?"

D: "In company I would generally say nothing, I'm kind of out at work but I moved to a different department where I work with six people and I don't know if any of them know I'm gay, I haven't come out to them, but one of the guys....we were going into a room and there was a guy coming out of the room who happened to be an openly gay guy in the company. The guy in my team, after he went out said to us, me and a colleague: "he's gay you know" but he said it in a homophobic way and I just

didn't say anything....and the same guy aswell on different occasions has done limp wristed gestures, he calls it the gay hands.....now I know gay people can be taken the piss out of but this bothered me because if I was out to him and knew he was ok about it I'd have no problem with him making a joke, but it was just the fact that I wasn't out to him.....the comment about the guy didn't need to be made, the attitude and the way he said it was turning his nose up at the guy. It just bothers me purely because I'm not out to him, if I was out to him and he was still homophobic then I've no idea how I could work with him."

I: "Why have you not come out totally in work?"

D: "This is something that occupies my mind a lot...thinking of coming out to my new workmates and how to do it....this guy is actually somebody who helps me a lot at the moment and if he turned out to be homophobic in anyway to me, then that would be kind of dangerous for my job...and especially when I see him making comments like that it definitely makes me not want to come out to him."

I: "Is this a remnant of the process you described when you were in school?"

D: "I can't express myself fully, plus theres always the way straight people talk openly about their partners and wives and everything, I just stay silent, it's weird I hate that feeling like I'm some sort of freak.....em, and the phrase always comes into my head that straight people say about gay people "why do you have to shove it down our throats? Why do you have to talk about it?" but then they talk openly about themselves, everyone in my work talks about their personal lives and their partners and so on. Not that I even want to talk about it, I'd like it just to be completely normal.....I have to go through a thought process over it, it's not instinctive and

natural...it's the same as like holding hands with someone on the street, I have to have this big internal dialogue with myself about it, and the fact of mentioning a partner at work, I have to have this big internal dialogue with myself whereas for these people they never have to think of it, and that's just so unjust.....I don't think it will ever get to the point where that changes while living in Dublin...like I have walked around Dublin city centre holding hands with a man, it felt great, the two of us wanted to do it. A big part of it is that if we do it other people will see it and they'll see that nobody is giving us any hassle and they'll do it too, but somebody has to do it first or else it won't be done, so there's an element of trying to change the world by doing what needs to be done."

I: "How do you react to homophobia nowadays?"

D: "When I see homophobia I just think the person is an idiot, like sometimes I might think about replying with a comment if I see something on the internet but then a lot of the time I think what's the point?...the human race is a very varied species and some people will never understand your point anyway. It would make me angry if I thought it was having a bad consequence, hurting people's lives."

I: "What is homophobia?"

D: "Well, I suppose it's a fear, the word phobia. After a while I had decided to have the opinion that anyone who is homophobic is basically a closet homosexual because so much of it is a bravado, they're homosexuals, but they're trying to show the world they're not homosexual and the best way to do that is to show a hatred of homosexuals. If you're heterosexual why would you give a shit about homosexuals and what they do? You'd let them do what they want. I like to think that gives me a

moral victory, these are weak people that just can't accept their homosexuality. I think it's a good attitude to have because it makes me think that homophobic people are actually like me. It's just they don't have the moral courage to realise it's not wrong [homosexuality] and to stand up and come out, and trust that their friends will have the intelligence to accept them. It kind of makes me feel like I'm better than them which I suppose is shallow."

I: "Did you ever feel you had to create a false identity at any point?"

D: "Yes, while I was at school completely, I even had a girlfriend. Since I've come out I haven't had to do that...I don't pretend at work even with people who I'm not out to, I don't pretend I have a girlfriend. I don't want to put myself in that position. I've thought about dropping it casually into conversation but I've never done it."

I: "How do you feel about your sexuality now?"

D: "I feel fantastic about my sexuality now. Homosexuality rocks."

APPENDIX B

Patrick:

I: “Can you tell me about any experiences of homophobia growing up?:

P: “I can remember when there was a gay...em storyline on Eastenders, and there was two gay guys and they eventually kissed, and my father just went mental, he just said how disgraceful it was and how disgusting it was and turned it off and walked out the door, which I felt really crap about because I knew I was gay at that stage....and another time I was about ten I'd say, I had a friend who was a bit of a smart arse, and I had a bit of a crush on another guy and I used to say all the time, oh he's so nice, he is this and that...and then the other guy said “you're just a homosexual”, so I just retracted at that stage and didn't take part in the conversation anymore....and my mother heard that conversation and she stuck her head out the door and said “don't be saying such horrible things to Patrick” ...so homosexuality was horrible.”

I: “How did you feel hearing these things?”

P: “I felt very, very.....anxious in my stomach, depressed...quite similar to how I feel when I suffer from depression now, so I'm pretty sure it's all linked...a feeling of disgust, and how wrong it is, at that age anyway it felt really, really wrong, like terrible...and the feelings I got then are similar to the feelings when I suffered from depression.”

I: “How did you react to homophobia then?”

P: “I would have retracted further, I wouldn't have said anything, I would have become more insular about it and make sure that nobody was ever going to know...and that emphasised how bad it was, how wrong it was, and that maybe in a

way everything after that was to emphasise how macho I was.....this was around the age of twelve or thirteen.....I knew I was gay from when I was seven I reckon, I just never had any doubts whatsoever...even though I didn't know what it was or.....maybe even earlier than that knowing there was something odd about me, I'd say from five on. I always had a kind of a ...there was always friends I idolised and they were all male, even at that young age.....and from about ten or eleven I would be sexually aroused with any kind of horseplay in the yard or if somebody was injured I'd be taking care of them....the fear was that it was absolutely wrong, evil, the worst thing that you could possibly be, our family was very religious and I just felt it was the worst possible thing.....there was something really wrong...I remember looking up the world book, remember those encyclopedias?...looking up homosexuality and it was scathing ...it was a mental disorder, it shouldn't be encouraged....electric shock therapy, how impressionable young people can be indoctrinated into it by older men...it was absolutely horrific reading it, [I was] disgusted, I just felt really, really evil....and I kept all this to myself for years and years and years...I'm convinced that's what caused my depression, I was depressed even at that age...I was always extremely nervous and not particularly happy, the only thing that kept me happy was my little routine, my little comforts and food I suppose...staying inside all the time, not taking any risks, rarely going out, just reading and watching tv, and going into myself.”

I: “What were you avoiding?”

P: “I suppose it was to avoid interacting with people and being found out or something...I was definitely conscious of that, one of my biggest aims in life was not

to be found out so I became a 'professional liar' and even to this day I realise sometimes that I'm lying...it became like my whole life was like a fantasy, a kind of a lie and everything was done in a way to emphasise that I was normal...I became macho. I loved poetry and that kind of stuff and writing when I was younger, and I stopped in case anyone thought that I might be.....because there was other guys in school who wrote poems and stuff and everyone kind of went...I don't think gay was the word at that stage so I cant remember what word they used but that they were fucking benders...so I stopped all that, I even stopped playing music, anything that might give me a way, so I became a 'lad' going to matches and avoiding any sign of femininity or gayness...completely on guard or high alert the whole time. I would get erections in school and try and hide them, it stunted my sexuality no question, the only way I could get sexually stimulated was through horseplay, toughness...getting people in headlocks and stuff like that. It was the only sexual outlet I had, other people were kissing girls for the first time, I couldn't do any of that...after P.E. I couldn't even look at any peoples bodies because I was convinced people would go "look at him" and yet I was craving it at that age, just completely craving it.... and I think that those experiences I had, they have stuck with me to this day and definitely stunted my sexuality. Completely blocked it. Bottled up. Even music.... I used to secretly liked 'The Smiths'.....but I couldn't even dare say I liked it because it would be "fucking faggot".....em, just a total nightmare to be honest with you, absolutely horrific, horrible, childhood was just disgustingly horrible.....just continuous feeling of being completely evil, completely wrong...that it was all my fault, that I should be able to change, I tried.....I tried to kiss girls, I tried to masturbate about girls – not a chance! I even remember thinking ok I'll still be able to get married, and I'll be able to have intercourse if I just think about male sex while having sex with a woman. I

even thought about joining the priesthood before secondary school...when I was about ten thinking the way out of this is becoming a priest. Em...stunted and even to this day I still think I'm stuck in that, I'm actually sexually stunted after that time and I'm actually trying to get out of that in my therapy. My sexual fantasies involve no intimacy. I don't know maybe that was my safety valve if I was in control of everything. I find it impossible in situations where someone massages me or shows me intimacy...it doesn't feel wrong, just feels uncomfortable and it feels really belittling to me, to be the subject of...to be submissive even for a while in a sexual relationship, I have to be dominant, I think that's not me.....”

I: “You were conscious not to appear gay?”

P: “It was all bravado for the lads, anyone who's even slightly not the lad type I would have ignored them completely. As far as I was concerned if I was found out I would have been kicked out of the house, ostracised, sent to prison, I mean whatever, everything and anything, parents would have rejected me...that's another thing, I think that's part of the reason why I try to please a lot, with my family, try to do all the right things, do whatever they say and they say “Patrick you're great”....but that's what I needed at that stage.”

I: “A huge conflict going on inside?”

P: “I just felt like a fraud all the time and I was, but I kind of had to be... I was a fraud all the way through school, through secondary school, through college, after college I went to Limerick for a while. I started to, things started to unravel a bit there, in Limerick. I started veering towards fits of depression there. I think what happened was that when I was younger I had my own little niche, my own little life, a

safety valve...home was a very safe place because, I just felt safe there, my own little place but then things weren't as sure when I went to college, trying to find a job and then found a job and was trying to find accommodation and everything just unravelled a little bit. I felt the first throes of depression, I went to a meditation class to alleviate what I was starting to feel....the depression and the anxiety, I only spent one night because they were a bit kind of 'holy joe', mantras and stuff like that....and I went to one gay night in Limerick aswell, one of those 'icebreaker' evenings, and of course all the people....there was about three people running it and I immediately felt that...they were older and my negativity kicked in and I thought they were just trying to have sex with me or.... and they were 'as gay as Christmas', 'as camp as Christmas' which put me off completely, I hate it. I'm homophobic in that way...it actually disgusts me, it really, really gets on my goat...and I know there's no logic to it, it's not fair, I actually cringe when I see someone who is really camp...to me that's kind of... how would I describe it? It's like outing me or something, I'm not that, I'm a macho man...and when I that and I see gay pride marches I go ugh, when I was going through my teenage years to see the gay pride thing would have put me off forever, there's no way. In a way I kind of, I don't like it [gay pride marches]..even still, I'm just embarrassed by it, I'm quite homophobic about it, I'm quite dismissive of it, quite disgusted by it, I find it sexually cringeable...I get quite angry about it because- it's not fair- I reckon it puts off an awful lot of people who are younger from coming out. If they were like me, if I saw that when I was younger that would have set me back a long time, put me back in my box more and more. So I think there's a 'homophobic' in me without question."

I: "Where do you think this emanated from?"

P: "I think the messages I got...I needed to stay in my little world and I could not let anybody know the reality, but I actually became more macho than a straight person. Anything gay would be a danger to me at that stage...even though logically now at forty-one years old I can go you know...but it's deep set in me, there's a deepset fear of that I suppose, masked now by disgust and kind of dismissive... "oh look at the state of that, look at the state of them". Stuck at that blueprint, sexual fantasies set down then. It's quite sad really, I've never been truly intimate with anybody to be honest with you, my only way of getting off now is still to assume a role and I spent a lot of time going "there's nothing wrong with that, its fine its just the way you are" but I need to actually allow other things to develop in me to be truly intimate. It's too risky and emasculating, is that the word? To be passive in a relationship, to me I cringe, I feel it absolutely weakens me as a person, weakens me, makes me kind of pathetic. When I see others like that I cringe, pathetic, weak...I feel that's the way they are. I feel disgusted by them, maybe disgusted by that side of me."

I: "Do you like to socialise with other gay people?"

P: "No, not with outwardly, kind of obviously gay....I do have lots of gay friends but mostly they are actually quite normal. It's awful, I kind of write people off before I even know them, if they are very feminine or very gay and limpwristed I just write them off....I write them off as possible sexual partners, as possible relationships or as possible friends even. I think I'd be embarrassed to almost be in public with them. There's one guy I knew, very, very camp in public and I'd be cringing. Similar to the cringing feeling I'd get if I was to be passive or submissive partner in an intimate relationship."

I: “So what are the repercussions of the homophobia you experienced?”

P: “Logically I can resolve this in my head but its still very much deepset in me, I still cringe looking at a gay parade it would actually annoy me. My logic is, that’s just a *cliché*, painting everyone with the same brush. My view would be that people acting like that, real gay and camp, would put the straight community off very much, when really I shouldn’t care what the straight community think anyway. I care what family think of me, friends think of me....everyone going “Oh Patrick, you’re so not gay you’re very masculine” and I find that good, and why is that good? There’s no need for that you know. Yeah, sure people when I come out say “what?!” and in a way it felt good that they didn’t know I was, because that was part of my cover up for years.”

I: “Cover up?”

P: “Oh a complete and utter cover up. I can’t say that I covered up any feminine traits in myself....but I probably did. I probably did cover up true kind of feminine feelings but maybe I was always going to be masculine acting, straight acting.”

I: “What were the repercussions of this?”

P: “It pushed everything down and down, pushed further down into my stomach. When I get bouts of depression that’s exactly what it is – it’s all those feelings of disgust, of self-hatred, hatred of gay people, hatred of campness. Terrible negativity.”

I: "Did you have an outlet for your desires?"

P: "Porn....masturbation. I'm not very good at acting out the fantasies that I have. If someone wants me to have sex with them, I'm crap, I'm no use at it because...I don't know what it is, I get kind of shy and the only way I can do it is if I get into the role of it...I need role play or forget about it...I need to be saying like "get down there and fucking suck my cock you fucking piece of shit" and that's awful.....I have to become the aggressor, otherwise forget it, it's either that or I become really kind of caring.... "I'll take care of you, my little...". It's still there today and it's very hard to shake, because logically, you can read anything you want and think about it and go to therapy and everything, but its like it's deep seated, it's just there and very hard to get rid of....I mean I'm trying at the moment to vary my sexual fantasies."

I: "How do you feel about your sexuality now?"

P: "Well, frustrated by it because I know there has to be more to a relationship than that. I feel sad about that because I should be able to receive attention and love and touch...Its partly not feeling worthy of it, I just feel for some reason, I don't know if it's I don't deserve it, but I just don't like it. It's kind of sad because when someone touches me, massages me or is tender with me, I feel kind of trapped and I feel less of a man, weak and pathetic. What was driving the suppression was an absolute need to keep it secret...once I did speak to my mother when I was about fifteen and she just ignored it completely. I was watching 'top of the pops' and I was looking at some bloke in a band and I said "mam, I think I might be homosexual" and she said "no, don't be stupid that's ridiculous, we won't even talk about that" and then went off and did something else. I think that was a desperate attempt to broach the subject and then when that happened it put me back a lot really. I'm not sure if my mother remembers

that, but I don't blame her. My first really bad bout of depression was in Limerick maybe. But I think before that I had it but it became a serious issue from then on. I think when I was younger I had structures, even at home my family life, by not letting them know about my gayness I felt secure there. I lost that when I went away, I was forced to confront it. In a way in my teenage years and college years it didn't matter too much in that none of my friends were mad about going out with women and stuff like that. But then as they started going out with women more and I was on my own in Limerick, I had no structures. I became more and more aware of the fact that I fancied that bloke and that bloke and that bloke, and getting really frustrated about it."

I: "Could you express your sexuality at that stage?"

P: "I kept it very much hidden, the people I was living with I never said anything to them. I had a kind of a breakdown after about a year in Limerick. I was about a year in Limerick feeling really unhappy and then I got a job in Dublin and I moved back to Dublin and the job was horrible and for the first time I had a breakdown at that stage...the summer of 1994, the world cup was on, I was twenty four. I moved home then to my parents because it was the safest place to be. I had no job and I got really down in the dumps, really bad, and then I said to my mother that I was gay, and this time she embraced it. So that was that. I was suffering serious depression at the time anyway, so something had to come out, it was a breaking point definitely. Then unfortunately my parents brought me to the doctor, and he put me on antidepressants, which was probably the wrong thing to do at the time, but I don't blame them either for that now. So I went on antidepressants, and then I became better and then suddenly I felt great. I came back up to Dublin got a job and started going on the gay scene, just getting pissed every weekend...but again not doing anything sexual really.

I felt a kind of elation at the time, to be out, to be on the scene but I still had the same disgust feelings about gay...about camp people. I had numerous sexual situations that were just a complete disaster because I wasn't able to be intimate, it was just a fantasy thing. I felt self-disgust and guilt and shame at those fantasies aswell as the fact I was gay, so it was kind of a double whammy.”

I: “How did your parents react to your coming out?”

P: “My parents were grand, they were great when it happened. I was surprised about that, especially my father. I don't know, I think I got to the age, when I was twenty four that I knew they would be ok about it. I don't know. Whereas in my teenage years I thought it would be the end of the world but I think by the time I was twenty four I had a suspicion they would be ok about it, ok as in they weren't going to kick me out or ostracise me. When I did come out my mother was great, she embraced me and cried and all that kind of thing. Then she told my father and my father came to me and he said “I heard about your little problem”...god help him he didn't have a clue, he said “its ok not everyone likes women, but you don't fancy men do you?” and at the time I said “Ah, not really”. But that was just his reaction, and they got to know a lot about it after that. They read books continuously, they became very positive about the whole thing, and the rest of my family were very positive about it and all my friends were very positive about it. The only person that wasn't that positive about it was me, I've realisedmy parents fully accepted it, my family fully accepted it, my friends fully accepted it. That should have been a licence for someone at twenty five to fucking go off and enjoy it. But it was so deep in me that I didn't feel it was ok still, it was just stuck in my psyche or something, I'd internalised it so much, it was just stuck, and I still wasn't able to.....”

I: "How are things in relation to your sexuality now?"

P: "It hasn't moved on hugely, to be honest with you. I'm still kind of stuck in that rut. I'm trying to work on it a lot recently. Logically, I know there's nothing wrong with it, my fantasies even, I know there's nothing wrong with it between consenting people. But there's still that thing in my psyche, that feeling of disgust, more at my sexual fantasies than being gay. It feels wrong, I feel guilty. I've lots to work on really."

I: "Do you feel positive about your sexuality now?"

P: "No, not towards the type of sexuality I am still stuck in. I don't feel positive towards the fantasies I have, the sado-masochism thing, the domination and submission."

I: "How do you react to homophobia nowadays?"

P: "Unfortunately when I experience homophobia I'm quite quiet about it. I don't do much about it, again I feel the same sense of stay in there, don't make a big deal about it. Like in work there's a couple of porters who were slagging it off and slagging off a procedure laid down for how to treat gay and transgender people, and they were.. "Ah lads would you look at this fucking nonsense" blah, blah. They don't know I'm gay but I would really love to go "Shut the fuck up, I'm gay like, what's your problem?" But I find it easier to...I don't like making a fuss out of it. I kind of stew about it without actually doing anything about it. If I saw it in the media at this stage I would get angry about it, I would, or when I hear the latest crap from the Vatican I get angry

about it....frustrated about it. No question about it, they have a lot to answer for. Absolutely no question about it.”

I: “Are you out to everyone?”

P: “I’m out to everyone that I’m very close to. Like there’s nobody that I would be close to that I’m not out to. I’m out in work to most colleagues but not everyone knows, just because I haven’t told them. To be honest with you I have absolutely no problem whatsoever with telling anyone that I’m gay, absolutely no problem, I don’t care who knows. Although having said that, when those porters were doing that.....saying nothing was more about not having conflict I think or not making a big thing. I felt awkward and to my shame I kind of laughed along a bit. I’d like to be more honest in those situations but I suppose a lot of people are like that.”

I: “What is homophobia and where does it come from?”

P: “I’d say it’s a fear of difference, and also like, I’m homophobic myself. It’s a fear of stepping out of the ordinary or stepping out of the norm, that kind of thing. Fear from the majority that the minority are taking over or em.... converting everyone else. I heard kids recently just outside my house talking and saying “ah he’s only a faggot anyway” so it’s still there like. I suppose it’s any difference. I think the gay one though is almost worse than the racist one with kids these days, it’s still the absolute no-no for a kid, even now. I don’t think it’s changed hugely, maybe kids now can talk a little bit more about it. But I still think it’s the absolute worst thing a child can go through almost. Society is more tolerant, but society wants little boys and men to be strong and powerful and masculine and by admitting that you’re gay you’re really

disempowering yourself, I think, or everyone else sees you as disempowered, weak, puff thing.”

I: “How did you cope with this negativity towards your sexuality growing up?”

P: “I became everybody’s friend, I became the best brother in the world, I became the best son in the world, became everybody’s friend, became “real nice Patrick”, because I had to have that for the fear of being ostracised, I think, was so big that I attempted to please people a lot. Even now, I kind of try and please people and not rock the boat.”

I: “Could you sum up what these persistent negative messages have done to you?”

P: “It stunted me sexually and intimately without question. It’s given rise to anguish and I’m sure it has caused my depression, it has caused anxiety, sadness, anger. I feel a lot of sadness about the years and years and years that have been lost by not having the normal course of intimacy and the first kiss and the first dance. I feel sad that my only outlet is the sexual fantasies I have, based on domination and stuff like that without being able to take love and take tenderness. The biggest homophobia in my life was homophobia from myself, my own homophobia. It was the messages I was getting from the world book, from society, from religion, even in school em. My mother gave me a book when I was young about sex and there was a paragraph in it about how wrong homosexuality was and if any older man came near you in a public toilet to run.”

I: “Do you think it is possible to reverse these internalised feelings that so limit you?”

P: "It's completely to do with me, I'm more concerned at the moment about myself than changing society. At the moment it's about going back to my inner child and having a relationship with that seven or eight year old version of myself."

I: "What would you say to him if you could?"

P: "Oh I'd just completely comfort him, tell him there's absolutely nothing wrong with this, completely natural, completely normal. Tell him "You're not evil, you're not immoral, you're not the devil".....and that's what I need to do, I need to parent myself in a way. That's my kind of plan for the next while anyway. I didn't have that outlet at that stage, only in recent years when I started meeting people who were gay and I was really friendly with, that definitely helped. Although having said that when I met gay people and they were talking about sex that depressed me aswell because all I could think about was the only sex I want is the fantasy one I have."

I: "Do you feel the need to challenge gay stereotypes?"

P: "Without question I would have liked different representations of being gay growing up, that would have been fantastic to have. Someone coming out as gay that I thought was similar to me, you know that kind of way? Anyone that age that I saw who was gay in the media was completely outrageous. Either your man from 'Are you being served?' or the odd picture of some gay pride thing. That put me off, it put me down, it set me further back. What I would have loved, a bit like your man Donal Og, the Cork hurling keeper, oh, that would have been fantastic at thirteen, if someone like that had come out. What really is needed is in schools...if ten percent of the population are gay then these are the kids that are in the same shit that I was at my age...it actually needs people like me or somebody, gay people to actually go around

the schools and say....but could you imagine the reaction, there would be war, they wouldn't allow it, the parent's associations wouldn't allow it because of their absolute terror of their kids turning gay or being near them. I think still, even now, parent's worst fucking nightmare is that their kids are gay, and the kid could be anything."

I: "How do you feel about being gay now?"

P: "I love being gay at the end of the day, I love men and I love male bodies, the male psyche and the male personality but what's sad for me, I feel like I've wasted twenty years or more of not being able to be intimate."

APPENDIX C

Thomas

I: "When did you first realise you were attracted to men?"

T: "Em, I suppose I have memories going back to school days...I think even in my early childhood there was always, I was kind of more attracted to the male physique than the female. But in school then, as people grew more attractive, I kind of got more attracted to them. I think that's probably where it started but not really knowing what it was. Being into girlfriends at that time and not really realising either that I was attracted to somebody else aswell. Probably sixteen or seventeen, nothing really earlier than that, no, I don't think so. No, I can't recall anything before that."

I: "You didn't know what it was?"

T: "Well not knowing that I was different. I just thought it was normal and then realised it wasn't. It wasn't until very later on in life that I realised what it was, that I was suppressing something all the time. At sixteen or seventeen you don't know whether you're just looking at a role model, or you'd like to look like that person or dress like that person. You know, I'm not sure whether it was a sexual attraction or just, you know, wanting to be like someone else."

I: "How did you decide that it wasn't normal?"

T: "Well I suppose, it's hard to say really, I suppose what I found was maybe that girls weren't as attracted to me as I thought they should be, or maybe I wasn't attracting them as I should, something like that really. You know, I was wondering why other guys were able to pull women and I wasn't. Maybe I was too...I would have been a very shy person anyway, and shy with people. Same sex or opposite sex, I would have been shy with them, so I probably wasn't...If I was more attracted to women I

probably would have been more forward with them in a physical way, and I was more shy of them. I didn't know whether I should or not, I didn't know whether to put them off or not."

I: "Did you ever act on those feelings towards men?"

T: "You mean with somebody? No. But I would have been very curious about it, you know, what other guys looked like, and what they would be like in the nude or whatever you'd like to call it. I would have fantasised about it. It was just something I was very curious about...just something I was curious about. Like whether you'd see it in a movie or in a magazine or something, it would arouse me, you know that sort of way. I didn't feel guilty about it, I don't think I did. But it would be something I kept very much to myself, and I wouldn't dare share it with anybody else...because I was afraid to. I wouldn't have been able to....you know if one of the guys, say that I fancied or liked or would like to be friendly with, I couldn't know the boundaries with them, I couldn't be sure whether they were [gay] or not and I wouldn't move then, I wouldn't risk it. I suppose frightened of being discovered, that would be really what it was. Because it was something that I would have suppressed and wanted to keep a secret. In those days, em, I think I'd have to be very brave to do that and literally leave the country or leave the county. Certainly, I wouldn't have been accepted among my friends or family or anything like that, and that was the biggest thing. Losing the family, being found out really, guilty kind of feeling that sort of way and for that reason then living this double life."

I: “Where were you getting this fear from?”

T: “To me that kind of thing [being gay] was frowned upon and you were almost...in those days, a bit of an outcast and I mean you’re going back to the time when, you know, homosexual acts were illegal. I mean you were almost like a criminal. I was very em, sheltered, in the sense that I wasn’t out and about, I wasn’t going to the places where you would meet people like that. Even as a teenager I would have been very sheltered and very protected by family, as regards going to discos and stuff like that, you’d be brought there and collected and you know your chance of getting off with either sex were very limited. There would be the jokes and the stuff that would go on among the lads, that would even make you more fearful of being discovered, because of the wisecracks and the things that were said, you know. Compared to now, it’s more acceptable and people are more open about it, that time you almost.... when you’d hear that type of comment you’d duck your head to avoid it. You’d sort of, you’d try not to show a reaction and not to blush, anything like that. If there was any conversation like that, jokes like that, em....and somebody once said to me in later times that they weren’t out and they didn’t care whatever people thought about them, that was up to them, but they weren’t coming out to them. They were saying “if people think I am, that’s it, let it be” but they certainly weren’t going to tell them. Somebody said it to me one time, he wasn’t out and he said “look, sure, maybe as you get on in life and you get in to middle age and you’re not married and you don’t have a family, people might em, assume it anyway”. I suppose in my mid twenties I would have liked to have and I did meet some girls and I did get into some relationships. Almost twice, at two times in my life, I was at the stage of getting married but I think that’s [his sexuality] what held me back, I couldn’t go through with it. It just wasn’t...my feelings for women weren’t as strong and I was afraid it wouldn’t last.

I'd get married, I'd mess up someone's life, and this would always be in the background, and I was afraid of that commitment."

I: "Did you look on marriage as a way of escape from it?"

T: "No, one of the ways I saw as an escape was in my latter years in secondary school I was considering religious life, and I saw that as maybe a way of not having to face marriage or not having to prove to anybody.....and go into that life, not realising, like what I realise now, that what went on in the religious life. I didn't realise that went on. It was a form of escapism and em for a long time I felt that way and I would have been encouraged by my parents to follow that, what would you call it? ...life. I went for one of these interviews or retreats that was on in school and I said it to the priest who was there, he just told me to think seriously about it before I did anything. He asked my family circumstances and that, and he said like, you know you're an only child maybe you should consider it a bit more before you make any decision about it. That kind of got me off the hook on that because I thought maybe this isn't right either, so I won't go that route either, and I didn't. So I just chose an ordinary career and followed on from that. It's really only in latter years that I have had encounters with people and that I'm more at ease with it. I do feel more at ease, depending on the people that you meet, some people are very nice. Things like that, you know, that there's another lot of people out there that are on my wavelength. It makes me feel much more comfortable. I didn't think there was people like me, because that whole world to me was, was...you know, I just knew that I might be different but I didn't think there was such...I thought it was very much a minority group, and it's not. I'm only starting to realise now and maybe perhaps because people are more open about it now and it's more accepted. I think if I had been, if I had accepted earlier in my life,

maybe say in my late twenties, I could have had....how would I put it?....I could have had a lot better life I think really...I mean, I probably would have met people, I would have gone out to meet people and maybe have relationships or whatever or maybe got into a relationship that would have lasted. I missed out on that I feel. There's a gap of a number of years that I was messing around, getting into heterosexual relationships that weren't working out, and that were really timewasting. Kind of regret that in a way, yeah, because as you get on, as the years go by you feel that there's a chunk of life gone, that you could have perhaps had a different lifestyle."

I: "What did you perceive as what it was to be gay?"

T: "In the beginning? I would have been very naive about the whole thing in the beginning. I wouldn't have known that there was...you know, that you could have a sexual relationship with a person of the same sex, I wouldn't have known really what went on. It would have been a very platonic kind of thing I thought. I wouldn't have realised that it could be almost, that it could be on a par with having a full sexual relationship with a girl. I was having sexual fantasies. I probably wanted to explore it but I wasn't brave enough, I was too shy really. And as I say, I was brought up in a very sheltered unit. It was never talked about at home, oh god no, no none of that was talked about. In, fact nothing like that even on the other side [heterosexuality] was talked about either, or encouraged."

I: "When did you have your first sexual experience with a man?"

T: "I would have had some close friends....but only one of them I would have had a brief encounter with when I was about late twenties, mid to late twenties. My first experience really with another man, feeling and touching another man kind of thing. I

wasn't attracted physically to that person it was more just something that happened but it didn't happen because I fancied that person, it was just mutual pleasure, really that's all you could say it was. I didn't really know at the time what it was, I didn't know there was another life I could have. It was like a stopgap between relationships or something and it was just something that went on, now the funny thing is we are still very friendly, this other person and I, he got married and had a family afterwards, I would never mention that or he has never mentioned that to me. It's like if we parked it up or something, in the past. Now, whether he would still think that I might be in that kind of life or not, I don't know. He doesn't talk, and I don't talk about it. I don't think I could share it with him even at this stage, no matter how close I'd be as a friend to him. Very awkward. A lot of what I discovered, I discovered through maybe television, papers, magazines stuff like that. Nobody sat me down and said this is what goes on in this kind of set up. I had no real outlet, no. Who would I have had?"

I: "Were you making a conscious effort to hide your sexuality?"

T: "Yeah, I would have been and I would have been terrified of being discovered or even the slightest, you know, that anyone might have the slightest suspicion of it, you know. I was probably very naive because probably it was written all over me, you know, people would be smarter than I was at the top of it. Me covering it up might not have been working anyway. Just trying to live a straight life you know, and sound normal, while not being into all the things that straight men would be into...being apart from that being different."

I: “Were you ever homophobic yourself?”

T: “Oh God no. It was very hard to cope with that, you’re in company and there’s jokes and comments that are passed, I wouldn’t go along with it or make the comment on it one way or another. I feel if I defended it, I would be showing my colours, even today a comment was passed in the car going in to Dublin, about something. This guy would be very much anti-gay people, I think he would. He’s always saying things and I don’t know if it’s a defence or that he feels strongly, sometimes you have to read between the lines. It makes me feel uncomfortable but at the same time I feel that if people are saying those things in my company, or directly to me, if they had any idea I was gay they wouldn’t say them, so I’m getting away with it! It does annoy me that these people have to make these comments when they should live and let live. You know, to me it’s none of their business. Sometimes I think there’s a little bit of that in every male, and whether it’s brought out or not, I think every man has these fantasies at times. ...their own inadequacies, that would be my opinion on it anyway. Because gay people are not doing any harm to these people so why do they have to make such comments?, or why do they [gay people] have to be the butt end of these jokes all the time...like there is jokes and jokes but sometimes it’s just a little too much, I mean there’s jokes about everyone straight, gay, blonde, everything you know, but sometimes they’re a little too much.”

I: “Anything directed towards you personally?”

T: “Yes, a couple of times. I remember one time a card coming in to the office, it was from one of our employer’s family, that was away on holiday, or something, and they sent a card back to say hello to everybody, I can’t remember exactly the comment but it left me as being...there was the lads and the girls and then there was Thomas. They

weren't sure which way I was, I didn't pass any comment on it. I was thinking oh Jesus, I'm caught! Then I remember a new girl started in the office one time and very early on she was talking about something and she said "Well, I'm not sure which way you bat" I just said "What do you mean? I don't play tennis". So I left it at that, I pull back, I wouldn't...I feel if I went deeper into it.....I was a little embarrassed, I didn't worry too much about it because she was a young person coming in and I find some of these very young people don't have a problem with people being gay or bisexual or straight. They don't seem to have a problem with it, like recently my godchild, she's at college, and she works in a restauraunt at the weekend, and one of the guys that works with her is gay. Now, I've actually met him with her one day, I was picking her up from work one day and he came out with her to the car, and she was telling me going back in the car that they were out clubbing or something and he was meeting one of his friends in The George so she went along. She was telling me all about this place. I said "Oh, really, what did you think of it?". "It was grand, there were gay people and straight people, it didn't matter" she said. "Do you know where it is?", she asked. I said "No". "Did you ever hear about it?" she asked. I said "No, I didn't" . I was probably envying the young guy, thinking, "at my age I wish I could be as brave as you".

I: "Do you feel awkward around gay people?"

T: "Oh good God no, not at all, why would I? You mean if I had to work with one? Not at all, not a bit in the world. Everybody else might have a problem with it but I don't. I don't go to gay pubs or clubs or anything like that though, I probably just don't have the nerve to do it, just not brave enough really. There is that fear that I might get found out. That someone might see you and you not see them...but then

they'd have to say why they were there too..but then they wouldn't, and then they'd know and I wouldn't know and that would annoy me. I have never actually gone into a gay pub, I went to a gay sauna. The first time I was absolutely terrified, absolutely terrified of it. Getting in there and getting out, once I was in there I kind of settled after a while to it. I wouldn't have had any encounters with anyone in there, I wouldn't. I wouldn't have been really comfortable. My first experience going in there I would have been very nervous about it, and then I was afraid if a fire breaks out here and I die in this place and I will be secretly outed, or if I'm injured and taken away to hospital, how am I going to explain what I was doing there? I remember hearing one time how some priest died in it, that kind of....well I suppose if it was out it was out, you'd be lucky to be alive and suffer the consequences. I've only been there about three or four times anyway."

I: "Have you ever told anybody?"

T: "No, no, who would I tell? No I wouldn't, not unless they were on the same waveband as I was, I certainly wouldn't no. I've wanted to, of course I have, several times, but I wouldn't let down my guard I suppose that's really the thing....and who would I talk to? In the last few years, about three years ago, I went to a first communion party in a neighbours house and the wife of the neighbour, her brother was there with his boyfriend and I didn't know at the time...he was introduced to me as his partner and I very innocently asked later on in the conversation "What business were they in together?" and then I was told. Now I fancied the guy, her brother, I really did, I liked him, I thought he was a lovely looking fella, and even at her wedding before that I thought he was a nice guy, not knowing the way he was orientated...but, I've never really got to talk to him on his own, or to both of them on

their own, and I would have liked to. It would have to be...it would be very awkward with the girl beside me. Very late in the night, after a lot of wine and food, I got very philosophical and started talking, and I asked her about her brother and the relationship and everything else, and she thought I didn't approve initially and she said to me "Look he's my brother, I love him to bits, I don't have a problem with it, do you?" I said "No, no, no, I don't at all, I'm only asking". He has a step-father and he was there that night aswell and she gestured to him and said "he doesn't really approve of it" and I just said to him [the step-father] "you just have to live and let live, you can't be knocking people". He said "Oh I know that, it's just a bit awkward" But anyway himself and his partner were living with the stepfather and they were building a house nearby. They probably will end up getting married, I don't know, but they're very much a couple. I was kind of observing how this girl, whose brother was gay, her husband's family whom I would be friendly with all down the years, and I would have thought that they were very anti-gay people, but they were accepting of it...I just said to myself "well if it's in your family you accept it" and they were accepting it without.....that made me more comfortable with it and I think if we had got into a serious conversation that night I might have come out to them [the gay couple]. I might have come out to her, seeing as I now had found someone who is very understanding and is on the other side...it's finding someone to trust. I would like that, I would like a couple of people to know who are not gay."

I: "What is it like not having that?"

T: "You're very isolated, you really are on your own, you're living a double life and that's the killing part of it...it has effected me, it has...what would I call it?...stunted my growth in that area, you know, I mean I haven't had a full life, when I should be

able to do those things and have a full life in that respect. Not have to conform with what seems to everyone else to be the normal life, that's the way I see it. I think if I was in another country, if I had no connections with family whatsoever, I probably would be quite happy living that life and even if my work area was in that, I'd still be happy. It was never an option for me, far too much to lose and that's why I never pursued it. Very frustrating, very frustrating. I'm still dealing with it and it's a conflict all the time. I think I'm probably a little bit more mature about it now and there would be times that...I suppose I never will come out to people, but like I said earlier on, if they choose to think that of me and that's the way they pursue it, then so be it, but I'm not going to tell them they're right."

I: "Can you imagine what it would be like if you did come out?"

T: "It would be an awful big step for me...I suppose it would be a 'seven day wonder' and then it would die down, like everything else, there would be something else to talk about in a weeks time. To me it would be like a murder, I would have done something that nobody would have suspected I would do. Like, if I went out and murdered somebody tomorrow, nobody would believe that I had done it. It's the same if I came out and said "Look folks I'm gay and put up with it, get on with it". I think they'd be shocked and horrified for a while and then it would die down. Now, maybe I'm wrong, maybe I'm perceiving it as wrong, maybe people are seeing me differently and maybe just because I get on so well in my community..it's like, they might think it but no one confirms it to them. I don't want to risk it, the fact that some of the friends and acquaintances are so anti-gay that I don't think that they would behave the friendly way they do..they might ostracise me."

I: “How do you see things in the future for you in terms of your sexuality?”

T: “Well it’s a lonely life...I think. I’m in a lonely lifestyle anyway. I’ll probably just stay the way I am. You feel different and you feel left out of a lot of things. Sometimes I would decline because of the way I am and the way I feel, I wouldn’t get involved in everything that’s macho and family orientated. I would be a softer type of male than the average male, I think I would...I suppose the fact that I’m the outdoor type and I’m on a farm and stuff , I’m not perceived as ‘sissy-like’ or ‘pansy-like’ or something like that– these are old expressions, but like, I’m tough in that respect. I think everyone should have a soft nature about them though. At this stage of my life, not married, not in a relationship, people think there’s something wrong with you anyway.”

I: “Do you think it would be easier to be gay nowadays?”

T: “It’s definitely better nowadays and I admire the younger people and I really do envy them, and I admire the straight young people that accept their gay friends and it’s probably more because gay people are more confident about it now, they’ve made a voice for themselves, and they’ve established themselves, and they’re not going to be the hidden race or the hidden society that they had to be in the past. I do think it’s a good thing. I wish that some straight people would just cop themselves on and not be so much anti-gay.”

I: “How do you feel about your sexuality now?”

T: “I think I’m probably more gay than straight, I feel more pleasure on the gay side. The other thing I suppose about it is, I don’t know if I would have liked a family or not at this stage of my life, it didn’t bother me up to now and with more people saying

to you “you’ve no one coming after you” or “no one to hand it on to” [his land].....you begin to wonder if you had a child what it would be like and.... It’s not really bothering me really, you could be straight and married and never have a child.”

I: “What about aspects of gay life you dont like?”

T: “I wouldn’t be attracted to very camp people, I think some of the younger guys their dress sense and their behaviour, their body language, I don’t know whether they’re gay or just in the wrong body...that I wouldn’t like, I like men to be men. You have to be, some off the stuff in your conversation or your body language too I suppose, to a certain extent you have to be careful that it is not read by straight people as a gay thing, I would be conscious of that. I would try and be aware of that. Definitely would cover up a lot yeah. Some of the lads would make jokes with me, you know, if we were out for a jar and a bit of banter going on, they would say something, a gay thing, innuendo thing, but I wouldn’t rise to the occasion as such but then I’d think, they wouldn’t say that to me if they thought I was. This gay thing is centuries old, in the past people would have tolerated it and it went on even though people didn’t think of it, and it seemed to be latterly that people got all this notion and het up about the whole thing, and then it got legalised and that was the end of the whole thing.....I don’t like the churchs attitude to sexuality but it doesn’t stop me going to church but that is one section that I blot out. I feel that the church is very hypocritical about the whole thing because a lot of there people where involved in homosexuality anyway, and you know I find it hard that so much was covered up anyway, and I feel that the church has to be Christian about the whole thing and they eventually have to come around to accepting it. That would be my opinion, it wouldn’t be something I’m going to go to the confessional with. I live a Christian life

and as far as I'm concerned im not harming anybody, I see a lot of things as I grow older that people were so against in the past, things can be turned around and changed, and change will come. I mean from the states point of view it is accepted, they'll probably go a bit further and accept unions."

APPENDIX D

Al

I: "Can you tell me about your early experiences of homophobia?"

A: "I suppose my earliest memories of homophobic remarks would have been back in around 1965 or 1966, when I was a boy.....my father, and an uncle aswell, a brother of his, had been chatting on and off about people in the pub, and there was some person they were referring to, and they said you'd have to stand with your back to the wall when you're near them. In other words, they'd give it to you up the rear end. I remember a discussion about a guy at the time who was called Cassius Clay, who has since become Muhammad Ali, the great boxer, and my uncle and some of the guys who worked in the shop for my father were talking about him, and I distinctly remember overhearing one guy saying he was homosexual....and the way the conversation would have gone, it wouldn't have been good. So that's just as a child."

I: "Did you know you were gay at that stage?"

A: "No, I certainly hadn't much awareness but I was listening, and as a child, I probably heard conversations. It was negative connotations and it was sketchy...the word homosexual, probably the first time I heard it was an uncle of mine chatting in the house, I didn't know what it meant at all. I can't say it was spoken about much but for those two instances I mentioned. There would be always guys in the house when I was a boy, working in the butcher shop, and conversations.....my father would be if not hostile, very cautious or cagey.....suspicious. With my uncle, I don't know whether he'd be a little more open, he'd been in England and came home...he had the word homosexual, my father didn't seem to have that word at all, it was just "keep your arse to the wall".

I: "What about school?"

A: "I know, personally, I would have been very on edge if there was any suggestion and maybe that's because it was in me and I didn't know how to deal with it, or wasn't sure about it....but I certainly can't recall anything when I was young, at school. But then of course, I left secondary school very early, after first year I rebelled and wouldn't go, so I didn't have secondary education after that."

I: "It was a world you weren't aware of?"

A: "That would be very true, and little vocabulary or none. Homosexuality would have come into my awareness in my teen years. When I worked at home, I used to listen to the radio a lot, and I kept in touch with a lot of current affairs through chat shows....not that there was a lot of chat shows about that topic in the 1970's but at that stage, fifteen or sixteen, I knew I was homosexual I suppose, but I was terrified! I would have never mentioned it to anybody at all, at that time. Issues related to homosexuality, I wouldn't have had much knowledge about at all, only what I heard on the radio, and that would have been little enough."

I: "Why were you terrified?"

A: "I wonder was I terrified because of the moral teaching we had at school?, the catholic moral teaching about sex. Certainly, there was no mention at all of homosexuality in that teaching, it was all to do with heterosexual relations. I would have had hangups in myself about that and a bit scared about sex in general. You couldn't be near a girl who'd have sex, she'd have to be decent and respectable and this would be the way. You wouldn't dream of touching a girl inappropriately. That was the script. Sex itself, the very subject would have been largely taboo, by and large

yes. It was like a chasm,ok, here I was on the edge of a chasm, I'm gay, but very little vocabulary for it, very little understanding about it, little or none.... and nobody whatsoever that I would dream of opening the topic with, neither friend nor relation nor nobody. I would have been afraid, scared, talking now when I was mid teens. Absolutely terrified of the topic but it would have gone around in my head. At that time I wouldn't have even thought ahead of what would happen [if he was found out]. It would have just been *anathema*, you couldn't mention it, it would have been so.....the word criminal comes in to my mind. So outside of the box, the world I lived in, it would have been unbearable, unthinkable to even go to the topic in my environment. The thoughts were there. I mean, when I was a boy, I used to love looking at builders on building sites with their tops off, I used to cycle around my town....I can still see them this minute! The only time I ever heard homosexuality mentioned was by way of suspicion about that boxer at the time, and mistrust, you wouldn't trust anybody in a pub, or an atmosphere like that, who was thought to be like that. That message came across to me, that's what I recall from way back then. It was basically hidden, I was in my own world on the bicycle, I was observing, I was looking but never talking at all, only thinking, and I suppose desiring or admiring. Very internal, and when I was young aswell there would be guys stripping off, undressing quite regularly in the butchers yard because they were going to slaughter the cattle. I was quite interested in looking at all that. That was a regular thing, twice a week there would be slaughtering going on.

I: “How did you manage to keep it all to yourself?”

A: “I dealt with it very skilfully and under huge fear of disclosure, it would have been thought that there was something gravely wrong with you [if you were gay] in my environment anyway. If the thought came into the mind, I wouldn’t have blocked it or stamped it out, but I wouldn’t have shared it with anyone. I’m not conscious that I tried to stop it but I certainly didn’t understand it, and I didn’t have much vocabulary for it. It was like a dark room, you couldn’t see much around it, inside of it.”

I: “How was it affecting you?”

A: “I think it was a part of me that I kept very hidden. It was more distressing when I was a seminarian, in case I’d be discovered of being gay, because I used to stare at guys and one or two guys asked me, over the course of seven or eight years, was I gay? I just shrivelled. Huge fear, huge fear of being discovered and inability to deal with it inside myself, so I was hardly going to open up to anybody else about it. By that stage people were beginning to talk about it a bit more, so by 1979, 1980, things had changed a bit. I wasn’t worried, I kept it way down, suppressed way down, I still hadn’t found any way to vent or speak about it with anyone at that stage. Eventually, I did, in the early 1980s, I did speak to someone about it, that was with a theologian who was in the seminary. I decided I needed to come out to somebody. I was studying theology and I didn’t know what to do with that part of me. It was an issue that I needed to address but it was only addressed in a very surface way. In confidence, at that time, I said “by the way I think I’m gay” and the response I got was in the context of celibacy, “well, if you’re gay that’s that, you just have to keep your celibacy intact...”look at the menu but don’t eat. It was never mentioned again. He was my spiritual director. Years later, when I had a breakdown, one of the

professors out of the college came to visit me, he said to me “we didn’t have a way of dealing with it ourselves so it couldn’t be explored”. I wasn’t having a crisisit was an issue in me that I needed to bring out in to the open because my father always told me as a boy to tell the truth. I was very satisfied with how it went, it put me at ease at that time but I still hadn’t dealt with it in myself, it was surface. He didn’t address it any further but all I needed at the time was not to feel bad about it.”

I: “What compelled you to enter the priesthood?”

A: “In hindsight probably because of my sexuality, because it was a way of life that I could exist in, obviously, without having to get married. I wouldn’t have experienced it that way at the time. The questions were asked when I went in, was I trying to escape from something? What was I trying to escape from? From my father’s shadow? Was I running away from something? What my motive to join was asked. At that time, in relation to becoming a priest, the subject of homosexuality was never addressed at all, not mentioned at all, and probably due to peoples’ inability to deal with it anyway, at the time. To be honest about it, yes, I would have to say now it was to do with my sexuality, definitely, because there was no way I could face getting into a relationship with a woman at all, or into bed with a woman or anything like that...and people at that stage of your life were beginning to say “when are you getting married?” I reacted openly to very little, I internalised a lot of stuff so I was not good at confronting issues in those days, or for years after it, so if people asked me that question, I would just go silent and move away softly. I was avoiding it like the plague. Very much so avoiding. I didn’t have what you would call a relationship with a girl. I went to dances with girls and I invited girls out to dances. My first dance I can still remember, but it was bloody well arranged between my father and her

father, more than me, when I was about eighteen or something, because I would have been seen as a bit shy. My father would have seen me as very slow and backwards in relation to going out with girls. It was very limited, I kissed a girl a few times and ...see I was emotionally frozen over in those days, basically from the untimely death of my mother when I was just six years of age, and I hadn't thawed out in reality, at all, still.....it was years later. I was emotionally frozen over and I couldn't easily accept affection from anybody, so when a girl said "I like you" or something, I didn't know whether they were joking or not, I didn't believe them. I never pushed it and I would have never hardly have dated a girl twice, very rarely. But I went around with a social group at the time and we would have gone to dances but no real engagement on my part, at a personal level, in that way. I didn't make a conscious decision to avoid marriage.....Did I? maybe I did deep down, like, "I won't be going this way"....I remember at one point, ok, there was plenty of girls at school and whatever, and wondering what one I would marry. I could remember discussing that with myself and eyeing out one or two. Kind of saying "I could marry that one" but I had no capacity in myself to relate emotionally anyway. I left to study for the priesthood the year the pope visited Ireland. I began studies at that stage and I was full of energy for it, I was giving it my heart and soul. I felt at that stage, life was all 'me, me, me' and I wanted to go beyond that and the ministry was the way to do that. My grandmother had sowed the idea [joining the priesthood] in my head as a child, when I was very young, but it was dormant for years, the idea. When it surfaced, it was serving other purposes in me, but when it surfaced I couldn't say no to it, I thought "I've got to try this now because, if I don't try it, I might be sorry" or whatever. Huge enthusiasm, I had great enthusiasm, a granite wall wouldn't stop me and once my father didn't go against me - even though it was hard on him - that was great, and I forged ahead."

I: “Did you have any outlet for your sexual feelings at that point?”

A: “Masturbation was the only outlet at that point for my sexuality, little wrestling matches, that was as close as you got. Being in the all male environment probably reinforced my feelings more than anything else. It was a warm enough environment but I remember one guy used to sit in front of me in class and he turned around to me and said “You know Al, I’m not gay” he felt my eyes or something, even though I wouldn’t say it [that he was attracted to him] and that was sad..... I wasn’t trying hugely to appear not gay or contain myself but at the same time being afraid. I can see now how you would have guessed I was gay at the time, without me ever laying a finger on anybody in that way.”

I: “How did the teaching on homosexuality in the church affect you?”

A: “The teaching on homosexuality was very negative and it was seen to be an intrinsic evil ‘*intrinicae malleum*’ in the latin dialect....while the acts were evil the person wasn’t, this distinction was made....one of many clever distinctions. I suppose it just shoved it down further, shoved down my feelings...I suppose, I was coming in to a career, if you like, that left me an avenue to do something I wanted to do, so I wasn’t going to let a whole lot stop me and I didn’t have the awareness, I had never had any gay friends, or anything like that, to discuss it in any way properly. I don’t think I felt frustrated though, I was very full of the mission, very full of study, reading and writing, dialogue and debate about all sorts of things, and full of the formation procedure that was going on in those years....I suppose from time to time I must have been frustrated, there would have been no expression of it [his sexuality], yes that would have been there.”

I: “Was there any reaction to the teachings?”

A: “I remember in a psychology class one time....the nearest thing where homosexuality ever came to being discussed was in psychology. This guy at the top of the table was saying anyway, that with homosexuality, there was a principle of the masculine and the feminine in one individual, this was how it was described and so forth and blah, blah. I was sitting there and I wasn't going to open my beak even a millionth of an inch on the topic, as I was so afraid. I hadn't heard anybody else open their mouth about it either, there was no discussion, nobody even peeped during that class. That was an input we were given. The man [tutor] didn't flavour it either way, he just delivered it in a fairly impassionate way but, if anything, there was a little bit of a snigger, a little hint there, that's all. He wasn't going into the morality of it as it was a psychology class. Masculine and feminine principles, and that one partner might take one role, and the other, the other role, or whatever. I didn't become hugely curious about it, probably the 'terrified' word was there. Terror probably too dramatic, because I was so practiced at switching off at that stage. I had to survive, that's how I survived from the time I was a child, as a person. All the time. Close down. That's how I dealt with it from my childhood.”

I: “Can you tell me about leaving the priesthood”

A: “I had come out, I had a breakdown and I had to leave work for about six to eight months. My life up to then in the ministry had been a one way street so I was there to serve, I was there to do the work of God in relation to people, and there to be available twenty four hours a day. I had no way of taking in affection from people. I had no expression of myself as a person physically with anyone and I was a machine.

That's what I ended up being like – a machine. That's how I treated myself, I wanted to be Mr.Perfect, I wanted to do a great job and I endeavoured to do all that and have everything signed, sealed and delivered, and work my heart out. I liked people a lot and had a great time in lots of ways. Eventually, after a number of years in the ministries, I began to breakdown, it was around 1992 or 1993. Around thirty eight. A friend of mine came and heard me preaching one day, a very close friend, although we had never discussed sexuality - with my close friends you discussed everything other than sexuality - it just wasn't discussed. He came up and he said to me after the sermon, "you're slipping". So, I eventually realised I was in trouble. I had gone from one side of the spectrum completely to the other. Where I had been a workaholic, full of zeal, full of vision and ideas, and doing all sorts....but I had got to the stage where I didn't care if the country was swallowed up into the Atlantic Ocean and never seen again. It wasn't good, so I went to the bishop. Of course, I had taken up looking for sex with men and I went to the bishop and said "I need to get out of here before I make a disgrace of myself and the institution I belong to". He...the man is dead now....but he was very good with me, he didn't go into the subject with me but he knew after a half an hours conversation with me that this was serious. He took my word for it and let me go, more or less just like that. He said "make enquiries" and he allowed me to go over to England to a therapy centre. I had the luxury of being there, a residential centre for about six months. It was run by Catholic nuns. It was with a view to me dealing with issues that had come up in my life, that I couldn't handle any longer, and I couldn't handle in the ministry. I was near to breakdown. The issues that drove me to that situation, what came out in the therapy over those months, was the issues surrounding the untimely death of my mother, issues surrounding anger, and difficulties with my father and huge issues around my sexuality. The report that my

therapist eventually gave up, was that I was dealing with facing up to the issues as time went on, but with great personal cost to myself. The hardest time of my life. So, when I had come out to myself in that therapeutic situation, I came back to Ireland and I never had the same fire in my belly for the job again. So, I went back in and it didn't work. I had also become disenchanted with the institutional church as well. I had huge problems with that, and the authority structures that were there, that I didn't have originally. That was a big factor. My sexuality....I had found a huge freedom in myself having dealt with my sexuality, so it was ok to be me. Homosexual AI wasn't being beaten over the head anymore by Catholic AI. Huge warfare was going on and that came out in psychodrama and the various therapies. It came out by me sitting over there and being Catholic AI and sitting back here being homosexual AI, and the bean bag and a handle of a shovel in the middle, and several attempts to get off the chair and beat the shite out of the beanbag. Eventually, it happened, and I beat the beanbag until the beans started to come out. That was a huge relief. I had a lot of help to do that stuff there. So, I came back to Ireland and I was very vulnerable. I flew straight back in and a close friend collected me and I had started already to come out to my friends. It was positive for the most part. I knew, coming out to people, that they are either going to accept me or not, and of course real friends did. So, I came back to the parish and did duties there for a year. I realised I was going nowhere, so I knew then. I wouldn't be the type of person that would want to be part of the furniture or a passenger on the job. I'd wanted to feel that I was effective in any role I had. So, I could see no future in it, and I decided that was it. I didn't decide on my own, I went back into a therapy group for a while to get my head clear. I attended that group once a week for a few months. It was during my time there that I actually pulled it together finally. Hugely liberating. Huge weight off my shoulders. I no longer had this public

persona where I had to live a certain type of a life. I couldn't handle now, being in the ministry at all, and I had lost interest in the Catholic church as an institution, at that stage. Largely, I couldn't see myself wasting any more of my life in it. I wasn't openly gay at that stage, in the sense that I was going around and telling everybody "Hi, I'm gay". I would come out to certain people, I mean people that I valued in life...and I came out to all of them. Hugely positive about it now, it was a seismic change, an incredible change. I was positive but I was still only putting my foot in the water, it was a bit like that too. It left me feeling ok to be me in my entirety rather than just bits of me. I was no longer divided into two or three different bits that were hostile to each other. Certainly, the Catholic bit from my upbringing and the homosexual bit, they were no longer divided or split down the middle. One beating the other up, that had been happening big time. The blueprint was there for integration but it took me years to unpack the therapy too."

I: "How did you feel about being sexually active as a Priest?"

A: "There was a big split, a big division in me. I had one public persona and had to do all I had to do in public life, then there was the hidden side of me that sneaked out at night, occasionally, to try and find whatever was out there, that I hadn't a way of finding otherwise. Part of being a perfectionist as well, but a very important part was not perfect at all, and not integrated, leaking outside of me and acting out fantasies. I had learned along time ago to divide my life into segments, so I was very skilled at that and very used to doing that and compartmentalising bits of me, that's what I did. There was homophobia there on a few occasions, a fella held a syringe to my neck one night and robbed me."

I: “Were you exploring your sexuality when you left the priesthood?”

A: “Yes of course. I left the countryside and came to Dublin on Pentecost Sunday. I moved into a bedsit and started visiting ‘The George’ and these places. Of course, the fact of coming to terms with my sexuality was one thing, but I still knew nothing about relationships, nothing, nada, zilch....didn’t know where to start.”

I: “What impression did you get from being on the gay scene?”

A: “I was very happy and it was delightful, it was lovely to be around other people and it was lovely to be there. I had spent most of my life in the closet, a very strict closet. Now I was in a bar and these people were all gay aswell. I was like the child in the proverbial sweet shop, so a massive change....completely, outlandishly different. I was doing things, and in places, I’d never dreamt of being. I wasn’t a machine anymore, that’s true. It was exciting. I suppose I was indulgent, I indulged myself greatly. Pinching myself and saying “Is this what I’ve been missing?”. I’d be meeting lots of people around 1995, I was enjoying myself. Hangups had disappeared more or less. My first job was very good because it was in the University, and you couldn’t get a much more open environment. Some of the staff there were gay, the chief administrator was gay.”

I: “Did you experience any homophobia at that stage?”

A: “Certainly not in the work environment, because it was that type of environment. But before that job I had gone in to do a course in FAS and I would have been very conscious of homophobia there. I was asked directly, was I gay?, one evening in a social setting, and I hadn’t the guts to come out and say I was, because the guy who

was asking me, I felt him very threatening. I erred on the side of caution. It's alright to come out as gay but you weren't going to put your neck on the line or come a cropper over it."

I: "How do you react to homophobia nowadays?"

A: "I'd have huge resentment in myself if I saw it. Historically, I wouldn't be good at tackling anything directly. As time goes on, I suppose one would become more likely to tackle it. I've seen homophobia in action physically. I saw fellas getting set upon outside 'The George' one night years ago. I was sitting in a car and the cars came down and blew horns so the assailants fecked off. I saw a man being set upon another night, there were fellas pretending to be gay themselves and when this poor man followed one of them, a few of them set upon him. They tried it on me but it didn't work. They had a stick with a nail on it, I remember that experience. They were teenagers and I remember facing them up."

I: "Are you out openly now?"

A: "I don't make it a policy of walking up to people and telling them I'm gay. In work it's well known that I'm gay. Fortunately in work there isn't much of an issue about it. I've never encountered any issue there. I do realise in saying that, that there are many other work environments that there are issues where people have encountered difficulties."

I: "Is it easier to be gay nowadays?"

A: "If I said yes, I'd have to qualify that, I think for a lot of young people coming out, there's nothing easy about that. It seems more socially acceptable on the surface but I'm not sure much below if you scratch...I suspect old attitudes are still there."

I: "What is homophobia?"

A: "My line on that, would be fear of sexuality in themselves perhaps, some of these people who batter gay people, possibly afraid of their own sexuality and haven't maybe explored their own stuff well enough, and take it out on somebody else. Upbringing, negative attitudes from parents and others. It's hard to pin it down."

I: "Has it affected you?"

A: "Well, I always remember coming to Dublin in 1995 and at that time looking at guys and girls walking hand in hand and kissing each other, maybe on O'Connell bridge or somewhere, and saying "that's so bloody unjust and unfair that I can't do that with a guy" so one has to always be aware that you can't behave in a way that you might feel like behaving. The only time I walked down the street with a guy like that, was in Brighton, and even there, there is homophobia. People beaten up on the promenade at night.

I: "Can it change?"

A: "Education in the schools would be one way of doing it, an open education about it to deal with it in an appropriate way from early on, to deal with sexuality and relationships early on. That would be one important way as you can't go into someone's home and change their attitudes very easily. I suppose, what children get

at home in their own house and what they are fed, even unwittingly, can give them attitudes.”

I: “How do you feel about your sexuality nowadays?”

A: “It’s a part of me, it’s a blessing, it’s a gift, it’s a part of who I am, it’s how I was made or created or whatever word you use. It’s part of being a human being.”

I: “ What impact does the churches teaching have on attitudes to homosexuality?”

A: “I would say very negative. Their teaching isn’t always how it appears in the media, however the bit on homosexuality hasn’t altered much, to my knowledge, over the years, it’s discussed a bit alright. Personally, I feel it’s a great tragedy and sadness, to think, that the institution that is meant to carry a message of hope and light in people’s lives for humanity, is actually sullyng that message and destroying that by their interpretation and overfocusing on sexuality.....completely over the top....control, that’s what it’s about and that’s not what it was meant to be about at all. They’ve lost touch....I would be resentful, probably feel angry about it now. The church has a lot of growing up to do in that area. No change happens over night, how long did legalisation of homosexuality take? I had my breakdown around that time and maybe Ireland did aswell. Change is slow and painful in real life. It was for me but I came out the other side.”

APPENDIX E

Francis

I: “Can you tell me about your experiences of homophobia growing up?”

F: ‘Well, the first thing that comes to my mind is, I remember watching the Late late show one night, we used to all gather around as a family and watch it. This particular night there was a guy from the gay and lesbian equality network on, he was talking about being gay and homophobia, it was some time prior to the decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1993, but I just remember the reaction of my parents when he was on television, it was one of complete disgust. They couldn’t believe he had been given a platform to air his views on television. They didn’t turn it off, but it was made quite clear to us that if any of us turned out that way we would be finished, our lives wouldn’t be worth living, they’d kill us themselves...that was the way it was put. I suppose I would have been about ten or eleven at that stage but the message was out loud and clear, that this was something that was absolutely horrific, their response was so strong, I was left with no doubt, this was one thing that you could not even contemplate being.’”

I: “How did that leave you feeling?”

F: “I suppose at that time, looking at the guy, he seemed pretty normal, just like your average person, but because of his sexuality, it apparently made him into this demon. So that settled with me and settled very uncomfortably, because I suppose at that age, I was starting to become aware of my attraction to other men and that was full of difficulty. It was a natural urge and I was starting to look at men in pictures and magazines and on television and really like the look of men, and starting to have those sexual feelings but at the same time what I was hearing from family or in school,

media....everywhere, was that it was an absolute no-no. I can't stress enough how reviled it was, it was particularly so in the school yard. It was probably the most severe form of verbal abuse anyone could get at that time. I remember all the terms...gaylord, faggot, queer, puff....they all just came out so readily in the schoolyard, anybody who was at the end of another's vitriol or hate or anger, well that would be the first word out in order to abuse them. That was the foundation for what I perceived homosexuality was and as a result what I was. I played on hurling and gaelic football teams at the time and from about the age of eight or nine onwards really anti-gay jokes started to become the norm and it intensified as we got older, I suppose as people became more aware of sexuality, so that was always there."

I: "How did that affect you?"

F: "As I got into my mid teens it had started to affect me, I stopped playing sports because I was really aware of what I was and I felt like an impostor on the team or in the dressing room. I felt if anybody found out I was one of them, I would have been...I don't know, I would have been killed, set upon, humiliated, abused, I couldn't show my face again. It didn't even bear thinking about what could happen but I was very aware that I had these feelings and I really, really had to keep them at bay...I remember that was one of the most difficult things, for example maybe in secondary school, I was in gym and I was very good at sports and I loved sports but I started to miss a lot of Physical education. because I was scared that maybe some way I'd be found out by others in the changing rooms. The same with my hurling team, by the age of sixteen or seventeen, I had stopped altogether, just because of the fear, so all the enthusiasm and love of sports was replaced by a fear that I was going to be found out. I was hearing it left, right and centre, I was hearing it everywhere, how bad

it was to be gay, so evil and horrible and disgusting and perverted. I couldn't reconcile that with the feelings I was having. I had those feelings and felt really, really awful. I felt like a murderer, even in the act of desiring someone or fancying someone it was almost as bad as killing someone, that was the message I was getting, that bad, the messages were everywhere. It was also around the time of the big AIDS scare in the 1980s when I was first starting to fancy other men, so that complicated it and made me think that...I actually thought I had AIDS, my body was going through changes due to puberty and I suppose I would have been very unaware with not having much sex education, it was not talked about at home, it was a complete no-no. I couldn't talk to anybody about it, it was a real dark time for me. I was awash with guilt and fear and for a time I did think it was possible - even though I hadn't been sexually active - it was possible that I had AIDS. I had a health scare when I was thirteen and I was thinking this must be it, the gay disease, this is the life ahead of me. Almost a punishment that I expected for my desires. I was thinking of dying in disgrace and not making it to my 'junior certificate'. I was pretty sure I would be dead by the time I was fifteen and I really now attribute all this to how the AIDS scare was presented in the media: "the gay plague". I suppose it was also just my own self-hatred, fear and guilt, it was just huge! I can't overemphasise how awful that time was for me, how dark it was."

I: "So it was having a major impact on you?"

F: "I think I had gone from being someone who was very bright, very funloving, who loved sport and had a sense of adventure and joy, and with my sexuality coming to the surface and the really vicious, negative messages I was getting from the outside, wherever it was from....it really kind of drained all of that out of me, I was now

preoccupied and terrified by the idea I would be found out. As a result, I couldn't think about the future, I couldn't concentrate on studies, I didn't enjoy my sports anymore. I was just paralysed with fear. Such a dark time and I was paralysed with the fear. Was I going to die? What if people find out about me? The disgrace I would bring to my family."

I: "How did you deal with that?"

F: "I couldn't really think ahead, I suppose I dealt with it by switching off, daydreaming, getting lost in my imagination, it was the safest thing for me to do, to just withdraw from the world and withdraw from people who seemed to be so nasty about what I was. I certainly wasn't accepting of it, it was natural though and I really, really desired men but I felt that it was absolutely abominable. So I was getting the message that my true nature was terribly wrong. I'm not exaggerating when I say that everyday was a nightmare then, this conflict between my sexual desires, which I suppose were very strong at that stage for a young guy, and the message I had internalised that this was something completely wrong, completely evil, completely perverted. For me, that was the message I picked up from all around me...my family and friends, from school....so I suppose I felt very isolated, very alone, very guilty. I felt very wrong. I was constantly trying to cover up things. Lots of anxiety, I had to switch off. Trying to make sure nobody found out was a 'full time job'. But I remember when I was about fourteen or fifteen coming to the conclusion that I would just try and destroy these feelings I had inside me and the way I tried to do this was by trying to block out my feelings for men. I remember stopping myself from having any sexual desires and whenever they came into my head I would try and stop them. I didn't masturbate or fantasise about men. I really put a ban on it, looking at men on

television, around me, anything like that. It was difficult because as you can imagine, at that age I would have had strong sexual feelings, and particularly in school I would have had crushes on teachers....I remember for two weeks it being fairly successful and feeling an achievement but at the end of the two weeks I remember seeing a film with an actor I really fancied and I knew at that stage that I couldn't keep these feelings at bay. I knew that by keeping them at bay, I would really...it would be too difficult. I couldn't stop these feelings. It was pointless trying. I knew it wouldn't be a good thing for me. At that time I realised, "Ok, I can't stop these feelings, they're going to be there but I'll have to continue to....be so vigilant and thorough in making sure nobody finds out". So I suppose that was how I lived my life for such a long time. Whenever it was mentioned in company, I just died a million deaths and really tried not to show any reaction, maybe sometimes I'd go red. I just wanted to be away from all this nastiness that was everywhere, there was no getting away from it though. I suppose at times I was able to retreat into my own world, create my own world. I spent a lot of time in my room listening to music and writing, I was creative. It was very gloomy and negative though, I didn't see a future for me. I was just going from day to day, getting by. I had no outlet for my sexuality. I certainly wouldn't have countered or challenged any of the messages I was hearing about being gay. It was there all the time [homophobia] and I felt so alone and I had nobody to speak to about it. It wasn't until my twenties that I started to speak about it."

I: "When did you start to have an outlet for your sexual desires?"

F: "I started having sexual encounters with men when I was seventeen but it was very 'cloak and dagger', it all seemed illegal. It was still illegal at that stage too. Even after that though, it felt very secret, dangerous, clandestine, something to be guilty about

and a lot of time after the sexual act I would feel so guilty and just want to run away from these feelings. I felt so sad. I had to remove that part of my personality from the rest of my persona with everybody. I didn't rationalise it at the time, I felt I had no choice. It just seems now insane that I had to be forced to do that by society, and I'm angry. I had to cut off this part of my life and people still continue to do that. I know that things have changed substantially in recent years but I still think that there is such a long way to go. What it does to you when you have to deny yourself, cut off a part of yourself. I certainly wasn't able to accept it. I almost had to split. This is my sexuality, my gay part and I go out and meet men for sex under this cover. Completely unknown to anyone else. It just felt so wrong but at the same time it felt right because I enjoyed being with men. I couldn't bring these two worlds together. I had such strong desires for men but it went against everything I had learned, everything I had heard."

I: "When did you come out?"

F: "It wasn't until my early twenties when I met my first boyfriend, that was the first time I could talk to anybody about it. It was such a huge relief, it wasn't the best relationship by any means but even the act of being able to show that side of myself to somebody else and get a warm or positive reaction. I just remember one night almost kind of fainting because the years of repression and years of self-hate, years of keeping it all to myself, were shattered. I was so happy to have that experience, so I think, even though it has been a very long road for me, that was the start of it. I came out to my parents and family over the course of a year when I was twenty-six. I kind of did it in stages. It was very, very difficult. In a way, I felt I wasn't ready for it at that time. I was going out with a guy who kind of pushed me into it. I hadn't really

accepted myself but at the same time I was putting myself out there as gay. I still hadn't settled into myself. I think it was only later in my twenties, or my early thirties, after a lot of personal therapy, that I felt this is me and I like who I am and I like my sexuality. It wasn't until then that I started to feel good about myself and I feel a huge difference now. I suppose I almost take it for granted now at this stage. I can talk freely and openly about it. I'm out in work, I'm out with all my friends, out with all my family and I'll talk to them about it. I still think certain people find it difficult to talk about it, when I bring it up, but I'm not scared anymore. I mean, it's not one hundred percent great, certain situations where people are being anti-gay, I haven't addressed directly. I get very, very angry after it. I still find it very hard, I go into that place where I was a teenager and keep quiet and try not to rock the boat. It's that old message that you're constantly sent, that what you are is wrong. It's very hard when you've heard that from everywhere. It's very hard to reverse that and stand up to it. I think only through my personal therapy have I started to chip away at that. I know some people come out and it's not a problem for them but for me it was a very, very long and arduous process."

I: "What helped you in your process?"

F: "The main thing for me is having some kind of support. That was the first chink of light, when I met my first boyfriend and being able to talk about it in a normal way. Being able to express my love for somebody and express myself and who I am completely. That was the start of it, it seems like such a long time ago now. Everything followed on from that. I don't blame my parents or family, necessarily, that was where they came from. Things have changed though. I never thought my dad would accept me but he does now and he's quite proud of me. That contrasts so much

with things I would have heard him say, when I was young, but I know a lot of that is macho, bravado. I realise that now. Some of homophobia comes from peoples insecurities about their sexuality, I think that now. I certainly would have heard from my dad, really anti-gay things, how awful it would be for two men to kiss, how disgusting it was. Constant abuse towards gay people. Musical groups that were gay or perceived as being gay, they were constantly ridiculed or anybody that was gay in the public spotlight. I didn't have any role models at that stage. I remember there was one band I liked called 'Hüsker Dü' and the singer was gay, he was about the only person I looked up to. I didn't really identify with feminine gay men and a lot of what was out there in the media was a very camp, very feminine idea of what homosexuality is. I played hurling and played football, listened to 'death metal' bands, I was quite masculine in how I was, so I just felt even more alienated by that. Some of that was my own homophobia and when I started to go out on the gay scene, it surfaced, because I didn't like a lot of what I saw. I didn't feel at home with it. I've found my own little niche now, as my friends are quite similar to me in that way. I try not to be disapproving or negative towards gay people in any way, even if they are camp or feminine. I certainly would gravitate towards people like myself though and there is a lot of gay people like that out there. I sometimes feel that it's harder for them to come out because men who are very feminine or camp are almost forced out as they have nothing to hide behind and they must be bullied horrificly. Whereas I wasn't, people didn't suspect it, I played hurling, was fairly tough and fairly masculine."

I: "Did you make a conscious effort not to appear gay?"

F: "I don't think I exaggerated my masculinity, although maybe I did at times, thinking back. I was very careful that my cover wasn't blown though. I did see girls, some girlfriends around fifteen or sixteen but I wasn't attracted to them, so my avenue then was to withdraw into myself and I became very isolated and became quite depressed, very introverted. An element of that has stayed with me, it is a very different side to me from the younger version of me where I was so free and spontaneous, and full of joy. I think only recently that has started to reawaken and I've started to integrate that again because I'm more accepting of my sexuality. I tried to cast it off in my teens, it has been a very slow process of recovery for me. That was the only way I could cope with it back then. I denied it, something to hide behind but it was just a response to the difficulty of my early adolescence and trying to deal with the negativity coming at me from all sides. The AIDS scare, vicious anti-gay rhetoric from the church, gay jokes from my friends, stuff at school and in my family...it was always there. Nowadays I...I am gay, I'm not really feminine or camp, so maybe lot of people at first don't realise it, but I am happy to say "I am gay". I won't deny it. It's part of my life and as time goes on, I am more likely to challenge homophobia. As I say, a very gradual process."

I: "Is it easier to be gay nowadays?"

F: "Things have progressed but I don't think huge progress has been made. If you scratch the surface, it still is there. A lot of it is down to parents and things they say. How they react to it. The perfect example is my dad and the things he said when I was young. I wonder if he had known I was going to grow up gay, would he have said such awful things?. He certainly wouldn't say anything like that now. Parents don't realise at the time, what an impact their words have. Most people now have sons or

daughters, or brothers or sisters, or someone close who is gay, so I think, as more people start to come out, it challenges the negative sentiments. I think that is where progress will be made. I certainly feel that I have made a difference with people in my life....my family, people I have worked with. Just to challenge their misconceptions or negative evaluations of gay people. So I consider myself to be making some kind of difference.”

I: “How has homophobia affected you?”

F: “It does stay with me and it has shaped me. Homophobia has shaped me as a person. It has always been there and I’ve had to respond to it in whatever way. It has dictated, in a way, my journey. It made it very difficult for me, if I didn’t have that obstacle in my path, say when I was thirteen....if I had people to talk to me and to reassure me, to allow me to be just who I am and not have to change myself..I think it would have made things so much easier for me. It certainly wouldn’t have affected me in so many ways. I definitely believe it dominated my teens and stopped me from concentrating on school or sport, things that others would take for granted and that they can enjoy. I was really battling with a very intense internal process. I don’t regret that either. I do regret that I experienced such negativity growing up, from so many aspects of society, though. I think it is so dangerous to young people and I think a lot of people won’t be as lucky as me. They may turn to drink or drugs, or even consider suicide. All I can say, at this stage, is I’m glad I’ve dealt with things as well as I have, and I feel liberated. I like myself and I can see a positive future for myself. The fact I am being true to myself, I love that, it’s really important to me. It makes me enjoy life more, I feel integrated, no obstacles in my way, nothing to hide behind. I feel whole now, there is not a part of me I have to cut off from the rest. Certainly, it has helped to

have friends and people around who are so supportive. I definitely have a really positive sense about it and I feel really angry about homophobia. It's something I want to challenge more but it's still difficult. It's something I still have a problem with addressing. I certainly think there is more supports out there for gay people now. As more people come out, particularly people who don't fit the traditional gay stereotype, it makes it that little bit easier. Different representations of what it is to be gay. Even if that changes only a couple of peoples minds, that will start to have a 'knock-on effect'. I think that's certainly the way to do it. New legislation and attitudes to gay unions and negative attitudes to the church's approach..it feels like things are definitely starting to change. I just hope that it continues in that way. I don't think anybody should have to take on the fake identity, like I and others had to, to become something they aren't. It's dangerous. I don't think any child growing up should hear that they are wrong in their nature, in any way. It's such an awful thing and I remember how it made me feel, so lonely and scared, and full of shame and guilt and sadness, for such a long time. Nobody should have to encounter that and encounter that type of inner conflict. In some ways, you know, it is still there. I have to think ahead about behaviour. I wouldn't hold hands with a man walking down the street. There is still lots of obstacles to freedom there. But I'm happy with my progress and I'd love to think that there would be more support available to people growing up gay. I feel strongly about young people having support services they can access easily. That's one way that a lot of difficulties can be prevented, and so they can express who they are...that's what it is all about. I'm finally starting to accept who I am and express who I am and I'm really, really happy about that. If I can have a 'knock-on effect' it will be really worthwhile then."