‘Coming Out’ Stories:
A narrative study into ‘coming out’ as
lesbian and gay to the family

A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the degree of Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology (DCounsPsych) in the Faculty of Humanities

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<td>British Psychological Society</td>
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<td>LGB</td>
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<td>LGBT</td>
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Abstract

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‘Coming Out’ Stories:
A Narrative study into ‘Coming Out’ as Lesbian and Gay to the Family

Background: The ‘coming out’ literature reveals there is a high degree of selectivity and fear of rejection around disclosure of sexual identity to others. It is suggested this distress can be particularly elevated around disclosure of sexual identity to the family. Recent research suggests that the age of disclosure around sexual identity within the family is shifting, but even with the recent growth of research within the lesbian, gay and bisexual community, researchers still do not fully understand the complexities of the ‘coming out’ process. Aim: This narrative study aimed to collect ‘coming out’ stories to better understand the process an adolescent goes through in disclosing their sexual identity to family. Participants: Seven participants were recruited through snowball sampling, four adolescents (one female and three male) who self-identified as lesbian or gay and three parents (three mothers) who had children that self-identified as lesbian or gay. Method: Participant stories were audio recorded in one semi-structured narrative interview, lasting up to 90 minutes. A narrative analysis was carried out drawing upon Labov’s (1972) structural analysis and an adaption of Polkinghorne’s (1995) narrative ‘plots’ to develop Thematic Concepts from the participant stories. Analysis: The structural analysis showed that participants did not restrict their stories to a single event of ‘coming out’ to the family. They spoke about ‘coming out’ experiences based around numerous chronological events across their life to date, and included evaluations of these. Five Thematic Concepts were developed from the seven participant stories – (1) the influence of self - a sense of knowing something; (2) the influence of the school environment; (3) the influence of culture and religion; (4) the influence of the digital age/new media; and (5) the influence of the family. Conclusions and Implications: Research literature suggests that ‘coming out’ should not be viewed as a one-time event, but an on-going process evolving across the lifespan. Historical and socio-political
factors must also be considered in understanding the process of ‘coming out’. With regards to clinical practice, this study suggests counselling psychology should be pro-active in advancing educative interventions to address heteronormativity and discrimination within society, as well as considering systemic approaches when working therapeutically with sexual minorities.

**Keywords:** counselling psychology, narrative, sexual identity, LGBT, coming out, adolescents, family
Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.
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Chapter One: Introduction
Within this introductory chapter, I introduce the topic of the study and explore the background and significance of the research. I introduce and position my study within the profession of counselling psychology, defining key terms and reflecting upon my research motivation. To conclude, I discuss the purpose of the research and the questions which have guided the study and, finally, I outline the structure of the chapters.

Introduction to the Study
Human sexuality is a complex phenomenon and yet it is only in recent decades that Western society has recognised its diversity (Hicks, 2010). Within the UK, there has been much legislative change aimed at “prohibiting the discrimination in public life and providing a statutory framework for the protection” of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals navigating a pathway to facilitate the diversity of sexuality (Price, 2011, p.1).

Traditionally, homosexuality was viewed as a psychiatric disorder. It was only removed from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) in 1973. Consequently, homosexuality was equally pathologised within the research model which focused upon understanding its causes and a search for a cure for ‘the disorder’. The current research model now aligns itself more with a humane approach, thereby humanising the previously regarded ‘deviant homosexual’. Today, the postmodern research model approach to LGBT research has become a more active and reflective process (see Kong, Mahoney & Plummer, 2002, p.241).

Over the past three decades, there has been some growth in research into the area of LGBT youth (Horn, Kosciw & Russell, 2009). Despite this, Munstanski (2011) highlighted the fact that researchers often avoid conducting studies with this population due to their anticipation or actual experiences of the difficulties in obtaining ethical approval from institutional review boards. He goes on to argue that “waiting until LGBT persons turn eighteen to engage them in research and then retrospectively report on experiences at earlier ages is unsatisfactory” (Munstanski, 2011, p.675). Moore and Miller’s (1999) argument that researchers tend to avoid
vulnerable populations further strengthens Mustanksi’s claim. As a result, the needs and concerns of LGBT youth are potentially not being addressed in a way that could influence practice and policies with consequent improvements in quality of life for the sexual minorities. D’Augelli et al. (2008) emphasised that adolescents are now disclosing their sexual identity earlier and there is, therefore, a significant need for further research in this area.

**Background and Significance of the Study**

Recent research suggests that the age of disclosure around sexuality within the family is shifting. Toomey and Richardson (2009) found that the average age of disclosure to the family was 17 years old, compared with previous research claiming it was 18 to 19 years of age (Savin-Williams, 1998; Floyd & Stein, 2002). The transition from adolescence to young adulthood is a period that equates to ‘heteronormative’ milestones\(^1\) (Waters, Carr, Keflalas & Holdaway, 2011), while also being a time when disclosure of sexual identity frequently occurs (Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000).

Disclosing sexual identity to one’s family can be a challenging life stressor. In an adolescent’s transition to young adulthood, the parents’ role in shaping the health and well-being of their children is still critical (Arnett, 2000). With this in mind, my research collected adolescent and parent stories around the event of ‘coming out’ to the family. Moreover, Ryan, Russell, Huebener, Diaz and Sanchez (2010) state that there is a lack of literature addressing family support among lesbian, gay and bisexual youth and adults, with transgender literature being particularly scant. Bertone and Pallotta-Chiarollia (2012) further strengthen this claim that the relationship between family and LGBT members remains “an unexplored dimension” (p.301). They also state that there is little published research around the support for the families within the public, health, educational and voluntary sectors.

\(^1\) These milestones refer to the transition into adulthood, which is frequently equated to marriage and parenthood, to which there are many legal and societal barriers for sexual minority populations – resulting in discrimination and victimisation.
A Brief History of Counselling Psychology

Counselling psychology emerged from vocational and guidance movements (Whiteley, 1984). In 1982, in the United Kingdom, it was developed as an interest-based section within the field of psychology through recommendations from a working party formed by the British Psychological Society (BPS). Its task had been to assess how counselling, which had developed along its own trajectory, might be returned to the field of psychology, and be recognised as a professional division in its own right and so be supported within the wider BPS society (Orlans & van Scyoc, 2009, Strawbridge & Woolfe, 2010). In 1994, counselling psychology became its own distinct division following twelve years of much debate and professional unrest. This new division brings together the two professions of counselling and psychology, combining “two epistemological viewpoints of the ‘subjective’ and the ‘objective’” (Hanley, Cutts, Gordon & Scott, 2011, p.2). In considering the development of the profession to date within the United Kingdom, Woolfe (1990) summarises its historical progression under these three trends:

1. An increasing awareness among many psychologists of the significance of the helping relationship.
2. A growing questioning of the ‘medical model’ of professional-client relationships and a move towards a more human value base.
3. A developing interest in facilitating well-being as opposed to responding to sickness and pathology.

Counselling psychology has “embraced a defining set of values with humanism at its core” (Hansen, 2009, p.186). It attempts to move beyond the medical model of pathology and diagnosis to that of a relational approach rooted in humanistic values.

Counselling Psychology: A Humanistic Value Base

Humanistic psychology developed mainly through the work of Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers (Hayes, 2000). It emphasises the importance of how man sees himself and his relationship to the world. It was offered as a reaction to the mechanistic approaches of behaviourism and the pathological and deterministic nature of psychoanalytical psychology (Elkins, 2009).
Humanistic philosophy believes that free will exists and this free will has been the subject of human enquiry for many years. Bugental (1964) argues that humanity has choice and is aware of these choices through their experiences in a human context. A humanistic approach places value on not de-humanising clients with a general diagnosis, but places value and emphasis on the individual. It understands the limitations of scientific methodology (e.g., experiments) and places emphasis upon qualitative research arguing objective reality is less important than a person’s subjective perception and understanding of the world.

With regard to a humanist perspective, how then might a counselling psychologist put these values into practice? Cooper (2009) offers the following response, referring to counselling psychology as “ethics in action” (p.120). He highlighted that we are not just to hold humanistic values, but that we actually need to put this value-based approach into practice by:

- Prioritising the client’s subjective and inter-subjective experience.
- Focusing on facilitating growth and the actualisation of potential.
- Demonstrating an orientation towards empowering clients.
- Showing a commitment to a democratic, non-hierarchical client-therapist relationship.
- Appreciating the client as a unique being.
- Understanding the client as a socially, and relationally embedded being, including an awareness that the client may be experiencing discrimination and prejudice.

Reflecting upon this ethical value base, I argue that counselling psychology is in a unique position to address the many challenges that sexual minority populations can experience. As a profession, I believe that not only do we have a duty to engage with clients in a “valuing and respectful way” (Cooper, 2009, p.120), but I would suggest we must also recognise the impact of wider socio-political systems, drawing

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2 The term ‘sexual minority’ is used throughout this research and I recognise this could be viewed as reinforcing marginalisation. Hurley (2007) argues that where marginality is assumed it can reproduce a social deficit to the groups that are being researched, leading to its reinforcement; this research is mindful of this observation throughout.
upon social justice perspectives to help inform our understanding of client experiences. This research, which explores the ‘coming out’ experiences to the family, positions itself within the social constructionist paradigm. I believe, too, that there are many truths or versions of reality and that knowledge is constructed through social interactions (Burr, 2003). I argue that in order to understand the personal experiences of my research participants, we must also consider them within the context of social interactions.

In considering discourses of sexual minorities, those designated ‘other’ can be marginalised within society. I believe, therefore, that drawing upon social justice perspectives is beneficial for this particular study. There is, though, no consensus on the definition of the term social justice, as it can be difficult to operationalise (Gewirtz, 2002). For this study, I have selected the following definition offered by Constantine, Hage, Kindaichi and Bryant (2007):

“A fundamental valuing of fairness and equity in resources, rights and treatment for marginalized individuals and groups of people who do not share equal power in society because of their immigration, racial, ethnic, age, socioeconomic, religious heritage, physical ability, or sexual orientation status groups” (p.24).

As previously discussed, the profession of counselling psychology is rooted within humanistic values and phenomenological perspectives. In considering the definition above, I argue it is certainly one view of many to consider in discussions around social justice. Cutts (2013) highlights the fact that the United Kingdom, unlike the United States, has not explicitly discussed the role of social justice within the counselling psychology profession. This current study, although not focused upon issues of social justice, has certainly uncovered issues relevant to such debates. I was mindful, too, of how the participants’ stories would be influenced by and include accounts related to their social interactions within society. Therefore, being informed by social justice perspectives assisted in how I engaged with the research participants from a minority community (these are addressed further in Chapter Three under Ethical Considerations), and also created a context in which to consider and discuss some of the findings from the participants’ stories.
Considering Language and Definitions of Key Terms

In this section I will define the key terms that are used within this study and outline my reasons for their selection. I will also consider my use of language in my writing style within this study.

Sexual Orientation and Sexual Identity

Contemporary definitions of sexual identity are much more complex than they were viewed in the past, and are now seen as having multiple dimensions (Sell, 1997; Savin-Williams, 2008). Individuals may choose to identify with a sexual orientation closely aligned to behavioural experiences rather than sexual identity. For example, adolescents commonly have “sexually tinged fantasies or dreams about a member of the same sex, have engaged in mutual sexual experimentation, or had a crush on a teacher or a friend. They conclude that they are gay.” (Conger, 1991, p.265). This can lead to various forms of anxiety in which the adolescent fails to distinguish between same-sex experiences and same-sex attractions or identity.

For the purposes of this study, it is important to note that I recognise the terms ‘sexual orientation’ and ‘sexual identity’ are used interchangeably within the research literature. However, some literature would argue there are distinct differences between these terms. Within this study, as informed by the BPS (2012), I used the term ‘sexual identity’ to refer to an adolescents’ self-identified sexuality. The BPS suggests the use of ‘identity’ in place of ‘orientation’ as a shift away from technical or medical language. This research views ‘sexual identity’ as the label individuals select to define who they are sexually attracted to and to an adopted identity (Alderson, 2013). It recognises the importance of an individual integrating sexuality into self-identity throughout their life.

Coming Out

Orne (2011) draws attention to the term ‘coming out’ as being frequently used within sexuality research. He views the term as ‘conflicted’ and states that researchers often do not specify what this term means. To Orne (1992) ‘coming out’ is “packed with multiple meanings” (p.68). For the purposes of this research
‘coming out’ is defined as the “events surrounding one’s initial disclosure of sexual orientation to one’s primary social circle” (Ryan, Legate & Weinstein, 2015, p.552). However, in the use of the term, one must recognise that ‘coming out’ is not a single event but one which occurs multiple times. This current research is particularly interested in disclosure to immediate family members, such as parents and siblings.

**Considering the LGBT Acronym**

There are many terminologies that are used when referring to ‘sexual minority’ populations, or those who identify as non-heterosexual. Furthermore, acronyms such as LGBT, LGB&T, LGBTQ, LGBT+ and LGBTQI are frequently used within the literature. Price (2011) argues that many researchers therefore employ such terms, although they can actually be misleading. Firstly, their use makes assumptions that these individuals face similar issues when, in fact, this is not the case. Secondly, LGBT research samples focus almost exclusively upon the L and G, with the B and T often under-represented. Price (2011) argues that this can reinforce marginalisation further, with bisexuality and transgender individuals warranting separate research attention.

For the purposes of this study, despite these suggestions, I still set out to include bisexual individuals should they wish to take part. The reason for this being that the focus of this study was around ‘sexual identity’ and ‘coming out’, which includes bisexuality. I did take the decision to exclude transgender individuals. Stieglitz (2010) points out sexual orientation/identity and gender identity are not the same, “the term transgender does not include sexual orientation” (p.193). As a result, I did not recruit transgender individuals for this study as “an identity constructed around deeply felt unhappiness with one’s biological sex is different in kind from one constructed around same-sex desire” (Wilton, 2000, p.xviii).

**Adolescents**

The World Health Organisation (2016) currently defines adolescence between the ages of 10-19 years old. However, recent research has suggested that adulthood is now closer to age 25 years, with a new directive being provided to
child psychologists to extend this age range (see Curtis, 2015). It is proposed that adolescence can be viewed in three stages: early adolescence, ranging from 11 to 13 years; adolescence, 14 to 17 years; and late adolescence, being proposed as 18 to 25 years, as the final phase. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, I am defining adolescence as being within this range of 11 to 25 years. However, participants will only be recruited from age 16 years and above. This is due to potential issues, which might arise around gaining parental consent; I explore this further within Chapter Three.

**Considering Language: My Writing Style**

In considering language further, I feel it is important to make reference to my writing style within this research. I have selected to use a mix of both academic and personal styles throughout my research. In taking this decision, I recognise that use of personal language can enhance the relationship with the reader (Gergen, 2000). The stories within my research are personal accounts and I argue that this thesis, and the research presented within it, tells a story of its own. I felt it was important to create this personal connection with the reader by creating a relationship through my writing (Gergen, 2007).

**Research Motivations and Thesis Development**

Emerson and Frosh (2004) highlight the importance for researchers to explicitly state their interest and stance around their own positioning within qualitative studies. This concept was further asserted in a personal email from Catherine Kohler Riessman, a leading figure within narrative research. She emphasised to me that reflecting upon my own research motivations was critical and significant to the findings, writing, “Why you were drawn to the topic of coming out stories and family responses? As I used to teach my graduate students, we don't typically pick topics out of a hat.”

In reflecting upon my own position, I am aware I was motivated to research ‘coming out’ stories as this was something that I had experienced in my own personal life. However, it was not only on a personal level that this research developed, but also due to my experience as a professional working within the helping professions since 2001. On a personal level, it is important for me to recognise and acknowledge my
own insider status within this research, as someone who identifies themselves within the lesbian, gay and bisexual community. In fact, it was my own belonging to this community that connected me with a male who disclosed his own experiences of ‘coming out’ to his family, which impacted me significantly. I recall the night that he told me his story of how his family had “disowned” him, and his father stated that he did not want his son to attend his funeral, or carry his body when he dies. Although, I did not have any of these experiences with my own immediate family, it reminded me of the challenges I faced around ‘coming out’ in 2005 and thereafter. It reminded me of my low moods and the anxiety created stemming from an intense fear of experiencing rejection by others. On a professional level, it reminded me of clients I had worked with and supported around the challenges they faced in understanding and making sense of their sexuality. It was through these personal and professional experiences that this research evolved to its current state.

Ritchie and Lewis (2003) point out that, “Reflexivity is important for striving for objectivity and neutrality. We try to reflect upon ways in which bias might creep into our qualitative research practice and acknowledge that our own backgrounds and beliefs can be relevant here” (p.20). Therefore, I recognise my own personal and professional experiences will impact upon my research and the findings that I have presented. In order to address this, I decided to keep a reflective journal throughout the research process, and to utilise supervision and support from my peers to consider objectivity and bias. In the interest of transparency, these methods are expanded upon further in Chapter Three.

**Research Purpose and Research Questions**

Within this narrative study, I have gathered stories through semi-structured interviews from four adolescents around their experiences of ‘coming out’ to their family. The study also includes three parents’ stories around experiences of their child ‘coming out’ to them. It is important to point out at this stage that the parents within this study were not related to the adolescents due to issues around confidentiality; this is discussed further within Chapter Three.
Initially, I only planned to include adolescent stories within this study. As my research developed, I began to notice the voice of parents was largely absent from the literature. As previously discussed, I believe it is important that in understanding the diversity of sexuality, we must also be mindful of socio-cultural contexts. Adolescents do not exist within isolation, but in many systems. As the study was concerned with ‘coming out’ to the family, due to the lack of parental perspectives within existing literature, I decided to include parent accounts. By including parent stories around their child ‘coming out’ to them, it assisted me in gaining further insight around adolescent experiences. With this in mind, I developed the following research questions:

1. What can we learn from adolescents’ stories about ‘coming out’ to the family?

2. What can we learn from parental stories about adolescents ‘coming out’ to the family?

As my aim in this study is to explore the ‘coming out’ stories of adolescents. I, therefore, constructed research questions that were open and exploratory in nature. I was interested to explore how ‘coming out’ stories, to family, were structured. One might pose the question, that surely ‘coming out’ is an area that has been widely explored within the literature, and is clearly defined. So, why the need for the use of exploratory questions? Orne (1992) argues that despite being widely researched the term can mean many things. It is also suggested within the literature more insight is needed around the experiences of ‘coming out’ to family (Ryan et al., 2010; Bertone & Pallotta-Chiarolla, 2012). Therefore, my use of exploratory questions, would enable me to acquire new insight into the process of ‘coming out’ to family, providing a rich and descriptive data set.
**Structure of the Thesis**

The focus of this narrative study was upon adolescents ‘coming out’ to the family and consists of six chapters. The aim of this current chapter, Chapter One, is to introduce the study and to position it within the profession of counselling psychology. I also consider key terms, my writing style as the researcher, my research motivations and the development of the study. I conclude with the research purpose and research questions that guided this study.

Chapter Two summarises existing literature relevant to this study. Initially, I highlight the search strategies utilised within my research. I discuss the development of sexual identity and sexual identity formation, presenting two widely cited developmental models within the literature. I then consider the wider literature around the development of homosexuality research and the variations noted with the term ‘coming out’. I offer a brief reflection around the development of ‘self’ and then explore the literature around ‘coming out’ to the family. Next, I examine the impact of ‘coming out’ upon lesbian, gay and bisexual mental health. Finally, I offer the rationale for this current study, given the literature previously discussed.

Chapter Three begins by revisiting the research aim and the ontological and epistemology position of this current research. I then discuss how this positioning has guided the methodological approaches I selected within this study. I explore my selection of a narrative method, reflecting upon the use of this approach within social research. I then offer reflections around my understandings of the differences between story and narrative and consider analytical approaches used in understanding the narrative of stories. I present the Labovian approach which I drew upon for the analysis of the participant stories within this research. I then present my application of narrative inquiry by discussing snowball sampling, participant recruitment, data collection and analysis. I also offer discussion around ethical considerations and measures taken to assist with trustworthiness in this research.

Chapter Four presents my analysis of the seven participant stories. I apply a structural analysis to the four adolescent stories told by Amy, Mark, Kendon and Thanos and the three parent stories told by Karen, Tracey and Mary. Chapter Five considers this analysis and contextualises it within the wider literature under the
main 'plots' that were present within the narrations. Chapter Six, presents the conclusions of this research and considers the clinical implications for the progression of counselling psychology and directions of future research. I also offer a reflection on my selected methodology and present a personal reflection on the impact of my research upon me, the researcher.

Chapter Summary
In this chapter, I introduced the topic of the study and I considered the background and significance of the study in the context of existing literature. I explored the development of counselling psychology as a profession and discussed its philosophical underpinnings. I introduced the key terms within this current study and offered the selected definitions of these terms. I then discussed my research motivations and the development of my research and I concluded with the research purpose and the questions that guided this study.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

In this chapter, I discuss literature that informed my knowledge and understanding around sexual identity and adolescent disclosure of this to the family. As mentioned in Chapter One, the research questions guided the development of this literature review:

1. What can we learn from adolescents’ stories about ‘coming out’ to the family?

2. What can we learn from parental stories about adolescents ‘coming out’ to the family?

In considering the exploratory nature of these questions, I was mindful there would be an extensive literature base which could be included. Therefore, I established a literature search strategy, which is outlined below.

Literature Search Strategy and Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Identifying relevant literature for this review was an on-going process; it started when I developed my research proposal for this study and ended when I submitted this thesis, spanning a period of three and a half years. I found the literature included in this review using the following English language databases: Psych Info, Science Direct, CINHAL Plus, ASSIA and Google Scholar. The keywords I used were: gay, lesbian, bisexual, coming out, family, LGBT, sexuality and sexual identity. I chose these terms because they contextualised the research questions. The selection criteria I initially used were peer reviewed quantitative, mixed-method and qualitative primary research studies and systematic reviews written in English, published between 1980 and 2016, and reporting on gay, lesbian and bisexual identity and issues relating to ‘coming out’. I also reviewed the references from generated articles and included any additional relevant sources. I excluded commentaries, editorials, dissertations, and conference abstracts and literature that specifically focused around transgender issues. I would argue sexual identity and gender identity are not the same (Stieglitz, 2010) and believe these issues should be researched within their own right.
Structure of the Literature Review

I started this review broadly by exploring the development of sexual identity. I decided to start with this area because I wanted to understand how existing literature conceptualised sexual identity. Then I presented literature around sexual identity formation, introducing two widely cited models used within the literature. To provide a background to my research question, I also attempted to describe how past literature has studied homosexuality and considered the challenges that can occur when defining the process of ‘coming out’. I then presented several factors that the literature suggested could impact upon an individual developing their sexual identity. I described how the influence of an individual’s family of origin and its interaction with self-concept. I also explored acculturation and gender differences and how existing literature suggests it can influence the ‘coming out’ process. I then reviewed literature around disclosure of sexual identity to family, the age of disclosure to family, the disclosure itself and family reactions. Following this I included literature around the internal and external conflicts that lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals can experience integrating sexual identity and the impact this can have upon mental health. Finally, to conclude this review, I highlighted the gaps within existing literature and provided a rationale for the current study.

My review of the existing literature revealed several limitations and weaknesses in the available research. First, the literature continues to lack consistent theoretical and operationalised definitions of ‘coming out’. For example, several models of sexual identity development are inconsistent in identifying their specified milestone events, those that signify the ‘coming out’ process. Second, an area that has yet to be explored is how certain family types interact with the ‘coming out’ process and the decisions that a ‘gay’ individual may choose regarding disclosure. Third, ethnic differences in the ‘coming out’ process have not been sufficiently explored within the lesbian and gay community. Specifically, culture adds more complexity to sexual identity formation and influences the decision-making process of sexual identity disclosure. It is important to establish if ethnicity and specific sociocultural factors, such as self-construal and acculturation status may mediate the ‘coming out’ process, both for self-identification and self-disclosure of sexual identity. Finally, inadequate representation of the gay community continues to plague current publications. The following sections will explore and present this literature and the
Development of Sexual Identity

Scholars have been proposing developmental models of sexual identity for over thirty years, much of which has emphasised “understanding the emergence and adoption of sexual-minority identity” (Morgan, 2012, p.54). The most widely cited is Cass’s (1979) six-stage process model of incorporating a lesbian/gay identity (and to a lesser degree bisexuality) into one’s self-concept. Subsequently, research has attempted to empirically classify these stages but with limited evidence. Morgan (2012) suggests some empirical research evidence for the milestones of firstly having an awareness of being different; secondly recognizing and exploring same-sex and other-sex attraction and behaviour; and thirdly coming out to oneself and others, which includes an acceptance and integration of a sexual-minority identify and label” (p.54).

Contemporary definitions of sexual identity are much more complex than in the past, with multiple dimensions of sexual orientation and identity (Sell, 1997; Savin-Williams, 2008). For example, individuals may choose to identify with a sexual orientation label closely aligned to behavioural experiences rather than sexual attraction or desire. Many adolescents commonly have “sexually tinged fantasies or dreams about a member of the same sex, have engaged in mutual sexual experimentation, or had a crush on a teacher or a friend. They conclude that they are gay” (Conger, 1991, p.265). This can lead to various forms of anxiety in which the adolescent fails to distinguish between same-sex experiences and same-sex attractions and/or identity. Many adolescents who have same-sex experiences later establish very satisfying heterosexual relationships. This highlights the complexities involved in understanding the formation in sexual identity.

Sexual Identity Formation

Although there are several models of sexual identity formation (Coleman, 1982; Minton & McDonald 1984; Troiden, 1979, 1989), two models of sexual identity formation by Cass (1979, 1996) and Morales (1989) appeared to be the most widely cited within the literature. Cass’ and Morales' models are the only ones that address
Cass' (1979, 1984b) six-stage Western model of sexual identity formation is one of the most frequently cited models in the 'coming out' literature (Alquijay, 1997; Ben-Ari, 1995; Brady & Busse, 1994; Chan, 1989, 1992, 1995; Coleman, 1987; Franke & Leary, 1991; Harry, 1993; Kahn, 1991; Martin, 1991; Morales, 1989; Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993; Ross, Paulsen, & Stalstrom, 1988; Savin-Williams, 1996; Sophie, 1986; Strommen, 1989; Wooden, Kawasaki, & Mayeda, 1983). Frequent citations of Cass' model are due to the operationalization and development of her Stage Allocation Measure (SAM; Cass, 1984b) for assessing the 'coming out' process. Cass' model may be deemed as a better-conceived model than other models due to its distinctness and clarity.

Based on interpersonal congruency theory, Cass' (1979) six-stage model proposes that the "development of a stable homosexual identity is held to arise from the interaction between individuals and their environments" (p.221). The six stages of Cass' model are presented in Table One. Each stage represents a particular set of conflicts that must be resolved before entering the next stage. At any stage, an individual may choose not to develop further along this continuum, so identity foreclosure could take place, as suggested by Cass.

**Table 1**: Cass' model of homosexuality identity formation (1979; 1984b)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-stage 1</td>
<td>The individual considers her/himself as part of the majority group (heterosexual) or recognizes that she/he should be.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1: Identity Confusion</td>
<td>There is a realization that she/he is engaging in homosexual behaviours and that they may be homosexual. &quot;My behavior may be called homosexual.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2: Identity Comparison</td>
<td>In this stage, there is a first tentative commitment to a homosexual self, resulting in feelings of alienation and loss from changes in familiar lifestyle as heterosexual. The individual may initiate contacting others (e.g., therapy). &quot;I may be homosexual.&quot; (p.225).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3: Identity Tolerance</td>
<td>The individual will seek out homosexuals and the homosexual subculture and begin to tolerate rather than accept a homosexual self-image. &quot;I probably am a homosexual.&quot; (p.229)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 4: Identity Acceptance</td>
<td>The individual may feel the impact of the gay community, which validates and normalizes homosexuality as an identity and way of life. Individuals begin to accept rather than tolerate a homosexual identification.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 5: Identity Pride</td>
<td>The individual becomes aware of the incongruence between own self-concept and society's rejection of this concept. There is a sense of pride, group identity, belonging and a commitment to the gay community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 6: Identity Synthesis</td>
<td>There is a synthesis of personal and public sexual identities into one image of self. The individual no longer views all heterosexuals negatively and all homosexuals positively. &quot;Instead of being seen as the identity, it is now given the status of being merely one aspect of self.&quot; (p.235)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Due to the rigid and inflexible characteristics of current developmental stage models such as Cass' Model of Sexual Identity Formation, individual differences are not taken into account and the fluidity of identity development is largely ignored. For example, self-labelling tends to be more fluid in lesbians than gay men (Golden, 2006). Furthermore, Cass' stage theory assumes that a stepwise, unidirectional progression towards identity synthesis is the optimal process for LGB individuals. However, in order to achieve this position, the individual must resolve each and every conflict in a specified order. Some argue that the progression of stages is neither linear nor universal (Coleman, 1982; Harry, 1993; Kahn, 1991) and all the possible outcomes and divergent paths of 'coming out' cannot be accounted for in such models (Harry, 1993). Another limitation of Cass' model is its limited applicability to gay persons of colour as it was developed within a Western framework and has not been tested on minority populations. Since it is important to address how culture may alter the ‘coming out’ process for ethnic minority LGB individuals, it may be inappropriate to impose the Cass model on an ethnic minority experience.

Morales (1989) attempted to address Cass' limitations by formulating a five-state model of sexual identity development for ethnic minority gay men and lesbians. Table Two provides an illustration of Morales' five states. This is the only model that has tried to address gay identity development for ethnic minorities. Morales maintains that ethnic LGB individuals strive to live harmoniously within three rigidly defined and strongly independent communities: the gay and lesbian community, the ethnic minority community, and society-at-large.

Morales (1989) used the terms discredited and discreditable, originally coined by Goffman (1963), to illustrate the different experiences between ethnic minority homosexuals and homosexuals of the dominant culture. A discredited, ethnic minority person manages tension that is generated during social contact because of their physical or visible minority status, while those who are discreditable manage potential tension when their minority status is revealed. Like invisible minorities, discreditable individuals require public disclosure or recognition in order to be identified as a minority.
In his five-state model, Morales incorporated the dual minority status of ethnic minority gay men and lesbians, claiming that individuals may experience one or more states at one time rather than being at a particular stage. The individual attempts to alleviate anxiety by managing tensions and differences inherent in each state. The individual may also experience feelings of resentment concerning the lack of integration among the communities and feelings of anger stemming from their experiences of rejection by the gay community because of their ethnicity. Eventually, a greater understanding of oneself and an integration of multiple identities emerges as both cognitive processes and lifestyles change.
Table 2: Morales' model of sexual identity formation (1989)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State 1: Denial of Conflicts</td>
<td>A belief of equal treatment minimizes the individual's experiences with discrimination. The individual may feel that &quot;their personal lifestyle and sexual preference have limited consequences in their life&quot; (p.231).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State 2: Bisexual versus Gay/Lesbian</td>
<td>A preference to identify as bisexual rather than gay/lesbian and exploring the sense of hopelessness and depression that results from continued feelings of conflict.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State 3: Conflicts in Allegiances</td>
<td>A simultaneous awareness of being a member of an ethnic minority as well as being gay/lesbian. The need for these lifestyles to remain separate engenders anxiety.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State 4: Establishing Priorities in Allegiance</td>
<td>The primary identity is with the ethnic community. This generates feelings of resentment concerning the lack of integration among the communities and feelings of anger stemming from experiences of rejection by the gay community because of their ethnicity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State 5: Integrating the Various Communities</td>
<td>There is an attempt to integrate multicultural perspectives as a gay/lesbian person of colour.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although Morales' model has yet to be empirically validated, it provides an alternative for examining the 'coming out' process of ethnic minority gay individuals for future research. Another reason for presenting Morales' model is to encourage social scientists to address the possibility that the ethnic minority gay community
may have a distinct process of sexual identity formation different from the mainstream gay community.

Morales (1989) began to illustrate how culture plays a large role in the development of sexual identity among ethnic minority gay men and lesbians. He suggests a constant struggle with managing their dual identities of being both an ethnic and sexual minority. As such, ethnic minority men are faced with a double minority status (i.e., being an ethnic minority and gay) (Carrier, Nguyen, Su, 1992; Tremble, Schneider, & Appathurai, 2013; Wooden, Kawasaki, & Mayeda, 1983) and, for ethnic minority women, there is a triple minority status for lesbians (i.e., being an ethnic minority, gay, and a woman) (Chan, 1989; Greene, 1994b). Another theme for ethnic minority LGB individuals concerns "managing the social tensions as a function of a visible and invisible minority" (Morales, 1989, p.237). Visible minorities, such as ethnic minorities and women, have no choice but to cope with racism or sexism while invisible minorities (e.g., white gay men) have a choice to remain invisible and not ‘come out’; however, even invisible minorities may still be suffering in silence.

These two models can be compared, highlighting differences and elements in common. The main difference between them is their inherent level of rigidity and fluidity. Cass' notion that a stepwise, unidirectional progression towards the optimal position for gay men and lesbians represents the rigidity and inflexibility that is characteristic of current developmental stage models. Morales' model, on the other hand, allows for fluid motion through several states rather than fixed stage progression. Moreover, Cass' model does not account for fluidity of identity formation among LGB individuals as compared to Morales' model.

One similarity between Cass and Morales is their noteworthy attempts to address the cultural impact on sexual identity formation. However, Cass’ model is limited to the Western phenomenon of sexual identity development, which inherently does not apply to gay persons of colour. In comparison, Morales' model attempts to address ‘gay’ identity development for ethnic minorities while maintaining that ethnic minorities strive to live harmoniously within three communities (i.e., the gay and lesbian community, the ethnic minority community, and society-at-large). For LGB individuals, the integration of their ethnic and sexual identities may be impossible.
because these two identities may seem mutually exclusive (Tremble et al., 2013). Furthermore, ethnic minority LGB individuals may feel intense pressure to choose between the ethnic minority and sexual minority communities, which could result in anxiety (Morales, 1989) and create feelings of alienation from both communities (Chan, 1989; Chan, 1995). The lack of ethnic minority lesbian and gay role models may also contribute to feelings of alienation among ethnic minority LGB individuals.

In both models of sexual identity formation, Cass and Morales address the interaction between an individual and the environment. The environment, whether it is supportive or antagonistic, will influence the outcome of sexual identity formation. Hence, one can assume that the environment will also influence disclosure of sexual identity. Therefore, we must consider not just the individual in isolation, but be mindful of the various systems to which they belong and how these interactions contribute to sexual identity development. In the case of this study, I was particularly concerned with the system of the family. I also argue that alongside these models, we must not limit ourselves to these but must also collect subjective experiences around sexual identity formation.

**Researching Homosexuality**

The study of homosexuality was well documented within literature prior to the late nineteenth century, although it was not until recently that researchers began to examine how homosexuality contributes to a core part of an individual's self-schema. The Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) epidemic beginning in the 1980's resulted in greater visibility of the gay community. Since then, there has been a proliferation of empirical research focusing on this population, particularly in the prevention of AIDS transmission (Alcalay, Sniderman, Mitchell, & Griffin, 1989; Aoki, Ngin, Mo, & Ja, 2009), and the disclosure of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) seropositivity (Hays et al., 2003; Mason, Marks, Simoni, Ruiz, & Richardson, 1995), as well as the development of homosexual identity (Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1982; Martin, 1991; McDonald, 1982; Minton & McDonald 1984; Sophie, 1986; Troiden, 1979/1989). Despite this growth in research, there is still much to be learned from non-heteronormative communities.
In an attempt to define homosexuality, researchers have used milestone events such as initial awareness of homosexual feelings or the onset of homosexual activities to define certain aspects of the 'coming out' process. Within this field of study, several questions have emerged: is homosexuality defined by one's behaviour, a personal identification, or underlying orientation? Does an individual need to engage in homosexual activities in order to be defined as homosexual? It has been argued that it is "not necessary for actual sexual behaviour to take place between a man and other persons before he can define himself as a homosexual or heterosexual" (Ho, 1995, p.86) and "homosexual acts may be performed by individuals with heterosexual orientations and vice versa" (Ross et al., p.135). Evidently, homosexual sexual activity alone does not necessarily warrant a homosexual identity. In Lee, Gordon and O'Dell's (1989) qualitative study of twenty-four homosexuals, he identified the stages of "self-identification of homosexuality" (p.52) as (1) signification, (2) coming out, and (3) going public. Lee did not indicate whether the persons studied were males or females. Stage 1, signification, involves the process of beginning to label oneself as gay or lesbian. During Stage 2, coming out, the person goes from the first tentative steps into the gay and lesbian community, through disclosing to selected friends. The stage culminates in disclosing to persons expressing a pro-gay philosophy. Stage 3, going public, involves disclosing to persons in the general public. However, Lee did not address family issues in his study.

‘Coming Out’

‘Coming out’ has been variously defined in the literature. In 1971, Dank conducted a study of homosexual identity development. He used lengthy interviews of 55 self-identified homosexuals plus a one-page questionnaire distributed at a meeting of a homosexual organisation. He concluded that lesbians and gays do not usually have the benefit of socialisation to support their minority status. Unlike racial or ethnic minorities, parents of gays and lesbians are not usually gay or lesbian. They do not usually tell the child what it is like to be gay. Orne (2011) draws attention to the term ‘coming out’ as being frequently used within sexuality research. He views the term as ‘conflicted’ and states that researchers often do not specify what this term means. To Orne (2011), ‘coming out’ is “packed with multiple meanings” (p.68).
In a study by D’Augelli et al. (1998), they found that, on average, their respondents were aware of their sexual orientation at 10 years old, transitioning into adolescence they label themselves at 14, and by 16 years of age had disclosed for the first time, mostly to friends. Woody D’Souza and Russel (2003) refer to adolescence as a “period when adult sexual capacity and interests begin to emerge along with the emotional challenge of constructing a meaningful identity that will allow for a place in society” (p. 39). Therefore, by the time of emerging adulthood, most have identified their patterns or sexual attraction and some may have adopted and disclosed a sexual minority label.

It may be more helpful to conceptualise ‘coming out’ as a process by which an individual develops a lesbian, gay or bisexual identity and integrates this into their personal and social lives (Cass, 1979, 1984a, 1996; Coleman, 1982; de Monteflores & Schultz, 1978; Martin, 1991; Minton & McDonald, 1984; Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993; Sophie, 1986; Troiden, 1979, 1989). The ‘coming out’ process is commonly seen as a single linear dimension, moving from covert to overt behaviours or, from private ‘coming out’ events to public events (de Monteflores & Schultz, 1978). In other words, ‘coming out’ encompasses two significant events: the initial acceptance of a homosexual self-identity (i.e., self-identification or ‘coming out’ to self) and the subsequent public disclosure of one’s homosexuality to others (i.e., self-disclosure or ‘coming out’ to others) (Harry, 1993; Savin-Williams, 1996).

Self-identification (i.e., ‘coming out’ to ‘self’) entails a cognitive shift that leads one to self-labelling as being lesbian or gay. In contrast, disclosure of sexual identity (i.e., ‘coming out’ to others) involves interpersonal interactions within one’s social milieu. The delineation between the two significant ‘coming out’ events has yet to be explored. For example, an individual may ‘come out’ to her or himself by self-labelling as being homosexual, but she or he may never publicly ‘come out’ to their social system via disclosure. Another possibility is that an individual may indirectly or nonverbally disclose their sexual identity to others before cognitively arriving at the same conclusion.

Often seen as a precursor to self-labelling of homosexual identity (McDonald, 1982),
self-disclosure has been incorporated into later stages in models on sexual identity development (Cass, 1979, 1984b, 1996; Coleman, 1982; de Monteflores & Schultz, 1978; Kahn, 1991; Martin, 1991; McDonald, 1982; Sophie, 1986; Troiden, 1979, 1989). However, it has been argued that disclosure results from structural and individual conditions permitting one to be ‘out’ rather than where one is in a hypothetical sequence of ‘coming out’ stages (Harry, 1993). Regardless, self-disclosure of sexual identity is a continual process that entails personal evaluations of when and to whom one will explicitly reveal one's homosexual identity (Martin, 1991).

Furthermore, the ‘coming out’ literature has revealed several positive effects of self-disclosure. It has shown that self-disclosure may lead to a greater degree of self-acceptance (Coleman, 1982; Savin-Williams, 1996) and positive homosexual identity (Wells & Kline, 1987). Moreover, it can bring one's public identity in line with one's private identity (Cass, 1979). It can also create situations where known sexual orientation lends support for the individual's homosexual identity (Cass, 1979; Harry, 1993) and be linked to acquiring new sexual partners to satisfy same sex erotic desire (Harry, 1993). It has even been linked to improved self-esteem and decreased feelings of loneliness and guilt (Savin-Williams, 1989, 1996).

Current studies support the notion that the willingness to ‘come out’ is contingent upon the degree to which the individual is concerned about others' reactions and / or perceptions of others' negative attitudes toward lesbians and gays (Frank & Leary, 1991). Although one would expect that a ‘gay’ individual who embraces their homosexual identity will be more likely to disclose, Frank and Leary (1991) found that an individual's concerns with others' reactions to sexual identity disclosures predicted substantially more of the variance in openness than the degree of self-acceptance. Participants cited several major considerations in disclosing their sexual identity including: being honest, developing meaningful relationships, educating heterosexuals, maintaining a positive self-image, and evaluating the receiver's views about homosexuality (Wells & Kline, 1987).

The ‘coming out’ literature revealed there is a high degree of selectivity and a fear of rejection due to sexual identity (Chan, 1989; Wells & Kline, 1987). Many LGB
individuals state they choose not to disclose their sexual identity because of a fear of the unknown, a wish to avoid disappointing, hurting, or placing loved ones in an awkward position, a wish to avoid long-term detrimental effects on the quality of their relationships and status within the family, and a wish to avoid being rejected, harassed, or physically abused by parents and peers (Carrier et al., 1992; Cramer & Roach, 1988; Savin-Williams, 1996; Wells & Kline, 1987). Other LGB individuals are afraid that others will react punitively through economic sanctions, violence, social disapproval, loss of prestige, and discrimination (Harry, 1993; Herek, 1988). "It is these potential negative reactions which affect being out among most homosexuals regardless of where they are in any hypothetical sequence of stages." (Harry, 1993, p.28). Harry (2003) states that the reasons for disclosing one's sexual identity greatly depend on who the recipient of this disclosure is and the individual's motivation to obtain self-validation for being homosexual from others. It is not surprising that LGB individuals are more willing to disclose their sexual identity when they anticipate an accepting, positive and supportive response (Harry, 1993; Kahn, 1991; Wells & Kline, 1987). Disclosure appears to take place at a number of levels: to self, to other homosexual and heterosexual friends, to family members, to co-workers, and the public at large (Coleman, 1982). A close friend is commonly told first and then family members (usually a sister or mother) are told thereafter (Chan, 1999; Cramer & Roach, 1988; Savin-Williams, 1996; Wooden, Kawasaki, & Mayeda, 1983).

**Presenting ‘Self’**
Specific factors such as family of origin, self-construal, acculturation, and gender will be addressed in the following sections because of their influence on an individual's decision to present certain aspects of ‘self’, especially ‘self’ as being homosexual.

**‘Self’ and Family of Origin**
According to child development theories, the family is the primary socialisation agent, which provides the earliest teachings about what actions are acceptable in specific situations. First, the family home climate may dictate one's willingness to express aspects of oneself. For instance, a family environment filled with support and intimacy is more likely to encourage self-expressions of all kinds,
while homophobic family climates will hinder risking intimate ‘self’ expressions concerning homosexuality. Second, if an individual successfully differentiates from the family as an autonomous entity, individuals will probably feel more freedom in expressing aspects of the ‘self’ (Kahn, 1991). Furthermore, these individuals are likely to have less difficulty dealing with incongruence experienced during the ‘coming out’ process (Kahn, 1991). It is assumed that ‘healthy’ families encourage autonomy and intimacy which, in turn, may encourage a gay individual to express certain aspects of ‘self’. However, contrary to this ideal circumstance, LGB individuals will undoubtedly experience incongruence and strife, since individual family members are not always encouraged to develop as a separate, autonomous entity from the family unit. Family members are socialized to develop a strong interdependent self-construal, which is based upon the concept of collectivism.

**Self-Construal**

One’s self-concept stems from the individual's prescribed family role and is strongly associated with the family. Therefore, loss of family could be devastating to self-esteem. Due to the interdependent nature of culture, inappropriate behaviours and activities such as homosexuality will reflect upon the integrity of the family and could be seen as signs of disrespect to the entire kinship network, including both present and future generations. Behaviours and decisions are made with respect to how each will affect the family unit, since any deviation from the formalised code of conduct could bring shame and loss of face to the entire family; when the "family's honor is tarnished; it is not the children who have failed but the parents" (Savin-Williams, 1996, p.166).

As indicated by Markus and Kitayama (1991), an individual's view of her or himself is determined by their culture. The construal of self, in turn, affects cognitions, emotions, and motivation. The authors begin by explaining the universal aspects of self and aspects not affected by culture. They contend that there is a dichotomy between people whose culture includes an independent versus those with an interdependent construal of self. The degree of compliance to social obligations is greatly influenced by the position on this construct. A
comparative analysis will elucidate several cross-cultural differences between individualist and collectivistic cultures.

In individualistic cultures, behaviour is regulated largely by individual preferences, whereas in collectivistic cultures, behaviour is largely regulated by in-group norms and social obligations. Consequently, cultural norms are important determinants of behaviour in collectivistic cultures, while attitudes are more important in individualistic cultures. Collectivistic societies are characterised by a tightly knit social network in which individuals consider the needs of the group. In contrast, loose social structures and autonomy commonly characterise individualistic societies. Individuals from independent cultures define themselves by: (a) their internal abilities, thoughts, and feelings; (b) being unique and expressing the self; (c) realising internal attributes and promoting one's own goals; and d) being direct in communication. Individuals with independent self-construals consider others as external confirmation of their view of themselves.

In contrast, collectivists consider themselves as appendages of the in-group and frequently experience common fates. Triandis, McCusker, and Hui (1990) found that in collectivistic cultures, the content of self includes more group-linked elements. Individuals from interdependent cultures emphasise: (a) being part of society, primarily in terms of their in-group status; (b) occupying one's proper place and engaging in appropriate action; and (c) being indirect in communication and "reading others' minds". For instance, communication typically occurs uni-directionally from parent to child and from elder to younger in families. Therefore, it may be culturally consistent and appropriate for a lesbian, gay or bisexual lifestyle to remain unspoken of and undisclosed. Interdependent individuals believe that ideas are determined by the context and people within that context, and their "core conceptions of self are predicated on significant interpersonal relationships" (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p.231).

In general, self-construal has been conceptualised as "a constellation of thoughts, feelings, and actions concerning one's relationship to others, and the self as distinct from others" (Singelis, 1994, p.581). It is important to measure an individual's self-construal to assess what they "believe about the relationship
between the self and others and, especially, the degree to which they see themselves as separate from others or as connected with others" (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p.226).

It is expected that individuals with a stronger independent self-construal will think differently about others and the context; attend to different emotions; and be motivated by different aspirations from individuals with a stronger interdependent self-construal. Singelis (1994) claims that individuals from any culture possess both independent and interdependent self-construal. These two aspects of self have been found to be separate factors and not opposite poles of a single construct (Singelis, 1994). Therefore, each aspect of self needs consideration. With respect to disclosure of sexual identity, it is important to address all aspects/dimensions of the individuals’ self-construal.

Empirical research has yet to systematically examine how self-construal impacts the ‘coming out’ process in the gay community-at-large. However, studies have found independent and interdependent self-construal to be correlated with embarrassability, collectivism, and individualism (Singelis & Brown, 1995; Singelis & Sharkey, 1995; Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, & Gelfand, 1995). Kim, Sharkey, and Singelis (1995) studied the relationship between self-construal and perceived importance of interactive constraints to illustrate the importance of assessing self-construal in the ‘coming out’ process. Their results indicate that interdependent self-construal positively correlates with concern for other's feelings and avoidance of devaluation by the hearer, while independent self-construal positively correlates with concern for clarity. As the concern for clarity and the preference for direct communication increase with the individual's move toward an independent self-construal, one would expect gay individuals with independent self-construal to directly disclose their sexual identity more than gay individuals with interdependent self-construal. Another study supported the notion that willingness to ‘come out’ is contingent upon the degree to which the individual is concerned about others' reactions and/or perceptions of others' attitudes toward lesbians and gays (Frank & Leary, 1991).
Impact of Acculturation

Another factor of importance is acculturation status among lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals. For example, in the Asian community, homosexuality has been viewed as a form of rebellion, a bad habit, a myth of seduction, a Western phenomenon, (Liu & Chan, 1996; Pamela, 1991; Tremble et al., 2013), a rejection of cultural values (Aoki et al., 2009), or a form of social deviance that will bring shame to the family (Carrier et al., 1992; Chan, 1989). These views may serve as an avenue to externalise the blame (Tremble et al., 2013). Regardless of these views, LGB individuals must weigh the Western pressure to ‘come out’ and be openly gay against the cultural demand for privacy. This requires a balance between opposing forces (Chan, 1995). People who openly identify as being lesbian, gay, or bisexual, are likely to be more acculturated and to have been more influenced by American or Western culture (Chan, 1995; Liu & Chan, 1996). Chan (1995) indicated that: "While some individuals may never openly admit or act on their homosexuality, others will embrace the Western model enthusiastically; still others will be openly lesbian/gay only in safe (generally non-Asian) environments" (p.99).

When working with ethnic minorities, it is important to assess an individual’s acculturation status because it will enable the clinician to gain a better understanding of their current life circumstance. However, in the ‘coming out’ literature, researchers have not rigorously investigated the influence of acculturation on the ‘coming out’ process. This is probably due to the fact that there has been very little research conducted in the gay community, so the requirement to systematically account for acculturation status has not been imperative.

Acculturation is commonly defined as a multidimensional process whereby an individual from one culture experiences change in their attitudes, behaviours, and values as a result of first hand contact with another culture. Acculturation status reveals how immersed an individual is within mainstream culture and values. Cuellar, Harris, and Jasso (1980) claim, "Values, ideologies, beliefs, and attitudes appear to be important components of acculturation as are cognitive and behavioural characteristics such as language, cultural customs, and practices” (p.209).
There is a role of defining acculturation as it relates to psychotherapy styles and community intervention (Sue & Morishima, 1982). Acculturation status may be utilised as a moderator variable to match the extent of cultural compatibility between consumers and providers of health care (Cuellar, Harris, & Jasso, 1980). The level of acculturation has also been found to be associated with a person’s mental health status (Szapocznik, Scopetta, Kurtines, & Aranalde, 1978), willingness to see a counsellor (Gim, Atkinson, & Whiteley, 1990), symptom expression (Ying, 1990), and behaviour and attitude towards help-seeking behaviour (Atkinson & Gim, 1989; Ying & Miller, 1992).

**Considering Gender Differences**

A number of gender differences in the ‘coming out’ process have been consistently reported. First, lesbians have been found to disclose their homosexual identity at a slightly later age than gay men (de Monteflores & Schultz, 1978). This may be due to the fact that “women take longer to connect feeling different to their same-sex erotic feelings and behaviors ... and that it is easier for women to publicly express affection toward other women without arousing suspicion” (Savin-Williams, 1996, p.160). Second, compared to gay men, lesbians have a greater tendency to check out others attitudes by making indirect rather than direct statements about their sexuality to prepare the individual they want to disclose their sexual identity to. They will also consider the situation in which the disclosure will be made (Wells & Kline, 1987). Third, lesbians have been found to be highly discriminating in their disclosures, divulging first to close friends before family and wider groups. In contrast, men essentially tell everyone once they began disclosing their sexuality (Savin-Williams, 1996). Finally, disclosures among lesbians depend greatly on their perceptions of a positive recipient response, a high level of trust, or when they are developing a closer friendship, while gay men have a greater likelihood of telling strangers, acquaintances, or anyone they encounter (Wells & Kline, 1987).

**Disclosure of Sexual Identity to Family**

Parke (2004) highlights three important interdependent subsystems within the family that affect child and adolescent development, the parent child subsystem, the marital subsystem and the sibling subsystem. Self-identified gay or lesbian individuals often
fear a perceived negative reaction from within these sub-systems and the challenges of disclosure can be a source of psychological distress (Savin-Williams, 2003a/b; Wells & Kline, 1987). Much of the research, although not extensive, has explored the dyadic parent relationship. Heatherington and Lavner (2008) present a review of these studies, exploring firstly the dyadic-level variables of emotional bond/relationship in the parent child dyads and their associations with disclosure and LGB well-being. Secondly, they examined studies presenting the family-level variables of the characteristics of the family subsystem and how they relate to LGB offspring’s well-being and/or family adjustment following disclosure. Following their review, they present a preliminary family-systems conceptual model of family adjustment to disclosure of sexual identity (see Fig.1, Heatherington and Lavner, 2008, p.339).

Disclosure of sexual identity to the family can evoke intense fear and anxiety among LGB individuals. Many individuals believe the greatest risks for rejection and discrimination would come from family members if disclosure of their sexual identity should occur (Wells & Kline, 1987). According to Savin-Williams (1996), "many report never feeling completely comfortable or 'gay' until they disclosed their sexual orientation to their parents" and "disclosure to parents may feel like the final step out of the closet" (p.161).

Investigations examining the effects of family on the ‘coming out’ process of lesbian and gay youth (Cramer & Roach, 1988; Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993; Savin-Williams, 1989; Tremble et al., 2013) and self-disclosure of sexual identity (Harry, 1993; Wells & Kline, 1987) have established several factors that mediate disclosure to family among LGB individuals. Coleman (1982) contends that disclosing to family members is most successful when the individual has accumulated enough positive reactions from significant others. Moreover, it has been proposed that an accepting family facilitates the ‘coming out’ process (Troiden & Goode, 2000). A satisfying parental relationship for the gay individual also seems to account for their willingness to ‘come out’ to parents, particularly with lesbians (Savin-Williams, 1989). Interestingly, a majority of participants reported having a more satisfying relationship with their mothers than with their fathers (Cramer & Roach, 1988). Finally, lower levels of intergenerational intimidation and triangulation have been found to be
associated with a greater likelihood to disclose to parents, to the total family, and to siblings (Kahn, 1991). Many gay individuals report a desire to share their personal life, being tired of concealing sexuality, a desire for more freedom, and a desire for more intimacy with parents as reasons for coming out to parents (Ben-Ari, 1995; Cramer & Roach, 1988). Those who choose to disclose to their parents seek a more authentic relationship with them (Savin-Williams, 1989).

Sexual Identity and Adolescence

Over the past three decades there has been an increasing body of research literature around LGBT youth (Horn et al., 2009). Despite this, Munstanski (2011) showed that researchers often avoid conducting studies with this population. This is believed to be a result of researcher’s anticipation or actual experiences of not obtaining ethical approval from institutional review boards. He goes on to argue that “waiting until LGBT persons turn 18 to engage them in research and then retrospectively report on experiences at earlier ages is unsatisfactory” (p.675). As a result, their needs and concerns are often not being addressed in a way that could influence practice and policies leading to an improvement in sexual minorities quality of life.

Age of Sexual Identity Disclosure to Family

More recent research suggests the age of disclosure within the family is shifting. Toomey and Richardson (2009) found that the average age of disclosure to family was 17 years compared to previous research suggesting it was 18 to 19 years (Savin-Williams, 1998; Floyd & Stein, 2002). The transition from adolescence to young adulthood is a period associated with heteronormative milestones (Waters et al., 2011) as well as a stage when disclosure of sexual identity and identity occurs (Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000). Therefore, it is not surprising to see an international body of research literature suggesting sexual minorities are at greater risk of increased physical and mental health disparities at this age, possibly as a result of not conforming to heteronormative expectations of society, which will be discussed further in this chapter.
Disclosure to Family

Disclosure to family members, especially to parents, may occur over several years or may never occur at all. Cramer and Roach (1988) found that many gay individuals explore their family’s attitudes by disclosing to a sibling or to their mother before ‘coming out’ to their father. In the same study, 66% of the gay participants in their study told their mothers directly, while only 51% told their father directly. Toomey and Richardson (2009) conducted research into the relationships between sexual minority youth and their siblings and found that ‘coming out’ to siblings represented the largest number of first disclosures within the family. However, within the research literature, sibling relationships have received little attention despite these relationships being important in adolescence (Tucker, McHale & Crouter, 2001). Other research (Savin-Williams, 1998 & Beaty, 1999) suggests disclosure to siblings may be used by sexual minorities to gauge how other family members may react to ‘coming out’ but there is little empirical data about this process. Within the research literature, mothers are frequently the first person for disclosure rather than fathers. Mothers and sisters were perceived to be more accepting to LGBT disclosures within the family (D’Augelli, 1998; Savin-Williams, 1998; Morrow, 2004; Toomey & Richardson, 2009).

In a study by D’Augelli et al. (2008), they reported male siblings were less aware of sibling sexual identity possibly due to fears of negative reactions or perhaps they were less sensitive to their LGB siblings’ sexual development. LGB youth with more siblings decreased the likelihood of those siblings being aware of their orientation, “The more people in the family, the more considerations of different people’s awareness and reactions must occur” (p.112). They also found in their study that around 70% of LGB youth from single parent families were more likely to be aware of their child’s orientation compared to around 50% of two parent families. However, the researchers acknowledge that this finding could be due to an overrepresentation of single parent mothers compared to single parent fathers in their study.

Family Reaction to Sexual Identity Disclosure

Willoughby, Malik and Lindahl (2006) reported having family resources in place prior to disclosure might assist in reducing this distress. In their sample, those men who
reported a balanced family (cohesion, adaptability and authoritative) found their perceived reactions from parents to be less negative. Those who viewed their family as unbalanced (disconnected, rigid and authoritarian families) reported more negative responses from both parents. Shilo and Savaya (2011) found no association between sexual identity disclosure and family support. The support of friends had the strongest association with sexual identity disclosure. However, a significant association was found between family support and the mental health of adolescents. A strong association was also found between family acceptance and an individual’s own self-acceptance of their sexual orientation. Walner and Magruder (1999) provide further evidence in support of this, reporting “family relations” as an important variable to be considered in sexuality identity expression.

Ryan et al. (2010) report a lack of literature addressing family support among lesbian, gay and bisexual youth and young adults. Therefore, the relationship between the family and LGB members often remains ‘an unexplored dimension’ (Bertone & Pallotta-Chiarollia, 2012, p.301) with little published research addressing the support of families within public, health, educational and voluntary sectors. Heatherington and Lavner (2008) highlight “the vast majority of studies focus on initial family reactions to disclosure, and few address the processes and outcomes of longer-term family adjustment” (p.329).

D’Augelli and Hersberger (1993) found mothers to be more accepting of ‘coming out’ than fathers in their sample. They also highlighted that very few gay adolescents picked siblings as the first to disclose to within the family. This was also supported across other studies with parents being the main choice of disclosure and youth being more ‘out’ to their mothers. Therefore, in considering the disclosure of sexual identity within the family, it is important to recognise individual differences between family members. D’Augelli and Hershberger (1993) also highlighted that in consideration of these differences we should also be aware of the possible complexities that might be created with one parent aware and the other not.

Information concerning the influence of families on the ‘coming out’ process is anecdotal and lacks empirical validation (Aoki, 2003; Chan, 1992; Greene, 1994a; Greene, 1994b; Liu & Chan, 1996; Nakajima, Chan, & Lee, 1996). Based on this
limited research, it is premature to draw any conclusions about the experiences of ‘coming out’ among the LGB community and the family. It is imperative to conduct more empirical studies to further explore the complexities of the ‘coming out’ process for lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals.

Navigating Internal and External Conflict
Research suggests that lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals experience conflicts within themselves, their family, and their community when they attempted to integrate their homosexual identity and their ethnic identity (Morales, 1989; Nakajima et al., 1996; Tremble, Schneider, and Appathurai, 2013). In order to manage distress generated by multiple minority statuses, LGB individuals may either separate their sexual identity from their ethnic identity or conceal their homosexuality from their community. Tremble et al. (2013) suggest that, "In spite of the cultural pride which several expressed, they felt removed from their culture. They usually excluded themselves from cultural activities in order to avoid shaming the family in front of friends." (p.261)

Concealment of homosexual identity among LGB individuals may be a product of numerous fears. The fear of rejection or non-acceptance from their family or community can greatly influence the decision to disclose one's sexual orientation. The ‘coming out’ process jeopardises the closeness of interfamily relationships and threatens the strong association with ethnic community. An individual may "never publicly disclose their same-sex attractions for fear of humiliating and bringing community shame to their close-knit, multigenerational extended families" (Savin-Williams, 1996, p.165). The fear of being separated from all support systems (Morales, 1989) may be sufficient for the gay individual to conceal their sexual identity from others. The fear that ‘coming out’ to one’s parents may cause physical illness and emotional burden to their parents may further inhibit the disclosure of sexual identity among gay men and lesbians (Stewart, 2007). The fear of serious consequences, such as ostracism and discrimination, may also hinder disclosure of sexual orientation.

All of these factors combined, or in part, may influence the decision not to
disclose their sexual identity among gay men and lesbians. Therefore, it is not surprising that LGB individuals may choose to "identify and ally more closely with LGB at different times—depending on need, situational factors, and self-concept" (Liu & Chan, 1996, p.145). After all, remaining closeted generates less interpersonal conflicts for LGB individuals.

Among LGB individuals, it is common to conceal one's sexuality from the family, while not actively attempting to "pass" as heterosexual (Aoki, 2003). It may be more appealing to conceal their sexual identity or "pass" as heterosexual in order to diffuse additional discrimination for being a sexual minority. It is already difficult to cope with racial discrimination without the additional pressures of being a sexual minority. It is also worth noting that although ethnic minority parents prepare their children for racial discrimination, they generally lack the ability to prepare their children for discrimination as homosexual. Therefore, how is an individual supposed to disclose their homosexuality in the midst of societal and cultural discrimination? These factors have been found to be detrimental to emotional health and well-being.

**Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Mental Health**

The ‘coming out’ process of self-identified lesbian and gay individuals has been receiving increasing attention, with fewer studies researching those who identify as bisexual or transgender. Recent studies have highlighted the potentially stressful nature of the ‘coming out’ process which may give rise to higher risk for psychological and psychosocial problems, including substance abuse (Cabaj, 1996) and suicide (Hartstein, 1996; Muehrer, 1995; Shaffer, Fisher, Hicks, Parides, & Gould, 2005). For this reason, more empirical research is needed to better understand this process and develop culturally responsive and gay affirmative programmes.

McLaughlin, Hatzenbuehler, Xuan and Conron (2012) report lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) populations are at “elevated risks of psychiatric disorders” (p.646) compared to heterosexual counterparts. Homophobic victimisation and discrimination are cited as possible causes of increased emotional distress among
sexual minority populations (Almeida et al., 2009; Poteat, Mereish, DiGiovanni & Koenig, 2011). Bontempo and D’Augelli (2002) conducted a study (n=9188) with ninth to twelfth grade students, 315 of which identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual. The study was concerned with examining the link between at-school victimization and LGB health risk behaviours compared with their heterosexual peers. They concluded that the effect of an LGB status and high levels of at-school victimization was associated with higher levels of health risk behaviours (e.g. suicidality, substance use and sexual-risk behaviours). An LGB individual may also internally outplay victimisation and discrimination by the process of internalised homophobia. It occurs as a “result of the negative beliefs and assumptions that become internalized by LGB as a result of living in a stigmatized culture that values heterosexist beliefs and devalues the LGB experience or orientation” (Sherry, 2007, p.220). This can lead to a belief of ‘otherness’ and to feelings of alienation, fear and rejection.

Savin-Williams (2001) points out that research tends to focus on the difficulties experienced by sexual-minority youth and he encourages researchers and clinicians to focus more on their strengths and resiliencies. In a qualitative study into suicide resiliency among gay men, Fenaughty and Harre (2003) identified the following themes using grounded theory in reducing risk of suicide: (1) positive social norms and conditions; (2) high levels of support; (3) identification with role models; and (4) high self-esteem. They argue that efforts should be made to increase resiliency factors. As adolescents transition to young adulthood, parents still play a critical role in shaping the health of their children (Arnett, 2000). Recent research suggests that lower levels of family connectedness could lead to poorer health related outcomes for sexual minorities (Needham & Austin, 2010). In thinking about the role of the family, research suggests family acceptance of sexual identity predicts greater esteem, social support and general health (Ryan et al., 2010). However, disclosing one’s sexual identity to the family can be a challenging life stressor. Heatherington and Lavner (2008) suggest that an adequate answer around what facilitates the family coming to terms with disclosure of sexual identity is not yet available.

**Current Study**

Even with the recent growth of research within the lesbian, gay and bisexual
community, researchers still do not fully understand the intricacies of the ‘coming out’ process, especially within the gay community itself. The ‘coming out’ process is further complicated when one considers the impact of the family, with previous literature suggesting this can be a distressing time for adolescents. Therefore, this current study is interested in collecting ‘coming out’ stories, in particular to the family. The current study aims to address some of the limitations in the ‘coming out’ literature by gathering stories through narrative interviews from adolescents around their disclosure of sexual identity to the family and also how parents experienced their son or daughter ‘coming out’. The decision was taken, therefore, to gather parental accounts to gain further insight into adolescents ‘coming out’ to the family. Based on previous literature, narratives will most likely provide information around sociodemographic characteristics (gender, ethnicity, and acculturation), perceived ‘health’ of family of origin, and self-construal concerning independence and interdependence on the disclosure of sexual identity among lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals. These factors are expected to influence the level of perceived difficulty in disclosing to specific target persons (i.e., closest homosexual and heterosexual friend, sister, brother, mother and father); the degree of actual disclosure to these target persons; and actual disclosure to parents. Additional information regarding the circumstances leading to disclosure (i.e., each target person's attitude towards homosexuality- prior to disclosure), the mode of disclosure (i.e., told directly, told by someone else, asked by the target person, or discovered by accident), the reaction to the disclosure, and how the disclosure affected each relationship will be explored. The following research questions guided this current study:

1. What can we learn from adolescents’ stories about ‘coming out’ to the family?

2. What can we learn from parental stories about adolescents ‘coming out’ to the family?
Chapter Summary

In this chapter I outlined the literature search strategies used in the development of this research. I discussed the development of sexual identity, sexual identity formation and considered the development of homosexuality research. In line with this research I paid attention to literature around ‘coming out’ and connected this with literature around the development of the ‘self’ in relation to sexual identity. I also focused upon disclosure of sexual identity to the family, explored gender differences and the impact of ‘coming out’ upon mental health. I concluded with discussion of the current study and its research questions.
Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction
In Chapter Two, I highlighted the fact that there is a recognised gap within the literature around the process of an adolescent to disclose his or her sexual orientation to their family. In this chapter, I present my research design. I begin by revisiting the aims of this study by presenting the research questions. Secondly, I explore my epistemological positioning within this research and present the methodology selected, a narrative method. I also discuss the recruitment of participants, data collection, analysis and ethical considerations within this chapter.

Revisiting the Research Aim
Murray (2003) described how, over the past three decades, we have seen a shift away from quantitative, positivist psychology towards acknowledging the importance of language and ‘lived’ subjective experience. As discussed in Chapter One, counselling psychology has adopted a set of values rooted within a humanistic value base. The profession adopts a relational approach concerned with a person’s subjective perception and understanding of the world. With this in mind, my research aim was to collect stories about adolescent ‘coming out’ experiences to their family. I was interested to identify how adolescents structured their ‘coming out’ story to family, and how parents structured their story around their son or daughter disclosing their sexual identity to them. I wanted to gain insight through the participants’ own words and subsequently to explore how their personal stories were structured and what we could learn about what influenced the adolescent experience of ‘coming out’ to family. Again, it must be emphasised that these parents were not related to the adolescents within this study. The following research questions were developed as a result of my research interest:

1. What can we learn from adolescents’ stories about ‘coming out’ to the family?

2. What can we learn from parental stories about adolescents ‘coming out’ to the family?
Following the selection of these questions, it was important for me to reflect upon how my research methodology would explore the topic of interest (Krauss, 2005). A qualitative research design was selected as this methodology provides counselling psychologists with a range of approaches when designing qualitative research (see Creswell, Hanson, Plano, Clark & Morales, 2007). Here, the method of narrative analysis employed was structural analysis (Labov, 1972, 1997).

Within the social care arena, Price (2011) pointed out the importance of considering the methodological challenges when carrying out research within LGBT populations, “these challenges include accurately defining, measuring and sampling respondents and the ethical considerations that should be taken into account when working with minority groups and/or hidden and vulnerable populations” (p.6). Throughout this chapter I will be mindful of these, discussing how I considered and addressed them within my methodology.

**Considering Epistemology**

In this section I explore and outline the ontological and epistemological positions that influenced my research. Upon selection of the research questions, it was important for me to reflect upon these as they contributed to the methodological approaches I selected.

Within the field of psychology, it is important to recognise that “there are differences in opinion about how research projects should actually be conducted” (Sullivan, 2010, p.17), and how they uncover and contribute to knowledge. However, despite the methodological differences, psychologists must consider the underlying epistemological framework in the development of their research. This can often be underemphasised during the research process and in the selection of a chosen methodology. Burman and Whelan (2011) highlight the importance of engaging with epistemological issues in research. They argue this enables a researcher to clarify their positioning in relation to key values, politics, power and truth and the implications of these positions upon our research.
As an initial starting point, it was important for me to first recognise the philosophy underpinning the profession of counselling psychology, as it brings together the two professions of counselling and psychology by combining “two epistemological viewpoints of the ‘subjective’ and the ‘objective’” (Hanley et al., 2011, p.2). The profession positions itself within a humanistic value base, recognising the significance of the helping relationship. The phenomenological approach of humanistic psychology, developed mainly through the work of Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers (Hayes, 2000), emphasises the importance of how people see themselves and locate the self in their social situation. This was offered as a reaction to the mechanistic approaches of behaviourism and the pathological and deterministic nature of psychoanalytical psychology (Elkins, 2009). The humanistic value base was, therefore, a central component of my research design, viewing individuals as unique beings who are socially and relationally embedded (Cooper, 2009). Therefore, this research adopted a critical realist view of the world and was informed by a social constructionist understanding of knowledge.

In considering this positioning, it is argued that we cannot assume research data collected is a true and direct reflection of what is going on in the world (Willig, 2013). As a result, the researcher needs to ‘dig deeper’, gaining a better understanding of the underlying structures around the phenomena they are trying to gain knowledge about. In other words, the story is a by-product of particular social interactions and relationships that are embedded which are historically and culturally located (Smith & Sparks, 2006). In my research, I needed to adopt a method that enabled me to achieve this and to go ‘deeper’ into the story that was being narrated to me, considering socio-political and historical perspectives. I believe taking a social constructionist position enabled me to achieve this. As Burr (2003) writes, “Social constructionism, then, replaces the self-contained, pre-social and unitary individual with a fragmented and changing, socially produced phenomenon who comes into existence and is not maintained inside the skull but in social life” (p. 104). It views language (discourse) as a form of social interaction and this discourse constructs the reality, rather than the reality being determined by how we talk or describe a phenomenon (Willing, 2013). In considering my research and exploring ‘coming out’ stories, I needed to go beyond the language that was used to uncover the social reality that underlay participant accounts. It was important for me to be mindful that
these stories would be constructed and influenced by the social context in which they were told, but also by historical and socio-political landscape. In further consideration around this, Plummer (1995) discusses the importance around considering stories and their links with the wider world (e.g. change, history and culture). We therefore must reflect upon the moment in time in which a story is told, being mindful of that historical moment and the various social worlds which impact upon its telling. Many of these issues are also explored by Sedgwick (1990) in her book *Epistemology of the Closet*, where she considers the discourses of sexuality within a historical and socio-political context. This term ‘the closet’ is often associated with disclosure of sexual identity, being referred to as ‘coming out of the closet’, when one breaks the silence of their sexual identity by telling others. In her reflections around considering the many silences surrounding ‘the closet’ and keeping one’s sexual identity quiet, one needs to be mindful of these discourses within social-political and historical discourses. Therefore, to facilitate this process I wanted to collect stories around ‘coming out’ and I selected a narrative method for this study. In the following section, I explore my process in choosing a narrative approach.

**Selection of A Narrative Method**

Narrative approaches have become increasingly popular within the humanities and social sciences (Czarniawska, 2004; Howard, 1991) and play a significant role within therapeutic practice (McLeod, 2010). It is believed that narrative methods “may give new and deeper insights into the complexity of practice contexts” (Riley & Hawe, 2005, p.227). Therefore, I believed this method would assist me in working towards the research aims of this study, exploring personal narratives about ‘coming out’, and would be congruent with the epistemological positioning previously outlined.

With regards to the epistemological positioning of narrative methods, researchers within this paradigm are interested in producing knowledge about how people construct their experiences into meaningful stories. A narrative approach produces knowledge of a social constructionist nature, focussed on the social and psychological consequences in the life of the storyteller, as opposed to what is objectively ‘true’ or ‘false’ to them. Narrative psychology holds the view that in order to understand human behaviour and experience it in a meaningful way, we must
explore the systems and structures of meaning (Polkinghorne, 1988). The use of story assists us in attributing meaning from experiences through various media, but this meaning is created and negotiated within a social context. As a result, people are continuously involved in a ‘process’ of creating themselves (Crossley, 2000). For this reason, the researcher, using a narrative method, must also consider their active role within the research process. There has been growing awareness around the role of the researcher in not only collecting data from research interviews, but also in how their involvement will impact upon the way in which a participant might construct their story within the social context of a research interview (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). We must also be mindful of our own biases and beliefs when analysing the data collected, exploring how this was addressed within our methodology (Willig, 2013). Issues of ‘reflexivity’ have been briefly discussed in chapter one and will be discussed further in this research. For now, I wish to explore and consider the debates around defining a narrative approach and the implications for this current study.

The ‘Narrative Turn’

In considering the historical development and the beginnings of ‘narrative’, it has been suggested the ‘narrative turn’ within social studies can be traced back to hermeneutic studies of the Bible, Talmud and Koran. It is argued that contemporary literary accounts began with the work of the Soviet folklorist and scholar, Vladimir Propp (Czarniawska, 2004). Polkinghorne (1988) suggests that the contemporary literary study of ‘narrative’ has its origins within four national traditions: Russian formalism, US new criticism, French structuralism, and German hermeneutics. Subsequently, interest in ‘narrative’ diversified from literary theory to the humanities and social sciences. Crossley (2000) states, “A narrative theory of psychology advocates the need to focus attention on human existence as it is lived, experienced and interpreted by each human individual” (p.45). For this reason, it is not surprising to have seen an increasing interest in the use of the term ‘narrative’ over the past three decades within contemporary western social research (Squire, Andrews & Tamboukou, 2013). However, due to its multiple uses, this has led to ambiguity around its definition (Polkinghorne, 1995) and as I embarked on using a ‘narrative’ approach, this initially led to significant confusion. I soon realised that the term
‘narrative’ holds a variety of meanings across a range of disciplines (Riessman, 2008), indicating the diversity of this term and resulting in a growing body of literature suggesting numerous definitions.

For the purposes of this study, I chose to use Hinchman and Hinchman’s (1997) definition which states, “narratives (stories) in the human sciences should be defined provisionally as discourses with a clear sequential order that connect events in a meaningful way for a definite audience and thus offer insights about the world and/or people’s experiences of it” (p.xvi). I selected this definition because I believe it coincides with the aim of this study, which is focused on exploring participant ‘coming out’ stories, in order to gain deeper insight into their personal narrative accounts. It therefore raises the question as to what is narrative and what is story? Are they the same or different? In the following section I will explore the importance of distinguishing between these terms, which are so often used interchangeably.

**From Story to Narrative**

Frank (2000) suggests that it is important to make a distinction between the terminology of ‘story’ and ‘narrative’. He argues that everyone can tell a ‘story’, but a ‘narrative’ only unfolds from its analysis. In considering this perspective, a ‘story’ takes on ‘narrative form’ when an analysis is employed to uncover its underpinning structure. Frank continues, stating that by reducing a story to a narrative may lead to a loss of its initial purpose for which it was told. Focusing exclusively on the structure can result in missing what was most important to the storyteller. Atkinson (1997) further points out that we might need to shift our focus when analysing stories, from “investigators’ problems…to respondents’ problems” (Atkinson, 1997, p.334). Having close alignment to the storyteller’s intent and purpose will assist in overcoming the potential loss of original meaning. Therefore, it was important for me to recognise that misunderstandings could arise around the participant accounts at the point of data analysis. I felt it was important for me to be mindful that these stories were more than ‘data’ being collected for analysis, and to also reflect upon my relationship with the story and co-construction of meaning between participants and myself.
Elliot (2005) suggests ‘narratives’ have three key features. Firstly, they are chronological in nature, representing a sequence of events; secondly, they are meaningful; and thirdly, they are inherently social in the sense that they are produced for a specific audience. However, these three features cannot be seen as independent or separate from one another. It is important to note that meanings of events within ‘narrative’ are believed to be derived, “both from their temporal ordering and from the social context in which the narrative is recounted” (p.4). This was something I needed to be mindful of within my research; the participant stories were being narrated to me in the context of a research interview. Therefore, in understanding ‘narrative’ I needed to consider the temporality and causality of participants’ ‘narrative form’. Temporality is widely accepted within the field of ‘narrative’ research, viewing ‘narrative’ as “a method of recapitulating past experiences by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events that actually occurred” (Labov & Waletzky, 1967, p.12). It is the placing of these events into a sequence that is a defining feature of ‘narrative’. Reflecting further upon the temporal dimension of ‘narrative’, Riessman (1993) writes that, “Meaning is fluid and contextual, not fixed and universal” (p.15). With this in mind, meaning can change; it is only temporary in the social context within which it was constructed and produced.

Closely linked to the temporal nature of ‘narrative’ is the concept of ‘plot’. Sabin (1986) points out that a “story has a beginning, middle, and an ending...The story is held together by recognisable patterns of events called plots. Central to the plot structure are human predicaments and attempted resolutions” (p.3). The ‘plot’ forms the thematic thread within a ‘narrative configuration’, and the integration of a ‘plot’ forms an ‘emplotment’, by taking on ‘narrative meaning’ (Polkinghorne, 1995). Therefore, stories are structured around a complication and resolution; although not all complications lead to a resolution, resolutions almost always have a complication. The sociolinguists Labov and Waletzky (1967) were among the first to explore how structures within ‘story’, could be systematically subjected to formal analysis. Labov (1972) identified that ‘narrative accounts’ were structured around six elements, but not all of these need to be present within a ‘story’ for it to be defined as one.
Figure one illustrates the Labovian approach. I have demonstrated how it now argues that evaluation weaves in and out of ‘story’ by illustrating this vertically. In the early stages of its development, Labov did not view evaluations in this way, but as a linear process. The abstract is optional, depending on the context of the story that is being told by the narrator. In essence, its role is to set the scene of the story that is to come and is, therefore, found at the very beginning or close to it within the structure. In their model, an orientation clause provides the setting around the events being narrated, with details such as when it happened, whom the story is about, where it took place and references to time. The complicating action clauses relate to the event being narrated in the story and typically follow a “then and then” structure within a narration. The complicating actions are structured chronologically and any deviation away from chronology would be accompanied by explanatory clauses by the narrator. In Labov’s model, he noted that, in his view, the evaluation was the most important element in a narrative clause. He argued that this clause provides a justification as to why the story is being told, giving insight to the reader or listener by conveying the narrator’s perspective on the events being told. It is important to note that in Labov’s and Waletzky’s (1967) model, evaluation was seen as a more discrete element, although Labov (1972) highlighted the way it permeated the
narrative within the other elements, as highlighted above. The resolution informs the listener when the story comes to an end. If a coda is present within the story, this will be signified by a return to present time in the subject’s narration. In conclusion, the abstract and coda stages are viewed as optional, and both the orientation and evaluation can be realised either before or as part of the complicating action and resolution stage Eggins and Slade (1997) argue that these stages must occur within this sequence in order for a text to be considered a narrative.

According to Labov (1972), oral narratives told in a story are viewed as having two main functions. Firstly, they have a referential function, in which the storyteller refers to their experience by recapitulating it and reporting what happened. Secondly, oral narratives have an evaluative function whereby the storyteller communicates meaning through establishing their personal involvement and allowing insight into their perspective. As an approach, oral narrative focuses on reference and temporal ordering, as distinct from other narrative-analytic models which focus upon textual coherence and structure, or narrative functions. Labov’s model is not about “reconstructing the told in the telling” or “making a telling from the told” (Mishler, 1995, p.92), but is an approach that is event-centred, viewing the narrative as a representation of events, and text-centred by embodying personal experience narrative as text, taking little account of context. Nevertheless, I would argue that within my research, context is important. Although this study draws upon Labov’s framework, presented in Chapter Four, it recognises that as his focus was sociolinguistics, it is understandable that he regarded it as not significant. However, given my explanation of how this study views narrative in the previous sections above, I believe that context cannot be ignored; this will be explored in further detail within Chapter Five.

**Application of Narrative Inquiry**

A narrative approach enabled me to, firstly, understand participant experience, secondly, to access information that participants did not consciously know and, thirdly, it illuminated the temporal notion of experience, recognising that an individual’s understanding of people and events changes over time (Duff & Bell, 2002). The use of narrative inquiry facilitated this process by accessing knowledge
from participant stories. The use of narrative inquiry assisted me as a researcher to inquire deeper into particular aspects of life experiences (see Chase, 2005). Before exploring narrative inquiry further, it is important to note that there are many ideas within narrative literature around what is meant by the term. For the purposes of this study, I aligned with the following, as proposed by Connelly and Clandinin (2006):

“Arguments for the development and use of narrative inquiry come out of the view of human experience in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives. People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Viewed this way, narrative is the phenomenon studied in inquiry. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience” (p.477).

Narrative inquiry is, therefore, a way to understand and give meaning as we systemically gather, analyse and represent our lives through story (Andrews et al., 2008). In this research I was particularly interested in how adolescents structured their personal narratives around ‘coming out’ to family, and the way in which parents structured their personal narrative around their experience of their son or daughter identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual.

Narrative inquiry focuses more upon making sense of experiences over time by considering the relationship between individual experience and social contexts, as opposed to providing a specific set of rigid research methods and procedures (Clandinin & Rosieck, 2007; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998). It provides a framework to “retain the complexity of the situation in which an action was undertaken and the emotional and motivation meaning connected with it” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p.11) as the focus of the analysis. There is significant research literature, as outlined in Chapter Two of this study, discussing how LGB populations often experience marginalisation, as a result of identifying as non-heteronormative.

Narrative inquiry is viewed as an approach that can help to provide a voice for specific sub-groups of people who are often marginalised (Lieblich et al., 1998). It
was important for me to select a method that would not reinforce marginalisation further, but rather empower those participating in this research, providing a space to tell their story. Riessman (1993) argues that in a good narrative analysis one must “think beyond the surface of the text” (p.13) and towards a broader commentary. In order to understand the social process of ‘coming out’, narrative inquiry assisted me in this exploration. Duff and Bell (2002) stated that narrative inquiry enables us to move beyond the story and how the storyteller shapes their account, providing “a window into people’s beliefs and experiences” (p.209).

From Approach to Method
Having considered the approaches above, I will now discuss how I implemented these within the methodology of my research. In this section, I will also explore and explain my rationale throughout the various stages of the research process: participant recruitment, research participants, data collection and analysis, ethical considerations and trustworthiness.

As highlighted in previous sections, a narrative approach was selected, in accordance with Polkinghorne’s (1995) view that, “Narrative is the type of discourse composition that draws together diverse events, happenings, and actions of human lives into thematically unified goal-directed processes.” (p.5). As participants told their story within this research, they would draw upon their experiences, organising them into a plot of contextual meaning. The selection of a narrative analysis enabled me to go beyond the text, gaining deeper insight into socially situated knowledge through storied narrative by preserving “the complexity of human action” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p.7). I will now on go to discuss how I recruited potential participants.

Participant Recruitment: Considering Terminology
In considering participant recruitment, it was important for me to firstly reflect upon my use of terminology in recruitment literature. It has been suggested within the literature that the term ‘identity’ is more appropriate than ‘orientation’, reflecting a move away from the latter, as it is viewed as medical language used within clinical settings (BPS, 2012). It is argued, too, that this is more helpful as it reflects with how
individuals describe themselves. However, as a researcher, I also needed to be mindful of the socio-political and historical climate in which the language of identities has arisen (Weeks, 2003; Faderman, 1984; Sophie, 1986). Therefore, prior to developing my recruitment literature, I spent time exploring how I would use language within these documents to raise awareness about this study and recruit potential participants. I was mindful that I wanted to use language that was inclusive, and which did not exclude those who did not identify with a particular ‘label’.

I believe a label ultimately leads to comparison, creating separation and the taking away of individuality. In essence, we negate the person’s very existence beyond a label by restricting them to the boundaries within it. This was a tension that I was mindful of and needed to manage within my research. On the one hand, I needed to use terminology that would help people to identify with the subject area of study. In recognising the need to use sexual identity labels within the recruitment literature, I chose to select the term ‘self-identify’ before each of these labels. I viewed this as a means to work towards inclusivity and to assist me in knowing that an individual taking part identified with a particular sexual identity label. Not only did I include the terms lesbian, gay and bisexual, but also used ‘other’. This would enable me to capture participants who did not self-identify with the LGB label and also left open a window of opportunity to potentially uncover alternative labels that participants may have attached to themselves or others around sexual identity.

I have previously highlighted the challenges that can be faced when using the acronym ‘LGBT’. With this in mind, I chose not to include those who identified as ‘transgender’ within this research. By linking ‘all’ together, we can communicate and make the assumption that individuals falling within this ‘LGBT’ acronym experience similar issues. As Stieglitz (2010) points out, sexual orientation and gender identity are not the same, “the term transgender does not include sexual orientation” (p.193). Therefore, I did not want to follow limitations of previous research, where ‘T’ has been included in research samples. I believe the issues facing transgender individuals need to be researched in their own right and this is a widely reported limitation within many LGBT studies (Price, 2011).
Participant Recruitment: Snowball Sampling

After reflecting on which method to use to recruit participants who self-identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or other, the method of snowball sampling was chosen. This approach is widely used within the field of sociological research, particularly in qualitative studies that are explorative in nature (Blanken, Hendricks & Adriaans, 1992). Martin and Dean (1993) suggested that this sampling method is helpful when researching groups that can be viewed as vulnerable, socially stigmatised or from within hidden populations, all which factors can make it more difficult to access potential participants for research purposes. In this sampling method, people who share similar characteristics or have access to the population related to the subject of interest refer potential participants to the information about the topic of research. It is assumed that this social connection can facilitate people coming forward to participate in the research, something they may have otherwise declined. Snowball sampling creates multiple starting points from which to recruit potential participants for a topic of research interest.

Lee (1993) comments that potential participants from minority populations may fear stigmatisation from the researcher and this was something that I also needed to consider in participant recruitment. I was very aware of the sensitive nature of this research topic due to the private and personal accounts participants would be sharing during the narrative interviews. I wanted them to feel as safe as possible in coming forward to participate in this study.

Platzer and James (1997) highlighted the benefit of partner organisations when researching sensitive issues with minority populations. In recruiting individuals for their study into the experiences of nursing care for lesbians and gay men they stated, “Participants seemed willing to participate in the research because we identified with an organization” (p.629). To help reduce this fear, I partnered with LGBT charities in Manchester and Belfast, to assist me in forwarding recruitment information about my research. Alongside partnering with organisations, as I spoke with colleagues, family and friends about my research, some requested more information (Browne, 2005). As snowball sampling enables multiple starting points in recruitment, it thereby provided another point to disseminate information around this study. This was beneficial as it enabled people to use their social networks to reach
potential participants. Snowball sampling provided me with the opportunity to recruit in a way in which trust had already been established through my initial point of contact (Atkinson & Flint, 2001), whether that was an organisation or an individual who identified as LGB.

Initially, in the development of my research I planned only to recruit adolescents and explore their narrative accounts around ‘coming out’ to family. However, as outlined previously, I decided to recruit parents and include their narrative accounts of how they experienced their child ‘coming out’. This was a result of my having written a systematic review paper, as part of my counselling psychology training, around the role of the family in an adolescent’s experience around ‘coming out’. Limitations from a number of the research articles included within my systematic review highlighted further research was needed to understand the role of the family and that the parental experiences were often missing from the research. As previously discussed, adolescents do not exist in isolation, but within various systems. With this in mind, recruiting parents and hearing their experiences in order to gain further insight into an adolescent's disclosure of sexual identity was, I felt, important.

In considering participant recruitment, the following inclusion and exclusion criteria were selected for this study.

- **Inclusion Criteria**
  Adolescent age, 16-25
  Parent with an adolescent between the ages of 16 to 25
  Adolescent self-identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual or other
  Parent has an adolescent within the family that self-identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual or other

- **Exclusion Criteria**
  Parent of an adolescent within the study
  Adolescent identifies as transgender
Participant Recruitment: Step by Step

Below, I outline the steps that I took in order to recruit potential participants for this research. The steps are also illustrated in figure two and include the number of participants at each step of the process.

**Figure 2:** Step-by-step recruitment of potential participants

- **Step One:** To generate awareness around the research topic, I contacted five LGBT organisations within the voluntary sector in Manchester, England as this was where I was living during the time of my study. I also contacted three organisations from my home city Belfast, Northern Ireland, as I had contacts within organisations there. The purpose of this contact was to explain the aims of my research and to explore if they wished to partner and assist me in the recruitment of potential participants (see Appendix One).

- **Step Two:** Those organisations that expressed an interest in helping were provided with an email template (see Appendix One) to forward out to their mailing list and also a poster to display as they wished within their service premises (see appendices Two and Six). Also, at this step, I spoke with three LGB individuals who expressed an interest in my research. They did not, however, fit the inclusion criteria of the study, as they did not fall within the age...
bracket of 16-25 years. However, I asked if they would be interested in supporting me in the recruitment of participants and all agreed to place an advert on their social media sites.

- **Step Three:** Potential participants registering their interest were emailed an information pack (see appendices Three and Seven) outlining further details around the research topic and process. This enabled them to be as fully informed as possible at this stage of the recruitment process. The information also included a registration form (see appendices Four and Eight) to complete and return via email within two weeks of receiving their research information pack. I added this to ensure potential participants had a timeframe to work towards, so as to not delay the recruitment process.

Following the two-week opt-in period, an email was sent to those participants who had decided not to take part. The purpose for this was to acknowledge their interest and thank them for their participation thus far.

- **Step Four:** A potential participant returned the completed registration form expressing interest in taking part in the research.

- **Step Five:** Following receipt of the participant registration form, a telephone consultation was then arranged with a potential participant. The purpose of this consultation was to introduce myself and to begin building a rapport with him or her, answering any questions that they might have around the research. As previously discussed, when undertaking sensitive research, participants can fear stigmatisation from the researcher (Lee, 1993). Therefore, by introducing this step, I wished to use it as a means to overcome any potential fear or barriers that might have been present for the potential participant. During this call we arranged a suitable time to conduct the narrative interview, either by telephone or at a suitable venue (e.g. local library, community centre, university or LGBT organisation) to meet face-to-face.
• **Step Six:** The narrative interviews were conducted and audio-recorded. Prior to commencing the interview, I clarified any further questions and completed a written consent form (see appendices Five and Nine).

**Participants**

The question of the optimum number of research participants is frequently discussed within qualitative research. Compared with quantitative research, qualitative researchers tend to study fewer people, but delve much deeper into the data collected, in line with the inductive paradigm in which qualitative studies are positioned. Baker, Edwards and Doidge (2012) write that “the deep and profound relationship often established between the researcher and respondent can often make up for a lack of varieties of people” (p.8). In some qualitative studies, we can see a single case study design; however, when working with hidden or hard to reach populations, sampling a small number, from six to a dozen, may be more valuable (Baker et al., 2012). It is also important to remember that perhaps a small number of participants is all that a researcher may be able to reach due to their hard to reach and vulnerable status.

In my research seven participants (n=7) were recruited: four adolescents, of which one was female and three male, and three parents who were all female. Each participant was provided with a demographic sheet to complete prior to the narrative interview. Also, at the beginning of the narrative interview, they were asked to state a brief identifying statement. The demographic details of the participants involved in this study can be viewed in table three.
In considering the relationship between the adolescents and parents, within this study, I have stated in previous chapters that they were not related. Here I offer a brief reflection as to why this decision was taken. Although I acknowledge, that having children and family participants from the same family would have been an interesting dynamic to study, I also believe it may have impacted upon the construction and structure of the participants’ stories. The participants may have felt unable to share their experience due to a fear of offending either party or of being exposed. Therefore, I chose not include members from the same family in this study in order to reduce the possibility of participants censoring their accounts. I also wanted to ensure that I was able to provide anonymity to those who chose to take part. Interestingly, when I was recruiting parent participants for this study, I noticed that they all asked me about the confidentiality of their interviews; they all asked and needed to be reassured that their accounts would be anonymised as they were concerned their children may recognise their accounts.

Table 3: Synopsis of research participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Synopsis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent One: Amy</td>
<td>Amy is 24 years old, from Northern Ireland and self-identified as lesbian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent Two: Mark</td>
<td>Mark is 22 years old, from Northern Ireland and self-identified as gay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent Three: Kendon</td>
<td>Kendon is 18 years old, originally from Trinidad, but is now living in Manchester and self-identified as gay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescent Four: Thanos</td>
<td>Thanos is 22 years old, originally from Greece, but is now living in Manchester and self-identified as gay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent One: Karen</td>
<td>Karen is a parent of four children; her third child self-identified as gay; he is 18 years old.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Two: Tracey</td>
<td>Tracey is a parent of two children; her daughter self-identified as lesbian and is 20 years old; her son is 23 years old and self-identified as gay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Three: Mary</td>
<td>Mary is the parent of two children; her youngest child is 20 years old and he self-identified as gay.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Collection: Narrative Interview

In considering adolescent stories of ‘coming out’ to their family, and parental stories around the same kind of event, it was important for me to reflect upon how I might collect this data. In a study by Riessman (1989), she examined how three interviewees constructed meaning around marital infidelity and divorce. She discovered that what appeared to be the same life event was often “constructed in radically different ways by different individuals” (p.743). With this in mind, narrative interviews were selected because they are unstructured in nature and avoid a question-answer schema but, instead, they elicit a rich narration from the participant (Bauer and Gaskell, 2000). This would enable participants to construct their own unique story, with little direction or input from me. Bauer (1996) outlined five stages over which the narrative interview is conducted; I explore these in further detail below.

0. Preparation Phase: In preparation for an interview the researcher is encouraged to reflect upon and familiarise themselves with the field of study. I achieved this by reading literature around the subject matter of investigation. Using such information, it is suggested that a researcher can then develop a list of ‘examanent’ questions; I formulated them from my reading around ‘coming out’ experiences of adolescents. It also further strengthened my awareness around the gap in the research literature as to what had influenced an adolescents’ decision to ‘come out’ to their family. These ‘examanent’ questions were then translated into ‘immanent’ questions in the form of the interviewee’s own language used during the interview (Schuetze, 1977).

1. Initialisation Phase: Prior to the narrative interview, the topic of interest was presented to the research participant. Bauer (1996) suggested that the topic needs to be experiential and of relevance to the participant’s own personal experiences. It is also important to ensure that the topic of interest is broad in nature and not too specific. For the purposes of my research, I selected a single open-ended question that was used at the beginning of the research interviews, as outlined below:

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3 Examanent questions reflect the interests of the researcher and research study. In the case of my study I utilised the ‘coming out’ literature to assist me in reflecting upon what questions I might consider within the research interview to gain insight into adolescent experiences around ‘coming out’ to family.
• Adolescents: I would like to hear about your experiences of ‘coming out’ to your family. You can tell your story as you wish and I will only use minimal prompts as we talk. So for example, I may say something like:

1. Tell me more about that.
2. Have you any examples of that?
3. What happened then?

• Parents: I would like to hear about your experiences of when your son or daughter ‘came out’ to you. You can tell your story as you wish and I will only use minimal prompts as we talk. So for example, I may say something like:

1. Tell me more about that.
2. Have you any examples of that?
3. What happened then?

In the development of these questions, and also in the recruitment literature, it was important for me to consider the language that I used. This was to ensure that the research focus would attract participants that met the recruitment criteria. During the interview, I had to ensure my words did not appear directive and that topic of discussion was broad and as open as possible to allow the participant to recount their experiences in their own words.

2. Main Narration Phase: In this phase, the participant is allowed tell their story in an uninterrupted state until a ‘coda’ arises, or where there might be a pause in telling their account. Therefore, I had little verbal input in this phase, using only minimal prompts, to minimise any influence on the account being narrated (Riessman, 2008). The prompts used are detailed in the Initialisation Phase above, and were only used when there were pauses within the participant story, to offer some direction to the participant during the interview.

3. Questioning Phase: In this phase, once the story appeared to have come to a ‘natural’ end, the researcher then moves into the questioning phase. This is where ‘examanent questions’ are translated to ‘immanent questions’, and used to fill in the gaps of the story. In order to formulate these questions, there are three general rules
to follow. Firstly, when I was asking participants about details of their story, questions focused on such things as what happened and when, it was important not to elicit direct opinions in the form of ‘why’ questions. Secondly, when asking questions, it was necessary to use the participant’s own language relating to events in their story. Thirdly, although I might recognise contradictions in the story, these should not be highlighted and so avoid cross-contamination. The aim of the questioning phase is to “elicit new and additional material beyond the self-generating schema of the story” (Bauer, 1996, p.8).

4. **Small Talk Phase:** In this final phase, the audio recorder is switched off and the researcher is encouraged to create a more relaxed atmosphere. During this phase general discussion would be initiated which can provide further additional information to contextualise participant accounts. In my experience, the research participants did not provide any further information at this stage that I was able to use. Conversations were very brief at the end of the interview, being mainly around what would happen next and with the participants wishing me well in writing up the research.

**Method of Interviews: Face-to-Face and Telephone Interviews**

In this section I will discuss my experience of undertaking the narrative interviews. As already outlined in Step Six, under participant recruitment, I conducted seven narrative interviews within my research. Three of the interviews were conducted by telephone and four were face-to-face. I want to briefly explore the literature around these interview methods, outlining my decision for their selection.

Midanik and Greenfield (2003) discuss how methods of data collection are often influenced by two “critical issues, cost and sample size, each having a substantial impact on how a study is conducted and the results that it yields” (p.209). As I reflected upon my study, these factors influenced the decisions I took in how my interviews were conducted with participants. Regarding cost, this was a self-funded study and, so, due to financial limitations I would not be able to travel across the United Kingdom to interview many research participants from any areas. In light of this, I took the decision to recruit participants from Manchester, England, where I
was living during data collection, and Belfast, Northern Ireland, my place of origin and where I frequently visit.

Regarding data collection, telephone and face-to-face interviews were both considered. One might tend to select a telephone interview over a face-to-face interview when needing to access a large population sample as this can be more time efficient and cost effective (Chang & Krosnick, 2010; Couper, 2005; Kvale, 1996). Such interviews also enable the researcher to cover a larger geographical area. However, as I was only using a small sample and not recruiting from a wide area, conducting face-to-face interviews appeared to be the most appropriate. Upon further reflection, I considered the sensitive nature of this research and how a telephone interview could facilitate some degree of anonymity. I also recognised that some participants might not want to travel to a place of interview or have other commitments which might make it difficult to schedule an appropriate time. Therefore, I gave participants the choice of sharing their story in person or by telephone, lasting up to a maximum of 90 minutes.

**Data Analysis: Labovian Structural Analysis**

In this section, I will discuss how I made sense of the interview data that was collected from the seven participant stories. Firstly, I will introduce the selection of a structural analysis and my rationale. Secondly, I will detail how I carried out the analysis of the data.

The overall aim of this research was to collect ‘coming out’ stories and to explore how both parents and adolescents structured their accounts. Initially, I had considered using a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), but I believed this would have limitations in that it would move me away from the individual stories by developing themes across accounts. Therefore, my selection of a structural analysis enabled me to look at each story independently, but also provided the opportunity to compare across participant accounts, should I wish, without losing individual meaning. This type of analysis assisted me in exploring how ‘coming out’ stories

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4 For a more detailed outline of conducting telephone interviews (see Burke & Miller, 2001).
were structured and sequenced, with participants talking about the same event of ‘coming out’ but acknowledging they would be told in different ways. A structural analysis would enable me to ‘dig deeper’, facilitating insight into a range of meanings, but also keeping me aligned closely to the participant’s narrative account.

Having considered the type of analysis selected, I will now present the analytic steps in figure three that I implemented in order to develop the structural analysis and also how I devised the title for each story.

**Figure 3: My analytic process**

Step One enabled me to familiarise myself with the participant story and immerse myself in their account. This facilitated Step 2, in which I identified the narrative clauses. Labov (1972) argues that a minimal narrative needs to have “a sequence of
two clauses which are temporally ordered” (p.360). These temporal clauses sequentially correspond and are intertwined to the order of the original events narrated by the speaker throughout their story.

Sample: Extract from Kendon’s Story

And I was in a homophobic religion. I was a Jehovah’s Witness. One of the reasons why I left home, wasn’t so much the abuse, it was the fact that when I was about, let’s see, about fourteen….my grandmother who I live with, she found my diary where I had described some of my thoughts and fantasies, and she showed that diary to the religious ministers.

Development of Clauses

(And) I was in a homophobic religion. I was a Jehovah’s Witness. One of the reasons why I left home, wasn’t so much the abuse, it was the fact that when I was about, let’s see, about fourteen my grandmother who I live with, she found my diary where I had described some of my thoughts (and) fantasies, (and) she showed that diary to the religious ministers.

Having identified the clauses, I was then able to apply the elements of Labovian approach, in Step 3, as detailed in Figure One. In the transcripts, each clause was assigned to one of the six elements, abstract (A), orientation (O), complicating action (CA), evaluation (E), resolution or result (R) and coda (C).
One criticism of a structural analysis is that by focusing only on the narrative in this form, important information can be missed (Frank, 2000). In order to address this, the introduction of Step 4 enabled me to align myself with the intent and purpose of the story. By reflecting upon the complicating actions and evaluations within participant stories I was able to align myself with the main plot, what I refer to as the take away message from the storyteller. I specifically looked for a repeating theme arising from the participant evaluations of the complicating actions within the story. (Polkinghorne, 1995; Riessman, 1993; 2000). This enabled me, in Step 5, to select a title for each story to capture what I believed the storyteller was attempting to communicate to me, the plots within their story presented in Chapter Five.

**Ethical Considerations**

The study complied with the ethical research requirements outlined by the University of Manchester and the British Psychological Society (2012). All participants were
provided with an information sheet outlining the nature of the study, the method of data collection, confidentiality and consent (see Appendix Three and Seven).

In conducting social research, McCosker, Barnard and Gerber (2001) emphasise that researchers need to consider the potential impact that participating in research may have upon an individual’s well-being (e.g. triggering emotional material). It was important for me to be aware of the potential psychological distress that could be caused during narrative interviews. In order to address this risk, I provided participants with an information leaflet (see Appendix Ten) should they need support following the interview. I was also aware during the process of the narrative interview that I might need to manage any participant distress should it arise. It was important for me to make it clear to participants that, although I am a therapist, I would not be providing therapy in this interview, but I would be able support them in sourcing one if the need were to arise. Each participant was debriefed following participation and provided with an information leaflet of useful contact numbers in case any such issues arose from the session.

Prior to recruitment, I took the decision not to request parental consent for participants aged 16 to 17 years due to the sensitivity of the research topic. Gaining parental consent could have potentially left the participant more vulnerable to “parental abuse, rejection and neglect” (Mustanski, 2011, p.677). As this study was interested in exploring ‘coming out’ experiences within the family, it was important to recognise that a participant may not have disclosed their sexual identity to both parents or other family members. Also, requesting parental consent might have prevented a potential participant from taking part in this study and thereby losing the opportunity to hear their story. However, as none of the adolescents that took part in this study fell into this age category, I did not need to implement this measure with any of the participants. All participants were well informed throughout the study and a telephone consultation was conducted prior to any data collection to discuss the project and to answer any questions.
Validity, Reliability and Generalizability: “Trustworthiness”

In any piece of research, it is essential to reflect upon validity, reliability and generalisability and report how these aspects were addressed and implemented. Within researchers, it is important to highlight that there are many critics, particularly from the positivist paradigm, who are reluctant to accept qualitative findings as trustworthy (Shenton, 2004). Therefore, the issue of “trustworthiness” has been debated many times within the field of qualitative research. Loh (2013) highlights that these “discussions have a tendency to descend into a series of convoluted arguments which essentially is not particularly productive since each research study is derived from different epistemological and ontological paradigms” (p.1). It is not my intention here, to present an extensive overview of these debates, but to simply raise awareness of such discussions in the field.

In addressing aspects of validity, reliability and generalisability within my research, one step that I took was to first replace this positivist language with the term “trustworthiness”. This terminology is more aligned with the interpretative-constructivist paradigm in which this narrative study is positioned. It was also important for me to be mindful that the rigour and quality of studies within this paradigm are more queried (Loh, 2013). Therefore, it was important for me to ensure the criteria I selected to address “trustworthiness” within this research were appropriate. Within the qualitative literature that explores “trustworthiness”, there is consensus that the best criterion to select is one that has “a consensus within a community” with “validity” being viewed as “a function of intersubjective judgments” (Polkinghorne, 2007, p.474). With this in mind, I selected Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) criteria due to it being the most widely cited and influential within narrative studies. It consists of four criteria: (1) credibility (internal validity); (2) transferability (external validity); (3) dependability (reliability) and (4) confirmability (objectivity). Below I outline how I have used their framework within this study.

With regard to credibility, throughout my study I have shown transparency in the steps that I have taken in the development and implementation of my research design and methods. Internal validity was further strengthened by my use of member checking in which I forwarded the transcripts to research participants. It is important to highlight that I did not member check the application of the Labovian approach
with the research participants. The reason for this decision was due to participants being unfamiliar with this framework and, so, would have needed extensive instructions and guidance on narrative clauses and the various elements contacted within a structural analysis in order to effectively member check my analysis. Therefore, I decided to use “audience validation” (Kvale, 2007), seeking validation from the “primary intended readers” of this study (Patton, 2002, p.561). I achieved this by exploring my findings with two counselling psychology colleagues as well as my research supervisors. Transferability in this research was achieved by providing a thick description of the data, in particular by closely using the participant’s own words where possible. Dependability and conformability were achieved through keeping a reflexive journal throughout the duration of the research. Having clear steps outlined within the methodology around data collection, generation and analysis also met these criteria.

Chapter Summary
In this chapter, I revisited the research aim for this study and considered its epistemology. I introduced narrative methods and discussed the literature around this methodology and my application of narrative inquiry. I then went on to introduce participant recruitment, the sampling measure that was applied which, in this case, was snowball sampling. I also outlined a step-by-step process of the recruitment of participants. I provided a synopsis of each participant within the study and discussed how data was collected using a narrative interview. I also discussed the two types of interviews utilised, which were face-to-face and telephone interviews. I then discussed the data analysis of the stories that were collected and offered reflections around ethical considerations and the trustworthiness of my analysis.
Chapter Four: Analysis

“If once, and not so long ago, our sexualities were shrouded in silence, for some they have now crescendoed into a cacophonous din. We have now become the sexual story tellers in a sexual story telling society (Plummer, 1995, p.4-5).

Introduction

In this chapter, I firstly present the ‘coming out’ stories of four adolescents to their parents. Following these, I present the accounts of three parents and their experiences around their son or daughter ‘coming out’ to the family. I must emphasise that the parent voice was included to gain further insight into the adolescents’ experience of ‘coming out’. Also, as mentioned in previous Chapters, the parents were not related to the adolescents in this study.

Plummer (1995) explained that we have seen an increase in such accounts and how sexual stories are often seen as signs of truth. However, he challenged this view and maintained that rather than being taken as only signs of truth, they “can be seen as issues to be investigated in their own right” (p.5), thereby becoming topics of investigation and not just a resource to draw upon. With this in mind, I wanted to present these findings as detailed personal accounts, embedded in the participants’ own words as fully as possible. The use of bold and italic text within speech quotations denotes the data extracts from participant narrations. I used a Labovian (1972) structural analysis, as discussed in Chapter Three. To recap, the abstract informs the reader or listener as to what the story is about and an orientation sets out the time, place and characters within the story. A complicating action is a single or series of events within the story, and the resolution is how the events resolved. The coda brings the story back to the present day and an evaluation is the comments by the narrator on the events within the story. Below I offer a summary of this analysis.

Brief Summary of the Data Analysis

Using a structural analysis provided a framework with which to analyse each narrative. Although the purpose of this study was not to compare stories, I did discover that they all followed a similar structure. I found that each participant spoke
about their experiences based around numerous chronological complicating actions across their life to date, and included evaluations of these. I feel it is important to note here that at the end of each narration I asked questions based upon what each participant had said. The purpose of these questions was to develop my own understanding around their experience and to check I had not misinterpreted anything. As discussed, in Chapter Three, data analysis was conducted only on the narrative accounts and not on these explorative questions that followed the story. However, I do feel it is important to highlight that when participants answered questions around their narration, it appeared to take them to a higher level of thinking and evaluation, often gaining new insight into the narrative account so recently told to me. I made the decision not to include this information within the analysis as my focus was upon the actual story they told rather than any follow-up questions. The purpose of these questions was to clarify points within their story. The remaining section within this chapter presents the analysis of the participant stories.
Amy – “Stepping Up to Be Visible.”

Amy began with an orientation, giving me her name, age and where she lived. Her narration then moved me to how she self-identified and an evaluation of these terms.

“And I would probably identify as a gay woman, but also would say I was a lesbian as well, I don’t mind that term either.”

Her narration then moved me to a further evaluation exploring the development of her sexuality.

“It is a very like... it was all a bit fuzzy starting out. Erm. I don’t think... the way I was raised anyway; sexuality was never even a conversation that I heard.”

As she continued evaluating “sexuality” Amy orientated me to “secondary school” being the place she learned what “gay meant”. She also noted, even in learning about this term it did not lead to her questioning her own sexuality.

“I never questioned my own sexuality. Even sort of starting adolescence, like, I never really questioned that.”

The narration then orientated me back to school and the “gay people” that she knew there. They were girls and she evaluated them as “very masculine and I didn’t identify with that.” She continued the orientation of school in her story and how she did not question her sexuality, but explained how she found it hard to explain what she meant by this, “I find it hard to kind of explain that part”.

The complicating action of “dating guys” was then introduced by Amy and how she “didn’t seem to be getting the same whatever feelings, emotions or whatever that all my friends did.” Amy then moved her story to an evaluation around the reason behind this.
“But I just thought it was….hmmmmmm ahhhh….that that was a… that I hadn't met the right one yet or you know, I just wasn't ready for a relationship or something like that. And that is what I kept telling myself.”

She continued to evaluate how she did not “question things” and explained to me that this was “just part” of who she was, “I don't really question stuff unless it is right in my face.”

Amy then introduced a complicating action, taking a “gap year” and the orientation to meeting a lot of “different people” and having her own opinions challenged. As a result, she began to question her own sexuality and stopped “seeing it as a black and white issue.” Amy went on to evaluate this issue.

“…if you were a lesbian, you had to be really butch or whatever, like, that was just any limited concept that I had.”

Her narration then introduced a complicating action, following orientation to a meeting with a girl. Although she did not view this as “a relationship, it was just like an encounter” she noted, “It was just so different”. As she evaluated this experience, it returned me to the issue of her questioning her own sexuality. Amy connected with feelings of fear and linked this to her being on a “Christian gap year”.

“I got really scared at that stage, that this was a possibility, that I could be gay and… that would have explained all, like, you know, my lack of feelings towards guys etcetera.”

The resolution of what she did to manage this was introduced to the narration. Amy explained to me how she “buried, sort of hid it or managed to push it so far down inside” herself. She evaluated feeling happy and orientated the narration to the things which were making her feel this way, attending university, her job and working towards her degree.
Amy then moved her orientation to a time frame, of around a year ago when she was watching “The L Word”. She evaluated how this programme made her “start to confront” her own sexuality again.

I was then introduced to a complicating action of how “a lot” of friends were getting married and her narration moved me to an evaluation of this.

“I think I was just getting really frustrated that I wasn’t... like, in my head, I didn’t see myself with a husband and everything.”

Amy noted feeling “stressed” about this and a complicating action of questioning around how she “felt about girls and guys and all the things” was introduced. She explained her resolution to overcome this questioning with Internet research and evaluated how she liked “to be well-informed”. As she continued with her narration, Amy’s orientation turned to the fact that she did not “really know many gay people” and she acknowledged those she did know were male. In an evaluation, she noted having no one to talk to about her questioning. As Amy continued, the orientation moved to her having taken two gap years with the church. This resulted in the following evaluation.

“I was working for the church and I just... I didn't know how much I could really talk to the people I was surrounded by about my thoughts and all that sort of stuff.”

Her orientation included the passing of a few months and Amy explored her thoughts alone. The resolution was acceptance and how it “clicked one day and I was just like, ‘No, actually, this is what it is. I am gay. I like girls.” However, with this acceptance came a complicating action of what would happen next.

“Crap, what do I do with this? What is it like? How is my life going to look and like, what am I supposed to do?”

Her orientation turned to her involvement with church and also how her father was a minister. As Amy evaluated this, she informed me of an increasing awareness of
how an acceptance of being ‘gay’ would impact on her life and how things might change.

From there, the orientation went on to keeping things quiet for about a month. During this time a complicating action was introduced to the narration.

“...and then just lots of conversations that I happened to be in, were around, you know, like, the LGBT community and various other things.”

She then orientated to a conversation with her best friend and she evaluated a desire to tell her. As Amy evaluated this decision she noted, “Keeping things bottled up” can impact on her “mental health quite badly”. She informed me that this was something that she was aware of and her narration moved to the complicating action of telling her friend.

“I wasn't sure how she was going to react, so I did the whole about ‘I'm exploring my sexuality thing...”

Amy evaluated how she felt in telling her friend, that she had been “very vague about stuff”. However, when she told her it was a “non-issue for her friend”. The narration then moved me to an orientation, to the month that Amy had told this friend. As she continued, I was introduced to a complicating action of how the friend had been asking questions since. Amy evaluated this and believed it was the way this friend indicated how she accepted her and that “she didn't want to make a massive deal about it”.

The narration moved on and the orientation went on to this friend being the first person that Amy had told. I was now moved to a complicating action of how Amy had started “going out” with her first girlfriend around this time, too. The narration then moved to an evaluation around this.

“So I was just like, I don't want this to be some secret part of my life. I am confident enough in who I am to start telling some close friends who
I probably want to... I at least have a suspicion... would be grand with the whole thing.”

The orientation changed to Amy telling some close friends about her sexual identity. In her evaluation of this experience she noted that they were “fine with it” and “really supportive”. As her narration continued she informed me that around the same time as telling some other friends, a complicating action of signing up to a church mission trip was introduced. During her training for this trip she informed me that they covered sexuality as part of team training. In an evaluation by Amy, I sensed her disagreement with what was being asked.

“They sort of said about sexuality and things and there was a lot of stuff I wasn’t maybe completely happy with in terms of what they were asking me to say or represent…”

She continued to explain, moving to a complicating action of how if the topic of sexuality came up while out on the streets, Amy was to communicate this was wrong.

As she evaluated this, Amy noted that no one within her team knew about her sexual identity. She also noted her teammates reactions, their “sort of nodding” in the training, that they were in agreement that it was wrong. Amy identified that she could not lie, “I can’t. I can’t in all my honesty, say that.” The resolution that she devised was to tell the team leader about her sexual identity. Amy then evaluated her reason for this resolution.

“Because even in itself, I was just like, I think out there I will need, like, pastoral support and I will need someone who knows exactly what is going on so that they can support me.”

Amy told this team leader. She evaluated his response to be supportive and also that, due to him knowing her for many years, he knew that “there was more to me than my sexuality as well".
As she continued with her narration, Amy noted how the team training around sexuality “bothered” her. Her orientation went to the leadership team and the complicating action of Amy addressing this feeling with them; the end result was that she was unsure of her place on the mission trip.

“Erm, and at one stage it sort of looks like I wasn’t a hundred percent sure about my position on the team, whether I was going to be able to go…”

The complicating action continued and she was asked not to talk to the rest of her team about her sexual identity, “it was very much ‘Don’t ask, don’t tell’ kind of thing.” As young person evaluating this outcome, she continued to express how she was unhappy about this, but also explained to me that she never wished for her sexual identity to be an issue.

“Like I never wanted it to be a big issue in the first place, I wasn’t going out to [location of mission trip omitted] because of that. You know, so I was like, ‘Yeah, that is fine.’”

Amy’s orientation went to another leader on her team and how she took the decision to tell her while away on the mission trip. Before she evaluated this decision, the orientation included the fact that Amy had known her since they were about fourteen years old. In her evaluation around telling this leader, Amy explained how she felt nervous as both her and the leader “from a conservative Christian background”. She was worried that in telling her this would impact on their friendship and Amy goes on to evaluate her friend’s response.

“I don’t know if I would say supportive as such, but she didn’t make it an issue and ever since then we have been in... had a lot of conversations about it, and she has grown to be quite supportive, erm, of me.”

Amy believed it had been “really nice” for their friendship and explained and evaluated the resolution of telling these two friends was due to what had happened during her mission trip training.
The orientation in her narration passed to a Facebook group that had been established “for 18-30-year-old LGBT Christians who aren’t in supportive churches”. Amy joined this group around January (approximately nine months before our interview) and, in June, met up with some other people involved in this group. A lot of the group were based in England and she wanted to develop a support group in the place she was from. However, she noted something “kept coming up” for her that was impacting on this desire.

“I couldn’t really start to step up and be visible because I was still technically not really out.”

Amy’s orientation moved to the “six or seven people” who now knew about her sexual identity, but that they were not “to tell anyone”. In an evaluation around this, she noted struggling with it and introduced the complicating action of her parents finding out from someone else.

The orientation moved to Amy’s father. Amy evaluated how they often ended up in arguments around any topic of conversation, viewing this as a “negative experience”. She introduced the complicating action of how her father spoke of his opinion around “gay people in the church”.

“I used to ask him his opinion, like testing the water or whatever, and he said that he wouldn’t want an openly gay person in his church.”

As Amy evaluated this, she noted getting “really worked up about it”. This resulted in her believing she could not tell her father about her sexual identity during an argument. The complicating action of thinking about ways to tell him was then introduced to her narration. Amy retuned me to an evaluation explaining how she was “freaking out” about how she was going to tell him.

“…you know, we have talked about this topic and he doesn’t mince his words.”
Her narration orientated me to the month of July (a few months prior to our interview) and her decision to stay with her parents for the weekend. The orientation included her mother and then the evaluation of “how she just doesn’t like confrontation”. The resolution to her complicating action of telling her parents was that she planned to write them a letter and give this to them, while staying at the weekend.

“Erm... so I decided I had been thinking about it for a really long time and I decided that I would write them letters and that, I would sort of spend the weekend with them and then... give them the letters and sort of give them a bit of space then.”

Amy’s orientation set out the day she told her parents, “it was after church on a Sunday and we had all had dinner”. She included the fact that her mum had “vanished off somewhere” and the complicating action of Amy and her father getting into a discussion around “gay Christians” was introduced and she described that it had become a “bit heated”. She evaluated that this was due to her plan to “come out” to her parents that day. Amy explained the complicating action of how she became upset and started crying. She then orientated me to and described how the letters she had written were up in her bedroom and she went on to evaluate why she wrote these.

“I also wrote the letters because I didn’t think I would be able to express exactly how I felt speaking.”

She went on to describe the content of these letters. They included resources for her parents to read and telephone numbers of other parents who had a ‘gay child’. Amy then returned me to the argument between her and her father. She introduced the complicating action of her father asking why she was so upset and how she explained that she had something to tell him. Amy evaluated this experience.

“...I physically couldn’t [referring to telling her father]. Like, I thought I was going to be sick. I was just, I was so emotional.”
Her narration then introduced the complicating action of what happened next, how her father looked at her and asked, “Has this to do with your sexuality?” Amy evaluated this and explained to me at this point “he knew”. As she returned to a complicating action, Amy told me how her father came and sat beside her and gave her a hug, “we hugged for ages”. She also told me how her father apologised for the things he had said in the past about sexuality. Amy also highlighted to me that when her father spoke about “gay people” she heard him speaking negatively about her. She continued to explain how they spoke, that they hugged and her father repeatedly told Amy that he loved her. As she evaluated this she explained, “He just kept on repeating that, that was very important that I knew that.” Amy told me that she expressed her fears to her father about telling him.

“I sort of said to him that I was really scared that he was going to react to me as a minister and not as my dad.”

As her narration continued, Amy highlighted how she was worried he would talk about “theology…relationships, or sex or whatever”. Amy then evaluated that this was something she would have never spoken to him about whether she was “gay or straight”. Her orientation then moved to the letters and the complicating action of how she explained to her father that she had written them. He asked to read it and also enquired if Amy had told her mother. The young person’s narration then orientated me to her mother and going to speak with her.

“So I then got her letter and went outside to find her and she was… I think she pretty much knew what I was going to say.”

Amy introduced the complicating action of her mother changing the topic and distracting her. They then went for a walk together and the orientation described them sitting in the car. The complicating action of telling her mother was then developed in her narration and she evaluated being, “a lot more calm with my mum”. Amy described how she gave the letter to her mother, but her mother was unable to read it as she did not have any glasses with her.
“So that was... (laughs) again, just a part of my own perfect plan not quite working.”

She went on to explain how her mother said that she still loved her and Amy evaluated the experience as “a really surreal moment”. A complicating action was then introduced about how her mother went on to talk about Amy never tidying her room or saving money. Amy evaluated this response as “bizarre” having just ‘come out’ to her mother, with friends on standby in case things went “horribly wrong” and here her mother was talking about what annoyed her.

The orientation then moved to them returning back home and introduced a coda about her parents.

“...and to this day, I'm assuming they've spoken about it...”

The narration then changed orientation, moving to Amy’s “last girlfriend” and to the complicating action of how they broke up, and that she believed her mother had suspected it had been a girl at the time. Amy evaluated that in the future she believed relationships would be an issue with her parents. Amy also introduced the complicating action of having discussions around this with her father.

“And I think we are just at a really lovely point now where we know we disagree with each other but that doesn't get in the way of our relationship, which, quite frankly, like I never thought that we would ever get to the stage. I thought I would either never tell him or I would tell him and it would ruin our relationship.”

Amy continued to evaluate these discussions with her father and how they “can actually talk to each other about it, like civilly”. The orientation then set out to describe her sister and how she had known about Amy before Amy told her parents. I was introduced to the complicating action of how Amy’s sister had stopped speaking to her for about a month. As she evaluated this, Amy noted this reaction was difficult and one of the reasons she decided to tell her parents.
“…because I think they could see that there was something going on with me and [sisters name omitted] but neither of us would tell them what.”

This orientation expanded to Amy telling two of her cousins and she evaluated a positive response from them. Amy then introduced the complicating action of how she was then more open around sexuality on “Facebook and Twitter” sharing things such as “a poster or whatever”. This resulted in her sharing something around equal marriage and someone who did not know about her sexual identity seeing this status on social media.

The orientation changed to a summer youth team and how one person “sort of like reported a concern about me being on the team”. A complicating action was introduced of telling the leader in charge of the summer camp about her sexual identity. Amy also included telling a minister at the camp too. A meeting was then called and, as she evaluated this, she believed “that they were going to ask me to step down from being a leader”. However, she explained how everyone was supportive and that people wanted to make sure Amy was all right.

“So again, ended up coming out to some people because of that… erm, but it was a really weirdly positive thing again.”

Amy went on to explain the complicating action of how that individual, who raised the concern, told other people about her sexual identity. In an evaluation, Amy noted that “hurt” and how others have found out not through her, but also noted this could have been due to her “putting stuff up on Facebook and Twitter”.

“And I think that is why I wanted to make sure that my family at least knew beforehand.”

A coda was then introduced informing me that was “kind of up to where I am now-ish”. The orientation moved to most of her close friends now knowing and only just last week speaking with some university friends about her orientation. Amy evaluated being able to speak face-to-face with people about it was “really nice.”
Mark – “The Gay Thing.”

Mark initially introduced me to the abstract of his story, which was around him knowing that he was “gay.” His narration then turned to an orientation when he was thirteen years old, but as an evaluation was introduced, he noted being aware of something prior to this age.

“I knew there was something, like before that, I knew there was something. But I didn’t necessarily, like, have a word for it until I was about thirteen.”

As Mark returned me to an orientation of age and he communicated that it was at age thirteen that he had found a word that described his feelings. It was around that age that he “came out” to himself and in the twelve months to follow, he started ‘coming out’ to his close friends

“So I came out sort of to myself around that age and then slowly over the sort of next year, come out to, like, my close friends.”

In his evaluation around ‘coming out’ to friends, he noted that it was well received. The narration moved to a complicating action and I learned that he did not ‘come out’ in school. Although, some of the friends he told attended the same school as him, Mark did not disclose his sexual identity within the school environment. As his story’s orientation moved to the age of sixteen, I learned that this was when he told his mother.

“…so it wasn’t until I was sixteen where I actually told my mum and I told her on the phone, which probably wasn’t the best idea…”

As he evaluated telling his mother on the phone, he stated that it was not the best idea. The narration then orientated me to a short passing of time and I was introduced to the complicating action that he became a Christian. I was then moved to an evaluation made by Mark.
“So I was really, like, I think it was more conflicting for my mum because like, I told her I was gay and then I was like, ‘By the way, I have decided to become a Christian.’”

He identified that perhaps this might have been in some way conflicting and confusing for his mother, identifying as gay and then becoming Christian. Mark went on to describe the complicating action of “the gay thing” never being talked about with his mother. As he evaluated his reason behind this decision, it was due to his belief that he came from a very conservative family and stated that as individuals, he believed that they were liberal, but as a family unit together he held a view they were conservative.

“And we never discussed the “gay thing” at all. Like it was never talked about. I come from a very conservative family where we don’t talk about things. Like, I think… as individuals we are quite liberal but as a family unit we are quite conservative.”

After telling his mother, the orientation moved to a later time when he took the decision to tell some of his extended family, such as aunts, uncles and cousins. In his evaluation of this he stated that he “wasn’t really actually like actively telling people in the family.”

Mark’s orientation passed to his leaving school at sixteen years old and he informed me that he went to college. As he evaluated this experience he viewed it as a new start, that he was “completely out and it was fine.” He compared this to being at school, where he reported the complicating action of experiencing a lot of bullying. As he evaluated this experience, Mark identified that people assumed he was gay at school, but he did not tell them this.

“…in school I had a lot of bullying because of it, even though there were people who didn’t know for sure, it was just because they had assumed.”
The orientation moved to a school physical education lesson in which he was not taking part but was waiting outside the changing room while the other boys were getting changed. A complicating action was introduced as a teacher asked him to wait inside until everyone was ready. He communicated to his teacher, that he did not want to go inside and informed him that he was being bullied “for being gay.”

As Mark evaluated this experience he recalled the teacher had a certain look on his face, which communicated to him that he did not know how to respond.

“And I remember saying to him, ‘Look, I don’t want to go in there because I am not comfortable being in there. Like, everyone bullies me for being gay.’ And the look on his face, and he just... he didn’t know what to do. He didn’t know what to say.”

The resolution to this situation was that the teacher walked away and Mark continued to evaluate this further. He returned the narration to this teacher not knowing what to do, completely unaware of what step to take next and that the situation “was never brought up again.”

His narration continued to the complicating action of being bullied and as he evaluated this experience at school he compared it to that of college. Mark noted it stopped in college and evaluated the reason as due to people being more mature in college and they did not accept bullying.

“\textit{I was quite badly bullied in school. But obviously like from coming out of school and stuff, that has completely changed now. Um, and it was quite... isolated... well, I don’t know if introverted is the right word because I have always had lots of friends outside of school. But in school I was quite introverted so I wouldn’t really talk to a lot of people. Um... and then like the transition from going to school to going to [school name omitted] was completely different. Like, it was in a completely different environment. Everyone was a lot more mature, so if, like... it wasn’t acceptable to bully people.}”
Mark then returned to talk about his Christian faith and the orientation of how, for the first year, he identified not having issues and evaluated this as “the grace period.” A complicating action was then introduced when people started telling him that he could not be both Christian and gay. In his evaluation, this appeared to be conflicting to him as in his mind people at church had previously accepted him for being gay.

“And I was like, ‘Well, for the past year, being a Christian and being gay has been okay? So I don’t know what the issue is now.’”

The narrative’s orientation moved to the event, “Belfast Pride” and putting a status on Facebook stating that he was in town supporting the gay pride parade. Mark then introduced the complicating action of people from his church commenting on this status.

“I put up a status on Facebook saying like, ‘In town supporting Pride’ and… there was like 92 comments on that status and a lot of them were people from church and there was people publicly putting on my Facebook that I was a paedophile, that I was a dirty old man, that even though I was only seventeen at the time, and all these different things publicly on my Facebook, to which I had family on Facebook.”

As he evaluated the responses, Mark noted it as a daunting experience and connected this experience to his time at school, when he felt judged by others.

“Um, because in a way, it sort of felt like it was going back to school where there was always people judging me and like, saying these things about me that weren’t true.”

The narration then orientated me to the next day at church, after the pride parade and how no one mentioned anything about it until after the service was over. I was then introduced to the complicating action that a guy in his church started “having a go” at him. During this situation Mark’s orientation moved to how others were around, including the senior pastors of the church, but nobody stepped in to say anything.
“...no one stood up for me and I just thought, ‘Right. I don’t know if I can go to a place like this where no one is willing to stand up for me in front of people.’”

The resolution was making the decision to no longer attend this church and he started to attend another. As he evaluated this second church, he noted that it was not “that amazing.” A complicating action was introduced around how the pastor disclosed someone’s sexual identity from the front of the church, so Mark then made the decision that this was not the church for him either.

“Um... the pastor actually outed someone from the front of the church on Sunday Service and I just walked out and thought, ‘That was it.’”

In his resolution to leave, Mark’s orientation moved to attending another church. As he evaluated this church, he viewed it as “forward thinking” in relation to equal rights and LGBT matters. His narration then orientated me to him being nineteen years old and to his “circle of friends rooted in the church.” As he evaluated this group of friends he described them as “a really good support network, a really good friendship circle of really open-minded and like, forward thinking people... which was quite good.”

Mark returned his narration to the complicating action around not having talked to his parents about “the whole gay thing.” His orientation discussed members of his family he had not spoken to.

“I hadn’t actually told my dad, hadn’t told my sister, hadn’t told any of my immediate family, apart from my mum, and that was like on the phone, it wasn’t even face-to-face.”

His orientation continued and Mark introduced me to how he and his father had gone for a drink several months prior to us meeting for this interview.
“And I remember the date, the fourteenth of April, and um... Pause (10:35-37) We went for a drink at a local bar when he was about to go home.”

This complicating action of his father about to leave appeared to prompt Mark to tell him that a friend was coming to collect him and that he was “sort of seeing him” and his father responded to this.

“So he just said like, ‘Michael, I am your dad. I have known you were gay for years.’”

As he evaluated his father’s reaction, he noted that it was fine and orientated me to the passing of two weeks to when he received a phone call from his sister. The complicating action introduced was that his sister told Mark that she had been talking to their father who mentioned the previous conversation in the pub. She responded by telling him that she still loved him and it was fine. Mark continued with a further orientation, a passing of several weeks and to his mother’s fiftieth birthday party to a conversation between him and his cousin.

“I was telling her about all the things I am involved in. And then it got to the point when it was like, ‘Oh, I am organising Pride.’ And then sort of paused, because I thought, ‘Oh crap, I went too far.’ Like I probably shouldn’t have said that.”

In his evaluation of going too far, it seemed he was referring to his cousin making the assumption that he was gay, as he was talking about ‘gay pride.’ The narration then moved me to an orientation of him sitting talking with his grandmother. Mark introduced a complicating action to his narration as he informed me that his grandmother had stated that she read everything that he put on Facebook. As he evaluated this comment further he noted, “I put a lot of things on Facebook, like, human rights and LGBT issues.” His grandmother stated that she was proud of him for standing up for people’s rights. The following complicating action then unfolded as his grandmother asked was he “seeing anyone?”
“So… are you seeing anyone? Male or female?’ And I was like, ‘No, granny, I have just broken up with someone.’ And she was like, ‘Oh, okay. Well…’ um… what did she say after that? ‘Well, when you find your prince or your princess, they will be lucky to have you.’ I was like, ‘Oh. By the way, granny, it is a prince I am looking for.’ And she was like, ‘Well, I sort of thought so, but didn’t want to say anything.’”

In his evaluation Mark noted her reaction to be “positively strange.” He referred to his grandmother’s age as the reason why he appeared a little shocked at her response and concluded his evaluation by noting “that was really uplifting for me” in relation to her response to him.

The narration orientated me to several weeks later, when he and his sister were travelling to his father’s fiftieth birthday which was being held at his step-sister’s home. As Mark evaluated this journey he stated that he was “having a really good conversation” with his sister. A complicating action was then introduced.

“…before we pulled into the street, my sister had said, ‘By the way, I don’t know anyone up here that knows. So I wouldn’t say anything.’”

As Mark evaluated this response from his sister he noted that this was somewhat confusing for him.

“And for me, that was sort of like a blow, as in like, ‘Oh well, a few weeks ago you were on the phone saying like, ‘Ah, you know, it’s grand, I still love you and it’s fine,’ but yeah you think I am just going to walk in to this house with like rainbow shitting out my ears, as in like, ‘Hi, I’m here, I’m gay!’”

A resolution to this response led Mark to explain about his disclosure of orientation to his grandmother and also to his cousin. I was then orientated to Mark and his sister arriving at his father’s party and the story then moved to him and his sister on the journey home. Mark introduced his sister’s evaluation of her previous comments, affirming that she did accept him, but how she did not wish him to tell people at the
party as she did not feel this was the right time, stating “I sort of think that should maybe choose your time.” Mark then moved his narration into an evaluation around how it had come about that he had told his grandmother.

“I had been explaining that I didn’t really choose to tell... like... although I chose to tell my granny, like she blatantly put it out there, and... like, made it acceptable for me to talk to her about it. So that was quite good for that.”

Mark then orientated me to the first time he had told a family member. He was fifteen years old at the time and it was to his uncle’s wife at a cousin’s birthday. Mark made the following evaluation, “it always happens at birthdays.” He explained how his aunt had asked him, “are you gay?” and he responded by saying yes, but told her that his mother did not know yet. His aunt introduced a resolution to his mother not knowing.

“‘Look, if you need any... if you need help telling your mum, like, I will help you. It’s no problem.’”

As he evaluated this response, Mark turned his attention to politics and that he was left somewhat surprised by his aunt’s response. This was because the political party that his uncle was involved in is well known for strong religious views and opposition to ‘homosexuality’ in Northern Ireland.

“Ironically, my uncle was a DUP Councillor. So I guess, what I thought like, this is really strange, like they are so for me and so like, accepting of me, but yet their politics are so different to mine.”

A coda was then introduced as Mark brought me to present day. He informed me around his involvement within politics and how the majority of the party he represented was in support of equal rights.

The narration then moved the orientation to back to the car journey home, with his sister, from his father’s fiftieth birthday. As he evaluated this, Mark expressed how
his sister had been disappointed that he had not told, but that she had known for years. His sister had also spoken to their mother about it and asked their mother why he had not told her, and his mother’s response was, “…well, doesn’t change who he is.” As Mark continued with his evaluation he agreed, “I am still me at the end of the day.” He also orientated me to the fact that his mother had told her partner about his sexual identity and he introduced his sister’s theory around his mother’s experience when he first told her at the age of 16.

“Um… so my sister had this theory that my mum didn’t actually believe me, until I sort of started telling like my dad and stuff.”

Mark’s orientation moved to the passing of six years between telling his mother and telling his father. His sister then introduced the complicating action of when he does meet someone and how she believed it would be hard introducing him to the family. She suggested that the resolution to this was for Mark to be sensitive in how he handled these introductions. As his narration neared its end, Mark continued with his evaluation, noting it had been a long process for him, but overall his belief was that it had been a positive experience for him.

“I know it has been a very long process for me. I know people who have just went and done it and got it over with. So for me, it has been a process. It has lasted about ten years but it has been quite positive overall.”
Kendon – “Cleansing a Homosexual Weakness.”

Kendon began with an orientation about his age, that he was eighteen years old and due to turn nineteen in one month. He stated that he self-identified as “homosexual” and that he lived independently with housemates. As he moved from the abstract of what his narration was about, “my coming out story”, he evaluated this experience as “pretty simple.” Kendon then began the orientation of his previous home life.

“I lived in an abusive home when I was younger. And I was in a homophobic religion. I was a Jehovah’s Witness.”

As his narration developed, his orientation moved to age fourteen and the complicating action of his grandmother finding his diary, which she showed to religious leaders at church.

“One of the reasons why I left home, wasn’t so much the abuse, it was the fact that when I was about, let’s see, about fourteen...my grandmother who I live with, she found my diary where I had described some of my thoughts and fantasies, and she showed that diary to the religious ministers.”

Kendon evaluated this to be an embarrassing experience and revealed me to the fact he was living in Trinidad at the time. The complicating action of people talking about him was then introduced. His orientation then included the passing of one year and a visit with his grandmother to see his sister in England. Kendon introduced the complicating action during this visit, when he ran away from his grandmother and went into care. As he evaluated the reasons that he had stated to social services, he noted that this was not the real reason.

“The reason I gave social services, was that, um... was that I was tired of being abused, I wanted to change my circumstances. But the real reason was that I couldn’t face going back to... um, you know, to the
congregation where people, um, knew things about me that I tried for so long to hide.”

He continued with his evaluation, but at this point in his narration he referred to sexual identity. At age fourteen, he identified as “straight” and believed that “I had a homosexual weakness, that with prayer and time, I would be cleansed.” The narration then moved the orientation to the passing of a number of years, to when Kendon was attending college in Manchester.

“…when I became a college student and I started living in Manchester, because I was in London then, when we came back to England, I became an atheist and... I suppose after some time, I realised it was fine for me to um... be homosexual.”

Although he arrived at this evaluation he noted that he kept this to himself for a while. As he evaluated his reason behind this, Kendon noted that “I was perhaps a bit too close to... um, certain straight males.” As a result, he introduced the complicating action of being bullied in Sixth Form College. Kendon evaluated this experience and identified that although he considered it as bullying, he now believed they were only joking. As he continued in his evaluation he noted that they did not know he was gay.

“They probably didn’t know that I was gay, but they made jokes based on a couple of my actions, that destroyed me.”

Kendon continued his narration and introduced the following complicating action in response to being bullied. He revealed how he secluded himself from others and did not really speak to people at school. As he evaluated reasons for this response, Kendon explained he was worried that if he spoke with girls they might think he was “hitting on them as a straight male” while he feared that by speaking to “the guys” he would not be regarded as “manly.”

Kendon’s narration then moved me to an orientation and to the first person that he “came out to”, an Internet friend. He went on to explain that this was an ex-partner
of a "gay guy" that he knew in college. Kendon orientated me to his attempt at spending time with others in college who identified as ‘gay’, but his evaluation perhaps indicated he did not fit in with the group.

“I tried hanging out with a couple of gay people that I knew in college, but they tended to be a bit loud and nasty and they mainly ignored me.”

His orientation went back to the man he had befriended earlier in his narration. After telling him that he was “gay’ Kendon orientated me to his use of a student forum and he evaluated that, “everybody knows I am gay there, so I was able to be myself, um…speaking to others on there.” His story then moved me to the complicating action of telling his sister and how she responded, informing him “she had already guessed I was gay.” In his evaluation of her response, he noted that she had been telling him for years that he was gay, but he had not wanted to admit it. However, his sister’s reason for why she had thought him gay did not appear to sit comfortably with Kendon.

“But I didn’t want to admit it to myself, first because I thought it was bad, and then even after I felt it was okay, I just felt that... I just felt offended because the reason why she thought I was gay, wasn’t because I had a crush on anybody and I told her. It was because I was slightly effeminate, and I don’t like the idea of being a stereotype.”

He also noted that other members of his family had believed he was gay for “similar reasons.” Kendon identified that his sister “took it all right”, as she had previously guessed. The orientation then moved to Kendon’s eighteenth birthday and he informed me of the complicating action of telling a guy he “had been befriending sometime at college”. As a result this guy then began to ignore him and Kendon evaluated experiencing “shock” at his response. The narration then moved to the complicating action of using Grindr⁵ and Kendon informed me that he was also “trying to lose weight at this time because I had eaten to deal with my college

⁵ Grindr: a dating application developed for the use by gay and bisexual men.
troubles." He continued speaking and reported using Grindr to “hook up” with guys and evaluated enjoying this, viewing it as a way to “deal with stuff”.

The narration then moved to an orientation of the passing of several months and Kendon explaining he was in year thirteen.

“I was in Year Thirteen at this point, I told a few of my college friends about my orientation, and the people that I told seemed to be okay with it, so that was fine.”

In his evaluation he believed this news was received well. He introduced the complicating action of telling others in his family about his orientation. Kendon first orientated me to telling his aunt and he evaluated her response as “she was fine with it.” He went on to inform me that he next told his grandmother.

“She isn’t okay with it, but she… (inaudible 06:09). She even wants to hear about people I am interested in. Um… but at the same time, she still mentions how wrong it is on occasion.”

As he evaluated his grandmother’s response, Kendon believed that she took the news better than he had expected. In his exploration of a reason behind this, he noted things might have been different if he had still lived with his grandmother.

“…but certainly if I told her, and I still live with her, there was a good chance she would have kicked me out. So I am glad that I took responsibility for my own life and I moved out when I could, when I was fourteen.”

Kendon believed he would have been put out of his home. As he evaluated this further, he noted that he was glad to be “taking responsibility for my own life” and having moved out when he was fourteen years old. The narration then orientated me to Facebook and Kendon informed me of placing statuses on his account saying, “I’m gay.” As a result, he evaluated that most of his Facebook friends would be aware of his orientation. The narration then returned me to an
orientation and to a second Facebook account, which appeared to be for his Trinidadian friends.

“...some of my Trinidadian friends I have told but most of the people from my old life don’t know.”

Kendon went on to evaluate that most people that he talked to in life were aware of his sexual identity. He continued by thinking ahead to the future, to university and how he would “just pretty much tell everybody” and viewed this as being “simpler” for him so that he did not feel “pressured into keeping it down.” He also evaluated that he had been better than “expected at dealing with people who are homophobic.”

“It was just the fear of it that was limiting me. Because most people are all right, I just have to... it is just a case of perspective and it is easy to feel trapped within yourself.”

He ended his narration by noting a resolution to this which was “taking the power out of the hand of others.”
Thanos – “Homophobia and Macho Guys.”

Thanos’s orientation began with the fact that he was “originally from Greece” and that he lived there until aged eighteen. He continued the orientation about then moving to the UK to study for four years. A brief coda was introduced as he informed me of how his sister was currently in the UK studying. His story moved to an abstract informing me that the narration to follow was about his “coming out story.” I was then orientated to his ‘coming out’ experience being “probably completed, for me personally, this past summer.” His narration indicated this experience took some time and his orientation continued to the beginning of his story.

“So I have memories of, um, being attracted to other boys in school...

...since I was maybe ten or eleven years old. Um, so that days I didn’t really pay any particular attention to it. Um and slowly as I was growing up and moving into other lessons, um, so in Junior High School maybe, um, these feelings became more intense and the attraction was much more physical.”

Within this part of his narration, Thanos orientated me to an awareness of something when he was around ten or eleven years old, although he informed me that he paid little attention to it. His orientation to junior school introduced the complicating action around these feelings becoming more intense for him. He moved me to an evaluation and noted that this left him feeling “guilty and confused” and telling himself “that it was a phase.”

Thanos’s narration then moved the orientation that these experiences were in Greece. He evaluated it as “a stereotypically homophobic country”, believing this was due to religion and “guys” being perceived as “very stereotypical macho guys.” I was then orientated to the school environment and Thanos evaluated this as “quite homophobic as well.”
“Um, a few – a couple of guys who were gay they were being taunted quite, quite a bit and the environment in my house was like that as well. So my parents were very vocal about not liking gay people.”

He evaluated the complicating action of those who identified as being gay in school having a difficult time. This resulted in Thanos’s orientation of his home environment. He appeared to view his parents as homophobic and introduced the complicating action of them being vocal around their dislike of gay people. As he evaluated these experiences he noted that he was not “feeling particularly….ok” and as a result attempted to “suppress” his feelings. Thanos then orientated me that this suppression occurred between the ages of thirteen and eighteen and a complicating action was introduced to the narration.

“So at this point, um, well maybe a couple of years later, me and my friends we’ve start – like they started talking about girls and, um, the girls they fancy at school…”

In evaluating these experiences, Thanos told me of how he “had to lie to be part of the group” and this also served the function of hiding that he was ‘gay’.

“Um, so I, I really didn’t like the – like it, it felt really, really weird that I had to lie about it. And also it, um, alienated me quite a bit from my parents as well, because they were asking, “Do you have a girlfriend or do you like any girls?” and stuff and I was just saying no and end the conversation there. So we didn’t really communicate much.”

Therefore, his resolution was to lie to others about his sexual identity, which did not appear to sit comfortably with him. Thanos’s narration then orientated to the summer, when he returned to Greece following his first year of university.

During this time, he “got into a two-month relationship with, with a girl”, and he noted in a coda, bringing me to the present day that she still was a friend. The complicating action that he then introduced was that their friendship circle had encouraged them to get together, “friends sort of were pushing this, for this to
happen.” As he evaluated this relationship, he believed it was enjoyable and he liked “the companionship” but the narration then introduced a complicating action.

“But when it came to more physical stuff or when we were left just the two of us, I was getting very, very stressed and...and nervous and uncomfortable and I couldn’t understand why it was, it was so hard. I mean, at this point I wasn’t like ok with who I was.”

Although he enjoyed the experience in his evaluation, he noted the difficulties, leading to Thanos feeling stressed and uncomfortable. As he continued with evaluating this experience in his narration, he noted, “it was a very weird situation.” His narration then retuned me to an orientation and the relationship only lasting a few months. Thanos evaluated this ending and noted that “she didn’t like me either” and goes on to reflect that she might have sensed something was not right. The narration then moved the orientation to him returning to the UK for his second year at University and the following evaluation.

“I really, really started like thinking about the fact that I’m act – may actually be gay and that may never change.”

As he evaluated this realisation, Thanos noted that he was searching a lot online and watching YouTube videos on people coming out. He evaluated these were the “things that helped me the most by far.” His orientation moved to the passing of a few months and that he “started being ok” with who he was.” Thanos continued and then noted that he believed there was nothing wrong by identifying with his sexuality. The complicating action of wanting to tell people was introduced to his story and he went on to evaluate his desire to tell others.

“Because like it was strange; I moved from, from a place where I didn’t want to, I never thought I would come out to anyone in my life ever and probably I will marry a woman one day. I never really thought about it. Come to a point where I really wanted to tell someone…”
Thanos’s narration then orientated me to a friend from Greece who was studying at the same university. He described how one day, as they studied in the library, they were texting each other to walk home together as they lived close by. As he continued, Thanos evaluated a discrepancy “I got that wrong.” He then orientated me to the fact they were housemates and Thanos noted some of the previous orientations in his narration were wrong. I was then returned to the previous event, where they were texting each other in the library.

“Yeah, so we decided that day we’d text each other, we decided to walk back together. And I told him, “Can we go for a walk?” He was like, “Yeah, sure.” Um, and I told him, you know, “I want to tell you something.” And from the point I told him that to the point...I actually came out to him, it was almost like half an hour went by and I couldn’t physically spit out.”

As he moved his narration into an evaluation of his ‘coming out’ experience, Thanos noted that his friend initially believed, “I was dying or something.” When he eventually told him, Thanos evaluated that his friend was “very confused” and linked this to him having previously been in a relationship with a girl. He went on to explain to me that his friend took the news without much comment.

“But he was ok with it. I mean, he told me, yeah, yeah, he, he reassured me he was ok with it, but it took him a few days to, to see things from a different angle I guess.”

He orientated me to this being the first person that he had come out to. Then, “progressively”, over the next few years he told others, his flatmates and other friends within the UK. As he orientated his narration to his sister, this ‘coming out’ included her as she was also in the UK. In his evaluation of ‘coming out’ to his sister he noted, “It was really cool, because when I did she actually came out to me as well as a bisexual.” He continued and evaluated that he had already known about her sexual identity.
Thanos’s narration then orientated these experiences took place over some time, “all the way until spring of this year.” He continued with his orientation, recounting his graduating that same year and then being offered a job in Manchester. He spent the summer in Greece as the job was not to commence until September. The narration then moved me to the complicating action of him wanting to tell others at home about his sexual identity, his “group of friends and parents.” He evaluated that he wanted to personally tell people himself as he “didn’t want someone to find out on Facebook.” As he continued, the young person noted that how he came out to his friends “was like very weird, because it was - all of them in one go.” He evaluated the experience as stressful and orientated me to his best friends and others in his group being out at a café. This friend was encouraging him to tell the rest of the group.

“...and he was like, “I think, I think you should do it now”. And he sort of pushed me and motivated me. And he was like, “Come on, I'll help you out. I'll bring it in the conversation.” And what he did was tell them, “Ok guys, [young person’s name omitted] wants to tell you something” and then passed it onto me [laughs].”

Thanos evaluated that it “was very stressful” and continued with the complicating action of what happened next when he told them. He explained how they believed that he was lying and that “they actually thought I was terminally ill or something for a bit.” As his narration returned to an evaluation, he told me how he believed they “had a good reaction” and that they had questions, which Thanos evaluated as his friends showing an interest and that they wanted to try and understand.

He then introduced the complicating of telling “my mum and dad next.” In his narration he orientated me to both his parents and Thanos evaluated how as he was growing up they often made “homophobic remarks.”

“...whenever we would see a gay person on TV or, you know, just whenever the subject was brought up.”
In the light of this experience, as he continued to narrate his evaluation, it left him feeling nervous but at the same time wanting to tell them. Thanos moved the orientation to several weeks before he returned to the UK and his father brought the subject up. As he evaluated this he noted that it seemed to be somewhat forced.

“*It was, it was obvious that it was forced, like talking about homosexuality. It was – he sort of directed the conversation there but it was quite obvious that it was forced and I was like, yeah, he, he probably wants to find something out.*”

Thanos evaluated that his father was making “narrow minded homophobic remarks.” This left him feeling “very angry” and the main reason was that this was the first time they had both had a “direct discussion about homosexuality.” Then a complicating action was stated as to how Thanos argued with his father, attempting to show him his point of view. In his evaluation of this, Thanos got a sense that he provoked his father to think about things differently.

“*He was like, yeah, he was like, you might have a point there.*”

I was then orientated to a week passing by and then a complicating action of how his father then brought the topic up again.

“*He says, ‘Yeah, yeah, I was thinking of what you said and I, I think you were right.’ And in that conversation he said, ‘Um, yeah, if, if you are gay I, I don’t mind.’ And I was like, yeah, thinking, this is, this is my opportunity [laughs]. And I was like, ‘Yeah, actually I am.’”*

He went on to describe how they then hugged after this moment. As Thanos evaluated the experience of having just told his father, he believed “*it was so weird*”, thinking he might never have told him due to the previous homophobic remarks. I was orientated to the passing of a couple of days and then to why his father was being homophobic towards him.
“Yeah, I was just doing that because I was trying to prevent you from becoming gay.”

The orientation continued to how his father had suspected for the past four years that Thanos was gay. In response to his father, Thanos told him that he should not have been homophobic in his comments. His narration then moved to evaluate how he viewed his father’s views had changed.

Thanos then directed the orientation to some of his father’s university friends, who identified as ‘gay’ and how his father had found out about them on Facebook. As he evaluated his father’s relationship with them, Thanos identified that his father talked openly with them and that his father’s relationships with his friends had improved. Thanos orientated me again, informing me that telling him occurred about a week before he was to fly back to the UK. Then the complicating action of his mother not knowing was introduced and Thanos’s father offered to tell her. As Thanos evaluated this he noted that he wanted to tell her himself.

“Um, and I kept postponing every day for that week until I actually had to fly and, and I actually told her a day before I flew, which wasn't ideal, but it was the best I could do.”

As Thanos evaluated telling his mother, he noted that it was “the hardest thing I've ever done.” For the entire week leading up to him leaving, he been working through telling her in his head. He described the complicating action of thinking about how she was going to react, which was stopping him from telling her.

“So I walked into the room, then out, I was like silent. And she can always tell when something’s wrong with me and she’s like, ‘What’s wrong?’ and I was like, ‘I’m gay.’”

As he evaluated his mother’s response, he told me of how she was shocked and that she had not suspected this at all. However, Thanos believed “she had a good reaction” and informed me of how it took her awhile “to come to terms with it and I think she still is.” At this point a coda is introduced, bringing me to the present
where he told me of how he spoke to his mother often on Skype, but that “she doesn’t mention the, the word gay.” Thanos evaluated that he believed his mother just “wants me to be happy and she wants me to be ok.” His narration returned to the present, informing me of how he attended a LBGT conference a few weeks ago. His mother asked him about this and he evaluated her asking as “really cool.” Thanos’s narration then orientated me to his brother and how he does not yet know, but he planned to tell him when he returned to Greece at Christmas.

A coda brings the narration to the present and how Thanos is now “very vocal about homosexuality on Facebook” and that he often posted things around gay rights. His narration goes on to evaluate that by doing this he believed it could change people’s view by exposing them to the issue homosexuality and helping them to understand. However, until he had told people, he was unable to post things to Facebook.

“So I really wanted to be vocal about it, but I didn’t because I’ve got my dad on Facebook and, and my friends from Greece. So up until this point I didn’t do it.”

As he brought his narration to a close, he evaluated that he was now “much more open about it”, referring to his identified sexual identity.
Karen – “Unconditional Love.”

Karen begins her narration with an orientation which appeared to serve two purposes. Firstly, it positioned the story within a historical frame of reference and secondly, introduced me to the son around whom her narration was constructed.

“Okay. So, from the beginning, well, I was a single parent. And [son’s name omitted] is the third of four of my children.”

Karen then goes on to set the scene by providing an abstract around what her story was about.

“From a very young age, I suspected that [son’s name omitted] was going to be gay.”

The story then transitions to observations she had made about her son and subsequently evaluated what she interpreted this behaviour to mean.

“And I kind of thought that because he always favoured playing with girls. Played a lot with kind of dolls and stuff like that and was always very sensitive, really. And I just had this idea, ‘I think [son’s name omitted] is gay.’”

Karen’s narration then began an orientation and introduced me to a “lesbian” friend and a complicating action, her friend’s negative experience and rejection from a religious family when she “came out”. It would appear learning about this experience impacted on Karen and she evaluated her belief that her son might be gay.

“And it made me very aware that I needed to do things in a certain way with [son’s name omitted], and to show myself to him that if he ever did turn out to be gay, that that was okay.”

The story then moved to a resolution of how Karen might achieve this, by having gay friends and also talking openly with her son around sexual identity. She also sent
him to a particular school in the hope of putting further buffers in place should he turn out to gay.

“So I kind of picked [school name omitted] because I felt it was a school that there were going to be pretty smart kids there, and if anything happened with [son’s name omitted] sexuality, that he wouldn’t get bullied.”

Within this resolution, it was not only about her as a mother accepting him, but also the importance of protecting him from the possibility of homophobic bullying. Her story then moved to an orientation indicating a passing of time and with Karen introducing a complicating action in her story.

“…And then he started to tell me he hated school in fourth year.”

As she evaluated what might be going on, she believed this hate was a phase, linking this to him being a teenager. However, as her narration continued a further complicating action was introduced.

“And he spent a lot of time going out with friends that I didn’t really know. And his older sister told me that he was drinking…”

The resolution to this situation resulted in her speaking with her son, in a way that would not “alienate him” and as Karen evaluated the situation, she got a sense that she was “losing him, because he was just acting quite differently.” As the story returned to his school year, a previous complicating action in which her son communicated that he disliked school was reintroduced. Karen’s orientation moved on to a specific day when she and her husband were out on a day trip. When they arrived home there were numerous missed calls on her phone and a complicating action then unfolds.

“…there was a like a pile of missed calls and his sister had been on the phone saying, ‘[son’s name omitted] is in the [hospital name omitted].’ So we went to the [hospital name omitted] and basically what had
happened was, he had been out, he had got really, really drunk and had kind of collapsed in the street.”

Continuing with the story, Karen and her husband went to see their son in hospital. She described how her son was angry and aggressive and appeared unhappy. As she evaluated the situation, something seemed wrong and she appeared unhappy as to how the casualty staff were addressing her son’s presentation. It appeared that she viewed more should be being done for him.

“And Casualty were kind of treating him like a boy that was drunk. And I said to them, ‘I know my son. There is more going on here and I would like my son referred to the Psychiatric Team.’”

As the story progressed, a further complicating action is introduced when a nurse asked Karen if her son was gay? In evaluating this, she questioned herself as a mother: might she be missing something that others see, drawing on reasons why people would not make this assumption.

“... but as a teenager he has a very deep voice and he doesn’t... not he doesn’t look gay, that is not the right way to put it... but I just didn’t think it would be something that other people would look at and then they would automatically say ‘gay’.”

An orientation in the story indicated that her son remained in hospital overnight and the following day the family met with a crisis team. As Karen continued she stated, “Oh! Sorry! I have left out a really major part of the story!” However, she decided to continue and return to this omission later. She went on to recount how the family were separated, with her son speaking to one health professional and she to another. Karen explained how she informed the staff member that she believed her son was gay and this was the reason behind him ending up in hospital. It also seemed that Karen communicated her frustration as she explained this, not understanding why her son had not disclosed this suspected orientation to her.
“I think that [son’s name omitted] is gay and that this is what this is about. And I don’t understand why he just doesn’t tell me this.”

As the story continued, I was orientated to approximately sixty minutes of time passing, as both Karen and her son talked to different health professionals. A complicating action is then introduced, when the health professional talking with her son returned to explain what had been going on.

“And at the end of it, what they basically came and said to me when we were together, was that, [son’s name omitted] was suicidal and that he had tried to kill himself the day before, and I hadn’t known this. Not... it was more of a cry for help suicide attempt. What he did was he took a plastic bag, put it over his head and thought he was going to try and suffocate himself... and er, obviously didn’t. Then went out and drank half a, 10-glass bottle of vodka and got really drunk.”

Karen then turned her attention to seeking a resolution to this complicating action. The health professional advised that she took time off work. The orientation in the story took us to the passing of time, over nine weeks, and Karen evaluated her experience.

“So I then took nine weeks off work and it was truthfully, absolutely horrendous.”

Before I was orientated to the passing of four weeks under the care if the crisis team, Karen evaluated herself as “…the kind of parent who pushes” requesting that her son received input from the crisis team. However, Karen and her husband did not evaluate the reason behind her son’s problems as what had been suggested.

“[Son's name omitted] told them that he had social anxiety and that...that was what the problem was. And I heard that, and I just thought, ‘Bullshit.’ My husband heard that and thought, ‘Bullshit.’”
Although Karen did not believe this to be the reason, the only resolution was for her to listen and support him. As the story progressed, I learned how her son was prescribed Fluoxetine and as Karen evaluated this complicating action apprehension was apparent.

“I kind of felt, ‘God, I don’t know about this… you know, drugs his age, he is so young. I would rather he has talking therapies.’”

As time with the crisis team was coming to an end, the proposed resolution was to refer her son for further support. The story then transitions to a complicating action in which Karen believed the resolution of accessing mental health support went on and on, believing that it did not seem to get started. Therefore, in order to address this, the resolution was to have her son seen by a work colleague for a second opinion.

“And in the meantime I spoke to the guy that I work with who is like a doctor of psychology and [colleagues name omitted] said, as a favour to me…because as part of his role as a kind of psychologist, he can see team members, but as a favour to me, he agreed to see [son’s name omitted] and tell me what he thought…”

I was then introduced to a complicating action following a work colleague seeing her son. He believed that there was some “kind of psychiatric problem” and as Karen evaluated this feedback she seemed shocked and confused.

“…and I thought, ‘Oh my God, no, what is wrong with my son?’”

As the story continued, Karen evaluated the situation that she had been through with her son in relation to mental health services and also with him telling her very little. This seemed to further impact on her confusion, not knowing what was going on.

“So I felt that on one side I had psychiatric services that told me as a parent very, very little. And on the other side, I had my son who was telling me absolutely nothing and who I wasn't sure what kind of games he was playing. Not games in a kind of deliberate way, but I think games
in a way where he was trying to protect himself and he was just trying to have some control in his life.”

In order to address her son’s social anxiety, she was informed that the resolution would be to encourage him to attend school. Keeping him off school would only impact the problem further, leading to his social anxiety being maintained through avoidance. As she described following through with this resolution, a complicating action was introduced. Her son started running away from school and as she evaluated this something did not seem right to her.

“And in the back of my mind, I knew there was more to it, but just didn't know what.”

As Karen continued, she orientated to a particular day when she went to collect her son from school for his therapy appointment. She evaluated being late and the resolution to this problem was to park her car in the school grounds. We are then orientated back to Karen and her son walking in single file to his therapy appointment and a complicating action unfolds.

“And as we were walking out, somebody yelled ‘Bender!’ and somebody else yelled ‘Faggot!’ and somebody else yelled ‘Give him a rope to hang himself with.’”

She then went on and evaluated her response to witnessing this bullying directed towards her son.

“And I remember thinking… and I actually just started to shake. I mean, I can tell you it now quite calmly, but for a long time I couldn’t even repeat this because I was just so shocked. And I was really, really shaken…”

Karen continued and described how her son ignored the event, as if it had never happened. She then orientated the story to several hours later when she was at home speaking with her husband, who suggested the resolution be to contact the school. However, as Karen evaluated this resolution, a complicating action
developed and she wondered if the school would believe her and expected they might suggest this was not directed towards her son. The story then orientated us to the following day, when Karen went to speak with her son’s school. In her evaluation, it appeared that all the previous events leading up to this incident began to make sense, with the end result being the complicating action that her son was being bullied.

“And at that point, I thought, ‘Oh my God, this is real. This is what is happening.’ And it was all, suddenly, I could see it clearly. [Son’s name omitted] is being bullied.”

Karen’s orientation then moved back in time, to a few days before the Christmas break at the school for her son. As Karen continued to tell her story, a resolution was introduced and she decided to take more time off work to look after her son. A further resolution was also presented, telling him that he did not have to go back into school that week. As Karen orientates us back to Christmas, she explains that her son sent a text message to her.

“We were in the house, actually, together, and he sent me a text telling me, ‘I am gay.’ So I went rushing up the stairs and did my big rainbow flag waving, ‘This is the best news I have ever heard. And I am so proud of you and you are an amazing boy.'”

To this complicating action, we see the resolution being acceptance and support. As Karen evaluated her response she goes on to explain her son’s reaction to this resolution.

“And he floored me because what he said to me was, ‘I don’t know why you are saying this to me, because you are a homophobic.’ I looked at him and I... ‘What do you mean, [son’s name omitted]? I am not homophobic.’ Because all I am thinking of is my entire... his entire life, I have been so politically correct in my life and so careful not to do anything that would be... er... seen as offensive, do you know what I mean?”
Karen reflected how she believed an environment of acceptance had been created. However, on further reflection she recalled an incident many years ago, when she and a friend, who was gay, had fallen out. As she spoke to her husband about this she remembered calling her friend “a big gay bastard” and then she remembered.

“And [son’s name omitted] heard this and thought, ‘The homophobic mother.’ And boy, oh boy, have I lived to regret that, because it took such a long time for me to convince [son’s name omitted] that I am not homophobic.”

In this evaluation we see how one statement, heard out of context shaped her son’s opinion, believing that his mother was homophobic. The story then orientated to the passing of four weeks, with Karen updating us on the resolution of her son’s schooling, after he “came out” to his school peers. It was agreed that her son could attend a special school. As Karen reflected on this, she explained that it was “a school for kids that are basically not going to school for all sorts of psychiatric reasons, but funnily enough the most common reason they don’t go is because they are being bullied.” In her evaluation, she identified that her son enjoyed attending this programme, but stated that she remained stressed and reflected on the complicating action that her son was socially isolated.

“I remained really, excuse me, stressed about the whole thing because in my mind he was so socially isolated because he had one friend when he was at [name of school omitted] and out of [name of school omitted] the phone never rang.”

It was not only school friends who were not in contact, for as the narration continued I was reminded of his “drinking friends” from earlier in the story. Karen stated in her narration that they too rejected and “turned against him.” I was orientated to the passing of time, around a year in which her son spent a lot of time in his bedroom and having little social contact. He also communicated to his mother that he no longer wished to attend therapy, believing that he was not gaining anything
Karen went on to talk about seeking support for her son by contacting an LGBT support organisation.

“So then I spoke to [LGBT support organisation name omitted] in town, and asked, you know, said, ‘What I wanted [son’s name omitted] to see was to see he was normal.’ So I spoke to [LGBT support organisation name omitted]. They have got this kind of youth group, [youth group name omitted], and I wanted him to go to that.”

A complicating action is then introduced, as her son did attend once but was under the influence of alcohol. Karen goes on to evaluate how she viewed the situation of her son being isolated, having no social circle and talked of her relief at him passing six GCSE exams. The story then orientated me to her son now attending college where he is studying for his A Levels. Karen also reflected on their relationship since he “came out” believing that it “has come along leaps and bounds”. The narration then evaluated how Karen assumed that her son ‘coming out’ would be a relatively straightforward process, but what she stated is that -

“...I have realised how traumatic it is for young people to have to be brave enough to come out. I have realised how awful I made [son’s name omitted] feel through my crass stupidity of me just bitching about my friend…”

Karen continued to narrate how her son had now “gained self-worth” and this was something she believed helped him to come off his anti-depressant medication. While at school, her son believed he “was worthless and that all the things and names that he was called, he deserved all that.” As she continued to evaluate, Karen went on to offer further reflections over the past year.

“...I have went through like a year of being a bit ridiculous, in that I was a bit OTT, and kind of super rainbow flag waving and my husband said to me, ‘You have really got to stop this. You are trying to be his mother, his best friend, his boyfriend.’ And it was true. I was trying to be
everything for him. So I had taken a step back and I am just trying to be his mummy again.”

The narration continued and recounted how his older brother and sister had “always knew he was gay too, truthfully. And they are super-supportive of him.” Karen then turned attention to her husband, her son’s stepfather who had also been supportive throughout the process. The story is then orientated to a particular Christian friend whom she told of her son’s orientation and a complicating action is introduced.

“…she started to go on all this, ‘Loving the sinner, not the sin’ bit. And I was listening to her thinking, ‘Are you for real?’ And then I didn’t bother telling my husband this because I kind of thought, ‘These are our very good friends, I don’t want to start anything.’”

As the story then orientated me to the week after and Karen told of how the husband of her Christian friend was visiting. He explained to Karen and to her husband that his wife “can be a bit OTT” referring to the comments she had made the previous week. Once this friend left, Karen explained to her husband what he had been referring to and appeared supported by his response.

“And [husbands name omitted] automatic reaction was, ‘Well, if she is going to get on like that, she is not going to be coming round to our house.’ And it has never come to that, but I just so appreciated that he took [son’s name omitted]’s side and that the support is there for [name omitted], and like, this is my husband’s best friend and his wife.”

Karen then introduced a coda, informing her narration was complete. However, within this she also evaluated that she had, most likely, left much information out.

“Um, I think I have told you everything but I have probably left lots and lots out.”
Tracey – “Holding the Family Together.”

Tracey begins her narrative with orientation to the characters in the story, her son and daughter. It then moved to an abstract highlighting what the story was about, her two children ‘coming out’.

“Ok. Ok, um, well my son, [sons name omitted], is 20, 23 sorry and my daughter [daughters name omitted] is 20. And it’s now been four years since they’ve come out. Um, the first one to come out was [daughters name omitted]…”

The story’s orientation was first to her 16-year-old daughter ‘coming out’ and to the complicating action that she had had boyfriends, but “…she just said she didn’t think it was for her and she liked girls.” As Tracey evaluated this she informed me that she told her daughter, “…that was absolutely fine.” Tracey continued by introducing me to a further complicating action in her narration, as to how her daughter did not want her father to know. She also orientated me to the fact that Tracey was divorced from her daughter’s father.

“And she didn’t want him to know because she thought he wouldn’t take it very well, which he wouldn’t because he’s very anti-gay.”

I was introduced to the resolution of this complicating action, Tracey explained, “I said that was ok, you know, we would deal with that in time, you know, just to let her basically get her head around and my head around what was happening.” She continued with her narration, introducing the complicating action of how her daughter was subjected to bullying. Tracey often-heard crying coming from her daughter’s bedroom and that she had once been “quite a happy child” who went to being “very unhappy” and experiencing suicidal thoughts. The resolution that Tracey introduced was that she decided to attend a parent support group for parents of LGBT children.
“So I just didn’t know what to do or how to help and I went – [family support group omitted], um, who tried to, just to get some help and see how other parents felt and stuff.”

The narration’s orientation then moved to her son, who had gone to America for a year for a “placement in a university”. Tracey explained all this was going on with her daughter while he was away. I was then orientated to her son deciding to “come out” on Facebook, too, at this time and Tracey evaluated his decision.

“…which was a terrible nightmare because obviously he had his father on his Facebook page and um, I knew that that wasn’t going to go well.”

Tracey orientated me to a Skype conversation with her son, the night before he “came out”. She introduced the complicating action of how he was telling her that he “loved me and stuff”. As Tracey evaluated this, she believed perhaps he needed money, “I just knew there was something not right”. She explained that only later had she found out that that night on Skype, her son had wanted to tell but “he couldn’t bring himself to”. The orientation moved to the fact her son was away for a year and the complicating action of her ex-husband contacting her when he found out, following her son posting it on Facebook.

“I got a phone call from his father, um, absolutely just devastated and angry and did I know? Of course I didn’t know anything about it.”

Tracey’s orientation went to her work that day and the complicating action of needing to leave, as she was worried about her ex-husband. She explained to me that he was an alcoholic and “was afraid he would do something stupid”. Tracey continued with a complicating action of how she went to his home and “tried to console him”. As her narration continued, I was orientated to the one year she would have to think about her son ‘coming out’ before he got home from America, alongside thinking about her daughter too.

Tracey orientated me to the family support group she attended and the complicating action of how some members in this group had discussed “grandchildren and
In an evaluation, Tracey noted that this was something she had thought about, but was not something that troubled her. The orientation moved to her ex-husband and how this was something he had thought about more.

“...well he thought more about that than I did obviously because [son’s name omitted] the only boy grandchild, so he would carry on the [family surname omitted] name, if you like.”

As Tracey evaluated this, she noted that it had “devastated him” and taken her ex-husband a long time to “come round”. She explained how he did not talk about it, but Tracey orientated me to the family support group she attended every month where she learned about other people’s experiences.

“...um, how to cope with it and what to say to people, obviously worrying about your family and you’re coming out. Because I think when the child comes out they don’t realise that the parents have to come out too.”

Tracey continued her narration with an evaluation of how difficult it is for someone to ‘come out’ but it also has an impact on the parents.

“And they, they kind of think about themselves obviously because they’re obviously in trauma about it, um and they don’t think about the effect that it has on the parents as they have to come out as well.”

She evaluated that the group was helpful and Tracey also orientated me to her family and how supportive they were. However, she explained how her ex-husband’s family “were not so great really”. Tracey introduced a resolution to the narration and explained how she provided them with books, leaflets and also tried to talk with them to help. However, Tracey explained how they did not want to discuss the matter and evaluated how this was the opposite for her. The narration then orientated me to Tracey speaking at events to others about her experiences. She also evaluated how some people found it “strange at first” that two of her children were gay, although she orientated me to another member of the family group that
she attended having “a boy and a girl and they’re both gay as well”. Tracey evaluated supporting her ex-husband around the grandchildren issue and that “he is so upset about that, very, very upset about that and still he’d be upset.” She went on to explain that he would still contact her by phone when he was upset.

“Um, as I always say, you know, you can’t miss what you don’t have and grandchildren were not yours to begin with and may never have been, whether your children are gay or not.”

As Tracey continued with her narration, she evaluated her belief that it was important to support her children and not “dwell on the things that you don’t have”. Therefore, when her children needed supporting “you have to keep everything fine, telling them and help them best you can”. Tracey did identify at first that this was not easy. I was orientated to her being in bed at night and how she “just cried and cried and cried, you know”. She returned to explaining and orientation, about how her son was away in America when he “came out” and she felt that he did not “understand anything” of how difficult it was at home as he was not there.

A complicating action was introduced to the narration, when he “met someone there” and Tracey explained how she was worried and evaluated that all she wanted to do was go and hug him.

“I just, I just wanted to give him a hug and tell him it was ok.”

She evaluated how a good thing happened and oriented me to her ex-husband. Tracey explained spending the year trying to “bring him around as best [she] could”. When her son was coming home, Tracey introduced the complicating action of how he was worried about seeing his father and the reaction he expected, so she explained the following resolution to this worry, which was directed at her ex-husband.

“I said, ‘The best thing you can do for your son is to meet him at the airport and give him a hug and tell him that everything’s ok. Should it pain you and should you hate doing it, please do it for him. Don’t think
about yourself at the moment. Please do it for him because he's desperately worried about coming home.”

I was orientated to her son’s father doing just that and how he came with her to the airport and “gave him a hug and told him it was ok”. Tracey evaluated this action and explained how she knew inside that it still was not all right for her ex-husband. She evaluated that her ex-husband had to do this, believing that her son’s ‘coming out’ was more difficult, with him being thousands of miles away, compared to her daughter ‘coming out’. Tracey evaluated this further.

“[Daughter's name omitted] would have an attitude where she wouldn't care what people said, where [son’s name omitted] would be more kind of sensitive about it and worried that his friends would reject him.”

The narration’s orientation moved to the youth club that both her children worked at. Tracey evaluated how the children there “absolutely love” her son, viewing him as a “trendsetter”. She explained how her son was worried as to how the children would feel. I was orientated to the youth leader in the narration and how he had told her “he was gay and stuff”. Tracey orientated me to meeting with the youth worker while her son was away in America.

“…she assured me that there's no – the other children just love [son's name omitted] so there’s no issue and there would be no issue with, with anything, you know, because he was very highly respected…”

Tracey evaluated again how she believed her son how worried about how the children would react. I was then orientated to his best friend and his worry about his reaction, as “they’d been friends all their lives”. As Tracey evaluated his friend’s reaction she believed it “was brilliant”.

“….he just said he’s still [son’s name omitted], he hasn’t changed. He’s, he’s still [son’s name omitted], he’s not a different person.
The narration then returned to Tracey evaluating how much she loved her son and “nothing’s going to change”. She also re-orientated me to her family and friends and to how supportive they had been. Tracey explained how her daughter had some problems initially with her friends, but “…that all stopped and they all came around and, you know, she’s happy…”

The orientation moved on to her son and the complicating action of him not seeing very much of his father compared with her daughter. Tracey also explained that her daughter had only come out in the last year to her father.

“Um, so she kept it to herself for about three years, you know, rather than just let everybody know right away.”

In her narration, Tracey orientated me to her daughter’s father having a lesbian friend. This was the reason that her daughter then felt able to tell her father, “So she thought well if he can have friends he shouldn't mind me then”. Tracey evaluated this and just like the experience with her son and her ex-husbands response, “he knows it’s there but he just doesn’t want to talk about it”. Tracey believed and hoped that he will “come around” in his own time. She completed her narration by informing me that her ex-husband does welcome their children into his home.
Mary – “Moving Beyond Uncharted Territory.”

Mary started her narration with an evaluation that “it was no surprise” that her son was gay. The orientation started with him being twelve or thirteen years old and Mary, her husband and daughter having a conversation about whether her son might be gay.

“…my husband and my daughter having a very serious conversation about we did think that [son’s name omitted] was gay. My daughter is six-and-a-half years older than [son’s name omitted].”

Mary evaluated the trigger for this conversation was due to her daughter overhearing or perhaps seeing something on the computer.

“…you know we had suspicions up until then, but this was probably the first time, there was maybe something tangible.”

The complicating action of her daughter suggesting she could access this information was introduced. It resulted in Mary informing her daughter that this information was private and that her son would tell them if he was gay “in his own time”. She went on to evaluate this statement.

“And I had absolutely no idea how prescient that statement was, that it would be, in his own time.”

I was then orientated to the passing of a few years and the complicating action of there being no relationships, despite the fact of her son being around “absolutely drop dead gorgeous girls”. Mary orientated me to her husband being “absolutely convinced” their son was gay. She noted having a friend who socialised more with girls and he was not gay. However, she evaluated her friend was into sport and her son was not.

“…whereas [son’s name omitted] was kind of fitting in the stereotypical… the music, the drama and whatever.”
As Mary evaluated this, she noted not giving much thought to him being gay, only that if he was, she wanted him to ‘come out’ at “a time of his own choosing”. The narration introduced the complicating action of her son deciding to return to school after receiving his GCSE results. Mary orientated me to the month of August, just before he returned to school and that her son had made the decision to ‘come out’.

“So it was just... it was that August... um, before he started back to school. And we had actually all gone for dinner to a seafood restaurant, and during the course of the day, he’d... my daughter lives twelve doors away from us. He had gone down and told her. My husband was working from home. Um, he told my husband and then we were coming to meet for dinner and he told me.”

The narration introduced the complicating action of Mary being told by her son, him asking her to come over to the car where he stated, “Mum, I’m gay”. As Mary evaluated this experience, she noted that he was emotional, as was she. However, Mary did not want her son to think her “tears were any sort of disappointment or any negativity whatever towards it”. In response to her son ‘coming out’ I was introduced to this complicating action to her narration.

“And I said, ‘Look, [son’s name omitted], you know... I am just a worry-wort and I am well-known for being a worrier, but um, just worrying about the future,’ and stuff like that.”

In her evaluation of this statement Mary reflected perhaps she should not have shown fear by communicating worry about the future to her son.

The narration then moved me to a complicating action and orientation of her son wanting to tell other family members and close friends about his orientation, which he did. Mary evaluated that she did not believe anyone was “terribly shocked or whatever” and believed this was due to her extended family not having “homophobic tendencies”. She also believed things had moved on in relation to sexual identity in the world, comparing this to when she was younger.
“I mean, had I found myself attracted to my same sex, I wouldn’t even have known the word for it. And... had I told my parents, you know, my very loving, well-intentioned parents, probably would have taken me off to the City Hospital for some reparative sort of treatment.”

Mary continued to evaluate her experience of her son ‘coming out’ referring to it as her own “gay journey”.

“‘Okay, so there’s gay aware, there’s gay tolerant, there is gay friendly.’ But for me, the equivalent of self-actualisation is probably gay understanding. And I realised, I really didn’t have any comprehension... of what his life must have been like. And really as a parent, I felt, and as a mother, I felt quite guilty because it wasn’t like this came like a bolt out of the blue.”

Her narration continued and reflected how difficult it must have been for her son and how he might have been feeling different from his peers. Mary also questioned whether she should have asked him sooner, but returned to the importance of her son doing this in his own time, “what would have been the point in prompting him to come out with that before he was ready?” She also explained how no homophobic comments would even have been heard in their home. The narration then orientated me to religion and her evaluations of this.

“Um... and I guess I suppose we were very lucky in that we don’t have any strong... religious... I mean, my husband is an atheist. I was brought up as a Catholic but as an adult chose to live a Quaker life. And Quakers were the first faith group to actually accept same sex marriage. So, didn’t have that whatever as a battle.”

The orientation moved to a television documentary called “Hunted” and Mary explained how it had “an absolutely horrendous effect on... well, on all of us and particularly [son’s name omitted]”. As Mary evaluated this further in the narration, she believed it was due to her son having such a positive experience. However, this documentary showed the other side and it “was the first time to just
see something that was just so… oh God, so nakedly homophobic, cruel. I mean, it was just awful”.

Mary introduced the complicating action of her son asking, “Was he going to Hell?” In her evaluation she noted this idea had not been communicated within the home, but from the “outside world”. She found it upsetting and concerning that he was thinking this way and believed this was partially due to “the vulnerability of having seen that programme, which was just so horrendous, you know”.

The narration then orientated me to “parents who reject their children when they come out as gay” and Mary’s evaluation of not being able to understand this.

“I understand fear, I understand anxiety, even shock. But I don’t understand… you know, rejection. Certainly for me… I think my way of dealing with it was, he needed to understand more. He needed to know more.”

Mary moved the orientation to an LGBT organisation that she planned to contact. As she evaluated her reason why contact was not made, Mary identified feeling “very torn”, worrying that it might communicate a message to her son that she was perhaps disappointed and “incapable of dealing” with his sexual identity. In time, Mary did contact this organisation and explained how watching the documentary “Hunted”, that she had referred to previously in her narration, triggered this.

The narration then moved me to the complicating action of Mary exploring if her son had any concerns after ‘coming out’. He communicated the following to his mother.

“‘I did you an awful disservice because I did wonder if it might… was there just the possibility that it might have been the case.’”

Mary evaluated this and believed his comments made her “honestly reflect”. She questioned the emotion that was experienced when her son first “came out” and wondered where this had come from. However, she concluded there was no issue with him, but worried how her emotional response was interpreted by him.
“I was fearful that in some way this indicated that I was disappointed, or you know, couldn’t deal with it, and that to me, just would have been so terribly disloyal to him.”

Mary continued to evaluate and explained to me how she “hadn’t worked out how this might all play out”. She introduced the complicating action of asking what her son needed from the family and also discussed relationships with him. Mary explained to me her son wanted his relationships to be treated in the same way as his sister’s had been. She evaluated this to be “simple enough” as “whoever my children brought home I was going to love them, because nobody was going to come between me and my children”.

The narration orientated me to the first boyfriend her son brought home and Mary evaluated that she was “like Mum-zilla, it was just sheer excitement”. She explained how her son’s boyfriend’s family was not accepting of his orientation and his parents had asked him to not bring that part of his life home. Mary evaluated that as “absolutely awful”. She also went on to explain that, in reality, the way she treated her son’s relationship was different to the way she dealt with her daughter’s.

“...you were very conscious... it is the same love, but it cannot be displayed in the same way, you know. If they went out for a night, if they went to the theatre or something like that, while a heterosexual couple can go and into a bar and if they want to kiss or cuddle and hold hands, while really they can’t or it can be very risky for them.”

As Mary evaluated this further, she found herself being “overly protective”. I was also orientated to the fact that her son’s boyfriend shared a house with his “homophobic brother”. She offered a resolution to this problem by offering that he could come to their home anytime. Mary evaluated this and noted, “Well, bet your bottom dollar, I would never have... like allowed my daughter to do that do you know what I mean?” She felt this was due to her feeling that the world was unsafe and that she “wanted to make things as safe as possible”. Mary also held the view of not wanting to “interfere with how this relationship might run”. She believed that it was not the same as a “heterosexual couple”, as finding a
“significant other” would be harder for someone who identified as being gay, with a smaller potential population to choose from. Mary wanted both her children to find someone who would care for them when she was no longer around.

The narration then orientated me to a couple of years ago and the complicating action of Mary having a ruptured appendix.

“‘Oh, death would have been a happy release at this stage.’ I was just in so much pain and so ill and I remember looking at my daughter and just thought, ‘Well, she is married. She has a little girl,’ and whatever else. And my husband, I thought, ‘Oh, he will get out there, he is released now!’ (laughs) I support this…. And then I looked at [son’s name omitted], and oh, the heartbreak that… you know, ‘Oh no, no, no, don’t take me yet. No, you have to leave me here until I see him, sort of, safely...’”

Mary returned me to her belief that his “choices are so much less” (referring to relationships) and she did not want to place any “obstacles” in his way in regard to relationships. I was orientated to Mary’s friends and she evaluated that they are “wonderful, absolutely lovely people”. I was then orientated to the fact that none of their children were gay, with Mary evaluating “that is different”. As she continued to evaluate this, Mary discussed the issue of marriage and children. She introduced the complicating action of how some parents known to her, through work and the family support group she attended, can mourn the possibility of not having grandchildren when they discover their child is gay. Mary returned to an evaluation.

“I thought, ‘Well, that hadn’t even been on my radar. I would never have taken that as a given, anyway.’ And plus, I would be very optimistic in this very modern world that, you know, well, there is IVF, there is all surrogacy.”

As she continued, Mary explained that her anxiety was not around missing out on grandchildren, but around her son and introduced the following complicating actions.
“Would people only ever see gay [son’s name omitted], if you know what I mean? You know, would he be defined by his sexuality? That, I think, was my concern.”

The orientation moved on to the passing of three years and Mary’s evaluation of how this anxiety had “dissipated”. The narration then orientated me to her son’s Upper Sixth year at school and the complicating action of pupils voting for Head Boy and Head Girl. Mary orientated me to the fact her son was voted as one of the Deputy Head Boys at school. She evaluated that these votes were always based on “pure personality” and she found it “very reaffirming that he has complete acceptance”.

Mary went on to explain her concern was not around acceptance among girls, “everyone wants a gay best friend” and she orientated me to him having “lots of girlfriends”. It appeared her concern had been around males, but that he “also had male friends” which Mary found affirming. I was orientated to him now studying medicine at university and his group of male friends was widening. As Mary evaluated this, she believed it indicated the world was changing and I was orientated to her own age and an evaluation around this change.

“I am 54, so the generation that I come up with, and as we jokingly say to [son’s name omitted] now there were no gays in our day? It is a new thing. It must have arrived in when they brought MacDonald’s here, you know?”

Mary went on to joke how she did not go to school with anyone who was gay. She then continued to evaluate that obviously this had not been the case and how difficult this must have been for people then. Mary then returned and orientated me to the world her son was growing up in and, although it appeared more accepting, “but that is not to say that homophobia isn’t out there because we both know, that it actually is”. However, despite this, Mary did believe her initial anxieties around her son being all right had decreased.
The narration then orientated me to her “journey over the past three years” and Mary used an analogy that summarized her experience.

“...somebody has gone off to Paris on a trip, and um, this predates Euros so they have their francs and their French phrasebook and they want to go and see the Eiffel Tower and they have got their directions from the airport to Gare du Nord and all the rest of it, and off they are going and they can’t wait to go. But all of a sudden the plane lands in Amsterdam and they don’t have the money and they have no idea what it is they go to see and they don’t speak the language and they have just no concept of anything but through time, they exchange the money, they find their way and they realise that Amsterdam too is pretty with its, or, pretty with its windmills and canals and whatever and whatever.”

Mary goes on to evaluate how she has moved from “uncharted territory” to being in a “comfortable position”, feeling less anxious. She also orientated me to the fact of being a trade union activist and viewed gay rights important to this. Mary evaluated now having a personal interest in this due to her son and that she “will certainly tick [her] Rainbow Warrior status with, you know, full enthusiasm or whatever”.

A coda returned me to the present day and Mary evaluated how she was able to talk about her experiences “without getting emotional”. Mary orientated me to two years ago and evaluated that if she had been talking to me then, I would have heard the emotion in her voice. Mary evaluated that she was happy her son was doing so well. Her narration then orientated me a play called “Damage” that her family had been to see, and evaluated it as “absolutely amazing”. Mary orientated me to a conversation between her and some friends. I was introduced to a complicating action in the interaction between Mary and her friends.

“...this guy had said to me, ‘Is that your son?’ and I said, ‘Yes.’ He said, ‘He is really lucky to have a mum like you.’ And he said he hasn’t had any contact with his family, you know, for the last kind of seven years.”
Mary evaluated this in her narration and how this was not “an uncommon story”. It also returned her to evaluate the ‘coming out’ experience of her own son as being “very positive”, although noting that she and her husband had been much “more protective” of him compared to if he had not been gay. I was orientated to her son achieving well at school and that he was musically gifted. As she evaluated his achievements, Mary noted, “it certainly hasn’t impeded on his development”. She continued by explaining that she was “happy to take a bit of credit for that as well, in the sense that we created the right conditions”. Mary concluded by reflecting on the future, believing he might move away someday and how she would miss him if he did.

“…gosh, I will miss him, but would it be better that he could live in a place where you would be able to walk down the street and hold hands… you know, because ultimately I just want what is best for him.”
Chapter Summary
In this chapter, I presented the stories and the narrative analysis from the seven participants within this study. I took the decision to present their stories in as much detail as possible, using the participants’ own words to reduce my own interpretations of them and diminish any researcher bias. I was also mindful of my own insider status, identifying within the LGBT community. For these reasons, I selected this style of presentation here.
Chapter Five: Discussion

Introduction
My research was particularly focussed on the process of an adolescent ‘coming out’ to his or her family. As previously highlighted in Chapter Two, there is a gap within the literature regarding what facilitates an adolescent in the process of disclosing his or her sexual identity to the family. There is also little known around what role the family plays in an individual’s ‘coming out’ experience. In revisiting the research design, a humanistic value base was a central component in this research, viewing individuals as unique beings who are socially and relationally embedded (Cooper, 2009). The research adopted a critical realist view of the world and was informed by a social constructionist understanding of knowledge. I wanted to gain insight into the ‘coming out' process through the participants’ own words and subsequently to explore how personal narratives were structured and what we could learn from these stories. The following research questions guided my study:

1. What can we learn from adolescents’ stories about ‘coming out’ to the family?

2. What can we learn from parental stories about adolescents ‘coming out’ to the family?

These questions were explored using narrative interviews with seven research participants within the study, four adolescents and three parents. My discussion chapter, therefore, focuses on presenting and contextualising my findings within the empirical and theoretical literature, and is closely aligned to the participant stories. In Chapter Four, I presented the Labovian (1972) analysis. In this current chapter, I discuss the analysis, but also consider the content of these stories’ thematic threads, what Polkinghorne (1995) refers to as ‘plot' forms.

In my discussion, I first revisit the telling of the participant stories, providing a rationale for the development of the discussion. Secondly, I will consider the adolescent stories in the context of what I discovered around the narrators’ journeys
in ‘coming out’ to the family. I will also consider the parental stories, in the context of what I discovered about their journey in describing their child’s ‘coming out’ and how this can provide further insight into the adolescent experience.

In Chapter Three, I described how I started each of the narrative interviews by stating the focus of my research topic to the four adolescents and three parents that took part in this study. To the adolescents, I explained how I was keen to hear their story of ‘coming out’ to their family. To the parents, I asked about the story of when their child disclosed their sexuality to them. I anticipated the participant stories would be predominantly focused around that event of ‘coming out’ to the family. However, I found that the participants told their stories, by providing detailed accounts of the ‘coming out’ journey to date, not just to family members. Therefore, in this chapter I decided to discuss several components of the participant stories rather than focusing only on the event of ‘coming out’ to the family. I believe that exploring the events that came before provided me with the opportunity to gain much needed insight into what facilitated the journey of ‘coming out’ to the family. I believe we need to understand the historical background, in order not to diminish the complexity involved in ‘coming out’. As Bohan (1996) points out, it is a lifelong process of “embracing for oneself and disclosure to others one’s sexual orientation” (p. 112); it is not just a singular event. This was evident within all the participant stories in which they discussed multiple events and experiences around ‘coming out’.

**The Structure of the Participant Stories**

I noted that the narrative accounts offered by the four adolescents and three parents were narrated chronologically. Each participant started their narration at the point they seemed to view as the start of a ‘coming out’ journey. This is why I believe it is vitally important to understand the full story narrated. Although I asked the participants to tell me their story around a particular event, the adolescents and parents chose to provide much more detailed accounts; their stories were not only about ‘coming out’ to family, but also included accounts about ‘coming out’ to friends, self-discovery, socio and political issues and challenges faced by the adolescents and parents. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) explore constructivist perspectives in relation to narrative studies and argue that people mention things in a story for a
reason. They state that in storytelling, narrators include details which they view to be significant (Lincoln & Denzin, 1994). Informed by Denzin and Lincoln’s argument, I chose to reflect upon and discuss the participant stories in detail. Their personal accounts enabled me to gain insight into the background of what had influenced the decision to ‘coming out’ to the family.

As I reflected upon the narrative structure of the participant stories using Labov’s (1972) six-element structural analysis, the chronological order appeared to provide a framework to assist the adolescents in communicating their ‘coming out’ story to me. For the parents, it enabled them to map out their own journeys in a structured order. According to Elliot (2005), in order for a story to be considered a narrative, it needs to involve three key features: narratives are chronological in nature, representing a sequence of events; they are meaningful; and they are inherently social, in the sense that they are produced for a specific audience. This was evident in the participant stories as they were told in a sequential manner. Each story began with an awareness of something being different around sexuality, which went on to inform the various complicating actions and evaluations within each participant story. This supported the definition of narrative that I selected for this study, “Narratives (stories) in the human sciences should be defined provisionally as discourses with a clear sequential order that connect events in a meaningful way for a definite audience and thus offer insights about the world and/or people’s experiences of it” (Hinchman & Hinchman, 1997, p.xvi).

One thing that struck me within the structure of the adolescent and parent stories was that ‘coming out’ was not a single event (Bohma, 1996). The stories included a series of narrated ‘complicating actions’ (the events which make the account a story), which occurred prior to and after ‘coming out’ to their family. These complicating actions provided a landscape in which evaluative responses were developed and resolutions to these complicating actions were told within the stories. In Labov and Waletzky’s (1967) six-element structural model, evaluations were once seen as a discrete element within a story. However, in 1972 Labov argued that ‘evaluations’ were the most important element within narrative clauses that permeated the narrative. I would argue that my research supported this finding, with ‘evaluations’ interwoven throughout the participant stories, providing insights into
their interpretation and the meaning of the various ‘complicating actions’. The element of ‘evaluation’, alongside the chronological ordering of events, appeared to assist the adolescents and parents in constructing and narrating their stories, thus adding personal meaning to them.

Within this next section, I will discuss the narrative accounts from the perspective of the four adolescents and the three parents. In order to structure this part of my discussion, I developed five Thematic Concepts to highlight the main ‘plots’ that ran through the participant stories (see Polkinghorne, 1995; Riessman, 1993; 2000). With each concept, I first offer a brief overview as to what it incorporates which was guided by the content of the seven participant stories. Second, I explore each concept in relation to the adolescents and parents, contextualised within the existing literature. As previously mentioned, I outlined my rationale for providing a more detailed discussion in order to answer the research questions that guided my study. As stated, I took the decision that the discussion needed to go beyond the event of only ‘coming out’ to the family in order to fully understand what influenced and facilitated this event and the importance of exploring and understanding pre and post disclosure of sexuality to family.

**The Influence of Self - A Sense of Knowing Something**

This Thematic Concept, which I use to describe as the influence of self and a sense of knowing some difference about themselves, incorporates elements of the four adolescent stories around ‘feeling different’. D’Augelli (1996) argued that ‘difference’ is often the first indicator when an individual becomes aware of their same-sex orientation. For participants within this study, ‘difference’ appeared to be connected to an awareness of sexual attraction to the same-sex, how dating relationships with the opposite sex felt different in comparison to peers and not identifying with gay stereotypes. It appeared that the adolescents within this study identified with these factors, which reinforced their feelings of ‘difference’ prior to ‘coming out’ to their family and beyond. In two of the parent stories, I discovered that they also stated an awareness that their child might identify as ‘gay’.
All the adolescents reported an awareness that something felt ‘different’ in relation to sexuality within their stories. Mark told me that he had an awareness about sexuality, but was unable to define his feelings until around age 13 when he self-identified as gay. I also learned that Thanos was aware of feeling different at a young age, feeling attracted to the same sex from around 10 years old. D’Augelli, Hershberger and Pilkington (1998) investigated the patterns of disclosure of sexual orientation and reported that participants in their study were aware that something was different at age 10 and labelled themselves as having a different orientation, to the same gender, around age 14. This appeared to be congruent with the findings of this research. Kendon also noted having sexual attractions and fantasies towards members of the same sex which left him feeling different in comparison to his peers.

Thanos reported these attractions to the same sex increased as he moved into his teenage years, but he tried to ignore and hide these feelings. He was aware this was ‘different’ to how his peers were experiencing romantic attraction. These findings support the notion that LGB identity formation for males often begins within the context of sexual attraction and experimentation (Garnets & Kimmel, 1993; Gonsiorek, 1995). Thanos stated that at age 18, when others were talking about girls, he had to lie, pretending that he was also attracted to the opposite sex. Through his use of self-monitoring (Snyder, 1987) it would appear that Thanos may have been experiencing internalised homophobia (IH). Szymanski, Chung and Balsam (2001) suggest that due to negative attitudes towards the self, most lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals can experience degrees of IH. It appeared that feelings of shame, fear and rejection may have been experienced by Thanos. Mohr and Fassinger (2003) found that individuals who were fearfully avoidant of same-sex attraction were less likely to be accepting of their own sexuality. Despite the distress caused, Thanos chose not to disclose his sexuality until several years later. As stated in Chapter Two, it is well documented that LGB individuals are more vulnerable to mental health problems than heterosexual individuals. IH has been found to be one contributory factor relating to increased depression (Igartue, Gill & Montoro, 2003; Szymanski et al., 2001), anxiety (Igartue et al., 2003), somatic complaints and a lack of satisfaction with social support (Szymanski et al., 2001).
Amy also felt ‘different’ in dating relationships. She noted that in comparison to her peers, she did not feel the same emotions towards the opposite sex that she believed her peers were feeling. However, this did not make her question her sexuality initially, but as time progressed and close friends began getting married, she realised this was not what she wanted. Warner (1993) uses the term heteronormativity to highlight how sexuality discourses normalise ‘heterosexuality’, with ‘homosexuality’ being viewed as ‘deviant’. It was her interaction with such discourses that made Amy question her own sexuality, feeling ‘different’ from her peers and appearing to ‘deviate’ from the social norm of heterosexuality (Johnson, 2002; Simoni & Walters, 2001). It was these social interactions and her own construction of meaning around these experiences that appeared to bring her to the conclusion that she might be ‘gay’. Amy also picked up on stereotypes within her story and how, in her teenage years, this absence of identification with a stereotype was the reason she did not question her own sexuality. In considering this difference, she noted the lesbians’ she knew were masculine, and Amy did not view herself in this light. As a result, she concluded that she was not able to not self-identify as a lesbian at that time.

Karen and Mary both reported a sense of knowing something was ‘different’ before their children disclosed their sexuality to them. They identified that this was due to gender atypical behaviour (e.g. playing with girl’s toys, not dating girls and the observed internet behaviour). Karen told me that she had known from when her son was young that he might identify as “gay” later in life. She also highlighted that his older brother and sister had suspected for many years that her son was gay, even before he had made the decision to disclose this to the family. Karen believed this awareness within the family was due to him playing with girls rather than boys and preferring dolls as a child. D’Augelli, Grossman and Starks (2005) found that “being more gender atypical in childhood may have provided parents with more ‘clues’ and may have prompted such youth to tell their parents” (p.481). Upon reflection, Karen’s account appeared to illustrate how beliefs and stereotypes influenced the ‘coming out’ process for her son; it motivated her to ensure the family environment would accept and support him should he identify as gay. Ryan et al. (2010) found that family acceptance of LGBT adolescents appeared to be associated with positive mental and physical health in young adults. In an earlier study by Ryan and
colleagues (2009), reported that lesbian, gay and bisexual adolescents and young adults that faced family rejection in adolescence were 8.4 times more likely to have attempted suicide, 5.9 times more likely to report higher levels of depression and 3.4 times more likely to report illicit drug use; they also engaged more in unprotected sex compared to peers from families with no or lower levels of rejection around their sexual identity.

Mary also reported an awareness of her son’s sexual identity before he disclosed it to the family in her story. She explained that her husband, daughter and herself had had suspicions for a long time that her son might be ‘gay’. She spoke about how her daughter had seen things on his computer that would indicate this. Mary also informed me that her son socialised with “drop dead gorgeous girls”, but they were only ever friends, leading to Mary and her husband becoming convinced their son was gay. Additionally, Mark told me in his story that when he ‘came out’ to his father, he told him that, “I have known you were gay for years”. Despite my findings that parents did have an awareness around their son or daughter’s sexuality, the adolescents were not aware of this. Therefore, it is not surprising that within the literature, it is well documented that disclosure of sexual identity can be stressful (D’Augelli et al., 1998; Savin-Williams, 2001; Savin-Williams & Dube, 1998) due to fear of negative reactions (D’Augelli & Hershberger, 1993). I hypothesise that the adolescents within this research and those belonging to the parents had known their family members were already somewhat aware; this may have reduced their anxieties around ‘coming out’.

The Influence of the School Environment

The school environment forms a Thematic Concept which is incorporated in elements of the adolescent stories around the impact of the education system upon their identified sexuality. Outside of the family, the school environment is viewed as a primary institution “within which the development of adolescents can be directed and shaped” (Simons-Morton, Crump, Haynie & Saylor, 1999, p.101). The school appeared to facilitate the adolescents’ learning about their sexual identity and for some in this study, it was a place of exposure to homophobic bullying and victimisation.
In the parent stories, parents Karen and Tracey told me about their children’s experiences of being subjected to homophobic bullying in school and the impact of this upon their child’s mental health such as isolation, suicidal ideation, low mood and social anxiety. Similar to the findings from the parent stories, Almeida et al. (2009) reported that perceived discrimination was a likely contributor to emotional distress among LGBT adolescents. I believe that social interactions within the school environment with peers and teachers would have led the adolescents to construct meaning around sexual identity and how others perceive them, resulting in increased distress. Szalacha (2004) notes that the school environment is not just a place to acquire knowledge and skills. She stated that schools can “have a significant impact on students’ experiences, feelings attitudes, and perspectives” (p.67). This implies that, in order to fully understand what facilitates adolescents’ ‘coming out’ process to their family, it is important not to view events in isolation, but rather reflect upon how they are inter-related. It would appear that within the school environment, foundations were being laid, through adolescent experiences, of the development of their sexual identity. This highlights the fact that we must be mindful in our consideration of the process of ‘coming out’, that the adolescents exist not in isolation and that systemic perspectives must be considered.

Amy explained that it was in school where she learned what the term “gay” meant. When questioning her own sexuality, Amy believed that she did not meet the stereotype of how she viewed a lesbian. Para (2008) states that as individuals explore their identity they may or may not associate with similar peer beliefs and identities. This was evident in Amy’s story as she compared herself to lesbian peers at school. As an individual explores their sense of self, peer interaction can assist in discovering their own identities (Gonzales & Dodge, 2010). It appeared that Amy did not identify with the traits of her lesbian peers and so arrived at the conclusion that she was, therefore, not of this sexual identity. Before arriving at a decision to ‘come out’ to her family, Amy needed to first make sense of her own identity.

In further consideration of the influence of the school environment upon identity development, I learned that Thanos became aware of his attraction to members of the same-sex at school. He also noted that these attractions became more intense as he transitioned into his teenage years. Thanos explained that he chose to ignore
these feelings as guys needed to be “macho”. Despite changing attitudes towards LGB individuals (Avery, et al., 2007), social stigma is still present. Thanos would probably have been viewed as deviating from societal norms around gender roles, views which remain particularly pervasive among young people (Hoover & Fishbein, 1999; Horn, 2006; Taywadtiep, 2001). Here the school environment and interaction with male peers raised Thanos’s awareness that something was ‘different’, and provided further evidence around the previous concept of the influence of a sense of knowing. By being attracted to other males, he would be going against social norms; this will be addressed further under the Thematic Concept ‘Influence of Culture and Religion’. In two studies by D’Augelli (2002) and D’Augelli et al. (2006), males who identified with a sexual minority population reported more victimisation compared to females. Therefore, Thanos probably viewed himself then as more vulnerable to experiencing victimisation and rejection due to social stigma. This highlights the challenges that individuals often need to overcome within their own peer groups throughout the process of ‘coming out’, even before making a decision to disclose their sexual identity to the family.

Although Mark did not disclose his sexual identity to peers, he told me that he was bullied and called “gay” within the school environment. Kendon also identified that his peers at school “made jokes” about his sexuality when he attended school in the UK, despite him not having “come out” to them. This supports literature that suggests homophobic bullying is an identifiable problem within schools (Rivers, 2001; Rivers & Carragher 2003; Trenchard & Warren, 1984). In his story, Mark discussed an incident when he informed a teacher about being subjected to homophobic bullying and he explained to me that this teacher did not know how to respond. There still “remains an inherent unease among many heterosexual teachers in addressing the issue” of homosexuality and homophobia within the school environment (River & Crowie, 2006, p.14). It raises the question for me around what preparation is being provided within teacher training programmes to ensure that teachers are adequately prepared to address the needs of diverse populations within the classroom (see Szalacha, 2004). Although Thanos did not personally experience homophobic bullying, he did allude to witnessing others who identified as gay being “taunted” by their school peers. In his story, it became apparent to me why he chose not to say anything around his own sexuality to peers.
at school, being due to a fear that he might also be victimised. Individuals have a need to feel connected to others and to experience a sense of belonging (Brewer, 1991). Therefore, keeping aspects of identity hidden would ensure Thanos was accepted and not rejected by his peers.

Experiences of bullying were also evident within Karen’s and Tracey’s stories as they talked about their children. Karen explained how she witnessed her son being subjected to homophobic bullying when collecting him from school one day. She talked about her perceived impact of this upon his mood and then how it led to social isolation, increased alcohol use, social anxiety and an attempted suicide. This supports Bontempo and D’Augelli’s (2002) research finding that LGB individuals who were subjected to victimisation within the school environment reported higher levels of substance use, suicidality and sexual risk-taking behaviours. However, it is important to note that we cannot assume that victimization at school is the only factor contributing to social and mental health problems. Other literature argues that the combined effects of family, victimisation from wider society, internalised homophobia and pre-disposition towards self-destructive behaviours may also play a role in these difficulties and should be considered (Hershberger & D’Augelli, 1995; Rivers & Cowie, 2006). Tracey echoed similar findings to Karen’s story in relation to her daughter being subjected to homophobic bullying from school peers. This resulted in social isolation and suicidal ideation being experienced by the daughter. In considering the parent accounts around homophobia compared them to the adolescent stories, I noted that Mark and Kendon did not discuss the impact of homophobic bullying by their school peers upon themselves, whereas the parents explicitly discussed this within their stories and talked about its impact upon the emotional health and well-being of their children.

The Influence of Culture and Religion
Culture and religion are significant Thematic Concepts woven through the stories of both the adolescents and parents with emphasis around the perceived impact of these concepts upon the ‘coming out’ journey. In this study, the four adolescents held perceptions of how their culture and faith communities would view their identified sexuality, with the potential for rejection. This was also evident within the
stories by parents who feared culture and religion could have a negative impact upon their children, which would then bring its challenges. In the parent stories, the subjects of religion and culture were introduced following the disclosure of sexual identity by their child. The findings of this research offer insight and contribute further to the literature around the impact of culture and religion upon sexual identity.

In considering culture, there has been recognition of its impact upon the development of sexual identity (e.g., Chan, 1995; Cox & Gallois, 1996; Coyle & Rafalin, 2000, Peplau & Garnets, 2000; Phellas, 2005). Kendon came originally from Trinidad and Thanos from Greece. Both these adolescents communicated in their story that they believed the United Kingdom would be more accepting of their sexual identity than their countries of origin, as they believed the UK to be more inclusive. Thanos believed Greece was a “stereotypically homophobic country”, and that by identifying as “gay” he would not be viewed as “macho”. Therefore, ‘coming out’ and publically acknowledging a ‘gay’ identity may be seen “as a form of rejection and abandonment of all the things their parents and culture represent” (Phellas, 2005, p.73). Although, Kendon and Thanos believed the UK to be more accepting it is important to note that homophobia exists here, too. Mary explained in her narrative how she worried about her son identifying as ‘gay’. She held the belief that he might be subjected to discrimination from society. By migrating to the UK, it appeared Kendon and Thanos anticipated subsequent life might be less rejecting in comparison to living in Trinidad or Greece. However, it is important to note that issues of exclusion and inequality are present within all societies.

Young, Shipley and Trothen (2015) state that the relationship between religion and sexuality is a relatively new discipline, but “appear in conflicting relationships in the public sphere” (p.3). These conflicts were highlighted in the stories of Amy, Mark and Kendos, where they all talked about the impact of religion within their stories. Amy identified that she became more aware of her sexual identity while on a Christian gap year and this appeared to create fear and anxiety, which then created a conflict between her religious and sexual identity and that “homosexuality” was “wrong”. These experiences appeared to further increase anxieties around ‘coming out’ to her Christian family, in particular to her father who was a minister and who also had been quite vocal about his views on homosexuality being wrong. Rodriguez and
Ouellette (2000) discuss four strategies that people use in coping with identifying as both homosexual and religious: rejecting religious identity, rejecting homosexual identity, compartmentalization, and identity integration. It appeared Amy tried to keep these two identities separate which resulted in her distress arising from conflicting positions. She wanted neither to reject being gay nor her religion.

Mark also experienced challenges within his Christian faith community and feeling judged by members of his church, and he spoke of how he experienced congregational prejudice (Davidson, 2000; Schuck & Liddle, 2001). When he told his mother that he identified as “gay”, Mark noted that this might have been confusing. He had previously told her that he was involved in the Christian faith and he appeared to have a perception that in his mother’s mind the two would not be congruent with each other. Here, we see that perhaps the religious teachings were being projected onto his mother, leading to these internal conflicts. Although Mark did not communicate wanting to change his sexuality, it is important to note that these conflicts can often be the trigger for individuals with strong religious affiliations to seek some kind of “conversion therapy” in the hope they could change their sexual identity (Shildo & Schroeder, 2002; Tozer & Hayes, 2004). We see this demonstrated in Kendon’s story where he initially rejected his sexual identity.

Kendon described his own faith community (Jehovah Witness) as a “homophobic religion”. It was communicated to him that prayer could “cure his homosexual weakness” and Kendon appeared to hold this view, believing that he was not gay. It appeared that his religion was important to him and therefore it was “more realistic to consider changing sexual orientation than abandoning one’s religion of origin” (Haldeman, 2004, p.694). When his grandmother found his diary that included sexual fantasies towards the same sex, she turned to the faith community for support. Although Kendon did not ‘come out’ to his family at this stage, these experiences appeared to facilitate a belief that identifying as “gay” was wrong and so impacted his ‘coming out’ to family by initially suppressing his feelings. I would suggest that feelings of shame forced Kendon to internalise and initially reject a ‘gay’ identity.
The Influence of Digital and New Media

The next Thematic Concept relates to the fact that the adolescent and parent stories frequently refer to various forms of media, in particular TV and social media (e.g., Facebook, YouTube and Twitter). It has been suggested that youth in general use online spaces to explore identities, behaviours and lifestyles (Hillier & Harrison, 2007; Pascoe, 2011). I gathered from the participant accounts that the digital age increased awareness around sexuality and provided adolescents with online information that was not available offline, or that going to seek that information offline might ‘out’ the adolescent. The participant stories also discussed various digital media, such as text messaging, social media and the use of mobile telephones in the facilitation of ‘coming out’ and actual disclosure to family.

All four adolescents placed a strong emphasis upon the impact of social media. Pempek, Yermolayeva and Calvert (2009) found that adolescents and young adults can spend on average around 30 minutes a day just on Facebook alone. The four adolescents in this study reported anxiety that liking posts or writing about LGBT issues on social media might ‘out them’ to people who were unaware of their sexual identity. In particular, Amy, Mark and Thanos were all concerned that this would lead to their family knowing about them. Social media appeared to be a medium all the adolescents needed to navigate in the facilitation process of ‘coming out’. Amy reported experiencing fear that her family would find out from social media that she was ‘gay’. It appeared to be a factor that influenced her own decision in ‘coming out’ to her family. She believed it was important to speak directly with her parents so they did not find out about her sexuality from Facebook. This appeared to be an influencing factor for Thanos, too, as he also feared his parents might find out from social media. After ‘coming out’ to their families, both of these adolescents felt they could be more open on social media, using it as a medium to raise awareness around issues facing the LGBT community. Alexander and Losh (2010) reported that social networking sites are places where adolescents can discuss and explore their ‘coming out’ narratives. The emergence of the Internet has enabled individuals to explore aspects of their identity due to the way it permits anonymity. In the past, these aspects would most likely have been hidden in the offline world due to the fear of societal disapproval (Turkle, 1995). However, now these offline experiences can be
explored in a variety of media online, an observation supported by the findings of this current study.

Kendon discussed his social media accounts, telling me that he had one for his friends based in the UK and one for friends based in Trinidad. It appeared that this was due to his anxiety that his Trinidadian friends, in particular those from his past faith community, would find out that he was ‘gay’ via social media and this might be problematic for him. Mark also discussed his social media and some of the challenges he faced within his church community. In his story, he told me of how his grandmother had seen posts that he had made on Facebook around “gay rights”. These posts facilitated a conversation between Mark and his grandmother around his sexuality, where he ‘came out’ to her in a conversation at a family gathering as she questioned him about the Facebook posts.

Amy talked about a lesbian drama on television call the L-Word. She identified that this programme made her confront and reflect upon her own sexuality by raising her curiosity. Brown (2002) stated that the mass media is “an increasingly accessible way for people to learn about and see sexual behaviour” (p.42). However, with this in mind, it is important to note a lack of representation of lesbian, gay and bisexual youth within mainstream media. In a 2006 study into the BBC’s portrayal of ‘gay people’ and their lives on UK television, Cowan and Valentine reported only a limited number of gay characters. Furthermore, they stated that gay lives are five times more likely to be portrayed in negative terms, often with gay people being the subject of jokes and characters being portrayed in clichéd stereotypes. They also pointed out that lesbian representation within the media was minimal. I would argue that these findings are highly relevant for this study to consider, and the media should be viewed as a source of potential influence upon adolescents. Stereotypical or unflattering portrayals could further alienate adolescents and contribute to distress around their sexual identity.

Thanos also discussed the influence of digital media and how it increased his own awareness. He informed me of how he watched videos on YouTube around ‘coming out’ in the months leading up to telling his friends and parents. Thanos found these
helpful, providing information and that he was not alone in the challenges around accepting his sexuality.

Mark explained how he ‘came out’ to his mother by telephone. Although he stated in his story that he regretted telling her in this way, I believe it illustrates the influence of digital media on the decision making process in ‘coming out’ to the family. Using a digital medium enabled him to disclose his sexual identity but in a way that he perhaps viewed as being safe, placing himself in a less vulnerable position compared with doing this face-to-face. This was a similar finding from the parent stories. Karen told me that her son texted her informing her that he was ‘gay’ and Tracey’s son posted a status on Facebook saying that he was ‘gay’.

The participant stories strengthen the findings of Craig and McInroy (2014), indicating that digital and new media impact the ‘coming out’ process and identity development for adolescents (e.g. access information, provided education and exploration around identities). However, despite an increased use of internet-based media among LGBTQ youth, little is still known around the way in which it influences identity development and ‘coming out’.

**The Influence of the Family**

The family forms another Thematic Concept in adolescent and parent stories; the family appeared to have a significant influence on the adolescents’ decisions to ‘come out’. As adolescents transition to young adulthood, parents still play a critical role in shaping the health of their children (Arnett, 2000). Additionally, recent research suggests that lower levels of family connectedness could lead to poorer health related outcomes for sexual minorities (Needham & Austin, 2010) and that family acceptance of sexual identity predicts greater esteem, social support and general health (Ryan et al., 2010). Therefore, I believe it is important to reflect upon and understand the impact of family influences.

Within the wider literature, the decision to disclose sexual identity to the family is reported to be a dilemma for LGB adolescents and is supported by the findings of this research. In the complexity of this challenge, LGB adolescents perceive and fear
negative reactions to such a disclosure (D’Augelli, & Hershberger, 1993; Willoughby et al., 2006). All the adolescent and parent stories communicated feelings around fear in telling a family member, in particular parents, about sexual identity. Lasser and Tharinger (2003) discuss how this perceived impact can lead to “elaborate efforts to pretend that one is something other than what he or she is” (p.240). This “visibility management” (Lasser & Tharinger, 2003, p.237) was evident within the adolescent stories, not only just to family members, but peers too. Visibility management is a process that individuals utilise, over their entire lifespan, to facilitate how ‘visible’ they wish their sexual orientation to be. However, what led to this fear and the need to conceal sexual identity from the family?

In considering the participant stories, it seemed that family was a place where messages were communicated to adolescents around sexuality. I learned from Amy that her father frequently communicated his views to her that he “wouldn’t want an openly gay person in his church.” As Amy told her story, it was evident this increased her anxieties further around ‘coming out’. Although her father was not aware initially of Amy’s sexual identity, from her perspective it was clear that she felt he was talking about her. Amy’s father’s comments resulted in a conflict for her that appeared to influence her need to conceal her sexual identity. Amy explained that she had a desire to help others from a religious background who were struggling with sexual identity. She explained that in order to achieve this, she needed to be more “visible” in her own sexual identity. This desire resulted in her making the decision to disclose her sexual identity to her parents. This supports Willoughby et al.’s (2006) argument around exchange theory, which stated that an individual will make choices around disclosure in regards to costs and rewards. It appeared Amy’s desire to be more “visible” to support others was the reward, but she recognised the cost could be rejection by her parents.

Thanos also talked about hearing homophobic remarks from his parents while growing up, which increased his fears about ‘coming out’. It appeared that he was worried they might reject him due to their views. Again, similar to Amy, this was an influencing factor which spurred his desire to conceal sexual identity. This finding supports the argument by Waldner and Magruder (1999) that parents often assume children are heterosexual. As a result, they state that heterosexual norms and values
will often remain unchallenged in the family. I later learned from Thanos in his story that his father used these homophobic remarks so that Thanos would not identify as ‘gay’. Perhaps this was his father’s way of communicating societal norms and values to him, although creating distress for Thanos in the process. Karen explained how a fleeting comment following an argument with her “gay friend” was overheard by her son in his early teens. When her son did disclose his sexual identity to his mother he explained his belief that she was homophobic, referring back to this comment that he had overheard many years previously.

I believe these findings around messages communicated within the family environment support the role that parents can play in the process of an adolescent making a decision to ‘come out’ and also, more broadly, in their development. The manner in which issues of sexuality are spoken about within the family home seemed to influence an adolescent and their decision to disclose sexual identity to their parents. We also must be mindful that when adolescents disclose sexual identity, they can often still be living with their parents or are at least in some way financially dependent upon them (D’Augelli, Grossman, Starks & Sinclair, 2010; Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003b). Therefore, it is not surprising that anxiety was evident within the participant stories around disclosing to parents, and telling them about sexual identity can be viewed as “a difficult and delicate process” (Denes & Afifi, 2014, p.299).

As adolescents navigate the process of ‘coming out’, they may sometimes tell siblings before telling their parents. It is suggested that this can be a way that an adolescent can gauge how family members might react (Savin-Williams, 1998 & Beaty, 1999). We learned this to be the case in the story of Amy, Kendon and Thanos who all disclosed to a sibling prior to telling a parent or, in Kendon’s case, his grandmother who was his main caregiver. Amy reported that her sister did not react well to the news and I would suggest this perhaps increased anxieties further in regards to telling her parents. When Thanos told his sister, he explained how she disclosed to him that she identified as bi-sexual; his revelation prompted his sister to disclose her sexual identity to him. Kendon explained how his sister received his news about him self-identifying as ‘gay’ well, and told him that she had known for a long time that he was ‘gay’.
In considering disclosure to parents, it has been suggested that there can be differences between parents. Within the research literature, mothers are frequently the first point of contact for disclosure over fathers. Mothers and sisters often appear to be more accepting to sexual identity disclosures within the family (D’Augelli, 1998; Savin-Williams, 1998; Morrow, 2004; Toomey & Richardson, 2009). This study presented mixed findings in support of this literature. Amy and Thanos both disclosed to their fathers first and their mothers second. Mary explained how her son ‘came out’ to his father before her. Mark told his mother before telling his father and Karen and Tracey discussed how they were told before the fathers. I learned in Tracey’s story that her son’s father (from whom she was divorced) did not respond well to the news that his son was ‘gay’. In considering Kendon’s story, he did not talk of his parents and explained how his grandmother took care of him. Therefore, family circumstances make it difficult to draw firm conclusions. However, I did note that in Kendon’s story, an aunt was told prior to his grandmother which also highlights that disclosure does not just happen within the immediate family but the extended family, too.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I discussed the analysis presented in Chapter Four, contextualising my findings within existing literature. I considered the structure of the participant stories and how the narrative accounts answered my research questions. These accounts discussed several influencing factors that appeared to impact upon the process of ‘coming out’ to the family. Further discussion was assisted by developing five ‘plots’ (Polkinghorne, 1995, Riessman, 2008) that appeared to be influential within the participant narratives. The five identified plots, marked as Thematic Concepts, were:

- **Plot One**: The influence of self, which discussed how the adolescents had a sense of knowing something was different regarding their sexuality. The parents also had an awareness that their adolescent might identify as a non-heterosexual.
- **Plot Two**: The influence of the school considered the impact this system had upon the adolescent and sexual identity.
• Plot Three: The influence of culture and religion discussed how this impacted upon the ‘coming out’ journey in adolescent disclosure of sexual identity to family.

• Plot Four: The influence of digital and new media discussed the online and offline impact upon the disclosure of sexual identity, with some adolescents also using online media as a tool to facilitate ‘coming out’.

• Plot Five: The influence of the family in adolescent disclosure to family members around their self-identified sexuality.

This discussion shows how my analysis supports the existing literature around disclosure of sexual identity to family. In Chapter Six, the final chapter of my thesis, I discuss the strengths and limitations of this study, its contribution to knowledge and the implications of analysis of the participant stories. I also offer a personal reflection of my own process in undertaking this study.
Chapter Six: Conclusion

Introduction
The purpose of this chapter is to present a summary of my research, provide an overview of the conclusions and consider the implications of my analysis for the field of counselling psychology. The limitations of this current study and areas for future research will also be explored. Finally, I will reflect on how carrying out this research has impacted upon me.

Purpose and Summary of Current Study
This current study was interested in exploring adolescent stories around the process in disclosure of sexual identity to the family. It collected stories from four adolescents around their experiences of ‘coming out’ to their family, and three stories from parents around their experiences of their child ‘coming out’ to them. Again, it must be repeated that these parents were not related to the adolescents within this study. The purpose of including the parent voice was to offer further reflections into the process of the disclosure of sexual identity within the family. I was particularly interested in how these personal accounts were structured and in the plots that developed within their narratives. It was anticipated that these stories would enhance understanding around potential influences impacting upon an adolescent’s decision to disclose sexual identity to the family. It was hoped that these findings would also assist and inform the profession of counselling psychology in clinical practice. The following research questions guided my study:

1. What can we learn from adolescents’ stories about ‘coming out’ to the family?

2. What can we learn from parental stories about adolescents ‘coming out’ to the family?
These questions were explored using narrative interviews with seven research participants within this study. They were recruited through snowball sampling from Manchester, England and Belfast, Northern Ireland. Using narrative interviews, data was collected using semi-structured interviews by telephone or in person to elicit personal experiences around the process of ‘coming out’ to the family. As highlighted in Chapter Three, a single open-ended question was used at the beginning of the research interviews:

- Adolescents: I would like to hear about your experiences of ‘coming out’ to your family. You can tell your story as you wish and I will only use minimal prompts as we talk. So for example, I may say something like:

  1. Tell me more about that.
  2. Have you any examples of that?
  3. What happened then?

- Parents: I would like to hear about your experiences of when your son or daughter ‘came out’ to you. You can tell your story as you wish and I will only use minimal prompts as we talk. So for example, I may say something like:

  1. Tell me more about that.
  2. Have you any examples of that?
  3. What happened then?

These questions and prompts were used to encourage the participants to tell their story. Also in Chapter Three, I explained how following the telling of their experiences of ‘coming out’ to the family, I asked questions to assist me in gaining a deeper understanding of their stories. However, these non-narrative responses were not analysed. Data analysis was applied to the participant stories using Labov’s (1972, 1997) structural analysis, presented in Chapter Four. Several concepts were also developed to highlight the main plots that ran throughout the participant stories as described by Polkinghorne (1995) and Riessman (1993; 2000) and presented in Chapter Five. The structural analysis found that each story was told around a series of complicating actions that developed a chronological order of events leading up to the disclosure of sexual identity to family. Although participants were asked about
the event of ‘coming out’ to his or her family, I learned of many complicating actions that took place over many years, before the actual disclosure to family. Five recurrent plots, marked as Thematic Concepts, were identified within the participants’ narrative accounts that appeared to influence an adolescent’s decision to disclose sexual identity to family:

- Plot One: The influence of self: a sense of knowing something;
- Plot Two: The Influence of the school environment;
- Plot Three: The influence of culture and religion;
- Plot Four: The influence of the digital age/new media;
- Plot Five: The influence of the family.

The following section presents the conclusions that I reached from the analysis of the seven participant stores.

**Conclusions**

The adolescents within this study discussed an early sense of knowing that something was ‘different’ about them compared to their peers. This awareness resulted in the questioning of sexual identity. In two of the three parent stories, they explained how they and other family members had an awareness that something was different with their child from a young age and even suspected that their child would identify as ‘gay’ in later life.

Educational settings appeared to be where an adolescent’s differences to his or her peers became amplified. The school was a place where victimisation and homophobic bullying occurred, impacting the participants by making them hide their sexual identity from their peers and others. How the teaching staff addressed the issue of homophobia and victimisation within the school setting was viewed as unsatisfactory by some participants.

Wider culture and organised religion were significant influences that appeared to increase conflict between cultural and religious identity and sexual identity. Again, the sense of ‘difference’ was highlighted. Congregational rejection due to religious
teachings and not conforming to cultural and societal norms was experienced, resulting in internalised homophobia and increased experiences of distress.

Digital and social media appeared to be a space where adolescents worried that their sexual identity might be exposed. After ‘coming out’ to family it was a space to express their feelings and raise awareness around LGB issues. Online media also facilitated their learning to explore sexual identity and was used by some adolescents to facilitate ‘coming out’.

The family was a place where messages were communicated to adolescents around homosexuality. The family appeared to increase anxiety for adolescents around disclosing sexual identity. Siblings were often told before parents and mothers selected over fathers in disclosure to parents.

Research Contributions to Knowledge
I would suggest that this research contributed to existing literature in three ways.

Firstly, although, there are studies that focus upon ‘coming out’ and in particular to family, literature is limited around the relationship between LGB and family members around this process (Bertone & Pallotta-Chiarollia, 2012). Therefore, my study fills this gap in knowledge by providing further insight into the ‘coming out’ process to the family. It focused upon the personal and unique experiences of the seven participants. This study supports past literature that suggests anxiety can be created around the ‘coming out’ process, in particular to family.

Secondly, to my knowledge this is one of the first studies that focused solely upon the event of ‘coming out’ to family, using a narrative inquiry. Using this methodology enabled the collection of a rich and in-depth data set, in the form of participant stories as presented in Chapter Five. It contributes to knowledge by presenting the many influences that preceded the disclosure of sexual identity to family, contributing to existing literature within this field.
Thirdly, this study identified the significance of digital and new media within the participant stories. Existing literature is limited around the impact of adolescents ‘online’ lives in the development of their sexual identity. To my knowledge the distinction between ‘online’ and ‘offline’ lives, has yet be to fully explored in relation to the development of sexual identity. As the use of digital and new media become more prominent within society, I would suggest more research in this area is needed.

**Implications for Counselling Psychology**

Having considered the conclusions from my analysis of the participant stories, I will now discuss the implications of my analysis for the clinical practice of counselling psychologists.

Counselling psychologists need to be mindful when working with LGB individuals that the latter exist within systems. The social interactions within these systems can potentially expose adolescents to discrimination, resulting in internalised homophobia or externalised homophobia in their social environments. This was evident in all of the participant stories. It is well recognised within the literature that LGB individuals can be reluctant to disclose sexual identity to mental health professionals due to the fear of being discriminated against (King & McKeown, 2003). Therefore, I suggest in considering ‘otherness’, counselling psychologists must bridge this gap by building the therapeutic relationship through the humanistic values underpinning the profession. By engaging in therapeutic work with LGB adolescents, we have the potential to empower them, providing a space for their voice to be heard, a voice which can so often be silenced due to fear of rejection.

Within the participant stories, the use of social media and digital technology was reported. Counselling psychologists need to consider the online and offline lives of LGB adolescents within their therapeutic work. Some of the adolescents within this study discussed using the Internet to seek information and to explore their sexual identity. It was also used as means to express their belonging to the LGB community after ‘coming out’. With this in mind, offering online therapy and information around sexual identity should be considered. I argue that this allows anonymity, which may be useful to assist LGB individuals to access support that they might not do offline.
would suggest that this reluctance to seek support offline might be due to anxiety that someone might ‘out’ their sexual identity to others and, as already highlighted, a fear of discrimination by the mental health professional.

The education system was a space where homophobia was either directly experienced or witnessed by the adolescents. With counselling psychologists becoming more involved in schools (Kenny, Waldo, Warter & Barton, 2002), I suggest this places the profession in a unique position to address issues of discrimination within these institutions. I feel that as the profession continues to develop its own professional identity, its positioning within the area of social justice (Cutts, 2013) means that addressing issues around minority status and discrimination are critical areas to be engaging with.

As a result of the analysis of the stories within this research, I argue that as a profession we should be “proactive in effecting change, which ultimately will lead to improvement of quality of lives and the psychological well-being” in sexual minority clients (BPS, 2012, p.7). We have the potential to assist in positively influencing policies relating to LGB adolescents and promoting their inclusion within society. Cooper (2009) refers to counselling psychology as ‘ethics in action’ (p.120) and highlighted that we should not just be held within these humanistic values, but actually put this into practice. This can be achieved by providing “competent and non-judgemental care” to sexual minority populations (Society for Adolescent Health & Medicine, 2013, p.506) within the therapy room.

**Implications for Future Research**

This research was interested in hearing personal ‘coming out’ stories to the family. As the findings of this research indicated, there are many influences that appeared to impact upon the process and the decision to tell the family. ‘Coming out’ to the family was not just a one-off event; in other words, the adolescent did not just wake up one day and decide today is the day I am going to tell my family. From the participant stories, I learned there were many experiences that occurred across their life, leading up to the time when they decided to disclose their sexual identity. Further research to understand how these decisions are negotiated within personal and
social worlds would be beneficial. In particular, with regard to the participant sample, there was only one female in this study. It was, moreover, difficult to recruit parents to take part in this research. This is congruent with the limitations reported within the wider literature. It suggests there is an under-representation of lesbian and parent experiences (Lasser & Tharinger, 2003; D’Aughelli & Hershberger, 1993, Willoughby et al., 2006) and bisexual individuals (Shilo & Savaya, 2011) in population samples and this study suggests future research should pay particular attention to the experiences of lesbian and bisexual youth and understanding the experiences of parents with LGB children.

The impact of digital and new media appeared to be an influencing factor upon disclosure of sexual identity within this study. However, little is known about the impact this has upon the development of sexual identity (Craig & McInroy, 2014). Therefore, I suggest research into this area would be beneficial for understanding this phenomenon further.

**Limitations**

The study had a small sample size and this could be viewed as a limitation as the findings cannot be generalised to other LGB individuals or parents of LGB children. However, the aspect of generalisability was not the focus of this research; the participants' stories were not collected to arrive at over-arching conclusions that can be applied to the wider world. Rather, I focused on developing a deeper understanding of the ‘coming out’ process of adolescence and attempt to describe the unique participants’ story in a way that allows others to learn from their experiences. Within these stories I identified several influences upon the ‘coming out’ process to family, “[LGB] youth cannot be understood outside of their surroundings, and their surroundings cannot be completely understood in isolation from them” (Lasser & Tharinger, 2003, p.240). Therefore, despite a small sample size, this enabled a rich data set to be collected, enabling a deeper understanding.

Another potential limitation of this study is linked to the sexual identity of my participants. In my sample of four adolescents, one participant identified as lesbian and no-one identified as bi-sexual. Therefore, the ‘coming out’ experiences of this
identity, remain somewhat silent within this study. However, Price (2011) states that, within research samples, there is often an under-representation of lesbian and bisexual individuals. Thus, it is possible that recruiting lesbian and bisexual participants is challenging with any research conducted within this subject area.

Also, all of the parent participants in this study were female. Therefore, the voice of fathers was not included within this study. In further consideration around this, perhaps this reflects the findings of existing literature that suggested mothers are often told first, before fathers (Cramer & Roach, 1988; Savin-Williams, 1996). Therefore, a larger population of mothers as opposed to fathers were aware of their child’s sexual identity, resulting in an over-representation of them within this study.

Finally, it is important to note that I identified a number of methodological limitations, which are explore further in the following section.

**Methodological Reflection**

The selection of a narrative method facilitated the collection of the seven participant stories which were presented in Chapter Four. I feel that using a qualitative approach was a strength and enabled my exploration around the disclosure of sexual identity by adolescents to the family. Collecting these stories using a narrative approach allowed for a richness in the data collected.

Furthermore, I believe snowball sampling was a useful method to use within the research design. It enabled multiple starting points and assisted me in overcoming some of the challenges that can be encountered when recruiting vulnerable and hard to reach populations (Martin & Dean, 1993). However, despite it being helpful, I did face some difficulties in recruiting for this study. Within some of the organisations that I approached, I experienced gate-keeper bias in which staff felt some of their service users were too vulnerable to advertise this research to. It is also important to note that while a number of individuals did express an interested in taking part in this study, after learning more they took the informed decision not to take part. This highlights the silence that can often remain within minority populations.
The study had a small sample size and, therefore, this could be viewed as a limitation as the findings cannot be generalised to other LGB individuals or parents of LGB children. However, the aspect of generalizability was not the focus of this research; these stories were not collected to arrive at over-arching conclusions that can be applied to the wider world. My research view is that these stories were unique to the individual story-tellers and the purpose of their collection was not to make generalisations but simply to present what was narrated. I argue that these most definitely can contribute to wider discussions and be contextualised within other LGB research, but this research stresses the importance of an individual’s unique story.

In Chapter Three, I discussed the epistemological positioning of a narrative method, producing a social constructionist understanding of knowledge. Smith and Sparks (2006) highlighted a number of theoretical tensions within narrative inquiry. One of these was how one conceptualises one’s sense of ‘self’ within a story, a point upon which I will briefly reflect here. Although the focus of this research was not upon ‘self-conceptualisation’, but the event of ‘coming out’ to the family, I argue for the need to be mindful around self-identity within this kind of research. I needed to consider the concept of ‘self’ in relation to the development of sexual identity. In particular, how this might be narrated within participant stories. In considering the nature of narrative, one theoretical view is that identity is a life story which will change over the life course, although there is a continuity within the inner narrative. This is the view that I held in relation to this research. I argue my findings support the view that the various complicating actions and evaluations within participant stories communicated experience and assisted in gaining insight into ‘self’.

In further consideration of epistemology, I needed to be mindful around what it was within the participant stories that I was interested in. Smith and Sparks (2006) suggested there are two areas of interest to the narrative researcher. Of primary interest will be the content of the story (what the story was about), but also how the stories are told. I felt this current research was more concerned with the latter and this was my reason for the selection of a Labovian (1972) analysis. Nevertheless, I would suggest I did also consider content within my study, as presented in Chapter Five. One of the limits of a Labovian approach is that it can result in important information being missed (Frank, 2000). Therefore, an adaption of Polkinghorne’s
(1995) ‘plots’ as discussed by Riessman (1993, 2000) assisted in ameliorating this limitation by considering the content of the stories and not only the structure. Upon reflection, initially I found this tension between content and structure difficult to grasp and found it to be a challenging aspect to overcome in my use of this method.

Reflecting upon the narrative analysis, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) emphasise that this approach is open to interpretation. Although I have taken measures to reduce researcher bias within this study, as outlined in Chapter Three, the narrative reflects the co-constructed nature of stories. With this in mind, a different researcher may have generated different data. As an inside researcher my interpretation of the data may have had a different focus to a researcher who does not position themselves as belonging within the LGB&T community and thus generating different findings (Bruner, 1990; Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). Due to the richness of the data collected within the participant stories, these are inevitably open to multiple interpretations.

**Personal Reflexivity**

In September 2015, as I sat with a colleague who was launching her new YouTube channel, I was feeling very vulnerable: this colleague had asked me to come along to do a media interview where I would share my own ‘coming out’ story. It was in that moment I really connected to many emotions that my research participants might have experienced in taking part in this study. In their sharing, I feel connected to their stories, recognising the co-constructed nature of narrative. I believe it took great courage to step forward and be part of this research, especially considering how these adolescents for many years were silenced due to the many fears around being rejected by others. I felt privileged to create a space for both the adolescents and parents within my study to tell their story and I was struck by the honest reflections in these accounts. At times, I felt emotional as I was able to connect with some of the experiences narrated and I reflected on my own ‘coming out’ journey. I noted that I was particularly emotional following the telephone interview with Karen after I had heard her account of witnessing her son being subjected to homophobic bullying. As I continued to collect participant stories, I soon realised that narrative is more than
just telling a story (Duff & Bell, 2002) and became aware of how the narratives related to deeper and much wider discourses within society.

Embarking on this research as a novice narrative researcher, I did not realise the challenges that lay ahead. As someone who likes to have a set structure to follow, I very quickly realised the fluidity of narrative research. I initially struggled with getting to grips with this methodology and, I must honestly add, viewed narrative as a curse. However, as I progressed through this process, what I once viewed as a curse soon became a blessing. I recognised the flexibility that such a methodology brought and how it allowed me to present the individuals’ stories and then consider how they fit within wider discourses. Unlike a positive research philosophy, selecting a narrative analysis enabled me to present the unique stories and not to seek generalisation within these stories. In considering the plots developed, participants did present similar issues, but these were uniquely experienced by each participant and narrated within their stories.

Final Concluding Thoughts and Beyond

This research has demonstrated that elements of fear were central to all the participant narratives. Moreover, it has shown that the sources of this fear are many, and fear was not just created around a sexual identity label. Within their stories, I would suggest it was the underlying fear of the unknown and the possibility of being rejected due to ‘difference’ that appeared to create conflict and distress. In understanding the meaning of this fear, I argue that it was socially constructed by socio-political, historical and psychological factors rather than being an intrinsic part of the identifier. Therefore, in understanding the disclosure of sexual identity we must consider this process beyond only the sexual identity label. I believe it is the wider socio-political relations with others, and the development and disclosure of a self-identified sexual identity label narrated within the participant stories that create meaning.

In recognising the multiple threads of fear around ‘coming out’ that unfold over the individual’s adolescent and beyond, this research confirms Bohan’s (1996) finding that ‘coming out’ should not be viewed as a one-time event, but an on-going process.
evolving across the lifespan. This was evident in the adolescent and parent stories, as they told me not only about experiences of disclosing sexual identity to family, but also discussed many other complicating actions and evaluated these events within their narration.

Narrative inquiry enables us to go beyond stories by “recognizing that these rest on deeper stories of which people are often unaware” (Bell, 2002, p. 209). I argue that it is important for counselling psychologists to be aware of the wider narratives and assist the storyteller in bringing these deeper stories into their awareness. I also suggest that the findings of this research contribute to the wider discourses around ‘marginalisation’, an “analytic category that has its own history (Hurley, 2007, p.162-163). Therefore, counselling psychologists should be mindful of this when working with LGB clients, their families and the community. I believe that as a profession we should be aiming for justice and equality within society regardless of sexual identity; I see equality as one component in addressing the wider issue of ‘marginalisation’. An individual can be equal within the law, but legislative changes to address issues of discrimination and equality do not necessarily result in true equity within the wider society.

I believe counselling psychology must be pro-active in advancing educative interventions to address heteronormativity and discrimination within society. As a result of this research, taking this view forward, I approached a production company with a briefing to create a documentary to raise awareness around the issues I have presented in this research. After several meetings and discussions with commissioning editors a production has now been commissioned with one of the leading television broadcasters within the UK. In terms of my own clinical practice, I am in the process of creating a specialised psychology service for the LGBT community, enabling access to online psychological support and advice around the many issues this community can experience.

Chapter Summary
In this current chapter, I revisited the purpose of this current study. I presented brief concluding statements from the analysis of the seven participant stories. The
implications of this study were then considered in relation to the impact upon the profession of counselling psychology and clinical practice. I also reflected upon the implications for future research, offered a reflective discussion around my methodology and personal reflectivity around the impact of this research upon me as a researcher. I ended the chapter by offering a final reflection and moving beyond this research into my professional career as a counselling psychologist.
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Appendices
Appendix One: Recruitment Email to Organisations
Dear (insert organisation or point of contact staff)

I am a trainee psychologist in my final year on the Doctorate in Counselling Psychology course at the University of Manchester. As part of our professional training each student must undertake a piece of research, which is the reason for my contact. Please note I have a valid Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate and my most recent check was completed in May 2014.

I am currently recruiting participant’s to take part in a qualitative study. Firstly, young people age 16-25 years who self-identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual. Secondly, I am also keen to recruit parents of young people age 16-25 years to hear about their experiences of when their son or daughter disclosed their sexual identity to them. However, it is important to note that children and parents from the same family are both unable to take part in the study due to limitations of confidentiality.

The current study has been presented to an academic review panel and has also been granted ethical approval from the University of Manchester. It aims to explore the experiences of self-identified gay or lesbian adolescents and young adults in the disclosure of their sexual identity to their family.

I would be grateful if you could email these posters to any service users you feel might be interested in taking part. Please feel free to print the attached posters and display them on any noticeboards within your organisation. You may wish to suggest to those receiving the email to forward this on to others who might be interested in taking part in this study.

Should you require any further information please don’t hesitate to contact me.

Regards,

GLENN MASON
Counselling Psychologist in Doctoral Training
BACP (Accred.) Cognitive Behaviour Psychotherapist
Appendix Two: Adolescent Recruitment Poster
AGED 16-25?
DO YOU IDENTIFY AS
GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL OR OTHER?

THEN PLEASE GET IN TOUCH WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE OF “COMING OUT” TO YOUR FAMILY

EMAIL GLENN FOR MORE INFORMATION
GLENN.MASON@POSTGRAD.MANCHESTER.AC.UK
Appendix Three: Adolescent Participant Information Sheet
Participant Information Sheet (16-25)

You are being invited to take part in a research study that is being conducted as part of my training as a student undertaking a professional doctorate in counselling psychology. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

Who will conduct the research?

The study will be conducted by Glenn Mason, a trainee counselling psychologist from the School of Education, Ellen Wilkinson Building, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL.

Title of the Research

Family Disclosure of Sexual Orientation by Self-Identified Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual Adolescents and Young Adults.

What is the aim of the research?

The aim of this study is to explore the experiences of self-identified lesbian, gay or bisexual adolescents in the disclosure of their sexual orientation to their family.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen to participate in this study as you self-identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual and are aged 16-25 years old.

What would I be asked to do if I took part?

If you decide to take part, we will arrange and time and meeting place suitable to meet for you to tell your story about your experiences of ‘coming out’ to your family. This meeting will be only you and me none of the other participants will be present.
and will be audio recorded. The meeting should last for approximately 60-90 minutes in duration.

What happens to the data collected?

The audio recording of our conversation will be transcribed and will be deleted after transcription. The electronic document containing the transcription will be kept in a password protected file. Only the researcher will have access to the transcription. Some quotations may be used in the write-up of the research, but these will not be attributed to anyone in any identifiable way. They may also be used for training purposes if you consent to this.

How is confidentiality maintained?

All efforts will be made to ensure that confidentiality is maintained. As mentioned above, the electronic data will be kept in password-protected files and there will be no identifiable information contained within the write-up of the report. You will be referred to as a participant in any written reports and any quotes used will be non-identifiable. These safeguards are in compliance with the University of Manchester regulations, the British Psychological Society and Health and Care Professionals Council on data protection and conducting ethical research.

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part and if you do you will be asked to sign a consent form (see attached) when we first meet. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any stage without giving a reason.

Will I be paid for participating in the research?

No

What is the duration of the research?

The duration of the research that you will be involved in, if you decide to participate, will be one meeting that will last for approximately 60-90 minutes.
Where will the research be conducted?

At a public location that is convenient for you such as a room at a local church, community centre, library, GP surgery etc. However, if you prefer we can arrange the interview by telephone or Skype.

Will the outcomes of the research be published?

The outcomes of the study will form part of a University thesis and there may be further publications in academic journals. Again information will be non-identifiable.

Contact for further information

Researcher: Glenn Mason, Trainee Counselling Psychologist.
Email: glenn.mason@postrad,manchester.ac.uk

Supervisor Team: Terry Hanley, Lecturer in Counselling Psychology, at the University of Manchester.
Email: erica.burman@manchester.ac.uk
Phone: 0161 275 3636

If there are any issues regarding this research that you would prefer not to discuss with the researcher or his supervisor, please contact the Research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator by either writing to 'The Research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator, Research Office, Christie Building, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL', by emailing: Research-Governance@manchester.ac.uk, or by telephoning 0161 275 7583 or 275 8093
Appendix Four: Adolescent Participant Registration Form
Thank you for your interest. If you wish to take part in this study then please complete this form below and I will contact you by phone. This will enable me to arrange a time and location to hear you story around your experiences of ‘coming out’ to your family.

**Name:**

**DOB:**

**Location:**

**Contact Number:**

*Please indicate a response to these questions below (delete as appropriate):*

1. I self-identify as: **GAY** | **LESBIAN** | **BISEXUAL** | **OTHER**

2. I have read the information provided and I am happy to be contacted by telephone to arrange a meeting: **YES** | **NO**

3. I consent to the researcher leaving a message letting me know they have tried to reach me if I am unable to answer the phone call: **YES** | **NO**

Please email this completed form to: glenn.mason@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk within 2 weeks, following the date of receipt, of the participant interest and information email.

Please note this personal information will be held on a password-protected folder and destroyed on completion of the research. It will not be passed on to any third party.
Appendix Five: Adolescent Participant Consent Form
**Participant Consent Sheet (16-25)**

Family Disclosure of Sexual Orientation by Self-Identified Gay or Lesbian Adolescents and Young Adults.

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below:

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<th>Please Initial Box</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet on the above project and have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask any questions and have had these questions answered satisfactorily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>I understand that the interview will be audio recorded and transcribed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>I agree to the use of anonymous quotes in any write-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>I agree that any data collected may be published in anonymous form in academic books or journals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>I agree that any data collected may be used in anonymous form for training purposes</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

I agree to take part in the above project:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of participant</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Signature</th>
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Appendix Six: Parent Recruitment Poster
PARENTS...

DOES YOUR SON OR DAUGHTER IDENTIFY AS

GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL OR OTHER?

THEN PLEASE GET IN TOUCH WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE OF THEM “COMING OUT” TO YOUR FAMILY

EMAIL GLENN FOR MORE INFORMATION

GLENN.MASON@POSTGRAD.MANCHESTER.AC.UK
Appendix Seven: Parent Participant Information Sheet
Parent Participant Information Sheet

You are being invited to take part in a research study that is being conducted as part of my training as a final year student undertaking a professional doctorate in counselling psychology. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why this research is being conducted and what it will involve.

Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. If there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information email me at glenn.mason@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Who will conduct the research?

The study will be conducted by Glenn Mason, a trainee counselling psychologist from the School of Education, Ellen Wilkinson Building, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL.

Proposed Title of the Research

Family Disclosure of Sexual Orientation by Self-Identified Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual Adolescents and Young Adults.

What is the aim of the research?

The aim of this study is to explore the experiences of self-identified lesbian, gay or bisexual adolescents and young adults in the disclosure of their sexual orientation to their family.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen to participate in this study, as you are a parent of an adolescent age 16-25 years who self-identifies as lesbian, gay or bisexual.
What would I be asked to do if I took part?

If you decide to take part, we will arrange a time suitable for you to tell your story about your experiences of your son or daughter ‘coming out’ to your family. This meeting will be only you and me none of the other participants will be present and will be audio recorded. The meeting should last for approximately 60-90 minutes in duration. The interview would be a conversation about your experiences.

What happens to the data collected?

The audio recording of our conversation will be transcribed and will be deleted after transcription. The electronic document containing the transcription will be kept in a password protected file. Some quotations may be used in the write-up of the research, but these will not be attributed to anyone in any identifiable way. They may also be used for training purposes if you consent to this.

How is confidentiality maintained?

All efforts will be made to ensure that confidentiality is maintained. As mentioned above, the electronic data will be kept in password-protected files and there will be no identifiable information contained within the write-up of the report. You will be referred to as a participant in any written reports and any quotes used will be non-identifiable. These safeguards are in compliance with the University of Manchester regulations, the British Psychological Society and Health and Care Professionals Council on data protection and conducting ethical research.

What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part and if you do you will be asked to sign a consent form (see attached) when we first meet. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any stage without giving a reason.

Will I be paid for participating in the research?

No.
What is the duration of the research?

The duration of the research that you will be involved in, if you decide to participate, will be one meeting or telephone call that will last for approximately 60-90 minutes.

Where will the research be conducted?

If you wish to meet face to face for this interview it will take place at a public location that is convenient for you such as a room at a local church, community centre, library, GP surgery etc. If you would prefer to have this conducted by telephone this can also be arranged.

Will the outcomes of the research be published?

The outcomes of the study will form part of a University thesis and there may be further publications in academic journals and it may also be used for training purposes. Again information will be non-identifiable.

Contact for further information

Researcher: Glenn Mason, Counselling Psychologist in Doctoral Training.
Email: glenn.mason@postrad.manchester.ac.uk

Supervisor: Professor Erica Burman, Lecturer in Counselling Psychology, at the University of Manchester.
Email: erica.burman@manchester.ac.uk
Phone: 0161 275 3636

If there are any issues regarding this research that you would prefer not to discuss with the researcher or his supervisor, please contact the Research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator by either writing to 'The Research Practice and Governance Co-ordinator, Research Office, Christie Building, The University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL', by emailing: Research-Governance@manchester.ac.uk, or by telephoning 0161 275 7583 or 275 8093
Appendix Eight: Parent Participant Registration Form
Participant Registration Form (Parent)

Thank you for your interest. If you wish to take part in this study then please complete this form below and I will contact you by phone. This will enable me to arrange a time and location to hear your story about your experiences of your son or daughter ‘coming out’ to your family.

Name:

DOB:

Location:

Contact Number:

Please indicate a response to these questions below (delete as appropriate):

1. Is your child between the ages of 16-25 years:  YES | NO

2. How long ago did your child disclose their orientation?
   ______________________

3. Please note the sexual identity of your child: Gay | Lesbian | Bisexual | Other

4. I have read the information provided and I am happy to be contacted by telephone to arrange a meeting:  YES | NO

5. I consent to the researcher leaving a message letting me know they have tried to reach me if I am unable to answer the phone call:  YES | NO

Please email this completed form to: glenn.mason@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk within 2 weeks, following the date of receipt, of the participant interest and information email.
Please note this personal information will be held on a password-protected folder and destroyed on completion of the research. It will not be passed on to any third party.
Appendix Nine: Parent Participant Consent Form
**Participant Consent Sheet (16-25)**

Family Disclosure of Sexual Orientation by Self-Identified Gay or Lesbian Adolescents and Young Adults.

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below:

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Appendix Ten: Contact Details of Support Organisations
THANK YOU FOR TAKING PART

- you may find telling your story has brought up some issues which you may want support around and below are a number of organisations that could support you or provide you with further information should you need it -

**LGBT Organisations North West England & Northern Ireland:**
The Lesbian and Gay Foundation | www.lgf.org.uk | 0845 3 30 30 30
LGBT Youth North West | www.lgbtyouthnorthwest.org.uk | 07900 680725
The Rainbow Project | www.rainbow-project.org | 028 9031 9030

**Sexual Health:**
type in the address below and enter your post code for support in your area.
www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Sexual Health Information and Support/LocationSearch/734

**HIV Support:**
Terrence Higgins Trust | www.tht.org.uk | 0808 802 1221
George House Trust | www.ght.org.uk | 0161 274 4499

**Alcohol and Drug Support:**
Addaction | www.addaction.org.uk | 020 7251 5860
Frank | www.talktopfrank.com | 0800 77 66 00
Appendix Eleven: Worked Example of My Narrative Analysis
Extract from Kedon's Transcript

(And) I was in a homophobic religion. I was a Jehovah’s Witness. One of the reasons why I left home, wasn’t so much the abuse, it was the fact that when I was about, let’s see, about fourteen… my grandmother who I live with, she found my diary where I had described some of my thoughts and fantasies, and she showed that diary to the religious ministers. I was quite embarrassed. I was living in Trinidad at the time. People began to speak about me, so when the next year we came back to England to visit my sister, I decided to run away from my grandmother and go into care. The reason I gave social services, was that, um… was that I was tired of being abused, I wanted to change my circumstances. But the real reason was that I couldn’t face going back to… um, you know, to the congregation where people, um, knew things about me that I tried for so long to hide. At this point, I was still identifying as straight. I just felt that I had a homosexual weakness, that with prayer and time, I would be cleansed. Um… a few years later, when I became a college student and I started living in Manchester, because I was in London then, when we came back to England, I became an atheist and… I suppose after some time, I realised it was fine for me to um… be homosexual. Um… but I kept that to myself for a while. Um… I was perhaps a bit too close to… um, certain straight males. I got some bullying at my sixth form. Well, I considered it to be bullying, but I realise now they were just joking. They probably didn’t know that I was gay, but they made jokes based on a couple of my actions, that destroyed me. I secluded myself, I didn’t really speak to many people after that. I didn’t want to speak to the girls because I felt that they would think I was hitting on them as a straight male, and I was afraid that the guys would realise I wasn’t manly. They would assume I was gay and I would be bullied for that. Um… so… there was that. The first person I came out to, just trying to think, I think I came out to an Internet friend who was… um, an ex of a gay guy that I knew in college. I tried hanging out with a couple of gay people that I knew in college, but they tended to be a bit loud and nasty and they mainly ignored me. But I became friends with this guy’s ex. I took his side in their break-up. I told him… and I started using this student forum called The Student Room. Everybody knows I am gay there, so I was able to be myself, um… speaking to others on there. And then I… I think… I told my sister. She had already guessed I was gay. She has been telling me I was gay for years. But I didn’t want to admit it to myself, first because I thought it was bad, and then even after I felt it was okay, I just felt that… I just felt
offended because the reason why she thought I was gay, wasn’t because I had a
 crush on anybody and I told her. It was because I was slightly effeminate, and I don’t
 like the idea of being a stereotype. And other members of my family, not all of them,
 also realised I was gay for similar reasons. Anyway I admitted this to her, she took it
 all right, because as I said, she had previously guessed. Um… I don’t think I have
 really told anybody else. Um… and then, let’s see… my eighteenth birthday came. I
told, um, somebody I had been befriending sometime at college and then he began
to ignore me after that. So, that was a bit of a shock. Um… I then began using
Grindr, and… I was trying to lose weight at this time because I had eaten to deal with
my college troubles. And then I began to use… I began to hook up on Grindr as a
way to deal with stuff because I enjoyed it. Um, and during the next few months,
because I was in Year Thirteen at this point, I told a few of my college friends about
my orientation, and the people that I told seemed to be okay with it, so that was fine.
Um… and I eventually told other members of my family. I told my aunt, she was fine
with it. I told my grandmother, who was the [inaudible 05:55] in my life, her abuse
that I mentioned. So then [inaudible 06:01] interestingly, because I now care for her.
She isn’t okay with it, but she… [inaudible 06:09]. She even wants to hear about
people I am interested in. Um… but at the same time, she still mentions how wrong it
is on occasion. Um… but I think, secretly, she would prefer what is happening. So
she took it better than I would have thought. She has dementia and I have noticed
that her personality has softened recently, but certainly if I told her, and I still live with
her, there was a good chance she would have kicked me out. So I am glad that I
took responsibility for my own life and I moved out when I could, when I was
fourteen.
**Development of Clauses, Labovian Analysis and Plot Development**

*Key:* (E) evaluation, (O) orientation, (CA) complication action

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Development of Clauses</th>
<th>Labovian Analysis</th>
<th>Plot Development Coding</th>
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<tr>
<td>(And) I was in a homophobic religion.</td>
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<td>Religion</td>
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<td>I was a Jehovah’s Witness.</td>
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<td>One of the reasons</td>
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<td>why I left home,</td>
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<td>wasn’t so much the abuse,</td>
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<td>it was the fact that</td>
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<td>my grandmother</td>
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<td>who I live with,</td>
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<td>she found my diary</td>
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<td>(and) fantasies,</td>
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<tr>
<td>(and) she showed that diary</td>
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I was quite embarrassed.
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People began to speak about me,
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The reason I gave social services, was that, um... was that I was tired of being abused,
I wanted to change my circumstances. But the real reason was (that) I couldn't face going back (to) um, you know, (to) the congregation where people, um,
knew things about me (that) I tried for so long to hide. 
At this point, I was still identifying as straight. 
I just felt (that) I had a homosexual weakness, 
(that) with prayer (and) time, I would be cleansed. 
Um… a few years later, when I became a college student 
(and) I started living in Manchester, because I was in London then, 
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Um… I was perhaps a bit too close (to)… um, certain straight males. 
I got some bullying at my sixth form.
Well, I considered it bullying,
(but) I realise now they were just joking.
They probably didn't know (that) I was gay,
(but) they made jokes based on a couple of my actions,
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(that) I knew in college,
(but) they tended to be a bit loud
(and) nasty
(and) they mainly ignored me.
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with this guy’s ex.
I took his side
in their break-up.
I told him…

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<th></th>
<th>Sexuality</th>
<th>Victimisation</th>
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<td>School</td>
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<td>Peers</td>
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</table>
(and) I started using this student forum called The Student Room. Everybody knows I am gay there, (so) I was able to be myself, um… speaking to others on there. (And) then I… I think… I told my sister. She had already guessed I was gay. She has been telling me I was gay for years. (But) I didn’t want to admit it to myself, first because I thought it was bad, (and) then even after I felt it was okay, I just felt that… I just felt offended because the reason why she thought I was gay, wasn’t because I had a crush on anybody (and) I told her. It was because I was slightly effeminate, (and) I don’t like the idea of being a stereotype.
(And) other members of my family, not all of them, also realised I was gay for similar reasons. Anyway I admitted this to her, she took it all right, because as I said, she had previously guessed. Um… I don’t think I have really told anybody else. Um… and then, let’s see… my eighteenth birthday came. I told, um, somebody I had been befriending sometime at college (and) then he began to ignore me after that. (So), that was a bit of a shock. Um… I then began using Grindr, (and)... I was trying to lose weight at this time because I had eaten (to) deal with my college troubles.
(And) then I began to use…
I began to hook up on Grindr
as a way to deal with stuff
because I enjoyed it.
Um, and during the next few months,
because I was in Year Thirteen at this point,
I told a few of my college friends
about my orientation,
(and) the people that I told
seemed to be okay with it,
so that was fine.
Um… and I eventually told
other members of my family.
I told my aunt,
she was fine with it.
I told my grandmother,
who was the [inaudible 05:55] in my life,
her abuse that I mentioned.
(So) then [inaudible 06:01] interestingly,
because I now care for her.
She isn't okay with it,
(but) she… [inaudible 06:09].

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<th>(CA)</th>
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<tr>
<td>(O)</td>
<td>Peers</td>
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<td>(CA)</td>
<td>Sexuality</td>
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<tr>
<td>(E)</td>
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Um… and I eventually told
other members of my family.
I told my aunt,
she was fine with it.
I told my grandmother,
who was the [inaudible 05:55] in my life,
her abuse that I mentioned.
(So) then [inaudible 06:01] interestingly,
because I now care for her.
She isn't okay with it,
(but) she… [inaudible 06:09].
She even wants to hear about people I am interested in.
Um… but at the same time, she still mentions how wrong it is (on) occasion.
Um… but I think, secretly, she would prefer what is happening.
(So) she took it better than I would have thought.
She has dementia (and) I have noticed (that) her personality has softened recently, (but) certainly if I told her, (and) I still live with her, there was a good chance she would have kicked me out.
(So) I am glad that I took responsibility for my own life.
(and) I moved out when I could, when I was fourteen.