

**JEWISH MALE HOMOSEXUAL  
IDENTITY IN SOUTH AFRICA**

**AN INTERPRETIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL  
ANALYSIS CASE STUDY USING RESPONSIVE  
INTERVIEWING**

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UNIVERSITY  
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JOHANNESBURG

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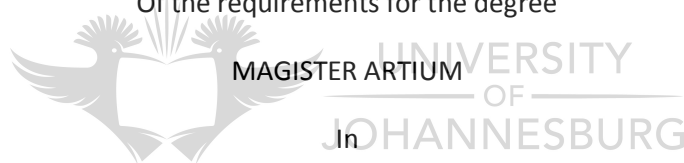
By

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## ABSTRACT

This study is a phenomenological case study [i.e. the focus is on the participant's personal descriptive experience] using responsive interviewing [i.e. the interviewer allows the interviewee to determine the direction and content of the interview] in an effort to understand the personal challenges that a Jewish male homosexual person, Irvin, has to face in the current South African context of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. What is revealed is that for a man to remain true to his religious convictions and at the same time to embrace his homosexual desires is by no means an easy balancing task. Yet the merger of a religious identity with a homosexual identity can become an inspirational example of what it is to live a truly authentic life, in which 'compromise', far from being a negative means to an end, becomes central to what it means to be genuinely authentic.

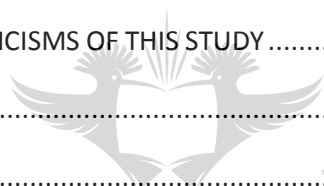


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# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION



## WHY THIS STUDY IS IMPORTANT

This research project is important for the following eight reasons;

1. The first reason this research project is important is that it will contribute to knowledge regarding gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered clients. When it comes to engaging with gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered persons there is a “gap ... [that] routinely exists between theory and practice” (Coyle & Kitzinger, 2007, p. 177). Drawing on actual lived experience this research can help “establish therapeutic models or develop new theories and practices that attend to the diversity of experience represented by lesbian and gay sexualities” (Coyle & Kitzinger, 2007, p. 175). As we will come to see from a post-modernist perspective, ‘sexuality’ is a phenomenon that can be co-constructed in the process of research, between the researcher and the participant. The collaborative aspect of research is vital as can be seen for example in “narrative psychology, where questions of the self and identity are pivotal” (Loyttyniemi, 2006, p. 259), narrative psychology being one of the psychological theories used to work with gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered clients.
2. In addition to the above point, it has been argued that “psychology, far from being an objective and dispassionate observer, actually performs an ideological role in actively constructing the phenomenon under its gaze” (Coyle & Kitzinger, 2007, p. 156). While on the one hand this “ideological” role can have negative outcomes in contributing a stereotyping framework towards homosexual persons, on the other hand, it can also have positive outcomes, in that psychology can contribute towards furthering social justice, as is the case with community psychology. So for example, psychological research can help contribute towards developing the self esteem of young gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered clients as in the case of “affirmative [gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered] psychology [which] is defined by [gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered] psychologists as research that contributes to positive social change for [gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered] people” (Coyle & Kitzinger, 2007, p. 82).
3. Thirdly, “there is a dangerous tendency among ... academics (in other words, most of academia) to *theorize us* [sic], and that is part of the silencing of our voices, bodies, and self-identifications” (Schneer & Aviv, 2002, p. 94). As in therapy where we do not talk ‘about’ the client, but rather, “with” the client, should we also not do so in research, seeing as this research affects the lives of those being researched? Thus,

It is clearly a misrepresentation of the phenomenon to look at the concept of illness solely through the eyes of the doctor and from the standpoint of scientific medicine, and to think that medical knowledge is the same as the patient's own self understanding (Gadamer, 1996, p. 52).

The actual lived experience of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered clients can contribute much to our understanding of them, and "bring down to earth" our theories regarding homosexuality, and so "we should never wholly separate our [theoretical] conceptual language from the experience which has been sedimented in the words themselves" (Gadamer, 1996, p. 125). This is precisely why psychological research should be empirical because "empirical, mean[s] literally, to be 'guided by experience'" (Gergen, 2009, p. 58). Thus, "what persons know of life they know through 'lived experience'" (White & Epston, 1990, p. 9). What this means is that "a psychological appreciation of diversity must include an understanding of the experience of being different from others" (Blaine, 2007, p. 17). Taking into account our clients diverse lived experience enables us to "fix [or work better with] the person instead of the category" (Morland & Willox, 2005, p. 77) and thus allow us to see for example "the unique struggles and identity issues that are associated with attraction to both genders [that] are often diluted and distorted in ... more generic treatments" (Campos & Goldfried, 2001, p. 612).

4. A fourth reason is the need for documentation –

I believe we need to explore, document and share our moments of disillusionment, doubt, conflict, confusion, loneliness, and alienation as much as our celebratory moments if we are going to be honest about our needs, our experiences and our real challenges (Schneer & Aviv, 2002, p. 176).

One reason we need documentation of the actual lived experiences of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered clients in psychological research is that even among open-minded social scientists "stereotypes operate on our thinking automatically even among people who want to be non-prejudiced" (Blaine, 2007, p. 214). Documentation helps us to show "respect for others [through] acknowledging their distinctness and difference" (Plumwood, 1993, p. 174). Acknowledgment of difference helps us to avoid a homogenizing effect of medical categorization by such terms as "homosexual" and thus on a social level can help create in



our society a “patchwork quilt, rather than a melting pot, [that] provides a helpful metaphor for appreciating multiculturalism” (Blaine, 2007, p. 11).

5. A fifth reason is to contribute towards conceptual clarification. In gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered research it has been noted that “results of studies are often ambiguous and contradictory. One reason is that different researchers measure the same characteristic in different ways” (Garrett, 2009, p. 203). Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis [IPA] helps us to gain greater insight into the construct validity of concepts that we use for quantitative research, concepts such as “homosexual”.
6. A sixth reason is that this kind of research can help us to problemmatize modernistic assumptions regarding sexual orientation. Thus, while on the one hand,

As the Wall Street Journal noted, ‘the discovery of a definitive biological cause of homosexuality could go a long way toward advancing the gay rights cause. If homosexuality were found to be an immutable trait, like skin colour, then laws criminalizing homosexual sex might be overturned’. Same-sex marriage, job protection, antidiscrimination in housing laws – all these could hinge on the redefinition of homosexuality as biologically caused rather than socially and culturally chosen (Morland & Willox, 2005, p. 57);

On the other hand,

The political stakes for gays and lesbians are complex: if science can “prove” that homosexuality isn’t a choice, what is to prevent its being repathologized and either ‘cured’ or therapeutically aborted after prenatal testing discloses the presence of the gay gene? Tying the rights discourse to science opens the possibility of devaluing choice as somehow illegitimate. It also tacitly reaffirms the either / or nature of heterosexual-homosexual split (Morland & Willox, 2005, p. 57).

From a post-modern perspective, “homosexual identity, like all categorical identities, is a ‘fiction’ to a certain extent, is a collection of regulations and positions that can, perhaps, constrain as much as enable, impose as much as liberate, police as much as free” (Morland & Willox, 2005, p. 19). When we understand that sexual orientation and homosexuality in

particular is a social construct, we will be more sensitive to the potential discrimination that can arise using medical categories like “homosexual” to classify people.

7. A seventh reason is to avoid what I call “correlative pathologizing” of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered clients, in other words, assuming that certain psychological conditions automatically are associated with being gay. Thus for example, it is reported that “rates of depression, suicide, self-harm, substance misuse, homelessness and school non-attendance, misconduct and criminal behaviour have been reported a higher amongst adolescents who identify as gay or lesbian” (Coyle & Kitzinger, 2007, p. 162). However,

Most of these studies fail to explore the aetiology of their participants’ psychological distress and behavioural difficulties adequately ... it seems a disproportionate part of their disturbance is the consequence of material processes of ostracism and victimization; for example, the result of actual or feared exclusion from family, work and social groups or the threat or occurrence of physical assault or emotional abuse (Coyle & Kitzinger, 2007, p. 163).

While the material processes may be related to the sexual orientation of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered clients, there is no direct pathological causal link. Thus,

Through gaining a greater understanding and appreciation of the way in which internalized culturally and subculturally-inspired ‘representations of gayness’ might function in the precipitation and exacerbation of emotional and behavioural disturbance, [this research will help] psychological clinicians will be better able to identify and, where appropriate, challenge such narratives (Coyle & Kitzinger, 2007, p. 170).

And so we can avoid “an insistence upon consistently sexualizing the emotional difficulties of gay men would constitute naive reductionism and would be potentially oppressive” (Coyle & Kitzinger, 2007, p. 154).

8. An eighth reason is that “there is need for further research specifically related to educational psychology practice with LGB youth” (Coyle & Kitzinger, 2007, p. 420). This is because “it is hard for us to imagine practitioners (let alone the public) holding an image of [gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered] youth as vital, empowered, strong and sexual” (Coyle &

Kitzinger, 2007, p. 411). In addition, “most support staff working with schools lack knowledge about [gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered] people, are usually ambivalent about the needs of [gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered] people, and may hold stereotyped attitudes and beliefs” (Coyle & Kitzinger, 2007, p. 417). Therefore, from a social justice or community psychological perspective there is a “duty [that] places ... psychologists in a pivotal front-line role when working with schools to manage the outcomes of homophobia and [for] opening up new possibilities for framing the experiences of young [gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered] people” (Coyle & Kitzinger, 2007, p. 410).

Now that we have looked at eight reasons for this study to be conducted, let us turn to chapter two, in which key concepts central to this study are addressed.



## CHAPTER TWO: KEY CONCEPTS



## INTRODUCTION

1. In this chapter I will explore some definitions of “identity”, which will show us that identity, rather than being a static phenomenon, is really something that is fluid, relational and part of a social process. It involves a type of dance on the part of the subject as they strive to balance affiliative and exclusionary dimensions of the identity process. Furthermore, identity has a language aspect to it, that comes to influence the subject’s actions or roles that they choose to perform in society. And because there is a behavioural component to identity, there is also an ethical positioning that takes place for the subject.
2. I will also look at the role that modernism and post-modernist, play in our understanding of the homosexual identity. We will see how modernist thinkers use analogies such as a machine or a flower to try to understand homosexuality and finally come up with the “psychobiosocial hypothesis”. From the post-modernistic perspective, we will look at the central role of language in identity formation. We will also come to see that psychology as a science is not really “neutral”, that it does not just describe phenomena, but also defines phenomena.
3. In looking at the central role of language in identity formation [using post-modern insights], we will see that sexuality is a type of “language game”, specifically narrative, and that identity is a life story. In other words, we construct ourselves through the sexual stories that we tell about ourselves. One such type of narrative is the transformational sexual identity narrative, an example of which we will look at being the “coming out process”.
4. We will also look [again from a post-modern perspective], at how sexual orientation and self-identification have been conceived, first as actions and then as indications of being. We will look at the move in medical science towards an essentialistic stance that gives rise to a false binarism, by which queer theorists then come to question.
5. Next, we will look at how post-modern queer theorists problematize discourses around homosexual identity, the role of “suturing” and “interpellation” in performative identities, and how discourses simultaneously liberates and oppresses homosexual subjects, but by means of normative identity judgments. In this regard we will focus on the coming out process, how that it is a long and arduous journey for the homosexual subject, involving uncharted territory and internalized homophobia and the “passing” effects of the closet.

6. Finally we will come to focus on Jewish male homosexuality, the compromise that is involved and the need for hermeneutics, for us to be able to “grasp” what this compromise really means for the individual Jewish male homosexual.

## 1. IDENTITY

When it comes to a definition of the concept of identity, it can be said that,

Potential identity elements ... refer to any goals, values, and beliefs that are actively considered during identity formation. The task of identity formation involves the process by which some range of goals, values and beliefs are identified and evaluated, and by which commitments to particular identity elements are formed and activities towards their implementation begun (Waterman, 2004, p. 209).

In other words, it is a process that involves “exploration and commitment” (Waterman, 2004, p. 220) in order to discover what one’s own goals, values and beliefs are. Thus, “identity constructions are not to be understood as ready-made and sharply defined identities, but rather as more flexible ‘clusters’, which construct and are constructed by ... relevant subject positions” (Soreide, 2006, p. 536). Thus, one way to understand the term “identity” is to understand that it is a fluid process, and not a static phenomenon.

Part of the process of establishing an identity through exploration is to experiment and compare “notes” so to speak with other people, so that it can be said that “self-definition [as part of the identity formation process] is largely created within conversation” (Gergen, 2009, p. 69). As part of a ‘conversational’ dialogue,

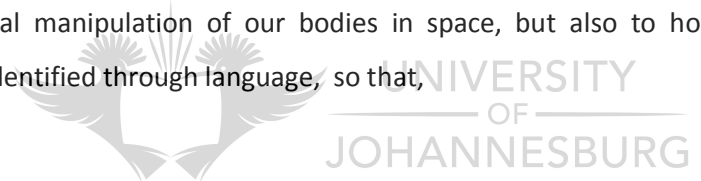
Identification is, of course, identification with the other, which means that [paradoxically], identity is never identical to itself. This alienation of identity from the self it constructs, which is a constant replay of a primary psychic self-alienation, does not mean simply that any proclamation of identity will be only partial, that will be exceeded by other aspects of identity, but rather that identity is always a relation, never simply a positivity (Warner, 1993, p. 313).

In other words, “the world becomes meaningful in relationships” (Gergen, 2009, p. 97). Thus, “what we take to be knowledge of the world grows from relationship, and is embedded not within individual minds but within interpretive or communal traditions” (Gergen, 2009, p. 88), and so when it comes to the process of identity formation, “there is not thinking, or indeed any sense of being a self, that is independent of the social process” (Gergen, 2009, p. 89). This means that the concept of identity involves an intrinsically relational aspect, with the consequence that “our identities – who we regard ourselves as – incorporate the impressions and beliefs others hold regarding us” (Blaine, 2007, p. 16).

So far we can see that identity is something that is formed, not in isolation, but in relationship to others, so that it can be said that “membership of a social group often is a central component of one’s identity” (D’Augelli & Patterson, 1995, p. 332). This implies that an identity has a social aspect to it. In this regard, “Erikson viewed identity formation from a social psychological perspective, as occurring at the intersection of self and society” (Swartz, 2002, p. 317). Another way to express the relationship between identity and the other is to say that “identity development at the intersection of intrapsychic ego processes and external social contexts” (Swartz, 2002, p. 317). When it comes to balancing the dynamic between self and the other in the formation of identity, it can be said that “there are least two forms of group identity, affiliative and exclusionary. The first is characterized by strategies of identification while the second is characterized by strategies of disidentification” (Warner, 1993, p. 147). Throughout this thesis we will come to see, that the process of identity formation is sort of a “dance” that occurs between these two positions, that of the affiliative type and that of the exclusionary type. Another way to express this dance of identity is to say that “we don’t define ourselves only positively but negatively as well” (Hook in Hook, 2004, p. 173).

Another key component to the formation of identity through exploration is the use of language. Thus, “wherever people are conversing, they are co-constructing meaning” (Gergen, 2009, p. 145). Identity is something that a person has to express or give voice. Naturally this means that a person must use language to do so. But as with identity [which does not exist in isolation], so “language is not the possession of the single individual” (Gergen, 2009, p. 160). In other words, “thinking is not an expression of an autonomous mind, but a public dialogue carried out privately” (Gergen, 2009, p. 101). To express this point differently, language is the shared means of enabling an individual to give voice or expression to their identity.

So far we can see that identity involves a process of exploration, part of which is carried out in conversation with others, who in turn influence our sense of who we are through the way they talk about us. In addition to language, there is of course the behavioural aspect to identity. It can be said that language influences our behaviour, so that “our ability to share symbols [or language] also benefits from our innate capacities for *role-taking* [sic]” (Gergen, 2009, p. 89). “Role-taking” or “role-play” is a crucial aspect of a person’s ability to give expression to their identity, so that “it is through role-taking that I become conscious of myself” (Gergen, 2009, p. 89). Through our behaviour, “we are constantly giving off signals that define who we are to others. Like actors on a stage, we choose our clothing, hairstyle, jewellery or watch, and so on, for the specific purpose of creating a public identity” (Gergen, 2009, p. 91). Role-playing also involves movement through space, or the way we manoeuvre our bodies and position them, so that it can be said that “your identity is dependent upon how you are positioned” (Gergen, 2009, p. 70). A related concept to behaviour is that of ethics, which means that “to be a certain identity is to be the kind of person for whom certain forms of behaviour, but not others, are taken to be proper” (Morland & Willox, 2005, p. 177). And so role play, as a key element of identity, cannot occur without positioning, a positioning which not only refers to the physical manipulation of our bodies in space, but also to how we choose to be described and thus identified through language, so that,


  
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Even before he is born, if only by virtue by the name he is given, the human child is already positioned [through language] as the referent in a story recounted by those around him, in relation to which he will inevitably chart his course (Lyotard, 1984, p. 15).

The creation of identity involves exploration as a person develops a sense of their beliefs and values about themselves. Such an exploration that place in a social context, through talking and interacting with the other through the roles that we choose to assume in the expression of our identities. Yet,

At a deeper level identity suggests an unconscious striving for continuity of personal character that brings automatic responses to new situations making use of old experience as a kind of template of perception and response. Identity means a certain idiosyncratic way in which the individual ego performs its tasks of perceiving,



valuing, reasoning, compromising, and choosing. At yet another level the concept points to that maintenance of one's rootage in solidarity with a group's ideals and corporate identity (Gerkin, 1979, p. 208).

Once again we come to a sort of dance that we need to partake of between two polar opposites, that of identity stability and that of identity fluidity. Thus, on the one hand it can be said that "identity is fluid – a constant process of disclosure, reflexivity, and continued disclosure to others" (Meyer, 2007, p. 118). This fluidity is necessary in order to incorporate and develop key components of one's identity, so that it can be said that identity formation is a "psychological process by which one 'makes' or extends one's identity, by taking on an aspect of the external environment or of someone else" (Gibson & Swartz in Hook, 2004, p. 476). On the other hand, a person must be able to hold onto those key elements of identity that are helpful or even necessary in their survival as they negotiate complex social situations. For some people, [for example homosexuals], holding onto key identity elements as a stable core of themselves evokes hostility from the social order in which they find themselves. They thus become "stigmatized". This can prove detrimental as "stigma affects social interactions and opportunities, as well as how stigmatized people view and evaluate themselves" (Blaine, 2007, p. 183).

## 2. MODERNISM VERSUS POST-MODERNISM

Seeing as it may become necessary to suffer for what may be stable or core elements of one's identity, this then raises the question of whether or not there really exists core or stable elements in a person's identity. From a modernist perspective, the answer to this question is yes. This is because "modernism proceeds from the grand narrative of a universal and objective reality and relies on the metaphor of the linear, predictable machine when designing enquiries into reality" (Devetzis, 1998, p. 6). Because modernism assumes stable and independent realities do exist, the modernist [or specifically the scientist] finds it easy to divide the world up into separate entities that are assumed to have essential characteristics that distinguish them from other objects in the world. This is no less the case when it comes to sex, gender and sexual orientation. And so "many spaces are divided into male-only and female-only" (Schneer & Aviv, 2002, p. 58) realities. Thus, when it comes to the "cause" of homosexuality many reasons or origins have been speculated by the modernist scientist, for example, "genetic factors ... brain differences ... prenatal hormonal factors ... adult post natal hormonal factors ... [and] psychological causation" (Balch, 2000, p. 90-102). In an effort to understand these causes,

Developmentalists have based their work on either one or two major metaphors of the person: the machine or the flower, or what are often called the *mechanistic* [sic] and the *organismic* [sic] conceptions of development. In the mechanistic case, the infant is largely viewed as an input-output machines, that is, as an organism whose development - or behavioural output - is largely shaped by environmental conditions (the input)' (Gergen, 2009, p. 92).

Thus, "in contrast the organismic theorist stresses the genetic base of development. Like a developing daffodil, the direction and stages of development are predetermined - inherent in the nature of the organism" (Gergen, 2009, p. 92).

With regard to the origins of sexual orientation it can be said that Sigmund Freud began a process of extending the search for the causes for homosexuality beyond the mere mechanics of a physiological universe into the realm of social science. Thus, "already with Freud who adopted a very modernistic, 'objective' medical perspective, there is the acknowledgement of the influence of society and culture [via the use of cultural myths] on the formation of the developing young person's sexuality" (Brannon, 2005). And so some modernist scientists began to realize that sexual orientation is more complex than just atoms fusing together, at a chemical, physiological level. They thus began to come up with more complex formulations or theories for the origins and development of sexual orientation. So for example, "the psychobiosocial hypothesis is based on the idea that some variables [of sexual orientation] are both biological and social and therefore cannot be classified into one of these two categories" (Halpern, 2000, p. 16). Thus, "instead of perceiving nature and nurture as 'independent variables', psychobiosocial hypotheses recognize that nature and nurture are inextricably entwined. Biology responds to the environment, and people adjust and select their environment to make it compatible with their biological propensities" (Halpern, 2000, p. 16). The result of these more recent hypotheses is that we can now say that "life experiences change our underlying biology - they shape and reshape the brain, and the brain, in turn, influences life experiences" (Halpern, 2000, p. 28). However, despite this complexification of modernist hypotheses, when it comes to the causes of homosexuality, current research can only conclude that "results of studies are often ambiguous and contradictory. One reason is that different researchers measure the same characteristic in different ways" (Garrett, 2009, p. 203). Thus, "it is not clear what causes homosexuality, which means we do not know how to explain heterosexuality either" (Garrett, 2009, p. 212).

Unlike modernism, which seeks to universalize research results, “post-modernism emphasizes the idea of local, as opposed to global truth” (Devetzis, 1998, p. 9). One version of a post-modern approach to reality is social constructivism. And so,

[Social] constructivism is the understanding that through the act of perceiving and describing our personal experience we construct our own understanding of that experience as well as the reality about that experience itself ... in terms of epistemology – or how we know things – our perception of the way things are is a function of our beliefs’ (Becvar & Becvar in Yarhouse, 2008, p. 199).

But once again, as with identity above, such perception and description is bound by the language that is used, so that “the ways we understand the world are often constrained and controlled by the structure of language” (Gergen, 2009, p. 36). However, language, like identity, does not exist in a vacuum, but “our traditions of speech are often embedded in larger organizations. Such organizations come to have authority over matters of reality” (Gergen, 2009, p. 47). Examples of such organizations are the Church and also modern medical science. Both the Church and modern medical science use language to try to understand and also control reality. However,

For the social constructionist, language is not a reporting device for our experiences ... rather, it is a defining framework. Thus a change in language equals a change in the experience; for reality can only be experienced, and the ‘reality’ experienced is inseparable from the pre-packaged thoughts of the society’ (Becvar & Becvar in Yarhouse, 2008, p. 199).

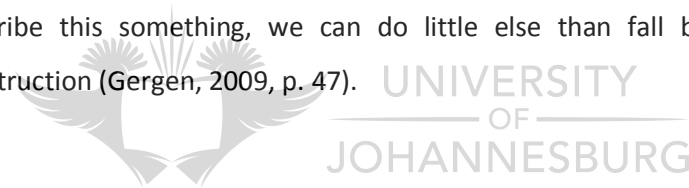
Thus, for example,

Rather than regarding language as an expression of thought ... discourse analysts tend to view it as a social instrument, as a means of achieving interpersonal goals.

Perhaps the most important of these is the establishment and maintenance of a socially desirable identity (Shotter & Gergen, 1989, p. 45).

In creating these socially desirable identities, both the Church and modern medical science can be said to be using “different language games” (Lyotard, 1984, p. xxiv). An example of such a language game is that of “sexual orientation”. Modern medical science would posit that sexual orientation is a fact, a reality that exists independent of the researcher and is thus capable of being ‘discovered’ as an object in the world. However, “post-modern theory challenges the idea of gay identity as expressing ‘true’ – not constructed – gay sexuality” (Morland & Willox, 2005, p. 9). It may be that modernist,

Critics often point out that the world exists prior to our constructing it. [However], constructionists agree that ‘something exists’. However, once we go about trying to describe this something, we can do little else than fall back on traditions of construction (Gergen, 2009, p. 47).



### 3. CENTRAL ROLE OF LANGUAGE

Seeing as language is so important in the formation of our identities and in the construction of what we would call “reality”, let us take a closer look at a specific use of language, the narrative. It can be said that “identity is a life story” (Plummer, 1995, p. 172). What this means from a post-modern perspective is that “the post-modernist assumptions underlying narrative ... posit that reality is subjective, multiple and fluid in nature, socially constructed through language within communities of people, and maintained through storied trajectories” (Saltzburg, 2007, p. 59). Thus, “meaning is derived through the structuring of experience into stories, and the performance of these stories is constitutive of lives and relationships” (White & Epston, 1990, p. 27). In terms of the process of identity formation what this means is that “the success of this storing of experience provides persons with a sense of continuity and meaning in their lives, and this is relied upon for the ordering of daily lives and for the interpretation of further experiences” (White & Epston, 1990, p. 10).

So in creating a sense of our own identity, especially in regard to sexual identity, it can be said that “we tell stories about ourselves in order to constitute ourselves” (Plummer, 1995, p. 172). This raises

the question “what then is narrative identity? It is the unity of a person’s life as it is experienced and articulated in stories that express this experience” (Josselson & Lieblich, 1993, p. 7). Thus, through stories, “identities provide scripts by which to live” (Morland & Willox, 2005, p. 174). Furthermore, “identities issue a call to coherence” (Morland & Willox, 2005, p. 174).

Words like “scripts” and “coherence” almost give a person a sense of implied stability, yet nothing could be further from the “truth”. When it comes to a stable sense of identity [sexual or otherwise], it can be said that “history might be altered as one’s perspective changes” (Josselson & Lieblich, 1993, p. 49). One reason perspective might change is that our life situations change. Change in turn can also bring with it discord and disillusionment, as we will come to see in Irvin’s [my participant’s] coming out process. In this regard it is said that “all narrative must generate the illusion of an ‘imaginary resolution of real contradictions’” (Lyotard, 1984, p. xix). Narratives help create a sense of continuity between old and new, past and present. They do this because “narratives punctuate experience and give them meaning” (Devetzis, 1998, p. 61). Nevertheless contradictions in experience do arise, and they do so when “identity is triggered by the interactions which are co-evolved within different and shifting contexts” (Devetzis, 1998, p. 106).

One such trigger is the sexual attraction for someone of the same sex as oneself, a trigger that implies that the person having such an attraction must fit into the category of “homosexual”. And with such a category comes a story attached. Thus it can be said with regard to homosexual orientation from a post-modern constructionist perspective that “sexual stories ... are the personal narratives that are socially embedded in the daily practices and strategies of everyday life” (Plummer, 1995, p. 15). However,

It is not to say that there isn’t much truth to the claim that homosexual identity, like all categorical identities, is a ‘fiction’ to a certain extent, is a collection of regulations and positions that can, perhaps, constrain as much as enable, impose as much as liberate, police as much as free (Morland & Willox, 2005, p. 19).

So for example, when dealing with a gay client, it is important to bear in mind that,

Clients are influenced by the primary story of their sexual attractions, how the story came to make sense to them over time. This is what might be referred to as looking for sense-making stories’ .... and they are told over and over again and become part of the individuals identity as a whole (Yarhouse, 2008, p. 200).

But once again, like identity and language above, stories do not exist or function in isolation, but need to be “interpreted”, so that,

An assumption in narrative sexual identity therapy is that interpretation – in this case of what same sex attractions signal about a person – has a powerful influence on one’s life, and the problems clients have are viewed as resulting from internalizing dominant discourses from either the broader culture or a dominant subculture. Dominant discourses can make some behaviour or activities more likely [while at the same time] limit others. These behaviours and activities may facilitate an identity and eventually consolidate it (Yarhouse, 2008, p. 200).

In therapy such dominant discourses can be “deconstructed” through helping the client to understand how they became “situated” within the particular [sexual orientation] narrative. In this regard, Mark Yarhouse develops the concept of “transformational sexual identity narrative” (Yarhouse, 2008, p. 201), which refers to a process through which “it is up to the client to identify how they wish to ‘situate their lives’ based upon their ‘preferred values and intentions” (Yarhouse, 2008, p. 202). Sexual stories can then come to be re-narrated so that such stories can have general themes of “suffering, surviving and surpassing” (Plummer, 1995, p.15). and so while sexual stories can become the “bases for identity” (Plummer, 1995, p. 18), they can also be used as a means through which “oppressed people resist by identifying themselves as subjects, by defining their reality, shaping their new identity, naming their history, telling their story” (Plummer, 1995, p. 30).

Seeing as from a post-modern perspective [one which I take throughout this thesis], stories hold such power over us because they are the means through which we shape and maintain our sense of identities with regard to understanding ourselves as sexual beings, what does this mean in terms of our understanding the concept of sexual orientation? From a modernist perspective “the phrase ‘sexual orientation’ now refers quite exclusively to gender of object-choice” (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 168). Thus, “we are dealing essentially with an orientation – an inclination, a feeling, an appetite – rather than what people decide to do with it” (Ruse, 1988, p. 140). Furthermore, it can be said with regard to the modernist understanding of sexual orientation that “sexual orientation, understood in terms of the object of one’s sexual attraction, exists on a spectrum exclusively heterosexual and exclusively homosexual, and for most persons in this culture is fixed relatively early in life” (Balch,

2000, p. 122). Thus, when it comes to homosexuality, it is believed that “gay men ... typically perceive that their sexual orientation is a given, a central aspect of themselves, and choice has little to do with it” (D’Augelli & Patterson, 1995, p. 26). A post-modern perspective would acknowledge “that many individuals [homosexual or heterosexual] take their sexual orientation to be a feature which plays an important role in their perception of who they are” (Morland & Willox, 2005, p. 171). However, for the post-modernist “self-identification rather than behaviour thus becomes the key to the scientific analysis of sexual orientation” (Morland & Willox, 2005, p. 66). This raises the following question: “What does this tell us about the relationship of ideas to acts?” (Morland & Willox, 2005, p. 66). In other words, the question revolves around “whether ‘homosexuality’ means having a homosexual identity or having exclusively homosexual sex” (Blaine, 2007, p. 6).

To answer this question let us look at the notion of “homosexual identity”. From a modernist perspective, “a homosexual is someone, male or female, who is erotically attracted to members of his/her own sex. By ‘erotic attraction’ I mean ... fantasizing about sexual encounters” (Ruse, 1988, p. 3). In terms of a medical science understanding of homosexuality, it can be said that “traditional narratives represent homosexuals as a homogeneous mass” (Devetzis, 1998, p. 133), or expressed slightly differently, “homosexuals form a homogenous social category” (Devetzis, 1998, p. 86). However, in “reality”, “there really is no such thing as a “typical” homosexual, male or female; any more than there is any such thing as a ‘typical’ heterosexual, male or female” (Ruse, 1988, p. 9). Furthermore, “the lesbian and gay ‘community’ is not homogeneous but diverse in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, age, socioeconomic status, disabilities and politics” (D’Augelli & Patterson, 1995, p. 304). From a post-modernist perspective more emphasis is placed on the phenomenological experience of what it is to be a “homosexual”, so that it can be said that “human homosexuality centres primarily on feelings, desires, and fantasies, with behaviour somewhat secondary” (Ruse, 1988, p. 118). In addition, as already noted above, for the postmodernist, “homosexuality is an identity issue rather than a phenomenon of sexual attraction” (Devetzis, 1998, p. 93). Furthermore, for the post-modernist “identity is conferred on people via the discourses they evoke within their social interactions” (Devetzis, 1998, p. 57). One such “discourse” is that of sexual orientation or homosexuality. Because there is so much diversity in the so called gay community, and no one “version” of homosexual can claim universal truth, post-modernists argue that “diverging narratives regarding the same constructs illustrate that making general, scientific statements on homosexuality is a trap. Despite empirical statements to the contrary, homosexuality is neither static nor concrete. Homosexuality is a manifestation of the social construct process” (Devetzis, 1998, p. 133).

#### 4. ACTION VERSUS BEING

Even from a modernist perspective, medical scientists have not necessarily been consistent about the “stable” identification of the homosexual. So for example the “medical history” of the homosexual can be divided into “two successive stages of homosexual definition, the premedicalization one of same-sex *acts* [sic] and the postmedicalization one of homosexual *types* [sic]” (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 232). Initially the focus of “homosexuality” was on the activity, and only later did it become more of an “essence” issue, a case of what a person is, rather than what they do. Furthermore, through the creation of the homosexual, the heterosexual came into being, thus a “hetero/homosexual binarism” (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 35) was established in medical discourse. With regard to this binarism, post-modernist argue that,

The aim must be to reverse the rhetorical opposition of what is ‘transparent’ or ‘natural’ and what is ‘derivative’ or ‘contrived’ by demonstrating that the qualities predicated of ‘homosexuality’ (as a dependent term) are in fact a condition of ‘heterosexuality’; that ‘heterosexuality’, far from possessing a privileged status, must itself be treated as a dependent term (Beaver in Sedgwick, 1990, p. 10).

With regard to the concept of binarism, “post-structuralists propose that the identity of an object or person is always implicated in its opposite” (Warner, 1993, p. 130). Thus,

Identities are constructed through, not outside, difference. This entails the radically disturbing recognition that it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its *constitutive outside* [sic] that the ‘positive’ meaning of any term – and thus its ‘identity’ – can be constructed. Throughout their careers, identities can function as points of identification and attachment only *because* [sic] of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render ‘outside’, abjected. Every identity has its ‘margin’, an excess, something more. The unity, the internal homogeneity, which the term identity treats as foundational is not a natural, but a constructed form of closure, every identity naming as its necessary, even if silenced and unspoken other, that which it ‘lacks’ (Gay, Evans & Redman, 2000, p. 17).

This means that,



For a gay or lesbian identity-position to sustain its appearance as coherent, heterosexuality must remain in that rejected and repudiated place. Paradoxically, its heterosexual *remains* [sic] must be *sustained* [sic] precisely through the insistence on the seamless coherence of a specifically gay identity (Butler, 1993, p. 113).

The consequence is that “to accept homosexuality involves taking on ‘the problems of the homosexual’ which the social imaginary imposes on one; to reject homosexuality is to accept oneself as normal” (Hocquenghem, 1978, p. 87). So with regard to medical science and the “history” or medical narrative of the “homosexual” Michel Foucault argued that,

The nineteenth century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious morphology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on this face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away. It was consubstantial with him, less as a habitual stance than as a singular nature (Foucault, 1978, p. 43).

From a scientific modernist perspective, it has been asserted that “that identities presuppose essences” (Morland & Willox, 2005, p. 171). In other words,

Essentialism is a method which attempts to explain the properties of a complex whole by reference to a supposed inner truth or essence, the assumption ‘that in all sexological matters there must be a single, basic, uniform pattern ordained by nature itself’ (Weeks, 2000, p. 57).

However from a post-modern queer theory perspective, a “wave [of] ... growing critique [is arising] of the ways in which all representations of people, regardless of the author or content, tend to *essentialize* [sic] their object” (Gergen, 2009, p. 52). It is important to realize “that there is no ‘essential’, ‘true’ or pre-social self but that instead, identities are constituted or ‘performatively’ enacted in and through the subject positions made available in language and wider cultural codes”

(Gay, Evans & Redman, 2000, p. 10), and that “what is ‘performed’ works to conceal, if not to disavow, what remains opaque, unconscious, unperformable” (Gay, Evans & Redman, 2000, p. 112). One outcome of this train of thought is that “gender[sexual orientation] ought not to be conceived as a noun or a substantial thing or a static cultural marker, but rather as an incessant and repeated action of some sort” (Butler, 1990, p. 112). In other words, “it is not that we *have* [sic] emotions, a thought, or a memory so much as we *do* [sic] them” (Gergen, 2009, p. 99). Thus, “the words, ‘I am a homosexual’, do not merely describe; they are figured as performing what they describe, not only in the sense that they constitute the speaker as a homosexual, but that they constitute the speech as homosexual conduct” (Morland & Willox, 2005, p. 142). In this regard, recall from above that “Foucault thought that there were first homosexual ‘acts’ and that only later did homosexuality emerge as an ‘identity’, then the military takes every ascription of identity as equivalent to the doing of an act” (Morland & Willox, 2005, p. 147).

In terms of the “narrativation” of sexuality, it is commonly accepted as a generalization that “men base their sexual identities on early instances of erotic arousal or explicit sexual memories about other men ... men attach sexual identity to explicitly desired or actual sexual acts with other men” (Meyer, 2007, p. 22). We will come to see that this indeed does happen in the case of Irvin. However, queer theorists assert that it is not a matter of “whether a person experiences same-sex attraction, but what a person does with their identity vis a vis their attractions” (Yarhouse, 2008, p. 206). And commonly what happens is that men who do experience sexual attraction for other men tend to identify themselves with the category of “homosexual” as against the categories of say “bisexual” or “heterosexual”, so that “to identify *as* [sic] must always include multiple processes of identification *with* [sic]. It also involves identification *as against* [sic]” (Sedgwick, 1990, p. 61). However, queer theory, as a post-modernist stance, problematizes identification and classificatory systems, whether their processes involve identification with or as against.

## 5. QUEER THEORY AND NORMATIVE IDENTITY JUDGMENTS

It can be said that “queer theory politicizes sex, gender and sexuality in a way that severs the notion of identity from any stable reference points” (Morland & Willox, 2005, p. iii). For queer theorists, who as a general rule take a strong post-modernist approach to sexuality, and to homosexuality in particular, “identity is a ‘trap’” (Talbert & Steinberg, 2000, p. 17). This is because, as already noted above, “sexual identity is a fiction” (Weeks, 2000, p. 192). Thus, “the modern homosexual identity remains a Western construct” (D’Augelli & Patterson, 1995, p. 98). In order to better understand why post-modern queer theorists assert that the category of homosexual is a fiction, let us once again take a closer look at language, specifically, discourse.

When a man declares himself to be a homosexual, what he is in fact doing is inserting [suturing] himself into a particular linguistic position [role play] from which the rest of his existence is then judged to be of a certain type or character, in other words, “a subjectivity is produced in discourse as the self is subjected to discourse” (Shotter & Gergen, 1989, p. 64). What is meant by the term “suturing”? suturing is “the process through which unconscious dynamics motivate the individual’s ‘stitching into’ or ‘articulation’ with the subject positions made available in language and wider cultural codes” (Gay, Evans & Redman, 2000, p. 12). In other words, “Miller defines suture as that moment when the subject inserts itself into the symbolic register in the guise of a signifier, and in so doing gains meaning at the expense of being” (Gay, Evans & Redman, 2000, p. 76). With regard to the concept of discourse,

The notion of an effective suturing of the subject to a subject position requires, not only that the subject is ‘hailed’, but that the subject invests in the position, means that suturing has to be thought of as an *articulation* [sic], rather than a one sided process’ (Gay, Evans & Redman, 2000, p. 19).



Thus, “where there is an ‘I’ who utters or speaks and thereby produces an effect in discourse, there is first a discourse which precedes and enables that ‘I’ and forms in language the contrasting trajectory of its will” (Gay, Evans & Redman, 2000, p. 108). This means that “identification is, then, a process of articulation, a suturing, an over-determination not a subsumption. There is always ‘too much’ or ‘too little’ – an overdetermination or a lack, but never a proper fit, a totality” (Gay, Evans & Redman, 2000, p. 17). One consequence or use of suturing is that “the concept of identity [can become] ... not an essentialist, but a strategic and positional one” (Gay, Evans & Redman, 2000, p. 17). For example the creation of a “gay” discourse has on a political level created a strategic social awareness of oppression towards certain people, and has led in some cases to the gaining of legal rights. Thus, in a political sense, the creation of the homosexual identity has become a powerful strategy move towards gaining political and legal rights.

For many men this strategy is a liberating experience, as finally they are able to give voice, or to describe in a common language, the desires they are experiencing as persons. However, queer theorists would warn us that “discourse that appears to give liberation is itself the condition of a more insidious oppression” (Shotter & Gergen, 1989, p. 61), or to express the point differently, “the

use of a term can obscure as much as it can clarify” (Weeks, 2000, p. 195). What this means is that the very term that produces a liberating effect for these men, itself can become a means of stereotyping them, reducing them to a faceless and homogeneous mass, potentially depriving them of their uniqueness as individual persons. Thus, “the [homosexual] person, far from expressing an ‘essential self’ through sexuality, is conceptualized as an actor, fulfilling a role, complying with a (socially constructed) script” (D’Augelli & Patterson, 1995, p. 140).

While it can be said that “the meaning of each linguistic unit can only be established by reference to another, and it is arbitrarily fixed” (Gay, Evans & Redman, 2000, p. 53), nevertheless “constraint is thus built into what that language constitutes as the imaginable domain of gender [sexual orientation]” (Butler, 1990, p. 9). How constraint is built into language is that,

Ideology [through language] ‘acts’ or ‘functions’ in such a way that it ‘recruits’ subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or ‘transforms’ the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or *hailing*, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing ‘Hey, you there!’ (Gay, Evans & Redman, 2000, p. 33).

In other words, “the term *interpellation* [is used] to describe the ‘hailing’ of a person into her or his social and ideological position by an authority figure” (Salih, 2002, p. 78). Hailing thus “brings into linguistic being that which it names” (Morland & Willox, 2005, p. 154). But because of the “ways in which identity is enacted through iterative practices” (Gay, Evans & Redman, 2000, p. 13) there is at the same time “endless slippage or ‘deferral’ of meaning in language” (Gay, Evans & Redman, 2000, p. 12).

What have we learnt so far from suturing and discourse? It can be said that “in the past, the possibility to choose to possess a gay identity did not exist’ (Plummer, 1995, p. 93). What this means is that “a homosexual identity is not inherent, but is socially created” (Hocquenghem, 1978, p. 43). One consequence of this process is that “in such a case, not biology, but culture, becomes destiny” (Butler, 1990, p. 8). This means that “we are, not what we are, but what we make ourselves” (Gay, Evans & Redman, 2000, p. 252).

However, “identity judgments are normative” (Morland & Willox, 2005, p. 173). For a long time now in the mind of the average person, “homosexuality primarily means anal homosexuality, sodomy” (Hocquenghem, 1978, p. 98). Negative images tend to be associated with the term “homosexual”, a term that constrains as much as it liberates. But because language is flexible, is it possible to transform such a term for more positive end results? It is said that ‘much of the deepest transformation throughout the ages has begun with renaming’ (Schneer & Aviv, 2002, p. 74). But before renaming can take place, we need to understand that “identifications are never simply or definitively *made* [sic] or *achieved* [sic], they are insistently constituted, contested and negotiated” (Butler, 1993, p. 76). A prime example of how identifications are constituted, contested and negotiated is the process called the “coming out process”.

## COMING OUT PROCESS

It can be said that,

The topic of ‘coming out’ is part of the content of narrative encounters with lesbians and gay men. Thus, for example, for many client participants, therapy was one of the first places where they voiced the possibility of a lesbian or gay identity (Coyle & Kitzinger, 2007, p. 185).

Some theorists still caught up in the modernist agenda have postulated that the average homosexual male tends to go through a series of definite coming out stages of development or coming to terms with his innate identity. So for example, Fontaine and Hammond speak of “six stages of identity formation: Confusion, comparison, tolerance, acceptance, pride and synthesis” (Fontaine & Hammond, 1996, p. 820). On the other hand, Siegel and Lowe advance the following as stages that the average homosexual male goes through: “Turning points: Pre-emergence, self-acknowledgement, self-identification; Coming out: Assuming a homosexual identity, Accepting Homosexuality, Celebrating self-expression; Maturing: re-evaluation and renewal and Mentoring” (Siegel & Lowe, 1994, p. 32).

However, for the average homosexual the coming out process is a “difficult developmental task of forming their identity (Campos & Goldfried, 2001, p. 611). This is because, “coming out involves a

major shift in an individual's identity, which often includes emotional distress" (D'Augelli & Patterson, 1995, p. 405). Thus, "compared to the 'development' of a heterosexual identity, a norm requiring little conscious thought or effort, the attempt to develop a healthy and viable bi- or homosexual identity is a draining, secretive, anxiety-producing, and lonely task for adolescents" (Fontaine & Hammond, 1996, p. 819). One reason why the coming out experience is such a draining, secretive, anxiety-producing and lonely event is that,

Gay and lesbian 'coming out' refers [to a] complex process of moving from a heterosexual (and confused) identity, telling the stories of others given in childhood, to a strong, positive and accepting sense of identity as gay being given to one through awareness of the gay community in later life (Plummer, 1995, p. 84).

In addition, coming out is not a once off discrete event, but can be a long arduous rite of passage, thus,



For others, coming out is, first, not a moment but rather a contradictory and complex process that involves (perhaps) self-revelation, construction, political strategy, choice and so forth. Second, it seems ludicrous to pretend that internalized homophobia and the realities of heterosexism and heterosexual privilege are not operative in and around these 'coming out' processes (Morland & Willox, 2005, p. 20).

Furthermore, there are no road signs to guide the young "homosexual" person through their coming out process, so that,

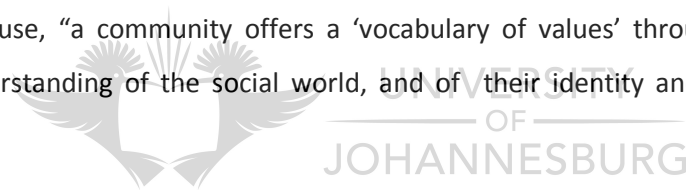
In the long, sometimes agonizing route to becoming his best self, a gay man does not follow any chart, because none exists. No sanctioned, institutionalized, liturgized pattern for growing up gay exists in the larger society; no clubs, teams, church

connected or fraternal organizations in his community, lend him support or offer camaraderie during his adolescence and youth (Siegel & Lowe, 1994, p. 28).

The homosexual has to find his own support network, community and organizations. As part of creating this support network,

Coming out has been conceptualized as a rite of passage, and the ritual of telling one's coming out experiences to others 'forms our tribal lore' ... telling these stories to one another, lesbians and gay men bond together and affirm group identity (D'Augelli & Patterson, 1995, p. 299).

As noted earlier on above, "identity is shaped in and through intimate relationships" (Weeks, 2000, p. 214), this is because, "a community offers a 'vocabulary of values' through which individuals construct their understanding of the social world, and of their identity and belonging" (Weeks, 2000, p. 182).



## THE CLOSET

One of the great symbols that form part of the coming out process for the "homosexual" person is the closet. However, the closet is not something that the homosexual person created for themselves, but "the closet is not a function of homosexuality in our culture, but of compulsory and presumptive heterosexuality" (Warner, 1993, p. 305). Part of the experience of the closet is what is known as "passing". "Passing concerns methods and strategies for concealing one's stigmatized attribute or condition from others. To 'pass' is to be known by others as normal, as if you possessed no discrediting or discernible attribute" (Blaine, 2007, p. 195).

Once again we must be careful not to "homogenize" peoples' experiences. Thus, "instances of talk about coming out in general – indeed, our own experience as lesbians [and gay men] is that talk about coming out is very variable" (Coyle & Kitinger, 2007, p. 150). Part of this variability is due to the fact that "conflicting messages from the world at large both force and encourage him to live his life in a unique way, one vastly different, first, from what his family might have expected from him, and ultimately different from what he might have expected for himself" (Siegel & Lowe, 1994, p. 4).

However there is a dangerous slippage of discourse that has “resulted in a homosexual orientation becoming the basis for the construction of an entire identity” (Coyle & Kitzinger, 2007, p. 165). Thus for example, a young homosexual male comments, “like so many other gays, maybe all of them in one way or another, I had prayed for the capacity to give up who I was and becomes whomever the larger society preferred me to be” (Siegel & Lowe, 1994, p. 20). Not only can a “homosexual” identity ostracize a person from main stream heterosexual life, but even from the sidelined gay community, so that it is argued that “these [gay/homosexual] cultures possess the potential to reaffirm the ostracized status of the gay man and to consolidate his position as ‘other’, as beyond mainstream society” (Coyle & Kitzinger, 2007, p. 165). Furthermore, the “homosexual” identity may serve to obscure underlying “real” problems in the gay client’s life during therapy so that “some gay men’s emotional and behavioural difficulties might be grounded within the very communities that also serve to empower and affirm their sexualities and identities” (Coyle & Kitzinger, 2007, p. 164). It is interesting to note that because the “homosexual” identity is something that needs to be “attained” or accepted as part of the gay person’s self, [and is thus by definition not an already present], the “coming out (and passing) are recurrent events in lesbian and gay people’s lives” (Coyle & Kitzinger, 2007, p. 148).

## 6. THE JEWISH MALE HOMOSEXUAL

Because “we have learned during the past decade that sexual identity – and gender identity – are much more fluid than we had previously imagined” (Schneer & Aviv, 2002, p. 18), the average Jewish male homosexual faces a number of choices when confronted with the possibility of adopting a “homosexual” identity, they are as follows;

- “Rejecting the religious identity” (Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000, p. 334).
- “Rejecting the homosexual identity” (Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000, p. 334).
- “Compartmentalization” (Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000, p. 334).
- “Identity integration” (Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000, p. 334).

And so when it comes to Jewish religious life it can be said that there is a “multidimensional nature of motivation for Jewish religious behaviour” (Lazar, Kravets & Frederich-Kedem, 2002, p. 50). Whichever of the above choices the “homosexual” religious Jew may make, there is an inevitable compromise to be made. Thus it can be said that “purity is part of the problem in the first place ... for me the interpenetration of worlds is desirable” (Greenberg in Schneer & Aviv, 2002, p. 41). Central to religious Jewish identity is the Torah. The Torah is composed of what Christians know as



the first five books of the Old Testament, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The Torah is a mixture of myth, legends, stories and legal tenets. In other words it is narrative literature. As noted above, “literature provides meaning and context, presenting events in a coherent structure” (Green, 2004, p. 252). Thus, the Torah as narrative provides us with potential life scripts, which we can choose to adapt to our own personal experience. But as with all literature, the Torah first needs to be interpreted in order to be understood and applied in daily living. When it comes to homosexuality, one can take the Torah “literally” and deny all “homosexual” existence, or reinterpret the Torah so as to accommodate a more contemporary understanding of homosexuality. So for example “these groups have reinterpreted the Bible [Torah] in such a way that homosexuality is viewed in a positive, rather than negative, religious light” (Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000, p. 335). Not only can the actual Torah text be reinterpreted, but also supporting literature may be found in auxiliary sources to the Torah; thus for example,

Rabbi David Seidenberg ... has found seven different genders/gender categories listed in the Talmud. These include ... in addition to ‘standard’ male and female, five additional categories that are roughly described as follows: *androgeenos* [sic], which describes people which have at least some sexual characteristics of both male and female; *tumtum* [sic], who have no clear characteristics of either sex; *aloneet* [sic], a biological female with no secondary sex characteristics; *sarees chamah* [sic], a male who ‘naturally’ has no secondary sex characteristics; and *sarees adam* [sic], a male who lacks secondary sex characteristics due to castration or other intervention (Schneer & Aviv, 2002, p. 65).

And so whatever choice the homosexual Jewish male makes, he has to do so bearing in mind his relationship to his Jewish community. So for example it is argued that “we remain convinced that queer Jews should not be separatists, since as Jews, they always hold a connection to the broader community and historical memory” (Schneer & Aviv, 2002, p. 6).

## **HERMENEUTICS**

Finally I would like to end off this chapter with a brief look at the subject of hermeneutics. Because this study effectively deals with lived experience and how that lived experience inter-relates with a written text, i.e., the Torah, and also because IPA is a research method that requires hermeneutics

as an integral part of its functioning, it is important for the reader to have an idea of how I will go about interpreting all the data. It is said that “hermeneutics reveals the inexhaustible depths of meaning inherent in such symbolic structures as texts, norms, the meaning of historical actions and the tradition itself” (Warnke, 1987, p. 114). Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation. In this regard I follow the philosophical leanings of hermeneutists like Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer would argue that “understanding is ... rooted in prejudice and the way in which we understand is thoroughly conditioned by the past or by what Gadamer calls ‘effective history’” (Warnke, 1987, p. 3). In other words, there is no such thing as complete objectivity, as,

One cannot leap out of one’s situation to gain impartial access to one’s past. Self-understanding is rather related to the conduct of one’s life and has an ineradicable practical dimension. The way in which one lives one’s life and the way in which one understands it are mutually determining (Warnke, 1987, p. 29).

However, “although we cannot break out of the tradition to which we belong, we can break with it on any given issue by emphasizing other elements of the tradition, showing the way in which the older opinion has to be modified in light of the way the evidence now looks to us” (Warnke, 1987, p. 103). Thus when it comes to understanding sexual orientation from a phenomenological study,

To equate the meaning of an action with an agent’s intentions is therefore simply to extrapolate a possible intention from the action, but the intention to which an action is thereby thought to correspond may not be anything like the intention the agent actually had (Warnke, 1987, p. 20).

In other words, psychologists don’t read minds, but infer from people’s actions and what they say internal states of mind. This may seem very subjective, but language once again comes to the rescue, so that when it comes to hermeneutics, on the one hand,

Hirsch no longer defines meaning as a private act but claims rather that it is embodied in language and limited by linguistic conventions. Verbal meaning is therefore accessible to other speaking subjects and can be shared by them. Hirsch argues further, however, that is verbal meaning is to be shareable it must be 'determinate'; that is, it must be self-identical and unchanging otherwise it would be impossible for other subjects to reproduce for themselves the meaning an author intends (Warnke, 1987, p. 44)

But on the other hand, as seen above, language is ever shifting, and meaning can be elusive. So a compromise needs to be reached, thus for Gadamer,

Understanding rather involves a transformation of the initial positions of both 'text' and interpreter in a 'fusion of horizons' or consensus over meaning that reveals new dimensions of die Sache and issues in a new stage of the tradition of interpretation (Warnke, 1987, p. 107).



Such a "fusion of horizons" inevitably involves a process of compromise, as we will come to see in Irvin's story.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter we looked at the concept of identity. We found that it is relational and part of an ongoing social process. Furthermore, there are affiliative and exclusionary components to the process of identity. As to what is affiliated or excluded in one's identity depends very much upon the language one uses, and the social role play one partakes of. However, such role play is not a neutral activity, but involves ethical positioning on the part of the subject. We see that from a modernist perspective that identity can be construed in a mechanical or organismic manner. Either way, there is an assumed underlying "essence" to one's identity. Post-modernists, for example, queer theorists, however argue that even assuming that we have an underlying "essence" what that essence is, is invariably determined by the language or language game that we use to describe it. In addition, language never "merely" describes, but also prescribes, so that whatever position we choose to take

in a sexual narrative, carries with it both liberating as well as constricting implications in terms of ethical behaviour. We focused on a specific type of narrative, the transformational sexual identity narrative, or more specifically, on the coming out process. Here we explored the possible role of discourse, suturing and interpellation in the developing Jewish male homosexual's identity process. What remains to be seen is how our participant or subject, Irvin, negotiated such a process in his own life, and what are common themes that may emerge from his story, and how much they are related to the theory as elaborated in this literature review. But first, let us look at the methodology that I employed in the process of compiling Irvin's case study.



## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**



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## INTRODUCTION

Homosexuality is a complex phenomenon [c.f. chapter three], with many theories being bandied around, theories ranging from those with “hard” scientific assumptions arguing that homosexuality is an inborn and innate property of the individual to those arguing that homosexuality is nothing more than a social construct, created by specific historic and linguistic forces and imposed on individuals. What *psychological* answers can we get concerning the nature of homosexuality? No doubt there are as many research methods for getting such answers as there are theories. In conducting my research on my participant, whom I shall refer to as “Irvin” for purposes of anonymity, I have chosen to perform an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis case study using responsive interviewing.

In “determining if the topic [of Jewish homosexuality in South Africa] is suitable for qualitative interviewing” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 47), and so suitable for an IPA methodological approach, I had to deal with some of the following questions in guiding my choice;

1. “Are you looking for nuance and subtlety?” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 47). Thus, for example, for a gay person, their “sexuality” is not some “object” to be studied, taken apart and analysed. It is a very personal and emotional experience and profound, even nuanced and subtle part of who they are in the world. Thus, whatever methodology I would choose to use, needs to be able not only to recognize the personal nuances and subtle subjective aspect of homosexuality, but also be able to incorporate the personal aspect in its results. And so “qualitative research tends to aim for diversity of participants rather than representative samples, with the intention of exploring the research phenomenon from multiple perspectives” (Coyle & Kitzinger, 2007, p. 190).
2. “Does answering the research question require you to trace how present situations resulted from prior events?” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 47). In other words, does the research method take into account the “situatedness” of the individual homosexual Jew, as well as the contemporary and past historical realities of South Africa? In this case study of Irvin, the answer to this question is yes.

3. "Is an entirely fresh view required?" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 48). As already noted, much of the contemporary discussion around the issue of homosexuality tends to be centred around a formal medical discourse, one which does not really take enough cognizance of the individual homosexual's experience, but which, in an attempt to "universalize" homosexuality for purposes of medical access, at the same time undermines the individual homosexual person, by forcing all gay persons to potentially conform to a standardized version of homosexuality, thus eradicating unique experience, in order to create and maintain a medical category. So yes indeed, a fresh view would be welcome.
  
4. "Are you trying to explain the unexpected?" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 48). As reflected in point 3 above, part of the oppression of homosexual persons takes place through the creation of stereotypical categories [this would include medical categories as well]. Thus, the dominated class must appear suitably homogeneous if it is to be able to conform to and confirm its "nature" (Plumwood, 1993, p. 53). What this research tries to achieve is to explore not the "sameness" of homosexual experience, but the difference that might exist between "homosexual" persons. Finally, "does puzzling out the research question necessitate layers of discovery in which initial questions are asked to discover alternatives that are then explored in turn?" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 48). It is hoped, that the study of Irvin's "homosexual" experience would indeed start the process of uncovering the many, perhaps unexpected, potential layers that exist in a homosexual male's persona; experience of his own sexuality, layers that cover many intersecting points that comprise a Jewish homosexual male's identity.

And so in this research I have two basic aims with regard to methodology. On one hand, while at this stage of scientific knowledge it is still questionable whether there really exists a "gay" gene, that does not mean that just because we haven't yet discovered the material essence or "thingness" of male homosexuality, that male homosexual experience does not exist or is not very real. For those men who go through the experience it is very real, and has very real psychological manifestations. Yet what those manifestations are can only really be revealed through engaging male homosexuals on an individual level or personal experience. On the other hand, bearing the potential use of the results of this study for a wider application, [for example community psychology research] in mind, I wanted to use IPA to raise critical issues, so that,

Critical research [becomes] a means of empowering the oppressed. Critical researchers explicitly take sides by studying underdog groups, those facing

oppression, suppression, and powerlessness, in order to give voice to the victims of crime; migrant workers; the hospitalized ill; AIDS patients, their lovers, and their advocates; political and social minorities; and the handicapped [and male homosexuals] (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 25).

In order to do this, “making sense of what is being said or written involves close interpretive engagement on the part of the listener or reader” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 35), thus “to interpretive constructionist researchers,[it is how] how people view an object or event and the meaning that they attribute to it is what is important” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 27).

And so when it comes to the IPA psychological study of Jewish male homosexuality, what I want to do is to “use the results of qualitative interviewing studies to shed new light on old problems” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 3), so for example, What is the nature of Jewish male homosexual experience? Does Jewish male homosexual experience have a particular nature? And so one way to find answers to these questions is to ask about the individual experiences of homosexual males, so that “through qualitative interviews you can understand experiences and reconstruct events in which you did not participate” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 3). Qualitative research through asking questions elicits insights and stories that will help us to gain access to the authentic experiences of individual Jewish homosexual males, so that,

The goal of ... interviewing is a solid, deep understanding of what is being studied, rather than breadth. Depth is achieved by going after context; dealing with the complexity of multiple, overlapping, and sometimes conflicting themes; and paying attention to the specifics of meanings, situations and history (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 35).

To further this goal, and with depth of insight in mind, I have decided to use the case study as part of my methodology.

Because of the personal nature of sexual desire, an in depth case study would seem appropriate, thus the use of a case study would be justified. As such,



The case study is not itself a research method. Instead, it constitutes an approach to the study of singular entities, which may involve the use of a wide range of diverse methods of data collection and analysis. The case study, is therefore, not characterized by the methods used to collect and analyze data, but rather by its focus upon a particular unit of analysis: the case (Willig, 2008).

Furthermore, “a case study is an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context” (Yin, 2003). The case study may involve “observation, interview [or] document review” (Stake, 1995). Case study also involves “search for patterns, for consistency, for consistency within certain conditions” (Stake, 1995), so that,

A case study usually deals with a relatively short, self-contained episode or segment of a person’s life. The episode is usually important in that it is formative, critical or cumulative – the sort of episode one would regard as a life-event worth mentioning in a life story. In the case study the ‘qualitative researcher concentrates on the instance, trying to pull it apart and put it back together again more meaningfully – analysis and synthesis in direct interpretation (Stake, 1995).

Thus, “the trick is to discover essences and then to reveal those essences with sufficient context, yet not become mired trying to include everything that might possibly be described” (Stake, 1995).

I will now proceed to explain what IPA is. Please note that even as I elaborate on IPA and responsive interviewing, points that I explicitly mention below I have used as part of conducting my research. So in other words, I used the “methods” that are described below.

### **THE ‘PHENOMENOLOGY’ IN IPA**

What is phenomenology?<sup>1</sup> According to Smith, Flowers and Larkin, “phenomenology is a philosophical approach to the study of experience” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 11), in other

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<sup>1</sup> The word phenomenology is derived from two Classical Greek words, *φαινόμενον*, referring to what ‘appears, or is seen’ and *λογος*, referring to the understanding of or study of what appears, or is seen.

words, “phenomenology ... is concerned with exploring experience in its own terms” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 1). And so, “in order to be phenomenological, we need to disengage from the activity and attend to the taken-for-granted experience of it” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 13). Furthermore, “adopting a phenomenological *attitude* [sic] involves and requires a reflexive move, as we turn our gaze from, for example, objects in the world, and direct it inward, towards our perception of those objects” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 12). In order to do this, we need to realize that “in phenomenological terms, experience or consciousness is always consciousness *of* [sic] something – seeing is seeing of something, remembering is remembering of something, judging is judging of something” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 13). In other words, taking a phenomenological stance involves taking seriously the “descriptive” element of a person’s experience, how a person describes their experience in terms of their own words or vocabulary. This of course involves taking a close look at the types of images and metaphors that such a person uses to get a better understanding of how they experience their own world.

So in other words, when taking a phenomenological approach to a subject matter such as Jewish male homosexuality, what we need to do is be able to “separate”, or ‘bracket aspects of the Jewish male person from their experience of being Jewish homosexual male, so that we become aware of “Jewish male homosexuality”. However, what makes such an endeavour difficult is the fact that all experience is embodied, so that it can be said that “experience is uniquely embodied, situated and perspectival” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 29). Phenomenology is thus a means used to study the individual Jewish male homosexual’s reality in light of their own lived experience, by focusing on the language that they use to describe such an experience. And so “IPA is concerned with understanding personal lived experience and thus with exploring persons’ relatedness to, or involvement in, a particular event or process (phenomenon)” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 40).

## **THE ‘INTERPRETIVE’ IN IPA**

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis,

Is an interpretive endeavour and is therefore informed by hermeneutics, the theory of interpretation. IPA shares the view that human beings are sense-making creatures, and therefore the accounts which participants provide will reflect their attempts to make sense of their experience (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 3).

It is assumed within hermeneutical methodology that “to understand any given part, you look to the whole; to understand the whole, you look to the parts” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 28). In other words, “interpretation always begins from a certain standpoint” (Gerkin, 1984, p. 55), in this case study, there are two stand points, the stand point of the Jewish male homosexual [the participant] and the stand point of the researcher. And so you as the reader will come to see in this study that,

I start where I am on one point of the circle, caught up in my concerns, influenced by my preconceptions, shaped by my experience and expertise. In moving from this position, I attempt to either bracket, or at least acknowledge my preconceptions, before I go round to an encounter with a research participant at the other side of the circle’ (Smith in Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 35; Cooper, 2003, p. 10).

However, is important to note that “the researcher’s sense making is second-order; he/she only has access to the participant’s experience through the participant’s own account of it” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 3).

### **THE ‘ANALYSIS’ IN IPA**

When it comes to the study of the interaction between a homosexual male identity and Jewish male identity “it is often difficult to *observe* [sic] what happens *directly* [sic], and so psychologists have generally been forced to observe ‘what happens’ at one remove, by inferring mental events from *observations of behaviour* [sic]” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 45). Interviewing becomes a good method of observing and recording behaviour [verbal and non-verbal]. In unravelling the meaning of behaviour in an interview,

The goal of analysis is to understand core concepts and to discover themes that describe the world that you have examined. Your analysis is done when you have put together a theory that answers your research question and that would be accepted by your interviewees as a accurate depiction of their world and thoughts (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 245).

In research analysis is an ongoing process that the researcher has to engage in, so that,

Analysis occurs throughout research: analysis begins early on when you examine the first interviews to make sure that your project makes sense and concerns matters important to your conversational partners. As you complete each interview, you examine its content to see what you have now learned and what you still need to find out. Based on this ongoing analysis, you then modify main questions and prepare your follow up questions to pursue emerging ideas. When you are done interviewing, you then examine all the interviews together to pull out coherent and consistent descriptions, themes, and theories that speak to your research question (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 202).

In other words, "*analysis is not a onetime task, but an ongoing process* [sic]. Interviews are systematically examined – analysed – immediately after they are conducted, to suggest further questions and topics to pursue" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 16)<sup>2</sup>.

In a systematic undertaking, the,

Analysis in the responsive interviewing model proceeds in two phases. In the first you prepare the transcripts [the transcripts of the first and second interviews with Irvin are found in Appendix A and Appendix B respectively]; find, refine, and elaborate concepts, themes, and events; and then code the interviews [Appendix C] to be able to retrieve what the interviewees have said about the identified concepts, themes and events. In the second phase several paths are followed. You can compare concepts and themes across the interview ... or combine separate events to formulate a description of the setting. In doing

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<sup>2</sup> However, it must be borne in mind that as noted above regarding interpretation, the process of analysis itself is not a value neutral undertaking but that 'the responsive interviewing model relies heavily on the interpretive constructionist philosophy, mixed with a bit of critical theory and then shaped by the practical needs of doing interviews' (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 30).

so, you seek to answer your research question in ways that allow you to draw broader theoretical conclusions (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 201).

Please have a look at Appendix C for a graphic representation highlighting the key themes and concepts that I isolated using a coding system to represent the key themes and concepts.

Furthermore,

*Data analysis* [sic] is the process of moving from raw interviews to evidence-based interpretations that are the foundation for published reports. Analysis entails clarifying, comparing, weighing, and combining material from the interviews to extract the meaning and implications, to reveal patterns, or to stitch together descriptions of events into coherent narrative. Researchers construct from this analysis informed, vivid, and nuanced reports that reflect what the interviewees have said and that answer the research question. Though the analysis is based on descriptions presented by the interviewees, the interpretations in the final reports are those of the researcher (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 201).



Please note that,

The data unit in qualitative work is an exchange on a single subject: in analysis, the comments made during an interview are broken down into data units [sic], blocks of information that are examined together. Part of the analysis is in determining the appropriate data units, as they differ depending on what precisely is being analysed. Data units describing events might take up several pages, whereas a quick explication of a concept might be placed in small, phrase-length data unit. Data units can consist of a chain of follow-up questions and their answers that inquire on the same matter (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 203).

Furthermore,

Data units are combined in distinct ways depending on the research purpose: part of analysis involves combining data units on the same topic, both within single interviews and across the entire set of interviews. To figure out what a specific concept means, you look at all the data units where that concept is discussed and then bring together in one file the separate definitions, examples and refinements. In working out what caused an event to occur, you examine and weigh the data units from separate interviews in which the conversational partners talk about the occurrence (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 203).

Examples of such data units that I derived are seen in Appendix C as codes, for example 'Ji' stands for 'Jewish identity'.

The researcher can elaborate on "concepts, themes and events, and markers explicitly raised by the interviewees" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 210) by realizing that "the concepts and themes [one has] already identified in turn often suggest new, related concepts and themes" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 211). Furthermore, "as part of searching for concepts and themes in your interviews, carefully check out figures of speech such as similes and metaphors, slogans, and symbols. These literary markers often indicate central concepts and themes" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 213). Stringing together themes can be a complicated process so that it is necessary to ask:

But how do you see which themes fit together? One way is to examine your own questioning patterns, because the questions that emerge during the study reflect your ideas about possible themes. A second approach is to examine your interviews closely to see how your interviewees themselves link together core themes. A third is to think about your own research in light of the published literature, which itself suggests both concepts and linked themes. Thus, 'as you clarify and synthesize ideas that are present, you generate new concepts and themes by *elaboration* [sic] (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 207).

Symbols, concepts and themes are elaborated upon in the Discussion section below.

## RESPONSIVE INTERVIEWING

Because there is an interpretive dimension to IPA it is important for the researcher to pay close attention to the interviewee's responses. Thus,

To achieve richness and depth of understanding, those engaged in qualitative interviews listen for and then explore key words, ideas, themes, using follow-up questions to encourage the interviewee to expand on what he or she has said that the researcher feels important to the research (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 13).

Responsive interviewing thus becomes an important aspect of this IPA study. And so,

The term *responsive interviewing* [sic] is intended to communicate that qualitative interviewing is a dynamic and iterative process, not a set of tools to be applied mechanically. In this model, questioning styles reflect the personality of the researcher, adapt to the varying relationships between researcher and conversational partner, and change as the purpose of the interview evolves. Responsive interviewers begin a project with a topic in mind but recognize that they will modify their questions to match the knowledge and the interests of their interviewees (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 15).

Part of responsive interviewing is the idea that,

Qualitative interviews are conversations in which a researcher gently guides a conversational partner [Irvin] in an extended discussion. The researcher elicits depth and detail about the research topic by following up on answers given by the interviewee during the discussion (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 4).

Thus, in this study I,

Let the conversational partner answer in any way he wishes ... such *open-ended, unstructured interviews* are meant to obtain a general flavour of what it is like to be a graduate student [for example]. Later the researcher discovers patterns, he or she might want to prepare a series of more specific, *semistructured* (also called *focused*) questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 4).

Responsive interviewing incorporates the idea that,

Researchers listen to each answer and determine the next question based on what was said. Interviewers do not [need to] work out three or four questions in advance and ask them regardless of the answers given. The interview, like an ordinary conversation, is invented new each time it occurs (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 12).

And so “through intense and often fatiguing concentration, qualitative interviewers listen for what has not been said, as well as what has been said. *Qualitative interviewers listen to hear meaning of what interviewees are telling them*’ [sic]” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 14).

Now that we have considered what IPA and responsive interviewing are and that these methods were used in this research, I would now like to turn to the important subject of ethics.

## **ETHICS**

Ethics are important in this research, as sensitive material is being used that could potentially disadvantage my participant [in terms of homophobic discrimination at his work place or even in his private life] should his true identity be revealed. Thus, concerning ethical issues with regard to this case study, I have focused on five important areas; reassurance or dignity, confidentiality versus anonymity, right to withdraw, accuracy and fairness and finally consent. I will now consider each in more detail.

### **REASSURANCE/DIGNITY**

1.1 One way that I ensured Irvin’s [my participant’s] dignity was to use the term or concept of “conversational partner” in this study, because



The term conversational partner also emphasizes the uniqueness of each person with whom you talk, his or her distinct knowledge, and the different ways in which he or she interacts with you (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 14).

Honouring a person's uniqueness recognizes their dignity, through the terms we use to refer to them. Thus using the term "conversational partner" for Irvin recognizes that he isn't "merely" my participant, but recognizes the central role and value he has in my research.

1.2 Another way of ensuring my participant's dignity was to reassure him throughout the process of the research, in other words,

People will not stay at emotional or intellectual highs for long periods of time, ... they are likely to feel exposed or uncomfortable after intimate revelations, ... it is your responsibility to make them feel more protected and secure before you end the interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 122).

Thus, I reassured Irvin at the end of each interview by performing a little "debriefing" in asking him how he felt about the interview and if he was emotionally "OK".

1.3 An additional way I ensured Irvin's dignity was to be respectful of his emotions and points of view throughout the research process, as Rubin and Rubin argue,

Respect is shown in how you act toward your interviewees. Be unfailingly polite and make it clear that you appreciate your conversational partner's help. Avoid mockery or sarcasm, not just while interviewing, but also in the write-up of the research results. Show you care what the interviewee is saying by not interrupting a story, even if it is not on research target. Show that you understand the interviewee owns his or her own words. Ask permission to record and be responsive to requests to turn the recorder off. If you feel that certain answers are worth quoting, ask permission right then to use those quotes (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 98).

These general guidelines I followed with regard to Irvin during the interviewing process.

## CONFIDENTIALITY VERSUS ANONYMITY

1.1 Smith, Flowers and Larkin argue that,

Raw, unedited data transcripts should only be seen by the research team; any data for wider use must be edited for anonymity. Note that anonymity is all that qualitative researchers can offer. To say that something is 'confidential' is to say that no one else will see it, and this is not the case (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 53).

So for example I do not include a copy of the actual signed agreement, but only an example of an unsigned one in Appendix D.

1.2 I did reassure Irvin of his anonymity by co-signing a confidentiality form.<sup>3</sup> Thus,

Professional societies encourage researchers to obtain signed *informed consent* [sic] statements from people they are studying. It usually promises to share results with those being studied, indicates the degree of confidentiality of the findings, and, most important, emphasizes that participation is voluntary. Participants in a study sign these forms to show they understand the risks described in the statement and agree to be in the study (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 104).

## RIGHT TO WITHDRAW

1.3 Smith, Flowers and Larkin argue that "it is conventional to see both qualitative and quantitative researchers offering participants 'the right to withdraw at any time'" (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 53). This step I included in the signed confidentiality form in Appendix D.

## ACCURACY AND FAIRNESS

1.4 It would seem obvious that one of the researcher's responsibilities is to,

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<sup>33</sup> Please see **Appendix D** for a copy of this form.

Be as precise as you can in your records. On notes that you reconstructed from memory, include details such as 'this is my term, not his' or 'I'm not sure of the order here; the point about her mother may have preceded this'. If you have paraphrased a question or response, mark that too, so you know later that you cannot use it as a direct quotation. Also include a record of your feelings about the whole interview, such as 'this interview was filled with tension' or 'the group was friendly and teasing, and it was hard to get past the small talk (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 77).

In this case study I strove to reflect as accurately as possible Irvin's own language and thoughts.

#### 1.5 However, when it comes to interpretive analysis of texts,

Sometimes accuracy means getting across the meaning of what interviewees have said rather than quoting them exactly, especially if the quote is convoluted or says two or more things at the same time. To be doubly sure you are right, draw up a summary and ask your interviewees if this is what they meant (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 71).

I have shared a copy of this thesis with Irvin before final submission.

#### 1.6 Another reason that I sought to be as accurate as possible is that I am myself a male Jewish homosexual. In this regard Rubin and Rubin argue that,

In creating a relationship with interviewees, researchers often have to cross the boundary from being an outsider to being an insider. Historically, some qualitative researchers claimed that taking the role of an outsider would produce better research because the interviewer would not be caught up in the cross-currents of a group or an organization. Other scholars have taken the opposite position, that the role of an insider is sympathetic and understands their language, concepts and experiences. The insider-outsider issue is still being debated' (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 87).

Thus, I carefully avoided having my own experiences replacing those of Irvin's.

1.7 Another aspect of ensuring accuracy is doing background research on one's subject matter, thus "you have to spend considerable time before the interviews learning the specialized vocabulary of the group you are studying and sometimes you literally learn a foreign language" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 86). And so, "in topical research, you cannot play the role of ignorant novice, because you have to know enough to pose meaningful questions" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 86). So for example, subsequent to the interviewing process I have asked Irvin to explain or correct the spelling of some of the Hebrew words that he used.

1.8 An additional aspect to "accuracy" is the participant's own desire to be open and truthful about their experience. Rubin and Rubin argue that,

In conversational partnerships most people try to be honest and open; lies are rare and easily discovered in a qualitative project. Over the course of a long, depth interview and better yet several, you can easily figure out where a person is exaggerating and what areas he or she is ignoring (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 71).

My ethical responsibility here was to be as open and authentic as possible with Irvin, so as to let him feel comfortable enough with me to be open about his experience. My sense of the interviewing process was that Irvin was at ease with me, and was consequently able to share intimate details of his experience with me.

1.9 Another way to ensure accuracy is "to help you recognize distortions, fabrications, and omissions, you build redundancy into the design by asking the same question in different ways to check out results. If you encounter inconsistencies, you can ask about them politely" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 73). I found consistency in Irvin's openness with me, as

elements of his coming out process were repeated in both interviews, which were a few weeks apart, for example [INT 1, 320]<sup>45</sup> is consistent with [INT 2, 321].

1.10 Another aspect with regard to accuracy, Rubin and Rubin (2005), further argue that,

To enhance credibility you choose interviewees who are knowledgeable, whose combined views present a balanced perspective, and who can help you test your emerging theory. You investigate your research problem thoroughly; accurately present what the interviewees have said, and carefully check apparent contradictions and inconsistencies (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 64).

Thus, “to increase credibility, you should describe the experiential base of the interviewees, that is, how they knew what they reported to you” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 266). Furthermore, “interviewees should be *experienced* [sic] and *knowledgeable* [sic] in the area you are interviewing about” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 64), in other words, “it seems obvious enough that the people you want to talk to should be knowledgeable about the research problem” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 65). Thus I made sure that Irvin was a self-identified Jewish male homosexual, who also is involved in a Jewish gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered organization in South Africa.

1.11 An additional aspect with regard to accuracy of,

The credibility of your findings is enhanced if you make sure you have interviewed individuals who reflect a variety of perspectives. The philosophy of responsive interviewing suggests that reality is complex; to accurately portray that complexity, you need to gather contradictory or overlapping

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<sup>4</sup> Please note my coding system is as follows; **INT** = Interview, **1** = [first interview] and **438** = the line number in the interview. Please also note that I footnote these references so that you don't have to constantly turn to the back of the thesis to read the example for yourself.

<sup>5</sup> [INT 1, 320] 'I struggled with it, I tried to change images in my mind'; [INT2, 321] 'and I fought against it as well so'.

perceptions and nuanced understandings that different individuals hold (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 67).

Part of the complexity and variety of perspectives is achieved in this study by the dual focus on both homosexuality and Jewish religious/national identity.

1.12 Finally,

Though you aim for balance in your presentation, you need not always present in your writings everything that you have learnt. Ethical researchers decide whether the harm they might inflict in what they report is justified by the increased accuracy (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 35).

So for example I haven't mentioned the specific name of the gay Jewish organization that Irvin belongs to.

## CONSENT

1.13 For me, part of the consent process was to ensure that Irvin was allowed to read written versions of the study so as to add or subtract material that he might want to include or exclude, thus,

Transparency means that a reader [the supervisor, external supervisor as well as the research participant] of a qualitative research report is able to see the process by which the data were collected and analyzed. A transparent report allows the reader to assess the thoroughness of the design of the work as well as the conscientiousness, sensitivity, and biases of the researcher. Interviewers maintain careful records of what they did, saw, and felt and include portions of this record in their final write-ups so the reader can determine where and how the researcher went beyond what the interviewees said (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 76).

1.14 Furthermore, part of guaranteeing the participant's continued consent is to "make sure you give your interviewees the opportunity to answer as they see fit. Interviews normally begin with broad questions that are relatively easy to answer from the

interviewee's experience and that do not box the interviewee into particular responses" (157). This I did throughout the interview process.

- 1.15 Finally, as part of a consent ethic, it is important to "anticipate potential sensitive issues [and] inform the participant in advance" (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 58). Thus for example, Irvin did want to know anonymity issues with regard to this thesis if I should choose to publish this case study. C.f. beginning of INT 1 – Appendix A.

## SELECTION PROCESS / SAMPLING

- 1.1 Concerning the selection process, Rubin and Rubin (2005), mention the following,

You describe how you selected interviewees, including what different perspectives they represented. If you interviewed at different sites, you describe how those sites differed and why they were chosen. You talk about the role you took, how you negotiated access, and whether you had special relationships with those you studied. You should indicate how many interviews you conducted, how long they lasted, and whether you did follow-up interviews. Also include your approach to coding and analysis and the ways in which you checked your evidence. If your study has the potential of harming your interviewees describe how you are protecting the. Be brief about how much personal reflection you include, but if you had strong biases or expectations when you began, you may want to mention how they affected the research (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 260).

Concerning the selection of my participant, Irvin, I contacted a Jewish gay and lesbian organization, and asked the gatekeeper of the organization for names of people who might want to participate in my study. However, finding a willing Jewish gay male was more difficult than I initially thought it would be. But after much perseverance I got Irvin's name and place of work and number. Irvin was then very willing to participate as he himself is an active campaigner for gay rights. Irvin represents a South African Jewish gay male perspective. I interviewed him alone in a conference room at his work as he did not want his colleagues to overhear the conversation. There was an immediate friendship between us as he understood my role as a researcher who also shared his perspective. I conducted two interviews, each lasting for an hour and between ten and twenty minutes. Regarding potential

harm was the issue of “outing” him in his work place to his colleagues, which we avoided [as mentioned above] by going off to a separate conference room where his confidentiality could be guaranteed. As regards personal bias, I had to make sure that my own experiences as being a Jewish gay male did not bias the final results, by including how my experience might have influenced the results.

#### 1.2 Furthermore,

The design must then be tolerant of mistakes and facilitate the correction of false steps. Pauses for reflection are built into the design, and during such pauses researchers compare what they asked with what they should have asked and what requires more depth, and alter the questions accordingly (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 37).

Part of the design of this research project included a follow-up interview which then allowed me to explore on a deeper level some of the issues not fully addressed in the first interview.

#### VERACITY

Mentioned earlier on in the ethical section is the issue of accuracy of the research findings or the veracity of such results. A further way to ensure the veracity of your results is,

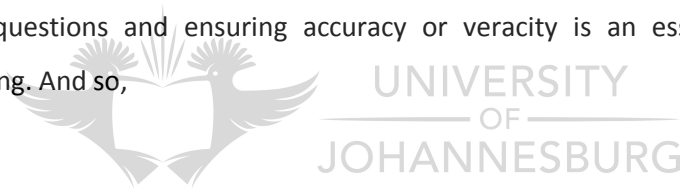
To find out if your interviewees have evidence behind their generalizations, you [thus] politely ask for an example: ‘You said many of your clients come from multiproblem families. Could you give me an example?’ Or you can delicately ask for evidence in other ways as well, such as ‘How did you find that out? (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 170).



In addition, “you listen hard during an interview and when you hear oversimplifications, new ideas, or relevant stories, or if you notice that information has been omitted, you try to follow up on the spot” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 173) [INT 1, 227]<sup>6</sup>. Furthermore,

When answering your questions, interviewees sometimes change the wording and answer their modified version rather than what you asked. Do not get frustrated if this happens. Most likely the interviewee is merely putting your question in his or her own language, something that you would have done if you had known how. At times, though, your conversational partner is intentionally rewording the main question to help you in a gentle, courteous way. Your interviewee might be telling you that you have misunderstood something or might be trying to answer a related or meaningful question than you actually asked (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 163).

Thus, following up questions and ensuring accuracy or veracity is an essential aspect of IPA responsive interviewing. And so,



Whether or not you ask follow-up questions during the interview, after the interview, you examine the transcripts to see what needs to be explored further. You look for where concepts need to be clarified, and where the implications of themes need to be examined. In addition, you look for places where you lack sufficient information on ideas introduced by your interviewee and then follow up for thoroughness. By exploring in depth terms that interviewees routinely use to describe their world, you learn the central features, rules, goals, and values of the interviewees' lives and worlds' (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 176).

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<sup>6</sup>[INT 1, 227] 'as you speak now, you speak very passionately, and sometimes one can the impression of Judaism as being a very intellectual religion'.

This means then, that a follow up interview with Irvin became necessary for me to conduct, so as to clarify certain outstanding issues from the initial interview. Rubin and Rubin have suggested some of the following reasons for, examples and types of questions that can be used in follow up interviews.

## **THE PARTICIPANT**

It is not the sample size that matters in a qualitative study such as this, but the quality of information (Moustakias, 1994; Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999). The researcher approached a gay-Jewish organization where he found participants. Because this is a minor dissertation, only one participant's results were used, as his story yielded the richest data, and was thus included in this final script

The criteria for inclusion as a participant in this study were as follows:

- The participant had to be an openly self-identified Jewish gay male person
- He had to be an 'observant' Jew, i.e. observe Sabbath and Kosher laws.

I will now proceed to chapter four in which I will examine some of the available literature regarding the issue of Jewish male homosexuality.

## **THE PROCEDURE**

I interviewed Irvin, the participant a first time. I then transcribed the interview and inserted line numbers so as to make referencing easier. I read through the written transcription three times to get a clearer idea of what might need to be explored further. Using the data available from this first transcript I then decided that I needed to explore in more detail what the "coming out process" was really like for Irvin, as it seemed to me that this process was central to Irvin identity development. I then conducted the second interview with Irvin and also proceeded to transcribe that interview.

Next I read through each of the two transcripts four times paying close attention descriptions, linguistic elements and concepts that Irvin utilized in narrating his journey. I then looked for themes as they emerged. Next, I arranged the themes into major themes and sub themes using a coding system [c.f. **Appendix C**]

Drawing on my sketch of themes and sub themes I then composed the analysis chapter, utilizing key quotes from Irvin's interviews. To gain a deeper sense of Irvin's phenomenological experience from a psychological perspective, I also utilized strategies such as looking for contradictions, nuances, emotional tone of sentences. In addition, I focused on the interaction between the three key psychological components of a person, his thoughts [as expressed in language], his emotions and his relationships [behaviour]. Finally, I used intuition to try and delve beneath the meaning of the text,

by drawing on my own experiences as a Jewish gay male. This of course I have done carefully, and reflect on this process in the final chapter, Discussion and Conclusion.

## **CONCLUSION**

In this chapter on the methodology that I employed in this case study, I first started off with a justification for the use of, and a brief overview of IPA methodology. Throughout this chapter, I listed numerous examples of actual instances when I employed the methodology elaborated in this chapter. I also elaborated on the meaning of IPA. Phenomenological is the taking of an experience, isolating it and through introspection, reflecting on the meaning of the experience; Interpretive is to discover the meaning of the isolated experience involves a double hermeneutic of questioning both oneself [one's own situatedness], and the object of one's study, and their interpretation of their experience; Analysis, that is, analysis involves inferring meaning from overt behaviour or the words spoken from the subject. Such analysis should be systematic, looking for alternative explanations. In so doing, coding the data aids in simplifying the analytic process. Furthermore, analysis involves paying close attention to the words used, patterns of words or ideas, and themes as they emerge. I then gave a brief overview of the responsive interviewing process and the subsequent write-up. I also looked at types of main questions and probes that I used through the interviewing process, giving reference to actual interviews, including the follow-up interview questions. The use of case study for this thesis helped to contextualize Jewish male homosexuality in South Africa, will be useful for inductive theory building, and to some degree contributes towards concept clarification.

Furthermore, I also addressed salient issues with regard to the ethical principles that I employed in conducting this research.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: THEMES THAT EMERGED**



## INTRODUCTION

As this study unfolded, the following major themes emerged;

1. Irvin
2. Jewish Identity
3. Gay Identity
4. The Jewish Homosexual Male [A Compromise]
5. The coming out process
6. "To Be Vulnerable In the Public Space".

Let us now turn to each theme as they emerged.

### 1. IRVIN

Irvin is a thirty-five year old Jewish male who is self identified as being gay. He grew up in South Africa, much of his very young years under Apartheid. He comes from a modern orthodox Jewish background. Both his parents are educated people, his mother being a teacher and his father a historian. He studied for four years at the University of Cambridge in the U.K. Irvin is an active member in both his Jewish and gay communities. And while prominent in both these communities, he has still elected to remain anonymous for purposes of this study.

### 2. JEWISH IDENTITY

Under the major theme of Jewish Identity, as we look at the language games of "religion" and "sexual orientation", there are various subthemes that I will be looking at, they are as follows: Shelter, Different types of Judaism [Modern Orthodoxy], Overlapping Elements Constructing Identity [Jacob], uncertainty of Belonging and Creating a Space for Identity.

#### SHELTER:

Growing up with a sense of Jewish identity created a shelter or protective space for Irvin in which to live, and so he reflects: "I was rather sheltered ... my experience was one of living in a family, going to a Jewish day school, and so my experience of the wider community, my early experience is very Jewish, in that sense" [INT 1, 74-76]. On a cognitive and emotional level, such a shelter created for Irvin a sort of "invisible" semi-permeable membrane of consciousness, through which his current and future experiences would be sifted and interpreted. Growing up, Irvin was immediately exposed to an environment in which there were boundaries, do's and dont's, yes's and no's. As time elapsed, such external "Jewish" boundaries became internalized as an essential part of Irvin's self-

acknowledged Jewish identity. This sheltered life gave Irvin the materials from which to construct a positive or concrete sense of self. However, such sheltering also had a potential down side, as Irvin reflects in the following statement: “I grew up in, to a certain extent, in a bubble, more Jewish Northern suburb, Johannesburg” [INT 1, 85-86], so that “anti-Semitism was in no way a function of my identity, other than early learnings of the Exodus story, the Holocaust, my dad’s an historian” [INT 1, 88-89]. The “down side” is therefore that Irvin may not have had the exposure to a constant barrage of prejudice, which could have helped him to develop mechanisms to deal with homophobia, something that he still finds difficult:

There was that struggle ... in relation to ‘gay identity’ ... err ... there was a struggle of how I was really going to be in my family ... how I was going to be in my community ... and um ... ya ... a difficult struggle about that, and I had to fight ... it wasn’t ... I had to be quite strong when I came out to my parents ... I had to be strong in myself ... and um ... that’s a difficult thing as a gay person ... in a way I think you do have to be very strong ... and sometimes I crave weakness ... [he laughs] ... and I don’t want to fight [INT 1, 433-439].



However, this shelter provided Irvin with certain identity materials with which to construct his Jewishness, but also inhibited him from exploring possible alternatives, although he does mention that his family life encouraged him to explore and to argue.

### **DIFFERENT TYPES OF JUDAISM<sup>7</sup>**

While Irvin may have experienced his growing up as being sheltered and in a bubble, it was by no means an homogenous bubble, for Irvin notes that even amongst “practicing” Jews, what it means to be Jewish differs, for example how far or how strict an individual practicing Jew is willing to be:

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<sup>7</sup> ‘**Orthodox** refers to a form of Judaism that follows all of the commandments and regulations of traditional Jewish scripture, including the rules of holiday and dietary laws (e.g., keeping kosher). The **Conservative** denomination generally accepts traditional Judaism, while absorbing aspects of the predominant culture and accepting modernization through their belief in gender equality and driving to synagogue on the Sabbath. **Reform** Judaism emphasizes the importance of individual decisions about commandments and observances and the need for continuing change and revision of practice and belief over time’ (Altman, Inman, Fine et al., 2010, p. 163).

Being Jewish was a central plank of my identity, growing up, in many ways I was the religious one at school. I went to King David, King David's in general a school which caters to people who are nominally orthodox, or not even orthodox, but [for] people who want their children to have a Jewish identity, but are not very practicing in terms of religion, generally, but we [as a family] were practicing. So that immediately carved me out as different, in the sense that I was a practicing orthodox, observant Jew. And when I grew up, Jewish identity was very much [a part of me], it defines the week, it defines the year, the calendar, it's a central plank of one's identity, and it was something, ... I suppose that was part of my DNA, it was part of what I grew up with, I was active, a part of a certain learning group, for people who had more advanced learning at school, in Jewish tradition [INT 1, 98-108].

And so, even within his own "Jewish" community, Irvin's experience of his life was that of feeling "different". He describes his Judaism as being a central plant of his identity, especially in the sense in which it structured his time. Later on., Irvin further elaborates concerning his sense of Jewish identity that,



I'm still very proudly Jewish, 'Jewish' again is not necessarily reduced ... that's why I don't necessarily like the label, I'm a 'reformed Jew' because I'm ... my Judaism seems to expand beyond that label, it's multi-, ... it embraces multiple influences [INT 1, 194-197].

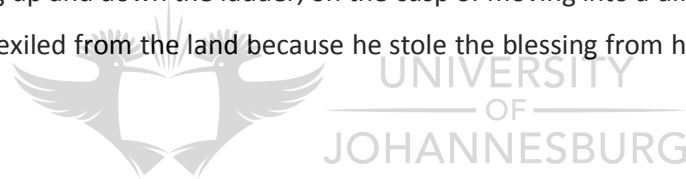
### **OVERLAPPING ELEMENTS CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY [JACOB]**

Within Judaism, Reform Judaism Irvin has found a place or "space" for himself where he is able to bridge the divide between a modern world and ancient practices and beliefs. Thus he notes "the ... that community has been very accepting of me, and very much wants me to give to them, and I want to give to them, and also is a nice space" [INT 1, 170-172]. However, Irvin states that "I suppose, [the] 'Jew' that I connect with ... is very much a type of eclectic type of Judaism" [INT 1, 179-180]. This is because Irvin enjoys "different ideas of openness to change, engaging with the different brilliant sources of our tradition, and sort of having multiple facets of ... trying to embrace complexity and nuance as well" INT 1, 199-201]. Here I noted that even within himself, Irvin still has

unresolved issues, so that while he moves around in the sphere of modern orthodoxy [or more specifically a reform Judaism congregation], he notes that “I still have some reservations about elements of reform Judaism that I am not totally comfortable with” [INT 1, 168-169]. So for example, Irvin mentions the disregard for animal suffering and animal rights that he feels many other reform Jews are not interested in. Simply stated, Irvin’s sense of Judaism, his current experience of being a Jew, is not simplistic. For him, there seems to be “tensions” at the very least on a cognitive or rational level, Irvin has to constantly strive with and make sense of these tensions or contradictions.

The story of the Jewish patriarch Jacob, as found in the Torah, as well as the Christian Bible, is a central narrative for Irvin’s understanding of his own Jewishness. Irvin states that “I love Jacob as a character” [INT 1, 375]. But even here, Irvin experiences a tension, as he says,

I’m very disturbed by Jacob, I am moved by two elements of his story, I mean, I don’t like him in some respects as well, the one is the dream of the ladder, and the angels going up and down the ladder, on the cusp of moving into a different space, so when he’s exiled from the land because he stole the blessing from his brother [INT 1, 405-408].



A part of the Jacob narrative that Irvin identifies with is when “he’s [Jacob] on the brink of a new transition into his life, and you see a similar thing happening just as he’s transitioning to come back into Israel, he has this wrestling with this angel” [INT 1, 410-412]. Irvin notes, that as part of Jacob’s transition experience, “he wrestles with the angel all night, by the morning he’s actually hurt and harmed, he has a limp, and his name is changed from Jacob to Israel” [INT 1, 414-416]. And so for Irvin, a tension in the Jacob story lies between a sense of conflict, of striving and a sense of peace or reconciliation that perhaps Jacob achieves, when he is renamed Israel, thus Irvin states: “I think that continual sense of striving, of ... of ... of a conflict, but also, of course, there is a peaceful reconciliation afterwards, between Jacob and his brother, which is beautiful” [INT 1, 417-419]. Jacob’s struggle and identity achievement has become Irvin’s struggle for identity achievement, a struggle in which “naming” or re-naming plays a central role.

### **MODERN ORTHODOXY**

Irvin refers to his “form” of Judaism as “what I would call ... refer to ... as a modern orthodox” [INT 1, 13-14]. Jews who belong to modern orthodoxy “are often people who would dress in a modern way,



but would keep Shabbat, kashrut, and generally adhere to the tenets of orthodoxy, in some tension with the modern world" [INT 1, 41-43]. But once again even in modern orthodoxy, there is not an homogeneity as Irvin describes modern orthodoxy as being a "slightly tense type of ideology because obviously issues of women's equality are complex, gay issues are complex, and those kinds of things" [INT 1, 43-44]. Such "complexity" is indicative of possible contradictions that have arisen for Irvin as he has attempted to live a gay Jewish life, contradictions in religious narrative that would encourage Irvin in the need to compromise in his transformational sexual identity narrative.

### **UNCERTAINTY OF BELONGING**

Early on in Irvin's life, even before he began to struggle with his gay identity, he began to question his Judaism, he began to question that teachings of the Torah, thus Irvin states:

Was the Torah from God?', 'Where was it from?', ... it was the kind of questions you didn't really ask in the orthodox community, but you know, you started reading a lot of stuff, and you couldn't help read stuff, you know, ... funny enough [even though] I studied the Torah, I never really took to heart the hectic elements, it's rather very interesting how in the orthodox community you start to minimize those really very difficult things, and you sort of ... you know ... you accentuate the good things [INT 1, 347-353].

Part of the struggle for identity achievement is being able to discern which parts of the Torah text to accentuate, and which parts to minimize. The struggle for identity involves compromise, the process of being selective, of affiliation, of exclusion. Thus, it was these kinds of "hectic elements" that Irvin would have to continue to struggle with, especially with regard to his homosexuality, so that even recently, after his coming out as being gay, he was not confident that such hectic elements of his new gay Jewish identity would be accepted by others so that he states "at the same time I was quite unsure where I was going to be in the Jewish community here" [INT 1, 159-160]. Here Irvin had to struggle with normative identity judgments.

### **CREATING A SPACE FOR BELONGING**

When Irvin first began to experience the tension between his gay identity and that of his Jewish identity, he had to struggle with the issue of "I would remain Jewish I suppose without going to schul or religious connection, but my links would be more attenuated and I would maybe ... I would not

*feel as Jewish ... I would not be doing active things to promote that identity, domain*” [INT 2, 523-525]. Thus, Irvin began to realize the importance of having or creating a “space”, perhaps both physical but most especially psychologically, for his dual identity at the time, thus Irvin ‘found an alternative space, a community, and created sites within the Jewish community’ [INT 1, 173-174]. Thus for example, his need to create a space for himself as being Jewish and gay “led to ‘Jewish Outlook’ of course which created a nice space in South Africa for a meeting of a number of queer Jewish people here” [INT 1, 554-556].

In summation, the story of Irvin so far, we have seen that for him, his sense of Jewish identity was one and still continues to be one that is “evolving”. Evolving from the more “innocent” days when his Jewish identity served a comfortable shelter or protective bubble against that harsh realities of the outside world, for example anti-Semitism. But even growing up within this bubble, Irvin began to experience tension, or contradictions calling for compromise, as his sense of Jewishness began to come into conflict with that of other Jews. But already then Irvin began to develop the intellectual skills that would enable him to negotiate such tensions, as his parents encouraged him to debate and argue issues. But even as Irvin’s own sense of Jewishness began to mature, he increasingly began to find himself paradoxically less like the average Jew “out there”. Thus, he has had to create a special space in order articulate a sense of his own authentic Jewishness.

### **3. GAY IDENTITY**

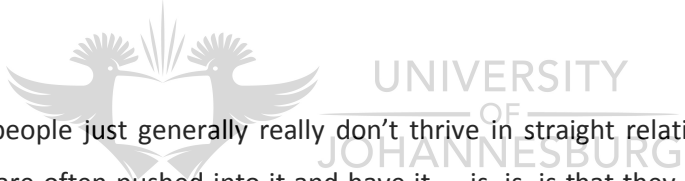
#### **A STRUGGLE BETWEEN THE ‘FIXED’ AND A SHIFT OF RELATIONSHIPS**

In terms of the evolution of Irvin’s gay identity, for him much of it seems to revolve around a struggle with the meaning of the Torah text for his sexuality, so that “from that fifteen [years of age] point on that was a lot of my struggle, was to grapple with that text, to find ways in which to understand it, and I didn’t really go to lots of sources on it, kind of only did that much later” [INT 1, 332-333]. On one hand, the Torah text informed his Jewish sense of identity, and gave him a constant set of values through which to articulate that identity, so that for example when it came to gay relationships Irvin says:

I didn’t funnily enough have any major relationships for a long time ... like one of the things I was certain about was that I didn’t want to be a person who slept around a lot ... I sort of still wanted to hold onto the kind of traditional ideal ... so while I was going to be in the ‘gay context’ I still wanted to have a serious boyfriend ... like I

didn't want to kiss just anyone ... I wanted to have a special kiss ... there were all those kinds of constructs that were around it ... and I find it kind of hard to find people who I connected with and who I wanted to be with on a more deeper level ... and that took a long time ... nine years before I had my first relationship ... which I was probably not ready ... there were issues I had to cope with myself [INT 1, 519-527].

However, the very text that acted as a foundation for his values, and thus also for his Jewish sense of identity, condemns his gay sense of identity, so that for example, while the Torah text condemns homosexual relationships for representing a perverted form of male-female sexual relationships, Irvin would rather reinterpret the text, than abandon it altogether, so that he disputes "I don't regard my sexual engagement with my partner as being akin to the lyings of a woman" [INT 1, 337-338]. But in "reinterpreting" the text, Irvin is at the same time adding to or elaborating his new sense of being as a gay man, so that for example he can argue that,



Gay people just generally really don't thrive in straight relationships even though they are often pushed into it and have it ... is, is, is that they can't open that *other side* to them ... you know ... and it's not, I don't think it's only because they're sexually frustrated, I think it's that there's multiple elements of themselves that are not realized [INT 2, 292-296].

In terms of his homosexuality being something that he is born with or that is an innate characteristic, Irvin expresses that according to his experience it must be something that is "fixed", thus he says "but my own experience does attest to ... I would have thought that my experience would say it's either biological, genetic, or it comes to a very early environmental influence, in the womb or maybe early developmental stuff" [INT 2, 306-308], or in other words, "I think it's pretty fixed that I'm gay" [INT 1, 207]. Part of the reason for feeling and believing that his homosexuality is something that is fixed is that for him it was not something that he went out one day looking for, or that he consciously decided at one moment in his life that this is the way that he is, rather Irvin says that "initially my understanding of 'sexuality' wasn't a conscious understanding, just a 'root attraction' towards men" [INT 2, 35-36]. Irvin experiences his sexuality as something that is beyond his

conscious control. However, what the “nature” of this homosexuality is, Irvin’s experience of other homosexual males leads him to the following conclusion: “I don’t think there’s an automatic way of being that follows from being gay” [INT 2, 382-386].

And so a significant part of the evolution of Irvin’s Jewish male homosexual identity is the shifting that he experienced, and the compromises he had to make, both in terms of how he articulated his experience and in terms of the actual experiences that he began to have. Irvin says: “I shifted a lot in terms of my understandings that came from that time, that in a way that text was never aimed at gay and lesbian people, it was never aimed at people who were fundamentally gay” [INT 1, 333-335]. There are two aspects to this shift that Irvin experienced; on the one hand as already noted above, he began to reinterpret the Torah text so that it would make more sense in terms of his own lived experience, and on the other hand, he began to give form or shape to the new identity that he was developing as a homosexual Jewish man. Such a shift of form or shape seems to have come from two major sources, books that he began to read, and experiences of relationships with other homosexual males. Such relationships in terms of Irvin’s experience are interesting, in that they touch on a dimension of experience that seems to involve ‘recognition’, as Irvin says, “once a person recognizes that they are gay um ... they ... there will be some inkling towards linking with others that are similar, and so whether one belongs to a community in the full sense of the word, or forms a kind of social group” [INT 2, 358-361]. “Recognition” implies prior knowledge, a fore-knowing. However, such fore-knowing does not exist in a pre-linguistic vacuum of “desire”. It is informed, as we have seen queer theorists argue, by discourses surrounding sexual orientation. “Attraction” or desire, comes to be framed in terms of a homosexual discourse. Here Irvin’s phenomenological experience begins to deconstruct some kinds of homosexual discourse, in that he differs from other homosexual males who are “typical” of the “gay scene”, and who supposedly only think about sex and clubbing all night, as Irvin explains next.

When it comes to things that matter in a relationship for Irvin, he states,

I don’t think attraction be looked at as purely a sexual matter, I think it’s sort of a romantic, affective ... it’s a lot of things which is about who you dream about settling down with, I suppose as I put it, like that um ... and it’s who you’re hard wired towards [INT 2, 238-241].

For him being gay involves more than just having sex with another man, there is a sort of shared essence of experience or “I suppose of recognition, [that] has to do with attraction” [INT 2, 249-250]. Thus Irvin’s earliest yearnings towards other males involved more abstract qualities of certain persons, as Irvin recalls with regard to one of his first crushes, “I can’t say [it] is purely physical, no, I mean it was towards him as a person ... you know ... I thought his mannerisms were attractive” [INT 2, 248-249]. This does not mean that Irvin does not enjoy the sexual side of his homosexuality, as he says,

I mean I can obviously get turned on by brute sexuality and pornography, but that’s never generally done it for me, it’s about a wider kind of attraction, it’s about a kinda personality connection, it’s about many kinds of things and I think that that is what I craved with men, that’s what makes me gay [INT 2, 258-262], [so that] there’s something about going deeper, um ... where you touch, you know, in other the words, the *soul* of the person, the core ... the sensitivity [INT 2, 269-270].

For example, when Irvin met his current partner, he says,

Then a year later I met Joe at a tashlich ceremony, is where you throw your sins into the water, symbolically on Rosh Hashana ... and that’s where I met Joe ... or though we never started going out then ... that’s the first time we met ... and then err ... we started going out ... he came to my schul ... and then you know ... I wasn’t going to go out with him, I didn’t even know that he was gay ... he invited me out to a date, I actually then invited him to my folks for Friday night dinner ... it’s interesting how he met my folks before we were going out [we laugh] ... ‘invite some people from the schul’ ... I thought he was ‘nice’ and interesting, I didn’t even know he was gay ... I was going to leave it at that ... but then he invited me out for a date ... and then we kinda started seeing one another ... and now we’re going on for two and a bit years ... those are I suppose some of the major mile-stones [INT 1, 590-600] ... there was something magnetic about our connection, there was something very deep about it [INT 2, 277-278].


What is so frustrating, is that this “essence” seems to go beyond language, and can never be reducible to any single word or concept, so that Irvin says, “there is of course the sexual attraction, there’s nothing wrong with that .. that’s great, but, um ... it’s multiple ... it doesn’t capture fully the experience I think to focus only on that” [INT 2, 253-255]. And so once again, contradictions, compromises and paradoxes become central themes.

#### **4. COMPROMISES ARISING FROM IRVIN’S IDENTITY AS A JEWISH HOMOSEXUAL MALE**

As I analyzed what Irvin spoke about of his experiences as a gay man, I noticed some very powerful and poignant contrasts emerging, they are as follows;

##### **A COMPROMISE BETWEEN BEAUTY AND LOSS**

Irvin expresses anger over how people tend to view homosexuals through prejudiced eyes, instead of being able to see the beauty that that exists in gay relationships, he says: “homosexuality, I think it’s just a lack of understanding and sort of making a ‘mess’ over something very beautiful” [INT 1, 211-212]. This beauty is something that enriched Irvin’s fantasy life, but which also, in contrast brought about a paradoxical sense of loss, as he elaborates,



Gave me sort of a fantasy world outside, but I didn’t have much else, and I was kinda frustrated, at not having any acknowledgement, the beyond and ya ... so then ... coming out to myself, um ... err... ya I suppose, fifteen, sixteen, exactly! ... really acknowledgement of ... that this was who I was, I am going to be ... dealing with some feelings of loss, I felt children was impossible [INT 2, 135-139].

At one point in Irvin’s life one can see that he even contemplated a celibate life, as a possible compromise, rather than live a “lie” pretending to be heterosexual, as he says of a hypothetical homosexual male guy: “does he stay celibate, [or] does he live a life which is going to lead him on a sort of gay identified path” [INT 2, 371-372].

##### **A COMPROMISE BETWEEN BEING AN OUTSIDER AND THE ‘CONFORMITY’ OF THE STEREOTYPE**

As can be seen from the discussion earlier on, even Irvin’s sense of Jewish identity already placed him on the margins of his community, a marginalization that seemed to be intensified as he began to

embrace a gay identified path: “an outsider within in a way, and I suppose that is still very much something that is a part of me ... I’m on the margins” [INT 1, 461-463]. Strangely enough, the pressure to conform was something that Irvin experienced, not only within the Jewish community, but even within the “gay” community there is a pressure to conform to a standard, to normative identity judgments, even a “stereotype” as Irvin elaborates:

I had seen a lot of aspects of gay ‘culture’ which had given vent to the stereotype which I now reject those notions today ... you know ... it gives vent to a sort of more promiscuous out there, clubbing, smoking, drinking, all the kind of stuff which I don’t particularly like [INT 1, 559-562].

It would seem then, that a man like Irvin, who is questioning, and thinks deeply about his experiences, will always be potentially an “outsider”, on the margins of community.

### **A COMPROMISE BETWEEN IGNORANCE AND “ACCEPTANCE”**

It is paradoxical that even acts of kindness or thoughts of concern can become very painful for the gay person due to ignorance around issues of homosexuality, this is poignantly demonstrated in Irvin’s experience with his parents when he came out to them: “they were concerned ... they were more concerned whether I was going to be Ok health wise, HIV! And stuff like that ... continuing ... my mom did freak out once or twice and shouted at me and said horrible things and I just refused to engage with her” [INT 1, 509-512]. In other words, while accepting that their son was “gay”, their implicit assumptions about what this meant concerning who Irvin really is, is that he now must be practicing unprotected sex. This in turn implies that Irvin is not a responsible person but must be making “bad choices” as a homosexual male.

## **5. COMING OUT PROCESS**

There’s a slow unfolding process that seems to take place in what Irvin calls “the evolution of my gay identity” [INT 1, 482-483]. Using the term “evolution” seems to imply a genetic or biological dimension to Irvin’s experience of his homosexuality in his “coming out process” [INT 2, 13]. Thus Irvin remarks, “there is something I suppose distinct, experientially, about coming out and the fears of knowing somehow that ‘you’re different’ and that ‘you’re going against’ ... you know ... I suppose social mores ... uh, or accepted social mores” [INT 2, 31-33]. Again, using such a term as “distinct”

would seem to imply that Irvin's understanding of his coming out process involves a unique or definite quality, an essence. If indeed it can be said that there is an "essence" to the male homosexual experience, then it would seem that there are some common experiences that are shared across coming out processes. However, we are focusing only on Irvin, so let us see what are his experiences of his coming out process.

## TRIGGERS

Firstly, there are events that take place in Irvin's journey, that one may refer to as triggers, or experiences that somehow "awaken" certain feelings and thoughts in Irvin. One could describe these triggers as events in life that challenge one's identity, or are "identity relevant life events" (Polya, Laszlo & Forgas, 2005, p. 785), and start a person on a long journey of self-questioning and self-discovery. What is significant about these events is Irvin's reactions to them, as he reflects:

And I fought against it as well so, so ... something was coming into my mind ... you know ... something was *impinging* on me in a way, right .... which, which ... I *wasn't* totally in control of ... um ... and um ... you know ... and that's quite frigt ... was frightening ... and I suppose is quite frightening to me in a way, because I'm a very ... like being in control kind of person ... uh ... *but* I couldn't ... [INT 2, 312-316].

One of the first triggers in Irvin's coming out process elicited feelings of fear and helplessness in him. Rather than experiencing the first inklings of his sexuality as being something to be excited about, perhaps something warm and embracing, he instead experienced a sense of danger, a sense of threat, as he further elaborates:

Because I wasn't doing anything to bring on this, these feelings, it was just happening and I couldn't push it away, and I was just not inclined towards women, that's just the way it was, that wasn't my fantasy, sexually and I would say on ... on ... I started kinda of having romantic fantasies of men too, right, at the same time I was also reading, my parents didn't have any books ... I was desperately trying to find something gay, so I kind of read, very ... surreptitiously, I took out Ian Forster's *Maurice*, and sort of like read that ... that was my kinda gay text [INT 2, 122-128].



Triggers can involve loss as well as discovery ...

I was being repelled more from the community, on a number of things, a sort of rational questioning around religious stuff, [so for example] gender and Judaism issues, sexuality and Judaism issues, and then also what stopped me from praying was, when my second cousin in the family died. So my aunt lost two children, I couldn't square that with there being a good God [INT 1, 127-131].

Another trigger that started Irvin off on this voyage of discovery was when a friend of his began to question the existence of God. This in turn on some level of experience threatened Irvin's sense of "Jewishness" so that he remarks "and so I started to have a lot of questions around Jewish identity, pushed by one or two friends, and started to ask questions around the religion itself" [INT 1, 114-116]. So for example "a friend of mine started to challenge me on whether or not God existed, and I really struggled with it, because I wanted to have an answer" [INT 1, 112-114].

Irvin, it seems, because of these early triggers began to lose some of the earlier confidence he had in his identity, "[I] was in a bit of a wilderness really, for quite awhile, I didn't feel comfortable because of the stigmatization of reform, and while the conservative community was a place I could go to, I did not really feel at home, and totally welcomed" [INT 1, 133-136].

Another trigger that Irvin experienced was that "I started recognizing that I was attracted to men" [INT 1, 117-118]. This ignited a confusion of thoughts and emotions, "my process has been in some ways a rational process, but also a lot of emotional underlying dramas" [INT 1, 234-235]. One reason for such dramas was Irvin's first love experiences, "and so as I was growing up I just found myself intensely attracted to my best friend, virtually had a crush on him" [INT 1, 311-312]. To further add to his identity confusion at the time, Irvin says that "I just kind of found myself unmoved by women, sexually, they wanted to go on dates with me, and I wasn't particularly interested" [INT 1, 315-317].

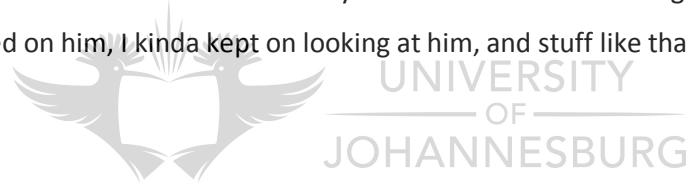
These triggers were of the kind "that forced me to have to make certain big decisions in my life as to which kind of community I was going to belong to" [INT 2, 450-451].

### **'I STARTED ...MAKING MOVEMENTS OUTWARDS' [CONSTRUCTION OR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF NEW IDENTITY].**

Part of the experience of the coming out process involved for Irvin “elements of one’s past and sort of connections that one makes” [INT 2, 10]. It seemed that for Irvin the coming out process involved having the fabric of his life torn apart, and him having to resow the pieces together so as to create a new cloth of identity. In a sense Irvin had to come out to himself first before he could do so to others, a process within a process which was slow, but finally he could say “OK and so accepting that this way ... attraction towards men ... I suppose that was a stage of actually, acknowledging ‘This is what it is’, and I’m not bringing it on” [INT 2, 94-95].

Irvin reflects on those earlier years,

It was about ten or eleven when ... as I said ... when I felt this ... this really strong attraction to this one Madrech ... um ... and as I said I didn’t recognize it as ‘attraction’ but uh ... I ... I um ... ya ... I mean I ... I can recognize that I was sort of locked on him, I kinda kept on looking at him, and stuff like that [INT 2, 224-227].



He further elaborates:

Had this sense of connection towards other members of the same sex ... early on ... sort of came to recognize it around fourteen ... fifteen ... struggled around it until about eighteenth ... nineteen ... I started like making movement outwards ... I started going by myself to the gay film festival and things like that ... but ... I um ... don’t come out until about twenty ... round about exactly now, funny enough, round about this time of the year ... pesach ... it was about the third day of pesach that I spoke to my folks ... I actually came out first to a few friends ... the first time I came out was at a Jewish conference’ [INT 1, 484-491]. [He met a friend at that conference who had given a speech on homosexuality, and said] I want to talk to you’ and we went and sort of had a chat ... and he was very cross with me ... I wanted to make the speech that you made!’ ‘Why?’ ‘Because it’s my issue!’ ‘What do you mean it’s your issue?’ so he said ‘I’m gay!’ so I took a deep breath and I was

like Jeess! We had a bit of a chat for a while ... and I said, 'well Ronald, it's *my issue too!*' [we both laugh] and um ... we landed up talking for a long time into the night [INT 1, 497-502].

So when it comes to Irvin's understanding of his homosexuality as being an "essence" of biological, he insists that,

I can't say that I played any part in constructing that um ... that, those initial emotions, and so in a way it was, it wore me down shall we say, into gayness, um ...in ... you know ... it's a horrible way of putting it I suppose, but, but, ... it's probably true that ... it's, it's, you know that I had to fight it in a way, and um ... because it was part of me ... I couldn't fight it *because it was there*, and so the way to acknowledge and to deal with it was to accept and come to accept ... and now I recognize of course it's a good part of me [INT 2, 314-320].

For Irvin, his homosexuality couldn't be just a "social construction" one reason being that "my folks never sat me down, for some kind of discussion about sex" [INT 1, 35-47]. Nevertheless, Irvin had to deal with it, through a process of reinterpretation of Torah texts, and assimilating an identity that is constructed through homosexual discourse. Irvin hints at this discourse when he later uses the term "political consciousness".

However, Irvin does acknowledge a,

One quite traumatic event that actually happened was on Sex Education, it was Std. 5, and it was actually in class, and um ... I asked it, or someone else asked it, about 'What do gay men do in bed?', and um ... and we had a woman, I suppose, in Std 5, sort of '87, '88, and um, she told us [Irvin sort of raises his voice here as if being her speaking authoritatively], ... but she um ... she was very judgmental about it, she sort of said ... um ... 'You must NEVER do these things!' 'It's bad', um ... all kinds of things, you know, uh ... and um ... and she ... exactly! ... um ... you talked about ... whatever, oral, anal sex and uh ... and ... it was very interesting! I had a very negative reaction to that, I of course had no political consciousness [at that age] ... I

had sort of ... I remember having nightmares ... and um ... I couldn't fall asleep, and uh ... and ... there was something that shocked me ... and um ... it's strange as I say ... I mean ... it's probably my own attraction to those things' [INT 2, 35-47]. This experience left a deep emotional scar on Irvin, as he reflects: 'I suppose at that time, maybe almost the *horror* of it [INT 2, 51].

Irvin further elaborates on the discovery of the horror of homosexuality when he says that,

I found it scary ... and, you know, ... and um ... as I say, that kind of *negative* tone towards homosexuality, was something obviously ... that kind of experience ... increases ... um and ... that visceral kind of reaction, I still I suppose don't know what that was, it was ... it was probably some recognition, as well as a sort of uh, ... frightenness, and a wanting it not to be, something like that, um, and and ... pushing it away [INT 2, 54-58].



From what we can read in what Irvin has reflected upon, we see that he experienced his homosexuality as something that on the one hand was irresistible, [and thus perhaps “biological”], but on the other hand, something which was horrifying for a young boy, and whose horror came about through a social construction [through sex education] of his sexuality. Another way that his homosexual identity could have been influenced by social constructs was through gay movies, as he remembers one incident in his adolescence: “well, sneaking into the gay and lesbian film festival, myself, .. um ... going to a play, a gay play, um ... and ... and ... so just starting to see representations of homosexuality, and then, ya, ... um ... but still *very* fearful, not wanting people to know” [INT 2, 169-172].

Irvin continued to experience this ambivalence around his homosexuality throughout his adolescent years;

I suppose towards 15, openly fantasizing about Ezekiel, and others, and sort of ... you know ... almost wanting to enact it ... and so I remember sitting next to him and

sort of brushing my leg closer to him you know, he was unaware of that although maybe on some deeper level he was and he didn't realize that I was trying to push closer and he was trying to push ... you know ... he wasn't even aware, uh ... and uh ... I do remember, exactly it was a little later and ... exactly, we had a kind of play fight, and uh... and I used to use this cream on my face called Citafil, and um ... it's a white cream, and it looks a bit like sperm [Irvin and I coyishly laugh here], and so we kinda had a play, and I sort of play fought that I was going to put it on him, and he was *horrified* and then he sort of wrestled me onto the ground, and uh ... of course I was turned on, by it, and I think he recognized that, it was was interesting, and he held me down ... he didn't want to ... he was horrified, like it was just I think like suddenly recognition that I was turned on by this, and I don't know if he was consciously aware of that, but I think um ... it was uh ... you know, I think we got gradually more and more sort of distant [INT 2, 102-117].

What were for Irvin "innocent" acts of wanting to connect with another human being, were for others in his life "horrifying". Here we see how a discourse can inform peoples' actual behaviour through a word, i.e., homosexual, and in turn, peoples' behaviour influences [make impressions on] the developing identity of the young homosexual male. There is a reciprocity between language and behaviour, between discourse and "reality" in Irvin's phenomenological experience.

We have seen how paradox functions in a central role of Irvin's experience, and with paradox, comes ambivalence.

### **AMBIVALENCE THAT PERMEATES THE PROCESS OF COMING OUT [AMBIVALENCE AS AN INTERPLAY BETWEEN COGNITION, AFFECT, AND BEHAVIOUR IN IRVIN].**

Ambivalence tended to plague Irvin's coming process in other ways too. For even though he had been "out" for a while, he still felt he could not tell his parents: "I was not out at the time, [I was out], but I was not out to them at the time" [INT 1, 141]. In order to gain a deeper insight into the mechanism of the ambivalence, we will now try to understand it from the perspective of an interplay between Irvin's thoughts [cognition], emotions [affect] and relationships [behaviour].

## **COGNITION: 'MANY PEOPLE ARE NOT THOUGHTFUL ABOUT THEIR JUDAISM'**

Irvin insists that while on the one hand “there are multiple ways in which can understand the text” [INT 1, 341], on the other hand there are “not many people are that thoughtful about their Judaism” [INT 2, 550-551]. Irvin says of himself that “I was more [one] who kept things in my head” INT 1, 237].

Having grown up with parents who were both educated people themselves and also encouraged questioning; Irvin came to value open mindedness. He says:

My parents um ... are both um ... professional people ... they are both teachers ... my dad's a history teacher and my mom's a ... well, she's actually qualified as a English and history as well ... but err ... she teaches music and um ... both of them are also modern people but they are also religiously observant [INT 1, 14-17].

As seen above, Irvin considers his upbringing as being modern orthodox, a tradition that values aspects of modernity while still retaining ancient traditions, thus “what people in the reform movement were asking for was for certain modernisation” [INT 1, 23], and so within the modern orthodox movement “there were those who felt that they needed to modernize, and discard many elements of Jewish tradition as well” [INT 1, 35-37], in addition there are “people who believe strongly in having secular education, often have a professional life” [INT 1, 39-40]. Open-mindedness for Irvin involves a willingness to struggle with fundamental issues; Irvin demonstrates a mental flexibility that is perhaps a contributing factor with regard to his resilience in his coming out process, and to a different understanding of his Jewish identity.

However he does qualify this statement by saying that,

‘I think one of the problems with things like Reform Judaism today is that there is very much focus on the head [though not always so much willingness to follow through on some of those things, and so for example there'd be a recognition that the conditions under which animals are treated is wrong, but people won't follow through with that in their own lives necessarily, so there is a kind of focus on the

head and the emotional content is kind of lost, and I think that for me, exactly, it is important to say that there is a very strong [emotional] attachment to things 'Jewish' [INT 1, 239-245].

And so for Irvin, because he approaching his Judaism seriously and with a thoughtful attitude he can say that "as I say, my theology is more complex today as well, though I'm not totally sure of the existence of an external entity" [INT 1, 252-254]. He elaborates on this point in regard to his theology and his identity:

I have a revulsion against the ghetto, that sort of ... kind of mentality ... 'revulsion' is maybe too strong a type of word, ... but I dislike it strongly, the narrowing of the mind, and an opening, an authenticity, a capacity to determine one's own identity in relation to Judaism, is something I embrace and connect with very strongly [INT 1, 288-291].



And so,

I love coming up with new and novel ways to interpret and to find modern glosses on old stories, and finding interesting Midrash, which is kind of an interpretive translation, not translation, but interpretive stories which come on top of these stories, looking at the whole host of sources that exist that interpret this tradition, kind of putting modern glosses on them and it's not only about modernity, it's about confronting the text in light of our own lives, and finding ways in which to make sense of that text [INT 1, 394-400].

And so ambivalence in Irvin's coming out process can be understood as a function of cognitive processes, in which conflict arises between his own willingness to explore issues and consider other points of view, versus a more conservative and rigid approach to Jewish identity as manifested by the attitudes of other Jews that Irvin encountered on his journey.

## AFFECT

When it comes to his emotional dimension Irvin insists that “I think that for me, exactly, it is important to say that there is a very strong [emotional] attachment to things ‘Jewish’” [INT 1, 244-245]. So for example, Irvin reflects on the role of prayer in his life: “I find that prayer is that kind of space to some extent, it does not make sense on a purely rational level. [In fact] a lot of the liturgy one can’t make [rational] sense of in that sense” [INT 1, 249-252]. Thus,

Essentially prayer is an attempt to get in touch with those better parts of oneself, those quieter parts of ourselves, and connecting with a deeper essence, and I think, that may be, and I’m not sure, but may be something external, it’s connecting with something deeper, and that is emotional [INT 1, 254-257].

However, it is not only his Jewish identity that stirs up emotion inside of him, but also his homosexual identity:



I just remember one Shabbat afternoon sitting with the text, and looking at it, saying ‘It can’t apply to me, ... It can’t apply to me’ because I believed that this torah text was from God, and I could not believe that God would do this to me, I struggled with it, I tried to change images in my mind, you know, when I was fantasizing, from men to women, it all didn’t work, I had dreams of men, that was part of ... that was the directional stuff that was in me [INT 1, 317-322] ... I could not understand how it could prohibit something that I felt naturally was part of me [INT 1, 119]. [These emotion conflicts gave rise to painful questions and thoughts]: ... What am I going to do?! Choices like celibacy, which was kind of an option, it didn’t make sense to me, it didn’t make sense that this text was there [INT 1, 327-328].

Thus in terms of ambivalence, there were both good and bad emotional experiences with regard to both Irvin’s Jewish and homosexual identities, however, such opposites of emotions also created



internal conflict within his Jewish and homosexual identities and between them. This in turn creates moments of wishful thoughts when “sometimes when there’s a certain moment of recognition, of a type of Jewish identity, that is wider, more open ... that also in a way resonates emotionally with me” [INT 1, 268-270].

At this point it would be interesting to look at the interplay of ambivalence between Irvin’s thoughts and his emotions as they were experienced in his fantasy life.

## **FANTASY**

Fantasy played an important role in Irvin’s sexual developmental process, and was indeed one of the indicators for Irvin that he was gay as he comments:

I suppose the next stage, was finding myself very attracted to this very good friend of mine, and um ... finding that um ... we were fantasizing or masturbating, etcetera ... we never masturbated each other ... (I would say sadly now)” [INT 2, 62-65] ... we often did fantasize supposedly ‘about girls’ ... In his mind it was about girls, but in my mind it was about him, that process ... I mean it was a process, I didn’t fully recognize it immediately [INT 2, 67-69].

Irvin further elaborates on the role that fantasy played in his developing homosexuality:

Then of course there was also the homosexual images in my mind, which were *gay* images which were coming into my mind, I tried to move those images to straight images, and I again, never ... prohibited was straight pornography [INT 2, 78-81] ... the images of women were never, they were never satisfying, they didn’t stay there, they weren’t ... you know although I had good female friends, ... they didn’t hold my attention on a fantasy level, and so that was ... there was ... that was very interesting. And so I moved towards acknowledging what it was, fighting it and then starting in a way to give up the fight [INT 2, 97-101].

The power of fantasy here lies in the fusion between Irvin's cognitions and his emotions through "visual" imagery, imagery that exists beyond language, beyond simple discourse, something connected or related to reality, something relational.

## RELATIONSHIPS

In his developing Jewish male homosexual identity, when it came to relationships Irvin believed that "it starts off with myself, and then going into relationships" [INT 1, 605-606]. How he began to relate to himself became as important in his identity development, as how he began to relate to others. Thus, for example,

I would have thought by self-recognizing you would sort of naturally incline to link with others who are similar, and hopefully to some extent support causes that are at least going to make living gay, being gay, ok with that [INT 2, 364-367].

In fact relationships became the key vehicle through which Irvin began to develop his sense of identity. He notes:

I think relationships are some of the primary teachers to some extent ... that being involved with others has put a mirror on me in coming to terms with myself ... um ... so exactly ... whatever I learnt about me, um ... look I suppose ... I'm a strongly principled person, I don't just cave in into certain things' [INT 1, 455-458] [Nevertheless], ... I think I'm a communal individual ... who's got a desire to belong ... but also a desire to be authentic ... and coming to terms with that authenticity ... there was also a sort of 'perfectionism' stuff' around that time ... I don't know if it was because of being 'gay' .. that I had to compensate ... to be ultra clever [INT 1, 467-471].

And so when it came to the development of his homosexual identity, Irvin says:

I think that being involved in a gay relationship, fundamentally recognizing that this is a beautiful thing that it's not something ... even if you are with someone for a night ... if it's respectful and you treat each other well, you know ... I mean you could do it in a bad way, there are certain ways ... there's a level of engaging respectfully ... and you can't be together for the rest of your life [INT 1, 613-618].

Here with regard to relationships, ambivalence in Irvin's coming out process is evidenced in the tension between his need to be authentic and principled, yet at the same time, his need to fit in, and enjoy relating on a common basis.

## **6. "TO BE VULNERABLE IN THE PUBLIC SPACE"**

### **COMPROMISE**

It would seem that compromise is an intrinsic part of Irvin's experience of having to negotiate the dual identities of being Jewish and also being gay. He notes in regard to some of the "difficult" aspects of the Torah: "there's quite a lot of stuff and when you look at it, a modern person is certainly uncomfortable with it, with it being just and not just" [INT 1, 363-364]. Adopting a homosexual identity for Irvin is "not necessarily having an answer in reconciling it with Jewish tradition" [INT 1, 47]. With embracing his homosexuality Irvin found that there is compromise involved in terms of his Jewish identity, specifically the type of Jewish identity he would later come to adopt, thus "I gradually became involved with the reform community there, I found them very welcoming" [INT 1, 145]. I think it is here where Irvin may be experiencing most of his current tension, rather than in terms of his homosexual identity, as comes across in the emotional undertones of the following passage:

But I get very angry on other types of expressions of identity, since we have a standing problem within my family with the humotsi, because I won't say humotsi, because my dad will only allow the boys to say humotsi, and there is nothing wrong Halachically with my mom doing it as well, [my parents are still modern orthodox], but my dad says 'it's the tradition!' and that's the way my dad wants it. And so then I said, 'if my mom's not doing it, the I'm not doing it!' but I've come to accept it, but it still infuriates me to some extent, that that is still over there, there's a kind of rigidity [INT 1, 275-282].

Another example of Irvin's discontent with regard to his current Jewish identity has to do with the value of the Hebrew language for him, and which he still holds onto fondly, and with much emotion, "but the Reform community doesn't really appreciate good Torah reading, because most people don't really understand what it is, they can't read the Hebrew or really appreciate it" [INT 1, 302-304]. In a sense he had to let go of, and leave behind, his more orthodox identity in order to make the compromise not only his own homosexual identity but also in order to embrace more modern values: "like that one *has* to leave, err ... one has to find an alternative way to being Jewish, and that it's not fully acceptable, one has to hide one's gayness, and so, that kind of choice is difficult" [INT 2, 456-458]. The compromise for Irvin has not been easy: "obviously I've struggled with Torah, it's hard, it's been difficult, it was a very difficult journey" [INT 1, 423-424]. He further elaborates with regard to his struggle:

There was that struggle ... in relation to 'gay identity' ... err ... there was a struggle of how I was really going to be in my family ... how I was going to be in my community ... and um ... ya ... a difficult struggle about that, and I had to fight ... it wasn't ... I had to be quite strong when I came out to my parents ... I had to be strong in myself ... and um ... that's a difficult thing as a gay person ... in a way I think you do have to be very strong ... and sometimes I crave weakness ... [he laughs] ... and I don't want to fight [INT 1, 433-439].

This compromise has left Irvin with a sense of constant emotional and psychological tension, so that while on the one hand he receive support, for example: "over the period of this time my parents were becoming increasingly comfortable with it, and um ... I spoke to my dad, my mom was sort of alienated from the Jewish community ... my dad goes to schul every Shabbat" [INT 1, 545-547]; on the other hand, there is a sense of having to constantly "justify' his existence [identity], thus,

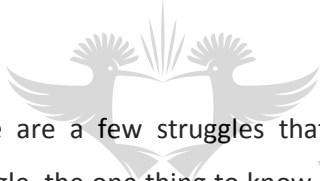
I sometimes feel that I have to, to stand up for things that I stand up for, but I don't really enjoy it, I would rather convince and engage, sort of not manage ... be in that conflictual mode ... so I think there is that tension between the struggling with the

angel and the resolution of peace, and that sort of sort towards reconciliation [INT 1, 446-449].

In other words, it is as though he lives a life of constant exposure, constant vulnerability, he notes:

All these kinds of things ... and being able to be vulnerable ... which I still find difficult ... in the public space ... in the arena ... being able to be vulnerable ... and ya ... fully realized ... ya ... and the tension between that ... and I suppose between public and private roles [INT 1, 471-474].

To hold onto his Jewish identity and also hold onto his homosexual identity requires immense amounts of effort:



There are a few struggles that are interconnected here, the one is a religious struggle, the one thing to know is that masturbation is prohibited in Jewish law, um ... in traditional Jewish law should we say, I don't believe it is any more, um ... but ya, right, and so the one struggle I had around sexuality was, .... um. I felt bad about masturbating [INT 2, 69-73].

Mutual masturbation is one of the sexual practices that enable gay people to bond with each other on a physical, emotional and psychological level, yet it is something that is condemned out right in terms of a more orthodox Jewish morality. This in turn creates psychological tension and guilt in homosexual persons such as Irvin, as it would prohibit one of his more fundamental emotional needs to connect with another human being. This was one of the types of prohibition in the Torah that cause Irvin a lot of stress and anxiety in his adolescent years, he says:

I used to try and regulate myself, I would say, 'I'm only going to do it three times this month!' and um, and try to reduce it, and try to keep myself away from it, so I quite

often failed in that, that was quite frustrating, in many ways, and um, that was a related struggle around the control of sexuality [INT 2, 75-78].

In a way this kind of tension could be described as follows:

It's almost like there's a shadow in the background, following you, ... and um ... with that sex education there was this part of you that you couldn't really talk about to yourself because you didn't know what it was and having to deal with the unnameable at that point ... and it's almost like the coming out process is finding a name for this experience [INT 2, 228-231].

Some of the emotional turmoil that Irvin experienced is reflected in the brokenness of the following sentences:



And I fought against it as well so, so ... something was coming into my mind ... you know ... something was *impinging* on me in a way, right ... which, which ... I *wasn't* totally in control of ... um ... and um ... you know ... and that's quite frigt ... was frightening ... and I suppose is quite frightening to me in a way, because I'm a very ... like being in control kind of person ... uh ... *but* I couldn't ... [INT 2, 312-316].

With the need to compromise, came also the need to control, lest he be discovered. Irvin reflects on an example of this need to control in his adolescence:

Because the interesting thing about being a boy of course you are in the boys' change room, so you ... which in itself is interesting, because it's not ... people think it's totally wonderful, like often young teenage boys would say 'Ah, I wish I was in the girls' change room!' but actually, it's quite inhibiting, because you can't show open sexual attraction, because you're going to be judged by that, um ... you kind of

*have* to control yourself, and um, it's always kind of the 'side ways glance' it's not the kind of embracing of it [INT 2, 83-89].

This need to control not only permeated Irvin's closeted existence, but even in coming out, he had to be careful, to control whom such information was disclosed to. He reflects about the first people to whom he disclosed his homosexual identity:

I told Joe the first two ... um ... two ... no its wasn't the first ... um ... my first friend Ronald, and then Nathaniel, the one was in Israel and the one was in Joburg, the next two friends were in the Drakensberg, and then we all went away together, and um ... you know, still having to hold back, which was difficult, but then I didn't want my parents to find out without actually going and confronting and talking to them [INT 2, 182-186].




### **“I HAD TO BE QUITE STRONG”**

Some people would condemn compromise as “giving in” and not being consistent to your principles or standing by your convictions. Yet, it took a lot of courage for Irvin to move beyond the “safety” of the orthodox castle, and to explore the potentially hostile lands that lay beyond its walls. Indeed Irvin's coming out process seemed to have been one that had its good moments: “I came out in front of everyone, it was fine, there was no sense of being in anyway alienated or hounded because of it” [INT 1, 147-148], even though for Irvin “it was one of the hardest things I've done ... and I did it ..and my folks ... ya! Their initial reaction was ... you know ... they weren't delighted ... but they didn't throw me out of the house which I had been concerned about” [INT 1, 506-509]. Yet paradoxically, even if Irvin had remained safely tucked away in his orthodox castle, his closeted existence would have itself been a compromise: “so there was that kind of ... of period I suppose of seeming outwardly to be straight but inwardly to be acknowledging gayness” [INT 2, 154-155]. And such a compromise would have had its own costs, for example living a life of constant fear and hiding, as Irvin states: “I think that it is indicative of the kind of mind set of the closet, which was fearful, it was also feeling like I was betraying my friends by going out with them but then not being

able to want sexual stuff, I mean, I did actually, I remember going out with one” [INT 2, 145-148]. Which is not to say that coming out would not have its own potential costs, as Irvin remarks: “I was *incredibly fearful*, I had feelings that my folks might reject me, they might throw me out of the house, I didn’t know what to do” [INT 2, 187-189]. In this regard Irvin recalls an incident from his adolescence:

So I only told my brother ... I don’t know if I already covered this ... I only told him at the end of Matric, that was his Matric year, so that was like ... um ... ya ... that’s also December of that year, and I told him very shortly, .. he was upset with me ... because I told him very shortly after he finished his finals, he kinda just wanted to kinda relax about ... into everything, and then he like landed up with this piece of information which he still found quite hectic [INT 2, 195-200].

In the often conflicted existence or experience of compromise and control, Irvin found himself alone:



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Was in a bit of a wilderness really, for quite awhile, I didn’t feel comfortable because of the stigmatization of reform, and while the conservative community was a place I could go to, I did not really feel at home, and totally welcomed [INT 1, 133-136].

Yet this was about to change: “Then I went to England, which was an important moment” [INT 1, 136]. With regard to this change Irvin further reflects about his coming out process:

In England which was also experience of much more normalized homosexuality, as part of the society, and come back to South Africa where I was sort of leading a campaign for gay marriage, and very open in the Jewish community, so ... that maybe a bit of a discussion of how things were [INT 2, 205-208].



One of the qualities of Irvin that contributes to the uniqueness of his experience is his positive disposition, as he comments:

I've always had the belief that it [being gay] was something good, I suppose for some reason maybe I'm just positively disposed, whatever, I suppose I also come from an affirming context, positive role-models [or role models of positivity], lots of that kind of stuff ... I think there was always that kind of affirming element ... I think what gave me a lot of strength, particularly in recent years, was being involved in gay relationships and realizing ... and also having the confidence to be more experimental and stuff like that ... and also being more open-minded to other forms of sexual expression which people ... which had been something that [I had felt to be for me]conservative and become less conservative [INT 1, 606-613].

What makes this statement interesting is the sense that it creates of Irvin not needing to "control" his homosexuality as much as he used to. Perhaps there is a greater ease with compromise, or perhaps a greater ease with just being "himself". Whatever the case, compromise and control will continue to function in the dynamics of Irvin's homosexuality, as he notes about the coming out process,

It's definitely not a once off event, I mean, as I've described it, it's a process, of coming to terms with yourself, um ... and ya, for me it was, what, a seven year process, to telling friends and family, and that wasn't the end of it [INT 2, 400-403].

His further elaboration brings to the fore this dynamic between compromise and control,

I mean I think you are always to some extent there areas of a gay person of whether to withhold information or not, see, even today I had someone in my office and I talked about going away to the Drakensberg with my partner, and then we were kinda talking about it, and then we got lost in the dark, and then, I consciously knew

that I had to make a choice of whether to say 'and *he* brought the torch with' or 'my partner brought the torch with', so I am still aware today, of making that choice, and I chose to say 'he' ... right ... because, like, um, I think that should be just natural, normal, right, ... and I should be able to talk about that, but I'm conscious of it, so ... so there is a degree to which it's not a person that I know from a bar of soap, I don't think straight people would have any problems talking about 'she' ... you know ... and so ... it's not that I had a problem, but it's just ... there is a consciousness around it ... so um ... I don't think it's ever a totally you know ... sort of just run of the mill ... I mean, you know, I think even though is ok with oneself, and I'm ok with myself, I think, I think, you know ... I don't have an issue telling people ... err ... I'm aware of it, and that's maybe because of it's a difference or whatever, maybe I'd be aware of being Jewish, I suppose as well, if I make comments about it being about Jewish, so, so, it might be a 'difference' thing, being aware of being a minority or something like that, but it is an awareness, and you know, that's the thing, like holding hands in public as well, it's like, you know, Joe and I do it, ... um ... but we're aware of it, like I know in the Drakensberg, if we were to hold hands, again it felt a little bit like a political statement, you know, and that's a pity, like I wouldn't like ... I wish we didn't have to do that ... um .... and you know ... as I say, it might be a reason for, you know, why I say, it's sometimes nice to travel to places where it's just not a question, and I think in South Africa today it is still a question, it's just not ... even if you walk in Rosebank, which is quite really open or Sandton, it's still not totally ... like people look at you ... you know what I mean ... so it's ... ya ... so to some extent there is some truth in the idea ... it's a process ... I, I mean ... that's coming out, I suppose it is coming out in some kind of way, but I would say largely that process for me is over, um ... but, that there are still moments of awareness of my sexuality in difference and choices to be made as to whether I, I allow my sexuality to be known or not, so there is still a kind of dynamic between hiding and openness that exists, and in some contexts I sort of embrace the dynamic of openness, there are others where I'm totally, I have to go back into hiding, when I was in Nigeria, I couldn't tell anyone that I was gay because it's such a virulently homophobic society that I was scared [INT 2, 404-436].

## IN SUMMATION

With regard to Irvin's experience it would seem that "there is an extent to which coming out doesn't stop happening for gay people" [INT 2, 439-440]. There is an intrinsic and pervasive dynamic of compromise and control that permeates the coming out process, so much so that even when I began recording the interviews with Irvin he asked: "so just to be clear ... um ... so the result... you obviously going to be writing this up for Masters ... and um ... but then ... um ... my name won't be necessarily used" [INT 1, 5-6]; in other words, there is still the concern [and thus the need for control] about who is going to have access to this information and what possible consequences will there be for me as a homosexual male.

## JEWISH GAY IDENTITY

Up till now I have been looking at Irvin as though he had two separate identities, one Jewish and the other homosexual. Yet as already seen above, and as we will come to see, it is not possible to totally separate out these "two" identities that "co-exist" in the body of Irvin. Both exist through compromise, through various levels of control in navigating the contradictory waters of Irvin's lived existence.


## "SORT OF RECONCILIATION BETWEEN MY JEWISH AND GAY IDENTITIES"

As we have come to see, compromise is an intrinsic part of the Irvin's experience, and in part such compromise consists of letting go versus holding on ... "I still am religious in many ways, sort of in the traditional [or] Frum kind of sense of the word" [INT 1, 123-124]. Irvin still observes Shabbat, Kosher laws and many various ceremonies that comprise Jewish orthodox existence. Yet it seems that for Irvin on a daily basis he has to "articulate the sort of reconciliation between my Jewish and gay identities" [INT 1, 533-534]. Thus on the one hand, "I still have an uneasy relationship with the sort of mainstream community" [INT 1, 583-584]. On the other hand, Irvin can't necessarily control whom he falls in love with, even if that person may not be themselves Jewish, as he says:

When I fell in love with an Afrikaans guy called Darren, it was ... it just made it clear to me that this was beautiful ... and this was something nice ... and it has the potential to be beautiful, and even though he disappointed me [INT 1, 563-565].

Thus allowing his homosexual identity to thrive and blossom may lead him on paths that go further and further away from his Jewish identity. However he is determined to hang onto his Jewish identity, and one way he will do it, is through the mechanism of involvement, as he says: “my way of understanding identity is through involvement” [INT 2, 530], involvement in Jewish activities and forms of worship and of course a Jewish community. Thus Irvin also says of his coming out process: “so there was a selective I suppose involvement ... but a deepening of my identity involvement with gayness, as well as with Judaism, and thankfully I have been very fortunate to find a place where I can do both” [INT 2, 538-540].

In summation, one of the aspects of Irvin’s experience and story that is beautiful and moving for me how his Jewish identity informs his gay identity and vice versa; so for example his sense of commitment to his current partner is informed in part by his belief in monogamy as inspired by the Torah text. Yet on the other hand, it would seem to me his homosexual journey has deepened his understanding and sense of being Jewish, as he notes: “would I have gone as far as I would have gone if it weren’t for gay, I don’t know if I would have, um ... I suppose there has been a ... it’s pushed me to rethink, and also to be open to difference” [INT 2, 471-473]. His homosexuality and his attribute of thoughtfulness have created a powerful dynamic in forming his sense of identity:



How my shift in my own way and approach towards Judaism is really very different to a lot of people in the community here ... I think largely also because a lot of people are not very thoughtful ... so they don’t bother to think, they’re also not very courageous, so if they do think, and they have a problem, they just don’t challenge, so there are all those kinds of things that are going on too, um ... but yes, I mean, I think that I’ve moved because of that deep process of thought and evaluation and reconciliation I suppose that has happened [INT 2, 477-483].

Thus, “there is a slow process of seeing a sort of different type of Jewish world I suppose that’s open, acknowledging and can deal with difference, can be creative, and all those kinds of things, which I suppose I would regard as a gift” [INT 2, 494-496]. This process, coming out process, arose from triggers in Irvin’s own life and experience, an experience that has often forced him to be confronted with a tension that exists between theoretical texts [such as the Torah] and brute “reality”. As noted above, Irvin’s theology is much more complex than it used to be, but it is also

much richer, because it is no longer informed only by texts, but also by his own lived experience. Irvin reflects on an example of this interaction between theory and his lived experience:

I mean I've got a theorist who sort of more Christian right wing person who sort of argues that uh ... being gay is being like religious rather than like being like racial, and so should be classed in a similar vein, and therefore of course in a certain way attract the same degree of scrutiny, legally, and um ... I think it's not true actually, I think that being gay is more like a racial or gender identity, than a religious identity. But religion is also, it goes deep, I mean someone like myself, now ... exactly ... at birth ... like I don't think that there is anything genetic there, right, or any deep environmental thing ... I mean that is full condition, right ... it's being in an environment and going from earliest on my folks being religious and just bring me up in this way, but it being very deeply inseated, right ... so, it being recognized that this was not something that I was going to give up easily on ... I remember making a choice, I was not going to have rabbis with a lack of understanding with a lack of humanity making choices to deprive me of my Judaism' [INT 2, 504-516]. Part of the challenge of Irvin's experience in negotiating a clear path of identity between being Jewish and being a homosexual male is that 'it's not clear that there are many models' [INT 2, 591]. So for example with regard to living as a successful gay couple, Irvin further reflects: 'we haven't got those models of exactly how to create successful gay relationships, we have to forge them, and I think what's interesting is of course Jewish identify provides a guide, but it has to be modified in a way to guide, and so it's this interesting connection' [INT 2, 597-600].

It seems for Irvin that such models will only come to us through the lived example of Jewish homosexual males like himself, an example that comes through being involved in both Jewish and gay communities, and being involved with both Jewish and male homosexual partners, for through such partnership "there was a deep emotional connection between us" [INT 2, 564-565]. As Irvin says of himself and his current partner, "so in a way we're creating a Jewish gay life' [INT 2, 578], and 'so that's kind of a lovely space" [INT 2, 546-547]. To create such a kind of lovely space where both a Jewish and gay identity can co-exist is 'to come to Ian Forster again,

Connecting up all the elements of ourselves' ... right ... that when he talks about 'only connect' ... and I think that's a very important thing for me is, I need to be whole, to be fulfilled and to be giving, to be fully able to do so, I need to connect up all the elements of myself, and for me that's about bringing together Jewish, gay, South African and many other elements [INT 2, 620-624].

For now, Irvin has found such a space in,

The reform movement is a bit more marginal in South Africa, but at the heart of one branch of ... of the Jewish community, where we're accepted and loved, and we're participating and making a contribution, and are forging a life together, you know, and as I say, one that blends Jewish and gay stuff [INT 2, 581-584].



## CONCLUSION

In this research, a question that I wanted to answer was “how in a way to live a ‘gay-Jewish’ life ... is it possible?” [INT 2, 16]. In terms of Irvin’s phenomenological experience “it’s a multifaceted experience” [INT 2, 519-520]. Irvin found this research to be beneficial in terms of understanding himself better as he notes:

I am a thoughtful person and do look back, you don’t often sort of spend the time recounting your own narratives I think it sort of helped in that sense, having made some of those connections, and having thought through them again [INT 2, 18-21].

Irvin’s experience highlights that struggle has been a central issue for him in his coming out process:

There are a few struggles that are interconnected here, the one is a religious struggle, the one thing to know is that masturbation is prohibited in Jewish law, um ... in traditional Jewish law should we say, I don't believe it is any more, um ... but ya, right, and so the one struggle I had around sexuality was, .... um. I felt bad about masturbating [INT 2, 69-73].

One reason that Irvin loves the Torah text character of Jacob is because how Jacob's own story reflects a struggle: "he wrestles with the angel all night, by the morning he's actually hurt and harmed, he has a limp, and his name is changed from Jacob to Israel" [INT 1, 414-416]. Part of Irvin's struggle involved an attempt at suppressing what was for him eventually a natural inclination: "but my own experience does attest to ... I would have thought that my experience would say it's either biological, genetic, or it comes to a very early environmental influence, in the womb or maybe early developmental stuff" [INT 2, 306-308], a natural inclination that,

I can't say that I played any part in constructing that um .. that, those initial emotions, and so in a way it was, it wore me down shall we say, into gayness, um ...in ... you know ... it's a horrible way of putting it I suppose, but, but, ... it's probably true that ... it's, it's, you know that I had to fight it in a way, and um ... because it was part of me ... I couldn't fight it *because it was there*, and so the way to acknowledge and to deal with it was to accept and come to accept ... and now I recognize of course it's a good part of me [INT 2, 314-320].

Whether or not, being gay is biological for Irvin there is "not necessarily having an answer in reconciling it with Jewish tradition" [INT 1, 47]. Nevertheless, "my way of understanding identity is through involvement" [INT 2, 530]. And when it comes to involvement for Irvin: "gayness offers ways of being perhaps, which are not necessarily identical with ways of straight being, but which are hopefully equally fulfilling and creative" [INT 2, 609-610].

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**



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## INTRODUCTION

This chapter takes a look at my own reflexivity in the process of this research, the value of compromise as achieving authentic homosexuality, potential criticisms of this research that might arise, and recommendations for future research.

### REFLEXIVITY CONCERNING MY INFLUENCE ON THE EMERGING THEMES

In terms of my influence on the emerging themes, I was concerned that my own experiences of being Jewish and being a male homosexual would prejudice the way that I present the material in this study. However, I did remain conscious of this during the process of asking Irvin questions, and while on the one hand my own experiences gave me an “intuitive” sense of where to guide the direction of the questioning, on the other hand, I strove to allow Irvin to speak freely, and also paid close attention to using his own words in developing emerging themes [as is required in responsive interviewing].

### COMPROMISE OR INTEGRATION?

The idea of “compromise” is something that I myself have struggled with in terms of my own coming process. But analyzing Irvin’s narrative has helped me to realize that compromise is inevitable. Thus a sort of “damned if I do, and damned if I don’t” situation arises in having same sex desires. Irvin’s story has showed me that compromise is necessary if one is to retain aspects of both one’s Jewish identity and one’s new found homosexual identity. The alternative, to remain closeted, is itself also a form of compromise. For me a powerful insight that arises from Irvin’s phenomenological experience is that in a sense one cannot be “authentic” without at the same time compromising on some things in one’s life. Compromise becomes a means, a way towards embracing one’s authentic self.

So while on the one hand “identity formation could be viewed as a process of self-construction or self-discovery” (Swartz, 2002, p. 320), on the other hand the challenge is to find “congruence between ... beliefs and ... behaviour” (Yarhouse, 2008, p. 197). With regard to the tension that is found in compromise, Jewish gay life is full of paradoxes and contradictions, for example “the closet which had been the protector of my dignity, had become the armour of my shame” (Schneer & Aviv, 2002, p. 43). Rather than seeing the coming out process as a form of compromise, perhaps it is better to conceptualize it as a process of integration. However, “it might not be the construct of

integration that should be of theoretical interest in studying gay and lesbian Christians [Jews], but the process of integration [itself] instead” (Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000, p. 345). So for example: “Is the integration process different for lesbians as opposed to gay men – if so how and why?” (Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000, p. 345). For Jewish homosexual males, the coming out process is a process of “integrating their multiple identities” (Schneer & Aviv, 2002, p. 12). Thus the focus “is not either-or but both-and” (Loyttynieme, 2006, p. 270), in other words, the coming out process is about *compromise*, an either-or dynamic, but rather *integration*, a both-and dynamic

When it comes to understanding some of Irvin’s coming out process, it would seem that,

For some people, it is important that sexual acts be embedded in contexts resonant with meaning, narrative and connectedness with other aspects of their lives; for other people, it is important that they not be; to others it doesn’t occur that they might be (Morland & Willox, 2005, p. 82).

Irvin began his life of meaning, narrative and connectedness in the context of a Jewish life and the Torah, thus it can be said of him “when other boys became enraptured by girls, I found my rapture in learning Torah” (Rabbi Steve Greenberg in Schneer & Aviv, 2002, p. 38). Irvin has retained his connection to the Torah and to his Jewish community, and sees these connections as central components or as a “central plank” to his life: so that “we remain convinced that queer Jews should not be separatists, since as Jews, they always hold a connection to the broader community and historical memory” (Schneer & Aviv, 2002, p. 6). However, connectedness for a Jewish homosexual male implies intentionality, a consciousness about whom one is and wants to be. So for example “though ‘straight’ weddings might reflect a sense of unconscious social conformity, gay weddings are filled with intentionality” (Schneer & Aviv, 2002, p. 116).

### **POTENTIAL CRITICISMS OF THIS STUDY**

The next six points are some criticisms that I have of my study, and which may also be suggestions for further research into the phenomenological study of Jewish male homosexuality;

First, it can be said that “much of the deepest transformation throughout the ages has begun with renaming” (Schneer & Aviv, 2002, p. 74), however, “no solution is likely to be permanent or perfect” (Schneer & Aviv, 2002, p. 175). This is partly because “no community is likely to serve all our needs

all of the time” (Schneer & Aviv, 2002, p. 175). While suturing oneself to the new found community of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people, and thus finding strength in numbers and a shared ‘common’ experience, nevertheless “abandonment has become a controlling metaphor for gay suffering” (Schneer & Aviv, 2002, p. 193). Identifying with this community means for many youths potential abandonment from families and friends. In other words, instead of focusing on the theme of compromise, I could have chosen a different theme, for example, abandonment. Yet with so many emerging themes in such a study, it would be inevitable that the researcher is forced to eliminate some to focus on others.

Secondly, one potential shortfall of this study is that it still employs a type of ‘methodology’ to achieve ‘acceptable’ results. But from a post-modern perspective “the very idea that one can achieve truth through method is challenged” (Gergen, 2009, p. 78). Furthermore, phenomenology itself as a philosophy would distance itself from ‘methodological’ approaches that would rob the individual of their unique experiences. One reason for this is that,

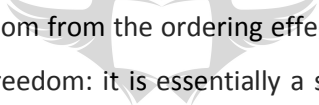
Unlike the Truth of the scientific ideal, the truths of personal narratives are neither open to proof nor self-evident. We come to understand them only through interpretation, paying careful attention to the contexts that shape their creation and to the world views that inform them (Plummer, 1995, p. 167).

Thus, on one hand, I felt uncomfortable following a ‘formula’ as laid out in the methodology chapter, yet on the other hand, I find it difficult to conceive of a way to make sense of all the data if one doesn’t have some kind of ‘systematic’ way of approaching it.

Thirdly, another criticism that I have is that the post-modern perspective which emphasizes language seems to undermine the very reality of pre-linguistic experience. So for example, “once you enter the halls of social construction, there is no material world in itself. That is, what we call the material world, is itself a construction” (Gergen, 2009, p. 54). The consequences of being a homosexual male are very “real”. For example, “parental distancing, rejection, or incidents of abuse ... sexual harassment, bullying, threats of violence, and physical assaults by peers in the school environs ... living on the street or in shelters ... truancy, low academic achievement and school dropout” (Saltzburg, 2007, p. 58). Acknowledging people have very real lived experiences is important because “people need their identities to be recognized as a matter of psychological and social significance”

(Morland & Willox, 2005, p. 175), and experience is an integral part of those identities. For many gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered persons “the argument is simple, if you can acknowledge in yourself that what makes a person is what takes place between the ears and not between the legs, then you are in a privileged position to know that sexuality is a movable and mutable force within us all” (Morland & Willox, 2005, p. 122).

Fourthly, another criticism that I have is that “post-modern theory often tends towards a fetish of inconsistency, contradictions, and the ever-present ‘difference’” (Morland & Willox, 2005, p. 9). While on the one hand post-modern theorists may emphasize difference, on the other hand, such difference is questioned to such a degree that it ceases to exist. So from a post-modern perspective in one sense, gender and sexual orientation do not exist as realities independent of language, they are constructed realities, constituted not by material substances outside of language, but by words and ideas. Effectively this means that gender and sexual orientation do not exist. And so “it is not clear to me that this vision of a genderless non-normativity is a worthwhile goal” (Suzanna Walters in Morland & Willox, 2005, p. 15). This is because,



Freedom from the ordering effects of language, from all traditions or conventions is not freedom: it is essentially a step into insignificance – a space where there is no freedom because there are no distinctions, and thus no choices (Gergen, 2009, p. 49).

Another way to express this concern is to ask,

If all thought is the result of taking in the cultural surrounds, is the individual anything more than society’s robot? Are we just carrying on the traditions of the past in our thinking? Is there no means of transforming our traditions? (Gergen, 2009, p. 94).

Fifthly, it has been asserted that “homosexuality is a certain practice of the self and relating which often explicitly contains a narrative focused on finding a home” (Devetzis, 1998, p. 147). However

that is only one type of narrative “explanation”. In Irvin’s case, it seems that “homosexuality” was more a coming out process, more about the journey, the quest, or exploration, the questioning, the search for identity, for a way to articulate who he is in the world. In this regard, “all narrative must generate the illusion of an ‘imaginary resolution of real contradictions’” (Lyotard, 1984, p. xix). Part of Irvin’s journey, even now as I write, is one of integrating real and apparent contradictions, of compromising. Thus in one sense we can assert that “homosexuality is an identity issue rather than a phenomenon of sexual attraction” (Devetzis, 1998, p. 93). For Irvin it is not “just” about sex. It is about ‘relating’ to other men on a most intimate level, a relating that calls for a ‘fusion of horizons’ on the one hand, but also on the other hand, a defining of boundaries, an establishment of individuality, of uniqueness. This kind of “relating” is different from “mere” friendship between two men, in that it does involve the element of sexual attraction, of wanting to copulate with another man. The act of copulating with another man tends to become a defining feature central to what it is to be “gay” or a homosexual. Yet as we have seen in Irvin’s narrative, being homosexual also involves certain “sensitivities” that perhaps the average heterosexual male does not allow himself. Such “sensitivity” may involve the ability to appreciate other men on an aesthetic level, such as Irvin did with his Madrech, noticing certain sensual, “manly” features that his Madrech had. And so being a homosexual cannot be reduced to just any one element such as “homecoming” or “copulation between two males”. It is a far more complex phenomenon than that.

Finally, in terms of defining boundaries, it can be said that “constructionists are not playing the truth game ... constructionist ideas are offered as possible resources for living” (Gergen, 2009, p. 160). In other words, “that a favoured reality is constructed is no reason for its abandonment. If we abandoned all constructions we would simply be mute” (Gergen, 2009, p. 165). Thus, we are “invited by constructionist dialogues to explore the possible ways in which such traditions bring injury to people, and to consider how we might generate new alternatives” (Gergen, 2009, p. 165). Dialogue of course implies that relationships are an intrinsic part of the process, as Gergen asserts, “the path to a meaningful life is through relationships” (Gergen, 2009, p. 172). What this means is that the results from this study depend on the unique dynamics of the relationship between Irvin and myself. So in one sense this study cannot be “replicated”.


In exploring Irvin’s struggle to integrate his Jewish identity with his male homosexual identity, a significant metaphor that emerged has been that of a dance, a dance between two extremes, the extremes of “sociological determinism (you are what society dictates) or extreme voluntarism (you can anything you want to be)” (Weeks, 2000, p. 61). However, this is not an aimless dance, but one which involves intentionality and reason, so that we can say that

Self identity is rational. It involves a taking into the self of 'contents of the encountered world'. To refuse to allow the new content from outside to enter the centred self is to become an empty self. Yet to open oneself too easily to change is to risk a chaotic self-identity (Gerkin, 1984, p. 64).

And part of reasoning as a psychological skill is the ability to be discerning, so that,

Self and object interpretations are always selective. Certain experiences are given symbolic significance and other experiences overlooked (Gerkin, 1984, p. 153).

However,



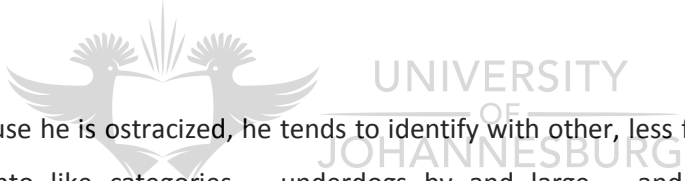
Codes of knowledge are inevitably supplied not by pure introspection but by rendering one's introspection in a particular vocabulary of feelings, beliefs, passions, desires, values or whatever and according to a particular explanatory code derived from some source of authority (Gay, Evans & Redman, 2000, p. 318).

Vocabularies and language provide narratives which in turn supply us with scripts through which we can assume roles to perform in life. In this sense Irvin can be said to have taken on a certain type of script, or sutured himself into the male homosexual character, which while on the one hand provides him meaning, on the other hand potentially restricts him. Miller comments on this tension when he "defines suture as that moment when the subject inserts itself into the symbolic register in the guise of a signifier, and in so doing gains meaning at the expense of being" (Gay, Evans & Redman, 2000, p. 76). One reason that restriction with regard to a male homosexual identity takes place is that 'identities suture those who take them up to specific moral duties. Identities carry with them a requirement to act, which is felt as "what a person like me does" (Warner, 1993, p. 147). This

tension increases, for while Irvin has sutured himself into the character position of male homosexual, there is a very real sense in which this script is open ended, for example,

The youngster who discovers himself to be gay, the young man who realizes he is gay, and the adult who after however long a lifetime of denial finally accepts himself as being gay (and furthermore as having been gay) must create his own map, must chart his own channels, and must interpret his own experiences as intelligently as he can (Siegel & Lowe, 1994, p. 28).

In other words, “the ways in which humans ‘give meaning to experience’ have their own history” (Gay, Evans & Redman, 2000, p. 312). Part of Irvin’s “own history” or uniqueness lies in the challenge he faces in constantly integrating his Jewish and male homosexual identity. In addition Irvin has a strong sense of justice that is perhaps tied to his own struggle for recognition, so for example,



Because he is ostracized, he tends to identify with other, less fortunate people who fall into like categories – underdogs by and large – and develops a kind of compassion and sensitivity deemed unusual, particularly for a man (Siegel & Lowe, 1994, p. 5).

In terms of the eight reasons given for this research thesis the following has been accomplished;

1. With regard to knowledge that this thesis will contribute to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered clients, the questions that I asked, and the answers that Irvin perhaps thought that I might want, and even the answers that he authentically made, are an example of part of a co-construction of the concept of “Jewish male homosexuality” that took place between us.
2. In terms of social justice, Irvin himself (as part of his career) is very involved with social justice efforts. From this study, what emerged in terms of social justice, is the importance of creating a “space” for Jewish homosexual males to voice their experiences and to creatively live out their lives.

3. In regard to Jewish homosexual males being theorized by others, we have heard Irvin's own voice in this study, and entered into his own world through his thoughts, emotions and behaviours of which he spoke and that are recorded herein.
4. Furthermore, this study is a clear and concise documentation of the experience of a Jewish male homosexual, that can be used as a resource for further research into the factors that contribute to the formation of sexual identity.
5. In terms of concept clarification, we can see through Irvin's own experience how difficult it can be to achieve *absolute* clarity. One reason for this is the compromise that has to be made by the Jewish male homosexual in order for him to live a more fully authentic existence with regard to his religious beliefs and actual day-to-day practices.
6. In terms of a modernist approach to Jewish male homosexuality, Irvin's experience seems to indicate that there is something about being homosexual that goes beyond "mere choice", something that happens to one, to a person. From a post-modernist perspective, Irvin's experience is not "just" a story, but involves very real thoughts, emotions and behaviour.
7. With regard to "correlative pathologizing" – we can see Irvin's uniqueness in not suffering from "substance misuse, homelessness, self-harm, non-school attendance or criminal behaviour" that tends to be associated with being a homosexual.
8. Finally, from an educational psychology perspective, we can see the effects of Irvin's own negative experience with "sex education" classes, and the shadow that followed as a result of being exposed to prejudiced and uninformed education with regard to sexual orientation issues.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

It would seem from my research on Irvin that sexual identity is more complex than "just simple biology". While future research into sexuality and sexual identity would continue to benefit from a more "strict scientific" investigation at the genetic and DNA level, we as human beings, nevertheless do not operate on a "merely" instinctive level. In terms of our cognitions, affects and behaviours, we are complex creatures, that use language not merely to "describe" our realities but also to create them. And so future research into sexual identity cannot ignore the role that language plays in



research. This I would like to recommend the following for future research into the subject of homosexual identity;

1. A larger study needs to be conducted using many *more participants* so that more varied input from diverse phenomenological homosexual experiences can add to and furnish greater detail into the phenomenon of homosexuality;
2. Also participants from *other ethnic backgrounds* [not just a Jewish background] need to be used as this can help us to develop a clearer picture of possible commonalities and differences of phenomenological experiences of ethnicity that may add to the formation of a homosexual identity;
3. In addition, *other aspects of what it is to be male*, for example, fatherhood, being a provider, aggression, male competitiveness, etc., and how this can differ from culture to culture, can also be included in future research into the formation of a homosexual identity.

To conclude, “the oppression of ... gay men can be effected by both essentialism and social constructionism” (Coyle & Kitzinger, 2007, p. 21). One reason for this is because “universality will always be constructed to the political advantage of some conception of the norm” (Cornell, 1995, p. 16). However, “understanding that the self [identity] is a cultural product is a first step toward change and reinvention” (Talbert & Steinberg, 2000, p. 19). Such reinvention can lead to redefining terms or perhaps even better, creating new identity possibilities that break the moulds of old ones, thus one thing we can learn from Irvin’s phenomenological experience of integrating his Jewish male homosexuality is that in the journey of sexuality there is a sense of “permanent becoming” (Morland & Willox, 2005, p. 18). This can be either an exciting prospect or a very daunting task, depending on which narratives and language you choose to frame your experience.

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## APPENDIX A



## FIRST INTERVIEW

S. today is 12 April, 4:15, this is an interview subject to confidentiality and will be recorded and written down and submitted to the interviewee before final submission.

I. so just to be clear ... um ... so the result... you obviously going to be writing this up for Masters ... and um ... but then ... um ... my name won't be necessarily used

S. absolutely not ...

I. unless I decide ... um ... you know ...

S. but even then I think the external won't ...

I. won't want that ... unless you want to publish it at some point ...

S. ok ... um ... I suppose let's start with a general question ... um ... How would you describe your upbringing ... did you grow up in a religious Jewish household?

I. yes indeed I did ... um ... I grew up in a ... what I would call ... refer to ... as a modern orthodox upbringing my parents um ... are both um ... professional people ... they are both teachers ... my dad's a history teacher and my mom's a ... well, she's actually qualified as a English and history as well ... but err ... she teaches music and um ... both of them are also modern people but they are also religiously observant .... err um ... but religiously more observant in a religiously modern orthodox way err ... so we grew up in a in ... err we kept Shabbat, kashrut err all those kinds of things but were also open to ideas of the world.

[At this point I would like to inform the reader that from here on in I will transcribe the rest of the recording without all the 'errs' and 'ums'. Obviously this is not a pre-planned interview flawlessly executed, but a spontaneous discussion that include the 'errs' and 'ums' of everyday speech. Where there is a particular emotional inflexion or bodily movement that might give a more **subtle or nuanced**<sup>8</sup> understanding of the interviewee, I will then include such in parentheses. I found the interviewee to be both an enthusiastic and obviously well educated speaker].

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<sup>8</sup> I highlight words and phrases that I will focus on in my analysis or that I wish to follow up as themes in the second interview with Irvin.

S. its a very interesting phrase that you use '**modern orthodox**' some people would consider that an oxymoron, could you tell me a little more about that phrase?

I. sure. Well I mean the notion of modern orthodoxy goes back way ... I mean that ... in the Enlightenment there was a '**reform movement**' and the reform movement was a break away from orthodoxy and there was a reaction from the orthodox side as well and part of what people in the reform movement were asking for was for certain **modernisation**, etcetera could be done within the framework of Jewish law and so there were some people like Rabbi Shimcha Rahrsh who basically argued that there needed to be some modernisation but within the framework of **Halacha** or Jewish law. And then of course there were those who felt that they needed to modernize, and **discard many elements of Jewish tradition** as well. So modern orthodoxy really stems from that time [of reform]<sup>9</sup>. Of course in its current format it's a little bit different. It's been linked often with the sort of vernacular misrachim movement [represented by] people like Rabbi Soloveichick, also people who believe strongly in having secular education, often have a **professional life**, but, sticking to Halacha. They are often people who would dress in a modern way, but would keep Shabbat, kashrut, and generally **adhere to the tenets of orthodoxy, in some tension with the modern world**. And so it's a slightly tense type of ideology because obviously issues of women's equality are complex, gay issues are complex, and those kinds of things. And those kind of things will come back in terms of some of the issues that I faced and more own sort of trajectory as well as my folks in **being open, accepting, but also finding a tension**, you know, in **not necessarily having an answer in reconciling it with Jewish tradition**. I'm talking about my folks there. So that's sort of modern orthodoxy.

S. ok ... now, may I ask you your age?

I. I'm **thirty-five**.

S. thirty-five? So that tells me that you've lived in South Africa all your life?

I. no, except for **four years studied in the UK, at the University of Cambridge** for four years.

S. but you grew up in South Africa?

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<sup>9</sup> I use square parentheses to either complete or explain a discontinued thought.



I Ya, I grew up in South Africa. From 1975 to 2000 I was in South Africa, and then there was a break for four years, and then I came back in August 2004 and I've been here ever since.

S so I would assume that you've had this experience of Apartheid and post-Apartheid South AFRICA?

I Sure. Absolutely.

S and, I guess what I want to know is ...

I although my experience of Apartheid South Africa, ... I was quite young, ... I did not have that much experience of **Apartheid South Africa**, Although I remember some things that were notable, but I wouldn't say that I had an awareness before it was already starting to unfold. So I was, you know, ... when De Klerk came to power, I was fourteen, I was [then] very aware of the transition, from that period, I was aware of things that were going on, but I, err, **my folks, were on the more left of things**, they weren't freedom fighters, but they were sort of on the point of view of being against Apartheid, sort against PFP, DP supporters at the time and disliking many elements of Apartheid and that was conveyed to me but I wasn't, it was something that **I didn't grow up experiencing living because I was young.**

S from what I remember of those times, it was quite an **Afrikaans conservative environment**, that we lived in, and I kind of wonder what was it like growing up with a **Jewish identity** in that kind of environment.

I I would say that it was quite interesting because **I was rather sheltered from that**, my experience was one of living in a family, going to a Jewish day school, and so **my experience of the wider community, my early experience is very Jewish, in that sense.** And perhaps it was a function of Apartheid that peoples were separated out into communities. But I was aware, you know, the news was on, I was aware there was this Afrikaans leadership, I was aware that there were, err, ... whatever, riots, and sort of protests, all those kinds of things going on, but it was **not something that was very much a part of my reality.** I saw some things going on, such as issues of passes, which was in relation to domestic workers, and my folks were very much against that very strongly. I remember being on a beach and a black child being kicked off, and my parents screaming about that and taking us off the beach, so there were those things that **punctured my consciousness,**

but I would say that mostly **I grew up in, to a certain extent, in a bubble, more Jewish Northern suburb, Johannesburg.**

S so you wouldn't say that you experienced directly in those years **anti-Semitism?**

I no, no way, anti-Semitism was in no way a function of my identity, other than early **learnings of the Exodus story, the Holocaust, my dad's an historian**, and that again was more towards my teenage years, which moves towards later, post-Apartheid, [thus] anti-Semitism was not strongly a part of my daily experience. **We had moments.** We were going on a train down to Cape Town, and my dad, he had like, a *long* nose, and so there were moments of those kinds of things, someone shouted to my dad 'Lang neuse!', and my dad shouted back, 'Groot beck!' [we both laugh at this point]. So there were moments. But to a large degree I did not experience that [anti-Semitism].

S going on to the next question, again linked to [your] formative years, **what does being Jewish mean to you?** What did it mean then and what does it mean now to you?

I shoo! Those are big questions. Being Jewish was a **central plank of my identity**, growing up, in many ways I was the religious by at school. I went to King David, King David's in general a school which caters to people who are nominally orthodox, or not even orthodox, but [for] people who want their children to have a Jewish identity, **but are not very practicing in terms of religion, generally, but we [as a family] were practicing.** So that immediately **carved me out as different**, in the sense that I **was a practicing orthodox, observant Jew.** And **when I grew up, Jewish identity was very much [a part of me], it defines the week, it defines the year, the calendar, it's a central plank of one's identity**, and it was something, ... I suppose that **was part of my DNA**, it was part of what I grew up with, I was active, a **part of a certain learning group, for people who had more advanced learning at school, in Jewish tradition**, we had sort of, a separate prayer group for people more advanced in that respect, and in a way it carved me out as separate and different. But because I grew up in an open minded environment, I would call my parents open-minded, **we had a lot of discussion at home**, there were a lot of things that happened. [so for example] when I was in standard seven, **a friend of mine started to challenge me on whether or not God existed, and I really struggled with it, because I wanted to have an answer**, and it was hard to give an answer, and so I started to have a lot of questions around Jewish identity, pushed by one or two friends, and **started to ask questions around the religion itself.** And part of that questioning was also gay-identity issues. So I had a struggle,

[which I will elaborate on a little bit later], because **I started recognizing that I was attracted to men**, and I recognized that there was a text in the Torah which seemed to prohibit it. And I could not understand how it could prohibit something **that I felt naturally was part of me**. That was in itself a struggle. But I would not say that that was the only issue [I had] with Judaism, but it was one of the issues, but I suppose it **allowed me to catalyze more radical questioning about Jewish identity**, etcetera. So those were all questions going on during school. I'm still Jewish, **I still am religious in many ways**, sort of in the traditional [or] Frum kind of sense of the word. [later] I was involved in Jewish feminist campaigns, in the orthodox movement community, where we were trying to get women to be able to read the Torah on Simchat Torah, which was completely Halachically fine, and I was involved in that kind of thing during University. So I was questioning more, **I was being repelled more from the community**, on a number of things, a sort of rational questioning around religious stuff, [so for example] gender and Judaism issues, sexuality and Judaism issues, and then also what stopped me from praying was, when my second cousin in the family died. So my aunt lost two children, **I couldn't square that with there being a good God**. So that just stopped me praying and putting on tefilin, and things like that. But I was still observant of Shabbat, though I stopped going to schul, I looked for alternatives for schul, was in a bit of a wilderness really, for quite awhile, I didn't feel comfortable because of the stigmatization of reform, and while the conservative community was a place I could go to, I did not really feel at home, and totally welcomed. Then **I went to England, which was an important moment**, because I had not known what was going to happen. But one of my first one of my first points of connection into English society was the Jewish community. Because one of the first things that happened when I arrived in Cambridge, was that there was Rosha Shana! And so the Rabbi invited me over, [and orthodox Rabbi]. And so we get on, he was an open minded kind of guy, but I was not **out at the time, [I was out], but I was not out to them at the time**, although that was not a problem subsequently, but what happened was that I got very involved in the community. **We created our own student [society], progressive reformed, but with tweaks**, [things like] Friday night service, I did not feel belonged to an orthodox community. I gradually became involved with the reform community there, I found them very welcoming, I enjoyed the openness and the debate and the discussion. So when Trembling came to Cambridge, I came out in front of everyone, it was fine, **there was no sense of being in anyway alienated or hounded because of it**. And it how I was in England for a number of years. Quite a rich enjoyable Jewish life, I was very involved [in the Jewish community]. I ran a seder one pesach, I did the cooking with my friend and we did a whole

lot of stuff. I was very intimately involved in the community. And so I was really worried when I came back to South Africa. I wanted to come back, for many issues. Again, part of the story is complex in terms of identity, not only was I Jewishly connected, but I was also very connected to a South African identity. In a way **my identity became connected to the New South African story**, because I matriculated in '93, I was going through university between '94 and '99, **I became very excited and committed to trying to build this country and push for transformation of South Africa into a positive space of social justice**, etcetera. And I still am very enthused by that vision. And [so] that pulled me back to South Africa. Family pulled me back. Lots of things. But at the same time I was quite unsure where I was going to be in the Jewish community here. And [I] had a bit of trepidation. Funny enough, when I came back, I decided I lost my fear of the reform community, I went once, one of my previous lecturers was there, and she encouraged me to join, and I started to become more involved in that community, and [so] **my practice had moved throughout the years**, and I landed up, very shortly coming back from running this tour film, Trembling before God, which then immediately got me smack bang into the middle of controversy in the Jewish community [we laugh]. [But] **I was much more confident in myself, both in gay and Jewish identity**, and where I was, so it was not as hard [as I thought it might have been], and then I became effectively a leader within the reform progressive movement. **I still have some reservations about elements of reform Judaism** that I am not totally comfortable with. And so **in some ways I suppose I am more traditional, [then the reform movement]. But on the other hand, that community has been very accepting of me, and very much wants me to give to them, and I want to give to them, and also is a nice space.** And so I found myself quite at home in the reform community, and found an alternative space, a community, and created sites within the Jewish community, for example Jewish Outlook, which was also nice, (though has not functioned as well recently), but it was functioning for many years, it gave a focal point for Jewish gay connections, and Limmud South Africa, of which I was the founder of, which is sort of a type of Jewish Graham's Town festival where [one can find] the full ambit of expressions of Jewish identity, all cutting-edge issues, and it's welcoming, it's open-minded, and it sort of expresses **the kind of, I suppose, 'Jew' that I connect with, which is very much a type of eclectic type of Judaism**, which draws on different people, draws on different ideas, and is not necessarily bound by different categories. In a sort of way, **'post-domination'** in some ways.

S it's interesting as you were speaking now, there is sort of a tension that I picked up. One tension is that between ... you spoke about your fear of reform Judaism, but it seems like the journey of your life has been one of transformation, over the years, and you've come to a place where you are more comfortable with transformation or reform than with total orthodoxy,

I absolutely!

S so if I were to ask you who is 'Irvin', may I call you Irvin?

I yes ...

S who are you in terms of your identity? What I'm hinting at, is what remains ... stagnant, ... well, not stagnant, but stable, versus what is changing?

I ok, it's a good question, obviously ... exactly, it's a hard question, ... it's hard to be reduced in any particular way, ya, I think there are more central prongs of identity, I'm still very proudly Jewish, 'Jewish' again in not necessarily reduced to ... that's why I don't necessarily like the label, I'm a 'reformed Jew' because I'm ... **my Judaism seems to expand beyond that label**, it's multi-, ... it embraces multiple influences, that's why I quite like the idea of sort of 'post-denominational' Judaism, maybe even something like you're saying, 'transformational Judaism' where one sort of uses different ideas of openness to change, engaging with the different brilliant sources of our tradition, and **sort of having multiple facets** of ... trying to **embrace complexity and nuance** as well, similar about my own issues, obviously also another complex element of identity is how I react to Israel, and things I like that, again one of the difficulties is being able to hold the tension, whilst I think it is a very valuable element and connection to our sense of identity, we in many senses must proclaim that there is a serious injustice going on, and so it's being able to recognize both the importance and value of Israel and also be able to be a critic, those kind of **dual tensions**, on **the gay side, yes, I think it's pretty fixed that I'm gay**, ... I feel very passionate about err, ... we are trying to make life better for children who are trying to come in terms with themselves, the next generation, ... and obviously also push for equal civil rights, really, a shift in mind set in relation to sexuality, and the way in which people perceive **homosexuality**, I think it's just a lack of understanding and sort of making a 'mess' over **something very beautiful. South African identity** also very important, still I'm very committed and passionate about shifting our society, in the direction of social justice, I'm a

virulent critic of some of the issues of the lack of change in term of the economic [conditions] in South Africa, and the need for a more fundamental shifting of resources to ensure that poorer people are improved and their conditions are improved and ultimately, I think, I am an **animal rights activist**, a very central issue, I am very opposed to the current treatment of animals, the terrible conditions they suffer through, in the production of meat and other things and that's a very important prong to my identity, and so overall, very strongly, sort of the idea of trying to be an individual who connects with and tries to promote ultimately positive values that connect us with, I suppose the 'oneness' of things, of the recognition and avoidance of pain, the injustice, trying to sort of promote a society in which all its facets, for animals, for gays, for poor people, for women, across the board, is able to provide people with the conditions with which they live decent lives. And that kind of **basic universal identity** is very important to me, crucially important. Perhaps **it's the core, of me.**

So, ok, err, .. as you speak now, you speak very passionately, and sometimes one can the impression of Judaism as being a very intellectual religion, always about arguments over little texts and things, how would you describe the **emotional aspect of Judaism?** And maybe by giving an **example in your life**, if there was a particularly **poignant experience** that you had.

Um, ... that's a nice questions ... I think that Judaism, as you say, it often has moved towards a more rational place, and lot of my focus, I also have a background in philosophy, **my process has been in some ways a rational process, but also a lot of emotional underlying dramas**, I'm more able to say that now, because I have tried to in the last while, acknowledge, **develop and come to terms with some of my own emotional elements**, which is. **I was more [one] who kept things in my head**, and to actually enable myself to be able to emote, and be able to lift up those sides are very important, and to a large extent, exactly, I think one of the problems with things like Reform Judaism today is that there is very much focus on the head [though not always so much willingness to follow through on some of those things, and so for example there'd be a recognition that the conditions under which animals are treated is wrong, but **people won't follow through with that in their own lives necessarily**, so there is a kind of **focus on the head and the emotional content is kind of lost**, and I think that for me, exactly, it is important to say that **there is a very strong [emotional] attachment to things 'Jewish'**, should I say, I think that attachment, so for example one of the services I like the most is a service which is called the chabura service,

held once a month, myself and friend started it, **and it is a service in which we sing and we dance, and we do things in a more emotional way**, rather than only, we have a sermon, which I usually give, that's a discussion that's usually in the head, [but] it moves beyond the purely rational, and I find that prayer is that kind of space to some extent, it does not make sense on a purely rational level. [In fact] a lot of the liturgy one can't make [rational] sense of in that sense. It's a different type of space, it's a space of connection, ... as I say, **my theology is more complex today** as well, though I'm not totally sure of the existence of an external entity, ... essentially **prayer** is an attempt to get in touch with those better parts of oneself, those quieter parts of ourselves, and connecting with a deeper essence, and I think, that may be, and I'm not sure, but may be something external, it's connecting with **something deeper, and that is emotional**, I found recently, because I have been quite active in this whole thing, opposing the boycott that [the institution at which I work] has just put on an Israeli [institution] that I found myself feeling quite emotional about the very un-nuanced attacks on Israel and on sort of almost singling out ... and I haven't yet worked out what that is exactly all about ... but it has touched me emotionally to and I wonder if there is a sense if there is something touching on something quite ugly, in those attacks, which strikes me as perhaps discrimination, and an unwillingness to hear a side of the story, and it seems to me that Jews have a side of the story to tell, but there is no willingness to listen to that side of the story. It might have touched other parts of me that have been submerged as well. That's something that has been quite recent ... I'm trying to think off an incident, I'll have to give it some thought, ... where sort of the emotional ... the obvious one that strikes me is prayer, where that's come about [the feeling, experiencing of emotion], sometimes when there's a certain moment of recognition, of **a type of Jewish identity, that is wider, more open** ... that also in a way resonates emotionally with me, I read the book *The Finkler Question*, I don't know if you have read it, it's a very interesting exploration of modern secular Judaism, and I led a discussion on it in my synagogue, about a week ago, and it was a fantastic discussion, there was something quite resonant about it, it felt like it was opening up space, in the community for discussions about hard things ... I suppose my emotional connections are very much about being sort of proud, but I get very angry on other types of expressions of identity, since we have a standing problem within my family with the humotsi, because I won't say humotsi, because my dad will only allow the boys to say humotsi, and there is nothing wrong Halachically with my mom doing it as well, [my parents are still modern orthodox], but **my dad says 'it's the tradition!' and that's the way my dad wants it**. And so then I said, 'if my mom's not doing it, the I'm not doing it!' but I've come to

accept it, but it still infuriates me to some extent, that that is still over there, there's a kind of rigidity, to some extent, perhaps there's a common theme about my reacting quite negatively to a sort of rigidity, and then quite emotionally to an embracing open sort of safe space kind of stuff within Judaism, kind of connecting then closing down ...

S it's almost a contrast between a more closeted form of Judaism versus a more universal form of Judaism ...

I that's extremely interesting ... maybe, ... exactly, maybe there is something there with me as well, I have a revulsion against the ghetto, that sort of ... kind of mentality ... 'revulsion' is maybe too strong a type of word, ... but I dislike it strongly, the narrowing of the mind, and an opening, **an authenticity, a capacity to determine one's own identity in relation to Judaism**, is something I embrace and connect with very strongly.

S ok ... now in terms of the Torah text, or Tanak, how much is that a part of your life, uh ... one of the questions I have is How often do you study Torah, because one of the assumptions of 'being Jewish' is that one studies Torah, what's your stance?

I the Torah is part of and in a way very connected to growing up, to my experience of Judaism, it's something that ... again coming from an intellectual family, literary analysis, from my early teens, I would often give the *dabar Torah*, which is a short speech, at the Friday night table for about three minutes, on the portion of the week, I would learn ... I would look through the portion of the portion of the week, I read from the Torah, Barmitzva age, in schul, I was very good at it, and then I withdrew from that as well, and that was a sad thing for me as well, because when I refuse to accept that only men could do it, I withdrew. Although I do it today, but the **Reform community doesn't really appreciate good Torah reading**, because most people don't really understand what it is, they can't read the Hebrew or really appreciate it, so it's interesting, ... that community ... I could be appreciated for that, but my community doesn't really recognize that ... and so I would earn a lot of Torah, **every week you would have to learn quite a lot, and I even paid a small amount for it, ... and the struggle with the Torah text, in relation to sexuality**, so obviously one of the key issues for me in relation to gay and Jewish identity was Leviticus 18 and 20, which says 'with a man you shall not lie the lyings of a woman, it is a *toeba*' whatever that means, abomination, depends how you translate it, some ... or a second text talks about your blood will be upon you, it probably means 'death penalty', ... and so as I was growing up I just **found myself intensely attracted to my best friend, virtually had a crush on him**, and I



wanted not to do that or feel like that, and then I saw this text, and I was like kind of struggling with this text that was here, but I had not done anything to sort of ... kind of bring this on, 'What is it saying to me?', ... you know ... and at the same time I just kind of **found myself unmoved by women, sexually, they wanted to go on dates with me, and I wasn't particularly interested**, and so, like, what was that? And so I just remember one Shabbat afternoon **sitting with the text, and looking at it, saying 'It can't apply to me, ... It can't apply to me'** because I believed that this torah text was from God, and **I could not believe that God would do this to me**, I struggled with it, **I tried to change images in my mind, you know, when I was fantasizing, from men to women, it all didn't work, I had dreams of men**, that was part of ... that was the directional stuff that was in me ... and [so] I struggled, I tried ... and so it couldn't be that I was going to change because I realized that it wasn't .. I was about fifteen or so ... and I could trace back a crush, even when I didn't even recognize what it was, at eleven or ten, when I sort of really had a crush on my madrech, [a madrech is a kind of leader in a youth movement], and so I realized at a certain point it was there and **'What am I going to do?!' choices like celibacy, which was kind of an option, it didn't make sense to me, it didn't make sense that this text was there**, which would ban something that I didn't do to bring on, so I realized very soon that I had to find a way to understand that text, in a different way, and so from that fifteen point on that was a lot of my struggle, was to **grapple with that text**, to find ways in which to understand it, and I didn't really go to lots of sources on it, kind of only did that much later, **but I sort of came to the conclusion** ... and it was kind of a reasonable one ... I sifted a lot in terms of my understandings that came from that time, that in a way **that text was never aimed at gay and lesbian people**, it was never aimed at **people who were fundamentally gay**, it says that 'with a man you shall not lie the lyings of a woman', and so I asked, why does it refer to the lyings of a woman, I mean **I don't regard my sexual engagement with my partner as being akin to the lyings of a woman**, the whole context speaks of heterosexual relationships, and it seemed to me that it was more likely that it was talking to straight people and saying to them, **'Don't go and be gay, because it's not part of your nature'** ... but it didn't really have to do with me, and so in a way, it didn't really specify that. There are multiple ways in which can understand the text, which I've learnt, and of course Steve Greenberg has really come up with an interesting attempt to gloss that text, in terms of prohibiting kind of violent, kind of degrading types of relationships, I find it very interesting and probably a nicer standing of the text than mine because it actually allows us to develop an ethic from that wording, ... and so that was a struggle, I did struggle with the Torah, I struggled with that text, but it also threw up

questions for me around the Torah as well. Like, **'Was the Torah from God?', 'Where was it from?'**, ... it was the kind of questions you didn't really ask in the orthodox community, but you know, you started reading a lot of stuff, and you couldn't help read stuff, you know, ... **funny enough [even though] I studied the Torah, I never really took to heart the hectic elements**, it's rather very interesting how in the orthodox community you start to minimize those really very difficult things, and you sort of ... you know ... **you accentuate the good things ...**

S **can you give some examples there?**

I yes ... there seems to be commandments to wipe out nations, the children of Israel coming into Israel, ... you have fifteen chapters, lots of chapters on animal sacrifice, which just seems to me completely strange is completely against my understanding of a divine God, what a divine God would want, ... I do understand it has an historical context and all that kind of stuff, ... but it did strike me as being very strange, **the 'homosexuality thing' certainly, while certainly can be reinterpreted, certainly caused a lot of pain to a lot of people**, and is still not reinterpreted in a lot of circles, so I think one can question that ... there's quite a lot, so for example the Hebrew slave, is allowed to be freed after seven years but not the non-Jewish slave, there's quite a lot of stuff and when you look at it, **a modern person** is certainly uncomfortable with it, with it being just and not just, women can't inherit, then there's an interesting section that [only in the case of the not] being male heir, then a woman can inherit, **which [admittedly] was very advanced for the times**, but then they have to marry into that same tribe, for the rest of their lives, so that the property doesn't pass out [of the tribe], that again seems to very patriarchal, it obviously makes sense, maybe against an historical backdrop, but it make a lot of sense in terms of justice, in terms of today, **there also very wonderful things in the Torah, let me say, apart from saying there are negative things**, that was my intension as well, because **I loved the Torah as well, and I still do,**

S **can you give me some examples there?**

I yes, for example **I love narrative**, I love the narratives of Genesis, the stories from creation stories, I love Jacob as a character, I think he's a fascinating complex character, I like even the 'difficult' stories, that I think are **very interesting and raise real questions**, the tower of Babel, the rape of Dinah, the sort of harlotry of Tamar, these are fascinating stories which have depth, the early stories of Moses, I did a detailed study on the first five chapters

[of Exodus], they're absolutely fascinating, the tradition is incredibly deep, I love the book of numbers, and I think a lot of the laws are fantastic, **it's amazing that Jewish tradition, as opposed to most other traditions of that time, had 'some' concern for other creatures**, for example, and we are actually commanded to have concern for other creatures, you're not allowed to take an egg from the mother sitting on top of the egg, you are not allowed to slaughter a mother and its child on the same day or in front of one another, you are not allowed to muzzle an ox when it is threshing, you are not allowed to put an ox and donkey together, on human relations as well, the biggest command is that you have to have concern for the stranger in your midst, it got laws protecting people, commanding concern for the orphan the widow, laws against poverty in the land, serious constraints to some extent on what people can earn, and they have to deal with other people as well so a lot of really amazing laws, good stories and some problematic ones too, so **you kind of have this mixed bag of this text, which is seemingly unbelievably advanced but also in some ways not so advanced**. And so you have to struggle with this issue, and so I just started broadening my approach to Torah, questioning, reading around it, who formed it, etcetera, I still regard it as a rather remarkable document, and I still love it, and I still teach it. And I love coming up with new and novel ways to interpret and to find modern glosses on old stories, and finding interesting Midrash, which is kind of an interpretive translation, not translation, but **interpretive stories which come on top of these stories**, looking at the whole host of sources that exist that interpret this tradition, kind of putting modern glosses on them and it's not only about modernity, it's about confronting the text in light of our own lives, and finding ways in which to make sense of that text. And so I find a never ending sort of fascination, I'm still very engaged with the Torah.

S        what would you say is the **story that you most identify with?**

I        The story that I most identify with? I'll just give it some thought ... I'm fascinated by lots of texts, it's an interesting question about what do I identify with. I find **Jacob** a fascinating character, like, **I'm very disturbed by Jacob**, I am moved by two elements of his story, I mean, I don't like him in some respects as well, the one is the dream of the ladder, and the angels going up and down the ladder, on the **cusp of moving into a different space**, so when he's exiled from the land because he stole the blessing from his brother, he goes and lies on a rock and he dreams of the angels going up and down and God blesses him at the end of that day, he's on the brink of a new transition into his life, and you see a similar thing happening just as he's **transitioning to come back into Israel**, he has this wrestling

with this angel, or man, it's quite unclear, it's the image that Steve Greenberg uses, it does resonate with me, because **I'm feeling emotional about it now**, but it is that idea of wrestling, the text says that his name is changed, he wrestles with the angel all night, by the morning he's actually **hurt and harmed, he has a limp, and his name is changed from Jacob to Israel**. And it says 'because you struggled with God, God and man, and you prevailed, and you will overcome, and you will try and achieve the possibilities ...' I think that continual sense of striving, of ... of ... of a conflict, but also, of course, there is a peaceful reconciliation afterwards, between Jacob and his brother, which is beautiful, but, ... that striving and that attempt to continually overcome, and gage, and develop, that is something I definitely do relate to ...

S do you think that is because of your gay experience, or how are the two related?

I ya, maybe ... obviously I've struggled with Torah, it's hard, it's been difficult, it was a very difficult journey, you know ... in the early days, I really didn't know how my parents would react, to my being 'gay', and **I didn't know how my community would react**, and I didn't know even, once it started working out, how I could live Jewishly and be gay ... I felt ... I just wasn't sure I was going to be living a life like this, and um ... so ... sorry, what was the question again? [Here I could see that Irvin was being deeply affected by remember aspects of his past in the conflict between his being Jewish and being gay]

S um ... err .. in terms of the idea, or the theme of 'struggle' ...

I yes! ... and so ... exactly! Struggle ... yes the struggle was in a sense with the text, and I suppose in a sense with God, **however we understand him or her**, so 'what was I required to do in life?' 'what was meant for me?' ... there was that struggle ... in relation to 'gay identity' ... err ... there was a struggle of how I was really going to be in my family ... how I was going to be in my community ... and um ... ya ... a difficult struggle about that, and I had to fight ... it wasn't ... **I had to be quite strong when I came out to my parents ... I had to be strong in myself ... and um ... that's a difficult thing as a gay person ... in a way I think you do have to be very strong ... and sometimes I crave weakness ...** [he laughs] ... and I don't want to fight ... I just want to ... you know ... I did a dream work shop recently ... it was fascinating, a very intense and powerful experience ... one of the things that came out that ... it was a woman that was very angry with her husband ... and the sort of resolution of the moment was a sort of 'soft feminism' and I like the idea ... it's sort of the idea of 'yes, we still hold to some ideals' in a sort soft, more gentle, less confrontational mode, and I've had to

be in that mode often, even just recently, I don't really enjoy it, I must say, it's part of the recent I suppose I didn't choose to be a lawyer who stands up in court, and who argues all the time, and **I sometimes feel that I have to, to stand up for things that I stand up for, but I don't really enjoy it, I would rather convince and engage, sort of not manage ... be in that conflictual mode** ... so I think there is that tension between the struggling with the angel and the resolution of peace, and that sort of sort towards reconciliation, etcetera ...

S now something interesting in terms of what you've been saying, with regard to the struggle, a lot of the struggle seemed to be in regard to your identity as part of a community, what were some of the things that you learnt about 'Irvin' in that struggle ? ...

I in the struggle? ... well ... I've learnt a lot about myself over a number of years ... and **I think relationships are some of the primary teachers to some extent** ... that being **involved with others has put a mirror on me in coming to terms with myself** ... um ... so exactly ... whatever I learnt about me, um ... look I suppose ... **I'm a strongly principled person, I don't just cave in into certain things**, at the same time I'm kind of an open engaging person, who would like ... I suppose ... to win people over ... and **be sort of creator** ... be positive community experience ... and so on the one hand ... **I suppose a bit of an outsider** ... I also want to be in [he laughs] ... you know ... that's the funny thing ... an **outsider within in a way, and I suppose that is still very much something that is a part of me ... I'm on the margins**, and yet I'm still accepted ... in my community ... I'm a leader in my community now ... and yet ... some of my animal stuff ... is still marginal in a way ... [here Irvin is referring to how some of his ideological leanings are still not accepted, not to some constitutional aspect of his sexuality] ... and gay, I suppose to some extent ... ya, I suppose that's one element ... I'm just trying to think community dimensions ... ya ... **I think I'm a communal individual ... who's got a desire to belong ... but also a desire to be authentic** ... and coming to terms with that authenticity ... there was also a sort of **'perfectionism' stuff** around that time ... I don't know if it was because of being 'gay' .. that **I had to compensate** ... to be ultra clever, ultra ... all these kinds of things ... and being able to be vulnerable ... which I still find difficult ... in the public space ... in the arena ... being able to be vulnerable ... and ya ... fully realized ... ya ... and the tension between that ... and I suppose between public and private roles ....

S um ... now in terms of your ... **I just want to check the time ... I don't want to overdo it ... when would you like to stop ...**

I well ... I'm still fine to go on for a little while ...

S Great! ... um, in terms of ... can one call it your 'evolution of identity' both Jewish as well as gay and sexual identity? ... uh ... what were some of the more recent and significant moments .... you mentioned relationships being an important role?

I well ... I mean ... they're quite a lot ... I suppose ... it depends how recent we go back to ... but um ... I suppose I should tell you just a little bit about **the evolution of my gay identity** ... I've already done that [in that] I've told you bit about my struggle with the Torah, came to terms ... as I said ... had this sense of connection towards other members of the same sex ... early on ... sort of **came to recognize it around fourteen ... fifteen** ... struggled around it until about eighteenth ... nineteenth ... I started like making movement outwards ... I started **going by myself** to the gay film festival and things like that ... but ... I um ... don't come out until about twenty ... round about exactly now, funny enough, round about this time of the year ... pesach ... it was about the third day of pesach that I spoke to my folks ... I actually came out first to a few friends ... the first time I came out was at a Jewish conference ... interestingly enough ... I was at a Jewish student conference in Israel ... one of the leadership of the South African Union of Jewish Students ... and um ... there was a resolution whether to accept a gay group of Jewish students as part of this organization ... and I stood up and spoke passionately about accepting them ... **I said South Africa ... we've had a history of discrimination ... it was all of course theoretical ... I didn't speak from my experience of being gay** ... I wasn't confident enough to do that ... and um ... after that my one friend came up to me, he was also on the committee, and said 'I want to talk to you' and we went and sort of had a chat ... and he was very cross with me ... I wanted to make the speech that you made! 'Why?' 'Because it's my issue!' 'What do you mean it's your issue?' so he said 'I'm gay!' so I took a deep breath and I was like Jeess! We had a bit of a chat for a while ... and I said, 'well Ronald, it's *my issue too!*' [we both laugh] and um ... we landed up talking for a long time into the night ... and so that was obviously very significant ... but interestingly it was at a Jewish community conference! [we both laugh] ... and um ... ya ... I came out in the next few months ... to a number of my friends ... the biggest issue was to come out to my folks ... and I did the kind of 'traditional' thing ... I sat them down ... I was speaking to them ... for them it was very unusual for them ... I was very nervous ... it was one

of the hardest things I've done ... and I did it ..and my folks ... ya! Their initial reaction was ... you know ... they weren't delighted ... **but they didn't throw me out of the house which I had been concerned about** ... and they err .. they were concerned ... they were **more concerned whether I was going to be Ok health wise, HIV!** And stuff like that ... continuing ... my mom did freak out once or twice and shouted at me and said horrible things and I just refused to engage with her ... **I actually had gone to a therapist before** who actually told me 'I think **you need to be the parent** here ... like ... you don't have to shout back or anything like that' ... and it was very good advice ... and I didn't ... and she got it out of her system ... we spoke ... and then she was upset with herself ... and we actually went to joint therapy together ... and my folks actually worked it out together which was very important as well ... and um ... ya ... over the course of a year things improved ...and I felt like the lid had just been lifted! And I felt liberated ... **so I went to my first club** ... Pandora's in Rosebank ... and you know ... **I was sort of excited** ... I didn't funnily enough have any major relationships for a long time ... like one of the things I was certain about was that I didn't want to be a person who slept around a lot ... **I sort of still wanted to hold onto the kind of traditional ideal** ... so while I was going to be in the 'gay context' I still wanted to have a **serious boyfriend** ... like I didn't want to kiss just anyone ... I wanted to have a special kiss ... there were all those kinds of constructs that were around it ... and I find it kind of hard to find people who I connected with and who I wanted to be with on a more deeper level ... and that took a long time ... **nine years before I had my first relationship ... which I was probably not ready ... there were issues I had to cope with myself** ... and I was part of the gay society and one of the leadership at Wits, I gave a talk at a Jewish venue on Shabaot about Jewish gay issues ... I didn't come really I think at that point ... but I gave an explanation of the text and how it could be reinterpreted ... I got very positive feedback about it ... I was very nervous about it ... because it felt like I was putting myself ... it was very interesting because it was an intellectual engagement ... but it felt like I was putting myself out there ... **because if I was shot down I wouldn't have had a way to sort of articulate the sort of reconciliation between my Jewish and gay identities** ... and that wasn't what happened I got very positive feedback and that encouraged me ... of course 'Cambridge' happened, and the Trembling tour I came out and I got a lot of support and it wasn't that difficult I'd been to Jewish gay groups as well ... I just became more and more comfortable and you know ... went to gay events in Jewish communities, we had discussions, and then I suppose coming back, the next significant thing coming back to South Africa I ran this tour Trembling before God ... it ended up me coming out on the front page of the Jewish Report

S REALLY!

I YES! Which I didn't do deliberately, but I spoke to someone and I was the organizer, and she just wrote 'IRVIN ....., A GAY MAN FROM MAYFAIR' and that was on the front page of the Jewish Report, I wasn't so unhappy about it, but I was worried, it was also an interesting moment with my parents, because **over the period of this time my parents were becoming increasingly comfortable with it**, and um ... I spoke to my dad, my mom was sort of alienated from the Jewish community ... my dad goes to schul every Shabbat ... I said to hem ... it was a Friday night ... 'How do feel about it?' 'look I'm not delighted, but it's *you!* you know ... it's fine' [we both laugh] at the end of the day .. we had actually came back ... the Rabbi had quietly pulled him aside and said 'we support you' 'don't worry' you know ... and most of his friends ignored it, but one or two came up and were supportive ... and exactly! ... so everyone knew, and I was very out ... the tour was an unbelievable success ... even the detractors of the tour said it was unbelievably ... it was the first time it's been so discussed in the Jewish community ... and so it was an unbelievable success ... it led to 'Jewish Outlook' of course which created a nice space in South Africa for a meeting of a number of queer Jewish people here ... also after coming back I also started my first more **serious relationship** ... which although it didn't last very long, it was more of a kind of 'love' relationship I would say sort of fell in love and got very disappointed ... it was the beginning of recognition of ... which also **gave me a lot of strength of recognition** that in a way I had seen a lot of aspects of **gay 'culture' which had given vent to the stereotype which I now reject those notions** today ... you know ... it gives vent to a sort of more **promiscuous out there, clubbing, smoking, drinking**, all the kind of stuff which I don't particularly like, and what I felt was, when **I fell in love with an Afrikaans guy** called Darren, it was ... it just made it clear to me that this was beautiful ... and this was something nice ... and it has the potential to be beautiful, and even though he disappointed me, it was something that core was something good, something positive ... and that was fundamentally important ... and I took that with me .. and so from that point on I was in Jewish Outlook, I was involved, when the gay marriage campaign came in, I became a legal adviser to the gay community here, I was on television, I had to fight, I was the subject of vicious homophobia by the Rev Moshwe form the ACDP on television ... it was a horrific program where people were phoning from all over Africa ... horrible things ... but I didn't feel ... **I was confident because I knew they were wrong** ... I knew that this was ugly, and this was hatred and it was wrong, it was bad stuff, but I fought it, and was involved in negotiations with the minister which eventually led to



the civil union act, and so that was amazing, it was one of the greatest times, ... I then started marrying gay people, I did the first lesbian Jewish wedding in the Jewish community, which pushed the Jewish Reform movement two months later to accept Jewish gay weddings amongst Jews, they do do it now, they've already done some of their first weddings, and um .. I've done a number of gay weddings, which was exciting, ... I suppose **my experience then became more integrated**, from being on the outside, from being the activist, with something like Limmud, I became part of the sort of mainstream liberal Jewish community and that includes some orthodox people like my parents, who don't like conservatism and closed mindedness. And so I became embraced by that part of the community ... [however] ... **I still have an uneasy relationship with the sort of mainstream community** ... though that relationship is sort of improving, and to some extent I think there is sort of a degree of respect from both sides, and then of course serious relationships happened, I had a very serious relationship with an interestingly enough ... a Rabbi ... who was a chareidi rabbi, a frum Jewish guy, although he moved into the liberal community ... he was based in London ... we met at a Limmud conference ... it was a very passionate six months .. but unfortunately it didn't work out ... we couldn't find a way to live together ... and um ... then I met ... it's **also interesting how Judaism attracts me** ... and then a year later I met Joe at a tashlich ceremony, is where you throw your sins into the water, symbolically on Rosha Shana ... and that's where I met Joe ... or though we never started going out then ... that's the first time we met ... and then err ... we started going out ... he came to my schul ... and then you know ... I wasn't going to go out with him, I didn't even know that he was gay ... he invited me out to a date, I actually then invited him to my folks for Friday night dinner ... it's interesting how he met my folks before we were going out [we laugh] ... 'invite some people from the schul' ... I thought he was 'nice' and interesting, I didn't even know he was gay ... I was going to leave it at that ... but then he invited me out for a date ... and then we kinda started seeing one another ... and now we're going on for two and a bit years ... those are I suppose some of the major mile-stones ...

S um ... it's almost like one could talk about a certain theme of there's the 'truth' that the text has and then there's truth of lived experience? – could you maybe talk a little about that?

I it's very interesting that you say that ... I mean I think that the truth of experience of 'gay' identity, of gay relationships in a way ... well ... it's not even relationships, **it starts off with myself, and then going into relationships** ... I've always had the belief that it was

something good, I suppose for some reason maybe I'm just positively disposed, whatever, I suppose **I also come from an affirming context, positive role-models, lots of that kind of stuff ... I think there was always that kind of affirming element** ... I think what gave me a lot of strength, particularly in recent years, was being involved in gay relationships and realizing ... and also having the **confidence to be more experimental** and stuff like that ... and also being more open-minded to other **forms of sexual expression** which people ... which had been something that [I had felt to be for me]conservative and become less conservative ... I think that being involved in a gay relationship, fundamentally recognizing that this is a beautiful thing that it's not something ... even if you are with someone for a night ... if it's respectful and you treat each other well, you know ... I mean you could do it in a bad way, there are certain ways ... there's a level of engaging respectfully ... and you can't be together for the rest of your life, well ... that's maybe ok ... it still can be beautiful ... and it's deeper the more you form a deeper relationship with someone ... that's no different ... you know, I've not only married gay couples I've also married heterosexuals, I've learnt about the **similarities of experience and the connections** between ... you know ... I was very angry about where my heterosexual friends got married, I'm not so angry anymore, I'm able to do it with love and care, because I'm also not excluded now, I just think that there is a fundamental distinction, **I think some of us are orientated in a particular way, and we all have to deal with the ... you know if we want to have relationships we have to deal with the good and the bad, and the bad is also maybe good, because you have to deal with another person and come to terms with yourself ... those are all good things ...**

S ok ... shall we end it here? ....

I do you want to end it here?

S yes

I great

The interview lasted an hour and seven minutes.

## APPENDIX B



## SECOND INTERVIEW

S the time is 4:50pm and it is Tuesday the third of March and this the ...

I 3<sup>RD</sup> of May ...

S 3<sup>rd</sup> of May [I say with embarrassment], and this is the second interview, uh ... from last time's interview, was there anything that carried over since then ... how did you feel after that interview?

I umm ... well it's interesting ... it was quite an emotional interview in some ways, and back to ... um ... I suppose some of the various points of development ... emotional and um ... ya, I think in a way useful **to revisit some elements of one's past and sort of connections that one makes**, and ... so ya, ... I think that was definitely something that was helpful and then interestingly I think ... about two days later I had met someone who had contacted me for assistance in his own 'coming out process' ... and uh ... you know ... he's a young guy, very similar to me in a way, in the modern orthodox community and he also knows he's gay, but he's struggling with his own uh ... how to deal with it ... and **how in a way to live a 'gay-Jewish' life**, ... is it possible? ... and all those kinds of questions, and so it was just very interesting, and I uh ... in a way, I think, going through and revisiting all these issues, sort of ... uh ... ya, made me, perhaps a 'stable adviser' to him, in a way, ... **I am a thoughtful person and do look back, you don't often sort of spend the time recounting your own narratives** I think it sort of helped in that sense, having made some of those connections, and having thought through them again, I could then talk to him about, you know, what the possibilities are and things like that.

S Okay ... um ... it's interesting that you mention the whole '**coming out**' process, um ... perhaps that is something that we could focus on in this interview, ... last time we focused mainly on the 'Jewish' aspect of your identity, and I'd like to touch on that also, a little bit later. But in terms of the 'coming out' process, can you go into more detail of the kinds of thoughts, the struggles, the emotions you had to go through, because, '**coming out**' seems **to be something unique to the 'gay experience'**, I don't usually hear it in any other context, ...

I yes, I think that there is definitely something ... I suppose many people sort of hold that sort of secret, but **there is something I suppose distinct, experientially, about coming out** and the fears of knowing somehow that 'you're different' and that 'you're going against'

... you know ... I suppose social mores ... uh, or accepted social mores, I mean uh ... I uh, ya I suppose, where does one start, with coming out, as I say that ... coming out ... um, ... as I said to you, **initially my understanding of 'sexuality' wasn't a conscious understanding**, just a **'root attraction' towards men**, and then ... you know ... feeling that kind of sort of somehow I've locked onto someone, um, but as I say, it was about mid-teenage years, I was rather naive, and **my folks never sat me down, for some kind of discussion about sex**, ... one quite **traumatic event** that actually happened was on Sex Education, it was Std. 5, and it was actually in class, and um ... I asked it, or someone else asked it, about 'What do gay men do in bed?', and um ... and we had a woman, I suppose, in Std 5, sort of '87, '88, and um, she told us

[Irvin sort of raises his voice here as if being her speaking authoritatively],

... but she um ... she was very judgmental about it, she sort of said ... um ... 'You must NEVER do these things!' 'It's bad', um ... all kinds of things, you know, uh ... and um ... and she ... exactly! ... um ... you talked about ... whatever, oral, anal sex and uh ... and ... it was very interesting! I had a very negative reaction to that, **I of course had no political consciousness** [at that age] ... I had sort of ... I remember having nightmares ... and um ... I couldn't fall asleep, and uh ... and ... there was something that shocked me ... and um ... it's strange as I say ... I mean ... it's probably my own attraction to those things

[note that Irvin speaks in the present tense about a past event, as though going through some of the experience even as he recalls it, which is also indicated by his verbal phrasing and tone of voice],

but also the ... I suppose at that time, maybe almost the *horror* of it, and you know ... and and ... and your fear, and I remember speaking to my mom about it, and um ... you know ... her having to calm me down, put down those kind of ... just calm me and sort of images in my mind, and um ... I didn't find them attractive at that point, but **I found it scary** ... and, you know, ... and um ... as I say, that kind of *negative* tone towards homosexuality, was something obviously ... that kind of experience ... increases ... um and ... that **visceral kind of reaction**, I still I suppose don't know what that was, it was ... it was **probably some recognition**, as well as a sort of uh, ... frightenness, and a **wanting it not to be**, something like that, um, and and ... **pushing it away**, you know, um ... so ya, um ... and I think one of the interesting things was, I was rather, **I wasn't a total asexual being**, ... my growing up ... I mean I never had any sexual relationships, or anything else in my teenage years, and ... um

... you know, and there was ... um ... exactly! ... I went away from that, you know, interestingly enough, um ... and ya. Um ... and so **coming out**, um, I suppose **the next stage**, was finding myself very attracted to this very good friend of mine, and um ... finding that um ... we were **fantasizing or masturbating**, etcetera ... we never masturbated each other ... (I would say sadly now)

[we both smile and laugh],

but um ... uh ... uh ... we um ... err ... I mean we often did fantasize supposedly 'about girls' ... In his mind it was about girls, but **in my mind it was about him**, that process ... I mean it was a process, I didn't fully recognize it immediately, I started realizing that my interest, my focus was wasn't on the girls, end of discussion, but it was, it was on him, and err ... his reaction, and um ... you know, and that, as I say **prompted a real struggle**, I mean ... there are **a few struggles that are interconnected** here, the **one is a religious struggle**, the one thing to know is that **masturbation is prohibited in Jewish law**, um ... in traditional Jewish law should we say, I don't believe it is any more, um ... but ya, right, and so the one struggle I had around sexuality was, .... um. I felt bad about masturbating, right,

[Irvin says this with some embarrassment],

so that's the one issue, and **I used to try and regulate myself**, I would say, 'I'm only going to do it three times this moth!' and um, and try to reduce it, and try to keep myself away from it, so I quite often failed in that, that was quite frustrating, in many ways, and um, that was a related **struggle around the control of sexuality**, in a way, uh ... and then of course there was also the **homosexual images in my mind**, which were *gay* images which were coming into my mind, **I tried to move those images to straight images**, and I again, never ... prohibited was straight pornography, as well, and so I didn't see much of it, we did on occasion look at naked pictures of girls, and things like that, and I would *try* and move my mind from ... because the interesting thing about being a boy of course you are in the boys' change room, so you ... which in itself is interesting, because it's not ... people think it's totally wonderful, like often young teenage boys would say 'Ah, I wish I was in the girls' change room!' but actually, it's quite inhibiting, because **you can't show open sexual attraction, because you're going to be judged** by that, um ... **you kind of have to control yourself**, and um, it's always kind of the '**side ways glance**' it's not the kind of embracing of it, you know, that in itself is uncomfortable, and you know, exactly, I would uh ... **always, there would be guys in my class that I was looking at, I had to make out like I wasn't**

**looking at** ... you know ... and um ... and and and even to myself initially wasn't wanting to openly looking at, but was tempted, but you know, it was this kind of funny struggle, and um, ... and um ... that was a big ... and then in my own mind, having to acknowledge what it was, OK and **so accepting that this way ... attraction towards men** ... I suppose that was a **stage of actually, acknowledging** 'This is what it is', and I'm not bringing it on is what which was very important that I'm ... I'm trying to fight it in fact, fighting those images, I'm trying to struggle against it, I'm trying to put images of women into my mind, the images of women were never, they were never satisfying, they didn't stay there, they weren't ... you know although I had good female friends, ... they didn't hold my attention on a fantasy level, and so that was ... there was ... that was very interesting. And so I moved towards acknowledging what it was, fighting it and then starting in a way to give up the fight, ... look it's there ... and then actually sort of ... you know, I suppose towards 15, openly fantasizing about Ezekiel, and others, and sort of ... you know ... almost wanting to enact it ... and so **I remember sitting next to him and sort of brushing my leg closer to him you know, he was unaware of that although maybe on some deeper level he was and he didn't realize that I was trying to push closer and he was trying to push** ... you know ... he wasn't even aware, uh ... and uh ... I do remember, exactly it was a little later and ... exactly, we had a kind of play fight, and uh... and I used to use this cream on my face called Citafil, and um ... it's a white cream, and it looks a bit like sperm

[Irvin and I coyishly laugh here],

and so we kinda had a play, and I sort of play fought that I was going to put it on him, and **he was horrified** and then he sort of wrestled me onto the ground, and uh ... of course I **was turned on, by it, and I think he recognized that, it was was interesting, and he held me down ... he didn't want to ... he was horrified, like it was just I think like suddenly recognition that I was turned on by this**, and I don't know if he was consciously aware of that, but I think um ... it was uh ... you know, I think **we got gradually more and more sort of distant**, I think that's because he probably recognized these things, so there was that thing ... there was **a struggle on the Jewish side**, I sort've gone into a bit where I **struggled with the text**, that was a turning point, I think I mentioned the last time, I sort of sat on my bed and I struggled with this text, and **I sort of realized at a certain point that it wasn't me that it was talking about, and it couldn't be, at least any form of Judaism that I could acknowledge, because I wasn't doing anything to bring on this, these feelings, it was just happening and I couldn't push it away, and I was just not inclined towards women, that's**

**just the way it was, that wasn't my fantasy**, sexually and I would say on ... on ... I started kinda of having **romantic fantasies of men too**, right, at the same time I was also reading, my parents didn't have any books ... I was desperately **trying to find something gay**, so I kind of read, very ... surreptitiously, I took out **Ian Forster's Maurice**, and sort of like read that ... **that was my kinda gay text**, for growing up, like, what was also a problematic text in a way, it's quite **repressed sexually**, and all kinds of stuff, although, towards the end it's sort of acknowledged, and you know, there sort of a beautiful scene towards the end, ... um ... and **D. H. Lawrence as well, my mom's very literary, so we had all these 'literary' excuses to read about sexuality!** But that was all, I mean, it wasn't a lot, ... D. H. Lawrence ... I desperately tried to find a short story of Lawrence, that had sexuality, he was of course mostly straight, he had strong relationships with women, but he also had some relationships with men, and um ... so that was interesting, and **gave me sort of a fantasy world outside, but I didn't have much else, and I was kinda frustrated, at not having any acknowledgement**, the beyond and ya ... so then ... coming out to myself, um ... err... ya I suppose, fifteen, sixteen, exactly! ... really acknowledgement of ... that this was who I was, I am going to be ... **dealing with some feelings of loss, I felt children was impossible** ... things like that ... which I don't necessarily think anymore, um ... but ... um ... you know ... and then hiding it of course, and hiding it ... I can't let it be known, so the **choice at the Matric Dance**, not to go with a friend, a close friend of mine, um, because I was worried that she would be upset with me if she found out that I was gay later on, I went with someone I didn't really care about, and um .... that was a mistake in a way, because it would have been a much nicer evening, and um ... my friend subsequently said to me that I was silly, you know ... I think that it is **indicative of the kind of mind set of the closet, which was fearful**, it was also feeling like I was betraying my friends by going out with them but then not being able to want sexual stuff, I mean, I did actually, I remember going out with one girl who invited me in Klerksdorp she I met her at camp, and she invite me to her Matric dance, and then we were sitting on the bed late at night **she was making all of the advances and I wasn't picking up on any of them, ... she only understood it when she knew I wasn't attracted to her, it was horrible**, but like it wasn't about that it was she just found out I was gay and I was to some extent aware of that but I didn't want I didn't feel it wasn't right for me to do anything sexually with her, ... **so there was that kind of ... of period I suppose of seeming outwardly to be straight but inwardly to be acknowledging gayness** and ...and then, um, ... ya ... how does one move from that point to being um ... you know, I suppose, to being out to friends and family, .... well, again there's a stage to kinda move ... I think university was



obviously important, and um **I went to university, some important conversations for me ... I'm a rationalist**, rational conversation as important things, I remember fighting with one friend why homosexuality was wrong, I was still saying this at eighteen, and my friend very strongly, straight!, coming down on me 'no! No! No! That's nonsense!' and sort of taking each of my arguments and sort of knocking them down, which was important for me, because, I started saying, well, actually

there are no good arguments against homosexuality, like this is not something that can be rationally supported, um ... that was an important cognition, and then was that came ... I suppose, seeing a little bit more openness around it ... **of course I ... again 1994, the change in South Africa**, um ... some **consciousness of gay rights issues**, and then starting to go to certain ... um ... events which had gay ... I mean, **I love theatre, and film, music and art**, and just going to some of that ... so going to ... well, sneaking into the gay and lesbian film festival, myself, .. um ... going to a play, a gay play, um ... and ... and ... so just starting to see representations of homosexuality, and then, ya, ... um ... but still *very fearful*, **not wanting people to know**, and um ... the ... you know, towards second year university, I supposed I reached the point where I was ready to come out, my one friend asked me, and I just evaded the question, and then that December was the time I think we spoke about it where I made that speech in favour of gay rights, and my friend came to me and said that he wanted to make that speech, I um .. and then I came out to him, and so that was my first acknowledging, ... although I was really ready I think then, and then as I say **I felt like I wanted to tell the world**, and um ... and I couldn't and my parents of course ... and so ... so the first thing a number of friends, but interestingly going back to the Drakensberg,

[just before this interview, Irvin was telling me about his Easter holiday with his partner Joe in the Drakensberg ]

I told Joe the first two ... um .. two ... no its wasn't the first ... um ... my first friend Ronald, and then Nathaniel, the one was in Israel and the one was in Joburg, the next two friends were in the Drakensberg, and then we all went away together, and um ... you know, still having to hold back, which was difficult, but then **I didn't want my parents to find out without actually going and confronting and talking to them** ... um ... and so um ... as I say, I went to a therapist to try and find out how to do it, **I was incredibly fearful, I had feelings that my folks might reject me, they might throw me out of the house, I didn't know what to do**, and ... but ... but I ... I think they were quite unrealistic fears, really, but uh ... you

know ... um ... ya ... at the end of the day um ... um ... those were kind of the fears and the experience, and then April, Pesach, when I was twenty, that' what now, fifteen years ago, um ... I spoke to them and that was **a big turning point, because I started going out, to clubs, to be able to see a little bit more gay life, and I still didn't have relationships for a while**, but um ... I went out, and became more open .... and then I ... they asked me nor to tell my brothers, so I only told my brother ... I don't know if I already covered this ... I only told him at the end of Matric, that was his Matric year, so that was like ... um ... ya ... that's also December of that year, and I told him very shortly, .. he was upset with me ... because I told him very shortly after he finished his finals, he kinda just wanted to kinda relax about ... into everything, and then he like landed up with **this piece of information which eh still found quite hectic**, you know ... but he was fine with it ultimately, and then ... ya ... I mean from that point on, I was pretty open ... um ... still not very publically open ... like on TV kinda open ... but uh ... you know ... I was open to everyone who I cared about and um ... the I became more and more comfortable with it ... and got involved with the Activate society, at Wits, and leader of it, so I suppose I was prepared to be publically recognized, and um ... you know ... I suppose there in ... **in England which was also experience of much more normalized homosexuality**, as part of the society, and come back to South Africa where I was sort of leading a campaign for gay marriage, and very open in the Jewish community, so ... that maybe a bit of a discussion of how things were ...

S well ... ok ... thank you ... I just want to check that it is still ... um

I ya, and I hope I hope you get it picking up because I'm just worried that I'm speaking too softly,

S um ... ya ....

I shall we close this window, ya ....

[there was an open window onto the traffic in the room where we were doing the interview]

S ya, that's much better thanks!

[Irvin got up and closed the window]

um ... ok ... you've given me a lot of stuff there and it's powerful, um ... going back to the ... the ... sort of ... there's different segments of your coming out process, that you went

through ... um ... going back to the very early time ... um ... almost five you said? Or was that standard five?

I ... um ... well ... I wouldn't say I was coming out at five, I would say, I mean ... as I said my earliest experience I can remember now ... um ... there might be other things before hand, ... but ... um ... my earliest experience was ... I sort of had close friendships ... my young age ... but it was **about ten or eleven when** ... as I said ... when **I felt this ... this really strong attraction** to this one Madrech ... um ... and as I said I didn't recognize it as 'attraction' but uh ... I ... I um ... ya ... I mean I ... **I can recognize that I was sort of locked on him, I kinda kept on looking at him**, and stuff like that ... you know ... so that ... I can remember that very strongly, and that I would say is the beginning of sort of **slowly coming out** ... and of course Std. 5 is the story of the sex education ...

S ... sex education ... ok, now in terms of that sex education, because immediately I get the ... it's almost like there's a shadow in the background, following you, ... and um ... with that sex education there was this part of you that you couldn't really talk about to yourself because you didn't know what it was and having to deal with the unnameable at that point ... and it's almost like the **coming out process is finding a name for this experience** ... what's interesting is ... **you had to do that by yourself** ... or a lot of it ... and initially it seems like the 'attraction' was how you decided that you were gay ... is there any other aspect to being gay ... or is it only the sexual aspect that makes you gay ... what makes you gay?

I ... that's a good question, um... I mean ... look I don't think it's only the sexual aspect ... I mean I think it's a much more deeper kinda issue ... like when we talk about 'attraction' ... I don't think attraction should be looked at ... I'm putting on more a thinking head here ... but I mean .. I mean ... **I don't think attraction be looked at as purely a sexual matter, I think it's sort of a romantic, affective ... it's a lot of things which is about who you dream about settling down with, I suppose as I put it, like that um ... and its who you're hard wired towards**, I suppose ... it's hard to explain that ... it's what an orientation is ... it's ... it's ... it's that sense that I was just unmoved by girls, I had close friends, but ... **it wasn't going to move into 'boy-friend girl-friend' territory** ... right ... um ... and like I wanted that you know ... I suppose ... exactly ... what someone like Ezekiel , in a way I had quite an intimacy , and I kinda almost wanted to sort of make that **both physical and emotional** and all those kinds of things together ... um ... and ... ya ... and so ... ya ... I mean as you say ... the initial stuff I suppose of recognition, has to do with attraction, because um ... ya, and I can't even say like

that attraction ... like even at ten to my Madrech, **I can't say is purely physical, no, I mean it was towards him as a person ... you know ... I thought his mannerisms were attractive**, I thought ... so, so it's not about ... um ... it's not about, I wouldn't put as reductively as 'sexual attraction' no, um ... ah ... it's a sort of ya ... as I said, **it's something of who you're hard wired towards**, let's put it like that and ... and that for me is ... is what I suppose is very much about being gay it's about having ... there is of course the sexual attraction, there's nothing wrong with that .. that's great, but, um ... **it's multiple ... it doesn't capture fully the experience** I think to focus only on that ... um ... so it's ... ya ... my experience I would say ... exactly ... suggests you know ... as I say I might of recognized it because teen age boys are often ... you know ... sort of attractive in a particular way, but yes, again, like I've never been one that being strange .. like I've never been one that like just say totally brutally ... **I mean I can obviously get turned on by brute sexuality and pornography, but that's never generally done it for me, it's about a wider kind of attraction, it's about a kinda personality connection**, it's about many kinds of things and I think that **that is what I craved with men, that's what makes me gay ...**

S a hum ... so for you it's not just, as you say, it's not just about sex, it's almost the 'intimacy' aspect, the *emotional connection* is what 'being gay' is about ...

I ya, I mean it's hard to say because of course one has great emotional relationships with women too, and close friendships, but there is, I mean obviously again, this raises the question of **what is the difference between friendship and relationship, and there is a difference, it's experiential, it's understood**, you know, friendship, one can be very close, care deeply about a friend, um ... but **there's something about going deeper**, um ... **where you touch, you know, in other the words, the soul of the person, the core ... the sensitivity** ... is all those kinds of things that starts happening in relationships, and you start opening up, and you start ... all those kinds of things and somehow that's something that ... um ... and can also happen .. I mean for me with people who don't always reciprocate the ... the ... sexual aspect ... so I mean ... you know ... I've had sort of almost a relationship with a straight man, right, I mean .. um ... you know ... one guy I was with became a very close friend in Cambridge, you know ... and there was something ... as I say ... I don't know if it was intimacy ... but it's hard to capture ... but **there was something magnetic about our connection, there was something very deep about it**, for me that went deeper, um ... and, and ... funny enough, even his girlfriend who became his wife said to me, 'there's something deeper here' ... like you know .. she kind of recognized it, um ... he always had to cut himself

off a little bit because to have opened himself up to that would have been ... and, and ... there were moments it could have turned physical, so that's what funny, like the physical is not ... I, I can't see it as like it's *just* brute physicality, I think it's often an expression of a deeper kind of connecting, intimacy, and opening up ... that, that ... you allow yourself ... um ... which, you know, ... may even have a potential, exactly, I don't know, I don't know ... I mean ... to exist, exactly, in that kind of context, beyond 'straight – gay' ... you know ... boundary, um ... but then again, exactly ... maybe for him ,like the reality is that that wasn't his directedness, it was not towards me, even though there was something very powerful that almost became akin to a kind of relationship, you know, so, ya ... as I say, like I say ... it's, it's a **certain type of ... um... I suppose, even 'complementarity'** one could talk about it, that happens between people, um ... but there is a certain bruteness about perhaps with whom one wants to have 'it' with ... and um ... you know ... that's why .. um ... **gay people just generally really don't thrive in straight relationships even though they are often pushed into it and have it ... is, is, is that they can't open that *other side* to them ...** you know ... and it's not, I don't think it's only because they're **sexually frustrated**, I think it's that **there's multiple elements of themselves that are not realized**.

S OK ... um ... I sort of asked that question, um ... because some theorists ... um ... for example Judith Butler, I don't know if you've read her? ...

I um ... ya ... I haven't read a lot of her ...

S um ... would argue that sexuality is really a social construct, it's not something biological necessarily, and therefore, we create ideas, around what it is to be straight, what it is to be gay, and we grow into those ideas, um ... but it's almost like you're saying, 'No! There is an essence!' even though it's hard to give it words, there is something deeper? ...

I ya, I mean, my experience ... **I find it hard to think that it was *easily* socially constructed**, I mean, it depends what you mean by that, there could be multiple ways of you know ... I mean of cashing what that means out ... **but my own experience does attest to ...** I would have thought that my experience would say it's either biological, genetic, or it comes to a very early environmental influence, in the womb or maybe early developmental stuff, um ... I find it hard to say I mean ... you know ... everything in my environment you know ... other than **maybe unconscious stuff** which ... which **my parents know about would have pushed me against being gay** ... right ... it ... it was a modern orthodox family ... **it was not socially acceptable** ... it was ... ya ... it wasn't something ... and **I fought against it as well** so,

so ... **something was coming into my mind** ... you know ... something **was impinging on me in a way**, right .... which, which ... **I wasn't totally in control of** ... um ... and um ... you know ... and that's quite frigt ... was frightening ... and I **suppose is quite frightening to me in a way, because I'm a very ... like being in control kind of person** ... uh ... *but* I couldn't ... even though I didn't want it at first ... I mean it's different now, right ... but, even though I didn't want it at first, I fought against it, **I hoped for things to change**, right ... um ... even though that occurred, **I can't say that I played any part in constructing that** um .. that, **those initial emotions**, and so in a way it was, **it wore me down shall we say, into gayness**, um ...in ... you know ... it's a horrible way of putting it I suppose, but, but, ... it's probably true that ... it's, it's, you know that I had to fight it in a way, and um ... because it was part of me ... **I couldn't fight it because it was there, and so the way to acknowledge and to deal with it was to accept and come to accept** ... and now I **recognize of course it's a good part of me**, I think it's a great part, something that I think ... you know .. is wonderful and I think it's very sad that we have to be made to feel that that's a bad part ... but again all my language as we're gathering is, is sort of saying that it's more than 'essential' part ... um ... as I say, I'm rather agnostic and I think that's for scientists to look at whether that comes to uh ... you know, biology – genetics or early environmental stuff, but *early on hard wired* shall we say and uh ... you know ... and I mean **there are different expressions of homosexuality** so ... you know ... I don't know if you even call this homosexuality ... but people like in all male environments, like in prisons, yeshivas, and things like that act out in gay sex, or in male sex, ways, I don't know if that's totally homosexuality, in fact some of them ... you know ... one of my ex- told me, you know, in yeshivas, a third of his class ... I mean ... he slept with ... um ... and I'm sure many of those people weren't gay ... just there was **no other available sexual outlet** .. so that's maybe ... it's not gayness even ... so I wouldn't even call it constructive, it's, it's **finding a sexual partner to play with** ... um ... you know ... um ... but I mean it is complicated and I ... you know ... I think Butler's points are more complicated because .. you know ... you obviously have **places like Brazil and Turkey where often people have had same sex relationships alongside heterosexual relationships, and so, have constructed their sexuality in different ways and of course there might be lots of variants there might be some variants between some people may have opportunities to** um ... err ... you know .... **to play both ways I suppose both ... bisexual** ... um ... my sense is amongst men I think that's less common and I think a lot of the time that it tends to ... it may be more common amongst women ... um ... and, and, and it also tends to happen **because of social pressure** ... um ... a lot of time, **because gayness is a 'bad choice', so you have to go ... you know ... stay**

**in both worlds**, so, so that's how its constructed, so, ya, I mean ... but as I say **there have been different expressions of sexuality in different cultures ... my culture is not one** ... in the one that I grew up in ... that, that gave positive image of us ... **so it wasn't constructed in that simple way**, so if one's going to be a social constructionist one's going to have to find some way to explain um ... my experience and how it's constructed, in that way ...

S ok ... that would lead me onto another question that is related to that in that what, do you think there is a difference between being gay and gay culture, and if so, what is that difference? ...

I uuum ... yes! I mean there is a difference I mean I think ... I mean there is obviously a whole issue of a relationship between being gay and assuming a gay identity, um ... and um ... what it means to ... you know ... um, it's similar to the like the masculine and feminine thing, men and women, you know ... women are not necessarily nurturing, they assume that role because that's what expected, um ... and **so you'll find that gay people there's a certain construction of gayness and identity in the world** and one can assume that identity or not, um, one can also think that one belongs to a group or not, I don't think it's essentially linked with gayness, I mean I think it's likely that **once a person recognizes that they are gay um ... they ... there will be some inkling towards linking with others that are similar**, and so whether one belongs to a community in the full sense of the word, or forms a kind of social group, um ... it's, it's, it seems to me that you're going to link to others in some ways ... you know ... and um and, and, ya, and there is some kind of self recognition of who, what one is ... um ... and what one's, at least sexual attraction and sort of all those kind of things , romantic, affective attraction ... um ... tend towards ... so I mean I, I you know, **I would have thought by self-recognizing you would sort of naturally incline to link with others who are similar, and hopefully to some extent support causes that are at least going to make living gay**, being gay, ok with that ... you know, you might acknowledge who you are and say that you have to be celibate, or adopt some kind of religious view, it's not automatic that you necessarily a sort of gay positive point of view, and this sort of youngster that I was talking to ... um .. you know ... that's one of the things, he knows he's gay, his question is does he like get married, uh ... to a woman ... uh ... **knowing this, does he stay celibate, does he live a life which is going to lead him on a sort of gay identified path**, and you, I just said to him there first two are just not really options for you, **unless you want to of course live a lie, live badly and deceitfully** and also ... you know ... celibacy just seems ... you know ... it's possible I suppose if you heroic, but ... you know ... I mean, ... you know, **WHY? !...**

[we both laugh]

so, I mean I think that ... so gay identity, you know, you certainly don't have to assume all the things ... ok ya, it's complex .... **modern culture thinks gay people are** ... and I've resisted that to a large extent ... right ... I mean ... not in a negative way, but I mean, you know, I don't think I have to believe it's ... say **there's lots of drugs in gay culture**, I don't want to take drugs, it just doesn't follow for me that ... because **lots of people like going and having multiple sexual partners**, uh ... it doesn't mean that I necessarily have to do that ... and so I've always tried to ... you know ... and those were maybe **other values that I have** ... you know ... which condition how I wanted to live my life, which is with more serious relationships and things like that ... you know, but, um ... I think that um ... **I don't think there's an automatic way of being that follows from being gay**, um ... but I think that um ... I think gay people with a healthy self respect to some extent will ... or should be ... linked to others in some way, will want to link to others who are gay ... or to that extent become part of the community, and probably should also support causes ... um, that are, that are, ... that try to fight against homophobia, in favour of gay rights, I would have thought that a self recognizing dignified person will not fight against those things, ...

S um, um ... it's **almost that participating in activist causes would ... reinforces a certain identity, gay identity**, or otherwise,

I oh yes! Absolutely! It does definitely ....

[at this point the interview is interrupted when Irvin's mom phones him on his cell phone] ...

S um ... ah ... would you say that 'coming out' is a once-off event or is it something that you have to constantly do throughout your life? ....

I ummm ... that's an interesting question, um ... it's definitely not a once off event, I mean, as I've described it, **it's a process, of coming to terms with yourself**, um ... and ya, **for me it was, what, a seven year process**, to telling friends and family, and that wasn't the end of it, so ... yea, maybe ten, eleven years, and even till becoming more outward, um, I mean, I don't think it necessarily continues all the time, like that, so I think ... um ... I mean **I think you are always to some extent there areas of a gay person of whether to withhold**



**information or not**, see, even today I had someone in my office and I talked about going away to the Drakensberg with my partner, and then we were knida talking about it, and then we got lost in the dark, and then, **I consciously knew that I had to make a choice** of whether to say 'and *he* brought the torch with' or 'my partner brought the torch with', so I am still aware today, of making that choice, and I chose to say 'he' ... right ... because, like, um, I think that should be just natural, normal, right, ... and I should be able to talk about that, but I'm conscious of it, so ... so there is a degree to which it's not a person that I know from a bar of soap, I don't think straight people would have any problems talking about 'she' ... you know ... and so ... it's not that I had a problem, but it's just ... **there is a consciousness around it** ... so um ... I don't think it's ever a totally you know ... sort of just run of the mill ... I mean, you know, I think even though is ok with oneself, and I'm ok with myself, I think, I think, you know ... I don't have an issue telling people ... err ... **I'm aware of it, and that's maybe because of it's a difference or whatever, maybe I'd be aware of being Jewish** , I suppose as well, if I make comments about it being about Jewish, so, so, **it might be a 'difference' thing, being aware of being a minority or something like that, but it is an awareness**, and you know, that's the thing, like holding hands in public as well, it's like, you know, Joe and I do it, ... um ... but we're aware of it, like I know in the Drakensberg, **if we were to hold hands, again it felt a little bit like a political statement**, you know, and that's a pity, like I wouldn't like ... I wish we didn't have to do that ... um ... and you know ... as I say, it might be a reason for, you know, why I say, it's sometimes nice to travel to places where it's just not a question, and I think in South Africa today it is still a question, it's just not ... even if you walk in Rosebank, which is quite really open or Sandton, it's still not totally ... like **people look at you** ... you know what I mean ... so it's ... ya ... so to some extent there is some truth in the idea ... it's a process ... I, I mean ... that's coming out, I suppose it is coming out in some kind of way, but I would say largely that process for me is over, um ... but, that there are still moments of awareness of my sexuality in difference and choices to be made as to whether I, I allow my sexuality to be known or not, so there is still **a kind of dynamic between hiding and openness that exists, and in some contexts I sort of embrace the dynamic of openness, there are others where I'm totally, I have to go back into hiding, when I was in Nigeria**, I couldn't tell anyone that I was gay because it's such a virulently homophobic society that I was scared, you know, so ... um ... that obviously is just about **personal safety**, and I usually wouldn't , usually that would be something that I ... barring personal safety I would like to think I would challenge, but not always, and **it's difficult**, and

sometimes it's just, you're in social set ups, so ya, I mean, **there is an extent to which coming out doesn't stop happening for gay people,**

S ok ... now, from what you've been telling me both in this interview, and in the previous interview, um ... it's almost ... the coming out process, enabled you to re ... look at your religion, your faith, your Jewishness, and interpret it in a different light, would you say that that is the case?

I um .. yes! I wouldn't say it's *only* coming out, I mean I would say it's multiple things, I mean I was obviously a person who was ... was sort of thoughtful, I think, and sort of ... I suppose more of an intellectual type, uh ... growing up in a family which ... where there were questions, and so, of course **I had a radical prompt to question which was gayness,** um ... and you know ... it's just interesting to see, you know in that .... and I had a process with that too, but **that forced me to have to make certain big decisions in my life as to which kind of community I was going to belong to** ... and I saw it interestingly reflected in this younger guy's life, where you know, he's maybe, you know, someone who doesn't want to leave his community ... I don't think I wanted to leave either

[Irvin's tone of voice rises here]

... who's very nervous about leaving the orthodox community who hasn't even really considered other options, and um ... who this is very scary for ... **like that one has to leave, err ... one has to find an alternative way to being Jewish, and that it's not fully acceptable, one has to hide one's gayness, and so, that kind of choice is difficult,** err ... I suppose for me I don't know, **it's also got to do with my personality,** ya I suppose, it was never a choice, once I acknowledged myself ... and **when I started to accept my sexuality, it was never really a choice to sit, and be quietly in the back, sort of ... sort of humiliatingly ... sort of , uh ... acknowledging my 'underclass status' in an orthodox schul, it just wasn't an option,** uh ... like **I had to find a way of being Jewish** which was ... if was going to be an orthodox schul, it would accept me on my terms, on who I was, it was not, it was not gonna ... it would be embracing, you know ... and I think ... and so ... I had the intellectual challenge too, which was about finding a way in which to be intellectually, and that definitely prompted a lot of other questioning, but I wouldn't say that it was only, the only source , I mean **I had issues with feminism in Judaism, I had issues with what God's place is within Judaism, you know, I had issues with whatever ... the Divinity of the Torah, and all these kinds of questions which I had to ask questions ... I was a philosophy person,** I had those kinds of questions

around me ... so, exactly ... **would I have gone as far as I would have gone if it weren't for gay, I don't know if I would have, um ... I suppose there has been a ... it's pushed me to rethink, and also to be open to difference**, and open to ... you know ... whatever, Butler's Subaltern voices, things like that, you know, these kind of ideas, and sort of look at feminism, look at queer theory, look at different issues and sort of try to think about them in relation to my own Judaism, and so in a way, exactly ... sometimes it just comes home to you, **how my shift in my own way and approach towards Judaism is really very different to a lot of people in the community here ... I think largely also because a lot of people are not very thoughtful** ... so they don't bother to think, they're also not very courageous, so if they do think, and they have a problem, they just don't challenge, so there are all those kinds of things that are going on too, um ... but yes, I mean, I think that I've moved because of that deep process of thought and evaluation and reconciliation I suppose that has happened ... and move away from **anger towards Judaism which was also interesting ... because I was angry** ... um ... you know, and I'm not angry anymore, I was angry towards the marriage ceremonies of my straight friends, initially, when I was twenty-twenty-one, and I made a speech, and my one very religious friend this thing, about how, you know, how hopefully in good time gay people will be able to be married, and how it's patriarchal, and it needs to change, and you know, they tolerated the speech because, they knew it was me I suppose,

[we both laugh],

... but um ... but I was angry, and I was cross, and I was excluded, discriminated against, not only me, the way in which the whole construction of women as well, you know, and I suppose there's that kind of solidarity I think, I certainly feel, ya, and so, exactly ... that made me angry ... there is a **slow process of seeing a sort of different type of Jewish world I suppose that's open, acknowledging and can deal with difference, can be creative**, and all those kinds of things, which I suppose I would regard as a gift ...

S now it's interesting two distinctions you've made, you made a distinction between being gay, and gay identity, and in a sense being Jewish and Judaism, um ... one of the questions I wanted to ask, is what is the relationship between the Jew and the Torah, the Text, obviously, in one sense it's not one and the same thing, but in another sense one informs the other, and so I suppose the question is, what is the distinction between being, and these different forms of isms, or identities for you?

I um ... that's extremely interesting, it's interesting to look at comparing is being Jewish like being gay for example, I mean I've got **a theorist who sort of more Christian right wing** person who sort of argues that uh ... **being gay is being like religious rather than like being like racial, and so should be classed in a similar vein**, and therefore of course in a certain way attract the same degree of scrutiny, legally, and um ... I think it's not true actually, **I think that being gay is more like a racial or gender identity, than a religious identity**. But religion is also, **it goes deep**, I mean someone like myself, now ... exactly ... at birth ... like I don't think that there is anything genetic there, right, or any deep environmental thing ... I mean that is full condition, right ... it's being in an environment and going from earliest on my folks being religious and just bring me up in this way, but it being very deeply inseated, right ... so, it being recognized that this was not something that I was going to give up easily on ... **I remember making a choice, I was not going to have rabbis with a lack of understanding with a lack of humanity making choices to deprive me of my Judaism**, ok ... or my Jewishness ... so it does go deep, and it's not identical ... I think, as you say, [with] religious identity, ok ... so **it is complicated**, it's a long question, being Jewish I think is very much it is connection with, I suppose. **A sense of connection to people, I suppose, a history, religion, a land, all those kinds of facets, and so ... it's a multifaceted experience** ... um ... which is very rounded, very rich, it's very deep, um ... and it's ... um ... and **it's not something that is reducible to any one element, but also not easily separable from them too, that's the complex connection** ... right ... so ... um ... it's not like ... I could be Jewish without ... **I would remain Jewish I suppose without going to schul or religious connection, but my links would be more attenuated and I would maybe ... I would not feel as Jewish ... I would not be doing active things to promote that identity, domain**, um ... and um ... so my involvement is very much ... um ... is very connected to the **depth of the identity** I suppose, would be what I would say, you know, and you asked how that related to gayness, well maybe that's true as well, maybe that's an interesting connection with Jewishness, maybe I got involved with gay activism and various kinds of things as well because ... because perhaps **my way of understanding identity is through involvement**, is through deepening that sense of identity, and um ... when recognizing that this was part of who I was I didn't want to just peripherally sort of recognize it, but I wanted ... you know ... I wanted to deepen the connections, of my gay identity, I suppose, but not in every way of course ... **so maybe there was a tension there between the visible aspects of let's say more 'promiscuous' culture, whatever it is, uh ... and my own design to have more meaningful relationships and things like that** ... and drugs and various kinds of things, which I just

rejected ... but then again, I don't think those are integral parts of gayness at all, so ... um ... so there was a selective I suppose involvement ... but a deepening of my identity involvement with gayness, as well as with Judaism, and **thankfully I have been very fortunate to find a place where I can do both**, and where I can form an organization like Limmud where gayness is just not an issue, my straight colleagues are saying ... you know ... let's have a gay speaker, I didn't push it, and we had two guys, you know David Schneer and you've read his book, and Greg his partner, I didn't really push it at all, probably lot's of people in the community thought that it was me, but it wasn't, it was actually many other people, who said 'Brilliant! Bring him out!' you know ... that's great ...and I obviously wasn't opposed to it ... you know, it wasn't a big push from my side, **so that's kind of a lovely space** and my reform community as well ... although I must say I felt not as easy coming back from Cambridge and stuff ... you know, I've been out, I 've been clearly out, I've been fighting for these causes, and um ... I think I'm still a little bit beyond some of the people, in terms of ... sort of being more radical and also **not many people are not that thoughtful about their Judaism** unfortunately, it's been mostly embracing, and not really that difficult, and very nice ...

S I think for one more question ...

I sure ...

S to sort of tie everything together, bring it all together, in terms of the Torah text, or maybe the Tanak text, are there any stories now that reflect your identity as being gay and Jewish? Or that you can read into the Text?

I in terms of Torah? I mean, that's nice ... you mean my own stories? You mean like personal stories? What comes to mind is relationships really, I mean it's just interesting, my two most meaningful, three most meaningful relationships that come in Jewish community context, the one person I met overseas, in Limmud U.K. , we had this very passionate connection, that in itself felt very unreal and very kind of mythical in some ways, all kinds of mythical things ... he was Costarican, and Jewish ... one way a rabbi here ... um ... both were rabbis ... was a rabbi here .. and that was never a physical relationship, but um ... there was a deep emotional connection between us, and then Joe who I met at the Taslich ceremony, and then the flowering of our relationship which interestingly has been very Jewishly connected ... and so, the first year Joe had to put up with me cheering Limmud, which was very hard, and then the following year he got involved in Young Limmud, and he ran Young

Limmud, which is for the young children and he was involved running it, he did a massive job, which was hugely stressful for him, and for me, because with all that stress he found that he was not getting much support, **we've both been involved in the schul together, Joe and I, on the management comity, I mean I'm like the lay rabbi,** and so what's very interesting is that ... **Joe doesn't necessarily like all the stuff around Pesach, but I'm very strict about it,** we cover the kitchen and we sort of use different cutlery, and crockery, and I mean, Joe, which is very nice, he went and did all the **koshering**, so he boiled all the cutlery, in boiling water, all that kinda stuff, and even now in the Drakensberg, we had a Shabbat dinner, mad a Shabbat dinner, had humotsi, and ... and Kiddush, and Benshing, and you know, and so in a way we're creating a Jewish gay life, which is just you know ... I suppose that is the new story of the 2000's, right ... is that **we're forming a loving relationship together,** in the Jewish community, at the heart of the ... or maybe we can't say in the heart of the Jewish community, because **the reform movement is a bit more marginal in South Africa,** but at the heart of **one branch of ... of the Jewish community, where we're accepted and loved,** and **we're participating and making a contribution, and are forging a life together,** you know, and as I say, one that blends Jewish and gay stuff, and tries to better the world, and make contributions in various respects, and also acknowledging **and being joyess, about our own sexuality,** you know, and you know, **Joe and I have been at quite different stages of ... we certainly started of being at quite different stages of acceptance,** him really only really coming out in our relationship to his family and things like that, which was hard, and we've come a long way, and that's been a really amazing journey, and also learning about relationships, and I think one of the harder things is that **we don't really have ... it's not clear that there are many models ...** I mean I know that you've been involved in a seventeen year relationship, but it's like, it's something that you don't ... it actually exists quite a lot, but it ... **it's not something that you see very visibly,** and so those kinds of models are not so easy, you know, models of how do we ... I don't know, Joe and I might, we'll see ... **we might get married at some point ... who proposes for example? Right ... and you don't want that to turn into like 'you're the male, and I'm the female'** ... you know what I mean ... and so all those kinds of issues ... and **we haven't got those models of exactly how to create successful gay relationships, we have to forge them,** and I think what's interesting is of course Jewish identify provides a guide, but it has to be modified in a way to guide, and so it's this interesting connection **I suppose between ... linking up nicely I suppose ... the idea of I suppose going back into the past ... the Torah text and the wonderful stuff, and stuff we learn about, failed relationships, and difficult relationships,**

in the Text of the Torah, and things that we have to learn about the way to be in the world, with applying it into a new context, in a way ... into a way which makes sense ... and that raises lot's of interesting questions, things like children you know ... it's obviously not as imperative as a straight couple, but does one have children ... and for me it's interesting, it's not as obvious to me, although I have the opportunity so it's obvious to me now that I will, although I know Joe wants, so it's something that we will have to grapple with, I think that **gayness offers ways of being perhaps, which are not necessarily identical with ways of straight being, but which are hopefully equally fulfilling and creative**, and you know it's an interesting thing, when we were struggling about the children, we struggled with the verse ... **'Be fruitful and multiply'** which means *be fruitful and multiply* ... right ... in the text, and it's traditionally taken as ... you know ... 'you should have children', ... um ... and then I was speaking to one rabbi about it, and he said to me, 'No, it doesn't have to be understood like that at all' ... I mean, 'Be fruitful and multiply', ***multiply your works in the world, contribute, do good things, improve things for people*** – there are different ways of being fruitful and multiplying, and I think for me that's a very important commandment, like, ***be fruitful and multiply, do lots of things, we don't know how long we've got in this world, but when we are in this world, try and better the world, and use all the things we've got*** and ... to come to Ian Forster again, **'connecting up all the elements of ourselves'** ... right ... that when he talks about 'only connect' ... and I think that's a very important thing for me is, I need to be whole, to be fulfilled and to be giving, to be fully able to do so, **I need to connect up all the elements of myself, and for me that's about bringing together Jewish, gay, South African and many other elements...**

S ok ... well thank you for allowing me to interview you,

I sure ...

S um ... just before we conclude, is there anything you want to add, or you feel we haven't covered? ...

I I think we've covered a lot and ... I think we've covered a lot of ground, um ... and ya, thank you very much, ... and I think it's been a great process, and I hope this will be useful for you, and that you will ... uh ... your Masters will go well ...

S thank you ... uh ... the time now is 6 o'clock ... ok ... thanks ...

*End of interview two.*

## APPENDIX C







## APPENDIX D



## INFORMED CONSENT

### WHAT HAPPENS TO MATERIAL

The interview[s] is/are recorded and then transferred onto a hardcopy [disc] of which I will give a copy to the interviewee. Furthermore, the entire interview is transcribed, and appended to the final thesis. It will be referred to within the text of the thesis. The final draft of the interview as well as the thesis will be submitted to the interviewee for inspection and alteration. The material is evaluated by my supervisor and will be further subject to further evaluation by at least two external examiners before two copies of the material are finally submitted to the UJ library. Copies of the material will be kept by the researcher for a period of approximately two years in the event of there being a necessity of such material needing to be reviewed, after which copies of recordings will be destroyed.

### CONFIDENTIALITY

All material is subject to confidentiality which means that actual names of persons and places will not be used in the final draft. In addition any material that the interviewee should not want in the final draft will be excluded.

### PARTICIPATION

Under no circumstances has the interviewee being compelled to partake of this study. In addition the interviewee is free to withdraw from the study any time they wish to. Reasons for the study have been made clear to the interviewee, and any questions with regard to methodology used in this study will be answered. I have sent via email a copy of my proposal as well as a copy of intended questions that I will ask to the interviewee.

Signature of interviewee

Date:

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Signature of researcher

Date:

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