A qualitative exploration of 'coming out' in the context of a heterosexual marriage in Ireland: the perspectives of children, spouses and self.

By

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise at this or any other university. I declare that this thesis is entirely my own work.

Signed:

Siobhán Daly

Statement of Contribution

This is an article based PhD. The candidate was responsible for the design, data collection, transcription and analysis and write-up of each of the three studies comprising this research. The supervisory team, Dr Kiran Sarma and Dr. Pádraig MacNeela advised and provided support in conducting the research.

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"Today is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday, and all is well" – Grandmother
"The result of negative thinking is endless suffering and ignorance" – Mother
"Life is not a dress rehearsal" – Father

Abstract

Despite several decades of research into the sexual orientation of parents and spouses, there is a dearth of literature that explores the experience of having a parent or spouse declare a change in sexual orientation in the context of a heterosexual marriage and a historically conservative, religious culture. Furthermore, studies have largely ignored this experience from a holistic familial perspective.

Aim. The aim of this research is to explore how Irish children experience a parent coming out as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual (LGB), and to examine the 'lived' experience of coming out in the context of heterosexual marriage in Ireland from the perspective of the heterosexual and the same-gender spouse. Enhancing understanding of this phenomenon and exploring possible implications for practice is sought. While the thesis initially sought to explore the coming out process, the importance of the parental/marital separation experience became clear as the research progressed. Inevitably the research became focused on the coming out experience with co-occurring parental/marital separation.

Methods. Three qualitative studies were conducted in this thesis in an attempt to represent the various parts of a family unit – the child, the heterosexual (female) spouse, and the same-gender (male) sexually orientated spouse. In Study 1, the experiences of 15 Irish sons and daughters (all adults) born into heterosexual unions whose parents have separated, one of whom has come out as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual (LGB) were explored. Grounded Theory was the method used to guide the approach to data collection and analysis, and theory development. Study 2 explored how nine heterosexual female spouses (all mothers) made sense of a husband disclosing as gay during their marriage. Study 3 examined how nine gay fathers assumed a gay identity in the context of a heterosexual marriage and family ties in Ireland. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was the approach used in Studies 2 and 3.

Findings: In Study 1, the primary concern of the sons and daughters was adjusting to the parental separation, as opposed to their parent being LGB. This involved varying degrees of loss, and adjusting to changes in the home

environment and family structure. Parental support, the marital relationship and the parent-child relationship impacted on the adjustment process. Heightened reflection on sexual orientation, and an increased sensitivity to societal LGB prejudice were specifically associated with a parent coming out. In Study 2, the significance of the marital loss and marital identity for female spouses after a husband came out as gay was prominent. The process of separation involved trying to accommodate an altered marriage, mourning the marital loss and positioning themselves as single and separated. Concerns regarding possible separation and sexuality related social stigma were recalled. Those who experienced positive communication with, and empathy towards, their husbands facilitated the resolution of the hurt suffered. Professional support was perceived as judgemental pre-separation, and supportive post-separation. In Study 3 the influence of Irish cultural change on the experience of marriage, marital separation and same-gender sexuality was highlighted. A sample of Irish gay fathers transitioned from being married and suppressing 'unacceptable' same-gender sexual desires to their being separated and openly gay. The coming out process resulted in extramarital same-gender sexual thoughts for all, same-gender sexual affairs with existential angst (remorse) for most, and the eventual dissolution of their marriage. The loss of their family life was devastating. Positive father-child relationships and cohesion in repartnering with a man were recalled following the disclosure and separation.

Conclusions. The findings of this thesis contribute to insights in relation to heterosexual marriage in a more conservative culture, coming out in a more liberal culture, and the process of parental and marital separation that can co-occur as a result. The marital separation, which was a difficult process, was considered more significant for children and spouses than issues relating to same-gender sexual orientation of the parent, husband or self. This process was intensified as a result of societal stigma relating to the same-gender sexuality and divorce. The implications of the findings and clinical considerations are discussed. Concluding suggestions for research are suggested.

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List of Abbreviations

CFT: Compassion Focused Therapy

CPD: Continuing Professional Development

FST: Family Systems Theory

GT: Grounded Theory

GRC: Graduate Research Committee

IPA: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

IPT: Identity Process Theory

LGB: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual

LGBTI: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender or Intersex

LGBTQI: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, or Intersex

MOM: Mixed Orientation Marriage

MMR: Mixed Method Research

MSM: Men who have Sex with Men

NUIG: National University of Ireland, Galway

PREFACE

The nature of the family structure has changed profoundly over the last 30 years. An increase in spouses coming out as same-gender sexually orientated in the context of heterosexual marriage and parenthood has affected the structure of family in Western countries (Umberson, Thomeer, & Lodge, 2015). This thesis focused on exploring the experience of a parent/spouse coming out whilst married heterosexually in Ireland, of which there is a dearth of information.

The Cultural Context of the Thesis

Ireland has undergone a transformation both legally and socially with regard to people who identify as nonheterosexual, and for those who want a divorce. Early to mid-20th century Ireland was dominated by a conservative Catholic stance on sexual morality (Tovey & Share, 2003). Catholic doctrines stressed biblical verses and concepts related to 'natural law'. Same-gender attractions were deemed to be deviant and morally 'bad' or sinful (Boulough, 1976) and a threat to 'family values', as was sex before marriage in general. Sexual expression was confined to the sanctity of heterosexual marriage for the benefit of procreation and was perceived as requiring management by the Church and State (Inglis, 1998). Selling or importing contraception in Ireland was illegal from 1935 until 1978. Married women were relegated primarily to the role of a procreative homemaker and permanent working posts were generally terminated automatically by marriage. Same-gender sexual activity was illegal from 1861 until 1993, and divorce was prohibited by the 1937 Constitution, until an amendment in 1995, which enabled and resulted in the Family Law (Divorce) Act of 1996.

The connection between religion and the State began to loosen around the time that Ireland joined the European Union (in 1973), which coincided with the 'gay liberation' and civil rights movements of the late 1960s through the mid-1980s in the Western world (Stein, 2012). These events, along with the emergence of the Celtic Tiger economy (1995-2008), helped liberalise a significantly conservative society into one which became more accepting of divorce, female and sexual orientation equality in the workforce, and same-gender sexuality (Bartley & Hidalgo-Tenorio, 2016).

The decriminalisation of same-sex sexual activity in 1993, the Equal Status Act 2000-2004, the Employment Equality Acts 1998-2007, the Equality (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2013, the Gender Recognition Act 2015, and the legalisation of 'same-sex' marriage (following a referendum in 2015), lessened the discrimination which had affected the lives of people identifying as nonheterosexual, and enhanced societal pluralism (B. Anderson, Byrne, & Cullen, 2016).

Ireland is notable for its significant change in attitudes towards same-gender sexual relationships and homosexuality in the space of a generation. In August 2018, the first openly gay head of the government of Ireland, Taoiseach Leo Varadkar, welcomed the head of the Catholic Church, Pope Francis to Ireland. Homosexuality was illegal during the one and only previous papal visit in 1979 - such a meeting would have once been unthinkable. While advancements are reflective of the social normative perception that heterosexual and gay, lesbian and bisexual (LGB) lives are increasingly equal, discriminatory challenges continue to exist for people who identify as nonheterosexual both in Ireland (Fahie, 2016), and globally. For example, Ireland remains a predominantly Catholic country and the Catechism of the Catholic Church does not recognise same-sex marriage, and continues to view same-gender relationships as immoral (Wedow, Schnabel, Wedow, & Konieczny, 2017). The belief that people no longer face discrimination in relation to their sexual orientation (termed amnestic heterosexism; Katz, Federici, & Ramos-Dries, 2019) is an erroneous one.

Marriage in Ireland. Until the 21st century, a traditional marriage in Ireland existed exclusively between a man and a woman, and was presumed to be monogamous and a lifelong commitment. According to the 1937 Constitution (Article 41), the institution of marriage 'upon which the Family is founded' was to be protected (Fahey, 2012). Heterosexual marriage in Ireland represented a lifetime commitment perspective that was reinforced by the Catholic Church. It was subliminally and often forcibly self-imposed as the desired and prescribed heteronormative cultural script. Marriage was endorsed from the pulpit and reinforced legislatively by the State, which allowed the Church to take charge of institutions such as hospitals, schools and Mother and Baby Homes. While economic and social benefits were (and continue to be) linked with marriage, being a nonheterosexual parent, a lone

parent or an unmarried parent opposed this script. The internalisation of the oppressive forces of that time (which can occur as a bi-product of living within a conservative or oppressive context; Duran, 2006; Fletcher, 1999) may have necessitated the maintenance and perpetuation of this script (A. Johnson, 2001; Mullaly, 2002). However, a reform of marital law began in the 1970s and culminated in the extension of marriage to same-sex couples in 2015 (Marriage Act, 2015), and also permitted same-gender couples to adopt (Children and Family Relationships Act, 2015). These reforms altered the legal and societal definition of what constitutes marriage and family (McGowan, 2016). While same-gender sexual marriage and parenthood are increasingly being normalised, a heteronormative, dominant version of relationships within western culture continues to be of "life-long or serial monogamy via marriage, with 'the one' perfect partner" (Ritchie & Barker, 2006, p. 587).

The Thesis

This thesis is an article-based PhD thesis and comprises three papers, which focus on a parent/spouse coming out in the content of a heterosexual marriage in Ireland. The perspectives of children (sons/daughters) were explored in the first published paper, the heterosexual (female) spouse in the second published paper, and the nonheterosexual (male) spouse in the third paper, which has been accepted for, and is awaiting, publication. The title and methodological approach of each paper are given in Figure I (situated at the end of this preface).

The following theoretical perspectives were used to inform and guide the research: (1) queer theory, which holds that individuals deconstruct and construct their concept of gender and sexuality via their behaviour, within the cultural and societal environment in which they live (Butler, 1990; Minton, 1997; Sedgwick, 1990; Warner, 1993, Oswald, Blume, & Marks, 2005); (2) social constructionism, which posits that gender and sexuality (and knowledge) are determined individually, and are shaped by historical and cultural contexts (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2009; A. Seidman, 2014); and (3) ecological theory, which emphasises the reciprocal impact of cultural and societal systems on human behaviour, including peer and community environments (Alderson, 2013; Bronfenbronner, 1979).

Individuals are influenced by both their own immediate interactions, and the larger cultural systems in which they reside.

Thesis structure. The structure of the thesis is as follows:

Chapter 1 introduces the historical developments relating to same-gender sexuality. An overview of the 'coming out' process is given, in addition to the reasons some individuals with same-gender sexual desires marry heterosexually. Coming out in the context of a conservative culture and in mid and later life is explored.

Chapter 2 gives an overview of the triadic focus of the research, in addition to the theoretical underpinnings of the thesis. This is followed by a review of the literature on children with same-gender sexually orientated parents, the heterosexual spouse, and coming out in the context of marriage and parenthood. Additionally, an overview of the divorce literature from the viewpoint of both children and parents is presented, as marital separation featured heavily in the outcome of the thesis.

Chapter 3 outlines the rationale for, and the multi-method qualitative design used in the thesis. The (two) methodological approaches employed in the research are described. A Grounded Theory approach was the methodology used in Study 1, which explored the experiences of Irish sons and daughters who had a parent come out as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was the approach used in Study 2, which focused on mothers who experienced a husband come out as gay and in Study 3, which focused on the experiences of Irish gay fathers who assumed a gay identity in the context of heterosexual marriage and parenthood. Ethical considerations and researcher reflections are also discussed.

Chapter 4 contains the first published study, titled 'When parents separate and one parent 'comes out' as lesbian, gay or bisexual: sons and daughters engage with the tension that occurs when their family unit changes'.

Chapter 5 contains the second published study, titled 'The female spouse: A process of adjustment when a husband comes out as gay'.

Chapter 6 contains the third published study titled 'Coming out experiences of Irish gay fathers who have been heterosexually married: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis'. This been accepted (and is due) for publication.

Chapter 7 concludes the thesis by presenting a general discussion of the empirical findings from each study, and the commonalities and divergences across the three studies. Limitations of the research and possible future research are outlined.

Core Concepts

Terminology describing same-gender sexual attraction in Western cultures began in the mid-19th century and has undergone many changes (and is constantly changing). The initial binaries of male/female and heterosexual/homosexual - that were often produced and reproduced via institutions - were challenged (Allen & Mendez, 2018), particularly by queer theorists (e.g., Butler, 1990, 2004; Sedgwick, 1990, 2003). They argued against the heteronormative assumption that gender, gender roles and sexuality were fixed and immune to change, and that heterosexuality was the norm.

For the purposes of this research, the following terms and concepts were used, and are outlined as follows:

Asexuality is generally characterised by a lack of sexual attraction towards others.

Cisgender (or cis) refers to individuals whose sense of gender identity matches their sex at birth.

Transgender (or trans) refers to individuals whose gender identity or expression does not match (society's expectations of) the sex they were assigned at birth. The term trans can also include those who do not identify as exclusively masculine or feminine, such as individuals who are bigender, pangender, gender nonconforming, gender variant, non-binary, and agender (McCann & Brown, 2018).

Coming out is used to indicate the process of a parent or spouse identifying themselves as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB; Savin-Williams, 2001).

According to Troiden (1998), ‘coming out’ is associated with the adoption of a same-sex or nonheterosexual sexual identity, and is a process by which lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT; or ‘other’) people disclose their alternative sexualities. It can be defined as the “process of describing oneself in terms of social constructs rather than a process of discovering one’s essence’’ (Rust, 1993, p. 63).

Gender identity is an individual’s inherent belief in being female, male, an alternative gender or a blend of male and female (Bethea & McCollum, 2013; Graham, Mancher, Wolman, Greenfield, & Steinberg, 2011).

Heterosexuality is defined as romantic, and/or sexual attraction or sexual behaviour between persons of the opposite sex or gender.

Heterosexism originates from the assumption and belief that heterosexuality is the preferred, natural and universal manifestation of human sexuality (Walls, 2008). This, by default, assumes that other forms of sexual identity, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, are not. Consequently, “heterosexism ignores, rejects, and stigmatizes nonheterosexual identities, behaviour and relationships” (McClelland & Dutcher, 2016, p. 502).

Same-gender/same-sex sexual orientation is defined as an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions to individuals of the same sex or gender (American Psychological Association, 2015). This includes sexual attraction, behaviour, fantasy, emotional preference, social preference, lifestyle and self-identification (Klein, 1990). In addition to ‘same-sex’, equivalent terms may include, but are not limited to, homosexual, lesbian (women attracted only to women), gay (men attracted only to men), bisexual or multiple-gender attracted (someone who is attracted to people of two or more genders) and nonheterosexual.

A *‘settled’ sexual identity*, or sexual health, is described by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as “a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality” (WHO, 2006, p. 5).

Sexual identity formation is an ongoing process shaped by cultural expectation and may include identity, desire, eroticism, emotion, and relationships (Ritchie & Barker, 2006).

Literature Review

This thesis involved extensive and continuous literature reviews using search databases such as Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, PsycINFO, PubMed, ScienceDirect and Scopus, in addition to specific journals. The searching of relevant keywords, phrases, titles, abstracts and full text articles informed the review. The web search engine Google Scholar was also useful in exploring articles in which a specific research term was not included in the title or abstract. Evidence based peer reviewed articles were sought which provided a critical and holistic perspective on a given topic, and were well written, focused, conceptually clear and rigorous. The references contained in specific systematic and narrative reviews were explored and many were subsequently accessed.

Filtering occurred whereby articles were deemed to be either a) highly relevant and of high quality, b) probably relevant/warranting further exploration, or c) irrelevant/unsuitable. This filtering process occurred both when reviewing the abstracts and the full text copies, as “abstracts can be misleading” (Albanese & Norcini, 2002, p. 142). Common selection criteria considered during searches included: the research topic, core concepts, participants, time frame, cultural range and methodological quality (Meline, 2006). Published ‘grey’ material “not subject to traditional academic peer review processes” (Adams, Smart, & Huff, 2017, p. 2; e.g., policy documents, newsletters, dissertations and newspaper articles) helped to corroborate conclusions or develop further empirical searches within the literature. Evidence based literature provided at conferences and continuing professional development (CPD) events (i.e., workshops and lectures) also contributed to the epistemological background of the thesis.

Figure I The title and methodological approach of the studies comprising the thesis.

CHAPTER 1. SAME-GENDER SEXUAL ORIENTATION: AN OVERVIEW

1.1 Chapter Overview

In this chapter an overview of the history of same-gender sexual orientation is given, in addition to the process of same-gender development. Associated theoretical perspectives are outlined. Possible reasons why some individuals with same-gender sexual desires marry heterosexually are given, and the definition of heteronormativity and marriage is discussed. Coming out in mid and later life is explored, in addition to disclosing (or not) as same-gender sexually orientated in a conservative culture.

1.2 Understanding Same-Gender Sexual Orientation

There is evidence of same-gender sexuality in almost every documented culture, particularly in ancient Greek, Roman and pagan Celtic societies (Spencer, 1995) and in many animal species (Driscoll, 2008). Regarding the aetiology of same-gender sexual orientation, the general scientific consensus is that it is present at birth, either due to genetics and/or prenatal hormonal events (Bailey et al., 2016). While other scholars (e.g., Goldberg, Kashy, & Smith, 2012; Tasker & Golombok, 1997) have emphasised the influence of environmental factors on gender and sexual identity development, there has been a dearth of recent research on the sociocultural environment associated with the aetiology of sexual orientation. The accumulated evidence to date points to sexual orientation being biologically conferred during the gestational period (O'Hanlan, Gordon, & Sullivan, 2018; Sanders et al., 2017), although the studies tend not to focus on the full sexual orientation continuum (Ngun & Vilain, 2014). Regardless of origin, sexual orientation components - sexual attraction, identity and behaviour - can change over a person's life span, although consistency between the components tends to increase with age (Diamond, 2014). While there is significant overlap between sexual identity (how an individual thinks about and describes themselves to other people) and sexual behaviour (an individual's sexual practice or activity), they often, but do not necessarily, coincide (Savin-Williams, Joyner, & Rieger, 2012).

Despite the historic evidence of same-gender sexuality, European and Christian colonisers and missionaries perceived same-gender sexual activity as being sinful, demonic in nature and a threat to traditional heterosexual family life - it was not for the purpose of procreation (Han & O'Mahoney, 2014). This gave rise to heterosexism, defined as a cognitive bias which assumes that heterosexuality is the only 'correct' or desired manifestation of sexuality, and devalues all that is not heterosexual (Herek, 2000). The judgement and application of religious morals on same-gender sexual behaviour gradually resulted in legislation outlawing consensual same-sex sex (including masturbation and oral sex), or 'anti-sodomy laws' (Crompton, 2003). Punishment for same-sex acts included incarceration, fines, castration, and death, and resulted in an irrational 'fear of homosexuality' (Herek, 1991) or homophobia[2]. Eventually, religious perceptions and irrational fears of demonic possession and sodomy gave rise to the scientific categories of insanity, immaturity, illness, and homosexuality, and to the premise that same-gender sexuality could be cured or treated. In 1952 the American Psychiatric Association officially classified 'homosexuality' as a mental illness ("a Sociopathic Personality Disturbance", p. 38) in the first edition of its *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM*; American Psychiatric Association [APA], 1952).

An increasing body of literature on sex research disproved and rejected the pathological model of homosexuality (e.g., Hooker, 1957; Ford & Beach, 1951; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953). This, in addition to the rise in popularity of the theory of 'normal variation', which perceived people as being born with same-sex and/or other sex attractions, pressurised the APA to remove homosexuality from the *DSM*. It did so in 1973. It took until 1983, however, for the APA to remove all abnormal diagnoses pertaining to homosexuality from the *DSM*, i.e., "Sexual Orientation Disturbance" in the *DSM* (2nd ed; *DSM-II*; APA, 1968) and "Ego Dystonic Homosexuality" in the *DSM* (3rd ed*; DSM-III*; APA, 1987).

[2] Homophobia (or sexual prejudice; Herek, 2000) can be defined as a range of negative attitudes and feelings, including contempt, fear and prejudice, towards people who identify as nonheterosexual (Plummer, 2007).

Moreover, it took another nine years for the World Health Organisation to remove homosexuality from its Internal Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD) manual, with the publication of the ICD-10 in 1992 (World Health Organisation, 1992).

An increasing awareness that 'homosexuality' is not a psychological disorder (Dillon et al., 2004) began to permeate throughout clinical practice and research. This represented a significant shift from pathological treatment, based on an illness model of homosexuality, to supporting the health and mental health needs of same-gender sexually attracted patients (and "towards stigmatization models of homosexuality"; Hegarty & Massey, 2006, p. 47). Same-gender sexual desire began to be viewed as a normative variation of sexual 'classification'; the term 'homosexual' was perceived to be a derogatory term and was gradually replaced by 'gay', 'lesbian' and 'bisexual' (Hammack & Cohler, 2011). The emergence of a diverse narrative of sexual orientation destigmatised homosexuality (to some extent at least; Katz-Wise, Reisner, Hughto, & Keo-Meier, 2015). With regard to legislation, sexual orientation rights began to advance after the 18th century in many countries. This included (1) the repeal of sodomy laws, which began in the 19th century (Weinmeyer, 2014) and the decriminalisation of same-sex acts, (2) the legalisation of same-sex marriage in 28 countries (since the start of the 21st century), including Ireland (but not Northern Ireland), and (3) legislative protection and equality for nonheterosexual people in the workforce (H. Russell, Quinn, King O'Riain, & McGinnity, 2008).

Despite the advancements in same-sex civil rights and recognition, discrimination continues in many respects. The historical focus on 'treating' homosexuality by psychiatrists, physicians and psychologists, and the visibility of sexual differences (Herek, 2010) still perpetuates the shame associated with same-gender sexual practices (Dresher, 2015). There are an estimated 69 countries in which same-gender sexual relationships are a crime (Chavez, 2018), and many more in which same-sex marriage is not permissible by law. The latter prevents same-sex couples from accessing the legal benefits of marriage, such as inheritance and taxation, and makes

adoption a more complicated process. Contemporary challenges also remain in more liberal countries, including prejudice towards individuals whose sexual orientation and sexual practices challenge sexual and gender binaries, namely bisexuality (principally for men; Helms & Waters, 2016) and transgenderism (Garelick et al., 2017). Ultimately, the position taken on nonheterosexual sexual orientation (e.g., pathological, dichotomous, diverse, multidimensional) by individuals, communities and cultural systems (Moleiro & Pinto, 2015), including the mass media (Flores & Parks, 2018), determines the open-mindedness towards sexual diversity, or lack thereof.

1.3 Same-Gender Sexual Orientation Development and Coming Out

Research indicates that both sexual and romantic orientations are more fluid than previously believed (Ashley, 2013). Sexual orientation development is now acknowledged as a dynamic, emergent, universal and multidimensional process, and the product of changing contexts (DeBord, Fischer, Bieschke, & Perez, 2017; Morgan, 2013). For some, it may be fluid and can shift over time, while for others it is more fixed (Epstein, McKinney, Fox, & Garcia, 2012). Indeed, the emerging binary of transgender/cisgender has sought to remove the focus from having to define one's sexual orientation which allows for this fluidity - a person either identifies with their gender of birth (cisgender), or they do not (transgender). According to Blumstein and Schwartz (1990), "sexuality is situational and changeable, modified by day-to-day circumstances throughout the life course" (p. 307).

The process of coming out involves moving towards establishing a nonheterosexual sexual orientation (i.e., accepting, and informing others about this identity) and a place within some, or many, parts of the same-sex community (Rosario & Schrimshaw, 2014). Early models of 'coming out' proposed that sexual identity typically follows a sequential developmental process (e.g., Cass, 1979; E. Coleman, 1982; Dank, 1971; Troiden, 1979), and begins with being aware of one's same-gender sexual desires or attractions, usually during childhood or adolescence. The subsequent stages reflected in sexual identity sequential models typically involve: exploring a

same-gender sexual identity through same-gender related sexual and social activities, sexual-orientation self-acceptance, communicating this orientation to others (friends and family), resolving any internalised sexual minority prejudice (transforming negative beliefs into positive assumptions) and being openly/publically 'out' (Carrion & Lock, 1997).

While 'stage models' of sexual orientation development provide insight into the process of coming out (Matthews, 2007), they have been criticised. The implication that coming out comprises a series of developmental tasks for individuals to undertake does do not take into account cultural and historical factors that may impact on the process (Weststrate & McLean, 2010). For example, not all individuals may have the cultural support, resources, or motivation to identify with a same-sex community (D. Barrett & Pollack, 2005). The narratives of 'coming out' upon which the early models were based have also been criticised for encapsulating a singular kind of queer experience and cultural narrative - that of white, middle-class and predominately male, United States citizens (Chávez, 2013). Differences among individuals with alternative sexual orientations (e.g., gay vs. bisexual) are therefore not adequately reflected (Diamond, 2006; Reynolds & Hanjorgiris, 2000). Other differences include: gender (Diamond, 2014; Rust, 1993), ethnicity (Huang, 2017; Parks, Hughes, & Matthews, 2004) and culture (Shenkman & Shmotkin, 2013). Moreover, the staged approach does not account for sexual fluidity nor the possibility of lifelong sexual orientation identity development, as indicated by more recent research (Lamb & Gilbert, 2018). The expression of an individual's sexual preferences and desires can be influenced by an individual's sociocultural/postnatal environment (Ngun & Vilain, 2014). Changes in sexual identity and orientation can occur for some individuals over time (Diamond, Dickensen & Blair, 2017).

1.4 Theoertical Perspectives

A number of theoretical perspectives have been used to frame highly cited studies on same-gender sexual orientation, gender and parenting since the early essentialist models of coming out (Farr, Tasker, & Goldberg,

2017). These include queer theory, social constructionism and ecological theory, which also underpin this thesis.

1.4.1 Queer theory. "Queer research can be any form of research positioned within conceptual frameworks that highlight the instability of taken-for-granted meanings and resulting power relations" (Browne & Nash, 2010, p. 4). Queer theory began emerging in the 1980s, in tandem with the global HIV/AIDS activism movements. Influenced by queer and feminist theorists, such as Judith Butler (1997, 2004), Lauren Berlant (1997, 2008) and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990, 2003; Sedgwick & Frank, 1995), and philosophical scholars such as Michael Foucault (1978), queer theory focuses on how concepts, such as sexuality and gender, are historically defined, and can structure society and social relations (Foucault, 1978). It highlights the complexity and socially constructed character of these concepts (Lovaas, Elia, & Yelp, 2006; Oswald et al., 2005; Wilchins, 2004). From a queer theoretical perspective, individuals deconstruct and construct their definition of sexuality and gender via their behaviour and beliefs, within the cultural and societal environment in which they live (Allen & Demo, 1995; Fish, 2018).

Queer theory is post-structuralist, in that it seeks to understand social concepts as normative or deviant, thereby revealing underlying dominant/powerful structures. Acts and activities that resist, defy or deconstruct cultural assumptions or dichotomies (e.g., the traditionally binaries of man/woman, heterosexual/ homosexual; Browne, Lim, & Brown, 2007; Giffney, 2004; Sedqich, 1990) are acknowledged, in addition to the complexity of gender, sexuality and family relations (Oswald et al., 2005). Queer theory "interrogate(s), complicate(s), and destabilise(s)" (L. Smith & Shin, 2015, p. 1461) social identity and social power. Family studies that challenge traditional concepts of gender, sexuality and family are increasingly evident in the recent literature (e.g., Carroll, 2018; Catalpa & McGuire, 2018; Kuvalanka, Allen, Munroe, Goldberg, & Weiner, 2018; Ruppel, Karpman, & Terres, 2018). Queer theory perspectives and resources are increasingly being utilised in clinical practice (Riggs, 2011; Semp, 2011) and advocated for in the psychological domain (Hegarty, 2011).

Queer theory has been criticised by some for not allowing for the stability of fixed identities, which can provide comfort to some, facilitate a sense of group connectivity with others, and support the advancement of human rights (Richardson, McLaughlin, & Casey, 2006). Its geographical focus on the 'Global North' (Browne & Nash, 2010), and lack of engagement with the sexuality and gender beliefs of those in other geographical contexts have also been criticised (Allen & Mendez, 2018; Gorman-Murray, Waitt, & Gibson, 2008; Liinason & Kulpa, 2008). Nevertheless, queer theory has highlighted the fact that identities can change over the course of a lifetime (Gorman-Murray, Johnston, & Waitt, 2010), and that identity differences can be socially created/constructed and reproduced through historical processes within institutions and culture. Queer theory illuminates identities that are marginalised or excluded through dominant prescriptions of gendering and heteronormativity (Walters, 2005), which can affect change and 'good practice'.

1.4.2 Social Constructionism. Rooted in symbolic interactionism and phenomenology, and developed within the disciplines of social psychology (e.g., Gergen, 1985, 1994; Mead, 1934, 1982) and sociology (Berger, 2001; Berger & Luckmann, 1966), social constructionism questions "taken-for-granted realities" (A. Gordon, 1997, p. 8), particularly in the study of social issues and assumptions (Fairhust & Grant, 2010; Steele & Morawski, 2002). Social constructionism is a theory of knowledge which holds that characteristics such as gender, sexuality, identity and behaviour are determined/constructed individually (Philaretou & Allen, 2001; A. Seidman, 2014; Subramaniam, 2014), and are shaped by historical and cultural contexts (Alderson, 2003). This theoretical perspective has been used to frame many of the studies on same-gender sexually orientated parents (Goldberg, 2007a; 2013b; Perlesz et al., 2006). The social construction of reality is emphasised, in contrast to the positivist philosophy which posits that there is an external reality that exists 'out there', independent of the thoughts of those participating in it (DeLamater & Hyde, 1998): "Western science may hold a mirror to nature, but it is not a plain mirror, rather, it is poached and twisted by the expectations and the world

view of those who hold it" (Rose & Appignanesi, 1986, p. 4). Dominant beliefs within society, and the self, can influence our understanding of what is "real" (White, 1995).

Social constructionism focuses on the process by which people make sense of their interactions with others and create their own reality. Reality is believed to be shaped by an individual's perception of it (Rasborg & Fuglsang, 2004), and reflects the individual's unique history, ideological beliefs, language and experiences (Santrock, 2001). By interacting with others, individuals are constantly constructing meaning and creating subcultures within their social groups (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Stiles, 2002). Social constructionism challenges how inequalities (such as discrimination against nonheterosexual individuals) are established by focusing on their creation and recreation "through unequal systems of knowledge and power" (Kang, Lessard, Heston, & Nordmaken, 2017, p. 22). Culture provides the tools by which social and individual worlds are constructed (Bruner, 1996) and constructs (e.g., sexuality, family and marriage) and cultural categories (e.g., "men", "women", "black", "white", "gay", "straight") can vary across time, and within a given society (Aniciete & Soloski, 2011). Social constructionism has been criticised for its 'obvious' nature (in differentiating nature from humanity; Motyl, 2010) and its disregard for biological influences on behaviour, 'facts', or culture (Serrle, 1995; Sokal & Bricmont, 1999). Other scholars, however, argue that the focus of this approach on co-creation, participation, justice, and power dynamics can enhance understanding and generate debate, which in turn can lead to change (Brusila, 2015; Burningham & Cooper, 1999; Galbin, 2014).

1.4.3 Ecological Theory. Ecological theory (or ecological systems theory), developed by Urie Bronfenbronner (1979, 2001), asserts that understanding that cultures and systems change over time is important when examining a social phenomenon, an individual, or the self (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Darling, 2007). According to ecological theory, phenomena and individuals are influenced by interactions at multiple levels (Bronfenbrenner, 1995) - microsystem (individual, family, community); mesosystem (interactions between multiple microsystems); ecosystem

(systems that affect, but do not contain, an individual); macrosystem (the social-cultural context, norms, beliefs, values), and chronosystem (sociohistorical and environmental change across the lifespan). These levels constitute an ecological system, within which an individual is situated (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). While individuals are influenced by their environment, they also influence their environment in a bidirectional manner, termed 'proximal processes' (Griffore & Phenice, 2016). In short, human development from an ecological perspective derives from individuals, their environment, and the reciprocal interactions between the two.

Therefore, changing contexts in an individual's own immediate system, and his/her interconnectivity with the larger cultural system in which they reside, can influence identity formation and sense of self (Schachter, 2005). The process of sexual identity (or family) formation in some cultures may differ over a period of time, due to greater social acceptance of same-gender sexuality (or divorce) in an individual's societal environment (American Psychological Association, 2017; Bukatko & Daehler, 1998; Floyd & Bakeman, 2006; Gontzales-Backen, 2013; Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2009). For example, a 60 year old gay man will have experienced different (and multiple) cultural-ecological contexts over the course of his life, compared with those experienced by an 18 year old gay man. The extent of this experience can vary, depending on the rate and extent of societal change to which an individual is exposed.

Contemporary social ecological models, such as Alderson's (2003, 2013) ecological model of gay or LGBTI (lesbian, gay bisexual, transgender and intersex) identity, stress the influence of an individual's immediate and wider cultural environment on identity development. According to Alderson (2013), sexual identity formation is influenced by both internal (i.e., psychological) and wider, external (i.e., social and cultural) factors. Although individuals may feel nonheterosexual, how they engage with this identity can depend on societal catalysts (e.g., liberal environments and influences) and hindrances (e.g., conservative environments and internalised homophobia). Once an individual comes out 'to the self', he/she is challenged to integrate the self with both the

heterosexual and nonheterosexual worlds (via disclosure; Alderson, 2003). Identity Process Theory (IPT; Breakwell, 1986; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2012) also stresses the importance of understanding the impact of internal identity processes and the social environment on identity formation. According to IPT proponents Jaspal and Cinnirella (2012), individuals can be culturally motivated to evaluate, maintain, or change their established sexual identity, and may seek to manage conflicting identities (such as being gay and of religious faith; Coyle & Rafalin, 2000).

1.5 Reasons Why People with Same-Gender Desires Marry Heterosexually

There are many reasons cited in the literature why people with same-gender sexual desires marry heterosexually. These include feelings of love toward a partner (E. Coleman, 1985a, 1985b; Ross, 1983; Yarhouse, Poma, Ripley, Kays, & Atkinson, 2011; Wolkomir, 2009), a desire to hide or eliminate same-gender sexual feelings (Legerski et al., 2017; Walker, 2013), social and family expectancy of heterosexual marriage and a desire for the 'traditional' marital script, including children and family life (Alessi, 2008; Higgins, 2002; Kays & Yarhouse, 2010; Legerski et al., 2017; Pearcey, 2005; Yarhouse et al., 2011), identifying as heterosexual before marriage (Giunti & Fioravanti, 2017), and uncertainty about their sexual identity and/or a fear of criticism (Pietkiewicz & Kołodziejczyk-Skrzypek, 2016). Before the relatively recent developments in same-sex legislation, parental rights and fertility treatment progression, the majority of same-gender sexually orientated parents had their children within opposite-sex relationships (Tasker, 2013).

Internalised homophobia (negative self-evaluations towards same-gender sexuality) and shame and discriminatory experiences can further result in stress and identity concealment among same-gender parents and nonheterosexuals in general (Frost & Meyer, 2009; Newcomb & Mustanski, 2010; G. Russell & Bohan, 2006). These reasons are not isolated from the cultural context within which an individual lives. While no large scale study has explored religious motivations for marrying heterosexually, several studies (e.g., Kissil & Itzhaky, 2015; Yarhouse, Gow & Davis, 2009;

Yarhouse et al., 2011) have highlighted the link between conservative religious cultures (which emphasise heteronormativity and promote traditional family structures) and heterosexual marriage.

1.5.1 Heteronormativity and Marriage. Heteronormativity comprises "localized practices and centralized institutions which legitimate and privilege heterosexuality and heterosexual relationships as fundamental and 'natural' within society" (Cohen, 1997, p. 440). This view is reinforced in many cultures via institutions such as marriage, taxes and employment. Heteronormativity promotes a particular configuration of sexual and gendered practices and goals (generally that of patriarchal, masculine superiority and heterosexual desire) with "a tacit sense of rightness and normalcy" (Berlant & Warner, 1998, p. 554). The historic dominance of this concept is evident in world views on what constitutes sexual difference (e.g., gender roles), relationships/marriage, and the family (Allen & Mendez, 2018).

In the late 19th century and early 20th century, the dominant, Western assumption regarding sexual difference and societal gender roles was that men procreated and provided for the family ("bringing home the bacon"), while women bore children and worked within the home ("barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen"; Ray, 2016). Marital unions reflecting this perceived universal 'natural order' and heteronormative assumption were reinforced (Ingraham, 2002). The formality of marriage enabled and secured the naturalisation and continuation of this ideological belief, although some writers (e.g., Coontz, 2005) believe that the evolution of the marriage bond occurred as a means to create cooperative ties amongst individual families and communities. Romantic and parenting relationships have traditionally been recognised by marriage (which continues to be unavailable to nonheterosexual couples in many countries). In this cultural form, marriage is primarily heteronormative, i.e., heterosexual and monogamous (Wolkimer, 2009).

1.6 Disclosing as Same-Gender Sexually Orientated: Considerations

Many reasons for why an individual discloses his or her same-gender sexual orientation have been cited in the general literature on coming

out. These include the desire for intimacy (Ben Ari, 1995), validation of one's self-concept (M. Anderson & Mavis, 1996; Ragins, 2004), desire for honesty and to strengthen family ties (Heatherington & Lavner, 2008; Jourard, 1971), to avoid loneliness (Isay, 1996), and to enhance the ability to exercise self-expression and social control (Bazarova & Choi, 2014; Derlega, Metts, Petronio, & Margulis, 1993). The disclosure literature indicates that disclosing one's sexual orientation can benefit the health and wellbeing of nonheterosexual individuals (Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004). Studies (e.g., Floyd & Bakeman, 2006; Halpin & Allen, 2004; Hoffarth & Hodson, 2017) have found that same-gender attracted individuals who have adopted this identity report lower emotional distress and loneliness, and higher self-esteem and happiness compared to those who have not. Moreover, in supportive contexts disclosure can foster the development of a cohesive self-identity and feeling of identity congruence (Legate, Ryan, & Weinstein, 2012), strengthen positive outcomes in child-parent relationships (Tornello & Patterson, 2012), and enhance overall psychological adjustment (Alderson, 2013). Studies have also emphasised the positive association of being openly 'out' with full integration of a same-gender sexual identity and greater authenticity in relationships (Rosario, Schrimshaw, Hunter, & Braun, 2006; Tasker, Barrett, & De Simone, 2010; Whitman & Nadal, 2015).

Despite the many potential benefits in disclosing as same-gender sexually orientated, the potential risks of sexual minority prejudice and discrimination as a result of identifying as nonheterosexual (including interpersonal rejection and disapproval by significant others) remain (Corrigan & Matthews, 2003; Herek & McLemore, 2013; Legate, Ryan, & Weinstein, 2012). Societal attitudes toward nonheterosexual sexual orientation have historically been associated with sexual stigma, defined by Herek (2009, p. 66) as "the negative regard, inferior status, and relative powerlessness that society collectively accords to nonheterosexual behaviors, identity, relationships, or communities". Furthermore, a sense of hurt and/or embarrassment may be experienced by those disclosed to, which may be an added stressor in coming out (Bigner & Wetchler, 2012).

1.6.1 Non-disclosure in a conservative culture. The literature on the non-disclosure by individuals (both married and single) who are same-gender sexually orientated indicate that identifying as being 'out' in the context of a conservative cultural climate can be particularly challenging (Herek & McLemore, 2013). A fear of rejection by family, friends, or members of their religious community who hold more traditional family values can result in sexual repression and suppression, especially in more heteronormative environments (Lassiter, 2016; Meyer, 2003; Pietkiewicz & Kołodziejczyk-Skrzypek, 2016; Van Zyl, Nel, & Govender, 2017). The presence of children has also been cited as a strong incentive not to disclosue, due to a fear of losing access to their children (Laird & Green, 1996; Johnston & Jenkins, 2004). Furthermore, in contexts that are intolerant of sexual minorities, identifying as same-gender in sexual orientation could result in harassment or possibly violence (Smuts, 2011). Anti-same-sex language, negative religious teachings about homosexuality and historical rejection of non-normative sexual identities by most mainstream denominations have been cited as factors facilitating non-disclosure (Ellison, 1993; Mahaffy, 1996; Rodriguez, 2009). Older same-gender sexually orientated individuals are, in general, less likely to disclose their sexual orientation to others; many remember the societal sexual minority prejudice and religious homophobia of their youth (Herek, 2004).

Non-disclosure is associated with decreased well-being overall, with risks to both physical and mental health (Ryan, Legate, & Weinstein, 2015). For example, the desire to 'hide' one's sexual orientation can negatively influence communication and intimacy with others (Kurdek, 1994), and can result in depression, isolation, low self-esteem (Halpin & Allen, 2004) and 'intrapsychic conflict' due to an emotional clash of opposing impulses in the self (Alderson, 2013). Higher levels of stress and negative health outcomes are reported by those whose environment is intolerant toward sexual minorities (Gibbs, 2016). People who experience regular anti-same-sex attitudes report more rumination, suppression of same-gender sexual behaviour, and consequently greater levels of psychological distress compared to those who do not (Hatzenbuehler, Dovidio, Nolen-Hoeksema,

& Philis, 2009). Furthermore, some religious individuals with same-gender sexual attractions have reported distress and conflict due to the perceived irreconcilability of their sexual orientation with their strong religious beliefs (e.g., Lassiter, 2016; Ritter & Terdrup, 2002; Schuck & Liddle, 2001; Subhi et al., 2011), or their race/ethnicity (Parks et al., 2004; Platt & Scheitle, 2018).

1.6.2 Coming out in mid and later life. Reasons why individuals come out in mid and later life can include a desire to reduce feelings of isolation, education regarding same-gender issues, positive support from others, and feeling unfulfilled (S. Hunter, 2007; 2013; Johnston & Jenkins, 2004; Peacock, 2000). While the process of coming out relates to individuals of all ages, there are unique considerations for adults coming out in mid and later life compared with in youth. Older adults tend to be more developmentally independent (financially, socially and emotionally) and can form supportive friendships in their community (often termed 'families of choice'; S. Choi & Meyer, 2016). However, in contrast to coming out in early adulthood, disclosure in mid and later life can involve explaining past relationships while also attempting to integrate a same-sex identity into current relationships, including parenthood (Fredriksen-Goldsen et al., 2017). Reconciling historic internalised homophobia may be additionally challenging (J. Brown & Trevethan, 2010; Jensen, 2001; Pietkiewicz & Kołodziejczyk-Skrzypek, 2016).

Those who perceive less support from their families and who live in less supportive legal contexts tend to report poorer mental health (Shapiro, Peterson, & Stewart, 2009). Some studies suggest that required support may be perceived as unavailable, due to family or religious homophobic beliefs (Itzhaky & Kissil, 2015; Reygan & Moane, 2014). Other conditions that have been linked to poorer well-being among lesbian and gay parents include higher levels of internalised homophobia (Goldberg & Allen, 2012; Newcomb & Mustanski, 2010; Puckett, Horne, Herbitter, Maroney, & Levitt, 2017) and low levels of extrafamilial support (Goldberg & Smith, 2011; Semlyen, King, Varney, & Hagger-Johnson, 2016). Being interlinked with same-sex communities can help ameliorate the challenges of reduced

support after identifying as nonheterosexual, and can contribute to feelings of positive well-being (K. Coleman, 2016; Frost & Myer, 2012; Weston, 1991). Indeed, the rise of extensive nonheterosexual friendship networks has been a positive development in sexual minority communities in recent decades (Harper, Serrano, Bruce, & Bauermeister, 2016). These social networks are often cited as essential social support providers for same-gender attracted individuals, especially when family and community support is more limited (Frost, Myer, & Schwartz, 2016). LGBTQI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or intersex) community connectedness through participation, friendships and problem sharing/solving has also been cited as conferring positive psychological effects in buffering societal stigma and prejudice (Frost & Meyer, 2012; Zimmerman, Darnell, Rhew, Lee, & Kaysen, 2015).

CHAPTER 2: COMING OUT AND THE FAMILY

2.1 Chapter Overview

In this chapter, the focus of the thesis is outlined. The literature on children with same-gender sexually orientated parents, the heterosexual spouse, coming out in the context of marriage and parenthood, and divorce is reviewed. Finally, the aims and objectives of the thesis are given.

2.2 Focus of the Thesis

The thesis sought to holistically understand the experience of a parent coming out in the context of heterosexual marriage in Ireland from multiple perspectives, i.e., son/daughter, heterosexual spouse and nonheterosexual spouse. Examining the distinct, yet related "streams of influence" (Flay, Snyder, & Petraitis, 2009. p. 253) of each group was sought in this triadic approach, as illustrated in *Figure 2.1*.

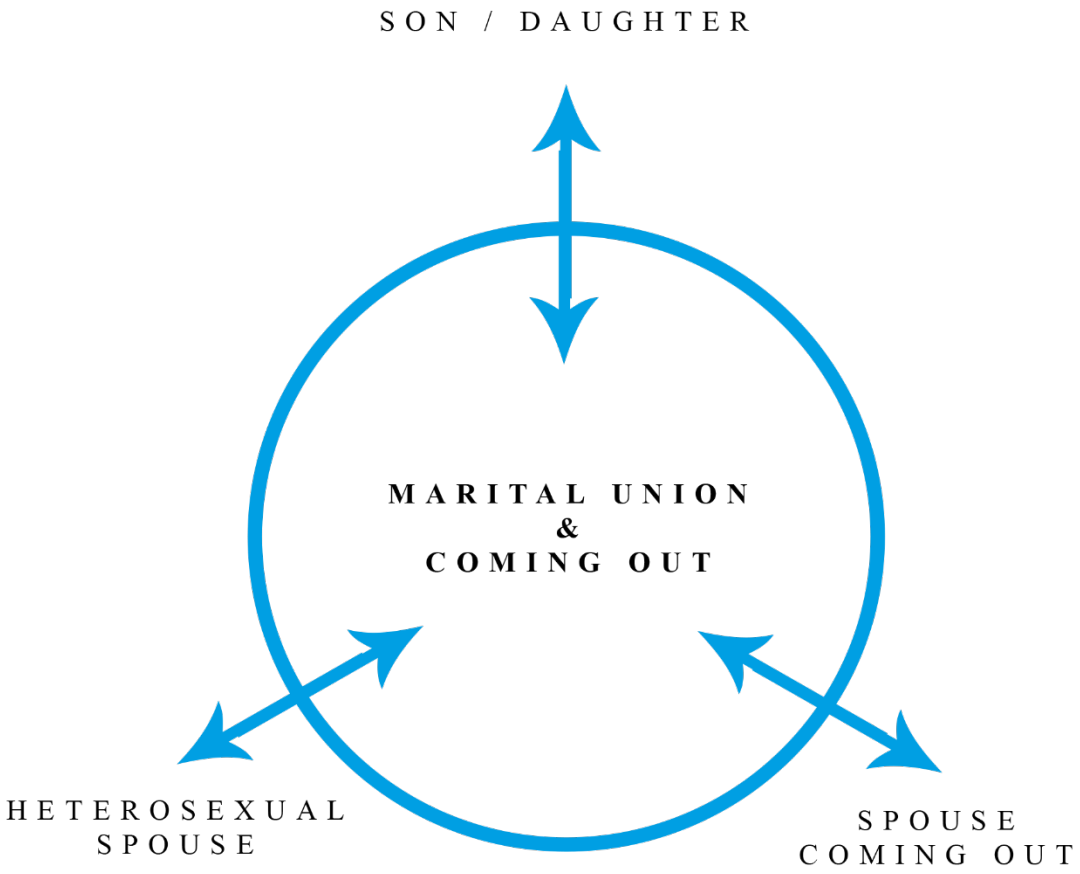

Figure 2.1 How a parent's or spouse's coming out is experienced by children and spouses.

2.3 Children with Same-Gender Sexually Orientated Parents

There is very limited data on the prevalence of children with same-gender sexually orientated parents, globally, and in Ireland. Many US population-based surveys suggest that over a third of LGB individuals report being a parent (e.g., Gates, 2015; Stilton, 2017) and population data suggest that numbers are increasing, particularly in the United States, Europe and Australia (Patterson, Riskind, & Tornello, 2014). Consequently, a proliferation of research on such children has occurred over the last few decades. While more contemporaneous research focuses on planned same-gender couple parenting (Tasker, 2013), early research on nonheterosexual parents and their children focused primarily on the maternal instincts of lesbian women (compared with heterosexual women), the well-being of lesbian and gay parents, and the impact of lesbians' and gay men's sexual relationships on their relationships with their children (Falk, 1994; Patterson, Fulcher, & Wainright, 2002).

Many of these early studies arose due to the need for empirical data to establish the role of sexual orientation, if any, in child custody disputes following divorce (Schumm, 2016), and the majority of published research focused on younger children, and on children with lesbian mothers (Tornello & Patterson, 2018). In a meta-analysis of same-gender parenting by Fedewa, Black, and Ahn (2015), only four out of the reviewed 33 studies included gay fathers, and only three out of 23 studies in an earlier systematic review (by Anderssen, Amlie, and Ytteroy, 2002) included gay fathers. However, studies on same-gender fathers have increased significantly in the 21st century literature (e.g., Dempsey, 2010; Patterson & Tornello, 2010; Tornello & Patterson, 2015), as access to same-gender fostering, and adoption (and surrogacy in the United States) has also increased (Carneiro, Tasker, Salinas-Quiroz, Leal, & Costa, 2017). There is a dearth of research that focuses exclusively on bisexual parents and their children (for exceptions see Bowling, Dodge and Bartelt, 2017, and Power et al., 2012).

Most studies on same-gender parenting have compared the psychosocial outcomes of children who grew up with heterosexual parents with those who were reared by one or two LGB parents (e.g., Rosenfeld,

2010; Tasker, 2010; Telingator, & Patterson, 2008; Wainright & Patterson, 2006), or have focused on children in stepfamilies headed by same-sex couples following a heterosexual separation (Stewart, 2007). The majority of these studies were carried out in the United States, although studies are increasingly being carried out elsewhere, including Australia (e.g., Power et al., 2010) and Europe, for example, Belgium and the Netherlands (e.g., Brewaeys, Ponjaert, Hall, & Golombok, 1997; Van Rijin-van Gelderen et al., 2018) and the United Kingdom (e.g., Golombok & Tasker, 1994). Almost all are cross-sectional studies rather than longitudinal (exceptions, Gartrell & Bos, 2010; Golombok & Tasker, 1996), and use convenience sampling. Representative samples from the National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study (based on interviews from American lesbian mothers and their children who were conceived by donor insemination during the 1980s) have been used in more than 20 studies (e.g., Bos, Gartrell, & van Gelderen, 2013; van Geledren, Bos & Gartrell., 2012). Overall, the studies on children with lesbian mothers have tended to include more quantitative (using standardised questionnaires, self-report inventories and tests) than qualitative (using data from semi-structured interviews) methods (Manning, Fettro, & Lamidi, 2014). The converse can be seen in studies on gay fathers, with qualitative methods (using thematic or content analysis techniques) comprising the slight majority (Carneiro, Tasker, Salinas-Quiroz, Leal, & Costa, 2017). The studies on gay fathers also tend to focus less on child outcomes and more on issues related to stigma, identity and pathways to parenthood. Exceptions include H. Barrett and Tasker (2001), Lick, Tornello, Riskind, Schmidt, and Patterson (2012) and Crosbie-Burnett and Heimbrecht (1993).

Despite research design limitations, substantial and accumulated research outcomes, (e.g., Patterson, 2005, 2017; Perrin, 2002; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001; Tasker, 1999) indicate that the development, adjustment, social functioning and well-being of children with same-sex parents is similar to that of children with heterosexual parents. These include the findings of meta-analyses of same-sex parenting studies (e.g., American Psychological Association, 2004; Crowl et al., 2008; Fedewa et al., 2015). Furthermore, research outcomes suggest that nonheterosexual parents “are

as likely as heterosexual parents to provide supportive and healthy environments for their children" (Paige, 2005, p. 496; Patterson, 2014).

Nonetheless, researchers have acknowledged that children with LGB parents can face a number of difficulties due to experiences of heterosexism (V. Mitchell, 1998; Goldberg, 2009; Tasker & Golombok, 1997), although the effect of stigmatisation on psychological adjustment may be reduced by the presence of protective factors, such as a strong child-parent bond, social acceptance and support from peers, and contact with others from sexual minority families (Bos, van Balen, & van den Boom, 2007). These factors may be particularly important if children have to manage societal sexual minority prejudice, as discrimination in society against same-sex parents can have a negative impact on their children (American Psychological Association, 2004).

Other studies cite various strengths associated with growing up with LGB parents, including resilience, tolerance and empathy toward diverse and marginalized groups (Goldberg & Allen, 2013; Patterson et al., 2014; Saffron, 1998; Shechner, Slone, Lobel, & Shechter, 2013; Tasker & Golombok, 1997). While findings on LGB parents indicate that a parental coming out process has no effect on offspring sexuality (Bailey, Bobrow, Wolfe, & Mikach, 1995; Patterson, 2017; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001), reports of greater flexibility regarding the perceptions of gender and sexuality in adults with an LGB parent have been cited (e.g., Goldberg, 2007a; Goldberg et al., 2012;). Overall, the current literature on families headed by same-gender sexually orientated parents focuses more on strengths-based approaches (family resilience), and challenges the heteronormative ideals of family systems (Golombok, 2015; Prendergast & Macphee, 2017).

2.3.1 A parent coming-out as nonheterosexual: mixed sexually orientated parents. Few studies have focused solely on the experiences of children born into a heterosexual combined parent family that became a mixed sexually orientated parent family at some point across the lifespan of the child (e.g., Gates, 2011; Tasker, 2013). In a mixed-orientation relationship, other-sex partners have differing sexual orientations; usually one identifies as heterosexual and the other does not (Hernandez, Schwenke, & Wilson, 2011). The empirical focus on this niche area has been somewhat

replaced by planned LGB and same-gender couple parenting, a phenomenon which is on the increase with fertility advancements (Erera & Sagal-Engelchin, 2014; Murphy, 2018; Nejamie, 2017). However, children born in the context of heterosexual relationships differ from those conceived via planned donor insemination or surrogacy or adoption in the context of same-gender relationships (Goldberg, Gartrell, & Gates, 2014). Despite the fact that (at least until recently), the majority of LGB parents are likely to conceive their children in the context of a heterosexual relationship (Stilton, 2017), there is a dearth of research on this population group. Furthermore, conclusions specific to this latter group are difficult to ascertain, as the majority of studies comprise samples of children reared by both same-sex parents, and children born into an initial heterosexual union. This is less typical in studies involving gay fathers, although overall they are a less studied cohort than lesbian mothers (Patterson et al., 2014).

The literature that is available focuses primarily on three facets relating to the parental disclosure:

Firstly, a child's age at the time of parental LGB disclosure on the adjustment process has been tentatively explored with variable conclusions (Patterson, 2005). Some researchers posit that children experience a parent coming out as LGB in adolescence more difficult that in childhood, due to their preoccupation with their own emerging sexuality, and a fear of being ostracised by their peers (Huggins, 1989; Schulenberg, 1985; Tornello & Patterson, 2018). Other studies (e.g., Goldberg, 2007b; Tasker et al., 2010) report a sense of nonchalance, depending on the progressiveness of their communities. Children with an LGB parent may also be confronted with societal stigmatisation that can accompany their parents' homosexuality, although this is less of an issue in more progressive urban regions that have same-sex communities (Papernow, 2013). Some studies on the children of lesbian and gay parents have reported instances of their being either 'teased' (e.g., Tasker & Golombok, 1997) or worried about the potential of being teased or stigmatised (e.g., Bucher, 2014; O'Connell, 1993; Javaid, 1993) as a result of their having same-gender parents. For example, in-depth qualitative interviews carried out by Kuvalanka, Leslie, and Radina (2014) with 30 adults with lesbian mothers (half of whom were born into a

heterosexual union) highlighted issues of sexual orientation related stigma and discrimination during adolescence. This is of concern, as stigma-related stressors can be linked to a variety of adverse mental health outcomes, including depression and anxiety (Brownell et al., 2005; Meyer, 2003; Pascoe & Richman, 2009).

Despite these concerns, being 'out' is linked to increased relationship quality between parents and children (K. Davies, 2008; Elizur & Mintzer, 2003; Tornello & Patterson, 2018). This may also apply to extended family relationships, as indicated by Tornello and Patterson (2016) who found that gay grandfathers reported enhanced relationships with their grandchildren after coming out. The importance of parents presenting a positive viewpoint about the same-gender sexuality disclosure (Barret & Robinson, 1990) and disclosing using language appropriate to the child's developmental level (Bigner & Bozett, 1990; Breshears, 2010; Goldberg, 2013a) is highlighted in the literature. The findings are more mixed, however, with regard to the age at which parents should come out to their children.

Some studies have indicated that early disclosure is associated with enhanced outcomes in child-parent relationships (e.g., Benson et al., 2005; K. Davies, 2008; Goldberg, 2007b; Goldberg, Kinkler, Richardson, & Dowling, 2012). A qualitative study by Goldberg (2007b) reported issues with trust amongst daughters with gay or bisexual fathers due to their parents (or other family members) concealing their parents' same-gender sexual orientation from them during late childhood. A study by Sirota (2009) reported similar qualitative findings, although the age at which offspring were disclosed to is not given. However, a recent online study by Tornello and Patterson (2018) found no differences in psychological or relationship outcomes among 84 adult children of gay fathers due to the timing of the disclosure, and highlighted the quality of the parent-child relationship as being more predictive of child well-being. This is in keeping with the findings of studies on same-gender versus other-gender parents which indicated that the qualities of parent-child/adolescent relationships, rather than the family structures, were significantly associated with child and adolescent adjustment (Tasker & Golombok, 1997; Patterson, 2005).

Secondly, children have to negotiate telling others about the coming out of their parent. Research findings generally indicate child selectivity in choosing whether, when, how and to whom to disclose the sexual orientation of their LGB parent (Goldberg & Allen, 2013; K. Lewis, 1980). The level of comfort in disclosure practices may be culturally dependent. For example, the results of a survey and content analysis of interviews with 50 sons (aged 16-40) of gay fathers carried out by Bucher (2014), indicated a positive association between traditional views of masculinity and discomfort in disclosing to others. O'Connell (1993) also found evidence of conflict in qualitative interviews with 11 young adult offspring, as a result of withholding the same-gender (lesbian) sexual orientation of their mother from others due to societal heterosexism. Some studies also suggest that familial reactions to a LGB parent coming out later in life can also influence child responses to the adjustment process (Huggins, 1989; Garner, 2005). Inferences between child withholding the orientation of their LGB parent and feelings of difference and isolation have been made, as have suggestions of the benefits of support groups (K. Lewis, 1980; O'Connell, 1993). Interlinked are reports of children feeling different whose parents have separated and divorced (Hogan, Halpenny, & Greene, 2002).

Thirdly, in contrast to children reared by two LGB parents, older children, adolescents, and adults who experience a parent coming out have to adjust to a change in the sexual orientation of that parent, and the possibility of parental separation and new parental sexual and romantic relationships (Cartwright, 2006; Garner, 2005; Sasser, 2006). The disclosure may often result in separation and/or divorce (Joos & Broad, 2007; Tornello & Patterson, 2015), which can create further challenges within the family. Having one parent come out can also result in children experiencing stepfamilies headed by both same-gender and/or heterosexual couples, if their parents both form new partnerships and family units.

Significant diversity exists in childrens' experience of life in a stepfamily, as this life event is dependent on individual, familial, and extrafamilial risk and protective factors (Papernow, 2013). Although further research is needed on same-sex stepfamily formation post-heterosexual divorce (Goldberg et al., 2014), it can be presumed that much of the generic

literature on stepfamilies (including the formation of a new or altered family identity and the incorporation of a stepparent) will also apply to children raised in same-sex stepfamilies (Tasker, 2013). For example, a qualitative study involving 23 lesbian and gay stepfamilies by Lynch (2010) found that, like different-sex stepparents, same-sex stepparents may experience tension with children, and may struggle with confusion over their disciplinary role.

2.4 The Heterosexual Spouse

This section gives an overview of the literature on the heterosexual spouse, including commonly reported implications.

From the 20th century, many studies, biographies and autobiographies of heterosexual spouses who experienced a spouse come out as LGB have been published (Buxton, 1994). The findings in this niche area are largely unsystematic, based on data from convenience samples of predominantly middle-class, white participants (Hernandez et al., 2011), and tend to comprise personal or anecdotal therapeutic case descriptions (e.g. Duffy, 2006; Grever, 2012). While it is difficult to assess the prevalence of this population (Yarhouse, Pawlowski, & Tan, 2003), Amity Buxton (one of the most prolific writers on a spouse coming out), estimates that there are as many as two million same-gender sexually orientated individuals who are, or have at some point in their lives been in a heterosexual marriage in the United States alone (Buxton, 2004). Other estimates from studies of gay and bisexual men (e.g., Janus & Janus, 1993; Ross, 1989) indicate that at least 20% of participants had married heterosexually.

The limited empirical research that is available has provided insight into issues and themes commonly reported by the heterosexual spouse (e.g., Auerback & Moser, 1989; Buxton, 2006a, 2006b; Hays & Samuels, 1989; Hernandez et al., 2011) and those in mixed-orientation marriages (MOM; Buxton, 2001, 2004, 2005; Hernandez & Wilson, 2007; Pearcey & Olson, 2009; Wolkomir, 2004). These include: (1) the impact of the disclosure and isolation, (2) implications for identity and beliefs and (3) marital challenges. Most studies focus on the female heterosexual spouse (for exceptions see Buxton, 2001, 2012), while a small number of studies on MOMs have included the perspectives of heterosexual men and women (e.g., Wolkomir, 2009; Yarhouse et al., 2003). Sampling issues and the sensitive nature of the

subject matter continue to impede research. Furthermore, despite the majority of studies on the heterosexual spouses and mixed-orientation marriage being qualitative in nature (Hernandez et al., 2011), the approach taken in analysing the data is often vaguely described, or absent. Analytic terms used have included 'analytic induction' (e.g., Wolkomir, 2009, 2015), and 'descriptive analysis' (e.g., Hernandez & Wilson, 2011). While some studies have used content analysis as a research technique (e.g., Adler & Ben-Ari, 2018; Itzhaky & Kissil, 2015), the specific qualitative approach of such studies is usually unspecified.

2.4.1 The impact of disclosure and isolation. The literature consistently shows that disclosure is most common following marriage, although there is significant variability in the timing of the disclosure over the lifespan of a couple's relationship (Ben-Ari & Adler, 2010). Studies (e.g., Buxton, 2006b; Grever, 2012; Hernandez & Wilson, 2007; Schwartz, 2012) have indicated that emotions such as shock, confusion, anger, sadness/grief and anxiety are commonly reported by many female heterosexual spouses when husbands come out. Buxton (2012) found that male spouses married to lesbian or bisexual women report similar feelings following disclosure. The disclosure can be a source of marital tension and pessimism, or even fear regarding the future and the need to renegotiate life plans (Buxton, 2006a; E. Coleman, 1982, 1985a; Hernandez & Wilson, 2007). Concern for the emotional well-being of their children has also been reported by heterosexual male and female spouses (Buxton 2012; Hays & Samuels, 1989; Hernandez & Wilson, 2007).

Marriages where one partner comes out may face the potential stigma of a 'failed marriage' in more conservative cultures, in addition to the possibility of homophobia (Herek, 2015). Both spouses may feel isolated, and not have access to relevant support services (Duffy, 2006; Gocros, 1985; Serovich et al., 2008). Fear of encountering social disapproval, stigma or ostracism can render the seeking of support difficult (Duffy, 2006). For example, a survey by Hays and Samuels (1989) of 21 heterosexual women who were or had been married to, and had children with, bisexual or gay men found that they did not feel at liberty to seek support from friends and family due to fear of stigma. Nonetheless,

according to surveys and examinations of self-reports carried out by Buxton (2001, 2005, 2012), peers and online support forums (such as the Straight Spouse Network) can provide the most support to both men and women when a spouse comes out, especially if family members and therapists have minimal understanding of sexual minority issues and the societal attitudes that impact mixed-orientation headed families.

2.4.2 Implications for identity and beliefs. Reports of cognitive confusion and dissonance when a husband comes out have been reported (Hernandez et al., 2011), although they are also cited in the literature on infidelity and marriage (Scheeren, Apellániz, & Wagner, 2018). What relates to what (i.e., the sexual orientation disclosure or the general infidelity experience) is unexplored. The altered sexual orientation identity of a spouse may include changes in behaviour, group affiliation, personal values and norms (Buchanan, Dzelme, Harris, & Hecker, 2010). For example, stress and anxiety regarding the implications of a gay identity being at odds with their religious faith or community of the couple can occur (Haldeman, 2004, 2015; Marks, 2008). Some heterosexual spouses may experience a crisis of faith following disclosure (Buxton, 2006b), and change or redefine their religious practices after disclosure and querying "what they had previously interpreted as answers to their prayers or signs from God that they should get married" (Hernandez & Wilson, 2007, p. 192). Buxton (2001) explored post-disclosure experiences of a survey that involved a convenience sample of 51 wives of bisexual men and 28 wives of gay men. Concerns regarding community, religious and moral views of their husband and marriage, and narrow traditional ideas about marriage were cited as the primary factors that threatened its stability.

The concept of divorce can also challenge individual and cultural values and norms (Stoycheva & Lubart, 2001) and may further fuel the complexity involved in separation decision-making. For example, a lifelong marital commitment perspective assumes the dedication of each spouse to the other and acknowledges that marital conflict can often occur in the context of love (Waite & Gallagher, 2015). Family life or a positive marital relationship were identified as the primary reasons for attempted marital continuity in a survey by Buxton (2004) of 47 lesbian and 40 bisexual wives

and their heterosexual husbands. Similar outcomes were found in samples of heterosexual wives with gay or bisexual husbands (e.g., Buxton, 2001; Latham & White, 1978). Religious beliefs can further reinforce marital commitment. In a five year follow-up study of 13 heterosexually married couples with differing sexual orientations, Yarhouse et al. (2009) found that the couples' marital commitment was attributed to their shared religious (Protestant, Christian or Catholic) faith. Other studies (e.g., Kissil & Ikzaky, 2015; Ortiz & Scott, 1994; Yarhouse & Seymore, 2006) have also reported faith based reasons and dedication to religious covenants to "honour the vows they made before God" (Wolkomir, 2004, p.741) as reasons for staying married. Viewing same-gender sexual activities as compulsive, or a spouse's sexual orientation as an illness have also been shown to facilitate an ongoing commitment to the marriage for some (Schneider & Schneider, 1990; Wolkomir, 2004).

2.4.3 Marital challenges. Research suggests that known infidelity typically results in marital conflict due to distress at the rupture in the emotional bond, or separation (Adler & Ben-Ari, 2017; Amato & Previti, 2003; Cann, Mangum, & Wells, 2001; McCarthy & Wald, 2013). The negative effect of marital conflict is well documented (H. Choi & Marks, 2008) and may result in marital dissolution, either suddenly or following a prolonged period of deliberation (Sprey, 2000). Indeed, the majority of studies on a spouse coming out indicate that most marriages end immediately when a spouse discloses his or her same-gender sexual orientation, or after a short period of time (Bigner, 1996; Higgins, 2002; Isay, 1998). This may be, in part, attributable to the samples of individuals involved in these studies, who were divorced at the time of their inclusion (Bozett & Sussman, 2012). Other studies indicate that couples attempt, and manage to, maintain the marriage and seek to accommodate the spouse's same-gender romantic or sexual attractions (Adler & Ben-Ari, 2018; Bigner, 2006, Corley & Kort, 2006; Hernandez et al., 2011; Latham & White, 1978). This may involve a renegotiation of the marriage contract to incorporate the newfound differences (Schwartz, 2012).

Mixed-orientation marriage (MOM). A mixed-orientation marriage (MOM) is defined as marriage between a man and a woman in which one of

the partners is heterosexual and the other is not (Buxton, 2005, 2011; Corley & Kort, 2006). Sexual attraction generally characterises mixed-orientation relationships, given the limitation of categorical definitions of identity (Kays & Yarhouse, 2010). Many of the assumptions and assertions of the heterosexual spouse in a MOM are based on the literature of the experience of the gay and the male bisexual spouse previously in MOMs (Kissil & Itzhaky, 2015; Pallotta-Chiarolli & Lubowitz, 2003; Swan & Benack, 2012; for an exception see Wolkomir, 2015), and to a lesser extent, the experiences of bisexual and lesbian women in MOMs (Adler & Ben-Ari, 2018; Buxton, 2004; Hernandez & Wilson, 2007; Pearcey & Olson, 2009; Wolkomir, 2004).

Most studies have highlighted the role of open and frequent communication between spouses in contributing to the satisfaction of the relationship and its maintenance, as well as the presence of children (Buxton, 2000, 2004, 2004; E. Coleman, 1985b; Hays & Samuels, 1989; Latham & White, 1978; Yarhouse et al., 2003; Yarhouse et al., 2009; Yarhouse & Seymore, 2006). A positive association between the disclosure and greater relationship satisfaction has been found (N. Collins & Miller, 1994; Derlega et al., 1993; Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004). However, where couples decide to continue to reside together it can be difficult to know what should be disclosed by them, and at what stage this disclosure should occur (Bozett, 1987; Duffy, 2006; Grever, 2012). The literatre is scant in this regard.

Sexual needs may be met outside of the marriage with an agreement to engage in separate sexual relationships (non-monogamous; Buxton, 2001; Wolkomir, 2009, 2015), even among spouses who refrained from sexual intimacy before marriage for religious reasons (Hernandez & Wilson, 2007; Kissil & Itzhaky, 2015; Yarhouse et al., 2009). While a consensual non-monogamous marriage can be a preferred path for some couples, others may engage in hidden infidelity, and have secret, anonymous sex with multiple partners (Corley & Kort, 2006) due to the desire to protect their marital relationship (W. Afifi & Guerrero, 2000; Baxter & Wilmot, 1985; Guerrero & Afifi, 1995; Guerrero, Andersen, & Afifi, 2013). Such secret infidelities may strain the emotional well-being and physical health of the spouses,

especially in the context of intimate relationships (Lehmiller, 2009). While a few studies indicate that secrecy may enhance marital satisfaction in cases where secrecy is used to protect a spouse from stress or pain (Finkenauer & Hazam, 2000; Vangelisti & Caughlin, 1997), others report experiences of significant emotional turmoil as a result of living with a concealed same-gender identity in a heteronormative and religious cultural context (Itzhaky & Kissil, 2015; Kissil & Itzhaky, 2015). Indeed, estimates indicate that the majority of couples in MOM will divorce (Buxton, 2001, 2006b; Yarhouse et al, 2011).

2.5 Coming Out in the Context of Heterosexual Marriage

Perspectives of same-gender sexually attracted men and women within heterosexual marriage have highlighted the unique challenges both of trying to remain closeted (i.e., not disclosing their orientation and aspects thereof) and of coming out (Abbott & Farmer, 1995; Alessi, 2008; Klein & Shhwartz, 2001; Leddick, 2003). Most of the existing studies on coming out in the context of a heterosexual marriage examine the experiences of gay or bisexual men who are or have been married to a woman (e.g., Ben-Ari & Adler, 2010; Edser & Shea, 2002; Higgins, 2002, 2006; Ortiz & Scott, 1994; Swan & Benack, 2012; Tornello & Patterson, 2012, 2018). In contrast, there is a paucity of research on the experiences of bisexual or lesbian women who married heterosexually (for exceptions, see Buxton, 2004; Wolkomir, 2009). Overall, many questions remain, such as how the process of coming out in the context of marriage is experienced, and shaped by societal change, legislative developments, and geographic location.

Research indicates that some people identify as exclusively heterosexual prior to marrying heterosexually, but grow toward an increasingly same-gender sexual orientation during marriage (Beckstead, 2012; Yarhouse et al., 2009). Others are aware of their same-gender sexual attractions and/or sexual orientation prior to marriage; many do not disclose this to their spouse, while others tell their spouse before marriage (Bradshaw, Heaton, Decoo, Dehlin, & Galliher, 2015; Yarhouse et al., 2003). Although many same-gender sexually orientated individuals may marry an opposite-gender partner, researchers have identified several issues with the sustainability of this choice. Over time, individuals are more likely

to engage in behaviour that is reflective of their thoughts and attractions (Gorman-Murray et al., 2010; Rosario et al., 2006; Savin-Williams, 2016). Brownfain (1985) argued that the contradiction between same-gender sexual desires and a heterosexual identity, and the concealment of same-gender sexual attractions from spouses can result in guilt and anxiety. The existence of same-gender sexual urges in heterosexually marriage can be problematic, resulting in sexual infidelity and elevated levels of stress (Corley & Kort, 2006; R. B. Lee, 2002; Malcolm, 2000). Research suggests that known infidelity typically results in marital conflict (Adler & Ben-Ari, 2017; Amato & Previti, 2003; Cann et al., 2001), although some couples may agree to engage in separate sexual relationships outside of the marriage (Buxton, 2001; Wolkomir, 2009).

Coming out can occur at different stages of the marital relationship. Some individuals come out (voluntarily or forcibly) prior to the marriage, while others do so during their married lives. Timing, context and the relationship itself can impact on the consequences of the disclosure, and on the marriage itself (Ben-Ari & Adler, 2010). Coming out as gay in a heterosexual marriage involves facing many ingrained fears and interpersonal conflict, in addition to the possibility of marital separation, which is frequently the outcome (Büntzly, 1993). Identifying as gay in the context of a conservative cultural climate is particularly challenging and can have family and contextual repercussions (Tornello & Patterson, 2012). For example, R. B. Lee (2002) interviewed 15 gay Filipino fathers who came out in their heterosexual relationship, most of whom reported concerns about losing their children and family contact in the context of a conservative culture. Only 27% separated as a result. The length of marriage for these men ranged between three and 30 years. Some studies on heterosexually married gay fathers (e.g. Benson et al., 2005; Bozett, 1981) found evidence of paternal “internal stress” (Benson et al., 2005, p. 17) due to challenges in integrating the same-gender identity with heterosexual marriage and parenthood.

Studies of heterosexually married gay men and gay fathers in mixed-orientation marriages have provided insight into their identity development and psychological adjustment and relationships, the outcomes of which are

largely positive (Giunti & Fioravanti, 2017; Higgins, 2002; R. B. Lee, 2002; Pearcey, 2005; Tornello & Patterson, 2012). Despite concerns regarding the impact of social stigma and possible family loss, positive outcomes in child-parent relationships and psychological adjustment have been reported, and indeed comprise the primary focus of research on post-disclosure adjustment (Malcolm, 2008; Tornello & Patterson, 2012). Although assuming an openly same-gender sexual identity involves revealing one's sexual orientation to others, which can be an additional relational challenge for the self and family, studies have emphasised the positive association of being openly 'out' with full integration of their gay identity and greater authenticity in relationships (E. Dunne, 1987; G. Dunne, 1997; Ortiz & Scott, 1996; Tasker et al., 2010).

Despite the fact that some men and women maintain their same-gender sexual desires and heterosexual intimacy with their spouse within the framework of a mixed-orientation marriage (Adler & Ben-Ari, 2018), overall they form the minority. Most reconcile their same-gender sexual orientation via the ending of the marriage (Buxton, 2006), although the high rate of marital failure may be attributable to the use of clinical samples of individuals who were already separated from their spouse at the time of the research (E. Coleman, 1985b; Peterson & Bush, 2013). While the divorce literature indicates that the transition from marriage to divorce, if this is the outcome, can be difficult and may be associated with negative health consequences, in addition to custodial and financial upheaval (McManus & DiPrete, 2001; R. Taylor, 2004), the literature on the whole focuses more on issues relating to parental sexuality, and less on issues commonly associated with marital separation.

2.6 Divorce/Marital Separation

It is acknowledged that marital separation or divorce and coming out are interlinked (Cartwright, 2006; Sasser, 2006; Yarhouse et. al, 2011). Over the past four decades marital dissolution has increased substantially (M. Chen & Yip, 2018; Perelli-Harris, Berrington, Gassen, Galezewska, & Holland, 2017). The reasons for marital separation vary, and are individual to each couple (Amato & Previti, 2003; Scott, Rhoades, Stanley, Allen, & Markman, 2013). They can include one, or many, of the following:

problems inherent in the marital relationship, a lack of marital commitment, financial strain, abusive and addictive behaviour, infidelity, and mental illness (O. Cohen & Finzi-Dottan, 2012; Gravningen et al., 2017). Divorce can impact on all members of a family unit, and result in changes in residence, family composition, financial stability, extended family relationships, daily routines, parenting, and family support (Gianesini & Lee Blair, 2016). Much of the earlier research focused on divorce as a traumatic event (Blechman, 1982; Demo & Acock, 1988), without considering that cultural and societal perceptions of divorce, i.e., how common and accepted divorce is within a given community, can impact the adjustment process (Pantelis, Bonotis, & Kandri, 2015). In many cultural and historical contexts, including Ireland, divorce has gradually become more socially acceptable and is easier to obtain. Therefore children (and their parents) may feel less stigmatised and be less exposed to significant on-going parental or marital conflict (Amato, 2014).

2.6.1 The impact of divorce on children. Since the 1970s, there has been a significant increase in studies focusing on how children adjust to divorce (Rappaport, 2013). Much of the divorce literature indicates that children from intact families exhibit fewer behavioural problems and score higher on measures of psychological and emotional adjustment and academic performance than children from divorced or remarried families (Ahrons, 2007; Frisco, Muller, & Frank, 2007; Hango & Houseknecht, 2005; Hetherington, 2003; Kelly & Lamb, 2000; Sun & Li, 2002). However, there is little agreement about "the extent, severity, and duration of these problems because there is great diversity in children's responses to parental marital transition" (Hetherington, Bridges, & Insabella, 1998, p. 168). The degree of separation related stressors can vary between children, families and over time (Haimi & Lerner, 2016; Kelly & Emery, 2003) and negative outcomes are predominantly short-term (Amato & Irving, 2006; Cui, Fincham, & Ddurtschi, 2011). Nonetheless, painful emotions such as loss, anger and anxiety are reported by the majority of children whose parents separate (Amato, 2010).

The negative effects of divorce on the parent-child relationship are often explained by the economic, social and emotional disruptions and

conflicting feelings that are associated with the separation (Amato, 2014). Changes in family income, parental access, relocation, changed residences, new family structures and roles, behavioural and psychological child and parental modifications, possible depression and academic issues, are just some of the challenges that may occur (Bing, Nelson, & Weisolowski, 2009; Strochschein, 2005; Oppawsky, 2000). The early divorce literature, however, did not consider the impact of significant parental conflict or other factors such as reduced parenting, poverty, and impaired parental well-being, as attributable to the negative impact of divorce (Kelly & Emory, 2003). Most notably, parental conflict can have an adverse effect on child development, and in particular adolescent development, and result in negative experiences of parental divorce (Brumandzadeh, Martin-Lebrun, Barumandzadeh, & Poussin, 2016; Sandler, Wheeler, & Braver, 2013; Yu, Pettit, Lansford, Dodge, & Bates, 2010). Stress, sadness, reduced academic outcomes and difficulties in relationships with parents, siblings and peers may occur as a result (Baxter, Weston, & Qu, 2011; Harold & Sellers, 2018).

Children can adjust both negatively and positively to parental divorce (Majzub & Mansor, 2012), and mediating factors can attenuate the link between parental divorce and childrens' adjustment difficulties. Research highlights as important the involvement of the non-residential parent (Menning & Stewart, 2008; C. Lee, Picard & Blain, 1994; Pleck, & Masciadrelli, 2004), parental education (Weaver & Schofield, 2015) parental support and well-being (Bartfeld, 2000; Hetherington, 2003; Kalmijn & de Graaf, 2012; Lamela & Figueiredo, 2016), financial stability (Amato, 2014; Harold & Seller, 2018), diminished parental conflict (Amato & Afifi, 2006; Bauserman, 2002), and parents supporting their children to comfortably maintain relationships with their immediate and extended kin networks, including new partners (Ahrons, 2007, 2010). Joint custody can have a positive effect on child adjustment, although parental conflict negates this effect (Gianesini & Lee Blair, 2016). Children's own resources and perceptions about the divorce can also impact on the post-divorce adjustment process, in addition to the experience of divorce as a whole. For example, young adults from divorced parents can have more positive views

towards divorce than those from families of non-divorced parents (N. Miles & Sevaty-Seub, 2010; Moon, 2011). In general, children with better coping and adjustment skills prior to the divorce are likely to be less affected by divorce than children who have adjustment difficulties and less developed skills (Cummings & Davis, 2011).

2.6.2 The impact of divorce on spouses. Marital breakdown and divorce are associated with increased risk of psychological distress, and negative health outcomes, including depression for those separating (Sbarra, Law, & Portley, 2011; Strohschein, McDonough, Monette, & Shao, 2005; van Tilburg, Aartsen, & van der Pas, 2015; Wyder, Ward, & De Leo, 2009). Concern for children, custodial and legal issues, emotional distress and loss, financial uncertainty and restrictions, changing family and social ties and loss of, and desire for, companionship, may arise as the most prevalent stressors (Amato, 2014; Dykstra & Fokkema, 2007; Kalmijn & van Groenou, 2005; Terhell, van Groenou, & van Tilburg, 2004). The loss of a happy marriage in later life may be experienced akin to a spousal bereavement, with associated rates of depressive symptoms, especially for those who value their marital identity (Stack & Scourfield, 2015; Zisook, Paulus, Shuchter, & Judd, 1997). Indeed, a great deal of literature exists on the positive effects of marriage and marital quality (Soulsby & Bennett, 2015). In unhappy marriages, higher levels of interparental conflict may result in increased parental depression, which, in turn, may negatively impact the children (Shelton & Harold, 2008). Ongoing conflict with an ex-spouse can further negatively impact on parental mental health (Symonen, Colman, & Brake, 2014), and having children maintains spousal ties.

The multidimensional nature of divorce – it is unique to each couple and spouse - is often neglected in the literature, which mostly focuses on the stressful aspects of divorce from a post-divorce perspective (Amato, 2014; R. Gordon, 2005), without considering the impact of prior life experiences on well-being (Wheaton, 1990; Williams & Umberson, 2004). For example, a significant proportion of parents in a study by Wallerstein and Lewis (2004) reported psychological issues of significance prior to divorcing. Divorce may be experienced more positively if the marriage is characterised by low marital quality (Amato & Hohmann- Marriott, 2007; Kalmijn, 2010),

or if the decision to divorce is shared (Hewitt & Turrell, 2011). Although marital separation might come as a relief, it is frequently accompanied by feelings of helplessness, anger, sadness, guilt, and loneliness (Angelisti, 2006). Support is important in negating the negative health consequences of separation or divorce, and there is a positive correlation between community support and, in particular, new, positive partner relationships and enhanced mental health (Kołodziej-Zaleska, & Przybyła-Basista, 2016; Langlais, Anderson, & Greene, 2016, 2017; Skew, Evans, & Grey, 2009; Soulsby & Bennett, 2015).

2.7 Overall Aims

The overall aim of this research was to explore the experience of a parent/spouse coming out in the context of a heterosexual marriage and parenthood, and of the children of such a family. The research to date on the heterosexual spouse is sparse, the qualitative literature on mixed-orientation marriage is limited methodologically, and no studies have explored this topic from an Irish perspective. Furthermore, there is a need to consider the different component or perspectives within the family system - child, mother and father.

A central query underpinning this thesis was whether the coming out of a parent, spouse or self could have knock-on effects on other aspects of family life, including marital dissolution. Despite the acknowledgement that divorce and coming out in midlife are a likely co-occurring experience (Cartwright, 2006; Sasser, 2006), there is dearth of research that has considered the dual impact of possible marital separation and the coming out of a parent, spouse or self on children and spouses.

The thesis focused on the following: the experiences of children who had a parent come out as LGB, of heterosexual (female) spouses/parents and the gay (same-gender) spouse/father.

2.7.1 Research aim and title/reference of each study. The research aim, and title/reference of each study comprising the thesis are outlined as follows:

- **Study 1**: This study focused on how sons and daughters who experience one parent come out as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual adjust to this change, particularly when it co-occurs with parental separation. (Chapter 4).
    - Daly, S. C., MacNeela, P. & Sarma, K. M. (2015). When parents separate and one parent 'comes out' as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual: Sons and daughters engage with the tension that occurs when their family unit changes.
    - https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0145491
- **Study 2**: This study aimed to explore how heterosexual women, all mothers, make sense of the experience of having a husband come out as gay following a marriage that produced children. (Chapter 5).
    - Daly, S. C., MacNeela, P. & Sarma, K. M. (2018). The female spouse: A process of separation when a husband 'comes out' as gay.
    - https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0203472
- **Study 3**: This study sought to explore the lived progression by which heterosexually married men attain a gay identity within an Irish socio-cultural context, and the impact of this experience on their family ties and unit (Chapter 6).
    - Daly, S. C., MacNeela, P. & Sarma, K. M. (2019). Coming Out Experiences of Irish Gay Fathers Who Have Been Heterosexually Married: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
    - https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2019.1585727

The methodological approaches used in the three studies are discussed in the next chapter. A general discussion of the findings, the implications and limitations of the studies, and suggestions for future research are presented in the final chapter of the thesis.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1. Chapter Overview

This chapter describes the overall design of this thesis, namely a multimethod qualitative design. It provides an overview of, and rationale for, the use of qualitative research methods and outlines the research aims, objectives and rationale. It describes the two qualitative methods employed in the thesis, with a discussion of justification for their use. Research trustworthiness, ethical issues associated with the study and researcher reflections on the research process are also addressed in this chapter.

3.2 Aims and Objectives of this Research

The overall objective of this thesis was explore the experience of a parent, spouse, and self 'come out' in the context of a heterosexual marriage in Ireland. The research aimed to a) explore the experience of individual family members (son/daughter, heterosexual spouse and spouse who came out) from the perspective of the individuals themselves b) develop an in-depth understanding of the experience of a parent or spouse coming out, and c) contribute to insight on the subject matter, therapeutic understanding, and the literature.

3.3 Rationale for the Thesis and Studies

Three key reasons were identified as to why this thesis was merited. Firstly, there is limited data available that address the developmental and systemic challenges within a family unit when a parent or spouse comes out in the context of a traditional heterosexual marriage (Rivers, Poteat, & Noret, 2008). A central query underpinning this thesis is that the coming out of a parent or spouse could have knock-on effects on other aspects of family life, and in particular the parental/marital union. Secondly, the topic was chosen due the relative lack of holistic attention given to it by researchers. The literature that currently exists is very one dimensional, in that it usually takes into account either the perspective of the children of LGB parent(s), or, typically, the LGB parent(s). A multidimensional, dialectic approach was sought, which assumes that multiple, yet individual, lenses or outlooks can contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). The thesis, therefore, focused on the

experience from the point of view of the child (son/daughter), spouse, and self. Finally, the subject matter of the thesis was of interest to the researcher, which is an important consideration in the selection of a research topic (Hayton, 2015).

3.3.1 Rationale for Study 1. Despite the acknowledgement that divorce and coming out in midlife are a likely co-occurring experience (Cartwright, 2006; Garner, 2005; Sasser, 2006), there is a dearth of research which considers the dual impact of separation and the change in sexual identity of a parent on children. Study 1 sought to gain insight into, and develop a tentative theoretical model of, the experiences of sons and daughters with one heterosexual and one LGB parent, and to explore the possible impact of a co-occurring marital separation. A Grounded Theory methodology was used in this study and is discussed in section 3.5. Given the initial exploratory nature of this first study, children with a gay, lesbian and bisexual parent were involved.

3.3.2 Rationale for Studies 2 and 3. Following Study 1, the variety of potential avenues to explore were then narrowed down, given the scope of the PhD. The desired objective of the subsequent studies was to produce an in-depth examination of the phenomenon of having a spouse or self come out in the context of a traditional heterosexual marriage. Generating and interpreting detailed descriptions of how individuals made sense of their experience (via intricate case-by-case analysis) were sought, as opposed to generating theory. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was the methodology employed in Studies 2 and 3 and is discussed in section 3.6. Due to the detailed and homogeneous nature of IPA, the research focused on the experience of the heterosexual (female) spouse in Study 2, and the gay (male) spouse, in Study 3. The individual rationale for Studies 2 and 3 is outlined as follows:

Study 2. In Study 2, the researcher was interested in how wives made sense of their personal experience of their husband coming out to them as gay following a marriage that produced children, as the experience of the heterosexual spouse in this context is largely unexplored in the literature. To date, many of the assumptions and assertions of the heterosexual spouse are unsystematic and are based on disparate sources of

information from the literature on the experiences of a spouse 'coming out'. Further research is required to explore the experiences of the heterosexual spouse, and the possible co-occurring experience of marital separation, as indicated in Study 1.

Study 3: Study 3 sought to explore the process of identity formation and coming out as gay, within the context of family ties and in a historic conservative society. The impact of coming out as gay in mid and later life when heterosexually married in Ireland is unexplored to date. There is also a dearth of research that explores the coming out experience and identity processes within the context of a society that has undergone a recent cultural transformation, i.e., from religious (primarily Catholic) conservatism to a greater acceptance of same-sex sexuality (Reygan & Moane, 2014).

3.4 Overview of, and Rationale for, a (Multimethod) Qualitative Design

This study adopted a qualitative (multimethod) research approach, following a process of considering which of the diverse methods was the most appropriate in answering the research questions. A qualitative research design was selected because (1), the research aims focused on experiences, meaning and perspective from the standpoint of the participant; (2), the subject matter required a methodology that allowed the participants to relay their story in a detailed way so as to facilitate in-depth understanding; (3), given the dearth of research on coming out from the view point of the child and spouse, and within a specific cultural context, building understanding from the ground up was required.

The researcher reflected on the definition and strengths of qualitative research. Qualitative methods seek "to understand and represent the experiences and actions of people as they engage and live through situations" (Elliot, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999, p.216), most commonly via interviews, participant observations or focus groups. They focus on processes (e.g., experiences, opinions, reasons, motivations) rather than outcomes ascertained via quantifying behaviours or other defined variables (Merriam, 1988). Qualitative methods have strengths in gaining a more extensive understanding of a specific issue in which the researcher is key to the sense that is made (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor, & Tindall, 1994). They are also suited to smaller sample sizes (as was envisaged to be the case

with the subject matter of this thesis), can give insight to experiential nuances that can be lost when data is quantified, and are considered appropriate for an exploration of a family experience about which an in-depth appreciation is desired (Creswell, 2013).

3.4.1 Explaining a multimethod qualitative approach. Given the focus of the thesis on the individual perspectives of sons/daughters and spouses, a multimethod qualitative design (Morse & Niehaus, 2016) was chosen, because an inductive design, involving different qualitative methods can facilitate a greater depth and breadth in understanding a phenomenon (Sandelowski, 1998). Underpinned by a pragmatic philosophy, this approach focuses on the selection of appropriate and unique qualitative methods in responding to a complex research inquiry (Morse, 2003). The researcher considered the definition of multimethod research, and how it differs from a mixed method design. It should be noted that the terms 'mixed method' and 'multimethod' (or multiple method) are often used interchangeably in the literature, which can generate confusion, and that there is a disparity in defining these typologies (Anguera, Villasenor, Losada, Sánchez-Algarra, & Onwuegbuzie, 2018).

Multimethod research involves the use of two or more research methods within a research programme that has an overall goal (Guest, 2012). Each method is chosen according to a given criterion, conducted rigorously, and publishable by itself (A. Hunter & Brewer, 2015; Morse, 2009). A multimethod design requires the researcher to (1) understand the aims and justification of each study (Hesse-Biber, 2010), (2) explicitly explain the paradigms upon which studies are based from the outset of each study (Neuman, 2006), and (3) respect the methodological integrity of each study (Morse, 2003). Multimethod research is multidimensional in nature and emergent, in that it seeks to answer specific sub-questions thoroughly as they arise (J. Greene, 2015). Different types of research activity (i.e., data gathering from different sources and data analysis) occur within the separate phases of a research programme (Mingers, 2001). The integration of the outcomes of the phases/studies is not required due to the individual nature of these studies (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016). This differs from mixed method research (MMR; R. Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007), where

the results arising from a variety of methodological approaches may be combined in many, or all, of the stages of a study (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Furthermore, in MMR the same interviews or observations can be used as data for the various components of a research project (although new data may also be required; Thorne, 1994) and the results of methods used to supplement a core research project are not complete by themselves – they "can only be interpreted within the core component" (Morse, 2009, p. 1523).

3.4.2 Qualitative research roots. In this subsection, key information on qualitative research is outlined to highlight the roots, and variety, of qualitative approaches. This was necessary as a precursor to the selection of each specific qualitative method used in the thesis.

Qualitative methods developed primarily to provide an alternative to the quantitative, positivist research landscape. There are multiple epistemological roots of qualitative approaches, and multiple approaches (most notably since the early 1990s), such as, phenomenology, ethnography and grounded theory. With all qualitative approaches, the research question and epistemological focus determine the research methodology (Pope & Mays, 1995). For example, phenomenology, with roots in philosophy, is concerned with how people experience a particular phenomenon, and attempts to systematically uncover these experiences to enhance and illuminate understanding (van Manen, 1990). Ethnography, with origins in anthropology, seeks to systematically study and interpret the behaviour of a cultural sharing group and cultural phenomena (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997). Grounded theory, which evolved from a sociological perspective, aims to construct theory and understand social processes via the systematic gathering and analysis of data (Creswell, 2013). All qualitative approaches focus on how people make sense of, and the meaning people assign to, events, people, places, and things (Henink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011). They highlight the importance of an individual's natural environment and focus on interpreting the 'everyday' language that people use to describe their experiences (Bruan & Clarke, 2013).

3.4.3 Addressing qualitative methodology concerns. The researcher considered the limitations of using a qualitative research

approach. As with all research paradigms, caution is warranted when using qualitative methods. Since their application, particularly within the social and natural sciences, fears have been expressed that they may reduce the credibility of academic disciplines due to their more subjective nature (Baker, Wuest, & Stern, 1992). It has been argued that the qualitative studies are not generalisable to the wider population from which the study sample is drawn, due the limitations of small size, combined with the subjective and interpretative nature of qualitative research (L. Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). However, the objective of qualitative research is not to predict but to describe and offer explanations of events; it is concerned with the quality of experiences, rather than the identifying cause-effect relationships (Padgett, 1998), and seeks to understand different perspectives between groups of people. Replicability is not relevant, as the focus of a qualitative study is to offer a new perspective on, or illuminate thinking about, a given situation which could guide further exploration and focus (Suddaby, 2006). Analytical generalisability (the use of the concepts/constructs/themes to explain a specific situation; Munhall, 2001), as opposed to statistical generalisability is sought.

Method-specific guidelines for researchers have arisen to address concerns regarding the impact of the researcher on the research process and to make qualitative methods accountable (Thorne, 2011). The credibility of qualitative research rests on the importance of transparency in how the research process and conclusions occur (Padgett, 1998). A qualitative study should focus on a specific research question, be carefully constructed and accomplished, and seek to empirically explore the intricacies of our social world (Atkinson, Coffey, & Delamont, 2003). This can involve questioning, scrutinising, interpreting and theorising, as opposed to "verifying rule-based equivalencies with the real world" (Kvale, 1996, p. 244). Although there is no accepted consensus about the standards by which qualitative research should be determined (Rolfe, 2006), researchers who frame their studies in a qualitative paradigm commonly think in terms of trustworthiness, as opposed to the conventional, positivistic criteria of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Trustworthiness is defined as the clarity of the description of

the research process, or "the conceptual and analytical soundness of the inquiry" (Fassinger, 2005, p. 163). However, whilst adhering to a complex methodological process, qualitative researchers also need to take care that demonstrating specific adherence to a method does not result in extreme rule-boundedness, which can limit the creative insight of the researcher and the provision of a holistic overview of the subtle nuances of a study (Janesick, 1994).

3.5 Study 1

3.5.1 Aims of Study 1.

The study was guided by three research questions:

(1) How do the children of parents who come out experience and adjust to a parent coming out, particularly when it co-occurs with parental separation?

(2) What factors influence the adjustment process?

(3) Does the age of sons and daughters at the time of separation and disclosure influence their experiences?

3.5.2 Approach to Study 1: Rationale for selecting Grounded Theory (GT).

The first study in the thesis adopted a Grounded Theory (GT) methodology. Given that theory generation is a key component of GT, it was deemed appropriate for seeking to generate an exploratory theory or framework of how the social experience of one parent coming out as LGB is processed in the context of family life. A systematic, yet flexible, approach was sought. GT is defined as "a comprehensive, integrated and highly structured, yet eminently flexible process that takes a researcher from the first day in the field to a finished written theory" (Glaser & Holton, 2004, para. 14). GT is an inductive, developmental and iterative qualitative research approach commonly used in qualitative social and health science research (Birks & Mills, 2011). The main features of GT suited the researcher's previous experience and mode of working at the time, namely simultaneous data collection and analysis (or theoretical sampling), examining similarities and differences within the data (the constant comparative method), coding and categorisation, memo writing and theory generation, without the guidance of a preconceived theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The researcher considered the possible benefits and limitations in selecting GT as the approach for Study 1.

Among the benefits, GT can:

- Discover theory from data that is systematically obtained from participants in a social context, as well as exploring the main concern of participants and their attempts to resolve it (Glaser, 1992).
- Increase knowledge and facilitate theoretical development in the absence of adequate information regarding a phenomenon (Woolley, Butler, & Wampler, 2000).
- Apply theoretical information to practice (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), although GT requires well developed conceptual skills (Fassinger, 2005).
- Help gain a fresh perspective on an area or topic of interest, or explore social relationships, individual processes and the contextual factors that affect individual lives and larger social processes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).
- Highlight links between previously ignored associations via abduction, defined as a cerebral process "that brings together things which one had never associated with one another: A cognitive logic of discovery" (Reichertz, 2007, p. 220).
- Move beyond description to an understanding of social situations or phenomena (e.g., parental separation and a parent coming out as LGB) to which people must adapt (Schreiber, 2001).

Among the limitations of GT:

- GT involves a focus on the researcher, who is charged with using his/her insight and personal experiences for theorising from data, in addition to continuously self-reflecting and accounting for personal assumptions. The requirement to minimise expectations and personal beliefs can be challenging (Guerin et al., 2013).
- Waiting for concepts to 'emerge' and full immersion in the data requires patience, acumen, a tolerance of ambiguity and uncertainty on the part of the researcher, in addition to the indomitable challenge

of time. Moreover, GT tends to produce large amounts of data which can be difficult to manage (Byrant & Charmaz, 2007).

- The GT interpretative process can depend on researcher sensitivity to meanings inherent in the data and their creative processes. Care needs to be taken to mediate the tension between an overly mechanical application of GT coding techniques (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and the importance of an inductive, creative and interpretative approach (Glaser, 1978).
- GT has been criticised for its reifying tendency that leads to discourses being represented as static and unchanging (Potter, 1996); "we do not discover reality; we construct it discursively" (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1990, p. 72). Arising theories must be framed in the context of the 'best fit' with respect to the data collected at a specific historical time. Furthermore, they are not comparable to information obtained inductively that leads to conclusions (Sandleowski, 1993).
- In GT, theoretical saturation is defined as the point in the analysis process where the selected categories "are well developed in terms of properties, dimensions and variations" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 263). Saturation is used as a rationale for discontinuing data collection and analysing new data (Saunders et al., 2018). Consequently researchers need to be mindful of the risk of assuming that categories are saturated, (i.e., when no new data related to the core focus of enquiry appears, and when the concepts of the theory and their linkage with other concepts are clearly described; Morse, 2004) when they may not have been: the specific research aims require detailed categories and sustained enquiry (Charmaz, 2003).
- Premature conclusions can result in the description of themes, rather than the elevation of categories to a theoretical or abstract level (Glasser, 1992). Charmaz (1990, p. 1164) argues that "weaknesses in using the method have become equated with weaknesses inherent in the method", while Grbich (2007) posits that concept generation, rather than the formal theory, may be the best outcome as a consequence.

3.5.3 An overview of GT origins. The researcher considered the origins of GT, and was mindful that the evolution of GT in the 20th and 21st centuries resulted in several GT approaches from which to choose. GT emerged in 1967 when sociologists Barney Glaser and Anslem Strauss produced their seminal book titled 'The Discovery of Grounded Theory' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Based on a study of dying in Californian hospitals in 1967, they sought to compare and contrast different experiences of the same phenomenon (dying), and explore what influenced those experiences. This was similar to the aims of Study 1, which focused on exploring the social phenomenon and individual experiences of having a parent come out.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) outlined a systematic approach to qualitative research and empirically grounded theory building, based on an inductive method. In an inductive approach, the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis creatively emerge "out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data collection and analysis" (Patton, 1980, p. 306). The data analysis process described loosely in Glaser and Strauss's seminal text, however, led to challenges in methodological adherence, especially for the novel researcher. Glaser (1978, 1992) subsequently explained theoretical sampling, theoretical coding and use of memos in more detail. This is often termed 'Glaserian', or 'classic' grounded theory. Strauss (with Juliet Corbin) proceeded to produce a reformulation of the classic GT approach with a greater focus on data analytic techniques (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, 1990; Corbin & Strauss, 2008), often referred to as 'Straussian' GT.

GT has been titled 'methodically dynamic' (Ralph, Birks, Cross, & Chapman, 2015), being associated with the theoretical traditions of sociology, positivism and symbolic interactionism (Reynolds & Herman-Kinney, 2003). Subsequently, alternative epistemological lenses have been applied to GT, resulting in new interpretation of the methodology and 'second generation' schools such as constructivist GT (Charmaz, 2000), situational analysis (Clarke, 2005) and dimensional analysis (Bowers & Schatzman, 2009; Schatzman, 1991). In these latter approaches the researcher takes a more active role in constructing "what the interactants see as their social reality" (P. Stern, 1994, p. 215).

3.5.4 Rationale for the selected GT approach. A 'Straussian' GT approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was selected for Study 1 for three primary reasons.

Firstly, an approach was sought that gave guidelines for the analysis of data obtained via participant interviews, whilst also allowing for flexibility within the analytic process. Straussian GT, defined as "a logically consistent set of data collection and analytic procedures aimed to develop theory" (Charmaz, 1995, p. 27) can facilitate the democratisation of the research process and, given that qualitative inquiry is difficult to do (Willig, 2012), techniques of analysis are therefore useful. The coding process of Strauss and Corbin (1998) comprises a three-tier coding process, namely open (line-by-line coding), axial (reassembling selected data by focusing on possible influential factors) and selective coding (the integration of categories and final theme selection), with the overall aim being the interpretation and construction of meaning from the narrative data (Fassinger, 2005). Flexibility, however, is also accounted for - guidelines are "suggested techniques but not commandments" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.4). Moreover, Straussian GT is particularly suited to data produced through interview transcripts (Kan & Parry, 2004), given the co-occurring process of data collection and analysis and the recursive strategies that explicate the nature of relationships within the data (Carlson, Speca, Patel, & Goodey, 2004; Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Secondly, the researcher sought a specific GT approach that emphasised participant subjectivity, given that Study 1 focused on the subjective meanings that the participants imposed on their perception of a parent coming out. Unlike the postpositivism of Glaser and Strauss, GT as defined by Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Corbin with Strauss (2008) has theoretical underpinnings in symbolic interactionism with constructivist intent (Byrtant & Charmaz, 2007). Straussian GT emphasises the value of a multiplicity of perspectives and "truths" relating to the social processes and the world in which the participants live (Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Participants' experiences are not viewed as true or false, but as useful or not useful for the particular individual in their particular setting (Shotter & Billing, 1998). This view appears to represent a shift within GT from a

realist ontology to an increasingly relativist ontology (Annells, 1997), which is in line with the researcher's epistemological beliefs.

Thirdly, the researcher sought a GT approach that allowed for the potential influence of the researcher on the research process. In Straussian GT, the subjectivity of the researcher, who cannot be neutral or detached (Bowers, 1988), is emphasised. Specific understanding from past experiences and literature may be used to stimulate and generate theoretical suggestions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). While the researcher must begin with as few predetermined ideas as is possible, so he or she can be as sensitive to the data as possible (termed theoretical sensitivity; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the researcher in this approach is not required to begin with a 'blank slate'. Furthermore, verification of arising conclusions occurs throughout the research process. In Straussian GT, reality and theory are therefore viewed as contextually dependent and co-created by the interviewer and interviewee: reality "cannot be known, but is always interpreted" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.22). This interpretivist (L. Parker & Roofey, 1997) or constructivist (Annells, 1996) approach is in contrast to the Glaserian approach which assumes the existence of both an objective reality and researcher, and where verification is only possible after theory is developed (Suddaby, 2006). Unlike the inductive analytical approach highlighted by Glaser (1978), Straussian GT is an inductive-deductive approach: the researcher's focus is shaped by the data, but also shapes the data by following 'hunches' (followed by validation and elaboration). All conclusions, however, must be supported by evidentiary data (M. Johnson, 1999).

3.5.5. A primary Straussian concern. In addition to the GT limitations discussed in subsection 3.5.2, the researcher considered the main concern that can arise when using Straussian approach, namely mechanical over-coding or forcing the data into a predefined model (Glaser, 1992). Researchers need to be mindful when coding not to detach from, or lose the essence of, the data, as a result of an overly technical organisational process (where the mechanics of coding or an initial focus takes over a holistic analysis; Charmaz, 2003). It is necessary to progress past the process of axial coding, which "provides depth to the description of a concept"

(Kendall, 1999, p. 753), and to examine how the codes fit together in categories. An arising theory should be 'grounded' in the categorical codes that have arisen during the analysis process, precluding the possibility of theorising unfounded on any real substance (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

3.5.6 Overview of the GT procedure as used in the thesis. An overview of the participants and the data gathering and analysis process used in Study 1 is given in this subsection.

Participants. Given the retrospective nature of the study, recruiting adult children enabled freer, more direct access to the sample, allowed for a greater lifespan approach, and was less ethically complex. To be included in Study 1, participants had to (a) be 18 years of age or older and (b) have/had at least one lesbian, gay, or bisexual parent and (c) be born into heterosexually organised parental partnerships/unions. Parental affirmation of his/her same-gender or bisexual sexual orientation to the participants must have occurred. Fifteen participants (8 sons, 7 daughters; all white Irish) were recruited from the Irish population for Study 1. Details of participant recruitment are contained in Chapter 4 (p. 80).See Table 4.1 for *Participant Demographic Information.*

The ultimate sample comprising the study was determined by the data (and not by a previously determined number, as data collection and participant sampling in GT is based on arising, relevant constructs within the data.) Participants continued to be recruited in order to maximise the discovery of as many facets and dimensions related to the experience as possible (categorical saturation; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The recruitment ceased when this was deemed to have occurred. However, Corbin and Strauss (2015) posit that less than five or six are not enough to achieve saturation.

Overview of the data gathering and analysis process. A qualitative semi-structured research interview design was utilised in this study (and in Studies 2 and 3) to facilitate "an exchange of views between two people on a topic of mutual interest" (Kvale, 1996, p. 14), with the purpose of eliciting certain information from the participants. The researcher believed that this method would give her (and the participants) more flexibility than the more conventional structured interview. Although this form of questioning

reduces the control the researcher has over the situation and can take longer to carry out (Willig, 2001), the advantages were perceived to outweigh the disadvantages, as outlined in Appendix A1 (*The Advantages and Counteracting the Disadvantages of Semi-Structured Interviews).* See Appendix A2 for an outline of the *Interview Planning,* and Appendix B4 for the *Interview Guide* utilised in Study 1. Interviews lasted between 40 and 80 minutes and were digitally recorded. 12 occurred face-to-face in a location selected by the participants; three occurred via Skype. Six occurred in the participant's home and nine took place in a quiet public setting (i.e., café, bar or office).

While the researcher was cognisant of the necessity of 'broad' reading (reading around the topic) and of being alert to a wide range of possibilities (Glaser, 1992), existing insights from past experience and knowledge were used to generate the research aims (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Assumptions, however, were suspended, as the researcher focused on how the participants understood their situation and experiences: 'what were they saying and doing in the context of what was happening?' This occurred via (1) the recording of researcher reflections (as field notes) during the research process and (2) discussing reflections during the analysis process in supervision, and their possible use (as contextual information).

The interlinking process of data collection and data analysis proceeded in parallel, whereby data was analysed soon after collection and the findings from that data determined the focus of the subsequent data collection (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Data directed and redirected the researcher's focus in data analysis, as the researcher strove to interpret the patterns contained in the data and to follow potential leads or hunches (Charmaz, 2003). For example, the category 'Age at Disclosure' was added to focus on the different experiences of Parental Separation, as variations of this experience arose in initial interviews. Memo-writing, akin to free-writing (Elbow, 1981) facilitated this process by aiding the development, and the illumination, of theoretical categories as they emerged. They included general ideas, possible categories that could be explored, phrases and associations (emotional and theoretical) and exploring the components of categories and emerging patterns.

The researcher undertook an extensive literature review when emergent themes arose, which focused on existing theories that had possible relevance to the emerging theory (Glaser 1992). Data collection ceased once it was agreed during supervisory meetings that new data would not yield any further insight deemed significant (the categories seemed 'full'; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The interviews began to be repetitive, new information did not indicate the need for new codes or the expansion of existing ones, and the marginal value of new data was considered to be minimal.

The coding process. The (three-tier) coding process of Strauss and Corbin (1998) was utilised, with the overall aim being the interpretation and construction of meaning from the narrative data (Fassinger, 2005). An outline of this coding process is contained in Table 3.1. See Appendix B5 for *An Example of Each GT Coding Stage (Study 1)*. Data was concurrently sought that illustrated the properties of each category on a continuum (Creswell, 2013). The researcher continually checked and adjusted derived categories against successive paragraphs of text ('constant-comparison'; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987). This comparative process enabled the identification of similarities, differences, and general patterns. This continued throughout all the coding stages.

Table 3.1

The GT coding process

Coding stage	**The process involved:**
1. Open Coding	o Line-by-line coding of each individual transcript where data (words, phrases, sentences) were broken down into units of meaning (concepts), and named. o Use of the qualitative data analysis Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) program of NVivo to organise and manage the data. The analytical tasks, however, were left entirely to the researcher. o Formation of initial categories that grouped the concepts under a broader umbrella, e.g., 'Emotional Reactions' and 'Parental Boundaries'. o Coding the second transcript with the first interview in mind. Comparing coded concepts to existing data and re-categorising (Charmaz, 2003) as additional data become available.

Table 3.1 (continued)

Coding stage	The process involved:
2. Axial Coding	○ Reconnecting data by focusing on how the concepts and categories related to one another after open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). ○ Focusing on categories that were emerging with a high frequency of mention, resulting in core categories ○ Assembling the data in new ways: focusing on a central phenomenon (e.g. Parental Separation), exploring the conditions that influenced the phenomenon, the strategies or actions that resulted from the phenomenon, the context of each experience, and the outcomes of actions and thoughts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).
3. Selective Coding	○ Integrating the categories into a more holistic framework, leading to a selection of final themes in an attempt to fully explain the experiences of participants sampled (Fassinger, 2005). ○ Grounding 'theory' in the data: does it offer a valid, contextualised explanation of the phenomenon? ○ Selecting a core category (around which all the other categories are integrated). This resulted in a theoretical model that was deemed to best fit the data, the logical associations with the data and the literature, and the experiences of the participants sampled. ○ Acknowledging that the perspectives of the participants and the researcher represented 'one view among many' (Charmaz, 2003, p. 95).

3.6 Studies 2 and 3

In this section, the aims and objectives of Studies 2 and 3 are given (3.6.1), and the rationale for the selection of IPA as the methodological approach (3.6.2). This includes a description of IPA - its origins and theoretical underpinnings (3.6.3) - and the limitations of IPA (3.6.4). Finally, an overview of the research procedure comprising Studies 2 and 3 is given (3.6.5).

3.6.1 Aims of Studies 2 and 3.

- ***Study 2:*** Study 2 sought to gain insight into how heterosexual (Irish) women, all mothers, made sense of the experience of having a

husband come out as gay following a marriage that produced children.

- ***Study 3***: Study 3 sought to explore the lived progression by which heterosexually married men attained a gay identity within an Irish socio-cultural context, and how this impacted on their family ties and unit.

3.6.2 The rationale for the selection of IPA for Studies 2 and 3.

Following the completion of Study 1, several research directions and methodological approaches were considered, including the use of Grounded Theory. Methodological considerations (and time constraints) contributed to decisions around the inclusion and exclusion of participants. For example, the number of male versus female heterosexual spouses, specific demographics (e.g., Ireland versus Northern Ireland), the chronology of experiences (e.g., of coming out after marital separation versus before) and specific sexual orientations were considered. The researcher wondered whether the importance of the parental separation would be similarly experienced by both the heterosexual and same-gender parent, or whether the same-gender sexual orientation (or both) would be to the fore.

Once the aims of Studies 2 and 3 were specified, it was felt that an approach was required that allowed for an in-depth exploration of the lived experience of having a husband or self come out as gay whilst married. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), first introduced in the 1990s by Jonathan Smith (J. Smith, 1996), is an integrative hermeneutic phenomenology (Finlay, 2011) and was selected, primarily for the following six reasons:

(1) A methodology was required that could facilitate a focus on the individual experiences of a specific cohort of people (e.g., the female, heterosexual spouse and mother). IPA was well suited to the research aims of Studies 2 and 3 given that it comprises an in-depth analysis of individuals' subjective accounts, and is suited to homogenous sampling (J. Smith, 2011). GT, in contrast, is less focused on the individual subjective experiences of participants than IPA, and more on how such experiences are connected and can be conceptualised into theoretical conclusions (Suddaby, 2006). IPA

focuses on how each participant interprets their unique experiences of a particular phenomenon as the central priority (J. Smith, Harré, & Van Langenhove, 1995). This can allow for participants' stories to be heard, and following this, data-led inferences to be made (Moustakas, 1994).

(2) The phenomena of being married to a man who came out as gay (Study 2) and assuming a gay identity in the context of a heterosexual marriage and traditional culture (Study 3) are relatively unexplored. IPA was selected, as it is particularly useful for understanding under-examined phenomena which are multifaceted in nature (Creswell, 2013) and is a well-established research methodology within clinical, health and social psychology (Brocki & Wearden, 2006), and education (Tesch, 1990).

(3) An approach was required that acknowledges the potential impact of culture and social norms and practices on the sense that people make of their experiences (Eatough & Smith, 2006): "historicity (past, present, and future)…shape and inform our lives as we shape others" (Conroy, 2003, p. 3). In IPA, experiences are explored within their specific social context, and can be framed within a discussion of social and political contexts, should this be relevant (J. Smith, 2011). Participants from a particular context (e.g., marrying within a traditional, conservative cultural climate) with a particular experience can illuminate, and offer a valuable perspective on, a topic. For example, how do gay men attain a settled gay identity in the context of 'heterosexual marriage, parenthood and an Irish socio-culture? While the researcher in IPA is tasked with immersing themselves in the world of the participants, and their culture and socio-historical lives (Moran, 2000), the researcher also brings to the fore an awareness of how they themselves are influenced by their own culture, beliefs, motivations, etc. (Clancy, 2013).

(4) It was anticipated that access to participants, in particular the heterosexual spouse, may be challenging, and therefore more suited to IPA. GT uses theoretical sampling, which typically results in a greater number of participants than IPA, and seeks to establish

conclusions that may be applicable to others (Urquhart, Lehmann, & Myers, 2009). IPA, on the other hand, seeks to select a homogenous group of participants (contrary to GT) that give insight to a specific research question. This usually involves smaller samples than GT, as examining the divergences and convergences within and between accounts takes time (J. Smith, 1999).

(5) IPA is a suitable methodology for the analysis of data collected via open ended semi-structured interviews (J. Smith & Osborn, 2008), which was the data gathering procedure desired by the researcher.

(6) IPA research is a dynamic process that stresses the centrality, and impact, of the researcher in the analysis and research process; the researcher is actively gathering and interpreting the participant's interpretations (J. Smith, 1996). The methodology was considered to be particularly suited to the researcher's skill set, i.e., experience in interviewing others on a range of sensitive topics, focusing on the individual, self-reflection, and critically evaluating and interpreting information. IPA focuses on unique, individual stories, and aims to develop a thorough interpretation of the data (Suddaby, 2006). While both GT and IPA involve an interpretative process, where the researcher is an active part of the outcome, in IPA the researcher is more involved in interpreting the participants' interpretations (Starks & Trinidad, 2007).

3.6.3 The origins and theoretical underpinnings of IPA. Given that IPA emerged from the phenomenological tradition, a historical overview of phenomenology is given prior to describing IPA as a research approach.

Phenomenology. Phenomenology (the study of experience) began with Edmund Husserl and was developed, primarily by Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer in the first half of the 20th century (Dreyfus & Wrathall, 2002). They were all influential German philosophers who focused on the analysis of life-world/individual-world relationships and sought to understand how reality is constituted (Sheets-Johnstone, 2017). Reality, from a phenomenological perspective, exits within the meaning of the individual's experience, i.e., how something is experienced by an

individual, and describing the experiences of individuals about a single phenomenon can uncover understanding (Moustakas, 1994).Phenomenology is both a philosophical, historical movement and a range of research methods - the discipline of phenomenology (Finlay, 2008). The definition of phenomenology, however, is debatable, which may be attributable to it being "a style of thought, a method, an open and ever-renewed experience having different results" (Farina, 2014, p. 50).

Two philosophical traditions are prominent in the history of phenomenology, namely descriptive and hermeneutic phenomenology:

The descriptive (or transcendental) phenomenological philosophy of Edmond Husserl focused on the science of conscious experience. For Husserl, our consciousness is made up of 'intentional acts'; it is subjectively directed towards objects (via particular concepts or ideas) the results of which form the content of a given experience (Husserl, 1973; Sheets-Johnstone, 1990). This involves a process of conscious 'intentionality', which is how knowledge should be evaluated (as opposed to objectively seeking theoretical verification; Crowell, 2001; Husserl, 1977). Husserl claimed that accessing the 'intentionality' of others and getting to the essence of an experience (i.e., knowledge) is only possible by putting aside one's natural attitudes and assumptions about how things originated or are or exist in the 'external world' (McKenna, 1982). He advised that people set aside their previous knowledge, prejudices and personal history (termed 'bracketing' phenomenological reduction) so as to discover meanings in the accounts of others and to get to the essence of an experience (Finlay, 2011).

The philosopher Martin Heidegger, a former student of Husserl, contributed to the shift in phenomenology from being descriptive to hermeneutic (or interpretative; broadly defined as knowledge related to interpretation; Grondin, 1994). Heidegger rejected subjectivism and relativism, including the premise that people can be objective spectators of experiences (Healy, 2011) and its claim that the intrinsic nature of experience "can be isolated outside of the researcher's cultural and historical location" (Henriksson & Friesen, 2012, p. 1). Our 'being in the world', which he termed Daesin (or 'being-there'; Soloman, 1972), involves experiencing interpretive situations that urge us to ask questions (Friesen,

Henrikson, & Saevi, 2012). In his philosophical approach, understanding is embedded in, and inseparable from, the world (Spinelli, 2005). It contains a 'fore-structure' (Vor-skruktur) of assumptions that supports interpretation (Horrigan-Kelly, Millar, & Dowling, 2015): to understand an experience as a whole one must reference the individual parts and to understand each individual part, one must reference the whole (termed the hermeneutic circle; Heidegger, 1962). Gadamer later stressed the iterative nature of the process of interpretation, claiming that new understanding can occur when an experience is examined in detail, and that dialogue is the means by which we come to a deeper understanding (Gadamer, 2004). Making sense of the world, and 'bringing it into language' (Gadamer, 1975, p. 282) is therefore a social, dialogical activity (Bakhin, 1981).

Both Heidegger and Gadamer believed that interpretation is an essential part of all understanding (Gadamer, 1975; Heidegger, 1962). While Husserl advised that people move away from their natural attitudes, Heidegger believed that our understanding is situated, and influenced by, our personally related prejudices and lives (Moran, 2000). Furthermore, experiences are often reflected on retrospectively, and actual experiences in the here and now are therefore often unavailable to the analyst (J. Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Heidegger's work and focus on the natural influence of an individual's personal beliefs and prejudices prompted researchers to be reflexive in their interpretations of the experiences being investigated (Segal, 2010).

IPA. IPA is phenomenological in that it focuses on how an individual subjectively experiences a phenomenon within a particular context (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003; Flowers, Hart, & Marriott, 1999). However, while phenomenology perceives the data as unfolding (Barbour, 2007), IPA focuses on the researcher taking a more active role in the dynamic research process, in order to further illuminate the experience at hand (Braun & Clarke, 2013; J. Smith, 2004). The researcher attempts to access the participant's personal world through a process of interpreting the participant's account (J. Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999). IPA is hermeneutic phenomenology (underpinned by Heidegger's interpretive philosophy; Finlay, 2011) and involves a dual interpretation process, termed

'double hermenutics' (J. Smith & Osborn, 2008). The participant attempts to make sense of his/her experiences, and the researcher attempts to make sense of the participant's interpretations. Understanding then emerges from a systematic exploration of individuals' subjective reports, researcher interpretations of these reports, and intersubjective conclusions (existing between the researcher and individuals, and supported by the data; Flowers et al., 1999; Rommetveit, 1998). The end result is an "account of how the analyst thinks the participant is thinking" (J. Smith et al., 2009, p. 80).

In IPA, experience is rooted in local culture and ideologies (of both the participant and researcher); open to new insights; and involves 'others' (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). IPA is also influenced by the sociological theory of symbolic interactionism, which focuses on the way meanings are construed by people as they interact and communicate with one another (using language), and how they make sense of their social and personal world from their unique perspective (Denzin, 1995; J. Smith & Osborn, 2008). Meaning can continually be revised, interpreted and reinterpreted and is perceived as fluid - it can change over time (Blumer, 1969; Davidsen, 2013).

IPA is idiographic, in that it focuses on the detailed analysis of a phenomenon and focuses on (and values) each individual account, prior to examining convergences and divergences between cases (J. Smith et al., 2009a). Gadamer's iterative and dialogical approach, and the emphasis within symbolic interactionism on individual perspectives and how they are communicated, contributed to this idiographic component (Applebaum, 2012). IPA seeks to examine how people make sense of major life experiences and perceive reality as existing within the meaning of the individual's experience (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997; J. Smith, 2015). Examples include the meaning an individual places on being homeless and how this affects his or her sense of identity (E. Riggs & Coyle, 2002); how people with chronic fatigue syndrome experience stigma and delegitimation (Dickson, Knussen, & Flowers, 2007); or what role, if any, does spirituality and religion play in helping older adults make sense of the death of a partner (Golsworthy & Coyle, 1999). While the meaning others ascribe to their experiences should be of primary concern to the researcher, this is only

obtainable via an interpretative process (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008).

With IPA, the researcher "brings their fore-conception (prior experiences, assumptions, preconceptions) to the encounter, and cannot help but look at any new stimulus in the light of their own prior experience" (J. Smith et al., 2009, p. 25). Reflexivity involves taking into account one's 'internal world', positioning, behaviour and the external culture in which the researcher is embedded (Attia & Edge, 2017). Phrases such as 'self-reflection' (Carolan, 2003), 'self-inspection' (Colbourne & Sque 2004) and 'acting on reflections' (Finlay, 2002) are common in the literature on reflexivity. Researchers are required to consider how their own experience, personal values, beliefs, motivations, culture, etc., can influence the stages of the research process (Clancy, 2013; Koch & Harrington 1998).

3.6.4 Challenges to be faced when using IPA. IPA demands a certain level of communicative skill (of participants and researchers) in order to effectively capture the nuances and interpretations of experiences, as opposed to a mere description of the data or a summary of researcher opinions (Willig, 2012). It also seeks the collection of (ideally) rich and detailed data from participants, and a thorough analysis of this by the researcher in order to maximise the quality of findings (J. Smith, 2011). Interpretations take place in the context of words, phrases and metaphors in stories. For example, a participant's use of the contrasting metaphors 'poison' and 'cleansing' can be interpreted as describing their fluctuating positions towards, and ambivalence about, alcohol (see Shinebourne & Smith, 2009). A participant's reference to the term 'creative hopelessness' can be interpreted as illustrating feelings of unresolved despair during therapy (see Skinta, Brandrett, Schenk, Wells, & Diley, 2014), while the use of the term 'in a pit' or 'hole' (Rhodes & Smith, 2010) is cited as a common metaphor used in reference to depression (Emslie, Ridge, Ziebland, & Hunt, 2006). The main focus of IPA is to gain insight into experience. This can only occur via participants' and researchers' use of language. The process of language interpretation, however, can be very time consuming, requiring repeated re-readings of the data to ensure contextual accuracy and the richness of analysis and thematic extracts (J. Smith et al., 2009).

IPA demands a transparency with regard to reflexivity – being

mindful of personal opinions, characteristics and values (and open to differing ones) throughout the research process so as to improve the way that interpretations are formed. According to Linda Finlay (2008), "the challenge for the researcher is to remain focused on the phenomenon being studied while both reining in and reflexively interrogating their own understandings" (p. 29). Therefore, there is a certain onus on researchers who choose IPA to be critically reflexive and to monitor their preconceptions throughout the analysis process (J. Smith, 2011).

IPA sampling tends to be small (usually fewer than 10 participants) and uses an approach to sampling based on homogeneity (uniformity), in order to allow for a richer depth of analysis (J. Smith, 1999). The majority of published IPA studies have included between one and 15 participants, although sample sizes over 10 and under two are less common (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). While there needs to be scope to examine the convergences and divergences between individuals, analysing the accounts of a large number of participants can be overwhelming and may lead to the loss of potentially subtle, but illuminating material (K. Collins & Nicolson, 2002). The focus should be an in-depth investigation of an experience. Consequently, researchers need to give consideration to the inclusion criteria used to identify potential participants (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). For example, criteria such as age, or gender and being a parent (as is the case in Studies 2 and 3) might impact on the homogeneity of a sample, and introduce elements into the analysis of a phenomenon that might obscure the researcher's ability to address the research question. It has also been argued that the epistemological basis of IPA is developing (Todorova, 2011), and could widen further to allow for a researcher to consider meaning in the context of socio-cultural processes (Houston & Mullan-Jensen, 2012).

3.6.5 Overview of IPA procedure as used in the thesis. An overview of the participants and the data gathering and analysis process used in Studies 2 and 3 is given in this subsection.

Participants. The composition and size of the sample comprising Studies 2 and 3 was determined by the increasingly specific research question(s), the practical considerations of the thesis, the rich and detailed

nature of the data (i.e., of first-person individual accounts) and the analytic process of comparing and contrasting cases.

- **Study 2:** Study 2 focused, initially, on heterosexual parents who had at least one child while in a heterosexual union with a partner/spouse who subsequently disclosed as LGB. This was narrowed down to solely heterosexual women, and mothers, who were, or had been married to a man who had come out as gay during the course of their marriage. Reasons for this specific sample included the small sample of heterosexual men available during the recruitment time-frame (pragmatic considerations) and primarily, the methodology employed in this study (IPA), which promotes participant homogeneity, and the richness of the data. For Study 2, nine participants (all white) were recruited. Six were Irish, two were Canadian and one was Scottish. Three non-Irish participants were included in the sample, due to difficulties in recruiting an exclusively Irish sample within the required time-frame. All participants married traditionally within a conservative Christian culture. See Table 5.1 for further details on the *Contextual Information of Participants.* Details of participant recruitment are contained in Chapter 5 (p. 105).
- **Study 3:** Study 3 focused on LGB parents who had at least one child while in a heterosexual union before subsequently disclosing as LGB. This was narrowed down to solely gay men (all fathers), due to the need for participant homogeneity, as per the specific methodology (IPA) employed in the study. Study 3 comprises the accounts of nine men, all white Irish, who had married heterosexually and came out as gay during the context of their marriage. See Table 6.1 for the *Demographic Information of the Participants.* Details of participant recruitment are contained in Chapter 6 (p. 131).

Data collection and analysis.

Data collection: The researcher collected the data from audio-recorded semi-structured interviews. In IPA the interview schedule or guide "is merely a basis for a conversation" (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008, p.

217). Unlike the semi-structured interview schedule used in Study 1, the interview guides used in Study 2 (see Appendix C4 for the *Interview Guide, Study 2*) and in Study 3 (see Appendix D4 for the *Interview Guide, Study 3*) were less structured and focused more on themes for discussion with the participants. While the researcher did not necessarily follow the order of the pre-prepared questions and prompts (each participant told their story in their own ordered way), the guide was checked at the end of each interview to ensure that all the questions or main themes had been covered. This approach seemed to enable a more natural flow to the interview, and was preferred by the researcher.

In Study 2, six interviews were face-to-face in Ireland and the remainder (n=3) abroad, via Skype. The modal interview length was 80 minutes. They were interviewed in their homes and when it suited them. In Study 3, the interviews were conducted either in the participants' own homes (n=2), their place of work (n=1) or in a local restaurant (n=6), depending on which was most convenient for each participant. The modal interview length was 70 minutes.

Data analysis: The analysis to place cautiously via an inductive, double hermeneutic process, whereby the researcher focused on how each participant made sense of having a husband (in Study 2), or self (in Study 3), come out as gay, and also tried to interpret the participant's sense-making process (J. Smith, 2004). Conclusions were specific to each group (Flowers, Smith, Sheeran, & Beail, 1997). The researcher was mindful not to reach an understanding of the phenomenon being studied "too quickly, too carelessly, or slovenly" (Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nystrom, 2008, p. 130). Continuous researcher reflexivity during the analysis process facilitated a deep exploration of the subject matter, i.e., being aware of the potential impact of being female, Irish, heterosexual, a non-practicing Catholic and having a father who identifies as gay, on the interpretative process. The "analytic attention to the researcher's role in research" (Dowling, 2006, p. 3) also reduced the temptation to prematurely summarise or conclude initial interpretations (Finlay, 2008). The iterative and inductive analysis process comprising Studies 2 and 3 involved the following steps:

(1) *Raw data to coded data:*

- The researcher transcribed each interview soon after and obtained a sense of the whole by reading each transcript several times. While the research question focused the researcher on particular perspectives in the analysis (such as an awareness of same-sex sexual orientation, the disclosure, the impact of the disclosure, disclosing to others), a sense of the individuality of each account was apparent from the outset. The data comprising each account were considered on a case-by case basis, with each transcript being analysed individually: how did each participant make sense of either their husband coming out as gay, or the self coming out as gay in the context of a heterosexual marriage?
- The researcher identified meaningful units or codes by reviewing the transcripts, line-by-line, noting initial thoughts and ideas next to the corresponding text and writing a description of the experience (e.g., words, emotions, phrases, places, metaphors, actions), including quotation (J. Smith, 2011). Codes were examined for relevancy to the research question and those that seemed irrelevant were discarded. Reflexive notes were also recorded, such as how was being a 'daughter' impacting on the researcher's rapport with the participants, and their data sharing and analytical process.

(2) *Initial theme groupings:*

- The researcher translated descriptions or notes into psychologically relevant meanings, or preliminary (initial) themes by moving back and forth from data to meanings, while also integrating the researcher's own memos and descriptive interpretations. See Table 3.2 for *Examples of Emerging Themes in Study 3.* This occurred for each interview, before comparing and contrasting across interviews in the next stage of the process.

Table 3.2

Examples of Emerging Themes in Study 3

Transcript extract	**Emerging themes**
Dylan: I came out; I'd been struggling with it for a number of years. I was one of these people who was always gay but never knew it, never actually realised it or accepted it, in any way; We were once out walking and she [my wife] said to me, "why are you staring at that man?" I didn't realise I was doing it. I didn't have a clue. It never entered my head.	Denial of (habitual) same-sex sexuality; eventual coming out; period of 'struggling' (identity conflict). Wife as mirror; self not seeing what his wife sees; repression and self-awareness.
Kieran: The night she confronted me we cried for four hours solid. She was saying "we dedicated our life to us; we've done this and that". We had always said that if one of us cheated on the other we would finish. That's what happened. We discussed it and decided it was unfair. But I dragged it out a bit, and let it go on, as opposed to being honest with her earlier; but I would have had to tell her. Because it would have eaten me up inside. So I knew it was over either way.	(Forced) confrontation leading to coming out; intimacy and grief; Broken agreement; joint dedication to the relationship now over; open dialogue. Guilt (and query not being out) metaphor 'being eaten' internally. Dishonesty and lack of choice (only one outcome).
Niall: The separation was hell on earth. The most difficult thing. Leaving that house, and leaving the children and leaving her, and knowing that the relationship was broken; There were times when I was suicidal, there's no doubt about that. And depressed.	Marital separation (hell on earth; endless torture): Loss of family, relationship, role and home; suicidal ideation and depression.

(3) *Refinement into subordinate and superordinate themes:*

- The subsequent stages involved greater data reduction. The researcher explored connections between the emerging themes across all the interviews, grouping them together into clusters and labelling (and often relabelling) them as subordinate themes (See Appendix C5 and D5 for *Examples of Clustered Themes*). As the process progressed, more connections were established between the preliminary themes – themes were added, removed or reconceptualised (in keeping with the iterative nature of IPA). Overarching master themes or superordinate themes, with connecting subordinate themes, began to arise, as the similarities and differences across the accounts were examined and interpreted.

- IPA researchers are required to use direct quotes from participants to support and justify their interpretative conclusions (J. Smith, 2011). Meaningful quotes and metaphors from participants were used to anchor the findings directly in the data and to illustrate and describe the arising narrative. Theme titles that contained participants' quotations further rooted the interpreted themes in the data (Broki & Wearden, 2006). For example, the phrase "salvage what's good and move on separately" from a participant in Study 2 formed a subordinate theme (Self-Integration) in Study 2, while the metaphor of "life after the earthquake" was used to highlight the superordinate theme titled 'Same-Gender Repartnering' in Study 3. Care was taken to include a sufficient range of sampling when evidencing each theme, in accordance with IPA guidelines (Alase, 2017; J. Smith, 2011).
- A meaninful description of the unique, yet shared experience derived from the specific context of a husband coming out as gay, or the 'self' coming out as gay in the context of a heterosexual marriage, was drafted and redrafted. The essence of the experience was summarised through a series of superordinate and subordinate themes in a meaningful descriptive sequence. See Appendix C6 and Appendix D6 for an *Overview of the Arising Themes* in Studies 2 and 3.

3.7 Trustworthiness: Research credibility

In order to validate the credibility of the analytic process, the following actions were taken to enhance qualitative transparency:

- The role of the researcher within the reflexive analytical process was acknowledged throughout the research process; the researcher is affected by, and impacts on, the respondents' recollections. During the analysis, the researcher asked herself, "How could my experiences and beliefs be influencing the findings?", and was mindful to double check assumptions and interpretations during supervisory meetings.

- To enhance the description of the analytical stages of each study, specific details were given of: the research question and how it 'fit' the selected methodological perspective, the participant recruitment process, the research procedure and the stages comprising the analysis. Rich and verbatim descriptions of participants' accounts were provided to support the conclusions (Noble & Smith, 2015).
- The data gathering protocol and arising conclusions comprising each study were discussed during supervision. Challenging prevailing assumptions was encouraged (Marshall & Rossman, 1989), alternative explanations were discussed, and revisions occurred as required. For example, debate occurred regarding the word 'change' in the recruitment sentence "Has your parent changed his or her sexual orientation?" The disclosure of an LGB orientation may, or may not be, perceived as a 'change' for the parent coming out, or their children following a previous assumed heterosexual identity. Following discussion the wording was altered ('change' being omitted in favour of 'come out').
- The overall process was monitored through periodic supervisory reviews at all stages of the analytical process, in addition to peer and editorial journal reviews.
- The researcher engaged in a prolonged engagement with the research, which, according to Padgett (1998), can enhance the rigour of the research. This included perseverance in recruiting participants that met the inclusion criteria, following best practice guidelines in interviewing, and conducting an honest, meticulous analysis. Information checking occurred where required, which involved contacting respondents to confirm the accuracy of facts, although this was not construed as confirmation of epistemological integrity, or 'truth' (Thorne, 2011). Feedback from the participants also resulted in an enhanced awareness of the sensitivity attached to terminology, and of the importance of being up-to-date with pejorative terms and socio-cultural preferences. For example, 'homosexual' was changed to 'gay', 'straight spouse' was replaced

by ‘heterosexual’ spouse and ‘same-sex sex’ was replaced by same-gender’ sex.

- An audit trail was used to accomplish confirmability of the data in relation to the results and recommendations (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). This involved backtracking from conclusions to initial coding phases. The data was re-read by the researcher to ensure that the themes comprising the thematic model or summary were valid.
- The researcher sought to engage and resonate with peer reviewers following their critiques of the Studies comprising this thesis, because, according to J. Smith et al., (2009), the soundness of qualitative research “lies in whether it tells the reader something interesting, important or useful” (p. 183).

3.8 Ethical Considerations

The research process occurred in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the Code of Professional Ethics issued by the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI, 1999). Anonymity, confidentiality, respect, informed consent, self-determinism, competence, responsibility and integrity are emphasised. The following measures were adopted to ensure the current research upheld appropriate ethical standards:

- All studies conducted for the purposes of this thesis fulfilled the University’s ethical requirements pertaining to research with human subjects. Ethical approval was sought from, and granted by, the National University of Ireland Galway (NUIG) Research Ethics Committee for each Study.
- Expectations and personal experiences were acknowledged by the researcher at the onset of the research and were reflected upon as the thesis progressed. The role of the researcher within the reflexive qualitative process was acknowledged; the researcher is shaped by, and shapes, concepts and interpretations emerging from the data (Creswell, 2013).
- Care was taken to ensure that informed consent was obtained from the participants. This process of communication (which is not merely a form to be signed) aimed to respect each participant’s right

to self-determination, and to promote good professional care (Carr, 1999). It was acknowledged that the issue of informed consent can be challenging in qualitative research. The unfolding and exploratory nature of the research can render it very difficult for researchers to provide 'full information' to participants at the initial consent-seeking stage, as expected outcomes may change (Cribb, 2004). "Questions are often reformulated and new ones emerge. Interests are re-shaped, foci shift" (Biott, 1996, p. 171).

- The researcher sought to take whatever reasonable steps were necessary to ensure that the information given to the participants was understood (PSI, 1999). A *Participant Information Sheet* was compiled and forwarded to potential participants prior to their consent to participate in the research (see Appendices B1, C1 and D1). The *Participant Information Sheet* included (1) a brief description of the study and its procedures, (2) full identification of the researcher's identity, (3) an assurance that participation was voluntary and that the participant had the right to withdraw at any time without penalty (and that the interview could be terminated at any point), (4) an undertaking of confidentiality and (5) the benefits and risks associated with participation in the study. The participants were assured that the data collected for the study would be used for research purposes only, with audio recording unavailable to external sources. Prior to the commencement of each interview, participants were reminded that that they could withdraw from the study at any point prior to the publication of any anonymised findings.
- The subject matter of the three Studies had the potential to elicit emotional responses from the participants, and as such was deemed sensitive in nature (Cowles, 1988). Given the potentially sensitive nature of the interviews, a *Participant Referral Protocol* (see Appendices B2, C2 and D2) containing the contact information of support services was constructed. This was available to participants during each interview, in case they identified themselves, or were identified by the researcher as experiencing significant psychological distress.

- The researcher committed to adhere to section 1.2.6 of the Code of Ethics (PSI, 1999), i.e., to "store, handle, transfer, and dispose of all records, both written and unwritten …in a way that attends to the needs for privacy and security" (p. 6). The transcripts were revisited several times to ensure that potential identifying information was omitted from each transcript. Audio files and any documentation that could render a participant identifiable or threaten their anonymity were stored in a secure, locked location.
- The NUIG Record Retention Policy (2018) states that research data should be held securely after the completion of a research project, in line with the University's Record Retention Schedule. The researcher undertook to destroy the research data after the required time frame, namely seven years following the completion of the research project.
- Before conducting the individual interviews, a *Participant Consent Form* was completed by each participant (see Appendices B3, C3 and D3). This referenced the details contained in the participant information sheet, and served as a 'research contract' (Banister et al., 1994). All participants were informed that a copy of any publication involving them would be forwarded to them.

3.9 Researcher Reflection

In this section, a summary of the potential impact of the researcher's background on the research is given, in addition to reflections on the overall learning process.

3.9.1 Personal reflexivity. The thesis required a continuous and critical self-exploration of the researcher's assumptions, experiences, characteristics, decisions, and self-interests, which had the potential to both impede and enhance the research process (Shaw, 2010). This included reflecting on the potential impact of being female, Irish, heterosexual, a non-practicing Catholic, experiencing a father come out later in life, etc. Examples of self-reflective questions included the following:

Firstly, "Was the subject matter of this research chosen to illuminate the experience of having a parent come out, or to support and bridge information sharing within the researcher's family, or to gain a better

understanding of the experience in general?" Whilst all these reasons contain varying degrees of truth, the topic was chosen primarily due to the doctoral requirement to produce work that makes a significant contribution to a chosen subject area from a holistic perspective, in addition to the dearth of literature on the topic.

Secondly, "Did I (the researcher) focus on heterosexual mothers and gay fathers, to the exclusion of other potential groups?" On reflection, the decision to focus on heterosexual mothers (as opposed to heterosexual fathers) and gay fathers (as opposed to lesbian or bisexual mothers) was due to the methodological approach employed, the scope of the PhD, and the available data.

Thirdly, "Did working in therapeutic support services or having a parent who identifies as nonheterosexual facilitate the sensitive information shared by the participants?" Whilst these factors had a positive impact on the recruitment process, some participants had questions relating to the private life of the researcher. The researcher was aware that the process of revealing information about the self (self-disclosure) to interviewees can lead to role confusion, or 'blurred boundaries' (Dickson et al., 2007). Care was taken during interviewing to encourage the participants to focus on their story (for example, by deferring any interviewer related queries to the end of the interview), and to minimise interviewer interference. In addition, the researcher was mindful of the difference between being a student, engaged in a rapport building and information gathering process, and being present from a therapeutic perspective.

Fourthly, "Am I (the researcher) being affected by the sensitive nature of the interviews?" The content of the information shared during data collection was often highly emotive in nature, and at times unrelated to the subject matter and too identifiable to be included in the data. The emotive nature of the research, along with personal and professional experiences of loss, made collecting and analysing the data challenging and at times, taxing. The importance of self-care was evident during this process, given that researching sensitive topics has the potential to impact on an interviewer's well-being (R. M. Lee, 1993).

Fifthly, reflecting on potential self-interest and the significant variability in participants' experiences (related to coming out, marital separation, and religious, societal intolerance) resulted in questions during the analysis process such as, "Am I over-emphasising a point of view in the data to the expense or exclusion of others?" or, "Am I choosing to ignore an anomaly because it may result in having to rework the context of the arising conclusions?" These were discussed at supervisory meetings.

3.9.2 Key learning points. The key learning points experienced by the researcher are highlighted in this section. The researcher was mindful of the importance of critical self-reflection, debriefing, being open to new ways of knowing, and maintaining an open and accountable framework during the research process (Barnet, 1997). While there has been much debate about the definition of reflection (McDrury & Alterio, 2002), a well-known description is that of Boud, Keogh, and Walker: "reflection in the context of learning is a generic term for those intellectual and affective abilities in which individuals engage to explore their experience" (1985, p. 19). Donald Schön's model of reflective writing (Schön, 1991) structured the researcher's reflections. Two types of reflection are focused on in this model, namely reflection in action (the immediate experience and action at the time) and reflection on action (evaluating and learning from an experience; Schön, 1991).

1. Considering ethical guidelines. "Avoid doing harm to research participants. Co-operate with colleagues and other professionals to ensure the best service to clients, and act positively to resolve ethical dilemmas" (PSI, 1999, p. 4) Ethical dilemmas arose on occasion that required intense supervisory discussion and consultation with ethical guidelines. Three examples are outlined as follows:

- *Example 1(a): reflection in action:* The researcher took particular care not to disclose any information about another (previously interviewed) family member when it became apparent during the interview that this information was unknown to the interviewee.
  Example 1(b): reflection on action: After interviewing the related family members separately, it became apparent that all three members had differing recollections of significantly stressful events,

or had withheld information from one another. Although a case study, i.e., an up-close, in-depth, and detailed examination of a case (e.g., a related son, mother and father) and its related contextual conditions (Stake, 1995) had been considered, the researcher deemed this to be ethically impossible. The premise of confidentiality, and of doing no harm (beneficence), highlighted in psychological guidelines could not be maintained. Participants' interests and disclosures within family networks require protection.

- *Example 2(a): reflection in action:* The researcher queried whether interviewees wished to proceed with the interview process if they became visibly distressed, and sought to ensure that they had access to sources of support prior to terminating the interview. The researcher also made immediate contact with her primary supervisor when sensitive information (in the data) arose which connected with an investigation in the media. Ethical guidelines were immediately consulted to determine the most appropriate course of action.
  Example 2(b): reflection on action: Scenarios such as the above examples reinforced the researcher's need of (and responsibility in seeking) support and supervision when extremely emotive or ethically compromising disclosures arose. This was in order to maximise technical guidance, integration, and help prevent burnout (Hastings & Brown, 2002). Debriefing (both self-guided and with others) reduced post-interview stress (J. T. Mitchell & Everly, 1997) and enabled the researcher to critically reflect on each interview. Questions asked included the following: What went well? What could have been improved (for future application)? How was that experience for me? What do I need? What has been achieved? What remains to be done?
- *Example 3(a): reflection in action:* The researcher had to be mindful of what information she disclosed during a review meeting, as one of the reviewers was directly connected with the research.
  Example 3(b): refection on action: The researcher requested an altered meeting format that did not involve the possibility of anyone involved being connected with the research data - it could

reasonably impair the researcher's professional performance via the necessity of withholding information. Supervisory support, in addition to support from other professionals reduced stress during times of required decision making.

2. The publication process. Examples of reflection in, and on, action with regard to the publication process included the following:

Reflection in action:

- The word count limitations of publishers resulted in the selective editing-out (or sacrificing) of some information from submitted manuscripts, such as more detailed methodological descriptions or participant quotations. Whilst limiting quotations made the researcher focus on choosing data that best illuminated the themes or concepts (a challenging task), reducing the methodology often resulted in peer reviewers seeking previously deleted sentences or sections. This was a cumbersome process at times.
- Not fully adhering to the 'instructions for authors' specific to each journal when preparing articles for submission was time consuming in terms of meeting short term goals.

Reflection on action:

- Some publisher peer reviews facilitated the transparency of the three Studies, by suggesting how better to revise (and ultimately improve) each manuscript. Although individual critiques were sometimes difficult to assimilate, learning to weather rejection and to use it advantageously became a more familiar experience as the PhD process progressed.
- In terms of publishing, the following experiences became familiar and beneficial: seeking qualitative research-friendly journals; examining qualitative papers within the selected journals; citing an article from the targeted journal, where relevant; seeking alternative journals after rejection; patience with regard to the expected turnaround time (lowering expectations); anticipating reviewers' recommendations for revision.

3. Managing work demands.

Reflection in action:

- The researcher was aware of the impact of 'role conflict' on the PhD process, which can occur when two or more conflicting job demands impinge on the delivery of work (Huebner, Gilligan, & Cobb, 2002). It is acknowledged that significant stress can occur if demands or constraints are judged to exceed personal resources or capacities (Lazarus, 1966). This can lead to a sense of paralysis, inefficacy and a lack of productivity (Maslach & Leiter, 2005). Managing the necessary demands of a part-time PhD and the demands of a full-time job was a balancing act that often needed revision.

Reflection on action:

- Supervisory planning meetings and taking unpaid leave from work greatly facilitated the researcher's ability to progress the thesis.
- The following were important to the researcher: continuation (focusing on the parts comprising the thesis, and seeking to finish); trust (believing in what feels valuable or insightful); respect (towards the participants who enabled the research to occur, during and after data collection); and reflection (the necessity of time and thought in enabling the parts of the thesis to connect).

3.10 Summary of Chapter 3

This chapter outlined the aims of, and rationale for, this thesis and gave an overview of the (multimethod) qualitative study design employed. The details of the methodological approach of each Study were explored. An overview of Study 1 included the research aims, the origins of the chosen methodology (Grounded Theory; GT), the selected GT approach and details of the overall procedure. The aims of Studies 2 and 3 were outlined, in addition to the chosen methodology - Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). This included a discussion of the origins and theoretical underpinnings of IPA, the rationale for the selection of IPA in Studies 2 and 3 and an overview of the procedure. Research credibility was considered, and the ethical considerations were outlined. Finally, examples of researcher reflections on the research process were given.

CHAPTER 4: STUDY 1 - WHEN PARENTS SEPARATE AND ONE PARENT 'COMES OUT' AS LESBIAN, GAY OR BISEXUAL: SONS AND DAUGHTERS ENGAGE WITH THE TENSION THAT OCCURS WHEN THEIR FAMILY UNIT CHANGES

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The manuscript in Chapter 4 has been formatted to meet the style required for this thesis, i.e., American Psychological Association (6th ed.) and British English style. The paper as it appears in PLOS ONE is included in the Appendices (see Appendix E1).

Study 1 article: When Parents Separate and One Parent 'Comes Out' as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual: Sons and Daughters Engage with the Tension that Occurs When Their Family Unit Changes

Running title: Parental Separation and a Change in Sexual Orientation

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Abstract

The experiences of Irish sons and daughters born into heterosexually-organised parental partnerships/unions whose parents have separated and one has come out as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual (LGB) were explored through a grounded theory approach. 15 adult children (over the age of 18 years), who varied in age when their parents separated and one disclosed as LGB, were interviewed. The primary concern that emerged centred on participants having to adjust to their parents' being separated, as opposed to their parent being LGB. This involved engaging with the tension that arose from the loss of the parental union, which involved changes to the home environment and adapting to new parental partners and family units. Heightened reflection on sexual orientation and an increased sensitivity to societal LGB prejudice were specifically associated with a parent coming out as LGB. How parents negotiated disclosing the changes to others, the level of support available to parents, and how capable parents were at maintaining the parent-child relationship had an impact on the tension experienced by sons and daughters. Participants moved from initially avoiding and resisting the family changes that were occurring to gradual consonance with their altered family environments. Concluding directions for research and clinical considerations are suggested.

4.1 Introduction

This study explores the reflections of sons and daughters who have experienced a parent coming out as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual (LGB). In contrast to most studies in this area, however, we have sought to probe more broadly the range of experiences that can co-occur with the parent coming out, and in particular relating to the separation and divorce of parents and the impact of this on the child (e.g., Cartwright, 2006; Sasser, 2006).

A central argument underpinning our research is that the coming out of a parent has knock-on effects on other aspects of family life. This can include separation, divorce, a change in residence, and changes in family support. For instance, there is already a developed evidence base relating to the impact of parental separation on children with studies suggesting that experiences relating to changes in parenting, child custody, financial arrangements, extended family relationships, place of residence and daily routine have psychological effects (van-Eeden-Moorefield, Pasley, Crosbie-Burnett, & King, 2012). While the degree of stress arising varies between children, families and over time (Kelly & Emery, 2003), and the effect sizes are small for long-term negative outcomes (Lansford, 2009), some painful emotions such as a sense of loss, anger and anxiety are reported by the majority of children whose parents separate (Bacon & McKenzie, 2004; Sun & Li, 2002).

Having one parent come out can also result in children experiencing stepfamilies headed by both same-sex and heterosexual couples (Lynch, 2010), if their parents both form new partnerships and family units. They may also be confronted with societal stigmatisation that can accompany their parents' homosexuality (Patterson, 2005), although this is less of an issue in more progressive urban regions that have LGBT communities (Papernow, 2013). Where this occurs during adolescence, when there tends to be an intense focus on sexual orientation, concerns regarding peer ostracism through being perceived as 'different' can be heightened (e.g., Goldberg & Allen, 2013; Gershon, Tschann, & Jemerin, 1999).

In contrast to children reared by two LGB parents, older children and adults who experience a parent coming out have to adjust to a change in the sexual orientation of that parent. In adjusting to the reality that 'my

father is gay', or 'my mother is a lesbian', the child or adult must come to terms with the parent having same-gender sexual and romantic relationships (Tasker, 2005). The psychological and emotional well-being of the LGB parents may also play a role here – particularly to the extent that the well-being of the parent influences his/her relationship with the child. A LGB parent who has just come out and their heterosexual spouse or partner may feel isolated, and not have access to relevant support services (Berger, 2008). This said, in the long term, being out is linked to increased relationship quality between parents and children (Elizur & Mintzer, 2003; Mohr & Fassinger, 2006).

Another essential avenue for enquiry is to better understand the factors that improve resilience to negative psychological sequelae of divorce and separation. Research highlights as important the involvement of the non-residential parent (Menning, 2002), diminished parental conflict (Amato & Afifi, 2006; Bauserman, 2002) and parents supporting their children to comfortably maintain relationships with their immediate and extended kin networks (Ahrons, 2007). These factors may be particularly important if children have to manage societal LGB prejudice or heterosexism (a cognitive bias that assumes that all individuals are heterosexual in their orientation, and that this is desirable; Herek, 2003). For example, Bos and colleagues found that a strong child-parent bond helped buffer children against exposure to heterosexism and homophobia (Bos et al., 2007).

Unfortunately there is dearth of research that has considered the dual impact of separation and the change in sexual identity of a parent on children. Most studies have compared the psychosocial outcomes of children who grew up with heterosexual parents with those who were reared by one or two LGB parents (e.g., Rosenfeld, 2010; Tasker, 2002; Wainright & Patterson, 2006) or have focused on children in stepfamilies headed by same-sex couples following a heterosexual separation (Stewart, 2007). Differences in outcomes due to parental sexual orientation have been the primary focus in such studies. The accumulated knowledge of this body of literature, however, does not transfer easily to our understanding of families that were once a heterosexual combined-parent family, but subsequently

became a LGB-heterosexual separate-parent family at some point across the lifespan of the child. The changes that occur for both the heterosexual and the LGB parent, and the child's role in processing these changes is often neglected in favour of a focus on the heterosexual spouse or the LGB parent.

It is against the backdrop of this knowledge vacuum in our area of interest that we decided to explore the experiences of sons and daughters with one heterosexual and one LGB parent. Our aim was to generate an explanatory theory (a model) of how this social experience happens in the context of families. The study was guided by three research questions:

a) How do the children of parents who come out experience and adjust to this change, particularly when it co-occurs with parental separation?
b) What factors influence the adjustment process?
c) Does the age of sons and daughters at the time of separation and disclosure influence their experiences during this time?

4.2 Methods

4.2.1 Design and participants. The study had full ethical approval from the National University College Galway Ireland. All participants signed a consent form and provided informed consent (they were given an information sheet which outlined what their participation would involve and the topic areas that would be explored via interview). Confidentiality was assured as they undertook to retrospectively recount their experience of having a parent 'come out' as LGB. Interviews were conducted in Ireland and adapted Grounded Theory techniques were utilised (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The resulting theory was 'discovered, developed, and provisionally verified' Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 23) through concurrent data collection and analysis of data relating to the phenomenon of parental separation and a parental disclosure of LGB. To be included in the study participants had to (a) be 18 years of age or older (i.e., an 'adult child'), (b) have at least one lesbian, gay, or bisexual parent, and (c) have been born into heterosexually organised parental partnerships/unions. LGB parental affirmation of their sexual orientation to

the respective adult child must have occurred. Fifteen individuals participated in the study.

Twelve participants were recruited through colleagues and friends of the primary researcher informing people with an LGB parent of the research. Sons and daughters then contacted the researcher directly and expressed an interest in taking part, after receiving more information about the study. Three participants were recruited from the researcher making contacts within LGB associations; two LGB parents passed on the information to their son and daughter, who then contacted the researcher, and a third, a son with a gay father, read an information leaflet published in a LGB magazine and subsequently contacted the researcher. Data collection ceased when we reached theoretical saturation (Glaser, 1992) and new data did not change the core findings that emerged from the data analysis. A profile of each participant is presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Participant Demographic Information

ID	**Age at time of interview**	**Age at parental separation**	**Age at direct informing of sexual orientation**	**Sexual orientation as defined by sons/ daughters**	**Sexual orientation of parents**
1. Clare	34	30	30	Straight	Father: Bisexual Mother: Heterosexual
2. John	26	11/12	13/14	Straight	Father: Gay Mother: Heterosexual
3. Ashton	22	7	7	Bisexual	Father: Heterosexual Mother: Lesbian
4. Betty	52	13	19	Straight	Father: Gay Mother: Heterosexual
5. Barry	19	5	5	Straight	Father: Heterosexual Mother: Lesbian
6. Tina	30	Unsure	21	Straight	Father: Gay Mother: Heterosexual

Table 4.1 (continued)

ID	Age at time of interview	Age at parental separation	Age at direct informing of sexual orientation	Sexual orientation as defined by sons/ daughters	Sexual orientation of parents
7. Andy	28	15	16	Engages in straight relationships	Father: Heterosexual Mother: Lesbian
8. Ben	24	13	24	Engages in straight relationships	Father: Gay Mother: Heterosexual
9. Sally	30	19 (mother died)	Unsure: 24	Straight	Father: Gay Mother: Heterosexual
10. Mark	31	10/11	10	Straight	Father: Gay Mother: Heterosexual
11. Jenny	18	3	11	Straight	Father: Heterosexual Mother: "In love with a woman'
12. Tom	19	19	16	Gay	Father: Gay Mother: Heterosexual
13. Ann	20	14	14	Straight	Father: Gay Mother: Heterosexual
14. Amy	22	6/7	6/7	Bisexual	Father: Other Mother: Lesbian
15. David	21	1	8/9	80% straight; 20% other	Father: Gay Mother: Heterosexual

Eight participants were male and seven were female and they ranged from 18 to 52 years of age (mean age = 26). Data on their age when they were made aware of the change in their parents' sexual orientation and when their parents separated are provided in the Table 4.1, as are the sexual orientation identification of their parents. Eleven of the 15 were directly disclosed to by their LGB parent (five mothers, six fathers); the remaining four by their heterosexual parent (three mothers, one father). Five parental unions ended when the child's father came out as gay and five when their mother came out as lesbian. One father came out following the death of his

wife. Two marriages ended when the heterosexual mother had an extramarital affair with a man. One mother began a relationship with a woman after her heterosexual husband had an affair with a woman. One parental marriage remains intact approximately thirty years after the husband disclosed he was gay to his family.

4.2.2 Data collection and analysis. Interviews lasted between 40 and 80 minutes and were digitally recorded. All interviews were semi-structured and focused on when, and how, participants became aware their mother or father was LGB and separating, reactions to the change, changes in family relationships, supportive sources (or lack thereof), experiences of disclosing the parental changes to others, and reflections on sexual orientation in general (self and other). Following each interview the researchers reflected on the core messages that emerged during the interview process, and their context. A 'funnel-like approach' (Fassinger, 2005, p. 159) postulated by Strauss and Corbin (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) occurred, where the interviewer only moved from broader to more specific questions if specific information did not emerge naturally during the course of the interview.

Each interview was transcribed verbatim and rendered anonymous. Computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (NVivo 9) was utilised to help organise the data and facilitated a more efficient coding retrieval process. As grounded theory requires reflexivity (Malterud, 2001) we remained cognisant of the potential influence of our own beliefs and experiences on the data throughout the analytic process. We also drew on past experiences when generating hypotheses, such as the experience of the first author having a father come out as gay following the death of his wife.

Research memos were written, and discussed among the research team in an attempt to reduce potential data bias, and transcripts were reread once the analysis was complete. Epistemological reflexivity occurred by reflecting upon any assumptions made (such as gender based associations or being able to focus on a parent coming out as LGB as removed from the experience of parental separation), and the implications of assumptions on the research process (Willig, 2001).

The analysis/coding protocol utilised was guided by the Grounded Theory coding procedures outlined by Strauss and Corbin, and Corbin and Strauss (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The intense and flexible process comprised a three tier coding process involving 'open', 'axial', and 'selective' coding. Data was concurrently collected and analysed, in that the coding process revealed categories and directed further interviews. The process was overlapping and recursive. For example, open coding occurred with respect to new interview transcripts while axial coding was occurring with data from previous transcripts and new data was compared to, and often altered, existing categories.

Open coding involved line-by-line coding of the data/scripts. Key words, phrases and excerpts were assigned names (codes) based on what they represented and grouping of similar codes were collapsed into concepts and renamed. Analytical generalisability, defined as 'the utility of the concepts to explain a given situation' (Munhall, 2001, p. 219) was sought. Following the breaking down (multiple categorisation) of the data, axial coding occurred, whereby the categories were refined or clustered into key categories that subsumed several categories. This occurred through making connections or comparisons between categories, supplemented by memo writing and diagramming of the developing processes. For example, when exploring the category 'indirect disclosure' we reflected on the nature and context of participant suspicions (such as parental relationship difficulties, parental behavioural changes, and making parental comparisons), what participants did with their suspicions (non-articulation), why they took this action (familial repercussions) and possible consequences. The contextual conditions that resulted in similarities and differences among categories were also focused upon. This process enabled theoretical concepts (for example avoidance and withholding) to be explored in depth.

We adhered to the advice of Corbin and Strauss (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) in allowing the researcher to play a role in analysis and avoided focusing too methodically on analytical procedures to the detriment of the theoretical possibilities contained within the data. Selective coding involved the selection of the core category 'family reconfiguration, involving transitional tension', around which all the other significant sub-categories

were integrated and subsumed. The theoretical model was refined through discussions among the authors (which included comparing original transcript excerpts against the emerging theory) to best account for the dynamic processes involved in adjusting to parents as separated and differently orientated, as influenced by family, age and socio-political domains.

4.3 Results

The model (Figure 4.1) summarises a theory of what happened as the participants in this study processed their parents' separation and a parent coming out as LGB. It outlines a process of moving from resistance to gradually engaging with the tension that occurs leading up to, and following, the actual disclosure(s).

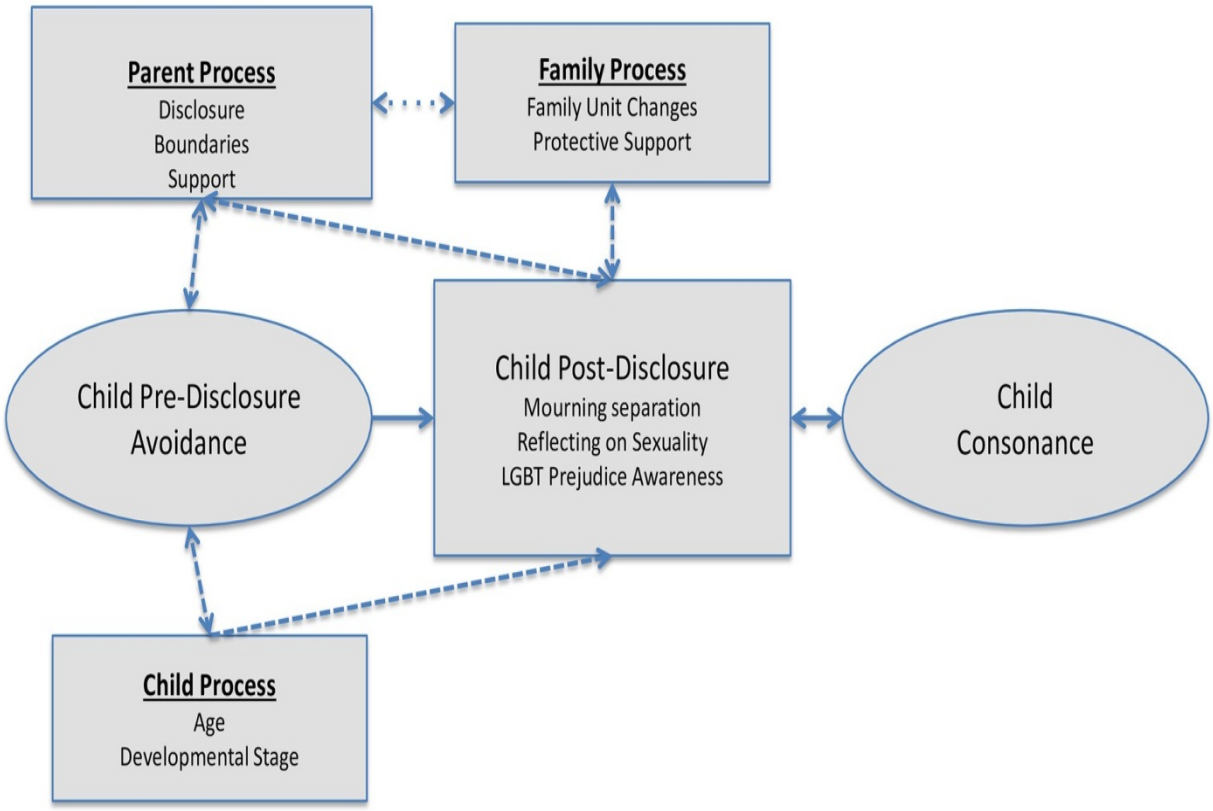

Figure 4.1 Sons and daughters engaging with tension that arises (when parents separate and one comes out as LGB): A transition from avoidance to consonance.

A parent coming out as LGB co-occurred with parental separation and the primary focus of sons and daughters was adjusting to the parental separation, and not the sexual orientation transition of their LGB parent. The process was influenced by how parents dealt with the changes and although common experiences were reported by participants, these also differed according to their age or developmental stage (namely whether they were in childhood, adolescence or adulthood at the time). Although varying degrees of stress were reported, the participants adjusted to the family unit and parental changes that occurred and reported the restoration of consonance (accord) in their family lives.

Pre-Disclosure: Avoidance

The main factors that participants recalled prior to the disclosure and separation were new parental interests and friendships and in particular acrimony and tension between their parents. While they had a sense that their parents had increasingly diverging identities, they resisted and avoided this reality. Their resistance was characterised by silence and a sense of 'not wanting to know/believe', as voicing their suspicions may have signalled the end of their parents' relationship and changed their family unit. Ann described this as:

> I suspected, but I didn't say anything to anybody. I didn't even write it down. It was just an idea but I didn't want to entertain it because it was just too big to really think about the consequences, of what it would mean for mum and dad.

Those in adulthood who lived away from the family home did not feel as exposed to the parental difficulties and were less suspicious of the imminent parental separation. Those whose parents were already separated for many years focused more on their parents' avoidance of dealing with the LGB disclosure at the interview. This is discussed below. Some participants in adolescence and adulthood had subliminal awareness that they only became aware of and "tuned into" after their parents separated. They commented on "signs" such as one of their parents having a 'new intense friendship' or in the case of their LGB parent, media coverage which had resonated with them.

The Disclosure: Parental Processes

The degree of stress and tension reported by participants seemed to be influenced by the parental disclosure process and by the extent to which their parents supported each other and were supported by others.

Parental disclosure. Although participants reported feeling varying levels of upset and shock at the disclosure, those whose parents had already separated reported more nonchalant reactions. They felt relieved by the clarity the disclosure provided, or that the disclosure was not about their parent being sick/dying. Intense emotional reactions were reported by the two participants who experienced the separation and LGB disclosure simultaneously (one in adolescence and one in adulthood). Some parents requested that they hold back from informing immediate family members that they or their spouse now identified as LGB. This was identified as stressful by participants. They attributed reasons for the non-disclosure to parental fears that they would be rejected by family members, societal prejudice and/or concern for the well-being of their loved ones. In some instances participants had to be mindful to not let the revealing information accidentally "slip", which required vigilance. For some it was the LGB parent who encouraged non-disclosure to the other parent, siblings or extended family members, e.g., one young adult's father came out to him two years before he told his wife, which he described as very isolating and "a lot to carry on his own". For others it was the heterosexual parent who did not want specific family members, such as younger step-siblings to be directly told. For example Ashton recalled:

> Dad drummed it into us, "you don't talk to Zara [half-sister] about your mother [being a lesbian]…you're not allowed talk about it", but Zara asked us one day and my brother had to say "I'm not allowed talk to you about it but you should ask your mum". Zara's really sharp. She just wanted to talk to us about it, to see where we were with the whole thing because no one was broaching it.

Feeling of guilt occurred if the withholding extended over time, as illustrated by Ben:

> She [mother] still doesn't know dad's gay....it's not my place to tell her. We've always been really close, but knowing about my dad and her not knowing, or not sure if she knows, it feels like I'm hiding something from her, it's that bit of guilt I hold. And I feel that if she knew about dad she might feel a little less guilty that she left.

Parents who had other family members come out in the past and/or who had LGB friends were perceived as being more comfortable with the disclosure, which was supportive for their children. Overall participants felt that relationships were less strained when their family became more open and comfortable with the separation and sexual orientation changes.

Parental boundaries and support. All participants felt that being directly informed of the parental separation and the disclosure of LGB was important and advised parents to recognise that children are perceptive at sensing parental difficulties, as exemplified by Sally:

> I think the way he did it was pretty good. He told us before other people knew. It must have been hard and brave to do but it was important to tell us straight away rather than other people telling us, or finding out some other way. You know when something is bothering your parents.

The process was made more difficult for participants when they had to manage significant parental acrimony. They reported feelings of discomfort, confusion and anger if their parents (heterosexual/or LGB) made negative comments to them about each other, or ex-spousal partners (mother/fathers new partner). Jenny reported,

> Dad had a very difficult time getting used to it. When I'd be out with him he'd be bad mouthing Maria [mother's partner] really inappropriately. And I loved Maria. This built up my confusion even more. I thought this is my dad and he doesn't understand why this is happening so how can I understand why this is happening. I'd then get the feeling of basically wanting to run away, and not wanting to deal with it in any way, shape or form.

For some parents, their son or daughter was one of a few with whom they could talk to about past relationship or new relationships and intimacy issues. Over time participants began confronting and questioning the appropriateness of being positioned as an intimate confident by their parent(s), as Betty explained,

> Dad started talking more openly to me about different things, like his relationship with another man. Part of me was glad that he'd be talking but at the same time, it doesn't matter whether you're gay or straight, you're my father and I don't really want to know, and so for a while it became more like a peer thing. I think both my parents shared too much with me; you shouldn't have to carry that much too early.

Participants felt relieved when they became aware that others supported their parents, personally through friends/family members and/or professionally, through counselling.

Post-Disclosure: Tension and Engagement

All the participants reported tension as they tried to accommodate and engage with practical and personal changes that occurred post-disclosure. Family unit changes occurred and the amount of support available to and within the family unit was influential. Three core experiences emerged during the process of accommodation, namely experiences of parental separation (loss), sexual orientation reflection and an increase in LGB sensitisation.

Family unit changes. The marital dissolution involved changes to the family unit and home. Sons and daughters who were in adulthood when their parents separated and one came out as LGB were likely to be more independent, living or working outside the family home and caring more for themselves. However, they still experienced changes to their family home, as one parent was now absent, there was a new parental partner in the family home or their parents had sold the family home and moved. They themselves did not have to relocate and could distance themselves somewhat from the process. They were less likely to experience stepsiblings and were more likely to be sought as a support by their parents in processing the separation and the coming out process.

Children in late adolescence or early adulthood continued to have almost equal access to both their parents, whilst younger participants spent most of their formative years with a single parent (with contact with the non-residual parent) or in a stepfamily. Many experienced two stepfamilies, as both their mother and father had subsequent relationships and children, naturally or through fostering/adoption. Sons and daughters who were younger at the time focused more on parental acrimony and the challenge of moving or living between two family homes, as Barry articulated:

> Mum and dad giving out about each other and the practicality of having to go from one house to the other every week was the most difficult thing...I always left something behind, school books, school uniforms. You'd have to have two sets of everything!

Protective support. Not feeling isolated or "alone" during the family changes was identified as important. Participants who felt they had significant support from their mother or father during the separation and disclosure process reported a reduced need for additional support(s). Those who had access to sibling support found that humorous interactions helped defuse family tension arising at family occasions. Relief and reassurance was also gleaned from talking with open minded friends who supported sexual and familial diversity. For older participants this meant some changes to friendships already in place, whereas younger participants usually only formed friendships with those perceived to be "open minded".

Whilst many participants had peers whose parents had separated or divorced, they were 'tuned into the fact' (largely as a result of the reactions of others) that having a parent come out as LGB later in life seemed more unique. Becoming naturally aware that their family situation was far more common than they had first realised was named as supportive. Those who were younger when the family changes occurred had more access to support in this regard; many had spent time in the company of other children with same-sex parents or one LGB parent. Older adolescents and adults were less likely to know other sons or daughters with a LGB parent. They reported that until participating in the study they had not met another who had a parent come out later in life.

Some participants accessed professional support to manage difficult thoughts and feelings which resulted from significant parental acrimony. Others did so as a result of being the only family member disclosed to by their LGB parent for a prolonged period of time, or from feeling isolated in general. Such support was identified as helpful and needed. Support from their extended family made the family changes easier and seemed to reinforce a sense of normality and acceptance that the participants were seeking, as outlined by Bernie:

> The attitude of my family helped me the most. They made me feel that this is ok, this is normality; this is just the way it is. Nobody in the family pulled me aside and said “this is not right,” “you’re different from everyone else”. Everyone carrying on as normal was great because I didn’t at that time want to stand out, I wanted to blend in.

Participants felt protective of their parents and angry with extended family members (grandparents, aunts, uncles) if they were perceived to ‘reject' or ‘blame’ their parent for breaking up the family unit (through making negative statements, ceasing communication, or metaphorical acts such as removing family photographs from walls).. They also tended to avoid such family members where possible or were vigilant in the information they shared with them.

Mourning the parental separation. Participants perceived their parents as being fundamentally “the same” before and following the separation and disclosure, irrespective of their sexual orientation. However, participants still had to adjust to their parents being separate and single. Mourning the loss of the parental union was experienced by participants for several years after their parents parted. For some additional loss also occurred when parents repartnered and these relationships subsequently broke up after many years, or a new parental partner died.

Although participants reported some initial discomfort in seeing their parents (both heterosexual and LGB) with new partners, they wanted their parents to have appropriate parental partnerships or friendships so they would not feel sad or lonely. For very young children parental repartnering was less of an accommodation, as they had no or limited memories of their

parents as single. Seeing a parent form new relationships was more of an adjustment for participants who were near or in adulthood, after a lifetime of seeing their parents as a couple. The word “awkward” was frequently used when recalling meeting new parental partners. They expressed concerned for their parents’ mental and physical health, and sadness in seeing their parents adjust to the separation and to being single. Adult sons and daughters had had more collective and parental memories to explore and reflect on. Some reported feelings of resistance to looking at old family photographs, as expressed by Tina: “I feel sadness looking back at family photos and seeing us all together as a family with mum and dad and pictures of their honeymoon or their wedding. I’m really sad just for both of them.” Sadness in having to question their parents’ marriage was coupled with the belief that “they were good memories, and real moments” (Clare). Participants empathised with their parent in coming out later in life. Many felt a lack of family or religious acceptance formed the root of their parent not coming out earlier, while some felt the decision of their parent’s disclosure was unintended or accidental, but inevitable.

Participants also expressed varying degrees of anger towards the parent who was perceived to initiate the family break-up (heterosexual or LGB) through having an affair, or leaving. Sadness at the family dissolution was coupled with a perception that their parents would not have been fully satisfied if they had remained together, as exemplified by Ann:

> I think most children of broken homes or spilt-up families would think things like “it would be pretty good if they were together”, but it also wouldn’t have been good, cause they would have been unhappy. Even if they weren’t shouting and screaming there’d be tension and something unfulfilled.

The participants in the main avoided asking their parents if they had had an extramarital affair, or when their LGB parent knew they were LGB. For some this was unarticulated due to the possible implications this could have on their memories of the parental union, and the heterosexual parent, but in general the topic was avoided as participants did not want to reflect on their parents’ sex lives, as illustrated by Andy: “I don’t really want to think about or explore my parent’s sexual past, or present! Who does?!”

Sexual orientation reflection. Having a parent come out as LGB resulted in enhanced reflection on sexual orientation differences. This, in addition to an increased awareness of LGB prejudice, was unique to the process of a parent coming out. Following the dis closure, adult offspring wondered about the sexual orientation of others, and of potential partners. Participants who went through adolescence following the disclosure reflected more on their own sexual orientation. They recalled feeling some confusion and curiosity regarding their orientation, especially as their parents differed in this regard. Participants who were very young when their parent came out tended to devote less focused thought on the sexual orientation of others. Differing sexual orientation was nothing novel. For example, Mark reported, "people's sexuality is such a non-issue for me because I grew up around homosexuality....It's never really held any mystery for me, I mean, not to trivialise it, but to me it's like do people like tea or coffee." As participants became increasingly comfortable with sexual orientation differences they reported spending spent less time focused on sexual orientation in general.

LGB prejudice sensitisation. Having an LGB parent resulted in an increased awareness of societal prejudice, including heterosexism and homophobia for all participants. Although they made others aware that their parents had separated with little reservation, they tended to be more cautions and sometimes avoided informing others of the LGB parental orientation. They found the reactions of others to the disclosure supportive in general, however, vigilance occurred regarding what was "acceptable" in their social environment and social situations were often assessed before decisions regarding disclosure were made. Many limited the information they shared with those who may have viewed the orientation of their LGB parent as bizarre, shocking or problematic. Limited disclosure occurred particularly for participants within their work environments and during their school age years where they felt more pressure to 'blend in'. David explained:

> It wasn't that I was ashamed, I'm very proud of my dad. It was more that I knew that it wouldn't fly because I came from the country where some people can be very narrow minded……

> So if I'd told anyone in school they would have been like, "what? That's bizarre". It might have affected me and dad socially.

No participant wanted their parent to be treated or judged differently due to their orientation. They reported feeling 'protective' and 'proud' of both their parents as a result of societal LGB prejudice. References were made to being attuned to heterosexist or homophobic comments and a sense of resulting frustration emerged at times. For example, Amy commented:

> I'm quite protective of mum and I get really, really annoyed when people are in any way homophobic. I wouldn't be mean or feel attacked. But I'd feel annoyed with that person and not want anything to do with them.

Feelings of concern were also expressed towards their parents' new partners if they did not seem to have their parent's best interests at heart, e.g., were perceived as "gold diggers" or were "taking advantage" of their parent(s). This level of worry decreased over time, as participants saw supportive parental relationships develop. They found it increasingly difficult to tolerate heterosexist attitudes from friends or colleagues, and distanced themselves from, or avoided such company or sometimes engaged in 'educational' dialogue or debates, striving for balance in this regard, as exemplified by Ashton:

> Now I find I'm confident enough that if somebody would have a problem I would challenge them, you know not in a nasty way....if somebody said you know gay people shouldn't be allowed to have children or whatever, I would try and give another point of view, or I'll remove myself from the situation.

With reference to the culture in which this study took place, which has been a traditional one (Meaney, 2010), participants believed that Irish society has become more tolerant of sexual orientation differences and sexual fluidity in recent years. They felt this has made their life and the life of their LGB parent "easier". While older participants were more fixed in defining their sexual orientation as "definitely" heterosexual or gay, sexual orientation was viewed more as a fluid concept by younger participants, as articulated by Andy:

> I've tended to think more in terms of people being fluid. I think society is the thing that imposes us as being one thing or another. I don't think anyone can be completely 100% straight; ultimately you never know at the end of the day. There could be one person of the same sex that you just find irresistible!

Consonance

Positive outcomes and relationship healing between parents, extended family members and child-parent relationships was reported by the majority of participants. In the few cases where parental acrimony and family difficulties continued to exist, participants felt that they were able to manage on-going issues with greater understanding and confidence, and at a greater distance. Mark surmised, "I feel a lot of love for both my parents. I used to get angry, but after everything that's happened, they love me. I've given it enough energy. I'm more interested in building my life and looking forward." All the participants acknowledged the importance of support that was available naturally to them, as Ann highlighted: "Talking naturally with friends and family helped....you don't want it to be like an AA group sitting around, "Hi I'm Ann, my parents have broken up; Dad's gay!"

Due to the retrospective nature of the study many references were made to the passage of time ("time to adjust"; "transition time", "time as a healer") in accommodating changes and in making what was new familiar. Time seemed to allow participants and the significant persons in their lives to become increasing comfortable with altered family reconfigurations. Participants reported feelings of love and pride towards their parents, who exist in a society where they feel some prejudice towards LGB persons remains. Although the transition from the 'traditional' family unit to having blended family unit(s) and an LGB parent was a difficult process, involving additional, and for some continuing challenges of varying degrees, overall consonance occurred.

4.4 Discussion

The conceptual model we developed (see Fig.1) represents a process of adjustment by sons and daughters who have experienced a parental separation and a parent coming out as LGB. Regardless of age, the primary concern for participants centred on the transition from the nuclear family to

separated parents and blended family units. The model outlines the movement from wanting to avoid family unit change to engaging with the loss of the parental unit (involving altered family environments and parental relationships) and finally attaining consonance in having separated and differently sexually orientated parents. The theory arising from this study has similarities with previous grounded theory studies which highlight contextual factors and loss in post-divorce families and the importance of positive parent-child communication in family adjustment (e.g., T. Afifi & Keith, 2009; Jamison, Coleman, Ganong, & Fiestman, 2014). However, unlike the previous studies, our model also incorporates the experience of a parent coming out as LGB.

An increase in tension was shown to occur for sons and daughters who experienced significant parental acrimony or isolation arising from parental non-disclosure (where parents disclosed to the participant rather than their marriage partner or siblings). Participants strove to reduce the tension that arose through strategies such as empathy, confrontation and resistance, which is in keeping with the literature on tension or dissonance aversion (e.g., McConnell & Brown, 2010; Stone & Fernandez, 2008). The experiences specifically associated with a parent coming out, namely increased sensitivity to societal LGB prejudice and reflection on sexual orientation, although minor, caused additional sources of tension at times. The 'unusualness' of a parent coming out seemed influenced by participant, family and community exposure to, and acceptance of, LGB diversity. In general, overall adjustment was reported by participants following the family unit and parental changes.

Our findings suggest that the manner in which parents and the family as a whole manage the changes and the support that they receive have an influence on the adjustment process of sons and daughters. This is comparable to other studies which highlight the link between how a family as a whole adapts to change and adjustment in young people (Heatherington & Lavner, 2008). As expected protective factors, such as positive parental support, reduced parental conflict and comfortably maintained child-parent and extended kin relationships (Ahrons, 2007; Jamison et al., 2014; Menning, 2002) facilitated a smoother transition for sons and daughters

during the adjustment process. These factors seem even more important where societal sexual prejudice exists. Parents who come out later in life, and their spouses, are less likely to be involved in LGB or heterosexual (straight spouse, for example) family support organisations or to know others in similar situations (Berger, 2008). It may be that feelings of parental protectiveness evoked by LGB prejudice strengthens the child-parent relationship, and possibly enhances resilience through this connection. Clearly, enabling family members to access support where required is important in family adjustment, as situations in which individuals perceive themselves as being 'alone' in processing a societal stigma can lead to negative psychological consequences (Frable, Platt, & Hoey, 2004), including depression and anxiety (Brownell et al., 2005; Meyer, 2003).

We showed that parental non-disclosure to others resulted in vigilance and isolation, whilst parental openness enhanced child-parent communication. Immediate and extended family disclosure and support impacted positively on the family adjustment as a whole, which supports the association between disclosure or 'outness', positive self-acceptance (Herek, 2003) and enhanced child-parent relationship (Elizur & Mintzer, 2003; Mohr & Fassinger, 2006). Our findings suggest that the ability of sons and daughters to avail of, and access parental and family support decreases when they feel unable to tell significant family members that their mother or father is LGB. This may result in a greater need for professional support as a consequence of withholding information from others.

Our findings support the premise that the age and developmental stage of sons and daughters at the time of separation and disclosure can result in experiential differences. For example, we found that sexual self-questioning was more salient for participants during adolescence (which is in keeping with the literature, e.g., Kuvalanka, Leslie, & Radina, 2014), whereas older, adult children reflected more on the orientation of others following a parental disclosure of LGB. Mourning the loss of the parental union was also more intense for older participants, as they had more memories of their parents as a couple. They were also more likely to be a source of support to their parents than their younger counterparts. The

current study conflates and combines several research questions which may be better explored singly, such as possible age related differences for sons and daughters when a parent comes out before or during or after separating from their partner. Recruiting larger samples of sons and daughters and exploring their experiences at differing developmental stages, including adulthood, may add additional depth to the current findings.

An important contribution of the current work is the finding that the process of parental separation and a parent coming out as LGB has different trajectories. Some parental relationships ended as a result of either the heterosexual or the LGB parent having an affair, or as a result of a spousal death. Some unions ceased when a spouse came out as LGB; some parents were aware that they differed in their sexual orientation before they married, but sought other relationships over time. Many transitioned into stepfamily units following the disclosure. While the literature is substantial on stepfamilies (Braithwaite & Baxter, 2006; Kuvalanka, Leslie, & Radina, 2014; van-Eeden-Moorefield et al., 2012), it can be disjointed in focusing more on the transition from nuclear to gay or lesbian stepfamilies or LGB single families. It would appear that consideration needs to be given to the fact that children whose parents separate and one parent comes out often experience both gay or lesbian stepfamilies and heterosexual stepfamilies. Educators and therapists should be mindful of any societal prejudice which family members may experience (as social stigma can accompany gay stepfamilies; Crosbie-Burnett & Helmbrecht 1993) and be cognisant of the variety of family forms and altering sexual orientation(s) that can occur, uniquely, over time.

The limitations of this study are acknowledged. Our insights and conclusions are drawn from participants in Ireland who were in a position to speak about their experiences, and who had generally adjusted positively to their family changes. The study excluded the children of transgender parents, which should be included in further studies. Furthermore our sample size was small. However, we reached theoretical saturation quickly as we analysed and collected the data in tandem (Glaser & Holton, 2007). Despite the variability of ages and family backgrounds the participant reports showed high convergence with each other and an explanatory theory

of the social processes involved emerged. Although the small sample size and methodology prohibits the generalisation of findings, replicability is not relevant given that the focus of theory generation is to offer a new perspective on a given situation which may guide further exploration and focus (Suddaby, 2006). While the findings need to be interpreted with caution given the respective nature of the data (which can be influenced by memory bias or how participants felt at the time of interview), the reflective accounts enabled the formation of, and insight into, an experiential process of adjustment.

In conclusion, some sons and daughters in Ireland experience both parental separation and a mother or father disclosing a change in his or her sexual orientation. This involves varying degrees of tension as the family unit changes and associated processes are accommodated. Where support is sought, the model developed herein should help clinicians and educators have a better understanding of the factors which can exacerbate or reduce familial stress, and to respond sensitively to the complexities inherent in this journey (Bigner & Wetchler, 2012; Goldberg & Allen, 2013).

CHAPTER 5: STUDY 2 - THE FEMALE SPOUSE: A PROCESS OF SEPARATION WHEN A HUSBAND 'COMES OUT' AS GAY

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The manuscript in Chapter 5 has been formatted to meet the style required for this thesis, i.e., American Psychological Association (6th ed.) and British English style. The paper as it appears in PLOS ONE is included in the Appendices (see Appendix E2).

Study 2 article: The Female Spouse: A Process of Separation when a Husband 'Comes Out' as Gay

Running title: The Female Spouse when a Husband 'Comes Out' as Gay

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Abstract

This study investigated the stories of heterosexual women who experienced a husband coming out as gay and a consequential marital separation. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used. Loss, anger, spousal empathy and concerns regarding societal prejudice were reported. Additional stress was experienced when others minimised the experience due to the gay sexual orientation of their husband. Experiencing positive communication with their husband during and after the disclosure aided the resolution of the emotional injury experienced by them. They all eventually 'let go' of their husband. This involved a process of reconceptualising the self as separated. Findings indicate the importance of supporting women to re-focus on their needs during and following marital dissolution. The importance of non-judgemental support for marital loss, rather than a focus on the gay sexual orientation of the spouse, was highlighted.

5.1 Introduction

When a husband 'comes out' as gay (accepting and revealing oneself as gay), it impacts the family unit. Yet little is known about the experiences of the heterosexual spouse. Marriages where one partner comes out face the potential stigma of a 'failed marriage' in addition to the possibility of homophobia (Herek, 2015). Stress and anxiety regarding the implications of a gay identity being at odds with their religious faith or community of the couple can occur (Haldeman, 2015; Mark, 2008). The altered sexual orientation identity of a spouse may include changes in behaviour, group affiliation, personal values and norms (Buchanan et al., 2010; Diamond, 2006). Moreover, a fear of rejection by family, friends, or a religious community can result in suppression and isolation, especially in more conservative or homophobic environments (Pietkiewicz, Kołodziejczyk-Skrzypek, 2016; Van Zyl et al., 2017).

It seems reasonable to assume that the experience of a spouse having same-sex desires resonates with families within which extra-marital affairs occur (e.g., husbands with other women). For the wife, these would include distress at the rupture in the emotional bond with her husband (McCarthy & Wald, 2013) and feelings of betrayal (Vaughan, 2003). More broadly, concern for children, emotional turmoil and loss, financial uncertainty, changing family and social ties and loss of, and desire for, companionship, may arise as they do in any marital crises (Atwood & Seifer, 2007; Wilkinson, Littlebear, & Reed, 2012). Marital dissolution rates are high across Western countries (Bracke, Coleman, Symoens, & Van Praag, 2010) and support is important in negating the negative health consequences of separation or divorce, if that is the outcome (Idstad et al., 2015).

Some couples may wish to maintain their marriage and seek to accommodate the spouse's same-sex romantic or sexual attractions (Hernandez et al., 2011). A lifelong marital commitment perspective assumes the dedication of each spouse to the other and acknowledges that marital conflict can often occur (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Sexual needs may be met outside of the marriage with an agreement to engage in separate sexual relationships (non-monogamous), adding another layer of complexity to the situation (Buxton, 2001). While a consensual non-monogamous

marriage can be a preferable path for some couples, others may engage in hidden infidelity, and have secret, anonymous sex with multiple partners (Corley & Kort, 2006). Such secret infidelities may strain the emotional well-being and physical health of the spouses (Lehmiller, 2009).

The loss of a happy marriage in later life may be experienced akin to a spousal bereavement, with associated rates of depressive symptoms, especially for those who value their marital identity (Stack & Scourfield, 2015; Zisook et al., 1997). However, some studies suggest that required support may be perceived as unavailable, due to family or religious homophobic beliefs (Hays & Samuels, 1998; Reygan & Moane, 2014). Yet such support is important for couples in acute distress to aid their processing of the disclosure and reduce feelings of social isolation and depression (Slepian, Masicampo, Toosi, & Ambady, 2012).

To date, many of the assumptions and assertions of the heterosexual spouse are based on disparate sources of information from the literature on the experiences of a spouse 'coming out'. The findings in this niche area are largely unsystematic and tend to comprise personal or anecdotal case descriptions, or when empirical are primarily descriptive. A small group of published studies, for example those carried out by Amity Buxton (e.g., Buxton 2006a; Buxton, 2006b) have provided insight into common issues reported by the heterosexual spouse, such as marital challenges, isolation, concern for their children and self, and crises of identity and belief systems. Where couples decide to continue to reside together, it can be difficult to know what should be disclosed by the couple, and at what stage this disclosure should occur (Grever, 2012). Further research is required to explore the experiences of the heterosexual spouse, and how a marital dissolution following a same-sex affair differs from that of a heterosexual affair.

This study sought to expand on the existing literature, and on research carried out by the authors, which explored the experiences of husbands who came out as gay in the context of a heterosexual marriage (publication forthcoming), and children who had a parent come out as lesbian, gay or bisexual. The latter study indicated that the primary focus of the participants was in adjusting to their parental separation (Daly,

MacNeela, & Sarma, 2015). In this study, the lived experiences of mothers and wives, whose voices may appear more silent in the context of a disclosure of a gay sexual orientation of their spouse, were explored. An interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach was adopted in seeking to understand the unique experiences of having a husband disclose as gay following a marriage that produced children. The IPA methodology focused on how each person made sense of this specific phenomenon (J. Smith & Osborn, 2008).

5.2 Methods

The researchers were interested in how wives made sense of their personal experience of their husband coming out to them as gay. IPA was the chosen methodology due to its ability to offer insights into how people make sense of a lived experience (J. Smith, 2009), especially in the context of a significant life change (i.e., the disclosure of a gay sexual orientation that changed the marital relationship) and a focus on the self (as wife, mother, individual). IPA focused attention on how the women recalled, retrospectively, the significant transition and disruption that occurred in their marriage (a phenomenological process; J. Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). It allowed the researchers to try to interpret the participants trying to make sense of their experiences (a double hermeneutic process; J. Smith & Osborn, 2008). IPA also accommodated the individuality of each person through an in-depth analysis of each singular case (an idiographical process; J. Smith et al., 1995).

5.2.1 Participants. All women had (a) experienced a husband come out as gay, and (b) had a child or children with their husband. Data collection ended after completing the ninth interview due to the richness of the individual cases. IPA sampling tends to be small (usually fewer than 10 participants) and seeks homogenous groups of participants. The focus is on the individual (Alase, 2017). As IPA is idiographic in nature, it focuses on the unique, personal experiences comprising the phenomenon under investigation before analysing convergences and divergences between cases (J. Smith et al., 2009). The study focuses on the accounts of nine participants whose contextual information is presented in Table 5.1. Names have been changed to protect their identity. They ranged in age from 49 to

62 years (mean age = 54.5 years) and all identified as heterosexual. Six were Irish, one was Scottish and two were Canadian. They were aged between 18 and 25 years when they got married and the mean marital length was 26 years. Their children at time of interview ranged in age from 13 to 41 years (mean age = 25.5 years). The mean length of time from disclosure to marital separation was seven years. Four were divorced, three had commenced the legal process of divorcing and two were 'separated'. All the participants had to make sense of what the disclosure meant for their marriage and themselves. This was the key focus of the study.

Table 5.1

Contextual Information of Participants

Pseudonym	**Age**	**Marriage length**	**Time from disclosure to separation**
Mary	54	30-35 years	5 years
Helen	50	20-25 years	2 years
Sarah	49	15-20 years	7 years
Rose	62	20-25 years	5 month
Lorraine	51	20-25 years	6 years*
Patty	60	20-24 years	29 years
Grace	50	20-24 years	14 years
Lucinda	58	30-35 years	7 years
Christine	57	30-35 years	5 months

Note.* Lorraine separated from her husband six years ago. They continue to cohabitate.

5.2.2 Procedure. Full institutional ethical approval was obtained from the National University of Ireland Galway (NUIG) Research Ethics Committee before the study commenced. An email detailing the recruitment details of the study were sent to members of the Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, and the Straight Spouse Network (SSN). Two participants heard about the study from their ex-husband, three via word-of-mouth, one was informed of the study by a therapist, and three (non-Irish) responded to information disseminated via the SSN. The participants volunteered, making contact with the first author directly by telephone or email. The entire research was discussed with each participant who received an information sheet about the study. They completed a consent form prior to being interviewed, and consented to the use of their

anonymised interviews for analysis and publication. They were interviewed in their homes when it suited them.

The first author completed the interviews and the analysis coding. Each interview was audio recorded. Six were face-to-face in Ireland and the remainder (n=3) abroad, via Skype. Interviews lasted up to two hours (modal length = 80 minutes) and were open-ended. In line with the IPA approach, questions focused on each unique experience of having a husband 'come out' and the consequential changes that occurred. Topics focused on during the interview included: ◦Initial sexual experience(s); ◦Experience of marriage before the disclosure; ◦Any signs/awareness of changes in the marriage and/or husband; ◦The disclosure; ◦Consequential impact on the family unit and self; ◦Telling others; ◦The most difficult thing(s); ◦Sources of support; ◦Subsequent relationships; ◦Current relationship with husband or ex-husband.

Critical self-reflection (reflexivity) is required in IPA, as researcher presuppositions, experiences and beliefs can both inhibit and augment the interpretations of the experiences of the participants. The first author has a father who identifies as gay. She drew on her experience as a psychologist in interviewing people about potentially sensitive topics, and was cognisant of the potential impact of her own assumptions on the research process. Reflective memos made during the study were carefully considered as the interpretative process proceeded. They also served as a method of debriefing. A further strategy used was to discuss, confidentially, the (anonymised) arising themes and individual differences within the accounts at supervisory research meetings. The second author is a cisgendered male who was socialised into traditional Irish culture dominated by the Catholic Church and the lifelong pattern of marriage described by the participants in this study. He has also seen how this model has been questioned in recent decades. He has extensive experience of working on qualitative projects in which participants reflect on traumatic life changing circumstances that cause them to question their basic assumptions. He has developed a particular interest in sexual health research in recent years and promotes culture change based on open discussion of preferences within a culture of mutual respect. The third author is a married heterosexual male of mixed

Irish-Indian heritage. He has worked closely with the LGBT community on issues relating to homophobic bullying, mental health, peer support and victimisation.

Jonathan Smith's IPA evaluation guide (J. Smith, 2009) informed the iterative and inductive analysis process. Each audio recording was transcribed and read several times to gain a more holistic understanding of the depth of the account. The primary author transcribed each interview and analysed the nuances of each account (a case-by-case analysis). This was followed by a phase of comparing and contrasting the accounts. Initially, meaning units or codes were identified by reviewing the transcripts, line-by-line open coding, noting thoughts next to the corresponding text, and writing a description of the experience (focusing on emotions, phrases, places, metaphors, actions). Emerging themes were established for each case. Descriptions were translated into psychologically relevant meanings by moving back and forth from data to meanings, while also integrating the researcher memos and descriptive interpretations. Themes and subthemes began to emerge.

The second and third author reviewed the transcripts and the arising thematic interpretations. The iterative process was discussed collaboratively at supervisory meetings, and reflections on the different nuances arising from (each and across) the accounts occurred. The codes were examined for relevancy with regard to the research question, and discarded if deemed irrelevant. Conflicting perspectives were utilised by exploring the contexts of differing experiences, and constructing a portrayal of how the phenomenon was also experienced, individually (Creswell, 1998). Broader themes were identified, drawing upon psychological concepts and examining the nuances of each superordinate theme. The main themes were solidified into a final structure that seemed to best summarise the data. Participant quotations were used to illustrate the essence of the themes being recounted. Care was taken to include a sufficient range of sampling when evidencing each theme, in accordance with IPA guidelines (J. Smith, 2011; Brocki & Wearden, 2006). Finally, an account summarising the interlinking activity of the researchers and the participants' interpretations was produced. The aim was to provide an understanding of how the participants

experienced key factors that emerged – making sense of a husband disclosing as gay.'

5.3 Results

A summary of the main results is given in Table 5.2. Three main themes emerged: 'Committing to lifelong marriage', 'Marital floundering and limbo' and 'Having to move on'.

Table 5.2

Superordinate and subordinate themes

Thematic Number	**Thematic Name**
Theme 1	Committing to lifelong marriage
Theme 2	Marital floundering and limbo: being partially married, partially separated
Subtheme 2.1	*Loss, anger and empathy*
Subtheme 2.2	*The fear of stigma*
Subtheme 2.3	*Adjusting the marital script*
Theme 3	Having to move on (living apart)
Subtheme 3.1	*The marital end: crossing the Rubicon*
Subtheme 3.2	*Self-integration: 'salvage what's good and move on separately'*

Theme 1: Committing to Lifelong Marriage

This short theme is an overview of the participants' hopes for, and experience of, their marriage prior to their marital difficulties. Marriage fitted the idealised picture they had imagined and believed during their youth. Phrases such as falling "head over heels in love", or falling "'hook, line and sinker" exemplified the deep love they recalled towards their husband. Nearly all (n=8) surrendered their careers outside the home to take charge of their role as home maker and wife. Rose described how as a young adult she believed she had found her match and remembered proudly herself being competent in her role of mother and wife: "I followed my heart's desire and when I was 18 we married. I loved the life of a housewife and mother. I truly thought that marriage didn't come any better than what we had. Everyone admired our marriage and I was in love and felt love.

The religious background of the participants (eight identified as Catholic, one as non-defined) reinforced the assumption that "you married for life". Patty described how she was happy to conform to social and

religious traditions to please her parents, to legitimise sex and have children. In keeping with her faith, which viewed premarital sex as sinful, she (and participants n=7) remained chaste until her wedding night. She dedicated herself to her marriage; it was both a splendid reality and serious business: "I was a traditional Catholic. What lay ahead - marriage, sex, kids- seemed thrilling. Only the wanton ones were having sex before marriage back then. That was the prevailing culture. I married and vowed to stick with my husband."

All the participants initially presumed their marriage would continue to develop over their life. Most either gave up work (n=6) or reduced their career hours (n=3) when they married and had children. Helen recalled a lifetime of experiences with her husband, namely establishing a home, having children, and supporting each other in times of spousal ill-health or following the death of significant loved ones. She surrendered her career outside the home to take charge of her role as home maker and wife. Her use of the term 'golden years' seems to reinforce the hope that the idealised picture would continue and she could make the most out her marriage later in life, travelling as a celebratory reward: "I gave up work and managed our home. We were married for over 20 years and went through everything together. I thought I'd spend my retirement with him, my golden years, travelling the world, visiting our children."

Theme 2: Marital Floundering and Limbo (Being Partially Married, Partially Separated)

Following a lengthy period of relative marital stability, unexplained tension and a sense of disconnection with their husband was described. Helen noted changes in her husband's mood ("he seemed more switched off and agitated."). A distancing within their sexual relationship was a worrying indicator that there was something wrong: "When we eventually did have sex I remember thinking he was more athletic, that there was something different. And one night when he didn't come home I realised that in the back of my mind I asked 'did he pick up a rent boy?' I had it, but I didn't want to think about it." Her husband's new found athletic potency contrasted with the inactive and weakened connection between them. She started debating her husband's sexuality internally, but 'did not want to believe it'

and relegated the thought that there was something wrong to the back of her mind.

2.1 Loss, anger and empathy. The narrative threads of the disclosure sequence were ones of increasing intensity of feeling, and progression into the verbal confrontation after the disclosure. Despite their suspicions, the disclosure was experienced by them as abrupt, dramatic, penetrating and dislocating. Emotional pain was felt bodily: "It felt like I'd been kicked in the stomach. I felt ice-cold" (Christina); "It was like a slap to the face" (Grace). Words such as "zombie", "autopilot" and "blurry" conveyed a sense of shock and a loss of connection. Participants described something akin to an existential crisis: the realisation that the 'secure home and marriage' was paradoxically unstable, causing significant distress. Nearly all did not want to be separated, nor for their husbands to want intimacy with others. Many years later, the loss of her marriage still triggers painful tears for Mary: "When he told me the tears came and they just did not stop. I was absolutely devastated. Heart-broken. I still love him [upset]. We were married for over 30 years. This wasn't the plan. I never thought I'd be on my own. That was the hardest part."

Mary, and all the participants, expressed anger towards various significant others including family, friends, God, and society at the marital breakdown. However, she felt empathy towards him. Seeing and hearing her husband 'struggle' to accept his sexuality quelled feelings of anger that arose towards him, and also forced her to accept his gay identity. Even after the separation, echoes of empathy continue – although she is angry at her loss, her frustration towards her husband is tempered by a continuing concern for his well-being: "He told me he had gone up to the attic with a rope. He was going to hang himself. I never showed him anger because I didn't think he deserved it. But God I have been angry, because he put me in this situation. I still care for him and want him to be happy." This effect was evident across the narratives, including anger and disappointment directed towards the self: "How could I have been so stupid; He can't help it." (Helen)

Patty's process of finding meaning in the origins of her husband's gay identity resulted in an understanding that the disclosure was not, fully, her husband's fault. She believed his reasons for not disclosing his same-sex

desires when they wed, which he shared with her. This appeared to enable a continued dialogue between them. Rather than focusing on her choices and constructing an anticipated future life as separated, Patty initially focused on her husband:

> He told me he had talked to the GP [doctor] about having thoughts about men before we got married. He said 'don't worry that's quite common. Once you get married and you start having sex with her all of that will just fade away'. He thought, 'That's what I want to hear'. To be gay for him it was a hellish sin. It wasn't all his fault; society is a lot to blame.

In contrast, Grace's husband did not discuss the origins of his gay sexual orientation with her, and he believed that his extra-marital affairs were unrelated to their marriage. She expressed anger towards him, which increased when he 'outed' his gay identity to others (and their troubled marriage), without her knowledge or consent, and which she considered a betrayal of their union. The disclosure threatened her own assumed safe world. Grace did not want to be a divorcee. She tried to make him accountable for his actions ("being with guys is having an affair"), but he had stopped listening. The resultant hostile silence between them was never repaired.

> He never talked to me about why, or thought of my feelings. I was 'outed' by him. He told everybody in work. I will admit I have been very nasty and angry. I felt so betrayed. I tried to explain to him, 'it's not that you are gay; it was your behaviour'. But he wouldn't hear me. It is difficult to be separated and not want to be.

Grace's feeling of anger was further compounded when their marriage counsellor focused on her reasons for staying in her marriage; 'He kept asking me 'why didn't you leave years ago?'. The participants, like Grace, felt frustrated when others advised them to separate: 'He didn't get it or understand how hard it was to have young children and not want them to be torn between two parents'. Her perception of her counsellor as judgemental resulted in her disengagement from therapy; no alternative 'script' was offered. Like Grace, the majority of the participants (n=7) sought professional support with their husband at the time of the disclosure, but

they did not find it helpful. They were often urged to 'move on', which was not in keeping with their desires, or were offered sexual advice that focused on their husband's sexuality. This resulted in further frustration.

Nearly all the participants (n=8) hoped that their marriage could be maintained. Having very young children, unwell adult children, financial concerns, and spousal ill health significantly lengthened the separation process. Furthermore, it was difficult to consider separating when the couple communicated to one another that they did not want this to occur (*n* = 7).

2.2 The fear of stigma. Love and empathy coupled with grief and the shattered 'marital sanctuary' seemed to instigate the participants' constant worry about their family and their future self. Anxiety resulted from the negative social stigma they had traditionally associated with divorce and homosexuality. Helen worried "will it turn people? Will everybody be looking at me, thinking it was a marriage of convenience?" She feared the disclosure would result in a negative evaluation of herself and her family, subsequently resulting in social exclusion: "being the talk of the town". Sarah worried about her children being impacted by the societal prejudice– she was reared in an era where the cultural taboo of divorce and homosexuality were societal sins: "I was so worried about the kids. That they would be teased. Fellas can be cruel and say things like 'feck off your father's a faggot'. There are a lot of people in heterosexual relationships who stay together for the family life. In our era you got married for life." The stigmatising aspect of the marital separation is evoked, with the added element of societal and sexual prejudice. Sarah's reluctance to separate was further exacerbated by protective, parental feelings that arose when she thought of others possibly negatively evaluating, or teasing, her children.

All of the participants shared their need to be understood by significant others while experiencing the marital dissolution. However, validation of their feelings initially from others was often limited, or unavailable. Patty highlighted the stress she experienced in withholding her marital difficulties from friends: "I couldn't be with my friends and not be fully open. It felt like daggers. You'd be there smiling and pretending. We used to share everything. So it was easier to not meet them." The deception and pain appeared to reinforce each other, making it harder and harder to

face what was really going on. Withholding information for Patty meant she had to think of what she was trying to hide (marital problems) and deliver a convincing performance of the opposite (marital normality). The pain of pretending felt something akin to being stabbed. That was unbearable and so, for a few years, she avoided her peers.

2.3 Adjusting the marital script. With their desire to remain married, and the stigma they internalised about the prospect of change, the participants described the process of becoming separated as slow and incremental. Nearly all (n=8) did not sleep in the same bed again once they or their husband had disclosed about being intimate with another man. While most participants described themselves as dedicated to their husband, three participants, and most of the husbands, engaged in extra marital affairs, which provided some degree of escape and enabled the marriage to continue.

Patty tried to tolerate a more consensual non-monogamous marriage so as to avoid the family being a 'broken home'. However, sexual relations outside the marriage caused further confusion and dissonance for her given her religious beliefs. In this extract there is a strong sense of the internal 'whirling' and ruminative distress that she experienced:

> I was in a sea of confusion. One part of me was saying 'God closes a door and opens a window', and this is my window. On the other hand my upbringing was telling me 'you can't do that; what are you doing?!' We had done our deal - we would stay together and be a priority for each other. But he reneged on that deal. But he still needed me.

Patty tried to maintain a pre-disclosure version of their marriage which was transactional ("our deal") and caring ("he needed me"). The extramarital affair was going against her religious beliefs and the marital identity to which she had originally committed, and contradictory ambivalence was aired in simultaneously experienced opposing thoughts (rebellion and obedience, vice and virtue).

The consequences of trying to make things work gave rise to further feelings of instability and some of the participants (n=3) fantasised that an event outside their control would 'respectfully' force the change from married to separated (via an accidental death), without having to go through

the process. For Lucinda there was a metaphorical sense of the walls of her marital home closing in, as she struggled to maintain her fragmented identity together. She eventually acted on her escapist thoughts – she left with 'nothing', which may have reflected the marital void: "Eventually I thought 'I can't do this anymore. I can't live this lie'. I needed to get out - it was all closing in. I walked out, with nothing but my car and my handbag. I had to." However, for Lorraine the marital home was a critical factor in maintaining her marriage. She was the only participant who remains united with her husband. She continues to support and depend on him and although she is exploring career and dating interests outside the home, she is limited in how far she can expand on these. Her use of the word 'We' instead of 'I' reaffirms their intertwined (almost telepathic) connection: "I'll just look at my husband and we both know what we're thinking. We're good friends. We have our home. Someday we should get divorced, but I'm not financially secure and I have health issues."

In contrast to all the other participants, Christina bypassed the process of marital limbo and the consequential angst or dissonance involved in being partially married and partially separated. She decided to separate soon after the time of disclosure, despite her loss and her husband's reluctance and sorrow. Her account highlights refusal ("not going to live with"), openness ("come out into the light") and separation ("we have to break up now"). Although Christina empathised with her husband, she did not want to identify with a marriage that involved 'others' or any pretence:

> I knew at that moment exactly what I was going to do. That I was going to separate from him, although I loved him dearly and still do [upset]. He didn't want to tell the kids but I said, 'we have to be open and tell them, because I'm not going to live in a closet with you. We are going to come out into the light and we are going to own this'. He felt terrible, but I knew I didn't have a choice and that my life was changing irrevocably. And there was no turning back.

While Christine moved relatively quickly to end the marriage, most participants did not. They expressed despair and anger which were vented in different directions, including anger towards self. Anger was often coupled with empathy towards their husband in 'coming out', if they were

communicating with one another. They questioned the self and others, seeking to make sense of their broken marriage and to relieve the tensions from their being partially married/partially separated. Support was not found to be helpful at this time.

Theme 3: Having to Move on (Living Apart)

Eight of the participants showed clear signs of being loathe to end the marriage. This theme focuses on the actual transition and irrevocable step ('crossing the Rubicon') that resulted in every participant, except one, identifying as fully separated and living apart (n=6) or preparing to live apart (n=2). Transitioning into separation was worse that the eventual separation itself. This is reflected in the gradual lessening in emotional intensity of the participants' accounts as described their self-development in the 'here and now'.

3.1 The marital end: crossing the Rubicon. Two participants decided to leave, but for the majority (n=6) it was their husband who left. As a result, the participants had to 'move on'; their marital thread. Their slender was now broken. Descriptive metaphors in the accounts, such as "a wake-up call" and "a turning point", are indicative of a forced transition. Their marriage was over. This realisation seemed to be the end point of a process of separation, and varied across the accounts. Almost all felt a sense of the force of finality when they began to live apart: "The separation bit hadn't fully kicked in when we were still living in the same house and he was still there for me. The ending really hit me hard then." (Mary) Rose realised that her marriage was 'really' over after her husband began living with another man. Rose had dedicated herself to the vocation of marriage but her husband had broken the marital rules both by having an affair and by leaving. Relinquishing her attempt to regain control and accepting that her marriage was over was a shattering experience, but one which also brought relief and seemed to restore her clarity of thought. Her husband was gone:

> When he left it was very, very difficult. Seeing all the missing things. He was already living with someone which was extremely painful for me. One evening when I called over and he didn't open the door I became furious. I kicked the door and a piece broke. I thought, 'it's over. I now pick up the pieces of my life and go on with my life'.

The thought of being and living alone, as an individual 'self', for the first time was coupled with trepidation and fear for the participants. This was foreign territory and a solo expedition. Having being married for so many years, several changes resulted from the mid-and later life separation, including threats to their emotional well-being, personal identity, and security (i.e., financial and residential). Sarah believed all her worries at this time related to her core concern, being alone and single: "I was worrying about the future. Will I have enough money, will we be ok? But looking back the worry really was just about being on my own. Missing the security." A focus by others on the gay sexual orientation of her husband was additionally frustrating for her, and was experienced by her as minimising the significance of her loss. Sarah did not feel "lucky"; her marriage was not a success. Her husband had left her for someone else: "I've had loads of women saying to me 'aren't you lucky he left you for a man'. They don't realise that it's about the loss of the couple, and what that means for the family. What's the difference what sex the person is. They still left you."

3.2 Self-integration: 'salvage what's good and move on separately'. Cut off from the spousal relationship, a core source of support or focus, the participants moved towards taking control of their lives and created a new, meaningful identity. This was experienced as difficult, often painful, but rewarding. While most positive growth was gleaned from self-reflection and self-action, supportive friends and family members played a large part in sustaining the participants during their more difficult times. Feeling understood resulted in a sense of belonging and appeared to help redirect their focus on themselves. Many participants (n=7) availed of therapeutic support when the cohabitation ended to help them to 'return to themselves'. In contrast with previous therapeutic experiences, this was identified as helpful and often other, unexplored issues, such as family relationship issues, abuses and anxiety were also explored. Patty sought objective, if not directive, support to help her get to know, understand and be herself. She sought to break the pattern of focus on her husband, who had health issues. Entering her later life as single, she had to face the reality of

returning to the workforce to secure her future. Her use of the word 'I' instead of 'We' reinforces her strengthening sense of self and singeldom:

> When he said he was moving out I thought, 'I need to take control of my life. I need a therapist; somebody objective to help me to do that. My default was, 'how is my husband. Is he ok?' That stopped me from feeling my own feelings, and thinking about practical, financial things.

The physical separation also resulted in unexpected perks ("now the toilet seat is always down!") and unanticipated sexual experiences. All the participants highlighted the importance of transparency and trust in new relationships. Individual patterns emerged when they separated with some re-partnering and some remaining single. Words such as "foreign", "cautious" and "daunting" were used to describe the initial concept of post-marital sex and process of exploration (n=4). They did not want to be "hurt again". Despite this concern, three participants reported happiness in living with another man, and one remarried. While Grace reported no desire to be with another man, she, like all the participants, strove to embrace unexplored parts of her life. Having her own space enabled her to return to her pre-marriage 'self', namely a dancer. Although the symbolic replacing of her husband 'in the closet' was indicative of a sense of tension and withdrawal, living apart was the liberating antithesis. Grace proudly took ownership of 'creating a new life', without judgement: "I had danced when I was young and I went back dancing. Now I have a whole network of people that know me. For a long time I felt that he came out and I went into the closet. I needed to get out. It has taken me years to get back to myself. I am not on edge anymore."

Whilst Grace focused exclusively on herself in the present and future, most of the other participants accepted that their past experiences contributed to who they are now, and to their greatest gift, their children, and for some their grandchildren. Integrating their past and present self seemed to move them further towards psychological growth. Sarah described her attempts at integrating her past and present self, as she focuses on what she has achieved:

> He could never be to me what I need, and I will never be to him what he needs. Salvage what is good, and move on separately. You have to move forward. I look back at the good - we have our children. Stay friends if you can. Just kept it simple and made it ok for the kids. You have to go the extra mile because of the prejudice they might get. Things happen to everyone. If you move beyond that and go forward with life then good things are there.

There is a sense of awareness that both her and her husband's needs were better met outside their marriage. At the heart of Sarah's identity as divorced are her past links to her marriage and shared parenting. Like most of the participants (n=8), she continued to draw on insights from her past and expressed a desire to therapeutically support others in a similar situation. This seemed to further enhance a positive sense of self.

In summary, the participants, having for decades identified as married, had learned to make sense of a life separate from their husbands. This required a consequential shift in focus onto themselves. The realisation that there was no restoring of the past spurred participants into an appraisal process where their own abilities and others' availability to them were assessed. The passage of time helped them to reflectively balance the loss of their marriage with the positive outcomes, namely their children and unexpected independent achievements. They rebuilt an integrated sense of self that was separate from, yet always somewhat connected to, their ex-husband by virtue of their children, and their history together.

5.4 Discussion

This study focused on the experience of nine heterosexual women whose husbands came out as gay in mid-and later life. The loss of their marriage was extremely painful. Demonstrating the importance of the martial script to them, and concerns about social stigma, most tried to accommodate an altered marriage for a protracted period of time following the disclosure (being partially married, partially separated). In most cases it was the husband who finally left. Concerns regarding potential stigma towards them and their family were enhanced by virtue of their husband's gay identity. Those who had positive communication with their husband experienced significant empathy towards him following the disclosure,

which facilitated the resolution of the hurt incurred. Professional support sought following the disclosure was perceived to be judgmental, whilst therapy during or following their separation was experienced as supportive.

Marriage for the participants spoke to the internalisation of a traditional, monogamous script for coupledom, motherhood, and lifelong commitment. It was a permanent commitment in the cultural context of Catholicism. Marriage legitimised their relationship, and provided them with a plan for the future. Detaching from their 'successful' marriage following a perceived 'lifetime' (at least 15 years) of being interlinked with their husband was identified as 'the most difficult thing'. Almost every participant who participated became tearful or cried when recalling the loss of their marriage. Most recalled fearing (hence presuming) societal stigma and being alone: "I did not want to be a divorcee". In line with previous research, the women experienced the personal reactions commonly associated with a marital separation, such as stress, anger, fear and pain in processing the marital loss (Canham, Mahmood, Stott, Sixsmith, & O'Rourke, 2014; Demo, 1999; Simon & Marcussen, 1999), concerns regarding their children, financial concerns and changes to their living arrangements (Hennon & Brubaker, 1996; Rahav & Baum, 2002). Being 'older' was an added consideration. The vulnerability and chance for poverty are higher for women post-divorce (Gander, 1991). As with individuals separating or divorcing in mid- and later life, many felt more economically vulnerable and reported a lack of confidence and uncertainty regarding their futures (Radina, Hennon, & Gibbons, 2008). Breaking the dependency on one another and negotiating the reality of their situation was complex. Illness for some of the participants or that of their husband made separating additionally difficult given the increased need for care. This is in keeping with research highlighting the positive link between increasing age and the risk of illness and associated care needs (Bracke et al., 2010; Koopmans & Lamers, 2007; Mark, 2008).

An enhanced awareness of societal sexual prejudice relating to the disclosure of a gay sexual orientation that is highlighted in previous studies (e.g., Buxton, 2006a; Grever, 2012) was also experienced by these women. They had grown up in a society where homosexual marriage was illegal;

legislation allowing for same-sex marriage is a twenty first century phenomenon. For many, in seeking to protect the self and family unit, there were dilemmas about when and to whom to disclose the reason for their marriage difficulties or separation, namely the 'coming out'. The women wanted to share their experiences with others who they felt would understand. They found it difficult to deal with dismissive suggestions to quickly separate or 'move on' if the couple did not wish to separate, or the assumption that the experience of marital loss should be experienced less intensely because of the gay sexual orientation of their spouse: "at least he is not leaving you for a woman". While being 'out' (the degree to which others know the sexual orientation of the self and others) is linked to increased relationship quality (R. Lewis, Kozac, Milardo, & Grosnick, 1992), the findings show that such benefits did not apply to their marriage.

Most of the women had tried to sustain and accommodate a state of being partially married and partially separated, but it created tension for them. Perceived bias from professional therapists during couple therapy at the time of the disclosure was experienced as additionally isolating, especially for those for whom informal support (family, friends, on-line fora) was limited. The findings concur with research on the negative psychological consequences that can occur if individuals perceive themselves as being 'alone' in processing a significant loss or societal stigma (Beals, Peplau, & Gable, 2009). Conversely, non-judgmental support from others that focused on the women's needs and wants was perceived as helpful. In order to cope with the demanding process of finally 'uncoupling', most of the women then sought support from a professional therapist. In contrast with their previous therapeutic experiences, this latter support was experienced as beneficial and helped them to perceive the life transition as an opportunity for personal development. Similar positive health benefits are reflected in the literature on social and therapeutic support, with reductions cited in distorted thinking and conflict (Hecker & Murphy, 2015; Vaillant, 2000). It may be that therapeutic practices have improved in recent years and that the women had more efficacy and control of their lives at this later stage– they could, and had to, focus on themselves. It may also be that this experience is being increasingly integrated into

mainstream conversations about sexuality and marriage, in addition to the existence of several on-line support groups. Nevertheless, our findings emphasise the importance of therapeutic neutrality, and of educators and therapists being aware of their own attitudes and beliefs about relationships, infidelity, sexual orientation and divorce (Lambert & Barley, 2001).

All the women had to cope with their 'shattered assumptions' (Janoff-Bulman, 1992), re-conceptualise the self, and reconstruct their life narrative (Jirek, 2016). This involved constructing a 'new' identity around the concept of being separated or divorced (e.g., having an 'ex', post-separation co-parenting, being single or repartnering). By engaging in self-action, such as solo pursuits, independent living and new relationships, they began to transition to a self-image as fully separated. The transition involved uncertainty and an acknowledgment, as seen in literature on therapeutic change, that they were moving away from a position of certainty of how things should be (the marital script), and "towards positions that entertain different possibilities" (Mason, 1993, p. 195). Constructing a new self-identity was breaking the gender norms they had attempted to uphold in their previous marital relationship (e.g., pressure to marry for life and being homemakers/caregivers). This highlights the fluid, dynamic and contextual nature of identity (Stryker & Burke, 2000). There was no finality to their past lives, by virtue of their shared connection with their children. Moreover, many of the women continued to positively connect with their ex-husbands, integrating their past and present self. For all, the disruption that co-occurs with a marital separation, stabilised and moderated over time (Canham et al., 2014; Hetherington & Jodl, 1994). Therapeutic tools, such as autobiography and narrative therapy, may further help deconstruct a distressing story and 'reauthor' a meaningful, alternative one (White, 2004).

One of the most significant findings, which contributes to the extant literature, was the presence and role of empathy towards their husbands in enabling the women to reconnect with them and to eventually forgive them for the injury incurred by the broken marriage. This related exclusively to the women who reported positive communication with their husband prior to, and following, the disclosure, and whose husband had shared their remorse regarding the suppression and disclosure of their gay sexual

orientation with them. While accepting responsibility was synonymous with bearing blame, it was not 'fully' their husband's fault, given the homophobic culture in which they had grown up (Reygan & Moane, 2014; Tovey & Share, 2003). Initially the empathetic connection and concern for their husband made it additionally difficult for most of the women to 'move on'. They felt with, and possibly even for, their husband rather than feeling against them. It also seemed to enhance the communication between the couple, thereby facilitating resolution of the hurt at the marital dissolution, and constructive change.

This finding is in keeping with research on the process of forgiveness which highlights the importance of empathy in being able to emotionally recover following an interpersonal injury (Greenberg & Malcolm, 2010; Karen, 2001). It involves a process of transforming feelings, as well as giving up the hope that the past (or person) can be changed (Greenberg, Warwar, & Malcolm, 2008) following a protracted period of time trying to do so. This was borne out by the participants who transformed feelings from hurt and anger to compassion, and (over time) had to focus on their own future. It should be noted that most of the participants recalled having a happy marriage, prior to the disclosure, and a positive relationship with their husband. This is likely to have been a factor in their ability to restore amicable closeness with their husband given that forgiveness has been shown to occur more frequently in the context of close relationships (McCullough et al., 1998).

Limitations. There are a number of limitations in the current study. Firstly, regarding recruitment, a selection bias may have occurred because of the voluntary nature of the recruitment. Those who participated may have been more comfortable in discussing their private lives with the researcher or in accessing support. Secondly, the accounts were retrospective in nature and they, as with all retrospective research, need to be interpreted with caution. The accounts may have been influenced by memory bias and the affective state of each participant at the time of interview. Finally, the results obtained from the data are not generalisable due the limitations of small size, the characterisation of the sample population, and the nature of IPA. The accounts of heterosexual husbands were excluded, given the

necessary homogeneity of our sample. However, the objective of qualitative research is concerned with the quality of experiences, rather than the identifying cause-effect relationships. The results of this study are specific to the perceptions and context of the particular participants who partook, and are, therefore, more suggestive rather than conclusive.

Conclusions. Our findings contribute to the literature on the experience of a husband coming out as gay, and are novel in terms of the systematic research method employed, the focus on the process of marital separation, and the impact of culture and empathy on the resolution process. While there was some divergence across the accounts, the majority of the women emphasised marital separation and the process of negotiating loss of the marriage as more traumatic than the husband's gay identity. Nonetheless, an appreciation of the individuality and cultural context of each marriage and person was, and is, required. Separating involved a diverse process of coming to see the self as a separated and single person, and mourning the loss of a marital identity into which they had invested so deeply. The women in this study demonstrated that a husband coming out as gay can mean a long marital goodbye, an immediate separation, or a continued marriage. All involve varying degrees of pain and loss, and a focus on the separate self and self-care can provide a pathway to healing.

CHAPTER 6: STUDY 3 – COMING OUT EXPERIENCES OF IRISH GAY FATHERS WHO HAVE BEEN HETEROSEXUALLY MARRIED: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMONOLOGICAL ANALYSIS (IPA)

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The manuscript in Chapter 6 has been formatted to meet the style required for this thesis, i.e., American Psychological Association (6th ed.) and British English style. The paper as it appears in the Journal of Homosexuality (published by Taylor & Francis Group) is included in the Appendices (see Appendix E2).

Study 3 article: Coming Out Experiences of Irish Gay Fathers Who Have Been Heterosexually Married: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Running title: Coming out: Irish gay fathers

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Abstract

This study explores how Irish gay fathers, who married heterosexually in a heteronormative culture, assumed a settled gay identity in the Republic of Ireland. A purposive sample of nine men reflected on their experiences of marriage and separation, assuming a gay identity, and social and familial connectivity. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) indicated the suppression of gay sexual desires before marriage as a result of cultural homophobia. The 'coming out' process continued during the participants' marriage. Extramarital same-gender sexual desires and/or transgressions co-occurred with existential conflict (remorse), and resulted in marital separation. The marital and family loss was experienced as traumatic, and suicidal ideation occurred for most. All the men assumed an openly gay identity after separating. Many established a family orientated same-gender repartnership. Results highlight the individuality and significance of the marital and family loss for those who separate after coming out as gay.

Key words: Gay fathers, heterosexual marriage, coming out, marital separation, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), Ireland

6.1 Introduction

Previous studies of heterosexually married gay men and fathers in mixed orientated marriages (comprising spouses of varying sexual orientations) have provided insight into their identity development and psychological adjustment and relationships, the outcomes of which are largely positive (e.g., Giunti & Fioravanti, 2017; Higgins, 2002; Pearcey, 2005; Tornello & Patterson, 2012). Nonetheless, the literature is underdeveloped with regard to the process by which heterosexually married gay fathers in conservative cultures assume a settled sexual (health) identity, described by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as "a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality" (2006, p. 5), within the context of heterosexual marriage, including marriage breakdown. We sought to explore this process, which will continue to be an important issue for societies that religiously or legally discriminate against same-gender sexuality, or where arranged heterosexual marriage is the societal norm (Jaspal, 2014).

In this article, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is used to explore the experiences of fathers who were (1) gay/same-gender attracted, as opposed to bisexual or multi-gender attracted, (2) heterosexually married, and (3) reared in a traditional Irish cultural context dominated by the Catholic Church that was not accepting of a gay identity. Until recent times, Irish society was dominated by a conservative religious outlook on sexual morality and a resistance to nonheterosexual identities (Tovey & Share, 2003). The prevailing heteronormative narrative was that sex was confined to the sanctity of heterosexual marriage, for the benefit of procreation, and it was perceived to require management by the Church and State (Inglis, 1998). The decriminalisation of same-gender sexual acts in 1993, and subsequent legalisation of 'same-sex marriage' in 2015, removed the legal discrimination which had affected the lives of gay people in Ireland and enhanced societal pluralism (B. Anderson et al., 2016). Such advancements are reflective of the normative perception that heterosexual and gay life are increasingly equal, although discriminatory challenges continue to exist for some people who identify as nonheterosexual in Ireland (Fahie, 2016).

A number of themes have been explored in the literature on men who marry heterosexually before coming out as gay including 1) the prevalence of gay men or men with same-gender sexual desires who marry heterosexually and their reasons for doing so, 2) coming out as gay in the context of family and conservative community life, and 3) difficulties suppressing same-gender sexual urges whilst married heterosexually. Exact numbers of heterosexually married gay men are undetermined, although they are estimated to be as high as 20 percent (Janus & Janus, 1993; Ross, 1989). An estimated 20% to 25% of self-identified gay men are also fathers (Patterson & Chan, 1997). The multifaceted reasons why men with same-gender sexual desires marry heterosexually include societal expectations for heterosexual marriage (Pearcey, 2005), a desire for the 'traditional' marital script, including children and family life (Alessi, 2008; Higgins, 2002; R. B. Lee, 2002); identifying as heterosexual before marriage (Giunti & Fioravanti, 2017); and societal sexual minority prejudice, including religious homophobia (Ortiz & Scott, 1996). Historic pathological views of same-gender sexual orientation, internalised homophobia (negative self-evaluations towards same-gender sexuality), and experiences of shame and discrimination can further result in stress and identity concealment among sexual minorities in general (Frost & Meyer, 2009).

Sexual orientation development is acknowledged as an emergent, dynamic process and the product of changing contexts (Dillon, Worthington, & Moradi, 2011). From a queer theory perspective, individuals deconstruct and construct their concept of gender and sexuality via their behaviour (Oswald et al., 2005) within the cultural and societal environment in which they live. For example, same-gender sexual repression and suppression may occur in more conservative, heteronormative environments (Pietkiewicz & Kołodziejczyk-Skrzypek, 2016), due to a fear of rejection by family, friends, or a religious community, whereas the opposite (i.e., sexual expression and disclosure) may be experienced in more liberal cultures. The contribution of Identity Process Theory (IPT; Breakwell, 1986; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2012), which stresses the importance of understanding the impact of internal identity processes and the social environment on identity formation, is of particular

relevance in resolving identity challenges. It offers a novel perspective and means of exploring how men negotiate the challenge of being gay in the context of heterosexual marriage and fatherhood. Self-identity in IPT is developed through: (1) identity assimilation-accommodation, where new information is absorbed into the identity structure (e.g., being gay), and changes are made to an existing identification to accommodate this (e.g., whether identifying as gay can be reconciled with identifying as a heterosexually married man); and (2) evaluation, namely the value and meaning given to an identity (e.g., resolving on a personal level what being gay means to the self and others). Culturally, individuals can be motivated to maintain their established identity, as changes in self-identity arising through accommodation can be taxing: "Assimilate if you can, accommodate if you must!" (Block, 1982, p. 286).

Although many gay men may choose to enter into marriage with an opposite-gender partner, researchers have identified several issues with the sustainability of this choice. Over time, individuals are more likely to engage in behaviour that is reflective of their thoughts and attractions (Rosario et al., 2006). The existence of gay sexual urges in heterosexually married gay men can be problematic, resulting in sexual infidelity and elevated levels of stress (Corley & Kort, 2006; Malcolm, 2008). Research suggests that known infidelity typically results in marital conflict or dissolution (Adler & Ben-Ari, 2017; Amato & Previti, 2003; Cann et al., 2001), although some couples may agree to engage in separate sexual relationships outside of the marriage (Buxton, 2001; Wolkomir, 2009). In the absence of a consensual non-monogamous marriage, others may engage in hidden infidelity and have secret, anonymous sex with multiple partners (Corley & Kort, 2006) due to the desire to protect their marital relationship (Guerrero et al., 2013). Such secret infidelities may strain the emotional well-being and physical health of the spouses, especially in the context of intimate relationships (Lehmiller, 2009). While a few studies indicate that secrecy may enhance marital satisfaction in cases where secrecy is used to protect a spouse from stress or pain (e.g., Finkenauer & Hazam, 2000; Vangelisti & Caughlin, 1997), others report experiences of significant emotional turmoil as a result of living with a concealed gay identity in a

conservative religious culture (e.g., Itzhaky & Kissil, 2015; Kissil & Itzhaky, 2015). For some, reconciling cultural and personal beliefs of heteronormative love and religious, marital commitment within their mixed-orientated marriage (MOM) is unattainable or unsustainable (Swan & Benack, 2012), and eventually their marriage ends. Indeed, estimates indicate that the majority of couples in MOM will divorce (Büntzly, 1993; Buxton, 2001, 2006)

The transition from marriage to divorce, if this is the outcome, can often be associated with negative health consequences, in addition to custodial and financial upheaval (R. Taylor, 2004). Furthermore, coming out and assuming an openly gay identity later in life can involve facing many ingrained fears and interpersonal conflict, including revealing one's sexual orientation to others, which can be an additional relational challenge for the self and family. Despite concerns regarding the impact of sexual stigma and possible family loss, positive outcomes in child-parent relationships and psychological adjustment have been reported, and indeed comprises the primary focus of research on post-disclosure adjustment (Daly, MacNeela, & Sarma, 2015; Malcolm, 2008; Tornello & Patterson, 2012). Studies have emphasised the positive association of being openly out with full integration of a gay identity and greater authenticity in relationships (e.g., E. Dunne, 1987; Ortiz & Scott, 1996; Tasker et al., 2010). Therefore, while it can be challenging to manage identifying as both gay and being heterosexually married, there appear to be benefits in identifying solely as gay, primarily through the ending of the heterosexual marriage.

The current study sought to use pre-existing theory (IPT) and the literature on heterosexually married men from conservative religious societies to explore the lived experienced of men in an Irish context, with Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the qualitative research design. IPA is a well-established research methodology and has particular relevance when seeking to understand under-examined phenomena (J. Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). It can support the exploratory analysis of convergences and divergences within individual accounts of lived experience (Brocki & Wearden, 2006; J. Smith, 2011). This study explores how a small sample of Irish men managed the identity of being a

heterosexually married man and of subsequently coming out as a gay man within an Irish socio-cultural context, and the impact of this experience on their family life.

6.2 Method

6.2.1 Data collection. Ethical approval for the study was granted by the authors' associated university. To be included in this study, the male participants had to have (1) assumed a gay identity when married to a heterosexual spouse, and (2) had a child or children with her. The participants volunteered for the study by making contact with the primary researcher following dissemination of information about the study. Four participants read about the research when it was disseminated in a gay newspaper and associated online forum, and five were recruited via snowball sampling (participants informed others, who became participants). After initial contact the men received a participant information sheet. They signed a consent form prior to the interview and consented to their anonymised interviews being used for publication.

A total of nine semi-structured interviews were completed and analysed. The interviews were conducted by the first author either in the participants' own homes (n = 2), their place of work (n = 1), or in a local restaurant (n = 6), depending on which was most convenient for each participant. The interviews were audio-recorded for subsequent transcription and the modal interview length was 70 minutes. The participants were encouraged to recount and reflect upon the development of their gay identity and their marriage. Topics focused on during the interview included: initial sexual experience(s); experience of marriage; coming out/the disclosure; consequential impact on the family unit and self (marital separation); telling others; the most difficult thing(s); sources of support; subsequent relationships. The interviews had a flexible structure to enable the participants to discuss topics of prime concern or interest to themselves.

Pages 132-145 of this document have been redacted to protect the anonymity of research participants.

6.4 Discussion

This study explored the experiences in Ireland of a sample of Irish gay fathers who assumed a gay identity in the context of heterosexual marriage and family ties. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to interpret processes of individual significance and experience over time (J. Smith et al., 2009). All the participants recalled suppressing same-gender sexual desires before they married, primarily due to religious and societal expectation and homophobia. This is in keeping with literature showing the association between the impact of socio-cultural and ethno-religious contexts and the pressure to conform to heterosexual marriage expectations (Pearcey, 2005; Ross, 1989). Marriage generally occurred in early adulthood, which has been linked to religious salience during adolescence (Uecker & Hill, 2014), family expectations (Wolfinger, 2003), and a lack of life experience in resolving sexual identity concerns (Higgins, 2002). Given the known association between early marriage and marital dissolution, this has relevance when exploring transitions from marriage.

The men developed the primarily suppressed gay sexual orientation of their youth, although this involved a conflict between their gay and married self. This study contributes to the current literature on men for whom a gay identity can result in identity conflict, which, from an IPT standpoint, may be perceived in terms of identity threat (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2012; Jaspal & Siraj, 2011). IPT (Breakwell, 1986) provides a novel interpretive stance on the experience of gay fathers who were married through its use of the accommodation-assimilation process and the evaluation process. In order to assimilate their gay desires and sexual identity to the threatened married self identity, the participants attempted to consider sexual thoughts of men as separate to the marriage. For most, this progressed to having covert sexual acts with other men and acting, if not identifying privately, as gay during this time. A sense of anonymity appeared to have a liberating effect on sexual behaviour, as shown in previous studies (e.g., Lemke & Weber, 2016; Pritchard & Morgan, 2006), and often facilitated promiscuity, primarily via cruising.

Despite their ability to separate same-gender sexual encounters from their family life, most participants recalled feeling consequential remorse, self-chastisement, and emotional conflict. This supports previous findings indicating that self-chastisement (and for some, suicidal ideation) can occur as a result of conflicting self-identities – desiring gay sex and resenting the self for doing so; desiring a heterosexual identity, but unable to resist unmet sexual needs (Page, Lindahl, & Malik, 2013; Reback & Larkins, 2010). This is also reflected in the literature on temptation and self-regulation failure in situations where the strength of an impulse (i.e., an internal demand) or another process overrides the self-regulatory process (Heatherton & Wagner, 2011; Legault & Inzlicht, 2013). The sociocultural environment is also acknowledged in IPT as being influential in activating goals and desires. The participants were exposed to an increasingly liberal Irish society in mid-adulthood. Desiring men sexually began to strengthen their gay identity - they were thinking (and for most, acting) like a gay man, and beginning to belong to a gay community. This accommodation of gay identity as a distinct element of the self is in keeping with the coming out process, whereby pro-gay communities can support the reconstruction of identity in accordance with context and desire (Cerulo, 1997).

Concealing increasing same-gender desires from their wives seemed to lead to increased angst for the participants. This resonates with literature that highlights the connection between concealing a part of the self, deemed unacceptable, with negative impacts such as rumination or negative self-evaluations (e.g., King, Emmons, & Woodley, 1992). In addition, the participants did not want to separate from their family. In most cases the balancing act between private gay self-identification, covert sexual behaviour, and continued marriage was disrupted through unwilling discovery. Marriage, particularly in the 20th century, represented a lifetime commitment perspective, as shaped by the religious beliefs of the vast majority of the Irish population who had accepted Catholicism “as the essence of their identity and their county’s ethos” (Fuller, 2002: xiii). Heterosexual marriage was subliminally and often forcibly self-imposed as the desired and prescribed heteronormative cultural script. Spousal dedication was assumed and marital conflict was tolerated in the context of

love (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Indeed, studies (e.g., Wolkomir, 2009; Yarhouse et al., 2009) have reported religion-based reasons for remaining married.

Consistent with previous literature (Higgins, 2002; Latham & White, 1978), only one man remained married to his wife. The separation was very unsettling, recalling previous research that demonstrates the heightened significance of relationship termination if that relationship had been happy (e.g., DeGarmo & Kitson, 1996). After many years of being married, adjusting to the marital separation and associated loss was a traumatic experience, and resulted in suicidal ideation for most. This study confirms the loss of identity and a sense of exclusion from their family unit and its presumed future, and the link between this grieving separation and the occurrence of suicidal thoughts (Wyder et al., 2009). Marital breakdown and divorce are associated with increased risk of psychological distress, and negative health outcomes, including depression (Amato, 2010; Kalmijn, 2010; Sbarra et al., 2011). Divorce also entails financial stress due to alimony, child support payments and the costs of maintaining separate housing (McManus & DiPrete, 2001). Additional stress due to heteronormative biases during legal proceedings, such as negative references to the men's same-gender sexuality in child access proceedings and the absence of equal rights for separated fathers, was also recalled in this study.

The traumatic impact of separation tends to receive relatively little attention in the literature on coming out as gay. Rejecting a previously presumed way of life, which was rooted in the social institution of heterosexual family and marriage (Herz & Johansson, 2015) may have heightened the marital loss. Until recently, the disruption of heteronormativity and attachment to the 'family man' ideology through divorce in Ireland was taboo, possibly less so than a same-gender sexual orientation which "for better or worse" could be accommodated in marriage. Until the legalisation of divorce in 1997 - more than 20 years after most other western countries (McGowan, 2016) - anti-divorce campaigns argued that divorce would destroy the fabric of Irish society. Marriage in Ireland no longer has the same importance for family formation that it once had.

Childbearing and cohabitation outside of marriage now widely occur. Yet the divorce rate is low by international standards (Burley & Regan, 2002; Fahey, 2013; McGarry, 2017).

Disclosing as gay to others involved the integration of private (same-gender) experiences with family 'life narratives' (McAdams, 2013; e.g., being a spouse or father). Positive and better father–child relationships were reported following the separation and disclosure, consistent with previous research (Elizur & Mintzer, 2003; Tasker & Patterson, 2007). Most reported cohesion in repartnering with a man and engaged in homonormativity, framing their gay relationship through a heteronormative lens of relationship commitment and parenthood. Age-related maturity, the absence of rearing children of a young age, and the absence of social-expectation that co-occur with co-habitation (Elizabeth, 2000) were referenced as factors in their positive partnership experience. Ireland's transition to a more homonormative culture (where same-gender relationships are increasingly seen as 'normal', and included within heteronormative structures) may have further supported this experience – they were now divorcing and coming out against a backdrop where being a parent in a gay committed relationship could be part of their life script. While the normativity of same-gender sexuality in Ireland may be perceived as doing little to challenge the dominance of heteronormativity, which can disenfranchise and stigmatise 'other' different ways of living (Weeks, 1995; A. Yip, 1997), committed relationships remain the preferred form (Kean, 2015).

The limitations of this study warrant consideration. Although the sample size was appropriate for an IPA study, the homogeneity necessary for the analytic approach excluded parents of alternative sexual orientations. Further qualitative research exploring the experience of heterosexual marital separation and coming out as bisexual, lesbian, and transgender warrants further exploration. Moreover, the participants who volunteered may have been more positively adjusted to their separation and sexuality than others. The findings reflect the lived experience of a small number of Irish gay fathers. However, given the consistency of the findings with previous literature, these are suggestive of a more general phenomenon of gay fathers reared in conservative cultures.

This study highlights for gay fathers the importance of, and continued access to, their children during and following marital separation, and the therapeutic need for increased awareness of the significance of the marital separation for men who identify as gay, in the context of a heterosexual marriage. The profile of divorce, older age, and the male gender have been established as risk factors for suicide (Ide, Wyder, Kolves, & De Leo, 2010). There is a therapeutic need for meaningful support, such as online networks and sharing, empathetic counselling and community spaces that facilitate the expression and exploration of identities (K. Coleman, 2016). We suggest that therapists and educators challenge the heteronormative assumptions of sexuality and family formations (Oswald et al., 2005), and acknowledge that in some cases relationship formations that are "decentred from the norm" (Minton, 1997, p. 349) are preferable. The contemporary cultural climate in which marriage, separation and sexual identity formation occur warrant consideration in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of individual experiences and needs. Our results also illuminate the impact of a cultural transformation from conservativism to pro-gay acceptance in the space of a generation. This reflects the premise that culture can influence personal identity development, and societal change can moderate prejudice reduction (R. Crisp, Stone, & Hall, 2006).

In conclusion, this study provides information about the experiences of gay fathers in Ireland who came out during their heterosexual marriage and transitioned to a separated, openly gay identity while retaining family connectivity. The coming out process included extramarital gay sexual thoughts for all, same-gender affairs with existential angst (remorse) for most, and the eventual dissolution of their marriage. The loss of their family life was devastating. Most participants reported cohesion in repartnering with a man, while all experienced positive relationship quality with their children following the disclosure and separation.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION

7.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter begins with a summary of the main findings of the three Studies comprising this thesis. The contribution of the research is then discussed (overall findings, specific findings, and the themes that traversed the three studies). Core post-hoc researcher reflections are summarised. Clinical implications are outlined, in addition to the research limitations. Considerations for future research are described, and finally, concluding remarks are given.

Note: The candidate's role in the studies. Given that this is an article based PhD, the following tasks were performed by the PhD candidate in each study: The collection of data, the transcription and analysis of the data, drafting each paper (i.e., background/literature review, methods, results and discussion) and performing paper revisions and edits following feedback and advice from supervisors, peer reviewers and publishers.

7.2 Summary of the Main Findings

The main findings of each of the three studies are outlined as follows:

7.2.1 Study 1. In the first study, the experiences of 15 Irish sons and daughters (all adults) whose parents have separated, one of whom has come out as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual (LGB) were explored through a Grounded Theory approach. The process of adjustment and the interlinking conceptual model highlighted that the primary concern of the participants was adjusting to the parental separation, as opposed to their parent being LGB. This involved varying degrees of loss, changes to the home environments, new family structures or blended family units. The age and developmental stage of sons and daughters at the time of separation and disclosure resulted in experiential differences. Parental support, the spousal relationship, and the parent-child relationship impacted on the adjustment process. Heightened reflection on sexual orientation and an increased sensitivity to societal LGB prejudice were specifically associated with a parent coming out as LGB. Participants transitioned from initially avoiding and resisting the family changes that were occurring to gradual consonance with, and overall adjustment to, their altered family environments and parental 'changes'.

7.2.2 Study 2. In the second study, the experiences of nine heterosexual women whose husbands came out as gay in mid and later life were explored using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; J. Smith et al., 2009) approach. Results highlighted the significance of the marital loss and marital identity. Most attempted to accommodate an altered marriage following the disclosure. Concerns regarding possible separation related social stigma were enhanced as a result of their husband's same-gender identity, and feelings of frustration occurred when others minimised the marital loss due to their husband's same-gender identity. The separation involved a process of mourning and positioning the self as single and separated. Experiencing positive communication with, and empathy towards, their husbands facilitated the resolution of the hurt suffered. Professional support was perceived as judgemental pre-separation, and supportive post-separation.

7.2.3 Study 3. The third study explored the experiences of nine Irish gay fathers who assumed a gay identity in the context of heterosexual marriage and family ties using IPA. The participants married within the cultural context of religious heteronormativity; heterosexual marriage was the presumed social script. The participants transitioned from being married and suppressing gay desires to being separated and openly gay. The coming out process resulted in extramarital gay sexual thoughts for all, same-sex affairs with existential angst (remorse) for most, and the eventual dissolution of their marriage. The loss of their family life was devastating. Most participants repartnered and reported contentment in their relationships with their children and male partner.

7.3. Contribution of the Research

The overall and specific findings, and the themes that were common across the three studies to a greater or lesser extent are detailed in this section.

7.3.1 Overall findings. Overall (in terms of exploring the experience of a parent, husband or self coming out in the context of a heterosexual marriage), factors relating to the loss of the parental or marital union were identified by the participants as being of greater significance than issues relating to a parent's, husband's, or a participant's own, same-

gender sexual orientation. This is significant, as despite the acknowledgement that divorce and coming out in midlife are a likely co-occurring experience, the available literature and research on a parent or spouse coming out in the context of heterosexual marriage tends not to focus on the generic impact of marital separation. Stigma related experiences of societal prejudice intensified, and was an added stressor to, separation related difficulties. Increasing cultural tolerance towards divorce and those who identify as same-gender in sexual orientation (de Freytas-Tamura, 2018; Frias-Navarro, Garcia-Banda, Pascual-Soler & Badenes-Ribera, 2017) appeared to facilitate the process of adjustment relating to the coming out and separation experience.

A further contribution is that the process of parental separation and a parent coming out has different trajectories. Some couples were aware prior to marrying that they differed in their sexual orientation, but sought other relationships over time, while others only developed same-gender sexual attractions during the course of their marriage. The disclosure that a parent or spouse was not heterosexual (or desires another sexually) also resulted in a variety of outcomes, including the immediate ending of the marital union, an open marriage, or a prolonged separation. It was an individual, couple and family specific experience.

7.3.2 Specific contributions of the three Studies.

Study 1. This was the first Irish study to empirically explore the experience of a parental separation and a parent coming out. The Grounded Theory (GT) approach used in Study 1 resulted in a theoretical model that detailed the process of adjustment for a group of Irish sons and daughters following a parental disclosure of LGB and a parental separation. This model (showing initial resistance, then engagement with the tension of the disclosure and separation, and eventual consonance, together with influential parental, societal and age related factors), may help generate future investigation into this experience. This GT approach also helped to link the diversity of two typically separately researched experiences in a useful and logical way (Morse & Niehaus, 2016) - separation and a parent coming out - whilst contributing to the literature on both. The findings highlighted the impact of societal sexual stigma, which is in keeping with

the current literature (Herek, 2015; Patterson et al., 2014; Patterson, 2017), and added to the core concern of the participants, namely adjusting to their parents being separated. Study 1 also involved a small number of bisexual or non-defined sexually orientated parents (and children); their inclusion in studies on self-identified LGB parents is minimal (Bowling et al., 2017; Ross & Dobinson, 2013).

Study 2. There is a scarcity of empirical research that taps into the "lived" experience of spouses who experience a husband come out as gay. This exploratory study, framed within a specific methodological paradigm, contributes to this field. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) enabled the core concern of the wives- the loss of and painful transition out of their significant marriage- to be explored and interpreted. The finding that spousal empathy and positive spousal communication appeared to contribute to spousal forgiveness complements the existing literature on forgiveness (e.g., Aalgaard, Bolen, & Nugent, 2016; Greenberg & Malcolm, 2010), of which there is a dearth of information in the context of a spouse coming out. The relevance of forgiveness in relation to well-being, and the role of empathy in this process is becoming increasingly established (Braithwaite, Selby, & Fincham, 2011; Greenberg et al., 2008; Lichtenfeld, Buechner, Maier, & Fernández-Capo, 2015), especially for those who experience a painful relationship break-up or an infidelity related experience (Fife, Weeks, & Stellberg-Filbert, 2011; Finchman, Beach, & Davila, 2004; Yárnoz-Yaben, Garmendia, & Comino, 2016). Finally, the emphasis on the 'self', or self-care by the participants is an important contribution to therapeutic understanding: "after a lifetime of focusing on 'us', I needed help to focus on 'me'" (Patty).

Study 3: The use of IPA with a sample of Irish gay fathers in Study 3 focused on the men's difficult process in leaving their marriage in order to resolve the conflict that arose from having same-gender sexual desires and being heterosexually married. No study to date has explored this experience from an interpretative, Irish cultural perspective. The use of Identity Process Theory (Breakwell, 1986; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2012) to frame the negotiation of conflict between internal identity processes and the social environment (being gay in the context of heterosexual marriage and

fatherhood) added a novel theoretical perspective to the study. The marital loss was experienced as devastating (most loved their wives and family life), which is a unique finding within the coming out literature, and resulted in suicidal ideation and behaviour. The men had grown up in a culture where divorce was illegal, which may have intensified the sense of loss. Following the separation most of the participants settled in a committed relationship with a man, which adds to the literature on gay stepfamilies indicating high levels of relationship cohesion amongst repartnered gay men (S. Chen & van Ours, 2018; Crosbie-Burnett & King, 2012; Eeden-Moorefield et al., 2012).

7.3.3 Triangulation of core themes across the three studies. The literature tends to focus on either the coming out experience or divorce/marital separation, and from a singular perspective, i.e., the child, heterosexual spouse or the spouse coming out. In this section, all three perspectives are discussed in relation to the following themes: (1) the impact of divorce/marital separation, (2) the focus of others on the same-gender sexual orientation, and (3) stigma-related cultural factors which influenced the separation and coming out experience. Some experiences were not shared by all three groups. The commonality and diversity amongst these themes (from the perspective of child, wife/mother and husband/father), are outlined as follows:

Theme 1: The impact of divorce/marital separation. In all three studies, the loss of the parental or marital union, and separation related issues (e.g., conflict between parents/spouses) were identified by participants as being of greater significance overall than issues relating to the same-gender sexual orientation of the parent, spouse or self. The separation experiences recalled are in keeping with the generic infidelity and divorce literature, which highlights their difficult and stressful nature (Adler & Ben-Ari, 2017; Amato & Previti, 2003; Cann et al., 2001). Marital breakdown is a significant social issue in Ireland (Buckley, 2013) and is frequently accompanied by feelings of sadness, anger, guilt, loneliness and ambivalence toward the possibility of reunion (Angelisti, 2006, van Tilburg, Aartsen, & van der Pas, 2015). Changes to the family unit, child custody, financial arrangements, place of residence and daily routine can have

psychological effects (Kołodziej-Zaleska & Przybyła-Basista, 2016). The presence of children, financial issues and the difficulty in securing a new residence for the person leaving the family home, or having to secure two new residences, are significant factors in how the process unfolds over time (Amato, 2014).

The findings showed that the marital loss was a particularly intense and traumatic experience for both the heterosexual women and the gay men. (The separation appeared to be experienced less intensely by sons and daughters, unless parental conflict or poor parental boundaries occurred.) It may be that cultural and generational attitudes regarding same-gender sexuality and divorce, and the assumed marital script, further fuelled the complexity and intensity involved in the separation decision-making process. Marriage in 20th century Ireland represented the standard package for sociosexual relationships and was reinforced by the Irish State and church with "a tacit sense of rightness and normalcy" (Berlant & Warner 1998, p. 554). It was the hegemonic, idealised form of heterosexuality (Van Every, 1996), merging gender power dynamics (masculine superiority) with heterosexual desire. Divorce and same-gender partnerships were not legally viable options in Ireland when many of the participants began separating.

While there were similarities between all the spouses in the intensity of their accounts, the women appeared more grief stricken about the loss of the relationship, whilst the men seemed more impacted by both its loss and by the consequences of the separation process (i.e., changes in residence and reduced access to their children). Suicidal ideation during this time was the greatest expression of this for the men:

> I have stood at the graves of separated Dads who took their own lives. Most of them weren't gay at all. They were separated and couldn't get to see their kids. I think the legal system is very female orientated, and prejudiced against men (Breen).

This is in keeping with the literature showing that marital dissolution or divorce are risk factors for suicide (Bridges & Tankersley, 2009; Corcoran & Nagar, 2010; Stack & Scourfield, 2015; P. Yip, Yousuf, Chan, Yung, & Wu, 2014). Indications of increased suicide risk for men have been found in many studies (e.g., Denney, Rogers, Krueger, & Wadsworth, 2009; Freeman

et al., 2017; Kõlves et al., 2010; Kposowa, 2000; Nikić, Nikolić, & Bogdanović, 2009; Petrović, Kocić, Turecki, & Brent, 2016), and the rates of suicide globally is higher in males than females (Jobes, Au, & Siegelman, 2015; Kõlves, & Kumpula, & De Leo, 2013). Men are also disproportionately less likely than women to engage with mental-health services (Cleary, 2012; Sweet, 2012). Nonetheless, the suicidal ideation evident in the findings was particularly striking, and may reflect the additional suicide risk among LGBT populations (Haas et al., 2011). Evidence indicates that nonheterosexual people are at increased risk of suicidality when compared to their heterosexual counterparts (Semlyen et al., 2016; Sidaros, 2017).

Theme 2: The focus of others on the same-gender sexual orientation. While the separation was extremely difficult, the findings indicate that it was even more difficult when the same-gender sexuality was focused on instead of the marital or parent-child relationship and the individuality of their situation. For sons and daughters, this frustration was linked to references made by others to their parents' same-gender sexuality. For a number of gay fathers, the focus during litigious proceedings on their same-gender sexual orientation was additionally upsetting, and minimised their paternal role. For the heterosexual spouse, a focus by others on the gay sexual orientation of their husband minimised the significance of the marital loss:

> I've had loads of women saying to me 'aren't you lucky he left you for a man'. They don't realise that it doesn't matter what sex the person is. It's about the loss of the couple, and what that means for the family (Sarah).

Spouses also recalled negative therapeutic experiences due to the perceived over-focus of therapists on issues relating to the sexual orientation of the spouse coming out, as opposed to the marital relationship or practical related separation issues. Receiving reparative or conversion therapy/advice (Jenkins & Johnston, 2004; Van Zyl et al., 2017), encouragement to accept the same-gender sexual orientation, or advice to separate "without understanding what it means for the family" without practical advice or an alternative script, especially if they did not wish to separate, resulted in

heterosexual spouses disengaging from therapy. For gay fathers, a lack of focus on the child-parent relationship or a focus by mental health professionals on the men "being gay" did not have the supportive effect required: "they just didn't get it, the loss of my family" (Breen). Nonetheless, given the distress experienced in the aftermath of a spouse coming out and a marital crisis, there is a vital role for the provision of 'meaningful support' (Horvath, Del Re, Fluckiger, & Symonds, 2011) at this time. Professional support was not as sought by sons and daughters whose parents protected them from spousal conflict, who sought support from others (and not their children), and who "kept checking in" with their children, thereby being a significant source of support throughout the process.

Theme 3: Sigma-related cultural factors which influenced the separation and coming out experience. The findings showed that experiences of stigma related societal prejudice were an added stressor to separation related difficulties. Stigma for the participants was the perception, or the experience, of being devalued in society due to being 'different'; the stigma was dependent upon both social context and particular inter-personal relationships (Major & O'Brien, 2005). A range of factors contributed to the 'felt' stigma, including religious beliefs and societal values and norms, which together are known to shape individual's attitudes and behaviours toward family norms and sexual relationships (Adamczyk & Hayes, 2012; Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009; S. Myers, 1996). For the children, stigma was not attached to parental separation. This likely reflects the societal transformation in Ireland since their birth, which involved an increasing tolerance of variation in family life and societal acceptance of divorce. Heterosexist attitudes or homophobic comments from others were, however, experienced, which caused enhanced (known) frustration (Herek, 2015). They resulted in participants distancing themselves from, or avoiding such company, or sometimes engaging in 'educational' dialogue or debates, striving for balance in this regard. Sons and daughters living in more "narrow minded" and rural communities recalled being vigilant regarding what was socially acceptable in their immediate environment, and often did not disclose the same-gender

orientation of their parent during secondary school as they felt pressurised to "blend in".

On the contrary, stigma was attached to the marital separation for the heterosexual spouses - "I did not want to be a divorcee" (Grace), which resulted in the reluctance to disclose the marital difficulties to others and to separate. Divorce during their upbringing was perceived as inherently inappropriate or shameful (Moore, 2011). They did not want themselves or their children to be negatively evaluated by others. Separation broke religious marital vows to which they had dedicated their lives "for better or worse". For both heterosexual and gay spouses, anxiety resulted from the negative social stigma they had traditionally associated with both divorce and 'homosexuality', i.e., of potentially "being the talk of the town". For the gay spouse, this resulted initially in the suppression of same-gender sexual desires. During their upbringing, being 'gay' "was not something to aspire to" (Conor). Same-gender sexuality was defined as a mental illness (APA, 1952), was illegal in Ireland until 1993, and was associated with the HIV-AIDS epidemic. AIDS was characterised by significantly high levels of stigma and discrimination (R. Parker & Aggleton, 2003). However, the suppression of same-gender sexual desires was ultimately unsustainable. The men eventually actively infringed upon the norm (by virtue of the coming out process), the heterosexual spouses had their norm infringed upon, while the children acknowledged the generational change from what was normal in their parents past to their present.

The suppression of thought and feeling due to stigma related fears is in keeping with literature which indicates that the withholding of information (for example, of marital difficulties) is likely to be motivated by fears of negative evaluation and avoidance of rejection. While there is no common theoretical perspective on stigma (Link & Phelan, 2001), stigma-related stressors are linked to a variety of adverse mental health outcomes, including anxiety and depression (Brownell et al., 2005; Richman & Hatzenbuehler, 2014). The internalisation of stigma can lead to self-doubt and lower self-esteem. Indeed, those who keep personal secrets that are perceived to be societally unacceptable tend to be more socially anxious than those without a tendency towards secret keeping (Cepeda-Benito &

Short, 1998; Wismeijer, 2011). The inhibition of the expression of emotion-laden topics may be associated with rumination about those topics and thought intrusion, which can result in disordered thinking (Lane & Wegner, 1995; Pachankis, 2007).

The findings on the association between stigma and cultural change have relevance for members of conservative religions, and traditional communities (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). Those who have same-gender desires may continue to pursue heterosexual marriage (or MOM's) given the continued emphasis on traditional heterosexual marriage as enacting "God's will", and the lack of a socially acceptable alternative (Hernandez et al., 2011; Hernandez & Wilson, 2007; Yarhouse et al., 2011). The conservative Christian agenda in which same-gender sexuality is perceived as threatening 'family values' (as it is not what God wants), is still popular and is shaped by narrow heteronormative ideologies. According to Pope Francis, there is "no room" in the Catholic Church for priests with "that kind of ingrained [gay] tendency" (Roche, 2018, para 5), or for same-sex marriage. For many religious fundamentalists same-gender sexual behaviour is viewed as unnatural, is against biblical teachings, and in some countries (e.g., parts of Africa and the Middle East) continues to be illegal and severely punishable (Bailey et al., 2016).

Relationships in present day Ireland. The dynamic cultural shift from oppressive to anti-oppressive legislation (due to the 'challenging of societal inequalities'; Burke & Harrison, 2002) facilitated the separation and coming out process. The findings of this thesis highlight the socially constructed nature of the family, and how societal change can erode heterosexism and expand the perceived definition of 'family' over time. Contemporary Irish society is far more tolerant than it was in the past and it needs to be, since the number of non-traditional families is rising (McGowan, 2016). Many of the spouses in this thesis (both heterosexual and same-gender) fashioned their new relationship forms within the framework of the romantic love ideology (Wolkomir, 2015), and largely reinforced heteronormative ideals and practices. Same-gender sexual relationships are now legal in 21st Century Ireland - they are an increasingly socially accepted relationship option. This reflects the common

phenomenon in contemporary society of what S. Seidman (2005) refers to as a 'normalising logic', in which 'others', who do not identify as heterosexual, are increasingly included in a broader definition of heteronormativity.

While same-gender sexuality may now be considered normative, other sexualities (e.g., asexuality, pansexuality), however, may continue to be perceived as 'other' (Herz & Johansson, 2015). The concept of 'us' versus 'them' can challenge our ability to accept and support different relationship forms (Allen & Mendez, 2018), such as spouses who have relationships of significance 'with each other and another', or those who resist conventional definitions of sexual orientation. For example, a small number of participants in Study 1 did not define their sexual orientation in categorical terms, i.e., "I engage in straight relationships"; Ben; "I am 80% straight, 20% other"; David. As they and the few polyamorous participants in this study illustrated, people can create concepts of self and relationship structures (such as multiple partner relationships) that may challenge culturally prescribed family, sexual and/or gender assumptions (Haslam, 2014). Queer theory offers a solution based perspective in this regard. Rather than seeking to include others under an umbrella of normativity, queer theory challenges "the idea of normal behaviour" (Warner, 1993, p. xxvii) and focuses educational and therapeutic practice on enabling and empowering differing possibilities (Roen, 2011).

7.4 Core Post-hoc Researcher Reflections

The researcher moved from (1) seeking to develop a theoretical understanding of the phenomenon of coming out in Ireland as a spouse or parent, to (2) an appreciation of the individuality of experiences and the heteronormative cultural context within which those experiences were rooted, to (3) understanding the importance, and relevance of, queer theory (which became apparent as the research process progressed), intersectionality and the power of narrative. In this section core queer theory concepts are outlined (as they would have appeared in a revised Glossary of Terms) and highlighted with reference to the findings. In addition, a reflection on intersectionality and narrative is given.

7.4.1 Core queer theory concepts. The concepts of heteronormativity and shame and the closet permeated the overall findings:

(1) Heteronormativity promotes and privileges patriarchy, heterosexism and heterosexuality with "a tacit sense of rightness and normalcy" (Berlant & Warner, 1998, p. 554), although it is prevalent in other categories involving gender and sexuality, such as race, class and societal or ethnic identity (Benin & Cartwright, 2006). Heteronormativity includes "the institutions, practices, and norms that support heterosexuality (especially a particular form of heterosexuality – monogamous and reproductive) and subjugate other forms of sexuality, especially homosexuality" (Martin, 2009, p. 190). It comprises an array of cultural beliefs, privileges, rewards, rules and sanctions which socially reinforce and maintain heterosexuality (Oswald et al., 2005) and oppress or marginalise others who do not 'fit' or follow what is deemed acceptable or normal. In essence, the dominant power in a society at a given cultural time 'forms' (or at least heavily influences) 'the subject' (Butler 1990; Nietzshe, 1887).

The dominance of this concept regarding what constituted sexual difference (i.e., gender roles), relationships (i.e., marriage) and the family (Allen & Mendez, 2018) and its enmeshment in Irish institutions and relations became evident as the research progressed. The Catholic Church as a social institution reinforced the belief that heterosexuality was the (only) natural form of sexuality, therefore implying that anything which was different was not normal, or desirable. Traditional marriage and its economic and social benefits was established as central to a heteronormative societal structure (Battle & Ashley, p. 14). The cultural rules associated with heteronormativity represented both a "field of forces" and a '"field of struggles" (Bourdieu, 1982, p. 47). The participants were embedded in institutions (schools, churches, workforce settings) that they did not create or control (Bordo, 1993) but that were prejudiced against non-patriarchal or nonheterosexual sexual, gender or marital relations. The concept of living outside, or not seeking to follow the heteronormative norms was disregarded, until the feasibility of living an alternative family life became an increasingly viable option, alongside the weight of trying to make the marriage work. The thesis was strongly framed by the perspective of

challenges to heteronormativity, via the disclosure and marital separation experience. Although the participants and their families did not deliberately establish themselves as nonnormalitve, their family experiences and reconfiguration challenged the traditional notions of marriage, sexuality and family. The findings highlighted the fluid nature of identity (e.g., heterosexual to LGB, heterosexually married to divorced, having two heterosexual parents to having one heterosexual and one nonheterosexually sexually orientated parent). The couples in the thesis eventually had to move on from the heterosexually normative script of monogamy, via an open marriage or, for most, via separating.

(2) Shame and the closet.

Shame is a powerful affect that both "defines the space wherein a sense of self will develop" and "derives from and aims toward sociability" or "relationality" (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 37). While shame as an affective response may feel internal (and is internalising), it is a form of communication that both separates the subject from others and connects the subject to others; its existence is dependent on the affect of others (Tomkins, 1963). Shame experiences are contextually dependant, contagious, and a performance whereby one absorbs and acts out the affects of others. (Sedgwick, 2003). It is also cumulative - the experience of shame influences the way further prejudice and discrimination is interpreted or 'felt'. Shame is associated with the social action of pity which must be processed before it can be replaced by its antithesis, namely pride (Benin & Cartwright, 2006).

"Shame is both an interruption and a further impediment to communication, which is itself communicated" (Tomkins, 1995, p. 137). Despite the profound impact that feelings of shame can have on well-being and relationships, shame experiences are rarely discussed. As illustrated in the three studies, vigilance (and/or silence) in discussing what was traditionally perceived to be shameful (i.e., having a non-traditional marriage, being a divorcee, or being nonheterosexual) occurred. While tentative attempts were made to either consider, or to actively share their experiences, the result was usually a recoiling back into the self due to a less than empathetic response. Responses comprised friends, family members, doctors or members of the clergy and legal institutions making prejudiced

comments, along with the participant's desiring to "fit in". This increased experiences of isolation, dislocation and detachment across the findings and contributed to continued living "within the closet".

The closet (where shame resides). The terms 'closeted' and 'in the closet' are terms for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer individuals whose erotic desires, sexual orientation, identity, behaviour and gender identity remain hidden or undisclosed to others. "The 'closet' is an epistemological space where knowledge is either forcibly suppressed from outside or willfully withheld from within" (M. Taylor, 1993, p. 22). Understanding the 'epistemology of the closet' (Sedwick, 1990) is crucial to everyone, and applicable to any anyone concealing an aspect of their identity due to social pressure. While silence can serve to produce and reinforce the power of the 'closet', coming out of the closet (disclosing one's sexual orientation and aspects thereof or concealed identity) highlights communication. "'Closetedness' itself is a performance initiated as such by the speech act of a silence…that accrues particularity by fits and starts, in relation to the discourse that surrounds and differentially constitutes it" (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 3). The participants in all three studies had to weigh the pros and cons of disclosure versus concealment and make decisions based on their individual situations. However, incremental recognition that the shame associated with having a spouse, self or parent coming out and marital separation was cultural in nature - essentially existing outside the isolated self - appeared to make "space" for the resolution of identity (Sedgwick, 1990), i.e. being gay, being divorced, being a reconfigured family).

Being 'out of the closet' indicates the resolution of inner stigma (Jordan & Deluty, 1998), as reflected by one participant who refused to withdraw into supressed or stigmatised living by joining her husband 'in the closet': "I said I'm not going to live in a closet with you. We are going to come out into the light and we are going to own this" (Christine). Coming out was the liberating antithesis. This appeared to be reflected in the findings overall, in that participant openness (or 'outness') and increasing comfort with what had been stigmatised appeared to promote greater self-integration and self-consonance.

The impact of shame on the formation (and alteration) of identity is applicable to any shame based experience which may be associated with race, disability, sexuality, health, or living a life script that is perceived to be different and undesirable. Whereas shame involves subjection, processing shame and releasing its hold is an intersubjective (existing between conscious minds) empathetic process involving the self with others. The self can only be expressed through communicating with others (Merleau-Ponty, 1962): we are not the subject (I) and others the object (You); we are involved in a dialogue (Bakhtin, 1993). This also offers an escape from the problem of duality, e.g., the categorisation of people and the presumption that such categories are immovable and suitable for all. As opposed to 'for' or 'against' (e.g., heterosexual and married versus nonheterosexual and divorced, or vice-versa), the concept of 'beside' (Sedgwick, 2003), i.e., living equally alongside, can better facilitate difference.

7.4.2 Intersectionality and narrative. These two epistemological positions were reflected on, by virtue of their importance in helping to understand how an individual can be impacted by multiple systems of power and prejudice, and allowing their core concerns to be heard.

Intersectionality. Intersectionality focuses on the multiple categories of social identities (e.g. race and gender), privilege, and oppression that co-exist and interact with one another in everyday experience (Cole, 2009). It is highly applicable to health and social psychology research (Bauer, 2014), given that "There are multiple ways in which -marginalised individuals might be traumatised by the complex systems of power (e.g., patriarchy, white supremacy, heterosexism; Gkiouleka, Huijts, Beckfield, & Bambra, 2018, p. 93).

Intersectionality attempts to disable heteronormativity and offers a framework upon which to develop an integrative approach to a phenomenon (e.g., the experience of being a woman, being a divorcee and being a nonheterosexual). Often, research focus is singular in its focus – e.g., focusing on experiences of divorce, or coming out, or racial discrimination (Paradies et al., 2015). In contrast, intersectionality focuses on contexts within which more than one force of inequality is operating (multiple disadvantaged identities; Crenshaw, 1991) and can also highlight

inequalities between and within specific groups (inter-group relations; McCall, 2005). This is important as the impa-ct of having multiple marginalised social positions and identities, for example, experiences of biphobia, racism and disability prejudice within general and same-sex communities can often be overlooked (Bowleg, 2012).

Narrative. The narrative of gender and sexuality, and how it relates to dominant discourses or 'truths' (Foucault, 1971), is a powerful one. Narrative, and how language is used, can help explore the construction of identity both at the cultural and interpersonal level (Laing, 1969). Storytelling is a means of ordering experience and interpreting reality (Bruner, 1986). According to Sarbin (1986), an individual's life story gives insight into human social behaviour and historical context. "Our planning, our remembering, even our living and hating, are guided by narrative plots" (p. 11). Narrative allows powerful, dominant discourses to be challenged (C. Brown & Augusta-Scott, 2007) and the impact of history on identity to be highlighted (White & Epstein, 1990).

While thick narrative descriptions can reflect and reproduce powerful social discourses, what is left unsaid (or silent) is important and warrants equal consideration. According to Foucault (1978), "There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses" (p. 27). Marriage, a couple, a family are often presumed to be heterosexual in nature. For the spouses in the thesis, this presumption was reflected in their narrative of growing up and marrying in early adulthood; less so in the discourse of the sons and daughters who grew up in a more liberal environment. The traditional script was exclusively heteronormative, in contrast to an increasingly queer national discourse: "Language is recursive: it provides the categories in which we think" (Hare-Mustin, 1994, p. 22).

Focusing on the narrative allows the primary concern of an individual to be heard, as opposed to 'dominant truths' (G. Chen, Offord, & Garbutt, 2012). In this thesis, storytelling enabled the marital separation to be heard as the core concern of the participants.

7.5 Clinical Implications

The implications of the findings for therapeutic/clinical practice are discussed in this section. These apply equally to the domain of education, which informs practice (Lehane et al., 2018). Suggestions are made in supporting the parent-child relationship during marital separation, and the needs of heterosexually married couples (and individuals) who seek therapeutic support after a spouse, or self comes out. Recommendations regarding continuing professional development are given, namely the importance of therapeutic awareness of the socio-cultural environment within which families are situated, and of the self.

7.5.1 Separation adjustment and the parent-child relationship.

With regard to the therapeutic needs of sons and daughters, supporting parents to foster the maintenance of a positive-relationship with both parents, in addition to parental self-care is important. Indeed, there is well documented evidence that, in general, children have better rates of post-divorce adjustment when they have continuing and regular contact with both parents (Bauserman, 2002; Fabricius, Braver, Diaz, & Velez, 2010; Reiter, Hjörleifsson, Breidablik, & Meland, 2013). This, however, can be dependent on both parents taking part in supportive co-parenting, and upon joint custody arrangements (Sandler, Wheeler, & Braver, 2013).

The overall findings indicated challenges to, and anxiety regarding, child access for the fathers in this study, especially in the immediate aftermath of the marital separation. This appeared to contribute to the presence of suicidal ideation amongst this group. While the modern father is encouraged to take a greater role in the care and upbringing of his children, this can be "either opposed or not supported by many of the structures, policies and practices which directly impact on fathers" in Ireland (McKeown, Ferguson, & Rooney, 1998, p. 406). However, in family support services evidence of father's exclusion from family support work has been reported (Hogan & Gilbertson, 2007; Ferguson & Hogan, 2004; Whyte, 2017) and in family law evidence of bias against fathers has been cited (McKeown, 2001; M. Stern, Oehme, & Nat, 2016).

While the literature indicates that safe space groups and organisations can provide much-needed peer support for members of the

LGBTQI community (K. Coleman, 2016; Goh, 2018), further support for separating fathers seems important in general. It is recommended that family support services adopt a pro-active role in focusing on the needs of divorced/separated fathers, for the benefit of both fathers and their families. Furthermore, given the heightened risk of suicide amongst men (Sweet, 2012) and more so gay/bisexual men (Hass et al., 2011), an enhanced awareness of suicide risk and prevention interventions that address suicidal behaviour is important. Easy access to a continuum of care, ranging from peer, community and technology based support (Bush et al., 2015) to suicide-specific therapy (ranging from brief interventions to longer term care) is required (Jobes et al., 2015).

7.5.2 Post-disclosure support: couples and individuals. The current findings support the premise in the mixed-orientation marriage (MOM) literature that an appreciation of the individuality of each family situation is required when a parent, spouse or self comes out as nonheterosexual, the goal being to ascertain what is important for each individual. For some, it may be issues related to sexual orientation, while for others it may not be.

A limited number of studies offer guidance to clinicians working with mixed-orientation marriage (MOM; e.g., Bradford, 2012; Crofford, 2018; Schwartz, 2012), although these studies tend to focus on couples who, initially, seek to remain married, rather than on the generic experience and impact of marital infidelity and separation and forgiveness. Overall, they highlight the importance of: understanding the differing therapeutic needs of each partner (e.g., health and emotional needs, the spousal bond, relationship and family history and potential stressors), addressing relational and sexual issues, and facilitating the negotiation of consequential changes. The use of affirmative GLB-straight practice (Crofford, 2018), or gay/LGBT affirmative therapy (S. Johnson, 2012; e.g., Alessi, Dillon, & Kim, 2015; C. Crisp & McCave, 2007) has been advocated for in some studies, particularly with nonheterosexual clients. This psychological practice “affirms a lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity as an equally positive human experience and expression to heterosexual identity’’ (D. Davies, 1996, p. 25), and seeks to support the acceptance of the sexual orientation

and identity of each individual (Waidzunas 2015). LGB psychology, however, has also been criticised for its positivist, normalising and essentialist focus (Bohan & Russell, 1999; Hegarty, 2011), its limitations in exploring the impact of heteronormativity and sociocultural systems in clinical practice (Gamson, 2000), and its focus on therapeutic recommendations based upon sexual orientation (Semp, 2011). According to D. Riggs (2011), evidence-based practices informed by positivist assumptions can potentially result in a "narrow and prescriptive understanding of marginalised identities" (p. 88).

The overall findings of this research emphasise the need for therapeutic understanding in focusing on the core concern of participants, i.e., the marital loss and associated changes, rather than sexual identity affirmation. This suggests that clinicians (and their educators) should be mindful of not over-focusing on issues relating to the sexuality of a parent, spouse or self, to the detriment of other separation, marital or psychological related issues. The impact of marital stress and its source and treatment, if required, needs to be explored holistically. As Buber (1992) posits, "to divide [a person] into departments which can be treated singly in a less problematic, less powerful, less binding way" (p. 29) is less effective and meaningful. The findings also suggest that access to meaningful therapeutic support is particularly important in the immediate crisis or aftermath of the disclosure or separation if sought/required, where overall dissatisfaction in professional support was reported. Examples of therapeutic approaches - crisis/brief, individual and family systems - are outlined as follows:

Crisis intervention. A crisis, as a rule, tends to occur when the stress from a critical event exceeds an individual's capacity to cope with the event, and threatens their physical and/or mental health (Dattilio & Freeman, 2007) - although what is a crisis for one individual may not be a crisis for another. Brief interventions, such as solution-oriented brief therapy are often used in crisis intervention to: focus on quickly assessing a given situation; assist in creative change; and support a positive course of action (Dulmus & Hilarski, 2003; Henden, 2017; Kanel, 2007). It is recognised that "the immediacy of the intervention is vital… to relieve anxiety and prevent further disorientation" (Greenstone & Leviton, 2002, p. 37). Brief therapy is

goal orientated, rather than problem focused, which may be particularly suited to situations in which the perceived 'problem' cannot be altered (e.g., an infidelity or a disclosure of a sexual orientation; Ratner, George & Iveson, 2012). It focuses on helping clients to attain the following: define concrete, specific goals for achieving stability (and their possible attainment); develop a sense of empowerment; locate appropriate resources; develop coping skills in the here and now (G. Greene, Lee, Trask, & Rheinsheld, 2000; Shennan, 2014). However, some individuals who experience a marital separation of significance may benefit from more formal, and prolonged therapeutic support, given that this experience is associated with more persistent psychological sequelae, such as grief, anxiety and depression (Hamaoka, Benedek, Grieger, & Ursano, 2007).

Individual therapeutic approaches. "In love, you grow and come home to your self "(O'Donohue, 1997, p. 28). The use of positive therapeutic approaches such as compassion-focused therapy (CFT; Gilbert, 2012, 2014), which contextualises the individual in his or her environment, may further help individuals in distress, or those less able to general positive affiliative emotions (Gilbert, 2009). The therapeutic focus of CFT on developing and strengthening positive affect can play a significant role in reducing distress and enhancing psychological well-being, and is particularly useful when working with self-critical or shame-focused individuals (Leaviss & Uttley, 2015; Stott, 2007). Although shame is a prevalent and painful emotion (Dearing & Tangney, 2011), its role within the therapeutic process is often overlooked. As alluded to by the heterosexual spouses in this research, the therapeutic use of self-narrative (e.g., autobiography and narrative therapy) to interpret and to make sense of life changing events in a coherent manner may also help individuals to deconstruct a distressing story and 'reauthor' a meaningful, alternative one (White, 2004). Narrative therapy also allows for an exploration of how language (of the self and others, past and present) can construct dominant versions of subjectivity whilst subjugating others, which can facilitate change (Semp, 2011).

Family systems therapy. Family systems therapy (FST; Bowen, 1978; M. Kerr & Bowen, 1988), also known as family counselling/therapy,

may be of particular relevance when supporting some couples and individuals in differing (non-traditional) family formulations in need. The interconnection of family members' lives is highlighted in this approach, in addition to the dynamic relationship between families and social or cultural forces (Minuchin, 1988). FST focuses on the most pertinent aspects of the problem and resolution process, and considers the uniqueness and the family system of each individual, and the reciprocal nature of the interactions therein (Carr, 2012; Stratton et al., 2014). Family systems work seeks to promote adaptive change (Becvar & Becvar, 2009). It focuses on relations, structures and processes that create systems and make them 'work', or not (Plas, 1992), and seeks to empower individuals to take responsibility for the change that inevitably occurs. Systemic work can also bridge the gap between theory and practice through working collaboratively with the 'person-in-context' (Orford, 1992) to help resolve identified needs (Eraut, 1994).

7.5.3 Continuing professional development. Clinicians may play a supportive role in helping to restructure a family's self-definition when a parent/spouse comes out as nonheterosexual in the context of a heterosexual marriage, and should be open to the possibility that any family may contain members of differing sexual orientations and definitions. Recognising the possible strengths of family members who experience a parent, spouse or self come out (e.g., an increased appreciation for diversity), as well as areas of possible difficulty/stress (e.g., suppression and societal heterosexism) is recommended. Although sexual prejudice and its consequences for the family will hopefully continue to be historical in nature, if the legal endorsement of equal civil rights for all individuals and family types continues, it is important that clinicians are open to supporting those whose way of life may challenge the traditional view of marriage, commitment and family. Higher sensitivity to an individual's cultural and family context (the 'person-in-context'; Orford, 1992) is required, particularly if a family contains members of differing sexual orientations and definitions (Bigner & Wetchler, 2012; Weiler, Lyness, Haddock, & Zimmerman, 2015).

Research on the efficacy of therapy suggests that positive therapeutic outcomes are dependent on the formation of a positive client-therapist

relationship (Lambert & Barley, 2001), and interconnected core conditions such as congruence, empathy and unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1961). Therapeutic professionals are challenged to become more aware of their own beliefs about marriage and family and how these beliefs may affect their work. While therapeutic neutrality is essential, it appears particularly important when working with individuals whose experience is outside the cultural 'norm'. Therapists are obliged to reflect on their own ability to work with those in alternative relationship formations, and on their own views on divorce, differing sexual orientations and cultural difference in general (D'Andrea & Daniels, 2001). If necessary they should make an onward referral to another professional (McGeorge, 2016; McGeorge, Stone, & Farrell, 2015), although seeking appropriate supervision and training may serve better in addressing gaps in competency (British Psychological Society, 2012; K. Myers, Morse, & Wheeler, 2015), in addition to challenging heteronormative assumptions. Furthermore, empirically informed best practice guidelines for working with mixed-orientation marriage, infidelity (regardless of sexual orientation) and marital separation should include an awareness that therapists own assumptions and biases may impact on the therapeutic process for individuals, couples, and families.

7.6 Limitations

This research has a number of limitations, primarily in the areas of sampling (demographics and data collection procedures) and methodology, which are outlined in this section.

7.6.1 Sampling. Sampling restrictions in this thesis due to the self-selection of the participants warrant consideration. Many became involved due to 'snowball sampling' whereby participants volunteered another participant who qualified for the research, leading to referral "chains" (Noy, 2008). A selection bias may have occurred because of the voluntary nature of the recruitment. These samples upon which the studies are based may have been skewed toward those who were in a position to discuss their lives, or who sought to help others, or who were more comfortable with the topic in question (i.e., marital separation and same-gender sexuality). The family culture of participants (e.g., the degree of heterosexism and religiosity

present in their family or community) may have implications for the level of comfort with the disclosure and separation. In addition, being aware of a parent's same-gender sexual orientation or having separated parents from a very early age may have contributed to a sense of normalcy. The overall sample of this thesis was also multi-generational in nature. Ireland has transitioned from an overwhelmingly conservative culture to a liberal one in the space of a generation (de Freytas-Tamura, 2018). The parents/spouses in this study were coming out and separating in a different cultural climate than that of their youth and of that of the sons/daughter participants, which made triangulation (the process of comparing the qualitative findings; Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, Dicenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014) additionally challenging.

Participants who were unwilling or unable to contact the researcher were not included, thus the experience of those who may have had more varied experiences may not have been captured. For example, individuals who do not acknowledge the same-gender sexual orientation of themselves, their spouse, or parent are not represented in this sample. Such a population is difficult to access given that these individuals are unlikely to acknowledge their parent's or spouses (or own) nonheterosexual sexual orientation. Talking about the issue may be taboo in some families, and participants who experience shame, and/or internalised homonegativity (Herek, 2004) regarding the same-sex sexual orientation may remain silent.

Although the thesis focused on participants within an Irish context, thereby reflecting the current societal context within which such families exist, three participants in Study 2 (due to recruitment difficulties), were not Irish. However, all participants married traditionally and were reared in a context of religious conservatism. Given the sensitive nature of the research and the absence of specific support fora (other than the Straight Support Network; www.straightspouse.org), being able to recruit the sample for this qualitative study is an indication of the courage of the participants who chose to speak about a potentially very sensitive topic. The recruitment of participants through social media or smart phone applications, and the discussion of the research topic in mainstream, public media forms (as

opposed to sexuality specific fora) may facilitate greater access to potential participants and should be considered in future studies.

Sampling restrictions occurred due to the scope of the study, and the methodological considerations that arose. These resulted in specific groups being omitted. For example, Study 1 was limited to children with a LGB parent, but those with a parent who came out as transgender, intersex, or any other alternative sexual orientation or self-definition were not included in the study. Studies 2 and 3 focused on the experience of a spouse coming out as gay, to the exclusion of spouses of other sexual orientations (e.g. Lesbian or Bisexual) and the male heterosexual spouse. Their experiences may be different. Furthermore, participants from Northern Ireland were not included due to fact that the pace of societal change regarding same-sex sexuality differs somewhat from that of the Republic. For example, same-sex marriage, which is now legal in Ireland, is not legal in Northern Ireland at present. The participants were also homogenous in race (all were white) and lacked racial and ethnic diversity, although the information shared during interviews indicated that education levels of participants varied greatly. The inclusion of differing racial and ethnic groups warrants further exploration in future studies.

7.6.2 Methodology.

Summary of methodological limitations. The limitations in using a qualitative research design and specific methodological limitations are outlined in Chapter 3. In summary, much debate has taken place about the validity and reliability of retrospective quantitative data in studies (Henry, Moffit, Caspi, Langley, & Silva, 1994), and the same concern is applicable to the trustworthiness of studies of a qualitative nature (as discussed in Chapter 3). The sample size and qualitative methodology prohibits the generalisation of findings; within the qualitative paradigm interpretations are temporal, provisional and limited in time. However, replicability is not relevant given that the focus of theory generation and the interpretation of peoples' experiences of a phenomenon is to illuminate understanding of a topic under exploration, and to offer a perspective on a given situation which may guide further exploration and focus (Suddaby, 2006). The rigour of the each study depends on the adequacy of the sample "in terms of its

ability to supply all the information needed for comprehensive analysis" (Yardley, 2000, p. 221), rather than the size of the sample.

Theoretical saturation in Study 1. The determination of data saturation in Study 1 warrants further reflection in light of the importance, and challenge, of theoretical saturation in Grounded Theory (GT). Although data saturation as a concept in qualitative research is difficult to define, and is a gradual, ongoing, subjective and often non-linear process (Aldiabat, Le Navenec, 2018), failure to reach data saturation can impact on the quality of a research project (C. Kerr, Nixon, & Wild, 2010). Theoretical saturation is indicated when categories are "full" (or fully accounted for) and the variability and relationships between them is understood (Green & Thorogood, 2004). New data no longer changes the core findings and the selected/emergent categories are well developed in terms of their properties (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

How many interviews are required to reach theoretical saturation? In GT the relationship between theoretical sampling and saturation is a reciprocal one (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012). The researcher realised that the process should not be concluded prematurely when an initial theoretical model emerged that did not fully explain the variability between the age related and the parental process categories. Developing the categories to an adequate theoretical level was the required focus, and hence the phenomenon at this stage was not fully explored (Morse, 1995). Furthermore, reaching saturation quickly can indicate an analysis which lacks "criticality and complexity" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 215). Consequently further interviews took place that explained and accounted for these categories (via the constant comparative method), in addition to the relationships between these categories and the arising theoretical model. The researcher re-familiarised herself with the advice given by Barney Glaser, namely to continue to compare "incidents which yield different properties of the pattern until no new properties of the pattern emerge" (1969, p. 223).

The following factors were considered when determining theoretical saturation:

1. Although variations can always be discovered, further (new) data did not contribute additional insights to the core categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1971) or the theoretical conceptualisation. The researcher acknowledged that the data as a whole would never be fully saturated, as there would always be additional and unique social nuances to discover (Wray, Markovic, & Manderson, 2007) that related to other research aims and foci. For example, code clusters that were unrelated to the core categories and arising theoretical model remained unsaturated, namely career (current and/or aspired), historical or specific participant relationships with other men/women, and individual parental experiences (e.g., career, health, relationships with others).
2. The combined categorical data contributing to the theoretical concepts and model was rich (i.e., detailed, intricate) and thick (i.e., descriptive and lengthy; Dibley, 2011; Fusch & Ness, 2015).
3. The researcher became increasingly familiar with the data analysis and gathering process and was engaged with the data collection and analysis for a prolonged (two year) period of time.

These factors can have a positive impact on data saturation (M. Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). An awareness of the philosophical underpinnings of GT, such as the belief that there are multiple truths in the social world which are "are probabilistically apprehensible, albeit imperfectly" (Annells, 1996, p. 385) also motivated the researcher to attain a more thorough picture through categorical saturation. The focus was on 'an' explanatory theory of the social process of a parent coming out.

Historical considerations – the impact of time. The findings of this thesis present a phenomenon in a certain time and place. The level of any bias associated with self-report, particularly in asking participants to recall a range of historical experiences, and the influence of the researcher charged with interpreting the data cannot be estimated. The participants may have been affected by memory biases, i.e., experiences after their parent, spouse or self came out. How participants currently feel, and cultural and contextual (i.e., time) developments may have also influenced participant recall. For example, the participants currently live in a time when issues of same-gender sexual orientation rights and parenting are frequently discussed

and debated in the media, and attitudes about gay rights are increasingly tolerant. The participants may currently be more comfortable with their parent's, (ex)-spouse's or own sexuality than they were previously. It is acknowledged that historical recollections are biased by their source (those who give them), and by those that interpret them. For example, research in historical demography is increasingly revisited (Tsuya, 2016). Hence causal inferences can only be assembled with extreme care, and have limited theoretical applicability (Rahman, 2017).

Despite the methodological limitations, the qualitative methods used provided a deeper understanding of the subjective and lived experiences of having a parent, husband or self come out in Ireland in the 21st century. As with all qualitative methods, the rich information gathered allowed for the in-depth exploration of phenomenon related issues which were of significance to a sample of differing family unit members – son/daughter, mother and father.

7.7 Further Research Considerations

Family values and norms arise from a complex interplay of factors including familial, historic and social context (Gelfand et al., 2011). The hallmark feature of the research to date on a parent/spouse coming out in the context of heterosexual marriage, however, is its singular focus, i.e., on the children or the parent(s). Future research would benefit from broader perspectives and models that allow for the multifaceted factors involved in this phenomenon. The research model employed in this thesis, whereby the perspectives of children and spouses in the coming out and separation experience were explored, is a useful model that could be applied to research elsewhere. Indeed, a dyadic, and more recently triadic multiple perspectives approach to research (e.g., Branchet, Monfort, Poulet, & Weil, 2018; Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2011; Keeling, Laing, & de Ruyter, 2018), is becoming increasingly popular in gathering holistic information about a social issue (Chakraborty & Kaynak, 2018). Given the complexity involved in accessing the numbers necessary for quantitative research, the qualitative model of this thesis can provide in-depth insight on each group individually and, as demonstrated, can also enable the exploration of common threads and issues that may arise across all three groups.

The model used in this thesis, however, did not lend itself to a family systems analysis, as the participants represented different family systems. A systemic perspective that considers the experience of related family members, i.e., family triads, would provide further insight and would allow for the complex interactions (and multiple perspectives) between the dynamic family systems (Stratton et al., 2014) to be explored in greater detail. Family systems theory considers "people within the contexts of the social settings and systems of which they are parts or which influence them" (Orford, 1992, p. 6). As the individual and relational experiences that affect family composition differ, there is an increased need to be mindful of, and examine, within-group variation and similarity to further enhance understanding of families 'in context' (Hadfield, Amos, Ungar, Gosselin, & Ganong, 2018). A focus on parents or spouses who disclose alternative sexualities other than same-gender sexual orientation warrants particular inclusion in the research overall.

Individuals from other cultures may attribute different meanings to marital separation and to the experience of having a spouse, parent or self come out as nonheterosexual, including identifying as transgender. As Tasker (2013) states, "research should take into account the complex intersections of gender, sexuality (dis) abilities, racial or ethnic differences" (p. 14). Broader societal and contextual influences should also be taken into account, such as the dynamic nature of divorce and disclosure practices, experiences of stigma, and the role of social and political changes in shaping such events. Future research should also take into account the relationship marital quality and examine how it may affect the coming out experience, with reference to the general infidelity literature. High quality studies with methodological transparency (which have been lacking particularly in qualitative research) are also recommended.

While the participants in this study gave a general overview of post-separation repartnering experiences, this did not comprise the core focus of the research. Further research into the process of post-separation relationship building with others is recommended, given that the transition from marriage to unmarried unions is understudied (Daatland, 2007; Langlais et al., 2016). Although positive repartnerships were reported in this

thesis, anxiety and confidence issues were referenced by some spouses when recoupling sexually and when attempting to integrate sexual acts and intimacy. Further exploration into dating and repartnering relationship formation following a marital separation may provide insight into the need for psychosexual, esteem or communicative based therapeutic support and/or advice.

The experience of therapy following the disclosure of a parent, spouse or self as nonheterosexual in the context of marriage warrants further exploration, given the negative experiences of professional support reported by the participants in the immediate aftermath of the disclosure. The therapeutic support and "advice given" may have been influenced by a lack of education and/or societal related therapeutic prejudices at the time that therapy was sought. Further investigation is required in this regard. Queer theory, in particular, has relevance for exploring the meaning of therapeutic support for individuals, in that it adopts "a position of inquiry that is decentered from the norm" (Minton, 1997, p. 349), allowing for an interpretative critique of the limitations of former or existing perspectives and the development of new modes of thinking.

Further research is also needed on the experience of same-gender sexual desires or extra-marital sexual practices pre-disclosure from a first person perspective. (This may include both same-gender and opposite-gender desires or practices for bisexual individuals). The literature on heterosexually married same-gender sexually orientated spouses and men who have sex with men (MSM) in religious, conservative and/or homophobic cultures stresses the potential for identity conflict and stress (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2012; Jaspal & Siraj, 2011) and concerns regarding the potential health risks of unsafe sexual practices (Shiman et al., 2009; Tomori et al., 2018). The assimilation of same-gender desires in such cultures may mean the compartmentalisation of these desires (and self; Cerulo, 1997). Further exploration is recommended.

In general, greater attention to theoretical integration within studies exploring the coming out and separation experience and to the diversity of experiences of family members (and their socio-cultural environment) will more accurately reflect the reality of the growing diversity of family

formations that exist. Theory-driven empirical research which includes under-represented populations in the literature (e.g., transgender, intersex, bisexual, and queer populations) is recommended in contributing to the interconnected fields of family, sexuality and culture.

7.8 Concluding Remarks

Parental and marital separation is a difficult process of change and adjustment, and societal prejudice can accompany family formations and sexual identities that differ from the norm, particularly in conservative, religious cultures. The social and legal landscape for people who identify as married and as nonheterosexual has undergone radical shifts in Ireland in the last 30 years, resulting in legislative changes and new definitions of what constitutes ‘a family’. This thesis indicates that the increasing cultural tolerance towards divorce and same-gender sexuality facilitated the process of adjustment relating to the coming out and separation experience. The findings highlight the significance of a parental or marital separation, which accompanied a parent/spouse coming out as nonheterosexual, and of perceived societal stigma which intensified the emotive process. As social and political climates change, the diversity inherent within families, and the socially constructed nature of ‘family’ and sexuality, can become more apparent and visible. A continual exploration of what is important to individuals who experience differing (or changing) family formations is needed to further develop therapeutic and educational practice relating to marriage, separation and identity/sexuality.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A1: The Advantages and Counteracting the Disadvantages of Semi-Structured Interviews

Advantages:

- Topics and issues to be covered can be specified in advance, which can result in a more relaxed, informed respondent (and aid the informed consent process).
- The semi-structured interview facilitates the development of rapport/empathy between the interviewer and interview. Interview data allows the researcher to "take into account who the other person is, what the other person could be presumed to know, 'where' that other is in relation to ourself in the world we talk about" (Baker, 1982, p. 109).
- The outline increases the comprehensiveness of the data and makes data collection somewhat systematic for each respondent. This degree of structure focuses the interview and facilitates aggregation and analysis of responses. Moreover, direct observations of the participant during the interview adds a 'personalised dimension' to the process (Sattler & Hoge, 2006)
- The interview is guided by the schedule rather than dictated by it. As interview questions are adapted to the context, the interviewee's style and thoughts, and the general flow of answers, the relatively natural conversation seems to produce richer, more genuine and more realistic information on the interview's own terms. The interviewer is free to probe interesting areas that arise. In addition, open-ended questions enable important but unanticipated issue to be raised.
- The semi-structured interview enables logical gaps in the data to be anticipated and closed (Cohen et al., 2000). In this way they are high in credibility as the interviewer can clarify responses and probe for more in-depth responses.
- The process of recounting an experience may prove cathartic for participants (Carlick & Biley, 2004). Reflecting on, and retelling a

significant personal narrative may result in a sense of relief and empowerment that can contribute to healing (East, Jackson, O'Brien, & Peters, 2010).

Disadvantages and how to counteract them:

- Semi-structured interviews, and interviews in general, have low reliability (Willig, 2001). Interviewers are human, and their manner is likely to have an effect on the interviews (Selltiz, Jahoda, Deutsch, & Cook, 1965). For example, the use of appropriate language or non-verbal behaviour can affect how well information is obtained from the interview (Cormier & Cormier, 1991). Interviewers need to take care not to lead participants with overly biased prompting and questioning (Fassinger, 2005).
- As interviews are unique and based on comments of respondents, different questions and probes are likely to be used in different interviews, and lead to inevitable variation. Silverman (1993) suggests that interview experience, and planning and piloting interview, can enhance the reliability of interviews and should be considered.
- Interviewers and interviews alike bring their own, and often unconscious, experiential and biographical history with them into the interview situation (Cohen et al., 2000). Due to the interpersonal nature of interviews, it is inevitable that the researcher will have some influence on the interview and, thereby, on the data (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989). Furthermore, the researcher has stake in the interview, and a focus that he/she wants the participants to hone in on. However, when using qualitative research, loosely defined as ‘an interpretative study of a specified issue in which the researcher is central to the sense that is made (Banister et al., 1994, p.2), the researcher is acknowledged in the process of constructing meaning. Knowledge is constructed between the interviewee and interviewer. Hence, the interview is neither solely objective nor subjective; it is intersubjective (existing between people; Laing, 1967).

Appendix A2: Stages of Interview Planning

1. Thematising: The purpose of the interview was formulated and a general overview of the topics to be explored was considered.

2. Designing the Interview Schedule: The objectives of the study were translated into the areas that constituted the main body of the interview schedule. Open ended questions deemed pertinent to the study were placed in the most appropriate sequence, with the awareness that this may not be the order followed during interviewing, and that flexibility would be required.

3. Collaboration: The Interview Schedules were debated during supervisory meetings and piloted with two colleagues. This facilitated a sub-piloting process whereby decisions were discussed regarding the sensitive, yet appropriate, nature of questioning, and some amendments were made accordingly.

4. Preparation: (Oppenheim, 1992) argues that effective impression management is essential when conducting research, and efforts were taken to ensure that participants were reassured about what constituted their participation prior to meeting with the researcher. A summary of the interview topics was forwarded to the participants prior to the interview. This enabled the objectives and general purpose of the interview to be communicated to the respondents prior to the interview itself.

5. Procedure: Having gained consent from each participant, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Prompts were minimal (e.g., to encourage elaboration or clarify information). Each interview was audio-recorded, as audio recordings can increase the descriptive validity of research findings (Crichton & Childs, 2005), and lasted approximately 80 minutes. As the process

proceeded, questions were reduced during the interview process. This is likely related to the examiner familiarity with the process, and a methodological shift from seeking to generate theory to emphasising the subjective experiences of participants' 'lifeworlds' (Husserl, 1973).

6. Transcription: The audio-recordings were subsequent transcribed by the researcher and identifying information (namely people, places and professions) was omitted or altered to preserve confidentiality. Sensitive and potentially compromising information that was unrelated to the research topic was also omitted for some participants, as requested. Minor errors, which can often occur in normal speech, were changed in the text. In such instances the integrity of the content was maintained. The punctuation was, however, kept to a minimum to reflect the flow of the dialogue. Personally transcribing, reading and rereading the interviews resulted in an in-depth familiarity with the content of the data, and facilitated the process of analysis.

Appendix B1: Participant Information Sheet (Study 1)

National University of Ireland, Galway
Ollscoil na hÉireann, Gaillimh

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Title of Project: A parental change to, and affirmation of, lesbian, gay or bisexual orientation: the experience and relational sequelae, as reported by the adult child.

Dear Reader

You are being invited to take part in a research study that will explore the experiences of adult children whose parent has changed his or her sexual orientation. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This *Participant Information Sheet* will tell you about the purpose, risks and benefits of this research study. If you agree to take part, I will ask to ask you to sign a *Consent Form*. I will be happy to speak with you personally regarding any questions you may have or if you would like more information. You should only agree to participate in this research study when you feel that you understand what is being asked of you, and you have had enough time to think about your decision. Please take as much time as you need to read this information.

Thank you for reading this.

What is the purpose of the study?

There is now a growing awareness of the topic of gay parenting. Research generally shows that the development and well-being of children of lesbian or gay parents does not differ notably from that of children of heterosexual parents. To date, few studies have examined the experiences of children born into heterosexually organised unions where a parent has later changed their sexual orientation. The aim of this study is to explore how the adult child experiences the change in its parent's sexual orientation. The purpose of the study is to find out *your* views. It is hoped that this study will provide others with a greater understanding of the experiences of children whose parent has changed his or her sexual orientation.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and will be asked to sign a consent form (see below). If you agree to take part and then change your mind later on you can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.

What will happen if I take part?
If you agree to take part I will interview you. The interview (which I will expect will not take more than an hour) will take place at a time and venue that will suit you. You will not meet anyone else at the interview other than myself. You will be asked to sign the consent form and will be given a copy to keep. The format of the interview will be a discussion on your experience, and will touch on such matters as your awareness of the change in your parent's sexual orientation, reactions to the change, changes in family relationships (if at all) and supportive sources (or lack of). The interview will be audio recorded and will also be transcribed by me. You will never be identified by name or otherwise in any transcription, discussion, interim or final report whatsoever. When I have finished all the interviews in this study (which should be completed within 6-8 months) I will consider all the information received from you and other participants with a view to identifying experiences common to all participants. All recordings will be destroyed safely by me once the project has been completed.

Why Interviews?
It is hoped that the interview will afford you ample opportunity and freedom to discuss your own experience with me.

What are the possible benefits in taking part?
Primarily, the purpose of this study is to encourage and develop a greater understanding by others of the experiences and needs of adult children whose parent has changed their sexual orientation. Although there may be no direct benefit to you, you may still enjoy the opportunity to talk about your experiences, particularly if you have not done so before.

What are the possible risks of taking part?
It is possible that issues may arise for you during the course of the interview which might cause you some distress or upset. If you feel that you that you would like to talk to someone about any of the issues the process raises I will recommend someone suitable to you. You are, of course, free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?
Information about your identity and the identities of all other participants will be kept strictly and permanently confidential, and you will never be identified in any material which may be written or published. You will only be identified by a number and/or pseudonym.

What will happen to the results of the research study?
I will give you a summary of the results once they are completed. I hope that the findings/themes may be published in professional journals and/or discussed at appropriate conferences. However, you will not be identified in any publications or at any conference. It is hoped that the results of this study will enhance understanding.

Who is doing the research?
The researcher of this study is myself, Siobhán Daly, a psychologist undertaking a PhD with the National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG). Further members of the research team include Dr. Kiran Sarma, who is a lecturer in psychology at the National University of Ireland, Galway, and [specific named psychologist] a clinical and research psychologist. The NUIG Research Ethics Committee has given me permission to carry out this study.

What now?
If you decide to take part in this study, or if you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me on [mobile number given] or e-mail me at s.daly14@ nuigalway.ie or contactsiobhan@gmail.com.

Thank you very much for taking the time and trouble to read and consider this information sheet. I hope that you will be able to participate in this study and I look forward to meeting you in the near future.

_____

Siobhán Daly
B.A.;H.Dip.Psych.; H.Dip.Ed.; M.A.E.P.;A.L.C.M.

If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone else in confidence you may contact: 'the Chairperson of the NUI Galway Research Ethics Committee, c/o Office of the Vice President for Research, NUI Galway, ethics@nuigalway.ie.

Appendix B2: Participant Referral Protocol (Study 1)

National University of Ireland, Galway
Ollscoil na hÉireann, Gaillimh

REFERRAL PROTOCOL
PhD (Psychology)

Title of Project: A parental change to, and affirmation of, lesbian, gay or bisexual orientation: the experience and relational sequelae, as reported by the adult child.

Researcher: Siobhán Daly

It is recognised that the subject of inquiry has the potential, by virtue of its personal nature to trigger distress. If participants identify themselves or are identified as experiencing significant psychological distress, every effort will be made to support them through the following procedures:

Potential Counselling Sources:

1) The Principal Investigator can provide participants with the contact details of the *Irish Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy:*
Tel: 0035312723427
Email: iacp@iacp.ie

2) Participants can be given the contact phone number and e-mail address of the Principal Investigator:
Tel: 086-8632221;
E-mail: s.daly14@nuigalway.ie

If the participant has any concerns regarding the research and wishes to contact someone in confidence the following contact has been provided on the *Participant Information Sheet*: 'the Chairperson of the NUI Galway Research Ethics Committee, c/o Office of the Vice President for Research, NUI Galway, ethics@nuigalway.ie.

Appendix B3: Participant Consent Form (Study 1)

National University of Ireland, Galway
Ollscoil na hÉireann, Gaillimh

CONSENT FORM

The information on this form will be treated as confidential information. Any information provided will be held and processed in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act, 1998.

Title of Project: A parental change to, and affirmation of, lesbian, gay or bisexual orientation: the experience and relational sequelae, as reported by the adult child.

Name of Researcher: Siobhán Daly

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read the information sheet (dated December 2009) for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. ☐

2. I am satisfied that I understand the information provided and have had enough time to consider the information. ☐

3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, without my legal rights being affected. ☐

4. I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

Name/Signature of Participant:

Participant Contact Phone Number and/or e-mail:

Name of Researcher: ***Date:*** ***Signature:***

Appendix B4: Interview Guide Sheet (Study 1)

Age:
Gender:
Parental Orientation: Mother: Father:

Developing awareness as an evolving process and circumstances

1. When were you first aware that your dad/mum had changed their sexual orientation?
2. Where you ever told directly?/ Can you describe how you were told about this change?
3. How did you feel about this change?

Effects on family relationships & interpersonal relationships

4. How did your family react to the change? When/How were they told?
5. Who (if anyone) did you talk to about it? /What was the reaction of others that you told?
6. Are you aware of anyone who does not know about the separation/disclosure?
7. Would you say that this process has impacted on your relationship with you and your parents – did anything change? If prompting needed: Thinking back to before the 'change', what was your relationship like with your Dad/Mum? Now, just after he came out, did that relationship change? In what way?
8. Thinking back now, how did this change impact on you?
9. When you realised that your parent was LGB did it help you to make sense of anything... Did it make you question anything about your past? If so, what?
10. Have there been any situations since when you felt concerned about your parent's changed sexuality?
11. What kind of feelings have you experienced throughout this process?
12. What was the most difficult thing about this process? If support deemed necessary: What/who helped you during this process?
13. Imagine if you had a young daughter/son now, about your age when your dad/mum came out, and you or your partner come out? What would it be like for her?/What advice would you give?
14. How would your life have been different if your mum/dad had not come out?
15. Is there anything else that that you feel is important that you would like to add?

Developed questioning

16. Do you perceive your father/mother as having changed at all? – If so, in what way?
17. Did you ever question your own sexuality or that of others? If so, in what way.
18. What was your parent's relationship like before they separated? How do they get on now?
19. New Parental Partners: Were your parents subsequent relationships "different" - in what way? How did you feel about new parental partners?
20. Are there any unanswered questions you'd like to ask (that you think about but have not asked/may never ask)?

Appendix B5: An Example of Each GT Coding Stage (Study 1)

B5.1a Table: Phase 1 Open Coding Example

Disclosure
OPEN CODES:
Anger - affair/breaking up the family/poor parenting boundaries
Empathy - not wanting to see mother or father sad, stigmatised, lonely, stressed (protectionism); I "see why he/she did what he/she did"
Burden of holding (from others)
Confusion – what did the tension and conflict mean?
Denial – having "niggles"
"Don't tell your sister/brother/mother…."
Destruction of trust
Health: tension/anxiety building: parental fighting
Helping to make sense - of parental tension
"A lot at the same time"
Blame -mother or father having an affair
Relief - parent not unwell; reduced tension
Reflecting on/re-evaluating the parental relationship
Vigilance (increased reflection on openness of others)
Shock
Sadness and upset – father leaving the home
Upset "by mother's upset and heartbreak"
Sad "seeing father sad"
"Wasn't too put out": early exposure to diversity
Weird - reaction of others – 'unhelpful' versus supportive (joke, empathy, open minded)
Love for parents
Concern regarding the opinions of others & family
Awareness of parents relationship breaking down
Having indirect (untold) awareness – books, friends, TV
Direct telling - mother, and/or father
Wondering about the sexual orientation of family members/friends/partners
Reflecting on own sexual orientation – "knowing"
Impact of religion (Catholicism)
Living between two homes – bags, toothbrushes, public transport, shared living
Being a mediator between parents
Stress relieved by "mother checking in"
Continued parental conflict after the separation, continued stress
Parents getting on after the separation "helped"

B.5.1b Phase 1 Open Coding Example Data Extracts (Descriptive)

- **Child awareness of parental tension/conflict/unhappiness; love for but not in love:** "There was always tension. Mum and dad were unhappy cause the love for each other was there, but they weren't in love anymore. I knew the arguing was unhappy." (Tom).
- **Signs: parental separation:** "I remember they started sleeping in separate bedrooms when I was about 13." (Andy)
- **Recalling his father leaving/confusion/unhappy marriage/anger not seeing his father –blame:** "I remember him driving up the road as clear as day. I used to say 'why can't he still live here even though you're not together anymore?' I know absolutely why now, but it doesn't make sense when you're 13. I wasn't too bothered by them splitting up cause they were unhappy together, but I was angry I couldn't see him. I held that against mum for a while." (Andy)
- **Continued access to father/no parental arguing recalled/amicable agreements:** "He used to come and go. There was never any stress over custody arrangements or anything like that. To save the cost of solicitors mum said 'you can come and go when you want to see the kids', and dad signed over the house. It was simply done. No arguing at all which was great. I think that's why we accepted it so much. We didn't have to listen to one bitching about the other, you know." (John)
- **Living between two homes (extra work):** "I feel like I have to live out of a bag all the time. It's a lot of extra work. I'd just love if they all lived in the one place. Once I attempted to tidy and put all my clothes in the wardrobe, but it was pointless because the next day I had to pack them all up again to go home to mums." (Anne).
- **Child (and adult) as mediator 'diploma' – parental role; ongoing acrimony/separation (choices, necessity, empathy):** I was actually a good kind of diplomat when I was young. Relaying messages and trying to work things out in terms of dates. Luckily my dad's not very sentimental so I invited Mum to my graduation and he didn't go. He still doesn't really like her. She made the choice to leave, not to say that she had a choice emotionally (Ashton).
- **Wanting to run away – seeking avoidance; the hardest thing -→ confusion/stress re tense co-parenting relationship.** The hardest thing was the feeling of wanting to run away and not wanting to deal with it, the arguing, in any way. If dad took me out for a day then sometimes I'd want to stay with him and not come home. Then other times I wouldn't want to see him." (Jenny)

B5.2 Phase 2 Axial Coding Example

Causal conditions (major event)	**Intervening conditions** (broad and specific situational factors that influence strategy)	**Strategy** (actions taken in response to the core category)	**Consequences** (outcomes from strategies)	**Core Category**	**Context** (broad and specific situational factors that influence strategy)
Indirect disclosure Disclosure/ parental separation Changes in the family unit/home	• Parental changes • Parental informing • Parental withholding • Parental support • Parental (co)relationship quality • Age of son/daughter • New partners: level of understanding	• Questioning/information sharing; versus avoidance/ withholding/vigilance • Mediating between parents or giving parental support; versus taking/receiving support • Having 'two of everything' (child); versus independent living (adult) • Processing the loss of the parental union versus no memory of parental union • Resistance or acceptance	• Suppression • Avoidance • Consonance/ relief • Tension • Feeling supported (processing/mental health enhanced; decreased need for professional support) • Feeling isolated (mental health impacted; increased need for professional support)	Process of adjustment – family unit changes	• Cultural/societal stigma • Support received: parents, extended family, stepparents, friends, community • Rural versus urban living • Heteronormativity • Communication • Time/maturity

B.5.3 Phase 3 Selective Coding Example

Family Reconfiguration: Transitional Tension

- ❖ Becoming Aware: Differing Trajectories
  - The slow dawning (indirect "niggles")
  - Being 'told' (direct informing) : child, sibling, extended family, community/others → separation versus sexual orientation
  - Balancing love with difficult feelings: "the disclosure part of the jigsaw"/ "part of a larger package"→ parental separation

- ❖ Support: Getting Versus Giving
  - Parental support (giving support to parent(s): lack of parental support/ poor boundaries/parental conflict

    → increased tension/anxiety/holding & need for therapy)

    versus
  - Parental support (getting support from parent(s): parents accessing/good boundaries/reduced parental conflict

    → reduced tension/anxiety/holding

- ❖ Sexual Questioning: Enhanced Reflection
  - Questioning the sexuality of others
  - Questioning the sexuality of self

- ❖ Societal Prejudice: Stigma (awareness of the 'conservative' past versus the more progressing present)
  - Vigilance (in disclosing to others)
  - Protectiveness (self and parents: not wanting to be perceived as "different"/judged)

Appendix C1: Participant Information Sheet (Study 2)

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Title of Project: When one parent comes out as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual (LGB): the experience, as reported by the heterosexual parent.

Dear Reader

You are being invited to take part in a research study that is exploring the experiences of families where one parent has come out as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB). (I am conducting this research as part of my PhD in psychology). Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This *Participant Information Sheet* will tell you about the purpose, risks and benefits of this research study. If you agree to take part, I will ask to ask you to complete a *Consent Form*. I will be happy to speak with you personally regarding any questions you may have or if you would like more information. You should only agree to participate in this research study when you feel that you understand what is being asked of you, and you have had enough time to think about your decision. Please take as much time as you need to read this information.

Thank you for reading this.

What is the purpose of the study?

There is now a growing awareness of the experiences of children who have a heterosexual and a gay/lesbian parent. Research generally shows that the development and well-being of children with LGB parents and mixed-orientated does not differ notably from that of children of heterosexual parents. To date, few studies have examined the experiences of how parents manage the process of a parental disclosure of LGB and changes in the family unit that can occur as a result. The aim of this study is to explore your experience as a parent of having a partner/spouse disclose as LGB. The purpose of the study is to find out *your* views. It is hoped that this study will provide others with a greater understanding of the experiences of parents and children in this regard.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and will be asked to complete a consent form (see below). If you agree to take part and then change your mind later on you can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.

What will happen if I take part?
If you agree to take part I will chat with/interview you. The interview (which I will expect will not take more than an hour) will take place at a time and in a venue that will suit you. You will not meet anyone else at the interview other than myself. You will be asked to complete the consent form before the interview takes place. The format of the interview will be informal discussion on your experience, and will touch on such matters as the 'coming out' and separation process, reactions to the change, what helped, changes in family relationships (if at all)/new partnerships and supportive sources (or lack of). The interview will be audio recorded and will also be transcribed by me. You will never be identified by name or otherwise in any transcription, discussion, interim or final report whatsoever. When I have finished all the interviews in this study (which should be completed within 6-8 months) I will consider all the information received from you and other participants with a view to identifying experiences common to all participants. All recordings will be stored confidently (by me) for five years while the project is being completed, after which I will personally destroy them.

Why Interviews?
It is hoped that the interview will afford you ample opportunity and freedom to discuss your own experience with me.

What are the possible benefits in taking part?
Although there are no direct benefits to you, you may enjoy the opportunity to talk about your experiences, as you may not have had sufficient opportunity to discuss them previously. Also, the information that you give will provide others with a greater understanding of the experiences of families where one parent comes out as LGB.

What are the possible risks of taking part?
It is possible that issues may arise for you during the course of the interview which might cause you some distress or upset. If you feel that you that you would like to talk to someone about any of the issues the process raises I will recommend someone suitable to you. You are, of course, free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?
Information about your identity and the identities of all other participants will be kept strictly and permanently confidential, and you will never be identified in any material which may be written or published. You will only be identified by a number and/or pseudonym.

What will happen to the results of the research study?
I will give you a summary of the results once they are completed. I hope that the findings/themes may be published in professional journals and/or discussed at appropriate conferences. However, you will not be identified in any publications or at any conference. It is hoped that the results of this study will enhance understanding.

Who is doing the research?
The researcher of this study is myself, Siobhán Daly, a psychologist undertaking a PhD with the National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG). A further member of the research team includes Dr. Kiran Sarma, who is a lecturer in psychology at the National University of Ireland. The NUIG Research Ethics Committee has given me permission to carry out this study.

What now?
If you decide to take part in this study, or if you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me on [mobile number given] or e-mail me at s.daly14@ nuigalway.ie.

Thank you very much for taking the time and trouble to read and consider this information sheet. I hope that you will be able to participate in this study and I look forward to meeting you in the near future.

Siobhán Daly
B.A.;H.Dip.Psych.; H.Dip.Ed.; M.A.E.P.;A.L.C.M.

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Appendix C2: Participant Referral Protocol (Study 2)

National University of Ireland, Galway
Ollscoil na hÉireann, Gaillimh

REFERRAL PROTOCOL
PhD (Psychology)

Title of Project: When one parent comes out as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual (LGB): the experience, as reported by the LGB and heterosexual parent.

Researcher: Siobhán Daly

It is recognised that the subject of inquiry has the potential, by virtue of its personal nature to trigger distress. If participants identify themselves or are identified as experiencing significant psychological distress, every effort will be made to support them through the following procedures:

Potential Counselling Sources:

1) The Principal Investigator can provide participants with the contact details of the *Irish Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy:*
Tel: 0035312723427
Email: iacp@iacp.ie

2) Participants can be given the contact work phone number and e-mail address of the Principal Investigator:
Tel: 0876160101;
E-mail: s.daly14@nuigalway.ie

If the participant has any concerns regarding the research and wishes to contact someone in confidence the following contact has been provided on the *Participant Information Sheet*: 'the Chairperson of the NUI Galway Research Ethics Committee, c/o Office of the Vice President for Research, NUI Galway, ethics@nuigalway.ie.

Appendix C3: Participant Consent Form (Study 2)

National University of Ireland, Galway
Ollscoil na hÉireann, Gaillimh

CONSENT FORM

The information on this form will be treated as confidential information. Any information provided will be held and processed in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act, 1998.

Title of Project: When one parent comes out as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual (LGB): the experience, as reported by the heterosexual parent.

Name of Researcher: Siobhán Daly

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read the information sheet (dated May 2012) for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. ☐

2. I am satisfied that I understand the information provided and have had enough time to consider the information. ☐

3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, without my legal rights being affected. ☐

4. I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

Name/Signature of Participant:

Participant Contact Phone Number and/or e-mail:

Name of Researcher: ***Date:*** ***Signature:***

Appendix C4: Interview Guide Sheet (Study 2)

- Initial intimate experience(s)
- Experience of marriage before the disclosure
- Any signs/awareness of changes in the marriage and/or husband
- The disclosure (how, when it occurred)
- Feelings/thoughts following the disclosure

Prompts (if required)

1. What was your relationship like before the disclosure?
2. When were you first aware that you/your partner had changed your/his/her sexual orientation
3. How did you become aware? What was said?
4. How did you feel about the disclosure?
5. Did you have any awareness/niggles prior to the disclosure....can you tell me about them?
6. Did you have any concerns following the disclosure....can you tell me about them?

- Impact, if any, on the family unit and self
- Telling others (including the children)
- The most difficult thing(s)
- Sources of support
- Experiences of subsequent relationships (if any)
- Current relationship with husband or ex-husband
- Talking to someone else in your shoes

Prompts (if required)

7. How were your children told? (disclosure→parental separation; parental separation→ disclosure)
8. What were their reactions?
9. Impact on marital/parental union
10. Who was told after the disclosure and or separation occurred - immediate family, community, friends, etc. (Staggered telling?; When were they told; Reactions of others)
11. What kind of feelings have you experienced throughout this process?
12. What was the most difficult thing about this process? If support deemed necessary: What/who helped you during this process?
13. Current relationship with (ex) spouse?; How do you get on now?
14. (If any) were your subsequent relationships “different” - in what way?
15. How would your life have been different if you/ your (ex) partner had not come out?
16. How are you now?

Pages 267-269 have been redacted to protect the anonymity of research participants.

Appendix C6: Overview of the Arising Themes (Study 3)

1. ***A 'Lifelong' Partnership – a lengthy endeavour***

- Embracing traditional expectations: lifelong commitment; religious covenant; presumed future; contentment and love
- Role dedication; career as homemaker
- Negotiating life together: interwoven dependency: home, children, "the ups and downs of life"

2. ***Crisis and Management – a lengthy process***

- The pull away
- The disclosure: the beginning of the end
- Angst: heart break
- Seeking control and expanding tolerance; spousal support, frustration, empathy and communication versus isolation, anger and silence
- Conflictive identification: "I don't want to be a divorcee"; "what will people think?"
- Protection and stigma (for self, children and family)
- Unsupportive sources (minimising the loss) versus "understanding others"; focus on spouse (discomfort) v focus on the self (relief, eventually for some)

3. ***Leaving: filling the void - facing the fear***

- (Forced) role release: identifying as single – trepidation and loneliness
- Facing practical realities
- Re-focusing on the self – pride and self-efficacy
- Developing new, and reframing old, relationships: "moving on" versus "forgiveness"

Appendix D1: Participant Information Sheet (Study 3)

National University of Ireland, Galway
Ollscoil na hÉireann, Gaillimh

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Title of Project: When one parent comes out as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual (LGB): the experience, as reported by the LGB parent.

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Do I have to take part?

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B.A.;H.Dip.Psych.; H.Dip.Ed.; M.A.E.P.;A.L.C.M.

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Appendix D2: Participant Referral Protocol (Study 3)

National University of Ireland, Galway
Ollscoil na hÉireann, Gaillimh

REFERRAL PROTOCOL
PhD (Psychology)

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Researcher: Siobhán Daly

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If the participant has any concerns regarding the research and wishes to contact someone in confidence the following contact has been provided on the *Participant Information Sheet*: 'the Chairperson of the NUI Galway Research Ethics Committee, c/o Office of the Vice President for Research, NUI Galway, ethics@nuigalway.ie.

Appendix D3: Participant Consent Form (Study 3)

National University of Ireland, Galway
Ollscoil na hÉireann, Gaillimh

CONSENT FORM

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Title of Project: When one parent comes out as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual (LGB): the experience, as reported by the LGB parent.

Name of Researcher: Siobhán Daly

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read the information sheet (dated May 2012) for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. ☐

2. I am satisfied that I understand the information provided and have had enough time to consider the information. ☐

3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, without my legal rights being affected. ☐

4. I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

Name/Signature of Participant:

Participant Contact Phone Number and/or e-mail:

Name of Researcher: ***Date:*** ***Signature:***

Appendix D4: Interview Guide Sheet (Study 3)

(1) Early intimate experiences and marriage

- When were you first aware that you were attracted to the same-sex?
- When did you meet your wife; how is/was your marriage?
- How did you experience same-sex attractions during your marriage?

(2) Coming out as gay in the context of marriage

- Did the relationship with your wife change?
- How did the disclosure happen; how did it impact on your marriage?

(3) Marital separation and disclosing to others

- How did you experience separating from your wife? [if this occurred]
- Who was told after the disclosure/separation occurred; what were their reactions?
- How were your children told; what were their reactions?
- Did you experience any negativity as a result of identifying as gay?

(4) The self following the disclosure/separation

- How did you experience separating from your wife? [if this occurred]
- Who was told after the disclosure/separation occurred; what were their reactions?
- How were your children told; what were their reactions?
- Did you experience any negativity as a result of identifying as gay?

Possible reflective probes:

"You mentioned that....What did you mean?
Can you tell me more about that?
What would you say to someone standing in your shoes going through that?"

Appendix D5: Examples of Clustered Themes (Study 3)

Denial of same-gender sexual desires in youth	- Repression and suppression - Cultural and family message of unacceptability - Trying to follow the cultural normative script - Awareness of being gay–relegated to playful (gay play) versus real – not serious; separate - Creating distance from being gay
'Settling down'; Marrying heterosexually – following the presumed social script	- Early, complicated life: having a lot of responsibilities for others at a young age - Marrying very young and directly into married life (stress of having young children, and co-occurring financial pressure)– with little time for self and to explore wants and needs - Parental expectations and desires reinforcing the marital script and couple image - Marriage providing relief and a sense of self-efficacy (success) - Best friend (continuous) protecting, admiring, difference in how families accepted it- all accepted made it easier – make it difficult telling the children –fear of shame and judgement of family - versus early pregnancy/desire for family
Awareness of self in adulthood Awakening/tuning into same-gender sexual desires/orientation (literally and psychologically) - same-gender sexual acts with others	- Marital distancing resulting in men (or wife) having an affair - Seeking to have sexual needs met - Same-gender sexual thinking (stimulation/masturbating) for all, progressing to same sex-sexual extramarital sexual acts for most – relief, segmentation of sexual and intimate self; remorse/guilt - Self as mirror – really seeing the self – reflecting back reality; emotions and dissonance intensifying - Self-persuasion to enter and an inability to avoid the allure of sexual attraction and release
Disclosure - forced (being found out) or disclosing	- Being confronted by wife (texts, receipts, calls from the public/ex-lover), or disclosing to their wife – immediate coming out. Crying together, sharing and discussing the future of their marriage, versus immediate ending of communication and marriage
Trying to make the marriage work; trying to integrate the segmented self	- Roles ending and changing; wife 'separate' acts difficult to process - Resistance – turning a blind eye – subtle preparation and inevitability - Financial and practical concerns
Support from others as an essential lifeline	- Support from LGB community – a family substitute - empathy - Having someone to talk to – not being isolated. Community, friends, counselling. Kindness - Crutches to lean on when in danger of self-destruction. Emotional crutches through emotional injury

Not wanting to leave 'family/children': loss of access to children and family life and suicidal ideation/attempts **Extreme sadness – ending of happy marriage versus litigious stress and conflict - ending an acrimonious marriage**	- Reality of separation (loss of family, loss of role) - Hell on earth - Loss of their best friend- still wanting to protect their friend who they still love - Marriage as a contract - extraction causing pain and hurt; separation being so difficult. - Access to finance; child custody arrangements. Worry. Complex reasons for wanting to stay - Children giving intermittent hope and a reason to look forward. Relationship with children of paramount importance and reason for living. Importance for children to know that the marriage and love for spouse was genuine. Fear of blame - Suicidal ideation and depression: Feeling discarded, dislocated - Love and pride of children – supporting self-acceptance - Using sexuality negatively to strengthen custody case and monetary proceedings - Anger towards spouse (push from spouse)– not wanting to return (reduced feelings loss) – reduced suicidal ideation; more relief versus significant loss/sadness in separating (pull remained towards wife); increased suicidal ideation; decreased relief
Positive versus negative co-parenting	- Supportive, facilitative continuing parent-child relationships versus spouses not supportive of one another – negative interactions and resisted access - Level of openness in disclosure and separation issues mirroring level of openness in continued family dynamics
Telling others	- Good relationships – good support; difficult relationships – minimal support - Sad at the marital end/separation. Family seeking to make sense – some ambivalence – some support in the form of other family members being LGB, or from parents
Seeking societal development	- Community support for different gay cultures within the culture; avenues for more natural, open conversation, versus converse sexual encounters (akin to the dark ages).
Relationships since separation	- Varied experiences: initial burst of sexual exploration before 'settling down' and the majority are now living with long term partner). Repartnering for most; desired for the others (difficulties integrating sex and intimacy or feeling despondent re aging and recoupling) - Feeling of friendship and positive relationship with children (significant outcome) - Somewhat restored relationship with ex-wife for the majority, primarily associated with role of co-parenting)
Awareness of facilitative cultural changes (helped self-acceptance)	- Changed times ("no longer kosher to be homophobic"). Choosing to live in an open, accepting community – supporting children to be open and accepting – nonchalance and a hug: Reflected (mirrored) in children's ambivalent attitude towards their homosexuality (query preparation). Pride

Appendix D6: Overview of the Arising Themes (Study 3)

1. Cultural conditioning – get married; don't be gay

- Expectations and desires reinforcing the heterosexual marital script, and a heterosexual orientation. (Religion and society; the marital script was choreographed through relationships (family, church and community - "marry or join the priesthood").
- Homosexuality being reinforced as negative and undesirable in Ireland: hiding and denying the self (being gay was not acceptable – a 'no no').
- Marriage as a homosexual cure, reliever or a necessity following an unplanned pregnancy.

2. Marriage and eventually reflecting on, and facing, the same-gender sexual self

- Having a lot of responsibilities at a young age: working husband and father: little time to focus on the self.
- The impact of the passage of marital time and maturation: the self and extra-marital desires for all, progressing to extra-marital sex for some (facing the denied gay self).

3. "Straying": Increased dissonance and the marital ending

- Same-gender sexual desires and/or extramarital sex intimacy: increased dissonance (relief and guilt).
- Suicidal ideation and loss: The end of a happy marriage (their "best friend") versus an unhappy marriage: loss of presumed future/marital life, former access to children and family home.

4. Self-integration

- Making sense of the reaction of others post-disclosure: the influence of current societal influences and cultural changes.
- Lifelines of support.
- Integrating the former and present self - repartnering and current relationship with family (ex-wife/wife and children).

Pages 280-282 of this document have been redacted to protect the anonymity of research participants.

Appendix D8: Final Superordinate and Subordinate Themes (Study 3)

Thematic No.	Thematic name
Theme 1	***The initial gay self and marriage***
Subtheme 1.1	Denial of the gay self and getting married
Subtheme 1.2	The reassertion of the gay sexual self: extramarital thinking and acting
Subtheme 1.3	Conflict and disclosure
Theme 2	***Separated – the importance of family***
Subtheme 2.1	Break-up trauma and loss
Subtheme 2.2	Being openly gay
Theme 3	***Repartnering (life "after the earthquake")***
Subtheme 3.1	A new, lifelong partnership
	Versus
Subtheme 3.2	Desiring a relationship script