

**‘Coming Out or Staying In?’:
The Persona and Shadow of Being Gay,
and its Relevance to Psychotherapy in Modern Ireland**

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Student ID: 9757

Module: 3420

Word Count: 10,392

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BSc Counselling & Psychotherapy

Awarded by PCI College in conjunction with Middlesex University

March 2016

Abstract

In May 2015, Ireland became the first country in the world to legalise same-sex marriage by popular vote. This milestone is reflective of much-increased social acceptance towards gay and lesbian people, yet the fact remains that homophobic attitudes and various forms of discrimination are still extremely common. Irish gay people have been raised in a typically heteronormative society and are likely to have internalised many negative images and beliefs towards their sexuality. This is especially true for older generations, raised when homosexual acts were still illegal in this country. Therefore, the vast majority of Irish gay people are also well-versed in the art of hiding one's true identity and 'passing' as heterosexual. I propose that these experiences correlate well with the Jungian concepts of Persona and Shadow – the former, a mask we wear to negotiate with society; the latter, a storeroom for all the aspects of ourselves that we deem shameful and unfit for public view. The essay explores this idea from both general psychotherapeutic and specifically Irish perspectives, in the hope of offering counsellors a complementary lens through which to view the experiences of their gay and lesbian clients. Traditional outlooks on homosexuality within the school of analytical psychology are appraised, and the core tenets of modern validation-based models such as gay affirmative therapy are presented. Three key areas of gay experience, namely homophobia, assimilation, and coming out, are considered in-depth, with a range of sub-issues and therapeutic interventions explored for each. Finally, a five-stage model of gay and lesbian development grounded in the aforementioned concepts of persona and shadow is suggested. The essay ultimately argues that though Irish society has changed largely for the better in terms of gay rights, psychotherapists working with gay and lesbian clients still need to be acutely aware of the unique issues they face in their daily lives, as well as past challenges that may continue to inform their mental wellbeing.

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Acknowledgements

This thesis is dedicated to:

- My beautiful husband John, for reasons too numerous to mention.
- My ever-supportive family, for their unwavering belief in me.
- My delightfully heteronormative colleagues at the Gate Theatre.
- Eloquent trailblazers like Panti and Ursula Halligan, for giving voice to the voiceless.
- Róisín and all the dear friends, teachers, role models and counsellors that helped me become who I am.
- And last, but not least – from Janis to Jarvis, Bowie to Björk; all the musical misshapes/mistakes/misfits who encouraged and inspired the 18-year-old me on his journey towards coming out.

THANK YOU / MERCI / ARIGATŌ!

Introduction

For me, there was no first kiss; no engagement party; no wedding. And up until a short time ago no hope of any of these things. Now, at the age of 54, in a (hopefully) different Ireland, I wish I had broken out of my prison cell a long time ago.

– Ursula Halligan (2015, May 15)

On May 22, 2015, Irish voters went to the polls to decide whether or not to legalise same-sex marriage in their country. In the build-up to the referendum, the topic saturated the political and everyday landscapes, with both Yes and No sides fervently fighting their corners through newspaper columns, television and radio debates, and social media platforms. On-the-ground visibility came from street posters that neatly summarised the two camps' positions, ranging from 'Vote Yes for a fairer Ireland' to 'A mother's love is irreplaceable – Vote No.' The lives and fundamental rights of Irish gay people were arguably under greater scrutiny than at any other point in history, both nationally and internationally. On May 23, the outcome became clear – Ireland, a country that had only decriminalised homosexuality in 1993, was now the first in the world to approve same-sex marriage by popular vote, with a majority of 62 percent voting Yes (Ó'Caollaí & Hilliard, 2015). Succinctly contextualizing the impact of the result for future generations, Michael Barron, founding director of youth support group *Belong To*, announced, 'We've changed forever what it means to grow up LGBT in Ireland' (cited in Carey, 2015, p.1). And yet this joyous proclamation has a shadow side.

Personal accounts from both public figures and private citizens throughout the campaign illuminated the reality of growing up gay in Ireland, with acceptance, pride and resilience often standing side-by-side with fear, isolation and sadness. Many highlight the pain of being aware of one's true sexual nature but feeling unable to honour this publicly, for a variety of reasons and for varying lengths of time – for some, indefinitely. In an Irish Times article that proved particularly resonant, respected journalist Ursula Halligan came out at the age of 54, her story heavy with the regret of living a life not fully true to itself. The deleterious effect that concealment, or the desire for it, can have on the psyche is not restricted to those who are still 'in the closet,' however. In a speech¹ that in some ways foreshadowed the beginning of the marriage debate proper, in February 2014 Rory O'Neill, in his guise as celebrity drag artist Panti Bliss, eloquently told of the internal shame he experiences on 'checking' himself for outward signs of homosexuality in public (Connolly, 2014). The 'whys' of such situations, such as why one might feel the need to disguise an innate aspect of oneself and present as something else, form a crucial element of the oppressiveness gay people can still feel in Ireland today, even when 'out.' The divide between what one chooses to portray to the world and what one hides from it, either consciously or unconsciously, is also at the heart of the Jungian concepts of Persona and Shadow. As such, I propose that these concepts can be readily applied to the lived experience of being gay in Ireland today, offering a complementary lens to existing psychotherapeutic practices regarding gay and lesbian clients.

Thus, the foundation of this essay shall be a general explanation of the persona and shadow. We will then place this pairing in a wider academic context by exploring Jung and the school of analytical psychology's thoughts on homosexuality, considering both historical and

¹ The full text of Panti's 'Noble Call' speech is presented in Appendix II. Ursula Halligan's coming out article comprises Appendix III.

revisionist perspectives. Next will be an overview of the therapeutic discourse on working effectively with gay clients², noting the move away from pathologising styles of treatment to more validation-based models such as Gay Affirmative Therapy. The following sections shall then explore three core areas of gay experience, namely homophobia, assimilation, and coming out. Sub-issues, such as gay invisibility and heterosexual marriage, will also be considered, with all topics being linked back to the key concepts of persona and shadow. Though research and experiences from several countries shall be drawn on, the backdrop will aim to be primarily Irish, with personal testimonies playing an important role. Each chapter shall be prefaced by an excerpt from the poem *The Logic of Queerness: (Releasing Your Ivy Evening Within)* by Ron Palmer³ (2004), which poignantly depicts a common trajectory for embracing one's gay identity.

Finally, it should be noted that the length of the current study precludes an adequate analysis of all groups under the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) banner, with the experiences of gay men and lesbians prioritised.

² For the sake of brevity, the phrases 'gay people,' 'gay clients,' and such like may be used as an umbrella term to encompass both gay men and lesbians. Any data related specifically to one group to the exclusion of another shall be flagged as such.

³ The poem's full text can be found in Appendix I.

***A feeling like the onset of an evening: pregnant with growling
thunder
will find itself growing inside you...***

***And yes, you will say nothing: no, you will not say one word about
it to anyone.***

(excerpt from *The Logic of Queerness: (Releasing Your Ivy Evening Within)* by Ron Palmer)

CHAPTER 1

Defining the Persona and Shadow

Carl Jung's concepts of persona and shadow shed some light on the complex internal processes that inform our relationships with both ourselves and those around us. They are but two of countless 'archetypes' that Jung proposed inhabit mankind's 'collective unconscious' – universal symbolic characters such as those found in folklore that provide us with templates for a huge range of personality traits and behaviours (DeVoll & Blazina, 2002). Their formation can be traced back to childhood, beginning with the process of ego development. Abrams & Zweig (1991, p.47) explain how the child learns to adapt in relation to its social world, with the ego, or one's sense of individual identity, acting as the 'organizing principle of our growing consciousness.' In other words, the ego acts as a sort of janitor for the psyche as a whole, filtering information from the outside as it grows and deciding which parts to integrate and which to reject; which to prize and which to shun. In this way, the child's sense of 'right' and 'wrong' is very much indebted to socialisation and a growing knowledge that certain actions or behaviours will be rewarded, while others will be met with disapproval (Stevens, 2001). The formation of both persona and shadow are direct by-products of this knowledge.

The persona may be seen as a composite outward projection of all an individual's 'best' qualities – the ones that the ego has learned others are likely to approve of. Jung himself (1928, cited in Lafontaine, 2011) described it as 'a complicated system of relations between individual consciousness and society... designed on the one hand to make a definite

impression upon others, and, on the other, to conceal the true nature of the individual.’ This ‘true nature’ may not be accurately represented by the persona’s stance, but often that is precisely the point – at its core, the persona is a socially-demanded mask that ‘constitutes the compromise between the individual and society’ (Hudson, 1978, p.54). Whenever we hold our tongues or feign interest, for example, we are acting on behalf of the persona – being fully authentic will often be frowned on, so out comes the mask.

On an everyday level, then, the persona is simply one of many tools we use to negotiate the world around us in a civilised manner. Problems can arise, however, when one becomes ‘possessed’ by it (Mayes, 2005). In other words, if an individual places too much credence on their outward persona to the constant detriment of their true selves, they may become hopelessly mired between who they are and who they have constructed themselves to be. The more such a person identifies with their persona, the further they drift from their ego, thus putting themselves in danger of inner emptiness (Hudson, 1978). Such a process may take years to develop and can happen quite unconsciously, but self-awareness, if it comes, will not necessarily alleviate the situation in and of itself. The knowledge that one has fashioned an existence out of pretence may result in feelings of guilt, disappointment and anxiety over being ‘found out,’ creating further stresses. Yet on the other hand, altering the established persona leaves one open to rejection so great that there may be strong resistance to change (Hudson, 1978). As Jung (1968, p.123) warns, when a person *becomes* their persona, ‘he lives exclusively against the background of his own biography,’ and it can take a huge leap to get back to one’s true self.

If the persona is akin to a 'shop window in which we like to display our best wares' (Stevens, 2001, p.63), then the shadow is a dimly-lit storeroom for all the items the keeper is convinced won't sell. So it is with the child's socialisation process – their environment and the people that populate it teach them, both directly and indirectly, that certain ways of being are 'good' and others are 'bad.' The former shall be integrated into the persona and the ego, and the latter shall be repressed – pushed back into the dark unconscious but still very much alive (Whitmont, 1969). Diamond (2012) elaborates that the shadow primarily contains 'the primitive, negative, socially or religiously depreciated human emotions,' such as anger, jealousy, greed and lust. Jung (cited in Abrams & Zweig, 1991, p.3) thus described the shadow as 'the sum of all those unpleasant qualities we like to hide.'

As the shadow is the nearest part of the unconscious to consciousness (Abrams & Zweig, 1991), it is likely to bubble up to the surface in a variety of ways, mostly notably through projection. Miller (1989) explains how any personality trait that we have disowned and contained in the unconscious can be activated through witnessing the same trait in another. At this moment, we observe in them a part of ourselves which we no longer recognise, and react accordingly. In the case of shadow projection, the other party will invariably be labelled 'bad.' Such projection is not unique to individuals, either – in the act of scapegoating, for example, the collective shadow of a whole group can be projected onto the 'evil' and despised Other in society, who is then held responsible for upsetting the peace (Stevens, 2001).

While the shadow's dark credentials may engender a sense of fear, the fact is that 'it cannot be argued out of existence or rationalized into harmlessness' (Jung, 1968, p.20). Instead, it is

better met head-on and safely integrated into our conscious beings, in turn bringing us closer to the ultimate goal of Individuation – a state of personal acceptance and wholeness where we increasingly become our true selves (Stevens, 1993). Those who choose to go down this path may be surprised to find that the shadow's contents are not always 'bad.' As Zweig (cited in London, 1998) points out, the shadow can sometimes be concealing latent abilities and talents that at one time or another during the lifespan were suppressed, but are now ready to take flight. A heightened awareness of our own blind spots will also foster a kinder, more empathic stance towards the 'weaknesses' in others (Mayes, 2005). Jung ultimately viewed the acceptance of the shadow as a transformative encounter 'equal to that of experiencing God' (Abrams & Zweig, 1991, p.4) and it became a dominant theme of his later works (Frey-Rohn, 1974, cited in Mayes, 2005). As von Franz (1964) summarises,

Whether the shadow becomes our friend or enemy depends largely on ourselves... He is exactly like any human being with whom one has to get along, sometimes by giving in, sometimes by resisting, sometimes by giving love – whatever the situation requires. The shadow becomes hostile only when he is ignored or misunderstood.
(p.38)

We now have a basic grounding in the persona and shadow, but as the thesis of this study is to link these two Jungian concepts to the lived experience of being gay, it will be important to consider what Jung and his followers have had to say about homosexuality as a whole. The following section provides a brief overview.

***You will look at yourself directly in your eyes
and say, no, absolutely not,
And again your body will go
Frozen with fear.***

(excerpt from *The Logic of Queerness: (Releasing Your Ivy Evening Within)* by Ron Palmer)

CHAPTER 2

Homosexuality and Jung

Much medical and psychological research into homosexuality has presumed pathology, or in other words, that it is a type of disorder that must have both a cause and a cure (Davies, with Neal, 1996). From a therapeutic point of view, the literature suggests that followers of Freud have historically been most conspicuous in subscribing to this view, reinforcing societal prejudices and potentially harming clients in the process (Davies, with Neal, 1996). Wirth (1993, p.204) attests that, in comparison with the large number of 'disaster stories' reported by gay men in Freudian analysis, those who engage in Jungian analysis generally have positive experiences. This should not, however, lead to the automatic conclusion that analytical psychology is a haven of enlightenment. Jungian scholar Hopcke (1993) is damning of the paucity of discussion on homosexuality in the school, likening this neglect to a form of homophobia. In addition, a large portion of what *is* written on the subject, he (1989, cited in DeVoll & Blazina, 2002, p.32; and Clark, 1991, p.250) dismisses as 'stereotype in psychological guise,' with homosexuality 'defined and treated as psychopathology before its normality, its positive attributes, its individual character are even entertained.' To establish the origins of these views, we must look at what Jung himself had to say on the topic.

Jung actually wrote relatively little about homosexuality. Hopcke's (1988) comprehensive review of his entire canon yields a total of twenty-two references, some of which do lend themselves to negative interpretation. Of the small number of definable attitudes and theories posited, the most enduring summarises homosexuality, for both men and women, as a 'form

of psychosexual immaturity derived from a problem with the Feminine' (Hopcke, 1993, p.75). This view proposes that the gay man has given a surplus of 'psychic power' to his domineering mother, and as a result he cannot feel an erotic attraction towards any other woman (Beebe, 1993, p.152). Lesbians, meanwhile, are swayed towards homosexuality either due to the opposite – a dissatisfying or detached mother relationship – or as the by-product of socio-economic changes which have forced them to take on work roles more commonly associated with men (Hopcke, 1988). Hopcke (1988, p.74) queries the legitimacy of an approach to male homosexuality that seeks to explain an 'exclusively masculine phenomenon in exclusively feminine terms,' while also highlighting the inherent contradictions in Jung's inferences on lesbianism - 'Is [it] a psychological or cultural phenomenon, both, or neither?' He (1993) laments the general acceptance this 'Feminine problem' theory found among analysts, including such luminaries as Marie-Louise von Franz and Erich Neumann, while more positive interpretations contained in Jung's writings were roundly ignored.

Ironically, one such ignored attitude is, as Hopcke (1988, p.71) points out, arguably the most 'Jungian' of his observations on homosexuality. He summarises it as, 'An individual's homosexuality has its own meaning peculiar to the individual in question and that psychological growth consists of becoming conscious of that meaning.' This idea moves the conversation on homosexuality away from over-simplified pathological statements to more expansive philosophical interpretations, especially ones concerning the process of individuation (Walker, 1991). It seems to suggest that a person's homosexuality might be the key to self-realisation, if they can only find the door. The literature, meanwhile, presents some interesting reformulations of Jungian thought. McKenzie (2006, p.407), for example, dubs Jung's archetypes of Anima and Animus (the feminine aspect in the male, and vice versa) a 'terrible fit for our time.' She advocates a radical revision of Jungian gender theory

that would more accurately provide for the diverse range of genders and sexualities that therapists work with today. DeVoll & Blazina (2002), meanwhile, suggest that gay men in analysis could benefit from a queer reinterpretation of the classic male archetypal images ('The Warrior,' 'The Wise Old Man,' and so forth) that are available to straight men. Among their suggestions are 'The Diva' (one who appropriates expressions of femininity to subvert prescribed notions of gender) and 'The King' (one who embodies the ultra-masculine 'ideal'). Finally, Kiefer Hammersmith (1987, after Bell *et al.*, 1981) challenges the aforementioned 'Feminine problem' idea through Kinsey Institute research on homosexual development studying both gay and straight men. Findings showed that while those with the classic 'overbearing mother, absent father' model were indeed more likely to seek therapy, sexuality differentials were minimal.

Later sections will build on the above to map the concepts of persona and shadow onto various aspects of gay life. We will firstly explore some modern approaches to effective psychotherapeutic work with gay and lesbian clients.

This newly found seed strange and slick will grow like an invisible ivy – it will grow from your mouth – invisible to all except those who have a twin seed hidden under their own terrified tongues.

(excerpt from *The Logic of Queerness: (Releasing Your Ivy Evening Within)* by Ron Palmer)

CHAPTER 3

Gay Affirmative Therapy

The American Psychiatric Association de-classified homosexuality as a mental disorder in 1973 (Davies, with Neal, 1996). It was not until 1992, however, that the same happened for the World Health Organisation's International Classification of Diseases, the system most commonly used in the UK and Ireland (Davies, with Neal, 1996; Kennedy, 2014). In the interim years, the former pathological model of homosexuality 'all but disintegrated under the weight of empirical research' (Gonsiorek, 1982, p.5), with a growing movement towards what became known as 'Gay Affirmative Therapy.'⁴ This mode of therapy stresses that while homosexuality itself is not a mental disorder, experiences of societal and interpersonal homophobia often result in psychic disturbances for gay people (Malyon, 1982). The model draws on established approaches to psychotherapy, but from a validation-based standpoint (Malyon, 1982). It is also mindful of the fact that while adverse cultural experiences of stigma are universal for gay people, it cannot be assumed that these are the central cause of a client's problems (Malyon, 1982). The literature suggests that the therapist who wishes to work affirmatively with gay and lesbian clients needs a combination of awareness, respect, openness, and adequate training, each of which shall be explored below.

⁴ It should be noted that this exact term is not used or accepted by all proponents of the model – for example, the well-known UK-based organisation Pink Therapy has in recent years adopted the more encompassing 'Gender and Sexual Diversity Therapy.' I use the original term because it is arguably the most widely known phrasing.

Awareness

Here, ‘awareness’ applies both to oneself and to the wider social context. Firstly, it is crucial that therapists explore and, if necessary, challenge their prejudices, beliefs and assumptions about homosexuality *before* they engage with a gay or lesbian client (Davies, 1996a). As Cormier-Otaño & Davies (2012) point out, it would be rare for anyone who has been brought up in a heteronormative society to be free of some vestiges of homophobic or heterosexist attitudes (i.e. those that inherently value heterosexuality over all other lifestyles). A therapist who believes, for example, that homosexuality is in any way unnatural, inferior, piteous, or incompatible with their religious beliefs would be best to refer a gay client on (Davies, 1996a and 1996b). This goes not just for straight therapists, but gay and lesbian ones also. A gay therapist is just as likely to have internalised negative societal messages as their gay client, so they too have a duty to examine themselves for any values (e.g. towards monogamy, parenting, sex) that may cause conflicts (Davies, 1998).

In addition, therapists must be mindful of the wider environment in which the client has been raised, a quality Rochlin (1982) refers to as ‘gay consciousness.’ In a possibly well-intentioned effort to appear inclusive, some therapists may erroneously suggest that gay and straight clients are all ‘the same.’ This stance serves to diminish a whole range of issues that are specific to gay people, and to deny these is to also deny the ‘widespread social loathing’ that they grow up with and internalise (Kort, 2004, p.3). Davies (1996b, p.54) suggests that gay men and lesbians ‘spend every day of their lives knowing that some sections of society wish they did not exist’ – and this should be honoured in the therapy room.

Respect & Openness

The therapist must be respectful of the gay client's sexuality, culture, and needs. A simple example is being mindful of language that the client may interpret as pejorative or outdated, such as 'alternative lifestyle' or 'homosexual' instead of 'gay man' (Kort, 2007). The therapist must also respect when the client's sexual orientation is related to their difficulties, and when it is not (Davies, 2012). If the presenting issue is a bereavement or break-up, for example, an attempt to focus on the client's sexuality is more likely to alienate than hit the mark. Regarding lifestyle, therapists must be cognisant of the fact that gay culture is often more accepting of divergent romantic and sexual practices, such as non-monogamous relationships. These should be respected as valid options by the therapist, and not just viewed as deviations from the 'norm' (Moore, 2005).

Also, should it arise, the client's wish for information on the therapist's own orientation should be respected. Rather than remain stoic or treat the enquiry as a boundary-breach, the therapist would be better to consider the reasons for the client's curiosity – most likely, they are simply trying to establish whether the counselling space is safe enough for them to talk openly about such issues (Davies, 2005). For the straight therapist, disclosure can be a good opportunity to share one's stance on gay and lesbian affirmation (Kort, 2004; Malyon, 1982). Furthermore, as a representative of the heterosexual majority, the gay client may experience the straight therapist's unconditional acceptance of their sexuality as more 'valid' than that of a gay therapist, who they would automatically assume to act in such a way (Davies, 1998). Conversely, the gay or lesbian therapist who displays honesty and openness towards their sexuality can set an example of positive self-identity for the client who has grown up in the absence of gay role models (Rochlin, 1982). They may also provide an effective outlet for

transferences such as internalised homophobic projections, which can then be explored therapeutically (Malyon, 1982). Of course each case must be dealt with differently and always in the client's best interests, but the therapist who chooses *not* to disclose their orientation upon direct questioning should be aware that this can cause mistrust in the relationship and, especially in the case of a gay therapist, appear to collude with society's passive endorsement of gay concealment (Davies, 1996a).

Adequate Training

Evidence suggests that the majority of counselling and psychotherapy training courses fail to adequately prepare their students for working with gay and lesbian clients (Butler, 2010; Cormier-Otaño & Davies, 2012; Davies, 1996a; Davies, 2007). In fact, Dworkin & Pope (2012, cited in Rodgers, 2016, p.11) succinctly declare that LGBT training in the sphere is 'inadequate at best and non-existent at worst.' Most courses continue to display an inherent heterosexist bias towards developmental, relational and sexual topics, with two common examples being Freud and Erikson's stages of development (Davies, 1996a; Buhrke, 1989, cited in Davies, 1996b). While such teachings may reflect society's straight majority, it is noteworthy that gay clients are over-represented as consumers in the therapy market (Davies, 2007). As such, there is a cogent ethical argument for training institutions to better prepare their students for working with this demographic. It is not the place of the gay client to educate their therapist about salient gay issues (Rochlin, 1982), nor should the gay student be expected to facilitate their classmates' learning or assume the mantle of spokesperson for their entire community (Davies, 2007).

While Davies (2007) acknowledges that course syllabi can only accommodate so much, he (Cormier-Otaño & Davies, 2012) is also clear that including a single lecture on gay issues is merely paying lip service. Some important topics for trainee consideration are suggested by the work of Long and colleagues (1993, cited in Butler, 2010, pp.106-107), who interviewed LGBT clients to ascertain what key areas they felt therapists should be mindful of. Chief among these were ‘Awareness of “invisibility” in society,’ ‘Coming out as a continual process,’ and ‘Awareness of effects of homo/transphobia.’ As it stands, the majority of students wishing to increase their knowledge of such topics will have to engage in extra-curricular learning and workshops – as Cormier-Otaño & Davies (2012) point out, having gay friends or being gay oneself is not sufficient. Supervisors should also monitor for any signs of homophobia in the work of their supervisees (Buhrke, 1989, cited in Davies, 1996b).

We will now move into more specific areas of gay experience. In the following sections, the key concepts of homophobia, assimilation, and coming out shall be examined through the lenses of persona and shadow, with a special focus on Ireland. Opportunities for gay-affirmative therapeutic interventions shall also be suggested.

*Perhaps you will want to shave your desire down
With your shame; perhaps you will want your desire to drown
in its own fear of singing.*

*It will swim its way back to the back of your throat, it will grow
back double
And make a mental moat around your consciousness.*

(excerpt from *The Logic of Queerness: (Releasing Your Ivy Evening Within)* by Ron Palmer)

CHAPTER 4

Homophobia: The Shadow in Action

Homophobia may be best described as a ‘fear, dread or hatred of homosexuals or homosexuality’ (Davies, 2012, p.18), and ‘in the case of homosexuals themselves, self-loathing’ (Weinberg, 1972, cited in Davies, 1996b, p.41). Society inherently queries any deviation from heterosexuality, with gay people historically labelled as sinful by organised religion, mentally ill by the medical professions, and unequal or criminal in the eyes of the law (George & Behrendt, 1987). There have been forward strides in each of the above areas, but full acceptance is by no means a reality – homophobia, in one guise or another, remains a constant in the lives of gay people the world over. The internalisation of these wider attitudes can negatively impact on their mental wellbeing, with possible outcomes including low self-esteem, isolation, depression, self-medication through drug and alcohol abuse, and for a significant minority, self-harm and suicidal behaviour (Cormier-Otaño & Davies, 2012; Maycock, Bryan, Carr & Kitching, 2009). Though it would be unwise to assume that every gay person will encounter the above in their lives, or that they will react to adversities in a uniform way (Malyon, 1982; Maycock *et al.*, 2009), mental health professionals such as counsellors and psychotherapists have a duty to at least be aware of the hallmarks of growing up with a stigmatised identity.

In Jungian terms, homophobia can be thought of as a shadow dynamic. As Hopcke (1993) elaborates,

Fear and hatred of homosexuality are derived directly from cultural values which insist that heterosexual marriage alone is normative and good, all else aberrant and bad... [This] all but determines that homosexuality as a phenomenon and homosexual individuals specifically will become the carriers of all the shadowy aspects of sexuality that do not fit into this heterosexist schema. (pp.78-79)

In other words, homophobia can be seen as the collective shadow projections of the heterosexual majority onto the homosexual minority. The minority then psychically integrates these projections into their own self-concept as internalised homophobia. In turn, inherent restrictions on the rights of the minority serve to reinforce assumptions and stereotypes. For example, Davies (1996b) and Kiefer Hammersmith (1987) cite the contradiction of presupposing the instability and promiscuity of gay relationships when gays and lesbians are, in most countries, legally forbidden from marrying and therefore deprived of the opportunity to present society with an alternative image. Other myths include the linking of homosexuality to paedophilia; that gay people are destined to live sad, unfulfilled lives; and that lesbians are only with women because they can't 'get a man' (Romesburg, 1995). Unfortunately, due to isolation, lack of information and the effect of internalised homophobia, gay people themselves are at risk of believing negative myths also, particularly when they are younger (Hetrick & Martin, 1987). In Rodgers' (2016) thorough study on the lived experience of being a gay man in Ireland, one participant used the word 'inbuilt' to describe his sense growing up that same-sex attractions were wrong. As Rodgers identifies, this highlights how shame can *feel* inherent to the gay person, when in fact it is a product of anti-homosexual socialisation.

Kort (2004) and Margolies (1987, cited in Davies, 1996b) list some potential signs of internalised homophobia that the counsellor can watch out for and therapeutically challenge. These include the fear of being identified as gay by others; discomfort with ‘obvious gays;’ unease regarding gay parenthood; and repeated pursuit of unavailable (e.g. heterosexual) love objects. A common example of one of the above is so-called ‘camp-shaming’ – the disapproval or even revulsion that many ‘masculine’ gay men display towards their more recognisably ‘gay’ (i.e. effeminate) counterparts (Stone, 2015). Through seeming to live up to societal stereotypes of what a gay man looks and acts like, such men are dismissed as ‘giving the rest of us a bad name’ (Davies, 1996c, p.74). However, it is quite possible that this is more accurately reflective of an internalised homophobic suggestion that gays are fundamentally unmanly, weak, etc. (Stone, 2015). Thus, the fear of embodying the same characteristics in oneself projects outwards from the shadow as a negative judgement of the *too-gay* other. Sophie (1987) suggests that cognitive restructuring is the foundation for reappraising such negative internalised messages and moving towards a positive gay identity. As such, she found that techniques drawn from cognitive behavioural therapy, such as challenging irrational beliefs and exploring the reality of a diverse gay community, were particularly useful in her work with lesbian clients.⁵

Any client who asks for a therapist to help ‘turn’ them straight may be said to be exhibiting signs of a particularly virulent form of internalised homophobia. Collusion with such requests is both unethical and potentially damaging to the client (PSI, 2015). Though they are undoubtedly a minority, Paul D’Alton, president of the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI), has recently stated that so-called reparative or conversion therapies which seek to reverse homosexuality are still being practiced here (cited in McGreevy, 2014). Insofar as

⁵ Davies (1996a) suggests that Sophie’s findings can also be applied to gay men.

these treatments seek to ‘compartmentalize the unwanted feeling into a hated part of one’s being that is buried and ignored’ (Baird, 2004, p.20), from a Jungian perspective one might describe them as ‘counsellor-assisted shadow maintenance.’⁶

The literature suggests numerous structural ways through which homophobia presents in society. Two that seem particularly apt for Ireland are gay invisibility and the effect of religion.

Gay Invisibility

A common theme of the literature, especially among older generations, is the lack of healthy representation of gay people in society or, in many cases, no representation of *any* kind. This has resulted in countless gay men and lesbians growing up in a state of identity-limbo where they may honestly feel like ‘the only one.’ Romesburg (1995) highlights how children from ethnic minorities generally have an immediate social circle to lean on should they experience discrimination. The gay child, on the other hand, is unlikely to have any openly gay friends or family, and typical absence of discussion regarding homosexuality by parents automatically confers a negative impression (Browning, 1987).

Alienation will likely be compounded by the pervading lack of LGBT visibility in school curriculums and teaching staff (Davies, 1996d; Maycock *et al.*, 2009). As Feierhardts (2003) recalls of her Irish schooldays,

⁶ An in-depth discussion on such therapies is beyond the scope of this essay, but good overviews can be found in Baird (2004) and Davies, with Neal (1996).

Sometimes I heard about alien concepts like gay ‘pride’ that simultaneously amazed and horrified me. How could someone be proud of being gay? Wasn’t that illegal? Wouldn’t they disgrace their families? I mean, a girl kissing a girl... eugh... that just isn’t natural, I’d think to myself at the back of maths class. (p.45)

Though recent research suggests a persistently high level of homophobic bullying in Irish schools (GLEN, 2013; Maycock *et al.*, 2009), O’Higgins & Norman (2009, cited in Kennedy, 2014) found that it was absent from many anti-bullying policies and was ‘often ignored’ by staff. Anecdotal evidence from contemporary gay Irish youth corroborates the latter suggestion, with reports of teachers not taking the victimisation seriously, perpetrators escaping punishment, and the use of pejorative terms such as ‘faggot’ going unchallenged (Wade, 2014; Maycock *et al.*, 2009).

Regarding the media, evidence points to an over-representation of stereotypes that may serve to alienate and confuse the many gay people who do not fit with such images (Kiefer Hammersmith, 1987). Sanderson (cited in Davies, 2015), for example, recalls his youth in 1970s England, where ‘the best I could hope for was to be a clown.’ Here he is referring to comedic personalities such as John Inman of *Are You Being Served?*, the ‘sex’ of whose sexuality was effectively neutered and reduced to mere camp frivolity. This ‘safe, clean, antiseptic gay’ stood in polar opposition to the only other representation available – that of the dirty, cottaging⁷ pervert. Irish gay people of this era were also devoid of positive role models (O’Gorman, 2003; Rodgers, 2016), with a common misconception of gay men as transvestites and gay people as mentally unstable (O’Carroll, 2014, February 23). In Ursula

⁷ The act of cruising public toilets for anonymous gay sex.

Halligan's (2015, May 15) words, they were 'society's defects.' Naturally, laws that treat homosexual acts as criminal, such as those that existed in Ireland until 1993, will also serve to keep gay people hidden. As a corollary, there is an historic trend towards gay identity being 'hushed up' by the use of euphemisms that might *imply* homosexuality, such as 'maiden aunt' and 'that way' (Davies, 1996b; Young, 1996). Younger generations, meanwhile, have grown up hearing a more modern derogatory use of the word 'gay' to mean 'uncool,' which also reinforces a negative/inferior connotation (Sweeney & Cashin, 2014).

The Effect of Religion

In the case of Ireland, homophobia, gay invisibility, and the Catholic Church are inherently intertwined. Growing up in the 1950s and '60s, David Norris (cited in Rodgers, 2016, p.26) recalls how, 'the ecclesiastic instruction that homosexuality was not to be mentioned was slavishly obeyed throughout society. It... was quite literally unmentionable, and throughout my youth, was not referred to in newspapers, magazines or the broadcast media.' Sex education in schools was minimal and would mostly reinforce Catholic teachings that sex in general was bad, unholy, and best avoided ('Maurice,' 2003⁸; Lynch, 2003). Allen (2003, p.184) recalls how any male student who might be concealing homosexual leanings was simply told to go to confession and 'find a woman.' This vacuum of proper information is likely to have produced countless Irish gay people who were, in the words of Lynch (1996, p.201), 'psychosexually mutilated' by their Catholic upbringing. This is not necessarily restricted to older generations, either. One of O'Carroll's (2014, February 23) young respondents remembers the internal anguish he felt in 1999, when a priest told his primary school class that homosexuality was an illness and gay people would burn in hell. More

⁸ Many contributors to O'Brien's 2003 anthology of Irish gay experiences chose to use pseudonyms.

recently, the Church advocated for the defeat of the marriage equality referendum, calling the proposed amendments to the constitution a ‘grave injustice’ (Irish Bishops Conference 2014, cited in Rodgers, 2016, p.39).

Religion has also contributed to gay invisibility in schools. Over 90 percent of Irish national schools are still run by the Catholic Church (Humphreys, 2015, cited in Rodgers, 2016), so the lack of gay role models amongst teachers is closely linked to (recently repealed) legislation that gave educational institutions affiliated with religious bodies exemptions from certain equality laws. This effectively legitimised the prospect of discrimination against gay teachers, whose ‘lifestyle’ could be seen to undermine the school’s religious ethos (Barry, 2015). A key outcome of the legislation was a mass disenfranchisement of Irish teachers’ right to publicly identify as gay or lesbian (O’Carroll, 2014, September 14). Kieran Rose of the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN) described its repeal in December 2015 as providing a ‘critical springboard for the cultural change necessary in our schools’ (cited in Barry, 2015). More general research on openness in the workplace, however, found that even today many Irish gay men and lesbians keep their identity hidden or restricted to a few close colleagues (Bielenberg, 2015). It often seems that the implied message from society, even for those who are out in most contexts, is that the ‘good gay’ keeps quiet and doesn’t make a fuss about their sexuality (Davies, 1996b; Davies, 2015).

Above we have linked homophobia to the shadow – the next section shall focus on the persona and the key concept of assimilation.

***Perhaps you will not want to free the seed to grow
Where it wants to grow, perhaps you will
Want no one to know of your seed's need to grow. Instead you will
Construct a permanent smile made from your own hiding.***

(excerpt from *The Logic of Queerness: (Releasing Your Ivy Evening Within)* by Ron Palmer)

CHAPTER 5

Assimilation: The Persona in Action

While most sources suggest that awareness of one's homosexuality typically occurs around puberty (Kennedy, 2014; Maycock *et al.*, 2009; Romesburg, 1995), public disclosure as gay may not occur until much later, if at all. What happens in the interim? Most commonly gay thoughts and feelings will be perceived as shameful and therefore repressed, forming a particularly hostile part of the personal shadow that will haunt the person's consciousness. The major resultant coping mechanism is what deMonteflores (1986, cited in Davies, 1996b) terms 'assimilation' – the donning of a carefully constructed mask in order to 'pass' as heterosexual and evade discovery. This is in keeping with the idea that the persona necessarily embodies qualities opposite to those in the shadow (Stevens, 2001). Jung's (1928, cited in LaFontaine, 2011) likening of the ego to an army commander fighting on two fronts seems particularly suitable here – 'before him the struggle for existence, in the rear the struggle against his own rebellious instinctual nature.'

The mask may provide the gay or lesbian adolescent with a means of survival, but it carries a price. As Hudson (1978) points out, using the persona as a coping mechanism for anxiety is dangerous, as in time this process will yield an anxiety of its own. This can manifest in numerous ways, including constant monitoring of self for signs of homosexuality; purposeful limiting of interests; and (often self-imposed) isolation and emotional distance from others (Hetrick & Martin, 1987). Thus, maintaining a straight persona negatively impacts on social, psychological, and sexual development (Kort, 2004; Malyon, 1982), and can lead to an

increased vulnerability to depression and suicidal behaviour (Davies, 1996d). In their study of LGBT mental health in Ireland, Maycock and colleagues (2009, p.17) found that the period between realisation and disclosure of homosexuality was experienced as ‘difficult, daunting, and traumatic’ by a majority of participants.⁹ In addition, an extensive survey by the EU’s Fundamental Rights Agency (cited in GLEN, 2013) found that 86 percent of Irish LGBT youth ‘always or often’ concealed their minority identity in school. As one 14 year old succinctly describes, ‘If someone asks me if I’m gay, I turn red and betray myself’ (cited in Wade, 2014).

Beyond adolescence, efforts to remain hidden range from excessive commitment to work and study (Feierhardts, 2003; Halligan, 2015, May 15) to more extreme measures, such as joining the clergy or getting married to a heterosexual partner. Irish perspectives on the latter will be explored below, as well as the effect of living in a rural area.

Rural Isolation

Davies (1996c) and Moon (1996) suggest that gay men and lesbians living in rural areas are much more likely to experience a sense of isolation than their urban peers – for example, they may have to travel to their nearest town or city to avail of basic community resources such as social groups and magazines. At home, passing as straight may be seen as the only option. For such people, lacking support and fearful of further isolation, the process of coming out is typically prolonged, sometimes indefinitely (Davies, 1996c). Indeed, Dave Roche of the Cork Gay Men’s Project (cited in Kavanagh & Bartley, 2015) comments that a large number of those using the initiative’s support systems feel that ‘their chance has flown.’ He adds that in

⁹ It is worth noting that just under 80 percent of their sample consisted of gay men and lesbians.

spite of the great legal and cultural leaps made in the country, for many closeted gay people in rural Ireland, the prominent experience of their sexuality is one of sadness. Allen (2003, p.186) paints a vivid portrait of the discrimination he encountered:

The worst came as I walked with other family members behind my father's coffin down the main street of the town. Three youngsters sat on beer barrels outside a pub and as the hearse passed by they looked at me and shouted 'Queer'. I couldn't trust anyone.

Isolated gay people who are not out in their towns may use trips to urban centres to engage in sexual encounters, before resuming a straight existence at home (Kavanagh & Bartley, 2015; Mullally, 2015, May 25). The furtive nature of such incidents may result in guilt and shame at the 'transgression,' contributing to feelings of low self-worth (Moore, 2005). Bosnak (1993, p.266) describes such a client of his as 'living short electric effusions followed by a power outage. During the blackout he could only feel bitter disgust, the taste of a trespassed taboo.'

There is evidence to suggest that isolation may be a particular problem for gay people in the midlands and certain western areas of Ireland. Maycock and colleagues (2009) note the lack of LGBT services in these regions, as corroborated by Figures 1 and 2. These show the locations of dedicated centres/adult-oriented groups and youth-specific groups (often run in conjunction with more general youth services) across the country (LGBT Helpline, 2016)¹⁰:

¹⁰ Images are © 2016 LGBT Helpline. Figure 1 has been modified by the author to include other active groups in Kerry, Mayo and Waterford (cited in PSI, 2015). It is noteworthy that the websites for supposed groups in Westmeath and Kilkenny (also cited in PSI, 2015) are not functioning.

Figure 1: LGBT centres/groups

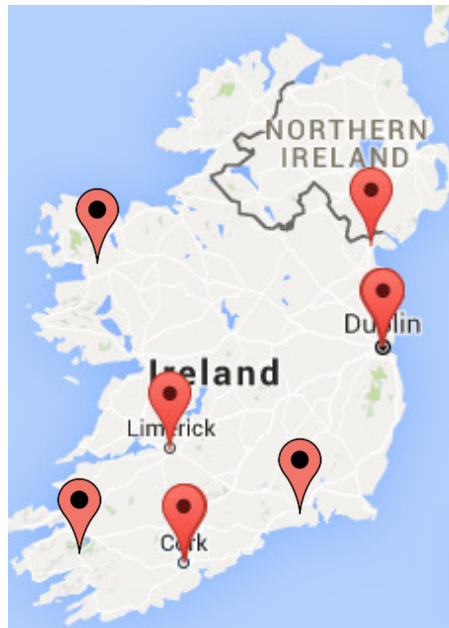
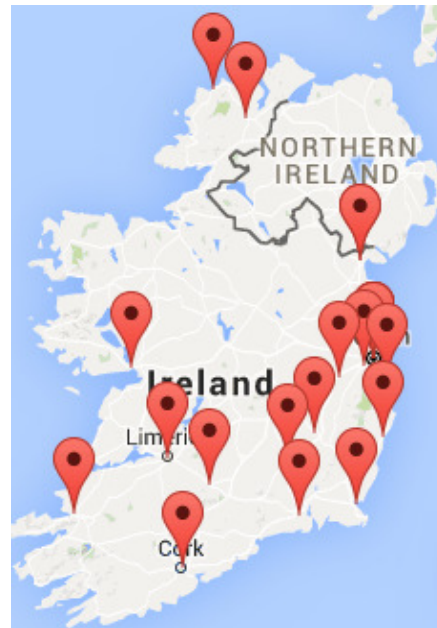


Figure 2: LGBT youth groups



Furthermore, in the marriage equality referendum of 2015, seven of the ten constituencies that registered the most ‘No’ votes, as well as the only one (Roscommon-South Leitrim) to return an overall ‘No’ majority, are located in these regions (Ó’Caollaí & Hilliard, 2015). This may reinforce fears around coming out for closeted gay people in these areas. Therapists working with such clients will need to treat the matter with respect and care, rather than advocating a ‘blanket’ approach to disclosure that could backfire (Moon, 1996).

Heterosexual Marriage

Hudson (1978) warns that the adoption of a persona may fulfil a number of ‘secondary gains’ that can prove difficult to relinquish. For gay people wearing a heterosexual mask, such gains might include a sense of normalcy, unquestioning social acceptance, and a predictable life path in contrast to the unknown or negatively-perceived gay world (Wolf, 1987). The latter

can be particularly hard to resolve, with the conscious decision to come out as gay seeming to necessitate a trade-in of life goals such as marriage and children, and the established norms these entail (wedding, buying a house, etc.) (O'Donovan, 2003; McGrath, 2003). Against this backdrop, it is perhaps unsurprising that many gay men and lesbians cling to their expectations and engage in long-term heterosexual partnership.

Such people will experience the same negative stressors as other closeted groups, but with the added fear of the effect exposure/disclosure will have on their spouse and possibly children. Referring to gay fathers, Dunne (1987) suggests that this anxiety can cause an emotional distancing between parent and child that can negatively impact the latter in later life. In addition, the father may be so preoccupied by thoughts of discovery that interactions with their children concerning anything sexual may produce an intense fear response (Dunne, 1987). Queer icon Carrie Brownstein (2015), for example, recalls how her parents had previously reacted with amusement when her child-self unwittingly used bad language, yet for mentioning the word 'penis' to her father, she was dragged to the bathroom and her mouth washed with soap. Being confronted by images connected to a buried part of himself yielded an extreme discomfort that, in retrospect, hinted at his true orientation.¹¹

The coming out process, should it occur, may be particularly fraught. In a sudden role-reversal, straight spouses frequently conceal the truth from family and friends, thus finding *themselves* shamefully closeted (Gochros, 1992). Due to society's deification of the Mother ideal, lesbian women with children may be met with particular anger at a mid-life revelation of homosexuality. This is illustrated by a client of McKenzie's (2010) who faced widespread

¹¹ Brownstein's essay on life with a closeted gay father can be found in Appendix IV.

condemnation among her social circle for the ‘audacity’ at putting herself first and not continuing to live a lie for the sake of her children. In Ireland, the national Gay Switchboard reports up to twenty calls a week from gay or bisexual men in heterosexual marriages, with an average of 12-16 attendees at their monthly married men’s support group (Keane, 2015). LGBT Helpline, meanwhile, recently launched two equivalent groups, for married lesbians and straight spouses (Keane, 2015). The literature confirms the efficacy of group therapy for offering help, practical advice and a sense of community to both gay and straight partners (Coleman, 1982; Dunne, 1987; Gochros, 1992; Wolf, 1987). These people often feel like they are the only ones going through such circumstances, so the space to talk openly with others who can empathise with their experiences can have a powerful transformative effect (Keane, 2015; Long, 2003).

The reasons and guises may vary, and sometimes a reasonable replica of ‘normal’ straight life may be achieved. Yet it seems the gay person forever tied to a heterosexual mask will never fully escape from their own fear and recrimination. When the mask is removed, the effect on self and others can be profound. As Carrie Brownstein (cited in NPR Music, 2015) says of her father, ‘When he came out, it was like this moment where something goes from black-and-white into the realm of color. There was just this brightening, this sense of illumination. And within that gleaming came feeling.’

The following section shall focus on this coming out process, in which the shadow is finally brought into the light.

*I almost ran out of breath as the invisible ivy was getting tighter
And tighter like a tether
Of sad snow around my neck. Finally,
I let all the seeds grow, grow, and grow
Until they kept growing and covered me with ivy so strong
And vibrant and unique that it became my reason for living.*

(excerpt from *The Logic of Queerness: (Releasing Your Ivy Evening Within)* by Ron Palmer)

CHAPTER 6

Coming Out: Meeting the Shadow, Dropping the Persona

At some point or other, many gay people passing as straight reach an internal acceptance of their homosexuality and tire of the constant need to suppress themselves. They may thus begin the often difficult process of ‘coming out,’ through which they will finally reveal their true sexuality to the world.¹² In Jungian terms, this may be seen as the removal of the persona-mask and a conscious shining of light on the shadow – the embracing of the latter sparking a gradual dismantling of the former (Miller, 1990). Abrams & Zweig (1991) call the confrontation and integration of one’s inner darkness ‘shadow-work.’ Regarding the precipitating factors in commencing such a process, they (p.239) suggest that, ‘When we recognize and feel the constricting effects of denial, or when we doubt the values we live by and watch our illusions about ourselves and the world shatter... then shadow-work can begin.’ The parallels with the gay experience are obvious.

Many start with one trusted family member or confidante, and from then on coming out is an ongoing occurrence – given society’s general assumption of heterosexuality, the gay person will frequently have to weigh up the timing, appropriateness, and level of disclosure commensurate to each new social environment (Cormier-Otaño & Davies, 2012). It may also be the case that they are purposefully out to some people but not others, thus retaining some old cloaking habits. They may even feel the need to create new masks (regarding fashion and body image, for example) so as to find acceptance in the gay community (Cormier-Otaño &

¹² There are several proposed models of coming out cited in the literature. An exploration of these is beyond the scope of this essay, but Davies (1996c) offers an excellent overview of three of the most well-known.

Davies, 2012; Kennedy, 2014). Davies (1996c) suggests that, lacking alternative role models, many younger gay people feel that in order to identify as gay they must conform to established presentations, such as the ‘butch dyke’ or ‘bitchy queen.’ Those in long-term partnerships, meanwhile, may feel subtly pressured into hiding any relationship difficulties, lest they ‘let the side down’ by seeming to uphold a negative stereotype of gay unions as unstable (Simon, 1996). Such behaviours may be seen as carrying the vestiges of previously internalised homophobia – evidently, even when the shadow has been illuminated, some darkness remains. This idea can also inform discomfort with being ‘seen’ as gay and misuse of drugs and alcohol, examined below. A further section will outline the important role counsellors and psychotherapists can play during the coming out process.

Fear of Visibility

The psychic effects of self-concealment have ramifications for not just the gay adolescent, but also the adult who forms from the process (Hetrick & Martin, 1987). Having consciously repressed their instincts and passed as heterosexual for a prolonged period of time, many out gay men and lesbians continue to carry a residue of anxiety towards being publically identified as gay. If they become aware of this inclination, they may experience feelings of shame and anger at *being* ashamed, as captured in Panti’s ‘Noble Call’ speech (cited in Connolly, 2014):

Have you ever been on a crowded train with your gay friend and a small part of you is cringing because he is being *so* gay, and you find yourself trying to compensate by butching up or nudging the conversation into ‘straighter’ territory? This is you who have spent 35 years trying to be the best gay possible and yet still a small part of

you is embarrassed by his gayness. And I hate myself for that... I hate myself because I fucking check myself while standing at pedestrian crossings. And sometimes I hate you for doing that to me.

Mullally (2015, April 27) echoes these sentiments, recalling the anger and embarrassment she felt upon hesitating to reveal to a nurse that her next-of-kin was another woman. Meanwhile, one of Rodger's (2016, p.106) respondents recalls an incident in which he shamefully moved to conceal his identity, manifested as a collection of soft toys, in the company of stereotypically 'manly' tradesmen whose negative appraisal he feared – 'In my kind of logic, it was... like, "Oh, if I hide the evidence, then that won't happen".'

A common theme in the Irish literature is the reluctance of out gay couples to engage in public displays of affection. A survey suggests that three-quarters would refrain from holding hands in public for fear of harassment or violence (GLEN, 2013), with anecdotal evidence from O'Carroll (2014, February 16 and February 23), Wade (2014) and Rodgers (2016) all corroborating this negative predisposition. As one 18 year-old lesbian commented, 'Something as little as a disgusted stare can have quite a bad impact on you when it happens every five minutes' (cited in Wade, 2014). Finnegan (2015) acknowledges the courage it can take to be openly affectionate with one's partner, but suggests that only when such displays are commonplace will Ireland have become a truly inclusive society. On this note, Casement (2003) proposes that the more a person learns to live with their shadow out in the open, the easier it will become to keep the persona-mask off. This is well illustrated by one of O'Carroll's (2014, February 16) respondents who, upon realising that he is 'checking' himself, defiantly resolves to *not* reach for his mask and 'butch it up for the benefit of others.'

Substance Misuse

Gay people most commonly socialise in pubs and clubs (Smith 1988, cited in Davies, 1996b), with a concurrent higher level of drug and alcohol use than the heterosexual population, and a longer ‘career’ of engaging with this culture (King & McKeown, 2003, cited in Davies, 2007; Kowszun & Malley, 1996). This may be linked to the concept of minority stress, with many gay people ‘self-medicating’ to alleviate the pressures of, for example, homophobia and presumed heterosexuality (Maycock *et al.*, 2009; Kowszun & Malley, 1996). In addition, members of the gay community may feel compelled to engage with alcohol and drugs in order to fit in with the scene (Davies, 1996d). Kowszun & Malley (1996, p.176) describe how these substances can temporarily produce a boost in self-confidence that has been eroded through growing up with a stigmatised identity. However, they warn that persistent use will ultimately result in a loss of connection to self. In Ireland, Maycock and colleagues (2009) found that 84 percent of their LGBT sample regularly engaged in heavy drinking, with a significant minority displaying levels for serious concern.

Malyon (1982) suggests that gay adolescents constantly hiding their true natures suppress the parts of themselves that govern capacity for intimacy. This idea is key to the work at London’s 56 Dean Street, a sexual health clinic at the forefront of treatment for casualties of ‘chemsex.’ This relatively new phenomenon involves weekend-long gatherings of men who engage in anonymous sex with multiple partners whilst under the influence of disinhibiting drugs like liquid ecstasy, often administered intravenously (Flynn, 2015). Parties are mostly organised impersonally via social media and the sex is frequently unprotected, possibly linking the practice to a recent rise in HIV infection rates in the city (Flynn, 2015; Hennessy, 2015). David Stuart of the clinic comments that many gay men who have spent much of their

lives concealing their true identities are now ‘trying to incorporate intimacy... with no frame of reference’ (cited in Flynn, 2015). Low self-confidence can also lead to a preference for online anonymity and predetermined self-presentation (itself a form of persona) over more spontaneous in-person interactions (Hennessy, 2015). Though there does not appear to be any data on similar practices taking place in Ireland, the fact that Stuart and his colleagues have been approached for advice by more than thirty similar organisations across Europe indicates a subculture on the rise (Flynn, 2015).

Coming Out and Therapy

The literature suggests that counselling may be of particular use to gay people on the cusp of coming out or those who have done so but are still adjusting to the change. Offering a safe, empathic and affirmative space for reflection can prove invaluable to such clients (Maycock *et al.*, 2009). The challenging of internalised homophobic beliefs will be a key part of the work, with Clark (1987, cited in Davies, 1996a, p.34) suggesting that the gay affirmative therapist’s primary objective ‘should be to help the person to become more truly themselves, which means among other things... more truly gay, developing conscious self-appreciation and integrity that includes the integration of gay thoughts and feelings.’ Browning (1987), meanwhile, cites the importance of helping facilitate a shift from an external to an internal locus of evaluation. This will allow the client to make choices and take risks that are right for them, even if they are not validated by others. In their respective work with lesbians and closeted gay fathers, Sophie (1987) and Dunne (1987) both found the use of role-plays to be particularly useful. Among other benefits, the technique allowed clients to explore realistic reactions to their disclosure and feel more prepared for the task, thus reducing anxiety. In addition, role-plays can help the client understand that while *they* have been aware of and

coming to terms with their sexuality for some time, it is often completely new information to those around them. As such, family and friends will also need time to adjust (Kiefer Hammersmith, 1987; Sophie, 1987).

Sanderson (cited in Davies, 2015) reminds therapists to be cognisant of the client's environments and support systems outside the counselling space, suggesting that 'if we're going to un-silence the voice [and] hear them roar... is it *safe* for them to roar?' Romesburg (1995) echoes this point, advising gay adolescents living with very conservative or religious parents to be prudent and maybe postpone disclosure. While on paper this may seem incongruent with a counselling process that seeks to help the gay client become their authentic selves, the therapist must respect that the non-judgemental bubble of their office can be a far cry from the lived reality outside the room. Therefore, they should not pressure a client towards coming out if there are justifiable reasons not to (Moon, 1996).

Regarding Ireland, it is noteworthy that over a quarter of Maycock and colleagues' (2009) sample had some experience of counselling, making it the most availed-of healthcare service after GP visits. Furthermore, LGBT Helpline report that in 2015 the majority of their calls looking for information were related to 'LGBT-friendly' counsellors and psychotherapists (Condon, 2016). This clearly highlights the demand for gay affirmative therapy in Ireland today. As one man ('Braveheart,' 2003, p.178) attests, 'I will always be grateful to my therapist for giving me the safety of her counselling room... The sense of relief was unbelievable: at long last I could be gay without the shame.'

*The seed that began inside me finally taught me to sing.
It became a source of love and beauty instead of my reason
For wanting to disappear from the planet.*

*The black evening contains a wild field of sky: coded with ancient
instruction.
The same sky will follow you for your entire life: use the scattered
and stunning stars
as a map to survive!*

(excerpt from *The Logic of Queerness: (Releasing Your Ivy Evening Within)* by Ron Palmer)

Conclusion

To conclude, the below sections will return to the basic proposal of the essay and consider if its validity has been sufficiently argued. Some suggestions for further research and action will also be presented, as well as a look to the future.

Summary - A Five-stage Model

This essay proposed that the Jungian concepts of persona and shadow can be successfully mapped onto the experience of being gay, providing an adjunct tool to existing methods of gay affirmative therapy. By way of both summary and demonstration of validity, the following is a suggested five-stage model of gay and lesbian development through the above lens. Though generalised and not intended as prescriptive, it nevertheless offers a concise overview of the main points raised throughout the essay that may be of interest and use to psychotherapists working with gay clients.

A proposed model of gay and lesbian identity development from a Jungian perspective

1. Gay Shame: The majority of gay people become aware of their orientation in puberty. By this point they will have unconsciously internalised society's negative shadow projections related to homosexuality and may experience shock, confusion, fear and repulsion upon realising that these messages may in fact describe themselves.

2. Shadow Formation: In keeping with the idea that we repress anything which does not tally with our desired self-image, they will move these negative ideas into their personal

shadow, where they will solidify as internalised homophobia. I would argue that the contents of this particular area of the shadow will not be unconscious – on the contrary, the young gay person is likely to be hyperaware and ashamed of their sense of difference.

3. Persona Implementation: The response to this shame is to deny the legitimacy of the shadow by adopting a persona that fits the social convention, namely by wearing the mask of heterosexuality. What is left in the middle is a torn and isolated ego – the grotesque contents of the shadow are too frightening to integrate, but the persona makes a fraud of them every day. This combination exacts a psychological toll.

4. Shadow Integration & Persona Dissolution: The only true way to overcome this double bind is to find the courage to take off the mask and meet the shadow, most commonly achieved through the process of coming out. This moves the gay person closer to individuation, or becoming their most authentic selves.

5. Shadow Remnants & Persona Fluidity: Due to its long gestation, shameful vestiges of the shadow may remain even after coming out, while the overarching societal assumption of heterosexuality makes coming out itself an ongoing occurrence. On this front, the gay person is likely to keep their straight mask close by at all times, and may voluntarily don it when circumstances demand (or *appear* to demand). This can lead to anger and embarrassment towards self or society that is unlikely to ever be fully resolved, but in no way precludes the individual from living a happy and fulfilling life as an out gay man or lesbian.

Suggestions for Further Research and Action

- Issues of training and education

There is a lack of representation of gay and lesbian issues in counselling and psychotherapy training courses. The passing of the marriage equality referendum has proven the inclusivity of Ireland's people – the psychotherapeutic field needs to reflect this and adequately prepare students for work with these groups, especially given the demand for ‘LGBT-friendly’ counsellors. Furthermore, the Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP) would be wise to follow the example of the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI), who recently published a best-practice guide for working with gay, lesbian and bisexual clients. This provides PSI members with a useful educative tool that also includes an explicit denouncement of so-called conversion therapies (PSI, 2015). Finally, schools should be encouraged to implement a formal anti-homophobic bullying policy and perhaps avail of initiatives such as Belong To’s *Stand Up!* awareness campaign on same.

- The experience of rural gay men and lesbians

Evidence suggests that certain areas of Ireland outside the urban bubble, particularly the midlands, are lacking in community support and other provisions for gay people. Research focussing on this group could provide a valuable snapshot of life on the margins of the gay community, thus also assisting counsellors based in these regions.

- The persona and shadow experience for bisexuals and transgender people

Due to practical constraints, the current study was unable to consider the experiences of bi or trans people. The application of the above model towards these groups might glean useful psychotherapeutic data, particularly in the areas of identity confusion and belonging – for example, bisexuals may experience stigmatisation from both gay and straight communities (Smiley, 1997).

- The effect of marriage equality

There is a positive correlation between the dismantling of structural prejudice, such as exclusionary laws, and improved mental well-being amongst minority populations (Rodgers, 2016). An American study (Hatzenbuehler 2014, cited in Rodgers, 2016) on LGB people in the State of Massachusetts found a reduction in health issues such as depression and hypertension in the twelve months following the state's legalisation of same-sex marriage. A similar study on Ireland's gay community in the wake of marriage equality could prove enlightening.

Moving Forward

In 1993, a survey showed that 64 percent of Irish people opposed the decriminalisation of homosexual acts (Bielenberg, 2015). Twenty-two years later, nearly the same percentage voted in favour of same-sex marriage equality. Seemingly out of nowhere, Ireland has found itself on the vanguard of global LGBT social change. In spite of the many challenges presented, Rodgers (2016) and Maycock and colleagues (2009) ultimately found that the Irish gay people in their samples were more happy than unhappy in their lives. They displayed

high levels of resilience, felt a greater sense of freedom, and were able to form positive meanings from their personal struggles. Furthermore, with easier access to information and increased support from society, members of the younger generation are coming out at an ever-earlier age – in fact, some don't go into the closet at all (Bielenberg, 2015; Sweeney & Cashin, 2014; Ferriter, 2009). It is highly possible that future generations' experiences of the persona and shadow will be very different from now. In the meantime, Irish counsellors and psychotherapists can offer a confidential, non-judgemental, gay-affirmative space for those facing difficulties around their sexuality, one in which they can safely explore their identities and hopefully move closer to individuation. As with any client, the therapist may experience this duty of care as a challenge, a privilege, or both, but whichever the case, we must show members of our gay and lesbian community the utmost respect for the road they have had to travel.

We shall conclude as we started, with Ursula Halligan (2015, May 24) – hopeful for the future but with a solemn eye to the past, her words are for every gay person in Ireland who has been courageous enough to become who they truly are:

I spent decades passing as straight for fear of being hated.

The day I stopped pretending, I found I was loved.

I hope that's true of other gay people.

And that they don't waste decades pretending.

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Appendix I

Ron Palmer: *The Logic of Queerness: (Releasing Your Ivy Evening Within)* (2004)

Evening will find itself in me. - James Joyce (*Ulysses*)

A feeling like the onset of an evening: pregnant with growling
thunder
will find itself growing inside you. Yes it will begin with a growling
inside your body.
After the thunder calms and jells: gathering sound into a fluttering
green angelfish.
It will begin to move slow-motion with translucent wings.
And you will feel an underwater waving trigger a transformation
(Yes, it will happen inside your body) awakening your fleeing
desire.

It will happen in your bed, it will happen in the mall,
It will happen watching television, it will happen
In front of your computer, it will happen
At the dinner table, it will happen in Math class, it will happen
In the car at a stop light as you sit with your mother waiting for
your life to change.

And yes, you will say nothing: no, you will not say one word about
it to anyone.

The fluttering green angelfish will begin dropping
Snippets of desire like tiny green seeds
Between the glass walls of your mind - floating angelically
Like a hand made of green jelly - numbing your consciousness
With a python's pointed precision.

The logic of queerness never involves fairness. Shame: wounded
Until one of those bright green seeds
Appears one day in your mouth
while you are brushing your teeth,
Sticking out your tongue
while you are standing naked
In front of your bathroom mirror,
yes, you will be frozen with fear.
You will look at yourself directly in your eyes

and say, no, absolutely not,
And again your body will go
Frozen with fear. Go further.
You will survive on your own planning.

This newly found seed strange and slick will grow like an invisible
ivy - it will grow from your mouth - invisible to all except
those who have a twin seed hidden under their own terrified
tongues.

The invisible ivy will slowly creep over your ears, wind its way
around your fears and slowly wrap around your throat. Perhaps
you will want to give in
and allow the ivy to sap your strength
and strangle you, yes, perhaps you will
let your self be choked by what the seed has made.
Or perhaps you will want to sing,
make a song of the seed,
yes, seek out the others
who are surely singing the same quiet song.

Your silence will not protect you, Audre Lorde wrote, and this I
learned to be true:

Your silence will depend on you. It will also depend on what
country, what city,
What town you live in. It will depend on the laws that have been
made and re-made to make you Fear your desire, or worse, laws
that have been made to prevent you
From ever finding your match, your partner, your love who makes
you giddy
With life, the one you found with the bright green seed hiding
under the tongue.

Perhaps you will want to burn down your desire with your
volcanic rage: a rage
That has swelled like a giant translucent lava wave
Inside you with each joke that you hear about boys who like boys.
Or girls who like girls. Or boys who act like feminine girls or girls
Who act like masculine boys or someone who's just different from
anyone
In your family. And the town,
Someone who wears all black or all pink or all brown.
Or someone almost exactly like you who's just not sure yet
Who will be the one to love you.

Perhaps you will want to shave your desire down
With your shame; perhaps you will want your desire to drown
in its own fear of singing.

It will swim its way back to the back of your throat, it will grow
back double
And make a mental moat around your consciousness, trapping
desire
Within your force-field like a lonesome queen waving a pink silk
scarf
From the stone tower of your mind.

Perhaps you will not want to free the seed to grow
Where it wants to grow, perhaps you will
Want no one to know of your seed's need to grow. Instead you will
Construct a permanent smile made from your own hiding:
perhaps you will
Try to burn back the ivy that keeps growing from that original
seed of desire.
But you will want to survive. I will tell you how I survived.

Finally, after years of hating myself even though I was a star
football player. After years Of hating myself, even though I won
medals in track. After years
Of hating myself, even though I made high honors in high school.
After years
Of hating myself, even though I was king of my prom. After years
Of hating myself, even though I had friends and family who loved
me:
I almost ran out of breath as the invisible ivy was getting tighter
and tighter like a tether
Of sad snow around my neck. Finally,
I let all the seeds grow, grow, and grow
Until they kept growing and covered me with ivy so strong
And vibrant and unique that it became my reason for living.
The seed that began inside me finally taught me to sing.
It became a source of love and beauty instead of my reason
For wanting to disappear from the planet.
The black evening contains a wild field of sky: coded with ancient
instruction.
The same sky will follow you for your entire life: use the scattered
and stunning stars
as a map to survive!

Appendix II

Panti's *Noble Call* speech at the Abbey Theatre (February 1, 2014)

(Transcribed in Connolly, 2014)

Hello. My name is Panti and for the benefit of the visually impaired or the incredibly naïve, I am a drag queen, a performer, and an accidental and occasional gay rights activist.

And as you may have already gathered, I am also painfully middle-class. My father was a country vet, I went to a nice school, and afterwards to that most middle-class of institutions - art college. And although this may surprise some of you, I have always managed to find gainful employment in my chosen field - gender discombobulation.

So the grinding, abject poverty so powerfully displayed in tonight's performance is something I can thankfully say I have no experience of.

But oppression is something I can relate to. Oh, I'm not comparing my experience to Dublin workers of 1913, but I do know what it feels like to be put in your place.

Have you ever been standing at a pedestrian crossing when a car drives by and in it are a bunch of lads, and they lean out the window and they shout "Fag!" and throw a milk carton at you?

Now it doesn't really hurt. It's just a wet carton and anyway they're right – I am a fag. But it feels oppressive.

When it really does hurt, is afterwards. Afterwards I wonder and worry and obsess over what was it about me, what was it they saw in me? What was it that gave me away? And I hate myself for wondering that. It feels oppressive and the next time I'm at a pedestrian crossing I check myself to see what is it about me that "gives the gay away" and I check myself to make sure I'm not doing it this time.

Have any of you ever come home in the evening and turned on the television and there is a panel of people - nice people, respectable people, smart people, the kind of people who make good neighbourly neighbours and write for newspapers. And they are having a reasoned debate about you. About what kind of a person you are, about whether you are capable of being a good parent, about whether you want to destroy marriage, about whether you are safe around children, about whether God herself thinks you are an abomination, about whether in fact you are "intrinsically disordered". And even the nice TV presenter lady who you feel like you know thinks it's perfectly ok that they are all having this reasonable debate about who you are and what rights you "deserve".

And that feels oppressive.

Have you ever been on a crowded train with your gay friend and a small part of you is cringing because he is being SO gay and you find yourself trying to compensate by butching up or nudging the conversation onto "straighter" territory? This is you who have spent 35 years trying to be the best gay possible and yet still a small part of you is embarrassed by his gayness.

And I hate myself for that. And that feels oppressive. And when I'm standing at the pedestrian lights I am checking myself.

Have you ever gone into your favourite neighbourhood café with the paper that you buy every day, and you open it up and inside is a 500-word opinion written by a nice middle-class woman, the kind of woman who probably gives to charity, the kind of woman that you would be happy to leave your children with. And she is arguing so reasonably about whether you should be treated less than everybody else, arguing that you should be given fewer rights than everybody else. And when the woman at the next table gets up and excuses herself to squeeze by you with a smile you wonder, "Does she think that about me too?"

And that feels oppressive. And you go outside and you stand at the pedestrian crossing and you check yourself and I hate myself for that.

Have you ever turned on the computer and seen videos of people just like you in far away countries, and countries not far away at all, being beaten and imprisoned and tortured and murdered because they are just like you?

And that feels oppressive.

Three weeks ago I was on the television and I said that I believed that people who actively campaign for gay people to be treated less or differently are, in my gay opinion, homophobic. Some people, people who actively campaign for gay people to be treated less under the law took great exception at this characterisation and threatened legal action against me and RTÉ. RTÉ, in its wisdom, decided incredibly quickly to hand over a huge sum of money to make it go away. I haven't been so lucky.

And for the last three weeks I have been lectured by heterosexual people about what homophobia is and who should be allowed identify it. Straight people - ministers, senators, lawyers, journalists - have lined up to tell me what homophobia is and what I am allowed to feel oppressed by. People who have never experienced homophobia in their lives, people who

have never checked themselves at a pedestrian crossing, have told me that unless I am being thrown in prison or herded onto a cattle train, then it is not homophobia.

And that feels oppressive.

So now Irish gay people find ourselves in a ludicrous situation where not only are we not allowed to say publicly what we feel oppressed by, we are not even allowed to think it because our definition has been disallowed by our betters.

And for the last three weeks I have been denounced from the floor of parliament to newspaper columns to the seething morass of internet commentary for "hate speech" because I dared to use the word "homophobia". And a jumped-up queer like me should know that the word "homophobia" is no longer available to gay people. Which is a spectacular and neat Orwellian trick because now it turns out that gay people are not the victims of homophobia - homophobes are.

But I want to say that it is not true. I don't hate you.

I do, it is true, believe that almost all of you are probably homophobes. But I'm a homophobe. It would be incredible if we weren't. To grow up in a society that is overwhelmingly homophobic and to escape unscathed would be miraculous. So I don't hate you because you are homophobic. I actually admire you. I admire you because most of you are only a bit homophobic. Which all things considered is pretty good going.

But I do sometimes hate myself. I hate myself because I fucking check myself while standing at pedestrian crossings. And sometimes I hate you for doing that to me.

But not right now. Right now, I like you all very much for giving me a few moments of your time. And I thank you for it.

Appendix III

Ursula Halligan: *Referendum led me to tell truth about myself*

(The Irish Times, May 15, 2015)

“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter” – Martin Luther King.

I was a good Catholic girl, growing up in 1970s Ireland where homosexuality was an evil perversion. It was never openly talked about but I knew it was the worst thing on the face of the earth.

So when I fell in love with a girl in my class in school, I was terrified. Rummaging around in the attic a few weeks ago, an old diary brought me right back to December 20th, 1977.

“These past few months must have been the darkest and gloomiest I have ever experienced in my entire life,” my 17-year-old self wrote.

“There have been times when I have even thought about death, of escaping from this world, of sleeping untouched by no-one forever. I have been so depressed, so sad and so confused. There seems to be no one I can turn to, not even God. I’ve poured out my emotions, my innermost thoughts to him and get no relief or so-called spiritual grace. At times I feel I am talking to nothing, that no God exists. I’ve never felt like this before, so empty, so meaningless, so utterly, utterly miserable.”

Because of my upbringing, I was revolted at the thought that I was in love with a member of my own sex. This contradiction within me nearly drove me crazy. These two strands of thought jostled within me pulling me in opposite directions.

Plagued with fear

I loved a girl and I knew that what wasn't right; my mind was constantly plagued with the fear that I was a lesbian. I hated myself. I felt useless and worthless and very small and stupid. I had one option, and only one option. I would be "normal", and that meant locking myself in the closet and throwing away the key.

I played the dating game. I feigned interest in men. I invented boyfriends. I listened silently to snide remarks about homosexuals. Tried to smile at mimicry of stereotypical gay behaviour.

In the 1970s, homophobia was rampant and uninhibited. Political correctness had yet to arrive. Homosexuals were faggots, queers, poofs, freaks, deviants, unclean, unnatural, mentally ill, second class and defective humans. They were society's defects. Biological errors. They were other people. I couldn't possibly be one of them.

Over the years I watched each of my siblings date, party, get engaged, get married and take for granted all the joys and privileges of their State-acknowledged relationship.

My coping strategy was to pour myself into my studies and later into my work. I didn't socialise much because I had this horrible secret that must never come out. It was a strategy that worked until I'd fall in love again with a woman and the whole emotional rollercoaster of

bliss, pain, withdrawal and denial resumed. It was a pattern that would repeat itself over the years.

And never once did I openly express my feelings. I suppressed everything and buried myself in books or work. I was careful how I talked and behaved. Nothing was allowed slip. I never knew what it was like to live spontaneously, to go with the flow, to trust my instincts . . . I certainly couldn't trust my instincts.

Repressing my humanity

For years I told no one because I couldn't even tell myself. It was a place I didn't want to go. It was too scary; too shameful. I couldn't cope with it. I buried it.

Emotionally, I have been in a prison since the age of 17; a prison where I lived a half-life, repressing an essential part of my humanity, the expression of my deepest self; my instinct to love.

It's a part that heterosexual people take for granted, like breathing air. The world is custom-tailored for them. At every turn society assumes and confirms heterosexuality as the norm. This culminates in marriage when the happy couple is showered with an outpouring of overwhelming social approval.

For me, there was no first kiss; no engagement party; no wedding. And up until a short time ago no hope of any of these things. Now, at the age of 54, in a (hopefully) different Ireland, I wish I had broken out of my prison cell a long time ago. I feel a sense of loss and sadness for precious time spent wasted in fear and isolation.

Homophobia was so deeply embedded in my soul, I resisted facing the truth about myself, preferring to live in the safety of my prison. In the privacy of my head, I had become a roaring, self-loathing homophobe, resigned to going to my grave with my shameful secret. And I might well have done that if the referendum hadn't come along.

Now, I can't quite believe the pace of change that's sweeping across the globe in support of gay marriage. I never thought I'd see the day that a Government Minister would come out as gay and encounter almost nothing but praise for his bravery. But that day did come, and the work done down the decades by people like David Norris, Katharine Zappone, Ann-Louise Gilligan and Colm O'Gorman made me realise that possibilities existed that I'd never believed would ever exist.

I told a friend and the world didn't end. I told my mother, and the world didn't end.

Then I realised that I could leave the prison completely or stay in the social equivalent of an open prison. The second option would mean telling a handful of people but essentially go on as before, silently colluding with the prejudices that still find expression in casual social moments.

It's the easier of the two options, particularly for those close to me. Because those who love you can cope with you coming out, but they're wary of you "making an issue" of it.

Game-changer

The game-changer was the marriage equality referendum. It pointed me toward the first option: telling the truth to anyone who cares. And I knew if I was going to tell the truth, I had

to tell the whole truth and reveal my backing for a Yes vote. For me, the two are intrinsically linked.

That means TV3 taking me off referendum coverage. The rules say they must, and when I told them my situation, they reorganised their coverage in half a day.

Twenty years ago or 30 years ago, it would have taken more courage than I had to tell the truth. Today, it's still difficult but it can be done with hope – hope that most people in modern Ireland embrace diversity and would understand that I'm trying to be helpful to other gay people leading small, frightened, incomplete lives. If my story helps even one 17-year-old school girl, struggling with her sexuality, it will have been worth it.

As a person of faith and a Catholic, I believe a Yes vote is the most Christian thing to do. I believe the glory of God is the human being fully alive and that this includes people who are gay.

If Ireland votes Yes, it will be about much more than marriage. It will end institutional homophobia. It will say to gay people that they belong, that it's safe to surface and live fully human, loving lives. If it's true that 10 per cent of any population are gay, then there could be 400,000 gay people out there; many of them still living in emotional prisons. Any of them could be your son, daughter, brother, sister, mother, father or best friend. Set them free. Allow them live full lives.

Appendix IV

Carrie Brownstein: *No Normal*

(*The New Yorker*, October 12, 2015)

One of my earliest childhood memories is my father taking me in the evening to Samena Swim & Recreation Club in Bellevue. It was just him and me. I'd taken swim lessons and could hang out by myself with the help of water wings, goggles, and a kickboard while my father swam laps in a nearby lane. I loved the echo in the cavernous room, the way the sounds and voices melded into each other, gurgling, muted, watercolors for the ears. I spun around, did the dead man's float, watched pale, distorted legs dangle down into the blue. I kept one eye on my dad and another on the pool's edge, my two sources of safety.

Too young to get changed in the women's locker room alone, I'd accompany my father to the men's area. Once my clothes were tugged back over my arms and legs, sticky from inadequate toweling off, dampness seeping through in the creases but warm nonetheless, I'd wait for my father to shower and dress. As I sat there I wasn't looking anywhere in particular: at the rubber mats on the floor, the slats in the bench, at pale toes like gnarled gingerroots, calves with hair worn off in patches from dress socks, and knees everywhere, those scrunched-up, featureless faces. "Stop staring," my dad would insist over and over again, sounding admonishing and embarrassed. I kept my head down. Later I realized that this reminder, this reprimand, was likely something my father was saying to himself more than to me. The shame of looking, of wanting to look.

And then there was that time we were pulling the car into the garage and from the backseat I yelled the word "penis" for no reason other than that I was eight years old and at that age it's fun to call out the words for genitalia in a loud voice. One day I'd come home from

kindergarten and repeated a term I'd heard on the playground: "motherfucker two-ball bitch." Whether it was at my ignorant daring or at the perplexity of the phrase itself, I'm not sure, but my parents laughed. Here I was now going for the encore. But saying "penis" in front of my father, while he was trapped in a car with me, and thus trapped with that word, and whatever he pictured in his mind when he heard that word, whatever feelings he felt about that word, that thing, resulted in me being dragged upstairs and getting my mouth washed out with soap.

Oh, we also received the International Male catalog, a men's underwear catalog that is essentially a showcase for big European cocks.

Only in retrospect can I find clues to my father's gayness. Sometimes the dull detritus of our pasts become glaring strands once you realize they form a pattern, a lighted path to the present. I have to turn over and reimagine certain moments from my childhood and make them conform to a different narrative, a different outcome.

When my sister and I were both away at college, my father, still living in the house we grew up in, informed us that he was going to start taking in "boarders." I imagined something out of a W. Somerset Maugham novel: doilies, stale biscuits, afternoon tea, a collision of international seekers. Except our house was in the suburbs, carpeted, with an open layout, replete with landings and those bulked-up banisters that were good for jumping off when adults weren't around, or for hide-and-seek stealthiness. The playroom, with its sloped ceiling, old striped couch, and first-generation CD player, would be the "room for rent." The idea of a boarder seemed odd, even seedy. I was indignant. This was a childhood home, not a hostel!

It wasn't for financial reasons. My father's rationale was that the house was unnecessarily big for one person—true. And empty—also true. I suppose he was staving off loneliness. They

were always men or college-aged boys. They were unlike my father: One was a snowboarder with beachy, blond hair whose family owned a water sports business. Another was a part-time musician who sold me an Ampeg amplifier head and cabinet that he was storing in the garage. *My garage!* One man I know nothing about save for the fact that his car was repossessed right there in the driveway. If they had one thing in common it was that all of them were slightly wayward, rough-hewn, jocose. I would occasionally come home on the weekends and no longer feel like the house was a retreat, or even mine—I was simply crashing there like anyone else. There was a new sense of transience to the house, of transition. It was a husk, emptied of sentimentality, populated by strangers, and by that I don't just mean these men, I also mean my father. I am certain nothing happened between the renters and my dad. The men, the boys, were unaware, in between and on their way. But for my father this was a rehearsal, a way of circling around a new kind of male intimacy.

My father was a corporate lawyer. He went to work in a suit and tie. He had a secretary. He left the house before seven a.m. His professional life felt generic, like a backdrop, a signifier more than a life: office job. I knew very little about what he did. He traveled to China, Russia, Australia, sending home postcards and returning with stuffed koala bears or wooden nesting dolls. He collected toy trucks and paraphernalia with company insignia that he displayed atop credenzas or that my sister and I would grudgingly mix in with our other toys, as if we didn't want to sully our Cabbage Patch dolls or My Little Ponies with crass corporate sponsorship. My dad had work friends whom we saw infrequently. It was all trousers and ties. Grays and browns. There was a sterility to it that I found both exotic and comforting. The office was in a nineteen-seventies high-rise next to a mall. A swift-moving elevator, a destination we'd reach undeterred, a telephone number I had memorized, a secretary who knew my name.

My father wasn't just taciturn—it was like he didn't want to be heard.

I don't know if he had nothing to say or if he didn't know what to say. Perhaps his reticence came from not being able to name what or who he was, or what he felt. So he stayed quiet, and he waited for the words to find him.

This is what I knew about my father: He grew up in Evanston, Illinois, outside of Chicago. He attended Duke University and then the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign for law school. He has one brother. He was the assistant coach of my soccer team, and the head coach of my sister's. He ran marathons. He mowed the lawn. He was always working on something called a sump pump in the crawl space. He was slight and handsome, dark-eyed, wide-eyed, wide-nostrilled, looking curious and confounded, boyish. He was stern yet timid, a disciplinarian with no follow-through, self-conscious, not prone to affection, undemonstrative. He liked liver pâté. He had a mustache and then he didn't; I cried when he shaved it off because I didn't know he had a space between the bottom of his nose and his upper lip, like a pale secret.

My father was hard to know, and gave little indication that there was much to know. He claimed he remembered almost nothing about his childhood. He only ever recalled one incident. It was about the first time he came home from college on holiday break. He was sitting in his parents' home, waiting for my grandfather to return from work. When my grandfather came through the door, he greeted the family dog first, even though he and the hound had only been apart for the day and my father had been gone for months. That's the story.

My father came out to me in the summer of 1998. I was headed to Seattle from Olympia to pick up a friend at the airport. She wasn't arriving until almost midnight, so the plan was to stop in on my father and then visit some friends after their soundcheck at the Crocodile Café.

My father was at his first apartment in Seattle. He had sold the Redmond house, a nontraumatic event, probably for the best considering it had become a house for wayward youth. I was relieved he was out of the suburbs, especially Redmond, changed so fiercely by Microsoft, transformed into a corporate headquarters, indistinguishable from the brand. It was as though you could see an architect's model as you walked around; it had an exemplary quality, both a place and a placeholder.

Seattle felt like a good spot for my father. Though he'd been living there for a while now, his apartment had that strange first-apartment feel, always odd for someone you associate with the accumulation of things. Parents are supposed to be our storage facilities: insert a memory, let them hold on to it for you. Leave behind stuffed animals and school projects, report cards and clothes, they keep them so you don't have to. I knew that wasn't part of the bargain with my family. I've thrown out piles of things, taken them to the dump and never looked back. But still, to see my dad in a blank space, it only seemed to make him more blurry, like he had just appeared on a canvas, before the background was filled in. His sphere was borderless, and the sense of nowhere made me feel alone, unbound. I'd often felt that around my relatives, but now I felt it anew and acutely. Like the first time my dad bought Christmas ornaments and I realized that after wanting to celebrate Christmas for so long, it wasn't about having a tree, it was about having a box in the basement or attic or garage, something that we could return to over and over again, something that said, this is us and this is where we were last year, and this is where we'll stay, and this is where we'll pile on memories, over and over again, until there are so many memories that it's blinding, the brightness of family, the way

love and nurturing is like a color you can't name because it's so new. And then my father went out and bought cheap ornaments and we took them out of boxes and plastic and I realized it wasn't Christmas that I wanted. What I wanted was a family.

So here was my father, in this white apartment with textured walls and thick carpeting, and the scant amount of furniture and paintings he'd brought from Redmond, looking like interlopers, like imposters, neither here nor there. And we're sitting in this living room and I have no idea who he is and he says, "So I guess I'm coming out to you." He said it like that, in a sort of meta way, as if he were along for a ride that his new self was taking him on. Which was typical, like he was just a sidekick in his own life, a shadow, though I'm assuming it was more of a linguistic fumbling, not knowing exactly how to come out or what words to use.

I was used to this sort of presentational mode at this point. What I heard was "Your mother is going into the hospital," or "Your mother is moving out," or "I have cancer," and then again a few years later, "I have cancer." I was used to being sat down and presented with life-altering information and taking it with expected nonchalance. This was me asking my friends' parents about MS all over again. My role was to be factual and professional, like a reporter. Emotions were not part of the equation. So, tell me, Dad, how did you know?

What my father explained next was basically the history of the Internet, at least in terms of how we use it for social media and networking. In fact, if it weren't for the Internet, I don't know if my father would have realized, or been able to acknowledge, that he was gay. I thought of Microsoft taking over Redmond, and now gayness taking over my father.

He began in chat rooms. International ones. Asking questions. Talking with other men, many of them married, he made sure to point out. Eventually, it was U.S. chat rooms, exchanging

stories, feelings, desires, telling of trysts and transgressions, confusion, shame, lust. Eventually he was chatting with other men in Seattle. The truth was a satellite, the picture getting clearer, circling and homing in, and then he was close enough to touch it. He met a male nurse named Russ, a friend, someone he could confide in. And there was a Northwest men's running group. He was allowing the truth to get closer: it was the galaxy at first, then global, then the continent, then local, and finally the shape of him, settling in. I don't know what that must have felt like, to realize you have a body at the age of fifty-five.

The year before, my father had been diagnosed with cancer for the second time. Kidney. I remembered that right before his surgery he had taken a business trip to Texas. It seemed strange that his company wouldn't send someone else, that he would insist on traveling so close to the surgery. I passed it off as stoicism, not wanting cancer to interrupt his life or schedule, or just denial. But that night in Seattle he told me that on an earlier trip he had met a couple in Houston, both lawyers, gay. The trip he took right before his surgery was to come out to them. In case he didn't make it. To strangers. In Texas. He put down a small "x" on a map, a little scrawl of visibility. Then he came home, the doctors removed the cancer, and he had to live. More important, he wanted to.

I took the news better than my sister. She felt abandoned a second time: first my mother, and now this. But I, too, felt confused. If he wasn't himself during my childhood, then what was my childhood? What was I? When someone says, "That wasn't me, *this* is me," then I wonder how was I myself around a you who wasn't? My father had been the constant, the territory, and now I felt like he was rescinding. There was no longer a placeholder. I would have to discover him anew.

We want our parents to be the norm from which we deviate. So when my dad came out, my instinct was that I needed to husband-up and get married. As if my family wasn't freaky

enough. Me: adrift. My sister: unmarried. My mom: ? And now my dad. Who would fly the flag of normality? My sister bore this burden more heavily than I did. But I immediately felt like I should be popping out kids within a few years of my dad realizing he was gay. Let our parents be anorexic and gay! That shit is for teenagers. My sister and I would be the adults. We would be conventional, conservative even. Guns, God, country, and my contrarian, reactionary self. (This phase lasted about ten minutes.)

When my father came out to his mom, my grandmother said, “You waited for your father to die, why couldn’t you have waited for me to die?” I knew then that I never want to contribute to the corrosiveness of wanting someone to stay hidden. Despite all my initial conflicts about trying to reconcile the father I had as a child to the one I have now, I am thankful that he is happy, that he did not waste another second. Now there is someone to know.

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I set you free – now run along.