Exiting Exodus: Narratives of Gay Christians

Rachel Goff

22206655

Submitted in fulfilment of the Master of Arts

School of Political and Social Inquiry

Faculty of Arts

Monash University

2012

Abstract:

This thesis is a qualitative sociological study of Christianity and sexuality within contemporary Australia that seeks to examine the identity construction of a (post-*Exodus)* gay Christian. Drawing on interviews with six gay Christians who participated in an *Exodus*-style gay healing program, along with a comparison to five gay Christians who did not, this thesis explores the motivations for involvement in gay healing, and reasons for the failure of religiously-mediated change of same-sex attraction. It is argued that the exclusive nature of the post-*Exodus* gay Christians' plausibility structure is the reason for involvement in gay healing, and the failure of reparative therapy to be based on Durkheim's (1897) concept of *anomie*. In exploring the reconstruction process of a religious worldview, it is argued that the (post-*Exodus*) gay Christian might begin to reclaim a personalised experience of Christianity and spirituality through the application of a gay theology.

I declare that this thesis contains no material which has been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material which has been previously published or written by another person, except when due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

2012

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the research participants for their courage and willingness to share their experiences. Also, thanks to my supervisors, Dr Andrew Singleton, Professor Denise Cuthbert and Dr Suzie Adams for their time, encouragement, support and feedback. Thanks must also be given to Anthony Venn-Brown, Freedom 2 b[e] and the Gay Christian Network for their assistance with sharing information regarding this project. To the numerous Monash staff involved in the administrative process, particularly Sue Stevenson, thank you for the encouragement and advice.

Special thanks to Angela Elson.

This thesis was written on the land of the Kulin Nation.

Table of Contents

Chapter One:	Introduction	Page 6
Chapter Two:	Review of Literature	Page 16
Chapter Three:	Research Method	Page 28
Chapter Four:	Entering Exodus	Page 37
Chapter Five:	The Exodus Experience	Page 66
Chapter Six:	Exiting Exodus	Page 88
Chapter Seven:	Conclusion	Page 115
Appendices		Page 120
Bibliography		Page 127

Chapter One: Introduction

How can a person enter a gay treatment program, and based on religious conversion, exit as 'straight'? When a person has been brought up in the culture of conservative, Pentecostal and evangelical Christianity and identifies as gay, this presents a problem for the individual's religious conviction and spiritual growth in the setting of the institutional Church. In order to bring their so-called 'deviant' sexual identity in line with their religious worldview, some Christians choose to attend programs that seek to restore the gay person's sexuality to the heterosexual norm, thereby adopting an 'ex-gay' identity. This identity resists affiliation to the binary hetero/homosexual definition, and is said to repress sexuality altogether. This restoration is the aim of the organisation *Exodus International*. Through the gay healing movement, of which many programs are being run by *Exodus*, or a similar style model, there are few scholarly accounts of success. However for those who cannot 'change' their homosexual identity, what comes next? This thesis explores the journeys of Christian people as they move through an *Exodus*-style gay healing program and attempt to reconstruct an authentic spiritual and gay self.

Who is *Exodus International*?

Exodus International, the US-based chief organisation of gay healing programs, is central to my interest in the 'post-*Exodus* gay' experience. As the largest global ex-gay umbrella organisation, *Exodus* claims to liberate Christians with homosexual preferences from this 'chosen lifestyle'. This claim ignores recommendations by both the Australian Psychological Society and American Psychological Association: 'The reality is that homosexuality is not an illness. It does not require treatment and is not changeable' (American Psychological Association, 2009). My research findings, based on the narratives of those for whom their sexuality has not changed after participation in the gay healing movement, will support my critique of the *Exodus* motto: 'Freedom from homosexuality through the Power of Jesus Christ' (*Exodus International*, 2005).

Exodus International, a non-denominational, but conservative evangelical organisation, emerged from humble beginnings. In 1973 Frank Worthen, struggling with his same-sex attractions, established *Love in Action*, the first ex-gay ministry in the United States (Erzen, 2006). After several years of independent ministry north of the San Francisco area, Worthen joined together with Michael Bussee,[1] Gary Cooper, Ron Dennis, and Greg Reid, leaders of other independent ministries at the 1976 annual ex-gay conference, to form a unitary governing body, naming itself *Exodus International North America*.[2] Since its inception, *Exodus* has grown to include 230 ministries and 121 affiliated churches throughout North America alone, and is one of 13 ex-gay ministries globally (Erzen, 2006:12). *Exodus* promotes itself as a non-profit organisation, and has a number of high profile affiliates such as the National Association of Evangelicals, the National Association for the Research and Therapy into Homosexuality (NARTH), and the *Exodus* Global Alliance. Another major affiliate is *Focus on the Family*, an ultra-conservative American evangelical organisation founded in 1977 by Dr. James Dobson, and its homosexuality-specific ministry, named *Love Won Out*; 'We exist to help men and women dissatisfied with living homosexually understand that same-sex attractions can be overcome. It is not easy, but it is possible, as evidenced by the thousands of men and women who have walked this difficult road successfully' (*Love Won Out*, 2008).

The *Exodus* Mission Statement, 'Mobilising the body of Christ to minister grace and truth to a world impacted by homosexuality' (*Exodus International*, 2005), is condemning, and the organisation maintains an unapologetic stance on this 'abomination' against God's plan for humanity - that of the normative, heterosexual lifestyle:

> *Exodus* upholds heterosexuality as God's creative intent for humanity, and

[1] It should be noted that Michael Bussee and Gary Cooper left *Exodus* to be in a relationship with each other in 1979. After both divorcing their wives, they held a Commitment Ceremony in 1982. Gary Cooper died from AIDS related illnesses in 1991. Michael Bussee now advocates strongly against *Exodus* and in 2007 issued a public apology for his involvement in the ex-gay ministry.
[2] The name '*Exodus'* draws on the Biblical narrative of the exodus of the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt, an ironic twist on liberating homosexuals from the 'slavery' of their chosen lifestyle. This story of the Hebrew's exodus from Egypt can be found in the Book of Exodus, in the Christian Old Testament.

> subsequently views homosexual expression as outside of God's will. *Exodus* cites homosexual tendencies as one of many disorders that beset fallen humanity. Choosing to resolve these tendencies through homosexual behaviour, taking on a homosexual identity, and involvement in the homosexual lifestyle is considered destructive, as it distorts God's intent for the individual and is thus sinful.
>
> *Exodus International* Policy Statement on Homosexuality, 2005

Exodus strongly adheres to the evangelical worldview when its Doctrinal Statement declares, 'We believe that faith alone in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord frees us from the mastery of sin, and its consequences of death and eternal damnation' (*Exodus International*, 2005). Conversely, it claims to preach change in 'love and grace'. Testimonials of participation in an *Exodus* program are all 'success stories' which contain elements of propaganda; stories of failed attempts of re-orientation are notably absent.

However, the juxtaposition of 'faith and love' with the 'consequences of death and eternal damnation' confuses the participant, and can also instil a sense of failure and self-hatred, if the desired changes are not achieved. For example, one participant wrote on an online support network:

> I had come to the realisation that God hated me and that I had failed Him miserably… I guess it was true I was going to hell just like all the preachers and evangelists said. That was the punishment for me being a homosexual.
>
> Scott Carpenter, Freedom 2 b[e], 2007

How then, does *Exodus* repair the gay Christian's homosexuality? *Exodus* believes that change is possible through self-motivation, self-determination and a strong desire to change. This must be based on a personal, transforming relationship with Jesus, and measured through the ability to reject temptation, ultimately through heterosexual marriage or a 'Godly' single life (*Exodus International*, 2005). Such 'Godly change' is reinforced directly by what is known as reparative or 'conversion' therapy, which is 'therapy aimed at changing sexual orientation' (American Psychological Association, 2008). This is the preferred method used by *Exodus* leaders in achieving their goal of

restoring pure and moral sexuality to participants. Historically, therapy to treat the 'pathological' homosexual condition stemmed from a multi-disciplinary field, including psychoanalysis, endocrinology and neurology, and was practised by Sigmund Freud (1923 [1962]) and Melanie Klein, among others. Until the mid 1970s, treatment for homosexuality involved hypnosis, behaviour modification, psychotherapy, aversion therapy, nausea-producing drugs, and extreme actions such as castration, electric shocks, brain surgery, and breast amputation (Religious Tolerance, 2009).[3] However most of these methods were discredited and abandoned in the mid 1970s, even as 'transformational ministries' such as *Exodus* were emerging.

Ex-gay programs are based on the belief that homosexuality is caused by environmental factors, specifically parental incompetence.[4] *Exodus* argues that 80 percent of their participants were raised in homes in which the father was a substance abuser, and this translated into sexual, physical or emotional abuse and neglect, causing the participant to display homosexual tendencies (*Exodus International*, 2005). These statistics are based on anecdotes from ex-gay participants, and it has been suggested by post-*Exodus* gays Bogle (1990) and Venn-Brown (2004), that ex-gay leaders misconstrue such anecdotes to support their claims of healing. Gay healing is based on two fundamental religious beliefs: firstly that God is omnipotent and active in the lives of believers, and therefore has the power to change sexual orientation; and secondly that God is strongly interventionist, promising to answer sincere prayers of born-again believers (Religious Tolerance, 2009). These ideas about God are typical of the evangelical worldview.

To change the participant's sexual identity, *Exodus* employs a number of techniques: social conditioning and implementation of activities that teach traditional masculine or feminine gender roles,[5] encouraging the participant to enter into an intimate, non-erotic and non-sexual relationship with another

[3] Religious Tolerance is an information database which is a religiously impartial and academic website governed by the Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance. This group aims to represent all systems of belief, ethics and morality. It is found at www.religioustolerance.org
[4] This view is contested in social constructionist views of queer theory and sexuality studies.
[5] For example, men learning mechanics, and women practising hair and make-up techniques.

participant of the same sex; this is also said to reduce homosexual behaviour as heterosexuality increases. Secondly, cognitive behaviour modification, inclusive of visualisation exercises, reconditioning, and social skills training; and most importantly, fervent prayer, religious conversion through being 'born again', and one-on-one or 'Twelve Step' style group counselling. Interestingly, *Exodus* itself does not conduct clinical treatment, but provides referrals to reparative therapists, such as those associated with NARTH (*Exodus International* Policy Statement on Reparative Therapy, 2005).

There has been very little academic evidence showing 'successes' in these ex-gay programs. Even so, *Exodus* claims a large success rate of participants' change in their sexual orientation:

> We find hundreds of former homosexuals who have found a large degree of change – attaining abstinence from homosexual behaviours, lessening of homosexual temptations, strengthening their sense of masculine or feminine identity, correcting distorted styles of relating with members of the same and opposite gender. Some former homosexuals marry and some don't, but marriage is not the measuring stick; spiritual growth and obedience are.
>
> *Exodus International*, 2005

As the success rate is built on spiritual growth and obedience, which are intangible, unmeasurable aspects of a participant's identity, statistics and statements of success are supported by anecdotal evidence and religious testimony, which can hardly be seen as an accurate measure. In a statement published on a support group website it is observed:

> I am now happily married and can testify that I too have come out of the closet, the dark homosexual closet … I want to emphasise that 7 months in an ex-gay ministry will achieve as you say very little. It takes many years. I myself have attended 48 one-on-one prayer ministry sessions together with a structured program that has already taken 4 years and I expect another few years. There is no easy answer but I am living testimony that it can be done only with the cleansing blood of Jesus.
>
> Anonymous, Freedom 2 B[e], 2008

This is a typical narrative used by *Exodus* as evidence of the efficacy of sexual conversion and restoration of God's intent for sexuality. If this claim can be achieved, this leaves the conservative, evangelical faction of Christianity with an unanswered question: how can one be a self-identified practising 'gay Christian'?

Narratives of 'gay Christians'

With this question in mind, there are narratives of 'gay Christians' which affirm that homosexual orientation and spiritual experience may be integrated into one's self-identity, including religious identity. International organisation Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) provides non-denominational Christian worship specific to the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (GLBTIQ) community. Additionally, there are several online communities specific to supporting the emotional and spiritual needs of self identifying 'gay Christians': 'Freedom 2 B[e]', 'Beyond ex-gay', 'The Gay Christian Network' and 'The Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement' are some examples. These communities allow gay Christians to share their personal experiences, often supporting them in making the important step of integrating these seemingly incompatible aspects of the self. A former leader of *Exodus,* Darlene Bogle,[6] shares the story of her 'exodus' from *Exodus*:

> *Exodus* believes that homosexuality is a sin and God needs to deliver you from that sin. I know that Jesus didn't specify homosexuality as a 'sin' or an evil to be delivered from, or a lifestyle to change before He will love anyone. I have experienced only loving acceptance in the gift of the life partners that He has provided. My life has been changed at the core, since God revealed His unconditional love through the unconditional love of Des, and now, my life partner, Becky.
>
> Beyond Ex-Gay, 2007

As displayed in the testimonial above, forums such as these provide opportunities for the post-*Exodus* gay to share their personal journey from taking on an 'ex-gay' identity, to then becoming a 'post-*Exodus*' gay Christian.

[6] Along with Michael Bussee, Darlene Bogle issued a public apology in 2007 for her involvement in the gay healing movement.

As participants willingly submit to ex-gay teachings due to their involvement in conservative evangelical Christian churches, here lies the problem: if healing cannot be attained in accordance with evangelical teaching, then the individual's place in the evangelical community becomes problematic. The structures through which they interact with the world must be renegotiated to hold the seemingly incongruent aspects of their identity together.

This research looks at the experience of post-*Exodus* gay Christians. For the purposes of this research, a 'post-*Exodus* gay Christian' is defined as an individual who has participated in an *Exodus* style program with the intent of religiously modifying their sexuality from gay to straight, who fails to achieve this change. Upon exiting the program, rather than discounting their faith and spirituality altogether, a post-*Exodus* gay Christian is able to combine religious identity and experiences within gay healing with their sexual identity, and self-authenticates as both gay and Christian. The juxtaposition of religious, spiritual and sexual identity forms the context of the question animating this research: how does the post-*Exodus* gay narrate these central aspects of the self, and find meaning through their experience of self?

In a broad sense, this thesis will elaborate the isolation and confusion which many post-Exodus gay Christians experience through participation in an *Exodus* style program, especially the tensions and stories of renegotiating a gay Christian worldview. In short, the present thesis regards the ex-gay experience as a process which aims to turn their 'gayness' into the more religiously acceptable heterosexual norm, based on mainstream moral standards issued through a specific biblical interpretation and constructed worldview. Whilst there has been much published on ex-gay narratives and the gay healing movement from religious and secular perspectives, including accounts of 'gay Christians', the outcomes of reparative therapy and renegotiating identity after unsuccessful participation in a gay healing program are yet to be examined; this research which subjects the data on the experiences of post-*Exodus* gay Christians to sociological analysis will fill a significant gap in the sociological literature.

Research Questions

As there has been no previous research published on this specific topic, the present research is pioneering, albeit preliminary. The questions underpinning this project are:

- What kind of Christian participates in an *Exodus*-style program, and what is their motivation?
- Why do *Exodus*-style programs fail to work? and
- How does the post-*Exodus* gay Christian experience religion or spirituality after leaving the program?

From these questions, it may be suggested that identity emerges from social, cultural and individual experiences. However, the commonalities or differences in how the participant narrates their experience may shed light on how the post-*Exodus* gay Christian renegotiates the self. To best explore these questions, I conducted qualitative interviews with six post-*Exodus* gay Christians (Group One). To allow a meaningful comparison, I also interviewed five non-*Exodus* gay Christians (Group Two).

Each chapter directly correlates to each research question. Mobilising the power of narrative and reflecting the chronological shape of the narratives of research participants, each chapter is shaped as either 'before, during or after' the gay healing experience. Chapter Four explores the beginning of the participants' involvement in an *Exodus*-style program, with particular emphasis on the plausibility structures (Berger, 1967; Wuthnow, 1986) which enforce the validity of fundamentally changing one's sexual attractions from same-sex to opposite-sex. Due to the conservative worldview of Pentecostal and evangelical religious institutions, post-*Exodus* gay Christians (Group One) experience a limited sense of identity, life experience and independence apart from this religious structure; therefore, a limited capacity to recognise alternative frames of reference apart from that of their plausibility structure. Experiencing a conservative religious worldview, and becoming aware of and struggling against same-sex attraction within this particular worldview,

culminates in a crisis of identity. It is this crisis which motivates the participants to seek a change in their sexual attractions in order to maintain an identity in which a religious outlook is prioritised. By contrast, those interviewed who did not participate in an ex-gay program (Group Two) engage in a more liberal plausibility structure which takes into account factors external to their religious worldview. This is not to suggest that gay Christians do not experience a crisis of identity, but that they resolve this crisis through other means.

Chapter Five follows the failure of *Exodus*-style programs in changing one's 'deviant' sexuality in becoming 'straight'. Through the participant's narratives of entering a gay healing program, it becomes evident that the aim for these individuals is to reinforce their conservative religious worldview through suppressing their same-sex desires in favour of a prioritised religious identity. Through an exploration of participant's narratives, two main themes emerge which confirm participant's lack of success: firstly, participants experience *anomie* and become isolated from their constructed worldview; and secondly, the participant also experiences a reality separate from their identity, in which a discord between their meaning system, sexual attractions and belief that God can cure their 'deviant' sexuality emerges. Based on their unchanging sexuality throughout the program, this sense of *anomie* is reinforced, and thus leads to a collapse of plausibility structure. This chapter follows participants as they tell of their experience of their involvement in an ex-gay program, and aims to expose the ex-gay experience as ineffective. Members of Group Two are not considered in this chapter, as they were able to resolve a collapse in their plausibility structure through means other than reparative therapy.

Based on the post-*Exodus* gay Christian's narrative after exiting the gay healing program, the notion emerges that to engage in a religious or spiritual experience which encapsulates their unchanged sexuality, other elements of self-identity must evolve to construct a different worldview. Chapter Six explores this reconstruction. This new worldview includes factors external to the initial plausibility structure, as well as the internalisation of subjective experience. From here emerges a 'gay theology', in which both sexual and

religious identities begin to merge and are affirmed through a different set of constructed meanings, and therefore, an emergence of a new plausibility structure. A comparison between the experiences reported by participants in Group One and Group Two suggests that a similar outcome of reconstructing worldview and sense of self exists, yet the process for Group Two is less complex and more internalised due to minimal engagement in external methods to reach the same 'self-authentication'.

Aims

The subject matter of this research can at times be confrontational, especially in conservative social contexts. It is therefore my aim to provide a sociological account of self-identity, which in the process may critique a powerful institution, especially in our politically obstinate society: the conservative evangelical church. In doing so, I aim to explore contemporary concepts of spirituality and religion pertinent to the experiences of gay Christians, contemporary notions of the fluidity of self, and to draw on the tensions between the social construction of the self, and the encounter of one's authentic self.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

This chapter provides a detailed review of research conducted into the area of gay and Christian identity. Firstly, it is essential to provide further background on *Exodus* style ex-gay programs, specifically those which continue to practice reparative therapy in Australia. Following this, an outline of research on ex-gay programs, from both a pro-evangelical viewpoint and a scholarly perspective, delineates the limitations of knowledge in this area. In addition, I provide a contextualisation of key terms used throughout this research. Finally, I offer an analysis of identity politics as a theoretical framework, which contextualises and justifies the context for this research.

Gay Healing in Australia

As discussed briefly in the Introduction, the ex-gay movement is more influential in the United States than in other countries with large Christian populations, however there are a number of gay healing programs in Australia. According to the online support and networking page for Pentecostal and evangelical gay Christians, Freedom 2b[e] (2010), there exists three national bodies and one other organisation which conform to the ex-gay ideology and mode of operation. Although not advertised in the public domain, such organisations are easy to access through word-of-mouth within relevant Christian communities, promotion through evangelical churches and via the internet.[7]

Exodus Asia Pacific, a member of the *Exodus Global Alliance*, 'serves people' from Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific region. Along with the values upheld by *Exodus International*, they are dedicated to "equipping and uniting agencies and individuals to effectively communicate the message of liberation from sexual and relational problems" (*Exodus Asia Pacific, Exodus Global Alliance,* 2011). *Exodus Asia Pacific* maintains a network of ministries, counsellors and churches that provide this support, inclusive of *Liberty Inc*. (Queensland); *Ministry One* (Queensland); *On Eagles Wings to Asia*

[7] See Appendix 1 for screen captures of ex-gay websites.

(Queensland); *Turnabout* (Queensland); *Sanctuary International* (Queensland); *Liberty Christian Ministries Inc.* (Sydney); and *Mosaic Ministries* (Victoria). According to *Exodus Asia Pacific*, local members provide a variety of services, including counselling, support groups and discipleship (*Exodus Global Alliance,* 2011).

The reach of the *Exodus* mission is not limited to formal ex-gay ministries; *Exodus Asia Pacific* offers biblical teaching and facilitation of workshops at a number of Bible Colleges across the country, to pastors, lay preachers or 'counsellors', and youth workers. This indicates that although the official number of programs run by *Exodus* in Australia may be limited to seven, the values and teachings are extended beyond this through an extended audience of workshop attendees and evangelical Christian discourses and values. One participant from this study attended an *Exodus* support group, although did not specify the name or location. *Exodus Asia Pacific* does not support individuals who are unsuccessful in changing their sexuality, therefore providing no clue as to how such individuals experience religion and spirituality post-program.

Living Waters is another umbrella ex-gay organisation of 'evangelical persuasion' (Living Waters, 2011), which provides services to the 'sexually broken' in Australia. Led by ex-gay Pastor Ron Brookman using a course developed by Andrew Comiskey,[8] *Living Waters* is based in Sydney and Melbourne. The *Living Waters* course is an 'in-depth Christian Discipleship' course, which runs one night a week for approximately 24 weeks. Broken into three modules, the course covers topics inclusive of 'Welcoming God to Heal', 'Working Out our Healing' and 'Walking Out our Healing'. On the *Living Waters* website it states "the aim of Living Waters is to call forth the true masculine or feminine, the true image of God in each one of us." These aims reflect the difficulty that participants may face on their 'struggle' out of deviance, yet once again displays a distinct lack of understanding of the

[8] Andrew Comiskey is a conservative Christian political activist who founded *Desert Stream Ministries*, perhaps the leading ministry of *Exodus* in the United States. He is considered to be a prominent ex-gay leader and has written many books on 'avoiding homosexual relationships and behaviours'.

spectrum of human sexuality, from both psychological and sociological perspectives.

Although still a relatively small organisation, *Living Waters* aims to establish a ministry in each state, and provides a large selection of articles and resources on its website, including links to Brookman's Sydney-based church, *Restore*. Two of the participants in my study attended the Sydney-based program, and despite their stories of failure, all testimonials published by this group recount stories of success.

The last[9] known *Exodus* style program is *Beyond Egypt*, run by the Anglican group of St Paul's Churches. Similar to all other ex-gay programs, *Beyond Egypt* aims to "support those who struggle with these issues to move towards sexual and relational wholeness, through a deeper understanding of God and his love for them; and equip others to understand the issues, and to demonstrate the love of Jesus to those who do struggle" (Beyond Egypt, 2011). This organisation runs day conferences with 'question and answer' style discussion panels, including guests who were successful in sexual conversion. In addition to the Sydney based conferences, all resources, including downloadable mp3 recordings can be accessed online. Like *Exodus* and *Living Waters*, this enables the philosophy and practice of reparative therapy to be easily accessed without providing a broader range of literature, physical or psychological support to the participant.

However, to supplement participation in an ex-gay program in Australia, literature by ex-gay leaders is also prominent in the justification of religiously mediated change of homosexuality. A number of publications are written by ex-gay leaders themselves, and are autobiographical style success-stories (Bogle, 1990; Consiglio, 1991; Comiskey, 1989; Nicolosi, 1991; 1993). These publications promote the Christian values of compassion and freedom

[9] There are a number of other ex-gay ministries that are related to other religious groups, such as the Catholic Church's *Courage International*, *Evergreen International* for Mormons and *JONAH*, an ex-gay program for those of the Jewish faith. Although these programs are in existence, I have limited my study to evangelical and Pentecostal organisations.

(Consiglio, 1991; Konrad, 1993) yet also align the message with one of 'struggle' against same-sex attraction.

Situated within an evangelical framework, these narratives are limited in scope, as they only provide positive reinforcement for an individual's decision to partake in gay healing rather than including other perspectives. Specimen documentation such as Citlau (2010) offers psychological tools to remain free of issues such as pornography addiction, lust and 'more serious forms of addiction'. Comiskey (2000) and Rentzel (1990) also provide resources for 'the homosexual struggler and their pursuit of freedom' (Comiskey, 2000). Many of these publications are available as resources on ex-gay websites, and confirm that the marketing strategy for *Exodus* style programs is designed to limit the availability of alternative points of view.

In addition to these national bodies, there is one other organisation which provides support for those seeking change to their sexuality. *Homosexuals Anonymous* (*HA*) is an "international organisation dedicated to serving the recovery needs of men and women who struggle with unwanted same-sex attraction" (Homosexuals Anonymous, 2011). Based in Brisbane, *HA* runs a '14-Step' program similar to the Alcoholics Anonymous '12-step' model, and expresses the belief that in order to be a 'true Christian', one must renounce one's homosexuality (Kell and Camp, 1999:99). The anonymous nature of the organisation makes it difficult to determine the "success" rate or the effectiveness of the methods for change (Besen, 2003:37).

According to self-identified gay Christian and ex-gay program survivor Anthony Venn-Brown (Gay Ambassador, April 2011), "Australian society has become more informed about sexuality and accepting of gay and lesbian people… [The ex-gay message is] damaging. We refuse to go back to our days of ignorance." In support of this statement, three of the six gay healing programs in which my study participants took part are no longer in existence (*Dominion*, *Moombara* and *Choices*), which may be an indication of the decline of gay healing in Australia.

Research on Ex-Gay Programs

There have been a number of studies of the efficacy of ex-gay programs and these can be categorised into two groups: pro-evangelical publications which are sympathetic towards gay healing, and other scholarly articles which explore gay Christian identity. There has been both qualitative and quantitative research conducted into this area, but nothing of purely sociological nature.

Pro-Evangelical Publications

Three studies have been conducted by pro-evangelical researchers and each suggests that there has been some degree of success regarding religiously mediated change of sexual attraction. Pattison and Pattison (1980) conducted a qualitative study of the religiously mediated change of eleven homosexual men. The study took the view that homosexuality is an expression of psychological immaturity, and could be changed from a Kinsey 6 to a Kinsey 1[10] through participation in a Pentecostal church and the application of 'folk therapy'. According to Pattison and Pattison (1980:1560), 'folk therapy' involved "ideological commitment; cognitive structuring of beliefs, values and expectations; behavioural interactions over time between subjects and their social reference groups; and a sequence of mutually expected behavioural changes." A review of the Pattison's study by Capps and Carlin (2008) suggests their research to be unethical. Based on the results of questionnaires completed by the initial 300 participants, the authors chose only to interview the eleven participants who had experienced the most change to their sexual attractions. The data reported in the study was based on this information, to the exclusion of their initial findings. Therefore, the credibility of this study is questionable, as the potential for skewed results is clearly evident.

Similarly, Spitzer (2003) in his study of 200 homosexuals concluded that most

[10]Also known as the 'Heterosexual-Homosexual Rating Scale', the Kinsey Scale was developed by American biologist and sexologist Alfred Kinsey. The scale measures sexual behaviour on a scale of 0 (Exclusively Heterosexual) to 6 (Exclusively Homosexual). The Kinsey Scale does not address all sexual identities or expressions, just that of same or opposite sex sexual interactions. See 'The Kinsey Institute' (http://www.kinseyinstitute.org/index.html) for further information.

claimed successful change after five years of some kind of reparative therapy. Of those interviewed, 93 percent said that religion was a primary factor in their decision to change. Spitzer does agree that reports of complete change were uncommon. Neither 'reparative therapy' nor 'change' is defined within the study. What both studies do assume however is that change to orientation is based on behaviour. Neither Pattison and Pattison (1980) nor Spitzer (2003) focused on the long-term success of reparative therapy, nor the effects on participant's mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. This is a gap which the narrative-driven methodology of the present study – which asks participants to reflect on their experience before during and after the ex-gay program – seeks to address.

Jones and Yarhouse (2007) conducted a longitudinal, quantitative and scientific study on the question of successful religiously-mediated change, in addition to the potential harmful effects. All 98 respondents to the study were active participants in an *Exodus* program, and the results were self-determined by participants themselves. At the conclusion of the study, 15% found success in conversion; 23% found success in chastity; 29% were continuing *Exodus*; 15% were non responsive; 4% had failed to change due to confusion; and 8% claimed no change and embraced a gay identity (Jones and Yarhouse, 2007:369). According to this study, 'change' is self-determined, and includes celibacy and a suppression of same-sex desires, which from a psychological perspective, is not change itself. In addition, the authors found that although the average participant experienced no harm, there may have been some harmful effects. Jones and Yarhouse (2007) do not address why the unsuccessful participants did not change, nor what the harmful effects experienced were; this will be a major focus of my research.

Studies on religiously mediated change itself are limited in scope. In a statement released by the American Psychological Association, Conger (1975) affirms reparative therapy has been rejected as a legitimate therapeutic practice, and suggests it to be 'highly harmful'. Despite this stance, the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH) and Throckmorton (1998) support the availability for such

treatments to be practised in an ethical manner on request from a client. Working within an evangelical framework, both NARTH and Throckmorton (1998) argue that effective change can be achieved based on the willingness of the participant. Haldeman (1994) suggests that although religiously mediated change can be practiced, the focus should rather be on "reversing prejudice, not what reverses sexual orientation" (1994:226). The studies conducted on religiously mediated change are limited from a sociological perspective, and do not take into account the failure rate of *Exodus* style programs, why such programs don't work or how the prejudicial assumptions on which they are based affects a gay Christian.

Research on Gay Christians

Scholarly research on gay Christians (Gross, 2008; Thumma, 1998; Wolkimir, 2001) often focuses on the dissonance between religious and sexual identity. Gross' (2008) research looks at how sexual and religious identity are negotiated within the individual, in which the individual experiences an 'act of conversion' by joining a more inclusive church which allows for a gay Christian identity, or by rejecting either the context for dissonance (the church), or the identity itself (2008:88). Gross (2008) also suggests that the current societal shift towards religious individualism (spirituality), has actually created a space for gay Christians to generate cohesion between their 'dual identities'.

Diverging slightly from Gross (2008), Scott Thumma (1998) uses a conservative evangelical gay Christian community, *Good News*, as a case study in determining how a gay Christian may strengthen their gay identity whilst accommodating an evangelical Christian identity, combining the two to create a new core identity of a gay Evangelical Christian (1998: 345). As the article is from a sociological perspective, Thumma (1998) suggests that it is through socialisation within the *Good News* community and through the affirmation of other congregants, that this 'new identity' is achieved. This article shares many correlations and explores similar interests to the findings presented in this thesis, such as identity dissonance to the point of crisis, evangelical identity and the desire to bring the 'gay' and the 'Christian' identities together. Thumma's exploration provides a basis from which this

research can explore such concepts in relation to a post-*Exodus* gay Christian identity.

Lastly, Michelle Wolkimir (2001) examines the construction of moral identities in gay and ex-gay men, through the revision of traditional Christian ideologies towards a new identity that accommodate the individual's sexuality. Specifically studying the structures of power and dominance in Christian ideology whereby gay and ex-gay men are subordinate, Wolkimir establishes that gay and ex-gay Christians remake themselves as 'moral' through ideological revisions, which therefore increases authority to revise Christian Ideology. Through a selective dismantling of existing ideology to open new interpretive spaces, constructing a new affirming ideology, and authenticating new self-meanings (2001:408), the conclusions of Wolkimir's research are in direct correlation to the findings of this thesis.

Limitations of Previous Research

As seen from the evaluation of previous research into ex-gay programs and gay Christian identity, there is little sociological research in this area. Publications regarding reparative therapy have been sympathetic to the benefits of religiously mediated change of same-sex attraction. This perspective is positioned within the evangelical viewpoint of 'spreading the Good News' or 'saving' those who are yet to identify as Christian. Of the limited studies which examine gay Christians, there has been no research conducted into the specific experience of a post-*Exodus* gay Christian. Some research is available regarding the negotiation of identity to combine 'gay' and 'Christian', although this too is limited to experiences outside of the ex-gay context. Whilst there has been some research regarding a gay Christian's experience of religion and spirituality, there is no definition of reconstructed religious ideologies as a 'gay theology', or an examination of religious and spiritual experience within the renegotiated gay Christian identity. The aim of this research is to establish clear arguments to fill these gaps in the literature.

Definition of Key Terms

Prior to presenting the data found through the analysis of post-*Exodus* gay Christian's experiences of ex-gay programs and religion thereafter, it is necessary to contextualise key terms that will be used throughout this thesis.

Evangelical – An evangelical is a Christian of either Protestant or Catholic persuasion, with four main characteristics: Evangelical Christians believe that salvation may only come through Jesus Christ; they must experience a personal conversion (commonly known as being 'born again'); must believe in the importance of mission and evangelising the 'Good News'; and believe strongly in the absolute truth of Scripture. Because an evangelical takes the Bible as the literal word of God, they also adhere to the scriptural interpretation of homosexuality as an abomination, among other moral issues. In the United States, up to 46 percent of the population are believed to be evangelical (Swatos, 1998). There are evangelical congregations within the Baptist, Anglican and Church of Christ denominations in Australia. In addition, the evangelical Christian actively applies one's conservative theological beliefs to social life and personal behaviour (Hammond and Hunter, 1984:226)

Pentecostal – With an emphasis on the *experiential* within Christianity, Pentecostalism is placed within the Christian Charismatic movement (Macchia, 2006). It places special meaning on spiritual baptism (being 'born again'), receiving the gifts of the Holy Spirit (such as speaking in tongues), and salvation through receiving Jesus Christ. Although not synonymous with evangelicalism, many Pentecostal Christians would consider themselves evangelical, although not all Evangelical Christians would practice the charismatic features pertinent to Pentecostalism, such as the raising of hands in worship, or speaking in tongues.

Ex-Gay – an ex-gay is an individual who has participated in an *Exodus* style program, has rejected their gay identity, and applied the teachings and experience of gay healing to their lives, therefore becoming 'ex-gay'.

Post-*Exodus* Gay – the term coined for the participants in this research, a post-*Exodus* gay is someone who aimed to overcome their same-sex attractions, however graduated through the other side of an *Exodus* style program not as a successful 'ex-gay', but as someone who went on to embrace a gay Christian identity. Amongst this small community, they are sometimes called 'ex-ex-gays'. For clarity, I decided not to use this term.

Theoretical Framework

One key theoretical framework used in this research is that of identity politics. Identity politics provides an important basis in understanding how the post-*Exodus* gay may experience both their sexual identity and their religious identity, not in dissonance, but reconstructed to be congruent.

Identity politics has arisen most interestingly within postmodernity, especially with the emphasis on the social construction of one's self. Postmodern theorists (Butler, 1990; Harris in Ward, 2003:121) suggest that the individual experiments with the self through continuous 'reconstructions' due to social fragmentation. This fragmentation enables a 'fluid self' to emerge, whereby the individual may create multiple identities. Although this 'fluid self' may be witnessed in the participants of this study as they struggle with being both gay and Christian, the notion of 'identity' becomes problematic when one values identity as an inherent, essential and crucial element to a person's 'authentic' self (Bendle, 2002:1) It is within this tension of essentialist and constructionist perspectives that this research lies.

A complexity of the application of identity theory to this research is the overlay of religious morality on the social construction of one's identity. In his 1989 work, Charles Taylor claims "our identity is what allows us to define what is important to us and what is not" (Taylor, 1989:28). According to Glanzer and Ream (2005), notions of identity in a Christian context enable the person to order one's identities in line with moral Christian beliefs; they argue that one's Christian identity is the most important, and all other identities are assigned order and meaning based on the prioritised Christian identity (Glanzer and Ream, 2005:17). The notion of ordered identities based on Christian teaching

is likely to emerge in this research, and may help explain why some people choose to participate in an *Exodus*-style program.

Studies which have examined the 'dual identities' of sexual identity and religious identity, such as Gross (2008), Thumma (1998) and Wolkimir (2001), have found that a process of construction or rather, 'reconstruction', is necessary to synthesise these seemingly polar opposites of the self. It is evident through these studies that new sets of meanings must be assigned to particular identities in order for these meanings to be accommodated within the context of the self. Halbertal and Koren (2006) diverge slightly from this model; although discussing the conflict and coherence in identity formation of gay and lesbian Orthodox Jews, the authors argue that such identity synthesis does not occur with Orthodox Jews, but rather there is the emergence of two mutually exclusive selves that coexist (2006:40). This argument is directly correlated to essentialist theory, and in juxtaposition to the expected results of this thesis.

As now established, the theoretical framework of identity politics provides a solid basis for how I might explain how someone who is both gay and Christian comes to renegotiate their identity and experience religion and spirituality with the reconstructed 'gay Christian' identity.

Research Aims

Responding to the literature reviewed in this section, my research aims to explore gay Christian identity, specific to the experience of gay Christians who failed their attempts to change their sexual attractions. It is my intention to analyse the stories of six post-*Exodus* gay Christians in comparison to five gay Christians, within the theoretical framework of identity politics.

In light of previous literature, this research aims to understand what kind of Christian wishes to change their sexuality through participation in gay healing, and what the motivating factors may be. It also aims to determine why ex-gay programs fail to convert people from being gay; and finally to establish an

understanding of how religion and spirituality is experienced by post-program participants.

This research will provide critical new insights into the experience of being a gay Christian and surviving gay healing.

Chapter Three: Research Method

Given the sensitive and complex nature of the topic investigated in this research, it is appropriate that a qualitative methodology be used. This chapter describes this method, and provides details about the study design: selection of informants, conduct of research and other ethical issues.

Qualitative Methodology: Narrative Analysis

Previous research regarding identity formation in the area of the gay Christian experience has predominantly been quantitative and scientific, to gauge the success of gay healing and conversion therapy (Bancroft, 1974; Jones and Yarhouse, 2007; Liss and Welner, 1973; Pattison and Pattison, 1980). If this research were to pursue a quantitative and scientific methodology, this would be problematic in addressing the experiential nature of the informant's narrative; it would reduce the participant to a scientific object without the freedom to interpret or self-determine the experience of gay healing. Therefore, the most appropriate methodology for this research is Narrative Analysis, which enables an exploration of narratives and how narrative gives meaning to the self and therewith to identity formation.

Catherine Kohler Reissman (1993) presents an in-depth and thorough perspective of narrative analysis, the process by which the narrative of the participant becomes the object of inquiry itself. Reissman upholds the idea that 'individuals become the autobiographical narratives by which they tell about their lives' (Reissman, 1993: 3). This suggests that whilst recognising self-narration as essential to authenticating the self, self-narration emphasises a sense of ownership and authority in how the participant wishes to interpret or perform their identity in such narratives (Goffman, 1959; Ricœr in Ballantyne, 2007: 126, 141), rather than the narrative determining the self (Kerby, 1991).

It would be also be appropriate to suggest for the following participants, experience and interpretation are entwined at a fundamental level, and necessary in understanding the narrative-self. Both Reissman and Ricœur (1976) emphasise the importance of narrative in the way meaning is

interpreted through the story itself. Ricœur suggests that self-interpretation, through narratives of self-identity, are paradoxically based in a history, yet also fictitiously created, as evidenced in an informant's recollection of the 'coming out' story. This allows the participants of this study to interpret their life and story in retrospect, without being determined by their own interpretation (Ricœur in Ballantyne, 2007: 141). It is from this model that the participants in this research have the authority to share a personal experience of identity re-negotiation after partaking in gay healing, and through which the data for this research can be analysed.

Recruitment

Recruiting of participants began in October 2009, with advertisements[11] placed in online discussion forums and support networks for self-identified 'gay Christians', most notably 'Freedom 2 B[e]' and 'The Gay Christian Network'. Due to the global nature of the Internet, qualification was needed for the Australian location of participants. Four of the six participants who identified as a post-*Exodus* gay Christian were recruited from 'Freedom 2 B[e]', and the remaining two from 'The Gay Christian Network'. Gary,[12] Alex, Rupert, Jeff and Bruce contacted me via email and following this, phone interviews were conducted, as all were interstate. Eddie chose to document his answers in written format, as he did not feel comfortable having a conversational style interview. Recruitment for post-*Exodus* gay Christians concluded in February 2010, and similar methods of recruitment began for a comparative group of non-*Exodus* gay Christians around the same time. Two participants from this group were found online, two through personal connections and one through the recommendation of another participant. Carolyn and Nina were interviewed over the telephone. Simon, Troy and Lisa were interviewed in person; Simon and Lisa at a cafe in Melbourne, and Troy at his place of work.

[11] See Appendix 2 for details

[12] Not their real names

Data Collection

Prior to interview, the interview questions[13] were emailed to each participant individually in addition to the official outline of research and consent form. After receiving signed consent, interviews were conducted in a semi-formal, conversational style. With the consent of the participants, all interviews, apart from Eddie's, were recorded in Mp3 format, and then transcribed. Each interview lasted between 35 minutes to approximately 90 minutes. During this time, key quotations and points of interest were noted by hand. The interviews were later transcribed. Once completed, the transcripts were emailed to the participants for personal amendments. Only Jeff took up this opportunity, sending through minor corrections of facility names which were unclear on the Mp3 recorder.

During the interview process for members of Group One, participants were asked a range of questions relating to their personal experiences of their sexuality, religiosity and spirituality prior to, during, and after participation in an ex-gay program. Members of Group Two responded to similar questions regarding their sexuality, religiosity and spirituality, but more so in the context of their 'coming out' experience.[14] The research was conducted with appropriate ethics approval from Monash University, and to ensure anonymity of those involved, all participants were assigned pseudonyms. No other identifying details have been altered, nor have other characteristics such as cultural or ethnic background been taken into account or favoured, due to the limited scope of participants available for interview.

Data Analysis

After completing the interviews of all eleven participants, their stories were individually transcribed onto my personal computer. Following transcription, a number of in-depth readings of each interview were conducted. Each interview was analysed thematically and grouped according to post-*Exodus* gay Christian (Group One) and gay Christian (Group Two). Following this, I colour coded each group according to the themes which emerged from this

[13] See Appendix 3 for Group One Interview Questions
[14] See Appendix 4 for Group Two Interview questions

analysis. Initial themes for Group One were gender identity, identity negotiation, ex-gay experience, religion, spirituality, impact of gay healing on others, ex-gay programs, and key words. The themes which emerged from Group Two were sexuality, authenticity, religion, spirituality, the impact of gay healing on others, and knowledge of ex-gay programs. Some time was spent structuring the data according to themes, however to provide further depth of analysis I decided to contrast Group One and Two in a typical 'story' format. Based on this analysis, the responses to the research questions began to emerge.

Demographic Information

In the initial stages of research, I was able to recruit six participants. These six individuals are known as the 'post-*Exodus* gay Christian' or Group One. This group of participants all took part in an *Exodus*-style gay healing program in Australia, and identify as both 'gay' or 'same-sex attracted', **and** Christian. What is to be known as 'Group Two' is another group of participants who were used as a comparison: five individuals who identified as same-sex attracted and Christian, but who **hadn't** participated in an ex-gay program. By expanding the scope of the research, this meant my initial research questions evolved to allow an exploration as to the reasons why some people choose to partake in an ex-gay program, and others not.

The eleven participants, in order of interview, are:

GROUP ONE:

1. 'Gary', a 35 year-old male, living in Canberra. He identifies as Christian and at the time of interview was affiliated with a church but did not attend regularly. He identifies his sexuality as 'gay';
2. 'Alex', a 35 year-old male, living in Perth. Alex attends both a Seventh Day Adventist Church and the more Pentecostal *Riverside* Church. He strongly identifies as 'gay';
3. 'Rupert', a 34 year-old male who currently lives in the UK after attending *Living Waters* in Sydney. He attends a High Church of England and occasionally attends Catholic Mass. He doesn't identify as gay but at the time of interview was engaged to his male partner;

4. ‘Jeff’, a 57 year-old male residing in Sydney. Jeff regularly attends *Hillsong*. He identifies as an out gay man;
5. ‘Bruce’, 41 currently lives in Sydney. He attends an Anglican church and identifies as ‘gay’;
6. ‘Eddie’, whose age is unknown but assumed to be in his 30s, moved to Melbourne from Canberra around the time of interview. His religious identification is Christian, and identifies as same-sex attracted.

GROUP TWO

1. ‘Simon’, a 44 year-old male living in Melbourne. He is a member of *Crossway* Baptist Church but also attends Ashburton Baptist on a semi-regular basis, for it’s acceptance of the GLBTIQ community. He is a same-sex attracted male who has been married to a woman for fifteen years. Although disclosing his sexuality at the time of their engagement, Simon and his wife decided to marry despite this, for both personal and familial reasons;
2. ‘Carolyn’, whose age is unknown but I estimated her to be in her 40s, lives in Canberra. She is a former Salvation Army Officer, but at the time of interview did not attend a Church. She is exclusively same-sex attracted;
3. ‘Troy’, a 21 year-old male living in Melbourne. He is of a Uniting Church background, but at the time of interview identified as having a ‘Christian derived Spirituality’ rather than a religious identification. He identifies as ‘gay’;
4. ‘Nina’, whose age is unknown but I estimated her to be in her 50s, resides in Adelaide. She identified as having a Pentecostal, evangelical based religious identity. At the time of interview, she was hesitant to adhere to a certain sexuality, but said she had a female partner;
5. ‘Lisa’, a 24 year-old woman living in Melbourne after a recent move from Sydney. Although currently not attending Church regularly, she identified strongly with her Catholic upbringing. She defines her sexuality as ‘queer’.

Limitations

Initially, the scope of this research was limited to participants who were practising Christians who had also participated in an ex-gay program in Australia; that is, individuals who identified as **both** gay and Christian (post program). However, after a period of four months, it was evident that there were some difficulties in finding sufficient participants within the research criteria for a robust study. There could be many reasons for this, usually anecdotal and purely speculative. However the Jones and Yarhouse (2007) study regarding the success of reparative therapy may explain some of the difficulties in finding participants within this scope. Of their participants, 15% were successful in conversion, 23% found success in chastity, 29% were continuing therapy, 15% were non-responsive, 4% were confused and considered to have failed attempts of sexual conversion, and the remaining 7% had embraced a gay identity (Jones and Yarhouse, 2007: 369). If this statistical evidence were to be applied to this particular study, the participants were either in the 15% non-responsive or the 7% gay identifying; this also neglects the possibility that many potential participants may have remained confused or traumatised by their participation in an ex-gay program and were not in a position to respond in the recruitment process. It was at this juncture that the scope of research was expanded to include self-identified gay Christians who had not participated in gay healing.

In addition, mention needs to be made of the potential limitations in the narrative attained from Eddie. In difference to the conversational style interview of the remaining ten participants, Eddie responded to the interview questions in short, written answer format. Due to this, there was no scope to clarify information or delve further into a topic of interest to this research, which was possible in a conversational style interview. In analysing the data of respondents, Eddie's experience of taking part in *Exodus* differed significantly to other members of Group One. Although reasons for this have been explored in Chapter Five, it could be suggested that the written mode of his response may have influenced the nature and quality of the data obtained from this participant.

My position as Researcher

In gathering participants' accounts of self-identity and how they in turn, interpret their experience into narrative, it must be acknowledged that my positioning as researcher also provides a lens through which specific information is presented, based on how I myself interact with and experience the world. Much of the language used in the respondent's interviews is contextualised within an evangelical, Pentecostal Christian discourse, which I would term 'Church speak'; words and concepts such as 'struggling with homosexuality'; 'living my life according to the Gospel'; 'the grace of God'; 'where there's life'; 'transcendent'; and 'living into how God created me' have particular meanings specific to a particular religious framework. I recognise this language at a core level, because I too, have used these words and understand these concepts due to my position as a same-sex attracted woman with a Christian background. It is from this basis that I related to the participants in this research.

Although I have not participated in an ex-gay program, my experience of Christianity is not dissimilar to many of the participants' experiences. I was raised in a Christian family and was baptised and confirmed into the Uniting Church at the age of 16, following what this discourse would define as a 'conversion experience'; although Christian principles were instilled in me from a young age, it was at this age that I decided that these principles applied actively to my behaviour, values and belief system. The Christian moral ethic of my family, that of 'God first, others second and self last', exemplifies a commonality shared with participants in their experience of 'finding their authentic self', as it is a psychological and spiritual upheaval one must go through in order to achieve this sense of self.

Since 'coming out' at the age of 21 until relatively recently, I chose not to attend organised religious services because I could not align myself with an institution which has historically discriminated against the GLBTIQ community; however I have recently 'dipped my toes back in the water.' I cannot, with full integrity, claim to be a 'Christian' without being a part of a religious community, which must practise a progressive acceptance of diversity. This

evolution of my theological values is yet another similarity to the subjects of this research. I claim to have an innate and strong Christian-based spirituality which I practice and acknowledge in the 'everyday'. By this, I mean that I am almost constantly aware of a Transcendent Being, and attribute to this Being the Christian values and principles instilled in me by my upbringing, and choose to actively behave in a manner in line with Christian doctrine.

My sexual identity is that of a woman who is attracted to other women; I identify as 'gay'. I began to explore my gender and sexual identity in my late teens and early 20s, after I had moved away from my parent's home in rural Victoria. During the 'coming out' process, I was fortunate to have supportive friends and some members of my family who chose to engage with me during the process. I am involved in several GLBTIQ community groups, and consider myself well connected in the Melbourne gay community. I choose not to identify as 'lesbian', due to its political connotations of Second Wave Feminism, but would rather be known as 'just me'. In acknowledging my sexuality, it must be said that I am on a continuous journey in reconciling my sexual attractions with the traditional, if not conservative, Christian ethic which my family of origin hold closely. I must acknowledge that through conducting this research and hearing participants' stories, the personal benefits have been immense: I too have realised that I am not isolated in my journey of identity renegotiation.

In conducting this research, I did not make known my own personal story to the participants, unless disclosure was warranted in the general flow of conversation, or was integral to building a rapport between myself as researcher and the participant. This occurred during four of the eleven interviews. If this information was revealed to participants, I acknowledge that some participants may have filtered their narratives in a specific way, depending on their level of comfort with this 'shared affinity'. The participant may have felt as though I had a greater understanding of their situation and may have emphasised certain aspects of experience that might have ordinarily gone unspoken. Similarly, given my position and personal experience as already mentioned, I have gained personal benefit from

interviewing these participants; some more so than others. At times I feel as though I have personally connected with a participant and the interview felt more like a conversation between friends rather than structured sociological research. It has therefore become evident that I too, filter the information provided to me through a lens of a gay Christian woman, rather than as an objective researcher. However, I do not believe that this diminishes the research; rather it allows the voices of this previously unheard group to become evident. Based on these aspects of the methods of research, I now begin an exploration of motivating factors in participation of *Exodus*-style programs.

Chapter Four: Entering Exodus

The ex-gay movement in Australia is a powerful presence in many conservative, evangelical and Pentecostal Christian communities. In particular, ex-gay programs such as *Exodus* and *Living Waters*, aim to influence one's sexuality and religious identity to conform to the traditional model of Christian heterosexuality, as well the method through which any necessary changes to sexual orientation occur. According to the post-*Exodus* gay Christians who took part in this study, there are a number of personal, social and religious aspects as to why they felt the need to change their sexuality from gay to straight. In this chapter, the main focus is on addressing the first research question: who gets involved in ex-gay programs, and what are the factors that lead individuals to believe that partaking in an ex-gay program is a plausible solution to the incompatibilities of their sexual and religious identities?

Analysis of the stories that the participants tell about the 'beginning' of their experiences of coming to terms with being gay and Christian reveal a 'typical' plot to the narrative, sharing common features which include: the experience of growing up in a religious context, becoming aware of their same-sex attraction (sometimes through an experience of lust or love), struggling with the conservative Christian rhetoric and morality espoused in their evangelical churches; and their feelings of a deviant sexuality. As reported by participants in this study, this culminates in a personal crisis of identity. For some participants (Group One) this crisis of identity was relentless enough to lead them to participate in an ex-gay program; and for others (Group Two), the crisis came to a head by other means.

This chapter provides a critical reflection of the juxtaposition between respondents who participated in an ex-gay program, in distinction from those who did not. The particular focus of the analysis is on the plausibility structures (Berger, 1967; Wuthnow, 1986) which exist to make people think they need to enter an ex-gay program and reinforces the belief that their

sexual attractions need to be healed. The foundation of this research is that individuals both construct and are constructed by their social experience, and as Berger and Luckmann (1967) suggest, as social agents, the participants engage in a dialectical process with their social structures (in this case, religious structures such as the Church) from which they both assign and are limited by their own meaning system. Based on this, this chapter presents three arguments: firstly, post-*Exodus* gay Christians experience a restricted sense of identity due to the conservative, evangelical and Pentecostal religious structure. Therefore, the post-*Exodus* gay Christian has limited independence and life experience apart from, and within evangelical religious culture. Secondly, due to the limited nature of individual agency and self-concept within the evangelical religious structure, the post-*Exodus* gay Christian has restricted capacity to recognise alternative frames of reference for their sexuality, life experiences and self-identity, apart from that provided within and through their religious experience - their plausibility structure. Thirdly, the participants' sense of deviant sexual identity is anchored in their understanding of what it means in both 'being' a same-sex attracted individual and 'doing' same-sex attracted behaviour.

Although working from the same dialectical assumption, in contrast, Group Two participants have a very different experience. All participants described their religious upbringing as conservative, however the denominations attended were not necessarily evangelical or Pentecostal. A distinction between these groups is that the non-*Exodus* gay Christians engaged in a different, perhaps more liberal 'plausibility structure'; that is, the meanings assigned to their sense of self were determined by religious experience, in addition to other external factors. This directly influences the participants' understanding and experience of identity as a whole, inclusive of both 'being' and 'doing' same-sex attraction, rather than defining identity by authentic or constructed aspects. On this basis of the small sample used in this study, it would appear that the difference in plausibility structures plays a role in the divergence between the two groups, and may play a part in answering the question as to why some people choose to enter *Exodus*-style programs. Prior to discussing these issues several key concepts need to be defined.

Plausibility Structures

Peter Berger, in his work *The Sacred Canopy* (1967), discusses the complexities of religious structures as sociological phenomena; although not specifically focussing on plausibility per se, he suggests it to be that the "socially constructed world is an ordering of experience – a meaningful order" (Berger, 1967:18). Further, and specific to the Christian tradition, "the reality of the Christian world depends upon the presence of social structures within which this reality is taken for granted and within which successive generations of individuals are socialised in such a way that this world will be real to them" (Berger, 1967:47). Robert Wuthnow (1986) discusses this notion of the plausibility structure, suggesting it to be a "selective process in how we perceive, and experience reality" (Wuthnow, 1986:124); that is, it is a 'filtering process' through which an individual, in an interactive interplay with the world, determines one's own reality, in which meanings are contextually determined and plausible.

Specific to this research, it may be that the participant's reality - the plausibility structure - consists of conservative discourse, ritual, language, activity and biblical interpretation which shapes the belief that same-sex attraction is not appropriate for Christians. The plausibility structure becomes a 'frame of reference' for social interaction (Wuthnow, 1986:127). The notion that meanings are contextually determined has a flow-on effect to influence not only interaction with the world and others, but also with the self; it is a way of framing meaning. In this chapter, I argue that it is the power of these people's plausibility structure that leads them to believe that 'gay healing' is 'God's will' for their lives.

Identity

The notion of self-identity is paramount to understanding why some people are motivated to take part in ex-gay programs, and is a concept explored in this chapter. In their study of identity synthesis and formation of gay and lesbian Orthodox Jews, Halbertal and Koren (2006) suggest that there are several stages of identity formation for these individuals: firstly, a sense of feeling different; secondly, manifestations of dissociation and coming out to

oneself; thirdly, a crisis of identity in which they realise their sexual identity may in fact be gay and recognise the ramifications of this; and finally, stages of integration and identity synthesis (Halbertal and Koren, 2006:47). Although specific to the Jewish tradition, this study strongly correlates to the findings of this research, in particular the alignment of identity formation within an established plausibility structure. In this chapter, I will focus primarily on the first three stages of identity formation, in particular, personal crisis of identity.

Bendle (2002) addresses the crisis of identity in high modernity, specifically the tension between valuing the uniqueness of human identity and the theorisation of identity as constructed and fluid. In particular, Bendle (2002) suggests identity to be defined and understood through narrative and story, which is central to the understanding of the interpretation of the post-*Exodus* gay Christian experience. Glanzer and Ream (2005), in their study on the fostering of Christian identity at universities, draw upon Holmes (1991), when stating that identity can be described in two ways: firstly, as dependent on one's personal experiences and memories; and secondly, as dependent on one's relationship to others (Glanzer and Ream, 2005:15). In this vein, the argument is put forward that religious identity is formed based on the collective identity and shared meanings of a particular denomination; when the individual engages in the dialectic interplay with a specific religious structure, a particular sense of religious identity becomes apparent (Glanzer and Ream, 2005:20).

Most members of Group One, I argue, experience a disconnection between religious identity and sexual identity. This could be explained, as Hermans, Kempen and van Loon (1992:29) postulate, "In contrast with the individualistic self… there are many *I* positions that can be occupied by the same person. The *I* in one position can agree, disagree, understand, misunderstand, oppose, contradict, question, and even ridicule the *I* in another position." That is, the multiplicity of identity is not easily defined due to the interaction with a number of pluralistic meaning systems, and for a participant in this study, the interplay between secular, gender, sexual, spiritual and religious identities

may provide an inability to articulate their sexual desires. These notions of identity will be explored in this chapter.

The Typical Story – Group One

For the post-*Exodus* gay Christian, there is a typical format that each story follows. As an exemplar of the typical experience of participants in this study, I wish to re-tell Bruce's story.

Bruce grew up on a farm in country New South Wales, within a religious family; church attendance was within the normal structures of his family culture. As an adolescent, Bruce began attending a religious boarding school and he says that at the age of 15, he "got interested in more than religion." He describes religion as "a habit", and that he experienced something on a deeper level through attending prayer meetings during his lunch hour. It was from this point on that he started calling himself a 'Christian', due to spiritual encounters than "gave (it) all a deeper meaning."

Bruce was a relatively shy person, and said "I spent a lot of time on my own." After secondary school Bruce began studying at university, participating in an orchestra. However, one night after orchestra practice, Bruce consumed a large amount of alcohol, and ended up at a local 'beat' with a man. After engaging in some sexual behaviour, the two men were seen by some local residents who called the police; the other man ran off, and Bruce was arrested and charged with offensive conduct in public. Ashamed, Bruce told no one, and represented himself in court against a skewed and exaggerated police report. Following the court case, his story was leaked to the media. Bruce says "That was when the church found out I was gay, all my uni, all my lecturers, and my peers, everybody, except for my parents who I then had to ring up and tell." Bruce lost his job and was likened to a paedophile. He went to see his local psychiatrist who labelled him a 'sex addict.' Suffering from this trauma, Bruce felt the only thing that sustained him was his Christianity. But to maintain his Christian identity, Bruce could not be gay.

Bruce had heard about this program called *Living Waters*. Bruce says, “I was stuck being on my own out west. Was part of the church out there, and there was no way they could accept the concept of ‘gay’ and ‘Christian’, it was just one or the other. So I had to make a choice at that point. So I thought, I’ll come to Sydney and see what this program is all about.” This collision of his sexuality and his religious identity was a catalyst; in his mid-twenties, Bruce left Bathurst, moved to Sydney with no job, no family, no friends, and because his religious worldview enforced the notion that his sexuality was a sin, he joined a program that purported to change his sexual attractions.

According to Bruce, *Living Waters* was a “12 Step pop-psychology style program”, gathering weekly with a range of Christian people, who were dealing with many types of ‘sexual dysfunctions’ including homosexual thoughts, pornography addictions, people in same-sex relationships or like him, “people who just played around the edges”. The evening would include singing, worship and prayer, followed by small groups in which they would share their stories. Bruce says that “it would be about our week by week struggle; it was always referred to as ‘a struggle’”. He recalls halfway through the course: “we went away on a retreat for a weekend, and they pointed out all these issues, and I thought, as far as what was going on inside me, it wasn’t having any effect, I was just going through the motions.” So, it becomes an irony when, instead of changing his sexual attractions from male to female, a number of other things began to take place. He says:

> It created a whole lot of questions in my mind, really. You know, where am I, and what do I want? I think in another sense I became more confused, and as a result of *Living Waters* I think what it did was open me up to other people’s sexuality, in that everyone’s sexuality is played out slightly differently.

And

> It made me question what I was doing with the whole religious aspect: what I was doing with my relationships, the church… I suppose I began to see a differentiation between the motions that people go through, and what is real.

When Bruce finished *Living Waters*, he says “I think as far as sexual desire is concerned, nothing changed from pre-*Living Waters* to post-*Living Waters*. The way I wanted to express that desire didn’t change; I just saw more opportunities!” However, his desire to change his sexuality continued, and because he believed his sexual orientation could be controlled by his behaviour, he began a relationship with a woman from his church in Sydney, while simultaneously “hooking up” with other men. Bruce says there was so much pressure to ‘get things right’ and marry, even though the church community knew his background. He proposed, but within six months the relationship ended.

Following this, Bruce began his first relationship with a man. He remembers being amazed at the connection he could have with another human being; however, this stage of his life was somewhat tarnished by two incidents which forced him to reconsider his religious worldview. Firstly, his church community asked him to leave due to his same-sex relationship, and secondly a male church leader showed up on Bruce’s doorstep and said “Let’s have sex.” Unimpressed with this hypocrisy, Bruce left that church and began attending an Anglican church who accepted his sexual identity.

After receiving this validation from a church community, and embracing his same-sex attraction, in his 30s Bruce got into the ‘gay scene’, started taking drugs and going out clubbing, doing odd jobs and as he says, “letting life fall apart.” Interestingly though, he says, “But then turning up to church on a Sunday, still having a faith, a sense of connection, spiritually… but the whole religion side of things was changing.” He says he became less religious, but began thinking about what he really believed, based on his own life:

> I experienced a deeper sense of peace, a deep sense of calm, right at the centre, something that I’d never experienced before. It was this real sense of quietness. And I think it’s that place, the spiritual centre, which is who I am. And no matter how dark or traumatic it gets, that place is always there, it’s always available. The quiet stream is there. All I have to do is walk there.

He felt his sense of spirituality, and religious identity become a lot more authentic, and he began to reject conservative religious ideals about sexuality which he'd previously held so closely. His story ends with this statement:

> I'm not going to try and sort this out. I'm just going to try to be authentic in the here and now. And if it is something really wrong, and if it is counter to the human race, and evil, then as I'm building good relationships then surely it would drop off, surely it would change… But that hasn't happened.

Bruce and the other participants to this study experience life in a way which, as seen above, has a typical narrative. The 'beginning' of this narrative is what will be analysed in this chapter, which will determine who participates in ex-gay programs, and what the motivating factors are that determines this participation.

Group One: Post-*Exodus* Gay Christians

Following this 'typical narrative', I now move into an analysis of Group One participants' stories, leading up to their decision to take part in an *Exodus*-style program, and why they decided to do so.

The ex-gay movement in Australia exists within the conservative, evangelical and Pentecostal framework, and to the non-evangelical and even secular communities, and in recent times as portrayed by the media (Dejesus, 2011; Hack, 2008; Palazzolo, 2005) the concept of reparative therapy is commonly thought to be as much an 'abomination' as homosexuality is deemed to be within the movement itself. The framework from which an ex-gay program stems is marketed towards those from within a similar plausibility structure, so despite the successes, failures, presentation and interpretation to the non-Pentecostal and evangelical community, ex-gay programs such as *Exodus* claim to offer a viable option for those struggling with their same-sex attraction. These programs are founded on the assumption that same-sex attraction is unwanted and unhealthy (Haldeman, 1994:221). This is evidenced by the following participants' opinions about how homosexuality is thought of in their pre-*Exodus* communities:

> [I was] Still thinking that being gay is bad and something I need to fix … I would have, over the next decade or so, I would have shared the 'deep embarrassing secret' with I don't know, maybe twenty people or so.
>
> Gary, 35

> It's a negative, it's a deficit.
>
> Alex, 35

> When I was about 14, someone told me I would grow out of it, that I would become normal.
>
> Rupert, 34

Ex-gay programs lure participants with the promise of fundamental change to their sexual orientation through behaviour modification, the security of group solidarity, the offer of being 'right' in God's eyes and to stop sinning, and the continuation of 'insulation'; a technique often used by religious organisations designed to uphold and transmit viewpoints (Hammond and Hunter, 1984:226). This insulation therefore accentuates and reinforces the participant's desire to change, and this change therefore seems possible (Hammond and Hunter, 1984:233). It is within the context of the Pentecostal and evangelical worldview consistent with their plausibility structure, that these promises are made.

The statement on the *Exodus International* website (2005), "The bottom line - **you don't have to be gay**! You can lead a life of fulfilment and holiness as God intended, a life far better than what you have experienced so far" clearly defines their intent for same-sex attracted Christians. For individuals who feel isolated from their religious 'home' because of their sexual attractions, not only does the offer of 'freedom from homosexuality' validate their decision to participate, but attendance also facilitates a feeling of group involvement, eliminating what Durkheim called '*anomie*'; the individual's feeling of isolation from the norms of their constructed reality (Berger, 1967:39; Durkheim, 1951). As several participants told me:

> Well, originally when I was a teenager, homosexuality was an offence. And mental health professionals thought that we needed treatment and should pursue it, and there was also religious, family and social pressures to not be this person, because the label attached to being a homosexual was that you were a pervert, you were evil, that you were a paedophile, a whole lot of terrible things, so I didn't want to be that person.
>
> Jeff, 57

> I wanted to change my gay orientation or preference because I believed it was something you could control. And being involved in a Christian world that was the way you view it.
>
> Alex, 35

> And not having any friends I could talk to one-on-one, because I was very much on my own… an opportunity I suppose, to connect with people. I mean, I certainly found that.
>
> Bruce, 41

For some participants, although hesitant to seek help, the decision to join an ex-gay program was an obvious choice, because the benefits of converting to heterosexuality outweighed the costs of being gay, believing that change was possible. In aiming to heal their sexual orientation, post-*Exodus* gay Christians were not only wanting to relieve themselves from sinfulness, but were aiming to connect with others, decrease their sense of *anomie*, and unconsciously maintain their plausibility structure, which for an evangelical or Pentecostal Christian, could be rationalised ultimately as submission to the Church and to 'God's plan'. This was deemed to be a fulfilment of conservative Christian expectations of values and behaviour, and an affirmation of the evangelical worldview (Hammond and Hunter, 1984:225).

Same-Sex Attraction: 'Being' and 'Doing'

The difficulty for some participants in articulating their same-sex attractions, I would argue, is due to the tension between 'doing' and 'being' a sexuality type, in this case, same-sex attracted. This notion is derived from the Foucauldian discourse; that is, 'doing', or the behavioural aspect of homosexuality, in difference to 'being' same-sex attracted (Foucault, 1980;

Halbertal and Koren, 2006:44). For the Christian who partakes in an ex-gay program, this behavioural aspect of sexual identity has negative connotations.

> I was fairly aware from a young age that I was gay, I kind of knew but didn't have the words for it that early but I knew what it felt like, I knew that it was wrong and that it was going against what was getting taught, so I spent my whole time in high school being really worried about this thing, and thought I'd get fixed somehow, but I didn't have anybody to talk to about it.
>
> Rupert, 34

> I actually didn't identify myself as GLBTIQ at all. I actually just didn't know. In fact I was quite shocked when someone from church asked me outright one day, "Are you gay?" because he'd heard or inferred that I might have had some involvement with *Exodus*. And I just stammered but ended up just nodding my head. I had never identified myself as 'gay' at that point in time. I was 16, turning 17, and had always thought I was 'straight'.
>
> Eddie, 30s

Without the words to define one's sense of self, some participants recall that being 'in the closet' brought notions of sex and sexual thoughts to the front of the mind, and being all they could think about, to the point that their behaviour was self-diagnosed as extreme or addictive, and perhaps what could be described as deviant behaviour. (The opportunity to lead a 'normative heterosexual life through the assistance of reparative therapy, in their mind, would lead to a decrease in this deviant behaviour.) All six participants in Group One believed their same-sex desires to be deviant, and in some cases went as far as demonising their sexuality altogether, and attempted to repress any form of sexual expression. This however, had negative consequences for two participants. For Gary, this led to a pornography addiction and for Bruce, being caught by police at a beat. These experiences catalysed their decisions to 'seek help':

> To be honest it was, a lot of it had to do with the fact that I moved out of home and as result of being on my own, my amount of time spent on the internet viewing gay pornography went through the roof … To the point that I was barely functioning, because I would stay up half the night looking at stuff, and then I, when I moved into my own house, there was of course no one there to

> monitor me, and the cork went out of the bottle if you like! And, so, I got very out of control and quite quickly came to the conclusion that I needed some kind of help.
>
> Gary, 35

> Whilst I was at uni I played in an orchestra, and spent a lot of time on my own, and one night got really drunk and ended up in a park with this guy. And we were seen by some people who rang up the cops. This guy ran away and I sort of just didn't care and just walked off down the street. And of course they chased me and said, "Was it you that was back up there?" and I was like "Maybe" and I just didn't know what was going on, I don't think I even cared what was going on at that point, and ended up arresting me and charging me with offensive behaviour or something like that.
>
> Bruce, 41

Having spent much of their lives engaging in the dialectic interplay between the self and a conservative religious framework, both Gary and Bruce perceived their sexual 'doing' and 'being' as sinful, and damaging to their prioritised religious identity, which the Pentecostal and evangelical framework prescribes as pure and godly (and, hence incompatible with same-sex desire). By engaging in behaviours deemed sinful within a Christian moral framework and therefore outwardly demonstrating their deviant sexual identity, Gary and Bruce reached a point of crisis, or *anomie* and felt that their sexuality was broken, and needed 'fixing' in order to remain congruent with their constructed reality.

Gary makes another important point, that same-sex attracted behaviour widens the gap between the traditional Christian view of the sacredness of sex:

> You know, you have the old chestnut of people saying 'sex is only for inside marriage', and yet I can't get married, so how am I supposed to deal with that rule?
>
> Gary, 35

Therefore, it may be argued that a primary reason why members of Group One chose to participate in an ex-gay program, was to bring the 'being' and

'doing' of their sexuality into alignment, and therefore remain insular and congruent with the ideology which defines, and is defined by the self (Hammond and Hunter, 1984). Therefore, the concept of Christian identity is 'naturally' the foundation for how post-*Exodus* gay Christians may consider the ex-gay movement and its ideology.

Christian Identity and Religious Structures

Group One participants engaged in the ex-gay movement because the structures of Pentecostal and evangelical religious institutions influenced them in a way which decreased their ability to construct their identity outside of their worldview. According the Hammond and Hunter (1984:225-6), the evangelical worldview encompasses several defining factors: piety, traditional familiarism, the legislation of morality and moral absolutism, the application of conservative theological beliefs to one's social life and behaviour. In addition to these aspects, I would also suggest prioritising a 'Christian identity', or living a 'Christ-centred' life (Glanzer and Ream, 2005:16-17). These features of the worldview actively affirms and justifies a higher than average religious commitment (Petersen & Donnenwerth, 1998:355) and continues to act as a reality which shelters the participant from the 'chaos' they encounter through the incongruence and multiplicity of identity (Wuthnow, 1986:127).

The narratives of Gary and Bruce both make reference to their sexual identity as a point of difference, or deviance, in relation to others' sense of normative sexuality. Gary's decision to keep his pornography addiction a secret further suggests his shame and embarrassment, and Bruce responded with a sense of detachment to the impact of his actions on his life. However, the consequence for his outward sexuality was to be charged with offensive behaviour. The net result of this was to further reinforce the notion that to be 'gay', is to be 'offensive' in relation to the Christian moral framework within which he was operating.

The majority of post-*Exodus* gay Christians interviewed for this research described a sense of shame and frustration about their sexuality, fuelled by their religious beliefs. A prevalent theme in the stories of the six participants is

an awareness of an impasse, or a crisis point, beyond which they could not move until or unless they addressed the issue of their same-sex attraction. This may include the notion of not wanting to run from oppressive conservative sexual morality anymore, or of reaching a point in their lives where they were not able to maintain their sexuality as a secret. For example, Alex and Bruce shared their experiences:

> I'd just believed what I'd heard: and that was it's purely a choice, unfortunately this dysfunction… But they sort of promised that this life, you could come out of it at the other end, and it would be different… So yeah, I took part to change.
>
> Alex, 35

> I read a book by the now Archbishop, Peter Jensen, about true repentance, making up your mind, that you had to decide, you can't be both, you had to be one or the other. He didn't specifically mention homosexuality; I put that in my mind. But it was sin, so I had to decide between being this way and being straight, basically. So for me it was an actively living decision, at that point.
>
> Bruce, 41

Both Bruce and Alex indicate a hope that once reaching this crisis point, the decision to take part in an ex-gay program is an expression of a genuine intention of isolating 'sinful' sexual behaviour from themselves to allow them to pursue a Godly, Christian identity, which to them, at this time in their lives is equated with 'authentic' living.

At this stage, prior to engaging in reparative therapy, 'authentic living' is characterised as 'curing' or 'fixing' the respondents' of same-sex desires, and remaining cushioned within the evangelical worldview. According to evangelical scholars Glanzer and Ream (2005:17), this authenticity is derived from Christian identity: "Our identity is what allows us to define what is important to us and what is not… For Christians, discovering one's true identity allows us to discover what should be of ultimate importance to us and what should be of penultimate importance." That is, by being aware of this sinful identity within the context of a collective religious identity, the urgency of isolating deviant characteristics is therefore heightened. It might be suggested

that participants fear this deviant aspect of themselves, because as Berger (1967:39) argues, “To go against the order of society is always at risk of plunging into anomy. To go against the order of society as religiously legitimated, however, is to make a compact with the primeval forces of darkness.” Becoming aware of one’s same-sex attractions and the awful prospect of gay identity is indeed dabbling on what is understood by evangelical Christians to be the edges of darkness, because the most important identity, religious identity, is at risk.

Glanzer and Ream (2005:16-17) go on to postulate:

> What makes a Christian understanding of identity unique, we believe, is that it posits a normative ideal for how one should understand and order one’s identities… we argue that an essential claim of the Christian tradition is that one’s Christian identity is one’s most important and fundamental identity over and above one’s other identities. In fact, one can only properly understand oneself and these other identities in light of one’s Christian identity and the story that gives meaning to that identity.

Therefore, the tension surrounding how participants from Group One order their identities, of how the evangelical Christian structures demand priority over their innate sexual being, this automatically determines same-sex attraction as sinful, and leads participants from Group One into a crisis of identity.

Authentic and Constructed Sexuality

It must be acknowledged that there are many theories concerning the nature of sex, sexuality and gender, however for the purposes of this research it is from a sociological standing from which I make my observations. The common sociological definition of ‘sexuality’ is “the mode by which sexual interest and sexual preference are expressed” (Abercrombie, Hill & Turner, 2000:313). It is not my intention to enter into the various discourses concerning the essential or constructed nature of sexuality, yet it can be recognised with reasonable evidence that for the post-*Exodus* gay Christian,

their same-sex desires and expressions are experienced as an authentic aspect of their sexuality.

Same-sex attraction as an intrinsic aspect on the spectrum of human sexuality was to some Group One respondents, a concept foreign to their (religious) experience of life; an attraction to the same sex did not necessarily denote homosexuality. Others however, were strongly aware of their same-sex desires and may have determined their sexual identity as 'gay', but felt they could not express it due to the traditional religious dogma surrounding sex and sexuality. Yet, the desire to change 'something' about their sexuality reinforces this sense of incongruence both in their worldview and in their identity. The incongruence, or arguably sense of *anomie* between all respondents' authentic sexuality and religious identity leads to other issues such as social isolation, depression, and suicide. As Rupert hits rock bottom and experiences *anomie*, he recalls:

> I became very, very depressed, and I felt like it was mostly related to not having reconciled, not feeling comfortable at all in it…Yeah, so when I found this I thought this (the ex-gay program) is it, this is the answer, this is how I'm gonna get fixed and be normal and happy and all this kind of thing, and that's kind of how I got involved in it, really.
>
> Rupert, 34

What is known as a major life crisis such as acknowledging one's sexual identity, as suggested by all participants, results in a point of crisis. To acknowledge this point of difference in their sexual identity is to acknowledge a deficiency, a deviance of some description from the Christian identity which they had constructed for themselves. For some, this may catalyse moving beyond the impasse, of making decisions about what to do with their unwanted sexual desires; and for some, the choice to acknowledge their authentic sexuality presents a serious challenge to their plausibility structure. Berger (1967:47) notes, "When this plausibility structure loses its intactness or continuity, the Christian world begins to totter and its reality ceases to impose itself as self-evident truth." The belief that one had to make a choice between either their sexuality or their relationship with God became a reality. And for

these six post-*Exodus* gay Christians, the hope of healing their deviant sexuality outweighed the potential costs of reconstructing their reality to reconcile the multiple aspects of themselves.

> I was part of the church out there, and there was no way they could accept the concept of 'gay' and 'Christian', it was just one or the other. So I had to make a choice at that point.
>
> Bruce, 41

Therefore, it is argued that post-*Exodus* gay Christians, on the basis of their acknowledgement of same-sex attraction, have a personal crisis of identity. This crisis of identity occurs because of three main factors: ex-gay programs, as an agent of social control, cocoons the respondents in Group One inside the evangelical worldview, and it is the dialectic interplay between religious structures and the individual that promotes this collision; secondly, the tension between the authentic and naturally evident aspects of the self with what is said to be socially constructed; and lastly, the tensions surrounding 'being' and 'doing' same-sex attraction. In particular, this crisis is of their sexual identity and their religious identity in collision with each other creates a sense of *anomie* from their own constructed reality. This collision of their religious and sexual identities is in their eyes, a logical justification for seeking reparative therapy through an ex-gay program.

Parallels between Ex-Gay Programs and Cults

Through analysing the narratives of those who chose to partake in an ex-gay program, it appears that what these programs have to offer are similar to what Sims, Bainbridge and Stark (1979; 1980) identified in cult formation and recruitment. Perhaps the most important similarity between religious cults and ex-gay programs is that they both frequently and consistently confirm the worldview, or plausibility structure, already established by the individual; the interaction between structure and agent continues to be 'normal'. Sims, Bainbridge and Stark (1979) also suggest that religious cults provide apparent solutions to common intractable human problems; subliminally indoctrinate members with new ideologies; and then market said ideologies, specifically

targeting participants who suffer from an ‘unresolved problem’. The notion of ‘mutual conversion’, that is, the interplay between the cult as a structural hub, and the individual in creating a deviant normative structure which stimulate hopes in impossible rewards (Sims, Bainbridge and Stark, 1979:291) is an obvious correlation to ex-gay programs, specifically in the indoctrination of the heteronormative ideology that is likely to be instilled, and a failure of becoming straight, as evidenced by the participants in this program.

I argue, therefore, that the structural power of these cult-like organisations actually robs the individual of their agency (Glanzer and Ream, 2005; Haldeman, 1994; Lewis, 1986; Sims, Bainbridge and Stark, 1979), by going so far as to enable participants to actively create a ‘deviant normative structure’ (Haldeman, 1994:291). Haldeman also suggests that ex-gay programs seek to provide treatment for individuals who believe that their same-sex attractions are incongruent with their values or religious structures (1994:221). Therefore, what ex-gay programs offer is a realignment of beliefs, values, and behaviour which displays firm observance of the evangelical and Pentecostal framework. To be put simply, this realignment could alternatively be viewed as ‘brainwashing’, a common criticism of cult-like organisations.

I argue that ex-gay programs claim to cure ‘being’ same-sex attracted by controlling the behavioural aspects, and based on the participant’s experience of being blindly enclosed within their meaning system, or ‘plausibility structure’. This is a reason why Group One respondents participated in gay healing. To sum up, other reasons why members of Group One decide to take part in gay healing are to re-affirm their plausibility structure through cocooning themselves within an exclusively evangelical worldview; they reach a crisis point in their identity; and their desire to maintain a Christian moral identity above other aspects of identity outweighs the cost of accepting their sexuality. These reasons do not, however, determine why some same-sex attracted Christians do not actively seek to change their sexuality and participate in an ex-gay program. Why is this so? This question will be explored further in the following section.

Gay Christians: Group Two

As mentioned in the previous Chapter, in addition to interviewing individuals who identified as gay, Christian, and who had participated in an ex-gay program, I also interviewed five individuals who identified as same-sex attracted and Christian, but who did not participate in an ex-gay program. This group included two men and three women, aged between 21 and late 50s. These participants had negotiated and resolved the crisis between their sexuality and their religiosity without resorting to organised gay healing.

The Typical Story – Group Two

Just as the post-*Exodus* gay Christians interviewed for this research all experienced events in a 'typical' way, so did members of Group Two. Although not involving themselves in an ex-gay program, their typical story is similar to Carolyn's.

Carolyn, a Senior Public Servant, did not grow up in a religious household. But due to her interactions with a group of Christians during secondary school, she "made a commitment and got very involved with the church." She had never felt an attraction to men, and being quite open about this fact, was told quite often by her religious circle that she must have had the 'gift' of celibacy, although thinking "what a drag of a gift to get!" After completing high school Carolyn moved into the Public Service, but in her early 20s felt as though she was being called into the ministry. She spent time in a range of different denominations, yet due to the traditional nature of the institution, Carolyn realised that none of the churches would ordain her because she was a woman. However one particular church memory did stand out for her:

> The reason I ended up leaving that church was because the Minister ended up preaching a set of sermons on 1 Corinthians 7, which you might remember starts with 'it's good for a man to be married'. But he managed to get seven sermons on marriage out of that, and he kept saying what Christian young women should do was put themselves in the way of Christian young men. And I had a look at the Christian young men in the church and thought, "That's not a very attractive proposition!"

Considering this was the normative perspective on human relationships, anything other than a heterosexual relationship was thought to be unnatural. Following this experience, Carolyn left that particular church and ended up in the Salvation Army, who ordained women. After attending Bible College, she was ordained as an Officer and posted to a small country town. Initially her congregation consisted of six people, all of whom were twice her age, but over time she grew the church to over 100 members. It was at this point, that she "was going along merrily thinking I have the gift of celibacy, and [then] fell in love with somebody in my congregation." Not a male parishioner, but a woman. Fortunately for her, her 'gift' of celibacy meant that she was in control of her sexual behaviour.

While making the decision not to share these feelings with anyone, Carolyn says that it became apparent that the feelings were mutual, and they secretly began a relationship; the fact that she might be gay had never really occurred to her because "no one mentioned it as a possibility." Carolyn remembers clearly:

> I was sitting there in a quite massive state of denial, going well… I couldn't possibly be gay because I was a Christian! And I remember that I'd done some theology and we got beaten around the head about how being gay was actually a psychological deficiency as well as a sin and spirituality wrong.

The collision of her sexual orientation and her religious identity came to a head when the lack of support and the inability to talk about her feelings with another member of the clergy eventually led her to leave the church. She claimed she was 'burnt out', all the while questioning, "Am I ok? Does God still love me?"

In her mid 30s, Carolyn left the church and her town, and with her female partner in tow, moved to Canberra. Saying "I basically left my entire culture, my entire friendship group, everyone I knew, everyone I had anything to do with," Carolyn initially felt like she was deeply disordered, and that her sexuality was a problem. However in retrospect, had she been willing to

accept her ‘subconscious’ same-sex attractions in her early 20s, she may have come to terms with her sexuality more easily. Although no longer in a religious context, ‘coming out’ to herself was a very difficult step to take.

Carolyn was eventually able to admit her love for another woman to herself, and describes personal research and her friendship with other Christians in same-sex relationships as paramount to this admission. She stated, “I saw a fairly healthy example of someone who was living a life in a same-sex relationship and the world wasn’t ending. I did lots of reading on the internet and discovered that being Christian and lesbian wasn’t actually that unusual, and that there were people who hadn’t been struck down immediately by lightening.” Coming from a theological perspective, it took her about five years to thoroughly work through biblical passages to conclude that “I don’t think God has a problem with me, and I don’t think God has a problem with same-sex attracted people.” In fact, when questioned about her thoughts on ex-gay programs, she says “you know, I don’t think they do any good,” and that the theology and psychology used to justify their practices is questionable.

Carolyn, now in her mid 40s has been with her partner for just over ten years. They occasionally attend a church, but Carolyn feels it to be integral to her religious and spiritual experience to belong to an accepting Christian community, which is limited in scope in Canberra. She states that since coming out, she has embraced her spirituality, “which for me sees me as someone who sees me as someone who is authentic and has integrity and is open before God, means that I have to acknowledge and integrate my gender identity.” Through accepting her love for her female partner, and incorporating that aspect of her identity into her spirituality, Carolyn now feels as though she can be authentic in her gay Christian identity.

Group Two: Self-Identity and Plausibility Structure

From the narratives of Group Two members, the common themes as to why they chose not to participate in an ex-gay program were a heightened sense of agency inside the religious structure; the ability to rationalise the ‘being’ and ‘doing’ of same-sex attraction, a strong awareness of the differences of

constructed and authentic aspects of identity and a differently framed plausibility structure which was open to and inclusive of elements outside the closed and exclusive structure of those in Group One.

Whilst the effects of one's plausibility structure, exploring the self for authenticity, and 'being' and 'doing' same-sex attraction are critical elements as to why some chose to take part in an ex-gay program and others did not, each member of Group Two differs slightly in their reasoning. Simon describes the tension experienced by acquaintances who tried to change their sexual attractions and this led him to question the validity of reparative therapy. Also, the desire to maintain personal control over his identity allowed him to affirm his own worldview, demonstrating a heightened sense of his own agency inside the religious structure:

> It scared me to death… because I knew people who were involved in ex-gay programs in my university years… It put me off, and the control freak in me didn't feel sufficiently comfortable letting someone else take such control over me. There was a time in my early twenties that I was reacting a lot towards spiritual control, so there was all this overlay of spiritual abuse and control and people telling me what to do with life and how to do it, and I was reacting against a lot of that, so because of this rebellious streak, I didn't want to succumb or submit to someone else's will or control. So going to an ex-gay program was really like you were submitting wholly to somebody else, their total control, and I wasn't willing to do that.
>
> Simon, 44

Attending an ex-gay program was a legitimate option for Simon, as his plausibility structure was similar to those of Group One. However, due to his desire to maintain control over the outcomes of reparative therapy, instead of attending a program facilitated by others, he purchased a number of books on the topic and read through these at his own leisure. Carolyn didn't consider attending an ex-gay program; she says her decision not to engage in reparative therapy was due to an awareness of her 'whole' identity, not simply an emphasis on her religious identity. This awareness enabled her decision not to participate to be based within a plausibility structure not founded

primarily on religious interaction, but also through other external factors which were evident in her worldview.

> I think I'd had enough exposure to the results of ex-gay programs, and thought "you know, I don't think they do any good." And I really question the theological and psychological basis… So by the time I was in my mid-30s, I'd actually got to that point where I thought "stuff the lot of you, I don't care what you think", except I'll probably die alone in a hostel somewhere! But I looked at what ex-gay programs did to people and thought; I actually don't think they're healthy … See I think my advantage was that I'd had enough life experience that I, when I realised that my perception of myself didn't match the reality, I had enough life experience to go by, well that's actually not a problem.
>
> Carolyn, 40s

Similarly, Troy regards his strong sense of self and ability to distance himself from conservative Christianity's 'black and white' view of human identity which he, in contrast sees as a complex reality:

> My sense of identity is quite strong, as is my sexuality, so to actually have to change or to even consider changing, that isn't something that I could do, because it's integral to me. So we're to actually think of sexuality as something that's arbitrary or stuck onto you that can be changed in the way you might change a limb or something, it seems really artificial and a construct… But it's interesting, because I'd ask the question, why does it need to work? Why do you see yourself at fault? If you want to go with that part of conservative theology, you can actually say "God made me as I am, and He's going to love me as I am…" I know that they're a relatively abhorrent concept for me and that they bring out the worst of Christianity.
>
> Troy, 21

Similar to those in Group One, Nina confirms the evangelical worldview to be an insular experience: "When you're a fundamentalist Christian, you only mix with the same; you don't go out in the world, so to speak." Her belief was that this interaction with individuals, beliefs, values and activities similar to one's own is a reason why some wish to change a deviant aspect of their identity, particularly same-sex attraction. Interestingly, she further suggests it was

actually because of the way she constructed her reality that she decided against participation in an ex-gay program, and instead sought an authentic experience of her sexuality:

> And so you only really mix with Christians, and there wasn't really the temptation, I just kind of blocked it off I suppose, so there wasn't really any need for me to undertake a gay healing program, because I thought 'well, I'm sort of cured and if I have any urges, it must be temptation, it must be the devil'. I know it sounds strange, but that's the kind of thinking that when you're in a closed, fundamentalist kind of situation, you think differently!
>
> Nina, 50s

Lisa states her lack of exposure, and external, more secular influences shaping her plausibility structure as a reason why she didn't participate. What she knew of *Exodus*-style programs was based on negative media stereotypes. This is a point of interest, as it could be suggested that a general lack of information exists within the community at large concerning the legitimacy of the ex-gay movement in Australia. She also recognises the difference between 'being' gay, and the problem of changing behaviour to ascertain a sexual identity:

> I kind of just personally think that's a whole lot of rubbish. I know absolutely nothing about ex-gay programs, because I see stuff on TV and I'm like… what's that movie 'But I'm a Cheerleader'… and that's about the extent of it. I've never once considered doing it… [because] I don't think you can just turn someone gay or turn someone un-gay. I think if you turn someone un-gay, I think they are lying to themselves and everyone they know.
>
> Lisa, 24

Members of Group Two therefore lack motivation to participate in an *Exodus*-style program because they interact with the world through a differently framed plausibility structure, which allows greater agency, can recognise the problems with behaviour modification to turn someone 'un-gay', and are aware of how they as individuals are able to construct their own identity.

Differences between Group One and Two

One of the questions this research is seeking to answer is 'Why do some same-sex attracted Christians partake in ex-gay therapy, and others not?' To answer this in part, differences between Group One and Group Two must be established; and there are several which can be identified at this stage.

Firstly, the most obvious difference between individuals in Group One and Group Two is that those in Group One actively choose to convert their same-sex attraction to a more normative, and religiously acceptable heterosexuality, and others (Group Two) do not. There is, however, a more subtle difference which is dependent on the level of religious engagement and the lack of external frames of reference which enable individuals to operate outside their religious worldview. The fact that members of Group Two belonged to more liberal churches is also significant.

Secondly, the narratives of those in Group Two suggest that the desire to convert to heterosexuality is dependent on the exclusive level of interaction between the self and the evangelical worldview; in this case, more open and inclusive than those in Group One. For the participants who did not partake in an ex-gay program, their worldview was influenced by external, perhaps secular, ideologies. This enables a sense of wholeness, rather than prioritisation of different elements of identity. That is, their sense of agency and self **as a whole** both within and outside of religious structures overrides religious identity, which in Group One, is prioritised. As Glanzer and Ream (2005:16-17) argue, "We argue that an essential claim of the Christian tradition is that one's Christian identity is one's most important and fundamental identity over and above one's other identities." This, I argue to be a key difference: Group Two, whilst maintaining a Christian identity, engage in 'pluralistic culture'; that is, the interaction with a number of symbolic universes (Wuthnow, 1986:132-133). This enables a more 'liberal' ideology, in that the definitions of a religious worldview encompass more than evangelicalism and Pentecostalism has to offer. This is not to suggest that those in Group Two do not encounter a disconnect between sexuality and religiosity, but what it does suggest, is that "evangelical Christians who operate in a more secular society

would have more difficulty in maintaining their commitment to the 'evangelical worldview'" (Hammond and Hunter, 1984:229).

A third point of difference between individuals in the two groups was that participants who did not partake in gay healing were disillusioned with the evangelical worldview. The disillusionment decreased the level of active engagement with the conservative rhetoric and dogma, or 'Church Law', which they experienced as a mandate by the institution of the Church, rather than as the word of God. As explained by Simon:

> For a long while, I really became terribly disenchanted and disillusioned with the organised church and organised religion, and even God per se. I went to church because I'd always been to church, I did things and wrote and I would attend meetings because it was expected of me, or I was leading them because I was in a position of responsibility or authority, but there was this deep lingering resentment to God and church, because other people couldn't accept me into their world and couldn't accept me for who I am.
>
> Simon, 44

Of those in Group Two, the pattern of disengagement, or retreating from institutional participation all together, meant that they were sufficiently engaged with contemporary secular ideology to be aware of the negative impact of ex-gay programs on some people. Haldeman (1994:221) illustrates this circumstance, by stating:

> Any definition [of homosexuality] based solely on behaviour is bound to be deficient and misleading. Sense of identity, internalised socio-cultural expectations and importance of social and political affiliations all help define an individual's sexual orientation, and these variables may change over time.

By choosing not to engage in this type of gay healing, participants from Group Two reflect a self identity which is constructed both **within** and **external** to a religious framework, therefore denoting a more liberal worldview. This therefore facilitates the experience of religious identity and sexual identity as equal, rather than being prioritised in any order, or reduced to deviant

behaviour. This is not to suggest that Group Two participants do not wish to change their same-sex attractions; rather, it implies an awareness of sexuality and religious identity as different aspects of the whole identity.

The fourth difference between the groups is that although members of both groups of participants narrate reaching a point in which they desire authenticity in their expression of self-identity, my findings indicate that Group Two participants experience this authenticity through self-awareness and personal experience, rather than through religious mediation. For example, in Nina's case, the experience of falling in love with another woman after 33 years of marriage was both a personal crisis, and a catalyst for a reconstruction of her plausibility structure:

> I had to make the decision whether the love I felt for her would override the trauma of coming out to my family. And in the end, I decided that there was more of the road behind me than there is ahead of me, and do I want to get to the edge of my grave and regret not going with the person that I fell in love with?
>
> Nina, 50s

To a certain degree, participants from Group Two were able to employ more autonomy in decisions regarding their sexuality because they displayed a higher degree of self-awareness in the way they were able to construct their reality. This furthermore reinforces my findings that active and exclusive (that is with little or no involvement in social interactions outside the church) engagement in an evangelical worldview is key in the decision to enter an ex-gay program.

Similarities between Group One and Two

Although one of the aims of this research is to establish differences that lead some gay Christians to participate in an ex-gay program and others not, it may be assumed that those who identify as same-sex attracted and Christian have similarities in their experience of sexuality and religion. A similarity between the two groups in this study was either a personal experience of religiously motivated homophobia, or internalised sense of homophobia, that

their same-sex attraction was deviant, or sinful. The interplay between the self and the constructed evangelical worldview, with a negative influence on the individual's sense of sexuality is a conclusion supported by other researchers in this area (*Fish Can't Fly: Conversations About God and Struggling to be Gay,* 2005; Gross, 2008; Thumma, 1991; Wolkomir, 2001). Other similarities are that of an active religious element within their plausibility structure, childhood upbringing in a Christian family, Christian based friendship groups and activities, listening to Christian music, attending Bible Study, and so on; and the pressures from within the religious structure to conform to a normative, conservative Christian identity.

Also, participants from both groups allude to the notion that 'doing' same-sex attraction, or the behavioural aspects of same-sex attraction, can be controlled, often through heterosexual relationships or marriage:

> And then, I got married. I tried once again to live in my marriage and live as a heterosexual; after 12 months I thought, this isn't going to work.
>
> Jeff, 59 (Group One)

> I got married and I suppose all this time along the way I didn't think I was straight, I just thought I could control the urges and try very hard not to actively participate in anything that was overtly gay, and so all the suppressing worked.
>
> Simon, 44 (Group Two)

> For me, I got married, and I suppose I just took on board the fact that well, this is my lot in life… I controlled my behaviour for 33 years, but the person inside didn't change.
>
> Nina, 50s (Group Two)

Therefore, both gay Christians and post-*Exodus* gay Christians interviewed for this research reach a personal crisis which acts as a catalyst to reconstruct incongruent aspects of identity. This crisis is quite different for the two groups: gay Christians experience a crisis of identity; but for those who participated in an *Exodus* style program, it is a little more complex. Not only do they have a crisis of identity as a whole due to a challenge to their 'plausibility structure',

but the collision of their sexual identity and their conservative religious identity is dramatic enough for them to want to heal their self-perceived 'brokenness' – a perception that is reinforced by the ex-gay philosophy.

Conclusion

The first chapter of this research follows the narratives of six post-*Exodus* gay Christians up to the point of deciding to participate in an ex-gay program. In order to answer the first question of this research, who gets involved in ex-gay programs and what is their motivation, another group of gay Christians who had not taken part in gay healing was also interviewed. All participants spoke about the 'beginning' of their experience, of interacting within a predominantly religious plausibility structure, and how their same-sex attractions were contextualised within this particular worldview. These stories included common themes: religiously enforced notions that their sexuality was deviant or sinful; strong religious ties and an active participation in a religious structure such as Church or Bible study; the belief that same-sex attraction can be controlled through behaviour; and the collision of their sexuality and religious identity, which presents an impasse which challenges their plausibility structure.

Analysis of interview data from participants of this study presents the argument that members of conservative Pentecostal and evangelical religious structures that interact more **exclusively** within their own plausibility structure are most likely to be involved in an *Exodus*-style program. The influence of the evangelical worldview, which stipulates the importance of a prioritised Christian identity, disables a sense of autonomy outside of a religious worldview; therefore the belief that reparative therapy can change the participant's sexuality is plausible within their own meaning system. The motivation for the six individuals in Group One to participate in an ex-gay program is to maintain this sense of balance within their plausibility structure, and so by aligning their deviant sexuality with the traditional Christian ideals of their worldview and agreeing to be healed, the sense of continuing to live a Christ-centred life can continue to exist. The next chapter explores what happens to these six post-*Exodus* gay Christians once the gay healing begins.

Chapter Five: The Exodus Experience

Introduction

The ex-gay movement in its basic form of reparative therapy was first developed in Australia in the early 1970s, based on the American *Exodus* model. Situated within a Pentecostal and evangelical Christian framework, the Australian ex-gay movement is determined by the values, beliefs and behaviours of this conservative form of Christianity; therefore, for those who identify with this tradition, the values, beliefs and behaviours are accepted as plausible.

This chapter seeks to answer the second question of this research: Why do ex-gay programs fail to work? In focusing on this question, this chapter will explore the process through which plausibility structures collapse; an interesting notion perhaps contrary to the aims of such programs, which are to maintain or reinforce the conservative, Pentecostal view on same-sex attraction. This occurs, based on respondents' narratives, due to the consistent affirmation of moral absolutism (Haldeman, 1994:225), in particular the promise of 'curing' a deviant sexuality. Religious and sexual identities become primary concerns in the pathway to transformation, specifically the suppression of gay sexual identity in favour of a prioritised religious identity. With this suppression, two main themes emerge which are a response to the research question: firstly, *anomie* is experienced, in that the participant feels increasingly isolated from the normative structure of conservative Christian identity and thus the plausibility structure; and secondly, the participant experiences a reality separate from personal identity, which reinforces this sense of isolation from the constructed worldview. Based on these factors, the participant continues to experience a discord between a self-constructed meaning system which suggests that sinful sexuality can be cured by faith in God, and an unchanging sexuality despite these promises. This reinforces *anomie*.

In the previous chapter, participants shared their reasons for why they wished to change their same-sex desires to the religiously acceptable heterosexual norm; this was determined by how each participant constructed a worldview, and how this worldview in turn affirms their desire to change. This chapter follows them through the next stage as they describe their participation in gay healing. Each program differs slightly in approach, from either residential to weekly meetings. Jeff entered Australia's first residential, rehabilitation style program, and actively participated for about six months. Rupert, who took part in a 12 week program, recalls signing a document agreeing to no social activities with any fellow participants outside session hours, and Bruce states "I had to uproot, get rid of a job, move down to Sydney where I didn't have a job, and do this program." Their experience of healing required an unquestionable commitment to change.

It is important to note that this chapter does not discuss participants from Group Two, as those belonging to this group did not take part in an ex-gay program. The aim of this chapter is to expose the ex-gay experience, and to establish reasons why plausibility structures collapse for those in Group One and therefore result in an ineffective change in sexuality. This is not to suggest those in Group Two don't experience a similar collapse of worldview, but were able to use other methods to renegotiate their identity to reach a place of self acceptance. This will further be discussed in Chapter Six.

Context of Gay Healing Ministries

Whilst the narratives told by the six post-*Exodus* gay Christians recruited for this study must speak for themselves as first-hand accounts of intended conversion of being gay to straight, it is necessary to situate gay healing, or 'conversion therapy' within the context of both Christian and secular frameworks. The majority of publications concerning conversion therapy are from within the ex-gay framework, therefore limiting other, critical analyses of the negative psychological, emotional and spiritual effects of attempting conversion. This research is intended to be a contribution to this perspective.

As previously noted in the introductory Review of Literature, both the American and Australian Psychological Associations have determined that homosexuality and same-sex attraction are not an illnesses, and hence not deemed curable through therapeutic methods (Conger, 1975). Whilst taking this into consideration, Throckmorton (1998) provides a critical reflection of the appropriateness of conversion therapy used as a therapy in a non-religious context. Throckmorton argues, “The purpose of this review is to demonstrate that therapeutic efforts to help clients modify patterns of sexual arousal have been successful and should be available to clients wishing such assistance” (Throckmorton, 1998:300). This point is not disputed, given the emphasis of this research on the importance the individual’s right to self-determination and autonomy. However, his conclusion is sympathetic to and strongly reflects an ex-gay philosophy, as published by multiple ex-gay directors (Comiskey, 1989; Consiglio, 1991; Konrad, 1993; and Nicolosi, 1991; 1993). Quantitative research conducted by Bancroft (1974); Jones and Yarhouse, (2007); Liss and Welner, (1973); and Pattison and Pattison, (1980), are all inconclusive as to the success of conversion therapy, yet are similarly sympathetic to the ex-gay philosophy.

There are, however, publications which are aligned with professional organisations’ perspectives on the risks of religiously moderated reparative therapy. Much of this literature is based on a critique of the effects of ex-gay philosophies on religious identity, post-program (Capps and Carlin, 2008; Haldeman, 1994; Wolkimir, 2001). It is intended that the personal narratives of the respondents to this study might make a small but significant contribution to the research into this type of therapy. It should be noted that this research is not intended to criticise those requesting reparative therapy, but to be used as a tool to question the motivation behind its existence as a therapeutic method and to present data on the experience of this therapy from those who have undergone this therapy. As an example, Alex describes his experience of the counselling ‘professionals’ behind his ex-gay program:

> The reality is, people who are involved in these groups, while well meaning and all that sort of stuff which is why I don’t have any hatred towards them,

> are not trained, and they actually don't understand the issue properly. You know, they've had one pop-psych Christian sort-of session with their pastor or some fly-in like Sy[15] and the next thing they think it's their calling to help change these people. And you know, I think it can create a lot of damage. I think in fragile people, and people that are in the wrong place, and they don't have the resilience or support networks, it can be hugely negative.
>
> Alex, 35

Based on Alex's first-hand account of the type and extent of training behind reparative therapy, the professionalism of some *Exodus*-style organisations must be called into question, as understanding the complexities of human sexuality surely goes beyond a one-dimensional therapeutic approach. The issues identified in Alex's comments, namely that of how change is achieved will be further explored in the following section.

Becoming 'ex-gay'

Although based on a conservative, Pentecostal and evangelical framework, each ex-gay program differs slightly in the therapeutic process. All are based on the *Exodus* model, most notably *Living Waters*[16] which is based in Sydney with a partner program in Melbourne. Of the six participants, both Gary and Bruce attended *Living Waters*, Alex took part in *Dominion*, Rupert participated in *Choices*, Jeff was a resident of the six monthly live-in program *Moombara,* and only Eddie attended *Exodus* specifically.

The *Exodus* model seeks to maintain and reinforce the Pentecostal and evangelical worldview, and is therefore similar in approach, regardless of the name of the program. However, as each respondent participated in their chosen ex-gay program over a span of years, locations and settings, the contextualisation of each individual's experience should therefore be determined through their own story. The remainder of this chapter is dedicated to the narratives of the six participants in Group One, as they tell of

[15] Sy Rogers, a pastoral care worker connected to *Exodus*. He has also travelled Asia, Australia and New Zealand extensively preaching the benefits of reparative therapy. He is an ex-gay, married with children.
[16] *Living Waters, Dominion, Choices and Moombara* are the actual names of these *Exodus*-style programs.

their ex-gay experience. Following this will be a discussion of the sociological determinates which lead to the collapse of each participant's plausibility structure.

Jeff – 59

As the only respondent to this research who participated in a residential ex-gay program, Jeff's experience of gay healing was perhaps more extreme than other participants. This is even more so as the program, *Moombara*, operated and closed down in the 1970s; this may be because the program practiced more traditional, unethical forms of reparative therapy such as those mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis. As Jeff recalls below:

> I was given a mentor who was said to be a good male role model for me. I had to do some chores, but I wasn't allowed to do anything like the cleaning in the kitchen, make meals, or all of that because that was considered to be female work. So all of my jobs had to be outside, doing harder type work and hard labour. Also, they went through my wardrobe and removed any clothing they considered to be gay, in particular bikini underwear, and any particular colours. I was constantly monitored – I was monitored 24 hours, so even while I was in the shower. There would be someone standing outside to make sure I wouldn't masturbate. They were very, very strict on masturbation because they believed masturbation was the first step towards you fantasising and not being able to change your mind, about being gay or straight, you know? So that went on for six months.

A fundamental working principle of the *Moombara* program was based on performing gender stereotypes, a prominent theory behind reparative therapy. The ideal held was that if the participants could learn and model normative heterosexual behaviour, same-sex attraction and behaviour would decrease. This is indicative of the values placed upon gender roles within the conservative religious structure from which Jeff's worldview was constructed.

> [They said] "If we can make a man out of you, and make you more masculine, if you try and deal with these thoughts you have, if you cut them out, what will happen is that they'll be replaced by these normal heterosexual feelings. And this renewing of the mind will take at least 12 months to two years."

Jeff was faced with the commonly held belief that by accepting his same-sex attractions, he would therefore be isolating himself from the Christian way of life, and choosing his 'deviant' sexual identity over that of his Christian identity:

> I'd been so indoctrinated in the program with things like: gay relationships don't last, everyone's promiscuous, they're all bitches, and you'll never make friends within the community.

Therefore, because these were the values taught within the program, these were the values Jeff began to internalise and implement in his constructions of his identity and place within the world. This resulted in isolating his sexuality from the rest of his identity.

When questioned about how participation in *Moombara* affected his religious identity, Jeff tells,

> Well, in one way, it dragged me more and more to God. Because, you know, that's where I thought the answer was. It was a matter of constant and intense communication with God, and very involved in a religious life and in the Christian church.

This is a prominent theme emerging amongst the stories of participants; a strengthened relationship with God due to traditional, religious ritual. Yet when questioned about his 'deviant' sexuality, he says:

> Because I realise now, that all that suppression, denial and self-hatred was the very cause that created my sexual addiction. And when I came out, that sexual addiction died immediately. It would be nice to have known that when I was 16.

Jeff's recollection of his experience supports the notion that as a self-identified Christian, he was expected to place his Christian identity above all other

aspects of identity, which essentially led to a devaluation of his identity as a whole (Haldeman, 1994:224). Jeff says:

> I guess it made me feel worse. It made me feel as though I was a really bad person, which I couldn't change. It was either that I loved my sin too much or too often, and you know, I was obviously fallen in this area, and it was like I loved my sin more than I loved God, or that you aren't exercising enough faith, and so I was struggling to be something I couldn't be and it made me feel much worse. And it was because of this reason that it caused people to kill themselves.

By participating in this residential ex-gay program, Jeff's intentions of healing his same-sex attractions were lost to the belief that he wasn't committed; either to change, or to the conservative Christianity of his upbringing. In the eyes of the ex-gay leaders, his sexuality would have been healed had his commitment to God been wholly evident. Instead, the 'healing' failed to work and he was left isolated and alone. It seems that the principles of reparative therapy and its emotional, psychological and physical effects had little success.

Bruce – 41

Bruce found his weekly participation in *Living Waters* to be beneficial in a social sense, by building a community of people around him who were 'struggling' with sexual deviance. This not only provided him with a network of people who were in a similar circumstance, but also normalised the traditional Christian perspective that same-sex attraction was an aspect of identity to be struggled against:

> The process was that we got together and it felt a little bit like a church congregation as there'd be singing and worship songs and prayer, and so on. And then a bit of a sharing time from the leader, and then we'd break into small groups and basically share our experience with one another. So that was the first session. And then as the weeks went on, it would be about our week by week struggle, it was always referred to as 'a struggle.'

> But there was a complete spectrum of people in my group: people who had been having homosexual thoughts, to people who were into pornography, people who had come out of a relationship or who were in a relationship, people like me who played around the edges, who had never had a gay relationship and who had a church background. I think most people who were in the group had a church background, so there was a point of commonality there. So it was comfortable in that sense, but it was uncomfortable in that we were all dealing with these full-on gay people as well.

When questioned about how *Living Waters* affected his religious identity, Bruce reflected that it was during the program that he began a time of questioning the beliefs he'd held for so long. This is in strong correlation with the other members of Group One; through questioning their own religious worldview in the context of a program which seeks to maintain and reinforce this worldview, it becomes evident that in this circumstance, gay healing does not provide the solutions sought by the participants, or at the very least, it fails to accord the participant's plausibility structure. As Bruce tells it:

> I'd say it started to fall apart during that time. It made me question what I was doing with the whole religious aspect: what I was doing with my relationships, the church… I suppose I began to see a differentiation between the motions that people go through, and what is real. That became clearer… I think I probably went though an experience of questioning, whether what I felt was valid, or was it part of the gay thing, that I had to reject what I felt there. And that became even too painful to consider, like, no, no, no, there's life in this, why would I want to reject that? There was nothing consistent with that and my understanding of God. I think it probably had a strengthening effect, going through that process, separating out religion from spirituality.

As mentioned, the emphasis of Christian identity in taking a primary role in de-emphasising his same-sex attractions, Bruce reflects on the importance of controlling his sexual desire yet seeing the irony of building a community of people around him who were in a similarly vulnerable position:

> You know, finding your pleasure in the presence of God rather than in anyone else… I think as far as sexual desire is concerned, nothing changed from pre-

> *Living Waters* to post-*Living Waters*. The way I wanted to express that desire didn't change; I just saw more opportunities!

Bruce concluded his reflections of his time in *Living Waters* by stating that it didn't achieve the goal of decreasing same-sex attraction, but rather it increased his awareness of the spectrum of human sexuality; sexual identity and practice was more than the conservative religious worldview believed it to be. Also, the ideal of 'healthy relating' was at the core of his decision to progress post *Living Waters*.

> I think in another sense I became more confused, and as a result of *Living Waters* I think what it did was open me up to other people's sexuality, in that everyone's sexuality is played out slightly differently… I think what affected me more was the poor relationships I had at the church where I was. I think where I am now, or rather what I didn't learn, was how to build a good relationship. That's what really affected my sexuality, when I had to decide who I am really, and what do I want.

Therefore it is evident that through the process of therapy, Bruce experienced external factors outside of his initial plausibility structure (such as building relationships with others, negative and hypocritical responses of clergy and other church members to their participation in worship, and continuing to engage in the 'destructive' lifestyle of sinful sexuality) which led him to question his religious identity and the plausibility structure that held this together.

Rupert - 34

Rupert attended *Choices,* which had a similar structured approach to *Living Waters*, and there was the expectation of repeating the program if the desired results weren't achieved during the initial process.

> So it was a twelve week program after the first session. I think it was about two and a half, three hours once a week. So we would watch one of Sy Rogers' videos, and we would watch a chapter a week, and then kind of discuss it in relation to reparative therapy, which is something that features a lot during the talk. So we'd watch the video, have a time of prayer, then

> discussion, or one-on-one with the group leader. And this went on for twelve weeks. And then they said, “Do it again”, which I did a second time, not long after.

The methods used by the leaders at *Choices* are reminiscent of traditional reparative therapy techniques, which often focus on cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), in order to ‘rewire’ the brain’s emotional responses to thoughts, feelings and behaviour. CBT is a popular and commonly practiced therapeutic technique, and the basis for sexual reorientation therapy, as denoted by the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality (NARTH, 2011). Another method used by leaders of this particular program, was to use ‘scare tactics’ to encourage Rupert’s continuing participation in the conservative Christian lifestyle.

> I remember one of them was trying to give me some semi-naked pictures of women and tell me wank over them, you know, and I was thinking, I can’t handle this anymore, and that’s when I left. I thought it was absolutely ridiculous.

> Because when you go through the ex-gay program, the biggest thing they tell you is that if you come out and choose to live a gay lifestyle, you will live a very lonely existence. If you live as a gay person, there is no fidelity and there is no love in a gay relationship, it cannot exist.

Along this vein, Rupert recalls:

> I can still remember the bloke telling me at the program, he was a success story, he was sitting there with his wife; he was the most camp man I’ve ever met in my life! He said “You’ll live a very lonely life if you don’t fight this thing, and you’ll never find anyone who’s faithful to you … I wasn’t faithful to any of my boyfriends!” And I thought, “Oh, ok…”

The premise that Rupert’s deviant sexuality would decrease as he committed to change was plausible within his evangelical worldview. In addition to this, through an active emphasis of his religiosity and relationship with God, he felt that many of the therapeutic methods used were justifiable.

> They weren't promising results in twelve weeks, but they said there would be a process of healing which would come through it, through identifying your sexuality that you weren't actually gay, that you were a misplaced heterosexual, and that being gay was simply a miswiring because of this factor or that factor, or a combination of the factors, which is why you would then start to grow and become heterosexual. We spent a lot of the program in prayer, and being very strict with oneself as well. That it would start to come, it would start to grow within me. That was the theory.

Concerning his feelings about how the ex-gay program actually affected his sexuality, the theme of *anomie* once again emerges; revealing how the program worked to isolate participants' feelings about their sexuality from their constructed sense of how things 'should be'. Rupert recalls:

> I think it definitely put a hold on it, it made me very ashamed of it, and very embarrassed about the whole thing. And a real sense of deep shame about being gay, about having these unwanted attractions and being desperate to be different… It was kind of a divorcing myself from it. I separated it out as a different part of me rather than integrating it into myself. And then just this complete shame about it all. And I think going through the program really slowed it down.

Rupert's experience of healing his same-sex attractions through participation in *Choices* was unsuccessful. Instead of successfully converting his same-sex attractions to the religiously acceptable heterosexual norm, *Choices* promoted a deep sense of shame about his sexuality, which he internalised, to the point of separating this aspect of himself from the rest of his identity.

Alex - 35

Alex's experience of gay healing was much less structured, even though it was contextualised within a religious institution and therefore within the confines of his constructed worldview. *Dominion* was a program run by West Australian *Hillsong* equivalent *Riverside*, and was a multi-step process, similar to that of a Twelve Step program such as Alcoholics Anonymous, or

Homosexuals Anonymous. After initial one on one therapy with a Christian counsellor, the participant could then upgrade to small group participation:

> Well the process was one on one therapy with a counsellor – not a psychologist, I mean they weren't trained – but a counsellor who you know, was lovely. We started the session with a prayer, and again, it started the moment you sat down because the prayer was about "Help Alex to overcome this, etcetera." So it started off as prayer and the behaviour thing, then we would have to journal… And then it would be working out, because she did some very functional, normal counselling techniques, but just from a dysfunctional viewpoint I would say – but it was still very much the journaling, looking at different affirmations, looking at your triggers, you know, if you were going to go looking for a sex place or even if you were going to masturbate with gay porn or something like that. You would talk through that and then come up with different action plans based on those triggers. And that was pretty much how it all sort of went... And it was a mixture of counselling and a safe place to be accountable, and to come back and say "I stuffed up, I did this, I did that."

Although Alex found some aspects of the one-on-one counselling helpful, he reflects on the irony of not progressing to the group process:

> I never actually made it into the actual group process part, and they did have a group process, but I think that people found the group process didn't usually work, as they found their partners there.

Instead of it having the desired effect of decreasing his same-sex attraction, Alex's positive experience of self in therapy created a divergence of values, or as Peter Berger (1967:18) notes, his interpretation of meaning began to shift. This shifting of meaning specifically concerns his Christian belief system, and the conservative idea that sexual attraction is based purely on behaviour. It was at this point in his ex-gay experience that Alex began to separate his own experience of reality from his identity (Berger, 1967:43), rather than conform to the expectations of his evangelical, Pentecostal upbringing:

> And that belief system that it was a choice…I can't believe I was going down that naïve path. And the fact that I didn't question a lot of things; I only

> looked at Christian literature, and anything that was opposite to that view, [it was believed] they were twisting things because they didn't want to give up on their desires. You begin to believe in right-wing propaganda that you almost don't question things either.

As Alex began to separate his value system from that of his Pentecostal and evangelical worldview, he also began to re-examine the enforced negativity towards his sexual attractions. In doing this, he began to experience a breakdown of the norms which were traditionally a part of his religious worldview. This differentiation between religious commitment and inability to change his sexual attractions reinforced a sense of isolation from his plausibility structure.

> But in hindsight it probably cemented even more back then that you know, I'm not living true to God, who I am or what I'm choosing to do isn't right. It didn't actually give me a way out. I didn't give me inner peace. It didn't actually provide any answers, solutions, testimonies… there was nothing clear about it… It just separates you from church and religion. It puts a divide there, and reinforces that the two don't go together, which is why in the end, people throw out the baby and the bathwater. It becomes clearer and clearer that you can't control, you just have to choose to be real, and because of all the religious stuff you've been through, you feel like you've failed, and therefore, how could you go back to church, or how could you go back to God, because obviously your faith wasn't very strong. You haven't been healed, so you can't really get up and talk. And so for me, it increases the distance.

In addition to the discordance of values concerning his religious identity, Alex's participation in gay healing also reinforced already present negative connotations towards his sexual identity. Because the *Dominion* counsellor continued to work within an evangelical worldview, the interaction between Alex and the counsellor continued to enforce the traditional view that sexual orientation could be controlled through behaviour modification, such as refraining from gay sex, masturbation and viewing pornography.

> I was almost doing the things I didn't want to do, in that the Christians talk about the 'destructive lifestyle', and if you've only ever been closeted, you almost only end up in that lifestyle. But back then, because the emphasis was 'because it's not an orientation, it must be behaviour, and because its behaviour, it's purely about the sex act itself…'
>
> And so when you're going to this therapy, and they're talking about all these behaviours, it sort of does cement that what you are doing is wrong. You don't get the ability at that stage to separate that this is an orientation and… what was I really going to do, thinking that it comes down to a behaviour?

Ex-gay programs operate on the basis that such behaviour can be controlled, and in doing so, it could be suggested that instead of reducing same-sex attraction, sexuality is repressed altogether. This is another example of Berger's theory of separation of reality from identity (1967:43), in which Alex isolated his sexuality from his prioritised Christian identity. By divorcing an authentic aspect of one's identity for the sake of maintaining a constructed worldview, this also increases the perspective that their gay sexuality is immoral. Arguably, this perspective could be interpreted as religious homophobia; as this belief is internalised by the participant, an increase in self-loathing based on religious principles becomes evident.

> And it meant that if I was going to change, it meant that I would be single, therefore giving up on intimacy and therefore I wouldn't have sex. And have a life of masturbation or whatever.
>
> It probably increases your internal homophobia without a doubt. You know, there's no question there. And that's the problem with all this sort of stuff, that unless you've got an individuality and identity that's strong, that's why you get so many people into depression and self-harm and suicide. But I think being involved in these kinds of things does cement homophobia even more so… It wasn't a negative process but if I analysed it, it increased my sense of internal homophobia.

Therefore, it could be assumed that whilst Alex's experience of therapy was helpful in widening the gap between his conservative Christian values and his emerging experience of authenticity, the alignment of his beliefs within the

evangelical worldview was negatively impacted in terms of his relationship to his own sexuality.

> To take away the word 'homophobia' so everyone understands it, it's self-hatred: hating that part of you, and wanting to be different. And realising that you don't accept a part of you and psychology shows that if you can't accept yourself then it's really hard to show others the real you to be accepted.

Alex felt that consistent relating to God through prayer and reflection created a sense of internal chaos, or *anomie*, particularly in his relationship with God; his belief in the evangelical plausibility structure was beginning to collapse. Yet it was not isolation from fellow participants, but rather isolation from his sexuality, in favour of his Christian identity, and isolation from his traditional sense of God, in favour of a devalued sense of self. This resulted in a failed attempt to heal his same-sex desires.

Gary - 35

As a participant of Canberra weekly support group *Living Waters,* Gary's experience of gay healing took on a structured approach similar to that of a worship service or small group get together. This provided an approach which maintained a sense of comfort and normality.

> Basically the night would start with worship, someone playing keyboard or guitar, and a couple of people singing, I dunno, maybe about four worship songs…. Halfway through the evening we would have a supper, and then we would split into our small groups…The big group was both male and female, the small groups were all single sex. So, my small group, the leader and participants were all guys. We would talk about stuff from the teaching, we would share what was going on, we would pray together.

The single sex structure of the small groups had the intention of putting into practice one of the fundamental principles of the program; that of 'healthy relating'.

> When I met the Canberra coordinator before the program started, I basically had to say that yes, it was a problem, that yes, I wanted to change and that I

> was committed to trying to change… Basically, homosexuality was one example of not relating to people in a 'normal' way… When I was doing it, it had definitely expanded into a 'you have a problem, some kind of problem relating with people.' So it tended to be along the lines that it was a 'relational disorder.'… And the subheading under the title *Living Waters Australia* was 'Pursuing Sexual and Relational Wholeness in Christ'. So there was an overall theme about relational problems, of which homosexuality was one.

As mentioned on the *Living Waters* website ('Understanding Homosexuality', *Living Waters*), "**The goal of growth** is freedom to love well and relate intimately, but non-erotically with other men, and to be able to relate with women as a needed counterpart, without fear or disinterest." As ex-gay programs are based on the premise that same-sex attraction is a learned behaviour, by learning to relate to the same sex in 'healthy' ways, this behaviour could be 'converted' through an individual commitment to change. This premise is not problematic in and of itself; however the intention for participants to form relationships with women as a 'needed counterpart' further isolates the individual from their same-sex desires. This reinforces the evangelical worldview.

At the time of interview, Gary reflected on this specific element with criticism of the 'black and white' perspective from which many conservative religious structures define a 'healthy' same-sex relationship.

> There is no reason why I can't have friendships with guys who are both straight and gay, that aren't sexual relationships, you know. But it doesn't make you straight, having your healthy non sexual relationships with other guys.

Gary completed the *Living Waters* program 'unsuccessfully'; that is, completing the course, but without the desired results of reduction of same-sex attraction, or a conversion to heterosexuality. Gary's decision to partake in the program a second time reinforces the absolutist perspective of the evangelical worldview, in which ex-gay programs seek to cure deviant aspects

of the Christian sexual identity (Haldeman, 1994:225). This further instils a sense of isolation from his authentic sexuality. As Gary told me:

> I was actually slightly cranky, I remember, when I started the second time, that I was still on the first rung, just as a participant, because… I can't even remember the details, but I remember someone else being elevated to 'group helper' and I wasn't... They had hinted at the end of the second year that they would ask me back to be a 'helper person,' not as a leader but as a first rung up the ladder the next time around and they didn't ring me.

A second undertaking of the program was not only personally disappointing, but also suggests that due to his failure to change, Gary was isolated from the group at a time when he may have relied more heavily on support from others and this religious community.

When questioned about how participation in *Living Waters* affected his sense of religious identity and his direct relationship with God, Gary felt that this, with the support of others struggling with same-sex attraction, was a key strength of the program.

> I mean really it's a form of Bible study and devotion and prayer and these things tend to make you feel closer to God regardless of what subject you are focusing or praying on, so yeah, its spending time focusing on God, in communion with God, talking with God, so yes it does have that kind of effect… There's also, there's a sense of community and support.

This feeling of support was mostly from other participants, rather than group leaders. The solidarity and the emphasis on his relationship with God acted as a means to overcome his sinful sexual behaviour, because all participants in the program were there based on sexual deviance and were focused on a similar goal of sexual purity. Prior to entering the ex-gay program, Gary's pornography addiction and focus on sex was so uncontrolled it was debilitating to his every day life. He attributes breaking these habits to entering *Living Waters* and the support he found in his fellow participants.

> I definitely have a sense that part of the problem of being in the closet is that you are so self conscious about sex, you are so alert for any sexual thoughts that you end up focussing on them. Once of the things that was talked about was not focussing on them, as not a big issue, you actually create a vicious cycle: "I mustn't think about it, I mustn't think about it!" And so, part of it was, I suppose getting on with life in other normal ways. And the mere fact that you've got the sense of the support means that you don't do it as much…

Reflecting on this during the interview, Gary admits that breaking habits and de-emphasising sex, although a positive aspect of the program, did not have the desired effect of heterosexuality, nor did it 'heal' him. He continued to feel a discord between the world in which he lived and the reality that his sexuality was not changing to the heterosexual norm. This reinforced his sense of *anomie*.

> I definitely found that I remember thinking at some point that I was thinking about sex less. That's a completely different thing to being straight. You know, I was able to look at a woman and say, "Oh yes, she's nice, she's pretty and all that", but that's a completely different thing from being straight.

Gary's two attempts at healing his same-sex attractions through participation in *Living* Waters were unsuccessful. Despite consciously surrendering his sense of agency, committing to change his sexual deviance through reparative therapy and upholding his evangelical worldview through a sense of social solidarity, Gary could not alter his sexuality from gay to straight.

Eddie – 30s

Eddie's involvement in *Exodus* began not to change his sexuality, but in a search for information concerning his same-sex attractions, and to gain a Christian perspective on sexual behaviour. He said,

> My youth group supervisor/coordinator, with my agreement, initially set up a meeting with one of the ministry's counsellors. I went and saw the counsellor and spoke about my attractions to guys at my church and school and eventually I decided I wanted to talk to her some more and went back to see her a few more times. I had no information about homosexuality and didn't

> know anything so I was relieved to be able to talk to someone. This was before the days of the Internet so information was hard to get hold of. I thought it was perhaps a phase I was going through and would grow out of. The following year (1996), *Exodus* was running a year long program and I was invited to participate in the program – if I were interested.

By promoting themselves as having **the** Christian perspective on same-sex attraction, a common criticism of *Exodus* by participants is that it assumes authority on this topic. Instead, as evidenced by the narratives of these participants, this so-called 'Christian perspective' actually further diminishes the spectrum of broader Christian belief and experience, isolating those who don't adhere to those conservative values.

> They didn't tout it as a 'healing' program or promised it would change my orientation, but rather they emphasised that the focus was to help educate and inform the participants about the issue from a Christian perspective. I thought about it and decided to go for it. So I went to the program and learned heaps – from biblical studies on human sexuality to the aetiology and various theories out there on the causes of homosexuality, to general issues about forgiveness and relationships, and some general topics on sexuality, sexual abuse etc.

As noted above, Eddie differs in experience from the previous five participants. Instead, he suggests the *Exodus* perspective to be enlightening. When questioned about how *Exodus* shaped his religious identity, Eddie suggested that the closer he felt to God, the less dissonance he felt with his sexual attraction.

> It strengthened my convictions and provided a lot of direction and gave me a greater sense of direction, reducing the confusion I felt. I guess they complemented each other. There was of course some dissonance there initially – between what one believes and what one wants to believe. But eventually one does reconcile both sides to a certain degree – but this took years, rather than as a direct immediate result of the program.

Once again, this is in divergence from other members of this Group. However, when questioned about the effect of *Exodus'* teachings on his sexual identity, Eddie affirms other participants' experiences in that his self-awareness of his sexuality was increased to the point he began to realise it couldn't be controlled through behaviour:

> In terms of sexual identity, I certainly went from being unaware of my sexual identity or not having a sexual identity to one that was strongly identified or leant towards being 'same-sex attracted' and/or 'homosexual'. And yes, 'gay' if I must use that term.

Interestingly, Eddie's story suggests that regardless of what gay healing sets out to achieve, attempts did not change his sexual identity. Eddie is also similar to the other participants in his account of a strengthened relationship with God, yet a difference was his attempt to isolate his sexuality from his religious identity; it seems as though his conservative religious worldview may have been maintained by his participation in *Exodus*.

Conclusion

As evident in the stories of these six post-*Exodus* gay Christians, the experience of each individual was based on a number of factors, primarily the structure of the program and the insular strength of their religious worldview, both prior to, and during participation. Although there were differences in structure, whether it was residential or in the form of weekly meetings, the underlying values of conversion therapy were evident in each participant's narrative. Whether it was *Living Waters, Exodus, Dominion, Choices* or *Moombara,* the aim of gay healing was to provide religiously mediated change from sexual deviance to sexual wholeness, from a conservative, Pentecostal and evangelical perspective.

It is evident through the above stories, that the data examined in this chapter answers the second research question: why does this religiously mediated change fail? It can be argued, that what participants actually encounter diverges from the aims of gay healing. Firstly, a claim of gay healing is that

the program seeks to maintain and reinforce the participant's plausibility structure, and by doing so, providing a religious solution to the problem of same-sex attraction or sexual deviance. By entering into an ex-gay program, the participants to this study, who are all from conservative religious backgrounds, hoped to be sheltered from the internal chaos or 'reality' which they experienced as incongruent with their constructed sense of self (Wuthnow, 1986:127). Through modifying their sexual identity, participants aim to be religiously acceptable and continue to conform to the evangelical worldview (Haldeman, 1994:225). However, because participants experience a discord between the aims of the program and the reality of their sexual attractions, this internal chaos results in *anomie* (Durkheim, 1951).

As evidenced by Jeff, Gary, Rupert, Bruce, Alex and Eddie, during the process of therapy, they do not experience a 'sheltering from the storm'; instead, the aspects which made their worldview 'plausible', namely the promise of divine healing, begin to collapse. The primary reason for this isolation is due to the tendency of ex-gay programs to de-value aspects of identity which are not in line with evangelical Christian values. This is reflective of Haldeman's (1994:226) study of the construction of the evangelical worldview, of prioritising Christian identity, and promoting a de-valuation of other aspects of self-identity, and is recognised in these stories through emotions such as shame, embarrassment and depression. In addition, participants aim to separate their sexual identity from their prioritised Christian identity, resulting in further discordance. For all participants, especially Gary and Rupert who took part more than once, there was a realisation that neither pop-psychology nor fundamentalist theology taught in the *Exodus* model would provide the answers for which they were looking. This incongruence of personal experience from the social norms of the evangelical worldview is reflective of the separation of reality from identity (Berger, 1967:43). Furthermore, instead of changing their gay sexuality to the more appropriate heterosexual norm, participants begin to question the belief structure which held their reality together, to eventually be discarded.

It should be noted, that while members of Group Two have not participated in an ex-gay program, it is not to say that they too may have gone through an internal process of *anomie*. The feelings of isolation from either their sexual identity, religious belief or social norms may still occur, as the 'coming out' process is "adopting a non-traditional identity, restructuring one's self concept, reorganising one's personal sense of history, and altering one's relations with others and with society" (McDonald, 1982:48). It could be argued that their sense of *anomie* isn't as prevalent, and because of this, the ability for members of Group Two to reconstruct their experience of reality and identity is less complex. This is to be further explored in Chapter Six.

The participants who took part in an ex-gay program exemplify the shifting realities and renegotiations of identity, worldview, and sets of meaning we apply to how we interact with others. Due to this 'transference into another world', or *anomie,* participants were not healed from their same-sex attractions, but rather experienced an increase in instability, or discontinuity of the plausibility structure in which they have constructed (Berger, 1967:50). Similar to theorists who analyse the structure and effects of religious cults, it could be argued that because the program neglects to provide answers that solve a particular problem, in this case self-perceived deviant sexuality, and also because there is no direct reward if there is no success (Bainbridge & Stark, 1980:1393; Wright, 1983:15), these factors become internalised, and the interpretation of meaning in these structures begins to shift (Berger, 1967:18).

To conclude, as exemplified by these narratives, participants leave ex-gay programs without success. What remains is the deconstructed mess of self-identity, worldview, and religious belief. The next chapter explores how these elements are reconstructed.

Chapter Six: Exiting Exodus

Introduction

This final empirical chapter discusses what happens to participants when they leave an ex-gay program after it hasn't delivered the promised 'cure' for same-sex attraction. Upon leaving an *Exodus* style program and re-entering the community, participants necessarily must renegotiate their worldview with consideration of their experience of gay healing. Similarly, those participants who did not partake in an ex-gay program, but still 'come out' as gay Christians, go through a similar process of renegotiating their worldview and sense of self, but there is one less 'layer' to work through. The process for Group Two is internal, rather than engaging in external methods to achieve this reconstruction of worldview.

This chapter takes up factors which contribute to answering the final research question: after leaving an *Exodus*-style program, how does the individual experience religion or spirituality? Based on the narratives of post-*Exodus* gay Christians, it becomes evident that to experience religion or spirituality in a way which recognises their authentic sexuality, other elements of the self must be renegotiated, based on a constructed set of meanings that are different to their initial plausibility structure. Although members of Group Two have less to negotiate, like participants in Group One, their experience of reconstructing their worldview supports the establishment of a 'gay theology'.

The Immediate Reponses to Gay Healing

Those who leave gay healing programs and are not yet 'cured' are not only leaving the security of the program itself, but are forced to discard their previous plausibility structure in order to construct a new perspective of life which fits their experience of self. The participants in this research differ in their views regarding the impact of reparative therapy on sexual identity, religious identity and spiritual practice due to their personal experience; but all agree that their same-sex attractions remain despite their efforts to change. Similarly, after leaving the ex-gay program, each participant experiences

differently ‘what happens next.’ As we see here from Gary and Rupert, they experienced a difference in meaning as to what their ‘new life’ would entail:

> And in an ironic way, I don’t know that I could have ever come out without going through *Living Waters*. The reason I say that is because I went from the complete shame, I could hardly talk about this without the crying, the staring at the floor, being red in the face to being in an environment where I could talk about it, being comfortable with my feelings and being in a safe environment to do that.
>
> Gary, 35

> I left the church at the same time as I left the counsellor and the group, and just completely left them behind, and I suppose it brought to an end the previous identity and tradition I had from growing up, really.
>
> Rupert, 34

As Gary and Rupert suggest, following their exit from gay healing, their sexual identity did not change, but it was evident that their experience within an *Exodus*-style program had indeed influenced the reconstruction of their worldview and how they experienced themselves within a religious context.

As participants emerged from their respective ex-gay programs, there is a variety of stories told about adjusting to life outside the program. Rupert describes the re-integration of his faith in a negative sense, in that he “couldn’t handle this program and I couldn’t handle church, [he] just stopped going for nearly eight years … and became very, very negative about anything church related or Christian.” On the other hand, although Bruce acknowledged his same-sex attractions did not decrease during his involvement in *Living Waters*, he began dating a woman from his church. The consequences of this relationship resulted in an end to his membership of the religious community of which he was a part:

> We were sort of ‘going out’ then they put on the pressure of “Well, when are you going to ask her to marry you?” and I said “I haven’t even considered that” and they said “Well, you better!” And then they found out I’d been

> hooking up with guys, so they said "Look, you can't work here and do that, so basically leave." And so I had to deal with all of that, as that was sort of my whole world, living there, working there, all the people in my social circle were part of that church. And then so the next chapter started. And it was a traumatic end.
>
> Bruce, 41

As previously discussed in Chapter Four, immediately following this 'traumatic end', Bruce tells of an incident in which a male leader from the same Church community then made sexual advances towards him "and basically said "well, let's have sex!" Bruce was unimpressed with the "hypocrisy" of the situation and left the church altogether, taking up membership in an Anglican church which was more accepting of his sexuality. It was at this point that Bruce exited the evangelical and Pentecostal plausibility structure to integrate a different and more liberal and accepting Christian practice as his religious worldview.

In the immediate period following their 'exodus from *Exodus',* participants are faced with a choice: to either continue to 'struggle' with their sexuality, or to face their authentic self by 'coming out'. By choosing to continuously explore a self-identity which remained unchanged by their participation in gay healing, participants in Group One are in fact asserting this 'authentic' self. This is not a simple process, and for respondents in this research, this marks the 'coming out' experience; not only coming out of the ex-gay program, but accepting their sexuality and making known to family and friends that they are no longer 'struggling' with their sexuality in the same way as before entering gay healing. As Jeff says:

> What happened was that many people from within our background, that being from a Christian faith background, in their struggle to find authenticity and acceptance, we may come in and out of the closet several times, which is what I did. And so, after I left the rehab program, because it wasn't working for me and I was under so much pressure, and then I came out for seven months, because I thought it would do me some good.
>
> Jeff, 59

Gary had a similar experience:

> I genuinely believe that it was God who told me to stop struggling and actually, you know it was along the lines of "Stop fighting. Actually try acknowledging your feelings for a while without wrestling with it, and you know, see how that goes." And you know… it went well.
>
> Gary, 35

And Rupert also told me:

> But I got the courage up it took me twelve months until I got my courage up. And so I finally went along [to a coming out workshop] and found it to be a very positive experience. Because until then I'd never seen a core team of gay and lesbian people… And it helped break this down, that I was meeting these good, decent people that I got on really well with.
>
> Rupert, 34

In acknowledging the internal longings and desires of living authentically, participants of this study do, over time, consciously recognise an element of self which has always been present (Haldeman, 1994:222). Although not a simple or immediate response, they are eventually able to reconcile the once irreconcilable aspects of their identity. After a fashion, it was participation in a gay healing program that actually led to this moment of self-realisation.

Integrating Authentic Sexuality into their Worldview

During the ex-gay process, the participant's worldview is challenged to the point that their existing plausibility structure is no longer congruent with their encounter with their authentic self. At the point of leaving the ex-gay program without achieving the desired results, participants from Group One share similar characteristics as to what aspects of the self needs to be renegotiated in order to create a new system of meaning (Wright, 1983:156-158). The three main aspects which emerge from the ex-gay process are the participant's sexuality, spirituality, and religious identity. In this section, it will become evident that the acceptance and integration of one's same-sex desires and

self identifying as ‘gay,’ is paramount to the establishment of a new plausibility structure.

Each participant who took part in an *Exodus*-style program experiences their sexuality differently. However, everyone from Group One held the conviction that because their sexuality didn’t ‘convert’ to heterosexuality through reparative therapy; their same-sex attractions were a part of who they are, and how they were created. What they had been ‘struggling’ with all along was reconciling themselves to an authentic part of their identity. Gary says that he “started telling some church friends who [he’d] had the ‘I’m struggling with this’ conversation”. He said “I was no longer struggling with it.” During his interview, he also discusses embracing his sexuality in a way he hadn’t before taking part in *Living Waters*, as he hadn’t acted on his sexual desires beyond viewing gay pornography:

> I would say that the Christian morals have had a lot less practical influence on me since I came out. This wasn’t a planned thing; it just happened suddenly as I was thrown into a world that I wasn’t part of. You know, the kid was in the candy shop and wasn’t strong enough to resist.
>
> Gary, 35

Following participation in *Living Waters,* Gary actively pursued sexual encounters in the gay community. This could be described as a newly established autonomy, in which his religious worldview, or religious identity was less of a determining factor in what he could and couldn’t do, sexually. Although his experience in *Living Waters* influenced his new plausibility structure, he was no longer bound by the evangelical worldview in the way that he once was; this is indicative of moving towards a more liberal plausibility structure.

Through his participation in *Living Waters*, Bruce’s experienced an internal evolution in terms of how he experienced his sexuality. It is suggested that broader exposure to a variety of sexual identities, in addition to the

shortcomings of the ex-gay philosophy, is a reason for why his 'problem' had not been fixed:

> I think in another sense I became more confused, and as a result of *Living Waters* I think what it did was open me up to other people's sexuality, in that everyone's sexuality is played out slightly differently…I think what affected me more was the poor relationships I had at the church where I was. I think where I am now, or rather what I didn't learn, was how to build a good relationship. That's what really affected my sexuality, when I had to decide who I am really, and what do I want.
>
> Bruce, 41

This was another dissolution point of his previous worldview, and the context for which he began to reconstruct a new perspective on his sexuality. In experiencing the freedom of autonomy, Bruce had the ability to live life on his terms, rather than through religious rhetoric. Similarly, Eddie suggests that his participation in the *Exodus* program actually exposed him to a variety of sexualities, and led him to define his own sexuality. This is a point of self-determination not seen within the evangelical worldview described by participants prior to entering the program:

> I certainly went from being unaware of my sexual identity or not having a sexual identity to one that was strongly identified or leant towards being 'same-sex attracted' and/or 'homosexual'. And yes, 'gay' if I must use that term.
>
> Eddie, 30s

Therefore, at the point at which respondents to this research exit gay healing, identify as gay and 'come out' to both themselves and those close to them, it can be argued that their same-sex attractions were not diminished through the therapeutic process; instead, what each participant experiences is a self-recognition of an aspect of identity, which leads towards a personal acceptance of their sexuality, a re-establishment of ownership in how they interpret the world around them, and a greater sense of autonomy. This integration of their authentic sexuality enabled them to create a new worldview. Like their sexuality, there also emerges a self-reflective spirituality.

The Emergence of a Self Reflective Spirituality

As participants of Group One exit gay healing, their reality, or plausibility structure, is reconstructed according to the internalisation and integration of new experiences and factors external to their original worldview. There are no clear results as to globally, how many participants in ex-gay programs reject their Christian faith altogether, but for this study, three of the six post-*Exodus* gay Christians abandoned their Christian belief system for an amount of time based on the traumatic outcomes of either the program itself, or events shortly thereafter. These three participants later re-joined a church and regained their faith.

For the participants, 'spirituality' was a concept not particularly relevant to their religious worldview, as it is not a word defined within the evangelical or Pentecostal traditions. As noted above, evangelicalism and Pentecostalism are based on more tangible evidence of God (such as miracles and speaking in tongues) and Christian deeds (such as evangelising and spreading the 'Good News'), rather than embracing the mystery of the transcendent. However, after re-entering the world post-*Exodus,* participants experienced *anomie* from their former religious identity, and a sense of spirituality emerged. The emergence of this self-authenticated spirituality was pertinent to their individual experience of God during the program, through prayer, reflection, discussion and journaling. As Bruce says:

> I experienced a deeper sense of peace, a deep sense of calm, right at the centre, something that I'd never experienced before. It was this real sense of quietness. And I think it's that place, the spiritual centre, which is who I am. And no matter how dark or traumatic it gets, that place is always there, it's always available.
>
> Bruce, 41

Common understandings of spirituality are that it is deeply subjective, is both passive and active, and is individually constructed based on a personal experience of the Transcendent, or Sacred (Bender, 2007; Bouma, 2006; Boyd, 1994; Carrette & King, 2005; Ford, 2003; Heelas and Woodhead, 2005; Singleton, Mason and Webber, 2004; Schneiders, 2000; Tacey, 2003).

Spirituality manifests differently for each participant because of their personal experiences, yet several participants discuss an intrinsic relationship between accepting their sexuality and their spirituality through a personal experience with God, concluding that God affirms their sexual orientation when religious leaders do not. At the time of interview, Rupert said

> So I suppose for me the spiritual journey at the moment is that I think God's ok with me being gay, and so what does that really mean now, where does that go to from here, that's the question for me I suppose.
>
> Rupert, 34

This feeling of self-affirmation through spirituality conveys a more authentic and personal experience of God, rather than adherence to how the conservative evangelical worldview dictates God to be. For the Gary, Jeff and Bruce, these statements refer to the time immediately after leaving the ex-gay program, in seeking new forms of meaning through which to live and experience their sexuality, God, religion, and spirituality. Gary told me:

> I believe under God's direction, in living as gay, and it's so much better than living in the closet, it's not funny. And reasoning that, you know, which interpretation is more likely to be correct, given my experience of living under one interpretation, then living under the other, you know, and the one that actually says, "It's ok to be gay," to me, the fruit of that was just so much better...
>
> Gary, 35

And Jeff says:

> Faith was something really important to me, as were Christian principles, and then I prayed for the first time in six years. And I had this overwhelming sense that I was complete and I was loved just as I am.
>
> Jeff, 59

Similarly, Bruce reflects on this time, suggesting:

> I think I probably went though an experience of questioning, whether what I felt was valid, or was it part of the gay thing, that I had to reject what I felt there. And that became even too painful to consider, like, no, no, no, there's life in this, why would I want to reject that? There was nothing consistent with that and my understanding of God. I think it probably had a strengthening affect, going through that process, separating out religion from spirituality.
>
> Bruce, 41

Through recognising and internalising spiritual experience, the personal, or as Luckmann (1967:112) suggests the 'private sphere' of spirituality becomes increasingly evident. Through the internalisation of 'symbolic representations of personal experience' (Wright, 1983:15), this enables participants to construct a new set of actions and meanings in regards to their spiritual practices. This not only reflects their personal experience of Christianity over time, but also reflects how they themselves interact with the world. As Rupert and Eddie recall:

> Then if you are on a spiritual journey, that's a life process and a journey of discovery and growing closer to Whoever He or She/God is. And then getting comfortable in that God might be a She, or a He, or either or neither, actually there having the discovery rather than putting God in a box.
>
> Rupert, 34

> I pray, I reflect, I read the Bible, I 'live' out my faith as best as I can in my interactions with people and in my daily life – and in the broader decisions I make in my life.
>
> Eddie, 30s

The experience of spirituality, rather than religion, is another starting point from which post-*Exodus* gay Christians can begin to renegotiate and reconcile their identity. Through experiencing spirituality as personal, and an affirming aspect of their identity, rather than continuing to 'struggle' with their sexuality, this displays a difference in the way these participants relate to religion post-program, as opposed to before they entered an *Exodus* style program.

Establishing a Gay Theology

As established in previous chapters, the conservative, traditional and evangelical worldview experienced prior to entering gay healing is a primary factor in limiting interaction with other kinds of meaning systems. The conservative religious ethic gives members of the evangelical community a particular way of understanding and negotiating the world and experiencing Christianity. The expectation that members of these religious communities prioritise their religious identity is initially a point of contention in reconstructing their post-*Exodus* religious identity. Eddie and Alex told me:

> There was of course some dissonance there initially between what one believed and what one wants to believe. But eventually one does reconcile both sides to a certain degree – but this took years, rather than as a direct immediate result of the program.
>
> Eddie, 30s

> I see myself as Christian. But I don't know, and I'm still on the journey to process what that means for me on a day to day basis. It doesn't necessarily mean subscribing to an exact dogma…
>
> Alex, 35

The predominant theme concerning the reconstruction of religious identity is that religious identity is no longer identified as prioritised, but becomes integrated as no more or less important than other determining aspects of self-identity. According to Bruce, "There's much more ebb and flow in it these days, according to who I'm relating to." The above narratives also support this supposition.

In addition to regarding religious identity as reflecting the 'ebb and flow' of everyday life, participants also describe a need to renegotiate their religious belief to, in a sense, establish their own personal 'gay theology' which incorporates traditional Christian principles, with practical elements which they can apply to their lives as same-sex attracted individuals. This continues to involve church attendance, Bible study and other activities, but without the struggle of trying to change their same-sex attractions. This, one would

assume, would be a much 'lighter load' to carry.

Richard Cleaver (1995), posits that gay theology contains three aspects: firstly, it is the use of scripture to interpret the individual's reality, rather than scripture determining the individual's interpretation of reality; secondly, the freedom to define religious experience rather than being defined by religious experience itself; and thirdly, the integration of 'body, mind and spirit', to allow this holistic view to be the basis through which they interpret the world (Cleaver, 1995:10-116). Althaus-Reid (2004) suggests queer theology to be based on the same premise; she suggests queer theology to be a spiritual and religious framework in which the 'queer'[17] or gay Christian can encounter their authentic identity, rather than their sexual identity be dictated to them through the historical theological construction of sex (Althaus-Reid, 2004:107). This allows self-determination in both religious and sexual worldviews, and is evident in the narratives of the participants post-gay healing. In their own way, those who moved through an *Exodus* style program and wanted to remain Christian had to formulate a new theology that accommodated their sense of self.

Gary reflects on the evangelical position of premarital sex, and is reminded that Biblical interpretation on contentious issues such as this must continue to be reconsidered based on self-determined theologies.

> You have the old chestnut of people saying "Sex is only for inside marriage," yet I can't get married, so how am I supposed to deal with that rule? So there's a lot of that sort of questioning going on that all those sorts of rules about sex and relationships have to be re-examined and re-interpreted.
>
> Gary, 35

It must be noted that after taking part in an ex-gay program, whilst renegotiating their religious identity and religious framework, participants may often have a positive church experience, whether through active participation

[17] The aim of queer theory is to destabilise identity categories into 'fixed' or restrictive orientations (Warner, 1993), which may be taken as a divergence from the argument at hand. However, in regards to constructing a 'gay theology', the notion that sexual experience affirms a particular understanding of the Sacred (Althaus-Reid, 2004) is the basis for this inclusion.

or support from members of a gay-friendly congregation. This reinforces that being a Christian is not necessarily what is dictated by a conservative religious worldview, but can also be self reflective and influenced by personal experiences, values and preferences for Christian practice. As Gary says:

> When I finally did do it [come out], it went very, very well and smoothly, very much with the support of the minister from my church! It was also my mother's church; he was you know, sort of supporting me in the lead up to it, to the point where I was on the phone with him that afternoon, praying, because I was so stressed.
>
> Gary, 35

Similarly, Rupert also reinforces this point by saying:

> I'm still actively involved in church, I go almost every Sunday. I'm also involved in a bible study group that is run through our parish which has actually got four churches in it. I'm on the parish council, so and I help run a service once a month for the GLBT community here.
>
> Rupert, 34

This is not to suggest that once leaving gay healing, the participant's experiences of religion are only positive. Gary and Alex describe negative experiences which indicate caution when re-entering a religious community:

> When I told him [the minister] I was gay, his response was to say that he would not support me being in any kind of leadership or ministry position. So I left that church in the middle of last year. I did not go anywhere near a church for about four months, did not want to, and then I started going to the one I go to now… so I am involved in the church, but it's somewhat cautious.
>
> Gary, 35

> [After a negative experience of a church] I told him [the minister] that after what happened in London, at this stage, be it right or wrong, I've built up a wall, and I'm not just going to put myself out there without being very over the top, be 100% gay and have that back up no matter what happens, because I'm not going to put myself in those situations anymore.
>
> Alex, 35

However, working on the constructionist assumption that identity is not static, but instead a fluid concept which evolves depending on intersubjective experience and interaction, the negotiation of religious identity is not exempt from this. Reconciling and negotiating religious identity is an ongoing process, and indicative of the presence of a gay theology. Alex confirms this, when saying:

> The questions I now have are who is God, how does He fit into my day to day life, and where is church/spirituality. But if I just go based on the bible, I'm totally theologically clear.
>
> Alex, 35

As seen through the stories in this section, participants are able to reconstruct their sense of religion, spirituality and sexuality. This is based on integrating these formerly incongruent elements of self-identity by entering a more liberal framework through which they experience Christianity. As Peterson and Donnenwerth (1998:357) suggest, through interpersonal interaction and the establishment of support structures, be it a different religious community, identifying their sexuality publically as gay, or tapping in to their personal spirituality, the post-*Exodus* gay Christian is able to create a new plausibility structure which incorporates a gay theology.

Becoming Whole Again

Lastly, this section concerns how a post-*Exodus* gay Christian integrates their whole self. After taking part in the program without the desired outcome, participants recognise that in order to reconcile their 'deviant' sexuality with their religious identity, an integration of gay theology into their religious worldview must take place. By integrating gay theology into their religious worldview, this would indicate that it is more likely that a member of Group one would have an integrated identity. Rupert gives an example of how his personal experiences are internalised and integrated to the development of a gay theology:

> To live with integrity, that's what He [God] wants. Not to turn myself inside out, but to live with integrity. I'm beginning to think that that's all He wants … I'm not hiding. I refuse to hide. And I think that I've got to have integrity, otherwise I've got nothing.
>
> Rupert, 34

Similarly, Alex told me:

> I can choose my faith but I can't choose my sexuality … And the choice was Christianity as a belief system, I can choose yes or no. But the only choice involved in sexuality was whether I'm honest. Because there wasn't an actual choice.
>
> Alex, 35

And Jeff says:

> I guess it's just about you know, being a whole person and being complete. The bridge for me, involves two things: the first thing was an inner resolution, knowing means educating myself.
>
> Jeff, 59

In the process of integrating religious and sexual identities, Eddie, Alex and Gary spoke of the complexities surrounding the reconstruction of a more authentic worldview. Integrating aspects of identity that were once recognised as contradictory is not an act which may come easily; rather, it is a process which takes time, effort, and at times, a new kind of struggle, to accept and live with authenticity. Gary tells of the criticism he received for what others perceived as him 'giving up' his struggle with same-sex attraction:

> I've got to throw this in there, the thing, you know, that people believe what suits them … oh, what a load of crap! I wouldn't have spent the last seventeen years struggling with this if I'd just believed what had suited me!
>
> Gary, 35

Eddie refers to the complexities of sexuality which at times, create difficulties in aligning it with his religious identity:

> I see it as part and parcel of life that sexuality is a continuum, and there may be certain ideals and original intent but sometimes life is not always perfect and sometimes people are the way they are because of extremely complex reasons.
>
> Eddie, 30s

For Alex, part of his identity integration process was learning to forgive ex-gay leaders and accept that his own participation in the program was a shaping factor in his life. Alex came to see that through his self-awareness he was able to evolve his sense of how the various elements of his identity would fit together.

> It's funny though – I don't regret it with full on anger; in the sense that you know, it was part of my journey. And I think that's because I've had lots of different areas of self-journey. I'd like to think that I've got quite a high sense of emotional intelligence, an emotional intelligence and self-understanding. I'm not as bitter as what some may be.
>
> Alex, 35

Both Eddie's and Alex's ability to take ownership over their response to the ex-gay experience displays elements of love and grace which are incorporated into the definition and practice of gay theology, because as Cleaver suggests, as "love is the grounds of our oppression, it must be the ground on which our theology is built" (Cleaver, 1995:138). However, it is important to acknowledge that none of the participants express this process as a simple one: by following a gay theology, the participants in this study are still a minority within the church. But it is the integrity and authenticity within their newly whole identity which is the motivating force to practice Christianity differently.

An aspect of constructing a new plausibility structure which several participants describe is the lack of answers, or the ability to construct their worldview in a way which is not defined by an external structure; for someone who is from the 'black and white' Pentecostal framework, is both challenging and confronting. As Pentecostalism is known widely for providing 'the answers' and encouraging those within this conservative structure to live only

within an absolutist framework, leaving this framework often uncovered more questions than answers. As Gary recalls:

> There has definitely been a process of working out what I want. It's not often that I think about what is right, or what is moral, in that context. It's been much more about, now that I want a guy, what about the rest? What do I want? Do I want to find somebody to spend the rest of my life with – do I want kids – do I want to declare my relationship in a public ceremony? There are a lot of things that a straight person can take for granted, and which of these things still apply to me? I don't automatically know the rules anymore.
>
> Gary, 35

Alex concurs:

> Now that I've come on the other side of gay theology, I've realised not everything is black and white. So I've become a lot more authentic, a lot more real, and I've actually questioned a lot more of the theological things. And so in a way I would think, depending on where I go with it that I'm a lot more authentic and real with God, at least. Both with myself, and also with God.
>
> Alex, 35

As Gary and Alex are faced with more questions, this therefore encourages them to reflect on their own experience and suggests an encounter with their authentic self to be a deciding factor in how they construct their worldview post-program.

Further to this, beginning to understand themselves from a post-*Exodus* gay Christian perspective, a common theme amongst participants is that they begin to understand themselves in a more holistic and integrated manner; that is, their sense of self is inclusive rather than suppressive. Alex, Jeff and Bruce explain that their experience of same-sex attraction is at times, more complex than the rhetoric taught in gay healing. Living as a self-identifying gay Christian is not black or white, and regardless of their sexuality, they feel loved by God. As Jeff says:

> I really believe it's important for gay and lesbian people within those contexts, to be living authentically. Not so much waving the rainbow flag, but being who they are. And that's very powerful because it dismantles all the stereotypes and misconceptions.
>
> Jeff, 59

And Bruce tells:

> I'm not going to try and sort this out. I'm just going to try to be authentic in the here and now. And if it is something really wrong, and if it is counter to the human race, and evil, then as I'm building good relationships then surely it would drop off, surely it would change… But that hasn't happened… I don't need to change who I am in order to be loved.
>
> Bruce, 41

Finding a sense of belonging in a church is crucial to both Alex and Eddie in the integration of their identity and to how they experience religion and spirituality as a post-*Exodus* gay Christian. As Durkheim (1951) and Bainbridge and Stark (1980:1382) suggest that it is through social solidarity that *anomie* decreases. Depending on their experience, this belonging may be negotiated within a diversity affirming congregation, personal spiritual practice, or even within the gay community itself. As evident in Alex's and Eddie's experiences:

> Because for me I feel like I can't truly and authentically be involved in a local denomination unless it was totally out there, affirming, but I also don't fit with the gay community, like I hardly even have a gay friend, whereas most of my world is still very much church or Christian friends, without a doubt. So I still don't relate to either community in a way. So finding that place and that belonging is still very much part of the journey for me, you know.
>
> Alex, 35

> And so, my faith continues to sustain me and gives me a sense of hope. My sexuality is a part of me, and I continue to pray, read the bible, think, read, and reflect.
>
> Eddie, 30s

Therefore, it could be concluded that 'becoming whole' through integrating these aspects of identity, is a journey, and an ongoing process.

The last point regarding the integration of a whole identity is through a kind of 'de-conversion', or a paradigm shift (Kuhn, 1962), in which the participant deconstructs previous religious experience, influenced by both their former religious identity as well as their involvement in an *Exodus* style program. Barbour (1994) suggests the de-conversion experience to lead to either another religious faith, or towards a more atheistic approach. Although some participants did leave the Church for some time, this is not the case for these post-*Exodus* gay Christians. He also suggests de-conversion may also lead to an experience of personal transformation, or a self-authenticated spirituality. The findings of this thesis support this. This transformation, or self-authentication, is apparent through the shedding of rules, rhetoric, moral absolutism and black and white statements, and instead, seeking faith through their own experience of life outside gay healing. Rupert says:

> I think it's the letting go of this concept of a vengeful God. That I had to make all the right noises, look the right way, say all the right things and I might just be saved… I don't believe it's ever planned that way, that God plans the bad stuff. I believe that God uses the bad stuff for good. That's where the redemption is rather than protecting us from the bad stuff. Whatever we've been through, and then God can manage something good.
>
> Rupert, 34

And also Jeff says:

> But also I was able to reconcile the Christian belief system or what I'd been taught from the bible verses, and what I believed from the bible verses, particularly the ones that talked about same-sex behaviour, that I was very ignorant, about the historical context and language. And after a couple of years of having spirituality and a relationship with God that I was able to look at that, and have a whole new understanding, or have a much more educated understanding.
>
> Jeff, 59

This can be described as an emergence of gay theology. Therefore, this research suggests the participants in Group One who took part in an *Exodus* style gay healing program renegotiate their identity based on their internalised experience of sexuality, spirituality and religion. In actualising their own identity as a whole based on personal experience, rather than through the conservative religious worldview they held previous to gay healing, all participants convert to a self-styled theology and mode of living which allows them to experience authenticity and integrity.

A Comparison between Groups One and Two

Some self-identified gay Christians choose to participate in gay healing, and others do not. To establish the slight divergences between groups in reconstructing one's worldview and plausibility structure, and therefore religious experience, there needs to be a comparative process to define these experiences. As previously discussed, it must be said outright that participants who did not take part in an ex-gay program also go through a similar process of reconstructing worldview and identity, yet there is one less layer to negotiate. This does not imply a stronger plausibility structure in the first instance, but instead denotes greater levels of autonomy within that worldview. There are however, several commonalities between Group One and Group Two.

Coming Out

A thread of commonality between the Groups is the self-authentication gained through the process of coming out to self and others. This is often instigated first by acknowledging it to themselves, followed at some stage by the act of verbalising their same-sex attractions to others. All participants in Group Two state that accepting their sexuality is difficult because of their religious background, but the point of acceptance is when one begins, as Simon mentions, "slowly and gradually knitting the two areas together."

It is argued that Group One participants come to accept their sexuality through a deconstruction of one religious framework and a construction of a gay theology, but in contrast Simon and Carolyn, who didn't participate in an

Exodus-style program, both suggest that it is religious identity which needs to be authenticated, as their religious identity is a point which must be reconstructed through the lens of sexual identity (rather than the other way around), to achieve self-acceptance. Simon told me:

> So I've got these two sides, and my struggle is how do I make myself into the one, The "a-ha" moment for me would be God is with me in church, and God is with me in the Pride March, and I find myself with God, and ultimately this was the most important thing for me. And as long as I'm happy for God to be there with me, it doesn't matter to me where I find myself.
>
> Simon, 44

And Carolyn supports this, in saying:

> Because growing up in the church, you thought that was your whole identity. So for me it was around learning that it was not my whole identity – my whole identity is not that I'm same-sex attracted, it is an important part of who I am because my significant relationships are determined to a certain extent by that, but it is not the be all and end all of who I am. And it's not an appropriate way to classify me. And coming to a point of going "you know, this is who I am, and if you don't like who I am, that's fine, but I'm actually not going to change."
>
> Carolyn, 40s

This suggests that the process through which participants in Group Two come to self-authentication, is more so an internal evolution of self-acceptance, because the external process of gay healing was not required or desired to achieve acceptance of their sexuality.

Troy discussed his coming out as an affirming experience which translated into feelings of self-acceptance. As a member of the Uniting Church, Troy's experience of a religious worldview is perhaps more liberal than others from a Pentecostal background. It could therefore be suggested that his response was less complex than others in Group One, as his individual autonomy within the religious structure was more evident. As he says:

> That catalyst of coming out, gives you permission to let something out that perhaps you haven't felt comfortable letting out. But from that point it was like yes, I can tell people and talk to people about it. And because I haven't had any negative feedback at all, I've felt really well supported in that idea of self acceptance which is obviously influenced by the way other people see you as well. So that bit of it was alright with everyone else, and that meant that it could be alright with me.
>
> Troy, 21

As Troy suggests, because he was "alright with everyone else", this enabled him to integrate his identity more freely, in a way where he felt he could be complete, both to himself and to others. Nina shares a similar experience,

> So now I just feel… it's not like I'm a raging feminist or anything like that, I just feel like I'm free, I'm not defined by anything anymore, I'm just a person, I'm a woman, I just happen to be gay and I think probably for the first time in my life I absolutely feel 100% myself.
>
> Nina, 50s

By coming out to herself and her networks, Nina then felt that she could be herself completely and without the damages that such concealment may cause to oneself.

Living a (gay) Christian Life

A second point of interest between the comparative groups is the notion of living a 'Christian life'. This idea is interpreted differently in various Christian frameworks; for those who partook in an *Exodus*-style program, being a 'good Christian' could be seen as a restrictive mode of living, revolving around prioritising one's Christian identity (Glanzer and Ream, 2005:16-17) and adhering to the evangelical Worldview (Hammond and Hunter, 1984:225). This is not so dissimilar for those in Group Two. For Simon, unlearning this model of behaviour and instead allowing other aspects of his identity to become evident, was significant in shifting the internalised religious homophobia previously experienced:

> It's kind of like, I've never learned to give myself grace from God. Because if I can't give myself grace, there's no way I'll ever give other people the same degree of grace, and trust that there is good in them, even if they don't do these things.
>
> Simon, 44

This suggests that the plausibility structure, in which all participants construct prior to 'coming out', needs to go through a process of reconstruction to enable an acceptance of sexuality and integration into the rest of their identity.

A common theme is the participant's acknowledgement of their sexual difference in the heteronormative context of Christianity prior to positively embracing their sexuality and practicing gay theology. Through an analysis of the data from Group Two, it is argued that they maintained a different, more accepting and liberal kind of plausibility structure to begin with. A result of this is a higher level of self-awareness and individual autonomy which prevented participants from wanting to change their sexuality to a religiously acceptable norm. This could be noted in two ways: firstly, as Carolyn suggests, age, life experience and maturity compliments levels of self-awareness; and secondly, in difference to those in Group One, the individual's sexual attractions do not define identity, but rather it is a part of the whole. As Carolyn, Nina and Lisa retell:

> I think my advantage was that I'd had enough life experience that I, when I realised that my perception of myself didn't match the reality, I had enough life experience to go, well that's actually not a problem.
>
> Carolyn, 40s

> I felt like I was on a monorail to the grave. I felt like I was on this horrible track, that if I didn't jump off it, I'd get to the end of my life and be so unhappy, and think 'I haven't lived'… I didn't want to reach that point. I didn't want to get the end of my life and feel so regretful that I didn't perhaps try and have a life with the person that I loved.
>
> Nina, 50s

> I went travelling just recently, and this is at the peak of my comfortableness I suppose with being out. I told people I was gay the second day I arrived on

> this tour, and I kind of felt like if I hadn't told them, they would have made more of an effort to get to know me. It's kind of how I've always been, but after that I've reverted back to in terms of allowing people to get to know me before coming out to them, just because they might make that judgement first instead of trying to get to know me.
>
> Lisa, 24

Interestingly, the age range in Group Two is greater than those in Group One; however, these narratives are evidence that age is not definitive when it comes to self-awareness, especially within a religious framework which allows greater autonomy. The analysis of the participants' narratives suggests a strong correlation between the achievement of religious autonomy and developing personal spirituality. Notably, this is the case with participants in both groups.

Constructing a gay theology and the emergence of Spirituality

People in both groups found the need to reconstruct their theological frameworks in order to maintain a religious worldview, and integrate their sexuality into this worldview. The difference with Group Two, was perhaps the more liberal approach taken in doing this, based on their already less conservative Christian background. Carolyn and Lisa retell their experiences of reconciling their theological beliefs:

> It took me about five years to work through the theology. I said "I don't think God has a problem with me, and I don't think God has a problem with same-sex attracted people." And in fact, a position that says same-sex attracted people ought to be denied marriage is theologically incompatible with the theology most people are proposing as a theology of marriage. You can't say you should avoid immorality and then say you can't get married.
>
> Carolyn, 40s

> I really don't know what happened, but I was able to reconcile it. I went back - I think I just realised that it doesn't have to be one or the other. I think I realised that God wouldn't judge me for who I slept with. I'm sure He has more important things to worry about… there's not just one truth, there's many truths.
>
> Lisa, 24

What these narratives suggest, as Thomas Luckmann (1967:110) postulates (when speaking about late modern societies), is that "individual autonomy thus comes to stand for absence of external restraints and traditional taboos in the private search for identity." The process of reconciling their religious and sexual identities, although similar, relies less on external factors (such as gay healing), but is indicative of an internal process in which the individual has the capacity to construct a different worldview. Like the post-*Exodus* gay Christian, these gay Christians also practice their religiosity through a gay theology.

Many respondents from Group One state that their spirituality was more tightly prescribed in their former worldview. Some comments from those in Group Two suggest that there is a greater emphasis on spirituality outside of the evangelical worldview and this may suggest why some participants of this study are able to reconcile their identity without the effects of participating in reparative therapy. Carolyn and Troy raise a critical point:

> If I'm to identify religiously as Christian or denominationally, it keeps my gender identity under wraps. So, if I'm to embrace a religious identity, I can't embrace my same sex attracted identity. I can't identify as lesbian or gay… In contrast, my spiritual identity, which for me sees me as someone who is authentic and has integrity and is open before God, means that I have to acknowledge and integrate my gender identity.
>
> Carolyn, 40s

> Spirituality and sexuality are both part of my identity, and gender is part of my identity, so they're all related and will influence each other in that way because they are part of the same thing.
>
> Troy, 21

Therefore, it is argued that the interaction between spirituality and sexuality allows for a 'gay theology' to be constructed, which positions the experience of holistic identity at the centre, rather than conservative religious rhetoric.

Lisa's experience of spirituality diverges slightly; she found it difficult to self-identify her spirituality, and this could be a factor in her journey of identity renegotiation.

> When I was going through that rebellious stage, I kind of thought that my spirituality wasn't mine, I thought it was my mum's or what my schooling fed me. But then I felt like I was old enough to be my own person and I realised that yep, I do believe in God, and I believe to live a good, Christian life, and on my own accord I do go to church, not regularly, but I still go.
>
> Lisa, 24

Her eventual acknowledgement of her spirituality and its applications to her life, allowed her to independently reconstruct a worldview which already had elements present in her life, but as a result, was able reclaim ownership through choosing how her spiritual and religious identities find expression.

Embracing the Unanswered Questions

The final similarity between the two groups in terms of the process of renegotiating identity and worldview, is accepting a life without all the answers. As the only participant from Group Two whose background is Pentecostal, Nina sums up the effect of figuratively 'jumping into the unknown' in order to experience authentic Christianity with integrity.

> I think for anyone who's gay, and you've been in the Pentecostal church for a long time, there's always that thing in the back of your mind, what if I'm wrong? What if God really does abhor gay people? That's the thing about faith. No one can give you absolutely certain answers, because that's what faith is. But there's always that thing in the back of your mind, what if I'm wrong? But now, I think I've thought enough about it that I'm coming to a place now where I can accept it.
>
> Nina, 50s

It is perhaps this acceptance which leads the gay Christian to engage in a process through which their spirituality, religious identity and sexuality are no longer isolated from each other, and instead continue to discover their authentic self, and interact with the world through a newly constructed

worldview.

Conclusion

From the data collected in this research, this chapter answers the third research question: How does the post-*Exodus* gay Christian experience religion or spirituality after participation in an ex-gay program? The response to this is individually determined. However, it can be concluded that those who identify as gay and Christian reach a point where their identity must be inclusive of sexuality and religiosity in congruence with each other, rather than in isolation. This is the basis for how a new religious worldview is constructed. For those who took part in gay healing, this reconstruction appears to be more complex, because they must internalise and integrate the experience of gay healing which specifically challenged their initial plausibility structure.

The immediate time after leaving an *Exodus* style program is highly influential in how a post-*Exodus* gay Christian experiences religion and spirituality; whether one initially leaves the Church, only to return once they realise something is missing, or whether their new religious community affirms their sexual identity; these are determining factors in processing a new religious worldview. Also, through integrating authentic sexuality, members of Group One become more accepting of an aspect which they had previously tried to change, and this decreases the dissonance between sexuality and religious identity. When thinking about spirituality, an emergence of a self-reflective, personal relationship with the transcendent is paramount in expanding the participant's plausibility structure, as is the establishment of a gay theology. Through determining religious experiences through the lens of a gay identity, the post-*Exodus* gay Christian creates a new type of theology which accommodates their integrated sense of self. It is in these ways which the post-*Exodus* gay Christian experiences religion and spirituality post-program.

Comparatively, those in Group Two suggest that 'coming out' is imperative in experiencing a new kind of Christianity; by vocalising their same-sex attractions, gay Christians are more likely to integrate their sexuality, therefore as Simon states, "slowly and gradually knitting the two areas together." Once

the gay Christians who participated in this research identify as gay, they experience the freedom to live an openly gay and Christian life. In response to this, internalised religious homophobia decreases and self-acceptance continues to develop. Similar to those in Group One, these aspects culminate in the construction of a gay theology, which emphasises the gay identity at the core of Christian practice.

By placing emphasis on religious autonomy, the identification of a gay sexuality and the emergence of personal spirituality, it is evident that post-*Exodus* gay Christians and gay Christians alike, experience religion and spirituality in a way which, like their sexuality, is more authentic and integrated to their unique identities, rather than determined by the evangelical worldview of which they feel they can no longer abide.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

What becomes evident in the narratives of gay Christians, whether *Exodus* style program participants or not, is that their experience of religious life and personal spirituality progresses from an insular and conservative perspective to one that incorporates their self-identity as whole and authentic. Based on the literature surrounding the topic of gay Christians such as Haldeman (1994) and Wolkimir (2001), this thesis departs from analysing gay religious experience and spirituality alone, to articulating **why** and **how** a gay Christian reaches the point of reconstructing their worldview. Certainly, this 'journey' for participants involved in this study, from initial involvement in a gay healing program to the program's failure, carries with it the complex nature of the evangelical worldview, in which each individual must negotiate the position of 'Christian identity' (Glanzer & Ream, 2005) in a social structure which does not accept, or even acknowledge a considerable aspect of their humanness – their sexuality.

From the first instance, it is the initial set of meanings adhered to by the individual which influences **why** and the **how** someone wants to change their sexual attractions. Initially, it could be assumed that all Christians may believe that religiously mediated changes to same-sex attraction was a plausible option. However, here emerged the prominent theme from both post-*Exodus* gay Christians and the comparative gay Christian alike: the self-construction of one's religious worldview, through personal experience and religious interpretation, is paramount in enabling religiously mediated changes to one's sexual attractions as a plausible course of action; as Alex says, "being involved in a Christian world that was the way you view it." For the post-*Exodus* gay Christian, this plausibility structure (Berger, 1967) has a restrictive and limited view, as it ultimately disables the ability to view alternative frames of reference in regards to sexuality **outside** of a conservative evangelical perspective. It is argued that from within this structure, self-identified Christians find that their sexual attractions are labelled 'deviant'; not only in actions, but also through simply acknowledging an existence of same-sex

attraction. However, the key difference between these the two groups analysed in this research, and an indicator of who is more likely to deem gay healing as plausible, was the set of meanings assigned to one's sexual identity, which once again, is determined through the self constructed approach of religious worldview.

Post-*Exodus* gay Christians exist within a primarily exclusive plausibility structure, whereas those who did not participate in an ex-gay program exist within a more liberal approach. Nevertheless, this approach is limited, as when elements of self-identity emerge that do not align with a conservative religious worldview, it is evident that a collision of both religious and sexual identities occurs, which therefore creates an impasse, challenging the overall plausibility structure of the (post-*Exodus*) gay Christian. Yet those who find it plausible to participate in an *Exodus*-style program aim to maintain a sense of equilibrium in their worldview by aligning their deviant sexuality with the traditional notions of evangelical Christianity.

Also evident from this research is that for post-*Exodus* gay Christians, religiously mediated change to same-sex attraction failed to work. This finding is in contradiction to Jones and Yarhouse (2007), Bancroft (1974); Liss and Welner, (1973); and Pattison and Pattison, (1980), who all claim the benefits of reparative therapy administered through *Exodus*-style programs. Regardless of the manner in which these changes are applied, whether through intensive residential programs or a weekly, '12-step style', what eventually happens, is that the participant's plausibility structure collapses. This is also contrary to the initial aim of the program, which, similar to religious cults, is to provide a 'shelter' from internal 'chaos' (Wuthnow, 1986:127). Through experiencing conservative Christian teachings regarding a 'religiously correct' sexuality, there occurs a devaluation of identity as a whole in favour of a prioritised and conformist religious identity. Furthermore, through the application of a religious solution to an authentic aspect of human identity, we see the individual isolated from their normative Christian identity, and therefore their plausibility structure. In experiencing *anomie*, the reality separate from their normative plausibility structure actually reinforces this

isolation; because of this continued discord between a continued experience of same-sex attraction and the broken promise of 'Freedom from homosexuality through the Power of Jesus Christ' (*Exodus International*, 2005), it is therefore argued that the interpretation of meanings shift, and there materialises a deconstructed religious worldview.

In analysing the move away from the evangelical worldview through to the failure of religiously mediated changes to same-sex attraction, we see a distinct change in how the post-*Exodus* gay Christian experiences religion and spirituality. The last chapter of this thesis departs from the **why** question, to **how** (post-*Exodus*) gay Christian experiences religion and spirituality. It may be rightly concluded that the baggage of conservative religious rhetoric might be enough for a gay Christian to neglect religious identity altogether; however, as evidenced through this research this is not always the case. To maintain a religious identity outside of conservative evangelicalism, other aspects of the self must be renegotiated, resulting in the prioritised Christian identity falling from prime position. This is indicative of a 'shedding' of the worldview which enables specific religious ideals such as reparative therapy to be plausible, and instead instigates a reconstruction of a worldview which integrates factors external to that of religious experience. This includes a reconstructed sense of self, which allows the previously opposed religious, spiritual and sexual aspects of identity to act in congruence with each other.

What is important to note is that this process is not limited to post-*Exodus* gay Christians, but rather is a process of self-authentication which occurs for all self-identified gay Christians. What is specific for participants of ex-gay programs, however, is that the process is decidedly more difficult due to the additional layer of a devalued and disabled sense of self (Haldeman, 1994:226). Returning to the question, of **how** the (post-*Exodus*) gay Christian experiences religion and spirituality, the data points in one direction: the application of a gay theology (Althaus-Reid, 2004; Cleaver, 1995) which is self-determined and built upon the aspects which they themselves had to personally renegotiate.

As discussed earlier, this thesis is the first study of (post-*Exodus*) gay Christians of a sociological nature and therefore its findings are preliminary, albeit pioneering. It should also be acknowledged that there were some limitations to this research which I believe may be explored further as follows. Firstly, the number of participants interviewed in this study was limited due to the specific scope of the research. This could be expanded by including post-*Exodus* gay Christians who may not be a member of a religious institution, but practice gay theology and experience a personal spirituality through means other than through a conventional church. The number and sex of participants to future studies could also be increased if data was collected internationally, in particular the inclusion of post-*Exodus* gay Christians from the United States, where *Exodus* style programs are more prominent.

Another limitation of this research was the lack of literature available which explicitly relates these kinds of programs to religious cults. Briefly touched on in the fourth and fifth chapters of this research, it would be of merit to compare the experiences of former cult participants to post-*Exodus* gay Christians, to draw firm conclusions regarding the existence of ex-gay programs as 'deviant', rather than as a solution for 'deviance'. Also, based on the findings of this research it is argued that although promising 'divine healing' of their sexual deviance, ex-gay programs do not work; this correlates directly to the hope in impossible rewards that is stimulated in cult participation (Sims, Bainbridge and Stark, 1979:291). More conclusive evidence would support this supposition. Finally, the conclusions of this research will have implications for how gay Christians are included and treated within the institutional church. As a base, this study could be used to educate religious groups of the potential consequences for discrimination and religious homophobia towards gay Christians.

Despite its limitations, this thesis is robust in its conclusions regarding the experience of gay Christians who participated in gay healing and the reasons for the failure of ex-gay programs. By allowing the real life stories and experiences of gay Christians to be examined within the rigor of an academic framework for the first time, this research provides a strong starting point for

further investigation into authenticity of self in the context of religious experience and spirituality from a gay perspective. These limitations in no way diminish the common voice of these gay Christians in documenting their journey through *Exodus*-style gay healing programs and their experience in finding their authentic self. As Bruce sums it up, “I don’t need to change who I am in order to be loved.”

Appendix 1: Screen Captures of ex-gay websites

Image 1. *Exodus International* 'Help for Leaving Homosexuality'
http://exodusinternational.org/find-help/leaving-homosexuality/#.TtRcZ7JCqU8
Accessed 29th November 2011
Last Updated November 2011

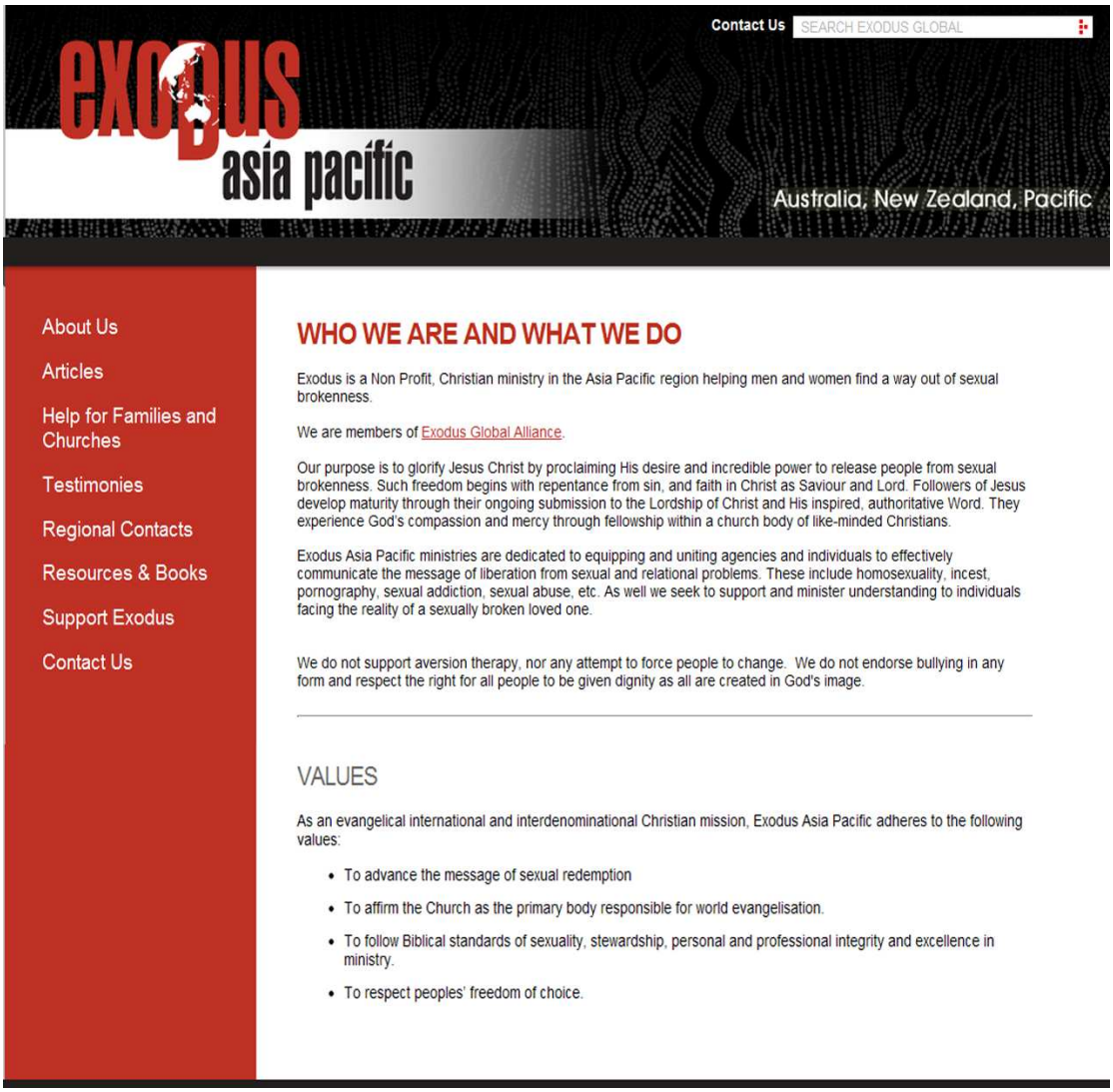

Image 2. *Exodus Asia Pacific* 'Who We Are and What We Do',
http://www.exodusglobalalliance.org/policyc896.php
Accessed 29th November 2011
Last Updated 2011

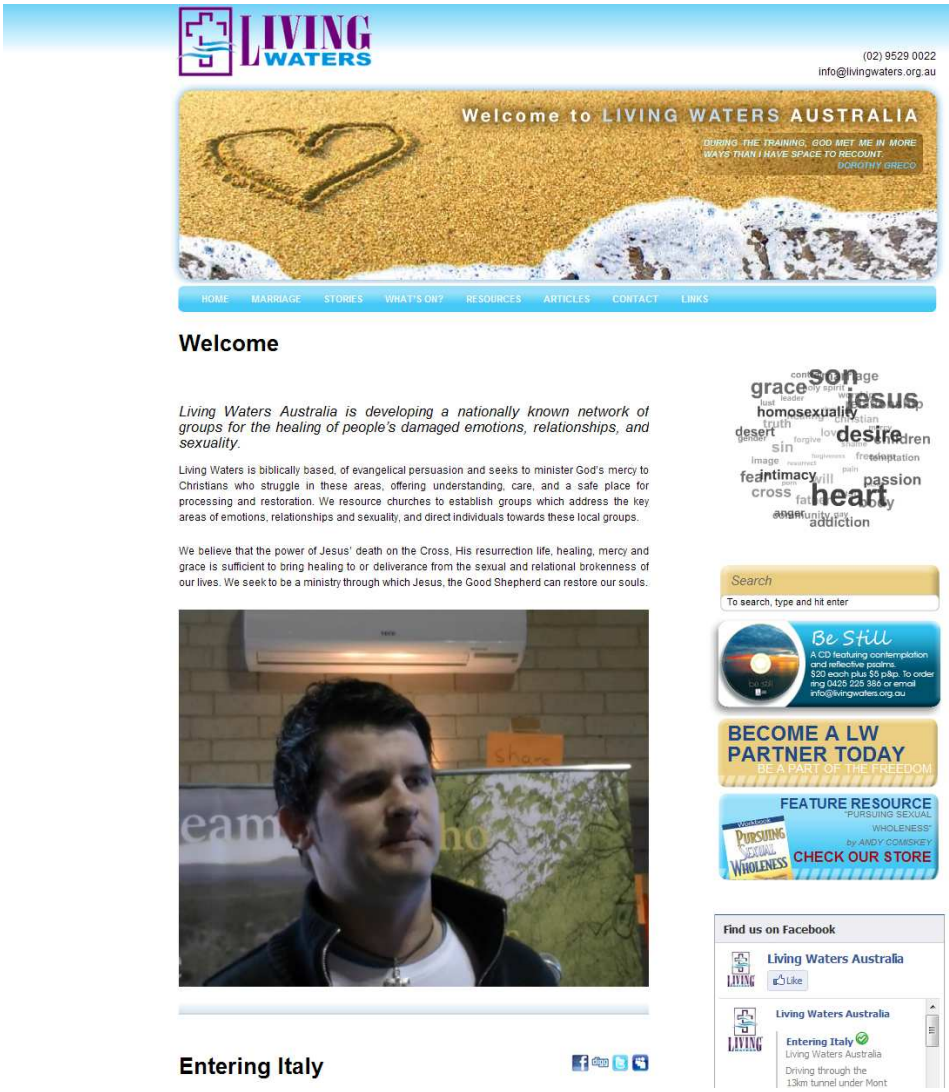

Image 3. *Living Waters* 'Welcome'

http://livingwaters.org.au/

Accessed 29th November

Last Updated 14th November 2011

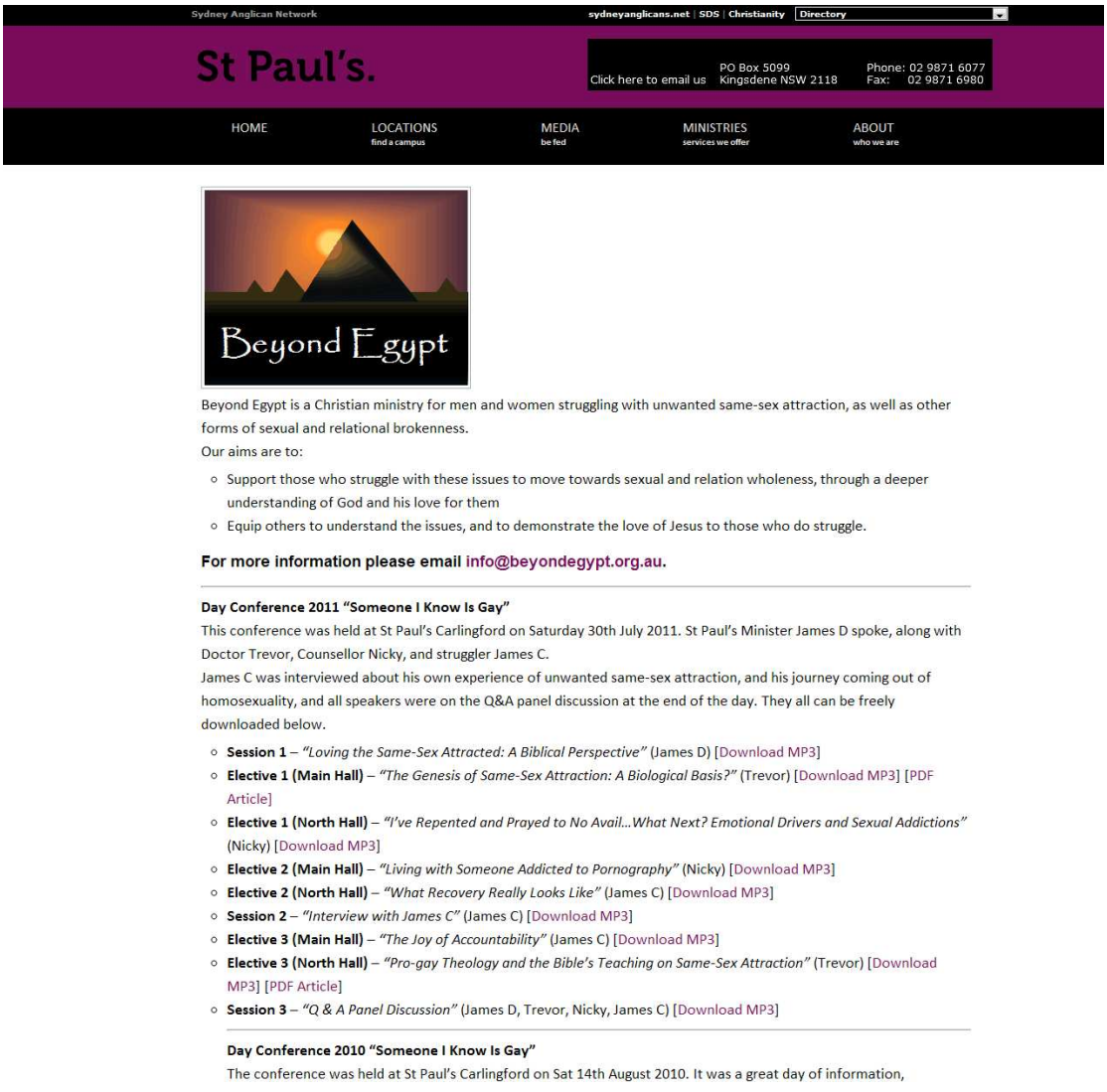

Image 4. *St Paul's.* 'Beyond Egypt'
http://www.stpaulscarlingford.org.au/ministries/be/
Accessed 29th November
Last Updated 2011

Appendix 2: Recruitment methods and Notices

The text of a typical recruitment notice placed in the discussion section of online 'Gay Christian' support forums between November 2009 and March 2010:

> "A Study on GLBTIQ Christians…
>
> I'm a postgraduate research student at Monash University in Melbourne, looking at the correlations between a person's gender and their spirituality. Specific to this research are the experiences of GLBTIQ people who have participated in an ex-gay program.
>
> This project is to hear the stories of people who are gay, lesbian and Christian, to learn about their journey and to understand how someone can have a 'gay' – and Christian – identity.
>
> We are looking for people aged 18 and over who have had experiences in ex-gay programs, who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer, and come from a Christian background.
>
> The project involves a conversation-style interview with the researcher, lasting around one hour. You will remain anonymous.
>
> If you would like to take part in this project or know anyone who might be interested, please contact me.
>
> My name is Rachel Goff, and you can contact me on 0401 818 099 or gaychristian.research@gmail.com"

Appendix 3: Interview Schedule – Group One

1. What made you want to take part in a gay healing program?
2. Tell me about your involvement in the gay healing program – what happened?
3. Tell me the story of your coming out.
4. Before your involvement in a gay healing program, how did you identify your gender on the GLBTIQ spectrum? Was this relevant to you?
5. Did you see yourself as a religious person before participating in gay healing?
6. If yes, how were you religious?
7. Do you see yourself as a religious person now?
8. If yes, how are you religious?
9. Did you see yourself as a spiritual person before participating in gay healing?
10. If yes, how did you practice your spirituality?
11. Do you see yourself as a spiritual person now?
12. If yes, how do you practice your spirituality?
13. How did your involvement in the gay healing program affect your gender identity?
14. How did your involvement in the gay healing program affect your religious identity?
15. How did your involvement in the gay healing program affect your spirituality?
16. Now that you have left the gay healing program, how do you identify your gender on the GLBTIQ spectrum? Is this relevant to you now?
17. How do your religious or spiritual practices relate to your sexuality?
18. How would you describe the relationship between your gender and spiritual identities now?
19. Would you recommend the gay healing program to someone struggling with their sexuality and religious beliefs?

Appendix 4: Interview Schedule – Group Two

1. Tell me the story of your coming out.
2. Before coming out, how did you identify your gender on the GLBTIQ spectrum? Was this relevant to you?
3. Have you ever considered participating in a gay healing program?
4. Why? Why not? Tell me about your motivations/reservations?
5. Tell me about your journey to self-acceptance.
6. Did you see yourself as a religious person before self-acceptance?
7. If yes, how were you religious?
8. Do you see yourself as a religious person now?
9. If yes, how are you religious?
10. Did you see yourself as a spiritual person before self-acceptance?
11. If yes, how did you practice your spirituality?
12. Do you see yourself as a spiritual person now?
13. If yes, how do you practice your spirituality?
14. How does your religious identity influence your gender identity?
15. How does your spiritual identity influence your gender identity?
16. Now that you have embraced your gender and religious/spiritual identities, how do you identify on the GLBTIQ spectrum? Is this relevant to you now?
17. How do your religious or spiritual practices relate to your sexuality?

Bibliography

'A peek in my inbox… dialogue with an ex-gay'
Freedom 2b[e]
http://www.freedom2b.org/node/182
Accessed 9th August 2009
Last Updated 13th June 2008

Abercrombie, N., Hill, S., and Turner, B.S., (2000) *The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology*, 4th Edition, Penguin Books, Camberwell

Althaus-Reid M. 'Queer I stand: Lifting the Skirts of God' in Althaus-Reid, M., and Isherwood, L (eds) (2004) *The Sexual Theologian: Essays on Sex, God and Politics*, T&T Clark International, London and New York, pp. 99-109

American Psychological Association
http://www.apa.org/
Accessed 26th September 2011
Last Updated 2011

Anthony Venn-Brown – Gay Ambassador
http://gayambassador.blogspot.com/2011/04/australians-tell-us-ex-gaynot-here.html
Accessed 15th November 2011
Last Updated November 2011

Australian Psychological Society
http://www.psychology.org.au/
Accessed 26th September 2011
Last Updated 2011

Bainbridge, W.S., and Stark, R., (1979) 'Cult Formation: Three Compatible Models', *Sociological Analysis*, Winter, Vol.40, pp.2283-295

Bainbridge, W.S., and Stark, R., (1980) 'Networks of Faith: Interpersonal Bonds and Recruitment to Sects and Cults', *The American Journal of Sociology*, May, Vol.85:6, pp.1376-1395

Ballantyne, G. (2007), *Creativity and Critique: Subjectivity and Agency in Touraine and Ricœur*, Brill, London

Bancroft, J., (1974) *Deviant Sexual Behaviour: Modification and Assessment*, Clarendon Press, Oxford

Barbour, J.D., (1994) *Versions of Deconversion: Autobiography and the Loss of Faith*, University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville

Bender, C.J. 'Touching the Transcendent: Rethinking Religious Experience in the Sociological Study of Religion' in Ammerman, N.T. (ed) (2007) *Everyday*

Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 210-218

Bendle, M.F., 'The Crisis of Identity in High Modernity', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 2002, 53:1, pp.1-18

Berger, P.L., (1967) *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, Doubleday & Company Inc., Garden City: New York

Besen, W., (2003) *'Undercover' Anything But Straight: Unmasking the Scandals and Lies behind the Ex-gay Myth*, Routledge, New York

Beyond Egypt
http://www.stpaulscarlingford.org.au/ministries/be/
Accessed 15th November 2011
Last Updated 2011

Beyond Ex-Gay: Survivor Narratives (Darlene Bogle)
http://www.beyondexgay.com/Narratives/Darlene
Accessed 10th August 2009
Last Updated 2011

Bogle, D., (1990) *Strangers in A Christian Land: Reaching out with Hope and Healing the Homosexual*, Chosen Books, New Jersey

Boyd, JW 'Is Spirituality Possible without Religion? A Query for the Postmodern Era' in Astell, A (ed) (1994) *Divine Representations: Postmodernism and Spirituality*, Paulist Press, New York, pp. 83-101

Bouma, G. (2006) *Australian Soul: Religion and Spirituality in the Twenty-first Century*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne

Butler, J. (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, New York and London

Capps, D., Carlin, N., 'The "Religiously Mediated Change" of 11 Gay Men: A Case of Unexceptional Sublimation', *Pastoral Psychology*, 2008, Vol. 57, No. 3-4, pp.125-146

Carrette, J., and King, R., (2005) *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion*, Routledge, Oxfordshire

Citlau, R., (2010) *Men Pursuing Purity*, Desert Stream Press, Colorado

Cleaver, R., (1995) *Know my Name: A Gay Liberation Theology*, Westminster John Knox, Louisville

Comiskey, A.J. (1989) *Pursuing Sexual Wholeness*, Monarch Publications, Eastbourne

Comiskey, A.J. (2000) *The Kingdom of God and the Homosexual*, Desert Stream Press, Colorado

Conger, J. J. (1975) Proceedings of the American Psychological Association, Incorporated, for the year 1974: Minutes of the annual meeting of the Council of Representatives. American Psychologist, 30, 620–651. Doi:10.1037/h007845

Consiglio, W., (1991) *Homosexual No More: Practical Strategies for Christians Overcoming Homosexuality*, Victor Books, Wheaton

Dejesus, I. '"Gay Conversion Therapy was constantly Undermining my Sense of Self," Central PA man says', *The Patriot News*, August 21, 2011
http://www.pennlive.com/midstate/index.ssf/2011/08/gay-conversion_therapy_was_con.html
Accessed 13th September
Last Updated 22nd August 2011

Durkheim, E. (1951) *Suicide* (1897), Free Press, New York

Erzen, T., (2006) *Straight to Jesus: Sexual and Christian Conversions in the Ex-Gay Movement*, University of California Press, Los Angeles

Exodus Asia Pacific – Who We Are and What We Do'
http://www.exodusglobalalliance.org/policyc896.php
Accessed 29th November 2011
Last Updated 2011

Exodus Global Alliance – Exodus Asia Pacific
http://www.exodusglobalalliance.org/exodusasiapacifics283.php
Accessed 15th November 2011
Last Updated 2011

Exodus International
http://exodusinternational.org/
Accessed 26th September 2011
Last Updated 2011

Exodus International – Help for Leaving Homosexuality
http://exodusinternational.org/find-help/leaving-homosexuality/#.TtRcZ7JCqU8
Accessed 29th November 2011
Last Updated November 2011
Exodus International – Love Won Out
http://exodusinternational.org/love-won-out/
Accessed 26th September 2011
Last Updated 2011

Exodus International Policy Statements
http://exodus.to/content/view/34/57/
Accessed 5th June 2009
Last Updated 2005

Fish Can't Fly: Conversations about God and struggling to be Gay, 2005, TJoe Murray Videos, 83 minutes, USA

Ford, DF 'Holy Spirit and Christian Spirituality' in Vanhoozer, KJ (ed) (2003) *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, Cambridge University Press, Carlton, pp.269-290

Foucault, M., (1980) *The History of Sexuality*, Vintage Books, New York

Freud, S. (1923) [trans. Strachey, J., and Riviere, J., 1962), *The Ego and the Id*, Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, London

Glanzer, P.L., and Ream, T.C. 'Whose Story? Which Identity? Fostering Christian Identity at Christian Colleges and Universities', *Christian Scholar's Review*, 2005, 35:1, pp.13-27

Goffman, I. (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday life*, Doubleday Anchor Books, Garden City

Gross, M. 'To be Christian and Homosexual: From Shame to Identity-based Claims', *Nova Religio: Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, Chappaqua, May 08, Volume 11, Issue 4, pp.77-102

Halbertal, T.H., and Koren, I., 'Between "Being" and "Doing": Conflict and Coherence in the Identity Formation of Gay and Lesbian Orthodox Jews', McAdams, D.P., Josselson, R., and Lieblich, A., (2006) *Identity and Story: Creating Self in Narrative*, American Psychological Association, Washington D.C., pp.37-61

Haldeman, D.C., 'The Practice and Ethics of Sexual Orientation Conversion Therapy', *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 1994, 62:2, pp.221-227

Hammond, P.C., and Hunter, J.D., 'On Maintaining Plausibility: The Worldview of Evangelical College Students', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 1984, 23:3, pp.221-238

Heelas, P. and Woodhead, L. (eds) (2005) *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is giving way to Spirituality*, Blackwell Publishing, Carlton

Hermans, J.M., Kempen, H.J.G., and van Loon, R.J.P., 'The Dialogical Self: Beyond Individualism and Rationalism', *American Psychologist*, 1992, 47:1, pp.23-33

Homosexuals Anonymous Fellowship Services
http://www.ha-fs.org/
Accessed 15th November 2011
Last Updated 14th September 2011

Jones, S.L and Yarhouse, M.A, (2007) *Ex-gays? A longitudinal study of Religiously Mediated Change in Sexual Orientation*, IVP Academic, Downers Grove

Kell, C., Camp, R., (1999) *In the Name of the Father: the Rhetoric of the New Southern Baptist Convention*, Southern Illinios University Press, Illinois

Kerby, A.P., (1991) *Narrative and the Self*, Indiana University Press, Indianapolis

Konrad, J., (1993) *You Don't Have to be Gay*, Monarch Publications, Turnbridge Wells

Kuhn, T., (1962) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago

Lewis, J.R. (1986) 'Reconstructing the Cult Experience: Post-Involvement Attitudes as a Function of Mode of Exit and Post-Involvement Socialisation', *Sociological Analysis*, 47:2, pp.151-159

Living Waters Australia
http://livingwaters.org.au/
Accessed 15th November 2011
Last Updated 14th November 2011

Living Waters Australia – Welcome
http://livingwaters.org.au
Accessed 29th November 2011
Last Updated 14th November 2011

Liss, J. L., and Welner, A., 'Change in homosexual orientation', *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, Vol 27(1) January 1973, pp.102-104

Luckmann, T., (1967) *The Invisible Religion: The Problem of Religion in Modern Society*, Macmillan Publishing, New York

Macchia, F.D., (2006) *Baptised in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids

McDonald, G.J. 'Individual Differences for Individuals in the Coming Out Process for Gay Men: Implications for Theoretical Models', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 1982, 8, pp.47-60

National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality
http://narth.com/
Accessed 10th August 2011
Last Updated August 2011

Nicolosi, J., (1991) *Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality: A New Clinical Approach*, Jason Aronson Inc., Northvale and London

Nicolosi, J., (1993). *Healing Homosexuality: Case Stories of Reparative Therapy*. Jason Aronson, Inc., Northvale and London

Noll, M.A. (2001) *American Evangelical Christianity: an introduction*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford and Massachusetts

Palazzolo, R. 'Ex-Gay Camps, Therapy attracts Controversy' *ABC: Good Morning America*, July 28th, 2005
http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/Health/story?id=983209&page=1
Accessed 13th September 2011
Last Updated 13th September 2011

Pattison, E.M., and Pattison, M.L., 'Ex-gays: Religiously mediated change in homosexuals', *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 1980, 137, pp.1553-1562

Petersen, L.R., and Donnenwerth, G.V., 'Religion and Declining Support for Traditional Beliefs about Gender Roles and Homosexual Rights', *Sociology of Religion*, 1998, 59:4, pp.353-371

Religious Tolerance: Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance
http:www.religioustolerance.org
Accessed 19th September 2009
Last Updated 2009

Reissman, C.K., (1993) *Narrative Analysis*, SAGE Publicatins, London

Rentzel, L., (1990) *Emotional Dependency*, Intervarsity Press, Westmont, Illinois

Ricœur, P. (1976) *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*, Texas Christian University Press, Fort Worth

Robinson, B.A. 'Reparative and other Therapy to alter Sexual Orientation,' Religious Tolerance: Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance
http://www.religioustolerance.org/hom_exod.htm
Accessed 7th February 2010
Last Updated December 2009

Schneiders, S. 'Religion and Spirituality: Strangers, Rivals or Partners?' *The Santa Clara Lectures* (California), Vol. 6, No. 2, February 2000, pp.1-26

Singleton, A., Mason, M., Webber, R., 'Spirituality in adolescence and young adulthood: a method for a qualitative study', *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, Vol.9, No.3, December 2004, pp.247-262

Spitzer, R.L., 'Can some Gay Men and Lesbians change their Sexual Orientation? 200 Participants reporting a change from Homosexual to

Heterosexual Orientation' *Archives of Sexual Behaviour*, Vol. 32, No. 5, October 2003, pp.401-417

Swatos Jr., W.H. (ed) (1998) 'Evangelical', *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Society*, AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek CA

Tacey, D. (2003) *The Spirituality Revolution: The Emergence of Contemporary Spirituality*, Harpercollins, Sydney,

Taylor, C., (1989) *The Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge

Throckmorton, W., 'Efforts to modify sexual orientation: A review of outcome literature and ethical issues', *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, Alexandria, October 1998, 20:4, pp.283-301

Thumma, S. 'Negotiating a Religious Identity: The Case of the Gay Evangelical', *Sociological Analysis*, 1991, 52:4, pp.333-347

'Understanding Homosexuality' *Living Waters*
http://livingwaters.org.au/articles/understanding-homosexuality/
Accessed 9th August 2011
Last updated 2011

Venn-Brown, A., (2004) *A Life of Unlearning: Coming Out of the Church, One Man's Struggle*, New Holland Publishing, Australia

Ward, G., (2003) *Teach Yourself: Postmodernism*, Hodder Education, Chicago and London

Warner, M.I., (1993) *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis

Wright, S. A., (1983). *A Sociological Study of Defection from Controversial New Religious Movements,* Ph.D. Dissertation. Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International

Wolkomir, M. 'Wrestling with Angels of Meaning: The Revisionist Ideological Work of Gay and ex-Gay Christian Men', *Symbolic Interaction*, November 2001, 24:4, pp.407-425

Wuthnow, R., 'Religion as Sacred Canopy', Hunter, J.D., and Ainley, S.C., (1986) *Making Sense of Modern Times: Peter L. Berger and the Vision of Interpretive Sociology*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London and New York, pp.121-142

*'*You might be attracted to guys or girls or both – but is that something you can change?*'* *Hack (Triple J)*, Radio Program, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 18th November, 2008