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**Learning to construct our identities over the life course:  
A study with lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender adults  
in Scotland**

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**Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy - PhD**

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**Abstract**

To date, adult educational research has had a limited focus on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered (LGBT) adults and the learning processes in which they engage across the life course. Adopting a biographical and life history methodology, this study aimed to critically explore the potentially distinctive nature and impact of how, when and where LGBT adults learn to construct their identities over their lives. In-depth, semi-structured interviews, dialogue and discussion with LGBT individuals and groups provided rich narratives that reflect shifting, diverse and multiple ways of identifying and living as LGBT. Participants engage in learning in unique ways that play a significant role in the construction and expression of such identities, that in turn influence how, when and where learning happens. Framed largely by complex heteronormative forces, learning can have a negative, distortive impact that deeply troubles any balanced, positive sense of being LGBT, leading to self-censoring, alienation and in some cases, hopelessness. However, learning is also more positively experiential, critically reflective, inventive and queer in nature. This can transform how participants understand their sexual identities and the lifewide spaces in which they learn, engendering agency and resilience. Intersectional perspectives reveal learning that participants struggle with, but can reconcile the disjuncture between evolving LGBT and other myriad identities as parents, Christians, teachers, nurses, academics, activists and retirees. The study's main contributions lie in three areas. A focus on LGBT experience can contribute to the creation of new opportunities to develop intergenerational learning processes. The study also extends the possibilities for greater criticality in older adult education theory, research and practice, based on the continued, rich learning in which participants engage post-work and in later life. Combined with this, there is scope to further explore the nature of 'life-deep learning' for other societal groups, brought by combined religious, moral, ideological and social learning that guides action, beliefs, values, and expression of identity. The LGBT adults in this study demonstrate engagement in distinct forms of life-deep learning to navigate social and moral opprobrium. From this they gain hope, self-respect, empathy with others, and deeper self-knowledge.

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**Author's declaration**

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Chris McAllister".

Signature

Printed name Christopher McAllister

## Chapter 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Background to the study

... we [gay people] have a different culture ... we really are different people ... we think differently ... we behave differently and that in our private lives we behave extraordinarily differently.... And we have different ideals, we have different ways in which we live our lives ...  
(Ian, b. 1951)

[Gay] people my generation have come through quite a number of battles in order to be honest and open and that you know, that's being within a whole sphere of life, within a family setting, within a church setting, within an educational setting and within an employment setting. Just within a society setting really. So for me those battles have made me be stronger I think, more determined, still angry at the injustice of people having to pretend to be what they are not, because of the ridicule and oppression that is still around.

(Billy, b.1960)

... there is constant learning about how we are in society - reinventing ourselves, finding our niche. That's a whole learning thing. It's possibly more prominent for LGBT people than maybe for others - it's still an issue - it's still a marginalised group. We are constantly learning the best way to interact with society. For me, as a lesbian what is the best way to do that...?

(Tina, b. 1966)

This study aims to critically explore the potentially distinctive nature and impact of how, when and where lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered - LGBT<sup>1</sup>- adults learn to construct their identities across their lives.

In North America, the last twenty years have seen the burgeoning of theoretically rich exploration and varied empirical study of the implications of LGBT issues for adult education practice and theory. Queer theory's disruption and destabilising of any fixed notions of sexual identity is increasingly used as an interpretive frame (Sullivan 2006), where its positioning in adult education has aimed to challenge heteronormative conditions that limit learning (Hill 1995, 1996; Grace and Hill 2009; King and Biro 2006; Ruffolo 2006, 2009). The landscape has been more dominated

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<sup>1</sup>As an identifier of sexual orientation, and gender status, LGBT is problematic. As this study will explore, there is much on-going debate and contestation as to the meaningfulness of the respective identity categories, in and of themselves, and their inter-relatedness. However, LGBT is used throughout the study as participants specifically adopted, and felt comfortable using these categories in relation to themselves and their life experiences.

however, by North American studies concerned with LGBT youth and teacher experience in formal, compulsory educational contexts (Grace and Wells 2009; Jennings 2010; Linville 2009; McCready 2011; Meyer 2010; Sumara and Davis 1999). This extends to studies of sexualities in the context of Higher Education (HE) (Browne and Nash 2011; Khyatt 2002; Mizzi and Stebbins 2010; Talburt 2007; Talburt and Rasmussen 2010).

Though not as extensive, educational research in the UK has followed similar trajectories to focus more on sexuality and learning in school-based educational environments (Epstein, O'Flynn and Telford 2003; Nixon and Givens 2011), while studies of university contexts are evolving. The latter have predominantly consisted of large scale campus climate surveys and small scale ethnographic studies influenced and directed by the central concerns of LGBT studies as these have evolved since the 1970s: the politics of identity, increased visibility and awareness raising of LGBT issues, responses to coming out, educational equity, celebration of openness and diversity and ending homophobia (Ellis 2008; Epstein *et al.* 2003; Taulke-Jonson 2010; Skelton 1999, 2000, 2002). However, to date there has been minimal adult educational and lifelong learning research in the UK that focuses on L,G, B and T<sup>2</sup> adults and the learning processes in which they engage over their lifetimes. Insights into mid to later life learning experiences in the context of Scotland are particularly absent, providing the impetus for this study.

The participants' extracts above introduce the major themes and questions with which I aim to critically engage in this study: the nature of LGBT identities; the nature and impact of how, when and where LGBT adults learn and how learning shapes their identities across the life course. The nature of LGBT identity is raised by Ian's reflections as quoted above. They are a strong assertion of his life experience as a gay man now in his 60s. For Ian, his sexuality defines who he is, and is understood by its inherent distinctiveness

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<sup>2</sup> B and T: the study has aimed to be as representative as possible of the diversity of the LGBT community. While I have engaged with transgendered and bisexual experience in analyses of post work and later life, the unfolding biographies and life histories focus largely on lesbian and gay experiences.

and difference. This extends across his sense of cultural belonging, how he thinks and behaves, his intimate life, the values that are important to him and in how he lives. Billy's commentary adds to Ian's views on the nature of LGBT identities. His sexual identity is characterised as resilient which has to be openly and honestly expressed. Billy also provides initial insight into the study's other major themes of the nature and impact of how, when and where LGBT adults might learn to construct their identities. His reference to "battles" across several settings to become strong, but also angry at continued oppression of other LGBT people, suggests engagement in learning processes that have been transformative and that are on-going. Tina brings the themes of learning and LGBT identity construction together. Her thoughts suggest that engagement in learning is about being re-inventive of her lesbian identity and how she can live in society. Learning therefore has particular purposes. This is because as a lesbian she is constantly learning how to interact with society and develop space in which she feels comfortable. In their respective ways, Ian, Billy and Tina provide a LGBT voice to the philosophical foundations that underpin this study's exploration. This focuses on the close relationship between ontological issues - the nature of our lived realities, who we are and become - and epistemological issues of how we are able to know, understand and construct meaning of reality and of who we are (Alvesson and Sköldböck 2009; Crotty 1998).

## **1.2 Philosophical foundations - it is the person who learns to be and become**

The philosophical foundation for this study is in part that '... who we are is inseparable from what we know ...' and that through multiple forms of learning 'our identities [and] subjectivities' are created and recreated (Kincheloe 2008: 250). I am also informed by Jarvis' (2009, 2012) extensive study of, and evolving theorisation on the nature of human learning. I suggest that this has particular relevance to this study. Jarvis defines human learning as involving:

'... the combination of processes throughout a lifetime whereby the whole person - body (genetic, physical and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, meaning, beliefs and senses) - experiences social situations, the content of which is then

transformed cognitively, emotively or practically (or through any combination) and integrated into the individual person's biography resulting in a continually changing (or more experienced) person' (2012:103).

His central thesis is that learning is experiential and social, but also existential, where it is about the person being and becoming over a lifetime or continually 'learning to be me' (Jarvis 2009: 21). As such, Jarvis adds a further perspective to that developed by Kincheloe. He identifies '... the crucial philosophical issue about learning...' (24). For him, 'Fundamentally it is the person who learns and it is the changed person who is the outcome of the learning,' (*ibid.*).

Jarvis (2009:30) considers the whole person as encompassing a life history across which she/he interacts with the life-world. The lifeworld designates all dimensions of social life in which everyday communication is framed, for example in the family and through culture (Jütten 2011). The lifeworld can also be considered as,

'... the background rules, assumptions, and common sense understandings that structure how we perceive the world and how we communicate that perception to those around us' (Brookfield 2005: 240).

To the whole person being about knowledge, skills, attitudes, emotions, beliefs, values and senses, Jarvis adds identity. It is through learning that each of these are changed and further developed. For this study I explore in particular what might be different and why in the learning in which the LGBT-identified person engages throughout a lifetime.

### **1.3 The parameters for understanding learning over a lifetime: lifelong, lifewide and life-deep**

To take account of the potentially multiple, contested and combined forms of learning that happen over the lifetime of LGBT participants I also adopt definitional boundaries that are as broad as possible. This also necessitates drawing on insights from a broad theoretical base that encompasses critical, post modern and poststructural perspectives, among others. In terms of

lifelong learning I include all potential informal, non-formal and formal learning processes in which LGBT adults have engaged across their respective lifespans, in diverse circumstances and settings, from childhood to later life (Billet 2010; Burke and Jackson 2007; Sutherland and Crowther 2006). In so doing I am informed by the promise of the ‘lifelong learning imagination’ which is implied in the opening extracts above and viewed as an on-going process that:

‘... enables people to understand their personal circumstances and the habits of mind, knowledge and skills they possess...that learning is an activity that takes place in many different settings, informal as well as formal’ (Sutherland and Crowther 2006:4).

The study also aligns with Hager’s (2012: 783) argument for a ‘maximalist’ and pluralist view of lifelong learning. This recognises that valuable learning happens in many ways, a mix of formal but also important informal learning, across an individual’s lifespan. Jarvis (1985) establishes a useful delineation of how learning may be broadly understood as informal, formal but also non-formal. Informal learning refers to processes in which the person acquires knowledge, skills, attitudes and aptitude from daily living. Formal learning refers to processes happening in the formal, institutionalized and hierarchical education system, which is graded and accredited through gaining qualifications. To these categories, Hager (2012) adds that informal learning allows a more nuanced understanding of lifelong learning. This moves beyond a narrow focus on formal learning activities and accumulation of accredited, course-based awards. Rather, informal learning is characterised by being ‘emergent, contingent, opportunistic, tacit, contextualised and holistic’ (783). Informal learning thus allows us to see lifelong learning as an on-going journey of becoming and reconstruction. Jarvis (1985) further explains that non-formal learning encompasses any systematic, organised, educational activity carried on outside the formal educational systems to provide selected types of learning to particular sub- groups of the population. For this study, the nature and impact of non-formal learning may be particularly relevant if participants have been engaged in LGBT-focused voluntary groups and/or political activism. As above, Jarvis’ (2009, 2012) more recent, evolving definition that has an existential, social and experiential basis, illustrates an

integration of these forms of learning.

Lifelong learning is also understood as a contested field, where crucially, 'What lifelong learning means, what it stands for, or against, needs to be debated and justified' (Crowther, 2012: 801). This study is thus informed by on-going critical enquiry that radically problematises the uncritical, narrow, homogenous conceptualisations of lifelong learning which dominant neo-liberal educational policy and practice have created. They frame the nature, the purpose, parameters and impact of lifelong learning processes in solely economic terms (Ball 2013, 2013a; Burke and Jackson 2007; Grace 2009; Kincheloe 2008; McLaren 2013; Tedder and Biesta 2009). In its attendant marketisation, managerialist practices and commodification of education and learning, neo-liberalism is viewed as a-historical and a-theoretical, while antithetical to the terms of a critical educational and humanities focus (Crowther 2012; Kincheloe 2008; Nussbaum 2010). Learners are ultimately placed as customers in a market system of education (Crowther 2012). These terms of reference would therefore dismiss, if not denigrate the legitimacy of this study's central concerns and examination of the complexities of learning in the construction of LGBT identities as introduced above.

In the midst of such a monolithic educational policy and research orthodoxy, I seek to afford new possibilities and alternative interpretative practices with which to explore the ontological and epistemological concerns lying at the heart of this study. The study therefore explores the nature and impact of lifelong learning in the lives of the LGBT people, alert to how it can be re-conceptualised. This demands a focus on the complexity, nuance and paradox of learning, beyond the reductive terms of neo-liberalism. This is through critical exploration and deconstruction of who learns, what is learned, where, and how this is learned and what impact this has in the particular contexts of LGBT adults' life histories and biographies. To do so I am committed to, challenged and informed by the values, ideals, principles and practices of the critical tradition of adult education, such that: adult students and learners are treated as citizens and social actors; knowledge is actively and

purposefully constructed through dialogical rather than transmission approaches which advance collective interests; critical understanding can lead to social action and political engagement and education is a key force in the broader struggle for social change (Martin 2006: 287).

Critical questions as to what constitutes knowledge are integral to adult education theory and practice. However adult education has been subject to rigorous and on-going scrutiny from a range of positions for over 40 years, inclusive of humanist, critical, Marxist/neo Marxist, post modernist, poststructural and social movement theoretical perspectives (Haggis 2009; Biesta 2012; Crowther, 2012). A similar multi-disciplinarity in research is often viewed as a hallmark of adult education (Crowther 2012). These developments consequently offer a mature, though still evolving, rich philosophical, theoretical and practical frame within which to work. Underpinning critical perspectives allow me space for interpretation of the impact of structural inequalities and the impact of socio-economic disadvantage that leads older adults to have differential experiences, mediated by class, gender and ethnicity (Phillipson 2006) and how social context may reduce individual agency (Andersson and Öberg 2006). I aim to develop as comprehensive an analytical framework as possible with which to interpret a maximalist view of the learner and learning. However, this is premised on the need to take account of the complex, idiosyncratic, multiple and shifting trajectories of adults' lives, particularly where they have complex, shifting LGBT identities. This demands a critical eclecticism. Therefore while I apply critical theory, I also explicitly draw on the dialectical tensions it has with poststructural theoretical frameworks and their central concerns. In their application in research on lifelong learning and adult education, poststructuralist perspectives can take us further than critical theory alone. They can bring new understandings of the fluidity, complexities and contested nature of knowledge, meaning and identity formation, positioning lifelong learning as a site of struggle (Burke and Jackson 2007; Burke 2008). This then creates possibilities for resistance and change to augment or challenge those identified by critical theorists.

A further broadening of scope is developed through adoption of lifewide learning perspectives. This allows a focus on the varying contexts, activities and processes of formal and informal learning in which adults engage on a day-to-day basis, which may be through work and leisure (Maclachlan and Osborne 2009). The growing significance of lifewide learning processes is also reflected in educational policy, and recently the Scottish Government's (2014) Statement of Ambition [for] Adult Learning in Scotland: 'adult learning is lifewide. It covers the personal, work, family and community aspects of living' (3). The significance of lifewide learning and importantly its conjoining with lifelong learning is claimed as central for realisation of the ambition that adult learning in Scotland is empowering, both personally and for communities:

A society where people develop through lifewide learning from the multiple contexts of home, work and their social lives and lifelong learning - often described as from cradle to grave. A society that recognises the importance of adult learning in the development of the individual, the community and the country as a whole. (8).

Questioning of the applicability of such policy discourse and characterisation of lifewide learning processes to LGBT adults in construction of their identities and of how and when learning happens in such spaces, is further developed through critical, queer temporal and phenomenological/spatial analyses. These allow a potentially deeper understanding and recovery of the particular nature, purposes and processes of lifewide learning as they may have occurred in hidden, subcultural, social movement and /or community spaces available to, experienced and /or created by LGBT adults over the life course.

The study is also alert to how LGBT participants may engage in particular life-deep processes of learning. Life-deep learning is concerned with building of: 'Beliefs, values, ideologies, and orientations to life ... all our ways of approaching challenges and undergoing change' brought by:

'Religious, moral, ethical, and social learning ... that enables us to guide our actions, judge ourselves and others, and express to ourselves and others how we feel and what we believe.' (Banks *et al.* 2007: 15)

Engagement in life-deep learning as defined may be particularly relevant in the lives of LGBT adults in terms of how they navigate and overcome the institutionalised religious, moral and social opprobrium they have faced in Scotland and further afield (Cant 2008; Meek 2015).

#### **1.4 Underpinning research values: research *with* LGBT adults**

The adoption of biographical and life histories methodology and a cross-generational perspective create the opportunity for understanding learning within such parameters. It also privileges participants' voices as a right to be heard in educational research that allows me to be actively attentive to 'voice as matter of listening, recognition and engaged dialogue' (McLeod 2011: 187). In keeping with a critical research orientation a multitude of voices are heard, and respected, while participants become active subjects in the research rather than objects of study (Holstein and Minkler 2007).

I also aim to illuminate the processes of adult and lifelong learning in their own right, across diverse settings and in the context of learners' life histories (West *et al.* 2007). Through the complex stories the participants tell, there is a powerful means for exploring the learning inherent in the construction of their identities. This looks beyond simple descriptions of the self to open up more in-depth analyses of lifelong and lifewide learning at micro, meso and macro levels to reveal how participants make connections between their emotional worlds and meaning, as well as subjectivities and social structures (Formenti *et al.* 2014).

A biographical and life histories approach also allows the opportunity to explore and chronicle how change has been experienced and managed. The last ten years in Scotland have witnessed an intensive period of unprecedented change in legislation and policy to extend social justice and equalities to LGBT adults in Scotland (Equalities Network 2015a). For example The Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act 2014, received a strong parliamentary majority and broad public support (Equalities Network 2015a). Such socio-legal change would have been unimaginable in the earlier lives of many participants. A life course perspective therefore also allows a

cross-generational comparison of the nature of participants' learning. This encompasses the impact of a more recent promising period of change but also across several preceding decades. Up until 1980 being gay in Scotland was criminalised, medically pathologised as deviance and an aberration across all religious denominations (Meek 2015). LGBT people in Scotland can still encounter the legacy of such unenlightened times. For example, The Equalities Network (2015a) most recent and extensive survey in Scotland highlights that LGBT people continue to encounter inequalities in legislation and unacceptable levels of prejudice, discrimination and disadvantage in society. To continue to make Scotland more equal for its LGBT communities, Holloway (2008: 3) contends:

‘... we must not be complacent and think we have reached the Promised Land. Far from it; there is still a lot of ignorance and prejudice out there. That is why we have to go on supporting the agencies and individuals who make a stand against oppression and discrimination. And you do not have to be LGBT to make this stand. It is just as important for heterosexual people to challenge Scotland to become a model of inclusion and openness.’

Though small in scale and exploratory, in this research I aim to bring LGBT participants' lived experience, perspectives and knowledge to the fore that can challenge, as well as contribute insights into how positive social and educational change can be achieved.

In adoption of these research values it is clear that I have not and cannot occupy a value-free or politically neutral position. As an adult educator I am committed to social justice and ensuring educational inclusion and equality for all learners. In my work I support the widening of participation of largely working class students into Higher Education. In this context, this translates into addressing the effects of power differentials that can be operant in day-to-day learning and teaching interactions between me and adult learners. This also applies to engaging in critically constructive educational research and practice in which the research is *with* and not *on* participants. This is particularly resonant as I am also positioned as an insider researcher in this study. I am a 49 year old, gay male who has much in common with many of the participants involved in this study, as well as experiences that will be markedly different in relation to being and becoming gay in Scotland.

The impetus for this study is thus also founded on both my commitment to inclusive education and an insider researcher status. I aim to maintain careful and critical self-reflection on both. In so doing I aim to develop an evolving and informed position to challenge, clarify and progress debates concerning the extent and nature of adult and post compulsory education's roles and responsibilities for furthering greater social equality and inclusion of LGBT learners. Given its exploratory nature and broadly defined parameters of learning, I am mindful that the study may raise more questions than definitive answers about the nature and impact of the learning in which LGBT adults engage across their lives and how this may be understood at this particular moment in time. However I have aimed to create a space in which LGBT adults' narratives on lifelong learning take centre stage. I believe that they provide useful insights, developed from cumulative lived experiences over many years, that can inform formal and non-formal educational providers' and LGBT agencies' in Scotland policies and practices.

### **1.5 Study's aim and research questions**

This study aims to critically explore the potentially distinctive nature and impact of how, when and where LGBT adults learn across their lives to construct their identities. Several research questions guide this exploration. The literature review addresses two overarching questions:

1. What is the nature of the LGBT identities adults develop across their lives?
2. What is the nature and impact of how, when and where LGBT adults learn to construct such identities across their lives?

The subsequent analysis chapters then address these questions in relation to different stages of the life course, namely: childhood and adolescence; across early adulthood to midlife, and post work and later life.

### **1.6 Chapter synopses**

Chapter 2 critically reviews the literature to address the study's central research questions relating to LGBT identity formation and the nature and

impact of how, when, where and learning contributes to their construction. From this a broad interpretive framework is developed with which to analyse the participants' biographies and life histories. Chapter 3 explains and justifies the study's positioning within a critical educational research paradigm. The appropriateness of a biographical and life histories methodology, semi-structured in-depth interviews and use of an abductive strategy for analysis of the data are then evaluated. Chapter 4 analyses the nature and impact of how participants learned to construct their identities. The particular character and influence of 'when' they learned is explored through a focus on participants' formative years of childhood and adolescence. A complex, nuanced and diffuse picture emerges of the nature of younger LGBT identity formations and the learning that contributed to and/or inhibited these. Learning is informal, non-formal, experiential, critical and queer in nature, developed in unique ways to address and navigate complex heteronormative forces. This allowed participants to inhabit intersecting, safer, subversive and risky spaces that had permeable boundaries with other spaces. Chapter 5 then moves to explore how trajectories of learning widen and deepen across participants' early adulthood and midlife to contribute to the development of their LGBT identities over this period of their lives. The diverse ways in which participants identify and attached significance to being lesbian and gay across early adulthood and midlife interacted with their student, learner, faith, political and workplace identities in varying ways. It is shown that a complex trajectory of intertwining learning processes scaffold life deep learning through which participants are equipped to address the particular moral, religious and social challenges they face as LGBT adults. Chapter 6 explores the nature and impact of how and where participants learn in the development of their LGBT identities, post work and in later life. It is shown that in constructing their LGBT identities at this stage of life, participants draw upon non-formal learning processes as part of their membership of a range of LGBT groups that bring new insights to Critical Educational Gerontology. They extend understanding of its focus on what can constitute emancipatory and empowering forms and outcomes of learning. Chapter 7 offers reflections,

conclusions and further areas of inquiry that future educational research could investigate.

## **Chapter 2 Literature review: understanding how, when and where LGBT adults learn across the life course**

### **2.1 Overview of the chapter**

As I have established in the introductory chapter, the central aim of this study is to critically explore the potentially distinctive nature and impact of how, when and where LGBT adults learn to construct their identities. This chapter critically reviews a broad range of conceptual and empirical literature to address this aim further, guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the nature of the LGBT identities that adults may develop across their lives?
2. What is the nature and impact of how, when and where LGBT adults learn to construct such identities across their lives?

The chapter adopts a multi-disciplinary perspective. From this I fuse relevant, convergent and divergent perspectives. The first question is addressed through exploration of a range of competing perspectives on the nature of adult LGBT identity formations. I draw from conceptualisations of identity, and LGBT identity formations in particular; Lesbian and Gay studies and evolving LGBT historiography; queer theory and studies in intersectionality. The second question then guides a speculative discussion on how and why learning processes as theorised and researched, might be altered if individuals identify as LGBT. This is premised on the contention that at different points in their lives, in different settings, LGBT adults learn differently. This is because they are required to understand, construct and express identities that have been condemned and abhorred, but in more recent times, decriminalised, politicised, celebrated and queered. In navigating such shifting contexts, learning how to be LGBT may be complex and varied. In relation to understanding the nature and impact of learning in their lives I draw from: psychosocial learning theory; critical theory as applied to education and lifelong learning; critical theory's incorporation of queer theory, and a focus on how LGBT adults might engage in intergenerational and life-deep learning processes. The second question is also cognisant of the study's life course perspective on learning from childhood to later life. The subsequent

conceptual analyses in this chapter are therefore attentive to the significance of when learning happens both in the past and present. I explore when learning may shape and be shaped by adult LGBT identities in different periods of their lives. This is analysed from the perspectives of cohort effects, queer temporalities and diversity studies on ageing. The time of learning in the life course is also analysed through emergent ideas of critical educational gerontology (CEG) as a means for understanding learning in older LGBT adults' post work and later lives. The importance of where learning happens is similarly considered. This focuses how in being LGBT, adults may interact with and influence the multiple sites in which learning happens, as encompassed by the lifewide dimension of learning. These range from conventional educational institutions of school and university, to the workplace and to differently constituted LGBT communities, subcultures and places of political activism.

From this, a provisional, speculative, open-ended and multi-theoretical framework is constructed. It enables an opening up of the study's major themes of LGBT identity and learning across the life course. This literature review chapter thus seeks to enable an abductive process of inquiry in which a broadly realised theoretical base can be brought into critical conversation with the participants' biographical and life history narratives. As such, data and theory are partly, 'forming and informing of each other' (Anyon 2008:2). In this relationship, theory allows interpretation of participants' biographical narratives. However, it is also anticipated that the complex realities participants recount can challenge, reconstruct, enhance and/or advance alternative insights to theoretical formulations on the nature of LGBT identities and their relationship with learning.

## **2.2 Conceptualising identity**

As a central theme for this study, I firstly explore how identity is broadly conceptualised. The nature of LGBT identities and how these can be understood to intersect with other aspects of identity are then explored,

drawing on Lesbian and Gay studies, queer theory and intersectional perspectives.

There is much contestation, inter-changeability in terminology and multiple interpretation of the concept of identity across disciplinary fields, such that it is 'beset with conceptual difficulty' (Hall 2000: 17). This renders any definitive understanding of its meaning to be considered highly improbable (du Gay *et al.* 2000) and its value as an analytical construct can be thus called into question (Fryer 2010). As a politically loaded term, it is further viewed as being used with '*linguistic carelessness*' (Norton 1997: 34). Nevertheless, identity is understood as the dynamic, ever-changing and multi-dimensional ways in which we represent and understand ourselves. This finds a broad, loose consensus, but basic unifying theme across otherwise opposing philosophical, theoretical and methodological debates (du Gay 2000).

Our sense of self is also conceptualised in terms of 'subjectivity', referring to our conscious and unconscious thoughts, feelings and emotions (Burke and Jackson 2007). From subjective positions we have a way to articulate those processes and conditions of being a person, how we are constituted as 'subjects' through social processes (Barker and Galasinski 2001). Our subjectivities are also concerned with how we make everyday common-sense understandings of our social environment (McLaren 2013). In short, subjectivities are productive in these varying ways (Billet 2010a).

Kreber (2010) further observes that post-structuralists will avoid 'identity', preferring subjectivities. This more readily captures subjects' shifting identities as they relate to particular aspects of 'identity categories' constituted in terms of race, class and sexuality, among others. In the context of HE spaces which this study partly explores, Brennan *et al.* (2010a) acknowledge such plurality of identities, but refer to useful, broad categorisations of 'ascribed' gender, class and ethnic identities, and/or 'achieved' identities, such as being a successful student, a confident person (137). In these terms, identity is thus understood as being incomplete, ever changing and a constant, unfinished work in progress (Burke and Jackson

2007; du Gay 2010; Quinn 2010). It is the ways in which ‘the self is represented and understood in dynamic, multi-dimensional, evolving ways...’ (Eccelstone, Biesta and Hughes 2010: 9).

Hall’s (2000) analysis adds a further layer with which to understand identity. He argues that it is not stable or fixed and has no ‘... guarantee [of] an unchanging ‘oneness’ or cultural belongingness’, rather ‘... identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured ...’ (16). Claims to such instability are further heightened in Youdell’s (2006) work that frames identity in terms of shifting subjectivities. Her positioning is informed by post-modernist scepticism about the viability, in theoretical and experiential terms, of unitary subjects, who are rational and self-knowing.

Post-modernist understandings of subjectivities have countered more humanistic, developmentally orientated conceptions that posit personal identities as coherent, rational and integrated, or wherein, there is the maintenance of a core self, assumed to be fixed and unitary (Hunt and West, 2009; Illeris, 2014; 2014a; Plummer, 2011). Hunt and West (2009) do acknowledge that post structuralists and postmodernists have rightly conceptualised the self as socially constructed, contingent, multiple and pluralistic. Identity formation is thus ‘redolent with possibilities’ for the creation of identities that are understood as playfully fluid and experimental (71). However, Hunt and West (2009: 68) argue in balance, that the ‘wholesale’ rejection of a humanistic notion of a confident, core self in discussion of adult learning reduces potential for deeper understanding of the complex relationship between learning and identity. They propose the notion of self is not as fixed, unitary and essentialist as assumed. Rather it is ‘constantly in the making’ (79), but as such, still requires ‘... some inner cohesion and sense of continuity, forged in the network of affective relationships in which we are embedded.’ (71)

These conceptualisations afford insight into the nature of identity understood as ascribed, achieved or as subjectivities that are multiple, ever changing and

that interplay in fluid ways. More pessimistically, identities are viewed as fractured and opportunities for cultural belonging reduced. The extent to which, and how, LGBT adults can know themselves in meaningful, coherent ways, and what may constitute a developed sense of cultural belonging are thus brought into question. However, if they claim a confident core self, this may not preclude them from having a more nuanced, complex sense of identity. This could be partly framed in postmodernist and post structuralist terms, but also possesses the pursuit of some form of inner coherence as to how they see and understand themselves. Identity and the person who we are in these frames are unfinished such that we are continually being and becoming (Jarvis 2009; McCallum and Tuhkanen 2011). McCallum and Tuhkanen (2011) contend that Foucault's focus (1976) on biopower and bio-politics impels us to see life as a 'dynamic and self-sustaining force' and how in this way it: 'is necessarily an expression of becoming' (2). Drawn from the scaffolding of broad ranging philosophical orientations, they identify the need to think of existence and identity, 'not in terms of being, of what exists, but of becoming' (2). Such formations provide several potentially useful points of reference against which to compare and interpret how LGBT participants talk about and learn to create meaning as to their sense of past and present selves. The following sections develop this discussion further, to consider contested positions as to how the nature of LGBT identity formations might be best understood.

### **2.3 Conceptualising LGBT identities**

The last 50 or so years have seen evolving trajectories of new, contested and radicalised ways of discussing and understanding LGBT identities in particular. These have been informed by, suffused with, echoed, re-articulated, renewed wholesale and/or have sought to rigorously reject and so reconstruct the broader conceptualisations of identity as discussed so far. The following section considers the changes in meaning and problematising of LGBT identities that such movement has encompassed. It is shown that these have been in part, the consequence of competing, as well as shared positions, occupied by Lesbian and Gay studies, with those of the post modernist

challenges embodied by queer activism and theorisation.

The theoretical developments, claims and criticisms of the limitations of the so-called 'queer turn' offer a radical and contentious re-conceptualisation of LGBT identity. They therefore add a further possible, though highly contested yardstick with which to compare how participants articulate and attribute particular meanings to their LGBT identity in the context of their auto-, and/or shared, biographies and life histories. The following section tracks the shift in how LGBT identity has been defined from within earlier struggles for equality and visibility, to LGBT identity as *queer*. The interpretative possibilities and limitations this represents are critically discussed.

A useful LGBT historical timeline can be constructed to account for how being and becoming LGBT has radically changed (Stonewall 2014). However the historiography it represents may be seen as partial and incomplete, belying hidden histories, the complexity of which biographical and life histories methodology would hope to recover (Bauer and Cook 2012; Norton 1997). This study's questions are alert to why and how the nature, purposes and impact of the learning in which LGBT-identified people engage may be distinct. There is therefore room to extend and/or probe beyond the historicisation of LGBT lived experience this time-line portrays.

### **2.3.1 The evolution of 'Queer' LGBT identities**

The so-called queer turn can be arguably traced to the 1970s that saw the emergence of new gay and lesbian social movements in North America and the UK, such as the New York Gay Activist Alliance and the London Gay Liberation Front (GLF) (Adams 2002; Weeks 1990). Evocatively, Hill (2009: 47) describes social movements as giving 'the pulse of an era'. Crowther *et al.* (1999) locate social movements' formation within civil society, which comprises of all forms of human association not directly controlled by the state or corporations (Brookfield 2005; Holst 2011). In their autonomy from the state, movements include large groups of people ranging from Trade Unions to environmentalists, consciously engaged in collective action for social change (Kane 2001), challenging inequality, exclusion and discrimination (Crowther *et*

*al.* 1999). Arguably the possibilities for gaining some sense of cultural belongingness may be increased for those participants who have been involved in social movements that promote actions to advance the rights of LGBT people. This is evident in Weeks' (1990) analyses of the early 1970s. He considers how the decade represented a major turning point in radicalising new understanding of homosexual identity and consciousness. This found expression in the GLF's defiance, openness and determination to collectively mobilise and protest against discrimination and increase gay and lesbian visibility. As such, the GLF was a revolutionary movement, the first to view homosexuality as a political issue, with a new emphasis on challenging the oppression of gay people (Weeks 1990). In the context of Scotland, the Scottish Minorities (SMG) held its first meeting in 1969 (Weeks 1990). Its work over the next twenty years served to tackle the condemning silence around homosexuality in Scotland and its criminalisation (Meek 2015). It did so by campaigning principally for law reform and established groups not only in Edinburgh and Glasgow, but also in Aberdeen, Dundee, Falkirk, Paisley, St Andrews and Fort William (Cant 2008). Its work was instrumental to landmark law reform in 1980 through which consenting male homosexual activity in private was de-criminalised in Scotland.

Adams (2002) charts the new knowledge creation, theoretical stances and discourses to evolve from such groups through which narrow, homophobic understandings and oppression could be challenged. These were expressed in Gay and Lesbian studies. Its visibilities and equalities agendas sought to critically discredit and subvert characterisations that condemned homosexuality as sin, sickness and/or crime (Adams 2002; Weeks 1985, 1990). Reductive, definitional boundaries that confused sexuality with the act of sex were challenged in the new sociology of sexuality. Rather, sexuality was analysed as a historically and culturally mediated construction, situated in a nexus of complex relationships between the body, desire, morality and social relations (Skelton 1999; Weeks 1985, 1986, 1990).

Projects engaged in liberation and consciousness-raising, while gay men and lesbian women formed coalitions in which they reclaimed stories about

themselves. Such actions built resistance to the hegemonic logic that historicised LGBT experience and identity in distorted ways, a struggle that also challenged,

... the notion that the features of queer culture throughout history are little more than symptoms of pathological oppression, internalized guilt, repression or sublimation... that we are 'virtually normal' and have no history except as victims or activists. (Norton 1997: viii).

In the 1980s, social and political action by lesbian and gay people saw thinking about the nature of sexual identity continue to be polarised, with exponents of social constructionism positioned at one end of the spectrum and essentialists at the other (Adams 2002; Norton 1997; Richardson and Seidman 2002; Tierney 1997). Central to social constructionism is that sexuality is organised and shaped by social and historical forces. Rather than existing solely as the product of an instinctive, biological drive, sexuality is a phenomenon that society produces in complex ways (Weeks 1986). In particular, constructionists challenged what they saw as the essentialism of early lesbian and gay movements, where understanding of sexuality was as an essential aspect of the self, emphasising a shared common identity (Richardson and Seidman 2002).

Such re-conceptualisations of LGBT identity were further complicated with the emergence of queer activism in the late 1980s, into the 1990s and its different expressions today. This projected anger and frustration at political inaction in the face of the AIDs crisis, resistance to the constructionist versus essentialism debate (Morris 2003) and exposure of hypocritical attitudes through outing of prominent 'establishment' leaders (OutRage! 2015). The struggle for liberation gave way to transgression (Adams 2002). Collective identity construction and the 'we' of lesbian and gay minority culture was increasingly resisted and challenged by people who did not see themselves fitting in with any unified, essentialised notion of a sexual minority or minority model (Adams 2002; Richardson and Siedman 2002). The new, 'queer' radicalism emerged, in which, black, working class, bisexual and transgendered people expressed their frustration with, and dislocation from, the gay and lesbian movement and its claims to be representative of them,

condemning its white, middle class, male agenda and focus on assimilation (Adams 2002). Queer theory emerged, in part, from this radicalisation and complicating of identity politics. As a no less controversial intellectual force, it changed the direction of and fragmented gay and lesbian studies. Re-conceptualisation of LGBT identity focused on its deconstruction and radical challenge of regulatory regimes which categorise sexualities as valued and devalued (Adams 2002). Any simplistic understandings of a unitary LGBT identity and community were unsettled (Sullivan 2006). Proponents of the queer project have thus claimed the enacting of a new, subversive and powerful rethink of LGBT identity (Hennessy 2002; Roseneil 2009; Taylor 2009).

Such queer re-conceptualisations of LGBT identities were founded in a range of seminal USA based work, notably the *Epistemology of the Closet* by Eve Sedgwick (1990). This demonstrated that if queer theory has to have any centrally defining and inherent tendency, it is to be transgressive in its subversion and radical questioning of fixed, binary categories of gender and sexuality (Sullivan, 2006). Sedgwick's (1990) central thesis is constructed around a series of seven analytical axes through which she aims to deconstruct the contradictions of sexual definition: the 'endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition' and 'definitional binarisms', whereby:

... categories presented in a culture as symmetrical binary oppositions - heterosexual/homosexual, in this case, - actually subsist in a more unsettled and dynamic tacit relation... '(10)... 'the now chronic modern crisis of homo/heterosexual definition has affected our culture through its ineffaceable marking particularly of the categories of secrecy/disclosure, knowledge/ignorance, private/public, masculine/feminine, majority/minority, innocence/imitation, ... (11)

These extracts express post modernist thought. This represents one strand of the complex set of roots that have had a defining influence on the formation of queer theory. It shapes its central preoccupations with identity formation, dichotomous binary divisions and the fluid nature of difference and identity (Giffney 2009). However Sedgwick (1990) appears critical of postmodernism, as one 'politically interesting project of post war thought' which may be insufficient in advancing understanding of 'the multiple, unstable ways in

which people may be like or different from each other' (23). Paradoxically, she encompasses postmodernism's central preoccupations to explain increased plurality in cultural representations and knowledge forms, and its focus on language and discourse in the construction of identity (Hunt and West 2009). The reconceptualisation of LGBT identities to emerge from Sedgwick's work, echoes, as well as reformulates the broader conceptualisations discussed above. In short, LGBT identities are understood as: 'always multiple, fluid, mobile, contingent, unstable (labile) and fragmented... fixed notions such as gay, lesbian, and straight [are challenged]' (Hill and Grace 2009: v).

Queer theory, is thus an eclectic synthesis of ideas. Trying to find a 'coherent lineage for queer thinking is a perilous and not necessarily useful undertaking.' (Browne and Nash 2011: 4). However, Giffney (2009) does create some sense of coherence in her analyses of the genealogies of the notion of queer and queer theory. She suggests that it can be loosely described as a diverse, conflicting set of interdisciplinary approaches to understanding desire, subjectivity, identity, relationality, ethics and norms. It has also come to occupy a central positioning in theorizing about sexual lives (Brown and Nash 2010; Taylor 2009). In effect it provides a means to deconstruct the knowing about, the being, acting and doing of non-normative sexualities (Grace and Wells 2009).

From a synthesis of its grassroots' antecedents and diverse philosophical genealogies, queer as theory and analytical tool retains a defiant, transgressive, anti-normative, counter-hegemonic position (Hennessy 2002). Together with post-modernist concerns, its foundations claim an authoritative Foucauldian genealogy in addition to second wave and post-feminism, psychoanalysis, 'queered' LGBT studies and post-structuralism (Browne and Nash 2010; Giffney and O'Rourke 2009; Hall 2003; O'Rourke 2011). A possible result of multiple, interwoven lines of theoretical inquiry, 'queering' or queer thinking as method remains a contested practice even amongst its own scholars (Browne and Nash 2010). However, as a post structuralist and post-modernist theory, its central analytical focus deals with the contradictions

behind apparent taken-for-granted surface appearances. Critical educational researchers, practitioners and activists are also making utility of queer theory (Hill 2004; Hunter *et al.* 2013; Nixon and Givens 2011). It is a tool used to gain new insight into how formal educational contexts such as schools produce particular sexualities while rejecting others (De Palma and Atkinson 2009; Youdell 2006). Queer theory also claims to deconstruct the complex intersections of identities, while seeking to resist oppressive social constructions of sexual orientation in HE (Renn 2010). Whether as radical political activism, or analytical tool, queer may be usefully viewed as the ‘category of contradiction’ (Chang 2005:172). In these ways it therefore adds possibilities with which to consider the nature of the LGBT identities participants construct over the life course. Other potentialities, but also the limits of queer theory for understanding the particular identity formations of participants are further considered.

### **2.3.2 Limits and potentialities of queer conceptualisations of LGBT identity**

In such interrogations of LGBT identities understood as diverse and multiple, queer theorisation has overtly rejected the notion of it being monolithic, offering a ‘single queer formula’ to understanding questions of identity (Hall 2003:5). Rather, queer demands continual discussion, redefinition and resistance to fixedness or prescriptiveness (Hennessy 2002). Butler (1993) provides an early illustration of this in her defence of the need to maintain queer’s protean nature. In grassroots protest, political activism, ‘queer’ manifests in theatrical, transgressive and edgy protest. It seeks to simultaneously provoke shocked reaction with colourful, playful (offensive) subversion and destabilisation of any fixed, essentialised notion of a ‘gay’ identity. Butler (1993) positions the term ‘queer’ as a theatrical, angry wrestling from accusative, shaming and pathologising insult to an expression of anti-homophobic politics. She argues for queer’s protean nature as necessary to retain its oppositional force and purpose:

If the term “queer” is to be a site of collective contestation, the point of departure for a set of historical reflections and futural imaginings, it will have to remain that which is, in the present, never fully owned,

but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior historical usage... (21)

That it can become such a discursive site whose uses are not fully constrained in advance, ought to be safeguarded, not only for the purposes of continuing to democratize queer politics, but also to expose, affirm, and rework the specific historicity of term. (22).

This defence of the mutability of the discourse of queer, its fluidity and changeability, its evolving creation as a site of contestation, raises particular questions for this study and how participants' make sense of their LGBT identities and the nature of any activism in which they have been involved. It is a relatively unconstrained theoretical form, and interrogative mode. As such a process of *queering* may be discerned. In its application to participants' narratives this may illuminate the nuanced, hidden and/or more overt processes of lifelong learning that come into play in past or present activism, as engaged in queering. The participants' narratives cover a period of approximately 80 years of multiple lived experiences. Inevitably the understandings they articulate about their LGBT identities, and how they do so, may be protean and ever fluid in nature. However they may be more reserved, at some distance from a queered articulation and understanding of sexuality. While the reclamation subverts the meaning of queer to bring potential empowerment to LGBT adults, at another level it raises challenges. This maybe particularly realised in how the 'specific historicity' of the term is affirmed and reworked. In the socio-cultural, political and -historical contexts of Scotland, the complex reclamation and subverting of a term such as queer, perceived as too pejorative, wounding or elitist, may be dissonant with the particular trajectory of LGBT identity politics, discourses and lived experiences of LGBT adults across their respective lives. In these ways, participants may declaim rather than reclaim a queer identity. Paradoxically, while rejecting the term, the participants may articulate their sense of self in queerly fluid ways, but in ways mediated by their circumstances and experiences, thus redefining queer or attributing counter queer meanings to their sexual identity.

As a means to develop understanding of the nature of the LGBT identities participants develop over their lives, another possible limitation resides in questions of queer theory's applicability to a Scottish socio-cultural, - historical context. It must be recognised that there is overt resistance to what is argued as an US unilateralism in relation to queer thinking and consequent problems of its translation (O'Rourke 2011) and non-equivalence to the diverse socio-cultural conditions of European countries (Baer 2011). In relation to how queer strategies are played out and disseminated across diverse European countries, Downing and Gillett (2009a) see the articulation of a story that is not:

... a linear or progressive one. Nor is it a story of parts of Europe 'catching up' at different speeds, with North America. Rather it is a story of discontinuities, of distinctions and of plurality (5).

At a global level, conceptualisations and lived expression of LGBT identities as queer must also take account of those highly socio-culturally dependent ways in which they may be formed (Bereket and Adam 2006; Cowan et al. 2011). Therefore, the analysis of meanings participants attribute to their LGBT identities is particularly cognisant of the socio-historical parameters of their biographies and life histories such that:

Fundamental to understanding systems of sexual connection and identity are socio-historical conditions that give rise to and support sex/gender systems, shift them, and create openings for change. ... There is no one-way determinism in the adoption of sexual identity from the global to the local and that the meaning of *gey* [their emphasis] is variable, entailing diverse ways of imagining, portraying, and seeing oneself (Bereket and Adam 2006: 133).

For the immediate purposes of this study, this extends to how the particularities of socio-cultural and socio-historical developments in Scotland have shaped participants' biographies and life histories and their constructions of LGBT identity.

For a study which focuses on the life course experiences of LGBT adults in Scotland, it is thus acknowledged from the outset that the notion of being, (un) becoming, doing and knowing 'queer' and the ways in which this is expressed by participants is likely to be a site of contestation. For this study,

the generational disjuncture that exists in terms of the appropriation of the term/lived expression by younger LGBT adults, and its rejection by older generations may be particularly resonant (Morris 2003; Plummer 2005). Though perhaps milder than some of the terms I have known to be used and encountered in Scotland that are abusive of gay people, the term queer is clearly one that has historically used for this purpose (Plummer 2005). Its appropriation by activists was thus a deliberately provocative move and reflected reclamation of a homophobic term to express a more radically politicised declaration of gay and lesbian visibility than had been the case previously (Hennessy 2002). However, it is important to acknowledge that the use of queer to assert a radicalised political position or expression of identity arguably remains limited in Scotland at the time of writing (2016). I have found older gay and lesbian friends and colleagues to express discomfort with and dislike of the term. It is still viewed as pejorative and/or unrepresentative of how they have developed understanding of their sexual identity, the inter-relationships between their sexual identity and class, their life experiences and political stance. It may be of further significance that one of Scotland's leading national campaigning groups, the Equalities Network (2011), adopts a strong equal rights and diversity discourse. Its advice on the meaning and use of the word queer reflects a cautious tone:

Queer: sometimes now used as an umbrella term that includes lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people. If you do not identify as queer, a risky word to use because of its long history as a disparaging word for gay men, lesbians, bisexual and trans people, and if speaking formally, use LGBT, this is the preferred term.

Varying reactions to the term queer are identified in the literature. Plummer (2005) refers to the older generation's rejection of notions of queer and the charge against younger queer theorists, which claims they have arrogantly monopolised political validity, and in so doing, negated both the political and theoretical gains of the past. Plummer (2005: 369) describes this tension as a *generational overtone*. Reflecting on her formative experiences of coming out, Morris (2003:199) is stronger in her critique. She refers to 'the generational divide', 'the devisiveness between young and old [lesbians]' and ultimately the 'separatist culture' of the gay scene in which she struggled to

feel part. She also refers to older gay men and lesbian women's unhappiness with younger counterparts in identifying as queer, given that they cannot appropriate a term so painfully linked to their experiences of homophobic abuse.

Adding further, nuanced debate to queer conceptualisations of LGBT identity, and echoing the broader, more humanistic debates above on how identity is conceptualised, for LGBT identities there may also be a sense of a 'subjective authenticity' (Munt 1997: 188), and as such, a fairly newly achieved sense of self and collective empowerment. Queer theory's interrogation, destabilisation and reworking of gay and lesbian sexual identity (Adam 2002; Hall 2003) may thus be experienced as undermining of a sense of self-acceptance. Combined with this, an over-preoccupation with and/or obscuring of definitional clarity have dominated evolving debates around queer thinking, possibly adding to its rejection. A deliberately opaque, contentious, provocative and complex nature contribute to a definitional slipperiness and resistance to fixed categorisation, reflected in contested political, theoretical and empirical claims and possible future trajectories, framed as post-queer (Browne and Nash 2010; Giffney 2009; Hall 2003; Khyatt 2002; Mizzi and Stebbins 2010; Nixon and Givens 2011; Ruffolo 2009; Talburt 2007, 2009; Talburt and Rasmussen 2010; Taylor 2009).

From a life course perspective and reflections on generational sexualities, Plummer (2011) adds a further, gentle counter-queer, humanistic note to the conceptualisation of LGBT identities. He is celebratory of, and concedes the need and place for "queer theory" in infusing sexualities research with an excitement, a wildness to counter the "dullness" of more pedestrian investigation, dominated by heteronormativity. However, through consideration of many decades of activism and engagement in theorisation of sexual orientation, he also maintains that this excitement be attuned to, or deployed in balance with our sense of wholeness and of being human. He relates this to his "thread of gayness" which he maintains has always been at the core of his life, contributing to the sense of a "substantial self",

regardless of the multiplicities of identity recognised as important. Plummer (2011) contends queer conceptualisations of LGBT identity have explanatory capacity in the deconstruction of the sexual self, but are less good at reconstruction, of how we make sense of ourselves out of the fragments. These perspectives are important to keep in play: participants' may view their sexuality as potentially foundational to who they are, but which does not preclude their engagement in de- and reconstruction of who they are as LGBT adults, searching for new ways to make sense of their identities but through which some sense of wholeness and stability may be attained.

In these ways the study seeks to keep in play a plurality of thinking about the nature of LGBT identities to which queer theory, among other perspectives can contribute. However, this aim is premised on engagement in productive re-thinking of queer in how it can extend understanding of LGBT identities. I thus very consciously aim to avoid the tendency to opacity and abstraction that a limited, 'facile reading' of queer theory has risked, in which an, 'uncategorizable polymorphous perversity' (McCallum and Tukanen 2011:1) can be indulged and privileged. As Norton (1997) contends to overcome queer theory as a 'phrase' we are going through, it has to move from the over-preoccupation of what it is to what it can do and inform methods of research. Thus, for this study, primacy is given to the more productive doing or act of queering (Giffney 2009). As Browne and Nash (2011) explain, what queer theory can do, and the contradictions and complexities it exposes may open up new critical spaces of enquiry and queerly infused methodologies. This can keep in play and problematise queer theory's blind spots and exclusions, particularly its over concern with the 'academic, the textual, the cultural rather than with 'real' life and *material* [writer's emphasis] reality' (Taylor 2009: 212). In queering masculinities in education for example, Landrau and Rodriguez (2011:4) refer to the capacity of queer to expose and critique heteronormativity while for other proponents it is further seen as a 'transformative, transgressive mode of thought and practice rather than a position or identity'.

It is also argued that the newness of queer claims over the last 25 years of LGBT identities as unbounded, intersectional and counter-assimilationist is overplayed and inaccurate. There may be an oversimplification of historical shifts in thinking and activism (Mayo 2007), in which queer's particular characteristics and assumptions are not so new (Hennessy 2002; Taylor 2009). 1970's lesbian and gay radical writers and thinkers arguably galvanised such queer projections to challenge provisional and political definitions of sexual minority status and homosexual/heterosexual boundaries, and moved their focus onto the complex intersections of identity (Adams 2002; Hennessy 2002; Mayo 2007). Mayo (2007) provides historical analyses of lesbian and gay protest movements originating in the 1960s, and educational research in minority sexualities. She discerns in them the persistence of the central tendencies of post-structural, queer theoretical interrogation: a radical questioning of essentialist, foundational ideas about sexuality and gender and a focus on the complex intersectionalities of difference. Thus, from the early days of the gay liberation movement to current, contemporary queer conceptualisations of LGBT identities, she argues that, 'It turns out, to a large degree, things have been queer all along' (79).

### **2.3.3 Intersections between LGBT and other identities**

Despite its claims otherwise, queer theory is criticised for its neglect and underdevelopment of intersectionality (Taylor 2009; Taylor *et al.* 2011). In the primacy it affords to the deconstruction, fluidity and multi-dimensionality of identity, its focus is on the deconstruction of discourse, through engagement in literary and film critique (Freeman 2010). Intersectional perspectives aim to go beyond the abstract that queer theory can privilege to analyse concrete lived realities and experiences across time and space (Taylor *et al.* 2011). Their focus is on understanding how different identities or social characteristics intersect and combine. This is premised on the belief that, we are not defined solely by sexuality or social class or ethnicity, but by how these and other aspects of identity uniquely interact; how they are 'routed through each other or [are] mutually constitutive' (Monro 2015: 59). Intersectionality therefore focuses on understanding how a 'minority status' related to being LGBT can be managed when we have identity formations in

which other minority and majority statuses interact (Köllen 2015). In short, discussion of sexuality cannot be narrowed down to it alone; rather, how it inter-relates with other aspects of identities is key to greater understanding (Taylor 2005)

Such an intersectional focus is of relevance to this study in seeking to analyse the nature of LGBT identities participants construct over the life course. Participants are from working and middle class backgrounds. They have been teachers, social workers, nurses, activists and academics. They are parents and have been married in heterosexual relationships. They have had long standing Christian faith. It is therefore important to have a framework with which to explore interconnections. In particular how the changing meanings they attach to their LGBT identities will interact, be managed and find expression with these other, potentially myriad identity formations related to class, gender, parenting, religious belief and job.

I would like to explore, by way of illustration, where theory and research has reached in terms of understanding connections between social class and sexuality. This is premised on the contention that in capitalist formations in which the participants live, social class is always relevant and operant at individual and collective levels of experience (Merrill 2007), while viewed as,

... a major determining factor of people's life chances. ... that socio-economic position is still one of the best predictors of who will achieve success, prosperity and social status and, in particular, who will enjoy the highest levels of educational outcomes (Field and Morgan-Klein 2012:162).

'New class studies' have evolved on-going, contested analyses of social class in terms of classed identities and lived experiences that move debate beyond binaries of economic and cultural theories of class (Reay 2011). Rather, they posit classed identity as attributed to a complex formation of the material, psychological, psychosocial, discursive and the cultural (Reay 2005; 2011), while being simultaneously ambivalent and coherent (Savage *et al.* 2001). On-going theorisation and research seeks to examine the nature of the interconnectedness between LGBT identity and class (Binnie 2011; Heaphy 2011; Hennessy 2002; McDermott 2011; Taylor 2012). This work points to the

past dominance of a masculinist, political-economic analysis of class that led to the reproduction of the marginalisation and exclusion of queer voices and sexuality as mere identity politics (Binnie 2011). As such sexuality is rejected as an unimportant 'analytic category' (Sumara and Davis 1999: 192), and/or neglected in intersectional studies that explore the interaction of class, race and gender as a source of multiple oppression (McCready 2004). However, Binnie (2011) argues that class has also been marginalised in sexuality studies. For example queer theory's focus on culturally created representations and meanings of sexuality and its explicit separation of this from analyses of classed, material inequalities draws attention to its particular limitations (Hennessy 2002; Taylor 2009). Taylor (2009, 2011) identifies the urgency for greater research and theorisation on the complex intersections between class and sexuality which the new class studies can seek to illuminate. Raising particular considerations for this study, she points to how being working class and queer can be negatively experienced in material and emotional terms in the context of education which reproduces oppressive classed and sexual divisions, the latter through the operation of heteronormativity (Taylor 2011). In consequence, educational choice and attainment can be significantly reduced (McDermott 2011). However being LGBT and working class can also engender resilience and persistence as a response to discrimination (Oldfield and Johnson III 2008).

Across several studies and commentaries there is therefore a broad consensus for greater theorisation and research on the intersectionality of classed and sexual identities. These call for a move beyond an unhelpful dichotomy that positions economic over cultural, queer analyses and vice-versa (Binnie 2011). Rather the fusion which material queer analysis allows can create insights into the material, socio-economic inequalities in LGBT adults' lives and how cultural, social and economic spaces interact (Heaphy 2011; Taylor 2009).

Understanding the nature of LGBT identities through their intersection with social class, among other identity differences, may be also be developed through critical theory's incorporation of queer theorisation. This creates a fluid framework that engages social, economic and cultural criticism. It allows

analysis of oppression in many forms so avoiding a focus on one at the expense of others. For example a single focus on class oppression over that resulting from heteronormativity and homophobia can omit analysis of their inter-connectedness (Kincheloe and McLaren 2005; Kincheloe 2008). Rather, critical and queer perspectives potentially open up ‘new and interconnected ways of understanding power and oppression and the ways they shape everyday life and human experience’ (Kincheloe and McLaren 2005:303).

In Scotland, ground breaking research, such as that by Equality Network, BEMIS and GRAMNet (Cowen *et al.* 2011) provides new insight into the significance of intersectionality of being LGBT and a refugee or asylum seeker. This research echoes and reinforces the findings that, as for exploration of how class and sexuality intersect, the complex intersections between the sense of being LGBT developed in different, oppressive cultural, legal and political circumstances and having refugee or asylum seeker status must be sensitively explored, understood and supported. Aiming to do so, projects established by campaigning groups such as the Equalities Network (2015) focus particularly on intersectional identities. Two such projects, Out to Access and EveryoneIN, focus on understanding the needs of, and supporting Disabled and Minority Ethnic LGBT people respectively, to access more inclusive services. The Network places learning and knowledge exchange between organisations and individuals as central in the development of such services, through which to counter mental health problems arising from exclusion and erasure:

We work with a variety of organisations with diverse expertise, exchange awareness-raising sessions, and speak to intersectional service users. Extensive partnership work reveals that there are many ways to be inclusive without spending any extra money and that learning to be inclusive of people with complex identities benefits every service user. (*ibid.*)

These theoretical deliberations, empirical research and on-the-ground developments open up understanding of intersectional identities and the complex needs these may create for individuals and groups. The latter

support the argument that understanding and responding to intersectionality is about how it is:

...really lived: sexual advances, limitations, intersectional negotiations and negations feature in everyday lives, beyond the abstract academic page' (Taylor *et al.* 2011:4).

As Weston (2011) demonstrates in interviews with lesbians from equally as diverse backgrounds as this study's participants, a focus on intersectionality can reveal how different aspects of identity have greater significance in different contexts, be in conflict and ever-shifting. Ultimately she argues that:

Class, age, gender, and such come together not only in the doing, but in the perceiving. They can be separated in thought but seldom disentangled in practice (Weston 2011:36).

This adds a further important analytical dimension within which to interpret the inter-relating nature of the LGBT and other identities participants construct. It encourages a focus on how and why participants might compartmentalise different aspects of their identity in their internal thoughts. However, an intersectional perspective is also alert to how different aspects of their identity may combine and influence the complex outward expression of this inner self.

#### **2.3.4 Summary: Understanding the nature of LGBT identity formations**

The review of literature thus far has focused on the evolving and competing ways with which to understand LGBT identities and the nature of how they connect with other identity formations. A complex picture emerges. It suggests that LGBT identities cannot be narrowly essentialised, but are fluid, unstable, ever-changing and in constant interaction with other aspects of identity. Development of a core and coherent sense of self amid such continual change and shifts is rejected by post-modernist perspectives as overly humanistic. However, while they may change and have varying degrees of significance, a sense of a core, authentic LGBT identity may be attained, becoming more and/or less prominent at different points in the life course. From the analysis presented, it is suggested that the level of importance we

attach to our sexuality may also shift, decreasing and/or increasing with age and changing circumstances, or remain more fixed and constant, as core to a sense of self: ‘ a basic, intrinsic or core identity’ (Norton 1997: 34). From intersectional perspectives LGBT identity formation must be understood in terms of its interactions with other aspects of identity. The next sections further explore the conceptual and empirical literature to explore the nature and impact of how, when and where adults may learn to construct such potentially diverse ways of being and becoming LGBT.

#### **2.4 How do LGBT adults engage in learning? Central assumptions**

The review of literature to this point indicates that there are multiple ways of being LGBT where it may be centrally defining of a core and authentic sense of self and/or is complex, multiple, unstable and fluid, in accord or disjunctive with other aspects of identity. The following sections therefore focus on the question of how adults with such potentially diverse and multiple LGBT identity formations engage in learning. The study adopts a whole life course perspective. This allows a focus on the shifts and re-negotiation of adults’ LGBT identity formations in interactions with other aspects of identity and changing, lifewide learning environments. It is assumed therefore that such changes and new understandings of the self will require multiple and combined processes of learning.

Learning is broadly defined by Illeris (2009:7) as:

... any process that in living organisms leads to permanent capacity change and which is not solely due to biological maturation or ageing.

Such an open definition provides the starting point for Illeris’ (2009) model of the field of learning that aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of human learning. Some of the central ideas of the model are applied to consider how LGBT adults might integrate the two fundamental processes involved in all learning. These are: ‘the external interaction process between the learner and his or her social, cultural and material environment, and an internal psychological process of elaboration and acquisition’ (Illeris, 2009: 8). The model acknowledges that learning encompasses a wide range of

complicated processes. Understanding the nature of the learning processes itself is not enough; there also has to be a focus on all the conditions that influence and are influenced by learning. In this study this requires understanding how changing historical, social, cultural, institutional, discursive, inter-subjective and psychological conditions might shape the learning in which LGBT adults engage across time and in multiple spaces. Jarvis (2009:21) further argues, it is the person who learns, fundamentally as a lifelong process of constant ‘... learning to be me’. This involves a combination of learning processes that change our individual biographies over a lifetime, specifically our knowledge, skills, attitudes, emotions, beliefs, values, senses and identity. The following sections explore what might count as learning and how it changes and is changed by being and becoming LGBT across the life course. This is considered through critical comparison of a range of theories of learning. These allow consideration of what particular forms of learning may be prevalent at different life stages and in which settings. These will be analysed later in sections 2.5 and 2.6 that explore questions of the temporal and spatial nature of learning when the individual is LGBT.

#### **2.4.1 The nature and impact of learning in LGBT adults’ lives**

The history of gay people shows that despite repression, secrecy and shame, we as a people have nonetheless survived, have insisted on our specialness, have developed coping strategies for survival... (Duberman 1991:5)

Duberman’s view here is reinforced by Cant (1997, 2008). His oral histories research provides in-depth testimony to LGBT adults’ creative navigation of and resistance to oppressive heteronormative forces. By doing so they invent new identities, develop resilience and persistence out of pain and alienation, while forming powerful solidarities with others. Meek’s (2015) recent work further demonstrates that gay men in Scotland were able to forge identities and relationships despite legal, social and religious condemnation across extensive periods of their lives. The 24 participants’ testimonies in Meek’s study also offer alternative views on how homosexuality was conceptualised by institutions, families and peer groups in highly oppressive times in

Scotland. He reveals, ‘a story of isolation, resistance, community and considerable endeavour’ (5). The varied lived experiences which are captured in these individual life histories and biographies suggest engagement in particular forms of learning that was both positive and negative in their outcomes. Through such learning their respective participants have been able to reconstruct and express LGBT identities openly and assuredly. This introductory discussion provides a useful starting point for the following sections that each engage with the question: ‘What is the nature and impact of how LGBT adults learn across their lives?’ To do so the following sections will aim to extend this speculative, outline analysis of the possible learning in which Cant and Meek’s participants may have engaged. This will be informed by Burke and Jackson’s (2007:3) central contention that deeper, more critical understanding of the nature and impact of lifelong learning needs to analyse the:

... marginalised and misrecognised values, epistemologies and principles [and] takes into account multiple and shifting formations of and for learners and learning across different social contexts...

With this focus I aim to ‘broaden what counts as learning ... and offer different understandings of lifelong learning ...’ (3) as they apply to LGBT adults. I thus seek to explore the possible combination and processes of learning in which LGBT people may engage to shape, reconstruct, positively express or repress their identities. This is also alert to the outcomes that such learning and change may cause, whether alienation and isolation and/or resistance and empowerment, as suggested by these recent studies.

The learning processes as articulated in the contexts of LGBT participants’ biographies and life histories are therefore anticipated to be multiple, varying and distinctive in nature, purpose, scope and impact. In part, learning may be preoccupied with de- and re-construction of what it means, has meant and will mean to be LGBT. At the same time variations and distinctiveness in the learning involved in the construction of LGBT identities may be a consequence of the interplay of multiple historical, social, cultural and organisational influences ranging across particular relationships, times and places in their lives. From the analysis presented in 2.2 to 2.3, it is suggested that the level

of importance we attach to our sexuality may also shift, decreasing and/or increasing with age and changing circumstances. It may also remain more fixed and constant, as core to a sense of self, centrally organising of who we are, have been and will be. At the same time, participants' learning may be concerned with how being and becoming LGBT intersects with being mothers, feminists, political activists, teachers, older, later life students, workers and disabled, among myriad, other identities. The following conceptual reflections suggest that the uniqueness and power of the learning processes in which LGBT adults engage may be found in how they combine to construct multiple, fluid and elastic identities over the life course. Such constructions of being and becoming LGBT, alongside making sense of our 'other' selves, may be therefore understood as combining multiple, nuanced, consciously and unconsciously developed forms of learning to create meaning about identity.

#### **2.4.2 Engagement in psychosocial processes of learning**

Competing psychological schools of thought as they have been applied to adult education, provide a general starting point for gaining possible insights into the nature, purpose and impact of the processes of learning involved in construction and expression of LGBT identities. In psychoanalytic and affective perspectives, exploration of mental interiority takes precedence for understanding ontological questions of how we construct who we are and why (du Gay, Evans and Redman 2000). Here the focus is upon the conception of an inner world, the interpretation of the inferred effects of unconscious processes and, the workings of an individual's interior life in creating subjects (Evans 2000). Critiques of a psychoanalytical focus through which to understand identity construction, point to particular limitations. Barker and Galasinski (2001) claim the obscurity of psychoanalytic language, through its use of metaphors of inner life, positions formation of identity in set ahistorical processes, removed from the patterns of cultural and social relationships that shape identity. However, to understand the particular nature and impact of the learning in which LGBT adults engage, it is important to consider their inner lives and the internal psychological processes that contribute to and/or inhibit learning. As they have faced cultural and social disapproval through homophobic attitudes and actions,

they may become aware that their sexual orientation has to remain invisible and hidden. The meaning and formation of their identity at different points in their lives may therefore more greatly rely on internalised resources and learning characterised primarily by inner psychological processes of acquisition.

Illeris' (2009) model of the field of learning explains the internal acquisition process as the integration of content and incentive, posited as two psychological functions or key dimensions involved in any learning. Internally the learner manages the content of the learning, while the incentive function creates and guides the mental energy required to run the process of acquisition. Content is concerned with what is learned. The content of learning encompasses those aspects of the whole person to which Jarvis (2009) refers and that are changed through learning: knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values. Illeris (2009) adds that learning content can include many elements, such as insights, opinions, meaning, strategies and ways of behaving. The content of learning contributes to development of the learner's capacity and understanding in which she/he endeavours 'to construct *meaning* and the *ability* to deal with the challenges of practical life and thereby an overall personal *functionality* is developed.' (Author's emphases) (Illeris 2009: 10). In directing the mental energy for the learning process to take place, the incentive function/dimension of acquisition involves feelings, emotions and volition. It maintains the mental balance of the learner and the development of personal sensitivity. The model thus shows the close connection between the cognitive and the emotional, where both areas have been proven to always be involved in the learning process (Illeris 2009). The third dimension that completes the field of learning model is interaction. This refers to the interaction process between the learner and her/his social, cultural and material environment. The content of and incentive for learning are initiated by, and crucially dependent on this interaction. The model's core claim is that all learning always involves these three dimensions.

Illeris' (2009) model of the field of learning provides bases for exploration of what may be distinctive about the nature and impact of how LGBT adults

learn across the life course. A focus on the relationship between the three dimensions that Illeris details may provide insight into what may be unique in how they learn. As stressed in Illeris' model, building of the content of and incentive for learning is crucially dependent on how the learner interacts with the social, cultural and material environment. LGBT adults' interactions with the social, cultural and material environment may be negative and alienating, for example through the particular effects of institutional homophobia and heterocentrism. In this instance, negative interactions associated with being LGBT may inhibit adults' internal development of knowledge and insights through which they can construct and express a positive sense of identity. Arguably, this could lead to an emotional imbalance and exhaustion as the mental energy required to support learning through which individuals are able to function and positively develop in the midst of hostility may be depleted. However, as Grace and Hill (2009: 34) argue, in occupying and interacting within queer marginal spaces LGBT adults may have alternative resources that mean processes of acquisition are empowering in their outcomes:

Having internalised hegemonic practices acquired in the classroom and in everyday life dominated by heterocentric discourses, they strategise and work from these spaces to interrogate normal which includes learning to shatter patterns of self-alienation.

Moreover, positive interactions in which their sexual orientation is validated and understood may build adults' capacity and increase emotional resilience. This would then reflect a more effective integration of the external and internal processes involved in all learning.

Understanding the external processes of learning is further developed through a focus on the relational and shifting nature of everyday social encounters, such that who we are, can be formed with and through relations with others. This represents a complex, dynamic psychosocial phenomenon across time and space (Hamilton 2010; Illeris 2014; Quinn 2010; West 2014). This can be construed as moment-by-moment interactions between the self and others, in which we 'accept, contest and negotiate identities ... to be seen in certain ways' (Gee 2000:109). This has important implications for more comprehensive understanding of the nature and impact of how LGBT adults learn over their lives, particularly if, '... in all, lifelong learning is a socio-

personal process as we negotiate our thinking, acting and doing across activities and interactions' (Billet 2010: 402).

Learning as a negotiated, socio-personal, interactive process can be analysed as inter-subjective in nature. Duranti's (2010) re-establishment of the importance of the work of the philosopher Edmund Husserl on the nature of inter-subjectivity for anthropological study provides interesting reference points of this study and its focus on learning. Duranti argues that a fuller understanding of the extensiveness of Husserl's work allows us to understand inter-subjectivity as not just restricted to how shared, mutual understandings can be created; rather, it is further concerned with the potential for achieving empathy, and recognizing the nature of the relationship between the self and 'Others' (as referred to by Duranti) and how the self is projected onto Others. Further clues to the distinctive nature and impact of learning in LGBT adults' lives are therefore offered through a focus on inter-subjective processes. If individuals have hidden or struggled to reconcile that they are gay or have had less struggle, this has implications for how they achieve empathy, understand and relate to others who are LGBT and /or heterosexual.

In the specific context of adult education there has been long-standing application and development of these debates and perspectives on the nature of learning. They have invited challenge and contention, offering evolving, competing and illuminating insights on the nature, purpose and impact of learning across the life course. Respective emphasises are given to, and advance, behavioural, cognitive, constructivist, socially-situated, transformational and developmentally staged accounts as being the most accurate and productive accounts of learning (Aberton 2011; Haggis 2009; Illeris 2009; Jarvis, Holford and Griffin 2003; Mezirow 2006; Tennant 1998, 2006). There is also a conceptually diverse range of educational inquiry that analyses how learner personal, professional-occupational, citizen, academic, and teacher identities, are developed in different contexts (Billet 2010b; Carpenter 2010; Ecclestone, Biesta and Hughes 2010; Fryer 2010; Kreber 2010; Maclachlan and Osborne 2009; Pifer and Baker 2013). The impacts on

learning of wider structural inequalities, of social, historical, cultural and institutional circumstances/constraints, as well as subjectivities and inter-subjectivities, have further preoccupied educational theorists and researchers. They seek more holistic, nuanced, psycho-social interpretations that counter over-reliance on cognitive theory-based accounts (Illeris 2014; Jarvis 2006; Sutherland and Crowther 2006; West 2006, 2014). As Illeris (2009) contends, for comprehensive understanding of learning the active involvement of both internal psychological processes and external interactions should be examined. Focusing on identity formation, Illeris (2014: 160) further contends that it extends across all dimensions of 'learning and mental processes - the cognitive, but also the emotional and the social' - that are wide-ranging and complex. In such terms, learning is continuous in nature, subject to internal psychological and external societal, conditions (Jarvis 2006; Illeris 2009; Merriam, Cafarella and Baumgartner 2007; West 2006). Often centrally placed in these conceptualisations of what learning involves is experience.

### **2.4.3 Experiential lifelong learning processes**

In many definitions of learning 'experience' plays a central role (Billet 2010b; Jarvis 2009, 2012). In a similar way to Illeris (2009, 2014), Beard and Wilson (2006: 2) focus on internal and external processes of learning where they define experiential learning as 'the sense-making process of active engagement between the inner world of the person and the outer world of the environment'. They define learning as relatively permanent change of knowledge, attitude or behaviour occurring as a result of formal education or as a result of informal experiences. In terms of the relationship between learning and experience this is also personal and unique to the learner. Learning flows from and builds upon experience and is influenced by the particular past of the learner. Earlier experiences that were positive can act as a stimulus for new learning and encourage us to take new risks. Negative experience can repress new learning and be inhibitive of our ability to respond to opportunities. While experience underpins all learning, it does not always result in learning. We can have experiences that may not lead to new insights and new learning, rather they confirm already held beliefs,

supportive of an existing cognitive state. Consequently for learning to happen, Beard and Wilson (2006) stress that we have to engage with experience through reflection on what happened, how it happened and why. For the positive development, understanding and expression of their identities across their lifespans it can be suggested that experiential learning and reflection on experience will play an important role in LGBT adults' lives. They have to make sense of past and indeed present experiences in which their sexual orientation could be condemned and /or accepted and over the life course when they may be continually 'coming out'. Consequently, additional capacities for critical self-reflexivity may be demanded of them. Giddens' (1991) influential work refers to reflexivity as concerned with how people constantly revise their lives as responses to new knowledge. More recent work argues for clearer connections to be made between reflexivity and reflection so to understand them as processes through which we see ourselves, others and the world (Archer 2012; Brownlie 2014). Heaphy (2008:1) refers to the longstanding theme in sociological research and theorisation concerning the nature and impact of reflexivity in lesbian and gay lives. This has established a 'heightened reflexivity... associated with self-consciousness, self-determination and empowered agency in everyday living' (*ibid.*). However for Heaphy (2008:1) lesbian and gay reflexivities have tended to be 'overly affirmative and normative projects, and are often narratives about how lesbian and gay life should be'. These perspectives are considered in relation to how and where participants may learn to develop reflexivity over the life course and what changes this may be subject to and why.

This positioning of lifelong learning as experiential and informal, where it is potentially free of the regulatory constraints and control of formal educational environments may also have particular significance for this study's participants. For LGBT adults the particular forms of regulation and control they may encounter in formal educational environments may be a result of the operation of heteronormativity. As noted previously, queer theory has particular concerns, focusing on deconstruction of the inter-relationships between identity, normativity, discourse, and relationality

(Giffney and O'Rourke 2009). This allows for scrutiny of operation of heteronormativity and its varying impacts on participants' learning in diverse settings. Warner (1993: xxvi) first conceptualised the notion of heteronormativity as an analytical category through which the operation of power in social relations can be understood. Heteronormativity operates the 'regime of the normal', through which heterosexuality is privileged and dominates as the natural, obligatory, inevitable and normal basis of all social relations and in which sexualities are valued and devalued (Adams 2002). In Sumara and Davis' (1999: 202) terms: 'Living within heteronormative culture means learning to "see" straight, to "read" straight, to "think" straight.' do Mar Castro Varela *et al.* (2011) analyse heteronormativity as a category of critical social analysis and how it might be resisted. They expose the difficult, diffuse, ever-changing and slippery nature of heteronormativity that defies singular explanation. How heteronormativity is negotiated and possibly resisted by participants, are thus important areas of consideration for this study. It may provide insights into the nature and impact of experiential, informal and formal learning and how this influences the construction of identities in the contexts of the participants' biographies and life histories. The unmasking and challenging of heteronormativity as a powerful tool of hegemonic control that leads to increased agency, purposeful reconstruction and new understandings of our identities, may be a consequence of having engaged in critical processes of learning.

#### **2.4.4 Engagement in critical processes of lifelong learning**

The particular nature, purposes, parameters and impact of critically orientated learning processes can be further explored by drawing upon the foundational premise with which the critical theorist begins, that: 'men and women are essentially unfree and inhabit a world rife with contradictions and asymmetries of power and privilege' (McLaren 2013: 3). As required to analyse such contradictions, critical theory's central tendency is interdisciplinary (Hunter *et al.* 2013). As such, critical theorists seek to adopt theories that are productively dialectical in nature, such as queer theory, that focus on analysis of what may be productively found, and acted upon, from

apparently contradictory processes (McLaren 2013). In relation to this study, this allows a focus on processes of learning and unlearning involved in the construction of LGBT identities. In a dialectical tension, learning processes related to identity construction may be troubled, disorientated, rendered non-linear and disrupted by processes of unlearning. However, at the same time, this may give rise to new insights into what and who we are, and how a learning-unlearning dynamic contributes to ontological processes of being and becoming, and addresses epistemological questions of what we know and how we know ourselves.

Hunter *et al.* (2013) further characterise the process of critical learning as engagement in praxis. Praxis establishes a dynamic relationship between action for change and critical social theory: through the actions of participants, for example in different social movements, theory is applied, tested out and evaluated, while confirmed, recreated and enlivened (*ibid.*). Simultaneously, action is informed by social theory to attain emancipatory outcomes (Kincheloe 2008).

Burke and Jackson (2007) develop further analysis of the learning processes involved in construction of identity through their adoption of a critical, post-structuralist feminist framework. In this, they posit lifelong learning as a site of struggle in which learning cast in neo-liberal economic terms ignores and/or misrecognises the forms of learning and knowledge developed by marginalised groups such as LGBT adults. Preston (2006: 162) draws particular attention to misrecognition as purposive and controlling phenomenon: it is both a form of categorisation, explanations that make the arbitrary legitimate, and a 'mode of differentiation', placing individuals and classes into 'abject' social positions. Narrowly economic neo-liberal discourses in their domination and shaping of lifelong learning and policy across all educational sectors can be seen to contribute to such misrecognition (Ball 2013; Burke and Jackson 2007; Gouthro 2009; Grace 2009; Kincheloe 2008; McLaren 2013; Tedder and Biesta 2009).

Analyses of wider structural inequalities and of social, historical, cultural and institutional circumstances/constraints, as well as subjectivities and inter-subjectivities, further reflect the application of critical social theory and research. It has evolved to analyse and challenge the changing nature of capitalism and the associated hegemonic, structural and ideological forces through which it maintains the subordination and oppression of particular societal groups (Brookfield 2005a; Henn *et al.* 2009; Kincheloe and McLaren 2005; Shor 1992). The critical theory tradition however is not only concerned with knowing about social inequality and oppression; it seeks to uncover how oppressive social reality is resisted and changed through ‘... sharing the vitality, strength and life of people engaged in emancipatory actions ...’ (Hunter *et al.* 2013: 34). In these ways it is claimed that critical theory is ‘one of the most productively disturbing bodies of theoretical work for adult education’, where an analysis of adult learning is implicit in such central propositions and concerns (Brookfield 2005: 102). Brookfield (2005) contends that it has a direct relevance for adult learning, and particularly in developing a critical theory of adult learning. This is evident where purposeful learning processes are embedded in critical theory’s chief concerns such as understanding, to then change, oppressive ideological forces and social processes, with the central question as to how do adults learn to do this (Brookfield 2005). To understand the nature of the learning in which adults engage to identify and oppose such oppression, Brookfield (2005:31) elaborates several questions. These are framed as:

- How do adults learn to interpret their experiences that might highlight their connectedness to others and leads them to see the need for solidarity and collective organisation?
- How do adults unmask how power operates in their communities and learn forms of reasoning that challenge dominant ideology?

In forming such questions, critical theory therefore allows a further level of scrutiny of lifelong learning processes in which LGBT adults in particular, may engage over the life course. These are in relation to questions of how they

learn to understand the nature of homophobic and trans-phobic oppression, and respond to these, possibly in alliance with others.

The deconstruction of the neo-liberalisation of education and learning is further taken up by critical theorists who have adopted and adapted Habermasian theory and its foci of exploration of how social, political and economic structures 'undermine and invade' the lifeworld, that is, those experiences of and communicative relationships within homes, communities, churches and schools (Gouthro 2009:160). In this vein, critically orientated educators and researchers seek to interrogate how a range of 'technologies' advance neo-liberal capitalism - individualism, marketisation, commodification and competition. These lie at the heart of regimes of control over educational policy and practice (Ball 2013a). They present formidable obstacles for those teachers, educationalists and researchers who are committed to an educational system based on principles of social justice and equity, acting in the interests of learners (Ball 2013).

Critical theory perspectives as applied to post compulsory education expose other impacts of neo-liberalism's operation that may be relevant to LGBT adults' experience of formal learning. Neo-liberal rhetoric and misappropriation of equality claims is evident in universities' policies and practices that seek to increase educational diversity through widening participation. These are concerned more with increasing consumer choice rather than progressing equality, so disguising more marketisation of education (Archer 2007: Reay 2012). Diversity rhetoric and diversity management policy and practices in the context of HE support the brand of a university and creation of the right image. In this way, 'diversity as a term has marketing appeal... a form of organisational pride' so that it serves to conceal for example, racism, and works against, rather than advances equality (Ahmed 2012: 207). Critical theory also keeps in play and alerts us to how neo-liberal capitalism seeks to pursue and control human rights legislation and educational policy, not to advance equality in relation to gender, race, sexuality and disability, but to serve the interests of business

and to increase capitalism's efficiency (Cole 2012; Elia and Yep 2012; McLaren 2012).

Neo-liberal understanding has thus significant implications for understanding identity construction as a complex form of learning. For the purposes of this study, economically orientated, hegemonic claims for the nature and purposes of lifelong learning therefore demand creation of alternatives and new possibilities with which to view learning. This is not an insignificant challenge in the face of a monolithic, one-dimensional, there-is-no-alternative, reductive perspective. In this framing, identity is configured in terms of individuals being constantly adaptive, but this is focused on always up-skilling, becoming a flexible worker/learner: no distinction is made between being learner and worker. Rather, individuals have the responsibility for continual engagement in processes of learning and training for renewal of social, cultural and human capital (Field and Morgan-Klein 2012). In so doing they meet the needs of employers, continued business competitiveness and global economic imperatives as they impact on the knowledge economy. Framed neo-liberally, adult learning processes are not about how diverse, multiple or intersected identities are constructed; rather, they are concerned with a fixity of identity, defined only in as far as what constitutes individual economic value (Gouthro 2009; Jackson 2011):

Educational questions around social justice, democracy and diversity are not given as much merit as learning that is connected (ultimately) to earning (Gouthro 2009: 161).

Crowther (2012: 805) adds to this in his analysis of the politics of naming which focuses on the power relationship that positions adults as learners in the discourse of lifelong learning. He contends that labelling of adults merely as learners as part of neo-liberal policy discourse conceals their identities as people with wider experiences; they are transformed from being a 'citizen and social actor into a shopper in the educational market place.' The neo-liberalisation of the learner, learning and educational processes enables a further interpretative lens through which to explore how it has encroached upon and affected the learning and educational experiences of LGBT adults. It may have particular relevance in consideration of the views on LGBT

identities in the workplace, of those participants who are, or have been schoolteachers, lecturers, as well as adult and community education workers.

#### **2.4.5 Engagement in critically queer processes of learning**

The above understandings of the nature and impact of how learning happens are challenged and developed further by critical theory and its incorporation of queer theory as introduced above. These allow analyses that extend out from a focus on internal, cognitive processes of learning to examine how the wider, complex interplay of socio-cultural and socio-economic conditions shape learning processes in identity construction. Critical theory further enables political-economic analyses through which to interrogate and challenge narrowly construed human capital and neo-liberal models which commodify adult and lifelong learning only for economic gain. Hall's (2000) non-essentialist positioning of identity, countering the notion of a stable and core self, adds another dimension to these analyses, that of the influence of discourse in learning to construct identity. He focuses on identity production as the subject of language, ideology and discourse, reflecting a distinct body of thought to permeate cultural studies. Here identity is:

... multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation (17).

The influence of discourses on identity construction is a central focus of queer theory. Kincheloe (2008) positions discourse analysis as an important element in the process of critical knowledge production. Discourse can be understood as a '...constellation of hidden historical rules that govern what can be said and cannot be said and who can speak and who must listen...' (68). Critical and queerly orientated discourse analysis focuses on how heteronormative discourses are produced in particular socio-cultural milieu and educational practices, how we produce and are produced by them: as such, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is both theory and method (Fairclough 2003). It allows examination of the relationship of language to power, ideology and inequality through critical examination of texts (in this instance biographical

and life histories narratives) as they are embedded in societal and institutional practices (Smith 2013).

Foucault's (1976) ideas significantly evolved philosophical understandings of the importance of discourse to construction of sexual identity. In particular he focuses on how meanings of sexuality are constructed and controlled within discourse: 'it is in discourse that knowledge and power are joined together' (100).

Sexuality ... is the name that can be given to a historical construct: not a furtive reality that is difficult to grasp, but a great surface network in which the stimulation of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of special knowledges, the strengthening of controls and resistances, are linked to one another, in accordance with a few major strategies of knowledge and power (105, 106).

The influence of Foucault's thinking here permeates the development of queer theory and discourse, particularly apparent in terms of how queer subjects or the subject of queer are conceptualised (Downing and Gillett 2011). Subjects are constituted as a consequence of such strategies of power and knowledge acting upon them (Burke and Jackson 2007). In being constituted in this way, subjects are then compelled to express their identity, who they are in the world, through discourses which are constrained by these networks of power and knowledge; they are products of such discourse.

A central tenet to queer theory is that all taken-for-granted meanings and assumptions about identity, (hetero) normativity, discourse and inter-subjectivity are 'queered'. This allows a 'radical process of disruption' which seeks to destabilise and radically challenge how power is held in hegemonic constructions of a heterosexual/ homosexual binary in which the former dominates the latter (Ruffolo 2009:3). Discourses or master narratives can be interrogated through narrative enquiry methodologies. They seek to interpret how and to what extent configurations of sexual identity and development draw upon and/or challenge 'available sexual taxonomies' and the lexicon of heteronormative discourse (Hammack, Thompson and Pilecki 2009: 867). As Ruffolo (2009: 2) contends, heteronormativity and exposure of the power

relations it seeks to preserve have ‘monumentally framed the ways in which we think about how subjects are subjected to the normative discourses of heterosexuality’.

One possible and powerful heteronormatively created discourse is that of personal and social shame associated with homosexuality (McDermott *et al.* 2008). Queer scholarship has sought to interpret the phenomena and paradoxes of gay shame and pride and their inter-relatedness, posing questions such as ‘What are the residual effects of shame in lesbian and gay subjectivity in the era of gay pride?’ (Halperin and Taub 2009:4). The operation and impact of discourses of shame and that of pride may have relevance to participants’ life histories and learning. What shame is and how it is learned, retained and or rejected, adds a further possible layer to understanding the nature and impact of the learning processes in which adults engage to construct LGBT identity formations over the life course. In his research with LGBT adults on their views on migration, Cant (1997) identifies shame as a recurrent theme. It impelled individuals to leave their home communities in the fear of bringing shame upon their families. However their stories demonstrate a subsequent transcendence of shame as part of the freedom gained through gay diaspora experience.

Framing her analyses as the cultural politics of shame, Munt (2007) identifies and analyses ‘shame’s latent intricacies’ (ix). She posits that shamed subjects are created through the operation of shame. This is contingent to different times and spaces, in which particular groups are negatively set apart, and socially constructed in insidious, distorting ways that communicates to individuals how they should feel shame and suppress themselves accordingly. Munt (2007) argues for the close interrogation of how space becomes a loci of shame, but also how shame enacts a space that contributes to the formation of identity. Munt’s (2007) contention is to subvert how we understand shame and reclaim our relationship with it and its role in the attachments we develop and those which we cannot, through a self-reflexive, cathartic and transgressive process of change and self-healing. Such reclamation and new insights can lead to a transcendence of shame. For the study’s participants

the focus on how they have been able to, or not, transcend and eliminate personal and social shame in their lives presents another potential way to understand what might be distinctive about the nature and impact of the learning in which they engage. It also invites inquiry into how they have learned about the notion of pride and how this has influenced who they have become as LGBT adults.

#### **2.4.6 Developing critical queer knowledge**

As noted above, critical theorists and researchers commit to praxis and the creation of 'ever-evolving criticality' where post modernist and post structuralist formulations such as queer theory are employed to understand the multiple, connected workings of power and oppression and their effects (Kincheloe and McLaren 2005). Critical researchers have also been informed by post-modernism and post-structuralism to find new ways of understanding the construction of identity and the influence of social and historical forces on how we view ourselves, while introducing scepticism regarding unproblematic notions of freedom (Brookfield 2005; Kincheloe and McLaren 2005). Grace and Hill (2009) locate themselves within such attempts to contribute to an ever-evolving criticality through the use of queer theory. They do so through exploration of what constitutes queer forms of learning and knowledge construction. They identify these as:

... communicative learning processes and critical analyses concerned with being, self-preservation, expectation, becoming, resistance, affiliation and holistic living (31).

Grace and Hill (2009) argue the role of critical adult educators is both practical and political in which they are required to engage in the deconstruction of 'exclusionary forms of adult education and the construction of inclusionary, transformatory pedagogies' for LGBT adults (35). Grace and Hill (2009) argue that the development of queer knowledge and praxis is central to the creation of inclusive and transformative learning. Queer knowledge is viewed as incorporating the multiple ways in which LGBT (Queer Others) make meaning and sense of the world: 'a composite of sociocultural

and political activities for social transformation' (p12). They argue that through queer knowledge LGBT adults open up spaces in which we:

can encounter and validate our complex selves as w/e confront an often hostile heterocentric world. It can proffer a location where identities grow and change and it enables learners to challenge heterosexualising discourses and heteronormative ways of being, believing, desiring, acting, becoming and belonging... Queer knowledge... forms new directions for personal development... (34).

Grace and Hill (2009) view queer knowledge as thus constituting a site for learning which Queer praxis builds upon. Queer praxis contests privileging of male over female and straight over gay, while challenging normative heterosexuality and rejecting any classification of identities. Queer knowledge and praxis serve to unsettle and disrupt heteronormative structures and institutions to challenge and rethink narrowly construed, exclusionary understandings of lifelong learning. Potential for this lies in the central importance and transformational, counter-hegemonic power they accord queer knowledge and the non- and informal learning which has contributed to its formation. Hill (1995, 1996) argues that such queer processes of learning occur in multiple and overlapping sites in adult education. They are most often constituted as sites of

... non formal learning (for example, workshops on topics like the "coming out" process or gay marriage offered through LGBTQ community centers) and informal learning (for example, everyday learning that happens in Queer bars, bookstores and other public locations). These sites contextualise everyday life, contest hetero-hegemony, resist readings that exclude or defame Queer persons... (Grace and Hill, 2009: 20).

These insights into queer learning processes and knowledge may allow exploration particularly of the nature and impact of the informal and non-formal learning in which LGBT adults may engage. I am mindful that this exposition of queer learning and knowledge construction is based on North American socio-cultural, educational and political contexts. In its application to arenas of educational enquiry, Talburt (2007:96) considers the appropriation of queer theory in the academy within a North American context. She is self-critical in this, qualifying her adoption of 'an all-too-easy gesture of focusing on U.S. contexts' that makes it therefore 'crucial to

remain aware that “queer” is being taken up in non-Anglophonic contexts in visible and not-so-visible ways for varying reasons and with varying effects.’ Informed by this note of caution opens up possibilities as to how queer learning and knowledge construction characterises LGBT participants’ learning and is mediated by UK and Scottish socio-cultural contexts.

#### **2.4.7 Intergenerational learning processes**

The intergenerational field is in the early stages of its development (Fredriksen-Goldsen and Bonifas 2005). However the growth and development of intergenerational education and learning to date has seen greater attention being paid to definitions of and for its practice (European Approaches to Inter-Generational Lifelong Learning [EAGLE] 2015; Mannion 2012; Pinto 2011).

Mannion (2012:387) argues that the overarching purpose of intergenerational education is to improve intergenerational relations that ‘assist in the flourishing of communities and places, local and beyond’. In terms of the nature and outcomes of intergenerational learning, EAGLE (2015:1) provide a further broad breakdown, where it is,

...a process through which individuals of all ages acquire skills and knowledge, but also attitudes and values, from daily experience, from all available resources and from all influences in their own life worlds.

Generations Working Together (2015) explain the aim of intergenerational practice is therefore,

To bring people together in purposeful, mutually beneficial activities which promote greater understanding and respect between generations and contribute to building more cohesive communities.

Educational purpose and practice aims are thus conjoined, reflecting Mannion’s (2012) argument that that any intergenerational practice must always involve an educative component. He also focuses on the significance of place and the nature of intergenerational reciprocity as a core principle and process for intergenerational practice. He argues that this can create greater definitional clarity and understanding through consideration of the influence of the many spaces, contexts and cultural locations of intergenerational

practice. He therefore describes intergenerational practice as ‘an emplaced practice’ in which,

...different generations reciprocally affect the places that social groups co-inhabit or inhabit separately. By this view, intergenerational practice is an emplaced practice that sets out to change relations, places and identities (396).

This anticipates later discussion in this chapter of the significance of where learning happens and how LGBT adults may inhabit different lifeworld locations (section 2.6).

EAGLE (2015) identifies a number of further key issues with which current and future research on intergenerational learning needs to engage. This is in terms of who is involved in intergenerational learning and what their roles might be; how ‘alternative lifestyles’ shape the nature of the environment in which intergenerational learning takes place; what conditions may support or prevent intergenerational learning; what is transmitted in terms of knowledge, values or tradition and what might be the benefits and risks for participants.

Given its cross-generational focus and investigation of the nature and impact of multiple forms of learning in the construction of LGBT identities across different generations, this study offers some scope to explore these issues. Participants span approximately three generational cohorts. These can be categorised chronologically as those born pre-second world war, post war, so-called baby boomers born between 1945 and 1960, and those born between the late 1960s to the early 1970s. These generations have had very different experiences of societal repression and or acceptance of their sexual orientation. There is therefore scope to consider the nature and impact of how and where intergenerational learning could happen between them. However, an intergenerational project could entail generations working together that could be 25 and 50 or equally 55 and 80 (Coull 2015; Mannion 2012). There are therefore possibilities for intergenerational learning and practice between participants and the generation of LGBT young people who are in their adolescence and early adulthood. This is reflected in Westwood’s (2013) engagement in ‘passionate scholarship’ in the practice of critical

gerontology, as called for by Bernard and Scharf (2007:8). Such scholarship seeks to challenge the decline and loss paradigm associated with ageing. It is characterised instead by engagement in meaningful, long lasting partnerships with academics, researchers and older people. This requires an overt value-commitment to make visible concerns with social justice, challenge discrimination and promote new understandings of the multiple variations of difference as we age. In her endeavour to engage older lesbians in more collaborative forms of research, Westwood (2013) refers to the important intergenerational dimension of her research that values participants:

... for the hidden histories they hold, spanning decades of dramatic sociolegal change; for the cultural heritage of younger lesbians that is contained within those histories' (308).

#### **2.4.8 Being and becoming LGBT: a transformational learning process?**

Bringing learning and identity construction together, Billet and Somerville (2004) contend that thinking, acting, learning and identity (trans) formation, are inseparable and simultaneously occurring. Jackson (2011b: 185) considers identities as rendered fluid, unstable, multiple and 'fragmented', but also transformed in interaction with, and development through, lifelong learning. Arguably, multiple forms of change and transformation, both positive and negative, small scale and potentially profound, run through and connect the learning processes considered above. Illeris' (2014, 2014a: 149) recent theoretical and empirical work problematises the central concepts to have defined transformative learning as being too cognitively orientated, neglecting the other important emotional, social situatedness and environmental dimensions of learning and mental processes. For Mezirow, (2000, 2006) transformational learning is the process by which taken-for-granted frames of reference are transformed to become more inclusive, open, and reflective, generative of new beliefs and views that will more effectively guide action. A frame of reference is a meaning perspective, through which we make sense of experience. It is also composed of a habit of mind, a set of assumptions that act as filters for interpreting the meaning of experience (Mezirow 2000). Habits of mind are viewed as multiple in orientation, and the worldviews they hold, ranging from being conservative or liberal to tendencies to respect or challenge authority (*ibid.*). Our values and sense of

self are anchored in our frames of references as defined, providing stability and identity.

It is in this area of self and identity in transformational learning that Illeris (2014; 2014a) develops his critique and pursues greater clarity. He takes up Kegan's (2000) question as to 'what form transforms?' as a means to explore and clarify what can be understood as a multi-dimensional target area with which to define and delimit transformational learning in more productive, accurate ways. Illeris (2014a: 148) posits the concept of identity should be the target area of formal transformative learning theory with which it can be updated and clarified. This is because it is 'identity' that is the form that transforms. It encompasses changes to the cognitive, emotional and social dimensions of learning, while it is understood that identity links the person and his/her practical, cultural, social and material environment. This provides a further basis upon which to explore how LGBT participants engage in transformational learning and its particular impact on their identity construction.

#### **2.4.9 Summary: the nature and impact of how LGBT adults learn**

In summary, sections 2.4.1 to 2.4.8 have explored theoretical and empirical literature to analyse the possible nature and impact of the learning processes involved in constructions of being and becoming LGBT. Kincheloe's (2008) conceptualisation of a critical complex epistemology provides a useful framing. At the heart of this is a critical ontology. As the study of being in the world, ontology in a critical frame sees the inseparability of the knower and the known, of knowing and being: '... who we are is inseparable from what we know ...' (*ibid.*:250). Understanding the complexity and multi-dimensional nature of reality and our being, requires multiple forms of knowledge production that act as new ways of 'producing our identities, our subjectivities' (*ibid.*: 250). This idea of inseparability, of the powerful and dynamic connection between learning and the construction of identity is further advanced by Fryer (2010). He maps out a philosophical and practical case for attainment of the highly contested notion of freedom. He argues that

ultimately the conditions for sustaining democratic freedom always involve a process of struggle, while its capacity to flourish can only be understood in the particular historical, social and educational context in which it is sought. The promise of freedom he argues is held in the centrality of learning to develop citizenship in which there is the unimpeded, fullest plurality of expression of our sense of self and identities. For this study with LGBT adults his emphasis on the relationship between identity and learning has particular resonance. From consideration of questions about the distinctive nature and impact of how LGBT adults may learn, the review of literature thus far alerts us to many possibilities for varied and enriching learning that could contribute to the fullest and freest expression of LGBT identities. The following sections now consider questions of the nature and impact of when and where learning may happen for LGBT adults across their lifetimes.

## **2.5 The distinctiveness of when learning happens for LGBT adults: perspectives on the past and present**

The nature of past learning and how it may have shaped and been shaped by adults' LGBT identities in formative life stages is analysed from the perspectives of cohort effects and queer temporalities. Diversity studies are then used to explore learning in the present with a particular focus on how older adults' LGBT identity formations could shape and be shaped by post work and later life learning.

Analyses of what may be distinctive about when LGBT adults learn across the life course requires a focus on the influence of the different socio-historical contexts in which they have lived their childhood, adolescence and earlier adulthood. For Chang (2005: 190) such historical analyses should be alert to the impact of heterosexism on LGBT people's lives where it is:

... not merely a temporary social phenomenon but an on-going one that historically plays between social practice and structural meaning.

Hill (1995) refers to heterosexism as a widely shared, repressive social system. It assumes heterosexuality is compulsory for everyone, supported by a discourse or logic of heterocentricism that acts as a hegemonic force

oppressive of lesbian and gay people (Hill 1995). Hegemony describes those ways in which people learn to accept as natural and consent to, an unjust social order, where power is held by an elite few and exercised in their interests (Brookfield 2005).

This study's participants represent a population of at least three generational cohorts. They have lived through periods of significant socio-cultural, socio-legal and political change, with attitudinal shifts towards homosexuality that may be discordant or in alignment with these wider, promising changes. Following Chang's (2005) argument, heterosexism and its impact will have been pervasive of their past lives. A focus on cohort effects may be insightful of how heterosexism shaped events to inhibit and/or extend possibilities for LGBT adults' learning.

### **2.5.1 Cohort effects**

Cohort effects are described as those national and international events that have distinct social, political and economic lasting effects that separate generations, affording them distinctive characters (Pugh 2002). I am mindful of the risk of making generalisations that assume an overall experience was collectively shared by older people at a past point in their lives, where this subsumes diversity of individual experience (Biggs and Daatland 2006; Pugh 2002). However, Pugh (2002) argues that analysis of cohort effects is important for understanding influences on older lesbian and gay people's earlier lives. In particular, he highlights the need to examine cohort effects on the identification of the self and the circumstances in which older lesbian and gay people associated with and formed relationships with others. In the case of Scotland, where consenting homosexual activity in private was only de-criminalised in 1980, the preceding oppressive legislation, and associated social and religious opprobrium impacted on gay people's lives (Meek 2015). This may be viewed as a significant cohort effect on the identity development and relationships of those participants who lived through the pre and post stages of legal reform.

Cohort effects may also extend to the impact on LGBT people's lives of the

vociferous ‘Keep the Clause’ campaign, run in Scotland in 1999. Legally termed section 28, this became law as part of the Local Government Act (1988) passed by the Thatcher-led Conservative government. It was a result of preceding controversial debate as to what constituted ‘the promotion of homosexuality in schools’ (Burridge 2004: 327). The legislation stated that:

- 2A-(1) A local authority shall not:
- (a) intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality;
  - (b) promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship (Local Government Act, 1988)

The campaign was led and paid for by a wealthy, right wing, fundamentalist Christian, Brian Souter. He was able to spread ‘misinformation’ across Scotland, employing extreme heterocentric discourses: propaganda messages on buses, billboards and shop windows, depicting homosexual deviance and promoting ‘proper families’ (Taylor 2005: 376).

Though the campaign was successfully defeated and the clause removed from the Scottish legislature, it has been noted that little subsequent research has explored the impact of the campaign. Cant (2011:1) argues:

There was, of course, resistance but the impact of this frenzy on the mental well-being of members of the homosexual minority was immeasurable - and it remains un-measured. The universities...might have been expected to find some European research funding to explore the historical and sociological causes of the frenzy, as well as mental health implications but the drawbridges went up in the seats of learning...

However, Taylor’s (2005) work does progress debate as to the impact of the campaign specifically on self-identified working class, lesbian women from across Scotland and England who took part in her study. It explored the significance of class and sexuality in the women’s biographies, everyday lives and identities. In her analysis of the women’s response to ‘Keep the Clause’ Taylor adopts an intersectional perspective to explore how sexuality and class interact in questions of the women’s sexual citizenship. She argues that the women in her study were in effect positioned as classed outsiders in the

repeal of the clause. A lack of outlets to voice their opposition was compounded by a lack of educational opportunity, social networks and social capital available to middle class counterparts. My exploration aims to explore what may be distinctive and significant about the time of learning that happens for participants, and how this influences and is influenced by being LGBT. Taylor (2005) provides insights into how working class, lesbian women's experiences, views and political voices were ignored and invalidated over the time of the Keep the Clause campaign. This in turn deepened their understanding of being lesbian and working class. One participant argued:

They [other lesbians] don't want to recognize class inequality, they want to think it doesn't matter. It seems we are all supposed to be happy together in a blinkered Utopia cloud cuckoo land, probably under a rainbow coloured LGBT banner, toeing the party line (Taylor, 2005: 379).

To examine cohort effects in these ways is not to neglect individual experience. As Westwood (2013) argues, her research on lesbian women's experience reveals the hidden histories they hold as mediated by 'decades of sociolegal' change as identified above. Cronin (2006) further reinforces the importance of exploration of the relationship between individual biography of older LGBT people and the wider socio-historical context. She critiques the dominance of heteronormative practices and assumptions in social gerontology, contending that this has resulted in its failure to adequately account for sexual diversity and understand older LGBT people's experiences. In the context of educational gerontological research, Withnall (2006, 2010) investigated experiences of learning in individual lives, but also in relation to changing social structures and historical events. Closely linked to the present study, is Bettinger's (2007; 2009) exploration of the lessons that may be gained from LGBT people in midlife, about rethinking adult learning and development. He refers to contemporary midlife LGBT people as a 'unique socio-historic cohort' (Bettinger 2009, p166). They have been witness to major societal change in relation to LGBT visibility, so may have many and unique stories for other LGBT cohorts.

### **2.5.2 A queer temporal lens on past learning**

Freeman (2010) characterises the ways in which time is organised and

constructed as being through a dominant bio-political paradigm. This refers to the accepted, the taken-for-granted, established temporal order of things. She refers to this as chrono-normativity, the normalising and categorising of chronological time. This envisions time as propelling forward in even, unified and un-interrupted ways. It relates to those,

... familial times that organise the durational and the everyday in supposedly universal or at least Western experience: generationality and intimacy (Freeman 2010: xxii).

Freeman (2010) argues that corporations and nation states' role in this has been to repressively organise and set the pace of living. They do this in ways that make people believe they have control of their own time as a matter of free choice; however, the true motive is to eradicate alternative ways of organising time that would not be in the interests of corporate or nation-state's hold on power. Queer articulations of history, time and becoming aim to counter such bio-political organisation of time and human development (Freeman 2007, 2010; Halberstam 2005; McCallum and Tuhkanen, 2011). The question of how LGBT adults learn in the past may be addressed through application of queer theory to create alternative understanding of time. Queer temporalities aim to counter 'hetero temporalities' (Halberstam in roundtable discussion, in Dinshaw *et al.* 2007: 181). They challenge predictable, chronological ordering of time to rethink different time periods in the past lives of LGBT people and how these shape their present circumstances (Dinshaw *et al.* 2007; Freeman 2007). Central to her assertions, Halberstam (2005) posits queer temporality as disruptive of taken-for-granted heteronormatively assigned narratives of time. These are marked out as clearly separated periods of childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Life stages can only be logically understood by the 'straight' clock, referred to as the 'rational clock-based existence of the social mainstream' (McCallum and Tukanen 2011: 1). In this account it is the '... paradigmatic markers of life experience... birth, marriage, reproduction, and death ...' that dominate (Halberstam, 2007:2). A queer view on the nature of the transitions within, and between, these life stages in the lives of LGBT people therefore aims to:

... open up new narratives and alternative relations to time and space...  
: it is about the potentiality of life unscripted by the conventions of

family, inheritance, and child rearing. (Halberstam 2007:2).

Bauer and Cook's (2012: 4) exploration of Queer 1950s for example, is premised on such a contention. They provide empirical evidence of the 'new narratives and alternative relations to time and space' that queer theorisation of time seeks to uncover. Their project is '... partly recuperative ... in the sense of tracking queer histories and genealogies of which we still know relatively little'. They utilise queer approaches to the study of the past, specifically the 1950s, as a means of creating a more complex, textured picture of past gay lives of which relatively little is known. They use queer theory to 'excavate and rethink the specific cultural, political and experiential contingencies that shaped sexual lives and thought during the 1950s' (5). From their application across the several studies to which Bauer and Cook (2012) refer, these queer conceptions of time offer a way to interrogate assumptions about the past. They reveal hidden histories of LGBT adults in which they were radically resistant and counter to the accepted norms of the time. For some they could subvert and live out with the particular heterocentric conditions and repressions of the time, to develop positive understanding of their lesbian and gay identities and find alternative ways of living. As such, queer conceptions of time illuminate how:

... both [lesbian] women and [gay] men seized, twisted and reconfigured dominant discourses to provide support and impetus to different ways of living and different understandings of the self (7).

Following Bauer and Cook's (2012) work, I would suggest that queer conceptions of time add a lens through which to interpret what is distinctive about the forms of learning that have happened in the past lives of this study's participants. If they 'reconfigured dominant discourses' this suggests engagement in learning that was critical, empowering and radicalising. This is particularly the case where the perpetuation of powerful heterocentric discourses across time have acted to severely limit the language and conditions through which participants could understand, think, talk about and find ways to express LGBT identities. Further interpretation of the LGBT adults' past lives that enabled them to counter and subvert such heterocentric discourse could explore the extent to which their learning

uniquely represents a process of ‘radical historicization’ (Hall 2000: 17). Hall (2003: 394) argues that identities are: ‘the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past’. He further contends they are:

...multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic discourses, practices and positions ... subject to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation (2000: 17).

Overall, these perspectives suggest that in learning to be and become LGBT, adults have been driven to influence, challenge and change the particular socio-political and socio-cultural constraints of past times. The forms of learning that enabled them to do so may be radical and transformative. This allows another interpretative lens with which to analyse the nature and impact of past. In chapters 4 and 5 particularly, I explore ways in which learning influenced participants’ changing LGBT and other intersecting identities across childhood, adolescence and earlier adulthood.

### **2.5.3 Present learning: insights from critical diversity studies**

Further consideration of the temporality of learning and questioning the nature and impact of when LGBT adults’ learning takes place, also requires a focus on the present as well as the past, while alert to connections between the two. West (2014) explains Freud’s notion that from birth humans depend on protective surroundings and others so that being left alone creates anxiety and repression of feelings. Thus ‘Past and present are constant companions... [as] ... we may also hold on to aspects of existing ways of seeing and being, for fear of what is repressed, and or of being abandoned and helpless...’ (65). This may be realised where earlier adulthood for LGBT people may be shaped by the conflicts and uncertainties of adolescence (Halberstam 2007).

Several participants are now in the post work and later life stages of the life course. Diversity studies may provide further insight into the nature of when learning happens in later life, and how this may shape re-construction or re-negotiation of LGBT identity formations.

[there is a]... need to develop a better understanding of the nature, sources and mechanisms of the multiple pathways in later life as a contrast to the stereotyping of ageing and older people ... Perhaps then insight would be gained more readily into how variation and inequality are produced among older people. This is, after all, what critical research should be about - about people, their problems, hopes, opportunities and remedies (Daatland and Biggs 2006: 223, 224).

Daatland and Biggs here refer here to the growing field of enquiry, for which they posit: to understand the phenomena of contemporary ageing it is imperative that recognition is given to its diversity. Diversity in ageing studies draw upon multi-disciplinary and international perspectives. They explore the possibilities of diversity of culture, lifestyle and experience and how the constraints of later life may be negotiated. This encompasses theories and findings from gerontology, psychology and sociology, as well as social policy and health sciences. Their synthesis allows investigation of multiple and individual pathways as we age, the particular sources of social identifications available to adults as they age, and an examination of the tensions between social structures and the possibilities for personal and social agency (Daatland and Biggs 2006).

While holding interpretative promise for understanding older adult identities, in being concerned with how older people live in a changing social world (Findsen 2005), social gerontology has been criticised. Its reliance and 'retreat to normative models as templates for theorising' about ageing, give rise to limited, a one-dimensional perspective that creates stereotypes of older adult identities (Biggs and Daatland 2006a: 223). Withnall (2006) particularly criticises social gerontology's uncritical acceptance of activity theory. It has dominated notions of what constitutes appropriate educational provision and narrowly defines the nature of the learning processes in which older adults engage. Activity theory posits that optimal ageing involves remaining active and carrying on interpersonal relationships for as long as possible (Duay and Bryan 2006; Withnall 2010). It emphasises the need for active physical, social and mental engagement in meaningful activities that contribute to good health, satisfaction with life and longevity (Boulton-Lewis et al 2006). The concepts of 'healthy, successful and positive' ageing further

relate to active ageing, in sharing a positive stance (Davey 2002: 98). However the implications of each concept differ as delineated by Davey (2002). Healthy ageing focuses on maintenance of health, frequently through lifestyle choices. Successful ageing also relates to health but emphasises personal well-being, autonomy and psychological adjustment, while positive ageing aims to challenge negative perceptions of ageing and retirement.

Activity theory also challenges or can be seen to balance disengagement theory. Emerging in the 1960s, disengagement theory drew from a functionalist paradigm. As such, it focused on individual adjustment to ageing and was concerned with how social roles and norms of older individuals contributed to the functioning of the social system (Pugh 2002, Estes *et al.* 2003). Disengagement is viewed as beneficial to the older individual's psychological wellbeing and is cast as a universal and inevitable process; failure to disengage is regarded as deviance. In withdrawing from, rather than engaging in social activities and relationships, he/she will maintain higher morale in later life (Estes *et al.* 2003).

Disengagement and activity theories are criticised on many levels. Pugh (2002) argues that both establish moral imperatives related to ageing, where older people have to be either active or reduce activity: both deny older people's individual wishes, experiences and diverse identities. From critical and queer perspectives, activity theory presents a severely reductionist view of ageing in its assumed homogeneity in older adults. This reductionist turn is further evidenced in the analyses of 'new ageism' as provided by Biggs *et al.* (2006). In this, he is critical of the rhetoric of ageing policy that narrowly focuses on positive or productive ageing. In their analysis of the policy construction of 'new ageing', Katz and Laliberte-Rudman (2004:45) further point to the inherently paradoxical picture it creates for adults in their mid to later lives:

On the one hand, middle-aged and older people are led to expect that active and healthy lifestyles will contribute to their acceptability and inclusion within public worlds of social participation. On the other hand, such lifestyles find themselves allied with neoliberal agendas

that problematise older bodies and identities as vulnerable, risky and in need of vigilance.

This warns against giving primacy to normative and contradictory understandings of ageing identities at the cost of more critically developed insights. This has particular resonance for the participants in this study who are in the mid to later stages of the life span. As Cronin (2006) argues, *heteronormative* thinking and assumptions have contributed to a marginalisation of and limited insight into the experiences and complex identities of older LGBT adults when they reach mid and later life. Heteronormative thinking and assumptions are viewed as upholding the domination of heterosexual privilege (Hill 1995,1996; Tierney 1997). Heteronormativity is therefore problematised to refer to the way in which western societies are structured on the belief that heterosexuality is the dominant and superior mode for having relationships, legitimating the differential treatment and denial of experiences of those outside of this 'heterosexual regime' (Cronin 2006: 110). Thus, Cronin (2006) calls for the inclusion of sexual diversity in later life studies to increase understanding of older lesbian and gay adults' experiences and identity formation, but also to demonstrate ways in which heteronormativity and its related discourse of heterocentrism has impacted on their lives and can be challenged.

Cronin's calls for inclusion of sexual diversity in later life studies are reinforced when the potential heterogeneous experiences of the older LGBT population in contemporary UK society are considered. Several generations of LGBT people have now lived through a post war period in which British political and social life in relation to equality of LGBT people has dramatically transformed (Forrest and Ellis 2006). However, despite significant legal reform, older gay men and lesbians can still consider themselves to have diminished rights, where lack of recognition of their lives in policy, service provision and in legislation can lead to 'a profound sense of invalidation' (Heaphy and Yip 2006: 450). Contrastingly, and as suggested by Hill (2004:86), participation in 'resistance and active construction of new politics' may also have contributed to later life diversity, where lesbian and gay activists whose

identities were established in the sexual politics of the 1960s and 1970s in the UK are now entering older age (Heaphy, Yip and Thompson 2004). As part of the movement for gay liberation, they may have had more positive and transformative learning experiences through exposure to affirmative, celebratory and counter-hegemonic discourse, leading them to embrace a gay or lesbian lifestyle and identity earlier in the life course (Cronin 2006). However, this identity cohort may be significantly different again from older gay men, lesbians and bisexuals who have been married, experienced parenthood, and started to be more open about their sexual identity in later life, while others have resorted to hiding and being shamed by their 'true' sexual identities, having lived through periods when homosexuality was viewed as pathological, criminal or sinful (Hill 2004; Munt 2008). As explored from an intersectional perspective, socio-cultural factors associated with class, gender, race and disability, which shape how older heterosexual adults negotiate later life, may also contribute to the diversity of non-heterosexual adults' identity formations in distinct ways, which require further exploration (Heaphy, Yip and Thompson 2004).

Diversity studies thus enable another potentially useful view on the particular question of temporality this study seeks to explore, in this instance the nature and impact of when older LGBT adults learn, focusing on post work and later life. This is alert to the connections between present and past educational opportunities. For many mid-aged as well as older LGBT adults the impact of the hegemonic ideology of heterosexism will have begun in their formative years of primary and secondary education. This is emphasised by Birden (2005), who refers to the distortive and 'mis-educative' effects of this ideology. Focusing on adolescence and school education, she highlights the plight of LGBT adolescents in the USA who, by their teenage years have already been subjected to a 'lifetime' of compulsory heterosexism, in myriad forms, resulting in psychological damage and their recognition as the nation's highest-risk group (Birden 2005:2). In the context of the UK and Scotland, significant moves have been made in recent years to tackle homophobic

bullying in schools and to raise awareness of such mis-educative effects through a range of on-going campaigns (Stonewall 2012).

While such developments are greatly welcomed in the context of school education, how heterosexism manifests in adult education remains relatively under-researched and therefore unchallenged in the UK and Scotland. However, an increasing body of work in North America has created awareness of heterosexism in adult and higher education (Hill 1995, 1996, 2004, 2009). Germane to the research questions this study addresses, Kreber (2010; 179) acknowledges that the continuation of such work is critical, given that it has developed greater understanding of diversity and inclusive practices in adult and higher education, but also necessary,

... if we want our research and practice to make it possible for learners to make a difference and experience a sense of agency for renewing the world.

For this study that extends to the nature and impact of learning in post-work, later phases of life, emergent ideas in critical educational gerontology (CEG) are relevant. CEG provide a means of interpretation of the nature, purpose, locations and impact of the learning in which older LGBT adults may engage.

#### **2.5.4 The nature and impact of when older LGBT adults learn: from the perspectives of critical educational gerontology**

CEG is concerned with development of educational and learning practices that can lead to the empowerment and emancipation of older adults (Findsen and Formosa 2011). It is a diffuse and evolving field of critical inquiry, ostensibly in its infancy in being used as an interpretative tool and applied to adult education (Findsen 2005). It has been shaped by and builds on developments in critical social gerontology. It aims to better understand the nature of ageing in a social context, with social justice as the major goal (Bernard and Scharf 2007; Formosa and Higgs 2013; Holstein and Minkler 2007; Phillipson 1998, 2000, 2006; Tulle 2004; Withnall 2010). Critical social gerontologists thus challenge the normative ideals of successful ageing which dominate ageing discourses to uncover the nature of oppression and inequality experienced by older people (Holstein and Minkler 2007). To do so, Estes et

al. (2003) argue for a greater integration of political economic analyses with humanistic perspectives. The political economy perspective is an important strand of critical theory adopted by critical gerontology. It provides a means of analysing the role of capitalism and the state in terms of how it contributes to systems of domination and marginalisation of older people (Estes et al. 2003). It therefore specifically focuses on the role of economic and political systems in shaping and reproducing power relations and inequalities in society. While a political economy of ageing (Findsen 2005; Phillipson 1998; Withnall 2010) can define the context, the humanities can expose its impact on older individuals' lives. In the bridging of these analytical perspectives one is dependent on the other:

... without an understanding of social structure...an overly humanistic approach to ageing is isolated from context and history. These two factors, experiential realism and effects of material realism, lie at the centre of a critical understanding of later life (Estes *et al.* 2003: 147).

Such perspectives provide a challenge to educational gerontologists who have uncritically promoted the third age (50 years+) as an unproblematic life-stage that brings freedom from work responsibilities, with new opportunities for learning (Laslett 1996; Phillipson 1998). Learning in this frame is largely viewed as contributing to active, productive and successful ageing as analysed above (Boulton-Lewis 2006; Duay and Bryan 2006). However such constructions of post-work life styles and identities are contested by social and educational gerontologists' application of wider, more critically orientated understandings derived from critical social theorisation (Findsen 2003, 2005; Formosa 2000, 2002, 2005, 2006, 2010; Findsen and Formosa 2011). They challenge what they argue as the overly optimistic view of retirement and moving into later life which proponents of the third age advance. This is done through the adoption of political-economic, feminist and humanistic analyses. These focus on the impact of socio-economic disadvantage that leads older adults to have differential experiences, mediated by class, gender and ethnicity (Phillipson 2006) and how social context reduces individual agency in later life (Andersson and Öberg 2006; Jamieson 2007). As applied to education and learning, CEG thus draws attention to the learning divide in later life. Through these lenses it aims to

illuminate the nature, purpose and impact of older adult education more comprehensively than that suggested by more conventional educational gerontology. It is premised on an explicit focus on older adults' educational aspirations and learning experiences that cannot be divorced from their social, cultural, political and economic circumstances that can vary greatly (Findsen 2005).

However CEG has limitations. For example, it can be seen to share with conventional educational gerontology, a neglect to understand the distinct learning experiences of older LGBT adults. This is despite CEG's central contention for education and learning that has an empowering and emancipatory intent, which seeks to tackle ageist, classist, racial and gendered assumptions (Formosa 2002). The ways in which CEG could support a heteronormative reading of learning and educational practice therefore demands critical attention. However, as Findsen (2005) argues, the application of critical theory to educational gerontology can alert us to new possibilities and ask new questions about older adults and learning; it allows for suspension of preconceptions about adult learning. Added to this, Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) argue the critical tradition has powerful interpretative capacity because it is always changing and evolving. Formosa (2002:82) presents an interesting synthesis of these views which has a particular appeal for this study, in exploring the distinctiveness of *where* older LGBT adults' learning takes place in Scotland:

Critical educational gerontology can only open a frontier of liberating education, which then has to be re-invented and remoulded in a sensitive manner in our actual situations, on our own terms and in our own discourses...

## **2.6 Understanding the nature and impact of *where* learning happens across LGBT adults' lives**

Analysis of the significance of *where* learning happens requires a focus on the changing lifewide dimension of learning from childhood to later life. As noted in Chapter 1 of this study, lifewide learning refers to a multiplicity of changing, potentially overlapping and conflicting sites in which learning happens: school, college, university, the home, faith groups, social

movements and the workplace. Analyses aim to suggest ways in which processes of learning associated with these different spaces and places may be altered by or need to be differently understood for LGBT adults. It allows consideration particularly of how such sites might intersect to create and/or inhibit opportunities for learning through which knowledge of the self is constructed and acted upon in positive and/or negative ways: greater persistence, resilience and agency or alienation, withdrawal and fear.

From a spectrum of theoretical and empirical perspectives, the following sections aim to explore how construction of LGBT identities might be influenced by, and influence, where learning happens. I acknowledge that this is an artificial separation from *when* and *how* learning happens. As Jarvis (2009; 2012: 103) argues learning is about the being and becoming of the whole person, who learns in social situations, so that it is both existential and experiential. There is a complex interplay and inter-relatedness between identity development, learning, place and time. Premised on this, analyses of how multiple forms of learning, across shifting time frames (*when*) and (*where*) places interact are brought together in the three analyses chapters (4 to 6).

Ahmed's (2006) work provides a guiding philosophical perspective and foundation with which to consider the lifewide dimension of learning that encompasses the range of multiple sites in which learning can occur. She seeks to extend ideas of sexual orientation. She builds this through a phenomenological focus. This seeks to deepen understanding of the 'orientation' dimension of sexual orientation in spatial terms: 'If orientation is a matter of how we reside in space, then sexual orientation might also be a matter of residence' (3). She considers how LGBT people might differently inhabit and alter spaces, particularly in terms of with "who" or "what" they inhabit space (3). Ahmed's (2006) central contention is that having 'different ways of directing one's desires, means inhabiting different worlds.' (68). This provides a basis with which to explore how participants' LGBT identity formations are shaped by, and potentially shape the range of spaces in which

lifewide learning happens. For the study's participants lifewide learning covers a broad range of spaces shared with diverse populations: compulsory schooling; in the home and family; in the workplace and in faith settings. This may also extend to other spaces created for and/or by LGBT people. These could include subcultural, underground space, the so-called LGBT 'scene' and spaces of political activism.

Queer theory aims to critically deconstruct taken-for-granted assumptions about the nature of identity, normativity, discourse, and relationality (inter-subjectivity) (Giffney and O'Rourke 2009). The particular concern with inter-subjectivities keeps in play exploration of how participants share inhabitation and the nature of the relationships they form in the many sites in which lifewide learning can happen. As discussed above (48), interpretation of this is facilitated by Duranti (2010) who considers several, necessary defining aspects of inter-subjectivity: the extent to which shared understandings can be created between subjects; the potential for achieving empathy, and recognizing the nature of the relationship between the self and others and how the self is projected onto others. Of particular significance to this study is the view that learning is always a consequence of such inter-subjective processes, particularly in identity construction, whereby the subject is 'continually recreated', and identity shaped 'through a process of self-other' (Murphy and Brown 2012: 645). These understandings of space open up a route for understanding the nature, purpose, parameters of learning in which LGBT adults engage. They can be considered, particularly in relation to how learning occurs from within spaces that are differently understood, experienced, created and navigated from that of a hetero-normatively assumed one. The following sections aim to draw out how being LGBT may influence and be influenced by learning in a range of lifewide spaces.

### **2.6.1 The nature and impact of workplace learning across LGBT adults' lives**

Felstead *et al.*'s (2009) research suggests that work and employment are powerful sources of personal and collective identities. Discussion and dialogue with participants therefore aims to examine the extent to which

understandings of the workplace learning may have distinct meanings and impacts when considered in relation to their sexual orientation. There is an added complexity to this line of inquiry. There is definitional and conceptual confusion identified in current educational discourse on work and learning in relation to the usage and what constitutes work based learning (WBL), for example (Allan 2015). WBL can be understood in instrumental, market driven and narrow neoliberal terms:

WBL provides the reality of an authentic context for learning which produces the currency of transferable credit. It can enrich student learning, create a well-qualified workforce and open up new markets for HEIs (Ball and Manwaring 2010:3).

This provides an example of Crowther's (2012) analysis of how learners' identities as people with wider experiences and as citizens and social actors are concealed within neoliberal discourse of learning and education. Such an understanding of learning in the workplace may therefore be limited for this study. Its aim to explore what is distinctive in how LGBT adults learn to construct their identities and the influence of locations such as the workplace on their construction. I would argue therefore that learning in the workplace requires a broader definition and conceptual framework with which to understand its nature and impact. This needs to take account of the influence of participants' wider experiences and learning within, but also beyond the workplace, and how they construct, understand and express their LGBT identities across diverse work environments. Evans *et al.*'s (2011:356) use of a social ecology framework provides a way to do this. It offers the possibility of more holistic understanding of the complex factors impacting on adult learning processes in the workplace, recognising that:

The ways in which adults learn in and through the workplace are rooted in educational trajectories and their complex intertwining with social institutions (of labour market, workplace, community) and social roles (of employee, citizen, family member) at different stages of the life-course.

Thus a focus the nature of how LGBT adults learn to construct their identities in work locations will be influenced by how they have learned in other lifewide spaces. This social ecology model directs our focus to understanding

how different lifewide learning locations may intersect and allow insight into the nature and impact of the learning processes that arise from their intersections.

A focus on the importance of LGBT identity and understanding how it may shape workplace learning may be further informed by research that adds to the social ecological perspective. In effect exploring what and who LGBT participants take into the workplace and how this shapes their work practices, values, attitudes relationships and sense of self. This is informed by Billet and Somerville's (2004) work on how identity and learning are constituted and transformed in the workplace, demonstrating that personal factors influence workers' learning and development. Drawing on their research from hairdressing, aged care, coal mining and motor mechanic workplaces they demonstrate that in the workplace individuals can be, '... active participants in remaking culture (e.g. work practices, technical innovations and values associated with work)...' (Billet and Somerville 2004: 324). Thus through workers' agentic actions workplace practices can be transformed. Billet (2010:3) extended this work to explore the complex role of the self and individual subjectivities to understanding engagement in work and learning. He alludes to a broad evidence base that has found individual subjectivities mediate engagement in work and work-related learning. Individual subjectivities are defined here as 'those dispositions [that] shape and direct thinking and acting, including how individuals construe and construct the experience (i.e., what they learn)'. Billet (2010:13) concludes that, 'at the heart of effective work and learning practices is the conduct of work that is salient and meaningful for individuals' sense of self and identity'. I use these basic premises to explore participants' engagement in learning in the workplace and the particular impact of LGBT subjectivities constructed in other sites and through other processes of learning.

This is in a context in which there have been a minimum number of studies that have examined why lesbians and gay men manage their sexual orientation in the workplace in the ways that they do (Köllen, 2014) and how they experience stigmatisation (Gates and Viggiani 2014). However

Hatzenbuehler (2009) does identify minority stress as the experience of gay and lesbian employees being stigmatised in the workplace because of their sexual orientation. Köllen's (2014) study identifies that in relation to organisational policy-making, the demographic of sexual orientation is one of the least recognised, and if addressed this can be very tentative. He argues that the adoption of an intersectional perspective can have positive and practical implications for development of a broader, organisational diversity management initiative that can more effectively address minority stress:

As employees often have to cope with minority stress that is related to more than only one demographic, for gay and lesbian individuals, it can be strengthening and supporting to experience affirmation not only in terms of his or her sexual orientation, but also in terms of other dimensions of diversity such as religion, gender, age or nationality (Köllen 2014:1006).

The findings of Köllen's (2014) research lend support to the importance of an intersectional perspective. From a cross-sectional investigation of 1308 gay and lesbian employees in Germany he found that the older, more religious lesbian and gay employees were the more open about their sexuality. Being in a relationship also led to greater openness. The present study recruited LGBT participants who are over 40 years of age, working in diverse work environments and with contrasting experiences and views on religious belief. Köllen's (2014) study encourages a focus on the intersections of participants' identity formations and their expression in the workplace in relation to the interplay between sexual orientation, age and faith. It also raises questions about what the processes of learning are involved that could enable such openness in the workplace and how positive interconnections between being gay, lesbian, older and religious might be developed.

### **2.6.2 Learning in formal educational environments**

This study seeks to expand understanding of '...the subject called the learner, as well as the subject of learning...' (West *et al.* 2007: 284). This is particularly in the case of LGBT adults. Therefore, understanding how 'shifting' LGBT identity formations might shape and are shaped by learning in different spaces may be deepened through consideration of how they

intersect with learner identities as shaped in formal educational environments. I focus on the particular contexts of HE.

Research has examined the nature and construction of learner identities in the particular spaces of HE, as well as other lifewide, lifelong and informal learning spaces (Aberton 2011; Brennan *et al.* 2010a, 2010b; Carpenter 2011; Hamilton 2010; Maclachan and Osborne 2009; Quinn 2010; Scott *et al.* 2014). The Social and Organisational Mediation of University Learning project (SOMUL), partly considered questions of who is a learner, particularly in relation to student identity, and how its construction is mediated in the context of HE (Brennan *et al.* 2010b). Brennan *et al.*'s (2010b) underpinning conceptual discussion of student identity mirrors the conceptualisations above in relation to the plurality of identities, between which there is intersectionality. However the project's exploration of identity was driven primarily by sociological perspectives to analyse social and organisational mediations of academic or subject, graduate and broader personal identities. They discuss the formation and nature of student identity as being a composite of 'well-established identities' that are imported into HE, whether ascribed gender and ethnic identities, and/or achieved identities, such as being a successful student, a confident person (*ibid.*, 137). Such identities may be developed or 'parked', maintained separately, interactively and/or eliminated; they are subject to the social and organisational mediation through the interaction between institutional contexts, life circumstances and students themselves (*ibid.*, 137). As such, Brennan *et al.* (2010b) propose that students have 'extensive choice' in relation to their identities, particularly from the multiple reference points which group identities present:

... from the parked identities from their pre-university lives, from social and work-related experiences while a student, from political or community engagement, or from the academic/professional content of their studies (139).

Scott *et al.*'s (2014) research on postgraduate students both complements, and extends the SOMUL project's finding in terms of what may constitute student identity, its formation, reformation, and how choice may operate within this. They suggest that student identities are formed and reformed

through varying experiences of transition into HE. Scott *et al.* (2014) conceive the notion of identity as a student as lying in how students appropriate the rules and work within ‘assemblages’ found in transition to HE: ‘... of official rules and arrangements of resources; stories, narratives, arguments and chronologies; structures of agency; and discursive structures ...’ (44). They propose that clues as to student identities can be discerned and insights gained into how students behave, act, and feel in terms of how they respond to and navigate such rules. Similar to the SOMUL project, Scott *et al.* (2014) refer to choice in student identity formation, though add a different perspective. Part of student identity is characterised in the degrees to which individuals choose to accept and conform to the rules or question their underlying principles and non-conform. However, they denote similarly constituted student identity formation as being multiple and fluid as highlighted by Brennan *et al.* (2010). Scott *et al.* (2014: 44) claim a dynamic process in which ‘...a student brings with them previous identities, knowledge constructs, skills, dispositions and so on and thus the process of identity formation we are referring to here is an overlay’. In this, student identity formation may be characterised by retaining and augmenting original formations, subsuming of previous identities or discarding of them.

These studies point to further possibilities for research on student identities, particularly consideration of how a developing /core LGBT identity interacts with student identities as constituted, and in turn, impacts on how LGBT adults engage in learning in HE, subject to its particular rules and conventions. Gunn and McAllister’s (2013) questions provide a basis for this and which later analyses pursue:

How does the development of one’s sexuality and sexual identity interplay with experiences in the classrooms and corridors of the university to facilitate or constrain learning, especially when that sexuality is considered as non-normative by others and the self? (163).

They identify a subordinate question to this that identifies a further path of inquiry into the nature of the interconnectedness between student and LGBT identities and its impact on learning:

[W]hy do some LGBT students seem to be able to make sense of their sexual orientations in a manner that enables them to progress through

their studies while others do not? (163).

### 2.6.3 Where older LGBT adults learn: the University of the Third Age

The most recent CONFINTEA VI UK National Report (2009) examined policy and practice in adult education in the preceding ten years. It highlights that, while the then UK Government had responded to the ageing population with a coordinated cross-Departmental strategy, this had not, to date, made a major impact on adult education. An unintended consequence of the policy to focus public resources on employment-related learning has been to reduce the number of older people participating in learning. In this context, a longstanding site of formal learning in the UK, and internationally, has been the University of the Third Age (UTA).

Formosa (2000, 2002, 2005 and 2010) has engaged in several investigations of the UTA. His findings claim that it runs the risk of becoming obsolete. He argues that the movement requires to undergo a cultural revolution if it is to remain relevant to contemporary ageing lifestyles and up to date with continuous socio-economic changes:

... UTAs portray older adults as a homogenous group when cohorts of older people are so diverse. Indeed, no effort is made to address the diversity of the ageing population on the basis of gender, health status...sexuality...UTAs must offer the process of engaging older adults in dialogue to discover their own meaning, identity and purpose in the face of cultural messages about ageing (Formosa 2010: 8, 9).

### 2.6.4 Other significant sites of lifewide learning across LGBT adults' lives

A more balanced analysis of lifelong learning processes has been called for by Billet (2010) which entails a clear focus on the important learning that happens out with formal educational institutions. He elaborates upon what he claims are vital philosophical, policy and practical distinctions between lifelong *learning* and lifelong *education*. He does so through the deconstruction of educational discourse rehearsed within the *Learning through Life: Inquiry into the Future of Lifelong Learning* report (Schuller and Watson 2009). His reading points to a superficial, uncritical, confused and narrowly construed conception of lifelong learning that primarily happens in

formal educational institutions and as part of taught courses. Consequently, Billet argues for learning characterised as a continuous, individual and/or collective 'socio-personal process' (401), happening out with the regulation and control of formal educational institutions, whereby:

... it is important to be reminded that the range of experiences and activities occurring outside of educational programs, and many of our requirements for effective lifelong learning cannot be realised through educational provisions, or even direct teaching... there is much knowledge that has to be learnt and not taught. (Billet 2010: 402).

This study therefore seeks to explore what the requirements of lifelong learning might be for LGBT adults in particular and what sites provide resources to meet these requirements.

## **2.7 Summary of the literature review**

This chapter has established a broad-based, multi-disciplinary, analytical framework drawing from a range of theoretical perspectives and empirical data. It therefore provides a range of possibilities for understanding the impact of how, when and where LGBT adults learn to construct their identities across the life course. It is demonstrated that identities are complex, fluid and shifting across our lives. The formation of LGBT identities further complicate this picture, while they may also provide individuals with a core, intrinsic sense of self, intersecting in multiple ways with other identities related to class, gender, age and professional roles. To understand the nature of the learning processes involved in dynamics of LGBT identity formation it is proposed that a maximalist view of learning has to be adopted that is lifelong, lifewide and life-deep, the latter of which was explained in the introduction. This allows a focus on the interplay between formal, informal and non-formal learning in the construction of LGBT identities, as mediated by the changing spatial and temporal conditions encountered across the life course. In so doing, the framework encourages speculation upon and a means for interpretation of what may be distinctive in how LGBT adults use and combine multi-modes of learning. Thus in being and becoming LGBT over the life course, I have been able to explore the extent to which and how psychosocial,

experiential, critical, queer, reflective, intergenerational, and transformational processes of learning could be altered.

The next chapter critically evaluates the research process. I explain and justify the investigation's positioning within a critical educational research paradigm, utilising an abductive research strategy and a biographical and life history methodology. I argue these were the most appropriate means with which to privilege participants' stories given their capacity to provide substantive narrative material that captures rich, complex and competing versions of reality, lived experience and learning in diverse settings. As such I can maintain a balanced, cautious view of theories explored, so they do 'not become personal crusades, but remain theories and open to modification or negation', therefore avoiding 'rigid absolutism' (Loxley and Seery 2008:18).

## CHAPTER 3: Research process

### 3.1 Overview of chapter

This chapter provides explanation and justification for the research approach adopted to explore the study's aim and related research questions. I aimed to critically explore the potentially distinctive nature and impact of how, when and where LGBT adults learn to construct their identities. To open up the scope and extend the reach of this exploration two overarching research questions were established. These allowed scrutiny of how learning occurs for the research participants, alert to what may be unique in its nature, purposes, parameters and impact, while focusing on the influence of changing times and places over the life course:

- What is the nature of the LGBT identities participants construct across their lives?
- What is the nature and impact of how, when and where LGBT adults learn to construct their identities?

In this chapter I discuss the advantages, challenges and limitations of the research design that was developed, and the decisions I made, to investigate the study's aim and research questions. I explain why the study was most appropriately guided by the continually evolving ontological and epistemological concerns of critical educational research philosophy on which this study has been based and applied to the particular lived experiences of LGBT adults. These are alert to the relationship between the knower and the known; what constitutes knowledge and whose knowledge counts, how and with whom this knowledge is constructed and how such knowledge is used to construct identities (Cohen *et al.*, 2011; Kincheloe 2008). I then explore how and why the adoption of a qualitative biographical and life histories methodology, utilising semi-structured, in-depth interviews, informed by a dialogical approach, and a discussion group enabled scrutiny of the questions and concerns of critically orientated educational research. For data analyses I explain why application of an abductive research strategy enabled in-depth analyses of the biographical and life history narratives. This brought the participants' narratives into critical conversation with the broad based

theoretical framework derived from the literature review. In relation to recruitment I discuss the challenges of research with hidden, or hard to reach communities. However, and albeit that participants voluntarily took part, I suggest that the use of purposive and snowball sampling proved an effective means of recruiting participants who come from richly diverse backgrounds and reflect multiple lived experiences as LGBT adults. I then explain how my insider research status and ethical issues were addressed.

### **3.2 Critical research philosophy**

Multi-disciplinarity in research philosophy and practice is often viewed as a hallmark of adult education (Crowther 2012; Haggis 2009). This offers a mature, though importantly, still evolving, rich philosophical, theoretical and practical **frame** within which to work. In my commitment to empowering and emancipatory goals of dialogical adult education in which learners and educators are 'equally knowing subjects' (Freire 1972:31), such multi-disciplinarity is essential. As Freire (1992: 170) further argues of the challenges of progressive university teaching, the 'quest [is] for an interdisciplinary understanding of teaching, instead of a merely disciplinary one.' This permeates and keeps in play an on-going critique of my teaching role and relationships with adult learners in the context of widening participation to HE. The many students with whom I work can be narrowly and reductively viewed as coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, categorised into zones of multiple deprivation, and for which funding is allocated to HE Institutions (HEIs). The application of critical theory to my pedagogic practices has been particularly instructive and challenging of how students are 'othered', perceived as in 'deficit' in these categorisations. The central tenets of critical theory have been equally challenging but informative of determining what constituted the appropriate philosophical orientation of this study. A critical educational research philosophy has guided how I have navigated and made decisions for conducting the study with LGBT adults, potentially othered and oppressed as a consequence of other factors.

Critical theory was founded in the traditions of the Frankfurt School,

emerging in the 1930s, following German intellectual traditions (Blaikie 2007). While not one consistent theory, it was inspired by Marxist thought and merged competing knowledge from sociology, psychoanalysis, philosophy, economics and aesthetics; it asks questions of power relationships within changing capitalist societies to expose injustice, the subordination of oppressed groups and promotes action for change (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2009; Brookfield 2005; Crotty 1998). It is thus concerned with the political and ideological dimensions of empirical research in the social sciences: social conditions are historically created and heavily influenced by the imbalances in power relationships and the pursuit of particular interests of those holding disproportionate power (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2009).

Critical theory and research in the social sciences has undergone significant and continual reformulations (Brookfield 2005; Henn *et al.* 2009; Kincheloe and McLaren 2005). Critical inquiry's goals are to challenge and radically change social conditions. Its agenda is deliberately and overtly political, directing an on-going, emancipatory project for how a just society, individual freedoms and equity can be realised (Cohen *et al.* 2011; Crotty 1998). For this study I explore how a just and freer society may be and/or has been realised from the perspectives and experiences of LGBT participants across the life course. In this however I am aware that the study's outcomes and contribution to changing the oppressive conditions that LGBT adults have, or will encounter as a marginalised societal group is severely limited. Rather, in purporting to and adopting a critical philosophical orientation I acknowledge that critical inquiry is an on-going, cyclical project that engages in praxis: the development of emancipatory knowledge through critical reflection on social reality that can inform actions to effect social change (Crotty 1998). As part of critical inquiry, action for social change cannot ever be a discrete, one-off event that meets its objectives and stops (Crotty 1998). Rather, reflection and action are in a continual dialectical relationship and open-ended (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2009). However, I would suggest that this study is a critical form of research, particularly where it is grounded in, and guided by a critical educational research paradigm.

### 3.3 Critical educational research paradigm

As applied to educational research, critical theory brings particular questions to how we can understand learning, knowledge construction and identity, the central themes of this study. I focus on the nature of oppression, as well as the empowerment of LGBT adults, particularly how, when and where learning happens that leads to increased self-agency. A critical educational paradigm guides such an inquiry in its exploration of how formal educational institutions such as schools reproduce and /or reduce inequality; who decides on what and whose knowledge is legitimate and worthwhile; whose interests are served by education and the legitimacy of such interests (Cohen *et al.* 2011).

Proponents of critical educational research contend that positivist and interpretivist research neglects such political and ideological dimensions (Cohen *et al.* 2011). A positivist research paradigm privileges understanding of social phenomena objectively, seeking to measure, control, and predict patterns from which laws and rules of behaviour are built (*ibid.*:31).

Interpretivist understandings of social realities counter positivism, where its central tenet is that the subject matter of the natural sciences is distinct from that of the social sciences: natural scientists construct a positivist sense of social reality from the outside, using observation; interpretivist social scientists focus on understanding the social world on 'its own terms in the same manner as its participants, from the inside as it were, not from some outside position occupied by an expert' (Blaikie 2007:124). However while critical educational research claims to go beyond the surface concerns of positivist and interpretivist research, it does utilise interpretivist orientated research tools such as interviews and focus groups, as selected for this study.

As applied to the particular arena of contemporary educational research, critical theory can be viewed as an umbrella for a range of other theories that inform empirical inquiry: critical race theory, critical pedagogy, critical disability theory and of some relevance to this study, queer theory (Cohen *et al.* 2011). Indeed, in the complex socio-philosophical vision for a fair and just society it advances, Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) caution against attempts to

understand critical theory as a set of fixed characteristics or specific prescriptions by which social change will be achieved. Rather, critical researchers are committed to the 'ever-evolving criticality' that they posit as inherent in the nature of critical theory and research (Kincheloe and McLaren 2005:303). As Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009) emphasise, critical theory has an open-endedness; no single formulaic solution or rigid frame of reference is privileged as a means of interpretation. This is evident where post modernist and post structuralist discourses (of significant influence on queer theory) have been employed to understand 'new and interconnected ways of understanding power and oppression and the ways they shape everyday life and human experience' (Kincheloe and McLaren 2005:306). Critical researchers have also been informed by post-modernism and post-structuralism to find new ways of understanding the construction of individuals and the influence of social and historical forces on how we view ourselves, while postmodernism has introduced scepticism regarding unproblematic notions of freedom (Kincheloe and McLaren 2005; Brookfield 2005).

There are further interesting examples of dialogically and dialectically based critical educational inquiry that offer further interpretative scope for this study where social critical and post-modernist, post structuralist orientations have been brought together. These are instructive of this study's attempt to draw on queer theorisation. For example, in his exploration of the relationship between critical humanism and queer theory, Plummer (2005) concludes that while the histories and canons of these theories are different, and tensions exist between them in the inquiries they shape, they are not as at odds as they may be perceived to be: both have a common focus on questioning and bringing to light the nature of difference, while recognising the 'multiple possible worlds of social research' (Plummer 2005: 371).

In the specific context of adult education research and practice, Edwards and Usher (2006) identify a tendency towards the adoption of polarised modernist and postmodernist positions. They contend this is at the cost of achieving a

more nuanced and subtle exploration of multiple and diverse contemporary adult learning practices in which postmodern and modern are not polar opposites, but instead 'layered and enfolded in complex ways' (66). In his conceptualisation of critical postmodernism Tierney (1997:174) reflects such a synthesis, where he can engage in dialectical analysis of heterosexism where 'we investigate the larger structural forces in society and consider [their] interplay with the more microscopic aspects of everyday life'. This echoes Estes *et al.*'s (2003) position as discussed in the literature review (section 2.4.5) of the marrying of humanistic and critical social theory orientations to challenge the uncritical assumptions of traditional gerontology and realise a more critical social gerontology. In his deconstruction of HE specifically, and exploration of how it is experienced by lesbian women and gay men, Tierney's (1997) adopts a critical postmodernist framework. In his analyses, he identifies critical theory as an attempt to understand oppressive hegemonic forces from which conditions for change and empowerment of those who have been silenced, invisible and marginalised, can be created. He sees the potential of complementariness and increased explanatory power for understanding gay and lesbian experience, when critical theory's advocacy for empowerment and development of voice is fused with a post-modernist struggle. He identifies several key tasks of postmodernism: to decode and understand how ideas of truth or deviance are constructed, defined and used; to analyse how norms come into being and what this means for those of us on the margins and how that marginality is constructed.

Of further significance to this study's focus on the relatively under-researched area of later life learning, Findsen (2005) argues, the application of critical theory to educational gerontology can alert us to new possibilities and ask new questions about older adults and learning; it allows for suspension of preconceptions about adult learning. Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) add to these possibilities. They further argue for the potential interpretative capacity of the critical tradition where it is always changing and evolving. Formosa (2002:82) presents an interesting synthesis of these views which has a particular appeal for this study, its location in a Scottish context and in

researching the distinctiveness of when, how and where learning happens for older LGBT adults:

Critical educational gerontology can only open a frontier of liberating education, which then has to be re-invented and remoulded in a sensitive manner in our actual situations, on our own terms and in our own discourses... (Formosa 2002: 83)

While I am positioning myself cautiously as a critical educational researcher, I am accepting of particular, basic assumptions of critical theory: that certain groups in society are oppressed and that critical research seeks to confront injustice resulting from this and consequently can be the initial movement to social and political action to redress such injustice (Anyon 2008; Henn *et al.* 2009; Kincheloe and McLaren 2005). However, such an acceptance has the responsibility of adopting a critical stance, both at a personal, self-reflexive level and more broadly, towards propositions such as this. The subsequent **analysis** chapters are therefore partly shaped by my values as an adult educator and as a learning/novice, critical researcher. This means necessarily engaging in self-conscious criticism. As Brookfield emphasises (2005: 32), 'a critical stance to critical theory entails a productive scepticism regarding its accuracy and universality'. Thus in relation to the immediate concerns of this study I am particularly mindful that a critical educational research paradigm offers inter-disciplinarity and a multi-theoretical lens with which to interrogate participants' narratives. At the same time its interpretative capacity for understanding older LGBT adults' learning is not without its limitations. Similar to those arguments which expose it as white, Eurocentric and under-theorised in terms of its analysis of gender (Brookfield 2005), critical theory can be viewed as existing in a masculinist and heteronormative framework (Binnie 2011; Heaphy 2011; McDermott 2011). This leads to reproduction of the marginalisation and exclusion of queer voices (Binnie 2011). Critical theorists can also be challenged where they reject sexuality, both in terms of it being an important 'analytic category' in educational research (Sumara and Davis 1999: 192) and how it intersects with class, race and gender as a source of multiple oppression (McCready 2004).

However critical inquiry's openness and necessary receptiveness for its forms

of social and cultural critique at structural and micro, day-to-day levels to be ever-evolving, creates a productive means with which to reveal and challenge masculinist and heteronormative assumptions. Critical educational inquiry that utilises queer theory may provide some space to be alert to, and analyse how heteronormativity has been played out in the lives of participants. There is a relative absence and under-development of queer theory as method in applied, adult and post-compulsory educational research in the UK. This raises interesting debate as to how it is perceived and why resisted (Gunn and McAllister 2013). It may be a consequence of the privileging of educational research that is large scale and through which claims of objectivity, reliability and validity can be made (Burke and Jackson 2007). The subversive, dissenting character of queer theory and how this might infuse research design is possibly perceived as too disruptive of such prevailing educational research orthodoxy, particularly if greater understanding of the complexities of inter-subjectivity, desire and intimacy is sought. As an applied field, aiming to improve practice, research on higher education in particular, may also be seen as resistant to heavy theorising and provides explanation for the lack of good examples of the limited use of queer theory (Renn 2010). In relation to contemporary schooling and addressing issues of sexuality in the curriculum Youdell (2006) identifies the very separate, discreet constructions of school and sexuality. This has created a 'site of significant struggle' (25). Therefore a lacuna is evident which represents a missed opportunity to explore the complex philosophical questions which Pring (2012) observes, are all pervasive of educational thought. There is room in this space for the contribution of the potentially subversive, dissenting, interrogative character of queer theory, combined with critical theory's forensic critique of social justice and unveiling of oppression. Such a merger aimed to productively disrupt and change the prevailing educational research orthodoxy. This is particularly resonant where greater understanding of the complexities of inter-subjectivity, desire and intimacy is sought in conjunction with analysis of the epistemological and ontological shifts experienced by LGBT adults.

There is a broadly similar intent here, to that of Burke and Jackson's

application of critical post structuralist feminism and positing of lifelong learning as a site of struggle. They use it to re-conceptualise and reclaim lifelong learning from the homogenising and reductive influences of neo-liberal envisioning, in order to,

... take into account multiple and shifting formations of and for learners and learning across different social contexts... to broaden what counts as learning and who counts as a learner and to offer different understandings of lifelong learning that are able to include currently marginalised and misrecognised values, epistemologies and principles (2007:3).

### **3.4 Biographical and life histories methodology**

The study used a biographical and life histories methodology to support narrative based inquiry.

Contemporary narrative inquiry can be characterised as an amalgam of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches, and both traditional and innovative methods - all revolving around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them (Chase 2008: 58).

Narrative inquiry is also recognised as an evolving field and wide in methodological scope (Denzin and Lincoln 2008; Webster and Mertova 2007; Wells 2011). Narratives are varyingly constituted, defined and shaped, dependent on disciplinary and theoretical frameworks, but fundamentally are stories, oral or written, about particular events and experiences through which meaning is constructed and conveyed (Wells 2011). As an educational research method specifically, narrative inquiry's growing popularity is attributed to the insights it provides into the complexity of human experience in the socio-cultural contexts in which teaching and learning take place (Goodson and Sikes 2001; Webster and Mertova 2007). In the wider context of the social sciences and critical humanities, as a field in the making, narrative inquiry holds promise for the advancement of social change and justice, where narratives of marginalised people can be disruptive of oppressive social processes (Chase 2008). This inter-disciplinarity of narrative inquiry therefore encourages linking micro and macro levels of analysis, of critical understanding of individual experience and how it is mediated by wider structural determinants.

For this study and the purposes of exploring the complex relationships between education, learning, ageing and sexuality across the life course, first person oral narratives were recorded in semi structured, in-depth interviews and discussion groups. These encouraged the recounting of significant experiences and events that were transcribed into text form. Narratives were also intended to be collected in visual form, in this case, participants' photographs. However the transcription of 21 interviews provided a large and rich data set. Photographs may have complemented and or augmented this in valuable ways but the participants' narratives provided wide scope for thematic analysis.

This scope which I saw in narrative inquiry is particularly well articulated by Chase (2008) whereby she believes it encourages us to think concertedly about who we write for and speak to, and how we do so, in order to illuminate:

(a) the creativity, complexity, and variability of individuals' (or groups') self and reality constructions and (b) the power of historical, social, cultural, organisational, discursive, interactional and/or psychological circumstances in shaping the range of possibilities for self and reality construction in any particular time and place (84)

Similarly, Burke and Jackson (2007) focus on how we construct our reality and ourselves in different contexts, referring to this as the 'narrating of the self'. As expressed here, the possibilities that narrative inquiry encompass, particularly in the realities which participants construct, also provide an evidential base in which the study's theoretical frameworks can be critically explored.

This focus on biographical and life history narratives very consciously aligned with the study's adoption of a critical educational research paradigm. As West *et al.* (2007:13) contend 'critical approaches to knowledge find lively expression in the biographical turn.' The biographical turn is viewed as a reaction against forms of research in which participants' perspectives and their learning experiences were dismissed as unimportant (West *et al.* 2007). Configured in this way means that:

- Learners' stories are privileged given their capacity to provide substantive narrative material that captures rich, complex and competing versions of reality, lived experience and learning in diverse settings;
- Biographical narratives on experience are brought into critical, productive conversation with existing theory, informed by a fundamental principle of critical theory as a process of on-going critique in which: 'the claims of any theory must be confronted with the distinction between the world it examines and portrays, and the world as it actually exists' (Giroux 2009:27);
- Rather than the 'the production of an intellectual class hierarchy where the only work deemed truly theoretical is work that is highly abstract, jargonistic, difficult to read, and containing obscure references', (hooks 1994: 64), is the alternative for an open and expansive view of the process of theorisation and its application to practice.
- Failure to have this engagement between theory and learners' experience creates the risk of theory left untroubled, so that, with no capacity for radically changing its assumptions and challenging our thinking we (researchers) 'freeze life and people into conceptual boxes and academic game playing' (West *et al.* 2007:291).

#### **3.4.1 An abductive strategy of analysis**

Such positioning of the significance and role of theory with that of biographical and life history data methodologies aligns with an abductive strategy. Through this the research process 'alternates between (previous) theory and empirical facts whereby both are successively interpreted in light of each other' (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2009:4). Anyon (2008:2) further adds that a critical educational research paradigm enables an in-depth process of abduction in which data are maintained in 'constant conversation with a theoretical arsenal of powerful concepts'. Neither data nor theory alone have the capacity for interpretation and attainment of a 'critical holism' (*ibid.*:21) developed where:

‘The researcher asks, are the theoretical concepts (still) useful and meaningful in explaining what I am seeing? Does trying to make sense of my data challenge the theorists I am using and require that I rethink that theory, or combine it with others?’ (*ibid.*:11)

The interrogation of theory through the data aligns with Abes (2008) who emphasises that all theoretical perspectives guiding research are incomplete and their choice is traditionally determined by the aim of the study and the researcher’s values. While an important guide for this study, I am also informed by Abes’ (2009) further assertion that it is potentially more illuminating to engage in inter-disciplinary theoretical experimentation. This allows transcendence of rigid disciplinary boundaries and ‘ideological allegiances’, to bring together multiple, divergent and/or convergent theoretical perspectives that offer new interpretations and enrichment of the data (*ibid.*: 141) . This is very much characteristic of the ‘inter-disciplinary imperative’ for educational biographical and life histories research as it has evolved in the last two to three decades (Formenti *et al.* 2014; West *et al.* 2007:15). Biographies capture the complex and idiosyncratic nature of processes of adult and lifelong learning that may be brought to de- and re-construction of identity in different socio-historical and cultural contexts. Such analyses thus confound reliance on overly rigid academic boundaries, to challenge singular disciplinary frames and related knowledge claims. This has required an interdisciplinarity ranging across, and fusing together, philosophy, sociology, psychology, cultural studies, critical theory and post-modernist, post- structuralist perspectives. In so doing a full, multi-dimensional picture is created whereby,

... understanding of life history, and of the subject called the learner, as well as the subject of learning, becomes more complete as an individual’s actions, thoughts and behaviour are seen in a dynamic interplay between psyche and social, the individual and narrative resources, history and specific struggles, the person and her social situation, the lifeworld and a life history (West *et al.* 2007: 284).

The literature review therefore sought to develop such an inter-disciplinary approach. In so doing I sought to develop a provisional, speculative, open-ended, but also penetrating theoretical framework with which to interpret the nature of where and how LGBT adults learn and the impact of this

learning. This aimed to illuminate the complex relationships raised by questions of how being LGBT mediates where and how learning happens, while exploring how learning might shape the construction of LGBT identities across the life course. Ileris (2009) regards the key constituents of comprehensive learning theory as necessarily including the processes, dimensions, types, barriers and conditions of learning. I sought to adopt and adapt these for the purposes of this study to guide inquiry and reflection upon what may be the processes, nature/forms, purposes and parameters of learning across LGBT adults' lives. These provided a useful set of foci around which a theoretical framework can be built, and with which to analyse what may be unique in participants' learning in relation to who they are as learners, what is learned, how they do so, with whom and in what circumstances.

An additional focus of the theoretical framework is on mid- to later life stages. This is because, the study's sample population of LGBT identified adults aged from 40 to 90 years of age, spanning a sizeable mid to later life period: approximately 50 years of lived experience into which adult and lifelong learning research has minimally explored. Premised on the dialectical relationship as outlined above, conceptualisations of identity and learning were brought into critical conversation with participants' biographical and life history narratives. The participants' biographies were interpreted through the theoretical perspectives as examined in the literature review. In turn, the biographical narratives are privileged in how they may challenge, reconstruct, enhance and/or advance alternative insights to theoretical formulations on the nature of identities and the learning processes involved in their construction.

I assumed that there would be many shifting contours of meaning and nuance implicit in participants' biographical and life histories accounts as they focus upon learning across the life course in diverse circumstances. This provided further impetus for drawing on a range of disciplinary areas. In particular I aimed to explore those 'theoretical borderlands' and 'interstices' (West *et al.*

2007; Abes 2007, 2009) which potentially have relevance to building a contingent, theoretical picture, through which to explore what may be distinct about how and where learning happens for LGBT adults.

In the question of the changing nature of the LGBT identities which participants construct over their lives, the adoption of life histories were also potentially helpful;

... not merely because they add to the mix of what already exists, but because of their ability to refashion identities... a goal of life history work in a postmodern age is to break the stranglehold of meta narratives that establishes rules of truth, legitimacy, identity. The work of life history becomes the investigation of the mediating aspects of culture, the interrogation of its grammar, and the decentering of its norms' (Tierney 2000:546)

### 3.5 Recruitment of participants

In the proposal stages and over the duration of the fieldwork, I acknowledged and sought to address several, limiting methodological dilemmas. One of these was in relation to the implications for access and research design in trying to reach those older LGBT adults who may represent a 'hidden community' that can be:

'social groups...difficult to access for the purpose of social research; where issues regarding access, emotions, power and the politics of representation ... [are] ... particularly posed' (Ashe *et al.* 2009:3).

The reasons for being a hard-to-reach research constituency are thus complex. I assumed that for older LGBT adults in particular, whose life histories and biographies may have been shaped by oppressive socio-historical circumstances, would wish their sexual identity to remain invisible for fear of further discrimination. Consequently, as in previous studies, the research relied in part, on self-selection (Heaphy, Yip and Thompson 2004). However, to balance this and extend the possibilities for reaching a wider, possibly hidden population and to be sensitive to the complexities of why older LGBT adults choose to hide their sexuality, purposive and snowballing sampling was used. Formal LGBT networks and organisations were contacted with a plain language statement providing information on the project's aim and how participants' anonymity and confidentiality would be assured (see appendix

1). Once I had completed 10 interviews I sought participants' permission to use some of their comments for an advert that I also sent to a range of organisations (see appendix 5). This led to recruitment of several more participants. I also visited the majority of organisations in person to meet with co-ordinators, volunteers and group members to discuss the project with them (e.g. Our Story Scotland<sup>3</sup>; older gay men's health project<sup>4</sup>; Highland Rainbow Folk<sup>5</sup>) (see appendix 6 for correspondence with organisations). Snowball sampling proved the most effective means of recruiting other participants to the study, through which several more participants were interviewed. It is recognised that snowballing can reach the hard-to-reach, particularly where the researcher is a member of that group, as in this instance (Cohen *et al.* 2011). However Cohen *et al.* (2011) also identify snowballing as prone to bias and volunteer-only samples, where the researcher may be limited to only recruiting participants from a similar background as herself/himself. This was possibly an issue when I aimed to recruit transgendered participants. I had an initial promising email discussion with the facilitator of a transgender group who was going to let individuals know about the project. However there was no subsequent response. I would now organise the process differently and follow up the initial inquiry with another polite reminder.

However, the combination of snowballing within these informal networks, and a degree of serendipity contributed to accessing and interviewing 21 individuals and a discussion group of 9 members of Highland Rainbow Folk. It would be difficult to maintain the view that, of the 21 individuals recruited, any one of them was hidden or reluctant to participate as a consequence of the factors above. For those participants finally interviewed, the ways in which they have led or are currently leading hidden lives may confound

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<sup>3</sup> OSS: Collect, archive and present the life stories and cross-generational experiences of the LGBT community in Scotland; present LGBT heritage through the arts, in exhibitions, storytelling and drama.

<sup>4</sup> Twice monthly support group for older gay men living in the West of Scotland

<sup>5</sup> Highland Rainbow Folk is an independent group of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender volunteers, working to raise awareness of issues facing older LGBT people in the North of Scotland. They are a working group and give presentations to health and social care staff, and to older people's groups.

expectations and challenges assumptions of what a hidden community may be. Vulnerability and fearfulness were explicitly and understandably characteristic of the maintenance of a hidden life at different points in the life course of many participants. However, I also anticipated different levels of agentic action, choice, creative self-preservation and insightful negotiation of pathways through the complex and multiple forms of homophobia and heteronormativity. Overall a more nuanced and complex picture that captures open and hidden lives as created within, and inhabiting marginal, but not necessarily constraining 'different worlds' (Ahmed 2006:68). Table 1.3 provides demographic and outline biographic details of the 33 participants who contributed to the study. Twenty-one took part in individual, semi-structured interviews, while the remainder participated in discussion groups and/or offered further observations and views as part of introductory and follow-up email correspondence.

Name Pseudonym	Year/decade of birth	Sexual identity	Outline educational and work biographies
Archie	1928	Gay	Retired; member Church of Scotland and range of voluntary groups;
Edward	1931	Gay	Retired hotel worker; member of Highland Rainbow Folk (HRF); left school at 14
Vera	1938	Transgender	Member of HRF; retired; left school at 16
Ben	1940	Gay	Visitor to HRF; retired, ex-army officer
Gregor	1940s	Gay	Member of Our Story Scotland (OSS); university
Edith	1944	Lesbian	Member of HRF; Humanist Celebrant, retired
Andrew	1945	Gay	Retired HE researcher, Trade Unionist, LGBT campaigner and writer
Harry	1940s	Gay	Member of older gay men's health project
Jessie	1946	Lesbian	University; Retired adult educator; member of OSS
Michael	1948	Gay	Left school at 14; Member of older gay men's health project; retired factory worker;
Iain	1951	Gay	Retired nurse; PhD student
June	1954	Lesbian	Specialist nursing degrees; Retired nurse; active LGBT choir member
Mary	1954	Lesbian	University degrees; Retired teacher, educational adviser
Rachel	1954	Lesbian	University degrees; Lecturer in Teacher Education
Dan	1955	Gay	Retired theatre worker from USA; full residence in Scotland now
Donna	1957	Lesbian	Member of HRF
Stewart	1958	Gay	University; Lecturer and psychotherapist
Fiona	1958	Lesbian	University; Community development officer - Local Authority
Helen	1950s	Bisexual	Member of HRF
Carol	1959	Transgender	Member of HRF
Billy	1960	Gay	Social worker; former Salvation Army officer
Liz	1961	Lesbian	Adult educator; recently married
Anne	1961	Lesbian	Member of HRF
Susan	1964	Lesbian	Doctor
Jean	1965	Lesbian	University; Policy officer; recently married, partner of Liz
Tina	1966	Lesbian	Social worker; member of HRF
Kevin	1965	Gay	Arts degree; Playwright and Community Arts worker
Sean	1969	Gay	Specialist nursing degrees; HE lecturer in nursing
Francis	1970	Gay	Specialist nursing degrees; Sexual health and specialist practice nurse, partner of Sean
Hannah	1970	Lesbian	Nursing degrees; HE lecturer in nursing
Colin	1970s	Heterosexual	Equalities and diversity officer
Craig	1972	Gay	PhD; HE researcher and lecturer
Phillip	1970s	Gay	Co-ordinator gay men's health group

**Table 1.3: Demographic details and outline biographies of participants**

### 3.6 Data collection methods

#### 3.6.1 Creating an 'engaged dialogue' in interviews and discussion group

As noted in the introduction chapter to this study I have aimed to engage in educational research in which participants' voices have the right to be heard and where it is my ethical responsibility to be actively attentive to their voices 'as a matter of listening, recognition and engaged dialogue' (McLeod 2011: 187). The development of a dialogical approach is partly informed by my role as a lecturer in learning development and academic writing and its focus on widening participation to learners from a wide range of backgrounds. Moriarty et al. (2008) point out the 'antithesis of dialogue is represented in situations in which one person... imposes his or her views on those who are [or perceived to be] less knowledgeable' (p.432). I aim to work in counter hegemonic and creative ways to deconstruct and challenge such traditional, exclusionary forms of HE teaching and learning. The power imbalance created by such monologic and transmission forms of pedagogy can be redressed through dialogical approaches (Kaufmann 2010). For the purposes of this study I aimed to further adapt my working practices of using dialogues of participation with students. These are based on the work of Lillis (2001) and allow the development of working relationships through which I can 'scaffold student-writers into a practice, rather than assume that they will somehow 'pick it up'' (p.158). While the aims of this study and semi-structured interviews were different, the principles of engaged listening, tentative teasing out of experiences and redress of power differentials were central to the endeavour.

In alignment with breaking down potential research hierarchies (Holstein and Minkler 2007), I undertook the 21 face-to-face interviews in locations that the participants chose. These included participants' homes, their places of work, my place of work and places on the commercial LGBT scene such as cafes and pubs. I followed the interview-based research procedures as outlined by Cohen *et al.* (2011): thematising; designing; interviewing, transcribing, analysing and verifying. The structure and themes of the semi-structured interview schedule were informed by the literature review. The schedule

was designed around clusters of questions relating to identity development and learning across the life course (see appendix 3). The semi-structured nature allowed exploration of a range of issues not anticipated in the schedule and again afforded primacy to what participants chose to speak about. Overall, this allowed for naturalistic discussions in which I followed the narrative of the participant and gently probed to develop the line of discussion further (Cohen *et al.* 2011). The interview process was reflexive and incremental in nature, in that I responded to unforeseen opportunities and themes for enquiry with individual participants. It was then possible to allow this accumulated experience to permeate subsequent interviews, for example, by indicating that particular themes had begun to emerge in discussions with previous interviews. I was mindful to approach this cautiously, alert to the potential for imposing pre-determined ideas on discussions.

### ***Discussion group***

As a preliminary step, I contacted and engaged directly with a number of voluntary groups that have an explicit LGBT focus which led to conducting one discussion group (see appendix 6). This process involved me in insightful informal discussions with group facilitators as well as affording opportunities to join their regular meetings and participation in their activities. I was able to introduce this study, obtain immediate reactions to its themes of learning and identity, and as indicated above discussion of recruitment, extend invitations to group members to be interviewed.

I was particularly fortunate and privileged in the group discussion I had with Highland Rainbow Folk (HRF). This is because their ethos, central principles and practice are based on creating open and engaged dialogue between themselves but also with the health and social care providers to whom they deliver training. Their experience in exploring LGBT issues in a group context enabled parity of participation, which aligned with the ethical principles of this study. I gave advance notice of the main issues I wanted to discuss with them (see appendices 4 and 6). This also contributed to their fulsome

engagement and willingness to discuss frankly the issues that were important to them collectively and individually.

### **3.6.2 Transcribing, analysis of data and follow-up with participants**

Transcription of the interviews enabled me to begin thematic analysis and immersion in the data (Wells 2011). The analytical techniques of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith, Flowers and Larkin 2009) allowed me to organise the data through repeated reading and the identification of initial, multiple themes. The use of an abductive strategy allowed me to compare these themes with theory on an on-going basis. For example, I read participants' narratives to explore the extent to which their learning experiences supported a number of theories of learning including Jarvis' (2009, 2012) experiential, existential and social model of learning.

However adoption of the abductive strategy also raised a series of challenges for me in the process of analysing the data set. I had to overcome these to arrive at the themes as analysed in chapters 4 to 6. I went through a number of iterations in which I struggled to maintain the balance demanded by abductive practice: theory and empirical data should be interpreted in light of each other, with the primacy given to theory subject to close scrutiny so as to avoid imposition of overly rigid interpretive boundaries on biographical and life histories narratives (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2009; Anyon 2008; Giroux 2009; West *et al.* 2007). In the earlier stages of data analysis I gave primacy to theory and imposed an overly rigid interpretive framework on the narratives that proved unworkable (see appendix 7). This in effect stifled the data, and closed down opportunities for a more fluid, open-ended and productive analysis that could allow themes to emerge more organically and that could analyse the complex relationships between the variables of identity and learning. This impeded the relationship between data and theory through which I sought to attain the 'critical holism' of abduction (Anyon 2008: 21). I was trying to map onto the narratives an overly technical, unwieldy framework that imposed a pre-configured shape and structure.

These problems led me to shift to the development of a more open, unencumbered approach to analysis that examined a closer integration of the key variables of how, where and when participants learned and the relationship between these and LGBT identity formation. I explored these by arranging and breaking down the participants' narratives into a simpler chronological ordering of childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, midlife, post work and later life. In each life stage I then brought together extracts of how participants articulated their identities. I then focused on building where possible, individuals' narratives that considered more closely the influences of family, schooling, workplace and formal educational contexts on how they were positioned and positioned themselves as LGBT young people and adults over the life course. This allowed me to identify the range of themes as explored in chapters 4 to 6. In short, I moved from a fragmented analytical approach in which the main research variables were artificially separated out and disconnected, to one in which their interplay could be more fully drawn out. This allowed for abductive processes in which the interpretive power of theory could be both demonstrated and challenged by the narratives.

In line with my commitment to inclusive research practices, once transcribed, I emailed participants a copy of the transcript of our discussions for them to check. There were no requests made for any changes.

### **3.7 'Insider' researcher status and ethical responsibilities**

I gained ethical approval to undertake the study by successfully meeting the ethical requirements of Glasgow University's School of Education formal application process. To address the ethical issues the study presented I obtained participants' informed consent to interview them and to use their narratives to arrive at the main themes and to support these with anonymised quotations (see appendices 1 and 2). However this study demanded further careful consideration of ethical issues that arose in the discussions with participants, particularly in light of my insider researcher positioning. For Sikes and Potts (2008:5), insider research holds radical promise to 'make things better'. It has capacity to challenge assumptions, in this case about the

nature of being and becoming LGBT over the life course and traditional or overly simplistic understandings of research ethics. Given its potential power, insider research should not be undertaken lightly. It carries ethical risks for the researcher who may become over identified with the particular research issues and participants' experiences of them. This is a difficult balancing act because as indicated I am gay. However I took the approach that inevitably the study was shaped by my experiences, interests and commitment to equal rights for LGBT people. I was therefore prepared and sufficiently self-aware that participants' personal stories, particularly of homophobia and discrimination, would have an emotional impact on me and on them. Fontana and Frey (2008) argue that this is inevitable in qualitative fieldwork and my approach to this was to be as honest as possible with participants about my interest in the study and to double check emerging themes to ensure that it emerged from the data rather a preconceived idea or personal opinion.

As much as possible I also wanted to create a welcoming and conducive setting that eliminated any potential power imbalance between myself, and the participants. Over the three-year process of data collection, I reflected on the importance of my subjective positioning as a gay, middle-aged insider researcher and what this meant for the nature of the inter-subjective processes that were played out between myself and LGBT participants in our discussions. I was sensitive to how subjectivities might be produced in the particular context of the research relationship with LGBT participants, as well as in their wider past and present lives. In my attempts to create a setting in which open, friendly and free-flowing conversations could take place poststructuralist perspectives were informative. Poststructuralists focus on the impact of different contexts on how subjectivities can be produced.

Subjectivity signifies how adults:

... understand and identify themselves in relation to multiple contexts in which they are positioned and position themselves. The production of subjectivity is always an interactive, inconsistent and unstable process interlaced with and mediated by social, emotional, cultural, textual and discursive practices and relations. (Burke 2008: 202)

Viewed in this way, it was important to create a research context in which

participants were enabled to talk openly about their sexual identities and did not feel inhibited. This was particularly significant given the discussions with many of the participants, in which we explored how we had witnessed at first hand, experienced and learned from the destructive effects of homophobic attitudes and violence. For myself, and participants, alienation and marginality were perpetrated to differing extremes in changing educational environments in Scotland and in wider life at a range of points across the lifespan. At the same time, I shared with participants the impact of learning from engagement in protest and celebration, with varying degrees of participation. These have resulted in an increased sense of individual agency, collective power and progress towards greater understanding of becoming LGBT. Overall, such discussions demanded an ethics of care on my part and the creation of an productive balance in the researcher-participant relationship in which our experiences and knowledge as LGBT adults could be understood as equally valid. I achieved this through responding sensitively to the range of emotionally charged recollections and disclosures that unfolded, often by sharing my own experiences of similar painful experiences. I aimed to build positive inter-subjective processes from which empathy for each other's experiences was attained. This drew from my evolving practice as an adult education practitioner with experience of working in different learning environments: community adult education focusing on literacy development; a direct action disability educational inclusion project and over the last twenty years, teaching academic writing in the context of widening access in a post 92 institution. These contexts that involve teaching in small groups and one-to-one allowed me respond appropriately and positively promote inter-subjective processes. With this awareness I was able to explore sensitively and openly questions raised by previous research: of the complexities of asserting 'gay rights' and the claims we make about the centrality of our sexualities to our identities; of the on going struggle to problematise and identify experiences of what it is for us to feel equal, authentic, included and open in education.

## Chapter 4 Learning in childhood and adolescence

### 4.1 Overview of the chapter

In this chapter I undertake the first analyses of the nature and impact of how participants learned to construct their identities. Questions of temporality and the particular character and influence of 'when' they learned focus upon participants' formative years of childhood and adolescence. A lifewide learning perspective allows a spatial analysis, alert to how different locations shaped and were shaped by participants' construction of LGBT identity formations. The nature of the LGBT identities participants construct is considered through the ways in which they were able to discern, articulate, manage and respond to a sense of being LGBT firstly in childhood and then in adolescence. An intersectional perspective on identities formation, as explored in the literature review, is also applied. This allows further understanding of the nature of LGBT identities in terms of how they interact with ascribed identities related to class and gender. Participants' narratives recount intersectional identities that had to navigate socially constructed, as well as prescribed notions of working class masculinity and what was deemed suitable behaviour for girls.

The nature of the learning in which participants engaged, and how this impacted on their sense of being LGBT, within and between different settings, are analysed, firstly in different family environments. The relationship between learning in the family and in school environments is then considered. Participants engaged in formal, compulsory education across decades that overlap, are at some years apart, generationally distinct and in which significant societal and educational change occurred at differing rates. Periods of between 30 to 60 years have elapsed since participants attended school. I am therefore alert to the possible extent of change and its impact in these periods. A critical, lifewide perspective allows a focus on the nature of learning within, between, but also beyond compulsory schooling and the family. In spaces such as the Scripture Union, libraries, a women's collective and illicit risky contexts in which initial sexual experiences happened, participants learned about their identities in constructive, but also unsettling

ways. I am informed in this lifewide analysis by Ahmed's (2006:3) phenomenological view of 'orientation' and how participants differently inhabit and alter such spaces, particularly in terms of with 'who' or 'what' they inhabit space (3). Interpretation of the nature and impact of learning is informed by a 'maximalist' understanding of lifelong learning: valuable learning happens in many ways, a mix of formal but also important informal learning, across an individual's lifespan (Hager 2012: 783). To determine this mix and explore its particular nature and impact, psychosocial, experiential, critically queer and transformational theories of learning are applied. Possible insights from queer temporal understandings that provide an altered view of past learning and attitudes to sexuality are also considered. Table 1.4 provides an overview of the themes to emerge from a synthesis of the main research questions:

<b>Research question:</b>	
What is the nature and impact of how and where participants learn in the development of their LGBT identities in childhood and adolescence?	
<b>Emergent themes</b>	
<b>4.2</b>	<b>The nature of LGBT and other identities in childhood and adolescence</b>
4.2.1	"... I didn't call it gay at five years old ..." - Being "it" - LGBT identities from the perspective of childhood
4.2.2	Concealment, anger, shame, or "a really good defence?" - The nature of adolescent LGBT identities
<b>4.3</b>	<b>Learning about the self in the family, school and spaces between and beyond</b>
4.3.1	Was there "nowhere to go with it...?" The capacity for learning within and between heteronormative family and school environments
	<i>Lifewide learning: within the family</i>
	<i>Lifewide learning: the intersections between the family and school</i>
	<i>Lifewide learning: safe and subversive spaces within schools</i>
4.3.2	"... being in something that wasn't quite the norm" - learning in safe and risky spaces
4.3.3	"I wish I had used all the learning that I had when I was younger..." - the legacy of learning in childhood and adolescence

**Table 1.4: Emergent themes - learning in childhood and adolescence**

## 4.2 Nature of LGBT identities: in childhood and adolescence

The following section considers narrative extracts from a number of participants who referred in detail to their childhood and adolescent experiences. These allow exploration of the nature of the LGBT identity formations from the perspectives of their childhoods. All these participants recollect particular, formative educational and learning experiences in childhood and adolescence and convey varying senses of their past **identity** formations. The interviews and discussions that developed were thus reliant on varying levels of retrospection and hindsight. Recounting the past in these ways, and based on subjective memories, presents risks in terms of how these may shape and distort earlier life experiences. Events and circumstances may be rendered in ways removed from the original experience, have become fixed in particular ways over time or focus on the ‘possibility, rather than actuality’ of what happened (Portelli 1988:46). However the expectation is that oral history testimonies, to which participants’ narratives are similar, are inherently messy and complex (Sheftel and Zembryzcki 2013). This is acknowledged in the following analysis chapters. I am also informed by two of the participants, Jean and June, who make insightful comments about making sense of the past. Jean refers to the increased capacity she has as an adult for reflection on past events. This aligns with Beard and Wilson’s (2006) framing of experiential learning. For learning to happen we need to engage with experiences through reflection on what happened, how it happened and why. For example Jean can rethink and make sense anew of how social class was operant in shaping her childhood identity and now:

I still feel that I identify as someone who has been certainly been formed and shaped by an upbringing in a very working class area in a working class neighbourhood and that kind of family view of itself as well.... I suppose everybody was, everybody was like you until you hit puberty. So that was probably something, looking back in retrospect, that was probably a measure of, it is almost that part of me that is retrospectively formed in a way. You don’t know you’ve got it when you are in amongst it because you don’t know any different.

June comments further on the value of reflection on past experience and retrospection in relation to her ‘coming out’:

When you are coming out you don't always look back and question, you are too busy getting on with the business of coming out and coming to terms with the here and now. You don't always look at the whys and where for do you? I couldn't pin point the moment when I looked back and thought, "Ah that's what that was". Certainly it was long after I came out.

Many of the study's participants engage in critical reflection and questioning of past events in these ways. They are also honest in their declarations that this "might have been" how particular incidents unfolded or that this is "not just nostalgia"; they are not claiming definitive versions of the past but rather aim to understand the importance of what happened and reconsider events in light of our discussion. This allows avoidance of a potential over-preoccupation with reliability and accuracy of memory that could be at the cost of more nuanced interpretation and undermine respect for, and trust in participants.

#### 4.2.1 "... I didn't call *it* gay at five years old but I knew was different ..." - Being 'it' - LGBT identity from the perspective of childhood

Participants recount varying and shifting levels of awareness that they were LGBT as children and adolescents. There is a broad consensus between participants born across several decades. In childhood particularly, they stress that the difference they were sensing in themselves would have been difficult to grasp, understand and articulate meaningfully. In effect, ways of knowing this part of the self were particularly limited and inhibited:

Oh no, you didn't ever say you were gay. In fact I don't think the word would have existed.

(Archie, b.1928)

I wouldn't have identified myself as anything as I wouldn't have known.

(Jessie, b. 1946)

I certainly wouldn't have known how to describe it myself...

(Andrew, b. 1945)

I wouldn't have known that I was gay. [But] I knew about lesbians. But I didn't really associate my own crushes on the girls, women, as being remotely related to that.

(Rachel, b. 1954)

I mean we are talking 1960s and you know I don't think I could have even put a name to it really.

(Mary, b. 1954)

Obviously I wouldnae<sup>6</sup> be able to articulate it the way I am now ...

(Billy, b. 1960)

And I know from reading around, some gay people say that in growing up that they were aware of somehow being different but I don't remember. ... No sense of that.

(Joe, b.1969)

It is clear that participants would not have been able to apply the range of language and insights to make sense of their sexual orientation which learning in later life course stages enables them to do. As these participants explain, articulating a sense of a past self is challenging. This may be unsurprising for participants born between the 1930s and early 1970s. This can be attributed partly to the degree of silence, sanctioning and /or condemning language concerning homosexuality to arise from its framing as perversion, sin and crime (Adams 2002; Bauer and Cook 2012; Meek 2015; Norton 1997). As highlighted by Hammack *et al.* (2009), discourses or master narratives set up narrow configurations of sexual identity and development. For these participants, the 'available sexual taxonomies' from which they could have made greater sense of their sexuality were limited and dominated by the lexicon of powerful heteronormative discourse (Hammack *et al.*, 2009: 867). Such discourses shaped participants' construction of identity in their youth.

In discussing the extent to which he was aware of being gay in his formative years, Stewart refers to how difficult it would have been to develop a positive, balanced understanding. He now sees a pervasive "loud silence" that surrounded any question of sexuality and opacity in the language and attitudes surrounding homosexuality in his youth. However he was able to discern that such silence was punctured with condemnatory warnings and danger. He explains that there was:

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<sup>6</sup> Wouldnae = would not: To remain as true to the voice and expressiveness of the participants, I have always recorded their dialects as authentically as a possible.

... the power of that absence. That kind of implicit learning. It is kind of like a loud silence, that kind of thing. ... About the only references I had in my childhood [about the nature of homosexuality], when I was growing up, was about perverts. Being in the language of who was around me ... [but]... everything was all set up to be rather confusing anyway that there was a set of rules about it that were implicit and explicit in the way that people seemed to just operate around it. It wasn't necessarily that people said explicitly that this was wrong. That is powerful enough and in some ways that is actually clearer to see, but I think that the combined mass of the implicit stuff and its sheer absence was a kind of teaching about its tabooess and inappropriateness if you know what I mean? ... so that raised my sense of danger about it all.

To the absence of language and feelings of a particular, invasive form of 'loud silence' related to lesbian and gay identity, Andrew adds a sense of questionable ways of being a boy where he is seen not to fit with hegemonic forms of masculinity of 1950s Scotland. He recalls some sense of being different. However he would have not been able to articulate this as an explicit awareness of being gay. This is internalized and still nascent. Nevertheless, he asserts a degree of resistance and determination not to completely surrender to acting out behaviours perceived to be 'manly'. This comes from his father's perception that Andrew lacked appropriate masculine traits deemed appropriate for boys:

... clearly my father was worried about me not being boyish enough and once or twice he would try and force me to play football ... That was supposed to make me more manly ... but I didn't want to do that.

Several other participants share the view that naming how they were different in any developed sense would have been challenging. Jessie similarly focuses on the difficulties she would have been likely to experience in trying to make accurate sense of what she was feeling or becoming aware of in relation to being lesbian. The sense of a partially constructed knowledge is shared with Andrew. I asked Jess further about her youthful 'rock the boat' and inquisitive character she had articulated and how this was linked to her understanding of sexuality. She felt that it must have led her to "... more exploring yourself and the boundaries. Yes I think that is possible". The learning she gains about lesbianism from books is acknowledged but she

downplays its significance given its lack of connection to her childhood and life at the time.

Surrounding LGBT identity in childhood there is thus, opacity, partiality, confusion and dangerous unknowns. These appear from the operation of a lexicon around gay and lesbian identity that carries an insidious sense of threat. This aligns with understandings of discourses as hidden and antagonistic rules that govern what can and cannot be said, in this instance about homosexuality (Hall 2000; Kincheloe 2008). However despite the limited and limiting heteronormative discourse available, this does not preclude building a wider picture of the nature of earlier, childhood LGBT identity formations. From participants' narratives on particular perspectives of childhood, some trajectories of change and pivotal moments can be discerned in how they described, understood, responded to, and subsequently managed early LGBT identities. These can be seen to align with conceptualisations of identity as ever changing, shifting subjectivities (Youdell 2006). They are developed through conscious and unconscious thoughts, emotions and relationships (Burke and Jackson 2007). As such participants provide insight into how the initial stages of gaining self-knowledge can happen in childhood, potentially the first important changes to individual biography over a lifetime (Jarvis 2009).

Although conceding that they could not have known that what they were experiencing and feeling in childhood was related explicitly to questions of sexual identity, Billy emphasises that he “was very aware” of his sexuality “from about the age of nine”. For him this was evident where he was “quite a sensitive child” and in the strong “feeling that this was something you had to hide and couldnae share wi anybody”. This was heightened where Billy became increasingly aware that he, “didnae tick any of the boxes” of who he was expected to be. In particular he did not fulfil the expectations of the working class, male identities that dominated his childhood:

... the expectation was that you would grow up to be a man in the West of Scotland mould. You wouldnae cry, you wouldnae be over sensitive.

Susan similarly explains not meeting gendered expectations whereby she “certainly didn’t fit in well to any popular ‘little girl’ stereotypes”. Rather, she describes herself as having been,

... a very gender-ambivalent young child - a very butch little tom-boy, and never very comfortable in my own skin ... and it made me feel, at times, very uncomfortable and uncertain during childhood.

The pattern of acting out with entrenched, and fixed expectations associated with being a girl is also identified by Fiona:

It’s hard to get the sense of feeling different but I did feel very different. I wasn’t aware of my sexuality. [But] I was playing football and was told “You’re eye running about wi the boys”. ... I need to use the word to explain it, though it is old fashioned; I was a tomboy, really, really.

For June, though it took a “long time to realise” it, she has been able to discern what “were homosexual feelings when you were a kid”. She refers to “several points from when I was quite young” and one in particular that alerted her to what became more intensely pronounced feelings in adolescence:

I always used to wish that some other friend’s mothers were my mother so that they would hug me and cuddle me. And it wasn’t that I wasn’t getting affection from my own mum, it was just that I obviously wanted other women to cuddle me...

Stewart who is from a similar working class background to Billy, talks about how at a very young age he “... would have been perceived as having been different ...”. He was able to work out that his strong desire to play with girls and with girls’ toys was “dangerous”, inviting derision from his brothers: “They would call me a sissy because I played with the girls ...”. Despite his fear of acting out with what was deemed acceptable male behaviour from other children, Stewart clearly remembers finding a way to fulfil his particular needs:

I would maybe think that would be quite nice to brush that doll’s hair, but almost instinctively knowing that if I did that, that would be wrong. ... I just knew it would be completely disapproved of. I remember actually feeling incredibly envious about how was it okay for her [baby sister] to get these things [toys] and I couldn’t get them. But... I remember being delighted because I would get a chance to play with some of these things. These dolls and things like that, and that would

be alright because I would be doing like a teaching thing or helping her. But I was actually getting something out of it. So at some level I would have known that.

Kevin also recalls being perceived as different, evident in the continual name-calling of other children to which he was subjected as a child:

I hated walking the dog going up the main street and these boys at the top of the road would always go 'Poof! Poofy [his surname]!'

For Kevin, like Billy and Stewart, other children sensed that he did not fulfil the socio-cultural roles prescribed for working class boys, for example to be good at sport. He was always viewed as "that wee poof who cannae kick a ball straight". Kevin's emotional response to how he was perceived was intense and he "longed to change as a kid":

And I hated being called that ... I'd think why are they calling me that? I mean children see what other children are anyway and what they were seeing was the truth but I just hated it.

He sees himself as "a right misfit as a kid". He recalls one particular "really terrible experience" when he was about seven years old. He had watched some of the film 'The Naked Civil Servant' in which he was exposed to the first depiction of a gay male figure who has a very difficult life. In school a classmate said, "Aye I saw that poof last night on telly just like you". Kevin vividly recalls the shock of this and his reaction: "I was in primary 3 [aged 7] and I thought I don't want to be like that man that would be just ghastly. Terrible." The reactions Kevin invited from other children clearly conveyed to him that he was doing something wrong. Like Stewart, he describes a coping strategy he used to manage, and hopefully deflect, such reactions:

I knew I was different and what I did to stop being different was that I didn't want to stand out. Standing out to me meant cheeky. So what I thought what I'd do was that I would be well behaved.

Older male participants describe similar childhood responses and identities:

I didn't want people to know about it [unsettled vague feelings of being different]... I think I was seen as a nice boy at school and eh, I suppose that was sort of a way of coping, you know, if I am nice then you'll like me.

Andrew (b. 1945)

... it was always poofs or weirdos ... you are a poof... [so] I was always quiet in those days ...

Michael (b. 1948)

Kevin sums up his childhood as being a period in which “although you always try and fit in” through such coping responses, he was “always going to come out in a sense”, regardless of his efforts otherwise.

The complexity of personal identity and beginning the construction of understanding and meaning of one’s sexuality can be seen to some extent in these accounts of childhood experience. As explored in new sociological and historical accounts of sexuality, it is situated in the nexus of complex relationships between the body, desire, morality and social relations (Skelton 1999; Weeks 1985, 1986, 1990). In these childhood experiences, the creation of this nexus is beginning to take shape in the participants’ earlier lifeworlds. The powerful operation of heteronormativity is evident (do Mar Castro Valera *et al.* 2011; Ruffolo 2009; Sumara and Davis 1999; Warner 1993).

Participants’ social relations, and initial childhood desires are dominated by its privileging of heterosexuality as natural and obligatory (Warner 1993). Albeit in confusing, vague and puzzling ways, as children, these participants also gained a sense of themselves as being somehow morally questionable.

The discussions and sharing of our childhood experiences, provide testimonies as to the nature of lesbian and gay identity in childhood. It appears to have been instinctive, sublimated, but at heightened emotional levels. There is a correspondingly strong sense that their early thoughts and emotions needed to be hidden or that there “was nowhere to go” with them (Stewart; Jean; Fiona). This is reflected where these aspects of their developing boy and girl identities were at odds with the established and narrow expectations of what being male and female entails. The importance of intersectional perspectives in understanding the nature of LGBT and other identities therefore comes into play in their earlier histories (Monro 2015; Taylor 2011). The nature of gay identity in childhood intersects with and is mediated by social class and related gender stereotypes in their experiences. This provides illustration of Taylor’s (2011:4) argument for the need to understand that in relation to

sexuality, ‘ ... intersectional negotiations and negations feature in everyday lives.’ In their very early life stage, internalised realisations, these participants indicate processes that mix negotiation and negation of an as yet un-named, confusing difference related to sexual orientation. Prescribed classed and gendered male identities and early signals of being gay are ‘routed through and mutually constitutive of each other,’ as claimed by Monro (2015: 59). The negation and negotiation of being gay, male and working class are apparent in the development of an inner world that puzzles over overt, hostile and or less explicit, but still condemnatory reactions. To cope with this means a retreat into being “quiet”, well behaved and suppressing of difference.

The nature of early childhood lesbian and gay identity is characterised by sensitivity, partial awareness and a mix of its negation by, and negotiation with, other aspects of identity, namely class and gender. This is further reinforced in Kevin’s reflections on why it is that we might know about our sexuality from a young age. As an adult now in middle age, Kevin understands his identity through three points of marginalisation, “Being Scottish, being working class, being gay”, where, “... even as a kid, from about five, knowing that I was gay and I was different ...”. For him it is “fascinating” that “sexuality can begin so early” and that “it is quite obvious” to other children in his experience. Such constructions of lesbian and gay identities in childhood can also be seen as a consequence of the early stages of lifelong learning that involves particular socio-personal (Billet 2010) and inter-subjective processes (Duranti 2010). Socio-personal lifelong learning involves negotiation of ‘our thinking, acting and doing across activities and interactions’ (Billet 2010:402). The participants’ early childhood interactions influence how they think and act concerning sexuality as explored in the ways compared above. The power of inter-subjective processes of learning to develop empathy, as proposed by Duranti (2010), appears much less achievable in these participants’ childhood experiences. However, there is developing recognition of the nature of relationship between the self and Others, and how the self is projected onto Others (*ibid.*). Their early senses of being different and relationships with

peers serve to create some uncertainty and insecurity, but also the capacity to work out ways of managing this.

Overall, Weston's (2011) contention about intersecting identities is supported in relation to childhood such that, 'Class, age, gender, and such come together not only in the doing, but in the perceiving' (36). The past everyday realities of complex, intersecting class and sexual identities 'beyond the abstract academic page' (Taylor *et al.* 2011:4) is summed up provocatively in Billy's thoughts that,

I think for a certain generation of gay men and women being brought up in a very much working class environment, it was a very much harder school and while I wouldnae like to stereotype across the board, generally speaking we didnae go for piano lessons or learn how to paint or be a potter. There was a sense that this is a tough world and to survive you need to be tough, you need to be hard. And that I think can make it more difficult for working class people to come to terms with their sexuality if they are gay. I am no saying that people from a middle class and aristocratic background don't have a struggle. I am not sure that it is as pronounced in terms of the expectations.

The next section shifts to a focus on the nature of LGBT identities in adolescence and the possible processes of learning involved in their construction.

#### **4.2.2 Concealment, anger, shame, or "a really good defence?" - The nature of adolescent LGBT identities**

The nexus of social relations, morality, the body and desire in which the nature of sexual identity can be understood (Weeks 1985, 1986, 1990) becomes more complex, amid the intense changes in adolescence as experienced by several participants. For Fiona, the uncertainties she experienced about fitting in, and questions she asked about herself became more pronounced in adolescence. She suggests that this was "maybe no unlike a lot of late teenage hood anyway". However, the pattern evident in her and other participants' childhoods of negotiation and negation of feeling different is again apparent. Her strategy for dealing with "being mixed up and a bit frosty" was "trying to be in wi [with] the gang". This presents a challenge to conform to and or resist expectations:

I think a lot of that was about not being quite sure ... the sense of something lying underneath to make you think I am not quite fitting in with this because I don't really want to go to the disco with you but I don't want to fall out with you. I am not wanting to put on the big false eye-lashes [laughter] ... you are walking a tight rope of keeping pals with people but always saying no thanks...

June further refers to the emotional energies required to understand and bring some balance to unsettling, confused feelings of being lesbian with the pressures to conform to peer group expectations in adolescence. She refers to her teenage self as “crazy mixed up kid”. She is now certain that this was because she was,

... struggling very much I suppose to articulate my sexuality at that point in time. I very much wanted to be part of my peer group who were all out chasing the boys, but thinking there wasn't something quite right about it.

Her outward, “surface” response was of “very much looking the teenage girl, off out with her pals, getting boyfriends”. For the more troubled, internalised questioning of being lesbian June explains, “I very much buried part of what I thought I was ...”. Mary describes her adolescence as “very unhappy”. She now thinks that, “this was to do with my sexuality. I think it was so repressed”.

The nature of emerging adolescent lesbian identity is markedly different in Jean's experience. She was possessed of an angry energy and did not repress disquieting feelings in the same manner as Fiona, June and Mary. Rather she was, “just a total gob shite<sup>7</sup>! I came out when I was 16 but I had to fight really hard to do it ... so I was just fighting everything and everybody round about me”. Echoing Kevin's thoughts on the inevitability that he was going to always come out, Jean stresses that in adolescence, concealment of being lesbian “wasn't really a choice ... It wasn't that I could shut up about it really”. She characterises her behaviour and defiant declaration of being lesbian as being “probably out of desperation”. She further explains this was because,

I had nobody to talk to about it or nowhere to go with it, no one to discuss it with. So what are you going to do? You might as well just put it out there. There were no quiet moments of reflection or confidants

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<sup>7</sup> Scottish vernacular expression: refers to an individual who is frequently argumentative and angrily outspoken, often viewed as opinionated.

that I could say to I think I might be lesbian. I think you might consider sharing this with the school - [laughter] - no there was none of that. There was like a “fuck it”.

Jean’s combined frustration, defiance and outwardly angry expression of her teenage lesbian identity is fuelled by feelings of desperation. She was not able to internalise, contain and deeply bury turbulent emotions in the same ways as other lesbian participants, albeit this was unsettling for them. As she emphasises: “It was definitely a crisis point. Nothing could continue on as it had been”. The degree of desperation and anger Jean experienced may be seen as a result of an imbalance between the three key dimensions of learning as established in Illeris’ (2009) field of learning model. As the model proposes, building the content and incentive dimensions for learning is crucially dependent on and initiated by how the learner interacts with her social, cultural and material environment (Illeris 2009). The internal acquisition process of learning involves the integration of content and incentive. Content is concerned with what is learned: knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, insights, opinions, meaning, strategies and ways of behaving. These develop the learner’s abilities and personal functionality (Illeris 2009). The incentive dimension provides the mental energy required to run the process of acquisition and involves feelings, emotions and volition. It maintains the mental balance of the learner and the development of personal sensitivity. Jean describes being brought up in a working class community experiencing post-industrial decline. Interactions to initiate learning of potentially positive insights and meanings about her sexuality were severely limited. As she says, “there was nowhere to go with it”. This can provide a possible explanation of the intensity of her anger and frustration when she was sixteen and the period of emotional instability she experienced. She has to rely on inner but depleted mental energies to make sense of how she is feeling and acting. Despite this, and though not having anywhere to go with knowing she is lesbian, she does not or cannot hide this part of who she is becoming. However as will be discussed in the remaining sections of this chapter, Jean and other participants do find somewhere and inhabit locations through which they are able to learn more positively about who they were becoming as lesbian and gay teenagers.

There is a similar intensification and sharpening of emotions concerned with sexual identity in adolescence for male participants. However this could manifest differently, for example in feelings of intense shame: “definitely a feeling of shame, very definitely a feeling of guilt,” which would lead to rejection (Billy). For Stewart there are similar tensions that he believed were some kind of passing “pubescent thing”. He longed “to not have any sexual feelings towards other guys ... it felt like it was an intrusion... [but] I was very aware of it, very rejecting of it, very denying of it”. Both Stewart and Billy’s experiences and feelings of shame can be seen to fit with Munt’s (2007) analyses on the nature of shame, how it is communicated and becomes absorbed into individual identity formations. Shame is influenced by different times and spaces, and its mode of operation is to negatively set apart, distort and misrepresent particular groups (Munt 2007). For Stewart the “tough” 1960s working class community in which he grew up made him feel shame through the “particularly poisonous and hateful meanings” that were associated with homosexuality and of which he was acutely aware. In Billy’s case, shame takes strong hold of his adolescent identity because of the impact of all-pervasive “religious catholic dogma” and constant reinforcement that his sensitive nature was deemed unacceptable.

In the account of his teenage gay identity, Francis appears to transcend and subvert any feeling of shame so that being gay becomes an outward expression of defiant pride. In so doing he raises further questions for queer scholarship on paradoxes of gay shame and pride and how they interrelate (Halperin and Taub 2009), as well as the nature of inter-subjective processes of the projection of self onto Others (Duranti 2010).

I grew up in a very working class environment ... it’s quite funny, for me being gay was a really good defence. I was always quite mouthy as a younger person, so people used to shout things like you are gay or whatever so I was like yeah, so what? .... It was a fear factor for them so part of the thing about my safety was that they are not going to hit me or do anything because they are frightened of what gay is actually so I used it as a defence mechanism in growing up. So I have never been afraid to say yes you are right. What is the issue with this? ... I never felt as those I had to mask or cover that up in anyway at all.

Part of Francis' explanation for this relates to particularly difficult circumstances in which, as the eldest in a single parent family, he had full caring responsibilities for his two siblings. His mother was "alcoholic", and he stresses that he would "much rather hide [this], than hide my sexuality". Francis further underlines the complex intersections that exist between gay and other identities. His role as a carer, juxtaposes his developing sexuality in a complex way in which being gay, paradoxically, becomes a source of empowerment. The following sections seek to explore further the influence of and interconnections between lifewide spaces of learning upon participants' formative identity constructions

### **4.3 Learning about the self in the family, school and spaces between and beyond**

Explorations to this point allow insights into the nature of earlier lesbian and gay identity formations, but also the possible learning processes through which they were constructed. Over the remaining sections of this chapter, I consider further how participants learned to construct other aspects of being and becoming LGBT. This is with a focus on the influence of the different locations of learning. A common reflection across many participants' narratives is that there was "nowhere" to go with their evolving unease and/or anger that they were different, other than in their own inner worlds. In this section I argue that while this was an undeniable and difficult reality for many participants, nevertheless, their narratives indicate that they did find somewhere to go: spaces in which they could begin to learn to construct more positive understanding of their sexual identities.

#### **4.3.1 Was there "...nowhere to go with it...?" The capacity to learn within and between family and school environments**

Analyses in this chapter thus far show that lesbian and gay identity formations can be understood through their complex interactions with other aspects of identity. It is proposed in the following discussion that different lifewide sites also intersect to influence how participants learn and from which there are changes in how they understand their sexual identities. In these ways, different lifewide spaces of learning are not strictly demarcated. Rather

school, family and other locations such as public libraries, the Scripture Union and a women's feminist collective and commune, have permeable boundaries. Thus, experiential, formal, informal and non-formal learning about the self in one location can be motivating, expanding and or inhibitive of these processes of learning in another, different location. These understandings of space may extend emergent work on how we can understand the geographies, as well as the histories of informal learning and education as experienced particularly by lesbian and gay young people, and the relationships between the spaces in which it takes place (Mills and Kraftl 2014).

***Lifewide learning: within the family***

Kevin recalls feeling protected to some extent in a large family, as his brothers would defend him against the worst excesses of homophobic bullying that he encountered in childhood and adolescence. However learning anything positive about his sexual identity in the context of his family would have been impossible, “an anathema” to his parents in 1960s Scotland. Combined with gendered expectations, family life for many other participants appears narrowly scripted by the “straight” clock (McCallum and Tukanen 2011:1). In this, so-called hetero-temporalities establish predictable and prescribed life pathways bounded by the ‘... paradigmatic markers of life experience... birth, marriage, reproduction...’ (Halberstam 2007:2).

At the age of 7, my father had died and left my mother and I in a dire financial situation. We had lost a lot of money in the depression in the 1920s ... left us penniless. I was the person who had to take over the family as one might say. I was going to be the father figure. I had no other brothers or anything like that but I felt that I was the one who had to support her and be the leader. I would have to be the one who made the money to keep us both living.

(Archie b.1928)

... my mother thought if you were a girl and got educated you would get a better husband! [Laughter]

(Jessie b. 1946)

I was brought up in a Roman Catholic family ... the expectation was that you would grow up to be a man in the West of Scotland mould ... you would have girlfriends, marry and have children and go intae a certain line of trade or work.

(Billy b. 1960)

I was so terrified because I felt that my family would just utterly disown me [if they knew I was lesbian] and my mum was very reliant on me as we had younger family that she needed me to look after. They would put me out or something.

(Liz b.1961)

... if I had been straight I could have probably just kept my head down and got through school to the end of it and made my escape that way. There was just too much going on for me then to find a way to do that.

(Jean b. 1965)

A queer temporal lens on lifewide learning in the particular context of the family offers something of an alternative view. The extracts above affirm little possibility of past learning and personal development within families that contributed to a positive sense of gender, gay or lesbian identities. However a more nuanced picture does emerge in some participants' narratives that suggest learning about the self was developed in ways unexpected or contrary to expectations of the time and in families differently constituted to those assumed as per the social conventions of the time (Bauer and Cook 2012). In so doing, these participants 'open up new narratives' in relation to lifewide learning in the family that point to 'alternative relations to time and space...' (Halberstam 2007:2). For example Rachel is struck today by how liberal her mother was in relation to homosexuality in the 1960s:

I can't remember which politician it was who had been caught in some compromising position with a male lover. And she said well he is homosexual and there is nothing wrong with that. You know there are all kinds of love ... it's just really nasty when it becomes like this.

In relation to wider issues of gender, she is clear that her abiding "sense of equality, of fairness" was learned from a young age because of her family background:

My parents ... became very, very left wing Socialists ... And I think for both of them they had an intuitive grasp of what we would now call social justice and equalities. So there were never any problems about gender equalities in our family whereas in other families there were.

As introduced above, Francis' complex family circumstances meant that for him, being gay was more straightforward than in other participants' teenage experiences:

I have always been really happy with my sexuality and I think that has been about being quite happy to be different I think. ... I think it was

the balance for me ... because from 12 maybe to 18 or 19, was really a time of turmoil in our family.

Francis thus engaged in experiential, informal learning in the turbulent everyday life of his family that paradoxically contributed to his self-validation as gay. He did not have much “control” over his life so that being gay offered him stability. To further understand the influence of lifewide locations on how participants’ learned to construct their younger lesbian and gay identities consideration can be given to how different spaces fed into each other and or were in conflict. It is evident that informal, everyday learning in the family, could be positively, and or negatively reinforced, by learning in other lifewide spaces such as school.

***Lifewide learning: the intersections between the family and school***

While the chaos and instability of family life meant that Francis could forge a positive sense of his sexual identity, it impacted more adversely on his secondary education. He was “just never there”,

... school just never took precedence over anything we had to do at that time. ... No investment in secondary education at all. But I think the investment was in making sure that stuff was sorted at home. Because I had a brother and a sister and that they were okay. That took precedence over everything else ... It kind of ruled that period of time for me really...

For Billy, family and school environments intersected in a different way from that of Francis, to inhibit his personal development and construction of any positive sense of his sexuality. His home life was dominated by domestic violence, perpetrated by his father who was dependent on alcohol. He explains that his father’s family “were very academic”. Billy was expected to achieve academically,

But because of my father’s alcoholism it was an expectation without support. And his attitude was very much you’re thick [laughs] and you must take that from your mother’s side of the family because we’re all academic. So that was very much the attitude and it was certainly implicit, if not explicit...

Dealing with such a difficult home life had a “huge impact” on Billy’s “ability to respond positively to the academic environment”. He believes that the

1960s and 1970s education system in Scotland sent out a very clear message, to reinforce that being conveyed in his home that, “you were thick” and therefore “you are no really worth spending much time on”. He reflects further on the limited thinking of the time when no attention was given to what could be a harmful relationship between home and school environments:

... in those days, there wisnae [was not] the same understanding about [about] you know how home life can impact on a pupil’s ability to engage positively with the educational system. You operated very much with this is school and you are here to learn and if you cannae respond to the academic requirements then you are thick.

Problems in both family and school settings were compounded by Billy’s “sensitivity” and in being “a stereotypical gay in that I didnae go in for sports or things”. However, while this was an ordeal, Billy also developed a surprising degree of agency, resistance and defiance, to the extent that,

I became bolshy so I would deliberately turn up ... without my [gym] kit. As if to say go for it. So I became anti-authoritarian, because interestingly though at school no academically bright, I was reasonably articulate so I would stand up to authority verbally which again kind of inflamed the situation rather than making it better.

Billy’s deliberately planned acts of disobedience to question, and antagonise school authority, suggest the development of resilience and courage, particularly as he knew this could worsen his situation. This raises questions as to the connections between the cognitive and emotional, particularly the volitional dimensions of learning (Illeris 2009). To be “reasonably articulate” and be driven to defiant acts meant that Billy could offer some degree of challenge to the operation of heteronormativity in the particular context of his school. He is not radically subverting the heterocentric conditions that narrowly defined his secondary education. Billy is clear when he explains,

My lasting memory of school is one of unpleasantness and unhappiness ... I certainly was not a comfortable young person and suffered from significant emotional and educational insecurities ... that’s directly related to a number of things, but sexuality in particular.

However he appears to have exercised strong volition that drives learning and the impetus for at least beginning to move toward different, more positive understandings of the self that destabilise the stereotype of gay lived

experience as consigned to abject social and identity positions (Norton 1997; Talburt 2004).

In his recollection of schooling and family life in rural Scotland in the 1930s, Edward (b. 1931) recounts more positive experiences. They suggest unique circumstances that challenge the social and moral conventions that shaped family life and education in this period:

... the younger ones ... coming out younger which can be difficult for them and I didn't find it that way because I knew my parents knew, well my mother did anyway, because I told her. Well, my experience of it in those days was no school bullying and it was a lot easier... But it is different nowadays. Because there is so much said about it [being gay].

In effect Edward gives voice to, and disrupts assumptions that spatially and temporally, past formal educational and family environments were completely bounded by heteronormative forces. Edward talked of it being easier to be gay in school many decades ago in rural Scotland when it was unspoken or unknown. Paradoxically then there is a view of silence or the unknowable allowing a sense of freedom:

I have been gay since I realised about 13 and I have carried on the good work ever since then [laughter]. Well, my experience of it in those days was no school bullying and it was a lot easier. I mean we were all just taken as one another. Just talked back and forth and I had no difficulties in school in any way. But there was 28 in that school, both boys and girls, separate playgrounds and we just all mucked in but I always landed in the girl's side.... And of course there was no bullying and they would say oh you are with the girls and I'd say you come on too then! And that was it. But we had no problems.

It is interesting that Edward perceives greater problems in contemporary schooling than in his own, 70 years before. In contemporary school contexts being LGBT is increasingly explored, accepted, spoken and known about, while homophobia is actively addressed through the curriculum (Stonewall 2012; 2014a). He suggests that the sense of a protective silence has been broken. From Edward's perspective this leads to bullying and problems for young LGBT people. Whether or not there is a degree of nostalgia here about a past perceived as more straightforward, the conviction with which Edward expressed how schooling and adolescence shaped his current thinking,

counters assumptions we might have about a liberated LGBT present and obviously homophobic, repressive past (Bauer and Cook 2012). Edward alerts us to something of a sense of the creation of spaces in school that he recalls as having enacted. This reflects the phenomenological framing discussed in the literature review and its focus on what and with whom we LGBT people occupy and construct space (Ahmed 2006). In this space it was legitimate and not odd that he played with the girls and encouraged others to do so for example. At the same time however, it is recognised that Edward's account represents a singular reading of contemporary schooling and the current younger generation's attitude to sexuality. This is remote from the otherwise optimistic and hopeful views expressed in other parts of the discussion with him. What he conveys here is a sense of sadness that despite new freedoms and enlightened views on homosexuality, homophobia still prevails in schools.

Intersections between school and family space could result in the development of other, more positive, initial insights in relation to questions of gender. In Rachel's case, the understanding she had gained about fairness and equality in her family were reinforced and expanded "because of the school I went to" - an all girls secondary school in which she was memorably exposed to proto-feminist ideas:

I mean this was years before anyone had put feminist theory into words in this country and certainly not in schools. And the history teacher would read stuff out of papers ... and she'd say this is ridiculous because women's voices are not being heard here... there is a lot of subversion if you put women together. There is a lot of subversion ... when I was at secondary school and think ... It was like a female society.

Fiona's primary and secondary school education was more common of the majority of participants, based on a co-educational model, entailing mixed classes of girls and boys. Fiona recounts much less positive experiences than Rachel in which she had to make sense of sexist attitudes: "nonsense where you got teachers who did that gender stuff". She vividly remembers a number of occasions of direct and overt sexism perpetrated by the educational system of the 1960s and by male teachers within it. In primary school she explains that,

... you have this memory of things going on but it is difficult to know what you thought of them. ... The head teacher was an absolute horrible brute of a man, [in letters home] ... He never even took the trouble to change the he to she; it was just your son ... and he will be bla bla bla. He will be expected to, he will. It was always written in the male and I remember thinking where am I in this? ... I remember that as a child... I realised it my self and it was maybe me who said it to her... look mum it just says 'he' all the time. So that stuck in mind. And my mum saying ... you'd think that the lassies didn't exist.

This continued into her secondary education and exposure to further prejudice. The English teacher frequently referred to the girls as “a brazen hussy... [and] for just having an opinion!” Such messages were reinforced by other teachers, where,

... this guy who taught Chemistry said boys at the back, girls at the front. ... They had this kind of raised platform for the science teachers so that they could show you things. And he went, I like the girls at the front because then I can look over the tops of their heads to the important people, the boys.

She felt powerless and frustrated “there was nowhere you could take that...”, but with a growing anger and sense of injustice, “Oh terrible, angry. You felt oh you cheeky swine!” However I would suggest that Fiona provides a further example of inhabiting intersecting school and family spaces, as well as spaces within school, in which more positive experiential learning arises. From this she was able to develop, a tentative, but more affirmative narrative that began to counter the marginalisation of her as a girl, particularly one who did not fit with gendered expectations of the time. An early example of the dynamics of how family and school environments interact is when they come into conflict. This was over the clearly taboo issue of Fiona's ability of being able to play football. Her brother appeals to the primary school head master to let her play in the school team. She remembers being very resistant to this and understanding that it was wrong:

I said no, no, I don't want them to know that I play football... and that was funny, why did I not want them to know that I played football? What did I not want them to know?

The head teacher's response negatively impacted on Fiona's already growing sense of that she was somehow at odds with rules that prescribed girl's behaviour:

“Are you fools and are you mad and who is this” and that is exactly what I feared, ‘what kind of strange person?’ He never came back and said anything to me but he obviously felt ... I was made to feel I was some kind of weirdo and they were made to feel even more like weirdos for suggesting it...

***Lifewide learning: safe and subversive spaces within schools***

However, within compulsory schooling environments Fiona was able to find much more affirmative and welcoming spaces through being good at sport: “And I felt in place: it was good to be good at sports and it was good to be recognised and it was just a real comfort zone”. Although not explicitly identifying herself as lesbian at this point, Fiona was struck by strong female role models who she later discovered, were lesbian:

But I just remember at times, looking at all these women who were our coaches and thinking, I didn’t think gay, I just thought I love them, I just want to be like them. Talk about infatuation ... thinking role models for me and I do remember thinking they are really pally with each other in a different way.... what I remember thinking is that I love this environment of all women.

As quoted above, for Liz there was never any possibility as a teenager in the 1970s that she would have been able to come out to her family. As the eldest she was relied upon to take care of younger siblings. She was terrified of being “disowned” and “thrown out”. Such fears were magnified by the experience of one girl in her school who was openly lesbian and her family’s reaction to this:

And one of the girls who was two years below me, her mum got her put into the psychiatric hospital and she had, I mean this would have been 74, she was getting aversion therapy and ECT and stuff. I mean it was absolutely dreadful. And she was only 15, 16 at the time.

However, despite knowledge of this girl’s experience and fear of rejection by her family, Liz contributes to carving out a subversive space of non-formal learning within the wider space of school, in the surprising setting of the Scripture Union<sup>8</sup> (SU) of which she was the leader:

I went to secondary in 1971 and left in 76 ... I was very into religion for a while. I spent a few years as a rabid Christian [Laughter]. When I was

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<sup>8</sup> Scripture Union Scotland: partnering with schools across Scotland for over 70 years, providing pupils with opportunities to explore values and beliefs from a Christian perspective through classroom work, assemblies, extra-curricula clubs and residential experiences.

at school, the Scripture Union was where all the lesbians and gays hung out. So bizarre... they weren't all lesbians and gays but there was a group of six people. In my year, there was one gay guy who was my best pal. And in the year below me there were two gay guys who I was really friendly with. And the year below that there were three girls and we all hung out so, there was six of them and me.

Liz reflects on the paradox of why she was able to “talk about what it was like” for this group to be lesbian and gay, when outwardly she was going through a very “holy phase” in an organisation that focused on scripture for the development of young people’s spirituality:

What was really interesting Chris and I why I know the religious stuff wasn't that important really ... [it] was about a place where people could go and have arguments and discuss stuff and we had quite a lot of tolerant teachers around about us ... I felt very comfortable with them ... there was never a sense of trying to get them to stop being gay or anything like that... they were all pretty out and I was very proud and I like being amongst that.

Liz believes that these experiences were also influenced by the “huge issues round about the time... when gay rights were really coming to the fore”. As Liz reflects, her experiences appear “unusual”. In terms of understanding the nature and impact of the learning in which she engages in the SU several possibilities arise. Her narrative suggests the beginning of engagement in unique processes of inter-subjective, non-formal, critical and queer learning (Brookfield 2005; Duranti 2010; Grace and Hill 2009; Jarvis 1985). These are characteristic of the forms of learning that happen in social movements, out with state control, and in this instance, beyond the control of the authority of the school. Such learning is facilitated by occupation of and interaction within a queerly marginal and discursive site (Butler 1993:22; Grace and Hill 2009). Arguably Liz and her six lesbian and gay friends created this space through which they were enabled to see their connectedness with each other, so developing a sense of empathy (Duranti 2010). While not yet a queer space that enables learning that can ‘shatter patterns of self-alienation’ (Grace and Hill 2009:34), it reflects development of ‘communicative learning processes and critical analyses concerned with being... becoming [LGBT]’ (Grace and Hill 2009:31). Liz and her friends have engaged in subversion and troubling of a space intended for radically different purposes, characteristic of queering and

queer activism (Giffney 2009) and as a transgressive mode of thought and practice (Landrau and Rodriguez 2011). That said, there is also the sense of the creation of a safe space in which to learn about LGBT experience.

#### 4.3.2 “... being in something that wasn’t quite the norm ...” - finding safe and risky lifewide spaces of learning

Further understanding of the nature and impact of lifewide learning on participants’ construction of lesbian and gay identities can be gained through analysis of how they occupied and could develop new insights in spaces that afforded them safety and security. For Kevin, his learning about being gay really started in secondary school. While he felt isolated in school, he began “devouring books” about leading gay figures in the arts, such as dramatists like Tennessee Williams. His desire for reading was directly influenced by the encouragement of “passionate” and “inspiring” teachers “who I think really have made me what I am today”. Formal learning in school that he “loved” provides the catalyst for him to engage in his own independent learning, facilitated by his local library. This had a profound impact on developing his understanding of gay identity:

I think libraries really save folk’s lives. They did... and those librarians were brilliant... And bells, subliminal bells ringing in my head where I thought, there is something about this writing that’s just about me, whether its about her having a gay husband or whether its about she’s a character who lives on the outside [A Streetcar Named Desire]. So that was a really brilliant kind of education... Eventually it became more explicit because then I go to the librarians and say could I have the Thief’s Journal by Jean Genet or Andre Gide’s the Immoralist, these very gay novels.

As discussed above, Jean felt acutely that there was nowhere she could go in the 1970s, as an adolescent that could offer support and reassurance to cope with the turbulent emotions of coming out as lesbian at 16. The lack of support in her family was paralleled in secondary school:

They just didn't really know what to do with me. ... in the third and fourth years it was really kicking off. They just didn’t know what to do with me. ... causing trouble in class and being disengaged.

However there was an indirect form of family support where through two older brothers she was able to move into communal living with a group of women who they knew:

... feminists and hippies and bit radical and a bit alternative. And they were all about 10, 12 years older than me. Because I was getting no support at home they became a sort of surrogate parent group. About 6 of them. They were all straight. I went to live with them when I was about 18 and just then never went back.

This provided Jean with new opportunities for alternative lifewide, non-formal learning opportunities that “was really like getting a feminist education”, which she found,

Exciting. It was exciting. It was an eye opener. A lot of things that I had taken for granted were getting really challenged. I definitely became more feminist. I really became a feminist through it. ... and [understanding] gender in a lot of things, as prior to that I hadn't really much of an analysis of. I was only young I was only 18

This group of local women also started up the town's first Women's Aid collective to provide assistance to women who had suffered domestic violence. Jean undertook the Women's Aid training and became a volunteer. She explains that “we were pretty radical” and engaged in training that brought her new insights into her own and other women's experiences of oppression. This demonstrates a powerful and intense trajectory of change through critical learning. In a relatively short space of time as a teenager, Jean has moved from a crisis and point of desperation to critically orientated informal and non-formal learning through the collective organisation of Women's Aid. The training allowed her to engage with the central tasks of critical learning and the unmasking of how power operates in communities and how this can be challenged (Brookfield 2005):

And I always remember doing this scenario and it was a description of a woman, it was this woman whose husband he would lock the door of the house when he left in the morning or take the phone with him and stuff like that. And then I remember saying come on who would do that? And them saying no that is not a ridiculous scenario that happens. I didn't really believe it but pretty quickly I learned to realise that it was not outrageous or ridiculous or sadly even uncommon. And throughout my life and every job I have ever done I have heard the story over and over and over again, someone will tell you a similar story of a woman who that has happened to.

Jean and Kevin thus find places in which they could engage in further alternative and interconnecting forms of lifeworld, formal, informal and non-formal learning, influenced by the evolving development and questioning of their lesbian, gender and gay identities. From this they attain new understandings about who they were becoming, drawing from and inhabiting spaces that extend their lifeworlds and make significant changes to their adolescent biographies. This aligns with Jarvis' (2012:103) evolving definition of learning, whereby, the content of learning is 'transformed cognitively, emotively or practically and integrated into the individual biography' in these instances to begin to alter positively and incrementally their sense of becoming gay. Their experiences can also be seen to demonstrate the promise of the 'lifelong learning imagination ... [in which] learning is an activity that takes place in many different settings, informal as well as formal' (Sutherland and Crowther 2006:4). This is evident at an early stage of the life course in the context of Jean and Kevin's narratives.

Understanding the nature and impact of lifeworld sites on how participants learn to construct their identities in adolescence can be further developed by a focus on their experiences of risky spaces in which sexual encounters happened. Consistent with other participants, Michael (b.1946) recalls that he had nowhere to go with his growing awareness that he was gay in the working class mining community in which he was brought up:

When I was younger there was nothing like that [Gay men's groups; organised learning] you had to live and learn....I didn't know what I wanted to do but I always pretended that I was straight. I never let on to anyone that I liked them. I knew myself that I was gay really. I knew I was gay because I had no intention of going with girls. It didn't feel right.

He recounts several sexual encounters as an adolescent, the first of which was particularly traumatic. Two older teenage males made him drunk and sexually assaulted him:

It [being gay] actually started off very badly... What I knew then... what I knew after it was - and I was absolutely pie-eyed and he just pulled my pants down, and he really hurted me. I was that drunk I never really felt anything at the time...

He had a further sexual encounter with the same two teenagers at some point later. In his reference to this, he expresses how he was resigned in a fatalistic way, to adopting a passive role “as usual”. This resignation and the sense of low self-esteem or inferiority characterised Michael’s family and school life. He describes himself as always being “dumb fuck” and this was projected into, and pervasive of the other sexually intimate encounters Michael discusses as part of his adolescence. The uncertainty and confusion about what was happening in the first sexual encounters, compounded with the strong impulse to seek out further sexual experience, led Michael into risky spaces of public toilets:

And then, where I found it out [that he was gay], was in what you would call cottaging. As you called it in the 1960s... but I usually found that it was older men, no my age, maybe in their 40s and as usual... They weren’t people I knew, but I know maybe if they were wearing a ring on the finger they were married. They always had the suit on, the collar and tie. ... and then I realised. ... the ones I went with in the cottaging they werenae actually my age they were ... quite a bit older than me...

Michael’s teenage encounters with these older men represent a reconfigured and complex picture of how the relationship between experiential learning and the nature of risk-taking may be understood, and particularly its impact on the development of sexual identity. Beard and Wilson (2006) claim past negative experience can inhibit learning and discourage taking risks. In Michael’s case earlier, negative sexual experiences with his peers do not deter him from regularly meeting older men for sex and the potential risks of further physical assault, particularly when “all they really wanted to do was penetrate you”. In relation to other risks and criminal consequences of what he was doing at 14,15 and 16, he “never thought that way about it”. Instead he explains that he “was actually looking for somebody to love me.” Of the men he had sex with Michael found that he “liked their company [and] they never hurted me”. While potentially risky, it appears that Michael found some degree of comfort in these exchanges. In relation to the question of how and where learning happens, Michael’s experiences represent a queerly transgressive form of lifewide and non-formal learning. This destabilises and twists conventional definitions of non-formal learning, in particular when

understood as organised activity carried on outside the formal educational systems to provide selected types of learning to particular sub- groups of the population (Jarvis 1985). The selected type of learning in which Michael engages can be characterised as a queer, coping strategy developed within a secret marginal site that ‘contests hetero-hegemony’ (Grace and Hill 2009:20).

Further complexity and paradox in relation to the nature and impact of non-formal learning is evident in Susan’s account of trying to come out as lesbian when she was a teenager. From about the age of 17 she “was full of questions” about her “sexuality and being in love with women but not acting on it. Well acting on it but it was a lot more fantasy than reality”. She sought out LGBT support groups and tried to get involved in a lesbian line switchboard. However she found the experience alienating:

It was a very serious business, and the women on the line were very serious women. And it was, there was nothing light hearted about it as I remember. But that ... is maybe why I didn’t have a place in there. You know I was a private school girl and I was young and frivolous and I didn’t belong to any political parties, not then, and I did have some friends who were men ... it is funny really as I suppose some people’s experience of being gay is how you fit into a straight world. I kept falling in love with women but I didn’t quite fit into the lesbian scene.

At this point in her life Susan finds that she more readily fits into her peer group:

And it is so important at that age that you fit in socially and I did have really good friends and nobody who was judgemental or excluded me so I was probably just more comfortable in the straight group. And that was probably why I ended up getting married...

As explored in the literature review chapter, Ahmed (2006:3) considers how LGBT people might differently reside within and alter spaces, particularly in terms of with “who” or “what” they inhabit space. The nature of how, as teenagers, participants such as Susan were orientated within and resided across a range of lifewide learning sites can be partly understood in how they talk of being “isolated”, “an outsider”, a “misfit”, “not having a place”. A particularly common perception was having “nowhere to go” with the unsettling, confusing, fearful and desperate emotional reactions that could

arise from the possibility that they were lesbian or gay. However I have aimed to demonstrate that for the lifewide dimension of learning, within and between the family, schools and other, sometimes surprising locations, participants do create and inhabit places where they can go. These allow them to commence varied learning trajectories in which there are some foundations for self-understanding, however troubling or reassuring this might have been. I would suggest that this supports Ahmed's (2006:68) central contention that having 'different ways of directing one's desires, means inhabiting different worlds.' In short, participants' teenage LGBT identity formations are shaped by, and shape the range of spaces in which lifewide learning happens.

#### **4.3.3 "I wish I had used all the learning that I had when I was younger..." - the legacy of learning in childhood and adolescence**

Opportunities for learning to construct a positive sense of a lesbian and gay identity in childhood and adolescence could be assumed to be limited by the powerfully repressive, homophobic conditions participants encountered in their past lives. Their narratives do point to varying extremes of anti-gay prejudice, where its implicit and explicit operation could be as equally alienating and disturbing. However, from the above analyses I would argue a more nuanced, complex picture takes shape of the nature and impact of how and where learning happens to shape participants' earlier constructions of lesbian and gay, as well as gender identities. Their narratives indicate lifewide, experiential, formal, informal and non-formal learning about a gay younger self that for most led certainly to low self-esteem, anger and fear. However, participants do challenge and find alternatives to the forms of learning imposed by '[l]iving in a heteronormative culture' from which the outcomes are to "see" straight, to "read" straight, to "think" straight" (Sumara and Davis 1999: 202). There is hopefulness and laying down foundations for further learning in earlier adulthood that can undermine the impact of ever-present heteronormative strictures. Possible reasons for this may be found in what Liz always now thinks, "that, quite a lot of time when I meet lots of lesbians and gays. I always think they are quite smart and they

have had to think a lot of things through". For Liz, when she comes out in earlier adulthood, in very difficult and stressful circumstances, she wishes could have "used all the learning she had when she was younger", forged in the SU with other lesbian L/ gay teenagers.

The potential power and lasting legacy of how LGBT people learned in childhood and adolescence to address questions we had about gender and sexual identity are further reinforced in Susan's (b. 1964) experiences:

I think the sense of not fitting in and questioning gender roles and stereotypes hugely informed the sort of reading I did as an older adolescent - lots of feminist writing and lesbian fiction - and without [that] I would never have formed the political awareness that I did, or gained the (fictional) role models of lesbian life that informed my early adult sexuality, and provided the foundation which made my coming out at the age of 40 such a comfortable, reassuring and liberating experience.

Archie's (b. 1928) narrative attests to learning in childhood and adolescence that has a different legacy but which has been equally powerful and influential across his life. From an early age there was continual reinforcement of the conditions for the creation and development of a code of strong Christian morals and values. Archie appears to have maintained such a code to this point in his life. The antecedents are evident in his childhood and adolescence where he explains:

And of course she [his mother] was a church going woman so that I was brought up from the earliest days to go the primary school Sunday service, bible class, the Youth Fellowship and into the church...

He goes on to refer frequently to having learned and lived by a value-belief system grounded in a Christian and Church of Scotland ethos of respectful, morally correct behaviour. This has guided him throughout his life and involvement in many voluntary organisations, for example:

They [young sea cadets in his charge] knew I had certain values. I didn't approve of drinking, I didn't approve of smoking and didn't approve of bad language, so they were all very careful in my presence.

Liz, Susan and other participants, recognise the value of the understandings they developed about lesbian and gender identity in their formative years and utilise this now. However Archie is much less able to reconcile the "gay

tendencies” he began to be aware of as a teenager with his development of a Christian faith:

I do say to myself should I be acting gay and also be a Christian attending the Church?... I mean nobody in the church knows that I am gay or that I have gay tendencies. Oh no. Because I don't know what their reaction would be. A lot of them may be horrified or shocked. I wouldn't want to do that to them.

#### 4.4 Summary of the chapter

From the analyses of participants' narratives a complex, nuanced and diffuse picture emerges of the nature of younger LGBT identity formations and the learning that contributed to and/or inhibited these. It provides insight into how the nature, purposes, parameters, conditions and impact of different forms of learning are uniquely altered and configured when used to construct younger LGBT identity formations in particular. At the same time, positive and/or troubling shifts in participants' self-awareness and identifications as younger LGBT adults mediate how they learn in different contexts.

Participants attempted to make meaningful sense of, and connect an array of unsettling, confusing, vague, angry and/or more fleeting feelings, impulses and thoughts associated with same-sex attraction. This was in the midst of heteronormative forces that were clearly operant and extending across many participants' younger lives. They served to ensure a continuous, often insidious, but all-pervasive enforcement of heterosexuality as obligatory, and homosexuality an abhorrence. Through these periods, for many participants it was shown that their evolving sense that they were lesbian or gay was diffuse and internalised, enfolded within inner emotional worlds, often building in intensity from childhood into adolescence. They struggled to name or understand such lesbian or gay formations in meaningful ways. However they were able to feel and discern the dynamics of heteronormative power in the danger and hostility in the language and reactions to which they were exposed. This was within and between a range of lifeworld spaces. For some there is an articulation of more innate, deeply felt, persistent, less fleeting and more developed knowledge that they were gay from a young age.

Consequently, for many participants, learning to meaningfully, progressively and positively understand and express younger LGBT identities, became about how, and to what extent they were able to navigate a pathway through such constraining, prohibitive conditions. Experiential, inter-subjective, socio-personal, psychosocial, critical, queer, non- and informal processes of learning are evident, which participants directed to making sense of particular struggles. These modes of learning could be occluded and inhibitive or laying the foundation for greater agency. Making sense of same-sex attraction had to be conducted in isolation or with minimal interactions that provided little explanation for tumultuous feelings and desires. Attempts to create meaning could therefore be largely reliant on internalised, limited resources that were also required to navigate inexplicable, sanctioning, oppressive silences about homosexuality. Learning processes in which meaningful interaction is central, were thus rendered narrow in scope and often negative in impact by such oppressive conditions. They were precipitated by experiences in which peers and/or family members' hostile reactions to gay identities drove participants to conform as best they could to heterosexual stereotypes. However, despite formidable, constraining conditions they developed and created imaginative inner emotional worlds, coping and defence mechanisms, and subversive spaces. This built resilience and a capacity for dealing with adversity and discrimination as teenagers and into earlier adulthood and midlife, the focus of the next chapter.

## Chapter 5: Learning across earlier adulthood and midlife: widening and deepening trajectories of learning

### 5.1 Overview of the chapter

As chapter 4 demonstrated, in childhood and adolescence, participants engaged in multiple, combined forms of lifewide learning. These were informal, non-formal, experiential, critical and queer in nature, developed in unique ways to address and navigate complex heteronormative forces. This allowed them to inhabit intersecting, safer, subversive and risky spaces that had permeable boundaries with other spaces. In so doing they could develop tentative, troubled and or increasingly more assured awareness of their sexual identities. For some participants, how they learned in childhood and adolescence to address questions about gender and sexual identity has had a powerful and lasting legacy for learning at later points in their lives.

Over the next three sections I explore how such trajectories of learning widen and deepen across participants' early adulthood and midlife to contribute to the development of their LGBT identities over this period of their lives. Informing this analysis are Jessie's (b. 1946) insights on how she has learned across her earlier adulthood and midlife. She defines this as "... widening the scope..." of what, and who she knows. This has influenced how she has behaved and changed, as well as how she has come to know and reflect upon her identity as a lesbian and as "a woman... older... retired...64 [years of age] ... Jewish... a mother... a grandmother... a feminist... a multiplicity of identities". I aim to explore how there may be a "widening of scope" in the learning processes in which other participants engage and how this impacts on the construction of their identities. I focus particularly on learning and LGBT identity construction as situated and developed in lifewide learning contexts of college and university, the workplace, in religious institutions, in social and protest movements and in engagement with the changing socio-political landscape of Scotland. These can be broadly designated as sites in which informal, formal and non-formal learning take place, as per Jarvis' (1985) typology: informal learning refers to processes in which the person acquires knowledge, skills, attitudes and aptitude from daily living; formal learning

refers to processes happening in institutionalized and hierarchical education systems which are graded and accredited through gaining qualifications; non-formal learning encompasses any systematic, organised, educational activity carried on outside the formal educational systems to provide selected types of learning to particular sub-groups of the population. Again I seek to explore the unique nature and interplay of these forms of learning in the construction of participants' LGBT identities.

As well as this focus on widening out of the scope of learning, I also explore how life-deep learning might be constituted in participants' biographies and how it contributes to their construction of LGBT identities across this period. Life-deep learning is framed as:

Beliefs, values, ideologies, and orientations to life. Life-deep learning scaffolds all our ways of approaching challenges and undergoing change. Religious, moral, ethical, and social learning bring life-deep learning that enables us to guide our actions, judge ourselves and others, and express to ourselves and others how we feel and what we believe (Banks *et al.* 2007:15).

As chapter 4's exploration demonstrated, in working out their younger LGBT identities, participants could be seen to engage in particular forms of religious, moral and social learning. Through this they had to make sense of and navigate a complex nexus of often hidden and more explicit sanctions, condemnation and disapproval of homosexuality arising from deeply riven religious and socio-cultural constraints. However it was also found that they engage in other forms of learning that were critical and queer in nature to navigate such constraints. Depending on their age, participants' early adulthood and midlife cover an approximate period of between 20 and 40 years. This has seen dramatic religious, moral, political and social change in relation to understanding and visibility of LGBT lives, with affordance of new socio-legal rights (Equalities Network Scotland 2015; Heaphy 2008; Meek 2015; Stonewall 2014; Yip 2008). A focus across the participants' early adulthood and midlife thus provides an opportunity to explore the particular nature of the scaffolding of life-deep learning, with what and how it equips them to address the socio-cultural and religious constraints they face in relation to their sexual identities and how this mediates the capacity to undergo positive

change. I also consider what other forms of learning, in addition to, or combined with the religious, moral and social, come into play across early adulthood and midlife that shape participants' LGBT identity formations. From this I aim to demonstrate whether and how life-deep learning can be differently understood and scaffolded in the particular contexts of LGBT participants' lives. These analyses are thematically structured as outlined in Table 1.5.

<b>Research question:</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the nature and impact of how and where participants learn in the development of their LGBT identities across earlier adulthood and midlife?</li> </ul>
<b>Emergent themes</b>	
<b>5.2</b>	<b>The dynamics of LGBT identities construction across earlier adulthood and midlife: the scaffolding for unique life-deep learning</b>
5.2.1	"... out of step ..." and "... opening out ..." - The impact of changing formal learning environments on identity
5.2.2	"So freedom making" - Learning to be LGBT in the workplace in early adulthood and midlife
5.2.3	From "Escapism...repression...idealism" to "We really could transform society": Addressing questions of faith, life politics and sexuality

**Table 1.5: Emergent Themes - learning across early adulthood and midlife**

## **5.2 The dynamics of LGBT identities construction across earlier adulthood and midlife: the scaffolding for unique life-deep learning**

The above themes allow exploration of the proposition that the dynamics of participants' LGBT identity formation can be understood as process of unique lifewide and life-deep learning. Such dynamics involve 'the complex business of negotiating who we are ... the resources we draw in self-negotiation and challenging how we may been scripted' (West 2014b: 62). This framing may be apposite for the learning processes that provide the impetus for identity changes across the period of earlier adulthood and midlife. To do this I compare several participants and the trajectories of learning in which they engage across earlier adulthood and midlife. I begin with a focus on the nature and impact of formal learning in the dynamics of LGBT identity

formation, as mediated by educational institutions of college and university. It is evident however that across all participants' narratives, formal learning processes are enmeshed with experiential, informal, non-formal, critical and queerly orientated forms of learning.

### **5.2.1 “... opening out ...” and “out of step” - the nature and impact of formal learning on LGBT identity construction**

This first section considers the changing, unique nature of formal learning processes in which participants engage across earlier adulthood and midlife that contributed to the construction of their LGBT identities. I examine the extent to which formal learning contributes to lifewide and life-deep learning and ‘ways of approaching challenges and undergoing change’ (Banks et al. 2007:15) in relation to becoming LGBT.

The varying processes and extents of being ‘out’ as lesbian or gay in earlier adulthood and midlife are a shared focus of the majority of participants’ narratives. I therefore also address Ahmed’s (2006) question of what it may mean to be orientated, focusing on how participants are ‘out’ in the contexts of the educational institutions in which they have undertaken formal study across early adulthood and midlife. This provides a route into analysis of how learning has occurred in participants’ lives, mediated by them, as well as the particular locations of formal education and times in which this took place. As the following analysis indicates, participants learned to be “out” with increasing confidence through formal learning in educational institutions. However this is through different orientations of being out. Participants could be simultaneously “out of step” with the institution, or experienced a positively orientated “opening out” of understanding of who they and others were, particularly as lesbian and gay adults.

Across earlier adulthood and midlife, participants have undertaken a range of college and university programmes of study. This has involved a wide range of disciplines, ranging from Divinity, Arts and Humanities, to more vocationally orientated courses in nursing, medicine, social work, community and adult education and teaching. Participants attribute varying levels of significance to

the formal learning in these disciplines and its impact on their personal development and sexual identities. The following analyses point to the emergence of particular trajectories of formal learning in which they engage in different educational institutions. They develop a positively orientated “opening out” to wider and deeper understandings of themselves and others as LGBT people, but also the complexity of macro-level socio-political and heteronormative forces they face. They do so through determining and developing an overt, increased and connected focus on lesbian and gay issues as part of their chosen programmes of study and to meet the requirements of formal assessment. This fuses learning processes that are in part experiential, engendering increased reflexivity (Beard and Wilson 2006; Heaphy 2008). This builds knowledge that is critical and queer in nature through which it is proffered as,

... a location where identities grow and change and it enables learners to challenge heterosexualising discourses and heteronormative ways of being, believing, desiring, acting, becoming and belonging (Grace and Hill 2009:34).

For Andrew (b.1945) formal learning and the academic content of his courses are what clearly stand out to him and influenced his subsequent engagement in formal education into midlife:

I think it’s also the case that I actually do like formal education. I remember I learned about at university [in the 1960s], particularly about history, about medieval history because we were taught medieval history particularly well. ... I learned there about doing research and also about the way that societies change.

However, as an undergraduate, learning about his sexuality does not appear to be an overtly realised or readily definable process for Andrew; it is much more nebulous and ambiguous, operating at an unconscious level:

I mean there must have been things. It [question of his sexuality] was not, em, it was not something that if I engaged with it, I didn’t engage with it in a meaningful way...

As referred to by West (2014b: 62), the resources available for self-negotiation and challenging how we are scripted appear limited in Andrew’s case, particularly where he is emphatic that “issues of sexuality, were... *were not there at all* at university”. However, in the intervening years since

studying Medieval History in the 1960s to his midlife in the 1990s, and early 2000s, Andrew engaged in multiple formal and accredited programmes of study. In these courses, spanning the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, Andrew increasingly adopted a lesbian and gay rights focus, bringing a critically questioning inquiry to formal study:

Two of the courses I did, the industrial relations and trade union studies course and the access into higher education course, there was an opportunity to do an independent piece of research, so I did one about gay trade unionists. This was like in 1980. So it wasn't an easy thing to do. ... So at that time, actually most people who openly identified as being HIV positive were gay men. I [then] did a lot of work about people being HIV positive... how it was a population group that would be open to doing access courses. Because, you know of the way their lives were changing.

While Andrew explains that there was “Nobody [who] said oh no, you shouldn't do that” in relation to the second assignment the possibility that it was not approved of is suggested where,

What I particularly remember about the latter one. I got a mark, so it was 56%, which isn't that great. But there was no feedback at all, not a word.

Nevertheless, it does appear that Andrew's engagement in formal learning was pushing the boundaries of educational curricula, through which he developed increased empathy for a wider constituency of gay men and critical understanding of wider social and equality issues they faced. This culminated in midlife where Andrew completed a PhD, “my subject being ‘Exploring gay men's narratives, social networks and their experiences of health services targeted at them: a London study’”. This trajectory of formal learning with a distinct LGBT focus, intersects with, and is encouraged by Andrew's engagement in non-formal learning across early adulthood and midlife in a range of settings. He places an equal value on,

the learning that I have got in less formal situations, like the Iona community, being in Tanzania as a volunteer, Gay Liberation Front, Trade Unions and so on. They have been like really important to me

The nature and impact of learning in “less formal situations”, in other lifeworld space, and its combination with formal learning to construct participants' wider and deeper understanding of being LGBT is a common

feature across many participants' experiences.

Jessie shares with Andrew, engagement in formal learning at university in the 1960s that did not then substantially add to her understanding of being lesbian. However she does recall one lecturer "being openly gay" who would invite students to his house where "a young man was always hanging around". This was never considered "a big issue" and nobody talked about though he was seen to be different, "though full of confidence". She also recalls being saddened through other partial insights about gay lived experience gained at university:

I remember there used be a paper, ... the International Times? With personal ads [for gay men] in it and I remember reading some of them and thinking that is really sad that people have to advertise in the papers ... really sad that people can't meet each other.

From a queer temporal lens on the past there are possible paradoxes reflected here (Halberstam 2005; Bauer and Cook, 2012). Jessie refers to the ease with which one lecturer has an openly gay life that he does not hide from some of his students. There appears to be acceptance of him and in fact Jessie recalls him as confident in his difference. However, that "Nobody really talked about it" possibly alludes to the repressive, silencing effects of wider society and state, commanding a sanctioning power over knowing what and how to talk about homosexuality, rendering it invisible. This may also reflect the limiting impact of discourse as a '...constellation of hidden historical rules that govern what can be said and cannot be said and who can speak and who must listen...' (Kincheloe 2008:68). Yet in Jessie's raised awareness of, and empathy for those men in the ads who looked to meet other men, questions as to the nature of (in)visibility of gay lives are raised and an altered narrative of relations to past time and place is constructed. This unsettles a view of 1960s Scottish society as unquestionably dominated by the hegemonic control of heteronormativity. Her realisation about the gay personals also offers a paradox, and alternative window onto the past. What saddens Jessie and is reflective of societal repression can also be viewed as a source of hopefulness, an exercise in agency, and to a degree, expressive of resistance: individuals have taken the risk to place ads in this paper. In so doing there is

an alternative view of gay men who have potentially ‘reconfigured dominant discourses to provide support and impetus to different ways of living and different understandings of the self’ (Bauer and Cook 2012:7).

Jessie’s tentative insights into gay and lesbian lived experience change radically through the subsequent formal learning opportunities she takes up. These are precipitated through crises arising from an unhappy marriage, divorce and depression:

The bits that had been churning along underneath that had caused me problems. To quote my ex husband, “If you just do what I say everything will be okay” And I thought I just can’t be that person. I felt that I lost myself, my personality, everything ... And it took me ages to actually get out of it [marriage] and there were a number of things that helped and one of them was doing Women’s Studies at Strathclyde.

The course was a “real eye opener” for Jessie. She began reading,

... feminist theory and a lot of lesbian feminist stuff, huge amounts of all sorts of things which was good and it got your brain going. The fact that I had to read for a course, for exams of a sort that made me read the theory, develop ideas and so forth, so I read a lot.

This engagement in formal learning had a profound impact on all aspects of Jessie’s life. It was “empowering” and led her to have her first lesbian relationship and meet other women “who thought the same as her”. This also acted as a catalyst for engagement in further formal learning with the completion of a diploma in Adult Education. Formal learning also became the impetus for participation in organised non-formal learning, volunteering with Rape Crisis and involvement in political activism through the anti-apartheid movement. Jessie expresses particular regrets that **Women’s Studies** “have gone by the board”. The radical insights she gained through undertaking this course in the early 80s have remained with her into the post work phase of her life. These allowed her to challenge the content and scope of further programmes of study she undertook in midlife:

I mean when I did my counselling diploma it [understanding the needs of LGBT adults] was something that was brought up a lot ... it may be an issue that people, who are working as counsellors will have to face and that was actually something that needed managed in a better way. I’m afraid I insisted on bringing up issues that I wanted everyone to

actually talk about. Whereas people were happy to talk about race and disability I would talk about LGBT issues and bring up and let's get that addressed...

For Iain (b. 1951), undertaking an initial, formal programme of nurse training in the early 1970s led to a major turning point in his life. He explains that,

The first time I actually came out was in 1973 in Inverness, believe it or not. And I was a student nurse ... and everyone seemed to like me so much I'll just tell everybody.

His decision to do so at this time in Scotland, when homosexuality was criminalised, aligns with a queer articulation of history. To some extent, Iain's story, like Jessie's above, allows excavation of and 'a rethink of the specific cultural, political and experiential contingencies that shaped sexual lives and thought' (Bauer and Cook 2012:5), in this instance, during the 1970s. Iain finds that he had seriously misinterpreted what he perceived as a conducive, social situation and openness among his peers for telling them that he was gay. The result was that he had to leave Inverness and the nursing course a month later,

So that will let you know the treatment that I got. For example the home warden, they refused to clean my room in the nurse's home. That was just one incident. And so I thought I am not going to last very long here so I left.

However, Iain's decision to come out, the hostile reaction and unfolding crisis it created, served as a catalyst for a combination of learning processes that have shaped the development of 'knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, meaning [and] beliefs' (Jarvis 2012:3) across early adulthood and midlife. These have allowed Iain to question, refine and deepen understanding of the religious, moral and socio-cultural constraints that have been imposed on his own life and those of other lesbian and gay adults. They guided his immediate actions at the time and his determination that he was never "going to be heterosexual for the sake of being heterosexual to please everybody else". He left for London, "determined that wherever I am going I am just going to be the same". Iain believes that what drove his fellow students to reject him and his forced departure from the nursing course was "Presbyterianism". This was confirmed further by his reactions from his family

at the time when he told them he was gay:

Yeah, I knew all about this Christian ethos and the bible says. And that time of course, to my own knowledge the bible said right, but I thought people had a bit more in them than that and though the bible says this, he is still a human being. But I also found through some of the people in Inverness and some of my own family, one of my sisters, that they were under the impression that we chose to be gay. They didn't think that it just happened as part of life that we were born this way. They thought we chose that way of life and therefore couldn't understand...

The combination of religious and socio-cultural constraints with which he was faced at this point in his life would have imposed an intolerable alternative:

If I hadn't made that escape I think that I would have been pushed by society into some kind of marriage. That would never have worked. And therefore I would have had a bloody miserable life I would think. By leaving Inverness and going to the right place at that time which was London, my life for the most was very good.

The coming together of being in the right place at the right time is offered to Iain again through nurse training. It is particularly ironic and characteristic of queer subversion of space that when he embarks on the new programme it is the hospital chaplain, a Church of England priest, who is gay. He therefore provided Iain with a markedly different response, a "kind of sheltering wing", which was crucial to Iain developing a sense of belonging:

During my first 8 weeks the hospital chaplain comes and gives you a lecture about his role ... I spoke to him and he invited me down to his little cottage for coffee. And he was really, really good. And I had already said to him I think I am gay, basically because of him because I thought he must be. [Laughter]. And he became a really, really dear friend. And he guided me and he told me places to go in London... through him met lots of other people and learned about the gay culture. Like gay places to go like pubs, clubs.

In a similar trajectory as Andrew, in midlife Iain has taken up doctoral level study. This examines,

... older gay and lesbian people's expectations of future holistic care ... [to] compare and contrast that with what professional carers believe they have to offer older gay and lesbian people.

The impetus for this has been informed by his working life as a **deputy** residential care manager, and his reflections on becoming older, gay and

potentially in need of care. He is also driven by intolerance of ignorance and anti-gay prejudice:

I witnessed [a number of incidents] that I was not amused with that involved bad treatment of older gay people. But it was in my mind to do some kind of research into this and find out how it could be stopped... I wouldn't go through what some of these people have had to go through because I would stand up to it. But what if I am not able to stand up to it and have to go through it?

He explains that one resident met his male partner in the “day room”. They hugged and were affectionate. This then caused an,

... almighty stink among other residents and staff who were not happy with this kind of behaviour. So the old man moved back to his room and never came out again. He refused to come outside of his room ever again. That is just not acceptable. And how the manager could ever accept that he would do this without ever re-educating the residents and staff, I found was intolerable. So that was one of the incidents that made me decide, this has got to stop, you can't have this.

Iain's commitment to improving conditions for older gay people reflects engagement in critically orientated forms of learning that counter a reductive, neo-liberal framing of the purposes of adult learning processes. Through engagement in his doctoral study, Iain is directly subverting and actively countering neo-liberal policy discourse. It labels adults as learners who are consumers in the educational marketplace so rejecting their identities as people with wider experience who are citizens and social actors (Crowther 2012). However Iain rejects this reductive view. For him learning has been inextricably bound with “life experience. Life experience. You can't learn better than living it”. He draws explicitly on his identity as gay, and related experiences values and beliefs, constructed through a particular lifewide and life-deep learning trajectory. In bearing witness to unfair treatment of other gay people he has taken responsibility to change and so repositions himself as a critical learner and researcher. Through the particular combination of experiential, existential, informal, formal and non-formal learning in which he has engaged, he is now conducting critical inquiry with a unique form of praxis for the development of emancipatory knowledge (Crotty 1998). This focuses on enlightening health care professionals so they can be educated beyond,

the fact that physically we are no different to anyone else, but that emotionally, spiritually, ... we [gay people] are different ... we have different ideals, we have different ways in which we live our lives, and unless people are educated towards that they won't know

This goal is paralleled in the particular type of non-formal learning promoted in the work of Highland Rainbow Folk (HRF). As Tina explained:

But I think for me growing older and particularly the work I do around Highland Rainbow Folk, is the perception of what we've been talking about: of coming out and identities of LGBT people. Its changes in care provision and services and how we access services and what sort of responses we get to maybe individual needs and that's a concern of mine. Is how to help older people, particularly in their 70s, 80s and 90s at the moment, and in the future for myself, what sort of service they get in care homes and hospitals.

Kevin's formal learning in school was inspired by "incredible teachers" and acted as a bridge into a subsequent self-directed, independent learning about his identity and other LGBT lives through reading increasingly radical gay literature (Section 4.3.2). University provides a fertile environment that enables further formal learning that opens out his conceptual understanding of sexuality through literature and theatre studies and in writing a play about coming out to his parents. In so doing he provides one possible answer to the question '[W]hy do some LGBT students seem to be able to make sense of their sexual orientations in a manner that enables them to progress through their studies while others do not?' (Gunn and McAllister 2013: 163).

I think again I wouldn't be who I am if I hadn't gone to university. I came under the influence of kind of really incredible people. I think that is where the Scottish Education system is incredible. I think it is that wonderful thing as well when you are studying, you think gosh I am maybe writing something here that's not been written about before. You know if you've taken something obscure that's very gay. You know I am writing about this obscure play from the 1970s and God my head is so full of it. Isn't it amazing that this has never been written about before? Or I'd look at a female sensibility and how her [Virginia Woolf] sexuality and how her gender influenced what she wrote. And the lecturer would make you really think and you'd really had to justify your decisions and your answers and your opinions and that's incredible.

Jean follows a similar trajectory. For her, formal learning at university about lesbian experience was radically developed by an opportunity to study abroad

for a year as an undergraduate. Like Kevin, this too built on previous, critical non-formal learning developed in her late teens as explored in chapter 4 (Section 4.3.2):

I spent the second year in the US. I went on the north American exchange programme. It was a really big deal. It was amazing but it was really hard as well, it was really tough. Yeah. But I chose well; better than I could have ever imagined. I ended up in a place that has more lesbians per head of population than any other place in America ... there is quite a history there of kind of proto feminist networks and connections.

She is exposed to radical lesbian feminist ideas in an exciting febrile environment:

There was all the sex wars stuff in the feminist and lesbian communities; it was at its absolute pitch then. It was very polarised positions. You were either for them or against them whatever side it was. There was no kind of grey areas.

However, the radical insights that Jean gained led to dissonant relationships with the Scottish institution to which she returns, and with peers:

Well by that stage I was really out of step with again the majority of folk in that environment. You go out of an environment [access programme in college] where most of the folk are like you, where you are all dead comfortable and happy with each other into this big, anonymous environment where the majority of folk are 6, 7 years younger than you. And that's setting aside any issues about sexuality or class issues. [But] I was out for 10 years and I was still in the city that I came out in. I had a peer group of pre-existing lesbians who I knew. There was nothing the university could ever say, or the younger lesbians at the university could offer me in terms of my identity.

The new ideas and insights about sexuality that she has gained through formal learning also brought her into conflict with one lecturer for the remainder of the degree programme. Jean found formal study of sexuality and gender in the US institution to be embracing of new radical perspectives. In a module on the sociology of sexuality she encountered a lecturer who was "probably a bit of a libertarian and quite dismissive of a lot of the radical feminists". She had "terrible run-ins with [him] ... I thought he was quite misogynist". Their relationship is worsened by his approach to the exploration of sexuality, where in his tutorials,

... he used to put pornography around the walls and advertising images

of women which were highly sexualised and we were supposed to have debates about it. But I had just come from an environment where people's hobbies were setting fire to these things... with tea shirts on saying I'd rather be destroying pornography. So I just found sitting in amongst that was more than my nerves could take so we constantly clashing over things.

Jean's experience abroad, learning about and opening out to new understandings of gender and lesbian issues, fit with Tierney's (1997) application of a critical postmodernist framework which addresses lesbian and gay issues in the academy. In this he argues for queer studies as a form of cultural politics that rethinks the discourse and structures that create norms and differences, in order 'to break heterosexuality's hegemony of the norm' (34). This is not consensual but confrontational and disruptive. He argues that dialogues of respect that focus on change, rather than consensus, are required. Such work is based on all voices being heard, respect and understanding, but where sexual identity is an, 'on-going site of contestation and redefinition' (*ibid.* 44). This should be 'participatory and inclusive rather than passive and exclusive' (175). It appears that Jean's engagement in formal learning in the US institution enabled such a dialogical but also productively dialectical approach (McLaren 2013). She was able develop new insights about sexuality in a period of conflicting and polarised ideas. The learning interactions on her return to a Scottish university were "more than her nerves could take". This suggests a formal learning environment where a dialectical tension around contradictory understandings of sexuality was not supported and therefore much less satisfactory formal learning. Despite the difficult circumstances and conflict she encountered on return, Jean is certain that "she really grew when I was there [US institution]". She attributes this growth in part to the formal learning in this institution in which she engages with "lots of feminist theory and women's studies" that equipped her, albeit through a stressful experience, to challenge the teaching of the sociology of sexuality from an alternative and informed position.

In varying ways these participants' trajectories of learning are not just formal in nature. There is a combination of formal with informal and non-formal

learning that are critical, experiential, transformational and queer. This informs how they become lesbian and gay, opening up new habits of mind and laying important stepping-stones and foundations for life-deep learning (Mezirow 2000). This can be seen in the development of the values and beliefs that shaped participants' developing self-knowledge, about the nature of their sexual identities: it encompasses deeper, troubled, critical, politicised and contested conceptual understandings of the nature of being and becoming LGBT and how it is outwardly expressed and inter-connects with other aspects of identity. At another level, these participants' biographies further accord with Brennan *et al.*'s (2010b) proposition that students have 'extensive choice' in relation to their identities, particularly from the multiple reference points which group identities present in 'political or community engagement, or from the academic/professional content of their studies.' (139). This was particularly resonant for Craig (b. 1972). He went to university in the 1990s. For him this was,

Probably the most transformative ... doing the degree was more about becoming a gay man and it was going from not being out ... Until the end of it [university] and having loads of gay friends, being out to my family, a complete transformation in 3 years. Going from being *in* to a gay success story. It was just that experience and that whole educational experience, it was purely, that gay transformation was only possible because I was at university. So it was an educational experience gave me that possibility and I'll never have another transformation like that because it is like going from a chrysalis to a butterfly: that's it exactly. There's a nice quote. [Laughter]

These participants' engagement in, ownership and or redirection of formal learning to critically understand their own identities and wider lesbian and gay issues, also raise interesting challenges for post compulsory educational institutions. The participants invite questions as to what might constitute creative curriculum development and learners' participation in this. They also raise questions as to how such complex LGBT issues can be addressed inclusively in educational institutions' policies, when these are controlled by neo-liberal appropriation and repackaging of equality issues within uncritical diversity policy and management practices. Diversity management policy and practices in the context of contemporary HE are shaped by neo-liberal market driven concerns with consumer choice and are thus more concerned with

supporting the brand of a university and creation of the right image than tackling complex inequalities issues (Ahmed 2012). Colin (b. 1970s) is a university's Equalities and Diversity Advisor. He talked about the challenges he faces in bridging the gap between such policy and curriculum development that addresses LGBT issues:

We have got all these fantastic things on paper but I think it is about making them happen in practice. It is about engaging with academic staff ultimately and working down the chain to who is responsible where we have strategy up here and who is responsible for implementing that strategy. So everybody either directly or indirectly. ... So everybody has got to be bought in and accepting firstly, attitudinally and culturally, even before we begin to look at integrating LGBT into the discourse of programmes themselves. We are not there yet as I have said a couple of times so it is about engaging the hearts and minds and how we do that, we have to try and be clever about it.

Epstein (2003) has identified such challenges in terms of how university curricula can be more inclusive of LGBT themes and how universities can respond to and tackle homophobia and heterosexism. His research has highlighted there is a need for 'extremely careful preparation in challenges to naturalised ideas about the normality and inevitability of heterosexuality and also to homophobia' (2003:109). He argues that ill thought through, fragmentary and add-on approaches to covering LGBT issues in curricula and in anti-homophobic programmes can be counterproductive and cause further marginalisation and stigmatisation of LGBT adults. This is reinforced by Ellis' (2009) UK wide study of diversity and inclusivity, which focused on the experiences of LGBT students. Her research found that homophobia on campus was still a significant problem and so expresses the challenge as being one of how to achieve a,

climate in which LGBT students feel safe to choose to come out (or not) and in which staff and other students feel empowered to challenge homophobia and other forms of resistance to the inclusion of LGBT issues' (p. 736).

To address this challenge, Ellis (2009: 737) advocates the establishment of a climate of zero tolerance, employing a 'multi-pronged approach', ranging from embedding LGBT issues in the curriculum to them being positioned as part of wider diversity and inclusion activities. These participants'

experiences are informative of how such an approach may be developed.

Analysis to this point demonstrates that construction of LGBT identities over earlier adulthood and midlife in the context of educational institutions involves a complex mix of formal but also non-formal, informal, experiential, critically orientated and transformative learning that changes identity. This opens out participants' understanding of being and becoming LGBT, in theoretical and conceptual terms but also as lived experience. This can be constituted as a particular form of life-deep learning, in that it scaffolds new meanings, values and beliefs that participants attribute to their sexuality across earlier adulthood and midlife. This equips them to address the particular challenges of becoming LGBT in this period of the life course. They undergo positive self-change and find greater confidence in the expression of their LGBT identities. There is also evidence of a further concern of life-deep learning in bringing an 'awareness and understanding of particular issues in the wider world beyond our immediate environment' (Longworth (2003: 46). The next section further demonstrates that combined, multi-modes of learning, developed across intersecting sites leading to reconstruction of identity are continued in the workplace.

### **5.2.2 "So freedom making" - Learning to be LGBT in the workplace in early adulthood and midlife**

Of her working life Edith (b.1944) talked poignantly of how she always chose to explain that she was lesbian:

... when I got together with my [names partner of 30 years who had recently passed away] I was never going to deny her. Basically when I started a new job and they'd say are you married and I'd say no but I live with a woman and that's how I feel about it now. I am so glad because it is so freedom making.

While for Edith being out in the workplace has been "freedom making", for other participants being lesbian and gay in their workplace has been much less positive and or required the development of particular skills to navigate discriminatory or exclusionary workplace conditions. I focus on the nature of being and becoming LGBT in the workplace and how this influences the

changing content, incentive and interactive dimensions of learning. This follows Illeris' (2009) three dimensional field of learning model combined with Jarvis' (2012) social, experiential and existential model of human learning. This merged typology allows a focus on the meanings, ways of behaving, knowledge, attitudes and values, practices and relationships participants develop in the workplace. It also allows exploration of how different ways of being LGBT intersect with the multiple professional roles participants hold: teachers, nurses, doctor, researchers, academic, lecturers, adult educators and arts and community development workers. Due to limits of space and for depth of analysis, I focus specifically on the varying teaching roles in which many participants have engaged over early adulthood and midlife (from the 1970s to the present). As lesbian and gay identified adults, participants demonstrate a heightened, critically reflective and questioning approach to their values, beliefs, responsibilities and commitments to ethical teaching practices. As such they provide compelling testimony that counters the vociferous and divisive 'Keep the Clause' campaign and its,

... crude, crude associations between gay and paedophilia and you know I remember discussions about social education do you think children really understand the difference [between straight and gay]. Aren't we really opening them up to, making them vulnerable to inappropriate relationships and always assuming that you know, it would be gay men who would be predatory on boys. (Mary, b.1954)

I also consider in turn, how and to what extent participants' workplace experiences as situated within different learning and teaching contexts, influence the understanding of being LGBT they have developed across this period. This is important as participants' narratives also provide insight into the nature and operation of homophobia in the workplace and how they have addressed this. From analyses of several participants' narratives and their diverse work experiences as LGBT-identified adults, I am then able to consider what might constitute and count as workplace learning and how its principles and purposes may be reconceptualised/redrawn to account for distinctive LGBT subjectivities and experiences.

*"... feeding our values and concerns in a professional context ..."*

Over her working life Mary explains that being lesbian has played a particularly significant role. She stresses that the particular values and concerns she has developed as lesbian, in combination with feminist concerns, have profoundly influenced and shaped her working life as a secondary schoolteacher, and then local authority education advisor. She defines a career in teaching in which her sexual identity strongly and positively shaped values, beliefs and commitment to furthering educational inclusion across all marginalised groups:

I mean I think I have always been very strongly identified with those who are excluded or are outsiders. [Laughter] Inevitably in our case! And so I suppose in that sense I would see myself as a sort of champion of those who are particularly deprived in society ... with your gay identity, it does inevitably let you see that social exclusion, ... being gay is also another factor that can lead you to being very, very severely socially excluded. ... I mean I think everyone should walk around with a badge that says how dare you assume that I am heterosexual! Whether they are or they aren't it would be very good for us all really.  
*Laughter.* Let's start from a different place. ... you find a professional context that allows you to feed these kind of values and concerns into.

Being lesbian has intersected positively with Mary's professional/work-based identities over the 40 years of her teaching career and latterly in senior educational management positions in local authorities. In the 1980s she joined the learning support department of a secondary school in an area of Edinburgh subject to severe and multiple levels of socio-economic deprivation. The school was 'very new and radical' and the department had three other gay teachers. Having "a groundswell of like-minded people" who were gay and also concerned with social justice and equality through education meant that,

we began to challenge the kids you know with homophobic language and it was really interesting because these were very working class kids with lots of baggage, lots of baggage in some cases and yet they did learn to just use the term gay in a non-pejorative way...

Mary's feminist and socialist values informed further developments through which she was able to go out into the school's community to develop adult education provision for women and adults with complex learning support

needs in the community. This proved to be empowering of the women who participated:

And of course they were very much more able than they perceived themselves as being. So part of the process was that we set up a training programme that they became adult basic education tutors as part of becoming involved in education again for themselves.

For Mary the freedom to develop innovative curricula that addressed gay issues with young people was ground breaking in the 1980s. She refers to the autonomy she was afforded to do so: "I think one of the things that is very interesting in Scottish education is that there this is this kind of *duality* about how things work." From her experiences, she found that local regional educational authorities gave head teachers the freedom to pursue equalities issues in ways they saw fit. In contrast, Andrew's attempts to introduce how lesbian and gay issues could come into the school history syllabus in the 1980s were met with a great deal of opposition and dismissal:

I suggested that it would be valuable for school students to know that Lesbian and Gay people had been targeted as victims of the Nazi holocaust. Some people there were outraged - for reasons that they did not explain. But what was clear was that the only approach that they would accept towards the treatment of Lesbian and Gay people in the curriculum was total silence and total invisibility. Such people always refused to answer our questions about what they would do if any of their children turned out to be lesbian or gay.

In her more recent career with responsibilities for all learning support in one local authority Mary experienced 'the most overt resistance I have ever had in my professional life'. This was particularly in working with schools' head teachers to encourage them to focus on LGBT issues. She explains that this resistance was part of the legacy of discriminatory legislation that included Clause 28's banning of the promotion of homosexuality in schools. In effect this meant that in the 1990s, schools could just take any focus on lesbian and gay issues,

right out of everything now and we don't have to do it anymore, you don't have to mention it; in fact we shouldn't be doing it in schools, we shouldn't be having to deal with this, we have been told not to, that's what the law says.

However with the repeal of the Clause and progressive changes in legislation, Mary was able to enjoy “socking it to them [headteachers]” that they had to now focus across all diversity issues. In the face of resistance, the strength of Mary’s commitment to educational equality, her determination and values meant she established programmes across a region’s secondary schools that focused on LGBT and other equalities issues.

From her perspective, Fiona explains that:

I feel fortunate that I am confident in my sexuality, which adds to the happiness. I feel maybe privileged in the jobs that I have done that I have been able to be open about my sexuality for a relatively long time. I feel rounded.

Her earlier experiences of formal, vocational teacher training in earlier adulthood contribute to this sense of roundedness to some extent. Of her time at teacher training college in the 1970s she reflects with a sense of surprise at how subversive she was, though unwittingly, when being assessed in the classroom. She believes that this was because of the progressive climate of the liberal college she attended. Its curricula allowed her to increasingly make sense of sexism and gender discrimination, which she had directly experienced in childhood and adolescence:

And I look back on it now and at the time I am just taking it in and thinking yeah, yeah, yeah, but I am more and more thinking there is something about people’s rights to who they really need to be and their rights to an education. That’s it for me. And education was how you do that ... I carried on the same stuff when I was teaching.

Unlike Mary, the schools in which Fiona worked in her early adulthood were not as progressive. She recounts staff room politics and school management in the 1980s dismissive and derisory of her views on the role of education as too radical:

I mean Jesus, unbelievable! And I can still see it to this day. They sat up there, defaming and we were all to listen and they were all pontificating.

However, she too worked in positive collaboration with four like-minded teachers who were able to form “quite a wee socialist group... there was feminist politics in there as well”. They eventually,

just never re-appeared in the staff room for lunch and never reappeared for another three years! ... of course what we were talking about was proper, what we saw as proper teaching...

Fiona believes that their shared views on equality and fairness in education extended positively into their classroom practices: “the children loved us... we had no discipline problems”. This led her to also develop links between the school and wider community, “a wee bit of pushing the boundaries”. This was in an intergenerational project that involved the children interviewing older people in a local home - “I suddenly thought I really like this being out here in the community”.

Rachel shares similar trajectories of learning with Mary and Fiona. Rachel had similar experiences as a classroom teacher in secondary schools, and now as a teacher educator in HE. This provides further understanding as to how identification and self-awareness as a lesbian directly feed into professional contexts and development of particular values. Rachel initially explains:

... [being gay] is a central part of my teaching life as well ... So when I was a teacher in school it was very important to me for a while to be out for myself, working with a group, of actually a very supportive staff on the whole ... But also out for, adolescents who I encountered, who came from an environment where it was difficult to be different in any sense but to be gay was very very different and it really mattered.

Now as an educator of younger people who are going to become secondary school English teachers, she is committed to the development of their critical insights concerning social justice and equality issues as they arise in the classroom in relation to issues of sexuality. From her research and experience she believes:

Young people, adolescents, have to find something of themselves in a text and if they don't find it they have to know how to...Quite often you begin to read against it but also you have to find a way of questioning that text because often, texts present themselves as ideological. ... it is very important for young people to see themselves in books. It is very important for young people to give a resistant

reading to a book, which is a taught thing. And is very important to critically question the way that assumptions and heteronormativity which creeps into the texts that we give to young people.

Rachel finds a critical space in which she to is able to explore such pedagogic concerns and wherein, evolving educational values informed by her sexuality are appropriately applied. This in the social justice strand of the PGCE course on which she teaches and has developed:

We have a suite of lectures now with an introductory one on ‘What is social justice?’ We have one on race. We have one on class and poverty. We have one on gender and we have one on tackling issues, practical approaches to tackling issues of social justice in the classroom and for that one we use sexuality as the focus.

She reports on the impact of the programme where a lot of students “end up doing their dissertations on the PGDE, on aspects of sexuality or aspects of gender.” Her approach is immersive and “in your face”:

I do that lecture on homophobia and I start of by playing them that...em...playing them that song by Katy Perry, I can’t stand it but I’m very glad that it exists, “I kissed a girl and I liked it”. I do it really loud when they are coming in and a big picture of two boys sitting on a fence and one of them is saying to the other are you gay? [Laughs]

Rachel uses a piece of writing that one of her former school pupils had composed about his coming out. The story reveals that the boy knew at 10 that he was gay, though not fully understanding what this meant. However, as was identified for this study’s participants in their childhood, there is nevertheless a heightened self-awareness of difference. Rachel uses the story as it is witty and students “get the picture” as,

... it plays around with the stereotypes of being gay and he looks at the vocabulary and all the bad words that people are saying, people are saying that so I knew that “I couldn’t really be gay because none of these words really described me”. ... half way through I say put up your hands if you are gay. And I put up my hand there is usually half a dozen or so people.

In so doing she fulfils a duality of purpose. It allows her to:

... push the pedagogy of social justice - everybody is valued - which is theirs [student teachers], and I link it to the curriculum for excellence and capacities and that children cannot reach these capacities, that children in primary schools can recognise that they are gay or lesbian

or that they are substantially different from those children round about.

Her premise is also based on the belief that:

... if you are going convince people that they have to value and respect diversity *truly* you have to let them listen to their stories because that helps them understand.

While she advocates and develops such teaching practice to explore difference, in her midlife, she also draws from her experiences as a lesbian woman to stress the importance of the “things that make you same...”, commenting that,

...it is that business that we are not the same but we are human beings and we have lots of links in common and we should be valuing what those links are, as well as linking what the differences are. So I think, maybe it is part of a necessary process that you *have to* define yourself as different before you can also define yourself as part of a bigger group,

So it is like working with young children and one of the things that you do as a teacher in that context, maybe that’s what young people need as well, is to let them see that there are other ways of being, there are other ways of thinking and they are not frightening or shocking and certainly not immoral or illegal.

Kevin similarly reflects on the power of focusing on difference, but also what connects us, as having been a foundation to his various interlinked jobs in community development, the theatre, play writing and in adult education:

... actually people are fascinating, we put up so many preconceptions that this person is going to behave in a particular way. And actually, really at the end of the day we are all so very similar. That’s a wonderful thing to acknowledge as well. I think.

Both accord with Young’s (1993) perspective. She posits that understanding of difference should be relational in nature whereby:

Groups should be understood not as entirely other, but as overlapping, as constituted in relation to one another and thus as shifting their attributes and needs in accordance with what relations are salient (*ibid.*: 123-4).

For Kevin, he has developed an enriched relational understanding that draws from his development as a gay man now 50 years of age and directly influences his work with diverse and marginalised groups as an arts-based

community worker. He sees his own and other's LGBT identities in his midlife as multiple and contradictory, but colourful and rich: "all these shades that are within it, and all these levels and depths and contours". However in his work he recognises that his experiences of oppression assist him to understand other's oppression:

I have been very conscious that I have come out to all those groups. Because actually if I was looking for a connection with them where they feel disenfranchised, if they feel they have made a mess of their lives and society treats them warily, then I can make a connection where as a gay man this happened to me... one of the reasons that I really wanted to write, and do outreach and those kinds of things [was] because you are told you don't count. Subliminally you are told you're a disease, you're illegal you're a pervert. All those things about being gay and actually that can wear you down so much. And actually so many people in life are told that, you know a woman's opinion is less valuable than a man's. You're a drug user, just go away and shoot up we don't want to listen to you at all. It's actually if you start listening to people and think, ah that's what makes them tick. How incredible is that they are sharing it. ... it is about connections. ... I think that's what life is.

Kevin is currently working with adults "with long-term addiction issues in their lives". He is very candid about how he could hold prejudiced views about them:

You know look at this group of people and I'd be frightened of them and judge them because of the track marks on their arms or because of the sunken faces. Just the terrible conditions of their lives and you know I'd run a mile I'd try and avoid them when I was walking on the pavement...when you begin talking to them they are as amazing as everybody and your own and their issues are the same. They want to be loved. Their lives have been a bit of a mess and they are trying to fix it.

Like Rachel, Kevin sees the power of storytelling as a pedagogic and therapeutic practice with adults who have had such difficult lives:

I really believe everyone has their story to tell and their story is really fascinating. So it is about seeing the thing that makes you tick and makes you special. So they'll write about that or other folk will maybe act it out. A lot of it is quite therapeutic actually... autobiographical ... and then you can change, you starting inventing from that autobiography. ... it is affirmative.

Rachel goes on to explain that her identification as lesbian and its relationship with her professional identity has not always been straightforward and

positive. She refers to periods when her lesbian identity and its positive expression and influence in the workplace have become dormant as a consequence of different triggers:

... though there are periods when it [being out as gay] goes dormant for a while. Very much during the forced Clause 28 thing... because I think I picked up on a kind of hysterical fear. But that kind of fear, a kind of sense of rejection made people lay low. And I met this woman at a disco once who I had taught ... she had been a really nice girl ... a really nice woman as an adult and she said: "Where were you?" And I felt terrible. But I mean I worked in a school where I think five of us were gay and we just all did the same thing and we went dormant. I think that things changed in society. It became suddenly that you were suddenly very othered in a way that you hadn't been earlier on. Then things happen and you realise you have to stop being dormant and do something.

Rachel describes the recent developments she has made to the social justice programme as a consequence of being impelled to act when faced with the homophobic views and actions of a colleague: "We have the social justice strand in our PGCE course and I thought well okay *we are beefing this up*". This developed from her initially aiming to assist one of her male students. He was openly gay and facing a lot of homophobia from other students. As part of her approach Rachel put Stonewall posters around the campus that challenged homophobic attitudes and gave contact details for support. However a colleague regularly took the posters down. She also began a very public campaign that precipitated "an enormous bullying chain of emails". Rachel describes it as "the worst ... very bruising experience" she has had over a long career in teaching that was free of homophobia. She eventually met the colleague who turned out to be a member of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. She wanted to ensure that Rachel was okay about what had happened. Rachel replied that:

No. We aren't all right and we can't be alright because your lifestyle rejects my lifestyle. That's a clash of ideology and in order to protect myself means we can't be alright. And she said well the church doesn't say you can't be gay, you just can't act on it. And I said but that is just complete oppression and a suppression of the central part of somebody's identity. And then it became clear that she thought gay people shouldn't be teachers.

Other participants' experiences show that homophobia can operate to specifically stigmatise them as lesbians. Jean talks positively about her current working life as a Policy Officer in a local authority:

I really like the job. I am it. I enjoy it. It is something that I really believe I could make something of it, make something big of it.

In this job and in previous community development posts, she has been able to draw upon her sexuality and experiences as a lesbian to successfully explore issues of homophobia, develop initiatives with LGBT youth groups and as part of LGBT history month. However her discussion of her work situation revealed a much less optimistic and troubling situation. She describes as “repeatedly, daily” experiences of heterocentrism and homophobia: “I work in a really straight organisation. If I was straight I would certainly feel a lot more comfortable than I am ... it is not a great organisation and it is very straight and lacking in professionalism in a lot of ways in terms of culture”. She considers her experiences to be,

... another form of stereotyping really. You [gay men] are all gossips and flirts and hysterically funny and into clothes and we are all dour and butch and bad tempered and humourless. I actually am! But not all the time ... it fucking does my head in! [Laughter].

She explains that alliances between gay men and straight women in her place of work act to encourage stereotypes of being gay and lesbian. However, paradoxically the gay male stereotype appears to work in their favour:

I need to say something Chris. See if you worked where I do you wouldn't have the problems that I do. Because the Head of HR at my work is a gay man and he is very camp. Entertaining. And there is a succession of female managers that he bonds with ... they are always looking very cosy as if they are having confidential conversations. And I don't think a gay man... I don't believe their sexual orientation ever comes in the way of them progressing in their careers within that organisation because they get included in things socially and they seem to be quite entertaining and gossip about folk, whereas I am not viewed in that kind of way at all. ... obviously I don't have that heterosexual oil to keep the wheels turning, to keep the gears working at my disposal or the camping up to compensate.

Other participants emphasise that their sexual orientation does not influence their roles and relationships within professional contexts in the same way or in different ways. Hannah (b. 1970) is a nursing lecturer.

I would mainly describe myself as an adult woman in my early 40s. I wouldn't tend to describe myself as a lesbian ... that is simply because in my personal life and in my working life I don't always disclose my sexual identity to everyone I work with or when I am on courses, be it a short course or a long course to many people within that kind of spectrum ... really, nurse lecturer... I think the nurse part defines where I have come from and the lecturer part defines my, I guess passion, in educating people to become qualified nurses really. And to do with that lecturing in the classroom, I am just the nurse lecturer [says name], me, there to educate.

Francis (b. 1970) explains that his work as a nurse and public and sexual health practitioner over the last twenty years “does very much identify who I am as person... I am a guy who is trying to give to society and to work in society.”. However, in his teaching role working in HE with student nurses and doctors, Francis stresses that,

... my sexuality is never in discussion in the room. I never bring myself into the room; I come as the teacher or the facilitator. I am not one of these people who would say “As a gay man this is what I would like”. I always say this is what the evidence says, or what the community says, or this what the policy and legislation says.

He has been concerned that in the classroom his sexuality reduces the impact of what he has to say, where students “may think this is my opinion rather than the right thing for society”. His practice,

also stems from my nursing career because in a clinical setting if someone had said to me “Are you a gay man?”. And I would always ask them, it was the old counselling thing that we were taught and say “Why is that important for you to know?”

***Summary: Being and becoming LGBT in the workplace: early adulthood and midlife***

This exploration of selected participants' experiences of work over early adulthood and midlife support the view that the workplace is a powerful and complex source for development of personal and collective identities (Felstead *et al.* 2009). Their experiences also find accord with the view that fundamentally ‘at the heart of effective work and learning practices is the conduct of work that is salient and meaningful for individuals’ sense of self and identity’ (Billet 2010: 13). These participants have engaged in work wherein there is congruence between the concerns and values they have

developed in relation to being lesbian and gay and how they engage effectively with different groups and colleagues. From comparisons between Mary and a number of other participants' working lives, it appears a valid proposition that being LGBT at has had a significant influence on work roles, relationships and practices. Their changing values and concerns as a lesbian or gay man are fed into their professional contexts. As found by Skelton (2000) in his study on gay men teaching in the specific context of HE, these participants draw positively from their sexuality to shape and inform roles and relationships in the workplace. To varying extents, it can be seen that it is because they are lesbian and gay that they have pursued particular work and learning trajectories in earlier adulthood and into midlife.

This draws out a more nuanced and complex picture of workplace learning than that defined by neo-liberal educational discourse would allow. Neo-liberalism's hold on work-based learning negates individuals' wider experience and identities (Crowther 2012), prioritising economic and market driven concerns (Ball and Manwaring 2010). These participants' experiences therefore serve to disrupt and redraw current understandings of workplace learning, adding to debates that demonstrate it is a contested concept and practice in itself (Allan 2015). Taken together, their narratives create a picture that depicts a particular social ecology of workplace learning (Evans et al. 2011). The ways in which these participants learn in and through the workplace are grounded in educational, and by extension complex learning trajectories, that intertwine with their social roles as citizens, but also their identities as lesbians and gay men; in this case, across early adulthood and midlife. For these participants, work can be viewed as extension of the self and represents a complex, challenging and or empowering site for learning about LGBT and wider issues of equality.

Kollen's (2014) research that drew upon intersectional perspectives to understand how lesbian and gay employees manage their sexual orientation in the workplace also has relevance. This is apparent for those participants - who in this study's specific cohort represent a minority - where their sexual

orientation has little bearing or is separate from their professional roles and work identity, for example, Hannah. In relation to minority stress and stigmatization of particular sexual orientations, it is significant that Rachel and Jean experienced this in relatively recent times in their working lives rather than their earlier adulthood. While they have both developed resilience and are critically informed about wider LGBT issues, these personal experiences have been emotionally harrowing for them. These examples of participants' experiences of recent discrimination in the workplace underline the need for on-going review of the adequacy and robustness of diversity management policy and practice.

### **5.2.3 From “Escapism...repression...idealism” to “We really could transform society”:** Addressing questions of faith, life politics and sexuality

Further insights into the nature of learning processes and their impact on LGBT identity construction in early adulthood and midlife can be gained by a focus on how participants address questions of faith, politics and sexuality. These questions can become closely intertwined. They are addressed through complex learning trajectories, encompassing a combination of experiential, critical, queer and transformational forms of learning, influenced by different spaces and times. As for the previous discussion of workplace learning, this section demonstrates that the need to address such questions extends across a range of contexts that go beyond religious institutions and political party affiliation. It is shown that in addressing these questions, a scaffolding for trajectories of unique lifewide and life-deep learning may emerge (Banks et al. 2007; Longworth 2003). These allow the development of critical, queer, inventive and pragmatic approaches to addressing the particular religious, moral, political/ideological and social challenges that participants face because they are lesbian and gay, fulfilling the promise of the ‘lifelong learning imagination’ (Sutherland and Crowther 2006:4).

For some participants questions of faith and sexuality and how they have learned to address them have had a profound impact across their lives. For

Francis there is a strong realisation that religious condemnation of his sexuality is no longer tolerable, now in his midlife:

... in terms of Catholic faith, I don't have. I don't think I have any space for it in my life and I don't think I can allow any space for it. I think that is just because, we were talking about being militant, I think I am now at a point in my life where I can't stand anybody telling me, or an organization telling me what you do is *wrong*. Or you are not recognised. And I am just thinking I am sorry I am just not going to have it. I am 42 years of age. I just can be bothered with this, I have had enough, I am just not going to do it. So for me that has kind of gone, the Catholic side of it. I do have faith of a kind but I don't have a name for it.

In contrast there is a poignancy in the combined sense of loss, regret and fear Archie (b. 1928) conveys when talking about the conflict he experiences between his lifelong Christian faith and sexuality:

A: I do say to myself should I be acting gay and also be a Christian attending the Church?

C: Have you worked that out?

A: Not really...not really. I still find that a problem. I mean nobody in the church knows that I am gay or that I have gay tendencies. Oh no. Because I don't know what their reaction would be.

Simultaneously, Archie is very respectful of his church-going peers who he has known for many years and expresses deeply felt concerns that disclosure of what he identifies as 'a gay attitude' or his 'gay tendencies' would be harmful to them. Archie believes "a lot of them may be horrified or shocked. I wouldn't want to do that to them".

In listening to and transcribing the digital recording of our discussion, it is striking to hear Archie's very deliberative, fully and sonorously expressive way of relaying his story. Consequently the language he uses about his sexuality stands out as being limited, politely controlled and rather warily intoned. He refers only to a '*having a gay attitude*', '*having gay tendencies*' or to '*acting gay*'. His choice of terminology therefore appears to be reducing the importance attached to being gay, that it is somehow being played down. There is a sense of distance being placed between an uncertain, ill-defined gay dimension of his identity and other much more definitively felt, learned

and experienced aspects of who he is: a confident leader; a person of lifelong faith and moral conviction.

One particularly pivotal moment in his younger adulthood provides further explanation and characterisation as to the possible cohort effects and context to have shaped the nature of the self-knowledge Archie articulates in relation to his sexuality, then and now. Cohort effects are described as those national and international events impacting on groups of people, such that distinct socio-political and economic experiences have a lasting effect, separating generations, while affording them a distinctive character (Pugh 2002). Pugh (2002) argues that analysis of cohort effects is important for understanding influences on older lesbian and gay people's lives. Of potential relevance to understanding Archie's configuration of his sexual identity, Pugh emphasizes the need to examine how cohort effects impact on identification of the self and the circumstances in which older lesbian and gay people associated with and formed relationships with others. It is evident that Archie was very much part of a strong church community that was an all-pervasive part of both his spiritual and social life. His associations were with other younger and older members of the Church of Scotland and in this he had lead role as president of the Youth Fellowship: "Already I was known in the church when it was decided who should be the president [of the Youth Fellowship]". There was no question or possibility of him associating with gay people at this time:

No, no...there was absolutely nothing. I personally didn't go to pubs [in general]. It wasn't the same, like cafes and pubs like there now.

Pivotal moments that shaped his sense of self were subject to the religious and moral restrictions of the period:

What happened then was we discovered another youth fellowship in another church in the town... Once a year, they took over the worship in the church and conducted all of the evening service. And so we decided we had to be up to that too; if that Youth Fellowship can do it, we can do it too. So naturally because I was president I was the one who was expected to give the address and preach the sermon one might say. So at that point I gathered that the church congregation at that time regarded me as a rather quiet, shy young man. With not much to say. So no surprises at that particular service there was a tremendous turn out. All the congregation, adults turned up that night to hear the address. Of course when I went into the pulpit, [laughter] I

gave them fire and brimstone as one might say. Thumping the lectern and lectured them. I could see the congregation sitting like this [in shock!] eyes out to here. After the service they were running about shaking hands with my mother. Your son is wonderful, really pleased. And they didn't realise that 'I had it in me' as one might say. Immediately after this the minister was sent to the Kirk Session to see if I would agree to become a church elder. I was only in my mid-20s at the time and these days the church elders were dottery old men - [laughter].

However there is something of a paradox here in relation to what can be uncritically accepted as being the influence of a cohort effects. Archie has lived for 83 years mostly in the same small community and constructs a self-identification as someone with strong values, faith, and a very clear sense of what is socially acceptable behaviour. In analysing cohort effects there is a need to be mindful of the risk of making generalisations that assume an overall experience was collectively shared by older people at a past point in their lives, where this subsumes diversity of individual experience (Biggs and Daatland 2006; Pugh 2002,). Even though Archie could appear a product of the time, his single mindedness and his ability to take on different personae are strongly evident. He moves from shyness to giving the packed congregation fire and brimstone. This speaks to an individuality, an assertion of self-belief, amidst circumstances which now appear very constraining and judging of those not deemed to fit in. This alerts us to the uniqueness of his experience. It does reflect that Archie was subversive in the sense that he rose to a very powerful position in the church and was able to work effectively within and to some extent, against the socio-religious hegemony of the early 1950s (Bauer and Cook 2012). At the same time as these events in his early adulthood in the 1940s were shaping the distinctive nature of Archie's lifelong learning trajectory, he was also questioning of his sexual attraction to other men. As the above extracts indicate, his close involvement with, and early advancement into the male dominated hierarchy of the Church of Scotland was unusual for the time given his youth. He clearly must have demonstrated the requisite moral rectitude and doctrinal credentials deemed appropriate for the important position of church elder. However, Archie confounds assumptions that such a staunch faith would impose a self-repression and

condemnation of non-normative sexuality. He recalls thinking about sexuality in a fairly pragmatic way, albeit that this is retrospectively:

I remember when I was in my mid-20s. I became aware myself that I hadn't much attraction to females. You know when my pals were running about or chasing after girls I didn't, somehow or other, it didn't occur to me here's this girl, and I didn't turn round for example and say look at that girl, she is a smasher or something like Whereas I could look at a young lad without really realising this must be a gay thing ... I was still single I had no inclination to get married. I didn't have much of what you might call a social life and I spent most of my time in voluntary organisations working voluntarily.

Archie's knowledge about his sexuality appears constrained and fairly fixed over his life-course and is protected in secrecy from his peers. However, he is not without resilience and determination. Albeit his sexuality has remained secret, his performance in the pulpit may be construed in different ways. It could be argued that there is some hypocrisy in his actions. He keeps the awareness of his sexuality internalized and secret, while outwardly representing the authority and moral rectitude of the church. However he does not express a faith that is condemning of homosexuality. His actions may invite questions about the complex and paradoxical nature of secrecy and subversion that can exist over the life course in the construction of identities. Archie takes to the pulpit and puts on the performance that the congregation and the hierarchy of the church want to hear and witness; for some 40 years of his life he has also lived as a gay man albeit in secret.

Assumptions about less enlightened times and the oppressive, alienating power of heteronormative forces in the past, across a range of environments can be seen in this chapter to be confirmed, troubled or at least re-thought through the lens of queer temporal, spatial analysis: histories, lifelong trajectories and lifewide learning spaces can be understood/reshaped through a queer theoretical lens (Halberstam 2005; McCallum and Tuhkanen 2011; Bauer and Cook 2012). As explored in 2.5.2, queer articulations of time introduce disruption, interrogation and opening up of that which is hidden in narratives of the past and lived experience (Bauer and Cook 2012).

In an alternative characterization to nature of religious and moral learning

and its impact on participants' thinking, attitudes and insights, Kevin's reflections are particularly poignant:

You know at a time when we live in a very irreligious age, how do you find connections and communality? Theatre is very religious in a sense without being about God. It's about sharing ideas and sharing feelings. Having a communal experience when you want to touch their minds and their hearts and their soul. So I don't think I have to do religion in that sense but I think there are similarities.

For many participants, addressing questions of religion over early adulthood and midlife are closely intertwined with increasing politicisation about their identities. Billy was "very shaped by a Christian ideology and even today you know some of my values are influenced by that background". As a rejection of Catholicism he joins the Salvation Army:

My view was that Catholicism was an irrelevance ... as a child and a teenager the social action that could come from a Christian belief wasnae evident to me, in terms of Catholicism, but was very evident in terms of you know, in terms of how the Salvation Army claimed to operate. I was attracted by the slogan soup, soap and salvation.

Of his impetus to reject one form of religion over another Billy explains that:

At the time I would have said it was a religious calling. In retrospect I was running away. Running away from an unhappy home situation and running away from a reluctance or a wish not to engage my sexuality. This was escapism.... I was definitely repressing my sexuality.

However Billy recognises that:

... there was also a lot of idealism there. I believed that Jesus and the gospels could make a difference in my life and other people's lives so it was not just about running away. There was a degree of idealism then and a sense that you know, that the gospels made sense in interpreting how your life should be. And what life could be for other people?

Andrew's understanding of his identity as a Christian and a Socialist profoundly and radically changed in university in the 1960s. He asserts a greater certainty about this than his sexuality in earlier adulthood. This was initiated through his engagement with students' social movements gaining popularity in the 1960s. Andrew's involvement allowed him to pursue socio-religious and moral questions in new ways that changed his identification as a Christian:

I had a very important experience because I was a member of the Church of Scotland and I'd even thought about being a minister. ... Anyway the first day when I went to university ... this man came round and spoke to me about, very friendly guy, and said would I like to join this organisation called the Christian Union which I'd never heard of.

Andrew has some discomfort regarding the central authority of the bible and other's unquestioning acceptance of it:

... it was very clear that this was a group of people who believed in the bible word for word. ... I didn't have a particular view about textual analysis and belief, or anything like that but I said no. Just on the spot. It is just very interesting that decision I made that that wasn't the kind of Christian I was going to be. ...

He finds a more receptive location for his altered understanding of being Christian in the Student Christian movement:

... a different kind of organisation interested in talking about social issues ... I remember once my mother being quite horrified when I went to a conference and the two themes were sex and race. So it was a good organisation to belong to, to just sort of think about other ways of looking at life. ... a sort of socially conscious Christianity and so that was probably, something that affected me in terms of turning down the man from the Christian Union.

In his early adulthood Andrew became more politicised leading to a significantly different trajectories of learning and identity development from that of Archie. He went on to be an active member of the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) in London, in the early 1970s that then led to engagement in the Trade Union movement over a period of 40 years. His sexual identity has been central to much of his activism, and in turn developed by it:

I was political for a number of other reasons ... I could relate very much, really very well to a political organisation based around sexuality, so the GLF was an incredibly important influence on my life and so I continued to be involved in gay political things from that time onwards.

For Andrew "one of the great things about GLF" was meeting other gay people that enabled opportunities for a,

... new discourse with them about your lives and your expectations ... it was part of a process of like challenging lots of things and em, yeah developing new ways of looking at things... an opportunity to get together and discuss, you know, gay liberation and socialism... we had had enough of criminalisation and medicalisation...

The radical nature of the GLF is evident as Andrew emphasises that the goals of such activities were “beyond consciousness raising and we really did believe that at some points we really could transform society”. He rejects the term queer as a suitable description of the work:

We were very resistant to the word queer ... as it had been a word that was used as a term of abuse. But in terms of being transgressive and transformative, we were definitely interested in that.

Of her earlier adulthood, June describes herself “a good Church of Scotland, Presbyterian girl”. Like Andrew she was similarly involved in political activism in the same period in Edinburgh that became more important than her faith beliefs. Paradoxically it was “The Chaplaincy centre of the university [that] had allowed this gay women’s group to meet which in itself was a bit of a step forward”. She was initially befriended through volunteers who worked for the Scottish Minorities Group (SMG). She then became a volunteer befriender of other gay young people. Her involvement had positively impacted on her professional life because,

... from that day forward I was sometimes cautious about being open about my sexuality but I never hid it. I wasn’t always totally open but I never hid it at work.

She too is uncomfortable with the notion of queer as a suitable way to have understood lesbian identity and activism at the time:

We have these expectations of what queer people should be, i.e. they should be queer, but we weren’t we were ordinary and most of the people that I knew were and I didn’t identify with extremes.

In their reflections on their evolving life politics, several participants share this rejection of what are perceived as queer identities and or activism:

Well for somebody to be using the term queer to me is a right insult... not a word to be used as far as I am concerned as part of my vocabulary any way

(Edward)

I just think it’s [queer] lightweight in a political content. It is a theory I suppose lots of politics have theories. But it doesn’t have that, to my understanding, the political context that you’d want or that I would want...

(Jessie)

I think probably my whole way of being as a person is that I would rather talk something through than scream it or shout it through.  
(Francis)

I have a real problem with queer theory, a real problem with it and I can't really have it, I don't really know how to work it. I don't how to align myself with it because I don't feel it is really speaking to me.  
(Liz)

These views attest to the provocative, controversial and destabilising nature of queer thinking. These participants' comments capture something of the diversity of feelings and perceptions that it can create: a disquietude and unease with a term experienced as pejorative, opaque and/or politically and culturally discordant. However Mayo's (2007) perspective on the history of lesbian and gay protest movements as they have originated from the 1960s, provide an alternative lens through which to consider participants' earlier engagement in identity politics. She identifies the central interrogative tendencies of post-structural, queer politics as concerned with a radical questioning of essentialist, foundational ideas about sexuality and gender and analysis of the complex intersectionalities of difference. Her contention is that these have been evident from the early days of the gay liberation movement to current, contemporary conceptualisations of queer thinking, such that: 'It turns out, to a large degree, things have been queer all along' (:79). Arguably both Andrew and June were involved in groups that pursued a queer agenda realised in this way. They were both active in campaigns to radically destabilise and end the criminalisation and medicalisation of homosexuality. I would argue they are representative of several other participants who were engaged productively in queer learning and knowledge development and were instrumental in forging non-formal sites of learning. These were adopted and adapted to address the particular socio-cultural and political exigencies of the time. Through these they could more readily find contexts for their everyday lives in collective coalitions with others,

To encounter and validate our complex selves as w/e confront an often hostile heterocentric world ... a location where identities grow and change and it enables learners to challenge heterosexualising discourses and heteronormative ways of being, believing, desiring, acting, becoming and belonging... Queer knowledge... forms new

directions for personal development... (Grace and Hill, 2009: 34).

As we discussed how he reflects on its political meaning and relevance in his middle age, Billy did not reject the term 'queer' as strongly as other participants. He firstly considers what he has perceived as *academic* theory, learned as part of his formal educational experience, and its relevance to his lived experience as a gay male in Scotland:

There is a danger when you go to university to do teaching or nursing or social work that your approach becomes very academic. The theory has to be shaped and formed by real life experience and I think all these personal kind of encounters you have with people help to do that.

Billy's first comment speaks to the risk which is arguably inherent in learning about all theory, that there is a disconnect between it and in this case, how it actually informs work practices and wider life experiences. However, Billy attaches value to the theory he has learned when it comes alive and is made meaningful by, as well as troubling of, his lived experience as a gay male:

The social work training in terms of your value base etc. can bring you into conflict with peers within the gay community. I struggle Chris, with how many gay men, appear, in terms of their language, appearance and attitude to be misogynists and suggest that there should be some sort of apartheid system where, you know lesbians, shouldn't be allowed in certain pubs. I struggle with that. And the language is sometimes pretty crude and nasty. There is a real venom in terms of the language that is used, which I struggle with both personally and from a professional point of view.

While Billy specifically relates his views to social work theory, arguably he is engaging in analysis infused with a queerly informed political perspective: he is troubling of and troubled by (degrounding in Butler's (1993) terms) the misogynistic discourse of gay men that discriminates against lesbian women. An extended queer perspective may add to Billy's to deconstruct the *homo-*normative and discriminatory stance of gay men, interrogating why they express these views in such extreme ways. In this instance, the use and interpretative capacity and usefully subversive nature of queer politics is evident. It enables '*the unpicking of 'liberal' and 'illiberal' amongst all identities, rather than claim this work as the right of the few* (Nixon and Givens 2011 p.47). The learning processes with which Billy has engaged to understand the politics of difference and intergenerational tensions in the

LGBT identity are informed by queer thinking. In so doing he can find ways to develop understanding and rethink answers to the difficult questions of equality in the LGBT community he encounters. He is able to deconstruct, the grounds of discrimination, and may offer a better chance of long-term social change towards equity in a world of complexity and fluidity' (*ibid.*:53).

#### **5.4 Summary: learning and identity in earlier adulthood and midlife**

This chapter has been able to develop and evaluate the realisation proffered by Kevin that for him in midlife, education and learning associated with being gay are characterised with the necessity to invent and be creative. Analyses in this chapter affirm varying degrees of inventiveness in the multifarious forms and locations for the learning in which participants engage. Particularly prominent is that across varying workplace environments, many participants draw upon their LGBT identity. This may be viewed as unsurprising, given the recognition from empirical studies of identity and work, that personal factors shape workers' learning and development (Billet 2010). However, these participants' narratives on work provide insight into the particular ways in which being LGBT can shape learning and personal development. This is evident where, who they have become as LGBT adults and the values they hold can deeply influence, positively intersect with, enhance and/or destabilise, come into conflict with and disrupt professional roles, responsibilities, working practices and relationships in the workplace. This invites an alternative understanding of the nature of workplace learning in terms of how it can be mediated by adults whose LGBT identity in midlife remains particularly important across all spheres of their lives. There is also a reciprocal relationship at play here. Through their workplace, some participants learn to understand and reconstruct their LGBT identities in new ways. In particular instances, this leads to a newly realised sense of agency and the need to be actively and openly 'out' in the face of different forms of workplace homophobia.

Participants' narratives also added to how life-deep learning may be understood through its development in the particular contexts of their mid - lives and scaffolding of ways to address religious, moral and social challenges

and undergo change related to being LGBT. This is evident in the changing religious, moral and political questions with which participants engage because they are LGBT. They do so in ways that align with a critically queer understanding of adult education and learning (Brookfield 2005; Grace and Hill 2004; Kincheloe and McLaren 2005). This is because they ask questions and develop nuanced understandings of the nature of homophobic oppression in their lives, but also how alliances within differently constituted LGBT 'communities' that can be fragile and oppressive and or empowering (Nixon and Givens 2011). Such life-deep learning is counter-queerly recreated for local conditions: while participants feel disconnected or alienated by queer forms of cultural representation and activism, they also reinvent and appropriate these to their own ends.

The next chapter moves analyses into post work and later life stages. This explores possible continuities and discontinuities in the extent to which participants change understanding and levels of importance to their LGBT identities. How and where learning can happen, and its impact on changes to self-understanding, are then explored.

## **Chapter 6: Learning to construct identities in post work and later stages of the life course**

### **6.1 Overview of chapter**

The previous chapter found that a combination of learning processes across several sites of lifewide learning figured significantly in participants' lives and in the construction of their lesbian and gay identities. The diverse ways in which participants identify and attached significance to being lesbian and gay across early adulthood and midlife interacted with their student, learner, faith, political and workplace identities in varying ways. This allowed reconsideration of how to understand the nature, processes, parameters and impact of combined forms learning when they are mediated by LGBT adults' particular experiences, values and concerns. It was demonstrated that these created the scaffolding for life deep learning and the means with which to address the complex moral, political and social issues that arise for lesbian and gay adults.

This chapter focuses on a further stage of the life course and considers the nature of learning in post work and later life periods. In this phase, the lifewide dimension of learning may be potentially reduced and/or enhanced when one of its key locations, the workplace, is no longer prominent. To analyse the significance of this I draw upon the biographies of several participants, as well as structured focus group and informal discussions with a range of older LGBT learners' groups. Individuals and focus group members are now in post work (retirement) and later stages of the life-course, aged between 60 and 88 years. I also explore reciprocally, how changing identifications, and cumulative lived experience as LGBT adults, may influence learning in this stage of the life course. This draws on and evaluates the interpretative capacity of theory, practice and research in ageing diversity studies and the evolving field of critical educational gerontology (CEG). I explore what understanding it provides for the particular experiences of older LGBT adults through critically orientated questions: to what extent do 'who' they are as learners and the learning in which they engage 'count' within this framework? I argue that in constructing their LGBT identities at

this stage of life, participants draw upon informal and non-formal learning processes that bring new insights to CEG. They extend understanding of its focus on what can constitute emancipatory and empowering forms and outcomes of learning. Participants' reflections and their participation in groups such as a gay choir also demonstrate possibilities for development of effective intergenerational learning and practices between older and younger LGBT people. Continuing the thematic thread developed in chapter 5, it is also shown that post work and in later life, life deep learning is being continually developed.

As summarised in table 1.6, the chapter addresses the following themes.

<b>Research question:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the nature and impact of how and where participants learn in the development of their LGBT identities, post work and in later life?</li> </ul>
<b>Emergent themes</b>
<p><b>6.2 The nature of LGBT and other identities</b></p> <p>6.2.1 "... it's a strange business ...” Being LGBT and newly retired</p> <p>6.2.2 “Oh well I suppose I’ll hae tae become straight again!” The intersections of being LGBT and older</p> <p><b>6.3 The nature and impact of how and where learning happens</b></p> <p>6.3.1 “Hugely rich learning: ... the mixture of LGBT”- Participation and creative coalitions through non-formal learning</p> <p>6.3.2 “three legged dogs and any other kind of poor soul...” - Fragile LGBT coalitions in non-formal learning</p> <p>6.3.3 “Mentors for a new generation” - Possibilities for LGBT intergenerational learning</p>

**Table 1.6: Emergent themes - learning post work and in later life**

## 6.2 The nature of LGBT and other identities, post work and in later life

I begin with exploration of the nature of LGBT identities in later life, focusing on the themes identified in Table 1.6. Participants in middle age offered some predictions about the importance of being LGBT in their later life. As diversely identified LGBT adults, and from the position of midlife, they expressed varied thoughts on getting older. Some focused on the continued significance of being LGBT and there not being care and educational provisions which are inclusive of and sensitive to their distinctive needs:

I kind of think God,... we [LGBT people] have survived and grown up through so much to get to where we are now, but that whole bit about care and support I am not filled with confidence.

(Stewart, b. 1958)

Others reflected a more pragmatic approach and assert that their sexual orientation will not have continued prominence. Rather questions of identity are much less focused on being LGBT and concerns about getting older are shared with those common across all groups (Stonewall 2011).

... the older you get the more disempowered you get anyway. Will that be different for LGBT folk? Possibly, possibly not. Fewer folk having children means you are the mercy of public services which isn't a cause for optimism. Do you actually think that the people who run these places actually have a view of older people having a sexual orientation full stop of any description? ... So I don't know. But do you know what I think the biggest thing that is going to determine how it is going to be is how healthy you can stay. Yes it might be something to do with your sexual orientation but probably not, probably not.

(Jean, b. 1965)

Participants who have retired and in later life do invite questions of and build upon such midlife reflections, insights and predictions. I use these perspectives from midlife and compare them with those later life perspectives and the significance participants now attach to being LGBT across the heterogeneous contexts and multiple realities of their later lives. This draws upon previous literature, particularly theoretical positions and empirical developments in critical social and educational gerontology. This allows interpretation of participants' narrated experiences of ageing, focusing on what meaning and importance are now given to different ways of being LGBT as developed over the life course, to this point.

### 6.2.1 “... it’s a strange business ...” Being LGBT and newly retired

As explored in the literature review, educational researchers and gerontologists have promoted the third age (50 years+) as an important life-stage, characterised by retirement that brings freedom from work responsibilities, with new opportunities for learning (Laslett 1996; Phillipson 1998). Learning in this frame is largely viewed as contributing to active, productive and successful ageing (Boulton-Lewis 2006; Duay and Bryan 2006). However such constructions of post work life styles and identities are contested by social and educational gerontologists’ application of wider, more critically orientated understandings derived from critical social theorisation (Findsen 2003, 2005; Formosa 2000, 2002, 2005, 2006, 2010; Findsen and Formosa 2011, 2016). They challenge the overly optimistic view of retirement and moving into later life which proponents of the third age advance. They analyse the impact of socio-economic disadvantage that lead older adults to have differential experience, mediated by class, gender and ethnicity (Phillipson 2006). These are understood through political-economic, feminist and humanistic lenses which claim successful ageing is attainable but dependent on class positioning and material well-being (Holstein and Minkler 2007). The participants’ biographies explored in this section build a picture of particular realities and forms of successful and productive ageing as mediated by LGBT identity and its intersections with class positioning and becoming older. They also extend critically orientated insights of CEG as to the nature of differential post work and later life experience as a consequence of being LGBT.

#### ***Adjusting to retirement: the influences of LGBT identities on productive ageing***

Questions of what may constitute productive or successful ageing emerged in discussions with Highland Rainbow Folk (HRF). One of the members, Tina, refers to older retired adults with whom she works as volunteers who commonly express concerns that without work they now “cease to contribute”. Edward (b. 1931) a volunteer in HRF, spoke of the difficulties of retirement as related to boredom and a sense of displacement after a life

time of working in the hotel trade. However he feels that his involvement in HRF “keeps him going”. Overall HRF has provided Edward a purpose for a number of recent years. He is particularly engaged as one of the main ‘story tellers’ in the awareness-raising sessions the group conduct across the Highlands with health and social care providers on LGBT issues. He explained:

I am proud of being a member, it has been great for opening out to the gay community and for the old aged like myself. ... the Rainbow group it can help people to come out, the people that’s in it, even if they are older and be honest about it...

In his retirement then, Edward, as with many other members of this group, engages in an enthusiastically productive form of ageing in which his gay identity still energises and gives him purpose and which he is keen to talk about through the story-telling model HRF adopts.

June questions her self-identity now in the early stages of retirement from full-time work that has heavily defined who she has been: “... who would I be, what would I be?” Several participants who have reached this stage of the life course ask similar questions concerning post work identities. Much of ‘who’ June had been to this point in her life had been constructed through working as a nurse over a 40-year period, latterly as a Nurse Practitioner with significant responsibility for patient health and wellbeing. Entering into the post work phase of her life initially raised unsettling questions about getting older and her identity. However she reflects an increasing sense of ease and prospects for engagement in the forms of active and healthy ageing as promoted by proponents of an emancipated and creative third age:

I think retiral will help with that because [a] I am going to get more physically active because I have the time to it now and I’ll just start to do the things that I enjoy ... we have got in the seat outside in the garden. ‘Grow old with me the best is yet to be’. ... sometimes we sit there and I think I am coming to terms with that [a] I am getting older and [b] I am not defined by my professional life any more. It maybe take a wee while longer to get there but it is coming quite easily I have to say...

However this point has come after struggling with fears about the reality of ageing and becoming “a fat frumpy old woman”, no longer attractive to other women, while also questioning why this would matter given that she is in a

long term and loving relationship. Again there is positivity where she has come to recognise that she is now:

... going to have learn how to describe [herself] again... The retired bit is good as now I am actually thinking I can start learning things that I didn't have time to learn before.

Part of this positivity and changing view on what will replace her professional identity and lead to a productive retirement is influenced by June's changing sense of being lesbian. Her involvement in the Loud and Proud Gay Choir has re-politicised her, 'reawakening the feminist streak' that had become less important as she "nested" building a career and home in the latter 20 years or so.

Mary recounts similar difficulties in relation to what she describes as the "strange business" of retirement. This was from a very "stressful and pressurised" job as a local authority Educational Adviser that dominated her life and from which she needed "recovery time... a shell that was dropping away from me, in terms of the stress and realising how many layers of stress that were on me". While she recognises the fortunate position in which she now finds herself, it has been nonetheless daunting to be "completely free to define my life in a way that I have never had before... [to] have define your life a lot more". As for June, she has come to a point when she is thinking about how she can be productive. She describes a long, sometimes fulfilling, sometimes extremely challenging career fighting for greater educational equality in schools. She has also had to learn, step by step, experientially and reflectively how to be a lesbian in interaction with being a mother. Her work and life experiences directly influence her view on how she could now be productive and active, post work and with less parental responsibilities. Though she had not decided on the specific direction of this, Mary sees her sexuality as playing a guiding role:

... if I could find something that was identified with my sexuality as well as other aspects of what I was interested in doing and contributing to, both things, then that would be great. But I haven't found anything like that so far.... But I am coming back to a point now where I would like to have some involvement. It's definitely around equalities issues for me. I don't really think I don't know where I would go with it to be honest.

Other experiences of retirement and views on the intersections between ageing and transgender identities also arose:

It [getting older] is like cheeses. Some are mellow, some are mature, some are extra mature, some are seriously strong and some are rancid!  
*Laughter*

Vera's (b.1938) humorous comment on ageing came from a lively group discussion with members of HRF that considered how becoming older impacted on our LGBT identities. Vera has experienced retirement in wholly positive ways. She refers enthusiastically to the improved quality of life she now has: "just having the time to yourself just to do things, to choose where to go, when to go, without having to get permission", particularly where, for her, a pension ("it's brilliant") and other older age concessions have brought a new freedom with greater material security than she has had in her previous life. She had a particularly unsettled twenty-year period leading to retirement of low paid, temporary work. Vera's humour also belies the difficult experiences over her life she had encountered in becoming a transgendered woman. She could only make the transition from living as a man when she was 60 years of age. As such, she provides a unique, subversive portrayal of retirement that paradoxically, accords with the optimistic vision of the third age. However its proponents have contributed to a homogenous and hetero-normalising picture of successful later life.

I am transgendered. It happened very much later in life because when I was young there was no public knowledge about it because when I was young all I knew about it was that I hated being a boy and wished I'd been born a girl. I never got the chance to be who I wanted to be. I made my first attempt at transition when I was around 40 but it was that much hassle and trouble then that I lost my bottle, gave up and spent the next 15 years wishing I had been able to go through with it and then finally deciding that if I ever make another attempt I am going to have to try and get accepted... never had the money of trying to go private, so I just turned 60 when I finally got as far as the op. And the op that was 13 years ago and I have never looked back since...

Vera's later life transition to finally becoming a woman thus destabilises heteronormative notions of what retirement should entail. However, in a similar way to Edward, HRF has provided another source for Vera to engage in particular forms of productive and active ageing because she is a

transgendered woman with an important life story to impart. Her contribution to HRF's activities is commented on as particularly significant by other members of the group: she tells her story through a profoundly "moving and very comical" poem which is a really important part of the presentation they do for health and social care providers on LGBT issues. For Vera, her sense of actively and productively contributing to HRF is strengthened as she has "learned that it's not just a social group it's a campaigning group", through which she can creatively and openly share her lived, transgendered experience, while still challenging misinterpretations and prejudice in constructive ways:

... a lot of people outside the LGBT community just generally are totally unaware about all the sort of restrictions that we were under in times past, before there was a more liberal attitude in society.

From her research on appropriate methodologies for older adult learning Gaskell (1999: 273) identifies the need to harness the positive aspects of ageing: 'the ability to develop a critical reflectivity that can comprehend stability within change,' from the perspective of 'a long and unique life'. I would suggest that Vera, and the other participants' biographies analysed in this, and subsequent sections, provide insight on how they have harnessed critical reflectivity and found stability in unique forms of productive and successful ageing, born out of their development of diverse LGBT identities. The uniqueness of participants' lives as a consequence of being LGBT may also account for the ways in which they are resilient.

### **6.2.2 "Oh well I suppose I'll hae tae<sup>9</sup> become straight again!" The intersections of being LGBT and older**

So I think I accept that I am getting older and I think partly that it is possible to do that because of things I have had to accept in the past, particularly accepting that I am gay, which wasn't easy, sort of in the 70s, accepting that I had a disability in the mid-80s. So when comes to actually getting on a bit in my 50s and 60s and so on, this is just kind of something that really I have to get on with.

(Andrew, b. 1945)

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<sup>9</sup> = I'll have to ...

Andrew's comments on ageing are representative of several other participants that show an acceptance of growing older, partly based on having faced adversity and challenges regarding their sexual identities. This is reflected in the literature review which considered Pugh's (2002) work that afforded some understanding on older lesbian and gay men's adjustment to the ageing process and later life. He refers to research that confounds some of the stereotypes of and assumptions made about older lesbian women and gay men's lives. Rather than being inhibitive, the repression encountered in their youth, painful coming out processes and in conducting their early adult lives can lead to a so-called crisis competence or an individual stamina. While it may not be defined as crisis competence, it is the case that across the biographies of those participants who are now post work, and in later life, diverse and cumulative experiences directly linked to their development of diverse LGBT identities have led to a resilience and self-belief:

I think I am quite a resilient person now and quite secure in myself. Well you would hope so wouldn't you - [laughter] It's been a long journey. I think on that basis you probably are better prepared, particularly as a woman. I mean I look at other people around me, heterosexual women of around about my age, women in the pottery class and so on, and I wonder, they don't really have a strategy. You see that they want things or whatever. But they sit and say I don't want to make a fuss and I'll wait and I'll wait. I am not used to be in milieu where that would be the case... So yes I think being gay does make you more aware and more able to respond to [ageism] and have a strategy inside your head so that okay I am not going to be pigeon holed ... I am going to nicely assert myself to get what I came here to get. So yes I think that would be true that I am better at dealing with it [ageing]

(Mary)

At the same time Mary does express some concerns about ageing as a lesbian. These parallel those comments expressed by participants when they were in childhood and adolescence about the absence of role models of lesbian and gay people.

I suppose I do see some difficulties in that when you are younger you see yourself as being kind of radical and its a bit cool and whatever you know. At least it became that in your peer group. And when you are older it doesn't seem to fit so comfortably. And you think oh I don't want to be some kind of stereotyped old lesbian! [Laughter]. I don't think there are many positive role models of older lesbians. I am

struggling to think of any there are. And there are lots of stereotypes of the older lesbian. So I guess I maybe have some issues with that...

Kevin has a confident and hopeful view of later life and from his experiences a trust in LGBT people's inventiveness for creating new role models and ways of being older:

I think that part of what we do is define, we're defining all the time. You know we are the first generation that are living in this liberated time when we can marry, but actually what are our role models for gay marriage? Well there are actually no very many so you to seek them out somewhere or you just invent. And I think a lot of being gay is about inventing, you know and I think that is really exciting and liberating

Other participants' perspectives on and experiences of getting older and being LGBT reflect a less optimistic view and predict a loss of identity. These compare with findings from research conducted by Stonewall (2011) that surveyed a sample of 1,050 heterosexual and 1,036 lesbian, gay and bisexual people over the age of 55 across Britain. The survey asked about their experiences and expectations of getting older and examined their personal support structures, family connections and living arrangements. It also asked about how they felt about getting older, the help they expect to need, and what they would like to be available from health and social care services. Results indicated that LGBT people shared many worries about ageing with heterosexual peers. However responses further indicated that they were consistently more anxious about future care needs, independence and mobility, health including mental health and housing. The report thus has implications for questions of understanding identity development and adjustment to the ageing process for older LGBT adults, suggesting continued, enriching identity development and its full and free expression would be dramatically diminished or thwarted. Of particular relevance to identity in later life, half of the Stonewall participants felt their sexual orientation has, or will have, a negative effect on getting older: 'many have experienced discrimination earlier in their lives - at work, from families or from authority figures - and this leaves them doubtful about the future' (Stonewall 2011:2).

From the perspective of midlife, some participants had a pessimistic view about getting older but this appeared to be more aligned with the concerns of heterosexual peers rather than related to their sexuality. Some participants' biographies reveal that they have developed resilience. However participants who are now post work and in later life voiced concerns about residential care where their sexual orientation would not engender resilience but cause them to be discriminated against. Andrew talked of one friend, an older gay man who was contemplating going into a care home: An older gay friend and he said "Oh well I suppose I'll have to become straight again!" He interpreted it the way he was seen". This accords with discussion of Iain's experiences of working in care homes that led him to undertake a doctoral research (5.2.1:153). However for Iain his views on ageing are much less positive. He has chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder (COPD)

I can put it in a few words. I hate it. This idea of growing old gracefully. I don't know anybody who can grow old gracefully. Growing old is horrible. Growing up is great. Living your life through your useful and energetic years is fantastic and the rest of it is shite [Laughter].

However, despite how physically incapacitated he has become he is insistent that,

mentally growing old... [it] is great because of the knowledge you are gaining if you want to gain it. Obviously there are a lot of people who grow old and don't gain any knowledge which is very sad. But the knowledge you gain throughout life is wonderful. I have to think of it that way. I was talking physically. It is crap growing old. But mentally it is fantastic. It is just fantastic having all this knowledge.

Iain provides a poignant insight into the role and impact of the ageing body on ways of being and knowing. He was one of the few participants to allude to such a connection. Formenti *et al.* (2014:21) highlight that in adult and lifelong learning issues surrounding the body and thinking are neglected in favour of an 'overly individualised disembodied cognition'. Similar to Evan's *et al.*'s (2011) application of a social ecology model to understand more holistically how adults learn in work, Formenti *et al.* (2014) seek to build an ecology of learning and the subject. This encompasses the body as one of multiple influences on learning. Iain's reflections point to an important

element of this. He further supports Horsdal's (2014:47) view that there is a need for a theoretical approach that 'combines the cultural, cognitive and corporeal elements of autobiographical narratives'.

### **6.3 The nature and impact of how and where learning happens**

The themes explored in this section lend support to Findsen and Formosa's (2011:185) proposition that non-formal and informal learning play an essential role in positive ageing not part of formal educational provision or 'institutional structures'. The section analyses the particular nature of non-formal learning and the locations in which it takes place for participants, exploring its impact on their identity construction.

#### **6.3.1 "Hugely rich learning: ... the mixture of LGBT"- Participation and creative coalitions through non-formal learning**

Several participants engage across various LGBT voluntary and support groups. Learning in these contexts that have an explicit LGBT and ageing foci alters participants' understanding of their own and others 'older' LGBT identity formations. Several participants are actively involved and attach significant value to such groups. These contexts are analysed through insights from the evolving field of critical educational gerontology (CEG) as explored in the literature review (2.5.4). From this two premises in particular guide exploration of the nature of the non-formal learning in which older participants engage in these groups. Firstly is Findsen and Formosa's (2011) position on the modes and types of learning that have the greatest potential to happen in later life. They argue these can be most plentiful and enriching in non-formal learning contexts. This is particularly given the limited opportunities afforded older adults to participate in a formal front-loaded education system, based on policy and resourcing that focuses on extending initial education for young people, as opposed to supporting the learning needs of a broader population (Slowey 2007). This lack of choice is explored firstly in one participant's attempts to engage in a more formal learning programme in the University of the Third Age. Withnall's (2010) study forms another useful, linked point of departure for the exploration the nature of non-formal learning. She identified that while there are a range of motives for

learning in later life, they can be primarily about older learners' needs to sustaining self-identity and social networks. Thus I aim to identify the extent to which these are motivational factors in the particular autobiographies offered by the study's participants, whether and how the need to sustain LGBT-self identities and LGBT social networks shapes learning. This then allows consideration of the interpretative capacity of CEG as an evolving analytical lens for understanding older LGBT adults' learning in particular, how its analytical reach might be extended to understanding the heterogeneity of older populations.

The limited opportunities and choice for more formal routes into learning for adults in post work and later life as identified by Slowey (2007) are reflected in some of the participants' narratives. While she was not looking for formal study, Mary expressed some interest in the University of the Third Age (UTA). She wondered about how accepting it would be of her as Lesbian.

So yeah maybe the University of the Third Age, I could get in there and say right let's do more on equalities and LGBT issues and get some people together and do some training. Yeah it could be interesting... can start radicalising all of us! [Laughter]

Andrew's negative experience of his local UTA would indicate the need for training in LGBT equalities issues to which Mary light heartedly alludes. Andrew's enthusiasm for joining a programme of study was fairly soon thwarted at the unfriendliness of the open day in which he became

aware that it [UTA] is very much an organisation that seems to be there for heterosexual couples, white middle class, heterosexual couples. ... You wouldn't think heterogeneity at all.

His experiences give credence to Formosa's (2010) findings that the UTA requires a cultural revolution if it is to remain relevant to contemporary ageing lifestyles, particularly where he found 'no effort ... made to address the diversity of the ageing population on the basis of gender, health status...sexuality.. (8). Reflecting on his past in various forms of activism Andrew explains that,

... once upon a time I would have got involved in sort of like, trying to raise the issue of LGBT people in that organisation. Maybe meeting

other people and setting up a group and all that kind of thing but I can't be arsed! I can't... I just think oh for fuck sake!

Andrew subsequently found a short course in creative writing in which he feels comfortable and happy as,

... an openly gay person there. People are as friendly to me as they are to anyone else. I mean I don't feel I have to do any kind of explaining. I mean I like that situation. I sort of made a point of coming out in that first session ... so I felt better for having done it. And one or two of the things that I have written have referred to, you know that I have to read out to other people, have referred to my sexuality.

For Andrew feeling comfortable and being able to be open about his sexuality are just as important in participation in learning at this later point in his life as they were at earlier points in his life. This is common across all the participants' biographies that focus on this later life stage. It is encouraging therefore that there are possibilities for involvement in a range of groups that promote spaces for engagement in meaningful non-formal learning through which older adults can come together to collectively explore issues of becoming older and LGBT.

### ***What they do - forms of learning promoted***

For this study I engaged directly with a number of voluntary groups that have an explicit LGBT focus. This involved me in insightful informal discussions with group facilitators as well as joining their regular meetings and participation in their activities. I was able to introduce this study, obtain immediate reactions to its themes of learning and identity and extend invitations to group members to interviews. I also interviewed several participants involved in a range of other organisations, including a gay choir (June), a gay reading group (Jessie) and an older gay and lesbian walking group (Andrew). I explore what forms of learning are promoted in these groups and their impact on LGBT identity construction.

From the group discussion with HRF based in Inverness it was immediately evident that the group does provide a sustaining social network for older LGBT adults. They come from across the Highlands of Scotland. I joined them on the

day of their annual general meeting and a programme of evening events to discuss their work and the value of participants attach to their involvement in the group. The group adopt a storytelling approach which Helen (b. 1950s) explained as: “monologues... [they are] presented to healthcare professionals and social workers and produce resources to try and raise awareness”. Helen is one of the six presenters who tells her story. She feels “we have been lucky enough to have two transgendered people”. The story telling approach, though in monologue form, is also dialogical as Helen’s and other participants’ stories of gay, lesbian and transgender experience are interwoven, and seek to bring legislation and policy into real life contexts:

...we provide snippets of our own stories. Some of them are funny, some of them are quite heart rending so we try to mix it and quite a lot of legislation. They follow in and out of each from light to a bit heavy and legislation to whatever is appropriate.

Helen’s story has learning at the centre of it and she very much emphasises that HRF provides her with “hugely rich learning” because of the “mixture of LGBT” and what brings them together in terms of experience, but also allowing them to share what is unique to others.

The thing that has been amazing for me in the learning is the mixture of LGBT. Because as a bisexual person, I used to think, nobody wants to listen to me about being bisexual because it doesn’t exist as far as just everybody is concerned.

Helen’s story presents an honest self-appraisal of being homophobic in the past to embarking on a journey that reflects transformational learning:

... my story ... as far as I could see was fairly straight in my early days and I happened to end up being married to a gay man. I didn’t realise that when I married him so it changed my life. So my story is about a period of my life and I say I am not at all proud of it, becoming quite homophobic. It wasn’t an easy time, it wasn’t an easy time, but I learned a huge amount from it. And it set me on a wonderful journey and I met a woman and fell in love and realised that it was all great ...

The underlying ethos and principles that have informed HRF’s approach are explained by Tina. There is an in-built openness to constantly review and develop the sessions they deliver “we do have questions throughout the sessions and we are learning as we go along”. For Tina their work,

... is not about being aggressively out. It’s about, and this is why I like the work of HRF, because we don’t assume that anybody’s homophobic

or bi phobic or trans phobic. We just are thinking there is just not enough information out there and people are wanting to understand. So if we do it in that nice soft gentle way that's the way we'll change attitudes. In my opinion we don't change attitudes by banging people over the head. And telling them they are wrong. We change attitudes by trying to help people understand where we are coming from.

The response from many health and social providers to this approach indicates that it is particularly successful. The feedback HRF receive from them is overwhelmingly positive. We had a very engaged discussion about their impact on audiences. I have included this because it illustrates the commitment that group members have to the above ethos and principles and awareness of the challenges this presents:

**Edith:** We have had a couple of negative comments. It is one woman in particular that I remember. She was quite difficult to cope with so I got somebody else to answer the question. She wanted to know why we weren't doing it for straight people as well. "Okay we know you do that; but what about straight people. They have problems too with sex when they get older etc." Of course the perfect answer "yes they do, let's help them. We are here and [can only talk] about LGBT experience". And she was quite aggressive about it.

**Tina:** That's why people find it difficult. Because people say I don't need to know who you sleep with ... that same woman you are talking about, because the question was, well you know, it's all very well and you are all very nice people and everything, but why, but why are you so in our faces. And she was saying you know every time you turn on the telly. And I was really tempted to say what channels are you watching? [Group laughter}. But it is perception, perceptions.

**Helen:** I would go as far as saying 99% of the people we present to, come out quite moved...Yeah and it's not the whole point to make them tearful. But the one thing that they say is it *really* makes me stop and think, it *really* makes me stop and think.

**Vera:** Yeah, in particular, a lot of people outside the LGBT community just generally are totally unaware about all the sort of restrictions that we were under in times past, before there was a more liberal attitude in society.... it could have been done on paper. In our view, I mean I should only speak for myself, but we all agreed this that the fact that we are there and people can see that we are people and that we are being quite vulnerable with our stories, we make a difference. When they see us in the flesh and that we haven't got two heads or something like that.

**Tina:** Yes that was the other comment wasn't it, you all look so normal! [Group laughter]

***Impact of on learning on identity construction/change***

One of the most striking aspects of HRF is how it has developed a particularly strong alliance between lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered adults.

When I was first joined I'd only ever been out to transgendered groups and it has been really good to have a LGBT group to come to. And the support from within the group has been wonderful and I have felt the confidence to try get involved, ... it has given me the confidence to see who I am. And to get to the stage where I am actually transitioning fully and so in that respect the group has done me a lot of good and I hope that I have done the group a bit of good.

(Carol 1958)

Carol comments on her previous experience where:

Down south LG doesn't have anything to do with T. In fact L&G tend to be separated off as well. So we are a little unusual that actually in the Highlands that LGBT tend to come together and work together as in this group.

Helen is representative of others in the group that "having the four strands together has been huge gift and hugely rich learning about the diversity related to transgender experience". Tina further explained that they were always adamant from its inception that HRF was always going to be inclusive of "LGB and T" but that this was underpinned by choice and "really open dialogue". This was with awareness that some transgendered groups feel they would not gain from LGB input. However they have managed to ensure people could get involved "who did see that there were similar issues around growing older, discrimination and past experiences of discrimination".

For Tina it is "really open dialogue" that has most significant impact on how she learns and which allows the group to raise awareness and interact with diverse constituencies of health and social care professionals in meaningful ways:

I think that is what we give when we go out and give our presentations, people see that we are very comfortable with each other and we are very comfortable asking questions and having a dialogue which makes other people more comfortable to ask us quite difficult and sometimes intimate questions.

HRF has created strong and meaningful coalitions between lesbians, gay men, transgendered, transitioning and bisexual women, supported by the critical, humanistic story-telling approach that lies at the centre of the group's work. It provides particular types of learning as characteristic of non-formal learning contexts (Finsden 2005; Jarvis 1985). This learning is humanistic in nature but has a clearly critical orientation in seeking to campaign for better conditions to meet the unique and social and health care needs of older LGBT adults. This also develops a self-reflexivity in participants, affording them new insights into what it means for them personally and collectively, to be and become LGBT and older. They affirm Finsden and Formosa's (2011) view that non-formal learning contexts can promote the most plentiful and enriching modes and types of learning. They also sustain and can further develop participants' self-identities and social networks, supporting Withnall's (2010) findings on the motivations for learning in later life. HRF allows exploration of many of the concerns of ageing diversity studies and critical educational gerontology. The ten members who contributed to group discussions provide insights into the multiple and individual pathways taken by LGBT community as they age. The particular sources of social identifications available to LGBT adults as they age appear rich and diverse, and the group affords possibilities for personal and social agency as highlighted by Biggs and Daatland (2006). In their approach to raising awareness and the empowering impact this has upon participants, HRF can be seen to have a CEG focus particularly where they adopt the values and principles of critical gerogogy: 'a liberating and transforming notion which endorses principles of collectivity and dialogue as central to learning and teaching' (Battersby 1987: 7). Of particular relevance to this study's central focus is that learning continues to inform participants about their own sexuality.

### **6.3.2 "three legged dogs and any other kind of poor soul...": Fragile LGBT coalitions in non-formal learning**

Despite the largely positive engagement in various groups, participants also provide insight into the complexities and challenges that can arise in non-formal learning contexts in later life in relation to questions of what constitutes LGBT community and the fragile coalitions that can exist therein.

These are encompassed in the comment made by one participant that “three legged dogs and any other kind of poor soul...” This comes from her reflections, shared by others, on what she has seen as the flawed assumption that the learning needs and experiences of LGBT adults reflect shared commonalities or at worst are homogenous:

In terms of adult education are there things that gay men and lesbians want study together and is there any reason they would come together to do that or not? I don't know. But actually what have they got in common, you don't have something in common with every other lesbian, with every other gay man, so sometimes trying to put us altogether and provide services and learning services for all ... there are times when you want to be part of a group, don't you, because you want to be visible and protest and be proud. And there are other times when you want access to same services as everyone else but you want to be able to be yourself within that. That's the dilemma because I do struggle at times with accepting, not accepting, transgender and bisexual, I don't mean accepting them as people, I mean what does that have to do with me any more than heterosexual people have..

Her experience and that of others has been a sometimes divided, factionalised and hostile LGBT community in which only fragile alliances exist, if at all. Another participant who is a mother of two children recalls a discussion with a gay men's health worker concerning the opening of an LGBT centre in which there appeared to be no grounds for the dialogue characteristic of HRF's practice:

... he said we couldn't have an LGBT centre that was family friendly because [gay men] wouldn't come any where near it. Well that's right then ... we'll just go away because it is us who has got the problem not your fucking clients [gay men]!

Engagement by participants in non-formal learning raises other questions about the role, purpose and impact of older adult education and the nature of the environment in which learning about sexual identity development can be facilitated for older gay men in particular. It encourages an exploration of 'shame's latent intricacies' (Giffney 2007: ix) as identified by Munt (2007). An alternative picture of a more radical older adult education provision is also presented: one that is both called for by Formosa (2010, 2012) in relation to the UTA, and that counters the perpetuation of hegemonic masculinities that

other, growing community based older men's organisations may project (Golding 2009). Below I reflect on time spent with a voluntary sector older (40+ years) gay men's health group that was co-ordinated by a gay sexual health worker and counsellor. A programme of twice monthly group sessions was organised around themes related to sexual identity development and safe sexual health practices in mid to later life.

When introducing this project to an older men's gay health group, I posed a very broad question concerning members' experiences of education and learning about sexuality, which elicited a range of varying responses from the small group of men in attendance. One man in his 70s, Harry, was very emphatic that life experience has always been his source of learning about his gay identity and that he was constantly surprised by what he found. He very much focused in a candid way, on linking his sexual orientation to his ongoing sexual desires and practices in later life. He talked about a recent sexual encounter with a man much younger than him and how life affirming this had been. This experience was recounted with a lot of humour but at the same time imbued with a combined sense of wonder, entitlement and transgression. He thus offered something of a defiant interpretation of his actions and evidently took delight in attempting to shock other group members.

Harry significantly countered any notion of having drawn upon a narrative of later life disengagement and decline or safe, un-troubling, heteronormative assumptions about active or productive ageing as has underpinned traditional social and educational gerontological study (Cronin 2006; Estes et al 2003; Formosa 2010; Pugh 2002). The extent to which he draws upon and expresses a more radicalised, queer narrative of sexual orientation and erotic desire would therefore seem evident. Narrow conceptions of the desexualised, passive and disengaged older man are thoroughly subverted and dismissed. At the same time, this part of his story also speaks as a disavowal of feeling any sense of shame regarding his sexual orientation and activity. In her exploration of the cultural politics of shame, Munt (2007) argues that it works

culturally to mark out certain groups, while operating a socially constructed and historically contingent phenomenon that creates shamed subjects. Munt's (2007) contention is that shame is an object and a process whereby as social beings imbued with shame we are encouraged to be self-reflexive in our relationship with it and its role in the attachments we develop and those which we cannot. For Munt (2007) this necessitates close interrogation of how spaces become loci of shame, but also how shame enacts a space that contributes to the formation of identity. This presents an interesting lens through which to consider the adult learning space and how exploration of sexual identity development, specifically sexual desire, was facilitated by this older gay men's group. Harry's forthrightness would suggest at this point in his later life, he had transcended shame, moving beyond it having an influence in the configuration of his later life sexual identity and sexual behaviour. The space in which he told his story was clearly one in which he felt safe, not unsurprising given the values and ethos of support and peer learning which the project engenders. However, this transcendence of shame also aligns with Munt's (2007) interpretation of shame in which she asks for it to be reclaimed, embraced and transgressed as part of a cathartic process of change and self-healing. Though I did not gain insight into Harry's earlier to mid-life story, there was a strong sense in his confident assertions that something of this process had occurred. In relation to my observations of the group and the discussions in which they engaged, this was a space in which these older gay men could be supported and be supportive of each other to accept and reconsider how shame had operated in their lives, potentially facilitating a means of working out its significance and impact. However Harry's view on the commercial gay scene was much less celebratory than his discussion of sexual desire as summarised above. He expressed a very vehement attack on "these fucking lesbians and their outrageous behaviour" and how they should not be allowed in gay pubs: "gay men and lesbians are totally different; not the same community". His comments were met with a degree of awkwardness and the discussion moved on. The incident raised questions for me as to how such perspectives could be positively explored and discussed. Paradoxically Harry's comments reflect a form of homo-normativity

and illustration of Billy's (b. 1960) experience of the misogynistic attitudes that can exist among gay men. The approach of other groups such as HRF and the Out and Loud Gay Choir provide examples of how such prejudices within the LGBT community could be explored. Of her experiences of the choir June explains

It doesn't always run smoothly. Sometimes there are very rough rides in the choir but on the whole it is a very supportive community and everyone tries to listen to everyone else's point of view. Sometimes democracy can get a bit messy when you try to take account of everyone's point of view. So we have to try to deal with it. We try to get on and make sure nobody gets hurt that is the main thing.

She discussed this with reference to the membership the choir. This was extended beyond LGBT people to straight. This "started off quite a lively discussion about how can we be inclusive if we don't let straights in?" While accepting of this, June and others in the choir were mindful of the need to maintain spaces for LGBT people who need the support of the community. She felt that:

You know. Just because we have got gay marriage, just because we are all out and open, we're legal, doesn't mean to say that people still won't need the support of their community.

Drawing on her past political experience she reflects some of the complexities and risks that have to be addressed in non-formal learning contexts such as this:

And even people, having come up through the political ranks, a lot of my politics was to do with feminism. It was not to do with being gay. It was to do with feminism and the fight against male domination, male violence which was the big thing, as much as being gay for me. There are vulnerable women in the choir, they are okay with gay men, because they are not a threat, but straight men are a threat because they have been brutalised by straight men in the past

While for June the LGBT community choir is primarily about the power of coming together to sing the issues she discusses here reflect the need to engage with critical questions about identity and heteronormative power. This points to queer forms of learning and knowledge construction through:

... communicative learning processes and critical analyses concerned with being, self-preservation, expectation, becoming, resistance, affiliation and holistic living (Grace and Hill 2009: 31).

### 6.3.3 “Mentors for a new generation” - Possibilities for LGBT intergenerational learning

From comparison of participants’ views and engagement in LGBT groups, they bring new challenges and possibilities in relation to understanding the nature and impact of intergenerational learning practices in the construction of LGBT identities.

Findsen and Formosa (2016) highlight population ageing as one of the most significant demographic trends of the twenty-first century: one in nine people in the world are 60 and this is predicted to increase to one in five by 2050. With increasing life expectancies, enlarged older generations potentially represent a rich source of learning for younger generations. However as Tina reflects there is some complexity of what constitutes older generations:

... we count older people as over 50. And most groups that I go to when I say that, they say, oh you know that’s not old! You’ve got people in their 80s and 90s so it is useful to just acknowledge that if you are talking about people over 50 being older and then you are talking about people being 100, then there is no other part of society that gets lumped together as older. 50 years. You would not think that somebody who was 14 had the same needs as somebody who was 54, yet, people do lump older people together as a homogenous group. I think that is something to acknowledge.

However the scope and parameters of intergenerational learning practice are potentially wide where they can entail generations working together that could be 25 and 50 or equally 55 and 80 (Coull 2015; Mannion 2012). On this basis intergenerational practices were happening within HRF but also encouraged in their outreach work with health and social care providers. Edward (b. 1931) is one of the group’s presenters. He considers the work of HRF as being important for young LGBT people. Helen also talks of the intergenerational learning potential of the work of group as she believes this to be really important. However their current focus is on older LGBT adults.

I would love to be doing the work if I had more time. But it does make a difference because my grandson came running up to my daughter, with his two little mates, girlfriends, and said mummy, mummy, mummy grandma did get married to a lady didn’t she. She did get married it was married. Wasn’t it? And she said yes and there are kids the whole school, and I know the school well, who are totally accepting

of our relationship, even in that grain of sand it has made a difference with those children and those parents. And what that little granddaughter who is very tiny still and my grandson who is nine they actually talk to 50 people, 60 people, 70 people and those people and actually it keeps going out there; it is the ripple effect. That's the best I can do for youngsters at the moment.

Several participants attach high value to opportunities for reciprocal experiential learning and knowledge exchange between themselves and younger LGBT adults. Intergenerational reciprocity forms a core principle and process in intergenerational learning. For Jessie (b. 1946) her considerations focus on what might constitute suitable content in intergenerational practices with secondary school aged pupils:

I think it's important. Obviously just choosing material, and the history, and for example history and politics. One can look at these from all angles and talking about women, talking about gay liberation, if you want to call it that, talking about all these kind of things. They've got a place in the curriculum.

Susan (b. 1964) is particularly open to engaging with both younger and older LGBT people:

I would definitely want to keep a connection with the older generation of gay and lesbian people. And as for the younger ones I would just be humbled and delighted if anyone was interested in my story and it would be great if we could be mentors for a new generation.... Would just like nothing better to be supportive to the younger generation.

She is particularly inspired to do so because of one incident which could be considered informal intergenerational exchange that provided a positive impact on a vulnerable young gay man:

I have to say [name's partner] and I met a young man when we were on a boat to Orkney and there was a pretty obviously gay young man who was only about 18. And he was completely inappropriately attired to be going on a boat to Orkney ... a little cardigan, smoking roll-ups and looking very cold. And [partner] is great, much more, she is never shy about talking to people and she started talking to him and we ended up buying him breakfast on the boat. And he was going through an awful lot of very hard times coming out and he was very keen to tell his story and he kept in touch. He sends face book things and stuff. And that was lovely and it was astonishing as we talked to him for about an hour on all sorts of things and then he said are your two sisters? Oh bless no we are a **couple**. And he said I have never met a lesbian couple before. So it was lovely. I don't know if he really thought we were sisters. I can't

really believe it. But that was such a lovely moment and if we would love to play that role if the younger generation need it. But in the same way I am sure lots of them don't. Lots of them are defining themselves in completely different ways.

However Susan is also cautious in what intergenerational practice could achieve and how it might be conducted:

But I am not sure if their needs are going to be the same as our needs. And I suspect if we do end up being supportive to people either practically or emotionally it wouldn't necessarily just be the G and L ones, it would be any of them going through the confusion.

Other participants such as Andrew are more sceptical and hesitant about the value of intergenerational learning with younger LGBT people. He is uncertain of what he might be able to contribute and questions what interest younger LGBT adults would have in him:

Because when I was younger, like when I was about 20, I wasn't interested in older LGBT people in their 60s. Like not at all. And I think it is difficult for some of them because there is few opportunities for them to develop a political consciousness than there used to be. And I was struck once when I did some research about LGBT teenagers' groups and I met a couple, I went along to a couple of gay groups. First I was struck how they weren't fazed at all by some one of my age interviewing them. That wasn't like a problem. But also that a lot of them had gone onto the gay scene at some point but they had realised that it wasn't like, it wasn't enough so they had come along to these groups for different kinds of support and eh, these seemed to me to be quite well sorted people and I suspect there are other less well sorted people who don't get it together to come along to groups who just stay on the scene and feel unhappy.

Despite Andrew's reticence about working with younger LGBT adults he provides some insights into how intergenerational learning could develop with younger people. He has a lifetime of involvement in LGBT groups dating back to the 1970s. From his discussion of the research in which he was engaged, these young people appear receptive to listening to his experiences and why development of political consciousness was such a profound part of the start of his learning journey. The reciprocity that is central to intergenerational practice could then come from younger LGBT adults providing insights into their priorities and why the gay commercial scene was failing them. That Andrew has a contribution to make to intergenerational practices was partly

affirmed by another experience he had as one of five contributors to a book on gay lives in the 1980s. The book was being re-launched at an event in a gay bookshop.

One young woman a young woman, got up, there were 5 of us involved in the book who answered questions and read extracts. And she said “I just wish you had been my aunties and uncles when I was much younger”. She was in her late 20s by this time and that was nice. I stopped the questions after that as I thought this was a nice note to finish on. Uncles and aunties!

Earlier discussion in this chapter highlighted an example of misogynistic, anti-lesbian prejudice. Liz and Rachel both see intergenerational learning with younger LGBT people as a means of exploring and addressing such prejudices. For younger people Liz’s main message would be that “we could perhaps have a bit more tolerance within in our community for each other. I think, that would be my main message”. She would be very encouraging of young people being out “but to be very, very tolerant to all the people within, or be more tolerant than perhaps my generation was of the differences within the Lesbian and Gay community”.

Rachel provides insight into this lack of tolerance when she recalls trans-phobic attitudes and the expectation that she should be anti-male in her early adulthood and involvement in lesbian feminist activism:

I spent a lot of time in my 20s thinking that I shouldn’t like men but actually I do. - [Laughter] - that sort of weird thing that was around at the time and lesbian discos and huge debates about should we allow men who cross dress into the disco ... why did we waste our breath? What did it actually fucking matter?

Reflecting the ethos of HRF, she considers that an appropriate focus that intergenerational practice should develop is that:

... we are not the same but we are human beings and we have lots of links in common and we should be valuing what those links are, as well as linking what the differences are. So I think, maybe it is part of a necessary process that you *have to* define yourself as different before you can also define yourself as part of a bigger group... maybe that’s what young people need as well, is to see that there are other ways of being, there are other ways of thinking and they are not frightening or shocking and certainly not immoral or illegal. ... And bearing in mind my experience with much younger people, adolescents I think they need

role models, I think that they need to know that people are gay and not just gay when they are young and trendy but when they are in their 50s and 60s and that's there's a community that you belong to and that it is a kind of a flexible community that is not defined by geography, that is defined by sexuality and by thinking and by all kinds of things.

Taken together these reflections indicate that there is potential for breaking into new territory that can extend the purpose and scope of intergenerational learning and practice. HRF and the Out and Loud Choir provide innovative examples of how different generations could be brought together to critically, reciprocally and constructively explore issues of LGBT identity and experience. However fuller exploration of the key guiding principle of reciprocity between generations and what young LGBT people can provide for older adults are beyond the scope of this study. This would require another investigation in which younger LGBT people could be brought into conversation with older adults to explore the possibilities for development of intergenerational learning as an 'emplaced practice' and 'how this might change relations, places and identities' (Mannion 2012: 396).

#### **6.4 Summary of the chapter**

The chapter offers reflections on ageing and later life. This explored the possible intersections for participants between becoming older and their identities as LGBT adults. A varying picture emerges that ranges across pessimistic to more radicalised, hopeful views of post work and later life. Enmeshed in this, questions of sexual orientation and learning remain as significant for some, while for others, greater concerns about maintaining health are predicted to dominate, in which LGBT identity may not hold the same degree of significance as in earlier stages of the life course. Exploration of the forms of learning in which they engage show that they continue to challenge and change their understandings of themselves and others as LGBT adults in progressive ways. The range of groups in which they participate are illustrative of non-formal learning that is again enfolded with informal, experiential, critical and queer forms of learning about the self. The chapter then considered participants' views to establish possibilities and challenges as to the nature, purposes and parameters of intergenerational learning between

themselves and younger LGBT populations.

## **CHAPTER 7      Conclusions and future research**

### **7.1    Overview of the chapter**

The impetus for the study was informed by the lack of adult educational research in the UK that has explored, with LGBT adults, the significance of learning across their lives. In this final chapter I offer conclusions and possibilities for future research, theory and practice, based on the exploration of the overarching research question: What is the nature and impact of how, when and where LGBT adults learn to construct their identities across their lives?

### **7.2    Centrality of learning in the construction of LGBT identities**

I would suggest that exploration of the participants' biographies and life histories establish the centrality of learning in the construction of their LGBT and other identities. They illuminate ways to re-conceptualise and reclaim lifelong learning from the homogenising and reductive influences of neo-liberal envisioning. In so doing these participants have allowed me to

... take into account multiple and shifting formations of and for learners and learning across different social contexts... to broaden what counts as learning and who counts as a learner and to offer different understandings of lifelong learning that are able to include currently marginalised and misrecognised values, epistemologies and principles (Burke and Jackson 2007:3).

Across the participants' narratives and from contributions to group discussions, it is possible to discern clearly the inter-relationship and reciprocity between learning and formation of LGBT identities. There are critical reflections and insights that give voice to rich, diverse learning trajectories and formation of LGBT identities, in which there is an inherent vibrancy, complexity, contradiction, power and above all, heterogeneity at play. Very consciously through, and/or the consequence of new realisations to emerge through recounting their educational life histories, the participants illuminate links between processes of adult and lifelong learning and formation of LGBT identities, wherein, there is multiple nuance. These trajectories of learning therefore encourage alternative ways of thinking about how marginalised societal groups engage in lifelong learning, the values

which sustain them, while bringing to the fore the potentially rich epistemologies they construct. A reconfigured view emerges of who counts as a learner, and what her/his learning involves. I offer the following as powerful testimonies that capture something of the nature and impact of how these participants, as diversely identified LGBT adults, learn to construct their identities in multiple, intersecting ways:

- There is internalised learning and learning with and through relationships with others, that develop ways of knowing about who and what they are, how society treats them, how they navigate and manage relationships in a slippery, ever-changing heteronormative world which does not just stop as they age;
- They have learned about how to identify and challenge hegemonic heteronormative power and the extent to which it has been operant in their lives, from being diminishing/oppressive of who they are, have been and can be in the world, to how to creatively navigate its ever-changing contours and forms;
- Participants' learning is concerned with how being and becoming LGBT intersects with being mothers, feminists, political activists, teachers, older, later life students, workers and disabled, among myriad, other identities;
- The uniqueness and power of the learning processes in which LGBT adults engage may be found in how they combine to construct multiple, fluid and elastic identities over the life course. Such constructions of being and becoming LGBT, alongside making sense of our 'other' selves, may be therefore understood as combining multiple, nuanced, consciously and unconsciously developed forms of learning to create meaning about identity
- Learning about and through our sexuality can be a matter of the intellectualism and theoretical abstraction promoted by higher education, as it is as much derived from embodied experience of ageing, becoming disabled or new found intimacy;

- Hiding, fear and withdrawal can create spaces for critical reflexivity and from which we can emerge with a renewed sense of self, identity and belonging;
- Learning can create rage about discrimination but also how to channel this and respond through creative action at individual and collective levels;
- Learning can contribute to the development of sexual settledness and happiness out of decades of self-repression and internalized self-hatred, shame and denial that has compromised mental and physical health;
- Learning may raise awareness about complacency that ‘we’ have all our rights now;
- Learning alerts participants to the dangers of a prejudiced homo-normativity;
- Further learning is stimulated and shaped from unfolding, lived LGBT experiences across the life course which positively and/or negatively impact on attitudes, orientations and approaches to learning in formal and non-formal contexts;
- Lifelong learning about the LGBT self stimulates and/or raises obstacles to further learning.

The learning processes and the nature of the knowledge constructed about, and reciprocally, through being and becoming LGBT, thus play varying roles in the participants’ lives. A wide spectrum is evident, through which they can be disenfranchised and/or empowered, and in between which, there is a multiplicity of experience and change that contribute to learning about the self and others.

### **7.3 The nature and impact of learning across the lives of LGBT adults**

In designing and undertaking the research I adopted biographical and life histories methodology. I aimed as much as possible to conduct interviews that could promote meaningful dialogue and fulfil my responsibilities as a critically-self conscious researcher to give primacy to participants’ voices and

listen attentively. An abductive strategy of analysis brought the participants' narratives into critical discussion with theory. This has enabled me to identify and deconstruct rich and complex trajectories of learning. I have been able to chronicle continuities and discontinuities between different life stages, how heteronormative forces inhibit promising trajectories, but also how they build empowering lifewide, lifelong and life-deep learning.

### **7.3.1 Learning to construct identities in childhood and adolescence**

In relation to their childhood and adolescence the participants' narratives reveal deliberately imposed opacity, implicit and explicit prejudice about non-normative sexualities. These permeated compulsory schooling, as well as other informal, lifewide sites of learning such as the family and beyond to risky and safe spaces. This required internalised learning processes and interactions with others through which they navigated and renegotiated a sense of their past-selves. A picture emerges of younger people who had at once, a confused, instinctive or partially worked out sense that certain ways of being and acting were condemned or forbidden. Such unreadable environments, apart from discernment of their hostility, invoked fear, isolation but also engendered a determination, curiosity, anger and inventiveness. From the vantage point of the present participants also express shock and anger at the discrimination they faced. Participants' learning in childhood and adolescence was also marked by heightened acuity to the insidious and multiple forms of heteronormativity and their operation.

### **7.3.2 Learning to construct identities in early adulthood and midlife**

As with childhood and adolescence, it was demonstrated that lifewide sites are not strictly demarcated and have porous borders in across early adulthood and midlife. The processes of learning are also not only those designated to particular sites. Critically and queerly orientated non-formal learning as part of political activism developed out with, and or within educational institutions influenced how participants' learn formally, and vice-versa. Different sites therefore again intersected to influence how participants have learned and from this, develop new understandings, values and beliefs about their sexual

identities and how to express them. Analyses of early adulthood and midlife also demonstrate that life-deep learning is scaffolded through experiential, formal, informal, non-formal, critical, queer and transformative learning about the self, others and the participants' wider worlds. These are shown to work across the different locations of educational institutions, the workplace, religious institutions and in political engagement with wider LGBT issues.

Analyses of learning across early adulthood and midlife sought to explore the potential for dissonances, ambiguities, uncertainties, as well as connections within and between participants' narratives. An overarching theme is that participants' learning is taken up with how they make further sense of and attribute meaning to sexual orientation, their own and others. This learning is enfolded within accounts of 'coming out' and the navigation of formal educational and other lifewide learning contexts that could simultaneously expand and restrict experiences for gaining new insight into what it means to be LGBT. Disruption, readjustment and/or rejection of traditional life and educational pathways are also evident as the impact of such learning about sexual identity evolves and asserts different impacts.

### **7.3.3 Learning to construct identities post work and in later life**

Participants' biographies tell a largely positive story of participation and meaningful engagement in non-formal learning. This sustains their self-identities as older LGBT adults and importantly provides social networks through which there is space to further explore their own and other's sexual orientations. This was particularly powerful in the case of Highland Rainbow Folk. They have developed humanistic, critically informed ways of working in combination with a strong and productive alliance of older LGBT adults. They very successfully engage health and social providers in raising awareness of the specific needs of older LGBT adults through their pedagogic approach of story telling.

#### **7.4 Future directions for theory, research and practice**

The study's main contributions to adult education research, theorisation and practice lie in three areas. A focus on LGBT experience can contribute to the creation of new opportunities to develop intergenerational learning processes. The study also extends the possibilities for greater criticality in older adult education theory, research and practice, based on the continued, rich learning in which participants engage post-work and in later life. Combined with this, there is scope to further explore the nature of 'life-deep learning' for other societal groups, brought by combined religious, moral, ideological and social learning that guides action, beliefs, values, and expression of identity. The LGBT adults in this study demonstrate engagement in distinct forms of life-deep learning to navigate social and moral opprobrium. From this they gain hope, self-respect, empathy with others, and deeper self-knowledge. In each of these areas there is scope for further research, development of theory and practice.

##### **7.4.1 Opportunities for intergenerational learning**

The analysis of learning post work and in later life, supported with a range of participants' views, identified opportunities for development of intergenerational learning practices. However further research is required to explore what could meaningfully constitute the focus and purposes of such practice in the case of older and younger LGBT adult populations.

##### **7.4.2 Extending criticality in critical educational gerontology**

To date critical educational gerontology has not focused on the nature and impact of later life learning in which older LGBT adults engage and the significance of this in the construction of their identities. Further research could build on this study's findings, the evidence of which could be usefully employed to educate policy makers and a range of professionals who work in different capacities with older LGBT people about their particular needs. This follows from the experiences of older LGBT people being marginalised in heteronormative settings such as care homes as reported in this study. HRF exemplify empowering CEG and the impact of this in practice. This valuable

approach provides a template which may be shared with other agencies supporting older people that gives primacy to their identification as LGBT people who have engaged in life-deep learning.

#### **7.4.3 Life-deep learning in other marginalised communities**

In learning to find out about who they are as LGBT adults, participants have had to make sense of a complex nexus of religious, moral and ideological and social issues. For many participants these have served to condemn, obscure and silence the LGBT part of their identity. However participants' biographies and life histories reflect engagement in combined processes of learning that together provide the scaffolding for life-deep learning and the development of resilience, positive personal change and deeper knowledge of the self and wider world. Further research could extend to other marginalised or hard-to-reach communities, such as people from Black and Ethnic Minority backgrounds. This study's findings on the nature of life-deep learning and the theoretical framework employed may provide a helpful foundation for exploration of how other societal groups learn to construct their identities across the life course.

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## Appendix 1: Plain Language Statement



**UNIVERSITY**  
*of*  
**GLASGOW**

### Invitation to be interviewed for the purpose of a research project

As part of a doctoral research study, I am looking for 40+ year old adults who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered (LGBT), who are willing to be interviewed individually and to take part in group discussion about their educational and learning experiences. The study's working title is: 'Becoming a model of inclusion and openness? An exploration of the scope of adult and higher education in Scotland to create spaces of transformative learning for older LGBT adults.'

#### **Who am I?**

I am a PhD student at the University of Glasgow, in the College of Social Sciences, School of Education.

#### **Why are you asking me?**

You are being approached because I believe your experiences, perspectives and insights on education and learning will make a significant contribution to educational research where older LGBT adults' voices are absent and to the development of greater understanding of diversity and inclusive practices in adult and higher education.

#### **How have I been selected for this?**

I contacted several LGBT organisations and adult and higher education providers in Scotland and requested that they publicise or send information about the study to older adults who they felt may be potentially interested in participating.

#### **What will I have to do?**

If you agree to participate in this research, I would like to interview you and engage in discussion on two occasions about your past, present and future educational and learning experiences as an older LGBT adult learner and/or educator. The interviews will take about an hour to an hour and a half and will be arranged for a time and place convenient for you. With your consent, you will also be invited to take part in a group discussion with four to five other older LGBT adults. This will come at a point between the first and second interview. The group will be invited to discuss some of the key themes/issues to emerge from the first interviews. The discussion group will take up to two hours and will be arranged for a time and place convenient for all participants. I will also ask if you would be willing to take photographs on the themes of learning, ageing and identity. I will show you examples of photographs which I have taken. With your permission I would then use some of these photographs to encourage discussion of our experiences of and views

on learning and education. The second interview will provide you with opportunities to reflect on any issues or major themes to emerge from the discussion group.

**Will my interview and group discussion contributions and photographs be kept confidential?**

The interview and group discussion will be digitally recorded and afterwards the content of both will be typed up. The original digital recordings will be destroyed once I have typed them up, and your name will not be used in the written transcript of the interview or group discussion, so you will not be able to be identified from it. I will write up a project report which includes an analysis section. Some direct quotes from your interview and group discussion contributions may be used in this section, but your name will not appear anywhere. You will have the opportunity to read any direct quotes I intend to use, and identify any changes or clarification of points made. The final project report will be submitted as a PhD thesis which will be read and assessed by members of Glasgow University staff. A copy of the analysis section and/or the dissertation will be made available to you upon request. I will request permission for inclusion in the final thesis of some photographs you may have taken. I will ensure that images selected will contain no information that would identify you.

**Do I have to take part?**

No. Participation is voluntary. Even if you decide to take part, you can change your mind at any time, and any data that you have already given can be withdrawn.

**Will my decision whether to take part or not affect my relationship with you as a university lecturer at Glasgow Caledonian University?**

No. If you are a student of Glasgow Caledonian University, your decision whether to take part or not in the project will in no way affect our relationship and the support to which you are entitled or in relation to ongoing assessment and progress. If you seek one-to-one tuition during the data collection period I will refer you to one of my colleagues, in order to keep the integrity of the research process. Similarly, if you are a member of staff in the institution with whom I work directly, we will discuss whether you want to continue to do so during the data collection period, or work instead with one of my colleagues in the team.

**Who should I contact for more information?**

If you have any more questions or would like additional information about the research, you can contact me Chris McAllister, by mobile on 07808 173154 or email at [c.mcallister2@gcu.ac.uk](mailto:c.mcallister2@gcu.ac.uk). You may also contact my PhD supervisor, Dr Ralf St Clair by telephone on 0141 330 3023 or by email at [ralf.stclair@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:ralf.stclair@glasgow.ac.uk)

If you have any concerns or questions about ethical issues or the conduct of the project, you can contact Georgina Wardle, Ethics Officer, College of Social Sciences, University of Glasgow, by email [georgina.wardle@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:georgina.wardle@glasgow.ac.uk) or telephone 0141 330 3048

## Appendix 2: Participant consent form



### **CONSENT FORM**

**Title of Project:** Becoming a model of inclusion and openness? An exploration of the scope of adult and higher education in Scotland to create spaces of transformative learning for older LGBT adults

**Name of Researcher:** Christopher McAllister

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the Plain Language Statement for the above research project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.
3. I understand that I am free to withdraw any data that I have previously supplied.
4. I understand that I will participate in an interview with the above named person, who is the only person who will know what I have said.
5. I understand that I may be invited to contribute to a discussion group with four to five other participants and that only the group and the above named person will know what I have said.
6. I agree to the interview and group discussion being digitally recorded and subsequently transcribed. I understand the original recordings will be destroyed once the interviews and group discussions have been transcribed and that my name will not be associated with the contents of the transcript.
7. I confirm that that participation or non-participation in the research will have no affect on my entitlement to support or in relation to on-going assessment and progress as a student and in my working relationship with you as a colleague.
8. I agree / do not agree (delete as applicable) to take part in the above study.

<b>Name of Participant</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Signature</b>
Researcher	Date	Signature

1 for participant; 1 for researcher

### Appendix 3: Interview schedule



#### Interview schedule:

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##### **Identity development**

*Part of the aim of this research project is to allow ‘us’ (i.e. myself, alongside you), to explore the development of our adult identities and where our sexual orientation may or may not fit into these. If okay, I would like to begin with a few questions about identity:*

##### **Questions to prompt discussion**

- What words would you use to describe yourself/who you are at this stage in your life?
- Why have you selected these words?
- Would you have used the same or different words to describe yourself when you were younger?
- What different words would you have used? Why might this be?

##### **Early formal educational experiences (school days)**

*Part of this study is concerned with lifelong learning, how, where and why this happens for LGBT adults, and so to gain as broad as possible a definition of what LLL means. On that basis, I would be really interested in exploring your earliest, formal educational experiences from school through to college or university and/or any professional/vocational training. Could you tell me about your early formal educational experiences?*

##### **Questions to prompt discussion**

- Where did you go to school?
- What did you enjoy/like about how you were taught at school?
- What did you dislike about how you were taught at school?
- What was your attitude towards primary and secondary education?
- What influenced your attitude towards primary and secondary education?

##### **Sexuality and early formal educational experiences**

- When you were growing up did you start to become aware of somehow being different?
- What may have prompted this awareness?
- How did you experience this difference/in what way did you feel different?

- Did others (peers, family members, teachers) perceive you as different?
- How did they react?
- In what ways did these early formal educational experiences influence your beliefs about and understanding of your sexual identity?

### **Formal adult educational history (college, university, professional/vocational training)**

- Have you undertaken any formal adult / higher education between school and now?
- What has this involved?
- What impact have your formal educational experiences, as an adult, had on your life - positive, negative, major changes?
- Why do you think these formal educational experiences have had this impact?
- Have your formal adult educational experiences influenced your understanding, attitudes, values or beliefs about your own sexual identity in any way?

### **Learning outwith formal educational settings**

*As for earlier discussion on how we can broaden the definition of lifelong learning, it would be interesting to explore with you your experiences outwith the formal educational set up of a school, college etc. Really, beyond the four walls of the class room:*

### **Questions to prompt discussion**

- Could you tell me about any experiences out with the formal set up of school, college etc., [for example, on the scene, in your working life, with friends, as part of a LGBT group], which you might describe as important learning or as a source of knowledge, not part of college, university or training?
- How has this learning impacted on your life e.g. has it influenced your understanding attitudes, values or beliefs about your own sexual identity in any way?
- How do these experiences compare with your formal educational experiences?

### **Working life: as an adult educator, teacher, lecturer, community development worker**

*You have explained that you have been an adult educator/lecturer. I would like us to share our experiences of and perspectives on working in adult education as LGBT...*

- In what ways, if any, has your sexual identity been an important factor in your working life in education?

- What significance/impact has your sexual identity had on your work with adult learners and colleagues?
- What role do you think adult and higher education should play in supporting LGBT staff and students?

### **Ageing and sexual identity**

*In research on ageing there are few studies to date which have looked at links between being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender and getting older. I would like for us to explore this link and hear about your experiences of getting older?*

- What is your attitude to getting older?
- Do you think of yourself as old?
- How important is your sexual identity now that you are in your 40s...50s...60s...70s+?
- What do you think the attitudes of other, younger (in their late teens and 20s) LGBT people may be towards older LGBT people?
- What was your attitude to other LGBT people when you were in your twenties? Why was this?
- What do you think younger LGBT people could learn from your experiences?
- What might you learn from younger LGBT people?
- At this stage in your life, what learning opportunities would you like to have? How does your sexual identity matter in this?

### **Information for discussion groups**

To explore further the points we have discussed today, I would like to invite you to participate in a group discussion with four to five other participants.

I am asking all those participants who are taking part in the discussion groups if they would be willing to take photographs on the themes of learning, ageing and/or identity. To show what I mean here are a few examples of photographs I have taken. The aim of the photographs will be to encourage discussion of our experiences of and views on learning.

I am giving each person one of these disposable cameras which take 12 pictures. I would ask that you return the camera to me in the envelope provided. I will then develop the pictures and with your permission use some of your photographs in the discussion group. Again with your permission, I will use some of your photographs in my final thesis.

Of course, there is no need to take photographs. Your participation and contribution to individual and group discussions are greatly welcomed

#### Appendix 4: Discussion group outline

- Our experiences of and views on learning in the past, the present and future - what we have learned and how we have learned - what has changed how we feel and think about ourselves; what has been inspiring; what have been barriers to learning;
- The impact of formal education on our lives;
- Who am I/Who are we? - our identities now compared to the past and the importance (or not) of being LGBT;
- How we feel about ageing as LGBT people;
- The value of being a member the Highland Rainbow Folk group - contribution to learning;
- What could younger LGBT people learn from us? What could younger LGBT people teach us?

## Appendix 5: Advert for the study



### Invitation to take part in research

#### **How we learn to be gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered? Older LGBT voices in Scotland: redefining lifelong learning and education**

*But actually the education was incredible I think. I had teachers who were passionate. Who were kind of understanding. You know I must have been a right misfit as a kid... By and large looking at my schooling, I loved it. I really loved it and I don't think it is just nostalgia...*

*When we succeeded in having positive images of lesbians and gay men discussed as a general educational issue we had no real idea just how much opposition to this there would be... what was clear was that the only approach that they would accept towards the treatment of L&G people in the curriculum was total silence and total invisibility*

*I mean, I think for me though, I really value the learning that I have got in less formal situations, like the Iona community, being in Tanzania as a volunteer, Gay Liberation Front, Trade Unions and so on. They have been like really important to me*

*... Because one of the really interesting things is that we live at the vanguard of a movement. You know we have lived through a time when... I don't think in 1965 when I was born my parents would have ever been able to say that in 30 years time my son could marry another man...*

*... So actually the sheer social changes that have happened in the forty five years of my life is really kind of incredible. So actually, I think that part of what we do as gay people is define, we're defining all the time. You know we are the first generation that are living in this liberated time...*

*People in my generation have come through quite a number of battles in order to be honest and open. And that's been through the whole sphere of life: within a family setting, within a church setting, within an educational setting and within an employment setting. Those battles have made me stronger I think, more determined, still angry at the injustice of people having to pretend to be what they are not.*

**I am interested in hearing about your experiences of learning and education in Scotland. Please contact Mr. Chris McAllister if you would be interested in taking part in a relaxed and informal interview or discussion group. Many thanks, Chris.**

***Please contact me on 07808 173154 or email [c.mcallister2@gcu.ac.uk](mailto:c.mcallister2@gcu.ac.uk)***

## Appendix 6: Email correspondence with LGBT organisations

### Email correspondence - Highland Rainbow Folk

Sent: Thu Jun 23 15:49:24 2011

Subject: RE: Research project on education and learning - older LGBT perspectives

Dear ...

Many thanks for getting back.

The afternoon of Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> July would be ideal.

With everyone's consent I would like to record the discussion group so that I can transcribe it later. The hotel coffee shop should be fine as a venue. I would want to create as informal and welcoming an atmosphere as possible so people feel comfortable to talk and contribute to discussion. If this a familiar environment for yourself and any members who can come along that is great. I have done one interview in a cafe which was fine and the recorder I used was powerful enough to pick up the conversation clearly.

The discussion group would be about one and half to two hours long. I would hope to encourage some discussion of several themes, e.g. -

- Our experiences of and views on learning in the past, the present and future - what we have learned and how we have learned - what has changed how we feel and think about ourselves; what has been inspiring; what have been barriers to learning;
- The impact of formal education on our lives;
- Who am I/Who are we? - our identities now compared to the past and the importance (or not) of being LGBT;
- How we feel about ageing as LGBT people;
- The value of being a member the Highland Rainbow Folk group;
- What could younger LGBT people learn from us? What could younger LGBT people teach us?

These themes are by no means set in stone but just to encourage some discussion.

I look forward to meeting you and any members who can make it along. Many thanks also, for mentioning the research at the last meeting and I hope to hear from the member who was keen to talk to me.

Best wishes  
Chris

**Email correspondence - Our Story Scotland (OSS)****Name:** Chris McAllister**Sent:** 22 Feb 2011

Dear OurStory Scotland

As part of a doctoral study being undertaken in the School of Education at Glasgow University, I am currently interviewing and setting up some discussion groups to take place over the next 18 months with older LGBT adults. The major focus of the study is to encourage exploration of what constitutes learning for older LGBT adults and how more equitable educational opportunities may be created in the context of an increasingly ageing population. In using participants' diverse voices and experiences I hope to challenge and redefine narrow understandings of lifelong learning. I feel their contribution in this will be particularly enriching and illuminating: they are generations (age 45yrs +) which have seen significant social change and increased LGBT visibility.

I would be only too happy to discuss the research further and learn more About OurStory Scotland.

Best wishes

Chris McAllister

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Sent: 23 February 2011 01:33

To: McAllister, Chris

Subject: RE: [WEB] Contact Form - doctoral study

Dear Chris

Thank you for contacting OurStory Scotland. Your study sounds very interesting and worthwhile. As you can imagine, we do get approached rather often about research, and as our members are all volunteers with busy lives, they may not be in a position to help with the research. You do not say what you are looking for from OurStory Scotland, but perhaps it is potential interviewees. If you like, I could make an enquiry at our next meeting (late April). Would that be of help? We are a small organisation staffed wholly by volunteers, so you may find the response from members is rather limited. In any case I wish you every success with the research.

With best wishes

Sent: 23 February 2011

Dear OSS

Many thanks for your prompt reply. I can fully appreciate that you are often approached with requests for potential interviewees and with information about research projects. I would be really grateful however, if you would be able to mention the research and whether there would be potential participants interested in being interviewed or joining in a discussion group. There is a striking absence of older LGBT perspectives in adult education and lifelong learning research, both from learners and those who have made major contributions to education in Scotland and beyond. The two lengthy interviews I have done recently pay real testimony to the importance of opportunities for learning across the lifespan and the critical understanding it can give to the process of coming out, becoming politicised and/or leading a fulfilled life.

I would also be interested in volunteering. I think that the work you are involved in is fascinating and so important.

Many thanks and best wishes  
Chris

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Sent: 24 February 2011

Dear Chris

Thanks for the further clarification. I shall be happy to ask people at our next meeting. I wonder if you yourself would like to come along and have a 5 minute slot to talk about the project and ask if anyone would like to be involved. However, do not expect a large attendance at the meeting, perhaps half a dozen.

Thank you also for the offer to do some voluntary work with us. It may be that you would be able to do some summarising of past recorded interviews/discussions. In order to archive our material in National Museums Scotland we do the standard oral history summaries (not transcriptions) which then can be searched by future researchers. We can discuss that further when we meet if you are interested, though I know that PhD work can take up all one's life, and you may want to do something that contrasts rather than more of the same!

Do let me know if you would be able to attend our next meeting. It is in the Mitchell Library (Fairfield Room) on Tuesday 12 April at 5.30pm.

Best wishes

OurStory Scotland  
Scottish Charity No: SC035729  
Email: [info@ourstoryscotland.org.uk](mailto:info@ourstoryscotland.org.uk) Web: [www.ourstoryscotland.org.uk](http://www.ourstoryscotland.org.uk)

Appendix 7: A queerly critical framework of lifelong and life-wide learning

<b>A queerly critical framework of lifelong and life-wide learning</b>
<b>... SCHOOLING: FAMILY: CHURCH: LGBT ACTIVISM: PUBLIC LIBRARIES: OUR CLASSROOMS: UNIVERSITY: RETIREMENT: INTERIOR MENTAL LANDSCAPES: THE IMAGINATION: LGBT 'COMMUNITY'? : PARKS, CLUBS AND OTHER 'QUEER' SPACES: INTER-GENERATIONAL SITES ...</b>

Interactive Dimensions of queerly critical inquiry	[1] The nature of knowledge constructed	[2] How, when, where and with whom knowledge is constructed	[3] The impact of knowledge
<p><b>Queerly critical de-construction of dimensions of inquiry</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge about what?</li> <li>• What and whose knowledge of being LGBT counts and why?</li> <li>• What is the nature of knowledge participants have constructed about being and becoming LGBT: diverse, fixed, changing and evolving?</li> <li>• How does power reside and operate in knowledge about sexuality?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What influences have contributed and/or inhibited the construction of knowledge about being LGBT?</li> <li>• What learning practices can be discerned in construction of knowledge?</li> <li>• How do influences at play in earlier life stages compare with those in mid to later life?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do participants make use of, integrate and embody these ways of knowing?</li> <li>• How do changing LGBT identifications and lived experiences influence the approaches, attitudes and orientations to learning we adopt within and out with formal educational environments?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Theoretical bricolage:</b> layers of queerly critical inquiry</p>	<p><b>Queerly critical knowledge forms:</b> fugitive, contingent, transgressive, empowering, transformational internalised, shaming, alienating?</p>	<p><b>Queerly critical analyses of when, where and how:</b> interrogation of socio- economic socio-cultural, structural, hegemonic and heteronormative forces and discursive practices;</p>	<p><b>Queerly critical analyses of impact of learning:</b> application of emerging ideas posited by the new materialism and new body realism to explore how we learn through and out of the ageing sexualised body; phenomenological</p>

	<p><b>As producers / products/subjects of discourse:</b> analyse heteronormative and homo-normative discursive practices on sexuality evident in ontological, epistemological and phenomenological understandings</p>	<p><b>Queer histories/ temporal, spatial and phenomenological analyses:</b> construction of queer times and spaces and how inhabited inter-subjectively, what is brought to such spaces, and the processes of knowledge construction they engender</p>	<p>exploration of inter-subjectivity, intimacy and desire as mediated by different learning and educational environment</p>
<p><b>Scope of educational life histories and critical narrative inquiry:</b> in 'any' time or place in a range of circumstances</p>	<p>Power of historical, socio-cultural, formal educational, discursive, relational circumstances, evident in knowledge(s) about being and becoming LGBT</p>	<p>The power of historical, social, cultural, formal educational, discursive, relational circumstances and the range of possibilities...constraints they create for learning about being and becoming LGBT</p>	<p>Interactional/inter-subjective and/or psychological circumstances in shaping the range of possibilities for learning about being and becoming LGBT</p>

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