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An Exploration of the Perspectives of Young Males with Regard to their Experience of non-Heterosexual Sexuality Transitions and the Potential Influences on this Transition within an Irish Context

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**An exploration of the perspectives of young males with regard to their
experience of non-heterosexual sexuality transitions and the potential influences
on this transition within an Irish context**

A thesis submitted to the Dublin Institute of Technology in part fulfilment of the
requirements for award of Masters in Child, Family and Community Studies

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September 2015

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Declaration

I hereby certify that the material which is submitted in this thesis towards the award of the Masters (M.A.) in Child Family and Community Studies is entirely my own work and had not been submitted for any academic assessment other than part-fulfilment of the award named above.

Signed:

Date:

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge and wholeheartedly thank the seven participants who took part in this study. I extend great admiration and appreciation for your openness and honesty in sharing your experiences. This research would not have been possible without your truly valuable input.

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To my loving family, thank you so much for your kindness, patience and never ending support. To this day I don't know how you put up with me.

Last but not least to my amazing friends. I'm so lucky to have such a wonderful group of people around me. Your reassurance, understanding and advice knows no bounds. You helped keep me smiling throughout this process.

Glossary of terms

- Social Context** - For the purpose of this research ‘social context’ refers to the immediate physical and social setting in which people inhabit.
- Social Networks** - Refers to people’s personal relationships and social interactions.
- Non-heterosexual sexuality transition** - refers to the process of recognising, understanding and integrating any sexual orientation that is not classified as ‘heterosexual’.
- Heterosexual** - refers to a person that is physically and emotionally attracted to a person of the opposite sex.
- Disclosure or ‘Coming out’** - refers to the process by which lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people openly declare their sexual identity, to themselves and others (Lalor, de Roiste and Devlin 2007, p.105).
- Passing** - refers to the ability to be regarded as a member of a social group other than your own, that being heterosexual for non-heterosexuals
- Sexual minority** - Is used to encompass more diverse expressions of sexuality and gender variance, it includes self-identified gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender adolescence and youths who are gender-variant and/or experience same-sex attractions, relationships, and/or behaviours without necessarily labelling themselves (Elze, 2005).
- Sexual Stigma** - refers to the shared belief by society in which non-heterosexuality is disintegrated, discredited and constructed as invalid relative to heterosexuality (Herek, 2004)
- Heterosexism** Is an ideology that perpetuates sexual stigma by denying and denigrating any non-heterosexual form of behaviour, identity, relationship or community (Herek, 2004).
- Internalized homophobia** – refers to the personal acceptance and endorsement among sexual minorities of sexual stigma as part of the individuals value system and self-concept

Abstract

This research aimed to explore the perspectives of young males with regard to their experience of non-heterosexual sexuality transitions and the potential influences on this transition within an Irish context. A qualitative research approach was adopted, using semi-structured interviews with young males between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-two. This method allowed for the details of participants' lived experience and their individual perceptions to be captured. Key findings suggest that experiences of non-heterosexual sexuality transitions in both family and friendship contexts shaped how the transition was negotiated. Disclosure of sexual minority status to family members is still a significant issue for many individuals and can be met with a wide variety of responses. Despite negative initial responses the transition generally strengthened and positively impacted on family and friendship relationships over time. The overwhelming majority of sexuality related support was found to come from friends, with non-heterosexual friends in particular offering support in terms of understand and reassurance.

A significant finding of this research was the monumental influence social and historical context had on non-heterosexual sexuality transitions. The fact that heterosexist beliefs and values were reaffirmed constantly through cultural institutions meant that sexual minority issues were invisible within cultural discourse. This led to isolation and stigmatisation. Individuals had very different approaches to coming to terms with their sexuality. These varying approaches stemmed from differences in personality, cognitive processes and coping mechanisms.

The individual nature and multiple influences on how non-heterosexual sexuality transitions are negotiated highlight the need to develop and explore inclusive theoretical frameworks that allow for variation in historical, cultural and psychological contexts. Interventions and practitioners working with sexual minorities should also consider the importance of recognising the unique challenges each individual faces and the specific supports that might work for them. This should limit the potential for making assumptions and generalizations about sexual minorities and help identify positive influencing factors which could be built upon.

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List of Abbreviations

LGBT: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender

GLEN: Gay and Lesbian Equality Network

IPA: Interpretative Phenomenological Approach

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The study aims to explore the perspectives of young males with regard to their experience of non-heterosexual sexuality transitions and the potential influences on this transition within an Irish context. This chapter will provide an introduction to the study by first outlining the context of sexuality transitions in Ireland. The rationale and aims of the study will then be introduced followed by an overview of the subsequent chapters.

1.2 Context of the study

Only thirty years ago Irish society could be described as extremely homogenous, the overwhelming majority were Catholic and lived lives centred on traditional Catholic family values including traditional attitudes regarding gender roles (Norman & Galvin, 2006). Due to Ireland's past experience of colonialism and the strong hold of Catholicism, there was effectively a silence surrounding sexuality (Tovey & Share 2007). It was linked to concepts such as sin, control and danger and sexual expression was confined to heterosexual marriage (Moane, 1995; Inglis, 1998). These issues, alongside the Catholic Church's homophobic discourse, lead to the legal, economic and social discrimination of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) people. Due to initiatives such as the Irish Gay Rights Movement (IGRM), the Campaign for Homosexual Law Reform and the work of Senator David Norris, strides have been made towards equality through the decriminalisation of male homosexual acts in 1993, and the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation under the Equality Act 2007 (Reygan & Moane, 2014).

Society has changed dramatically for sexual minorities in recent years (Barron & Bradford, 2007) and this change culminated in Ireland with the passing of the referendum on same-sex marriage which made Ireland the first country to approve same-sex marriage by popular vote (Irish Times, May 24th 2015). This campaign, while highlighting changing attitudes and societal acceptance for sexual minorities,

also exposed underlying hetero-sexist ideologies, for example, same sex marriage disrupts the ‘normal’ order of society due to it challenging definitions of the family.

1.3 Rationale for the study

The rationale for the choice in topic was due to a personal interest in the area and a desire to explore how non-heterosexual sexuality transitions were negotiated at a time of such significant social change for sexual minorities in Ireland. Recently many authors in this area have highlighted the importance of examining the influence of social, historical and cultural contexts in relation to sexuality transitions (Hammack & Cohler, 2012), yet there is very little empirical Irish research which investigates these influences. Research in the area of experiences within family and peer contexts is growing (Goldfreid & Goldfreid, 2001; Savin-Williams, 2005) yet more qualitative research is needed in light of changing attitudes and growing societal acceptance. It is anticipated that giving sexual minorities a voice within the discourse on this transition will allow for a deeper understanding of how the transition is negotiated. Finally, it is hoped that the identifying of potential risk and protective factors associated with this transition will help inform the work of practitioners and organisations working with sexual minorities.

1.4 Aims of the study

The overall research aim is to explore the perspectives of young males with regard to their experience of non-heterosexual sexuality transitions within an Irish context. The objectives are to explore the potential influences on non-heterosexual sexuality transitions. The main research questions are as follows

- To explore how young males experience non-heterosexual sexuality transitions within a family context
- To explore how young males experience non-heterosexual sexuality transitions within a friendship context
- To gain insight into the extent in which social context influences non-heterosexual sexuality transitions
- To obtain an understanding of the risk and protective factors associated with this transition

1.5 Outline of the study

Chapter One introduces the research topic and the context, rational and main aims and objectives of the research are presented

Chapter Two presents the reviewed literature relevant to the research question. In order to examine the different aspects with potential relevance to this study both national and international academic books and journal articles were consulted.

Chapter Three outlines the methodological approach of the research and the rational and strengths and limitations of the chosen research design. Ethical considerations will also be explored along with the approach taken in relation to data collection and analysis

Chapter Four presents the findings of the study under the themes and subthemes which emerged as part of the data analysis and coding process

Chapter Five links the findings with the overall aims of the study. Findings are discussed in relation to reviewed literature and reflection on the process of the study is presented.

Chapter Six puts forward conclusions that can be drawn from the present study. Recommendations in relation to further research and with regards to work with sexual minorities are also presented.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

As the objective of this research is to explore how non-heterosexual sexuality transitions are experienced this review will begin by exploring the literature in relation to the various perspectives on non-heterosexual sexuality transitions in general. The emerging discourse in relation to the significant influence of social context on this transition will follow. Due the family being one of the main ecological systems in which sexual orientation identity is explored (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) literature in relation to family contexts will then be discussed. Owing to the influence of friends already identified within adolescent developmental psychology (Graber & Bastiani-Archibald, 2001), the friendship context subsequently will be explored. Finally, this review will present the most relevant research pertaining to risk and protective factors associated with this transition.

2.2 Perspectives on non-heterosexual sexuality transitions

Research on sexual identity formation and the ‘coming out’ process has been carried out for a number of years. Early theoretical frameworks recognised that one has to weigh up satisfying emotional and physical needs with the resulting stigmatization (Altman, 1971). Plummer (1975) was one of the first to develop a stage theory and recognised that an individual may never get past the stage of accepting the label and its potential consequences. Recent research signifies a shift away from the linear stage models of Plummer (1975), Cass, (1979) and Troiden, (1989) in favour of theories that are inclusive and take into account psychological, historical and socio-cultural factors (Eliason & Schope 2006; Kelleher 2009; Rivers 2002).

A vast amount of research in the area of sexual orientation has been carried out in recent years; psychological research in particular has grown immensely in the last decade (Patterson & D’Augelli, 2012; Saewyc, 2011). It is now argued that identity development is better seen in terms of milestones rather than stages and the unpredictability among milestones means that there is no normal or ‘typical’

developmental trajectory (Eliason & Schope, 2007; Savin-Williams & Cohen, 2007). The milestones identified include feeling different, experiencing same sex attraction, doubting ones heterosexuality, taking part in same-sex behaviour (this may never happen), self-identification, disclosure and acceptance. Disclosure to others may immediately follow self-disclosure or it may take years or even decades (Savin-Williams & Cohen 2007).

Hammack and Cohler (2009) see identity as a process of co-construction between individual and culture. Considering the different historical, cultural and psychological perspectives in this area, they highlight the importance of taking an interdisciplinary approach to the study of sexual orientation. Developmental science has also recognised the importance of studying the influence of social and historical change over the life course (Cohler & Michaels, 2012).

Life course perspectives are considerably important when examining the lives of sexual minorities especially in light of the historical events and social changes that have shaped the particular experiences of different birth cohorts (Cohler & Michaels 2012). Seidman (2002) argues that the current cohort of sexual minority youth are more able to integrate their sexuality into their daily lives than previous cohorts. The rapid change in social climate surrounding the lives of sexual minorities means that findings of studies published in the past few years may in fact be based on an earlier cohort of sexual minorities and may not be applicable to the present cohort (Cohler & Michaels 2012). This poses major challenges to researchers in the area in terms of accessing up-to-date material and emphasises the importance of ongoing research in this area.

2.3 The influence of social context on non-heterosexual sexuality transitions

The 'sexual transition' is shaped by psychological and contextual factors both of which can cause unique challenges (Leleux-Labarge, Hatton, Goodnight & Masuda, 2015). Adolescence and emerging adulthood are crucial times for sexual identity exploration and this occurs alongside the normal challenges of these times such as puberty, changing family and peer relationships, exam stress and career decisions

(Arnett, 2006, Graber & Bastiani Archibald, 2001). Sexual minorities also face challenges unique to their status as a stigmatised group within society (Herek & Garnets, 2007). Society and social context is shaped by social norms, values and constraints (Graber & Bastiani Archibald, 2001). Therefore social, political and legal issues present young people with pros and cons with regards to confronting their sexual identity. One of the challenges they face revolves around common assumptions such as the presumption of heterosexuality and expectations of gender conformity. The fact that this transition occurs within a heterosexual society with heterosexual norms can lead to this group being invisible in society (Thompson & Jonson, 2003). They can be ignored or their behaviour or feelings considered a passing phase references. However, there is a growing awareness that it is a natural developmental outcome for some adolescents (D'Augilli & Patterson, 2012).

A cultural ideology that is said to shape today's society is heterosexism. Herek (2004) describes this as an ideology that perpetuates sexual stigma by denying and denigrating any non-heterosexual form of behaviour, identity, relationship or community. Seidman, Meeks and Traschen (1999) state that heterosexism is institutional and cultural and not just a matter of individual prejudice. Social Stigma is learned and internalized through childhood socialization and this internalization can lead to people concealing their identity (Goffman, 1963).

Horn (2012) in her review of literature surrounding attitudes toward sexual minorities found evidence of considerable complexity. It was found that attitudes have changed in some important ways yet prejudice still exists. Modern prejudice is more covert and implicit and individuals can display both explicit positive attitudes and strong negative implicit biases towards sexual minorities at the same time (Steffens, 2005). For example although reactions may appear positive, social constraints may be imposed such as members of one's social network stating that discussions relating to sexual orientation and activity must be kept to a minimum. These constraints may represent an underlying negative reaction to one's sexual orientation and a desire for the individual to reject their sexual identity (Rosario & Schrimshaw, 2012).

Aspects of social context that have been found to correlate with higher levels of sexual prejudice include the degree of religiosity within a country, traditional attitudes towards gender roles and political ideologies (Horn, 2012). This is extremely interesting when considering Irish society as discussed in chapter one. Despite recent changes, ideologies of the Catholic Church are still prevalent in today's society (Ryan, 2003). This can be seen in the discourse that arose surrounding the referendum on same sex marriage with regards to the fear of the impact of gay or lesbian parents on children (Patterson, 2012). Reygan & Moane (2014) in their recent study of religious homophobia in Ireland found that although Irish society is increasingly pluralistic, religion still presents significant challenges to LGBT people, such as eliciting feelings of guilt and shame. Baiocco et al.,(2014) also found that perceived ideologies from a strong religious culture can cause not only negative attitudes towards personal identity but also suicidal ideation.

Today Ireland is increasingly multicultural and influenced by individualism and global ideologies. According to Savin-Williams and Cohen (2007) the start of the twenty-first century has also seen prolific increases in gay youth culture and exposure. The authors claim 'The media is increasingly celebrating their culture and characterising them as any youth (i.e., the girl/boy next door)' pp. 42. Lalor, DeRoiste & Devlin, (2007) also identified that there is growing acceptance of different sexualities within contemporary culture in Ireland. Yet, prejudice still exists and this is acutely illustrated in the fact that a recent Irish study found that LGBT youth consider this new societal acceptance of them as more of a tolerance than a celebration (Mayock, Bryan, Carr & Kitching, 2009).

Negative peer communication and instances of homophobia and harassment within educational settings have also been well documented within the international and Irish context (Bontempo & D'Augelli 2002; MacManus 2004; Schubotz & McNamee, 2009). Youth often refuse to disclose their sexual orientation whilst at school due to experiences/fears of bullying or being singled out (Schubotz & McNamee, 2009). Other studies found school truancy and early school leaving to be a direct result of issues pertaining to sexual orientation (MacManus, 2004). Negative peer communication often becomes internalized and may cause feelings of self-contempt

and self-criticism, leading to social and psychological alienation and even internalized homophobia (Weinberg, 1972). A lack of opportunity to discuss non-heterosexual issues has been argued to contribute to the widespread homophobia in many Irish educational settings (Lalor et al., 2007; Lynch & Lodge, 2002).

There are multiple ecological social systems in which young people explore their sexual orientation identity including family, school and peer networks (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Harper, Serrano, Bruce & Bauermeister, (2015) also put forward the idea of the internet as an avenue for sexual identity development. They found that today's youth use the internet for a range of functions relating to sexual identity development including increasing self-awareness of sexual identity and to gain support and affirmation of their sexual feelings (Harper et al., 2015). Hillier, Kudras and Horesley, (2001) highlighted the importance of the internet in reducing isolation and connecting sexual minority youth with others of the same orientation. This is an area that is gaining attention within research and will be particularly relevant to the current birth cohort of sexual minorities (Parsons & Grov, 2009, Silenzio et al 2009).

2.4 The experience of non-heterosexual sexuality transitions within a family context

One issue that appears to be significant regardless of birth cohort is that of disclosing sexual orientation to one's family. Many studies highlight the fact that disclosing sexual orientation to family members is one of the most significant issues that sexual minorities face (Thompson & Johnson 2003, D'Augelli, Hershberger, & Pilkington 1998, Goldfried & Goldfried 2001). Patterns of disclosure have shown that parents are rarely the first person to whom sexual minorities disclose and mothers are often disclosed to before fathers. Mothers are also a more common recipient of a disclosure than a father (Beals & Peplau, 2006; Savin-Williams & Ream, 2003).

Alongside responses such as acceptance, there may be verbal or physical abuse, disownment, feelings of shame and denial (Lourdes 2003, GLEN/Nexus 1995). In

some cases where adolescents receive negative reactions they may respond by running away, isolating themselves from others or becoming depressed or suicidal (Thompson & Johnson 2003). By contrast, when parents are accepting and supportive these youth are much less likely to exhibit many of the problems listed above and tend to have higher levels of self-esteem (Ryan et al, 2010).

Savin-Williams (2001) highlights the fact that the spectrum of parental responses to disclosures has been categorized by some as being similar to individuals undergoing grief and mourning for the loss of an identity that the parent had assumed for the child. Factors that have been found to influence parental response to disclosure include religiosity, political orientation, traditional attitudes towards gender roles and socio-economic status (Baiocco et al., 2014). Ryan et al., (2010) in their research on family acceptance and LGBT youth concluded that Latino, religious and low-socio-economic status families were found to be less accepting of LGBT family members.

Concealment of sexual orientation is an option that may be chosen by some individuals in place of disclosure. Savin-Williams & Diamond, (2000) found that many sexual minority youth spend large portions of their adolescent years hiding their sexuality from their parents. Reasons for this include fear, expectations of rejection, discrimination, victimisation and harassment (Thompson & Jonson, 2003). Yet, at the same time it was found that hiding or 'passing' is stressful and requires constant vigilance not to be found out (Eliason & Schope, 2007). Self-concealment is positively associated with psychological distress, suicidal ideation, depression and anxiety (Leleux-Labarge et al., 2015). It can lead to individuals leading a self-protective double life, one known to their families and friends and one unknown (Rotheram-Borus & Langabeer, 2001). Avoidance can also lead young people to become engaged in relationships with members of the opposite sex (Lalor, et al., 2007). This can in turn lead to challenges in keeping their two lives separate, such as emotional conflict brought on by self-doubt, self-monitoring and self-denial (Rotheram-Borus & Langabeer, 2001). Concealing sexual orientation can also deprive young people of valuable support networks (Schubotz & McNamee, 2009)

Disclosure conversely can have both immediate and long-term implications for individuals (Beals & Peplau, 2006). Along with negative responses disclosure can also lead to social support, self-acceptance and improved self-esteem (Savin-Williams & Cohen, 2007). D'Augelli, Hershberger and Pilkington (1998) found that unlike many parents sibling reactions are generally accepting. It is important to note that initial responses to disclosures can change and families often gradually adapt and resume supportive relationships over time (Savin-Williams & Reem, 2003). Recent research has found that disclosure can in fact strengthen relationships between individuals and their social networks (Beals & Peplau, 2006)

2.5 The experience of non-heterosexual sexuality transitions within a friendship context

Friends and peer networks are another critical aspect of the interpersonal lives of sexual minorities (Rosario & Schrimshaw, 2012). Research has identified that peer reactions are perceived as being more accepting than parents and that the quality of relationships between peers and sexual minorities remains unchanged after disclosure (Beals & Paplau, 2006). Friends were also cited as the recipient of the majority of individual first disclosures (Beals & Paplau, 2006). Numerous studies have found that individuals receive more support from friend networks than family (Szymanski, 2009; Mayock et al, 2009).

In Mayock et al's (2009) Irish study, friends emerged as the most commonly cited source of support and trusted friends were particularly important during the coming out process. Coleman (1982) states that acceptance from heterosexual friends may be more valuable in the struggle to reverse negative self-images than acceptance from sexual minorities. Yet, Rosario & Schrimshaw, (2012) found that sexual minority youth may benefit more from having sexual minority friends than heterosexual friends. Literature in the area of sexual minority friends has only recently begun to emerge and requires further attention. The supportive role of friends as a protective factor in this transition will be discussed further in the following section.

2.6 The Risk and Protective factors associated with this transition

With regards to mental health and sexuality transitions international research has found higher rates of psychological distress and suicidality in sexual minorities due to victimisation, verbal and physical abuse and lack of social support (Adams, Dickinson & Asiasiga, 2013). Meyer, (2003) found that non-heterosexuals were twice as likely to have a mental health disparity than their heterosexual counterparts. According to Herek (2004) sexual minorities can experience psychological difficulties as a consequence of accepting society's negative evaluation of them. A number of studies have shown that sexual minority youth may be at greater risk for poorer school outcomes, multiple suicide attempts, emotional distress, risky sexual behaviour, delinquency and substance use (Elze, 2005).

Meyer's (2003) minority stress theory proposes that the stigma, prejudice and discrimination experienced as a result of sexual minority status in turn leads to stress which causes health disparities for this particular group. Hatzenbuehler (2009) in his integrative psychological mediation framework adds to the minority stress theory by incorporating the mediating factors of general adolescent vulnerabilities such as maladaptive coping and cognitive processes. This innovative work highlights the importance of incorporating knowledge already available in the area of adolescent development to the study of sexual minorities.

Elze, (2005) and Mayock et al., (2009) found that many individuals display resilience in the face of stigmatization. In fact, many authors discuss the need to identify protective factors rather than focusing solely on risk factors, as this can lead to a misrepresentation of the lives of sexual minorities (Savin-Williams, 2001; Mayock et al., 2009). Acknowledging sexual minority youths' capacity to successfully negotiate this transition and their life circumstances has been recognised as a gap in both international and Irish literature (Mayock et al 2009).

One protective factor that has been the topic of much research is that on the role of supportive relationships (Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002). However findings on the effectiveness of support have been inconsistent. Bontempo and D'Augelli (2002) found that family support may protect the youth's mental health from the effects of victimisation. However Szymanski (2009) found that the availability of support did

not moderate the levels of sexuality stress and psychological distress. Mustanski, Newcomb and Garofalo (2011) also found that social support did not alleviate the negative effects of victimisation.

Recent research by Doty, Willoughby, Lindahl and Malik, (2010) identified the conflicting findings relating to the impact of social support on sexual minorities and decided to look specifically at sexuality related social support. They found that support for stress relating to their sexuality was less available than support relating to other stressors and that sexual minority friends in particular provided the highest levels of support relating to sexuality stressors. A limitation of many earlier studies is that they fail to differentiate between friend categories when looking at this issue.

Literature has identified that alongside support other protective factors include personality, social competence and social context (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000). Although sexual minorities face stigmatization from families, peers and communities most successfully navigate this transition and attain similar levels of health and wellbeing than their heterosexual peers (Saewyc, 2011).

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has examined literature in the area of non-heterosexual sexuality transitions and the influences on this transition. Research has highlighted the variability in developmental pathways and individual nature and in which this transition is negotiated. Individual, socio-cultural and historical factors all need to be considered when exploring this transition due to their multiple levels of influence. Family and peer contexts were found to be critical contexts for identity development to take place. The increased risk for mental health disparities and associated problem behaviours in sexual minority youth has been well documented but the need to explore protective factors and resilience is a clear gap in existing literature.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is concerned with the methodological approach of the study. The approach chosen will be discussed in detail alongside the rationale, and strengths and limitations of the approach. It is of paramount importance to align the methodological approach with the aims and objects of the research (Silverman, 2010). The aim of this study is to gain insight into the retrospective views of non-heterosexual males aged between twenty-five and thirty-two who are identifying as gay and who have gone through the majority of the elements associated with a non-heterosexual sexuality transition, such as self-identification and disclosure to others. The objective is to gain a deep understanding of the perceptions, experiences and interactions of this group in order to identify and explore influences on this transition and how the transition is negotiated.

There was careful consideration of a number of methodological approaches before deciding on an approach influenced by interpretive phenomenology. There were various reasons for this choice such as it being advocated as an approach suited to the study of sexuality by many researchers in the area (Smith, Flowers & Larrkin, 2009; Frost, McClelland, Clark & Boylan, 2014). The fact that this approach is concerned with the details of participants' lived experiences as well as how they interpret that experience (Frost et al. 2014) clearly aligned it to the aims and objectives of this study.

3.2 Research Design

The study adopted a cross-sectional design. A qualitative phenomenological approach was chosen as it was felt that this method was most appropriate in terms of the research problem being investigated. The rationale for choosing a qualitative approach was that it would allow for the attainment of detailed data and the examination of complex interrelationships, which opting for depth of coverage is more suited to (Denscombe, 2014). Qualitative research allows for a degree of flexibility and potential for development and these are important elements of this research design, as research participants may identify emerging issues that are

important to them and these issues or themes can then be explored in more detail. This participant focused approach is the reason why semi-structured interviews were chosen. Interviews are also considered one of the best ways of gathering in-depth data especially if the research aim concerns gaining insights into feelings, perceptions and experiences (Denscombe, 2010).

According to Frost et al., (2014), phenomenological methods are essential in the study of sexuality as they allow the researcher insight into how the phenomenon of sexuality is experienced in everyday life and, moreover, they allow for the diversity of individuals' experiences to be captured. Interpretivism is an epistemological position that is concerned with grasping subjective meaning (Bryman, 2012). This approach is in direct contrast to positivism, which applies a scientific model to the study of the social world (Bryman, 2012). Positivism assumes that reality is objective and can be separated from the observer and can, in turn, be measured and predicted (Biggam, 2009). Interpretivism, however, emphasises understanding human behaviour and argues that people and their institutions are fundamentally different to the subject matter of the natural sciences and therefore require a different logic of research procedure (Bryman, 2012). Interpretivism acknowledges that there are many, equally valid, interpretations of reality (Biggam, 2009).

An Interpretive Phenomenological Approach (IPA) was also chosen as it prioritizes the viewpoint of the participant along with utilizing analytical strategies in order to examine the social, cultural and political climate in which the data emerged (Frost et al., 2014). This combination of analytical and descriptive components allows for experiences to be compared across individuals and across periods of time. As this is a retrospective study, looking back at the how individuals experienced different elements of the transition, this element is of particular significance.

3.3 Strengths and Limitations of Methodological Approach

Although opting for a qualitative phenomenological approach allows for the details and richness of peoples lived experience to be captured, due to the small sample size findings are not generalizable. This is a considerable limitation and it is acknowledged that quantitative research has an advantage in that it can often be more

representative and generalizable (Bryman, 2012). A further limitation of qualitative research is that it can be quite difficult to replicate (Sarantakos, 2013)

Positivism and interpretivism both have strengths and limitations. The aim of a positivist approach is to generate findings that are valid and reliable (Silverman, 2010). Although this is important, it has been argued that due to the fact that human subjects are so closely interconnected with their social context and setting, it is impossible to present social facts as independent from these (Husserl & Heidegger as cited in Breakwell, Smith and Wright, 2012). A strength of the IPA approach is that it recognises that research is a dynamic process in which the researcher and participant play an active role (Breakwell et al., 2012).

3.4 Sample

Males alone were purposefully chosen for this study as it was felt that it would not be possible to compare both male and female experiences within the time limits of this research and literature has already identified many differences in experiences of both male and female groups (Diamond, 2008; Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2014). The age group of 25-32 years was chosen so as to target males identifying as gay that have gone through many of the milestones associated with this transition so that they can reflect on past experiences. Due to ethical considerations it was also felt that a younger age group may be more sensitive to the issues being discussed as they might still be very much in the midst of the transition. A recent study in Ireland found that the average age at which one disclosed their sexual orientation to others was twenty-one (Mayock, et. al., 2009) and this fact helped justify the decision for the chosen age group. Purposive sampling identified seven participants and even though numerous potential gatekeepers were contacted such as Belongto, Gay and Lesbian Equality Network, (GLEN), and various other LGBT societies none of these avenues proved fruitful. This fact highlights the hard to reach nature of this particular group. A combination of purposive and snowball sampling, a technique often considered when exploring sensitive issues (Mayock et al, 2009) was utilised. Using snowball sampling alone may have led to initial contacts shaping the entire sample (Burnett 2009) but the researcher strove to ensure diversity within the sample.

3.5 Research Instrument

According to Mayock (2009), qualitative interviews are an ideal instrument for investigating the contexts which influence the lives of sexual minorities. According to Smith (2007) semi-structured interviews allow for initial interest areas to be expanded upon or moved away from in light of the participant's responses. Structured interviews on the other hand are more restricted and categories are predetermined in advance in order to elicit what constitutes as the required data to be obtained (Smith, 2007). Other qualitative methods of data collection were considered such as focus groups, however due to the sensitive nature this research it was felt that this would be inappropriate as it could possibly cause discomfort to some participants.

Having decided on semi-structured interviews an interview schedule was developed (see Appendix A). Extensive literature in the area was explored in advance of compiling the interview schedule in order for initial categories of interest to be identified. This was invaluable as it allowed for previously identified influences on this transition to be included. It also allowed for limitations in previous research to be identified so as that these could be avoided as far as was possible in this research. Due to the exploratory nature of this research the interview topics were open and gave considerable scope for participants to elaborate on influencing factors.

The topics were then ordered in sequence taking into account which topics may be interlinked and which may naturally be discussed together. A strategy that was employed was to encourage the participant to speak with as little prompting as possible. Using this technique avoided situations in which participants were led by questions (Smith, 2007). In order to test the research instrument a pilot study was carried out.

3.6 Pilot Study

The pilot study firstly involved seeking information as to whether the letter of explanation was understood. This is of fundamental importance as it impacts on the willingness of people to participate in the research and the data that will be collected (Breakwell et al., 2012). The pilot interview allowed for comprehension of questions to be tested as well as introduction, sequence and level of comfort with questions to

be examined. It also tested the appropriateness of the tool in relation to including questions surrounding previously identified influences and the information obtained from the questions with regards to their relevance. Feedback on these issues was then taken into consideration and the necessary amendments were made.

3.7 Ethical Issues

Ethical considerations were given significant attention. Prior to carrying out any research in the field ethical approval was sought and granted from Dr. Kevin Lalor, Head of School of Languages, Law and Social Sciences. While the study set out to explore transitions in a sensitive and non-intrusive manner, the potential for possible discomfort in terms of the sensitive nature of the material that was being discussed was acknowledged. Silverman (2010) identified three ethical issues that need to be considered when conducting social research. These are informed consent, sensitivity towards research participants and anonymity and confidentiality. In order to address these issues and any potential risks the following procedures were followed.

Firstly, a qualitative research method of one to one interviews was chosen as this allowed for privacy and sensitivity (Mason, 2001). The interview schedule was general in nature and participants were invited to talk about their experiences in a setting of their choosing that was comfortable for them. The interview schedule avoided any material which might have been intrusive or personally distressing to participants as far as was possible. A third procedure was that participants were fully informed about the purpose and aims and objectives of the research. Participation was entirely voluntary and participants had the right to withdraw from the research process at any time, without giving a reason, and this was explained in the letter to participants (See appendix B) and informed consent form (See appendix C). A letter explained the purpose of the research was also sent to potential gatekeepers (See appendix D). An interview schedule was given to participants in advance of the interview so that they were aware of the topics and to inform them that they had the right to refuse to answer any particular question/questions.

Participants were made aware of the steps put in place to ensure their confidentiality, such as contributions remaining anonymous and pseudonyms being used where identifying information was provided. The researcher recorded interviews on a

Dictaphone and transcribed them at a later stage. Once transcribed contributions were stored on a password protected computer and only the researcher had access to the information gathered.

Ethical issues identified with regards to clinicians working with sexual minorities were also transferred when looking at the role of the researcher. Wirth (1978 as cited in Thompson & Johnston 2003) stated that evaluation of one's value system is required in order to ensure sensitivity to the situations sexual minorities face in society. The researcher acknowledged that issues such as subjectivity and reflexivity needed considerable attention throughout the research process. This allowed the researcher to reflect on her role, position and biases and how these may impact on the quality of data collected and the way in which it was interpreted (Robert-Holmes 2014). For further ethical considerations see ethical application form (Appendix E)

3.8 Data Analysis

All recorded interviews were transcribed as close to the interview date as possible, with notes on tone and non-verbal reactions also recorded (See Appendix F for sample interview). Transcripts of the interviews were then analysed case by case through a systemic qualitative analysis. Data was catalogued and indexed, which allowed for recurring issues or themes to be identified and coded (See Appendix G for sample coding). A combination of describing emerging themes and interpretative analysis of those themes took place in order to present an understanding of what elements of the experience mattered to participants and also how it mattered. These identified themes and patterns were then used to guide the presentation of findings.

Chapter Four: Findings

4.1 Introduction

The chapter presents the findings of the study under the themes and subthemes which emerged as part of the data analysis and coding process. The themes identified included the experience of non-heterosexual sexuality transitions within a family context, the experience of non-heterosexual sexuality transitions within a friendship context, the impact of personality and personal traits on young people's sexual transitions, the influence of social context on young people's sexual transitions and self-identified risk and protective factors in relation to sexual transitions.

4.2 The experience of non-heterosexual sexuality transitions within a family context

The study found that families impacted the transition in both positive and negative ways. Due to the varying reactions and impact of different family members, findings are broken into the influence of mothers, the influence of fathers, the influence of both heterosexual and non-heterosexual siblings and the impact the transition had on relationships with family members.

4.2.1 The experience of disclosing to mothers

The study found that mothers had both positive and negative reactions to their son's disclosures but it is important to note that negative reactions came in different forms and there were a number of perceived reasons behind these reactions. Influencing factors included mothers fearing for the lives their sons had ahead of them due to society's views on non-heterosexual people. The negative reaction was not always towards the person but towards society.

"She cried, but she more cried about not the fact that I was gay, it was more about the fact of how society I suppose back then ...would have treated individuals like me and like people heckling me down the street and I suppose people's views and that in general"

(Interviewee 3)

One internal factor that influenced a negative reaction was due to a misunderstanding around sexual orientation and thinking that this decision was chosen. This in turn put a strain on the mother son relationship and the atmosphere in this house.

"Mam was shocked, ... I don't think she understood it properly initially, it was a bit tough for a while, ... I remember Mam saying to me one night, 'when did you decide this', and I was trying to explain that I didn't, I didn't decide this"

(Interviewee 5)

Mothers in particular were perceived to be upset by the shock and the fact that they had not known or had not anticipated that their sons might be gay due to their sons being in heterosexual relationships,

“so like my Mam was obviously like the one that had the worst reaction, it was kind of because I was seeing a girl and then not seeing a girl, I mean so she didn't know what was going on”.

(Interviewee 3)

4.2.2 The impact fathers on non-heterosexual sexuality transitions

The study found that although fathers had an unwillingness to talk about issues relating to sexual orientation, this silence on the issue was perceived in a positive way. No participants appeared to be hurt or put out in anyway about the fact that they don't discuss these issues with their fathers. The one or two occasions where the issue was brought up in a light-hearted fashion made participants aware that it was known and acknowledged at least and that appeared to be enough.

“he used to use these little expressions like are you going a bit funny or (laughs) he'd say to me like these little phrases that he knew I'd react to but I knew that he was comfortable with it but it was just something that he didn't really want to speak about”

(Interviewee 7)

Only two participants told their fathers of their sexual orientation directly, others were told by other family members or left to figure it out for themselves. One of the participants who did tell his father directly acknowledged that fact that it was harder to tell his father than his mother and tried hard to understand and make sense of his father's thought process on the matter which illustrates the complexity of father -son relationships.

“I'm not really sure why it was but my Dad was way harder, it actually took three attempts... he took it well but not great ... I think there might have been a bit of misunderstanding as to his role in it, was it his fault ya know cause he wasn't really there, I don't know if they are the reasons but he was very reflective ... it took him ages to say words out loud about it”

(Interviewee1)

4.2.3 The influence of heterosexual and non-heterosexual siblings

The study found that disclosure to siblings can be as big a concern as disclosure to parents, and over half of participants told siblings before parents. Disclosure to siblings can be an issue regardless of whether there is an assumption that they will be undoubtedly supportive.

“yeah I always knew that she would be supportive completely, it was never a question of it being any kind of an issue, still a big deal at the time for me to say, like the words out loud to somebody else but like I always knew it would be totally totally fine”

(Interviewee 6)

The study found that sibling reactions in general tended to be accepting and that the influence of non-heterosexual siblings was more significant than that of heterosexual siblings and therefore the following section will focus on this.

Participants having non-heterosexual siblings affected the transition in various different ways. In a positive way in that having older siblings can ease the coming out process to the point where it was felt that disclosures were unnecessary and this occurred regardless of the fact that older siblings' transitions had been difficult.

“I just never felt the need or pressure of coming out, I don't know if that was eased by the fact that my brother and sister who are both gay, had a little bit more of a rougher transition than me but yeah I just never felt the need to come out.... I never told anyone and then I just brought my boyfriend home”

(Interviewee 7)

The study also found that having other non-heterosexual people in your life can help discredit and breakdown stereotypes,

“I just found it really influential that like there's no, it was like the stereotype wasn't there, the stereotype I had in my head wasn't necessarily true”

(Interviewee 7)

But finding out later on in life that younger siblings were gay and not having realised this while disclosing to them can have a negative impact later on.

“for a sixteen year old there was no negative reaction, ... but in retrospect he probably would have been gay at the time as well so that's a bit of a sad issue for me to deal with cause he obviously has his own coming out story but when I look back at his struggle I was blinded because I was so involved with myself I didn't realise it”

(Interviewee 1)

4.2.4 The impact on relationships with family members

Most family relationships were influenced in a positive way by the transition, if not immediately then over time,

“your relationship just feels stronger cause they’re accepting you for who you are...it changed cause it was like I could be more myself around them”.

(Interviewee 7)

For some the initial period after disclosure was difficult but the supportive relationships eventually resumed. The study found that the transition’s impact on relationships can be mediated by coinciding changes in behaviour, outlook and the life style of the individual at the time. When speaking of the impact on the relationship with his sister one participant stated,

“well I imagine who I was wasn’t a very nice person at the time, I would have gone from a person that was family orientated to someone who was the complete opposite ... I was just on mad ones all the time which isn’t ideal for anyone from a family point of view but I just wouldn’t have seen outside that bubble at the time”

(Interviewee 1)

One participant’s experience with his father was quite difficult and disclosure led to a physical altercation.

“My Dad took it really bad, I had a fist fight with him, he caused murder in the house and was telling me to get out of the house”

(Interviewee 2)

Yet, it is important to note that the relationship was strained before disclosure also and that even after a period of not speaking for three years the relationship is better now than it ever was. When asked about whether disclosure changed his relationship with his father he stated,

“completely, (then changed his mind), no I wouldn’t say it did, if anything...when I think back its made it a lot better because the person (paused), I never really got on with my Dad, we didn’t speak, I lived with him for three years after that and we didn’t speak at all and before I didn’t have a great relationship with him cause all me anger would come out in the house.... Now I’ve a better relationship with me da than I’ve ever had in me whole entire life”

(Interviewee 2)

4.3 The experience of non-heterosexual sexuality transitions within a friendship context

Friends in general were found to be accepting and supportive and in the following section non-heterosexual friends in particular will be looked at in more detail due to the significant findings in terms of their impact. The fact that many individuals switched friendship groups as part of this transition will also be explored.

4.3.1 The impact of having non-heterosexual friends

Participants with other non-heterosexual friends in general cited this as a great support as they felt that the journey and experiences could be shared amongst people that knew what you were going through. Also having new experiences for the first time was easier when they were firsts for those with whom you were experiencing them.

“it was eased by the fact that there was a few of us going through the same thing and going on a bit of a journey together so like the first time we ever went to a gay bar was together, the first time we all went on a gay weekend we were all together so those kind of things made it much easier”

(Interviewee 7)

The study also found that having non-heterosexual friends can have a negative impact in that they can put unnecessary pressure on individuals to come out to others before they're ready.

“I think I said to him that I might be or something like that, he was gobsmacked and was straight away, ‘awh you are if you think like that’, I wouldn't say he was supportive, it was more of an excitement for him ... I felt that he was more pushing me out”

(Interviewee 2)

4.3.2 Switching friendship groups and its impact

A number of participants discussed switching friendship groups as part of this transition and cited many reasons for this. Switching friendship groups had positive outcomes for many as they realised that who they had perceived as friends might not have been actual friends at all. Moreover, the reason they had persisted in staying with this group could have been through fear of being seen as different or to mask their sexual orientation.

“All my friends were the friends that would slag everyone, they'd be like they're fagots and this and that..., they were proper macho scumbags and like there was times when I didn't even want to be with them and I used to prove

myself to them, just so people would think that I was more macho than I actually was ”

(Interviewee 2)

Others in hindsight noted that they could have done more to maintain relationships with heterosexual friends who they did not incorporate into their new lifestyle.

“I am a bit disappointed that I didn’t make the effort to ya know stay friends with the people that were my rock when I was younger but some of them did come out with me to gay bars and stuff but I just never went to straight bars then, ever!... it wouldn’t even enter my head to accommodate straight friends anymore”

(Interviewee 1)

Switching friendship groups as part of this transition also had a negative influence on some as they were introduced to a different lifestyle, one associated with the gay scene.

“I had actually shifted from one group of friends, all my school friends to another group, I started going out with gay friends, not people that I knew that well and with these people, I started taking drugs... I remember disappearing and coming back in bits”

(Interviewee 1)

Being introduced to other non-heterosexual people and the gay scene also had positive effects for some in that it helped broaden perspectives on what being gay might be like and diffuse negative associations.

“cause you grew up thinking gays were disgusting, men and women marry, you grew up and had kids and then when I started going out with (gay friend) and his friends I started to think this is actually not as bad, seeing how happy everyone was and all”

(Interviewee 2)

4.4 The impact of personality and personal traits on young people’s sexual transitions

The study found that individuals had very different approaches to coming to terms with their sexuality and feelings of difference. Some utilized personal coping mechanisms such as telling themselves it will be ok or allocating time to think about the issue whereas others felt the need to focus more on concealment and doing everything in their power not to be found out.

4.4.1 The impact of personal coping mechanisms and personality traits

During the period of uncertainty around their sexual orientation some participants had the ability to push feelings of difference and the idea that they might be gay aside and not let it consume them.

“it was something that might have popped into my head the odd time and it was something that you could kind of push to the back of your mind, it was never something that took over my head ”

(Interviewee 6)

Whereas others could not do this and thought about it every day and constantly worried about it due to an overwhelming sense that it was wrong.

“I used to think as a child that, you’ll grow yourself out of it ... but it never went away, it just got worse and worse and I thought about it more and more every single day. I thought at the back of my mind that this was wrong so I kept telling myself that you’re not that forget about it”

(Interviewee 2)

One used a coping mechanism of allocating time to thinking about the issue of sexual orientation rather than it being constantly present in his mind

“I used to think about it often when I ran ... whenever I’d go running it was kind of like my head space, that was the time I kind of allocated myself to think about it (being gay)”

(Interviewee 7)

Some participants had confidence in themselves and believed that things would work themselves out. This confidence not only came from the individual having a supportive social network but also having a sense of inner confidence,

“I always knew that if it ever was an issue with anyone that I would have people to stand up for me and for myself as well I never felt weakness or that ...I had my own kind of self-assurance and self-confidence that even if it was something that was reacted negatively too it was something that I could totally handle’

(Interviewee 6)

4.4.2 The impact of concealing sexual identity

Concealing sexual orientation appeared to have a major impact on some people’s lives but not on others. It affected people whether they had the ability to conceal or not. Some were able to conceal to the point where disclosure was a huge shock to both family and friends, yet the effort involved was a lot to bear.

“My whole entire life I felt the need to lie to people, sure I was with girls my entire life (up until coming out) ... I convinced myself that that was the norm where deep down I hated it, during my relationships with girls that’s what I thought of every single night (being gay)”

(Interview 2)

Concealment involved taking on different personas and was closely linked to fears of how others would react. It involved doing things that one may not have done otherwise in order to fit in and not be found out. Taking on different personas was perceived as being a coping mechanism.

“I used to prove myself to them, just so people would think I was more macho than I actually was...to be more a boy, even down to the way I dressed ”

(Interviewee 2)

“I was with girls obviously growing up ... but the whole idea is that you just try and cover it up so you do everything possible so you’d hang around with the lads and do what the lads do”

(Interviewee 3)

This association with being and acting ‘macho’ in order to fit in and be seen as straight was a common thread alongside the notion of gay being associated with being ‘girly’. This highlights the impact of underlying stereotypes.

4.4.3 The importance of the reaction of others

How participants felt that others would react to the news of them being gay also linked with personality traits in a sense and how comfortable individuals were with themselves. For example, some people cared greatly about what others thought, whereas others were not concerned and felt that the experience was personal.

“it was about everyone but myself, I never thought about myself once, it was more about what everyone would think”

(Interviewee 2)

“their reaction and how they felt about it wasn’t something that was ever really a big concern for me, I really did think this is my thing, this is part of me and my life and ya know it (what other people thought) just wasn’t really something that crossed my mind’

(Interviewee 6)

4.5 The influence of social context on young people's sexual transitions

School was found to be a major obstacle in the coming out process. Media coverage at the time and the influence of the Catholic Church both contributed to a lack of exposure or discussion around sexual orientation which, in turn, reinforced heteronormative ideologies.

4.5.1 The school environment's influence on the transition

Whether or not individuals 'came-out' at school this study found that its influence on the transition was monumental. Those who could chose not to come out at school, and in fact no individual willingly came out in school. One individual knew that it would be instantly easier once he got passed his school years.

"I remember thinking ya kind of just need to get passed the, like, leaving school time and it will be so much easier cause at the time for a student to come into my school and say they were gay would have been soooooo controversial and would be such a big deal so that wasn't something that I had any intentions of doing whatsoever"

(Interviewee 6)

The study found that being victimised in school lead to school truancy and mental health issues.

"now I did get a hard time in school, it wasn't easy at all so I'm actually quite proud that I did finished school considering the level of bullying and harassment that I did get"

(Interviewee 4)

One participant noted the lack of skills and training that teachers had in the area of homophobic bullying and its impact on mental health and the negative impact that this had on him. He also noted the unwillingness of teachers to address the situation. He put these factors down to a number of things such as the lack of knowledge and training on behalf of the teachers and also the school having a catholic ethos.

"Yeah they would pull people up over bullying me but no one ever got suspended, it was just a quick chat and that was it. Again I think they were afraid to deal with it ...I don't think it was their fault, it was the education system at the time, ya know there was no training, obviously I was in a catholic school"

(Interviewee 4)

4.5.2 The influence of the media and the internet

It is important to note that at the time of this transition for participants the media coverage and content was quite different from today. All participants cited few or no shows containing gay storylines, issues or characters.

“there was no sitting down at the telly and watching any gay characters cause there was none”.

(Interviewee 4)

This impacted the transition in many ways such as reinforcing heteronormity and reinforcing stigma and isolation.

“it made you think that you grow up, you marry a woman and you have kids so that was drilled in your head, if you thought anything opposite to that you weren't right, you were sick”

(Interviewee 2)

The internet was used by some for various reasons. Despite differences in the availability and complexity of technology, the study found that a key area in which the internet aided the transition was through exposure. Allowing people to be aware of, and get in touch with, other non-heterosexual people. It helped break down barriers, build relationships and support networks and dismantle feelings of isolation.

“I remember going online to chat rooms and stuff like that and finding out where there other people like myself out there cause this was all new to me”

(Interviewee 4)

“I do think social media helped people to come out, I think it was easier for people to come to terms with the fact that they were gay cause all of a sudden there were so many more gay people out there, it made people's perceptions of it so much more acceptable”

(Interviewee 7)

4.5.3 The influence of the Catholic Church

The Catholic Church not only acted as a powerful tool and influencing factor in instilling the ideology that homosexuality was wrong it also played a major role in reinforcing heteronormative values and beliefs.

“people obviously wanted to live up to their faith so if the Catholic Church denounces homosexuality ya know that kind of is putting people in an awkward position”

(Interviewee 4)

“the church was teaching, you grow up, you marry a wife and you have kids so automatically you’re thinking, I’m gay, I shouldn’t be here and then it’s just drilled into your head especially with the Catholic Church”

(Interviewee 2)

4.5.4 The influence of specific communities

The fact that issues of sexual orientation were not spoken about in communities added to the isolation and stigmatisation. The underexposure of gay people in communities led to individuals who were gay or perceived to be gay being targets due to their minority status and people having a fear of the unknown or the different. Using the word ‘Gay’ in a derogatory fashion and other associated terms appeared to be the norm and extremely common in certain communities.

“I think a lot of it had to do with how underexposed it was at the time and how it wasn’t spoken about in schools and all that kind of stuff whereas now I think it makes it easier for young people to come out”

(Interviewee 7)

“when I was younger there was no positives to it, it was all negatives. It would only ever be used as a slapping that someone was gay ..it was the worst thing that you could be”

(Interviewee 1)

A number of participants commented on the class status of their areas and how being from a working class area had a negative impact on the transition. Participants stated that this was due to people in their areas being undereducated in the area of sexual orientation.

“with being from an area that would have been considered a little bit more working class and like people I suppose in a way in certain areas they were undereducated when it comes to the whole gay thing ...so when you saw somebody that was a little bit different walking towards you down the street, yeah we were jeered and taunted”

(Interviewee 7)

4.6 Self-identified risk and protective factors in relation to sexuality transitions

Both risk and protective factors were found to be individual in nature and significant challenges in relation to this transition spanned a wide range of experiences. Support also came in various forms, with friends being the most widely cited source of support.

4.6.1 Challenges in relation to mental health

The significant impact on young people's mental health was emphasised by participants in a number of different ways causing anxiety, stress, depression, poor self-esteem, distraction and suicidal thoughts.

"I grew up a very unhappy person ... I didn't want to live and I didn't like myself and it got to the point where I thought you either kill yourself and die or deal with the situation"

(Interviewee 2)

These issues had far reaching effects including causing individuals to drop out of college, school truancy, drug taking and absenteeism from the workplace.

"I told all of them in college and I left. I was kind of finding myself and I was too distracted that's why I left college, my mind-set wasn't there"

(Interviewee 1)

This double stigma at the time of having mental health issues and being a sexual minority was also highlighted. This subsequently led to feeling further isolated and hiding these issues from friends and, in turn, preventing another possible source of support.

"There were days were I used to lie in bed and cry myself to sleep but people didn't know that because I didn't show it it I remember going down to the doctor and I was on anti-depressants for about for years but nobody knew because I was ashamed of it"

(Interviewee 4)

4.6.2 Further associated challenges and risk factors

When asked about the biggest challenge of the transition or the most difficult period, different aspects were significant to each individual. One participant found that at one stage he felt as though he was living a double life and found this aspect the most difficult to deal with.

"... at that point nobody knew I was gay , it was kind of like ... you're living a double life then I started seeing someone more regularly and I suppose that was probably the most difficult part because you're not experiencing it to the full extent of what it could be until you've incorporated friends and family "

(Interviewee 6)

Another participant developed a fear of catching HIV which had derived from a previous partner disclosing that he had tested positive. This in turn led to panic attacks and this had a huge impact on his life. Having accepted societies negative evaluation

of non-heterosexual people one participant found admitting he was actually gay and trying to fit in with the gay lifestyle particularly difficult as he found that it wasn't what he had expected.

“Probably telling myself I actually was or being in a gay bar, probably going and actually being in a gay bar and thinking right this is what you're going to be and when I went to gay bars I wasn't into it and still don't really like it”

(Interviewee 2)

4.6.3 Further associated supports and benefits

Support came in different forms and was individual to each person's situation although most participants noted that the best support came from talking with friends and non-heterosexual friends in particular as also discussed previously.

“only a gay person would know what it's like to come out and most people have very different experiences of it but for us we were all going through it at exactly the same time ..ya kind of go through the same conversations so it really feels shared amongst people that really understand what's going on”

(Interviewee 6)

Two participants cited their place of work as a particular support but for different reasons and to different extents. One due to the fact that it was an escape, where there were people that cared and took an interest in their well-being.

“I think if I didn't have that job I wouldn't be here today ... it was somewhere to go like, to get away from the shit I was dealing with in school ya know, I felt I could be myself, there was people there that I felt cared about me”

(Interviewee 4)

The other felt support due to the normalization and celebration of non-heterosexuality in the particular industry in which they worked.

“I think it's important for people to feel that they can be gay, it just so happens that I work in an area (fashion industry) that it's so openly acceptable, and this definitely helps”

(Interviewee 7)

A number of participants discussed the positive and reaffirming effects of the transition on one's mental health. They noted feelings of empowerment and self-actualization after worries and fears had gone away.

“once the big disclosures were out of the way ... ya can start to really be yourself and all of those confusing thoughts you had for years are totally gone, you feel great about it, you feel a real boost”

(Interviewee 6)

“I kind of think it made me a stronger person, I think it probably destroyed my confidence for a while, then I think it kind of built it up even higher than it would have been”

(Interviewee 3)

“I’ll say now it did in a positive way because I was really, really unhappy and there was times where I didn’t want to live ... Now I look at it in a more positive way and it’s made me the person I am today because there is nothing negative in my life at the moment and I’ll never go back to feeling like that again, out and proud!”

(Interviewee 2)

4.7 Conclusion

These findings highlight the individual nature in which young men experience sexuality transitions. Experiences of disclosure can have both positive and negative effects in relation to both family and friendship contexts, with non-heterosexual friends and siblings having a particularly significant influence on this transition. Personality and personal traits were found to have a considerable impact on how the transition was negotiated. Finally, the influence of the multiple levels of social context is also quite clear from these findings.

Chapter 5 Discussion of Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the main findings of the research. The findings will be compared to literature in the area and will also be related to the research aims. Findings from the present study will be discussed under five broad headings as follows: the experience of non-heterosexual sexuality transitions within family and friendship contexts, the impact of personality and personal characteristics on sexuality transitions, the influence of social context on sexuality transitions and the risk and protective factors associated with this transition.

5.2 The experience of non-heterosexual sexuality transitions within a family context

Disclosing sexual orientation to family members was a significant issue for many individuals in the present study, and this finding is consistent with a large body of research in the area (Thompson & Johnson, 2003; D'Augelli, Hershenberg & Pilkington 1998; Savin-Williams, 2005). However, it is worth noting differences in disclosure patterns identified in the present study. Specifically, only two participants disclosed their sexual orientation to their fathers directly, others allowed them be informed by various family members. Mothers were often disclosed to before fathers and mothers were a more common recipient of a disclosure than a father (Beals & Peplau, 2006). Belous et al. (2015) found that the greatest stress in relation to coming out was disclosure to fathers and in order to minimise this stress individuals relied on others to share the information rather than disclose directly.

In addition to the absence of disclosure to fathers, an important finding to emerge was also the lack of discussion between participants and their fathers around sexual orientation (Belous et al, 2015). Although this did not appear to be perceived negatively by participants in the present study, Horn (2012) found that, explicit positive attitudes may mask implicit biases such as constraints being put in place around discussion in relation to sexual orientation. Moreover, these constraints may in fact represent an underlying negative reaction (Rosario & Schrimshaw, 2012).

Mediating factors in relation to the non-necessity of disclosure to family members included having non-heterosexual siblings who had previously disclosed. Non-heterosexual siblings' impact on this transition is an area that has been neglected in current literature and, therefore, an area that warrants further research attention.

Both positive and negative reactions of mothers to their sons' disclosures were evident in the study findings. However, it is important to note that there was much variation in the nature of these negative reactions and in the rationales underlying such responses as perceived by the participants. Influencing factors in relation to key negative reactions, such as crying and sadness, tended to focus on how society treated non-heterosexual people and fears for the future of these young men, consistent with prior research (Belous, et al., 2006). Previous studies highlighting negative reactions have specified these reactions as being potential risk factors for problem behaviours (Patterson 2012; Savin-Williams 2001). However, this study highlights the importance of exploring the reason behind the negative reaction before making this assumption. The findings from this study suggest that where negative reactions are perceived to come from compassion rather than anger, this mediates whether or not the reaction can be considered a risk factor.

Other factors included shock due to non-heterosexual individuals having previously been in heterosexual relationships. In keeping with these findings, Savin-Williams & Diamond, (2000) found that many sexual minority youth spend large portions of their adolescent years hiding their sexuality from their parents. Previous studies have drawn attention to the fact that negative reactions from mothers can be due to the presumption of heterosexuality (Thompson & Johnston, 2003) and a sense of loss or grieving for the child they thought they knew or the future they had expected for that child (Patterson 1994; Savin-Williams 2001).

Significantly, the study findings highlight that in spite of some family members having negative reactions to initial disclosures, almost all family relationships were influenced in a positive way by the transition. In some cases, this was not an immediate change, but one that happened over time throughout the transition process. Previous researchers have also provided clear evidence for the return to supportive relationships over time (Savin-Williams & Reem, 2003).

5.3 The experience of non-heterosexual sexuality transitions within a friendship context

The importance of support from friends is a key finding to emerge throughout the narratives in the study. Coinciding with other research in the area (Herek & Garnets, 2007; Mayock et al. 2009), the overwhelming majority of sexuality related support came from friends, with non-heterosexual friends in particular offering support in terms of understanding, reassurance and making the transition seem less daunting (Doty et al., 2010). However a noteworthy finding in the present study was that having non-heterosexual friends can also have a negative impact in that non-heterosexual friends can put undue pressure on individuals to “come out” to others before they are ready to do so. This can cause internal conflict for the individual and put pressure on the friendship. Rosario & Schrimshaw, (2012) highlight the benefits of having non-heterosexual friends but a limitation of this and much of the available research in this area is that it fails to explore the possible negatives.

Another element of support in relation to non-heterosexual friends came in the form of introducing individuals to the gay scene and environments in which groups of sexual minorities can socialise. Reflecting previous research findings, involvement with sexual minority communities was found to help invalidate negative stereotypes and affirm positive evaluations of sexual minority groups (Herek & Garnets, 2007). However, in some cases, the introduction of individuals to the gay scene was found to have a negative impact and the risk of individuals being exposed to serious drug use was identified. Early research by Faltz (1992) found that sexual minority youth may use substances to feel part of the LGB subculture which often revolves around bars. The positives and negatives associated with the gay scene are areas that LGBT organisations and support networks need to be aware of.

5.4 The impact of personality and personal characteristics on sexuality transitions

A major finding of this research was that individuals had very different approaches to coming to terms with their sexuality. These varying approaches often stemmed from differences in personality and personal traits (Hatzenbuehler, 2009). Some people

were able to brush thoughts that they might be gay aside or were able to allocate time to think about the issue whereas others felt that they had to focus on concealment constantly due to internalized homophobia and fear of being found out. Baiocco et al., (2014) found that stigma-related stress can cause elevated levels of internal conflict and problems in relation to coping and emotional regulation. Cognitive processes have been previously identified as a possible mediator in the development of mental health disparities in sexual minorities (Hatzenbuehler, 2009). Fear of judgement, experiences of depression and suicidal thoughts tended to be associated with personal characteristics such as anxiety over what others would think about their sexual minority status. On the other hand, personality types tending to greater self-confidence and self-assurance felt that they could 'totally handle' any negative reactions that they were faced with and peoples judgements were 'never really a big concern'. Mustanski (2015) noted that although research has been carried out on the mediators of minority stress much less is known about the moderators.

Interestingly, these findings illustrate the fact that personality and personal traits can be seen as both a risk and a protective factor in this transition. Previous literature has highlighted the fact that personality, social competence and individual attributes can act as a protective factor in relation to adolescent well-being in general (Luthar & Cicchetti, 2000). However, research on their effects in relation to sexual minority youth are minimal and this area warrants much further research attention.

A key finding of this study was that concealing sexual identity had a major impact on some people's lives but not others. It affected some individuals greatly whether they had the ability to conceal or not (Eliason & Schope, 2007). Examples of concealment identified involved engaging in relationships with members of the opposite sex, and this has previously been associated with avoidance (Lalor, et al, 2007). Taking on different personas such as acting 'macho' in order to be seen as straight was another chosen mechanism (Belous et al., 2015). The association between being seen as 'girly' and being gay came up on a number of occasions, such as with regards to choice of clothes, hairstyle and certain behaviours. These facts highlight the impact of underlying stereotypes and gender associations. Savin-Williams (2005) found that the prevalence of stereotypes has decreased in recent years yet this contradicts the recent study findings. Belous et al. (2015) identified that the influence of stereotypes not

only prevailed in relation to sexual minorities but has also developed towards the gay community collectively.

Harassment and victimisation was frequently highlighted for those who did not or could not conceal (Lynch & Lodge, 2002). Yet, the negative consequences of concealment were also substantial for some and included experiences of isolation, depression, suicidal thoughts and feeling that there was no support, in keeping with prior research (Douglas, Warwick, Kemp and Whitty, 1997). Concealment has also been found to lead to challenges such as emotional conflict brought on by self-doubt, self-monitoring and self-denial (Rotheram-Borus & Langabeer, 2001).

5.5 The influence of social context on sexuality transitions

Consistent with a large body of both national and international research (Bontempo & D'Augelli 2002; Lynch & Lodge 2002; MacManus 2004; Thurlow 2001) school was found to have a monumental influence on the coming out process with no participant in the current study willingly coming out at school. The reasons for this included the extent of homophobic bullying that was apparent in schools, the lack of exposure or discussion around sexual orientation at school, the hetero-normative nature of the institute on all levels and the inability of teachers to address issues around homophobic bullying (Lynch & Lodge, 2002). In keeping with the present study, prior research has identified that the majority of individuals wait until after graduation to 'come out' due to fears of peer rejection and homophobic bullying (Schubotz & McNamee, 2009).

The Catholic Church's influence on value formation within society and politics in turn impacted on the transition in a number of different ways (Schubotz & McNamee, 2009). It was found that the Catholic Church not only acted as a powerful instrument in instilling the ideology that homosexuality was wrong, it also played a substantial role in reinforcing hetero-normative values and beliefs (Barron & Bradford, 2007). The majority of schools were of Catholic ethos and patronage which meant that the curriculum was conservative in nature and discussion of issues relating to same sex orientation were practically non-existent, a finding consistent with previous Irish research (Lynch & Lodge, 2002; Norman & Galvin, 2006). The Catholic ethos also

had a possible influence on teachers' reluctance to challenge homophobic bullying (Barron & Bradford, 2007). Consistent with the present study, prior research has identified that aspects of social context that correlate with higher levels of sexual prejudice include the degree of religiosity within a country, traditional attitudes towards gender roles and political ideologies (Horn, 2012; Ryan et al 2010).

The internet was found to play a pivotal role in the transition for some participants. It facilitated communication between sexual minorities, helped reduce isolation and supported positive sexual identity development (Hillier, Kudras & Horsely, 2001; Harper et al., 2015; Silenzio et al 2009). The full extent to which the internet and new technologies are being used as a tool for identity construction and exploration has not yet been extensively explored within literature (Mustanski, Newcomb & Garofalo, 2011).

An interesting finding to become apparent was the significant impact media content had on individuals, particularly at the time of questioning and self-identification. The lack of non-heterosexual content, issues or characters meant that a heteronormative ideology was reinforced and supported leading to feelings of isolation, stigmatization and confusion (Ward, Reed, Trinh & Foust, 2012). Hammock's (2005) framework on GLB identity development recognised that the media has the potential to influence important psychological domains such as individual's self-image and self-perception (Gomillion & Guiliano, 2011). Many studies highlight the fact that the influence of the transition occurring in a heterosexual society with heterosexual norms can lead to this group being invisible in society (Thompson & Johnson, 2003). A related finding was the significant influence that specific communities were perceived to have on the transition. This invisibility or under-exposure within communities led to individuals being targeted due to their minority status (Elze, 2005). It also led to harassment, discrimination and name calling being normalised consistent with prior research (Herek, 2004).

Recent have highlighted the positive impact of the inclusion of sexual minority characters and issues in the media (Elze, 2005; Lalor et al 2007; Norman & Galvin, 2006; Savin-Williams and Cohen 2007). Data gathered from the interviews also highlighted the reaffirming and positive influence of current media coverage on sexual minority's self-image and on societal perceptions of sexual minorities. Dunlap

(2014) also argues that the current birth cohort's exposure to positive non-heterosexual cultural images may lead them to having a different coming-out process to older cohorts.

5.6 Risk and protective factors associated with sexuality transition

The present research found that the transition impacted on young people's mental health in a number of different ways causing anxiety, stress, depression, poor self-esteem and suicidal thoughts. These findings are consistent with prior research in the area (Adams, Dickinson and Asiasiga, 2013; Elze, 2005; Maynock et al, 2009; Szymanski, 2009). In line with arguments put forward by Thompson and Johnston (2003), contributing factors to psychological difficulties included verbal abuse, lack of social support and victimisation. Individuals can also experience psychological difficulties due to accepting society's negative evaluation of them (Herek, 2004). Consequences of these issues include: dropping out of college, school truancy, illicit drug use and absenteeism from the workplace (Elze, 2005, Eliason & Scope, 2006).

Another very significant finding identified was the negative effects of having a double stigma - that of having a mental health issue and being a sexual minority. Accepting that one needed the help of counselling and/or medication to cope with this transition was difficult for individuals. Elze (2005) also noted that that fears of stigmatization, mistreatment and judgemental attitudes may deter sexual minority youth from seeking help for mental health problems, or prevent them from disclosing their sexual minority status to their providers. This is an important issue for clinicians and organisations to consider when working with sexual minorities.

Interestingly, the most challenging elements of the transition were found to vary greatly with different aspects considered significant to each individual. This finding challenges existing literature which has a tendency to focus on initial disclosures of sexual orientation (Ryan, Legate & Weinstein, 2015) or disclosure to family members as the most challenging element of this transition (D'Augelli, Hershberger, & Pilkington 1998, Goldfried & Goldfried 2001; Ryan et al, 2010). Although initial and family disclosures were found to be significant elements of the transition, no

participants in this research found them to be the most challenging element. This finding highlights the importance of exploring real life experiences and perceptions.

A substantial finding that is supported by recent research (Maynock et al 2009, Saewyc, 2011; Mustanski, 2015) is that that majority of participants successfully negotiated this transition in spite of difficult social climates and family responses. This also confirms the emergent trend in literature (Elze, 2005, Mustanski, 2015) to desist from identifying this group as an ‘at risk’ homogenous group. Additionally, the current study identified that the transition can have positive and reaffirming effects on mental health. It can lead to feelings of empowerment, self-actualization and pride in one’s resilience and ability to overcome adversity (Dunlap, 2014). Cohen and Savin-Williams (1996) also identified that the transition can enhance integrity, identity synthesis and psychological health.

To conclude it’s important to note that overall findings coincide with much of the theoretical research in the area which considers sexual identity formation a highly individual process (Eliason & Schope, 2007, Dunlap, 2014). The significant influence of social, historical and psychological contexts as illustrated throughout the research findings also justifies the shift from linear stage models (Cass, 1979 ; Troiden, 1989) in favour of theoretical frameworks that are inclusive of the influence of social and historical change over the life course (Cohler & Michaels 2012).

5.7 Reflection on the process of this study and conclusion

The retrospective nature of this study is a noted limitation. Adults recalling experiences of their teenage years allows for the potential of recall bias (Ryan et al., 2010). It is acknowledged that an individual’s current thoughts and feelings with regards to the transition may have influenced responses. Coincidentally, the fact that the research design was retrospective in nature also proved beneficial in that, it allowed for individuals to re-examine family reactions and explore the reasons behind these reactions, such as relationships before, during and after the transition.

Despite contacting organisations such as Belongto, GLEN and many college/university LGBT societies’ only seven research participants could be obtained. This highlights the hard to reach nature of this particular group. Using

qualitative research alone with a small sample size was a considerable limitation in that findings cannot be generalized and are not representative. However, the exploration of first-hand experience is important in that it provides a depth of human context that is not always provided in quantitative research (Dunlap, 2014)

Due to ethical considerations only males between the ages of 25 and 32 were included. It has been demonstrated in the past that the social context and socio-historical setting of this transition has a significant impact (Ryan, 2003) and although the context discussed in this research may be somewhat dated, as most participants negotiated many elements of this transition between five and fifteen years previously, this time period was one of significant change in Irish society and the importance of documenting influencing factors at this time cannot be underestimated.

This research proved to be an extremely enjoyable experience and the honesty and openness of participants allowed for an invaluable insight into this transition to be gained. Their experiences and perceptions gave depth and perspective to many statistically based studies in this area. A vast amount of imperative information was obtained from the interviews and it's important to note that findings could have been expanded considerably if it weren't for the word constraints of this particular project.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will consolidate and summarise findings while reflecting on the aims and objectives set out in chapter one. Subsequently recommendations will be made to address and support the issues which arose as a result of the findings and discussion.

The study set out to explore the perspectives of young males with regard to their experience of non-heterosexual sexuality transitions and the potential influences on this transition within an Irish context. The questions to which it sought to address were:

- To explore how young males experience non-heterosexual sexuality transitions within a family context
- To explore how young males experience non-heterosexual sexuality transitions within a friendship context
- To gain insight into the extent in which social context influences non-heterosexual sexuality transitions
- To obtain an understanding of the risk and protective factors associated with this transition

6.2 Conclusion

The study firstly set out to explore how young males experience non-heterosexual sexuality transitions within a family context. It was found that disclosure of sexual minority status to family members is still a significant issue for many individuals and can be met with a wide variety of responses (Goldfried & Goldfried, 2001; Savin-Williams, 2005). Non-heterosexual siblings were found to have an influence on disclosure patterns and to aid in the diminishing of pre-existing stereotypes in relation to sexual minorities.

The second research question sought to explore how young males experience non-heterosexual sexuality transitions within a friendship context. Coinciding with other research in the area (Herek & Garnets, 2007; Mayock et al., 2009), the overwhelming majority of sexuality related support came from friends. An unexpected finding was the shift in friendship groups that occurred alongside this transition. This consequently led to the introduction of individuals to the gay scene which assisted in affirming positive evaluations of sexual minority groups (Herek & Garnets, 2007) but also lead to the exposure of individuals to serious drug use.

A further area this research aimed to focus on was the influence of social context on non-heterosexual sexuality transitions. A key finding was the monumental influence social and historical context had on non-heterosexual sexuality transitions. Influences on ideology at the time of the transition for participants, such as that of the Catholic Church, the media and educational facilities all impacted on the transition in varying ways. The fact that heterosexist beliefs and values were reaffirmed constantly through cultural institutions meant that sexual minority issues were invisible within cultural discourse (Thompson & Johnston, 2003). This in turn led to stigmatization and discrimination being normalised on a societal level and on an individual level it led to isolation, confusion and internalized homophobia (Herek, 2004).

Finally the research sought to obtain an understanding of the risk and protective factors associated with this transition. A major finding was that individuals had very different approaches to coming to terms with their sexuality. These varying approaches stemmed from differences in personality and personality traits and due to how these differences affected coping they could be considered both a risk and protective factor (Mustanski, 2015). Other factors contributing to psychological difficulties included verbal abuse, lack of social support and victimization. Concealment of sexual identity lead to unique challenges such as emotional conflict brought on by self-doubt, self-monitoring and self-denial. Protective factors included supportive working environments, supportive social networks and unique coping mechanisms. Significantly, the study findings highlighted that the majority of individuals successfully negotiated this transition in spite of difficult social climates and negative family reactions (Elze, 2005; Mayock et al., 2015)

6.3 Recommendations

- Considering the research findings of the present study it is recommended that more research is carried out in relation to both sexual minority friends and sexual minority siblings and how they influence individuals' negotiation of this transition.
- Due to the multiple levels of societal and historical influence on this transition and its relevance to particular birth cohorts, future research should also incorporate both historical and societal influences and longitudinal research should be carried out to capture the experience over the life-course and to record generational influences
- Frameworks for intervention development should address the multiple levels of developmental context such as social and political landscapes, specific communities, educational facilitates, families and individual personalities and coping mechanisms
- The study of sexual minority adolescence could benefit greatly from incorporating the large body of knowledge already accumulated in the area of general adolescent development (Elze, 2005) and general psychological process, rather than focusing exclusively on minority group-specific processes (Hetzenbueler, 2009; Mustanski, 2015)
- The current findings in relation to the individual nature of challenges and supports should be considered by professionals working with or who come in contact with sexual minorities. This consideration should highlight the importance of exploring the unique challenges each individual faces and what specific supports might work for them. This should also limit the potential for making assumptions and generalizations about sexual minorities.
- Although not all contact with the gay community was positive, facilitating engagement between sexual minorities can help diminish stereotypes and reduce feelings of isolation. It can also help build support networks for individuals and practitioners should be prepared to refer sexual minorities to community organisations and reputable internet sources (Dunlap, 2014)

In conclusion, the importance of exploring the experiences and perceptions of sexual minorities cannot be underestimated. It helps aid understanding not only in the areas of perceived supports and challenges, but also in relation to how society as a whole can impact on the transition. It helps to identify risk factors in order for interventions to be put in place and to identify positive influencing factors which can be built upon and improved for future generations.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Schedule

Brief Introductory Questions:

- What age are you?
- Are you currently working? If so can you describe your occupation?
- Could you tell me about your family? (Your position in the family-brothers/sisters?)

Interview Questions:

1. When did you realise that you might not be straight?
 - How long did it take before you were fully aware that you were gay?
2. Can you tell me about your first disclosure of your sexuality?
 - How old were you?
 - Who did you 'come out' to and why?
 - What influenced your decision to disclose?
3. Did you ever feel the need to conceal your sexual orientation and if so why might that have been?
4. Have you disclosed to your family?
 - How did this disclosure come about?
 - How did your parents/other family members react?
 - How did you feel about this reaction?
 - Did your disclosure change your relationships with your family?
5. Have you disclosed to your friends?
 - How did this disclosure come about?
 - How did your friends react?
 - Did your disclosure change any of your relationships with friends?
6. Did you receive any support during this transition?
 - If so from whom?
 - Did you have any positive role models?
7. Were you aware of your sexual orientation whilst at school?
 - Did you disclose at school?
 - What influenced this decision?
 - Were peers/teachers supportive?
 - Did you experience bullying/victimisation/harassment?
8. Where did you get information/ideas about what being gay might mean for you?
 - Did you use the internet at all?
 - Did the media play a role?

- Did you use social networking sites at the time and did they have an impact on the transition?
 - Did you use any specifically gay social networking sites?
9. How do you feel society and your community at the time impacted on your life and coming to terms with your sexuality?
- Did you feel the Catholic Churches influence on Irish society had an impact?
 - Did you feel that Irish politics and legislation had an influence, such as gay marriage being illegal?
 - What was it like for openly gay people in your particular community at the time?
 - Do you feel that the opinions and perceptions of Irish society towards sexual minorities have changed over the last decade?
10. Do you feel that this transition impacted on your mental health in any way?
- If so what coping mechanisms did you use to help you
11. What would you say was the most challenging thing about this transition?
12. Is there anything else you feel impacted on this transition?

Appendix B: Letter of invitation for participants

Telephone: 0860540473

Email:c04615387@mydit.ie

Date: 04/04/15

Dear Participant,

My name is Caroline Kelly and I am a final year M.A. in Child, Family and Community studies student in Dublin Institute of Technology. As part of my studies, I am currently undertaking a research project which will result in a dissertation. The topic of the research is an exploration of the potential influence of social context and social networks on non-heterosexual sexuality transitions. The aim of the study is to gain insight retrospectively into the experiences of young males. Specifically, I am interested in interviewing young men who are who are identifying as gay and who have gone through the majority of the elements associated with the transition such as disclosing their sexual orientation to family members and friends. The objective is to gain an insight into their experiences and perceptions with regards to what has impacted this transition. It is hoped that this research will give sexual minorities a voice within the discourse and allow their perspectives to be heard. For the purpose of the research, it is desired that the participants are aged between 25 and 32.

The purpose of this letter is to inform you about the nature of this research and to seek consent from you to be interviewed. The interview is voluntary and consent can be withdrawn at any time throughout the research process. You also may refuse to answer any question you do not feel comfortable answering. An interview Topic Guide has been attached to this letter for you to review. The interview will take between thirty minutes and one hour to complete and will be recorded via Dictaphone and transcribed at a later stage. Your role as a participant will be to share your particular experiences, insights and perceptions where you feel this is appropriate when asked the interview questions. The questions will explore areas such as:

- Your experience of the ‘coming out’ process with regards to family and friends
- Your experience of how peers and peer communication impacted on the transition both inside and outside educational settings.
- Whether you feel Irish society and your community context affected the transition in any way

As a participant your identity will be kept confidential at all times and pseudonyms will be used where identifying information is provided. Only the researcher and research supervisor will have access to audio recordings and transcripts of interviews and information will be stored in a password protected computer. Throughout the design, research and analysis processes, strict ethical guidelines will be adhered to. Prior to the interview you will be requested to sign the

attached consent form and you will also be requested to provide verbal consent on the audio tape before the interview commences.

Your contribution to this research would be invaluable and very much appreciated. If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me at any time, my contact details are provided above.

Yours sincerely,

Caroline Kelly

Appendix C: Informed Consent

Research topic: An exploration of the perspectives of young males with regard to their experience of non-heterosexual sexuality transitions and the potential influences on this transition within an Irish context

Researcher: Caroline Kelly

1. The participant has been fully informed about this research and is aware of their role within the study?
Yes No
2. The participant has had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the study?
Yes No
3. The participant has received satisfactory answers to all of their questions?
Yes No
4. The participant has seen the topics that will be discussed in the interview in advance of the interview?
Yes No
5. The participant understands that participation is voluntary and that they are free to leave the study at any time and without giving a reason for withdrawing?
Yes No
6. The participant is aware that the information they provide will be recorded, transcribed and stored in a safe location that only the researcher and their supervisor will have access to?
Yes No
7. The participant is aware that all information will be anonymised and that pseudonyms will be used where identifying information is provided.
Yes No
8. The participant is aware that the completed work may appear in the DIT library and online at www.arrow.dit.ie ?
Yes No
9. The participant gives consent to continue in the study?
Yes No

Participant Signature:

Researcher Signature:

Date:

Date:

Appendix D: Letter of invitation to gatekeepers

Telephone: 0860540473

Email:c04615387@mydit.ie

Date: 04/04/15

Dear head of Belongto youth services,

My name is Caroline Kelly and I am a final year M.A. in Child, Family and Community studies student in Dublin Institute of Technology. As part of my studies, I am currently undertaking a research project which will result in a dissertation. The topic of the research is an exploration of the potential influence of social context and social networks on non-heterosexual sexuality transitions. The aim of the study is to gain insight retrospectively into the experiences of young males with regard to sexuality transitions. Specifically, I am interested in interviewing young men who are who are identifying as gay and who have gone through the majority of the elements associated with the transition such as disclosing their sexual orientation to family members and friends. The objective is to gain an insight into their experiences and perceptions with regards to what has impacted this transition. It is hoped that this research will give sexual minorities a voice within the discourse and allow their perspectives to be heard. It is also hoped that it may help identify risk and protective factors associated with this transition. For the purpose of the research, it is desired that the participants are aged between 25 and 32.

The purpose of this letter is to inform you about the nature of this research and to request, if you deem fit, that you pass information about this research onto possible interested parties. The interview is voluntary and consent can be withdrawn at any time throughout the research process. Participants may also refuse to answer any questions they do not feel comfortable answering. The interview will take around thirty minutes to complete and will be recorded via Dictaphone and transcribed at a later stage. The role of the participant will be to share their particular experiences, insights and perceptions where they feel that this is appropriate when asked the interview questions. The questions will explore areas such as:

- The experience of the ‘coming out’ process with regards to family and friends
- The experience of how peers and peer communication impacted on the transition both inside and outside educational settings.
- Whether they feel Irish society and their community context affected the transition in any way

Participants’ identities will be kept confidential at all times and pseudonyms will be used where identifying information is provided. Only the researcher and research supervisor will have access to audio recordings and transcripts of interviews and information will be stored in a password protected computer. Throughout the design,

research and analysis processes, strict ethical guidelines will be adhered to. Prior to the interview participants will be requested to sign the attached consent form and will also be requested to provide verbal consent on the audio tape before the interview commences.

Your assistance in sharing information about this research would be invaluable and very much appreciated. If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me at any time, my contact details are provided above.

Yours sincerely,

Caroline Kelly

Appendix E: Ethical Approval Form

Masters in Child, Family and Community Studies (2014-15)	
Application for ethical approval for research project	
Title of the proposed project: An exploration of the potential influence of social context and social networks on non-heterosexual sexuality transitions: Male retrospective perspectives	
Research Supervisor: Dr. Ann Marie Halpenny	
A. Researcher Details	
Surname: Kelly	Forename: Caroline
E-mail: carolinekelly42@yahoo.co.uk	
B. Sample/Participants	
Specify the number and composition of participants taking part in this project and the proposed recruitment process	
<p>The researcher proposes to interview between 8 and 10 young men who are identifying as gay and aged between 25 and 32 years old.</p> <p>The proposed recruitment process is purposive sampling. The researcher will use availability and snowball sampling in order to recruit participants. In addition, contact will be made with the organisations, Belongto and GLEN, Gay and Lesbian Equality Network which are associated with this community and may be able to inform potential participants of the research. .</p> <p>Are participants under the age of 18 to be included: Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If yes, please fill in the section D below for research involving children and young people under 18 years of age</p>	

C. Potential for risk/distress/discomfort arising from study

Do you consider that there is any potential distress/discomfort/risk to the participants arising from the proposed study? Yes No

If yes, please provide details and outline the procedures you will take to address such potential risks:

While the study sets out to explore transitions in a sensitive and non-intrusive manner, the researcher is aware of the potential for possible discomfort in terms of the sensitive nature of the material that is being discussed. In order to address potential risks the following procedures will be followed.

Firstly the interview schedule will be general in nature and participants will be invited to talk about their experiences in a setting of their choosing that is comfortable for them.

The interview schedule will avoid any material which might be intrusive or personally distressing to participants as far as is possible.

A third procedure is that participants will be fully informed about the purpose and aims and objectives of the research and the researcher will insure openness and honesty at all times.

Participation will be entirely voluntary and participants will have the right to withdraw from the research process at any time, without giving a reason, and this will all be explained in the informed consent form.

An interview schedule will be given to participants in advance of the interview so they are aware of the topics and to inform them that they have the right to refuse to answer any particular question/questions and to stop the interview at any time.

The researcher will also remain sensitive throughout of participant's verbal and non-verbal communication.

Participants will be made aware of the steps put in place to ensure their confidentiality, such as contributions remaining anonymous and that pseudonyms will be used where identifying information is provided.

They will also be given information regarding who will have access to their contributions and how it will be securely stored.

Finally participants will be given the opportunity to review draft material before it is submitted.

D. Research involving children and young people under 18 years of age N/A

Age of participants:

Number of participants:

In what way, if any, does the proposed study benefit the individual participant?

If your study involves working with young children (e.g. under 18 years of age?), please outline how the research instruments have been designed in a child-friendly format.

Has parent's/guardian's consent to be obtained? Yes No

If **Yes**, in what form - verbal, written, witnessed, etc. – will consent be obtained. Please attach a copy of the relevant forms.

Will the child's or young person's consent be sought? Yes No

If **Yes**, in what form - verbal, written, witnessed, etc. – will consent be obtained. Please attach a copy of the relevant forms

E. Research involving other vulnerable groups over 18 years of age and/or a very sensitive research topic?

Age of participants:25-32

Number of participants:8-10

In what way, if any, does the proposed study benefit the individual participant?

It is hoped that this study will add to the existing literature and shed light on the Irish experience of the significance of family and peer reactions to young people's disclosures of their sexual orientation. It is also hoped that this study will give sexual minorities a voice within the discourse and allow their perspectives to be heard. A further possible benefit is that it could inform policy makers and professionals working with young people and their families of the potential risk and protective factors associated with this transition. Finally it is hoped that it will facilitate greater awareness of the impact of family/ peer/societal support and/or family/peer/societal negativity on the young person.

If your study involves working with vulnerable people and/or very sensitive research topic, please outline how the research instruments have been designed in a user-friendly format.

Firstly, the researcher has chosen a qualitative research method of one to one interviews which will be sensitive and personal in nature and which will allow for privacy.

Secondly, questions are designed so as not to be personally intrusive and to avoid any personal distress to participants.

Thirdly, an interview schedule will be available in advance of the interviews so participants are aware of what areas will be covered in the interview.

Fourthly, having worked for the children’s charity Barnardos for five years the researcher has experience interviewing and working with vulnerable populations and this will help in ensuring that the interview is conducted in a manner that is appropriate and comfortable.

The researcher acknowledges that interviewing involves ‘researcher effects’ whereby the characteristics of the researcher such as demeanour, accent, gender and age can impact on the willingness of participants to answer questions and the nature of their answers (Breakwell et al, 2012). Therefore consideration will be given to the researcher as a participant in the data collection process.

At regular intervals the researcher will pause to make sure that the participant is comfortable and willing to proceed with the interview and will be sensitive to verbal and nonverbal cues throughout.

Finally, in the event of any distress arising participants will be informed of appropriate counselling services available to them, such as the LGBT helpline and organisations such as Belongto and the gay men’s health service.

Checklist

Please ensure the following, if appropriate, are attached:

Documents to be attached	Tick if attached	Tick if not appropriate
Research Proposal	√	
Letters (to gatekeepers, parents/guardians, participants)	√	
Consent forms	√	
Draft Questionnaire(s)/Interview schedule/Observation Sheet	√	
Other (please specify)		

Appendix F: Sample Interview Transcript

I=Interviewer and K=Ken Adams *pseudonym

I: Thanks again for meeting me today, as you are aware from earlier discussions the aim of this research is to gain insight into male perspectives on non-heterosexual sexuality transitions. I know you've read the informed consent and are aware that you can stop the interview at any time and don't have to answer questions that you don't feel comfortable answering

K: Yeah that's fine

I: Perfect, ok, for the purpose of the interview can you just tell me a bit about yourself and your family, i.e. your job, any brothers or sisters?

K: I have a twin brother and that's all and live with Ma and Da. I work as a personnel manager

I: Perfect, when did you realise that you might not be straight?

K: Since I was about 7 when I realised that I wasn't attracted to girls I was attracted to boys and it was somebody in my class who basically lived down the road from me, I just knew then, he used to be friends with me brother and I used to always kind of give him little kisses on the cheek and stuff like that when I was 7,

I: Did u know for sure then?

K: Yeah I was never attracted to girls but well going through then when I was 10 and into me teens, like early teens we used to go to discos and stuff like that so I kind of used to kiss girls cause all of the other boys kissed girls and stuff like that so I'd have a little girlfriend or whatever but I was only doing that because that's what I thought was normal if that makes sense but I knew, I'd be looking at other boys like but I felt that what society wanted me to do so that's why I done it

I: Who was the first person that you disclosed to?

K: The first person I told that I was gay was my line manager in (department store) when I was 15 years of age. She called ,me aside and she told me, she was like have you got something to say to me and I was like, what do you mean and she told me this story of how she worked on cruise ships with young people and all this type of stuff, it's like she felt she knew I was struggling with something or ya know, like I needed to talk to somebody, like admitting that I was gay cause I never kind of said it to anyone, obviously I wouldn't but eh eventually I did say it to her, I confided in her

I: Do you think you would have said it to her without that conversation?

K: No, I remember sitting in the canteen and she brought me upstairs I remember sitting down for ages and then I confided in her so not only was (department store) me job I just felt like it helped me come out as well, and the second person I told was a girl called Emily* cause she was my best friend when I started in (department store) so that would have been the second person

I: How did she react?

K: She was delighted she was like I always wanted a gay best friend. Because she always used to watch this show 'gimme gimme gimme' did you ever watch that show, the girl with the big fussy red hair, it's about these two people that live together so one of them is this very provocative woman that's a man eater and then there's her gay friend, roommate or whatever so she obviously loved that programme so then she nicknamed me one of the characters out of that

I: Did you ever feel the need to conceal your sexual orientation?

K: Em.....I did yeah to me home life, I think I did because like me brother was quite masculine and out there and obviously I used to pal around with him at the time and all his friends were obviously macho fellas so kind of to fit in with all them I felt like I had to act in that way up until I started in (department store) when actually I started to make friends of me own, they'd be mitching off school and I'd be going to school so they weren't actually the friends that I wanted to be with, it wasn't until I worked in (department store) that I started developing me own friendships. Then I don't know I felt that I met people that were on the same level as me and I felt then that when I did actually tell people or whatever they didn't bat an eyelid it wasn't...they didn't judge me for being gay

I: Can you tell me about disclosure to your family and how this came about?

K: I told me parents first when I was about sixteen actually I think I was 17, I told them I was bisexual first so I didn't tell them first of all that I was gay or anything like that though I felt all me friends know I was gay but I never came out out to my family till I was about 17, probably 18 it was to me mam cause I don't know I just felt...I was afraid to think what would they say and obviously me brother was very, he was completely different to me.

I: Did you tell your parents together?

K: I think I told me Mam and then she just told me Dad and that was it, do you know what I mean. At that time my dad was never really around that much so it was mostly me, me mam and me brother so I felt it was easier to tell me mam and me brother and then eventually me mam told me dad but it wasn't til I was in my early twenties then that I told me nanny and me uncles and stuff like that because I had a gay uncle, when I was younger he passed away. Yeah but he was gay and ya know people... back in that time it was illegal all that type of stuff so it was very pushed down and brushed under the carpet like oh my god shame to the family like so I ya know took that on board when obviously telling me nanny and stuff like that cause of the past and stuff like that cause I didn't want to bring all that back up for her. So that was difficult but she actually came to me, she knew, she sat me down and was like Ken*, I know about it and ya know I'm really proud of u and stuff like that and then she talked about me uncle and she was like do u know what maybe if I would have taken that on board back in the day, maybe he could have been still alive or whatever, but she blamed herself for all that type of stuff ya know ya can't really cause you don't know what's going to happen. so I did have a bit of loss as well obviously like with me uncle, it would have been great to have me uncle growing up with me and have that kind of relationship, ya know a gay relationship, someone that you can talk to and stuff like that

I: I'd say it would have, I can't imagine what that was like. How did your Mam react?

K: Me mam always knew I was gay cause like back in the day when I was younger I always wanted to me that pink power ranger and I'd be doing handstands off the wall thinking I was wonder woman ya know she always knew I was a bit feminine and I'd rather be in the house cleaning the house than be out playing football with the lads, I'd be in town shopping with her and I'd be a mammy's boy type of thing, so I think she always knew she was just waiting on me to kind of say it to her. She was completely supportive and I think that made me relationship with me mam stronger cause I think I would actually be her best friend so she always tells me jesus your my best friend and like I'd tell her anything and shed tell me anything like we do have a great bond and I think me being gay actually strengthens that bond cause its difficult having two sons she kind of always wanted a bit of a daughter and I was the nearest thing to a daughter for her

I: How did your brother react?

K: I think he became more protective then do u know what I mean so ya know if anybody would be ya know saying anything any of his friends or in school ya know he'd be squaring up to them and stuff like that, they were quire protective, at the early stage at school but then obviously they all left so I was kind of fending for myself, now I did get a hard time in school, it wasn't easy at all so I'm actually quite proud that I did finish school considering the level of bullying and harassment that I did get

I: Did you come out while you were in school?

K: Yeah I did so when you think of it I started in (department store) when I was 15 so I would have been just doing me junior cert at the time so when I came out, well I never came out out in school if ya get me I think they just assumed, they just knew and just got it, so yeah I did get a hard time in school, just slagged mostly just slagged and me bag would go missing and I'd get marker ya know and just stupid stuff sent around the class just silly stupid stuff, thinking about it now it actually so funny but back then for someone who's coming to terms with their sexuality ya know it was really hurtful there was days when I'd come home from school and be crying but then I'd go to work and id feel better, it was an environment where I felt ... I felt....good to be in. I remember me manager would be ringing me up asking could I do an extra shift and id be like oh my god, yeah, I'd be down the minute me phone would be off, cause I liked being in that environment

I: Did the bullying ever prevent you from attending school?

K: I stuck it out up until the start of sixth year and then it did get really heavy then and then I'd be missing for a lot, I felt that I wanted to be in work more than school, in that environment where it was just making me kind of...it was making me actually sick, I'd rather actually be in work with me friends and be in an environment where people actually give a shit about me and they're not there to judge me

I: Did you receive any support at school?

K: The support at school at the time??? Well so for me that would have been all new for them, nobody knew how to handle it so I'd be complaining, I'd be upset and I'd be going top people and they'd be like, the teachers would be like ya know there's nothing that we can do, just go to your doctor and get tablets, that's what they would

say but reflecting on that now I don't they knew what to do I don't think they were equipped and I don't think they teachers were trained to deal with that situation, because I was the only one that was out, the first gay pupil out there in the school, they just didn't know what to do

I: And was there a guidance councillor?

K: The guidance councillor didn't know what to do and I had a tutor and they would just say go to your doctor, go to your doctor that's all...that was the solution

I: And what happened if they caught perpetrators?

K: Yeah they would people up over bullying me but no one ever got expelled ever or ever got suspended, it was just a quick chat and that was it. Again I think they were afraid to deal with it or ya know.... I don't think it was their fault, it was the education system at the time, ya know there was no training, obviously in was in a catholic school

I: Ok, I see. Have you disclosed to friends?

K: I think at the time I didn't have to disclose myself, so I never had to go hey I'm Ken* I'm gay, I don't think I ever had to do that I think people just knew I was gay like, I think they respected me not to really say anything or ya know I think they just got on with it, ya know it was Ken, there was no Ken he's gay. So like all my friends were from work, I built all my relationships from work

I: Did it change your relationships with your friends?

K: It didn't change my relationships cause they knew from the get go that I was Ken and I was gay but that was never brought up in a conversation

I: Did you receive any support during the transition?

K: The only support that I got was actually from me job in (department store) so I remember talking to my line manager at the time and I remember having a personnel manager and I remember talking to her and stuff like that and I remember an incident where me till was snatched actually in work and I think I was 16 or 17 and one of the security men went up to the store manager and went one of the guys are after getting their till snatched and he was like which one, and he said, ya know the queer one sitting on the checkout. And me store manager didn't do anything about it but it was raised as a complaint to me personnel manager and I remember my personnel manager sitting down with me and she said to me you should be proud of who you are, you're a young person who knows who he is, you should never have to be spoken about like that, this is your area, you are who you are. I remember her having that conversation with me and I think that kind of empowered me and made me think actually I am who I am and I never kind of hide really who I was, so she kind of got that and I got a bit of support from her she'd check in every so often with me to see how I was and stuff which was really good

I: Did you have any positive role models?

K: I kind of did actually, but they were all in work, it was actually my managers and stuff like that that kind of supported me and stood up for me and stuff like that and checked in on me and then there was a gay manager at the time and he was so funny I

remember talking to him a lot and just having a laugh, he didn't care who he was he was out and so I kind of looked up to him

I: Where did you get information about what being gay might mean for you?

K: I remember at the time I didn't have any gay friends well not that I knew of because the people that I actually was friends with turned out to be gay themselves so hence why actually, I felt that kind of gay energy probably did connect us and made us be friends in some sort of strange way but because they weren't out out , I did feel like ... i actually wanted to see was there other gays like myself out there so I remember going online to chat rooms and stuff like that and finding out where there other people like myself out there cause this was all new to me I was only young and I didn't know what was going on and I remember meeting up with three fellas, we all met up with each other in town in a café and I remember drinking tea and arranging a night out the following week and we all went into town and went to the George but it was all just friends and for me to build some sort of gay relationship with people who were on the same level with me

I: Did that help?

K: Absolutely I'm still friends with one of them like he actually lives in London so every time I go over to London I always meet up with him and stuff like that and he comes here but at that time he was only coming to terms with his sexuality cause he was from Leitrim and they're very conservative, obviously they voted no in the marriage referendum and his family are quite like that as well, I actually don't think he has come out to his family and he's thirty two and I think that kind of helped him as well, like to find himself and the other guys

I: Did you use the internet for information or just chat rooms?

K: So it was chat rooms but it was information around ya know em, so for counselling, there was a lot of suicide on it as well, thinking back like if u felt u were different and stuff like that, suicide would be quite high ya know among gay people as well so there was a lot of information around that and there was information around HIV and all that type of stuff so it was a site for chat rooms but it gave information around that stuff

I: Did the media or television influence the transition in any way?

K: Back then there wasn't, there was no sitting down at the tele and watching any gay characters cause there was none, there was nobody that I can turn around and say actually I watched him and he was gay or whatever, ya know there was none of that back then

I: Did you use social networking sites?

K: Yeah definitely absolutely so obviously I did the chartroom stuff I ended up meeting with four people that were in the same position as myself and the funny thing is they were looking for friends in the same way as I did and ya know we kind of where friends for a couple of years and then they went their separate ways so they got what they wanted out of that, they wanted to meet up with people and talk.

One of them was from Waterford the other was from Leitrim and the other was from the country somewhere, I think it was cork but they came to Dublin for studying for college and i was doing me leaving cert at the time I was only 17

I: Was this Gaydar?

K: That was gaydar, that was the website that we went on and would get information and stuff around what I went through

I: Did society and your community influence the transition?

K: I think being gay back then was still an issue with people, like talking about school, people weren't equipped to deal with gay issues or gay students or bullying and all that, gay bullying so ya know that was completely new for them, ya know I remember having me hair died and ya know if ya had your hair dyed oh my god you were gay, ya know the way you dress, oh my god he's gay, ya had to dress a certain way and all that type of stuff, I think people were very homophobic back then thinking back, even when I was in work sitting on a check out people would have no problem turning around and saying look at that big queer and didn't give a shit how u felt or whatever compared to now where it's completely different, we've completely moved on but it was, it was really bad back then, there wasn't a day that went by that I'd be out or whatever and I'd get called a queer or a fagot or whatever so you can imagine somebody young going through that on a daily basis you'd have to be very strong

I: Absolutely. I can't imagine how hard that must have been. Did the Catholic Church influence the transition?

K: Absolutely yeah because ya know that's our religion of the country, people obviously wanted to live up to their faith so if the Catholic Church denounces homosexuality ya know that kind of is putting people in an awkward position and they kind of feel like cause the church says so they have to say so like even though they could have other people living next store to or members of their family that they might not be aware of but because the church says so that's what they have to do and the good thing about that now is that that's a thing of the past people make up their own minds, they're not driven or they're not brainwashed by the church any more

I: Yeah, I get that. Do you feel that politics and legislation had an impact?

K: I knew gay marriage was illegal so I always felt like a second class citizen, I knew I couldn't get married, I knew I probably wouldn't be able to have children so I was quite jealous of people getting married and people having children, I always felt different ya know that I wasn't treated the same way as straight people and up until recently that did hurt, why should my relationship be any different than other peoples relationship, did I fear for my future, absolutely, did I... I remember going to me nanny and she was dying in bed and I was looking at her thinking, that could be me when I'm 70 and I could be in a home and nobody around me because I probably won't be able to have kids and I probably won't be able to gay married so what does the future hold for me will I be alone for half of me life

I: What was it like for openly gay people at the time?

K: So I would have been out first so I think I became the tester for my friends, I felt that I was the genie pig so I think it became a lot easier for them to kind of come out or be themselves cause I think they learned what not to do I think they learned from my mistakes, maybe they shouldn't dye their hair blond (laugh) and dress in a different way or whatever. I kind of paved the way for them, eventually!!

I: I see. Do you feel that opinions have changed in recent years?

K: Absolutely obviously because of the gay referendum and stuff like that, it has actually changed people's perceptions of gay people, we're all actually the same as everyone else, we're no different, it's just who we're in a relationship with, like your born that way it's not like, I remember since I'm so young that I've never liked a girl, I've liked boys since I can remember so ya know that just tells you that your born that way it's not just something happened in the environment or whatever that I just decided ya know actually I'm gay so I think people realise that

I: Yeah I think they do. Do you feel that the transition impacted your mental health?

K: Yes absolutely so yeah back then I remember going to the doctor and I was on anti-depressants, I know people don't really.... I never talked about that with my friends cause it was something that I was actually ashamed of so oh my god he's on anti-depressants maybe he's going a bit mental or something but it wasn't it was to help me get through life because walking down the street and getting called queer and getting called gay and fagot and this type of shit ya know there's only so much you can take as a person and to be treated different every single day there's only so much you can take and there's days where I used to lie in bed and cry myself to sleep but people didn't know that because I didn't show it and I remember going down to the doctor and I was on anti-depressants for about four years but nobody know because I was ashamed of it. I didn't want people to think that I couldn't cope with it cause I had this kind of ya know, I didn't give a shit type of person or whatever it doesn't bother me yeah whatever but really behind closed doors it did, I was an absolute mess, I was crying myself to sleep my mind was racing, I wasn't sleeping, popping pills to help me, but them obviously when I started building relationships with people I thought actually you're not the only one out there that's gay and then throughout life it got better and easier so I don't need anti-depressants because I've dealt with all that so it kind of made me a lot stronger

I: I see and was there any coping mechanisms that you used?

K: It would have been antidepressants at the time, I remember being ...I was actually a member of a counselling on Shaftsbury Ave*, we used to meet every second Thursday evening, now it wasn't just for gay people it was for other people that were going through em midlife crisis there was other people going through marriage breakdowns and there was on other fella there that was going through the gay situation as well, it wasn't even about that it was looking at everyone else's issues and the problems they were going through threw life, it was a group session and everyone used to bring their own biscuits and stuff like that, it was good listening to everyone else's problems and stuff like that, not just gay problems, I think it made you realise that actually, whatever's happening with you it's not that bad compared to other peoples situations people were like living in hostels and people were kicked out of their homes, I still had a loving family, I still had good friends all that type of stuff going on I was just dealing with ya know finding who I was

I: What was the most challenging/difficult period of the transition?

K: I think from 17 until probably 20/21 was a difficult period for me cause I was on anti-depressants, I was obviously in counselling and stuff like that but it was stuff I was dealing with meself because I was still ashamed to say that actually I needed that help and I needed that coping mechanism for dealing with it and ya know it wasn't

until ya know going into me twenties that I could actually start to deal with it meself so yeah that was a difficult period I think. That was the most challenging thing.

I: Is there anything else that you feel impacted on the transition?

K: I think me job, I think if I didn't have that job I probably wouldn't be here today, I actually think I owe a lot to (department store) cause ya know if I didn't join (department store) when I was fifteen... I remember going down for ice cream at the time cause there used to be a lovely ice-cream parlour down there and I remember someone just asking me did I want a job and I went in for the interview and got it the following week and i just think if I didn't get that job I'd probably, I definitely wouldn't have been here today because it was somewhere to go like, to get away from the world get away from the shit I was dealing with in school ya know I felt I couldn't be meself, there was people there that I felt that cared about me, I had a laugh so yeah I do owe a lot to (department store)

I: Is being gay a big part of your identity?

K: Now, no! (straight away) I don't think so, back then I felt that it was because I let it be more than it actually was, I made it me, but now I don't think about it at all, I'm Ken, I'm not gay Ken, I think it's because of society and I think it's because people know everyone that's gay, people have family members that are gay, people have friends that are gay, everyone has a gay in their life, I think it's just acceptable now and I think for gay people they're themselves and that's it.

I: Thank you very much Ken, I really appreciate you taking the time to do this interview and for your openness and honesty.

Appendix G: Sample coding

1. The influence of families on young people's sexual transitions

1.1 The influence of mothers on the transition

"She cried, but she more cried about not the fact that I was gay, it was more about the fact of how society I suppose back then would have treated individuals like me and like people heckling me down the street and I suppose people's views and that in general" (Interviewee 3)

"Mam was shocked, completely shocked she hadn't a clue ... I don't think she understood it properly initially, it was a bit tough for a while, I don't think that I understood that she didn't understand it initially, so there was a few days were things were kind of tense, I remember Mam saying to me one night, 'when did you decide this', and I was trying to explain that I didn't, I didn't decide this" (Interviewee 5)

"At the time I was probably a nightmare at home, I was disappearing, I left college and I hadn't really explained why ... I started taking drugs so I would be coming home in the horrors all of the time... I never really got on with my mum living at home so this only added to it" (Interviewee 1)

"I told her I was bisexual, I didn't tell her I was gay, that's what it was because I kind of needed to lighten the blow" (Interviewee 3)

1.2 The influence of fathers on the transition

"The first person I told was my Mam, she told my Dad I didn't, I didn't ask her to tell him but she told him and he kind of never had a reaction to it, I said to him I know Mam told you and he was like, told me what, and I was like told you that I'm gay and he was like I don't know what you're talking about, and he laughed and I laughed and that was it. That was the only conversation I ever had with him" (Interviewee 3)

"he used to use these little expressions like are you going a bit funny or (laughs) he'd say to me like these little phrases that he knew I'd react to but I knew that he was comfortable with it but it was just something that he didn't really want to speak about" (Interviewee 7)

"I'm not really sure why it was but my Dad was way harder, it actually took three attempts... he took it well but not great, he was never angry with me just solemn about it, like he was just reflecting himself a little bit. I think there might have been a bit of misunderstanding as to his role in it, was it his fault ya know cause he wasn't really there, I don't know if they are the reasons but he was very reflective and when we were looking at scenarios he'd always be deep in thought and it took him ages to say words out loud about it" (Interviewee 1)

1.2 The impact of both heterosexual and non-heterosexual siblings

“yeah I always knew that she would be supportive completely, it was never a question of it being any kind of an issue, still a big deal at the time for me to say, like the words out loud to somebody else but like I always knew it would be totally, totally fine” (Interviewee 6)

“I just never felt the need or pressure of coming out, I don’t know if that was eased by the fact that my brother and sister who are both gay, had a little bit more of a rougher transition than me but yeah I just never felt the need to come out ... I never told anyone and then I just brought my boyfriend home” (Interviewee 7)

“I just found it really influential that like there’s no, it was like the stereotype wasn’t there, the stereotype I had in my head wasn’t necessarily true” (Interviewee 7)

“For a sixteen year old there was no negative reaction, nothing negative but in retrospect he probably would have been gay at the time as well so that’s a bit of a sad issue for me to deal with ‘cause he obviously has his own coming out story but when I look back at his struggle I was blinded because I was so involved with myself I didn’t realise it” (Interviewee 1)

“it was a little bit more difficult because there was a chance that I don’t know I think my Dad might have been thinking that if my brother hadn’t had a son then maybe the family name might not have been carried on and there was small issues like that” (Interviewee 7)

1.3 The impact on relationships with family members

“Your relationship just feels stronger ‘cause they’re accepting you for who you are ... it changed ‘cause it was like I could be more myself around them” (Interviewee 7)

“Well I imagine who I was wasn’t a very nice person at the time, I would have gone from a person that was family orientated to someone who was the complete opposite and ya know would have been very skinny and I was just on mad ones all the time which isn’t ideal for anyone from a family point of view but I just wouldn’t have seen outside that bubble at the time cause I just wasn’t hanging around with the same people” (Interviewee 1)

“Well I mean things aren’t black and white, I went over there , I burst over there told him I was gay and came back a different person so it was just a lot” (Interviewee 1)

“My Dad took it really bad, I had a fist fight with him, he caused murder in the house and was telling me to get out of the house ” (Interviewee 2)

“Completely, (then changed his mind), no I wouldn’t say it did, if anything...when I think back its made it a lot better because the person (paused), I never really got on with my Dad, we didn’t speak, I lived with him for three years after that and we didn’t speak at all and before I didn’t have a great relationship with him cause all me anger

would come out in the house.... Now I've a better relationship with me da then I've ever had in me whole entire life" (Interviewee 2)

2 The influence of friends on the transition

"it was eased by the fact that there was a few of us going through the same thing and going on a bit of a journey together so like the first time we ever went to a gay bar was together, the first time we all went on a gay weekend we were all together so those kind of things made it much easier" (Interviewee 7)

"because he had done that and told his family and stuff it just kind of made it easier" (Interviewee 3)

"I kind of found support in the people I was hanging around with cause they were all like me or similar or sort of had the same stories, other gay people and some good and some bad, you become quickly aware that just because someone's gay doesn't necessarily mean that they're the nicest person but at a time when you're meeting people and everyone wants to be your friend and stuff like that it doesn't really work out that way" (Interviewee 1)

"I think I said to him that I might be or something like that, he was gobsmacked and was straight away, 'awh you are if you think like that', I wouldn't say he was supportive, it was more of an excitement for him ... I felt that he was more pushing me out, like there was a point where I actually fell out with him when it was happening because he was being so full on about it and I couldn't cope with it ...I couldn't even cope with myself" (Interviewee 2)

2.1 Switching friendship groups and its impact

"All my friends were the friends that would slag everyone, they'd be like they're fagots and this and that...they were my friends for years, they were proper macho scumbags and like there was times when I didn't even want to be with them and I used to prove myself to them, just so people would think that I was more macho than I actually was " (Interviewee 2)

"I drifted away from the lads because they weren't my type of people, I used to just lie to myself and say that they were my friends but they weren't" (Interviewee 2)

"I am a bit disappointed that I didn't make the effort to ya know stay friends with the people that were my rock when I was younger but some of them did come out with me to gay bars and stuff but I just never went to straight bars then, ever! I wouldn't dream of it, it wouldn't even enter my head to accommodate straight friends anymore which was very strange, very strange when I think back" (Interviewee 1)

"I had actually shifted from one group of friends, all my school friends to another group, I started going out with gay friends, not people that I knew that well and with these people, I started taking drugs ... I remember disappearing and coming back in bits ... I went from being someone who was very secretive about himself to someone who was starting to be a little bit overtly camp and it didn't really suit me it was

something that wasn't really me but I was hanging around with a different group of friends" (Interviewee 1)

"Cause you grew up thinking gays were disgusting, men and women marry, you grew up and had kids and then when I started going out with (gay friend) and his friends I started to think this is actually not as bad, seeing how happy everyone was and all" (Interviewee 2)

3 The impact of personality and personal traits on young people's sexual transitions

3.1 The impact of personal coping mechanisms and personality traits

"it was something that might have popped into my head the odd time and it was something that you could kind of push to the back of your mind, it was never something that took over my head" (Interviewee 6)

"I used to think as a child that, you'll grow yourself out of it, you'll grow out of it, I thought I could grow myself out of it but it never went away, it just got worse and worse and I thought about it more and more every single day. I thought at the back of my mind that this was wrong so I kept telling myself that you're not that ... forget about it" (Interviewee 2)

"I used to think about it often when I ran, because I ran for years and years and whenever I'd go running it was kind of like my head space, that was the time I kind of allocated myself to think about it (being gay)" (Interviewee 7)

"I always felt that over a time or through my teenage years that it would figure itself out, when I come to a realisation I'll handle it then and it will be over and done with". (Interviewee 6)

"I always knew that if it ever was an issue with anyone that I would have people to stand up for me and for myself as well. I never felt weakness or that it was any sort of obstacle or it never in any way felt that it was something that I needed to be ashamed of... I had my own kind of self-assurance and self-confidence that even if it was something that was reacted negatively to it was something that I could totally handle" (Interviewee 6)

4.4.2 The impact of concealing sexual identity

"My whole entire life I felt the need to lie to people, sure I was with girls my entire life (up until coming out) which I didn't even enjoy, not that I didn't enjoy it, I convinced myself that that was the norm where deep down I hated it, during my relationships with girls that's what I thought of every single night (being gay)" (Interviewee 2)

"I used to prove myself to them, just so people would think I was more macho than I actually was ... to be more a boy, even down to the way I dressed and all, there were things that I would have loved to have worn but I would think, no, in case people think

that's gay. The minute the word gay was mentioned my stomach would turn inside out" (Interviewee 2)

"I was with girls obviously growing up ..but the whole idea is that you just try and cover it up so you do everything possible so you'd hang around with the lads and do what the lads do. So like if I'm hanging out with the lads and drinking down lane ways, that's kind of going to mask the fact that I'm gay. Obviously you're going to be real macho on a night out and meet girls around them just so no one questions you" (Interviewee 3)

"I think it's crazy that someone so young is burdened with such a , like a massive secret especially when you developing into (pause) to who your meant to be, but you're stunted, you're kind of holding yourself back where you're not developing you're lying for like eight years or whatever it is, it's strange" (Interviewee 1)

4.4.4 The importance of the reaction of others

"Their reaction and how they felt about it wasn't something that was ever really a big concern for me, I really did think this is my thing, this is part of me and my life and ya know it (what other people thought) just wasn't really something that crossed my mind" (Interviewee 6)

"I was on the athletics team in university and I remember thinking was I intentionally hiding it and I kind of was because I didn't want them to feel uncomfortable in certain circumstances" (Interviewee 7)

4.5 The impact of social context on young people's sexual transitions

4.5.1 School environments' influence on the transition

"I remember thinking ya kind of just need to get passed the, like, leaving school time and it will be so much easier 'cause at the time for a student to come into my school and say they were gay would have been soooooo controversial and would be such a big deal so that wasn't something that I had any intentions of doing whatsoever" (Interviewee 6)

"Now I did get a hard time in school, it wasn't easy at all so I'm actually quite proud that I did finish school considering the level of bullying and harassment that I did get ... I just got slagged mostly and my bag would go missing and stuff like that ... there were days when I'd come home from school and be crying" (Interviewee 4)

"I stuck it out up until the start of sixth year and then it did get really heavy and then I'd be missing for a lot, ... that environment was just making me kind of... it was making me actually sick"(Interviewee 4)

"well so for me that would have been all new to them, nobody knew how to handle it, so I'd be complaining, I'd be upset and I'd be going to people and they'd be like, the teachers would be like there's nothing that we can do, just go to your doctor and get tablets, that's what they would say but reflecting on that now I don't think they knew what to do ... I don't think they were equipped and I don't think teachers were

trained to deal with the situation, because I was the only one that was out, the first gay pupil out there in the school” (Interviewee 4)

“yeah they would pull people up over bullying me but no one ever got expelled ever or ever got suspended, it was just a quick chat and that was it. Again I think they were afraid to deal with it or ya know ... I don’t think it was their fault, it was the education system at the time, ya know there was no training, obviously I was in a Catholic school” (Interviewee 4)

4.5.2 The influence of the media and the internet

“it made you think that you grow up, you marry a woman and you have kids so that was drilled in your head, if you thought anything opposite to that you weren’t right, you were sick” (Interviewee 2)

“It was always a what if, like what if this is a phase and what if I’m just thinking it and other teenagers are thinking it and I’m not really gay, it was hard to figure out if that’s exactly what was going on because I didn’t really have anything to relate it to or compare it to” (Interviewee 6)

“I remember when I was going through it all ‘queer as folk’ was out ... and I remember thinking that it used to be fascinating and interesting but I’d watch it in my room on a really, really low volume and when anyone would come up the stairs I’d switch it off” (Interviewee 3)

“I remember going online to chat rooms and stuff like that and finding out where there other people like myself out there ‘cause this was all new to me, I was only young and I didn’t know what was going on” (Interviewee 4)

“I do think social media helped people to come out, I think it was easier for people to come to terms with the fact that they were gay ‘cause all of a sudden there were so many more people out there that you might not have crossed paths with before that you knew were gay so I think it was like, it made people’s perceptions of it so much more acceptable” (Interviewee 7)

4.5.3 The influence of politics and legislation

“From the political side of it I had known that it was only decriminalised in 1993 and that was only less than 15 years prior to my whole coming out process” (Interviewee 7)

“I was more than acutely aware that same-sex relations were illegal in 1993, in the back of my head I was thinking I was just born, I was born at a time, I know people say it was illegal to be gay, but it pretty much was, and that was kind of scary” (Interviewee 5)

“I knew gay marriage was illegal so I always felt like a second class citizen, I knew I couldn’t get married, I knew I probably couldn’t have children so I was quite jealous of people getting married and people having children, I always felt different ya know that I wasn’t treated the same way as straight people and up until recently that did

hurt, why should my relationship be any different than other people's relationship, I did fear for my future ... I probably won't be able to have kids and get married so what does the future hold for me, will I be alone for half of my life" (Interviewee 4)

4.5.4 The influence of the Catholic Church

"People obviously wanted to live up to their faith so if the Catholic church denounces homosexuality ya know that kind of is putting people in an awkward position and they kind of feel like 'cause the church says so they have to say so like even though they could have other people living next door or a member of their family that they might not be aware of but because the church says no that's what they have to do" (Interviewee 4)

"the church was teaching, you grow up, you marry a wife and you have kids so automatically you're thinking, I'm gay, I shouldn't be here and then it's just drilled into your head especially with the Catholic Church"(Interviewee 2)

"I think in Ireland that's one of the really, really powerful forces from the last God knows how many decades that has instilled in society the idea that homosexuality is a bad thing and along with it being a bad thing is all these other feelings of shame and ya know inequality and all those things ... yeah, I think it's definitely one of the driving forces as to why society acts the way it does in a wider sense when someone comes out or when the issue of gay people is brought up" (Interviewee 6)

"Like even now they'll only marry a man and women in the church so automatically you're excluded or singled out. Like you're christened, you make your communion, you're confirmation and when you're older you always attend church for weddings and funerals and at a wedding it's always a man and a women getting married so its ... they don't preach about gay people but they ... it's just weird do you know what I mean" (Interviewee 3)

4.5.5 The influence of specific local communities

"In society I suppose it was still kind of really hush hush it was still a little bit under the carpet I suppose" (Interviewee 3)

"I remember having me hair dyed and if ya had your hair dyed you were gay, ya know they way you dress, oh my God he's gay, ya had to dress a certain way and that type of stuff, I think people were very homophobic then thinking back ... there wasn't a day that went by that I'd be out or whatever and I wouldn't get called a queer or a fagot" (Interviewee 4)

"But the youngest kids even when it came to me it was like, faggot this or faggot that (pause) it's the immediate thing that kids think of because if it's there and its visible then they're going to use it against you because I think a lot of it had to do with how underexposed it was at the time and how it wasn't spoken about in schools and all that kind of stuff whereas now I think it makes it easier for young people to come out" (Interviewee 7)

“When I was younger there was no positives to it, it was all negatives. It would only ever be used as a slagging that someone was gay ... it was the worst thing that you could be, if you were shit in school, you were gay and if you were shit at sport in school it was ya know the worst thing you could be, girly or anything like that was the worst and there was fellas in my school who were obviously gay but they got the worst time ever” (Interviewee 1)

“So automatically it was drilled into your head that gay was a bad thing and that and a word that you could never be. Especially in my area cause everyone was a bit backward and not really educated they just listen to everybody else” (Interviewee 2)

“With being from an area that would have been considered a little bit more working class and like people I suppose in a way in certain areas they were undereducated when it comes to the whole gay thing, it just wasn't like it is now the way kids kind of see it in the media, like that so when you saw somebody that was a little bit different walking towards you down the street, yeah we were jeered and taunted” (Interviewee 7)

4.6 Self-identified challenges, supports and consequences in relation to sexual transitions

4.6.1 Challenges in relation to mental health

“I grew up a very unhappy person yet to everyone else I was a really, really happy person but deep down every time I was on my own I was dying inside, I didn't want to live and I didn't like myself and it got to the point where I thought you either kill yourself and die or deal with the situation” (Interviewee 2)

“I told all of them in college and I left. I was kind of finding myself and I was too distracted that's why I left college, my mind-set wasn't there” (Interviewee 1)

“There were days were I used to lie in bed and cry myself to sleep but people didn't know that because I didn't show it it I remember going down to the doctor and I was on anti-depressants for about four years but nobody knew because I was ashamed of it” (Interviewee 4)

“I never talked about that with my friends 'cause it was something that I was actually ashamed of, so oh my God he's on anti-depressants ... maybe he's going a bit mental or something but it wasn't ... it was to help me get through life... to be treated differently every single day there's only so much you can take” (Interviewee 4)

4.6.2 Social networks having a prior awareness versus no awareness of sexual orientation

“I think the community in general were just like I don't know if they had kind of already thought that there's a possibility that I was gay so it wasn't really a big deal” (Interviewee 7)

“Well nobody was really happy about it, everyone was really shocked ‘cause I had a girlfriend and lived with my girlfriend so to them it was like what the fuck is going on” (Interviewee 2)

“Obviously everyone thought I was straight because I had a girlfriend which made it one hundred times worse, whereas if I had of grown up and distanced myself from all that it wouldn’t have been as bad” (Interviewee 2)

“So like my Mam was obviously like the one that had the worst reaction, it was kind of because I was seeing a girl and then not seeing a girl, I mean so she didn’t know what was going on’. (Interviewee 3)

4.6.3 Further associated challenges and risk factors

“I started having sexual experiences which were totally secret ;cause at that point nobody knew I was gay , it was kind of like ya know you’re living a double life then I started seeing someone more regularly and I suppose that was probably the most difficult part because you’re not experiencing it to the full extent of what it could be until you’ve incorporated friends and family. You can’t share photographs and conversations that you’ve had with your partner in the same way that your brothers and sisters have” (Interviewee 6)

“I think from about seventeen to twenty-one was a difficult period for me cause I was on anti-depressants, I was in counselling and stuff like that but it was stuff I was dealing with myself because I was still ashamed to say that actually I needed help and I needed a coping mechanism for dealing with it and ya know it wasn’t until ya know going into me twenties that I could actually start to deal with it meself so yeah that was difficult.” (Interviewee 4)

“ Probably second and third year in secondary school, cause always in the back of my head I thought if I don’t tell somebody today, I can tell them tomorrow, even if I don’t I can, whereas if I tell someone today I can’t take it back tomorrow and I think that kind of, that was challenging because it made it very difficult to decide when to do it.”(Interviewee 5)

“I was very academic in school cause I was quite competitive, I just wanted to be better than everyone else, that was what drove me, so for the junior cert years forget about everything else, forget about doing well for yourself I just wanted to, ya know be competitive, so I think trying to balance that and the emotions and feelings in your head that was tough, trying to think what do I do and sort out yourself, they were the most challenging times” (Interviewee 5)

“Probably telling myself I actually was or being in a gay bar, probably going and actually being in a gay bar and thinking right this is what you’re going to be and when I went to gay bars I wasn’t into it and still don’t really like it, so I think it was hard for me because going into it I thought when I was finally going to go out I was going to think wow this is an amazing gay scene and I never felt like that and I still thought, is this what I am, because this isn’t the type of scene that I want to be involved in” (Interviewee 2)

4.6.4 Further associated supports and benefits

“only a gay person would know what it’s like to come out and most people have very different experiences of it but for us we were all going through it at exactly the same time ..ya kind of go through the same conversations so it really feels shared amongst people that really understand what’s going on so I was really lucky in that sense’
(Interviewee 6)

“I think if I didn’t have that job I wouldn’t be here today,..it was somewhere to go like, to get away from the shit I was dealing with in school ya know, I felt I could be myself, there was people there that I felt cared about me” (Interviewee 4)

“I remember my personnel manager sitting down with me and she said to me, ‘you should be proud of who you are, you’re a young person who knows who he is, you should never have to be spoken about like that, this is your area, you are who you are’. I remember her having that conversation with me and I think that kind of empowered me and made me think actually I am who I am I never kind of hide really who I was, so she kind of got that and I got a bit of support from her, she’d check in every so often to see how I was and stuff which was really good” (Interviewee 4)

“I think it’s important for people to feel that they can be gay, it just so happens that I work in an area (fashion industry) that it’s so openly acceptable, and this definitely helps” (Interviewee 7)

“I kind of think it made me a stronger person, I think it probably destroyed my confidence for a while, then I think it kind of built it up even higher than it would have been, I think ultimately it did” (Interviewee 5)

“Once the big disclosures were out of the way and those talks were becoming less frequent and everyone knew it felt like such a weight had been lifted, ya can start to really be yourself and all of those confusing thoughts you had for years are totally gone, you feel great about it, you feel a real boost” (Interviewee 6)

“I’ll say now it did in a positive way because I was really really unhappy and there was times where I actually did think, awe I don’t want to live ill just kill myself and this would be over. Now I look at it in a more positive way and it’s made me the person I am today because there is nothing negative in my life at the moment and I’ll never go back to feeling like that again” (Interviewee 2)

