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Quest for balm in Gilead: Disclosure patterns of church-affiliated family members with relatives who have 'come out' as lesbian or gay

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QUEST FOR BALM IN GILEAD: Disclosure patterns of church-affiliated family
members with relatives who have "come out" as lesbian or gay

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THESIS

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Quest for Balm in Gilead: Disclosure patterns of church-affiliated family members who have "come out" as lesbian or gay

ABSTRACT

The researcher conducted a study between September 2005 and March 2006 that explored the disclosure experiences of church-affiliated relatives of lesbians and gays in their mainline church communities. The researcher believed that findings would potentially contribute to the provision of pastoral care in church communities that would improve the life experiences of those family members whose relatives are lesbian or gay.

The study used a combined qualitative and quantitative approach. Interviews took place with 16 family members to discover their disclosure experiences, and an additional 54 family members completed a 30-item questionnaire that sought additional information about disclosure experienced.

The central theme that emerged is called "Quest for Balm in Gilead" with four identified processes: "Wakefulness through Mirror and Faith"; "Anticipation through Mirror and Faith"; Acceptance through Mirror and Faith"; and "Engagement through Mirror and Faith." Participants reported a liberating and empowering experience, whereby "a mirror" had been held up for them by others, as they began to recognize many beliefs, attitudes and behaviours they had previously exhibited themselves. They expressed that the process helped them to more clearly understand "who" they were as people of faith, as members of the body of Christ, and as human persons journeying alongside others, and to come to a place where they could focus on the peace and joy inherent in the Christian love and acceptance of others. The findings are discussed in light of relevant literature, implications are noted, and recommendations for further research are proposed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

wait for others to catch up. I appreciate Jack's interest in the application of his model to my work. And always, I am grateful to God.

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Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the wound of my people?

Jeremiah 8:22

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

It is now more than 30 years since homosexuality was removed from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual II (DSM-II) of the American Psychiatric Association, a manual that aids the diagnosis and classification of mental disorders. Because homosexuality could not be proven to "regularly cause emotional distress or regularly be associated with clinically significant impairment of social functioning" (APA, 1973), it was stricken from DSM II as a criterion for mental illness in 1973. In a position paper entitled "Homosexuality and Sexual Orientation Disturbance: Proposed Change in DSM-II, the APA reported:

> For a mental or psychiatric condition to be considered a psychiatric disorder, it must either regularly cause subjective distress, or regularly be associated with some generalized impairment in social effectiveness or functioning... all of the other mental disorders in DSM-II fulfill either of these two criteria ... Clearly homosexuality, per se, does not meet the requirements for a psychiatric disorder since, as noted above, many homosexuals are quite satisfied with their sexual orientation and demonstrate no generalized impairment in social effectiveness or functioning (1973, p. 1).

In the same document, APA made the following statement:

> A significant proportion of homosexuals are quite bothered by, in conflict with, or wish to change their sexual orientation. There is debate within our profession as to why this is so. Some argue that it is an inevitable result of the underlying conflicts that cause homosexual behaviour in the first place, while others argue that it is

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derived from a host of social and cultural pressures that have been internalized. Nonetheless, some of these individuals come voluntarily for treatment, either to be able to accept their sexual feelings towards members of the same sex, or to increase their capacity for sexual arousal by members of the opposite sex (p. 2).

While the designation has changed, literature reviewed in this study and the voices of participants combine to demonstrate that gay and lesbian individuals still experience both overt and covert incidences of harassment, discrimination and even violence directed toward them because of their sexual orientation (Garnets, Herek & Levy, 1990; Herek, 1993; Moon, 2000; Nolan & Nugua, 2005; Walters & Curran, 2000; Yip, 1997). Because of the stereotypes and prejudice directed toward these people, they are often reluctant to disclose their homosexuality to others, even their own family members.

While the gay rights movement and scholarly publications in the field have made considerable advances in having homosexuality normalized (recognized as a legitimate sexual orientation which is experienced by people from all walks of life), and while we now have a significant amount of information about homosexuality and the experiences of homosexual people, a composite search of a number of electronic databases (PsychInfo, Alta, Cinahl Info, ERIC, PubMed, and SocSci Index) demonstrates that we know considerably less about the experiences of their family members. In particular, this search indicates that we have a paucity of information about the disclosure patterns of family members of homosexuals to their church communities, and about the personal experiences of church-affiliated family members in telling others that their close relative (daughter, son, sister, brother, grand-child or other close relative) is lesbian or gay. This study sought to explore the experiences of these families in their mainline church

communities as they disclosed this information to their pastor/priest/minister and/or others in their church community. It was felt that this information could contribute to the provision of pastoral care in church communities and to the enhancement of the lives of those family members whose relative is lesbian or gay.

This study utilized both qualitative and quantitative methodology. Sixteen interviews were conducted to discover the disclosure patterns of participants and this data were analyzed using the constant comparative process of grounded theory. Additionally, a questionnaire was developed and 54 people completed 30-item Likert Scale questionnaires that sought additional information about participants' disclosure process.

Participants reported that when disclosure occurred, it was a painful process, but it also proved to be liberating and empowering. They also reported that "a mirror" had been held up for them by church members, as they began to recognize beliefs, attitudes and behaviours in others that they had previously exhibited themselves. They related that the process of disclosure, and recognizing their discomfort in disclosing, helped them to more clearly understand "who" they were as people of faith, as members of the body of Christ, and as human persons journeying alongside others, and to come to a place where they could focus on the peace and joy inherent in the Christian love and acceptance of others.

Background Information

Storied experiences tell us so much more than bare facts and figures, help us to understand what happens in the reality of life, and aid us in better appreciating the "why" and the "why not" of what takes place as perceptions change and experiences take on

different meaning. As cognitive beings, we always seek an answer to the question "why?" and seek deeper understanding of that which we do not comprehend (Kant, 2003). This study sought to provide meaning to the "why" question as applied to the disclosure experiences of church-affiliated family members of lesbians and gays, and hoped to formulate meaningful connections between these lived experiences and the implications of pastoral care in mainline church communities. Concerning the reality of these lived experiences, this study sought to understand what it is like for participants as they personally encounter the stigma and stereotypes that still surround homosexuality, and how they make sense of these stereotypes more than 30 years after radical shifts and changes were made in the mental health status surrounding homosexual orientation.

A process of methodological triangulation was utilized that combined hearing the lived experiences of 16 participants through interviews and collecting questionnaire responses that measured the attitudes and beliefs of 54 additional participants. Triangulation is defined by Burns and Grove (1997) as the use of two or more theories, methods, data sources, investigators or analysis methods in a research study (p. 797). Beginning in September of 2005 and finishing in March of 2006, I brought these two methodologies together to explore the experiences of disclosure patterns of church-affiliated family members of those who are lesbian or gay. I considered that an understanding of the personal meaning of these experiences would be an essential element in planning, implementing and evaluating pastoral care for family members of gays and lesbians in mainline church communities, and in providing foundational information for educational curriculum for pastoral counsellors and clergy. Especially necessary, I believed, was the beginning of theory development that would be enriched

through the "voices" of family members who have first hand knowledge of the experience of disclosing the information that a close family member is lesbian or gay to church members and clergy, or have first hand experience of not feeling that they can disclose this information.

The findings from this study can serve as a rudimentary framework and springboard for subsequent research in this area, and ultimately provide explicit knowledge that can potentially affect the pastoral needs of these families. Additional research and knowledge can lead to improvement in this area of pastoral care, and to enhanced pastoral practice, and can serve to detect and correct that which is problematic in the disclosure experiences of these families. Initial findings, I believe, will be beneficial to pastoral counsellors, clergy, church lay leaders, and religious educators in stimulating dialogue allowing for more comprehensive and creative practice decisions, and providing an overall structure from which more effective pastoral support can develop.

The Problem

In October, 2005, *Time,* a leading North American newsmagazine carried, on its front cover the picture of a gay teenager, and the caption, " THE BATTLE OVER GAY TEENS: they are coming out earlier, to a more accepting society…so how did they end up at the front lines of America's cultural war?" (Cloud, 2005). The story inside (pp. 42-51) documented that gays and lesbians are coming out at a much earlier age, and are disclosing their homosexuality in unprecedented numbers (p. 44). The story indicated that the appearance of so many gay adolescents is worrying for social conservatives and

reported that the evangelical anti-gay organization, Exodus International, gets referrals from scores of churches in 45 countries (Exodus International, 2006). This indicates that homosexuality is still not accepted as a legitimate sexual orientation by many churches, and that more and younger homosexuals and their families continue to experience negative attitudes from established organizations, including Christian organizations.

When a family learns that one of their members is lesbian or gay it can be a jolting and even shocking experience, requiring education, time to adjust and support in the adjustment process (Saltzburg, 2004). Those families who are affiliated with a church community at the time of a family member's "coming out" may look for support in that community. Many church teachings and supportive passages of Scripture would suggest that the ideal place to seek support at this time would be from the church [its clergy, other leaders, and its members] (Matthew 11: 28; John 13: 34-35; 1 John 3: 23; 1 John 4: 12; Romans 12:10; Romans 13: 8; Ephesians 4: 2 (The Holy Bible: The New International Version, 2002).[1] The literature, however, indicates that churches might not be forthcoming with support and may be relatively uninformed and uneducated about homosexuality as a distinct, legitimate sexual orientation, and about the issues affecting homosexuals and their family members. Many negative attitudes about homosexuality are based on scanty information, myths, the media and a literal reading of Biblical texts (O'Brien, 1991; Yip, 1997). To confuse matters further, many clergy do not declare a position on homosexuality (Olson and Cage, 2002) and there is a strong correlation between homophobia and religiosity as well as a strong relationship between conservative Protestantism and negative attitudes toward homosexuality (Holtzen, 1993).

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[1] All quotations to the Bible are taken from the New International Version (2002) Student Bible, (Rev. ed).

Given that the prevalence of homosexuality reported in society is estimated to be as high as 10 % (Michael et al., 1994; Gonsiorek, Sell & Weinrich, 1995), many church-affiliated individuals will have family members who are homosexual. Because most, if not all, of these members could potentially benefit from a supportive relationship with clergy and other church members, they may begin by disclosing their family member's homosexuality to someone in the church. This study sought to find out how these disclosures are made, and the nature of the experiences of these individuals in disclosing.

Purpose of The Study

This research project sought to explore the disclosure patterns of church-affiliated families of individuals who are lesbian or gay to those in their mainline church communities. Mainline churches are identified by Bibby (2002) as Anglican, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, United, and Lutheran. Since no Lutherans responded to the advertisements for this study, and Methodists did, participants were from the following denominations: Anglican, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, United, and Methodists.

These family members were affiliated with mainline churches at the time or since a close relative (son, daughter, brother, sister, grand-child) "came out" as lesbian or gay. The researcher sought to discern the experiences of disclosure or lack of disclosure for these family members, and their perceptions of comfort and support experienced from the church community as they disclosed. These experiences are discussed in relationship to current and landmark literature, and examined along the themes that arose in grounded theory analysis as well as in questionnaire analysis.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

While a generalized review of the literature began before interviews were conducted, the major aspects of this literature review took place after analysis of data and as themes arose. This is consistent with the view in qualitative research that consulting the literature too early in the process can potentially create bias, and in ensuring that the content of review is relevant to the themes that arise (Burns and Grove, 1997). This literature review is based on the experiences of participants as they moved from an initial position of having new knowledge (that a relative is lesbian or gay) in a familiar environment (the church), through the pain and confusion surrounding the new knowledge, and the two crucial factors (mirror and faith) that began as wakefulness and anticipation, to a comfortable level of acceptance and engagement (Fig 1-1). This literature review provides a framework and foundation for the analysis of themes that emerged from interview data with church-affiliated family members of those who have come out as lesbian or gay. To these ends, the literature is organized under the following headings: Homosexuality and the Church; Disclosure and the Family; Dimensions of Disclosure; Risks Surrounding Disclosure; The Concept of Empowerment; and The Process of Perspective Transformation.

Homosexuality and the Church

According to Farley (1998), the intensity of negative stereotypes against homosexuals has the power of an unreasonable, self-perpetuating taboo that must be addressed if these issues are to be politically and socially corrected. Stereotypical attitudes such as homophobia are learned in the environment, and can be perpetuated in the home, in

school, in church, on the playground and wherever people gather (Ormrod, 1999).

Organized religion has an enormous influence in people's lives, even after the teachings of that religion have been rejected and the organization abandoned, because traditional religion tenders the strongest category by which human acts are evaluated, and provides definition of these things which are virtuous and which are sinful (Rueda, 1982). Fairchild and Hayward (1998) observed that despite the fact that many gays and lesbians have left the institutional Church, they continue to remain in its tight grasp (p. 153), and they experience an inner turmoil that cries out for peace. They had this to say about the experience:

> Such men and women are deprived of their potentialities for growth and development in their personal self-identity... not to mention their agonies of guilt, remorse, self-hatred and potential emotional breakdown when they fail to achieve the accepted goal.... [they] suffer great mental anguish and a profound sense of alienation, often believing themselves to be outcasts not only from human society but from divine love as well....[they] tend to accept [their sexual orientation] as the single most important fact about [themselves], because they tend to accept their image from the attitudes of the people about them....[they] will never integrate [their sexual drive in a positive way] until they become aware of themselves as persons of infinite dignity and worth, worthy of their fellow humans' respect and consideration (p. 153).

According to Rueda (1982), religious belief is still possibly the most universal factor in the rejection of homosexuality. Even with the advent of human rights legislation favourable to gays and lesbians, some churches have not moved forward in advocating tolerance. Many churches, under the umbrella of protecting traditional family values and morals, continue to oppose initiatives intended to guarantee equal rights and privileges to gays and lesbians.

The practice of discrimination, when experienced in the church community is reasoned to be based on homosexuality's non-compliance with Scripture. The letters of Saint Paul are often quoted as rejecting homosexuality. However, the word homosexuality was not used until 1869 in an article first written in German and not used in the English language until 1892 (Switzer, 1996). While the exclusive interest in a person of the same gender is well documented in the pre-Christian world, the practice described in the Greek tradition was seen as an issue of taste or preference, and not as a moral issue, and to be attracted to men was often seen as a sign of masculinity (Dover, 1989). Many theorists have proposed that sexuality is socially constructed, and that sexual understanding is constructed within and mediated by cultural understandings (Greenberg, 1988; Halperin, 1990). Sedgwick (1990) asserts that notions about gender and sex that seem self-evident to our modern day Western world are constructed through everyday actions, with heterosexuality seen as the natural condition and homosexuality as the aberration. In discussing the three New Testament passages most commonly used in condemning homosexuality, Furnish (1994) has this to say:

> Not only the terms, but also the concepts "homosexual" and "homosexuality" were unknown in Paul's day. These terms, like the terms "heterosexual", "heterosexuality", "bisexual", and "bisexuality", presume an understanding of sexuality that was possible only with the advent of modern psychological and sociological analysis. The ancient writers...were operating without the vaguest conception of what we have learned to call "sexual orientation" (p. 20).

In making an argument for present day misunderstandings around homosexuality that he claims are based on misunderstanding of Biblical texts, Furnish makes the point that the first century world did not understand male homosexuality as the consenting

relationship between two adult people, but rather drew a distinction between the active and passive roles in the relationship. The typical relationship was between an older man in his 20s or 30s and a boy whose beard had not yet begun to grow, and while interest in the boy went beyond sexual concern to nobler interests in the boy; the relationship was terminated upon the boy reaching adulthood (Dover, 1989). Furnish makes the claim that Biblical writers would have seen such behaviours as examples of exploitation of one person by another, as in subjects by rulers, slaves by masters, young boys by older men, and in all cases with exploitation being the common thread. Temple prostitution was also similarly condemned. Behind criticisms levelled at such behaviour lies an understanding of the practice of homosexuality as a perverse extension of heterosexual desire, reflecting excessive lust, lack of willpower and, for Jews and Christians, ungodliness (p. 20). In reflecting on such practices and on the position of the early church's compassion and valuing of persons revealing the love of Christ, practices of oppression and exploiting others would have been viewed as disobedience to God (Switzer, 1996). In the first century, the practice of oppression and exploitation was detestable to both Jews and Christians, and it is this practice that both Scroggs (1983) and Furnish (1979) believe Paul was speaking of in his letters.

Switzer (1996) makes the point that many Christians feel that homosexuality is a "different order of sin" (p. 72). In discussing the extent of the sinfulness of humankind, Switzer quoted Romans 3: 23, "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God", and Romans 3:10, "there is no one who is righteous, not even one" (p. 72). He stated that the Bible does not designate different orders of sin, and that Jesus did not refer to homosexuality at all. Switzer argued that homosexuality is such a contentious and

misunderstood subject among some Christians because of the level of emotional intensity that surrounds it and because so many people attempt to understand it through Scripture. He pointed out that, although Leviticus 19:19 calls for the wearing of clothing made from only one fibre and calls for not planting more than one crop in a single field, contemporary society does not understand these practices to be still relevant, and therefore does not understand the entirety of Leviticus 17 and 26 to be still relevant today. He also compared common reactions to 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10 that condemn greed, idolatry, lies, slander, and perjury to common reactions to Leviticus 20:13. Noting that many Christians test older Jewish practices by New Testament standards and guidelines, the revelation of God in Christ, Switzer went on to say:

> It has been my experience that in the church our emotional reaction against homosexuality is not prompted by the fact that the Bible condemns it, but that we as human beings condemn it. We condemn it because of what we have learned from our society, because of our misconceptions about persons who are homosexual, about who they are and what they do, and because from time to time either it has touched our lives or we have heard of it when it has touched the lives of others in ways that arouse our fear, revulsion and anger. This is not to suggest that if people only had accurate information they would inevitably think that homosexuality was alright; I am simply stating the intensity of emotional reactions against homosexuality comes from a variety of social learning factors and from personal experiences rather than from the interpretation that the Bible says that it is wrong (p. 74).

Green (2005), in attempting to define homophobia, drew from a grouping of moral themes that recur in arguments against homosexuality. The author described the works of Jews and Christians who quote scripture and label homosexuality as sin. Added to this are secular attitudes around masculinity, sex and gender role conformity, and

clerical and civic authority that exist to justify the establishment of a normative sexuality. Holtzen (1993) also found that homophobia appears related to traditional sex-role stereotypes and religiosity. Lottes and Kuriloff (1992), in a study of more than five hundred university students, found a strong relationship between conservative Protestantism and negative attitudes toward homosexuality.

Rejection and misunderstanding is not always the case. In speaking of the struggles of homosexual people in church communities, Oosterhuis (1996) reported on positive dialogue on homosexuality that took place in a Dutch Catholic community during the twentieth century between health and welfare organizations that was organized within a religious context. Employees found that, because of the religious context, it was difficult to make a clear distinction between religious and moral discourse, however it was found that professional interventions (by health and welfare organizations) did not take the place of pastoral care. Instead, dialogue led to a process where medical and psychological definitions of homosexuality were accepted by the organization and were beneficial in promoting understanding of homosexuality in the Catholic community. Because of the dialogue between the groups, pastoral care for homosexuals gained ground.

Other reports are less favourable than the Dutch Catholic community project. In another study surrounding religiosity and homosexuality, Johnson, Brems and Alford-Keating (1997) explored the relationship between homophobia and several personality traits with 714 participants (religiosity, empathy, and coping style). They found that religiosity was significantly correlated with a number of factors: stereotypical beliefs about the origins of homophobia (that individuals were influenced by the style in which

they had been parented and/or made the conscious choice of adopting sexual orientation); greater affective discomfort around gays; less endorsement of human rights for gays; and greater overall homophobia. This study utilized the Homophobia Attitude Scale (HAS) (Wright, Adams and Bernat, 1999) and personality trait scales, and also found that women endorsed fewer homophobic attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours than men, and that age was negatively correlated with homophobia. Schwartz and Lindley (2005) also used the HAS in a study sample of 198 undergraduates, and found male participants to be significantly more homophobic than females. The HAS, developed by Wright, Adams and Bernat (1999) to assess the cognitive, affective and behavioural components of homophobia, utilized 321 participants in the field trial and 122 participants in the test-retest reliability trial. All participants were college students from a large Midwestern university, and results yielded a 25-item questionnaire measuring three factors: assessment of negative cognitions regarding homosexuality, of primary negative affect and avoidance of homosexual individuals, and of negative affect and aggression toward homosexual individuals. Concurrent validity established by the authors was established using The Index of Homophobia developed by Hudson and Ricketts in 1980 (p. 337).

In an attempt to understand negative attitudes about homosexuality, O'Brien (1991) concluded that negative attitudes in Catholic circles are most often based on scanty information gathered from folklore and the commercial media, and a narrow and literal reading of Biblical texts. In a study that included 263 Catholics self-identifying as homosexual and 20 Catholics identifying as non-homosexual, O'Brien did not find homosexuals to be significantly different in their religious attitudes, personal adjustment, and relational quality than the non-homosexual group.

In examining church-related stigma, Yip (1997) studied the accounts of 60 gay male Christians of how they managed the stigma they felt from the Church community. Participants reported a connection between positive self-image and involvement in the politics of counter-rejection (taking steps toward education and correction of negative stereotypes about homosexuality). This counter-rejection is related to the perceived rejection felt in response to official positions held by the Church on homosexuality, and participants believed these positions have a four-fold foundation: the Church's ignorance of sex and sexuality; the Church's ignorance of all sexualities as God's creation; the Church's misinterpretation of biblical passages on homosexuality; and the Church's fallibility. These positions can be further compounded by attitudes expressed by clergy.

Olson and Cage (2002) found, in interviews with 62 mainline Protestant clergy, that homosexuality is one of the most divisive issues within mainline Protestantism today. These clergy spoke about homosexuality without being prompted, however they discussed homosexuality in a depersonalized manner, focusing on the issue in their denominations rather than in their own congregations. They also spoke in a pragmatic manner, and did not take personally hard and fast stances on the issue of homosexuality. The researchers concluded that clergy who choose to speak on homosexuality tend to frame the issue in terms of the diffuse notion of homosexuality rather than talking about gays and lesbians as people or the personal side of homosexuality.

Bernstein (2003) asserted that, for the most part, mainline non-fundamentalist churches have been torn for decades by conflict between their conservative and progressive factions over the homosexuality debate. Responses to this dilemma,

according to the author, include the regular development and introduction of proposals to soften these traditional negative positions. Predictably, recommendations are made by denominational study groups that, in turn, are not agreed upon by the denomination at large, with the reason given by those who reject recommendations that homosexuality is incompatible with church teachings.

The Roman Catholic Church, represented by its moral theologians, states while gays and lesbians are accepted to belong to the membership, they must remain chaste, not asserting their homosexual orientation sexually (Roman Catholic Catechism, 2000). In addition to the responses to homosexuals, church groups speculate on the "cause" of homosexuality, indicating that it is something that "happens" to a person. Fundamentalist groups believe that parenting styles can influence the occurrence of homosexuality. Dobson (2001) had this to say:

> At ...about eighteen months, a little boy will not only begin to observe the difference [between Mom and Dad], he must now decide, "Which one am I going to be?" In making this shift in identity, the little boy begins to take his father as a model of masculinity....In 15 years, I have spoken with hundreds of homosexual men. I have never met one who said he had a loving, respectful relationship with his father...the father plays an essential role in a boy's normal development as a man. The truth is, Dad is more important than Mom (p. 120).

There also exists the belief that if homosexuality does indeed occur, Reparative Therapy will "cure" it. Reparative therapy is said to restore gay and lesbian people to a heterosexual state, so they can then enter into heterosexual relationships (Nicolosi, 2005). Reparative therapy is based on the premise that homosexual behaviour is always an abomination and moral transgression before God, and Leviticus 20:13 is often cited in

support of the condemnation of homosexuality ("if a man has sexual relations with another man, they have done a disgusting thing, and both shall be put to death. They are responsible for their own death").

In discussing cultural analysis and Scripture, Webb (2001) elaborated on the challenge of assessing the cultural and transcultural components within a Biblical text, and stated:

> "Most of the Western church no longer practices what Scripture says (on a concrete level) about head coverings, holy kisses, foot washings, hairstyles, slavery, and so on...but we have not been particularly clear in explaining why we have discontinued certain practices and continued others....the lack of explanation and consistency has often left thorny problems for the next generation of Christians...we pass on to them both the scriptures themselves and our assessment of what to practice and what not to practice within those scriptures, but without a clear guide as to how those decisions have been reached...the slavery texts ...the sociological structure of slavery ...should be viewed as culturally relative....Scripture does not present a "finalized ethic" in every area of human relationship (pp. 246-247).

Moon (2005a; 2005b), in exploring church debates around homosexuality, examined the process of emotional pain in two religious groups and how emotional pain can work to obscure differences between opposing sides of an issue. She asserted that what is needed is a coming together, not drawing further apart, and found that emotional pain can help to reproduce the social hierarchies that drive people apart, even as people appear to challenge the hierarchal rules. She discussed the languages of pain to justify welcoming gays into the church, albeit on very different terms, while creating particular expectations about how gay men and lesbians will feel. By comparing two opposing sides

on the subject of homosexuality, it is possible to see how narratives of pain (and the shared assumptions behind them) effectively help to reproduce the sexual hierarchy some members seek to subvert.

Tan (2005) noted that the attitude held by most mainline denominations is condemnation of any form of homosexuality, and that one would expect that gay men and lesbians would have little to do with religious spirituality. He drew on literature on homosexual oppression to support the premise that gays and lesbians would especially benefit from spiritual nourishment because of the oppression they face. In developing and using an instrument that measures spiritual well-being, Tan investigated the spirituality of 93 gay and lesbian individuals, and found that respondents espoused high levels of spiritual well-being in two areas: how one relates to God (religious well-being) and how one feels about life (existential well-being). Those participants who identified with a formal religion and who attended religious services frequently espoused higher religious well-being than the non church-affiliated group.

It is not unreasonable to conclude that prejudice, a learned behaviour, affects the political process, which in turn impacts on homosexuals in their striving for rights and freedoms in society. Saucier (2004) found that sexual prejudice, religious fundamentalism, and social dominance orientation were unique predictors of voters' choices in an election, and that prejudice can be a key factor in determining whom voters elect to represent them in government. He concluded that when church-affiliated persons engage in the practice of stating and echoing stereotypical homophobic remarks, they draw moral boundaries against homosexuals.

Fairchild and Hayward (1998) reported that many gay people feel that they need the support of an organized religious community because, having grown up believing in a God that accepts you when no one else will, they want to maintain these religious ties. For them, God is still God, despite the interpretation others place on God.

Posner (1992), in responding to the belief that exists among some people that gays and lesbians make a "choice" in becoming homosexual (and are, therefore, responsible for their sexual orientation), questioned why millions of young men and women would choose the personal and social disadvantages to which homosexuals are subjected in our society, and argued that to deliberately choose these disadvantages in the same fashion one might choose a career or a place to live or a political party or even a religious faith would be preposterous. Although the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association has not listed homosexuality as a mental illness since 1973, fundamentalist and Catholic churches still believe that homosexuality is a "disorder" which can be interpreted as a prejudicial label, which can be caused by negative parental influences, poor role models, and gender ambiguity (Posner, 1992). Considering the stereotypes and level of discrimination that surround homosexuality, it seems reasonable to assume that disclosure, and factors surrounding disclosure, become a major concern in the lives of homosexual people and their families.

Disclosure and the Family

Sadly, homosexuals often experience rejection and discrimination from family members. Reactions of family members are affected by a number of factors, including the amount of time families are given to come to terms with the disclosure, the quality of relationship

prior to disclosure, and strength of stereotypical attitudes held by the family members (Holtzen, 1993; Nolan & Nugua, 2005). Oswald (2003), in a study to determine the interpersonal dynamics and centrality of heterosexism at weddings (which most people attend at one time or another), highlighted how legally sanctioned weddings can be rife with rituals and social meaning that devalue same sex relationships (p. 127). The researcher found that gays and lesbians spoke of feelings of emptiness and unfairness of such rituals, and questioned and even avoided participating in these family rituals. Nolan and Nugua (2005) reported that, as parents grapple with their child's sexual minority status, the height of their anger may be throwing the child out of the home and the height of the child's reaction may be suicide (p. 36). The authors went on to say that if the parents were truly informed, and viewed the best interest of their child as fundamental, they would not force assimilation, as the risks of such a decision include the child running away, alcohol and drug abuse, compulsory heterosexual promiscuity, and suicide (p. 36).

Holtzen (1993) found that the degree of homophobia experienced by parents lessened with the length of time they knew of their child's sexuality. Those parents who were less comfortable with their child's sexuality were found to hold stronger sex-role stereotypes and more conservative religious views. Offspring who more readily disclosed their homosexuality to their parents reported more positive parental attachments compared to those who were reluctant to disclose.

Newman and Muzzonigro (1993), in examining the coming out process of gay male adolescents, found that coming out was systematized in three stages: sensitization; awareness with the emotions of confusion, denial, guilt, and shame; and finally

acceptance. The majority of respondents reported feeling different from other boys as children, experienced their first "gay crush" at the average age of 12.7 years, realized they were gay at the average age of 12.5 years, and reported feeling confused during their first awareness that they were gay. For many, denial was a coping strategy, and traditional family values played a significant role in their coming out experiences. Families with a strong emphasis on traditional values such as marriage, having children and practicing religion, were perceived as less accepting of homosexuality than were the low traditional families (Newman and Muzzonigro, 1993). These findings are evidence that young people require support in the coming out process because they often encounter stigmatization and disapproval from family as well as from society.

Remafedi, Resnick, Blum, and Harris (1992) described the confusion experienced by individuals as they struggle with their sexual orientation. They conducted a study of 35,000 young people, and found that uncertainty about sexual orientation diminished in successively older age groups, with corresponding increases in heterosexual and homosexual affiliation. Almost 20 years ago, Borhek (1988) established that gay and lesbian youths confront a number of serious problems, including disclosing their sexual orientation to their parents and helping their families adjust to the disclosure. This experience was often compounded by ineffective communication, poor self-esteem, and unresolved grief and anger, and was adversely influenced by misinformation about homosexuality, strong religious beliefs, and parental homophobia. Because disclosure is a complex issue in the lives of gays and lesbians and their families, the following section will discuss dimensions of disclosure.

<u>Dimensions of Disclosure</u>

Jourard (1964), one of the first to formally write about the process of disclosure, stated

that disclose means "to unveil, to make manifest, or to show" (p.19). He further described

it as "the act of making yourself manifest, showing yourself so that others can see you"

(p.19). Jourard and Jaffe (1970) defined disclosure as the means by which one person

willingly makes himself known to others. Disclosure has also been described as having

multiple dimensions, including intent to disclose, amount of information disclosed, depth

of disclosure, valence of disclosure, and honesty of disclosure (Wheeless, 1978;

Wheeless, Zakahi & Chan, 1988). It can serve different functions such as social

validation, getting feedback from others, getting support, asserting social control,

furthering the interests of others, and creating a favourable impression (Archer, 1987;

Derlega & Grzelak, 1979; Miller & Read, 1987; Coupland, Coupland, Giles & Wieman,

1988).

Self-disclosure is typically defined as "the means by which one person willingly

makes himself known to others" (Jourard & Jaffe, 1970, p.256). For the purpose of this

study, self-disclosure is defined as the voluntary and intentional sharing by church-

affiliated people with clergy and /or congregational members that a close family member

is lesbian or gay. Disclosure can be understood as what these family members verbally

reveal about the family member's homosexuality, including their feelings and

experiences about their family member's sexual orientation.

Making the decision to disclose or not to disclose one's personal experiences and

life situation impacts many areas of life including interpersonal relationships and

personal well-being (Derlega & Berg, 1987; Jourard, 1964). Disclosure, therefore, is an

important factor in relationships among people, and also implies trust that the other person will respond sensitively to the revealed information. What an individual discloses is influenced by the social context provided by the give and take of the ongoing conversation, events that are happening at the time, as well as feelings about the person receiving the information (Holtgraves, 1990). People are reluctant to disclose information that is too threatening, and when they do not feel safe disclosing (Holtgraves, 1990; Petronio, 1991) the risk of disclosure experienced is consistent with the intensity or importance of the information being shared: the greater the risk, the greater the vulnerability; the greater the vulnerability, the greater the need to trust the receiver.

Vulnerability centres around fear that the shared information may be misused and fear increases if the discloser is dependent on the disclosee for some course of action (Holtgraves, 1990; Petronio, 1991). Individuals are likely to begin disclosure tentatively, checking for reactions, and continue to disclose based on these reactions. Not disclosing at all or fully disclosing are easier processes than selective disclosure, because selective disclosure brings with it the stress of wondering what people already know, how much should be revealed and the guardedness of the process (Holtgraves, 1990; Petronio, 1991). Yet disclosure is related to the growth process, and it is common for individuals to conceal sensitive information until they feel that the social setting is conducive to disclosure (Culbert, 1968).

Sometimes full disclosure is necessary before one can evaluate consequences of the disclosure, which makes the process more complicated and the individual more vulnerable. Before a piece of information is disclosed, the person must accept the reality

of the information, going through a process called intrapersonal self-disclosure (admitting to himself or herself that this knowledge is indeed part of his or her personal reality) (Baxter, 1987; Chelune, Robinson & Kommor, 1984; McAdams, 1984).

The process of disclosure is also closely linked with cultural expectations, and is an important element in how disclosure will be organized (Tannen, 1990). Culture is a network of habits and patterns gleaned from past experience, and expectations about disclosure are learned and the role of disclosure is culturally considered appropriate or not appropriate (Tannen, 1986). In cultures that have strong and limited expectations of the roles of males and females, disclosure is more difficult, and those disclosing take a greater risk of being shunned by the group.

Winstead (1986) stated that self-disclosure behaviour may be the result of a type of cultural self-fulfilling prophecy. People come to expect certain reactions from disclosure in a particular culture. Egan (1970) described two societal factors that discourage self-disclosure: a kind of cultural ban against self-disclosure as well as a society-wide cultivation of the "lie" as a way of life (p.199). In situations where the lie is a way of life, disclosure is seen as a weakness, exhibitionism, or a sign of illness. According to Egan, the basic need of communication during times of stress overcomes this ban, and it is seen as appropriate to disclose, but only to a professional therapist. In this way, societies have learned to "professionalize" its intimacies and its personal struggles. However, secrecy in a community can be incompatible with co-operation in the group, and will get in the way of the goals of the community, since secrecy represents mistrust. In this way, disclosure is seen as healthy for the individual as well as the group. Tong (1998) offered three dimensions of disclosure: time, depth and mutuality. Time

spent with a person increases the likelihood that disclosure will take place, depth of disclosure increases as the relationship becomes stronger, and mutuality of disclosure occurs when disclosure and openness occurs from both sides.

Jourard and Jaffe (1970) pointed out that disclosure is a form of self-renewal, especially after a traumatic life event, when disclosure helps the person regain their sense of self. There is also evidence that disclosure is related to the cultural competence experienced by the person disclosing (Berry, 1986; Sue & Sue, 1990; Wehrly, 1986). Others have noted the importance of looking at how verbal and non-verbal behaviours operate together in disclosure (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Montgomery, 1981; Patterson, 1990), and the understanding of the setting as it is felt appropriate for disclosure. Individuals struggle with the personal and social consequences of disclosure, and the benefits of disclosure in relation to the risks. The following section discusses risks surrounding disclosure in the lives of gays and lesbians and their families.

Risks Surrounding Disclosure

Moore (2004) spoke of modern rites of passage, the ways in which young people may be expected to take part in these passages on their way toward adulthood, and the fear they will likely feel as this tunnel approaches, including the accompanying anxiety and even physical symptoms. He argued that rites of passage mark a change in the way people see themselves and their reality (p. 28) and notes that the transitional experience may last only one day but take a lifetime to play itself out. If disclosure can be recognized as a rite of passage in the life of a young gay person, it (the transition) indeed can take a lifetime to play itself out.

Herek, (1989; 1990; 1991; 1993; 2004), alone and with others (Herek and Berrill, 1990; Herek and Carpitanio, 1996; Herek, Cogan and Gillis, 2002; Herek and Capitanio, 1999) has researched and written extensively on societal reactions to homosexuality. Herek and Capitanio (1999) pointed out that it was George Weinberg's introduction of the term *"homophobia"* in the late 1960s that began to challenge attitudes and beliefs about homosexuality and help to bring attention to the degree of prejudice and stigma surrounding homosexuality. Sanders and Kroll (2000) argued that heterosexism must be addressed because it is pervasive in its view that homosexuality is somehow lesser, which is the larger social problem. Homophobia should be confronted in the same way one would confront racism, sexism, classism and religious prejudice (Nolan and Nugua, 2005).

Herek (2004) noted that antigay prejudice in society remains, and is based primarily in fear. Homophobia is associated with fears of social evils, debauchery, prostitution, criminality and pathology (Green, 2005). Steffens (2005) found that publicly visible attitudes toward lesbians and gays have become more positive over the past decade, while unspoken attitudes are still relatively negative. Findings indicated an exception, as female participants' spoken and unspoken attitudes towards lesbians were similar to their attitudes towards heterosexuals. Herek (2004) maintained that a new vocabulary is necessary to advance scholarship in the areas of sexual stigma, and describes three forms of sexual stigma that must be addressed: stigma against non-heterosexual behaviour, identity, relationship, or community; heterosexism (the cultural ideology that perpetuates sexual stigma); and sexual prejudice (individuals' negative attitudes based strictly on sexual orientation). Berrill and Herek (1990) reported that

lesbians and gays face multiple levels of possible victimization including being victims of crime, losing their jobs, being evicted from housing, and being denied public services or accommodations once their sexual orientation is disclosed. Herek (1990) and Herek and Capitanio (1999) in researching Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) stigma and sexual discrimination, found in their 1991 study that homosexual people are stigmatized as AIDS victims, whether they have AIDS or not. In repeating the study in 1999 to discover if attitudes had changed, they surveyed 1, 709 people living in 48 states, and found that, despite public information that links multiple causes of contracting AIDS, the majority of participants associated AIDS with gay men, lesbians or bisexuals. Fisher, Jurgens, Vassal, and Hughes (1999), in a final report for the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network and the Canadian AIDS Society, listed five critical findings surrounding homosexuality and HIV/AIDS: (1) stigma associated with homosexuality is transferred to HIV/AIDS; (2) stigma associated with HIV/AIDS is transferred to homosexuality; (3) men who have acquired HIV/AIDS through sexual contact with other men have been objects of considerable blame and little sympathy; (4) gays who acquired HIV/AIDS are at risk for "double disclosure" and are faced with disclosing their homosexuality whether they want to or not; and (5) the association made between HIV/AIDS and homosexuality has affected how government and institutions have reacted and failed to respond to HIV/AIDS promptly, adequately and consistently. A fact sheet published by the U.K. National AIDS Trust (2003), the leading independent policy and campaigning voice in the United Kingdom on HIV/AIDS, states that the link between homosexuality and AIDS has been so firmly established that discrimination against people with HIV/AIDS is inseparable from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, and HIV/AIDS

discrimination cannot be addressed without considering discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation.

Herek (1991) also found that, while gays and lesbians are extended basic civil liberties, most heterosexual Americans continue to condemn homosexuality on moral grounds and to personally reject or feel uncomfortable about gay people. Lesbians and gays continue to experience discrimination in secular society. Walters and Curran (2000) found, over a four-month study, that same sex couples received significantly less service in retail stores while shopping, while Jones (2000) found that same-sex couples were granted significantly fewer reservations from hotels and bed and breakfast establishments. Additionally, service providers have begun to market to lesbians and gays specifically, indicating that service gaps exist for lesbians and gays in numerous areas, and that these services are not adequately provided in the current marketplace.

Herek (1989) related that hate crimes against homosexuals occur within a broader cultural context that is permeated by heterosexism, which is described as an ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any non-heterosexual form of behaviour, identity, relationship, or community, and that operates principally by rendering homosexuality invisible or trivializing, repressing, or stigmatizing it. Those who practice heterosexism view the world in exclusively heterosexual terms and devalue homosexuality as illegitimate.

Heterosexism has been found to be a precursor to hate crimes against lesbians and gays (Herek, 1990), and hate crimes have found to have a negative effect on the mental health of lesbians and gays (Herek & Berrill, 1990). The ideological underpinnings of cultural heterosexism foster anti-gay attitudes by providing a ready-made system of

values and stereotypical beliefs that such prejudice is natural, and discouraging homosexuals from coming out to others (Herek & Berrill, 1990).

Burn, Kadlec and Rexer (2005), in studying antigay harassment and its contribution to stigma and stress, found that not only were harassment and stigma found to be offensive and indicative of prejudice, but perceived offensiveness was associated with a decreased likelihood of coming out. Howard-Hassmann (2001) reported on a Canadian study conducted in 1996-97 to examine the attitudes toward gay rights of 73 civic leaders. In the study, 12 respondents opposed gay rights, 40 were moderately favourable to gay rights, 21 were strongly favourable, 10 said they had difficulty with gay sexuality, and 27 had a concern with gay behaviour that they described as "flaunting" (p. 24). Respondents had the most difficulty accepting the rights of gays to marry and to adopt children, although almost all of those who opposed gay marriages agreed with the idea of a legal domestic partnership. Most agreed that children should be taught about homosexuality in schools. These 73 civic leaders reflect the rapidly changing attitudes to gay rights in Canada as a whole. Their more favourable attitudes were often a consequence of learning that someone close to them was gay or lesbian. Howard-Hassmann concluded that the process these civic leaders were undergoing was one of humanizing gays, no longer thinking of them as "the other."

Walden and Magruder (2000), in a study of 172 adolescents to examine the coming out process, found that perceptions of family members, identity expression, and pro-lesbian/gay resources were factors influencing coming out to parents. The study concluded that weak family relations hampered coming out to parents indirectly through lack of opportunity to disclose sexual orientation, and lack of pro-lesbian and gay

resources available to family members. If families cannot openly disclose the lesbian or gay member's sexual orientation to others and receive the support that this disclosure may produce, they may have a more difficult time in providing the support family members require, thereby keeping them in what Jennings (2003) calls "gender straightjackets." Jennings (2003) used the term "gender straightjackets" to describe the discomfort gay youth experience daily as they try to accommodate themselves to a culture that is built around a subtle but pervasive bias in which the people who make up cultural institutions, such as schools and churches, and even shops and markets, are conditioned to expect others to live and behave as if everyone is heterosexual, and that everyone is straight unless proven otherwise (p. 5). According to Jennings, this message, with its stereotypes and innuendos, reverberates with every gay and lesbian "like an incessant jackhammer outside the window, the notion that there is something wrong, abnormal [and they experience] ridicule, harassment and stereotypes everywhere, even at home (p. 5)."

Cramer and Roach (1988) examined the process of gay men coming out to parents and found that most parents initially react negatively to the disclosure, but become more accepting over time. The majority reported having a more positive relationship with their mothers than with their fathers, both before and after coming out. Savin-Williams (1989), in a study of 317 homosexual youth evaluating the significance of parents in "coming out", affirmed the importance of the support of parents for self-esteem of gay and lesbian youth. Strommen (1989), in examining disclosure practices, found that the traumatic nature of family member reaction consists of two related processes: (a) the application of

negative values about homosexuality to the disclosing member, and (b) a perception that homosexual identity negates or violates previous family roles.

In a study of 402 parents of homosexual people, Robinson, Walters and Skeen (1989) found that although parents suffered emotional upset upon learning of their children's homosexuality, many progressed through a five-stage grief process that ended with acceptance. Major concerns expressed by parents were fear that their child might contract AIDS, or suffer from stigma related to AIDS.

Ben-Ari (1989) examined the coming out process and argued that family dynamics prior to the discovery of homosexuality are related to post-discovery experiences. He found that parents who are educated about homosexuality prior to disclosure have an easier adjustment, resulting in improved emotional dynamics in the family. The disclosure process has been attempted for decades. Kennedy (1981) reported on the Third Sex theory. In the 1860's, a gay German lawyer named Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (writing under the pen name Numa Numantius) advocated for homosexuality as a legitimate lifestyle under the "Third Sex" theory. Believed to be the first gay activist, Ulrich believed homosexuality to be an inborn characteristic that could not be eradicated, and wrote the first of his many gay advocacy pamphlets in 1864 (Kennedy, 1997). Over the centuries, many people who have encountered discrimination and oppression have sought to be empowered (Friere, 1996). The following section discusses the concept of empowerment.

The Concept of Empowerment

Freire (1996) described a process of empowerment based on the dialogical interaction that included the validation of the voices of people traditionally deprived of legitimate participation, and claimed that dialogue is "a radically necessary process" (p. 122). He stated that humanization is a "dialogical" process, and dehumanizing another one is the same as dehumanizing oneself, albeit with different implications and consequences. Freire wrote that those who are oppressed can potentially reach a self-consciousness or critical consciousness that can ultimately transform their oppressed state. In working on one's goals, one begins to see the need for transformation, the need for self-reflection, which causes the subject to enter into the dialectic with its object. Giroux (2001) described this process as continually inventing and reinventing the self through intentional transformation.

Aronowitz (2003) made a case for the alliance of those who because of their economic, political, and cultural exclusion from power seek to change the conditions of life. Freire and Shor (1987) called for people to move beyond an individualist attitude of freedom toward freedom of the community, and to use their personal freedom to help others to be free by transforming society, (p. 109). Freire (1973) saw humanization as an ontological and historical vocation of human beings (p. 175) and stated that humans pursue their vocation of becoming more fully human when they engage in authentic praxis, through dialogue with others, in a critically conscious way.

Friere (1970) and Giroux (1981) concluded that the process of empowerment occurs when people gain mastery over their affairs and when the disenfranchised become aware of their life's situation and realize what has not been previously realized. This is a

time when the disenfranchised become aware of power asymmetries, gain voice and agency, understand whose interests are served by asymmetry, and come to a realization of how empowerment can now be constructed (Schied, Carter, and Howell, 2001). When issues become visible, the disempowered achieve a "double consciousness" of the effect of two realities and their discord.

The concept of power asymmetry is characterized by the de-valuing of cultural and social diversity and the belief that multiple truths do not exist (Ward, 2003), while power symmetry is characterized by discourse and pluralism. Pluralism, preferring the many to the one, allows minority groups to maintain their own positions, acknowledges more than one meaning and assumes that one set of values is not better than the other. Hudak (2005) spoke of the legitimacy language inherent in the binary categories of heterosexuality and homosexuality as being the equivalent of right and wrong, with the more favourable value attributed to heterosexuality as being the right or true sexual orientation. Kinsey, Pomeroy and Martin (1948) depicted the binary construct of sexual orientation as being seriously flawed.

Lyotard (1984) also spoke of the concept of "legitimacy" and described the process whereby legitimacy (the status of truth) is awarded to those who are already in possession of the power. This legitimacy is the manner in which society comes to agreement about rights, responsibilities and freedom of choice (Lyotard, 1984). Foucault, a gay philosopher who made the linkage between power and the way language is used and misused, expressed a belief that, in the absence of absolute truth, what we see as knowledge would be merely a "just what a group of people got together and decided is

true" (Fillingham, 1993, p. 5). Foucault also compared this mode of power-making as similar to "might makes right" (Fillingham, 1993, p. 7).

> The new methods of power are not ensured by right but by technique; not by law but by normalization; not by punishment, but by control...methods that are employed on all levels and in forms that go beyond the state and its apparatus.... New forms of power are more subtle than our traditional notions, easier to overlook, much harder to resist (Foucault, quoted in Fillingham, p. 141).

In speaking of power and powerlessness, Foucault spoke of society's attempt at putting everyone "in his place", an idea he called spatialization (Fillingham, 1993):

> A place for everyone, [and] everyone in his place. Where someone IS indicates WHO or WHAT he is. As in the wards, and in the schools...(p. 121) the case of a society which has been loudly castigating itself for its hypocrisy for more than a century, which speaks verbosely of its own silence, takes great pains to relate in detail the things it does not say, denounces the power it exercises, and promises to liberate itself from the very laws that have made it function...(p. 135).

For Foucault, the "normal" defines and has power over the "abnormal", and knowledge as power works through language. Language creates meaning and since the 18th century, knowledge as power through language has defined what is abnormal, and what is normal. The language of binary opposites are examples of power, including good/bad; normal/abnormal; and for the purposes of this study, homosexual/hetrosexual. As Simone de Beauvoir said more than half a century ago, "how can we break away from the definition of ourselves as "secondary" if we never encounter any other definition?" (quoted in Filingham, 1993, p. 90).

Hlynka and Yeaman (1992), in speaking for pluralistic thinking and a commitment to plurality of perspectives, called for distrust of Big Stories meant to

explain everything. This includes any Big Story that refuses to consider more than one truth, because in a pluralistic society there is a plurality of perspectives and ways of knowing--there are also multiple truths. The authors also propose steps toward critical thinking in the quest for personal power, and offer the following suggestions: consider concepts, consider ideas and objects, consider that meanings are open to interpretation; look for binary oppositions such as good/bad, progress/tradition, science/myth, love/hate, and truth/fiction; deconstruct the ideas by considering how the oppositions are not necessarily true; identify ideas and concepts that are absent, groups who are not represented and omissions, which may or may not be deliberate, but are important (pp. 1-2). The process of critical thinking and raising awareness through changing perspectives has been developed into a theory called Perspective Transformation by Mezirow (1997). The final section in this review will address the process of Perspective Transformation.

The Process of Perspective Transformation

How do people come to "know what they know", and how do they arrive at their own particular meaning of events? This researcher begins from the assumption that learning, both formal and informal, is a process of everyday life, and that learning is central to all personal and professional activity, including that of pastoral care. A second assumption is that principles of learning and transformation are transferable across professions, and aspects of learning that are developed in the disciplines of education, nursing, social work, psychology and others are potentially useful in pastoral care. Learning theory is presently in a watershed era, and is influencing growth and change in all areas of human life.

Constructivist epistemology proposes that individuals construct their own knowledge on the basis of their interaction with their environment (Gagnon & Collay, 1990). Gagnon and Collay asserted that assumptions are formulated in four ways: new knowledge is constructed by individuals who are involved in active learning; symbolically constructed by individuals who are making their own representations of action; socially constructed by individuals who convey their meaning making to others; and theoretically constructed by individuals who try to explain things they do not completely understand. Gagnon and Collay (1990) concluded that meaning is constructed from knowledge, and Lee (1991) asserted that meaning addresses the ultimate concerns about the purpose of life, is the most fundamental of human activities, provides opportunities for significant learning and is the centre of human experiences. It seems logical to assume that, when meaning is being constructed (perspectives are created, challenged and revised), the relevance of knowledge and the value assigned to knowledge is of the essence. A similar process, that of Perspective Transformation, has been described by Mezirow and others (Mezirow, 1997; Cranton, 2002; Cranton & Sokol, 1998; Taylor, 2000a and 2000b).

In the 1970s, Mezirow began to describe a process called Perspective Transformation (Mezirow, 1991), a theory that examines how perspectives are shaped, challenged and modified. This section relies heavily on the works of Mezirow and his theory of Perspective Transformation and this researcher readily acknowledges identification and resonance with Mezirow's work. As well, the works of Mezirow's "disciples" (Cranton, 2002; Cranton & Sokol, 1998; Taylor, 2000a and 2000b) are called

upon for their support of the original theory and for their work in furthering and challenging the theory of Perspective Transformation.

Mezirow (1991) noted that everyone develops, through life experiences, a set of assumptions about how the world works, and he uses the term "meaning perspective" to refer to the structure of assumptions within one's past experience, one's ways of understanding these assumptions, and assimilation that occurs which transforms new experience (p. 42). Over a span of almost three decades, Mezirow and others (Mezirow, 1997, Cranton 2000; Cranton & Sokol, 1998; Taylor, 2000a and 2000b) further described the theory of Perspective Transformation as a learning process that transforms one's frame of reference as well as the assumptions through which one understands human experience. In the process of Perspective Transformation, individuals go through a cognitive restructuring process that includes critically reflecting on an experience or event and finding a discrepancy between a previous perspective and a current perspective, with the current perspective being of greater meaning.

The process of Perspective Transformation generally takes place when one comes face-to-face with a situation that does not fit with existing knowledge, attitudes and meaning within one's present perspective, and a new perspective develops that selectively shapes and delimits expectations, perceptions, cognition, and feelings (Mezirow, 1997). There appear to be three critical components to Perspective Transformation: the importance of experience; the importance of critical reflection and rational discourse; and the importance of resultant action (Cranton, 1992; Mezirow, 1990, 1991, 1994, 1997; Taylor, 1998). According to Cranton (1994), an individual's cultural norms, personal characteristics and life circumstances impact on the ability to engage in

Perspective Transformation, a process that is described by Cranton as taking place in three stages.

Cranton (2002) agrees that, in the first stage, the individual experiences an incongruity between what was previously perceived to be true and what has recently been experienced, heard or read (Cranton, 2002), and maintains that incongruity can result from one single experience or a number of new experiences over time, and critical reflection on this new experience causes the individual to challenge previously held beliefs and assumptions, to assess the validity of their old assumptions in the light of new experiences or knowledge, to consider the sources of old assumptions, and to examine underlying premises. Cranton notes that three types of change occur in Perspective Transformation: change in assumptions; change in perspective; and change in behaviour.

It is notable that Perspective Transformation calls for a trusting social context in which to dialogue around the new experiences, a process referred to as reflective discourse (Mezirow, 2000). Taylor (2000a and 2000b) also found a key factor in the process of Perspective Transformation to be dialogue in the context of relationships. Mezirow further stated:

> [Perspective Transformation is] a process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to construe the way we perceive, understand and feel about our world; changing those structures of habitual expectation to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating and integrative perspective; and finally making choices or otherwise acting on these new understandings (1990, p. 167).

According to Cranton (1992), the process of Perspective Transformation can be precipitated by a challenging dialogue, the presentation of differing viewpoints, and by engaging with reading and visual materials that have new information (p. 146). In

Perspective Transformation, the individual initially goes through a period of destabilization and disorientation as new learning is experienced. Boyd and Myers (1988) asserted that there are three activities that take place during this period, including receptivity that something is different, recognition of the impact, and grieving old perceptions. The individual becomes receptive of alternative expressions of authentic meaning, and grieving takes place when the individual recognizes that old perceptions are no longer relevant in his or her life. To re-stabilize, it is essential that the individual critically examines (undergoes a new perspective taking) assumptions upon which old attitudes and beliefs were based, and reflect upon the validity of these assumptions (Cranton, 1992; Mezirow, 1990, 1991, 1994, 1997; Taylor 1997, 1998). Individuals may seek input from others considered to be more knowledgeable in the subject and more critically aware of the issues surrounding the subject. When individuals become aware of assumptions underlying their old ways of thinking, they are then able to examine potential alternatives, and a new perspective then becomes an option as the old meaning perspective develops into a new meaning perspective. Taking on this new meaning perspective may be challenging for the individual, may involve new learning activities and may require the support of others who share a similar perspective. Engaging with life experience in order to make meaning creates an opportunity for Perspective Transformation to take place (Cranton & Sokol, 1998).

During the critical reflection stage, rational discourse is believed to be important, beliefs are discussed and openly challenged in an objective manner (Mezirow, 1990,1991; Taylor, 1998), and discourse becomes the means for the exchange and questioning of ideas, assumptions and beliefs (Taylor 2000a; 2000b). Mezirow (1991)

states that rational discourse calls for a situation in which individuals have equal opportunity to participate, have accurate and up-to-date information, and are afforded an environment that is free from coercion, distortion and that does not promote self-deception. Individuals will weigh evidence and assess arguments, consider alternative perspectives, and critically reflect on presuppositions and their consequences. The outcome can result in changes in relationships, changes in organizations, and changes in entire systems, and once Perspective Transformation occurs, individuals will begin to think and act in ways that are consistent with the transformed perspective (Cranton, 1992, 2002; Mezirow 1990, 1991, 1994, 1997). A new meaning now exists to guide the way the individual thinks, acts and feels about what is being currently experienced (Mezirow, 1990).

The elements present in Perspective Transformation can be summarized as follows: the experience of a "disorienting dilemma" triggered by a life crisis or major life transition, and can also result from an build up of transformations in meaning schemes over a period of time (Mezirow 1995, p. 50); the experience of self-examination and critical assessment of old assumptions and beliefs; discovery that others share similar experiences and reactions; exploration of new options, acquiring self-confidence, knowledge and skills for new action; and utilizing a "new role" [new patterns of life] based on the new perspective. Response to Mezirow's (1991) "disorienting dilemma" depended on contextually appropriate and timely opportunities that allowed the individual a place for critical reflection and rational discourse, and resultant changes in thinking, feeling, acting, relating and being. Changes are not limited to new ways of thinking and viewing the world, but are also concerned with action taken that is based on

the new perspective, and how this new action affects feelings, intuition, and physiological states (Mezirow, 1991). In this context, Perspective Transformation affects the essence of what is meaningful in an individual's identity and relationships, and is highly linked with the individual's self-image, sense of place within the community, and the continual movement toward that which is held to be of value to the individual.

In a similar approach, Bridges (1991) reported on the process of change, arguing for three phases that occur and overlap: there is an ending (to the old process), then a neutral zone, and only after working through this neutral zone can the new process begin. Bridges states that a person is or can be in more than one of these phases at the same time, and the movement through transition is marked by a change in the dominance of one phase as it gives way to the next (p. 70). In the neutral zone, neither the old or the new process is working satisfactorily, the person is caught between the demands of two conflicting processes and can become immobilized, which Bridges called "a nowhere between two somewheres" (p. 35). As the person moves through the neutral zone, a range of potential experiences are possible: anxiety rises; motivation fails; and disorientation, self-doubt, resentment, and self-protection occur. In the neutral zone, the person is absent from responsibilities more frequently, old weaknesses and old resentments re-emerge, trust decreases, communication suffers, priorities become confused, information gets mis-communicated, tasks are often left undone; the person becomes polarized between moving forward and wanting to go back to the old ways, and confusion ensues.

Often, conflict occurs with others, loyalty to others is compromised and relationships suffer. The individual becomes tired and disorganized at this point, and

when harassed or otherwise disturbed by others, he/she responds slowly and half-heartedly. However, Bridges also wrote that it is during the neutral zone that people are weak enough to let creative solutions emerge unhampered and progress can take place automatically (p. 43).

Senge, Kleinger, Roberts, Ross, Roth and Smith (1999), in speaking of transitions, remarked that learning new ways of being becomes apparent through subtle shifts in language, and people in transition will make comments such as "this is the way I see it" rather than "this is the way it is." According to Senge et al, this change in language is a visible sign of a highly significant new capability, because the statement "this is the way I see it" reflects the individual's new comfort level with differences of opinion, and a belief that everyone's assumptions are open to inquiry (p. 45). Senge asserted that learning capabilities are new skills and proficiencies that enable people to consistently enhance their capacities that in turn support other capabilities. Also, when exercising their learning capacity, individuals are oriented toward what they truly desire rather than reacting to circumstances.

Another aspect of learning capacity described by Senge is "reflective conversation", which appears similar to Mezirow's "discourse" and is described as the capability to converse in ways that nurture reflection and inquiry, develop a shared understanding and coordinate effective action. Senge maintained that, in exercising learning capacity, individuals are able to understand complexity, see patterns of interdependence underlying problems, and distinguish short and long term consequences of actions. Senge cautioned that learning takes time, and cannot be imposed from outside. In speaking of the growth process of profound change, Senge has this to say:

We have become habituated to think in terms of the discrete beats of mechanical linear "clock time"....[it is] important to remember that the mechanical clock was only invented five hundred years ago, in the fourteenth century. Before that, human beings did not think of time in constant, fixed increments that keep adding in a steady linear progression. Today [we] can almost hear the machine's wheels grinding relentlessly: sixty minutes to an hour, then another sixty minutes make another hour, then...another hour...then another. Nature's time is different (p. 57).

Senge also spoke of the importance of utilizing artefacts in establishing meaning. Artefacts in the environment enhance the learning process, as these artefacts represent observable signs about the espoused values and underlying assumptions, and how they speak to those within the organization and others coming in to the organization. In like fashion, Kouzes and Posner (2003) spoke of shared values and the importance of shared values as the foundation for relationship building, how people stress their common values in working through diversity, and stated, "To take the first step, and then the second and then the third [toward relationship] people must agree on something...[have] some common core of understanding because shared values provide a common language with which to collaborate" (p. 121).

According to Boyd and Myers (1988) the theory of Perspective Transformation incorporates elements of psychoanalytic theory; and Scott (1997) maintains that the theory incorporates critical social theory. Taylor (1998) maintains that Perspective Transformation is grounded in three central concepts: the critical importance of human experience; critical reflection on experience; and rational discourse around experience.

It is also practical to point out that, while Mezirow has been celebrated for the development of a theory that has furthered the understanding of cognitive development in many disciplines, his work has also been critiqued for reliance on the individual-

cognitive aspect of learning at the cost of the social side. The theory has been criticized for its emphasis on rationality (Cranton, 1994; Taylor, 1998), and its emphasis on critical reflection in the process of transformation (Taylor, 1998). Grabov (1997) criticized the 'rationality' of the theory and supports the view proposed by Boyd and Myers (1988) that transformation is a far more intuitive, creative and emotional process than Mezirow's theory acknowledges. Boyd and Myers (1988) draw on depth psychology in their understanding of Perspective Transformation, and Boyd (1989) proposes that Perspective Transformation results in two significant changes: the resolution of a personal dilemma and the expansion of consciousness resulting in greater personality integration. Cranton (1994) asserts that the process of discernment is strongly at play in Perspective Transformation, and is associated with such non-rational sources as symbols, images, and archetypes that create new meaning for the person undergoing transformation. Boyd and Myers (1988) also see grieving as a critical part of the Perspective Transformation process, a concept that has been further developed by Senge et al (1999) and Bridges (1991).

Imel (1998) urges those who resonate with the concepts of Perspective Transformation to consider Mezirow's views and the views of those who critique his views are not mutually contradictory, but sharing the fundamental commonalities of humanism, emancipation, autonomy, critical reflection, equity, self-knowledge, participation, communication and discourse (p. 90). Imel quotes Grabov (1997) who states that, while Mezirow emphasizes rationality and Boyd and Myers emphasize a more intuitive, creative and emotional process, they agree on the essential components of the theory. Cranton (1997) and Taylor (1998) caution that no single mode of Perspective

Transformation exists, and that practitioners should be aware of individual and social reactions to life experiences, and to be aware that individuals often change in ways that are intertwined and not readily observable. Additionally, there exists the reality that Mezirow formulated his initial views in a world and within an education system that was strongly driven by modernist concepts and such processes as intuitive thought were not openly recognized during that time. Many of the critiques of the theory advocate a more wholistic and feminist way of knowing.

This researcher concurs with Grabov (1997) in cautioning researchers not to dismiss Mezirow's theory without a thorough examination of the processes involved, considering them in light of post-modernist thought and the advances that have taken place in learning theory over the past thirty years. Looking at the theory of Perspective Transformation in this way, the essence of the theory maintains its credibility, while practitioners can also understand implications for utilizing a more wholistic and intuitive style. Tennant (1993), in his critique of Mezirow, states that the theory of Perspective Transformation does not sufficiently explore the social origins of the life course, however it seems logical to assume that Perspective Transformation is a social as well as a rational process, profoundly influenced from peer interaction and dialogue, relationship processes, and reflection on life experiences, all of which call for a relational and personal approach to change. According to Mezirow (1991), Cranton & Sokol (1998) and Grabov (1997), it appears that it is at the very intersections of one's life course that Perspective Transformation is most influencial, and that all change, including Perspective Transformation, is highly reliant on social forces and human reaction to social forces. Further, it appears that Mezirow does not consider normative psychological development

in a vacuum, and from the beginning has stress the importance of social dialogue and intra as well as interpersonal reflection in the cognitive shift that is central to Perspective Transformation. Perspective transformation is a response to social as well as cognitive influences and, in turn, lends itself to furthering change in such areas as pastoral care.

Summary of Literature Review

This section included a compilation of the literature considered to be relevant to the themes that arose in this study, and relevant to the process experienced by participants. The areas of literature reviewed include: Homosexuality and the Church; Disclosure and the Family; Dimensions of Disclosure; Risks Surrounding Disclosure; The Concept of Empowerment; and Process of Perspective Transformation. This review indicated that there is a need for more research and more knowledge around the experiences of church-affiliated family members with relatives who have come out as lesbian or gay. This need exists because, to date, little has been reported about the personal experiences of these individuals. However, these experiences are important and necessary in establishing effective pastoral care for these individuals and families. Both story and theory are essential to learning, including the learning of church communities and pastoral care practitioners.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Participants

The approach to methodology taken in this research project was that of triangulation.

This report describes two aspects of the study: a qualitative aspect and a quantitative

aspect. Sixteen participants took part in the qualitative aspect and 54 participants took

part in the quantitative aspect of the study. Two separate advertisements were prepared,

one for the qualitative aspect (Appendix III) and the other for the quantitative aspect

(Appendix IV). Additionally, a Likert scale questionnaire (Appendix V) was developed

by the researcher to collect quantitative data. Instruments (Appendix VI and VII) were

also developed to collect demographic data from the two sections of participants.

Two characteristics were necessary to be included in both aspects of the study: to

have a close (daughter, son, grand-child, sibling, niece, nephew) family member who had

come out as lesbian or gay and to have belonged to a mainline church community at the

time or since the relative came out. Those interviewed included individuals from five

mainline denominations and a variety of educational backgrounds, who had had a variety

of experiences around disclosure.

Participants in this study were solicited from a variety of areas. Initially, the

researcher connected with several Integrity groups, asking that an advertisement about

the study be shared with group members. Integrity is a national network of organizations

and friends working toward the full inclusion of gay and lesbian people in the life of the

Anglican Church of Canada, encouraging churches around the world to promote the basic

human rights of gay and lesbian people and to support their active participation in the life

of the church (Integrity, 2006). As people heard about the study and offered to

participate, a snowballing effect occurred: potential participants passed the advertisement along to others they knew who contacted the researcher, and as word spread from person to person, interviews began to take place. The researcher also made contacts through Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (P-Flag), an international non-profit organization (P-Flag, 2006). A small number of participants approached the researcher and asked for a questionnaire because they have heard about the study from others through word of mouth. Additionally, e-mails were sent to 90 clergy in mainline churches in two countries, Canada and the United States. Names and e-mail addresses were obtained from websites that included contact information, and those contacted who provided additional e-mail addresses of people they knew who might like to participate. In response to the advertisement for the qualitative aspect of the study, a total of 27 individuals initially contacted the researcher asking for more information regarding the study, and provided contact information. From this number, 19 agreed to be interviewed, however three people did not respond to further contact from the researcher, and it was considered by the researcher that they no longer wanted to participate. A total of 16 interviews were conducted. Three e-mails were received from individuals who wanted to share their views on homosexuality, although they clearly stated that they did not belong to mainline churches. These individuals critiqued the researcher for her work, accusing her of immoral behaviour in engaging in such a project, and making clear their views on homosexuality as sinful and homosexuals as deviating from God's plan.

Although Bibby (2002), writing specifically about Canadian churches, includes Lutherans among mainline denominations, no Lutherans were interviewed as none responded to the advertisement for study participants. Because this study spanned Canada

and the United States, and because the United Methodist Church (UMC) is reported by the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA) (2000) to be the largest mainline protestant denomination in the United States, this denomination was added to the study in place of Lutherans, and the five denominations represented in the study were: Roman Catholic; Anglican; United Church; United Methodist; and Presbyterian. All of the initial 16 individuals who responded to the qualitative section of the project were interviewed except for one Roman Catholic, because Roman Catholics were over represented. Because Presbyterians were under represented, an additional Presbyterian participant was sought, again bringing the number to 16 with the following distribution: Roman Catholic (4), Anglicans (4), United Church (4), United Methodists (2), and Presbyterian (2).

Personal accounts were collected from 16 individuals who identified themselves as having a close relative who had come out to them as being lesbian or gay, and who was an active members of a mainline church community since or at the time of their relative's coming out. Of the 16 individuals interviewed, 11 were mothers, one was a father, one was a brother, one was a grandmother, one was a sister, and one was an aunt of the relative who came out. Three were under 35 years of age, 10 were between the ages of 35 and 50, and three were between the ages of 50 and 65.

Those who took part in the quantitative aspect had seen the advertisement through one of the groups previously mentioned, in their church (as many clergy had shared the information with people in their churches) or from a friend who had seen the advertisement. Those participants were not contacted by telephone by the researcher, and all communication with these participants took place electronically.

One hundred questionnaires were distributed as the quantitative aspect of the study, of which 62 were returned and 54 were considered to be complete enough for analysis (Table 1). Questionnaires were considered to be unusable if they had been completed by individuals representing other than mainline denominations, if sections of the questionnaire were not completed, and if participants used narrative statements in completing questionnaires instead of checking the appropriate response on the Likert Scale.

In the quantitative aspect of the study, of the 54 respondents who participated, 38 (70 %) were female and 16 were male. Of the females, 2 respondents were under the age of 35; 28 were between the ages of 35 and 50, and 8 were between the ages of 50 and 65. Of the male respondents, one was under the age of 35; 12 were between the ages of 35 and 50, and 3 were between the ages of 50 and 65. Among the 54 respondents, the mean age was 38.5 for men and 39.9 for women. Of the 54 respondents, 31 were mothers, five were fathers, three were grandparents, 11 were siblings, and four were maternal aunts of gay and lesbian individuals. Denominations represented were Roman Catholic (14); Anglican (14); United Church (14); Presbyterian (6) and United Methodist (6).

Procedure

The component of this research report which describes the procedure utilized will be broken down into two sections of the research process: qualitative and quantitative.

The Qualitative Section

This study was conducted within the ethical guidelines of Wilfrid Laurier University and the research processes outlined by Beauchamp and Childress (1994), quoted in Talbot (1995, p. 37-38), which include veracity, privacy, confidentiality, and fidelity. Before interviews began, the researcher obtained a signed consent form from each interview participant, which outlined the reasons for the research and mutual expectations, and answered any and all questions regarding the informed consent.

Using code names and numbers in handling data and limiting access to the raw data ensured privacy for each individual participant. Participants were assured that the researcher would not share with others that they had participated in the study and that in situations where results from the study were publicly presented, precautions would be taken to ensure that their identities or any other personal or identifying information would be kept in strictest confidence.

Sixteen interviews were conducted with participants and the data analysis was guided by the grounded theory methodology originally described by Glaser and Strauss (1967), and described by Glaser (1978), Strauss (1987), and Strauss and Corbin (1990). A grounded theory is one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents; therefore data collection, analysis and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The qualitative research design of grounded theory methodology utilizes a constant comparative process, in which data are examined carefully line by line, broken down into discrete parts, and compared for similarities and differences (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The features common to grounded theory, such as moving between data

collection and analysis, repeatedly asking questions of the data, and the making of comparisons between incidents in the interviews, are intended to encourage the emergence of the "meaning" of disclosure for those telling their stories. After each interview was complete, the researcher listened to it in its entirety for the purpose of memo writing while the conversation was still fresh in her mind. Audiocassette tapes were then transcribed, reviewed by participants, and coded.

The intention was to collect the information necessary to build a picture of the experiences of disclosure for these individuals, and indeed, this is what occurred. As data were analyzed, concepts and categories emerged, and the central concept of "Quest for Balm in Gilead" become apparent.

The requirements for participants in the qualitative arm of the study included: taking part in a telephone, tape-recorded interview, and agreeing to be available for a second interview if further questions presented themselves after initial coding was carried out; checking the transcripts for omissions and errors and other changes shortly after interviews took place; returning suggestions and changes in a timely fashion; and reviewing the initial concepts and categories that emerged from the data and remarking on the accuracy of analysis. Additionally, all participants were requested to sign informed consent forms, and to complete and return demographic data forms. Before interviews were scheduled, the researcher spoke with all participants personally, telling them about the study, outlining what would be required from them, and telling them what they could expect from the researcher. Participants were informed that they could leave the study at any time. Interviews were conducted using an un-structured format. The participant was asked the interview question, "Can you tell me about your experiences in

telling or not telling those in your church community that your relative is lesbian or gay" (Appendix II). Additional questions were asked for the purpose of clarity and understanding as participants spoke of their experiences of disclosing or not disclosing, and as they spoke of their comfort level, the support and spiritual direction they experienced, as well as distressing experiences, and their understanding of the church community in its openness to them.

During the interview process, the researcher further encouraged the participants to describe their own experiences and the disclosure process. Sometimes questions were asked to clarify what participants had said. Further, participants were encouraged to keep talking as the researcher engaged in the process of active listening and used reflecting and restating techniques. When unsure about what participants were talking about, or when further elaboration was required on an issue, the researcher would prompt them by such statements as: "Can you say more about that?" ; "Can you tell me more about that?" "Can you tell me what you mean by that?" "Who is the person you are speaking about?" or by making some similar comment. Participants were asked to clarify statements and responses that sounded sketchy or abbreviated.

A non-intrusive stance was adopted by the researcher, which meant that when individuals wandered away from the topic of disclosure no attempt was made to change the subject. Generally, participants kept coming back to the issue of disclosure. To ensure the emergent nature of the study, participants were encouraged to speak as if they were talking to themselves or thinking out loud. Notes were made as participants talked, and toward the end of each interview the researcher would ask participants, "let me summarize what I heard you say. You told me about [this] and [that]...am I hearing

correctly what you said?" In concluding the interviews, all participants were asked if they had anything to add to what had already been said.

Many participants stated that they felt emotional during the interviews and that they had talked about events in their lives that had previously caused pain and distress. Participants were given permission to discontinue or take a break in the interview at any time they felt necessary. Several acknowledged in the beginning that a break might become necessary, however no breaks were requested.

Interviews with participants took place between October 2005 and February 2006. Analysis of the transcribed interviews occurred concurrently, which is consistent with the constant comparative method of analysis described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Corbin and Strauss (1990). After initial contact was made with potential participants and this was followed up with a telephone call, participants were then e-mailed a copy of the informed consent/confidentiality agreement that they signed and returned to the researcher, and interviews were scheduled. Each individual was interviewed once, all interviews were conducted and tape-recorded by telephone, and interviews lasted an average of 90 minutes, with two interviews lasting closer to two-and-one-half hours, and one lasting 45 minutes. Throughout this research project, concepts elicited from each interview were constantly compared with concepts obtained from earlier interviews, so that commonalities and variations could be determined and refined.

Participants were provided with a copy of the transcript to read carefully and note omissions or errors, to add any new information that had occurred to them since the time of the interview, to delete anything they did not feel comfortable with, and to make any

other changes that they felt were necessary. They were requested to return transcripts to me as soon as possible for coding purposes.

Writing theoretical memos is an integral part of doing grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), and became a fundamental part of this work. In this study, the analysis began with brief memo writing during the interview process. As each interview was taking place, the researcher wrote abbreviated methodological memos on the reactions of the participants to the interview, how the interview proceeded and what was believed to be happening in the data, and any ideas or insights that might be forgotten if left until later. After each interview, audiocassette tapes were re-played, and observational memos written. When coding began, memos were used to ask questions of the data while the participant's tone of voice was still fresh in the researcher's mind. The researcher made note when particular words or phrases were used repeatedly, with greater emphasis, or in a particular tone of voice. Memos were clustered according to codes, and an emergent list of codes were kept at hand when writing memos. Memos reflected the researcher's thinking in relation to the raw data and noted her ideas and insights during the analysis process. Memos were stored in QSR NUD*IST and kept separate from the coded data.

After each transcript was reviewed and relevant changes made, copies of the transcripts were loaded into a computer software program called Qualitative Solutions and Research (QSR) Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theory Building (NUD*IST, Rev.4).

While manual files were developed by the researcher for different codes, material was also stored in NUD*IST for indexing and sorting purposes. Open coding (the

process of fracturing the text in instances and producing provisional dimensions and concepts) was done manually, while NUD*IST was utilized in some aspects of axial coding (the process of discerning the properties of a category, considering conditions and consequences, strategies and interactions, and relation to other categories) and selective coding (the process of identification of a core , salient or integrated category). Manual files contained master copies of material and were arranged by the code numbers of participants. NUD*IST served as a cross-reference tool. As data were reviewed and coded according to the event being addressed, files were subsequently developed for each of those subcategories and as well for categories.

In addition to the formal process, participants in the qualitative section of the study also made themselves available by telephone, e-mail and sometimes fax throughout the process, and in two cases a great deal of time was saved by sending questions and replies to and from via e-mail and receiving a prompt reply from participants. Participants gave generously of their time in taking part in this study, and were respectful of time lines and returned all information promptly.

The Quantitative Section

As themes began to emerge from the qualitative interview data, the researcher developed a 30-item questionnaire around these themes. This 30-item questionnaire contained statements that could describe potential factors of the individual's experience, and participants were requested to choose a response for each of the 30 items from a 5-point Likert scale: 1, not at all like my experience; 2, somewhat like my experience; 3, much

like my experience; 4, very much like my experience; and 5, exactly, or nearly exactly like my experience.

The questionnaire included statements intended to express the experiences of participants in four potential areas, and allowed them to reflect on the level of comfort/discomfort they experienced as they disclosed the information that a relative was lesbian or gay to those in their mainline church communities. The four areas were: the level of comfort they felt with the congregation; the level of comfort they felt with the clergy; the level of comfort they felt with the information that a relative was lesbian or gay; and level of comfort they felt with themselves in their church community.

After participants agreed to participate in this part of the study, they were e-mailed the questionnaire and a short biographical data form, asked to complete it and return by e-mail. Non-respondents received a reminder from the researcher after three weeks had passed and a second reminder was sent after an additional three weeks. No further contact was made to those who did not reply to the six-week reminder.

Of the 100 questionnaires that were distributed, 62 were returned and 54 were considered complete enough to be usable in analysis, a 54 % response rate. Those participating in the quantitative section of the study did not take part in the qualitative section, and those participating in interviews were not requested to complete questionnaires, thereby keeping the two sections of participants separate to avoid cross-contamination of study results. Questionnaires were completed between December, 2005 and February, 2006.

<u>Summary Of Methodological Process</u>

Polit and Hungler (1991) argued that using multiple methods or perspectives to collect and interpret data strengthens the validity of research, that the process of research triangulation provides a basis for convergence on truth, and that in the final analysis this is not conceptually different from the process of estimating reliability and validity by quantitative researchers. In this study, two methods were combined: the qualitative component was addressed in the form of 16 non-structured, in-depth interviews with family members were explored with grounded theory analysis; the quantitative component was addressed with a 30-item questionnaire. Qualitative methodology possesses distinctive characteristics that make it ideal for investigations in the area of personal feelings around disclosure.

The process sought to understand the process of disclosure from the viewpoint of individual stories, and the richness of meaning associated with these stories would have been difficult to investigate strictly with structured instruments. That is not to deny the place for measurement in the disclosure process, as a 30-item questionnaire was also incorporated and found useful in gathering substantive information. Qualitative methods allowed for rich descriptions that led to a more in-depth understanding of the experience. The quantitative method was beneficial because there was no interaction between the two datasets during the data collection, except that one gave rise to the other, and because the findings complemented one another at the end of the study (Morse, 1991).

Mitchell (1986) suggests that triangulation offers flexibility and an in-depth approach that single method design cannot provide. The two methods utilized in this study can be considered compensatory, as the limitations of one are offset by the

strengths of the other (Madey, 1982). Questionnaires that measure participants'

perceptions counterbalance exploratory interviews by improving the sampling framework

(Madey, 1982). Duffy (1987) also cites the benefits of the triangulation process,

including the benefit of verifying one set of findings with that of the other, developing

theoretical frameworks that can lead to additional studies in the area, and using interview

data as the basis for selecting survey items to be used in instrument construction such as

that described by the researcher in this study. In communicating the findings achieved

from the triangulation process, it is hoped that the researcher will provide a glimpse of

the world of experience communicated by the two groups of participants in this study.

Quest for Balm in Gilead

Experiences of Church–Affiliated Family Members in Disclosing that their Relative is Gay or Lesbian to their Church Communities

Wakefulness
Anticipation

Acceptance
Engagement

New Perspective, Action

Reflection, Discourse

Mirror & Faith

Mirror & Faith

Old Perceptions

New Knowledge

Having 'New Knowledge' in familiar environment (church): Event > Disorientation

Cycle

Adapted from Mezirow, 1991
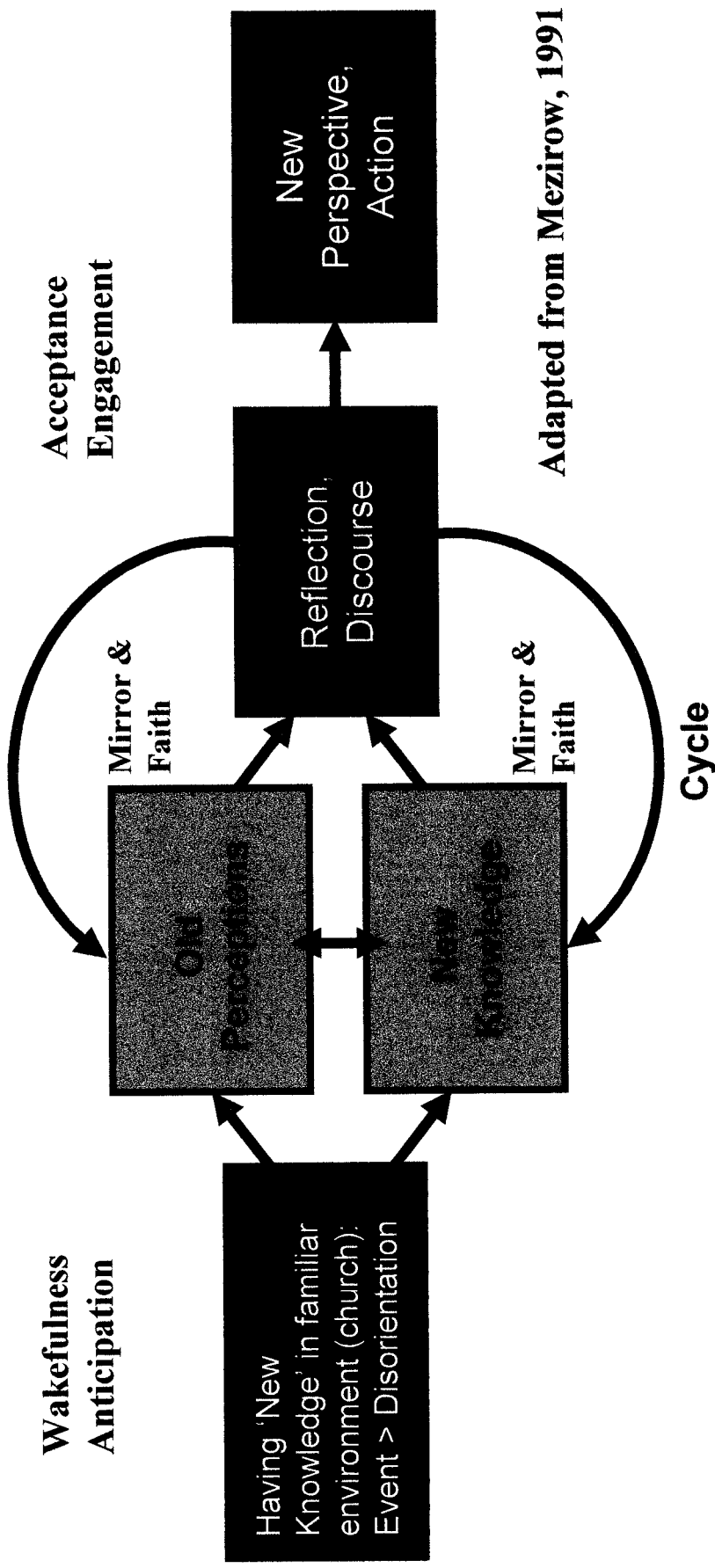
...more clearly understand 'who' they are as People of Faith

60

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Qualitative Findings

Sixteen participants took part in the qualitative section of this study. For confidentiality reasons, all were given code names: the eleven mothers interviewed have been given the names Jaimie; Lizabeth; Pattie; Ginger; Nora; Susie; Klare; Amber; Emma; Dawn; and Flora. The father has been given the name Terry and the brother has been given the name Jeremy. The grandmother has been given the name Mary Louise, the sister has been given the name Imogene, and the maternal aunt has been given the name Jasmien. The terms "faith community", "congregation", and "church community" are often used interchangeably and are used to denoted the physical structure and gathering of people within the mainline denominations to which these participants belonged and worshipped. As one person cannot know what is being experienced or felt by another, whenever emotions are described in this discussion, it is an attempt by the researcher to present the subjective experiences described by participants as they spoke to the researcher.

Participants related their experiences of disclosure to others in their church communities that their relative was lesbian or gay. When participants began to return the transcripts, the process of coding began, using the constant comparative process of grounded theory. Codes began to emerge very early on as each incident emerging in earlier interviews were compared with the material from subsequent interviews. Fifty broad, open codes emerged. Codes were then examined for underlying uniformities that reduced the number of emerging codes, and organized into axial codes, from which the core theme began to become apparent.

Participants were presented with the core theme, Quest for Balm in Gilead, and the process utilized by the researcher was described to them (the term "Balm in Gilead" is adopted from the Old Testament Scripture that refers to Gilead, a region of Palestine, on the west side of the Jordan, known for a healing ointment known as balm). The question and well known phrase "Is there no Balm in Gilead?" is found in Jeremiah 8: 22 where the author asks the questions, "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has not the health of the daughter of my people been restored?" Earlier, the author relates the conditions of the people that require healing: "For the brokenness of the daughter of my people I am broken; I mourn, dismay has taken hold of me." The author was expressing extreme sadness that his people were wounded, and in need of being restored, and he compares their brokenness to physical ills that would respond to the healing ointment of 'balm.' This ointment was well known and the caravan that brought Joseph to Egypt was reported to be carrying balm from Gilead. (Genesis. 37:25). He is asking how a people who traded in a healing ointment be so sick, that can be interpreted as, "How can the people of God, with the Law of God in their midst, be so sinful?" He is likely suggesting that the people use the balm that they already have (God) to heal themselves with what they already had. They could be healed only in seeking help where it could truly be found, in God. It would also seem that participants in this study were experiencing distress in the place where 'balm' (healing) was ever present—in the house of God.

Participants reported that they recognized their experiences in the codes that arose, including the central theme and distinctive discovery of participants' experience, "Quest for Balm in Gilead" (quest for healing for themselves and their family members from the source of the balm—the church community) that is comprised of four processes (Figure 1). These four processes describe the struggle or quest for balm, and he personal transformation that took place and that was ultimately instrumental in providing the sought-after balm." Qualitative research findings are communicated under the four processes that comprise the central theme. "Quest for Balm in Gilead" was a phrase used by one of the interview participants, and seemed to echo the experiences of others for the search for healing and understanding of what they had experienced, and to echo it so strongly that the phrase was used to name the core theme. The phrase "through mirror and faith" further reflects the experiences described by participants as the tools utilized in finding balm. The word "mirror" refers to participants' description of seeing the reactions of others as if a mirror had been held up to them that reminded them of their own previous ignorance about discrimination against gays and lesbians that existed before they had an intimate experience. They came to realize that they had not been generous with giving balm, and were now seeing the importance of that balm in their own lives and in the lives of others. Their own intimate experience was causing them to look more closely at the role of balm, and the necessity of re-examining their own previous knowledge and attitudes.

The word "faith" was used because it describes participants' belief in a loving, caring and accepting God that loves all people unconditionally and completely, and who does not focus on people's sexual orientation as a criterion for love or acceptance.

The first process was named by the researcher "Wakefulness through Mirror and Faith". In this process, participants described becoming wakeful (more conscious) to the reality that a relative is lesbian or gay, and to the reality that there exists a great deal of discrimination against this sexual orientation, even in the church community. At this stage, some selective disclosure is gauged according to the openness of the person being disclosed to, and the caring attitude of that person, but participants stated that they were still feeling "unbalanced" (confused, having conflicting thoughts) at this stage, and had not sorted out the depth of their own feelings on the issue. Increasingly they described hearing, as if for the first time, the extent of stigma attached to homosexuality. This stigma was described as being evident in offensive jokes and comments targeted toward gays and lesbians, and rude, offensive comments that stereotyped gays and lesbians.

The next process was named by the researcher "Anticipation through Mirror and Faith", was described by participants as a desire for, and expectancy of, support and understanding on behalf of homosexuals and their families in the church community. As anticipation progressed and participants' needs for support were incompletely met or completely unmet, participants reported progress to a stage the researcher has named "Acceptance through Mirror and Faith" which was described as a "going within" and experiencing hopelessness and disempowerment, and accepting the reality of that disempowerment. When participants progressed to the process that the researcher has named "Engagement through Mirror and Faith", they had accepted their new reality and were ready to play their new role with confidence and hope. They described a change in perspective that had taken place, and noted that they had left behind familiar assumptions they had held and transcended the place where they had been. This "leaving behind" was

also expressed as providing a deeper understanding of the realities faced by their homosexual relative, the oppression experienced by homosexual people, and the attitudes and beliefs expressed by people in the church community.

They described a sense of moving between two very human feeling states; that of being "an observer to something that really didn't affect me closely" (before the relative disclosed) and that of being "inside the experience, because it affected me so closely" (after the relative disclosed). One participant, Jaimie, the mother of a lesbian daughter, noted, "it was as if I was being introduced to a new culture that was at the same time my own culture...my own culture, but something I had to learn as an adult." Participants described a sense of being between the known and the unknown, and not being able to go back. Emma, the mother of a gay son, said, "It's an all or nothing experience, sort of like being pregnant, you can't change your mind and cop-out and I owed it to my child to stay the course". The pain and confusion experienced by participants was evident as they talked about the process they had gone through, and were still going through.

Participants talked about the process of "becoming aware" of homosexuality and "really beginning to thinking about it [sexuality orientation and church discrimination]" as they had not thought about it before, and spoke of the process of gaining the necessary confidence and strength to be a greater support to their relative and an overall advocate for fair treatment of homosexual people. Many had begun to exercise some control over their new reality and attempted to provide some clarification and informal education so as to prevent other potential family members from being hurt by offensive jokes and other offensive language. This sense of agency was described as a power-shift, which was coupled with a deeper sense of responsibility for themselves in their new reality, their

family members, and the gay and lesbian community. Each process will now be discussed under individual headings.

Wakefulness Through Mirror and Faith

Participants stated that when they initially found out that a close relative was lesbian or gay, they felt apprehensive and particularly vulnerable. All 16 participants reported reluctance to disclose to their church community at that particular time, and noted that they felt it necessary to maintain the status quo, and felt "too vulnerable" and "too unprepared" to engage in disclosure type conversation in the early weeks and months. In many cases, this reluctance to disclose extended outside their church communities. Participants described a lack of confidence and said they even wondered if they could maintain the same "place" (be seen as the same person and be able to maintain the relationships they had established) in the church community after they had disclosed, and some reported that they "preferred not to think about the issue" because they "just didn't know what they would do next".

During this period of wakefulness, participants reported that they became aware of the stigma that exists against homosexuality in the church community. It is interesting that they became aware of the existence of stigma at the same time they were coming to terms with their relatives' homosexuality. They believed that many of their previous attitudes and beliefs about homosexuality could have been formed from the same sources of information as others in the church community, and that it was only in having a personal encounter with this information that "a mirror" was held up and they saw more clearly the extent of their own unconsciousness.

Many expressed surprise that it was as if they had not previously thought about issues of homosexuality in the church in a serious manner. This was a theme that ran throughout the majority of interviews, and participants expressed that, while they had been aware of the existence of homosexuality, and though they thought they had been comfortable with homosexuality, they now felt "unbalanced", and really did not know what to think or do. Participants reported that they began to "hear" stereotypical language and anti-gay jokes, as if for the first time. Mary Louise, the grandmother of a young lesbian woman, had this to say:

> I was in the kitchen at church, getting ready for a meal [being served by the church ladies], and I heard a couple of people laughing, and then I heard someone saying something like, "shush, she'll hear you" and then there was silence. Just a few moments later, the same person that had said, "shush" came into the kitchen and she came over and asked me if I was all right. I knew …I just knew that the conversation she was having with the other person was about homosexuals, and I felt so angry, but I didn't say anything to her, just, "sure, I'm fine."

In their wakefulness, participants stated that they also begin to "hear" that there seems to be a stereotypical picture of a homosexual man, one who is viewed as being focused on sex in an excessive manner. They "heard" that the emphasis on sexual behaviour seems to be more important than sexual orientation, and it appeared to them as if "this [focus] gets in the way of seeing the real person…the gay person is a real person". They also described becoming keenly aware of the stereotypes that exist of gay males being predators of children, a stereotype that results in fear and mistrust. Ginger, the mother of a gay man, had this to say:

> We [she and her son who is gay] were at church just a few days after Christmas, and there was nobody around to go downstairs with the children to Sunday

school. He [her son] said he would go down with the four or five children who had shown up…after all, he is a registered nurse and very caring person. He went to the same Sunday school…and had helped out when home from university one summer. Rev ____ said, Oh no, no, we'll just keep the children up here this morning, and I had the distinct feeling that it was about him [her son].

Many described feeling acutely aware, some for the first time in their church going lives, of the need to talk to "someone", "just someone who could listen and understand what I was going through." It was not just hearing negative remarks and stereotypical jokes about homosexual people, but it was also the realization that they were hearing these remarks from people they had previously liked and considered "decent people." Some spoke about "reading the signs", an approach utilized to describe the attitudes of others, and looking for positive signs, described as "an approach from that individual that was more open". An example given for openness was, "like if that person [the person perceived as open] was speaking about a person being on welfare, the person didn't condemn the person, and would somehow indicate that it did not define the person and it was something that could happen to anyone." Another indicator of openness was described as "how much a person had lived", and "their tolerance toward others in unfortunate circumstances". The "worst case scenario" was described as "the person who felt that they had a formula for getting it [parenting, marriage, wage earning, etc] right" and those who were in unfortunate circumstances did not have such a formula, or even worse, were not "blessed by God in the same manner as was the successful person". Participants would find it difficult to disclose to or share emotions and feelings with individual's who "had such formulas". Jaimie, the mother of a lesbian daughter, had this to say:

The relative absence of gays and lesbians in our church...I don't know if that is a reflection of our church or a reflection of the demographics. And when we consider relatives of gays and lesbians, well they are invisible, aren't they, unless they tell us, and how comfortable are they going to feel telling. Well, I expect, like myself, most would read the signals around them...if they see gays and lesbians talked about in a disrespectful manner, then they won't feel so comfortable, and if they hear jokes and know that a person is anti-gay, they may never speak up.

Participants noted that they would not approach an individual who spoke negatively about disadvantaged people, and felt that others would be reluctant to disclose to them as well. They expressed a belief that many relatives of lesbians or gays would look closely at an individual before disclosing and take a close look at the person from all directions, cautiously answering any questions, and being guarded when questions seemed too personal. They acknowledge that they sometimes act on "hunches" or "gut feelings" and have not regretted this. Jasmien, the maternal aunt of a gay teen, stated:

When I think of the way gays and lesbians are responded to, its like its not just a pariah coming in, but a community pariah, like they are going to infect somebody. It's very interesting because now what I have seen happening is that people say, "oh, you raised him by yourself and there was no man around." Like, come on...there are too many old psychology books floating around.

Prayer, described as "communicating with God", "talking to God" and "asking God's help" was mentioned as a means of support by most participants, as well as "a belief that God loves [my gay or lesbian relative], and does not discriminate against him or her. " Imogene, the sister of a gay man, said: "I am so sure that God is right there with him, that God knows he is a good man, and God will take care of him." Faith was a strong theme, and participants stated that their faith in God had increased throughout the

process. Many expressed guilt and shame for not "waking up sooner", and for not being more tolerant over the years". Jeremy, the brother of a gay man, said that "it was seeing in other people many behaviours [I had] previously engaged in [myself]." Mary Louise said, "it was like somebody was holding up a mirror for me...here I was, in my fifties, and I was like...waking up...it was a real awakening for me." She went on to say:

> There is just so much ...so much intolerance of gay people. I hate the jokes, the stereotypes, the inaccurate information, and the idea that different is "lesser", or "less worth." There is subtle homophobia in our church...has always been there, but why didn't I pay attention to it before...what's wrong with me...it was like somebody was holding up a mirror, there I was...I had been something like that and I thought I had been okay.

Participants expressed a belief that confrontations would not solve anything and that people had to learn new information before they could be engaged in dialogue around their attitudes about homosexuality. Some participants stated that they found it useful to avoid being in direct contact with those who were more overtly "homophobic" and believed that "these people were in a certain place, and we won't change that overnight." They expressed a belief that these negative stereotypes are grounded in a whole way of thinking, of which homophobia was probably only one symptom. Two people stated that they had consistently spoken up after a period of time, and believed that a feeling of having "nothing to lose" influenced their judgement, as both were thinking of leaving their respective churches at the time. They expressed a belief that thinking about leaving the church helped to make them feel more assertive and confident in speaking up, and they feel grateful that they did. Pattie, the mother of a gay son, had this to say:

I'm glad I did [speak to a Bible study group she was involved in about her son]...I think that there can be a lot more understanding among people in the church than you might think... I mean there are really tough barriers for people like me, and there needs to be much more support built into that. It's the church, Christ's church, and Christ would be so sad...Christ was there for the underdog...But when it comes to challenges that affect us [members], there's a lot more handholding than you'd think. When I finally broke down and shared about him [her son], I was surprised at the response I got and [another person in the group] told me about her grandson who is gay, and [another member] told me about her brother's daughter. They hadn't spoken up for the same reason I hadn't spoken up, but when I spoke, there was like this watershed. Those who are free with their mouths [making offensive comments] have positions in the church, are valued for the work they do, and if I said anything I'd be "over reacting."

During this period of wakefulness, participants expressed feelings of fear and uncertainty. Nora, the mother of a gay son, said this:

I suppose it was up to me to bring my situation to awareness, to introduce it to the community, to define it, but I was afraid to do that. I know the attitudes of some people in the church...have heard the jokes and red neck language about "queers" and I was hesitant to speak out because I didn't want to be hurt...because I didn't want to give up on my idea of the church as a place of warmth and comfort if that makes any sense.

Several participants expressed an extreme dislike for at least one church member who had made offensive remarks about homosexuals in their presence, but stated that they felt guilty about these negative feelings, "so he [the person who made offensive jokes] is the bigot and I am the one who don't want to forgive, so what does that make me out to be?" The most common stereotypical remarks reported include references to gay males having a great deal of sex, as well as gays being sinners, not being "normal", gay men being a threat to children, and generally not accepted. Participants wondered

about the "sin" of disliking those who made offensive remarks as well as having strong feelings of dislike for the offenders whenever they were in close proximity with them.

Participants reported attitudes that ranged from a desire to disclose, even though disclosing would push the limits, spending a significant amount of time in judging the limits they perceived as existing with regard to disclosure, all the way to having a great fear of disclosing, even when it meant maintaining control of a situation and feeling less anxiety. One participant, Ginger, reported that she eventually made a deliberate attempt to "push the limits" and to disclose, even to those who were noted to be "homophobes" in the congregation.

> So you have to get to the point where you accept that people just don't know...don't have a clue...just as I didn't have a clue until I had to deal with it head-on. You have to get to the point where you accept that you do know some things now...that your beliefs are worth something...[that you have] come to a place where most others [in the church] are not there yet, and that doesn't stop you in what you believe...and when this happens, I think you see a whole different side of things. When I behave as if it is the most normal thing in the world—and I do that—it helps other people to do what they will with it. Most will not be comfortable yet because it's not their norm—not something they talk to others in the community about, it has been a taboo subject, and people have to feel comfortable talking about it before they can understand it and respond in a reasonable manner. They have to understand that nobody's trying to create a totally gay church, just make welcome those who are gay and the families of those who are gay.

Lizabeth, the mother of a gay man, reported that she did not want to receive the cup of wine (offered during the celebration of the Eucharist in some Christian denominations) from a person who had been making offensive jokes about gays, and

stayed in her seat while communion was going on. She reported speaking to her pastor about this and reported that he said "[the person] does not mean any harm. That's just the way he is." She described becoming angry about the pastor's comment to her, and she wondered how one was to know that "[the person] meant no harm." She described this incident as "like being physically assaulted, and not knowing why." She stated that she had not known that kind of experience before, and after that she felt more vulnerable to attack, so much so that she stayed away from church functions where she had previously taken an active role, because she believed that she was an easy target. She also reported that she stayed away from church for six months after this incident. Following is part of Lizabeth's "wakefulness" story:

> It was Christmas, and we [she, her husband and three children] always went to church Christmas Eve, and I was thinking...will we go, and I wanted so much to go...we sat down to supper that evening and we talked...my husband said, "you have to forgive...this is so negative...we all want to go and we will go, but we want you to go too, and then I cried, and I knew he was right", we went and [the person she was upset with] was administering the cup of wine, and I thought, "oh my gosh, what now...what if he won't give the cup to [her son] or something", but we went up and he kind of looked at [my son] and I think he was hoping he was going to dip [intinct the wafer], but he drank and I was so proud of him and so happy in my heart ...

Many reported that they began to see themselves as "outsiders" and that they often believed often as if they were on the "outside looking in" as Susie, the mother of a lesbian daughter, described her experience. In their period of wakefulness, church-affiliated family members of lesbians and gays reported that they saw themselves as being a small minority in an environment where they previously been part of the majority. Susie went on to say:

My first reaction was, how can I do this...how can I continue to go to church and participate and trust and all the rest when the atmosphere is so dark...much at odds with where I am... I felt like I was moving back and forth between two worlds, the world of home and family where we could talk about it [daughter's homosexuality], work, where I could talk quite openly to several friends, and then to church on Sunday where I didn't feel I could talk to anyone. I felt like a tumbleweed... being a different person in church than in my other places.

Many participants reported that they felt like victims during this time, that they would never feel the same again about being around people that could hurt them with words. The majority of participants reported that they had experienced more than one scenario that left them feeling shocked or numb. Amber, the mother of a gay son, had this to say:

When I talk about the "intimate conversation", a phrase my counsellor uses...the conversation I need to have with people in my life...Here I go and I sit beside [a female friend] and [another female friend] and we pray together and we walk up to communion together, and I want to scream as loud as I can...I want to say, Greg is a gay man and he lives with his partner...they just bought a house...and I want to show pictures of them and have them treated as normal...I wonder what would happen if I did that. Sometimes, I'm there in the pew, and this is all going through my head, but I keep pretending, and the whole picture becomes so crazy.

Those in smaller churches who knew most of the people in the congregation reported that they felt more favourable in disclosing to certain members of the congregation because they believed that they knew these people well enough to know what the reaction would be. Pattie had this to say:

I think some churches are more creative in reaching out because they have to. They are in larger, downtown areas and they have to become more receptive to

differences. In my area, if someone is going to make a statement and welcome different people or get beyond the sameness of it all...they have to do it on their own. The priest is not going to declare himself one way or another...it's so political. So, I know these people, they've known me all my life, and I'm not going anywhere else [to another church] at my age, so there you go. I told a couple of people, and it wasn't like, don't tell anyone, and it got around, so it's out there now, and that's a big relief.

Past life [before the family member had "come out"] was often linked to personal freedom and independence, and not being in a sensitive place where so much depended on particular words that could potentially be said and heard. Participants stated that they now saw fellow parishioners in a different light, "not taking the issues seriously, behaving less responsibly than they should, and with far less to lose with any decision they made around the issue." Dawn, the mother of a gay man, said:

There has to be some sense that the church "is walking the talk." Stereotypes are not corrected... if [a statement] a person makes is anti-gay ... people laugh and it just continues. [One woman] said [an older man in church who makes these jokes] is old, and not likely to change at his age. Its not so much that he makes them; it's seeing others laugh, which is condoning...it [homosexuality] doesn't really touch them [people in the church] ... it's so far from their lives.... Well, for me the reality of family life is the family structure and the family living arrangements, and the roles, and I want to share that when I talk to those people I've known all my life. I talk about [oldest daughter] and her family and children, and their new house, I talk about [second daughter] and her boyfriend, and I say, they drove home for Christmas, or whatever, and when it comes to him [her gay son], it's like he has no life, because I don't talk about his partner, or his living arrangements, and he is the one that is probably doing the best of the three, but we don't get into him.

Anticipation Through Mirror and Faith

As they moved from wakefulness into the process of anticipation, participants reported that they began to want very much to talk to others who were going through similar experiences. This was also a time when participants recognized that they needed support, and that they would find it increasingly difficult to support their homosexual family member "in a hostile world" if they did not receive support. Several reported that they began seeing therapists, some driving great distances to seek out counsellors that they felt were "open to gays and families of gays." Faith continued to be a major theme, as well as the continued recognition that they "would never have reached this place of understanding homosexuality if it hadn't happened into my own home." Amber, the mother of a gay son, noted:

> My son came out to me …when he went away to university…I needed
> support…I didn't know what to be doing. Our church is just not structured to
> respond to that because it [homosexuality] just isn't …it's not talked about…not
> even on the horizon…. so…there is no material on the bulletin boards or anything
> telling an individual such as myself where to get help, get support…I had not
> heard of Integrity…so, how would a person know what to do…I would be very
> selective in who I spoke with and cautious too…that awareness is not there [in my
> church]

It was also during this time that many participants reported that they attempted to talk to clergy and that they began to look more closely at clergy's attitudes around homosexuality. Many participants shared frustration with the neutral approach taken by clergy they presently knew and had known in the past. It was not unusual for participants to share that they had sought out more than one clergy person, including those they had known in the past. Participants expressed that they understood a caring church

community to be one in which all members were afforded "legitimacy" by others, and to be accepted as having full rights to be in community. Terry, the father of a gay teen, had this to say:

> And here I am …should be fighting for my son…fighting for his place in God's church…for his place as a child of God…and feeling so much guilt that I wasn't strong enough to speak up or walk out… I needed whatever comfort I could draw from there [the church] even if I couldn't be true to who I am. [I have] so much guilt for my inability to be true to myself or true to my son. And seeing the gap between God's love and what is on display and representing God's love…quite a difference. I am tired of waiting for acceptance of homosexual people by the church…its promise seems so near sometimes…the gatekeepers are holding on to their power, and there is no giving power in this game. There is so much irony.

Many participants reported that they did not believe that their homosexual family member was accepted unconditionally by the clergy or by the church community, and described a sense of "illegitimacy" for themselves and their gay or lesbian relative. They expressed a belief that they were considered different from the "normal" as understood by the larger group. Imogene, the sister of a gay man, had this to say:

> I see the message from the pulpit as a reflection of the friendliness of the church. Is the minister open about his views or is everyone guessing where he stands, and when this happens there are bound to be victims as one is not likely to approach him to talk about a family member if they don't know where he stands. I saw one minister, just one, in all the years I've been attending church that spoke out in love in support of gay people. There were lots of people who were up-in-arms about that, and he was rounded up and given a job in the office somewhere, somewhere where he wouldn't knock over the apple carts, I expect…it was a courageous move on his part, but the church was not ready for his message.

Participants reported that their faith is an essential part of who they are, and that their pastoral needs increased since the "coming out" of their relative, yet none reported that these pastoral needs were being met in their church communities. Emma said:

> It all looks so different now...the stuff that made me so angry...it doesn't really apply to me anymore. The doctor said to me, you've got to let it go...the anger...or you're going to get really sick. But I still think about it every time I go to church...not with the anger, but I think about it...I think about the times I sat there and thought about him [her son] and what he was going through, and there was nothing...nothing...the balm, the balm in Gilead, it wasn't there for me or for [her husband] or for him [her gay son who died with AIDS]. He went to Sunday school, and he was confirmed there ...it was his home...I always thought of the church as a place of refuge ...but it did not welcome him and it did not make those last months welcoming or easier for me, for us. So, what's that? I know [the pastor] was a homophobe, although he never came right out and said it. I thought of leaving and going somewhere else, but how would you know...it might be worse...it's not like churches have a sign up saying "Gays Welcome" or "Families of Gays Welcome." Perhaps that's what we need (laughs). Each time I go to church I remember, and I feel sad, and I wonder why I do this [go to church] to myself. Maybe I can make a difference to someone else.

Rather, some reported that they had gotten the message that such issues are not to be openly discussed, that the "normal" and preferred sexual orientation is heterosexual, and that they are responsible for management of any spiritual distress they find themselves in if it involves homosexuality. Imogene said:

> The beliefs around sexuality and sexual identity are just not liberated. If I had to guess, I would say that our minister is anti-gay. I grew up in [another] denomination, and one would not even dare say the word "homosexual" and it was so hard for him [my brother] and then we all changed [to another denomination] and now we are [members of a different denomination], and you would think it would be so different and it is in many ways...but this one

minister, he was not sympathetic to gays and that did not help much in my situation …it's there [homophobia] but not as obvious…but you find out when you really need someone to hear you and there's no one there…

Many reported that they had experienced, or perceived that they had experienced, a non-committed attitude from their pastor. Many stated a belief that their pastor and many congregation members were not seriously committed to advocating for lesbians and gays because they were "in another world and don't understand the importance of advocacy." They went on to say that they believed that pastors and church members did not understand the severity of not taking action, and were "walking around with their heads in the sand." It was in discussing this theme that the concept of "mirror" became most prominent. Dawn, the mother of a gay son, had this to say:

> I mean, the focus is on the roof or the bell tower or the women's group…heaven forbid that we should be focused on broader issues, for example, we don't talk about the things that make people uncomfortable and talking about gay issues has a tendency to make people squirm…we don't have serious issues in our church, we don't deal with issues of race …our congregation is mostly older…older than me…and I think there is the idea… not to make waves, not to bring up uncomfortable issues because someone might be offended and someone might leave the church…another empty pew, less money in the plate, so we just don't go there…but hey, I wasn't exactly walking in the [Gay] Pride parade myself, and I pretty much left all of that up to someone else, so I am learning so much these days by looking at others… I don't think it has ever crossed people's minds that someone might have a gay relative…goodness, I didn't spend much time thinking about that…what would that mean, so it's better not to think, not to talk about it.

Two participants mentioned one pastor who advocates for gay issues, and who is willing to provide education and awareness to parishes. Lizabeth had this to say:

If we have many gay clergy in this diocese, I am unaware of them. It seems that those [clergy] that do take a stand in advocating for homosexual issues...I can only think of one actually...and I would think that he shoulders a heavy burden of expectation, we look to him for hope and for miracles, when he is just a person...he's the Rosa Park of clergy...but he has taken a stand and said, it's okay, it's okay if you come to my church...it's okay if you have meetings at my church...it's okay. He is willing to promote and participate in gay-related dialogue. Many people wonder why does he concern himself, why...why get involved ...why get worn out...

Ginger spoke of the disappointment she felt when she "finally realized" that the church is not as open to diversity as she had previously believed. She had this to say:

I really thought it was...our denomination, open to what is different, I mean. I thought we were the "cat's meow of churches", so I guess that shows how much I knew...I spoke to the priest and he went on about how the church is open to diversity, but that is not my reality. It is my opinion that homosexual people are not valued as much [by the church] as straights. I have become cynical about this [denomination] and, well let's face it, we are likely the most open minded of the lot, so I wonder what the worst are like... and this [realization] is new [since my son came out as gay]. I will never stop believing [in God] and I will never stop going to church...but I believe the church is one place that should be trying to make a difference...should be trying to make an impact on society...and have the courage and the conviction to look at the gay issue in a [more positive] way.

Pattie spoke about the "illiteracy" around homosexuality in her church community. She described it as "closed in and not seeing what's outside the windows." This is how she describes her experience:

We pride ourselves on being a family-style church, but the idea of family is heterosexual, there is no doubt about that. We pretty much make new people feel at home, there is no problem there...There is some openness, and the approach is

different depending on who the priest is at the time. When [my son] came out to me, he was only 17, and I tried to speak to the pastor, and he told [my son] to "get his act together, and to stop putting his parents through so much trouble." I'm not sure if he was really illiterate about homosexuality or if he believed homosexuality to be a sin. He was not popular with the younger people, but he was great with the older ones and with the elderly and he had lots of good points. I tried talking to him once after that, and he changed the subject and started talking about the painting [project in the church] that was going on. I couldn't believe it...he changed the subject. I know that pastors do not have a standard basic approach to issues, and I don't expect them to, but I think some basic guidelines would be helpful, like listening without changing the subject. I think there should be a level of literacy in this day of age...about homosexuality...about other things...not that I knew much myself, but I'm getting there now... a lot of the time, it's just to be there for [the individual], just to show that you care, just to listen to you. A lot of time, I think that helps.

Amber had this to say:

There are lots of places to talk about homosexuality in the church, there are church activities, and breakfasts and other get-togethers. This creates a forum, or whatever...a speaker to come into the church community, increase education and awareness, and talk about interventions. I guess I'm thinking...the church...we are the natural helpers, the natural people who promote love of all people...the backbone of caring and forgiveness and reaching out and all the rest. If we don't have a basic understanding of homosexuality and acceptance of people who are different, then who does?

Acceptance Through Mirror and Faith

As they progressed to acceptance through mirror and faith, participants reported that they came to the realization that they were now "different." They reported that they

had come to a place in their lives where they "were guilty by association." They described a process of old roles giving over to new roles, and putting aside many aspects of life as they had previously known it in the past. Common words and phrases used by participants to describe this time in their lives centred around words such as "power", "ability", "legitimacy", "influence", "control" and "authority". Stories focused around a process that can be described as going from power to powerlessness, of going from being a legitimate and privileged member to being "the other", and being on the outside looking in and not liking what they were seeing. Participants described a process of recognizing that they were now part of the minority. Many reported that they felt disenfranchised and powerless. Klare, the mother of a lesbian daughter, said:

> Who gets to decide what is normal, anyhow? I know couples that are abusive and treat each other like crap, but they're "normal"! What is our vision of normal, anyway? I have a friend who had an uncle or a great-uncle who was gay years ago, and it was pretty much a crime back then. It was called a mental illness...so, I guess we are creeping forward to some extent...at least it's not called a mental illness anymore. There is no question...homosexual people are being short changed. Family members are being short changed. The minute you say it out loud, people look at you differently...what did you do wrong...it's there, and the best case scenario is that they will be tolerant. Why is it ...[that] some people get bent out of shape about homosexuality...oh, the SIN of it all, and don't really focus on all the other [possible] sins...I have heard people talking about the Bible that I'm guessing are not so familiar with the Bible, and have no qualms about [other sins] ...what is it about being a bigot...its like, okay, I'll be a bigot but I will only be a bigot in this one area or that one area... it's like placing an order at Tim Horton's...two sugar and cream, or no sugar and cream...

Not only did they report feelings of powerlessness and being disenfranchised, but they reported that they accepted where they were at the time. They reported that they

began to exhibit a "well, that's the way it is, I suppose" approach. They reported that, if they were to exchange their positions for empowerment, the process would involve aspects of optimism they did not feel. It would mean being involved in a change they desired, but did not ever expect to see, and it would involve expecting a commitment from church leaders toward this change. It would involve being able to identify and name scenarios of hope in the future, which included their homosexual relatives. Lizabeth said:

> It just felt so hopeless. I think when one is a family member…a stakeholder, one wants "something done", one wants to solve the problem [of most people not being aware, of not being informed, of having outdated notions about homosexuality] immediately, and nothing was happening, and I couldn't see anything coming up. I think I felt some pressure, mostly from myself, the kind of person I am…I see a problem, I want to do something about it…some pressure to make things right. I was speaking with a lady whose son "came out" twenty years ago, and I said, "how can you stand it…how can you be so quiet and peaceful" and she said, "things are happening…it just doesn't look like that sometimes." Because it's happening to me, I am aware of it now, but just a few years ago, I was as uninformed as the next person. I now look at homosexuality in a brand new way.

Participants expressed a belief that the church changes slowly, and many expressed a belief the church structure is not taking the responsibility that it should, and is not committing fully to the task of accepting its homosexual members and their families. Participants reported that they had experienced dissatisfaction and confusion with the position of the church, and with the silence of their leaders. They reported that they had experienced the lack of "signals" that would show them that it was okay to speak up and disclose to others [including clergy and church members] that a relative was lesbian or gay. Susie said:

What church means to me…a place of comfort, and warmth and nostalgia and a place of God's Grace. I went to Sunday school and I guess the education I received was pretty basic, but the one part I got and still get is that God Loves You. That's You and Me and all the rest of us. It's awesome, really, when we think of it. It's the one place where we can go where we are all right and it's the one place where I no longer take any of that for granted …the church as the congregation doesn't really cut it for me when it comes to acceptance and now that my own situation has changed and I guess I am expecting something, well, it's not so readily available.

Participant reports of feeling stress and anger were common, yet they reported that this stress and anger did not necessarily affect their behaviour. They spoke of the determination necessary to keep smiling even when they wanted to cry or scream. Some said their pastors were aware of their situation even though they had not told him or her that a family member was lesbian or gay, and related the anger they felt because the pastor did not attempt to bring it up to them. Flora, the mother of a gay son said, "Is ignorance an acceptable excuse that lessens a person's responsibility? …I don't think so." Another theme that emerged was that of "reading the signs". Jaimie spoke of how she "reads the signs" around her:

So, I pick and choose who I talk to about [her daughter], and I know some people in our church think it's the biggest sin. I don't hide about her as I know they all know anyway, but she is precious to me, my daughter, but I don't talk about her to people I know are not understanding or even care. Yes, this is the church we are talking about.

In discussing the perceived lack of openness on the part of the clergy, some participants stated that this lack of openness could be likened to a subtle form of

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oppression. They stated that they experienced indicators of oppression in the church community and belief that these indicators of oppression are "far too strong to be changed in the near future." Participants stated that they do not as much expect blanket acceptance of homosexuality as much as they desire the creation of a platform for dialogue where people would feel free to speak their minds about homosexuality without fear of being blamed for "stirring up trouble" or "being a troublemaker." They reported that at this time they had desired hope; and sought hope through critical engagement with the issues, as well as a willingness to challenge the beliefs of the status quo, but this hope had dissipated in this stage of the process. Klare said:

> We are encouraged to be "one holy people", and I get that. I also get that [one holy people] is more than words…there has to be some honest, open communication. But there isn't that…there are lots of players that are not at the table… I am tired of half-promises that say life will be better for my child and others like her. It is frustrating…you hear of so much violence against gays…two young men that were murdered last year, and there was so little in the news about that because they were gay. I don't understand what is going on …I guess [most people] were convinced long ago about what is normal and what is not normal, and it is hard to get beyond that. They [those who are not directly involved] do not listen to us…treat us as if we are on the fringes, and I want more than that for my child…more than being on the fringes.

Participants reported that they felt increasing anxiety when they perceived a need to "stand up" for their family members, and when they experienced feelings of guilt over perceptions of having let their family member down. They stated that this anxiety often occurred after hearing a negative remark about homosexuals in the church community and not speaking up to say that the remark was inaccurate or offensive. They expressed

that speaking with a family member or a good friend about these situations helped to alleviate the anxiety that they felt. Susie had this to say:

> When I think of disclosing this part of my private life to people at church, I think that they don't have this same situation happening to them in their lives, and why should they be able to relate to what is happening to me. I know a lot of times people think, well, what did they do to her when she was growing up, did they have a really bad relationship and did she [her lesbian daughter] get really turned off from a "normal" relationship, and is that what happened. A few times, people have brought up my divorce, and one woman said, I don't know how you could…put your children through a divorce, I don't have that on my conscience to deal with and mine [my children] all turned out all right, thank God. It was the "thanking God" part that really hurt. I happened to know that her marriage was a mess, and her husband would say the most inappropriate things to single women…he was a pig. I think a lot of people have read too much Dobson [fundamentalist writer who believes parenting styles encourage the development of homosexuality], and blame the parents.

> Pattie expressed feelings of guilt over a similar situation:

> I felt for the longest time that we had done something wrong…what if I had breast fed…better not say that too loud or the righteous right will be making that connection if they haven't made it already… what if I hadn't worked and left him with a babysitter when he was little, did I protect him too much, did I not protect him enough, did I encourage him enough to join sports…what if…what if…I felt guilty because homosexuality is so stigmatized …what kind of a life was he going to have and how was he going to survive in the face of all the homophobia out there. I think I went through a depression that first year after finding out.

Participants reported that they believe that the church is oppressive in several areas, and stated that they would feel more positive about disclosing, less hopeless, less

anxious and more comfortable in the role as family member to gays or lesbians if the church was more supportive. Jeremy had this to say:

> I think the church is kidding itself if it thinks it won't have to really grapple with the homosexual question at some point…but not in my lifetime…The church is the church and there isn't much room to struggle with the whole concept of love and acceptance. I think society, including people in the church, will become more questioning, more critical of the status quo, and really want answers. I see that even in our own city—people beginning to question lots of things that were handed down to us and accepted for so long. But there is so much control, like the celibacy part, and there is room for some flexibility now that there are so few priests. And not ordaining women… look at the work the Sisters have done, but still women cannot be ordained [in the Roman Catholic Church]. Whose needs are being met…and I think the church has to respond someday. I don't think there's really much room for that kind of power in our modern world.

Amber also expressed a belief that church members are confused and need guidance from church leaders:

> I think that people [in the church] are really mixed up about what to think and what to do and they don't know anything about the reality of [being gay]… I think most people [in our congregation] haven't done much reading on the subject, and haven't done much soul searching unless it [homosexuality] comes to their own door, or they have only heard the conservative side…and that conversion is possible…that only heterosexuality is natural and homosexuality is wrong by default. What does it take to get around that? It's not going to happen soon.

Engagement Through Mirror and Faith

As they reached the part of the process that the researcher has named "engagement" participants reported that their perspectives had changed. Those who had stood quietly in the sidelines, afraid of saying aloud that a relative was lesbian or gay, stated that they now began to think differently about themselves and their new reality. Most participants reported that they had stayed in their church communities, while three reported that they had left and become members of other denominations. Several reported that they had lived with the their "new reality" for more than a decade, while one participant reported that she had lost her homosexual son through death. They reported that rays of light, albeit small, had gradually entered into their thought processes, and they reported that they were now celebrating their roles as family members of individuals who are lesbian or gay rather than grieving over roles that were now gone forever.

Participants reported that they had grown in faith as they progressed on their journeys in the church communities and the "mirrors" that had been held up to them by others were reported to having contributed to an educating and liberating experience. Jeremy described attending his brother's marriage to another gay man, and reported the healing and energizing experience that this had been for the entire family:

> He [my brother] was married as soon as the laws changed and he is doing well in his life. I know he feels that [the church] failed him, and that has made a very big difference in his life. All the family attended his ceremony and reception...it was a very positive event for him...for us all [his family]...my brother has suffered, there is no doubt about that... He was in university and he was involved in the Newman society and he was so ...involved in the church...really, a very good person. I would go there and go to church with him, and his faith was so

strong…when he started to come out [disclose his homosexuality]…he first came out to me and to my wife…he went to see a priest and I don't know the ins and outs of it, but he was different after that…you could tell he was not treated well…he was upset…he came home and tried to talk to our parish priest, and it did not go well…after that, our parish priest would refer to him [to us] as "the gay one down in the city"…it was awful. The whole idea of the church is missing that [caring] side…the whole rejection of the nurturing side…rejection of women…rejection of things that are not male driven…what do you do with that…now, he is married and the ceremony was such a good thing for him, for all of us.

Klara, the mother of a gay man, described the liberating experience of adding her son's partner to the family names in writing her mother-in-law's obituary:

I think of it as the extent one offers assistance. The extent one will listen and suspend judgment and even accept that this might…just might be okay. It hurts because he [her son] is such a hard worker and went through a heavy professional program and is in a very responsible profession, and his partner is a teacher, and they have a lovely home. So when she [her mother-in-law] died, I helped to write up the piece for the paper, and I said I want to put them both in [son and his partner] and the others were saying, "are you sure?", and I said, "yes, I'm sure, but I can see that you're not." And they said, "well, it's not us, but the people at the church and [the pastor], what will he think. I didn't care what they thought, and Grandma loved him [her son] so much and was so proud of him, and I wasn't leaving him out and I wasn't leaving [the partner] out, and I said, "put the two of them in, and I'm serious" and that's the way it went in and I'm so glad I did it that way.

Lizabeth spoke of the experience of "no longer going along with the craziness":

People would always ask me, "when is he [her gay son] going to get married...he must be thirty by now", and I'd say, "No, not yet." Its hard when you're in a situation like this...I wanted to answer them as honestly as I could, and say, "no Mark is living with his partner and he is very happy"... but I think they were really wanting to relate to me as a "normal" mother of a son who will be getting married to a nice girl and having two children and getting a pool put in, and I felt like I am in this space all by myself and then I'd cry when I got home...so we were doing the altar clothes up at the church and [another member] asked me, "when is he going to get married?" and I said, "when the laws change I expect" and she just about fell over as I think she thought I was in the dark, or that I wanted to pretend that he is straight, or perhaps she really didn't know, I don't know... and I told her, and I laughed and we both laughed. It was good.

When participants were accepting "the ways things were", they reported that they felt more confident when they attended church with a partner, another family member or a friend. They reported that they did not like to attend church alone. When they reached the process of Engagement through Mirror and Faith, they reported that they were confident going to church and being "one of the crowd again", despite having feeling of discomfort with "the way the church still is." Going to church now was reported as being a far more liberating experience, and they expressed that their "sense of comfort with their own role" (sense of engagement) made a great deal of difference. Emma related that after her son had initially come out to her as being gay, she had her sister drive over from another community each Sunday morning to go to church with her. She described the support she experienced from having her sister [who knew all] sit beside her during Sunday service. She stated that, at that time, she had felt "very alert" at all times, and vulnerable because of her new position. She reported that this sense of vulnerability had been especially strong when she was around those who spoke up openly against gays and

lesbians, and her sister "helped her to feel protected". Dawn spoke of her feelings now, and how she believes that she has changed over the past three years:

> Our family really pulled together, we became stronger as a result, I think, and good friends were wonderful. We concealed it [son's homosexuality] from those who would not have understood...even a couple of relatives [great-uncles] who would have been obnoxious, but I'm sure they know. I think many [people] see AIDS as a gay disease, and the newspaper and television reports about AIDS add to the stigma. But there has been lots of support, but the church had not been one of the places where this family received support. I speak up these days... not that I'm always talking about homosexual issues, I'm not, but when it needs to be addressed, I'm okay with addressing it and if there's a question about being gay, someone will say, ask Dawn, she'll know.

Many participants recounted having lacked a position on homosexuality before their relative "came out", and some reported that some of their own family members had exhibited negative positions on homosexuality before their relative's "came out". The majority of participants related that they truly did not hold a firm perspective on homosexual persons until their own relatives "coming out" and then, as one participant noted, "I seemed to be seeing homosexual people everywhere, and I began to seriously think about the issues." They reported that, once they began critically thinking about the reaction of their church communities to homosexuality, and talking to others who were knowledgeable about the level of discrimination directed toward gays and lesbians, they prioritized the issues and identified themselves as stakeholders. They all agreed that the nature of the problem is complex, and reported a belief that it would be erroneous to expect to find ready solutions. They reported, however, that when they reached the engagement process, they did see that they could now be instrumental in furthering the

position of gays and lesbians, even if only in a small way. A mirror had been held up to them and they had looked in the mirror. The "mirror experience" was especially remarkable for Klara:

> I would say that the overall problem is not …most of the people in the pews, as they are …they haven't had that pivotal experience…haven't had the crisis event that I've had… years ago, I really didn't know what I thought about homosexuality and really would not have had a response to someone like me. Then, I found out he [her son] was gay and my whole life changed. So, I mean, what can I expect from others, when I was just in that same place… I would say that the overall problem is the church itself…those who have authority and are responsible for being in tune with what is happening in the world…I mean, people look to their leaders for direction, and the direction and the support is slow in coming. I mean, what does he [her pastor] think…I don't know, and I have never heard a word from him one way or the other …but as they say, when you know better, you do better, and I think I knew when it was my turn to do better, to get involved in some programs or something.

Participants expressed a belief that there should be a greater range of resources available to families who are coming to terms with their family members being lesbian or gay. All were in favour of increasing the education and visibility of homosexual issues in the church. Imogene said:

> I didn't know about Integrity or anything like that, and then I went on this retreat and this was years later, and that's when I found out that, yes, there is something out there, and I don't know why it was difficult to get that information…people shouldn't have to suffer through that on their own, and I just can't believe that that information is not right there…what would be the problem in that…

Participants expressed that, at this time (at this stage in the process) they also felt more encouraged in speaking to clergy and urging them to take a stand and do more to

intervene in conversations around homosexuality. All expressed a belief that it is unlikely that people can become engaged in the issue to the extent of those who are personally involved. At this stage, participants were also expressing that they were feeling less judgmental about those who take inflexible positions against homosexuality. They reported that their own belief systems and attitudes had made radical changes since their own relative "came out", and expressed a belief that, when one is faced with a family member being homosexual, they are "shocked" into a greater awareness of the reality of homosexuality. All reported a change in perspective, and this perspective transformation appeared to motivate participants to cope with situations as they arose.

They reported that perspectives changed from a state of hopelessness to a state of engagement with life as the family members of people who are homosexual. At this point, they reported that they looked forward to a time when support for such families as theirs would be readily forthcoming, and when people would be available in the church to serve as mentors and supporters to other families such as theirs. Ginger said:

> I have come to terms with my son being gay. So, I guess I'm a "Gay's Mother". I laughingly told my friend that it's like being a "Hockey Mom"...so much of my energy goes into supporting my son and his identity...it's quite complicated. I guess I have some pride in his identity, after all that is who he is. No, I wouldn't have signed up for this experience for any amount of money, but God chose to give this child to me, and so I say " Okay God, you must have a purpose in giving me this gay child, so I will do the best that I can, but you will have to help me out." And I have this fear of being given this job and really messing up big time...you hear all these stories about gay suicide, and the like, and I'm thinking, "please God, show me the way." My son needs to fully accept who he is...to integrate his identity and that takes support and ...the church is one place we do

not get that support. I don't want any of my children to become disconnected from us...to not be able to come home and tell us what's going on...

Life was reported to have changed for participants as they progressed through engagement. Some described time as before and after they found out that their relative was lesbian or gay. As participants went through the process of transformation, they described a sense of increased confidence and assurance with their new "heritage", and a strong aspiration to support their family member in any way they could. Nora said, "It's not like Christ is only here for a particular group of people...Christ is there for him [her son] and the least I can do is to receive that and celebrate that, regardless of what some others may believe and feel." Participants reported that, as time went on, they were less likely to worry about what others thought and believed, or what the pastor was "saying or not saying" but about the full experience of grace and how it included all people, including homosexuals. The other side of this increased confidence was the reported realization that they needed to stay where they were [in church] and try to make a difference instead of running away. Lizabeth said:

> We are functioning as the body [the Body of Christ] and I think there needs to be some understanding around how we feel about it [homosexuality], and I know everyone will not be 'on the same word', but there needs to be some consensus on how the congregation responds if a gay person comes and wants to be a member or if a gay person is part of the body and not disclosing that or if a family member is part of the church and not disclosing. I know that now. There needs to be some dialogue around that and the pastor and the leaders are the people to start that process, but people like me can be part of that process. Its only fair to gay people to be honest about who we were. There is a place there for education, for awareness. For people like me.

When church-affiliated family members begin to progress through engagement, they described a more enlightened perception of the issues surrounding homosexuality in the church. They reported that they became increasingly aware of the needs that exist around these issues and the limitations that exist because the perspectives of most others in the congregation had not shifted. They reported a critical examination of these issues and also reported that they have stronger feelings on these issues than they had previously believed, and are that they are now more confident in disclosing to others and more flexible in the approaches that can be taken in disclosing. Jasmien had this to say:

> I feel that...some kind of a shift has taken place [in me] ...we are the church and we are so guarded, and the secular world...secular services providers and secular organizations are okay with it all [homosexuality], but the church is further removed from the reality of homosexuality. The church has wrapped itself in layers of protection...it's like it is saying "we will close our eyes and if we cannot see it, then it isn't there"...and it has so much power to sanction the rightness or wrongness... it's like, "oh yes, it will have to be wrestled with, but lets get through the important stuff first", and if we're lucky we will have moved along or passed away, and someone else can deal with it. There are other people out there...go talk to them about it, and it [dealing with the issue of homosexuality in the church] becomes the responsibility of others...outside groups that care enough to take a look at people's needs and people's suffering. The church feels that it's no longer responsible for it- it doesn't have to do anything yet and let "yet" become longer. I can speak up now. I've found a voice.

As they reach the engagement process, participants reported that they have disclosed to at least one church member about their relative's sexual orientation, and many have disclosed to a much larger number, while a few have taken on an advocacy role in their church communities. When disclosing, participants reported disclosing to

people they felt comfortable with, even if they had known them for a very short time. The critical factor reported seems to be that they felt "heard and understood" by the individuals they disclosed to. Many were able to laugh at some of the experiences they have had. Jaimie laughed as she reported a conversation she had had with a church member, and how the two of them joked and laughed about references they had heard about "the gay lifestyle":

> I was telling her...there is the "sexual lifestyle" piece. It gets around having to say, "sexual orientation" or something...like, if you are gay, then your lifestyle becomes "a gay lifestyle." I never really thought about this either...before...but I can see how ludicrous this is...oh my gosh, it's like here we are eating lunch in our gay lifestyle, and our food is different and our dishes are different and our way of eating is different...and going to work in our gay lifestyle, and the workplace is different and our chair is different and our computer is different...and buying our groceries in our gay lifestyle...the food is different, a gay supermarket...if you really thought about it you would have to laugh...you have your OWN lifestyle, my gosh...and those who are not gay, they are having lunch in their heterosexual life style, and getting the groceries in their heterosexual lifestyle, and reading in their heterosexual lifestyle...how about going to church in your heterosexual lifestyle...we were laughing so hard.

Quantitative Findings

Findings from the quantitative data are reported in Table 1. Developing a questionnaire based on the emerging codes in the qualitative data allowed the researcher to gather information from a larger group of participants and added to the richness of information gathered in the in-depth non-structured interviews.

Data from 54 questionnaires strongly supported experiences reported in in-depth interviews. Fear of disclosure that a family member is lesbian or gay was a strong theme in the qualitative data. A total of 69 % of respondents to questionnaires felt some level of fear of disclosure. Perceived lack of openness in their church communities was a theme that ran throughout the qualitative findings. Seventy percent of respondents to questionnaires reported a perceived lack of openness from the church community in the disclosure process. This may explain why participants in the 16 qualitative interviews, as they progressed through the experience of their "new realities," experienced anxiety, lack of confidence and insecurity. From the questionnaire data, a total of 65 % of respondents reported that they experienced low levels of comfort in their church communities. Only seven percent perceived their congregations were open to the knowledge that their relative was lesbian or gay, while another 13 % perceived their congregations to be somewhat open, while 51 % indicated that their congregations were not at all open to the knowledge.

The 16 qualitative participants reported a belief that many clergy are uncomfortable with issues that surround homosexuality and are reluctant to take a stand. Questionnaire data indicated that all quantitative participants had disclosed, to some degree, to their clergy person that their family member is lesbian or gay, however only 37 % of respondents reported that they experienced understanding and support, while another 37 % reported that they received no support or understanding from their clergy person. Most strikingly, 31 % of quantitative participants reported that they "very much" perceived that their clergy person believes that homosexuality is reversible, while another 69 % reported a perception that their clergy person "may" believe that homosexuality is

reversible. None indicated that they perceived that their clergy person did not believe

this.

TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF QUESTIONNAIRE DATA ANALYSIS

5 – Exactly, or nearly exactly, like my experience; 4 – Very much like my experience; 3 – Much like my experience; 2 – Somewhat like my experience; 1 – Not at all like my experience.

Self Report	5	4	3	2	1
1. I have not disclosed this information to my pastor/priest/minister;	26 (48%)	18 (33%)	10 (19%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
2. I have disclosed this information to my pastor/priest/minister but not to any other person in my church community;	6 (11%)	5 (9%)	10 (19%)	33 (61%)	0 (0%)
3. I have not disclosed this information because I try to deny to myself and to others that this is a reality in my life;	4 (7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	20 (37%)	30 (30%)
4. I am afraid to bring the subject up with anyone in my church, because I do not feel comfortable enough to do so;	13 (24%)	0 (0%)	12 (22%)	29 (54%)	0 (0%)
5. I am afraid of what will happen to my relationships with others if I disclose this information.	18 (33%)	12 (22%)	0 (0%)	24 (44%)	0 (0%)
6. If I disclose this information, I am afraid people will say unkind things that will hurt me;	27 (50%)	11 (20%)	0 (0%)	16 (30%)	0 (0%)
7. My church community would welcome lesbian and gay members and would not expect them to change;	0 (0%)	2 (4%)	6 (11%)	10 (19%)	36 (67%)
8. I can only talk to a few other church members who also have lesbian or gay family members; (Only 18 answered this question)	12 (67%)	6 (11%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
9. How my church community feels about my family member's sexual orientation affects how I feel about myself and my level of self-esteem;	17 (31%)	18 (33%)	17 (31%)	2 (4%)	0 (0%)
10. I am comfortable with my relative's sexual orientation;	18 (33%)	21 (39%)	11 (20%)	0 (0%)	4 (7%)
11. Disclosing this information is necessary in order for me to have meaningful relationships with others in the church community, but I have not disclosed;	29 (54%)	16 (30%)	7 (13%)	2 (4%)	0 (0%)
12. Disclosure and sharing of life experience have strong spiritual components for our church community;	34 (63%)	19 (35%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
13. Because my relative is lesbian or gay, I experience shame and low self-esteem as a member of the church community;	25 (46%)	15 (28%)	10 (19%)	4 (7%)	0 (0%)
14. Because I have disclosed, I am now sensitive to what members say about homosexuality, and I do not like what I hear;	38 (70%)	12 (22%)	1 (2%)	3 (6%)	0 (0%)
15. Disclosing would be far too stressful for my church community, they just wouldn't know what to do or say;	25 (46%)	11 (20%)	13 (24%)	3 (6%)	2 (4%)
16. I feel bad about myself in the congregation because I feel that I am different and less worthy of congregational support because	15 (28%)	10 (19%)	0 (0%)	8 (15%)	21 (39%)

my relative is lesbian or gay;

Statement					
17. Since I disclosed, people have been open and sensitive to my situation;	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	7 (13%)	20 (37%)	27 (50%)
18. I believe that one role of a church community is that of support and that members should be able to ask for the support of others in one's church community	39 (39%)	15 (15%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
19. My pastor has been very understanding and supportive, and does not judge my family member;	11 (20%)	9 (17%)	0 (0%)	14 (26%)	20 (37%)
20. I think that my pastor believes that homosexuality is reversible through repentance and prayer, and that my family member can be "convert" to being "straight" if he/she wants to;	17 (31%)	0 (0%)	27 (50%)	10 (19%)	0 (0%)
21. Only the weak disclose such issues in church, and I would never talk about such a thing to others in my church;	6 (11%)	7 (13%)	2 (4%)	7 (13%)	22 (41%)
22. Because my relative is lesbian or gay, I believe that she or he is living a wrong and sinful lifestyle;	26 (48%)	9 (17%)	5 (9%)	4 (7%)	10 (19%)
23. I once disclosed this information to a church community and ended up leaving that church because of the negative attitudes of members there;	8 (15%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	12 (22%)	34 (63%)
24. If I disclose to my church community, I know that many people will reject me;	10 (19%)	7 (1%)	21 (39%)	8 (15%)	8 (15%)
25. I feel bad about myself and less worthy of being a member of the church community because my relative is lesbian or gay;	15 (28%)	6 (11%)	0 (0%)	8 (15%)	25 (46%)
26. The attitude in my church is anti-gay, and everyone knows that is so, but nobody talks about it;	29 (54)	0 (0%)	11 (20%)	5 (9%)	9 (17%)
27. I keep my true feelings hidden from most people about my family members sexual orientation;	6 (11%	10 (19%)	8 (15%)	20 (37%)	10 (19%)
28. Since disclosing, I have received frequent expressions of care and support from church members;	12 (22%)	4 (7%)	2 (4%)	17 (31%)	19 (35%)
29. I often deny my family member's sexual orientation, or refuse to admit that he/she is lesbian or gay, because I know that others in the church community strongly disapprove;	19 (35%)	1 (2%)	13 (24%)	2 (4%)	19 (35%)
30. I feel comfortable enough in my congregation to speak out on behalf of lesbians and gays and to feel good about speaking out.	21 (39%)	2 (4%)	4 (7%)	8 (15%)	19 (35%)

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The researcher draws on the theory of Perspective Transformation developed by Mezirow (1978; 1991) in reflecting on the experiences of participants in this study and the processes they went through as they took on their new reality as family members of lesbians and gays. As they progressed through this new reality in their lives and as they engaged in critical reflection on their own experiences, many changed their "meaning schemes" (specific beliefs, attitudes, and emotional reactions) about homosexuality and the experiences of homosexual people in the church, as well as the experiences of relatives of lesbians and gays.

Participants' new experiences were inconsistent with their old meaning schemes. They reported becoming more critically aware of the way stereotypical attitudes that persist and of experiencing an awareness of the injustice of the current situation that exists in the church for lesbians and gays and their families. They reported coming to an awareness that they had previously held stereotypical attitudes and assumptions that had constrained the way they perceived, understood, and felt about homosexuality. They began to act upon their new understandings by expressing a more inclusive and integrating perspective about homosexuality. These processes of moving from one meaning scheme to another are consistent with Mezirow's (1991) description of Perspective Transformation.

This section will examine the discoveries that emerged through data analysis in relation to relevant literature. Because the dominant theme of "Quest for Balm in Gilead" is composed of four major processes, this analysis will reflect on all four processes and the relationship of these processes to Perspective Transformation.

Wakefulness Through Mirror and Faith/ Critical Examination of Beliefs

The stage of wakefulness reported by participants began when their relatives "came out" as being lesbian or gay, and resembled the disorienting dilemma described by Mezirow (1991) as characteristic of the beginning of Perspective Transformation. Learning that a close family member was lesbian or gay started participants on a critical examination of what they believed about homosexuality and why they believed what they did. Participants reported that they began to "see as if for the first time" the stigma surrounding homosexuality, and what Farley (1996), calls the power of unreasonable and self-perpetuating stereotypes about homosexuals. The experiences reported by participants represent a state of wakefulness for them, as they were "hearing" offensive language that they recognized as "not new, it had been there previously", but they had not "heard" it before in the same way as they were hearing it now.

Participants reported the pain and confusion they experienced as they encountered discriminatory attitudes from their faith communities and lack of understanding and support from clergy. They reported disappointed and disillusionment with the church because they had expectations of the church as a receptive and caring place, which is consistent with the work of Rueda (1982). They reported frustration with themselves because they had often held similar stereotypical attitudes and engaged in similar biased behaviour against homosexual persons.

Although participants reported experiencing discriminatory attitudes that are commonly imparted upon lesbians and gays, they continued to seek peace and solace from the church community, that same institution that they believed to be lacking in

support and understanding. Participants reported that, despite the discrimination they perceived in their mainline church communities, they felt that "the church is the one place you should be able to go, no matter what" and reported the need of the support of these communities as they learned to live with their new reality of being the relative of a lesbian or gay family member. For the majority of participants, the need for support went unmet. This is consistent with the work of Fairchild and Hayward (1998) who found that gays, having grown up believing in a God that accepts you when no one else will, wanted to maintain their religious ties. God is still God, despite the interpretation others place on God. For participants, a similar situation appears to be true: God is still God, and they strongly believe in God's love for them and God's love for their homosexual family member. It is difficult to talk about God without interpretation.

Participants reported that they experienced negative attitudes about lesbians and gays, and congregations that they did not perceive as being accepting of homosexuality as a legitimate sexual orientation. These findings are consistent with the work of Switzer (1996), who spoke of the homophobia that exists in the church community because homosexuality is believed to be against the teachings of the Bible. Participants reported that they perceived their church communities to view homosexuality as a sin, but also viewed separate from other sin. This supports the work of Switzer (1996) who concluded that many Christians believe that homosexuality is a "different order of sin" (p. 72), Holtzen (1993) who found that homophobia appears to be related to traditional sex-role stereotypes and religiosity, and Johnson, Brems and Alford-Keating (1997) who found a correlation between religiosity and homophobia, and that high levels of religiosity are related to an individual's beliefs about the origins of homophobia.

The reported level of emotional pain experienced by participants and the levels of confusion and misunderstanding they perceived to exist in their church communities supports the work of Moon (2005a) who examined the process of emotional pain experienced not only by the homosexual group but also by the opposing group, and remarked on how this process can potentially tear people apart.

It was not unusual for participants to report that others in their church communities indicated by their language and behaviour that they did not see homosexuality as "normal" which supports Posner's (1992) reports that many fundamentalist and Catholic churches continue to claim that gay and lesbian people suffer from a "disorder" which can be interpreted as a prejudicial label. In examining such remarks, Posner ponders why anyone would deliberately choose a lifestyle fraught with hostility and oppression.

Participants reported that many members of their congregations, including themselves, were ill informed or completely misinformed about homosexuality. They reported that their own personal misinformation led to varying levels of guilt and the fear that "they had done something wrong" in the raising and nurturing of family members. This supports the findings of O'Brien (1991) that negative attitudes about homosexuality are often based on scanty information gathered from folklore and the commercial media, as well as from a narrow and literal reading of Biblical texts. Participants had been socialized in these or similar church communities, yet they reported that they had not "thought much" about homosexual issues until they experienced it personally when a family member "came out" as lesbian or gay.

Participants stated that clergy also experience confusion when it comes to homosexuality, which is consistent with the work of Olson and Cage (2002) who found that homosexuality is one of the most divisive issues within mainline Protestantism today. Participants reported that many clergy were non-committal, which resonates with the findings of Olson and Cage (2002) who found that clergy spoke in a pragmatic manner, and did not take personal stances on the issue of homosexuality.

Participants reported a belief that change around homosexuality in the church would be slow to develop. They also reported that they had heard condoning stories about Reparative Therapy. While the practice of Reparative Therapy is encouraged by some fundamentalist religious groups, it is not commonly associated with mainline Protestant churches (Nicolosi, 2005).

Participants in this study reported that they found their faith and prayer lives to be a strong support. They reported attending church even when it meant being fearful of attending alone, stepping down from valued church-related work in order to avoid the negative comments of others, and feeling anger at biased comments made by the pastor. They reported feeling close to God and a belief that God loved their family member. Tan (2005), in speaking of homosexual individuals, and not their families, found that respondents espoused high levels of spiritual well-being, and that participants who identified with a formal religion and who attended religious services frequently espoused higher religious well-being than the non church-affiliated group.

Data obtained from questionnaires supported the findings from participants who were interviewed, and indicated that family members experienced a high level of fear of disclosure to members of their church communities and perceived low levels of openness

from members of the church community. Participants described a process where they progressed from wakefulness to anticipation. The following section will discuss the process of "Anticipation through Mirror and Faith."

Anticipation Through Mirror and Faith / Understanding that Others Share Beliefs

Participants reported that they wanted the attitudes in the church to change, and become more favourable for their homosexual relatives and others who are lesbian or gay. This is not surprising, considering the level of rejection and discrimination they reported and the consciousness reported of the potential discrimination of their family member.

It is also not surprising, considering their new consciousness, that many reported hurt and confusion when learning of the family member's sexual orientation. This initial hurt and confusion supports Holtzen (1993) who described the process experienced by family members when they learned that a family member was homosexual, and found that the degree of homophobia experienced by parents lessened with the length of time they were aware of their child's sexuality. In speaking of the coming out process for gay adolescents, Newman and Muzzonigro (1993) described the stages adolescents went through in coming to terms with their sexuality, and which include the emotions of confusion, denial, guilt, and shame; and finally acceptance.

Participants in this study also reported stages (or processes) in coming to terms with their relative's sexuality, albeit somewhat different from those described by Newman and Muzzonigro (1993). These church-affiliated family members reported that they adjusted to the knowledge that their relative was lesbian or gay in a relatively short

period of time. Newman and Muzzonigro reported that they found families with strong

emphasis on traditional values (such as practicing religion) to be less accepting of

homosexuality than families with low emphasis on traditional values. It is also interesting

to note that, in the questionnaire data, 71 % reported high or very high levels of comfort

with the knowledge that their family member is lesbian or gay, 16 % reported a medium

level of comfort and only 19 % reported discomfort with the knowledge. Since data was

not collected to measure the amount of time participants in either section of the study

were aware that their relatives were lesbian or gay, the researcher cannot conclude if a

discrepancy exists with the findings of Newman and Muzzonigro. Because many

participants in this study were found through such support groups as Integrity and P-Flag,

it is reasonable to assume that they had utilized these resources in reaching acceptance of

their relative's sexual orientation.

Participants expressed vulnerability in disclosing, and reluctance to disclose to

those who did not appear "caring." They reported reluctance to disclose information that

they perceived as too threatening, and that they did not feel safe in disclosing. Disclosing,

for them, would become a manner of introducing their new reality to members of the

church community, which is consistent with the findings of Jourard and Jaffe (1970)

who described disclosure as the means by which one person willingly makes himself

known to others, as well as with the findings of Holtgraves (1990), and those of Petronio

(1991). It also supports the findings of Derlega and Berg (1987) who assert that making

the decision to disclose one's personal experiences and life situation impacts many areas

of the person's life, including interpersonal relationships and personal well-being.

While all those who completed questionnaires reported that they had disclosed to clergy, only 37 % reported that they felt clergy to be supportive and understanding. Surprisingly, 61 % reported a perception that their clergyperson believes that homosexuality is reversible. What is most surprising about this report is that all participants belong to mainline Christian denominations. Because the risk of disclosure is associated with the intensity and importance of the information being disclosed, it is not surprising that study participants reported that they experienced difficulty in disclosing the information that a relative is lesbian or gay because of the degree of risk involved in the disclosure. Each participant reported a progression to the point where they could trust the people to whom they disclosed. Participants described a change that occurred when their expectations (the responses they had anticipated) did not become a reality, and the progression they experienced toward the process that the researcher has described as acceptance. The following section discusses the process of "Acceptance through Mirror and Faith."

Acceptance Through Mirror and Faith

Participants reported a realization that acceptance of homosexuality as a "legitimate" sexual orientation by the church involved changes that are moving slowly, and an acceptance that this is "the way things are." They reported that this realization was accompanied by feelings of powerlessness as well as a sense of "illegitimacy." The reported feelings of participants are consistent with what Lyotard (1984) speaks of as legitimatization, the process through which a "legislator" determines the validity and truth of a situation, and society decides what is right and true based on the "legitimate

power" of those who make the statement about what is true. Feelings of powerlessness and illegitimacy were reported to be associated with the perception that the church communities did not validate their lesbian and gay family members as having a legitimate sexual orientation. In church communities in which conformity did not give way to diversity, the value system of the diverse group (the lesbian and gay individuals) became "illegitimate." It was reported that for many in these church communities, sexual orientation was either right (heterosexual) or wrong (homosexual). This supports Hudak's (2005) assertion that the binary categories of heterosexuality and homosexuality are congruent with right and wrong, and Fillingham (1993) who spoke of "power making" and decisions about what are perceived true and false depending on the perceived legitimacy (power) of those claiming to be legitimate and true. Only 58 % of respondents from the qualitative section reported reaching a comfort with themselves as members of the congregation.

Participants reported on the discrimination they believed was directed toward gays and lesbians by their church communities, and the barriers they perceive as existing against homosexuality in the church. This report is similar to what Freire (1996) spoke of as the futile nature of de-humanizing the other, which he believed also de-humanizes the self, takes away all power, and prevents both sides from realizing their goals. Although there appears to be two distinct "sides" to the debate on homosexuality and the church, the struggle continues. Participants reported on becoming more consciously "aware", as Freire maintained that the powerless and oppressed can become more critically conscious, and that consciousness can begin to transform the condition of powerlessness. Participants reported that, as they spent more time thinking about the lack of control they

were experiencing, they began to see that they needed to make personal changes in how they approached the issue, which is consistent with what Giroux (2001) calls the process of continually inventing and reinventing.

Participants reported a shift toward beginning to understand that they could be more assertive in helping themselves, in helping their gay and lesbian relatives, and in helping others in a similar situation. This is similar to what Freire (1987) calls "moving beyond being individualist, and using one's freedom to help others to be free by transforming society" (p. 109). Participants described a process of moving from the state of accepting a situation of disempowerment, and moving to a process of engagement with issues. The final section in this discussion is concerned with the process of "Engagement through Mirror and Faith."

Engagement Through Mirror and Faith / Utilizing the New Role

Participants reported that they began to experience hope that they could contribute to the improvement of their new reality. This supports Frankl (1959), who wrote that hope offers a promise of something better to come, and gives meaning to current life situations (p. 63). Participants reported that, initially, they felt disempowered, fearful about the future, sceptical of change, and somewhat bitter toward the church. They reported that, as their knowledge level grew and their attitudes began to change, they realized that they had not so long ago exhibited similar attitudes to those they now felt to be oppressive in the church community. They reported that they were no longer re-examining homosexuality from the perspective of outsiders, but rather in a new context as the family members of individuals who had "come out" as lesbian or gay. They

reported that, as they examined their previous beliefs, their feelings about homosexuality changed, and for them homosexuality became more credible, more legitimate. They were no longer responding to previous values and needs (having no personal attachment to homosexuality) but had linked with values that had been previously foreign to them (they were now intimately connected with the issue). They reported that when they better understood the contexts of their previous and current beliefs and feelings, they were then able to modify their expectations of others, which is consistent with Mezirow (1978) who argued that people must make sense of their new experiences before they can examine their rationalizations. These family members reported that, because they had taken on a new identity (they were family member of a homosexual person) they now felt connected with the families of other lesbians and gays, and were more aware of the issues affecting lesbian and gays and their families in the church. They also reported feeling closely affected by public and social reactions toward homosexuality such as those expressed through homophobic and heterosexist behaviour.

The terms of reference (contexts) upon which participants' prior assumptions were made had changed. Their consciousness had become raised by understanding the old context, by gaining information about a new context, by taking on a new point of view, and by beginning to think in a new way about the present context.

The learning reported by participants was rooted in their own subjective experiences and their subjective reframing (knowledge that they were now personally involved) and objective reframing (careful examination of the assumptions and beliefs of others, such as those in the church community that would or would not be considered

"safe" enough to disclose to). Subjective reframing continued as participants worked through their own feelings and their responses to the attitudes of others.

They initially reported wakefulness and anticipation. They began to examine and understand their own feelings, to feel disconnected as they experienced this state of apathetic acceptance, and what they believed to be the reality of powerlessness and hopelessness surrounding the situation. Because of the powerlessness they reported, they were unable to disclose or disclosed selectively, reported a separation from the church "body" and feelings of being at odds with attitudes they perceived to be present in the church community. They viewed their previous attitudes through the attitudes and behaviours of others, and had developed a new perspective that was inconsistent with the predominate perspective they experienced around them.

The researcher draws heavily from Mezirow's theory of Perspective Transformation in explaining how the meaning structures that these adults had acquired over a lifetime became transformed when they experienced a situation where old meaning schemes no longer fit: what Mezirow (1991) refers to as a disorienting dilemma, and what Cranton (1992) refers to as a period of destabilization and disorientation. These "old" meaning structures were frames of reference that were based on participants' cultural experiences and contextual experiences and that had influenced how they formerly understood and interpreted homosexuality. This is consistent with Taylor's (1998) work on Perspective Transformation. Old meaning schemes influenced their reactions toward homosexuality up until the time they learned that a relative is lesbian or gay, at which time they began to experience discomfort with old meaning schemes and how these meaning schemes understood homosexuality.

There is a considerable degree of discomfort with parents around the sexual orientation of their homosexual offsprings (Borhek, 1988; Holtzen, 1993), and while all will not likely experience a disorienting dilemma, they will experience a change in meaning schemes as they become accustomed to the new knowledge of their offspring's sexual orientation. Bearing in mind the social climate in which we live in North America in 2005, the degree of homophobia present in society (Green, 2005), and the pressures that lesbian and gay youth face on a daily basis (Cloud, 2005) it is reasonable to conclude that most parents would not choose to have their children in circumstances where they will be subjected to discrimination and rejection on a regular basis and over long periods of time. Meaning scheme changes from "my son who is heterosexual" with images and dreams consistent with that meaning scheme, to "my son who is homosexual" and a "disorienting dilemma" occurs between the two meaning schemes as new information is processed and life transitions take place to accommodate that new information. This can be likened to what Mezirow (1995) calls a life crisis or major life transition, or an accumulation of transformations in meaning schemes over a period of time (Mezirow 1995, p. 50). While all individuals may not experience a disorienting dilemma when hearing that a family member is lesbian or gay, and coming to terms with that new information, it seems reasonable to conclude, from their stories, that participants in this study did experienced a disorienting experience with their relative's disclosure. As they progressed toward engagement, they changed their frames of reference, critically reflected on their old assumptions and beliefs, and consciously began to define their world in a new way, which involved a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of their thoughts, feelings, and actions. This shift of consciousness, reported by participants,

irreversibly altered their way of viewing homosexuality as well as issues surrounding

homosexuality and the church, how they understood their relationships with others in the

church community, and how they understood their role as relatives of gays and lesbians

in the world.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Scope, Strengths and Limitations

Because discourse is a human interaction, it unquestionably follows that qualitative research cannot be valueless. Even with the most stringent of boundaries and bracketing (suspending or laying aside what is known about an experience being studied) (Burns and Grove, 1997), the researcher becomes subjectively acquainted with participants, and by hearing a variety of emotions expressed through stories related often reacts with empathy and concern for the experiences reported by the other. This research did not utilize behavioural data, and does not attempt to present reproducible results.

Another limitation of the study is the discrepancy between the numbers of males and females studied: 14 of the 16 qualitative participants were female, while 38 of the 54 quantitative participants were female. This leads the researcher to question if the results would be the same if males and females were more equally represented, and to question why a higher number of females responded to the research advertisements. Another discrepancy is the number of mothers as compared to fathers: 11 mothers participated in the qualitative section of the research as compared to one father, while 31 mothers responded to the questionnaires as compared to five fathers. Again, the researcher questions if a more equal distribution of mothers and fathers would have changed the research findings. While one grandmother participated in the qualitative section of the study, and three grandmothers participated in the quantitative section, no grandfathers participated. One aunt participated in the qualitative section and four aunts participated in the quantitative section, all maternal aunts, while no uncles participated.

Low numbers of people under the age of 35 and over the age of 50 participated in both sections of the study: three participants under the age of 35 in both sections, three people between the ages of 50 and 65 in the qualitative section and 11 people between the ages of 50 and 65 in the quantitative section.

As the researcher engaged in dialogue with participants, it became obvious from comments made about professional roles and responsibilities and language used that most were educated at the university level, while several held professional designations. The researcher was left wondering if there was a connection between education level and participant responses, if education influenced their decision to become part of the research study and if findings would have been different if there had been more variety in educational levels.

The researcher selected participants from five mainline denominations, and data is limited to the attitudes and beliefs of participants from the Roman Catholic, Anglican, United Church, Methodist, and Presbyterian denominations. Participants in both sections of the study presented self-reports, and it is impossible to know how these were influenced by such factors as the passing of time and the intrusion of other life events.

While participants represented both Canada and the United States, the researcher did not collect data to determine if respondents lived in rural or urban settings, the size of the communities in which participants lived, or the network of supports perceived to be present in their personal and professional lives. In retrospect, the researcher feels that this information would be valuable in furthering understanding the process of disclosure in this population.

This study gathered data from family members of individuals who are lesbian and gay, and not the homosexual family members themselves. Additionally it did not gather information from other congregational members or from pastors, and any perceptions of these three groups reported in this study are perceptions of these others. No attempt was made to elicit the views of those other than family members of individuals who have "come out" as lesbian or gay.

The researcher did not meet any of the participants face-to-face. The method of telephone interviewing was considered to be an adequate and economically affordable means to collect data from participants in the qualitative section of the study, while e-mail was considered adequate in the quantitative section. Face-to-face data collection of interview information has the additional benefit of allowing the researcher to view participants' subtle nuances, expressions and to study body language as dialogue transpires. While the process utilized elicited relevant information, face-to-face interviews may have allowed for more all-inclusive contextual analysis.

A major strength of this study was the depth to which experiences were reported and recorded, leading to discovery of meaning and understanding of participants' personal experiences. Another value of this study lies in its connection to the real world through the systematic analysis of data using the constant comparison process of grounded theory. My process of verification is inherent in the constant comparison process of grounded theory and provision of a thick descriptive qualitative report is a practical way to communicate the meanings and understandings of lived experiences.

The aim of the researcher was to produce research that would inform and enhance the practice of pastoral care in church communities, especially as it is provided

to family members of individuals who are lesbian or gay, and subsequently write a report that would enhance the current understanding of the reality of these experiences. In communicating the research results, I have laid out the process through which these individuals experienced the reality of their church communities as they faced a new and often uncomfortable situation in their lives, in hopes that the church community may benefit from the study and its analysis. It is my hope that others will conduct similar studies that will add to and refine the process I have described herein.

Recommendations and Implications of Research

Because of the percentages of homosexuality reported in the general population and because gays and lesbians are coming out at an earlier age (Cloud, 2005) most mainline congregations are likely to have, at some time, family members of gays and lesbians who are looking for pastoral support in dealing with the changes that have taken place in the life of the family. Sensitive and timely pastoral care can decrease anxiety and provide supportive care for these individuals.

This research indicates that family members of lesbians and gays, in attempting to continue in their church communities, go through a number of processes: wakefulness, anticipation, acceptance and engagement. This researcher recommends additional research with family members to further investigate these processes and to address factors that were not addressed in this study such as time-lines, age of family members at the age of "coming out", differences in the reactions of male and female relatives as well as age groups and self-reports collected at varying stages of these processes. Another relevant area of study would be the exploration of the stories of those family members

who did not participate in this study and who have not experienced the process described therein. It would be both interesting and beneficial to know of the experiences of those family members that do not increase their awareness, or who leave their faith communities because of the reactions of others to their disclosure that a relative is lesbian or gay. A further line of research would be to more closely examine the experiences of family members going through the process called "wakefulness." Many reported the feelings of despair they experienced. It would be interesting to look at the vulnerability of this group, what professional services they find helpful, what services may cause further pain, and the levels of understanding they perceive from church-affiliated counsellors. Researchers following the themes that emerged in this study might find it useful to conduct the inquiry as a number of interviews as opposed to a single occurrence.

In developing the quantitative data collection tool, the researcher did not incorporate factor analysis. Factor analysis helps in determining the number of factors necessary to explain the pattern of relationships among variables, the nature of these factors and how well hypothesized factors explain observed data (Gorsuch, 1983). Because the tool sought to analyze subjective perceptions, the researcher cautions those interested in furthering this study to do factor analysis and to make changes in the tool where necessary.

Additionally, further studies could incorporate the process of Perspective Transformation described by Mezirow, and which appears to be occurring as an unplanned and in-formal process experienced by participants. The Perspective Transformation process could be incorporated into workshops and other teaching events to raise consciousness and prevent discrimination in the church community. Those

teaching institutions that prepare ordained clergy for mainline Christian denominations might need to consider their core curriculum to ensure that learners have the benefit of critically exploring diverse issues that they will be faced with in the church community.

Because offensive comments and stereotypical jokes are painful for family members to hear, clergy can be aware of this and provide information to the congregation to educate and enlighten, in the attempt to heighten consciousness in this area with the ultimate potential outcome making the church community a more hospitable community for lesbians and gays and their family members as well as all who attend.

Many clergy may require some guidance to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to develop a strong helping relationship with these families and may first need to examine their beliefs and feelings about homosexuality and determine if they are indeed able to provide an unconditional relationship with families who are becoming aware that a member is lesbian or gay. For those willing to develop their skills and knowledge, many mainline churches have support groups in place to provide assistance and encouragement. One such group is the Integrity group in the Anglican Church, which has much to offer in terms of information and guidance to lessen such painful experiences. The information gained from consultation with such support groups can be invaluable in dispelling myths and stereotypes and are often critical when dealing with families of gays and lesbians.

It could also be helpful for clergy to attend workshops to further develop their understanding of homosexuality. Also, clergy may decide to refer families to such groups as Integrity and P-Flag that have been described elsewhere in this report. Not all clergy are pastoral counsellors, and it is important for clergy to be aware of the existence and

benefits of pastoral counselling services in their area, and to develop a comfort level in referring individuals and families for such services when they believe they will benefit from such support. Considering the findings in this study, it would be pivotal that clergy had some knowledge of the attitudes and beliefs of specific pastoral counsellors before referring. Family members who experienced a lack of openness in their church communities might not appreciate a counselling session with a counsellor who advocates Reparative therapy. Finally, clergy could consider identifying others in the congregation who might be interested and willing to attend workshops and other events outside the church, learning current information about homosexuality and what resources are available, and bringing that information back to share with the congregation.

<u>Summary</u>

The voices in this report are those of family members finding their way through a new reality and surfacing as people who knew who they were and wanted to be as relatives of those who had "come out" as lesbian or gay.

While participants report that they progressed through a painful experience, they also described a process that was liberating and empowering, and reported that "a mirror" had been held up for them by others as they began to recognize many beliefs, attitudes and behaviours they had previously exhibited themselves.

They reported that the process they experienced helped them to more clearly understand "who" they were as people of faith, as members of the body of Christ, who they were as human persons journeying alongside others, and to come to a place where they could focus on the peace and joy inherent in the Christian love and acceptance of

others. The researcher believes that information elicited in this study could contribute to the provision of pastoral care in church communities and to the enhancement of the lives of those family members whose relative is lesbian or gay.

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INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT /INFORMATION LETTER
Disclosure Patterns of Church-affiliated Families with Lesbian or Gay Family Members
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You are invited to participate in either Part A or Part B of a study to explore the "disclosure" patterns of church-affiliated family members of individuals who have "come out" as lesbian or gay. The purpose of the study is to discover how individuals with close relatives (sons, daughters, grandchildren, brothers, sisters) disclose to members of their church communities (clergy and/or other church members) that their family member is lesbian or gay. Part A of this study utilizes in-depth interviews to gather data. Sixteen people will be asked to take part in one interview that will be conduced face to face or by telephone and will be tape-recorded for further analysis. I will ask participants if they will be available for a second (albeit brief) contact in case further questions arise as transcripts are analyzed. The first interview will last in the area of 1-2 hours, and the second contact (if necessary) would take a few minutes. After interviews are transcribed, copies will be presented to participants for confirmation, for correction of errors or omissions and to keep participants informed of the process. Any changes made by participants will be incorporated into the transcripts. When themes emerge, they will be sent to participants for confirmation before proceeding. After transcribing, all tapes will be erased for confidentiality reasons. Part B utilizes a 30-item questionnaire that participants will be asked to complete. Questionnaires will be delivered face-to-face or mailed to participants by post or by E-mail and will be returned to the researcher by the same routes. Seventy-five questionnaires will be distributed.

Margaret E. Myers, the primary investigator is a registered nurse, Anglican priest, and counselor. She is also engaged in studies at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary in pastoral care and counseling.

INFORMATION

You are asked to be part of this study, either Part A or Part B, as described above. Upon consent, you will be asked to either take part in an interview or complete a 30-item questionnaire, which is the quantitative part of the study. The questions are enclosed. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. Rather, what is important is your experiences, your thoughts and your feelings, and how you remember the process of "telling" those in your church community about your relative being lesbian or gay (or your experiences, thoughts, feelings and how you remember NOT telling), and the meaning of these events in your life. Sixteen people will be interviewed, and interviews are expected to take somewhere in the area of 1-2 hours. 75 people will be asked to complete questionnaires, and this is expected to take somewhere in the area of 15-20 minutes. You will not be asked to participate in any follow-up interviews, but Part A participants will be asked to be available to answer a short question or clarify a question that may arise when interviews are transcribed. The sample for this study is drawn from individuals who have identified themselves as being family members of lesbian or gay individuals, as located through community bulletin boards, the P-Flag (P-Flag is a group of Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians & and is an international non-profit organization.); Integrity, a national network of organizations and friends working toward the full inclusion of gay and lesbian people in the life of the Anglican Church of Canada, encouraging churches around the world to promote the basic human rights of gay and lesbian people; and from Christian Gay website. I will also be placing

advertisements in libraries and on university bulletin boards, and the Metropolitan Community Church web page.

All interviews will be audiotaped and audiotapes will be transcribed. Your name or other identifying marks will be not be used on the transcripts. Signed consent forms will be stored separately from the tapes and completed questionnaires. After audiotapes are transcribed, they will be erased.

(Please initial this sheet to declare that you have read it _____)

RISKS

The risks of this study are minimal. Possible risks might include that in the process of sharing information a participant may experience some discomfort or embarrassment when remembering specific circumstances. These feelings would likely be short term and not affect a participant in any significant manner. The goal of the study is not to embarrass anyone, but to discover how individual family members "disclose" the information that a close family member is lesbian or gay to church members. However, any participant is free to stop his/her participation in the interview at any time, and should feel free not to answer any question. Should a participant become notable distressed, and make me aware of that distress, I would help that participant find a source of support in their own geographic area, but would not take financial responsibility for that support service.

BENEFITS

During the course of the interview process, participants may internally process concepts, which may clarify for their own perceptions of what the disclosure process/or lack of disclosure means to them, and the value of disclosure in their lives. By sharing their experiences with others, participants will be helping to inform the community and helping to add to the literature on this subject. They may gain personal appreciation of having their story "heard" by another. Also, the gaps in these stories may point to other areas requiring study.

The goal of the study is to focus on the disclosure process for these family members and the meaning of this disclosure for them. My aim is to produce research that will inform and enhance reader understanding of the current state of disclosure for these family members and to prepare my report in such a way as to allow readers a glimpse of the world of disclosure/no disclosure experienced by these participants. The ultimate aim of the study is to improve pastoral care to the family members of individuals who are lesbian or gay.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Interviews will be held in a private setting. If they are being conducted via telephone, the researcher will be using a private telephone in her private office, and attention will be paid to keeping the door closed, and ensuring that others will not be able to hear. Audiocassettes will be kept in a locked drawer in the researcher's office, separate from consent forms and completed questionnaires, and all transcripts and other data will be kept in a locked file. Privacy will be ensured by using code names and numbers in handling data, and limiting access to the raw data to the researcher and individual participants. I will assure participants that I will not tell others that they have participated in my study and that in situations where I present the study results publicly (writing in journals and presentations at conferences), I will take precautions that their identities or any identifying information will be kept in strictest confidence. Participants will be informed that, due to the nature of the Internet, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed while questionnaires are on the Internet. Researcher will ensure that no information, including participants' names, titles, or any demographic information or specific information that could identify that person, is ever mentioned in any publications, reports, presentations, or any other form of communication that comes from this study and the information given by participants.

COMPENSATION
There is no compensation for this study.

(Please initial this sheet to declare that you have read it _____)

CONTACT
If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures (or if you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in the study) you may contact the primary researcher, Margaret E. Myers,
153 John Street West, P.O. Box 818, Wingham, Ontario, Canada, N0G 2W0, (519) 357-4736 (Office); (519) 357-1146 (Home). You can also contact the Supervising professor, Dr. Marsha Cutting at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary at Wilfrid Laurier University, 75 University Avenue West, Waterloo, Ontario. N2L 3C5, 519-884-0710, ext 3234. This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board at Wilfrid Laurier University. If you feel you have not be treated in accordance with the descriptions in this document, or that your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Bill Marr, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wildred Laurier University, (519) 884-0710, extension 2468.

PARTICIPATION
Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed. You have the right to omit and question(s)/procedure(s) you choose.

FEEDBACK AND PUBLICATION
This study is being conducted as part of the researcher's Masters Thesis at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary that is affiliated with Wilfrid Laurier University. The principal investigator plans to disseminate the information through the writing of a thesis, journal articles and conference presentations and other groups both professionally and academic. Participants are welcome to a copy of the report or a summary of the report. They can contact the principal investigator, Margaret E. Myers, for this report.

<div align="center">

CONSENT
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I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

Please check here if you do not wish any quotations from your interview to be used in publications.

Participant's Signature   Date

_____ _____

Investigator's Signature   Date

Interview Question for Qualitative Interviews

1. Can you tell me about your experiences in telling / or not telling those in your church community that your relative is Lesbian or Gay...

Additional questions were only asked for purposes of clarification, and were spontaneously asked for the purpose of clarity and understanding as participants spoke of their experiences of disclosing or not disclosing, and as they spoke of their comfort level, the support and spiritual direction they experienced, as well as distressing experiences, and their understanding of the church community in its openness to them.

APPENDIX III

Advertisement for Participants for Qualitative Section

Do you have a family member who is Lesbian or Gay?
What has your experience been like in telling others that your close relative (daughter, son, sister, brother, grand-child or other close relative) is lesbian or gay? This study wants to hear about your experiences in your mainline church community. What was it like for you in disclosing to your pastor/priest/minister and/or others in your church community? Were you able to disclose? If not, why was that?

Why am I doing this research study?
The goal is to determine the experiences family members have in telling those in their church communities that their relative is lesbian or gay. The only way to obtain this is information is through contacting and talking to the very people who are going through this experience.

Where will the research study take place?
This research study will take place across Canada and the U.S. via telephone interviews.

I am looking for people over the age of 18 who:
■ Have a close family member (son, daughter, grand-child, brother, sister or other close relative) who has "come out" to you as being lesbian or gay;
■ Are members of mainline Christian churches (or have been members of mainline churches since the "coming out" of your relative;
■ Speak, Read, and Write in English;
■ Are willing to take part in an interview, (approx. up to 60-90 minutes), and check the interview transcript for accuracy. Phone calls and mailings will be at no cost to you.

For more information, contact:
Maggie Myers
Primary Researcher
Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Canada
519-357-1146
or E-Mail: lmmyers@wightman.ca

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APPENDIX IV

Advertisement for Participants for Quantitative Section

Is Your Family Member Lesbian or Gay?
What has your experience been like in telling others that your close relative (daughter, son, sister, brother, grand-child) is lesbian or gay? This study wants to know about your experiences in your mainline church community. What was it like for you in disclosing to your pastor/priest/minister and/or others in your church community? Were you able to disclose? If not, why was that?

Why am I doing this research study?
The goal is to determine the experiences family members have in telling those in their church communities that their relative is lesbian or gay. The only way to obtain this information is through contacting and talking to the very people who are going through this experience.

Where will the research study take place?
You will answer a questionnaire that best describes your experiences. Questionnaires will be mailed to you by post or by E-mail. You will send the completed questionnaire back to the researcher.

I am looking for adult persons who:
■ Have a close family member (son, daughter, grand-child, brother, sister or other close relative) who has "come out" to you as being lesbian or gay;
■ Are members of mainline Christian churches (or have been members of mainline churches since the "coming out" of your relative;
■ Speak, Read, and Write in English;
■ Are willing to complete a questionnaire, (approx 15 to 20 minutes; 30-items that are checked for the number that best describes your experience), Phone calls and mailings will be at no cost to you.

For more information, contact:
Maggie Myers
Primary Researcher
Wilfred Laurier University, Waterloo, Canada
519-357-1146
or E-Mail: lmmyers@wightman.ca

APPENDIX V: QUESTIONNAIRE for QUANTITATIVE SECTION

Disclosure Patterns in Mainline Church Affiliated Individuals when a Family Member is Lesbian or Gay

This questionnaire makes the following assumptions:
1. The person completing the questionnaire (the participant) is an individual over the age of 18 years who has a close family member (son, daughter, brother, sister, grand-child) who has "come out" to the family as being lesbian or gay;
2. The participant is affiliated or has been affiliated with a mainline Christian church (Roman Catholic, Anglican, United Church, Presbyterian, or Lutheran) since the family member has "come out" as being lesbian or gay.

On a scale of one to five, (**one being the least common and five being the most common,** please indicate the number in each situation that best reflects your own experience in disclosing the information to your mainline church community (clergy person and/or others in the church community) that your relative is lesbian or gay.

1 --Not at all like my experience
2 --Somewhat like my experience
3 --Much like my experience
4 --Very Much like my experience
5 --Exactly, or nearly exactly, like my experience

1. I have not disclosed this information to my pastor/priest/minister;
5, 4, 3, 2, 1

2. I have disclosed this information to my pastor/priest/minister, but not to any other person in my church community;
5, 4, 3, 2, 1

3. I have not disclosed this information because I try to deny to myself and others that this is a reality in my life;

5, 4, 3, 2, 1

4. I am afraid to bring the subject up with anyone in my church, because I do not feel comfortable enough to do so;
5, 4, 3, 2, 1

5. I am afraid of what will happen to my relationships with others if I disclose this information;
5, 4, 3, 2, 1

6. If I disclose this information, I am afraid that people will say unkind things that will hurt me;
5, 4, 3, 2, 1

7. My church community would welcome lesbian and gay members and would not expect them to change;
5, 4, 3, 2, 1

8. I can only talk to a few other church members who also have lesbian or gay family members;
5, 4, 3, 2, 1

9. How my church community feels about my family member's sexual orientation affects how I feel about myself and my level of self esteem;
5, 4, 3, 2, 1

10. I am comfortable with my relative's sexual orientation;
5, 4, 3, 2, 1

11. Disclosing this information is necessary in order for me to have meaningful relationships with others in the church community, but I have not disclosed;
5, 4, 3, 2, 1

12. Disclosure and sharing of life experience have strong spiritual components for our church community;
5, 4, 3, 2, 1

13. Because my relative is lesbian or gay, I experience shame and low self-esteem as a member of the church community;
5, 4, 3, 2, 1

14. Because I have disclosed, I am now sensitive to what members say about homosexuality, and I do not like what I hear;
5, 4, 3, 2, 1

15. Disclosing would be far too stressful for my church community, they just wouldn't know what to do or say;
5, 4, 3, 2, 1

16. I feel bad about myself in the congregation because I feel that I am different and less worthy of congregational support because my relative is lesbian or gay;
5, 4, 3, 2, 1

17. Since I disclosed, people have been open and sensitive to my situation;
5, 4, 3, 2, 1

18. I believe that one role of a church community is that of support and that members should be able to ask for the support of others in one's church community
5, 4, 3, 2, 1

19. My pastor has been very understanding and supportive, and does not judge my family member;
5, 4, 3, 2, 1

20. I think that my pastor believes that homosexuality is reversible through repentance and prayer, and that my family member can be "convert" to being "straight" if he/she wants to;
5, 4, 3, 2, 1

21. Only the weak disclose such issues in church, and I would never talk about such a thing to others in my church;
5, 4, 3, 2, 1

22. Because my relative is lesbian or gay, I believe that she or he is living a wrong and sinful lifestyle;
5, 4, 3, 2, 1

23. I once disclosed this information to a church community and ended up leaving that church because of the negative attitudes of members there;
5, 4, 3, 2, 1

24. If I disclose to my church community, I know that many people will reject me;
5, 4, 3, 2, 1

25. I feel bad about myself and less worthy of being a member of the church community because my relative is lesbian or gay;
5, 4, 3, 2, 1

26. The attitude in my church is anti-gay, and everyone knows that is so, but nobody talks about it;
5, 4, 3, 2, 1

27. I keep my true feelings hidden from most people about my family members sexual orientation;
5, 4, 3, 2, 1

28. Since disclosing, I have received frequent expressions of care and support from church members;
5, 4, 3, 2, 1

29. I often deny my family member's sexual orientation, or refuse to admit that he/she is lesbian or gay, because I know that others in the church community strongly disapprove;
5, 4, 3, 2, 1

30. I feel comfortable enough in my congregation to speak out on behalf of lesbians and gays and to feel good about speaking out.
5, 4, 3, 2, 1

Comments:
Please add any thoughts/feelings/memories you may have about your experience of "disclosing" the information that your family member is lesbian or gay that is not covered in the questionnaire.

APPENDIX VI

Demographic Data Sheet for Participants in Qualitative Section of Study

Sex: F: _____   Male: _____

Relationship to the family member who is Lesbian or Gay:

Mother: _____   Father: _____

Brother: _____   Sister: _____

Grandmother: _____   Grandfather: _____

Aunt: _____   Uncle: _____

Your Age:

Under 35: _____   35-50: _____

50-65: _____   Over 65: _____

Age of your relative when they came out to you: _____

Were you attending church at the time your relative came out to you: Yes: ___ No:
_____

Are you attending church now: _____

Are you attending the same church Yes: _____   No: _____

Are you attending the same denomination: _____

Do you/ have you attended a support group for family members of gay individuals:

Yes: _____   No: _____

Does your church have support for gay individuals and their family members:
Yes: _____ No: _____

If Yes, is it a:

Support Group: _____ Education Events _____ Other: _____

APPENDIX VII

Demographic Data Sheet for Participants in Quantitative Section of Study

Please include the following information:

Your Age: _____

Sex, (M/F): _____

Your relationship to homosexual relative: _____

Your Religious denomination: _____