Questionable Identities:
A Study of Gay and Evangelical Christian Identity Conflict and Resolution

by

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the ways in which some men who identify as both gay and evangelical Christian integrate those identities into their lives. Analysis of interview data yielded a variety of strategies that the research subjects had adopted in order to facilitate identity integration. The theoretical focus was on two models of homosexual identity formation, namely, Cass (1984) and Troiden (1988). The efficacy of each model in describing homosexual identity formation of individuals who have also maintained an evangelical Christian one is examined. In spite of their strengths, each model has some limitations. A new model is proposed which more closely resembles the paths of gay identity formation of the men in this study, one that retains the strengths of the Cass and Troiden models. The thesis concludes with a discussion about political and research implications of the new model, including its possible application to identities other than gay and Christian ones.

A Study of Gay and Evangelical Christian Identity Conflict and Resolution

Table of Contents

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Chapter One: Introduction

In North America, Christian activists have rallied to protect the nuclear family against what they see as "erosion." From their perspective, the nuclear family consists of a male and a female in marital co-habitation and their children. Christian activists claim that the nuclear family is under "attack" from a variety of threatening groups, especially homosexuals. Gays and lesbians, they claim, represent an aberrant expression of human sexuality, in direct opposition to God's plan for human propagation. Furthermore, gays and lesbians are said to live unhealthy and dangerous lifestyles from which children should be protected.

The power distribution in the so-called battle is not evenly matched. Power differences between Christian communities and gay communities to impose moral values in society are significant. Usual Christian moral values, such as so-called "traditional family values," transcend the boundaries of devout Christian communities and permeate (apparently) secular moral values in society. In spite of Christian moral influence within society, gays and lesbians in North America are marginalized in part as a result of such opinions. Many Christians uphold homosexuality as being an "abomination to God" (Leviticus 18:22, Bible, King James Version), and many Christian organizations have promoted an agenda that specifically targets gay and lesbian individuals and social organizations. Many gays and lesbians who assert their rights to social and legal equality with heterosexuals have expressed outrage, and have organized political agendas that challenge those of anti-gay Christian groups and organizations. The partisan political nature of gay and lesbian activists and

Christian activists is often described using the rhetoric of war, with phrases such as "attack on traditional family values", "spiritual warfare", and "political battle".

Gays and lesbians in North America and elsewhere have gained increased social visibility, public participation, and legal recognition. In addition to advancing demands for equality with heterosexuals, such as in establishing legal recognition of same-sex unions, and achieving the right to adopt children, some gays and lesbians also participate in religious institutions as publicly acknowledged gays and lesbians. For example, the mandate of Metropolitan Community Church (MCC), a growing Christian denomination which has built MCC churches in most major cities in North America, is to provide a safe and accepting place for gay and lesbian Christians and their families. A variety of groups within other denominations have done likewise, such as Dignity (within the Catholic Church), Integrity (within the Anglican Church), and Affirm (within the United Church). Many non-gay Christians have reacted with varying degrees of resistance, claiming that gays and lesbians are not eligible to be Christian because "homosexual lifestyles" are an abomination to God. Biblical passages such as Leviticus 18:22, Leviticus 20:13, Deuteronomy 23:17, Romans 1:26-27, and 1 Timothy 1:9-10 appear to condemn homosexuality, and therefore are used by some Christians to support their view that homosexuality is neither sanctioned by God nor socially tolerable.[1]

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[1] Leviticus 18:22 Thou shalt not lie with mankind as with womankind: it is abomination.
Leviticus 20:13 If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination . . . .
Deuteronomy 23:17 There shall be no whore of the daughters of Israel, nor a sodomite of the sons of Israel.

Some commentators about homosexuality and Christianity challenge usual anti-gay interpretations of Biblical scripture and support the right of gays and lesbians to practice Christianity by describing a Biblical exegesis that is not hostile toward homosexuals (e.g., Goss, 1993).[2] Several authors have recently attested to the movement of many gays and lesbians towards spiritual expression, particularly in Christian contexts (Bouldrey, 1995; Comstock, 1993; Gudorf, 1994; McCall Tigert, 1996; Sweasey, 1997; Shallenberger, 1998; Shelby Spong, 1998; and Stuart, 1997). The emphasis of such authors is on the right, and perhaps even the need, of gays and lesbians to embrace Christian beliefs and practices.

Discussions about how some individuals come to identify as gay or lesbian and also Christian appear to be missing from the epistemological picture. What leads certain individuals to pursue the integration of gay or lesbian and Christian identities? How do they do so? Although I focus only on gay men for reasons that I explain in Chapter Three, in this study I aim to address such

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Romans 1:26-27 For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly . . . .

1 Timothy 1:9-10 . . . the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient . . . for them that defile themselves with mankind . . . .

[2] The Bible does not make reference to sexual orientation identities, but -- from some theological perspectives -- appears to express a prohibition of homosexual acts. In my view, current understandings of such passages are often informed by the assumption that one "is" what one "does." What one "does" may not refer to homosexual acts alone; homosexual fantasies and desires are sometimes enough for some individuals to realize that they may "be" gay, as some of the men in this study illustrate. Furthermore, gay Christian men might view Biblical passages which appear to prohibit homosexual acts as void of social, political, and cultural contextualization. A focus on Biblical contexts tends to allow alternative interpretations from the norm, specifically that Biblical passages which appear to make negative reference to homosexuality refer generally to sexual acts which take place out of emotionally-committed relationships. On the other hand, some men do not develop gay identities based on their homosexual activity. The men in this study are clearly not among them.

questions about identity -- one of the implications of the title *Questionable Identities* -- in order to complement existing literature about being gay or lesbian simultaneously with being Christian.

Hostility towards homosexuality, expressed from within Christian churches, has not prevented many people from experiencing homosexual sex, from identifying as gay, from celebrating such an identity, from struggling for legal and social equality with heterosexuals, and from reconciling their gay and Christian identities. Gay Christians are people whose identities emerge counter to dominant ideologies about compulsory heterosexuality, and stand in opposition to so-called "traditional" Christian values concerning sexuality. Furthermore, the existence of gay Christians challenges stereotypical ideas about gay people (that gay people are not those who believe in and practice Christianity), and about Christianity (that the Christian faith necessarily forbids homosexuality).

It is neither original nor an overstatement to point out that, despite increasing tolerance of homosexuality among several liberal Christian denominations, Christian communities, in general, have alienated gays and lesbians. Christian churches are socially and politically powerful entities in North America and elsewhere. Most gay and lesbian people feel the effects of anti-gay attitudes and activism among Christians in a variety of ways. Hate propaganda against gay and lesbian people is disseminated by some high-profile Christians. One consequence of anti-gay sentiments and activism among Christians is an overall reputation of Christianity as being neither tolerant nor friendly towards

gays and lesbians based on the belief that homosexuality is not acceptable within Christian morality. What is often not addressed, however, is that gay communities sometimes alienate Christians. Gay Christian men appear to be socially-situated somewhere in the middle of non-gay Christian communities and non-Christian gay communities, perhaps embraced by neither, a scenario that provides the inspiration for the other implication of the title *Questionable Identities*.

A question closely related to "How?" is "Why?". Why would some gay men embrace a religion that appears to advocate intolerance toward homosexuals? Why would gay individuals not simply reject Christianity? Clearly, the role of religion in the lives of gay Christian men is significant enough to warrant their struggle to practice Christianity as gay men. To assume otherwise does not reflect the complexities of religion in North American society and discounts the challenge that gay Christian men pose to the privileged position of heterosexuals in Christian churches.

This thesis is not relevant only to gay men who are also Christian. More generally, I explore the individual, social, and political significance of identity construction, and, in particular, identity conflict and resolution. By "identity", I am referring to the ways in which individuals perceive and describe themselves in part by how they are acknowledged by others, such as: I am a mother, I am native-Canadian, I am bisexual, I am an accountant, I am a skater, I am a soccer fan. But identity is not merely a list of unproblematic self-descriptions. Indeed, many identities are problematic particularly when identity conflict arises between

two or more self-descriptions, as it commonly does for most people at some time in life. For example, some parents might have difficulty understanding themselves as full-time workers, some lesbians might question their lesbian identity when their sexuality involves men, and some social activists may doubt their status as "activists" if they are employed by large, multi-national corporations which exploit labour in developing nations. Most people, then, have experienced identity conflict in their lives, possibly concerning occupation, age, gender identity, and / or sexual orientation identity, to name a few domains of self-identification. This study concerns identity conflict and resolution specifically among men who simultaneously identify as gay and evangelical Christian, but provides insights that may be applicable to any person who has felt, or is feeling, conflict about two or more identities.

Because of my emphasis towards social justice, this study, a qualitative analysis of interview data, might also be of interest to anyone who enjoys the company of, or is related to, gay or lesbian individuals. The overall aim of this research is to promote civil parity of gays and lesbians with heterosexuals. In addition, I aim to contribute to the erosion of anti-homosexual discrimination and prejudice within Christian communities, and to the building of Christian communities that include gays and lesbians. The primary implication of this research, however, is to support and encourage the right of gays and lesbians to worship in Christian churches, and to be recognized and accepted as gay Christians. My research may also have particular significance to those Christians

who feel discouraged from expressing their homosexuality and from embracing gay or lesbian identities.

Some researchers might object to the political agenda that underlies this research. Those who do so subscribe to the dominant perspective of social research, namely, that researchers are, and must remain, value-neutral in the research process. The tradition of qualitative research is one that challenges such assumptions about research; researchers are not so-called objective observers of social life, but are fully engaged in the interactive process of sociological investigation. The very doing of social research is a social process. I, as the researcher, am not conducting this project as if I were a distant observer. Instead, I engaged with each participant, seeing them not as objectified research subjects, but rather as individuals with whom I interacted to gain understanding about their perceptions, beliefs, and experiences.

Furthermore, my own personal experiences are instrumental in the development of this study because they provided the original impetus for conducting research about Christianity and gay men, and because they influenced the development of the research problem. Qualitative research tends to emphasize emergence and reflexivity in the research process, rather than standardized research processes. This study is the result of a reflexive and continual self-examination of my intentions. When it came time to write a thesis research proposal for the sociology department of the University of Victoria, I had full intentions of doing research that would somehow undermine the anti-gay work of some Christian groups and organizations. Prior to beginning my post-

secondary education, I had participated in so-called "ex-gay" ministries to pursue a heterosexual orientation and identity.[3] At that time, I believed in, and practiced, Christian fundamentalism. In hindsight, I can see clearly that my decision was guided mostly by my own internalized homophobia. Fortunately, I eventually came to understand that my sexual feelings towards men did not, in fact, represent emotional disease or spiritual corruption. Later, as a graduate student, I felt resentful towards Christianity because of its negative influence in my life and in society. My early attitude provided the motivation for what I thought was going to be my graduate degree research.

As the proposal went through a series of revisions, so did my attitude towards Christianity. I came to consider the notion that, as one aspect of promoting equality of gays and lesbians with heterosexual people, gays and lesbians should have the same rights to access religious organizations and to participate in religious practices as do heterosexuals. Many gay and lesbian individuals do participate in Christian churches, but my educated guess is that most do so while hiding their gay or lesbian identity. In addition, I decided to challenge the belief of most Christians that gays and lesbians are products of a sinful world.

The political climate of most Christian churches is that gays and lesbians are not welcome and perhaps even deserve to be disparaged. Yet, some gay and lesbian people have chosen not to hide their gay or lesbian identity while

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[3] Christian-based "ex-gay" support groups have proliferated throughout North American Christian communities in political response to social and legal gains made by gays and lesbians. Members are encouraged to leave so-called "homosexual lifestyles" and to seek healing for the

they participate in Christian activities. The proposal for my thesis took shape when I began to realize that a more interesting approach to researching issues concerning homosexuality and Christianity would be to interview individuals who had incorporated both identities, rather than people, like myself, who had decided to choose either one or the other. As Thomas, one of the men whom I interviewed, pointed out, "[Pat Robertson] isn't a representation of Christianity, and [Queer Nation] isn't a representation of being gay. They're both off the mark, and they're the ones who get all the airtime, and they're the ones who confuse everyone. . . . There's another story going on here that's way bigger, and those are both distractions."[4]

It has been my goal to present a part of the other story to which Thomas referred. I use some of the narratives from eight men who simultaneously identify as gay and evangelical Christian in order to explicate the questions, "How?" and, to some degree, "Why?" concerning identity conflict and integration. I also discuss the ways in which analysis of the interview data sheds light on theoretical literature which explores identity in general, and homosexual identity formation in particular. Chapter Two describes literature which forms the theoretical basis for this study, especially that of identity theorists Vivienne Cass and Richard Troiden. In Chapter Three, I present details about how I conducted this research, and describe the somewhat fluid nature of the investigation. Data

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psychological and spiritual wounds which are purported to underlie homosexuality. For a less specific but comprehensive analysis of role-exit, see Ebaugh, 1988.

[4] Pat Robertson is an American politician and television evangelist who is known for his anti-gay rhetoric and activism. Queer Nation is an activist organization that challenges stereotypical, negative, and distorted information about gays and lesbians through public education and direct-action strategies.

analysis -- the organization of data into relevant themes -- is the subject of Chapter Four. In Chapter Five, the final chapter, I return to the main theories about homosexual identity formation which I explored in Chapter Two, and provide recommendations for change to theoretical frameworks. I also furnish a discussion about social and political implications of this study in order to rescue it from being considered by readers as merely academic.

Chapter Two: A Journey Through Theories about Identity and Identity Formation

Some Sociological Theories about Identity

The aim of this research has been to analyze and describe the ways in which men who self-identify as gay and evangelical Christian resolve those two apparently contradicting identities. To do so, I have relied on the narratives of the men whom I interviewed as my primary source of data. My central focus in the interviews with gay evangelical Christian men has been to elucidate the processes of identity formation in simultaneously identifying as gay and evangelical Christian. However, my own understanding has been grounded in theoretical research that has preceded my own.

At the most general theoretical level, identities are commonly used by individuals as terms of self-description. There are as wide a variety of identities as there are social categories, such as age, gender, occupation, nationality, regionalism, sexuality, religion, physical ability, and many others. The important point is that although identities are experienced on an individual level, they are linked with the social world because they reflect social categories.

George Herbert Mead (1934) developed the idea of the "self" and "other" as being reflexive and interlinked with each other (p. 173-78). In his view, the self is comprised of two components, the "I", which represents individual characteristics and uniqueness, and the "Me", which represents the "internalized other". The internalized other refers to the sets of attitudes, beliefs, and

behaviours of both significant and generalized others, which one has integrated into one's own sense of self.

Similarly, Charles Horton Cooley (1964) emphasized the social aspects of the self. Cooley conceptualized the "Me" as the "looking-glass self" (p. 196), in which individuals learn to see themselves as reflected through the eyes of other people. Cooley explained that "the thing that moves us to pride or shame is not the mere mechanical reflection of ourselves, but . . . the imagined effect of this reflection upon another's mind" (p. 184). According to Cooley, the self is dependent on, but not determined by, other people. The "looking-glass self" is a flexible process; as individuals change their beliefs and values, they tend to seek people who are supportive while drawing away from those who are not. The development of self, from Cooley's point of view, is achieved most importantly through close relationships with people such as family members and friends, although the specific individuals who represent those close relationships may change over time.

Victor Gecas (1982) problematized Mead's and Cooley's concepts of the self because, in his view, such concepts are not accessible to empirical investigation. Alternatively, the "self-concept" is empirically measurable because it is the measurable product of reflexive activity, a product which comprises the totality of thoughts, feelings, and perceptions from which one references oneself as a social object. The self-concept might arise as the reflected appraisals of others through the "looking-glass self", as described by Cooley, but, as does

Mead, Gecas points out the discrepancy between how an individual views oneself, and how other people view that individual.

According to Gecas, self-concepts arise, in part, from social comparisons. Social comparisons -- the self-assessment of one's characteristics in social contexts -- tend to be made in situations "where knowledge about self attribution is ambiguous or uncertain" (p. 6). Comparisons tend also to be made in reference to particular groups which provide a source of norms and standards for self-evaluation and reevaluation (Cass, 1979). Rather than passive, the self-concept is active: social interaction is a reciprocal process in which individuals have the capacity to negotiate their identities. For Gecas, individuals and the social world are reciprocal; self-concepts, including identities, are emergent, reciprocal, and negotiated.

To explain the self in the context of society, Erving Goffman (1959) employed the metaphor of the stage to imply that the successful performance of identities is achieved through a "veneer of consensus" (p. 9) among all of the players who tacitly agree that all of the self-presentations are real. Self-presentations are usually performed as shared understandings of social roles. Roles are not monolithic or inflexible, but, rather, exist as a framework around which individuals fill in the details of scripts in the negotiation of social interactions. By emphasizing the performative nature of the self, Goffman emphasized the active, as opposed to the passive, aspects of human actors.

Another view of self-concept is proposed by John C. Turner (1982). He suggested that self-concepts are comprised of social identities and personal

identities. For Turner, personal identities are individual in nature, reflecting specific attributes such as "feelings of competence, bodily attributes, ways of relating to others, psychological characteristics, intellectual concerns, personal tastes, and so on" (p. 18). Social identities, on the other hand, are the result of processes by which people locate themselves within a system of social categories. In Turner's view, self-concepts are adaptive. People learn to

> regulate their social behaviour in terms of different self-conceptions in different situations. Different situations tend to 'switch on' different conceptions of self so that social stimuli are construed and social behaviour controlled in the appropriately adaptive manner (p. 20).

The notion that self-concepts as identities are not fixed, uniform, or consistent is similar to the views of some historians. For example, Michel Foucault (1978, p. 42) and Jeffrey Weeks (1989, p. 108) argued that, during the nineteenth century, social regulation provided the conditions under which some people self-actualized their own consciousness and identities in accordance with newly-emergent categories which were regulated and repeatedly articulated, especially within the medical community. This process of emergence is purported to have been especially salient among homosexual people because of a scientific focus on sexuality. Weeks (p. 102) and Foucault (p. 43) argue that, while homosexual acts have existed throughout human history, homosexual people -- that is, people with homosexual identities -- did not exist until the nineteenth century.

Theorists such as Goffman, Gecas, Turner, Weeks, and Foucault support the view that individuals actively engage their identities in conjunction with the social world. Such a perspective contrasts with the common belief that sexual orientation and sexual orientation identities are stable, consistent, and uniform.

The Role of Behaviour in Identity Acquisition

Sometimes, identities are associated with specific behaviours. For example, people who engage in homosexuality often describe themselves as being "homosexuals". Other people might use descriptives such as "gay", "lesbian", or "queer". An important question here is whether or not behaviour is a necessary component in the formation of a particular identity.

John H. Gagnon and William Simon (1973) argued that behaviours, such as sexual ones, follow social scripts. In their view, the socially-scripted nature of human sexuality is hidden by an emphasis on biological explanations of the etiology of sexual behaviour. According to Gagnon and Simon, sexual experiences are unlikely to occur without sexual scripts:

> Combining such elements as desire, privacy, and a physically attractive person . . . the probability of something happening will, under normal circumstances, remain exceedingly small until either one or both actions organize these behaviours into an appropriate script (p. 19).

Gagnon and Simon included sexual arousal in the scripted process. They observed that many physical acts are homologous to sexual ones, such as "the palpation of the breast for cancer, the gynecological examination, the insertion of

tampons, mouth-to-mouth resuscitation" (p. 23), but the context is such that the social situation and actors are not defined as sexual. In such situations, sexual arousal is usually not facilitated because the sexual script does not tend to include such contexts. According to Gagnon and Simon, sexual acts occur through the channel of socially-learned meanings attached to situations and events (p. 23).

If one engages in homosexual activity, and if such activity follows a social script as argued by Gagnon and Simon, do homosexual social scripts necessarily result in persons who identify as homosexual? Less specifically, what is the significance of behaviour in the formation of identities? Perhaps not all people who have experienced homosexuality self-identify as being "homosexuals" (Humphries, 1970, p. 112). According to theorists such as Richard Green (1974), behaviour is a necessary component of identity, but not the only component. Green argued that sexual identity is composed of three components: a person's basic conviction of being either female or male, the behaviour of an individual which is culturally associated with being female or male (femininity and masculinity), and individual preferences for female or male sexual partners (p. xv). Most theorists would now likely separate those components into three distinct but related areas of identity: sex, gender, and sexual orientation.

It is apparent that Green attributed identity from behaviour in his statement that social scientists "have been accumulating knowledge into the origins of those *behaviours which constitute sexual identity*" (p. 307, italics mine).

In contrast to theorists who attribute, but do not explain, homosexual identity, Vivienne Cass (1979) developed a cognitive model of the acquisition of homosexual identity. I will explore each of the stages of the Cass model in depth later in this chapter, but the important point to be made here is that Cass has problematized identity and the role of behaviour in identity acquisition. For Cass, identities are best understood as achievements of individuals. On one hand, specific behaviours might precede identity acquisition, but on the other hand, such behaviours might also follow identity acquisition. One way to express the distinction between homosexual behaviour and homosexual identity is to refer to the former as "sexual orientation" and the latter as "sexual orientation identity" (Devor, 1993, p. 304).

Orientation refers to the set of sexual fantasies, desires and / or activities.[5] The term "sexual orientation" is a relatively modern one, but it seems appropriate to suggest that the Kinsey Heterosexual-Homosexual Scale (KHHS) (Kinsey et al., 1948) is a scale that describes sexual orientation, rather than sexual orientation identity. Kinsey and his colleagues developed the KHHS as a scale ranging from zero (exclusively heterosexual) to six (exclusively homosexual), rather than as two discrete categories (p. 638). The scale was developed by studying the sexual behaviours of 6300 men, focusing largely on overt sexual experiences (p. 57).

Some theorists have since modified the KHHS. Michael Shively and John De Cecco (1977), for example, divided sexual orientation into two components:

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[5] The absence of fantasies, desires, and/or activities might suggest an asexual orientation.

physical and affectional preference for male and/or female sexual partners (p. 45). Sexual orientation can be measured by using two physical preference scales and two affectional preference scales (heterosexual and homosexual), each ranging from "not at all" to "very". The dual scales for both physical and affectional preferences were improvements of the Kinsey scale in which sexual preference of individuals is measured behaviourally on a single 0-6 scale because, according to Shively and De Cecco, the Kinsey scale expresses one orientation at the expense of the other.

Another modification of the KHHS is the Klein Sexual Orientation Grid (KSOG). The KSOG was developed in 1985 by Fritz Klein, Barry Sepekoff, and Timothy Wolf, and builds on the Kinsey sexual orientation scale. In the view of Klein and his colleagues, the KHHS privileges overt sexual activity at the expense of other elements of sexuality, such as attraction, fantasy, lifestyle, emotional preference, social preference, and self-identification (p. 38).

The KSOG is a two dimensional grid. The vertical axis is composed of seven variables, three of which describe the sexual self (attraction, fantasy, and behaviour), three other variables which describe components of sexual orientation (emotional, social, and lifestyle), and a final variable which describes self-identification (p. 46). In addition, the horizontal axis is composed of past, present, and ideal responses for each area of sexual orientation. Thus, twenty-one ratings result from a 7 x 3 grid. In each cell, respondents were asked to rate themselves according to the Kinsey seven-point scale.

Using the KSOG to measure sexual orientation, Klein et al. found that sexual orientation is a process which often changes over time (p. 45). In addition, Klein et al. found that the categories of homosexual, heterosexual, and bisexual are simplistic and inadequate to describe sexual orientation. Although the KSOG is a useful tool to differentiate and describe individuals, including the ways in which they identify themselves concerning sexual orientation (p. 48), it is not able to describe the process of identity formation.

Scales such as the KHHS and the KSOG tend not to account for stigma. Stigma is a factor which is especially important in the process of sexual orientation identity acquisition because the acquisition of an identity associated with a stigmatized behaviour lacks social support (Goffman, 1963). Theorists and researchers have tended to focus on explaining stigmatized behaviours, leaving normative behaviours unexplained. It is therefore useful to look at some theories which try to explain sexual orientation in general, rather than homosexual orientation in specific.

Eidell Wasserman and Michael Storms (1984) formulated one such theory. They argued that the age of sexual maturation is critical in the development of sexual orientation. They hypothesized that the onset of sexual maturation during heterosocial bonding periods in adolescence leads to the eroticization of heterosexual cues. Similarly, the onset of sexual maturation during homosocial bonding periods, which Wasserman and Storms define as being between the ages of eight and thirteen, often leads to homosexual attractions. They found a positive relationship between early onset of sexual

maturation and higher levels of adult homoeroticism for men, but no statistically significant results could be found for women.

Daryl Bem (1996) explained sexual orientation by emphasizing childhood gender conformity or non-conformity, rather than the onset of sexual maturation. For Bem, childhood gender conformity / non-conformity is the "strongest [and] only significant childhood predictor of later sexual orientation for both men and women" (p. 322). According to Bem's Exotic Becomes Erotic (EBE) theory, gender-conforming children become aware that they are different from other-sex peers, while gender-nonconforming children become aware that they are different from their same-sex peers. Such childhood feelings of dissimilarity ("exotic") form the basis of adult sexual orientation ("erotic").[6]

The work of Wasserman and Storms, and Bem, are important because they draw the focus away from homosexuals and homosexuality and attempt to explain sexuality in general. Missing, however, is an analysis of identity acquisition. It is therefore necessary to examine and explain not only sexual orientation, but sexual orientation identity as well. Doing so broadens understandings of the ways in which individuals place themselves in the social world, assists in examining group affiliation and disaffiliation, and sharpens

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[6] Although Bem uses the term "gender" as the basis of the EBE theory, he assumes that there is a congruence between sex and gender. He hypothesizes that gender conforming (masculine) boys and will be attracted to gender conforming (feminine) girls because of the eroticization of "other". However, his schema does not account for the possibility of attractions between gender non-conforming boys and gender non-conforming girls, and between gender conforming boys and gender non-conforming boys. The expressions of masculinity and femininity are not traits only of gender-conforming boys and girls, respectively (Devor, 1989). Rather than gender (boy / girl), the EBE theory more accurately refers to gender role (masculinity / femininity).

analysis of the ways in which individuals negotiate social stigma and cognitive dissonance.

Social Sanctions and Identity

The stigmatization of homosexuality implies that some identities are prescribed while others are proscribed. Homosexuals are among individuals whose behaviours and identities are "discreditable" (Goffman, 1963, p. 42).[7] The term "discreditable" might apply to gays or lesbians who are closeted about their sexuality, who keep it hidden from all but their most trusted others, and who adopt strategies to pass as heterosexual in public. Individuals who pass commonly feel anxiety about accidental disclosure, and often experience feelings of self-contempt because of the discreditable nature of their identity (Goffman, p. 87-8; Humphries, 1972, p. 69).

For individuals who might be found to be "blemished" by the majority of people if their "discreditable" behaviour or identity were to become public information, social stigma often facilitates an internal conflict. Such conflict might be experienced because of the felt inconsistency between action and beliefs, or between identity and social norms. According to Leon Festinger (1957) most

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[7] I would argue that homosexuality is generally not as strongly associated with social stigma today as when Goffman proposed his theories in 1963, depending on factors such as geographic location, education, and religiosity. In contrast to when Goffman wrote Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity, many more people now reject the notion that homosexuality is abnormal and have voluntarily "come out" in society as gay or lesbian people. In addition, many heterosexuals have accepted and support their gay and lesbian family members, friends, and co-workers. However, strategies of identity management in order to "pass" as heterosexual (p. 80-1) remain relevant among many homosexuals.

people will, at some time or another, experience inconsistencies between their beliefs and actions. He called such discomfort "cognitive dissonance".

Festinger refers to dissonance and consonance as "relations which exist between pairs of elements" (p. 9). Two elements are dissonant if they do not fit together in one way or another. He also suggests that the magnitude of dissonance increases as the importance of the value of the elements increases (p. 18). The greater the dissonance, the greater will be the motivation to reduce it.

Consonance can be achieved by changing one's behaviour to correspond with one's social environment, or by requiring one's current social groups to accommodate one's behaviour. If not impossible, the latter approach is often more difficult than the former approach because it requires changing the attitudes or beliefs of others, rather than those of one's self. However, Festinger added that another approach is to add new cognitive elements (p. 21-4), such as information which challenges the assumption that homosexuality is abnormal and deviant. Changing one's social groups, for example, can provide such new cognitive elements.

Overtly compliant behaviour may be elicited by threatened punishment or promised reward, depending on the magnitude of each. Among individuals whose behaviour conforms, dissonance continues only as long as one continues to maintain one's initial private beliefs and opinions (Festinger, p. 94). Correspondingly, a reduction of dissonance may result from a change in private beliefs. The point to be underscored is that, as Festinger put it, social groups are

> at once a major source of cognitive dissonance for the individual and a major vehicle for eliminating and reducing the dissonance which may exist in [her or] him (p. 177).

Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory is useful in the context of homosexuality because of the social stigma which continues to accompany homosexual behaviour and identities, and the strategies which some homosexual individuals employ to manage such stigma. Some homosexual individuals are attracted to groups which seek to change their sexual orientation from homosexual to heterosexual. So-called "reparative therapy" and Christian "ex-gay" groups attract some homosexual people who feel persistent conflict about being homosexual, and who seek resolution of such conflict by seeking to become heterosexual (Davidson, 1991; Haldeman, 1991; Silverstein, 1991). For other homosexuals, the reduction of cognitive dissonance is achieved through seeking other groups, such as gay-positive counselling and gay Christian groups. Regardless of the context, affiliation reflects Festinger's observation that individuals often attempt to obtain social support for the opinions that they wish to maintain. If successful in this venture, dissonance will be reduced.

Richard R. Troiden (1988) illustrated stigma and dissonance associated with homosexuality as arising from a variety of linked factors. According to Troiden, individuals usually experience confusion and inner turmoil prior to identity acceptance. The decision to define themselves as homosexual is often proscribed within associated groups such as family, church or synagogue, and / or schools. Stigma and secrecy infuse homosexual identities with an awareness of social disapproval. In order to adopt and accept a homosexual identity, one is

often led to switch allegiances, perhaps by withdrawing from individuals and groups who disapprove of homosexuality and by associating with those who do not (p. 97-8).

Referring to religious contexts, Chana Ullman (1989) believes that the experience of intense negative emotions is common to all religious converts prior to their respective changes (p. 91). Such dissonance acts as an impetus for self-motivated change. However, contrary to Mead, Cooley, and Gecas, Ullman suggested that the self cannot be adequately described as merely a "looking glass" that reflects the beliefs, roles, and values prescribed by significant others. According to Ullman, potential religious converts are not merely passive recipients of social pressure or manipulation, and tend not to experience a mere temporary infatuation with particular authority figures, peer groups, or transcendental objects. Rather, a transformed self is one that undergoes a profound, long-term, and variably self-motivated shift in perspective. Ullman underscores the argument that adult identities are, in fact, resistant to change (p. 93).

Behaviourist, Psychoanalytical, and Biological Theories about Sexual Orientation

Behaviourists emphasize that sexual orientation is a consequence of the reinforcements in a person's environment to which one has been exposed. Behaviourist explanations of non-normative behaviours, such as homosexuality, emphasize life experiences and learning processes. From a behaviourist perspective, adult homosexuality is linked with childhood experiences, some of

which might be classified as traumatic (such as sexual assault), while others might be classified as associative (such as childhood gender non-conformity). Most behaviourists do not tend to consider or investigate the causes of normative behaviours. However, some such theorists emphasize the necessity of clinical intervention to reverse non-normative behavioural patterns (McGuire, Carlisle, and Young, 1965) while others do not (Money and Russo, 1979; Green, 1987). Theorists who do not necessarily recommend clinical intervention also tend to consider the ways in which social prejudices, such as homophobia, are sometimes disguised as behavioural modification programs.

Nevertheless, one of the implications of behaviourists' emphasis of learning theory is that, because behaviour is learned, it can also be unlearned. This notion has lead to so-called "aversion therapies" designed to shift the sexual orientation of homosexuals to heterosexuality through the administering of apomorphine-induced nausea and electric shock to male "patients" while they view erotic photographs of men (LeVay, 1996, p. 92). The purpose is to "unlearn" homosexuality by associating it with unpleasant and physically painful experiences.

Psychoanalysists do not emphasize social learning as a factor of behaviour. Instead, they explore the inner passages of the mind which are not readily accessible on a conscious level. Sigmund Freud argued that male homosexuality is a failure or inhibition of full human sexual development resulting from unresolved Oedipal conflicts (LeVay, p. 73). He suggested that, as children, male homosexuals have intense erotic attachments to a mother figure because

of the combined effect of maternal tenderness and paternal absence. The implication for many psychotherapists, such as Mayerson and Lief (1965), Bieber (1976), and Van Den Aardweg (1985) is that the resolution of the inner Oedipal conflict would "convert" homosexual clients to heterosexuality. During the 1960s and 1970s, psychoanalytic theory was highly influential and emphasized defective parenting in the form of detached fathers and domineering mothers as representing family dynamics in which an unresolved Oedipal conflict is typically manifested.

A third perspective on the etiology of homosexuality are biological theories of sexuality. Such theories have a long history and currently constitute perhaps the most influential of theoretical perspectives. One of the first of such theories was presented in 1864 by Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, a German sexologist, who suggested that the human embryo has the potential for mental and physical development in the direction of being either female or male (LeVay, 1996, p. 12). He argued that among male "inverts" (a term used to describe homosexuals before the word "homosexual" was coined), the sex of the body is male, while the mental development is female. Among female "inverts", Ulrichs argued that the body development is female, while the mental development is male.

Biological theories became more sophisticated throughout the twentieth century since Ulrichs' early theory. Shortly after the turn of the century, Magnus Hirschfeld coined the term the "third sex" to describe homosexual people. He suggested that homosexuals constitute a third category of humans, apart from males and females, because of inborn sexual variance (LeVay, p. 30).

The emphasis on the biological differences between heterosexuals and homosexuals continues to be a prominent theme in research about sexuality. According to Simon LeVay (1991), male homosexuality can be largely explained by prenatal sexual differentiation of the brain. He found a significant difference in a small section of the hypothalamus (known as INAH3) between men and women, and between gay men and straight men. He hypothesized that there is a correlation between the size of INAH3 and sexual orientation toward females, specifically that the INAH3 would be larger in heterosexual men and homosexual women than in gay men. LeVay found that gay men have significantly smaller INAH3's than do heterosexual men, but he did not examine female brains.

Among geneticists, Dean Hamer studied genetic material of gay brothers and claimed to have isolated a possible "gay gene", Xq28, near the end of the X chromosome. Xq28 has been unofficially named Gay-1 within the geneticists' lexicon (Burr, 1996, p. 196-97). A genetic marker in that region, according to Hamer, indicates a predisposition towards homosexuality.

While such biological theories attempt to explain the etiology of homosexuality, there are problems with the work of LeVay and Hamer, among other biological theorists. I do not pretend to have the expertise to critique their work from a biological standpoint.[8] However, the social implications of their work are problematic. First, researchers who have developed biological explanations of sexuality have concentrated their attention on the sexuality of men. Apart from the sexism evident in such male-oriented research, the validity of such theories

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[8] Byne (1995) and Swaab, et al. (1995) provide a critique of biological theories of sexuality.

is questionable unless they include research on and about women. Second, the interpretation of their findings by others may lead to the conclusion that homosexuality can now be conclusively "cured" through brain surgery, or eliminated through disposal of fetuses found to carry the gay gene. This is not the intent of researchers such as LeVay and Hamer, but the potential for such eugenics directed toward homosexuals is salient, given that some clinicians, psychotherapists, and researchers continue to view homosexuality as deviant.

Furthermore, whereas learning theories, psychoanalytic theories, and biological theories attempt to explain sexual orientation, they do not account for sexual orientation identity.

The Formation of Sexual Orientation Identity

Much of the emphasis among a wide variety of researchers has been on sexual behaviour and sexual orientation. My interest lies with sexual orientation identity. Sexual orientation identity is different from sexual behaviour because behaviour is not synonymous with, or even necessary in, the development of sexual orientation identity. Furthermore, identifications as gay, lesbian, straight, or "bi" do not necessarily follow from corresponding sexual orientations as homosexual, heterosexual, or bisexual.

Sexual orientation identity has been the focus of several theorists who have proposed a variety of "stage" models to explain gay male identity, lesbian identity and bisexual identity formation (Plummer, 1975; Ponse, 1978; Cass, 1979; Kitzinger, 1987; Troiden, 1988; and Rust, 1992). Such models are useful,

not as grand theories, but rather as typical-case scenarios or broad guidelines. While representing varied sexual orientation identities, each model emphasizes identity as being socially constructed, and psychically interpreted and negotiated. I will describe only two such models in depth because, according to Michele J. Eliason (1996, p. 53), only the Cass (1979) and Troiden (1988) models have been empirically validated after having been developed. The strength of the Cass and Troiden models, in Eliason's view, is that the stages of identity development have been formulated to correspond to people's experiences, rather than the other way around (p. 53).

The Cass Model

From her work as a clinical psychologist in a counselling service specifically for homosexual people, Vivienne Cass (1979) developed a theoretical model of homosexual identity formation. The Cass six-stage model emphasizes cognitive development in the acquisition of a homosexual identity; individuals continually evaluate and reevaluate their status as homosexuals. The question, "Am I a homosexual?" is the hallmark of the first stage, the confusion stage. It is during this stage that some people might compare their own behaviour with the behaviours that they associate with being homosexual. The question "Who am I?" is usually accompanied by varying degrees of personal alienation. One strategy for resolving the confusion is to seek relevant information, perhaps in the form of reading books about homosexuality, or going for counselling. Another strategy is to conclude that the meaning of one's

particular behaviours is indeed homosexual in nature, and is also undesirable. In such a case, one might reject the notion that one is a potential homosexual.

Identity comparisons are common during the second stage, the comparison stage. The realization that, "I may be a homosexual", is perhaps the first step toward commitment to a homosexual identity, and is done in the context of making comparisons between oneself and feedback from others or between oneself and one's perceptions of homosexuality in general. Negative comparisons or perceptions may abort or delay further exploration of a homosexual identity. Positive ones may encourage the individual to make contacts with other homosexual people and are beneficial to managing the expectations and behaviours of an emerging homosexual identity. Such a strategy might be especially important if one is abandoning heterosexual lifestyles and expectations.

The third phase is the identity tolerance stage. During this phase, an individual realizes that "I probably am a homosexual", and tolerates, rather than fully accepts, a homosexual identity. Making contacts with other homosexual people is seen as a necessary strategy for alleviating social isolation. Acceptance by other homosexual people increases one's awareness that one is not a heterosexual, and therefore one gradually detaches from social involvement with heterosexual friends.

Acceptance of a homosexual identity is indicative of the fourth stage in which individuals increase involvement with members of homosexual communities to validate their homosexual identity. Some individuals subscribe to

the philosophy of "partial legitimization", which is the belief that homosexuality is fine as a private identity, but should not be expressed in public. Passing becomes a routine management strategy, but restricting social contacts with heterosexuals limits the need to pass. Those who decide that passing is unacceptable subscribe to the philosophy of "full legitimization", which is the belief that homosexuality is valid both privately and publicly.

Most individuals are aware of the incongruency that exists between a positively-held identity as homosexual and the rejection of homosexuals by other members of society. During the identity pride stage, individuals become totally self-accepting as homosexuals, but are acutely aware of differences between themselves as homosexuals and the rest of society. The importance of heterosexuals in the lives of people in the pride stage is devalued, and identification with a gay subculture is increased. However, some individuals find that, contrary to their expectations, some heterosexuals are accepting of homosexuals, and some homosexuals are not desirable allies. The line dichotomizing heterosexuals and homosexuals becomes blurred, leading to Stage Six.

Identity synthesis, the last stage of the Cass model, is achieved when individuals integrate personal and public homosexual identities: "A fully developed sense of self as 'a homosexual' requires accord between self-perception and imagined views of self held by all others constituting the individual's social environment" (Cass, 1984b, p. 111). The "us and them" view of society, the sharp division in perceptions about homosexuals and

heterosexuals typical of the identity pride stage, begins to weaken. Pride about one's homosexuality remains strong, but there is often a renewed perception of similarity to heterosexuals and a growing awareness of dissimilarity in contrast with some other homosexuals.

The Troiden Model

Troiden (1988) constructed a four-stage ideal-typical model of identity formation. The first stage, sensitization, occurs before puberty. During sensitization, childhood experiences, such as generalized feelings of marginality and / or differences, sensitize future gay and lesbian individuals to self-definitions as homosexual. Individual perceptions of difference or marginalization is typically related to social and gender roles rather than to the cognitive adoption of gay or lesbian categories. The sensitization stage accounts for feelings of difference which many gay men and lesbians experience in childhood. Similar to Bem's focus on childhood gender conformity / non-conformity, Troiden emphasized the importance of the meanings which people subsequently attach to childhood experiences.

The second stage is identity confusion. During adolescence, individuals usually experience inner turmoil and uncertainty about the possibility that they may have an ambiguous or stigmatized sexual status. Strategies that individuals choose to cope with confusion usually involve a variety of avoidance techniques, such as adopting anti-homosexual postures, engaging in heterosocial (and perhaps heterosexual) immersion, and / or "escaping" through drugs, suicidal

ideation, or suicide. Another strategy involves an individual's redefinition of her or his behaviour along more conventional lines, such that homosexual feelings are deemed to be "one-time" occurrences, or "special-case" relationships. For some people, identity confusion does not necessarily lead to the continuation of the process of homosexual identity acquisition; Troiden acknowledges that some people who experience sexual orientation identity confusion never adopt homosexual identities.

For other people, identity assumption follows identity confusion. Usually occurring during or after late adolescence, this third stage reflects one's self-definition as homosexual. People who enter stage three begin to self-identify as homosexual and might begin to disclose their identity to others, as least to other homosexuals. Social and sexual exploration begin to take place. Individuals make contacts with other homosexuals and might interpret such contacts as either positive or negative. Positive contacts might facilitate identity formation, while negative contacts might hinder, halt, or reverse identity formation. The intensity and frequency of those positive and negative experiences will have an impact upon the identity formation process. During the initiation of such contacts, individuals often have lingering perceptions of the increased risks of living as gay or lesbian in homophobic cultures.

Once a gay or lesbian identity is adopted, individuals must employ strategies for managing the accompanying stigma. Strategies to do so may include "passing" as heterosexual among heterosexuals, and "group alignment", in which gay men and lesbians become absorbed in gay or lesbian communities

to achieve a sense of belonging and to avoid the stigma they feel while in the company of heterosexuals.

The final stage in Troiden's model is the commitment stage, the hallmarks of which are self-acceptance and comfort with a homosexual self-identity and social role. "Internal indicators" of commitment may include the integration of a homosexual identity into an overall image of self; the perception of the homosexual identity as valid and positive; and the degree of satisfaction about one's homosexual identity. "External indicators" may include the establishment of same-sex relationships, the disclosure of one's homosexual status among heterosexuals, and a shift in stigma-management strategies. Stigma-management strategies typically shift from passing and group alignment to "blending" or "converting." Individuals who "blend" attempt to act in gender-appropriate ways, while neither denouncing nor announcing their homosexual identity to heterosexuals. Individuals who "convert" endeavour to shift their perception about their homosexuality from being a "vice to a virtue."

Troiden explained that his model is developed specifically for *homo*sexual orientation identity formation, as opposed to *sexual* orientation identity formation, because homosexual identities are infused with "transsituational significance" (p. 33). He provided four considerations to explain such significance: the social stigma about homosexuality, the cultural link between homosexuality and gender-atypical behaviour, the assumption that individuals are "born" heterosexual, and the inferiorization of minorities by dominant groups. Such transsituational significance explains why some homosexuals feel that their

homosexual identity takes priority over their other identities. It also explains the emphasis placed on homosexual identities in others among most heterosexuals. Such a prioritized identity is known as a master-status (Becker, 1963).

Comparing and Evaluating the Cass and Troiden Models

Although Cass has specified two more stages in her model than does Troiden in his, both models reflect the process of homosexual identity formation as a gradation from one stage to the next, each stage indicating greater levels of commitment to a homosexual identity. Neither Cass nor Troiden emphasized overt sexual experiences in the various stages of their models, suggesting that sexual behaviour is a possible but not a necessary factor in the development of homosexual identity. However, both Cass and Troiden agree that the success of homosexual identity acquisition is buttressed by social, and perhaps sexual, interactions with other homosexuals. Positive interactions with other homosexuals is seen to facilitate the development of a homosexual identity, while negative interactions have the potential to abort or reverse, at least for a time, continuation of one's identity formation process. Positive interactions become increasingly important as one moves from one stage to the next.

Both Cass and Troiden allow for interruptions of the process at any point. Individuals can choose to forgo identity development, and can also return at a later date. Many gay men and lesbians choose heterosexual marriage, believing that making such a choice and engaging in such behaviour would change their SOI from gay to straight. Later in life, after realizing that homosexual desires and

fantasies remain, many such individuals begin, or return to, the process of acquiring a homosexual identity. Similarly, some people choose psychotherapy to "cure" them of their homosexuality, and some seek Christian "ex-gay" ministry and prayer to "heal" them of the traumatic experiences and "emotional brokenness" purported by some Christians to be the root cause of homosexuality (Payne, 1981; Moberly, 1983; Anderson-Barnes, 1991). The result tends to be exacerbation of cognitive dissonance until such time as the individual seeks resolution and self-acceptance of being a homosexual.

One difference between the Cass and Troiden models is that Troiden accounts for childhood and adolescent experiences which contribute to adult identities as gay or lesbian. No such age specification is included in the Cass model. Another difference concerns the finals stages of homosexual identity formation. While Cass separates overall acceptance into a pride stage (Stage Five) and an integration stage (Stage Six), Troiden groups the nuances of self-acceptance of one's homosexual identity into one stage (commitment). Perhaps Cass has organized such nuances because of her overall assumption about identity acceptance. Her model is based on the notion that for individuals who have "completed" the identity acquisition process, homosexual identity is integrated into all aspects of their lives, including public realms in which they might have little contact with other homosexuals and much contact with heterosexuals.

Although the Cass and Troiden models have been highly influential among identity theorists and clinical practitioners, three problems are evident.

First, the models suggest identity acquisition as a more or less linear process, even though the models are premised on the assumption that identity is negotiated and therefore never permanent. Cass and Troiden do account for interruptions or reversals in the process. Nevertheless, the implication is that homosexual identity acquisition has a theoretical beginning and a theoretical end. Among some self-identified gays and lesbians, perhaps the process is linear and permanent over their respective lifetimes. Among others, however, perhaps sexuality and sexual orientation identity reflect a pattern that is more fluid.

A second problem is that both Cass and Troiden apply their respective models to both men and women in the formation of gay and lesbian identities. Some of the other "stage" identity theorists specify application of their respective models as being appropriate for either men or women, but not both. Paula Rust (1992) attempts to account for bisexual identity formation among women. Some other theorists and researchers are in sharp disagreement with the assumed isomorphism of homosexuality in men and women (Gonsiorek, 1995; Eliason, 1996). Laura Brown (1995) argues that, although gay men and lesbians may have sexual minority status in common, the experiences of women that are germane to sexual orientation identity are significantly different from those of men. Specifically, Brown suggests that the awareness of same-sex attraction for women tends to begin affectionally rather than sexually, the latter being more reflective of the identity formation of gay men.

A third problem is that models of identity formation, while acting as broad guidelines of a single, but nevertheless very important, aspect of one's life, tend not to consider the ways in which other self-identity markers intersect sexual orientation identity. Eliason listed factors such as race, ethnicity, and gender as potentially being interlinked with one's homosexual identity (p. 52). Most of the research concerning coming-out theories has been conducted on white, middle-class individuals. Hence, such research cannot reflect or account for the conflict that some people experience between homosexual identity and some other identities. Michael Red Earth (1997), for example, self-identifies as Native and as gay, and describes his experiences of homophobia expressed by some other Native people, and of racism expressed by some other gay men (p. 214-15). Given the specific focus of this study, I would add religious identity to Eliason's list.

Religious Identity and Sexual Orientation Identity

As the experiences of Michael Red Earth suggest, the ways in which individuals self-identify are not always harmoniously integrated. Dissonance occurs when individuals experience conflict between two or more aspects of their overall identity. Some other examples might include physicians who smoke, feminist men, lesbians who are members of visible minorities (within a white majority), and transgendered people in a gender-dichotomized society.

Religiosity can confound one's acceptance of being gay. While most of the world's major religions have expressed opposition to homosexuality in a

variety of ways, I will specify my analysis to Christianity because Christianity is the dominant religion in North America, and because Christian moral values usually motivate anti-gay political movements. Such political involvement is undertaken by individual and groups of Christians collectively and commonly known as the "Christian Right" (Herman, 1997). Anti-gay activism sometimes takes the form of personal beliefs such as the notion that homosexuality is contrary to God's will for humans. Such a belief itself is rather benign; political action that is motivated from such a belief is more harmful to gays and lesbians than are one's religious values alone. People who subscribe to the conservative views of the Christian Right are often involved in campaigns to deny gays and lesbians their civil rights, thereby perpetuating heterosexual privilege.

The salient anti-gay Christian social and political context indicates one reason why I have not explored theories about religious identity with equal depth as theories about sexual orientation and sexual orientation identity. In spite of homosexual political activism and social visibility, homosexuality remains somewhat stigmatized, while Christianity is generally not fraught with such stigma, even though Christian beliefs and practices might be discouraged among some gay individuals or groups. Nevertheless, my focus is to explore the development of homosexual identities against a backdrop of Christianity, regardless of the order of emergence. While an important ideological tenet of evangelical Christianity is traditional family values (mother, father, and their children) -- which implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, excludes homosexual

individuals and gay relationships -- being gay in contemporary North American society does not tend to require the exclusion of Christians and Christianity.

A second reason that I have focused this literature review on homosexual identity formation is that the research about religious affiliation tends to focus on conversion (Suchman, 1992, p. 15). Conversion implies a complete change in identity construct (Thumma, 1991, p. 334). Alternatively, my focus on the integration of gay and Christian identities implies an analysis of the ways in which systems of meaning are created and maintained through identity negotiation in part through interaction with others. Such processes of meaning, otherwise known as symbolic interaction by social scientists, might be thought of as social products. For theorists of symbolic interactionism, the meanings of objects, phenomena, and events are not intrinsic nor formed through psychological interpretation. Rather, meanings are created, maintained, and negotiated through social interaction. Such a symbolic interactionist perspective explores the negotiation and maintenance of integrated identities through the process of socialization (Mead, 1934; Goffman, 1963). Scott Thumma (1991) refers to religious or sexual orientation identity negotiation as "a part of the natural process in which people engage to create a more stable and coherent self-concept" (p. 334). Such shifts in identity, less dramatic than common notions about conversion, illustrate general, but nevertheless complex and subtle, processes of negotiation and re-negotiation that take place in the everyday social world.

A third reason for my lack of attention to theories about religious identity is practical limitations. An expanded version of this research would pay close examination to the temporal emergence of incongruent identities, and the ways in which such temporality has an impact upon the magnitude of dissonance and choice of resolution strategies (Mahaffy, 1996). Such a future work would require thorough examination of theories that explain religious identity formation.

This study is somewhat limited by the lack of exploration of theories about religious identity formation for the reasons that I have described. Nevertheless, the absence of such a discussion does not impair my ability to provide a critical examination of the Cass and Troiden models of homosexual identity formation by using Christianity as a backdrop for analysis. My particular focus is on the ways in which some gays and lesbians have exercised their rights to full participation in society on par with heterosexuals, even in the face of Christian environments that tend to exclude, stigmatize, and sometimes demonize homosexuals. One of the ways in which some gays and lesbians have exercised their equality rights is by claiming their right to practice Christianity while expressing their gay or lesbian identity (Goss, 1993; Wagner et al., 1994; Cuthbertson, 1996; Bawer, 1997).

Conclusion

In view of the theoretical research that I have presented in this chapter, one can consider sexual orientation identity to be acquired through a process characterized by self-initiation and self-acceptance, negotiation and re-

negotiation, and relative longevity. Such a process is dependent on, but not determined by, society. Self-concepts such as sexual orientation identity and religious identity are informed, rather than determined, by interactions within the social world. For homosexuals, the social context is one which is generally not favourable toward homosexuality. For Christians, there tends to be less cause for concern about stigma than tends to be the case for homosexuals. Among individuals who define themselves as both Christian and gay, interpretations of the self are informed by communities of people who variably express disapproval of either, or both, identities.

Cass and Troiden have included such individual and social factors in their respective formulations of homosexual identity formation. However, neither theorist considered the role that other identities play in the process of self-identifying as homosexual. The intersection of a Christian identity and a homosexual identity provides a place that is rife with possibilities for theoretical ruminations and political interests. More specifically, the intersection of these identities provides a place from which to assess the Cass and Troiden models by analyzing and describing the ways in which some men have integrated their gay and Christian identities. The next chapter describes what I did to conduct such an assessment.

Chapter Three: Research Methods

Methodological Strategies: Choices and Rationale

In this chapter, I describe the strategies that I employed to gather data in order to examine the ways in which some men have integrated their gay and Christian identities. My personal experiences which I described in the introduction, as well as the experiences of some of my friends and acquaintances who resolved their own cognitive dissonance about being gay and Christian, have lead me to make the *a priori* assumption that being gay and Christian does indeed require individuals to experience some process of conflict resolution concerning one's self-identities.

In general, I am concerned with the processes of identity formation and of identity conflict resolution through integration. Such attention to process implies qualitative research procedures rather than quantitative ones. Qualitative research methods are similar to quantitative ones because each are employed to discover answers to specific questions through the application of systemic procedures, rather than to simply amass data. However, qualitative research methods are used to answer specific research questions which quantitative methods cannot adequately address. According to Bruce L. Berg (1995), qualitative procedures

> provide a means of accessing unquantifiable facts about the actual people researchers observe and talk to . . . . As a result, qualitative techniques allow the researchers to share in the understandings and perceptions of others and to explore how people structure and give meaning to their daily lives. Researchers using qualitative

> techniques examine *how people* learn about and *make sense of themselves* and others (p. 7, italics mine).

My particular research inquiries are phenomenological in nature. Phenomenology is a type of qualitative research used to examine the ways in which human lived experiences are interpreted by individuals as meaningful (Rudestam and Newton, 1992, p. 33; Creswell, 1994, p. 12). Phenomenological inquiries seek not to explain the causes of a given phenomenon, but rather to elucidate the essential features of experience and consciousness pertaining to a particular social phenomenon.

In addition to phenomenology, I am also employing aspects of feminist methods, methodology, and epistemology. The term "methods", according to Sandra Harding (1987, p. 2), refers to techniques for gathering data. Dominant social science methods posit that researchers record data by remaining "objective" in their observations of social life. Alternatively, feminist methods encourage researchers to engage in a research process that is interactive with research participants, one that "continually change[s] in response to new information and new participants" (Kirby and McKenna, 1989, p. 72).

The term "methodology" is not synonymous with "methods", although they are often used interchangeably. Sandra Harding suggests that methodology is a theory of how research is to proceed (p. 3). The methodological underpinnings of my research are phenomenological in the sense that I seek to investigate the ways in which participants interpret, negotiate, and express their self-identities in the context of their social worlds. One component of the methodology I have

chosen is the theoretical assertion that I, as the researcher, should attempt to interact with participants on a relatively equal level. Such attempts to promote egalitarianism contradict the dominant methodological assumption that researchers must remain "unbiased" so as to not "contaminate" the research process and the analysis of data. I subscribe to a methodological perspective that promotes egalitarianism and connectedness between myself and research participants. Accordingly, the method I have employed is "interactive interviews" (Kirby and McKenna, p. 66) to facilitate dialogue, rather than interrogation (Reinharz, 1992, p. 33).

The term "epistemology" refers to theories of knowledge. Feminist epistemologies legitimate women as agents of knowledge. Traditional epistemological perspectives, which are based in masculinist perspectives and in the experiences of men, have tended to disregard the experiences and knowledges of women (Harding, p. 3). Although I am not conducting research about women, I am inspired by feminist epistemologies that challenge masculinist epistemological hegemony in social science research, such as the notion of "value neutrality", perhaps also known as objectivity. Social science tends to reflect androcentrism in addition to heterosexism and thus legitimates heterosexual experience and knowledge and disregards and subjugates homosexual experience and knowledge. By confronting heterosexism and heterosexual privilege, I am also challenging sexism because the dominant perspective of masculinity, and indeed of gender, assumes heterosexuality (Rich, 1993).

Who to Include and Why

During the writing of the proposal, I had decided to include only men in the research for three reasons. First, my decision was based on the views of some researchers, in opposition to Cass and Troiden, that the patterns of sexual orientation identity acquisition of women are generally different from those of men (Brown, 1995; Eliason, 1996). Cass and Troiden each claimed that their respective models of homosexual identity development are relevant for both women and men. Second, I decided to include only men also because of the personal nature of the research, specifically concerning my own identity development as a gay person. In exploring how other men worked through the challenges of developing a gay identity, especially while identifying as Christian, I had hoped to gain further understanding about myself and about other people who had made choices concerning identity other than the ones that I had made. A third reason is that, quite simply, I was compelled by expediency for financial and professional reasons.

The criteria that I used as guidelines for judging inclusion of participants in the research, aside from narrowing the search to only men, shifted during the process of conducting interviews. Originally, I constructed a screening process that included three distinct features. First, I was interested in men not only who identified as gay (for at least five years) and as evangelical Christian, but who also generally felt comfortable about being both "out" as gay among heterosexuals and other gay people, and "out" as Christian among other non-Christian people. To be "out" is self-defined relative to one's subjective

interpretation about what it means to be out. Nevertheless, I operationalized outness as general comfort about expressing one's identities comfortably among other groups of people. For example, expressing one's gay identity only among other gay people would not have satisfied the criteria for inclusion. Similarly, being "closeted" about one's Christianity except among other Christians would also have not met the inclusion requirements.[9]

Another criterion for inclusion was the subscription to evangelical expressions of Christianity among participants. Whereas some Christians who are also gay might subscribe to liberalized forms of Christianity, I felt that evangelical Christians would likely be more conservative by comparison to non-evangelical Christians. Social conservatism is often expressed by non-gay evangelical Christians as their being exclusive and often contemptuous of gay and lesbian people. Given such a political and social context, I wanted to investigate the attractions that evangelical Christianity holds for some gay men.

The term "evangelism" implies actions that are motivated by particular belief systems. A wide variety of actions might be considered to qualify as being evangelism, such as preaching, "witnessing",[10] or seeking to attract other people to Christianity by modeling one's behaviour on that of Christ. The term "evangelical", on the other hand, refers to a particular belief systems which might underlie evangelism. To define "evangelical" for the purposes of this study, I employed the operational definition of Scott Thumma (1991, p. 338) and

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[9] Although the metaphor of the closet is typically used to describe the degree of outness of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and transsexual individuals, I am extending the metaphor to refer to one's Christianity for the purposes of operationalization.

Kimberly Mahaffy (1996, p. 393), both of whom argued that "evangelical" constitutes four necessary criteria: the belief in the inerrancy of Scripture, the divinity of Christ, the role of Christ as the only path toward salvation, and the importance of conversion through acceptance of Christ as one's personal saviour.

The term "evangelical," as I have used it in this study, reflects some overlap with the term "fundamentalist Christian" and also with the term "liberal Christian." Some people might even consider the term "fundamentalist" to be synonymous with "evangelical." However, fundamentalist Christians, in my view, tend to emphasize Biblical literalism more than do evangelical Christians. To use a legal metaphor, fundamentalist Christians tend to interpret Biblical scripture in a letter-of-the-law manner, while evangelical Christians tend to focus on the spirit-of-the-law.

Some people might also argue that the operational definition of "evangelical" that I have employed provides no distinction between evangelical Christians and liberal Christians. On the contrary, I argue that liberal Christians, in contrast with evangelical Christians, tend not to emphasize a personal relationship with Jesus Christ beginning with conversion.

A final criterion for inclusion was one's degree of resolution about being simultaneously gay and Christian. Whereas some people resolve dissonance concerning their religious identity and sexual orientation identity by ceasing to

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[10] To "witness" is a form of evangelicalism whereby Christians tell other people about their belief in salvation through Christ.

identify as one or the other, I sought men who have fully integrated both identities, both of which are of crucial importance to their overall identity.

Revision of Criteria for Inclusion

Throughout the process of gathering participants and conducting interviews, some unpredictable factors arose concerning the methodological journey as I had planned it prior to actually beginning the process. One such factor involved the ways in which I had operationalized certain terms of reference. Unlike my working definition for the term "gay", I encountered problems with the term "evangelical Christian." The term "evangelical" is methodologically problematic because of its association among some Christians with Sunday morning televangelists or door-to-door Christian "salespeople". Such intrusive fervency has compelled some people to reject Christianity altogether, or to express Christianity in other ways. Negative associations have compelled some Christians to reject self-descriptions as evangelical, despite evangelical motivations behind some of their actions.

After I conducted each interview, and after I had transcribed each tape-recording, I took time to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of each interview so that I could improve subsequent ones. After the third interview, I began to see that the term "evangelical" was problematic in a similar way as was the term "homosexual". As I have previously discussed, some people have homosexual fantasies, desires, and encounters, without necessarily identifying as "homosexual". In a parallel fashion, some people reject self-descriptions as

"evangelical." During the recruitment stage, I had asked each participant whether or not he defined himself as such. Although each man responded affirmatively -- which lead me to proceed with scheduling each interview -- two individuals hesitated to express themselves quite so definitively during the actual interview. One of these men was David. In my discussion with him, he appeared to synonymize the term "evangelical" with the term "fundamentalist." Nevertheless, I would describe David's orientation towards Christianity as evangelical in nature based on other parts of our discussion which implied his belief in the four criteria of evangelicalism as I described them above.

The other individual who expressed uncertainty about the term "evangelical" was Scott. During the interview, he said that he hesitates to "essentialize" his identities, that is, to assume that certain characteristics are intrinsic to any given individual. However, he nonetheless described the ways in which he worked through the identity conflict which he had felt about simultaneously "being" gay and Christian. Although I remain uncertain about Scott's status as evangelical, given the four criteria that I used to operationalize "evangelical", I included Scott among the participants because he had originally stated that he was an evangelical Christian prior to being interviewed. Ultimately, Scott contributed a great deal to this study. Moreover, the participation of both David and Scott provided an interesting source of contrast among the participants and therefore a richer source of data than otherwise might have become available.

Another operational definition that became problematic was my conception of "outness" concerning being gay and being Christian. I had originally sought individuals who were entirely out as gay men, even in non-gay Christian social settings, and who were entirely out as Christians, even in non-Christian gay social settings. During the time that I spent thinking about how to improve the interviews and in my preliminary readings of the transcripts, I realized that I had incorrectly associated "outness" with "resolution." The experiences in the lives of some of the participants demonstrate that there are many reasons to be selectively closeted about being either gay or Christian, or both, but such self-controlled closets are not necessarily reflective of continued cognitive dissonance about being gay and Christian. While it might, in some people, indicate continued inner conflict about one's homosexual orientation identity in light of one's Christian values and beliefs, it might merely indicate a strategy for managing particular circumstances. Only in the interviews did I discover that some of the participants did not meet my original requirement concerning "outness," although they had all originally claimed to be "out" as both gay and Christian. Nevertheless, I perceived these individuals not as experiencing continued conflict about their identities, but rather as negotiating circumstances in their lives. In my view, the major criteria for inclusion in the research above all others was resolution of identity conflict through identity integration. I came to realize that outness was a possible, but not necessary, indication of such.

Evolution of methodological procedures, such as I have described, reflects characteristics of the process of qualitative research methodology and analysis such as emergence, negotiation, and reflexivity (Lofland and Lofland, 1995, p. 181). Data analysis occurs simultaneously with data collection in qualitative research. Although methodological strategies are intended to be concrete steps in the research process, Lofland and Lofland add that, "the process remains, and is intended to be, significantly open-ended in character. In this way, analysis is also very much a creative act" (p. 181). I had not intended to evolve the methodological procedures to simply accommodate my needs as a researcher. On the contrary, adopting shifts in conceptualizations facilitated analytical richness by accommodating experiential diversity among the participants.

The Recruitment Process

To locate participants, I employed a variety of strategies. I started by contacting churches which I knew to provide gays and lesbians a setting in which to express their spirituality and their sexual orientation identity. I scheduled meetings with the board members of those churches, and asked if I could place an ad (see Appendix One) in their respective church bulletins. In the ad, I specified that I was looking for men who identified as gay and as evangelical Christian and who would tell me their stories about how they came to identify themselves as such. In each of the meetings with the respective board members, I was asked to explain my interest in conducting research about men who self-

identify as both gay and Christian. I provided a brief summary of my experiences, and concluded that my decision to discontinue my Christian identity was the primary motivation for my research. During one of those meetings, one of the board members objected to the inclusion of my ad in their church bulletin based, in part, on the fact that I no longer identified as a Christian. In retrospect, I consider such an objection to be reasonable, given that some gay non-Christian people do not express tolerance for, or acceptance of, Christianity as subscribed to by others. The board member who expressed such a concern assumed that, as an ex-Christian, I had further cause to feel resentment toward Christians, and that I would be using my thesis to conduct anti-Christian research. He was correct that doing so would be an inappropriate use of interview data, but he was incorrect that I had an agenda to, in my words, "Christian bash."

I explained that, contrary to his concern, I was motivated, in part, by a political agenda that celebrates the right of gays and lesbians to subscribe to and practice Christianity within an overall agenda of promoting social equality of gays and lesbians with heterosexuals. The board members voted on the matter, and it was agreed that my intentions were valid and honourable, although the one board member who expressed concern about my intentions declined further participation. The ads were printed in various church bulletins. Four participants responded and each was scheduled for an interview.

Another strategy for locating participants was a flyer (see Appendix Two) which was constructed in a similar fashion as the church bulletin advertisement. I distributed the flyer to organizations and social functions that I believed might be

frequented by men who self-identify as gay and evangelical Christian. Although the flyer itself did not yield participants directly, one participant volunteered through word-of-mouth generated from the flyer. The remaining three participants were individuals whom I knew personally.

I had anticipated a "snowball" sample to have been generated from word-of-mouth (Lofland and Lofland 1995, p. 38), but this did not happen in spite of my attempts to "spread the word" by contacting various organizations and talking with many individuals in gay, Christian, and gay Christian communities. Perhaps some individuals who live in relative proximity to my geographic location might have felt disinclined to volunteer participation because of their concerns about anonymity. Another factor which might have undermined the efficacy of word-of-mouth for locating participants is the long-distance nature of this research project. I had anticipated that I would have to search beyond Victoria because of its limited population, and because of the rather unusual nature of the specific individuals whom I was seeking. Most of the participants came from outside of Victoria, from as far away as Toronto. Five of the participants were from large urban centers, and three were from moderately-sized cities. None were small town or rural dwellers.

The participants reflected neither wide geographic diversity nor wide variation in class status or racialized category. All of the participants described themselves as middle-class, although some reflected a lower middle-class status while others reflected an upper middle-class status. All of the men described themselves as having Canadian, English, and / or Scottish descent, except for

David, who described himself as having an Italian ethnicity. Other demographic features of the participants were widely diverse. The ages of the participants were twenty-nine, forty-three, fifty, fifty-five, sixty, and two men were thirty-four. The average age was almost forty-five. Their educational levels were grade ten, grade twelve, grade twelve plus certification, an undergraduate degree, a masters degree, three years of a Ph.D. program, and two men had seven years each of post-secondary education. Significantly, two participants have been in a 30-year relationship with each other.

I also asked each participant how long he had described himself as being gay, and how long he had described himself as being Christian. Most of the men described identifying as gay since their childhoods or teenhoods. However, rather than describing a precise moment of clarity about their gay identity, they instead described an experience, perception, or feeling of either being "different" from other boys, or having a childhood crush on another boy. Given that some of the participants had such experiences, perceptions, or feelings before the term "gay" gained common usage as a reference to homosexual identity, they have likely framed their childhood or teenhood experiences within the identity of being gay later in their lives. Furthermore, their identities as being gay were typically described as a process of positive and negative experiences, finally culminating in acceptance of a gay identity in late teens or early adulthood.

By contrast with gay identities, Christian identities were usually posited as precise moments of conception, typically as a decision to accept Jesus as their personal saviour. Scott is perhaps the only exception to this general trend. He

described himself as being a Christian for the past five years, but hesitated to "essentialize what it means to be Christian". The decision each participant made to become a Christian was made with having had earlier exposure to Christianity; six of the eight participants were raised in Christian homes, while the other two were involved in Christian youth groups.

The Interview Process

During each pre-arranged meeting time, but before I began the actual interview, I asked each participant to read and sign a letter of informed consent (see Appendix Three). I ensured that each person had time to read the letter thoroughly. The letter informed them that I would guarantee their anonymity. I proposed using a pseudonym rather than their real first names within the text of the transcripts and the analysis chapters. I also promised to alter or delete any information in the interviews that might threaten anonymity, such names of people and places. I informed them that, if they wished, they could verify the alteration of identifying information by reading their respective transcript. However, some of the participants did not want me to use pseudonyms and expressed that, as out gay men, some of whom are politically active, they were unconcerned about remaining anonymous. For these men, I secured written permission to use their real first names. The names used in the transcripts and the analysis chapters are thus a mix of pseudonyms and real first names.[11]

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[11] Bob, Lloyd, Scott, Wayne, and David preferred me to use their real first names, while Charles, Pete, and Thomas chose pseudonyms.

The location of the interviews varied somewhat. Two of the participants expressed discomfort about using their homes as locations. In each such case, we agreed to meet at a nearby coffee shop where we found a quiet corner in which to talk. The other interviews were conducted in people's homes. The interviews were tape-recorded; those that took place in homes were much easier to transcribe than those in coffee shops, despite how quiet the coffee shops initially sounded. I was solely responsible for the task of transcribing each of the interviews, and I ensured the safe storage of the transcripts and tapes during the process of transcription. As stated in the letter of informed consent, the audio tapes were stored in a locked cabinet to which only I had access.[12] They were erased after I had sent each participant his transcript to ensure its accuracy. Only two of the men asked me to make alterations to their transcripts by either clarifying some points that they had made, or by deleting some identifying information.

All of the participants expressed interest in seeing their respective interview transcripts. Some, but not all, suggested changes for the purpose of clarification. Such changes helped me to understand some specific details that became important during the process of data analysis. Two of the participants asked me to delete some information that they deemed irrelevant and I did as they asked.

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[12] I had described in the consent form that I would ask each participant for a code which he could use to access his transcript. After I had conducted all eight interviews, I decided that using the code key would not be necessary because the number of participants was small, and also because I had become well-acquainted with the matches of transcripts with individuals.

The Interview Schedule

Using interviews as a research technology allowed me to talk with men who, unlike me, were able to integrate gay and Christian identities. I decided to use a semi-standardized style of interview to guide me through a series of predetermined questions which were organized within a list of topics. Although I used such an organization as an interview guide, I also designed the interviews to facilitate a somewhat informal dialogue. Unlike standardized interviews, dialogues are characterized by openness, uniqueness, spontaneity, and engagement with each participant (Kirby and McKenna, 1989; Reinharz, 1992). A standardized interview, I felt, would preclude possibilities for openness, connectedness, and self-disclosure. Employing a semi-standardized interview format allowed me to encourage each participant to disclose information I had not considered in advance (Berg, 1995, p. 33). In addition, I wanted to avoid the tendency among many social scientists to attempt to gain control over participants in the research process (Reinharz, 1992, p. 20). Although I disclosed to each participant that I am a graduate student at the University of Victoria, I intentionally downplayed my academic role in favour of highlighting my personal experiences which lead to my interest in doing this research. Doing so facilitated rapport and promoted egalitarianism and open dialogue.

Apart from some general demographic questions, such as age, educational level, and ethnic background, I organized the interview schedule into four sets of questions. The first set covered gay experiences, perceptions, and identity acquisition, such as: What were the participants' perceptions of

homosexuality or gay people while they were growing up? What were the source of such perceptions? When did they first begin to think of themselves as being gay? Did they tell other people about it? How did others react to the participants' disclosures? How did the participants feel about themselves as a gay, or possibly gay people, in light of the reactions from others? At what age did they first have sex with other men? How did they feel about those experiences? Did they ever attempt to stop being gay? What were such experiences like? How did they feel about themselves during attempts to stop being gay? How did such attempts come to an end?

A second set of questions was designed to investigate participants' experiences concerning Christianity, such as: Were they raised in Christian homes? How was Christianity manifested in their families as they were growing up? What experiences led them to becoming Christian? What were their families' attitudes about Christianity? In what ways did their families show support for their Christianity, or lack thereof? How did the participants feel about themselves in light of such attitudes?

A third set of questions focused on the intersection of the participants' gay and Christian identities. Examples included: At what age did they first think that they were Christian and gay at the same time? How did they come to believe that their gay and Christian identities are compatible? How did they reconcile their gay identities in light of Biblical passages which appear to condemn homosexuality? What were some of their experiences with his Christian friends concerning being gay? Did they receive support from other Christians concerning

their gay identities? Did they receive support from other gay people concerning their Christian identities? How did they feel about themselves in light of such support or lack thereof?

Within the three major topics that I wanted to cover in each interview, my hope was that there would be natural opportunities for participants to discuss their current circumstances concerning being gay and Christian. Such natural openings for disclosure were sometimes taken; otherwise, I probed for further discussion about their current circumstances. In any event, a fourth topic was designed to inquire about the participants' current situations, such as: Do they have partners? Are their partners also Christians? Are their congregations supportive of their being gay? Do they encounter hostility from other Christians about their being gay? Do they encounter hostility from other gay people about their being Christian? How do they react to such hostility? How do they express themselves as gay people while in Christian social settings? How do they express themselves as Christians while in gay social settings?

Although it might appear from the interview schedule that I had, in spite of my intentions, designed a highly-standardized interview, the selective use of the questions facilitated spontaneity, openness, and interaction. Such an interview orientation did indeed facilitate "dialogue". I interviewed -- dialogued with -- eight individuals who volunteered to participate. Doing so is contrary to the standard procedures of quantitative researchers who employ certain techniques to choose a representative sample from which to generalize their findings to a larger population. My aim, however, was to conduct exploratory research that describes

general themes and processes employed by those people who participated, and to contextualize such analysis within larger social processes. Limiting the number of participants to under ten also facilitated manageability of the project because searching for participants, scheduling the interviews, transcribing each tape recorded interview, and conducing analysis on each one proved to be very time consuming. Lack of financial and time resources compelled me to set limitations to the number of participants. In sum, conducting eight interviews allowed me to proceed with research that is exploratory in nature, as well as to keep the project at a manageable size.

Preparation for Data Analysis

Data analysis was an ongoing process which began with the first transcript. I read each new transcript several times before conducting another interview in order to attain a familiarity with themes that were beginning to emerge in the data. In the tradition of qualitative research, I decided to interweave presentation and analysis of the data to reflect the simultaneous process of collection and analysis. My decision was also based on the large amount of data which I had collected. I felt that presentation would necessarily be limited to discussion which was most germane to the core questions of "How?" and "Why?". The task of deciding which data were the most relevant was, in itself, a component of the data analysis process.

Collectively, the transcribed interviews added up to 141 pages of single-spaced, ten-point, Helvetica text. I required a system that would organize the

data into a more manageable form, one that would also facilitate the emergence of themes and contrasts of experiences, feelings, and beliefs of the participants. To do so, I used the interview schedule to generate numerical codes that corresponded to the general topics covered in each interview (see Appendix Five). The numerical codes are not meant to imply a sequential order of events, but instead are merely a method of labeling for the purposes of organization. I scoured each transcript to manually label particular sections with appropriate codes. Parts of the dialogue were coded with more than one numerical value because they reflected more than one theme. After manually coding each transcript, I then created documents in a word-processor software package whose file names corresponded to each topic. From each transcript on my computer hard-drive, I then "cut and pasted" each coded section of the text into the appropriate topic document. The final result was twelve documents (see Appendix Five), each corresponding to one theme and containing the relevant comments of the participants.[13]

I continued by analyzing the data in the central theme -- Theme Eight -- which I titled, *Strategies for resolution through integration.* I felt that the strategies of the men to integrate their previously conflicting identities would draw attention to a variety of experiences in their lives that I had categorized within the other themes. I analyzed each statement that I had included within Theme Eight, and counted seventeen strategies. I then grouped the seventeen strategies into five types according to qualitative similarity. For example, some

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[13] A qualitative software package, which I lacked, would have accomplished the same result.

men said that they came to believe that their perception of God -- being divine perfection -- was distinct from their perception of church -- being an imperfect human organization, though a holy one. Other men drew a distinction between a homosexual orientation and a so-called homosexual lifestyle. I discerned that both distinctions implied the acceptance of a perceived inconsistency in order to reduce dissonance. Hence, I classified such perceptions under a broad type called *Acceptance of Inconsistencies*. The analysis chapter of this study provides details on each of the five types of integration strategies, and includes relevant transcript excerpts.

The final stage of analysis was to compare the five types of strategies with theories about homosexual identity formation, specifically the Cass model (1979) and the Troiden model (1988). Neither theorist discussed the ways in which a homosexual identity is integrated with a Christian identity. However, comparing the five strategies with each of the models highlights the strengths and weaknesses of each model. The motivating question which guided such comparisons was: Is each stage of each model reflected in each participant's account of his journey towards a fully integrated gay and Christian identity? Assessing that question in light of the five types of strategies, in combination with the data that I had coded within the other eleven themes of the interview schedule, guided my critique of each model. Developing such critiques, which were grounded in the interview data, allowed me to propose recommendations for change in the models in order to bolster their respective strengths and minimize their respective weaknesses.

A large amount of data is not recorded in this thesis due to sheer volume. However, I used the remaining data as a backdrop from which to understand the contexts of specific comments made by each participant. It has been my aim to present data in a way that honours past experiences which underlie each man's present understandings of his identity development.

The methods that I have described above imply that this study is largely academic in nature. In addition to being an academic exercise, the research process of data collection, reporting, and analysis allowed me to make suggestions for social and political change. Not surprisingly, I had anticipated proposing that Christian communities move toward acceptance of gay and lesbian members. However, I did not anticipate other suggestions for social and political change until I had thoroughly analyzed the data. An account of social and political considerations, as I see them, appears in the concluding chapter of this study.

Chapter Four: Reporting and Analysis of the Interview Data

As I mentioned in Chapter Three, I had decided to combine both data reporting and analysis in one chapter to avoid including the entire collection of transcripts. Which data to include and which to exclude reflected early stages of data analysis. Presenting data separately from analysis would therefore be rather illogical. This chapter represents the final product of those decisions. It also represents the outcome of the process of data analysis which had been interwoven throughout the larger research process.

Data analysis, as I conducted it, resulted in an overall understanding of the motivations of these men to integrate a gay identity with a Christian one. More specifically, I describe five types of strategies from which they achieved identity integration. Not all of the men employed all five types of strategies. Rather, the five types represent a summary of the most common strategies of identity integration evident in the data. Prior to presenting the details of the five types, I discuss some general issues concerning identity integration which serve as a backdrop for contextualization.

The Overall Outcome of the Process of Integration

If one were tempted to view men who identify as both gay and Christian as being wracked with internal conflict about the supposed incompatibility between Christian beliefs and homosexuality, the stories told by these eight participants would quash that temptation. The overriding theme of the

discussions, as I discern it, was the expression of comfort with being both gay and Christian. Such comfort was usually expressed with keen enthusiasm. However, occasionally some lingering but relatively minor reservations surfaced. For example, two participants, Pete and Charles, referred to general contentment, laced with minimal uncertainty, about being gay and Christian. Pete acknowledged that he had not resolved "everything," while Charles said, "I don't think I've ever felt this contented with myself as I do now, in spite of the fact that there are inconsistencies."

By contrast to Pete and Charles, Lloyd was adamant in his belief that being gay is acceptable in the eyes of God. Speaking on behalf of himself and Bob, his partner of over thirty years, Lloyd emphasized without reservation the importance of his being at once Christian and gay:

> [W]e have reconciled our Christianity and our homosexuality. There is absolutely no conflict. I feel so secure that it will never be a problem for me. . . . If I didn't believe that I would have to believe that God is a cruel God to do that to so many people. I look at it differently, that God created us for a special reason. I don't know what that special reason is, but I do know that many, many gay people [are] in a servant-type ministry that cares for people.

In the above excerpt, Lloyd implies through his use of the word, "we," that Bob and he have developed strategies for identity integration in concert with each other. It is also apparent that Lloyd links his understanding of his being gay with Christian evangelicalism. Bob expressed similar sentiments about his security in being gay while also being Christian, and his belief that God uses him

to spread what Bob sees as the Christian message of love and grace to other gay people. He said:

> [E]ven from a young age, I would not allow people to trod on me. I'm a person of value, and God is my judge. . . . I believe that God arms us for [adversity]. He'll protect us. If there's a battle to be won, we've won the battle. But we just have to be strong in our faith, and in who we are as gay people. . . . The gospel has to be spread. It has to be spread to the gay community because they have been disenfranchised by mainline churches, by these [anti-gay] pastors who think they are doing good.

The above comment by Bob reflects a process of self-identity that seems to include relatively little conflict about being gay and Christian, in part because of his feelings of self-worth which have their roots in his childhood.

Wayne expressed similar feelings of self-worth which he has felt since childhood. He was raised in a highly religious evangelical Christian family. In spite of being raised in a religious tradition that emphasizes heterosexuality within marriage as the norm and as the only Christian option for sexual expression, Wayne explained:

> I've been Christian since the age of four, and I've been gay as far back as I can remember as well. My first recollection of that is, at the age of five in kindergarten, seeing a cute guy and being aware, not necessarily of the implications of that and what it would mean to the rest of my life, but knowing that there was that attraction there. So as far back as I can remember those two aspects have been integral parts of my identity. . . . A lot of gay people don't accept their being gay until a much later point, which I think might tend to make it more difficult to have the two existent in their life at the same time. . . . But for me, both aspects go back as long as I can remember. I've always had those two things to deal with, and

> perhaps that's made it easier for me to deal with it, to rationalize it, to accept it.

Other men described strong and long-term feelings of inner turmoil about being gay, either in conflict with co-existing Christian values and beliefs, or prior to adopting Christianity. Charles, for example, gradually adopted his Christian beliefs during his teenage years. Prior to doing so, he had had experiences in his boyhood that signified early homosexual attractions and provoked much anxiety at the time. He told me that he started to perceive that he was attracted to other males when he was about thirteen years of age. He described his reaction to that realization:

> I was horrified, but attracted at the same time. In the apartment building I was living in with my parents, I and another boy played with each other, touching penises. I felt it was wrong, but I liked it. [W]e didn't go to climax. He just touched me, or I touched him. I can't remember clearly, but we certainly didn't masturbate. I think the difficult thing for me was that I liked it.

One of the ways in which Charles attempted to circumvent his homosexual feelings was through heterosexual marriage. As did Pete and Lloyd, Charles felt that his homosexual attractions would cease to exist within heterosexual marriage. However, same-sex attractions remained, and anxiety continued.

> [I experienced] terrific guilt when I was first involved in intentional sexual activities with men, terrific guilt about my marriage and the infidelity that I created in my marriage. That raged on for years. After every [homo]sexual experience, I vowed not to do it again.

The degree to which each participant experienced internal conflict about being gay, whether in combination with a Christian identity or prior to adopting one, varied in longevity and severity. David, Lloyd, Charles, and Pete had made earlier decisions to reject a gay identity, but ultimately came to believe that being Christian could include being gay. None of the eight participants attempted to reject their Christian identity, although Charles, a pastor, had left the Christian ministry, believing that his role in church leadership was incompatible with being gay. He later returned to Christian leadership.

In spite of the earlier decisions of David, Lloyd, Charles, and Pete, the ultimate outcome for all of the participants was resolution through integration rather than through permanent rejection of one identity or the other. One could argue that their identities as gay and Christian are only apparently stable; given such earlier shifts in identity, it is possible that future dramatic shifts might occur. Such shifts are indeed possible. However, earlier shifts occurred in the presence of self-dissatisfaction. My aim here is not to predict the futures of each participant, but rather to suggest that the contentment that each man expressed about the integration of his Christian and gay identities would likely have a stabilizing effect rather than a destabilizing one. My interest here is to investigate the ways in which each of these men secured such apparently stable identities, especially given the political climate in which many Christians are not accepting

of gays and lesbians, and many gays and lesbians are not accepting of Christians.[14]

The overriding question of this research, then, is, "How?". The discussions I had with the eight participants incorporated commentary on a number of broad issues that are germane to that core question, such as gay identity development, Christian identity development, family upbringing, relationships with other Christians, relationships with other gay people, management of a gay identity in Christian social contexts, and management of a Christian identity in gay social contexts. From the interview data, I was able to discern a variety of strategies that they employed to achieve identity integration.[15]

Strategies of Integration: Five Types

Biblical Interpretation

Among the eight participants, the most commonly articulated strategy that was adopted for the purposes of identity integration is one that emphasizes exegesis, critical interpretation of Biblical text, in contrast with literalist interpretation. Exegetical readers consider the social, historical, or political contexts in which the text was written, whereas Biblical literalists do not. For most Christians, the Bible is considered to be the central authority from which

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[14] The difference between these two social phenomena is that while many Christians actively participate in anti-gay campaigns, no campaigns have been organized by gays and lesbians with strictly anti-Christian purposes.

[15] In using the term, "strategy," I am not only referring to conscious will or explicit intention, although some strategies do reflect such awareness of intent. I am also referring to the making of choices that may not be consciously linked with clear or explicit outcomes.

philosophical and moral standpoints are based. The Bible is often used by some Christians as the cornerstone with which to justify anti-gay attitudes and actions. Literalist interpretations of the Bible, commonly associated with the Christian Right, have lead readers to believe that God condemns homosexuality. Given such a common assertion about God's supposed rejection of homosexuality, I asked each participant to articulate his view of the Bible. My aim was not to enter into discussions about interpretation of specific Biblical scriptures, but instead to investigate the ways in which each participant negotiates the sections of the Bible that appear to denounce one of the central ways in which they identify themselves. In other words, I wanted to investigate the ways in which the Bible, as the central textual authority of Christianity, informs gay and Christian identities.

All eight men described having to struggle to locate a positive sense of themselves within scripture and to feel free from condemnation. Eventually, each one came to believe that Biblical literalism is an inappropriate way to interpret the Bible, and is not a valid cornerstone for one's beliefs about philosophy and morality. Wayne, for example, explained that,

> If you retrace history and look at many things that the Christian church has taught, [it] has supported blatant sexism, [and] has advocated slavery. . . . I look at the Bible, there's the traditional Pentecostal view that it's the literal word of God, and that everything should be taken literally. . . . To that, I would say that there is so many things that you can't take literally. They are part of the word of God, and they're there for a reason, but we have to look at them in their historical perspective.

Wayne also explained that whereas beliefs about certain issues in mainline Christian churches appear to be steadfastly-held, they actually have not been held firmly throughout the years. The example he presented was the common practice in some Christian churches, especially those that subscribe to Biblical literalism, of denying membership on church boards of directors to women. He said that such a practice

> is an example of how something is hard and fast in one particular generation, a few years later, or a different generation, it can be totally different. That can be said of sexism, slavery, and I would maintain that eventually, . . . some of the denominations now, they're starting to deal with homosexuality.

For Pete, literalism simply did not make sense. He was quite certain of his relationship with God in his assertion that,

> God keeps on answering my prayers, all the time, one after the other. I have so many answered prayers to be thankful for I can't even begin to name them. . . . If God considers [homosexuality] to be an abomination, why does He keep answering my prayers? Why does He keep on communicating with me?

Two men explicitly described having been reassured, through reading Biblical scripture, that God approved of their being gay. David said:

> I specifically remember reading Bible verses and parts of scriptures that I thought were really cool, like David and Jonathan. I remember sitting in church and reading stories, like they were such good friends and I'm sure that they [engaged in sexual activities with each other]. I think that one of the things that the church doesn't realize is that homosexuality is not about sex. For me, even

> back then, it wasn't about sex, it was about two people loving each other. I looked at David and Jonathan and I thought, "I'm sure they were in love." And I always took comfort in that.

Similarly, Lloyd described what he saw as God actively providing assurance through scripture.

> Even after I was saved, I needed some assurance. I hadn't read the Bible, but God lead me to a scripture . . . Acts 8. . . . When I read that I knew it was talking about me. It's telling me right now that I'm OK. . . . There is a scripture in Matthew 19 where he talks about the eunuchs. I believe that when he was talking about eunuchs he was talking about us. People not being able to marry, and all that, I think he was talking about gay people. They didn't call them gay in those days.

A humanist perspective of scripture was employed by Scott to bolster his sense of social justice for gays and lesbians, as well as for members of other marginalized groups.

> God is the real essence of [spirituality]. I think Jesus was an important person, but I don't think of him as a saviour in that sense. I don't think I need to be saved from anything. I think of God as a helping thing. . . . To me, an intelligent person would say -- this is very judgmental, but -- [Jesus] stood up for what is right, he aligned himself with the most marginalized people, and said, "You're OK." And that's a very powerful example for me, knowing I'm OK, and knowing that it's partly my responsibility to help others.

Another perspective on the Biblical interpretation was articulated by Thomas. He asserted that, in fact, most Christians are unable to list the particular scriptures of the Bible that are used by members of the Christian Right primarily against gays and lesbians. He argued that, "they just have this blanket [notion

that] it is written in there that homosexuality is wrong. What did Christ say about homosexuality? Absolutely nothing. Most Christians don't know that." Thomas also expressed his belief that Jesus -- after whom Christians purport to model their beliefs and behaviour -- has not been recorded in the Bible as having discussed homosexuality. For Thomas, then, the rejection of gays and lesbians by many Christians cannot be Biblically justified. His perspective has been met with anger from many other Christians. He explained further that, "I'm blessed because I'm like the leper that they wouldn't touch, . . . but God loves me."

All of the eight men expressed criticism of other Christians who reject gay and lesbian people based on the belief that God condemns homosexuality. Legalistic Christians are commonly associated with such hostility. The term, "fundamentalism" is commonly used to describe conservative legalistic Christians, most of whom reject gay and lesbian individuals. However, somewhat surprisingly, Thomas described himself as a fundamentalist. He was the only participant to do so. Whereas some gay and lesbian people have "reclaimed" words such as "fag," "dyke," and "queer" for positive self-description, likewise Thomas asserted his right to reclaim the term "fundamentalist" from its negative connotation as being narrow-minded and fraught with bigotry. He spoke rather disdainfully about liberal Christianity. His rejection of liberal Christianity seems counter-intuitive to what one might expect because liberal Christians tend to be more accepting of gays and lesbians than are most legalistic conservative Christians. Nevertheless, he was adamant about his support of the term "fundamentalist" and explained his perspective thusly:

> Fundamentalism means that you believe in [the] real essentials of the Bible, that those essentials are common to all churches, that Jesus Christ came to bring us good news of salvation, [that] he wants to have a personal relationship with every one of us, [and] that he came from God the father. Those are the fundamentals to me. And that's how I use that word, and [liberal Christians] are not taking it away from me.

Thomas was the most vocal, but not the only, opponent of liberal Christianity. In a similar manner, Bob maintained that what he sees as the core essentials of the Bible -- he did not use the term "fundamentals" -- are reduced to a "watered-down theology" when viewed through a liberal lens.

When David and I discussed the matter of Biblical interpretation, he contributed an additional perspective that was unique among the eight men. He described having a "linguistic advantage" in being bilingual and explained:

> I guess my whole approach to the whole scripture thing is one thing: interpretation. I can speak from that firsthand, not only because of [having taken] Greek [classes], but because I was raised bilingual anyways. And when you have this linguistic advantage . . . you look at languages different than someone who is taught just one language.

Overall, then, all eight men rejected literalism and six rejected fundamentalism. However, they all subscribed to what they consider to be the *fundamentals* of Christianity, those being love and grace. Perspectives on the Bible were diverse, but similar in outcome; each man described having achieved an understanding of the Bible that facilitated, rather than undermined, a gay identity. Each one expressed his view that, although the Bible is a divinely inspired text, it is, nevertheless, fraught with historical and social contextuality.

Within such an interpretive framework, identities, such as gay ones, that challenge literalist interpretations are able to emerge in concert, rather than in conflict, with Christian identities.

"A Christianity of Questions"

Another common type of strategy involved the perception of inconsistencies between idealized views of life and actual lived experience. It is the management of such perceptions that is a key element of the process of integration. For example, one could attempt to resolve all of the inconsistencies, specifically concerning sexual identity and religious beliefs, that impinge upon one's identities. By contrast, one could choose to simply ignore such inconsistencies. But one could also accept perceived inconsistencies without feeling compelled to resolve them, as demonstrated by some of the participants.

I have already alluded to minor reservations expressed by Pete and Charles in their statements that they have reached general states of inner contentment about their identities despite not having resolved every troublesome detail in the complex process of integration. They did not express a compelling need to address lingering questions, nor did they imply that the lack of utterly complete resolution necessarily signifies inner conflict. On the contrary -- and somewhat counter-intuitively -- it seems that the recognition and acceptance of inconsistencies has been a cognitive device with which these eight men have gained inner resolve about their identities.

The eight participants made statements that implied that they had made an active choice to accept certain inconsistencies concerning their identity integration, in contrast with other possible choices. One of the most common avenues for accepting inconsistencies, which paradoxically contributed to identity resolution, is through the recognition of the differences between God and church. Wayne, for example, was raised in a conservative Christian family. During much of his youth and early adulthood, Wayne held leadership positions in the church that he and his family had attended since Wayne was very young. Through a series of events, Wayne was "outed" by two self-described "ex-gay" visitors to his church to whom he had disclosed his (then physically unexplored) homosexual orientation. The next day, the church pastors asked Wayne to resign his membership to the church and to step down from his leadership positions. Wayne described the occasion as sad, but not traumatic, saying that he felt that it would have happened eventually. He also said that he felt that it was part of God's plan to eventually guide him to a new congregation in a gay-friendly church a few months later. The process that Wayne described was instrumental in his realization that God is an entity distinct from His followers.

> I think it's safe to say that in my life, and I'm sure in many others of people who have reconciled homosexuality and Christianity, the Lord has given us the grace and the understanding and the strength to endure the misunderstanding and the hardship and the broken relationships and to move on. And to focus on the Lord, because it's really our relationship with the Lord, it's not our relationship with the church. Looking back on my life, I thought I would be going to that church for the rest of my life . . . but you don't realize that the Lord might have another plan for your life.

Differentiating between God and church enabled identity integration also for David. He expressed that the turning point at which he was able to merge his gay identity with his Christian one was when he realized that God and church are different, but overlapping, entities. He expressed having felt alienated from God because of his belief, influenced by other Christians, that homosexuality was contrary to God's intent for human sexual expression. He described how a feeling of alienation from God metamorphasized into one of closeness.

> The catalyst [for me in accepting that I was gay] was me coming to the point where I was going to kill myself. At that point, I thought, "No, this isn't what God wants for me. God does not want me to kill myself. This is way beyond anything that He would ever want for my life." At that point, that's where the freedom was. I realized that for so long I was mad at God, and I had embraced the church. But at that point, I realized that it's not God that I should be mad at. It's the church that I should be mad at. I was able to embrace God at that point. . . . The church was totally abandoned.

Other men did not state their understanding of the distinction between God and church directly, but rather implied it. For example, Pete described a series of events that lead him to lower his expectations of other Christians, but not of God. He had been living in a small rural town, and he and his (then) wife of nineteen years were actively involved in the local Christian community. She knew about his homosexual desires, but urged him to go for counseling in hopes that such desires would be expunged. He attended counseling sessions, but, indeed, his sexual desires for men remained. In spite, she disclosed his homosexuality to various people in their small town. Pete briefly described the result of some of the reactions from local townspeople toward his being gay: "I

would say that a good percentage of the ones in the . . . church [would not talk to me]. Not all of them, but a good chunk were pretty cold . . . I just felt that some of this was not Christian." Significantly, Pete felt somewhat betrayed by some of the Christian people in the town, but he did not feel that God had betrayed him.

Many other statements were made by some of the participants that implied their recognition of the lack of congruence between God and church. Lloyd said, "[My partner] Bob and I have met so many anointed gay people. . . . I mean, God would not be anointing all these people unless he loved them. He's using them. He's using them in a powerful way." Lloyd also expressed his belief that certain social problems commonly associated with homosexuals by many Christians result not from so-called unhealthy homosexual lifestyles, but rather from Christian bigotry:

> I don't understand why Christians wouldn't want gay people to get married 'cause then it's sacred. We [could] have sex [within wedlock]. If we can't have sex out of wedlock, then [we should be able to get] married. All of their arguments don't make a lot of sense to me because I would think that it's common sense to draw couples together in monogamous relationships. That would cut out a lot of the problem with AIDS, and a lot of other problems. But no, [Christians] are not having any of it.

Recognizing the differences between idealized spiritual beliefs and human imperfections is one of the ways in which some of the participants expressed that they had achieved resolution through identity integration. Attaining an awareness of the incongruencies between the beliefs held by Christians and the ways in which Christians actually live their lives provides cognitive "spaces" in which

some of the men were able to self-actualize beyond the standard dualistic paradigm of "gay or Christian." Doing so took place apart from, and perhaps in reaction to, negative attitudes about gay and lesbian people expressed by many Christians. Whereas some gay men internalize such messages (some of whom participate in "ex-gay" ministries), others see opportunities for deeper self-acceptance by choosing paths that are generally denied and forbidden within mainstream Christian churches.

For two of the participants, parental role models provided examples of non-conformity within Christian social groups. The stories of Wayne and Thomas suggest that their choice to accept inconsistencies is rooted in their childhood experiences. Wayne's parents, for example, were very active in an evangelical and fundamentalist church, but his father was denied board membership because he was a smoker. Wayne described him as a proud smoker, and explained, "the church teaches that anyone who smokes can't be a board member, and isn't as truly as spirit-filled as someone else is. And yet, when I look at my Dad, [he] is more of a Christian than many who profess to be." For Wayne, his father was a role model for questioning church authority without necessarily doubting one's beliefs in God. In doing so, Wayne's father modeled his belief in the separation of God and church; God is perfect, but churches are imperfect human organizations through which God works.

A similar perspective was evident in Thomas' upbringing. Thomas perceived a similar disjuncture between Christian beliefs and behaviour through the example of his mother who he described as an evangelical Christian and an

alcoholic. Simply put, Thomas and Wayne understood at an early age that Christians are not always what they appear to be, or what other Christians feel that they should be. In his youth, Thomas felt uncomfortable about his mother's alcoholism, but did not doubt the viability of her being a Christian as well, even though he knew that alcoholism is not becoming of a Christian. He also felt that his mother's situation was beyond his capability to resolve. A "ripple-effect" resulted, and grew into a general understanding about life.

> We live in a society that wants to resolve things, and we never do. But when we kind of leap past it, and say, "You know, God, I can't deal with all of this stuff. Can you deal with it for me?" That's where I want to be.

For Thomas, the inability to resolve "things" is a key component of his Christianity, but such a notion also functions as a kind of philosophical model from which his gay identity had emerged in concert with his Christianity. His mother's alcoholism did not fit into accepted schemas of Christianity, nor did his homosexuality. Such a recognition -- a "cognitive space" -- provided Thomas with a potential venue for self-definition.

A statement made by Scott provides an apt summation. He said that he prefers "a Christianity of questions rather than a Christianity of answers" because the former, but not the latter, allows for personal growth and change. Subscribing to a Christianity of questions, Scott implies, challenges purported doctrinal "truths," undermines the agenda of some Christian activists to promote homosexuality as "evil" or "sick," and allows possibilities for self-actualization as both gay and Christian. Resolution of one's conception of God and one's

interpretation of scripture is a part of identity integration, but is not synonymous with it.

Choice

A third type of strategy of identity integration concerns the matter of choice. The issue of choice is especially contested in the area of homosexuality, and much less so in the area of religious identity. Many Christians, and others, continue to view homosexuality as a "chosen lifestyle." By contrast, many gays and lesbians claim that they were born with their particular sexual orientations. A variation of such a claim is that God made certain people gay or lesbian.

Five of the eight men explained that their sexual orientation is a product of God's work. Bob, for example, described an interaction he had at a former workplace with an administrator. Bob had challenged him after the administrator had made negative comments about gay people, specifically that homosexuality is "fundamentally against God." Bob offered a sound rebuttal to the administrator.

> "Who told you that? Did God tell you that? I don't think so." And I said, "Stop taking the scripture out of context. . . ." Every person who goes into a church and hears a pastor spewing off at the mouth are too lazy to look it up for themselves. And I said, "You [promote anti-gay agendas] with Jerry Falwell and all those guys down in the States cause it's big bucks." "Yeah," [the administrator] said, "[but] I still don't understand." I said, "I'm not asking you to understand. I'm not asking you to come to bed. If you're naturalness, so to speak, is to be straight, so be it. I respect that. Mine is not. God made me who I am, and God made you who you are. That's all I'm asking for is mutual respect."

Bob's belief that God made him who he is underlies his claim that his homosexuality is a "natural" aspect of his overall personhood. Bob explained to me that he had felt, from a very early age, that God created and approved of every aspect of his being. "With regards to being gay," he told me, "I never had a problem with it. . . . [I] knew right from the beginning that God loved me for who I was . . . What was natural for [my partner Lloyd and I] was for us to be together." Lloyd, shared a similar perspective, stating, "[being together] is normal for [Bob and I]." Wayne also expressed that self-acceptance followed his faith in God's acceptance of him. He said, "[I] really felt the Holy Spirit comforting me, and letting me know that it was OK to be the way I was. And also, that God created me the way I was." He added, "the Religious Right uses the term 'lifestyle choice.' [Being gay] is not a choice. The choice is whether you accept it or not." Subscribing to the notion that gays and lesbians do not choose to be homosexual often underpins homosexual identity formation. Moreover, identity integration, as described by each of the participants, suggests that making the choice to accept being gay can result from, rather than contradict, one's particular beliefs in Christianity.

The belief that being gay is predestined by God can provide the basis for feeling resentful towards God, at least initially. David said that, prior to accepting a gay identity, he had felt confused and had struggled to find answers to some questions that were critical to his self-identity.

> I couldn't make sense of [being gay]. It just didn't make sense to me. How could God love me and create me and turn around and

> say this is wrong and sinful and not take it away from me? And if it wasn't Him who did this to me, if it wasn't Him who created me this way, then why wasn't He just taking it away from me?

As did other participants, David implied that the cornerstone from which acceptance of being gay, in combination with being Christian, was made possible was his belief that he lacked a choice in the matter of being gay.

It is worth noting that, so far, I have made reference only to statements made by some of the participants that their homosexuality -- not their Christianity -- is somehow an innate feature of themselves. Homosexual orientations are framed as being a decision of God. However, the source of Christian identities are not explained in a similar fashion, possibly because of the common belief among many Christian individuals that subscribing to Christianity requires an act of one's will. For example, Christian people, particularly evangelicals and fundamentalists, commonly make statements such as, "When I became a Christian . . .," or "I decided to follow the Lord." Such statements imply that individual agency is required in order to "be" a Christian. It seems reasonable to suggest, then, that such a belief explains why the matter of choice -- or lack thereof -- was expressed by the participants strictly in the context of processes of homosexual identity formation, and not in context of Christian identity formation.

Thomas, however, was the one exception to that general trend. He was the only participant who asserted that both his homosexuality and his Christianity were beyond his choice. He emphasized that, contrary to the views of many Christians, his status as a Christian is an act of God's will rather than of his own:

> I probably believe different things about salvation than [other Christians do] because I don't believe salvation is a choice. I think God chooses us, and I could pull out ten scriptures in the Bible where it says He chooses us. No one is drawn to Christ unless the Father draws him. So people say, "Oh no, it's your free will. You choose". . . . His ways are His ways, and His thinking is way higher than our thinking. . . . [S]alvation is based on God's plan for you, not anything that you've done.

Only one participant implied uncertainty about the etiology of his homosexuality. In contrast with the other seven participants, Scott expressed resistance towards what he referred to as "essentialist" views of identity.

> I don't know [if I always knew that I was gay]. I mean, it's easy to say that now that I have a gay identity and I make it a focal point in my [academic] work. But there was a time that I thought that I was bisexual. I don't know. It seems now as though I always was gay. It feels that way anyway.

Even though Scott did not express that he was either made or born gay, he did imply, as the above comments suggests, that he nevertheless lacked choice in being gay. He also expressed similar concern about essentializing Christianity:

> I don't know. I mean, its funny. Because you think, 'Well, do I consider my self a Christian?' and its sort of like there. You know, there's the question. . . . I have alot of resistance against . . . to me Christianity becomes so essentialized so easily. And probably because it has been the dominant religion, so that everyone seems to define themselves against what it means to be Christian, against what they think it means to be Christian, and so in order to do that, they essentialize what it means to be Christian, and what that means is bad, and stupid, and uninformed, and naive and patriarchal. And so, you know, they don't want to be Christian. . . . I think that Christianity is one of the ways to express [spirituality].

In sum, seven of the participants implied or stated directly that they were either born or made gay. Some believe that God made them gay, in part, for evangelical purposes (as is the case for Lloyd, Bob, and Wayne). David and Pete described making the choice to accept themselves "the way they are" -- specifically referring to their homosexuality -- in order to confront temptations to commit suicide. The theme of lack of choice was commonly expressed as one way in which identity integration was facilitated. Subscribing to notions about lack of choice concerning sexual orientation is a way in which participants accepted and bolstered their homosexual identities. In the case of Thomas, the belief that Christian orientations are pre-ordained by God provided him with further evidence that God approves of his overall personhood.

The influence of others

The social world, by its very nature, is one in which individuals are influenced by other people. Identities arise within social contexts, as Mead (1934) suggested with the "I" and "Me" metaphors. Seven of the eight participants made statements that described the ways in which processes of identity integration are informed through social interactions with other people. Some men, such as Pete, Lloyd, and Wayne, acknowledged that interacting with other people at gay-positive Bible studies helped them to reconcile themselves with particular scriptural texts from which they had previously felt alienated. They implied that alienation resulted from standard interpretations of particular

scriptures, which are usually expressed by other Christians in an anti-gay manner.

Pete, Lloyd, and Wayne attended gay-affirmative Bible studies that were attended mostly by other gay Christian people. Both Charles and Pete stated that they had felt validated about their identities from meeting other men who identified as gay and Christian. But not all of the participants made the choice to study, attend church, and socialize with other gay Christians. For example, although David mentioned that a gay priest was instrumental in showing him different approaches to Christianity apart from a literalist one, he also said that a friend, a heterosexual minister, supported him through his struggle to accept his homosexuality in the context of his Christian identity.

Neither Thomas nor Scott discussed having frequented social circles in which men who identify as gay and as Christian tend to travel. Thomas described feeling quite comfortable attending a small church whose membership consisted mostly of heterosexual people. He said that he and his partner have been included, as a couple, in a variety of church events and social activities. Similarly, Scott expressed his preference for attending church in an otherwise mostly heterosexual congregation:

> My own internalized homophobia is not challenged when I go to a strictly gay church. When I go to a church where there's lots of straight people, and I see them accepting me, and I see them in this sacred place -- which I feel is sacred, and they feel is sacred -- and I feel them accepting me, it really works on the [internalized] homophobia because they're validating me being there, and they're interested in me being there. And making an effort. Whereas, if it's

> all gay, we are just sort of all there, and it can become just like another gay club, almost.

Each of the eight participants has expressed himself in various ways when in the company of other Christian people. As I have noted, some have chosen to find similar others with whom to relate and develop friendships. Other men, such as Thomas and Scott, have found gay-positive -- but not necessarily gay -- churches where they feel accepted and supported by other Christians.

Each participant also said that he receives support for his gay identity from some other Christians, both gay or straight. Conversely, some stated also that their Christianity is generally not tolerated by non-Christian gay people, and that they had not found non-Christian gay people with whom they could comfortably interact. David specified such difficulties as being linked with his Christian morality:

> [M]y personal morality is not something that is accepted very well. . . . The gay [friends] are not supportive of my Christianity. . . . In terms of dating it does [result in conflict]. I have convictions about my morality that for the most part, the [gay] people I have met don't come close to. It's kind of [like] a one-way street: Christians have hated gays for so long and yet now to be a gay Christian is difficult because gays hate Christians so much that to be a gay Christian is something that's bad. . . . When I tell people this is my perspective, this is where I come from, they treat me like I'm just out to lunch. There isn't an acceptance of that.

Thomas articulated a similar view. He said that he has generally discontinued social interactions with non-Christian gay people. However, his belief that Christians are compelled to spread the gospel of salvation, and that

doing so is a matter of God's timing, sometimes has lead him to selectively discuss his Christianity among non-Christian gay people.

> I don't hide [being a Christian], but as a Christian, we are called to witness. A witness is someone who is called to the stand to give their testimony [about being Christian]. . . . A witness doesn't run into the courtroom and tell everybody what happened. They're patiently waiting for the judge to say, "OK, would you come up and give your story?" So that's what I think of as a witness. It's almost like you can create hostility within people by pushing that on them. That's not how to win others to Christ. Christ wouldn't do that. You have to be sensitive to people.

In the above statement, Thomas implied that his expressions of Christianity among non-Christian gay people is selective and dependent upon his perception of God's timing. Thomas believes that God uses him as a vessel from which the message of salvation is expressed to others, some of whom are gay. Such a belief is qualitatively different from the assertions of other participants that they have a right to express their Christianity among non-Christian gay people. Charles, for example, felt that he is not accepted by the gay community. But he emphasized that if non-Christian gay people demand acceptance from non-gay Christians, then they must, in turn, accept individuals who are Christian, whether gay or straight. Charles may feel that, in his life, non-acceptance is equally weighted on both sides. In broader society, however, efforts to compel Christians to accept gays and lesbians are much larger, and have more political consequences, than those which compel anti-Christian gays and lesbians to accept Christian people.

In contrast with Thomas, Charles did not frame expressions of his Christianity as being a dimension of God's timing for the purposes of evangelism.

> I tend to talk a lot about spirituality [around other non-Christian gay people]. I was a typical liberal church minister. I downplayed being a follower of Christ. I downplayed anything spiritual. I really tried to be an invisible influence for good. Now, I say I'm a follower of Christ, a believer in the Bible, and I'm saved. I admit and I'm open about it. Just like you want to be open about being gay, I am ready now at this stage of my life to being open about being Christian. I don't try to hide it.

Charles' situation reflects another dimension apart from those of the other participants because he is currently married to a woman, although they do not live together. He explained that divorce seems unnecessary because it is bothersome, and he and his wife remain good friends. His marital status, in combination with his Christianity, has lead to experiences in which other non-Christian gay people have expressed negative judgments about the way in which Charles leads his life.

> I know that I am not accepted in the gay community. There are a number of gay people who come to this church, and are actively part of it, and know what my scene is. Yet, I recognize that, by and large, if I go down to [the gay bar], they look about and say, "There's that married minister. What an asshole." I have to live with that. That's how I'm perceived by some. . . . There are some [non-Christian gay] people who believe I am not living up to Christian principles. . . . I had been [to the bar], and I had one guy turn to me and say, "What kind of a fucking Christian are you, anyway?" I said, "A flawed one."

For Charles, most of the judgmental comments about his identities have come from non-Christian gay people. In describing himself as "flawed," Charles was referring neither to his homosexuality nor his marital status in combination with his homosexuality. Rather, he expressed that, as a human being, he is fundamentally flawed in the eyes of God, as he believes all human beings to be. Such a belief is the fundamental tenet of evangelism, specifically that Jesus saves people from their flawed and sinful natures so that God can receive them, in perfect spiritual form, into an eternal kingdom.

The theme of evangelism was also interwoven throughout comments made by Lloyd and Bob. Lloyd said,

> [Bob and I] don't have a lot of interest [in socializing with non-Christian gay people]. I find I'm uncomfortable going to a secular-type party, or something like that. I really find it uncomfortable. We don't have a lot of gay friends. Only ones out of the church. [Hearing other gay people bashing Christians] bothers me because I know that I'm part of their community, the gay community, but yet I'm Christian also. It does bother me, 'cause I understand where they're coming from. They're angry. I get the same way. But I try to reach out to them.

Lloyd described an example of how his beliefs in evangelism override his feelings of discomfort in being Christian among non-Christian gay people. He said,

> [For a] couple of years [Bob and I marched in the gay pride parade] as part of [our] union. . . . We were the only one's there [from our church]. There was two of us. They were all hiding in the crowd. When we marched [under the banner of our gay church], I didn't

> feel uncomfortable being gay, I felt uncomfortable being Christian there.

Bob, Lloyd's partner, added, "[Becoming Christian] wasn't an easy thing either because we lost most of our friends because of what they called our 'nuttiness'." Bob also said:

> We're not shoe-leather evangelists who shove it down people's throats. What I say is if they would just come into the church [and] sit down -- they don't even have to stay if they don't want to. But just sit there, and experience the service, and experience something within themselves. Give it a chance instead of writing it off right away. Because I do, I fear for their souls.

For Lloyd, and Bob, among others, evangelism tends to override feelings of discomfort about expressing Christian beliefs among non-Christian gay people. But for men such as Charles, an "equal rights" perspective, combined with an evangelical one, facilitates his conviction to express his Christianity among other gay people in spite of some negative comments that some gay people have directed towards him.

The participants reflect a usual social phenomenon, namely, that most people seek like-minded others with whom to associate. However, rejection by others can sometimes bolster one's identity, rather than erode it. The recognition that some Christians are hostile toward gays and lesbians, and that some gays and lesbians are hostile toward Christians, does not necessarily discourage some individuals from accepting and celebrating self-images that combine Christian and homosexual identities. On the contrary, occupying such a space

within the social matrix enables some individuals to integrate identities into meaningful whole images of self, free from the compulsion of having to choose between one identity or the other. Such self-images are influenced, rather than determined, by people who are supportive, as well as by those who are not.

Self-Affirmation

A final type of strategy of identity integration involves asserting one's individual agency. Individuals often make choices that facilitate and bolster one's identities, apart from the influence of particular others. For example, the adoption of alternative perspectives on the Bible, such as those that challenge Biblical literalism, is one way in which some people assert their individual agency within social groups which emphasize conformity.

I have mentioned above that some Christian homosexual people, such as so-called "ex-gays," feel badly about their homosexuality in part because they have internalized literalist and anti-gay interpretations of the Bible. However, alternative perspectives can encourage acceptance of one's homosexuality in concert with one's Christianity, thereby functioning as a conduit to identity integration. Adopting alternative perspectives to those of mainstream Christians can sometimes reflect a very long process of developing self-awareness. Charles expressed the difficulties and rewards of such a process:

> [My acceptance of being gay and Christian has come about] through a long, arduous and painful process of coming to terms and accepting myself. It's taken years to accept myself. The biggest thing was developing my own self-worth [and] self-esteem.

> I have had a very poor self-image, and yet at the same time, I've been involved in a lot of leadership. It's a poor combination when you have [both] low self-esteem and leadership skills. I've had to work on seeing myself as successful. I think that's the biggest thing that I've discovered. I am successful, in spite of my flawed nature. It works.

Pete described a similar process of self-acceptance in being gay in combination with being Christian.

> I remember saying, "I am like this," and I finally said to myself, "You know, you have a long time to live yet. You'd better start liking yourself." So I would count that as a turning point in my life as to me accepting me, who I was, even though all of the conflicts weren't resolved. . . . It got to the point that I realized that the only way I could stop being gay was to commit suicide. It wasn't that I was going to commit suicide; it was just that was the only way out. So what's the point in going on with [that] exercise? I guess I make decisions, and that's it.

Sometimes, participants expressed self-affirmations that emerged from childhood experiences of feeling "different." Wayne, who had recognized his attractions to other boys at an early age and who was raised in an evangelical and fundamentalist Christian home, described the rather pragmatic way in which he combined his Christian beliefs and his homosexual attractions:

> I had been brought up with [family] values very strongly. To me, somehow, I just took all these values and just transposed them onto my new sexuality. So it wasn't that I was gay and I was going to the bar, and [doing] the gay thing so to speak -- the clubs [that is]. I just transposed, so whereas I was supposed to look for a woman and get married and have kids or whatever, I transposed, meaning that I was going to find a partner of the same sex. And I had visions of getting married to a same-sex partner as early as my mid-teens, probably. Like thirteen or fourteen maybe.

Rather than feeling condemned, Wayne recognized in his youth that his identities could be accommodated without having to discontinue his Christian beliefs. For Wayne, such a cognitive "transposition" was a relatively minor difference from the norm considering that he continued to subscribe to the familial notions about morality, views on the family, and beliefs in Christianity.

Summary of Identity Integration Strategies

The five types of strategies presented above reflect the most frequently-articulated ways in which the eight participants resolved the identity conflict that they acknowledged as having experienced, albeit to varying degrees of severity. Overall, resolution was ultimately achieved not by discontinuing one identity or the other, but rather by blending both identities into their everyday lives. The strategies suggest that both individual agency and social processes facilitate identity integration.

The interview data represent rich life histories, and I have discussed some aspects of those stories. Unfortunately, practical constraints do not allow me to explore other aspects of their histories here. Analysis of some of the data yielded insights into the questions of "How?" and "Why?". I intuited a variety of strategic themes that I organized according to types. The process of doing so was grounded in the words and stories that each participant shared with me about his life.

The most common strategic theme was *Biblical Interpretation.* I discussed the ways in which the Bible informed the gay identity of each man, particularly

through exegesis. A second common theme was summed up by the phrase "A Christianity of Questions", a expression that Scott used to describe his philosophical orientation towards Christianity. For Scott, faith in Christianity lies not in discovering divine truths about the physical and spiritual worlds, but rather in recognizing and accepting inconsistencies between idealized religious perspectives and actual lived experience. Each participant discussed having accepted some inconsistency in order to understand himself as being Christian and gay. A third theme concerned the issue of choice, particularly in reference to homosexual identity. Most of the men felt that they did not have a choice in being gay, but had made a deliberate choice to become Christian. The only exception was Thomas; he argued that he chose neither to be gay nor to be Christian. Another strategy concerned the influence on identity integration of the social worlds in which the men were situated. In general, each participant sought particular social groups in order to facilitate gay and Christian identity integration. The final strategy that I discussed concerned the ways in which each man affirmed himself in simultaneously being gay and Christian, such as making deliberate choices to adopt perspectives on Christianity other than fundamentalist ones.

All of the strategies facilitate identity integration and are linked by the component of agency, which I see as asserting one's will to make decisions. Each participant expressed why he pursued identity integration. In particular, some of the men expressed their opinion that homosexuality was not a choice and that Christianity was an attractive venue for expressing their spirituality. After

recognizing that they could retain both aspects of their lives, they sought avenues for identity integration. Some of the participants implied that subscribing to Christianity, participating in Christian practices, and associating with other Christians are not exclusive rights of heterosexual Christians. They have held firm in their belief that identifying as Christian does not preclude their gay identities and they have overtly and covertly confronted individuals who believe otherwise. Similarly, they have asserted their right to express their Christianity among other gay people, some of whom have expressed disapproval about their Christianity.

It is possible, but unlikely, that the initial motivation of each participant to integrate his identities was to promote equal rights. The question "Why?" might imply an agenda to promote equal rights with heterosexuals, specifically concerning access to religion and participation in gay communities as Christians. However, the promotion of equal rights and political awareness likely followed the search for personal peace. The desire to resolve identity conflict was more likely the issue that compelled each man to pursue identity integration, including the men who had originally attempted to discontinue their gay identities. Finding inner peace through identity integration was ultimately achieved through a variety of strategies, reflecting factors such as choice of social groups and organizations, interpretations of Biblical scripture, and beliefs about the nature of (homo)sexuality.

Although I argue that the actions of these men are political in nature, I am not suggesting that every participant has embraced the political work of

promoting equal rights. Gay and lesbian communities in North America have not promoted an explicitly anti-Christian agenda. Therefore, it appears that political work in this context tends not to extend beyond being out as a Christian in non-Christian contexts. However, many Christian communities have initiated and promoted political agendas which are clearly anti-gay in nature, some of which actively condone violence against gays and lesbians (among others). In spite of the need to challenge such agendas, some of these men do not appear eager to do so. The strategies that I have presented in this chapter reflect the participants' primary intention to reduce cognitive dissonance (in part through building supportive social ties and relationships) rather than to confront discrimination.

Moreover, the five types of strategies collectively emphasize that, among the eight participants, homosexual identity formation has taken place within the context of, rather than apart from, evangelical Christianity. The identity theories of both Cass and Troiden, discussed in Chapter Two, do not account for such a possibility. More generally, neither theorist considered the effects of a conflicting identity upon the process of homosexual identity formation. Implications of the five types of strategies for the Cass and Troiden models are the focus of the next, and final, chapter.

Chapter Five: Evaluation of the Cass and Troiden Models

In this chapter, I first present a brief discussion about some of the issues raised in the data from Chapter Four in order to separately analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the Cass and Troiden models of homosexual identity formation. I then return to the five strategies of identity integration, specifically elucidating the ways in which the Cass and Troiden models can be revised in order to account for homosexual identity formation in the context of conflicting identities. Finally, I present a synthesized and revised model.

A General Discussion of the Data

The men in this study have learned to blend their identities as gay and Christian as a way of making sense of their sexual and religious orientations. The strategies that they have used to do so indicate that they highly value being both gay and Christian. The necessity of implementing strategies of identity integration arose in part from being told by others that being both gay and Christian is not possible because homosexuality and Christianity are mutually incompatible. That message comes particularly from other Christians because of a general Christian bias against homosexuality. To a lesser extent, some gay people who hold a bias against Christianity have attempted to deter the participants from also being Christian.

Rejection of gays and lesbians by some Christians and rejection of Christians by some gays and lesbians are not equally powerful social phenomena. As I have argued throughout this thesis, the ability of Christian

ideologies to impose moral values upon society is more pronounced than are the influences of gay and lesbian political activism on social values. Whereas anti-Christian attitudes and sentiments are usually expressed as a reactive defense against Christian condemnation of homosexuals, anti-homosexual attitudes and sentiments, especially those of right-wing Christians, are typically expressed as proactive attacks against gays and lesbians. Anti-Christian attitudes among some gays and lesbians might not arise if it were not for Christian campaigns that explicitly promote negative stereotypes, discrimination, and, at times, hatred against gay and lesbian individuals and their loved ones.

Right-wing Christian campaigns against gays and lesbians are perhaps the most visible, and sometimes sensational, ways in which Christian ideologies are imposed upon society. Some more moderate Christian denominations also condemn homosexuality and have done so for centuries. The notion that homosexuality is immoral and unnatural has thus become axiomatic in societies which are dominated by Christian values, even among people who are not actively Christian themselves. Gay activism functions in such societies where anti-gay Christian campaigns are organized, and where homophobia is mostly the status quo.

In spite of such prejudices, the men in this study have come to accept their being gay and Christian, not merely with a sense of resignation, but with contentment. As they proceeded along their respective paths of identity development, they made particular decisions -- adopted various strategies -- which facilitated a harmonious blending of their (previously-conflicting) identities.

I have suggested that identity integration can result in spite of anti-gay or anti-Christian biases expressed by significant or generalized others. In light of some of the strategies which I discussed in the last chapter, I would add that identity integration can also result *because* of such biases, as a kind of defiance against those who disapprove of people who subscribe to Christianity while at the same time identifying as gay. The adoption of Christianity by gays and lesbians may be perceived by some gays and lesbians as capitulation to political foes; in their view, Christianity may reflect a narrow, exclusive, and authoritarian moral regime that gays and lesbians should entirely reject. For many Christians, the acceptance of being gay or lesbian in combination with being Christian represents a moral contradiction.

Such perspectives indicate that the identities of being gay and Christian emerge in contexts of social and political power; blending identities, as some of the men in this study have implied, represents an act of resistance against particular moral or political regimes that attempt to deter their respective processes of identity integration. Be that as it may, the forces of Christianity, in my view, are much more powerful within society than those of gay and lesbian communities, in part because the latter continue to be mostly hidden within society. Devout Christians with homosexual orientations must contend with the widespread notion that their soul and salvation are jeopardized because of their sexual orientation. On the other hand, gay or lesbian people who are also Christian have only their social lives to consider when their Christianity is condemned by gays or lesbians. I do not mean to downgrade the significance of

anti-Christian opinions of some gay individuals on the lives of some of the men in this study. Rather, I mean only to suggest that men such as Charles, Lloyd, Bob, Wayne, and perhaps others, would likely consider their souls and salvation as ultimately paramount over their physical lives on earth.

Although the participants described having faced challenges in their lives that impeded successful identity integration, they were not deterred from doing so. Achieving a point in their lives at which they felt relatively little inner conflict about being both gay and Christian reflects processes of identity acquisition that are dialectical in nature. Once integration strategies were in place, they no longer compartmentalized the expression of their identities in accordance with social mores of particular groups. Most of the participants reached a point in their lives at which their private identities were expressed comfortably around other people, both gay and straight, Christian and non-Christian.

I have described the nature of the participants' integrated identities as dialectical to account for their acceptance of a gay identity in combination with a Christian identity, rather than for their entire identity formation processes. All had been raised in Christian homes except for Charles and Scott, both of whom had participated in Christian youth activities. Apart from whether or not they were raised in Christian homes, their Christian identities were likely well-grounded, or at least rooted, by the time they began to accept their gay identities. In the interviews, many of these men discussed childhood experiences that they later understood as signifying their adult homosexuality. However, such experiences are not synonymous with having a gay identity from childhood. My description of

their gay and Christian identities as dialectical implies that they had adopted identity integration strategies. I think of their integrated identities as reflecting a "continual reciprocity." Prior to attaining continual reciprocity, their Christian identities emerged in the absence of their gay identities or were mentally and socially compartmentalized from their gay identities.

The models of homosexual identity formation that I described in chapter two, one developed by Cass (1979) and the other by Troiden (1988), do not reflect continual reciprocity of (previously) conflicting identities. A brief review of the Cass and Troiden models here is beneficial for explanation. Cass developed a six-stage model that emphasizes cognitive development in the acquisition of a homosexual identity. She described the ways in which individuals continually evaluate and reevaluate their status as homosexuals. The six stages are: confusion, comparison, tolerance, acceptance, pride, and synthesis. Identity synthesis represents the last stage of the Cass model and is achieved when individuals integrate personal and public homosexual identities.

The model of homosexual identity formation that was developed by Troiden is somewhat different from that of Cass. Troiden's model reflects four stages. The first stage, sensitization, occurs before puberty, often as feelings of being different from peers. Confusion, assumption, and commitment are the other three stages. According to Troiden, commitment is typically felt as self-acceptance and comfort with a homosexual self-identity and social role.

Both Cass and Troiden described their respective models as ideal-typical and as general portrayals of the ways in which individuals come to perceive

themselves and present themselves in society as homosexuals. The overall strength of each model is that they describe general processes and common experiences of homosexual identity formation. In doing so, the implication is that homosexual identity formation typically contrasts with that of heterosexuals. For example, most heterosexuals are afforded the luxury of never or rarely having to question their sexual orientation, and of never or rarely having their sexual orientation questioned by others. Heterosexuality is a "given" for most people, unless they demonstrate or claim otherwise.[16] As Cass and Troiden point out, doing "otherwise" involves a process of continual self-evaluation concerning sexual orientation identity that is distinct from that of most heterosexuals.

The data that I presented in Chapter four reveal strengths and weaknesses of the models of homosexual identity formation. Each theorist emphasized cognitive perceptions and presented social and political factors that might facilitate or discourage the continuation of homosexual identity development. A more detailed assessment of each theoretical model in view of the interview data will bring some of their respective strengths and weaknesses into focus.

The Cass Model: A General Analysis

Cass describes a process by which homosexuals, both men and women, come to see and accept themselves as homosexuals. In her view, a stable

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[16] Heterosexuality tends to be attributed to individuals, whether gay or straight, based more on gender cues than on actual sexual activity. By "given," I am referring the attribution of heterosexuality at birth by others as a "default" sexual orientation identity. I am also referring to the continual validation of heterosexuality from others throughout one's life.

homosexual identity is achieved when three levels of one's perception are congruent with each other: perception of oneself concerning characteristics associated with being gay, perception of one's behaviour associated with being gay, and perception of other people's attitudes about one's characteristics. She emphasized that acquiring a homosexual identity is an active process; people make decisions to either continue with the process of acquisition or to foreclose upon it. Like other identity theorists, Cass described usual strategies that are adopted to reduce cognitive dissonance. Along the journey of sexual orientation identity acquisition, one increasingly "commits" to a homosexual identity, specifically in conjunction with public openness about it (what Cass calls public homosexual identity).

As I see it, there are three problems with the Cass model in light of the data I presented in the last chapter. In no particular order, one concerns Cass' argument that, during the second stage (Identity Comparison), feelings of inner tension about the possibility of being homosexual compel one either to inhibit overt and covert behaviours that one associates with being homosexual, or to reduce associations with others whom express anti-gay attitudes. Homosexual identity formation is foreclosed in the former scenario, and fostered in the latter scenario. Cass states that "giving up membership in a church group" is an example of a strategy that fosters homosexual identity formation. Cass conducted her research in the 1970s and likely did not have examples of church groups where gay and lesbian people would be welcomed. Such groups either did not exist or were unknown to the vast majority of people. However, in the

context in which the interviewees lived, it is possible to retain one's religious beliefs (and even church membership) while also accepting a gay identity.

The men in this study have been active agents in their respective processes of identity acquisition. Some have discontinued their association with people who are openly hostile towards homosexuals, but some have also decided to retain their religious beliefs and associations with non-gay Christian groups and individuals. Thomas and Scott even prefer to attend church with non-gay Christians rather than with gay ones. Furthermore, all of the men demonstrate that retaining such beliefs and associations can be a vital source of support for acquiring a homosexual identity. A revised Cass model would reflect such possibilities.

Another problem is that while Cass is clear that her model represents general processes which culminate in private and public homosexual identity integration (the Synthesis stage), she does not account for the ways in which individuals might arrive at the final stage while skipping one or more of the other stages. Cass explains that individuals can foreclose on identity acquisition at any time, and return to it later (or not return to it, as the case may be). She presents the model as though each stage is requisite in the process of homosexual identity acquisition. However, none of the men in this study described experiences that reflect the fifth stage of the Cass model, the Pride stage. None of the participants described having experienced a zealousness about his homosexual identity such that he considered all heterosexuals to be opponents and all other homosexuals to be allies. Contrary to Cass, each participant

instead described feelings of frustration in not finding enough allies among other non-Christian gay men whom specifically supported their Christianity. Feelings of adversity were perhaps directed more towards non-Christians than towards heterosexuals. In any case, it remains unclear why Cass considers all stages to be necessary, rather than possible, steps towards full homosexual identity development. Perhaps this stage represents an artifact from a particular historic time when pride was more tenuous.

Finally, the Cass model does not discuss age-specific experiences, perceptions, and feelings that often inform the development of a gay identity. The first stage of identity acquisition, the Confusion stage, appears to begin in adulthood, although Cass is not explicit about this. She does not discuss childhood experiences that many adult homosexuals consider, in retrospect, to represent early indications of being gay, such as gender-atypical behaviour. All of the men in this study discussed boyhood experiences such as having "crushes" on other boys that they later understood as being clues that would help to direct them out of the confusion that they had felt about their homosexuality. Subsequent adult gay identities emerged in part from such clues.

Smaller problems with the Cass schema are also evident. She correctly points out that making contacts with other homosexuals can lead to increased self-acceptance of a gay identity. Such contacts can result in finding sexual and / or romantic partners, gaining support for one's homosexuality from other homosexuals, and, moreover, "normalizing" homosexuality so that one's perceptions of homosexuality as deviant, pathological, or sinful are reduced.

Cass adds that making contacts with other homosexuals can also lead to identity foreclosure if those contacts are perceived as negative. According to Cass, some men with homosexual orientations who have not adopted a gay identity negatively associate increased involvement with other gay men with further acceptance of a gay identity.

While it is true that finding support among other homosexuals is a typical way in which individuals reduce cognitive dissonance about being homosexual, Cass reifies such contacts by describing them in the context of "the gay subculture" (p. 231). Cass first published her model of homosexual identity formation in 1979. The term "subculture" might have been more appropriate during that time when social visibility of gays and lesbians was not as integrated into public consciousness, discourse, and popular culture as when the interviews for this study took place. Perhaps many gays and lesbians no longer need to locate "subcultures" to find social support for their homosexual identity, but instead find support from individuals who represent a variety of sexual orientations in a variety of social settings and through mass media. I am not suggesting that gays and lesbians have not formed particular communities and cultures; I am instead arguing that the term "subculture" implies a singular organization. Gay and lesbian communities are complex, diverse, and comprise many social groups and organizations. As the men in this study indicate, social support can be found from a variety of people representing various sexualities and religious perspectives, including heterosexuals and Christians.

Furthermore, the data I presented in Chapter four indicates that, for the men in this study, other homosexuals (and other Christians) have not always offered them affirmation. A revised Cass model would elaborate on ways in which homosexual people seek affirmation through individuals who are supportive of their identities even if those individuals are not homosexual.

Overall, the strength of the Cass model is its detailed overview of general processes of homosexual identity formation and its emphasis on individual agency in such acquisition. However, Cass does not account for the ways in which homosexual identities emerge for individuals who simultaneously identify in ways that are usually considered to be in conflict with homosexuality, such as being Christian. According to Cass, the men in this study would likely have discontinued church membership and / or religious beliefs in order to attain a homosexual identity. Instead, they chose to do the opposite and yet have achieved similar results.

To summarize, the Cass model is problematic in some key areas not because Cass employed poor methodological or analytical practices. Rather, the Cass model suffers from being somewhat dated. Social circumstances for gay and lesbian people have changed significantly during the two decades since Cass' research was first published. Gay and lesbian communities have flourished since 1979, particularly in urban centres and especially for white, middle-class populations. Most people have access to venues of mass media which provide more positive reflections of gay or lesbian people than was the case even a few years ago. An updated version of the Cass model need not include a

comprehensive list of venues that are currently available for the purposes of affirmation, but would reflect the notion that identity formation tends to be achieved in diverse ways which are not necessarily as sequential as her model implies. An updated version might also mention that some churches have become more welcoming of gays and lesbians.

The Troiden Model: A General Analysis

In accordance with Gagnon and Simon's (1973) theory that physical acts become meaningful for individuals when contextualized within social scripts, such as gender and sexual orientation scripts, Troiden emphasizes the significance of childhood experiences which later form an important part of adult homosexual orientation identity. Unlike Cass, Troiden presents detailed descriptions of childhood experiences, usually pertaining to gender-atypical behaviour rather than to sexuality, which are later infused with significance for many homosexuals. He remarks that, "childhood experiences gained in social, emotional, and genital realms come to be invested with homosexual significance during adolescence" (p. 44-5).

As I have mentioned above, men such as Pete and Charles are, from Cass' perspective, developmentally problematic because they have not fully integrated public and private homosexual identities. Troiden argues that Cass erroneously equates identity acquisition with identity disclosure and suggests that identity disclosure is more a matter of identity management than identity development. Deciding who is correct depends on one's particular definition of

"identity." Throughout this thesis, I have emphasized that identity formation is an outcome of agency, which is to say that when one comes to accept a particular self-description, identity has been achieved. However, I have also implied that social processes are integral in the process of identity development. The concept of "Me," to refer again to Mead's (1934) description of identity as a function of "internalized others," captures part of the identity formation processes of the participants in this research. For these men, "Me" includes the influence of family, friends, individuals in gay or Christian communities (or both), and society in general.

In view of "Me" and Cooley's (1964) "looking-glass self," I am inclined to side with Cass on the issue of public disclosure. In my view, identity is fully-established when it can be reflected back by others. In my own life, I do not feel compelled to hide from other people the fact that I have a male spouse, rather than a female spouse. Due recognition from others of my spouse, and therefore also of my sexual orientation identity, contributes to my identity as a gay person. Furthermore, I have argued throughout this thesis that gay and lesbian identities (among others) are inherently political, not only because I believe that everyday actions and decisions have political implications, but also because such identities transgress compulsory heterosexuality (propounded especially by Christian people). Identity formation as both gay and Christian reaches fruition when one expresses both identities publicly, especially in areas of one's life which are voluntary, such as church.

When viewed from Troiden's model, the homosexual identities of Pete and Charles are no longer problematic because Troiden posits identity disclosure as optional rather than necessary in the process of identity development. In other words, Pete and Charles have achieved self-acceptance with a homosexual identity and social role and represent full identity development as described in Troiden's Stage four (the Commitment stage), as do all of the other men in this study. It appears that Troiden and Cass each operationalized "identity" in two very different ways which lead to two very different theoretical constructs.

The descriptions of identity development by the eight participants indicate that there appear to be no significant problems with the Troiden model. Each of the men I interviewed provided an account of identity acquisition that reflects the four stages of homosexual identity development described by Troiden. One resulting conclusion of the Troiden model could be that it is analytically robust; it generally reflects the processes of homosexual identity development as the men in this study described them. But each of the four stages is extremely broad, thus weakening their explanatory potential. Rather than constructing a model design that is "ideal typical," as Troiden calls it, Troiden has instead offered a model that is so general that it seems somewhat superficial; it could describe gay identity formation patterns of practically all gay men in North America, and perhaps elsewhere. Sensitization, confusion, assumption, and commitment, the four stages in the Troiden model, are somewhat obvious components of homosexual identity acquisition. In my view, each of these stages are too broad for maximum

theoretical efficacy, although they specifically address homosexual identity formation, rather than other aspects of identity.

In support of Troiden, he addressed the problem of linearity more clearly than did Cass. He described his model not as a series of step-by-step stages, but rather as a "horizontal spiral, like a spring lying on its side. Progress through the stages occurs in a back-and-forth, up-and-down fashion . . . [because] the stages overlap and recur in somewhat different ways for different people." (p. 42). Given the difficulties in attaining comfort with being gay as described by the men in this study, the metaphor of the horizontal spiral is an apt one. Although not addressed specifically, an interpreter of the Troiden model could frame "conflicting identities" as a possible constituent of the back-and-forth, up-and-down pattern of homosexual identity development. An improvement on the existing model would reflect the possibility that conflicting identities, especially ones that typically reference conservative views on sexual morality, can interfere with the process of accepting that one is gay.

A somewhat minor quibble with Troiden is his choice to describe men and women who have accepted and feel comfortable about their respective homosexual identities as "committed homosexuals" (p. 53). In my view, the word "committed" evokes an image of mental institutionalization, and implies subscription to organizations or activities, such as "committed social activist." People actively "commit" to doing particular things, but they tend not to "commit" to identifying as any particular sexual orientation. It also erroneously implies that other sexual orientation identities cannot co-exist with being homosexual, such

as bisexual and queer. I have argued that identity acquisition requires agency in order to make certain decisions that either facilitate or discontinue identity development. However, people tend not to "commit" to homosexual identities like others might sign up for military duty. Replacing "committed" with "self-accepting" more accurately evokes an inner and gradual process of self-awareness. The term "self-accepting" also implies that multiple and apparently-contradicting identities can co-exist, including multiple sexual orientation identities.

The Cass and Troiden Models and the Five Strategies of Identity Integration

In order to propose a synthesized and revised model, it is useful to discuss the ways in which each the five strategies is, or is not, reflected in each model.

The first strategy that I discussed, and the one that was referred to by the eight participants more than any other strategy, was *Biblical interpretation*. Both Cass and Troiden mention that, on the path from identity confusion to identity acceptance, homosexuals characteristically pursue sources of information that affirm their homosexual identity. Cass also states that, within the Pride stage, homosexuals often "immerse [them]selves in the gay subculture, voraciously consuming gay literature and culture" (p. 233). Such an observation is absent in Troiden's model probably because each theorist emphasized two different outcomes. For Troiden, identity formation is complete when individual's accept a homosexual identity, whereas Cass emphasized that individual acceptance and public disclosure are requisite components of full identity formation. It could be

that Troiden considers "additional sources of information" to mean "gay literature and culture," as Cass puts it. On the other hand, Troiden does not explicitly preclude sources of information such as the Bible.

Most people would consider the Bible to be expressive of hostility towards gays and lesbians. Clearly, the men in this study are not among them. I assume that Troiden is referring to material and literature that is explicitly gay-affirmative. Neither theorist has considered the ways in which texts that are usually used against homosexuals can be claimed by gays and lesbians for self-affirming reasons. David and Lloyd, among others, turned to the Bible as a reference point for understanding their homosexual identities. In the context of homosexual identity formation, the Bible is significant because it is the cornerstone of anti-gay activism among members of right-wing Christian organizations, and yet it also often underlies opinions that homosexuals cannot be Christian, even among non-Christians.

Acceptance of inconsistencies was the second strategy that I presented, referring to the ways in which some men learn to accommodate their Christian beliefs within circumstances of their lives that do not typically foster Christian beliefs or reflect usual Christian values. Thomas' mother, for example, was a Christian and an alcoholic and Thomas learned to accept that particular inconsistency. He also incorporated it as a general lesson in life that not everything can be resolved to eliminate inconsistencies. Other men were able to retain their Christian beliefs even though they recognized that the behaviour of others was, at times, not reflective of Christ as they interpreted Him to be.

Acceptance of inconsistencies was adopted as a strategy for retaining their Christian identities, in particular, within the context of a developing homosexual identity. Doing so can be an important factor in the integration of conflicting identities but it is not factored into either the Cass or Troiden models. Neither theorist entertained the notion that the acceptance of inconsistencies in perception of core values and beliefs can be a component of homosexual identity self-acceptance.

The perception of *lack of choice* was the third strategy that I presented. The issue of choice is discussed by both Cass and Troiden, specifically as identity acceptance through claiming "personal innocence" (Cass, p. 228). Some of the men in this study referred to their belief that they were "born gay," implying lack of choice, as a conduit to identity acceptance. Significantly, for some men, such a belief was also formed in reference to being Christian, evident in some statements that being gay was a result of God's will. Both Cass and Troiden acknowledged that, for many homosexuals, perception of lack of choice underlies acceptance of their homosexual identity. The claim made by some of the participants that "God made me homosexual" does not appear to contradict the "personal innocence" strategy discussed by Cass, even though neither she nor Troiden explicitly discussed the former notion. For many of the men in this study, their belief that God made them gay -- in contrast with merely claiming innocence -- provided a strong foundation for accepting their gay identities.

As a fourth strategy of identity integration, I discussed *the influence of other people*. I use the term, "influence" to refer to individuals or groups who

encouraged gay and Christian identities, as well as those who discouraged such identities. Both Cass and Troiden pointed out that, generally, the quality of contacts with other homosexuals is a significant factor in decisions to either continue or discontinue homosexual identity acquisition. Their observation is an accurate one, but it does not capture the complexity of homosexual identity formation for some men whom also identify as Christian. For the men in this study, identity acquisition was complicated by their perception that some gay men objected to their Christianity, and that -- predictably -- some Christians objected to their being gay. These men have found affirmation for their gay identities through Christian-positive gay people and gay-positive Christian people. However, people who are only Christian-positive can only foster Christian identities. As these men also demonstrate, identity integration can also be fostered by feelings of defiance against those who disapprove.

The final strategy I discussed was *Self-affirmation*. In general, the development of a homosexual identity is continual and progressive, and, in part, necessitates self-affirmation. Both Cass and Troiden pointed out that people make a myriad of decisions, based on emotions, situations, and perceptions, to achieve a positive and perhaps even proud self-identity as gay. But achieving a Christian identity in combination with a gay one problematizes the models. In my view, Christianity is an important consideration in the acquisition of a homosexual identity for the men in this study because Christianity is as important to their self-definition as is being gay. For Thomas and Wayne, Christianity

constitutes a central way in which they describe themselves, in addition to their gay identities.

In assessing each model by examining the degree to which they reflect five types of strategies of gay and Christian identity integration, I am not suggesting that each of the Cass and Troiden models should address issues that are specific to Christianity. Instead, I am proposing a revision that would address the general issue of conflicting identities, relative to homosexual identity formation. In this study, I have focused on Christian identity as a case study. However, the concept of conflicting identities, in the context of homosexual identity formation, can be broadened to reflect the experiences of many other people who define themselves as gay. For example, some individuals perceive their gender identity as conflicting with their homosexual one. Some men, for example, feel that being gay compromises their masculinity and therefore undermines their status as "men." Other people experience conflict between a homosexual identity and an ethnic / racialized one (Cochran and Mays, 1998).[17] In North America at least, some people perceive being gay or lesbian as an issue that concerns middle-class white individuals. Being gay or lesbian and a member of a visible minority can result in feeling compelled to choose between one identity or the other. The integration of homosexual and ethnic / racialized identities can often lead to feeling marginalized in homosexual communities because of being non-white and feeling marginalized in ethnic / racialized communities because of being homosexual.

The five strategies outlined above have a common characteristic apart from describing the processes of identity integration. Each strategy hinges on the meanings, developed through individual agency and social interaction, which some men attribute to their being gay in combination with being Christian. Gay people who also have a strong commitment to Christianity may actually be well-equipped to counter anti-gay arguments because they are motivated to adopt ideologies which support their identities. Many other gay individuals, however, become alienated from Christianity, religion, and spirituality because they are unable to make connections between Christianity and being gay in most Christian contexts. For still other people who live in societies dominated by Christian beliefs, acceptance of a gay identity may be slowed by living in a Christian context, whether or not they define themselves as Christian.

Towards Synthesis and Revision of Theoretical Models

I have discussed many aspects of the Cass and Troiden models, including the ways in which the data and analysis presented in this thesis bring their respective strengths and weaknesses into focus. But what is the point of proposing ideal typical models in the first place? What purpose do such models serve? In general, ideal types are used to compare and contrast empirical evidence against some benchmark of knowledge about a particular phenomenon. Ideal types are distinguished from stereotypes in the way that they

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[17] I use the term "racialized," as opposed to "race," to imply the socially-constructed nature of racialized categories.

are continually revised in light of current research (Troiden, p. 35). My aim here is to propose revisions, following Troiden's cue to do so.

Research underscores the impetus for the development of models of homosexual identity formation, but such work cannot be partitioned off from politics. Models such as those proposed by Cass and Troiden implicitly reflect societies where sexual orientation diversity is neither highly valued nor encouraged. Most people in North America, and elsewhere, grow up in a social context in which heterosexuality is continually affirmed through familial relationships, social and religious rituals, and popular culture. Social and legal rewards, such as having one's opposite-sex relationship recognized and sanctioned by others and by the state, encourage individuals to self-identify as heterosexual. In addition, the threat of censure from family, friends, co-workers, and teachers bolsters conformity to heterosexuality and heterosexual identity.

Gay and lesbian people do not have all of the social and legal privileges of heterosexuals.[18] Self-identification as gay or lesbian requires a cognitive shift away from culturally-sanctioned and enforced heterosexuality towards sexual orientation identities that are transgressive. Achieving a stable homosexual identity requires particular efforts from individuals who experience homosexual fantasies, desires, and attractions. Cass and Troiden each attempt to explicate the process of such an achievement, somewhat analogous to the "best fit" line in statistical analysis.

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[18] Cass and Troiden tend to use the term "homosexual". I have done likewise, particularly when discussing aspects of their research. However, I use the term "gay and lesbian" to refer to contemporary Western social groups in contrast with "homosexual," a term which is more general, and usually refers to eroticism rather than to socio-cultural identity.

I have discussed what Cass and Troiden each consider to be the "best fit" model to describe the process of homosexual identity formation. I have also assessed the respective strengths and weaknesses of each model in light of narratives from eight gay men. Overall, neither model adequately reflects the identity development process of the participants as each one described them to me, specifically concerning the influence of conflicting identities. Had I asked questions in the interviews that focused only on being gay, perhaps the models would more closely resemble the lives of the men in this study. Clearly, doing so would have neglected to account for a significant portion of the homosexual identity formation processes of these men. To avoid such an oversight, I asked questions about their Christian identities so that I could learn about the ways in which their respective homosexual identities were confounded and, to my surprise, encouraged by subscribing to Christianity. I found that the "path" of homosexual identity development as described by the eight participants, in view of their Christianity, contrasts with the two models that I have examined. Both the Cass and Troiden models lack the theoretical sensitivity necessary to capture many of the important dimensions of homosexual identity formation of the participants in this study.

Although being gay might give rise to inner conflict in light of one's Christianity, the converse is also true; one may feel conflict about one's Christianity in light of being gay. I have used the term "continual reciprocity" to describe the identity development processes of the men in this study. However, I have attended more to Christianity as a confounding aspect of homosexual

identity development, rather than the other way around, because both the Cass and Troiden models concern homosexual identity development only.[19] I have attended to Christianity also because each of the participants were Christian before they were gay and therefore developed a gay identity against a backdrop of Christianity, rather than the other way around. The overall question I have asked is, "How do conflicting identities (specifically being Christian) confound and / or reflect the processes of homosexual identity development as described by Cass and Troiden"? Having assessed each model in light of the interview data, my aim here is to propose a synthesis and revision of the models to account for identities that tend to conflict with being gay. Although my focus has been on the influence of Christian identities upon one's gay identity, I have attempted to design a new model of gay identity formation which has wider implications beyond Christian identity.

In light of the interview data, I propose several changes to the Cass and Troiden models. First, I would place more qualifiers upon the "stages" metaphor in describing identity formation processes. In my view, the term "stage" implies linearity too strongly, and evokes the image of a path similar to that of ascending a staircase. Troiden's metaphor of the horizontal spiral aptly evokes flexibility and illustrates possibilities for moving throughout the process in an up-and-down and back-and-forth fashion. However, the potential for skipping stages or jumping back two or more stages is not adequately conveyed through the horizontal

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[19] Had I chosen to investigate the validity of models of religious identity development, my focus would have been on assessing the ways in which other identities conflict with religious identity, specifically concerning Christianity.

spiral metaphor. The provision of more qualifiers in order to account for the limitations of the "stages" metaphor may result in a model which accounts for gay identity formation patterns which indicate various fluctuations as well as those which are more-or-less linear.

An updated model should also reflect current phrases and terms concerning sexual orientation identity. Both Cass and Troiden rely on the term "homosexual" which sounds rather clinical. Most people use either "gay," "lesbian," and / or "queer." Also, phrases such as "committed homosexual," (discussed above) and "the gay subculture" are no longer appropriate to describe the social milieu in which the interviewees lived, if they ever were. The so-called "gay subculture" evokes the image of monolithic, singular, and somewhat hidden group of individuals linked by sexual orientation identities. Such a singular subculture likely never existed. Historians such as George Chauncey (1994) and Kennedy and Davis (1993) have examined the ways in which gay and lesbian individuals have been divided not only by sex and gender, but also by class status and racialized category. Current gay and lesbian communities do indeed reflect cultural expressions, but communities and cultures are pluralistic rather than singular. In addition, the most visible cultural expressions tend to reflect white, middle-class values and corporate capitalism.

Third, I would place limitations on the model so that sexual orientation identity formation patterns of lesbians, said to often contrast those of gay men, are not blurred. Future research would have to be conducted on an updated synthesized model in order to make the claim that the new model reflects identity

patterns of both lesbians and gay men. Meanwhile, researchers such as Paula Rust (1992) provide further evidence that sexual orientation patterns of women tend to be distinct from those of men.

A fourth recommendation is that an updated model retain Cass' emphasis on the synthesis of public and private gay identities to represent full identity formation. Troiden argued that public disclosure is more reflective of identity management than identity development. I agree that public disclosure concerns identity management, but public disclosure also represents a dimension of identity other than self-identity. One's identities are enhanced by reflection from other people. Some of the men in this study discussed having made decisions to not disclose their gay identities in particular situations for particular reasons, such as church leadership (in the case of Charles) and respect for a closeted partner (in the case of Pete). Other gay and lesbian individuals are selectively closeted in situations where they feel emotionally and / or physically unsafe. In my view, such choices are certainly valid, but they nevertheless limit the potential for identity formation beyond self-identification.

Finally, I suggest that the Cass model should include discussion about childhood experiences as Troiden has done. The Cass model would then account for childhood experiences, perceptions, and feelings that many homosexuals subsequently frame as predicting later gay or lesbian identity. The men in this study discussed, at length, particular aspects of their childhoods that retrospectively formed a cognitive basis of their adult gay identities. I do not agree with Troiden that childhood experiences constitute a first stage of

homosexual identity development because such experiences are not usually framed within gay identities until later in life. The inclusion of childhood experiences would have to be understood not usually as the beginning stage of a gay self-identification, but rather as experiences which are later understood differently in light of a developing gay identity.

Many gay and lesbian people refer to their childhood gender non-conforming behaviour as early evidence of their later gay or lesbian identities. However, many gender non-conforming children do not grow up to become gay or lesbian adults. Furthermore, many gay and lesbian adults describe their childhoods as gender-conforming. The emphasis, then, should be not on the gender, but on the understandings of the gender. For example, some people might interpret their childhood gender non-conformity as simply non-conforming behaviour, or perhaps as pre-transgendered or pre-transsexual (Devor, 1997). The inclusion of discussion about retrospective association of childhood experiences with gay identity throughout the Cass model retains the original six stages.

In later research to develop a standardized model, Cass (1984a, p. 163) observed few statistically-meaningful distinctions between stages one (Confusion) and two (Comparison), and between stages five (Pride) and six (Synthesis) (Cass,). Collapsing these stages would result in a four-stage model which I use as the basis of a revised model.

In sum, the Cass and Troiden models are useful analytical tools from which to explicate and describe homosexual identity formation. Given my

assessment of each model using the data from each of the eight participants, I think of the models as skeletal frameworks which portray only part of the identity formation picture. The inclusion of Troiden's discussion about childhood experiences would complement the theoretical efficacy of the Cass model. In my view, theoretical models are useful tools in describing "best-fit" scenarios. However, the data from this study indicate that the experiences of many people fall outside of those scenarios.

Accounting for Conflicting Identities: A Revised Model

Identities such as gay and Christian are widely perceived to be mutually exclusive. However, the lives of some people, including the eight participants in this study, indicate that a gay identity can be compatible with other apparently non-complementary identities. These men demonstrate that being Christian does not necessarily rule out being gay. I recommend merging Cass' four statistically-meaningful stages with Troiden's discussion about childhood experiences to provide a framework for a revised model that attends to the issue of conflicting identities. I have done so because, as the identity patterns of the eight participants suggest, one's identities which one perceives to be incompatible with being gay tend to have a significant impact upon one's gay identity formation.

In discussions about the Cass and Troiden models, I expressed concern about possible implications of using the "stages" metaphor, such as the notion that identity formation is built from one necessary step to the next until completion is attained. Cass discussed the possibility that identity could be

discontinued at any point, but was less explicit about variations in patterns of gay identity development, such as skipping one or more stages or returning to earlier stages. She implied that all stages are requisite in the quest for full homosexual identity formation. She also implied that identity is permanent once the developmental process is complete. Identity categories such as "gay" arise for particular historical reasons, as Weeks (1989) and Foucault (1978) argued, and often become common ways of expressing certain concepts of identity. However, identity categories might not be as permanent as Cass implied. Some social analysts have expressed dismay about the identity "gay," that it is specific to white males and that it is imbued with capitalist interests. Such critics, many of whom prefer the term "queer" instead of "gay," have been called "post-gay" or "anti-gay" (Manning, 1996). Potentially, the term "gay" might itself become an historical discursive artifact. Meanwhile, "gay" remains in common usage, and those who identify as "gay," especially men, tend to perceive and express their gay identity as more-or-less permanent.

In contrast with Cass, Troiden presented a model which attended to possibilities for greater variation in identity formation patterns, but which did not fully account for the identity formation patterns of the eight participants. Analyzing patterns of gay identity formation only, in isolation from the other ways in which people might also identify themselves, might suggest a more-or-less linear progression. However, this study indicates that the ways in which people identify themselves, in addition to being gay, can have significant effects upon the path towards full gay identity formation.

Cass spent years gathering data from dozens of participants in order to design her model of homosexual identity formation. I do not pretend to have equivalent resources. Nevertheless, the identity patterns of the eight participants in this study reveal some limitations of the Cass model, the most significant of which is that Cass does not address ways in which other identities have a potential impact upon gay identity acquisition. The data that I presented and analyzed in this study indicates that patterns of gay identity formation tend not to reflect a linear progression. A focus on identity integration reveals various shifts in the pattern of gay identity acquisition, including skipping ahead one or more stages and jumping back to previous stages.

In less detail than the models of Cass and Troiden, I describe below a revised model in four broad stages in accordance with Cass' revised (1984) model. The four stages are: confusion / comparison, tolerance, acceptance, and pride / synthesis. In my view, only Stage Four (pride / synthesis) is requisite in attaining full identity formation because it represents the fruition of identity formation through the blending of private and public identities. Throughout the description, I make references, where appropriate, to each of the five strategies of identity integration. The five strategies are specific to identities of gay and Christian and are not all meant to be applied to being gay in combination with other potentially conflicting identities. Those strategies which are least likely to be more widely applicable are *Biblical interpretation*, *A Christianity of Questions* and perhaps *Choice*.

Identity Confusion / Comparison

Stage One is characterized by confusion. Individuals who are confused about their sexual orientation identity typically ask the question, "Who am I?". Doing so is sometimes prompted by their perception that behaviours or feelings during childhood (such as gender non-conformity or feelings of physical attraction to other boys) constitute early indications of being gay. Confusion may also arise if one subscribes to particular social mores which often accompany identities that tend to conflict with being gay, such as usual Christian moral values and / or heterosexual hegemony.

One's feelings and behaviour alone do not necessarily result in a gay identity. One must also associate one's feelings and behaviour with the possibility of being gay. Subscribing to negative views about gay men (such as negative stereotypes) can exacerbate confusion and / or compel one to truncate gay identity formation. On the other hand, neutral or positive perceptions of one's feelings and behaviour can facilitate gay identity self-acceptance.

Identities in addition to a (potential) gay identity may be stable but not permanent. To accommodate (the possibility of) a gay identity, one might choose to shift the meanings that one holds about current identities, perhaps by seeking resources for alternative information. An example of doing so is to use Integration Strategy 1: *Biblical Interpretation.* Abandoning current identities which are stable relative to a (potentially) emerging gay identity is usually not considered as an option during the confusion stage. Gay identities may not result even for people who are homosexually active; confusion may become chronic

and perpetual. One might perceive that being gay is counter to their current identities, such as men who also identify as straight, or as Christian, or as Jewish, or as Indo-Canadian, or as athletes. Some people might also find that same-sex attractions or sexual experiences are fleeting or rare, thus provoking gay identity confusion without necessarily leading to further consideration of a gay identity.

If one chooses to continue investigation of a gay identity, various decisions may be made to resolve cognitive dissonance about the possibility of being gay. Typically, people assess themselves through comparisons with other people. Feelings of difference may arise with being gay, sometimes in combination with retrospective associations of childhood feelings and behaviour. Feelings of difference may be perceived with pride ("I enjoy being different and there is nothing wrong with it.") or shame ("I don't like being different because other people don't accept me."). Not wanting to be different may lead to aborting or further delaying gay identity acquisition, evident in the pursuit of masculine activities thought to be indicative of straight men, and / or through the seeking of reparative therapy or religious "healing" to quash homosexual feelings. One may decide that same-sex attractions only represent a brief phase in one's life, in which case a gay identity is not usually explored beyond the confusion stage.

Confusion is felt by many, but not all, gay men prior to self-acceptance of a gay identity. Some men might not experience confusion about "who they are" depending on a variety of circumstances. For example, one might have access to gay-supportive social groups, reflecting Integration Strategy 4: *The Influence*

of Others. One's gay-positive attitudes, which are an example of Integration Strategy 5: *Self-Affirmation*, might also facilitate self-acceptance of a gay identity. Acceptance of a gay identity may be attained sooner than for those who feel confusion and who lack gay-positive resources. The confusion / comparison stage is the likely point at which most, but not all, gay men begin to self-actualize about the possibility of being gay.

Identity Tolerance

For those who have not foreclosed upon a gay identity and also for those who have not yet *accepted* a gay identity, the feeling that "I probably am gay" often arises. The qualifier, "probably," implies tentative consideration that one may be gay, perhaps as a bridge to acceptance, or perhaps as a temporary phase that does not yield to gay identity acceptance. For those who think that they "probably" are gay, associations with gay people may be sought, or existing associations may become more meaningful, both of which reflect Integration Strategy 4: *The Influence of Others*. If perceptions of those associations are negative, one may choose gay identity foreclosure. If perceptions are positive, gay identity acceptance may result. Conflicting identities may compel some people to seek similar individuals to foster retention of existing identities while attaining a gay identity. For such men, finding people who are "more like me" provides them with social support to integrate conflicting identities. Some examples which men might use are: finding men who are masculine ("real men"), who are similarly religious, who are Asian, or who are physically disabled.

Finding similar others with whom to associate potentially reduces alienation that might be felt about being gay, in combination with other significant but possibly conflicting identities. Alienation might also be reduced through associations with supportive yet dissimilar people.

The quality of contacts may influence one's perceptions of being gay, perhaps in combination with other identities. Gay identity foreclosure may result, either on a permanent or temporary basis, when one decides that one does not want to be gay, or that one does not like being gay. Lack of success in achieving integration of an emerging gay identity with other significant identities may lead to foreclosure of the more tenuous identity, likely the gay one. On the other hand, feeling that one had no choice in being gay (Integration Strategy 3: *Choice*) in combination with unsuccessful attempts to integrate identities which conflict with being gay may lead to foreclosure upon identities other than being gay.

Identity Acceptance

If gay identity foreclosure has not taken place, one may decide to move beyond tentative self-awareness ("I probably am gay") to definite self-awareness ("I am gay"). One may *believe* that public expression of one's sexual orientation identity is equally valid to that of straight people. Nevertheless, expression of one's gay identity may continue to be reserved for partners, friends, and allies. Such a scenario reflects Integration Strategy 2: *A Christianity of Questions.* Acceptance of a gay identity, which corresponds to Integration Strategy 5: *Self-*

Affirmation, refers to *self*-acceptance and reflects only partial gay identity formation.

Gay identity acceptance is often characterized by compartmentalizing various identities within corresponding social contexts as a routine strategy of identity management. Compartmentalization is an example of Integration Strategy 2: *A Christianity of Questions.* "Passing" as heterosexual in public settings is a common way of limiting expressions of one's gay identity to people who are familiar and supportive. For some men, "passing" as heterosexual may not attend to the management of their other significant identities. Gay Christian men, for example, may feel the need to manage their identities by expressing both their gay and Christian identities in the context of other gay Christians. Alternatively, they might choose to express their gay identity while suppressing their Christian identity among other non-Christian gay people. Yet another choice might be to express their Christian identity while suppressing their gay identity among other non-gay Christian people.

The acceptance of one's gay identity indicates the formation of a self-identity. Throughout the process of gay identity acquisition, a gay self-identity is continually re-evaluated in light of various factors. Among those factors are associations with others, which corresponds to Integration Strategy 4: *The Influence of Others.*

The recognition that, "I am gay," typically leads to further associations with gay people. Negative associations can lead to renewed confusion / comparisons or even to gay identity foreclosure. Positive associations can enhance

acceptance with feelings of pride about being gay. Gay identity acceptance might also lead to foreclosure of identities which one perceives to be in conflict with being gay. On the other hand, integration of conflicting identities might be facilitated through using Integration Strategy 4: *The Influence of Others*, perhaps by finding support from other people. For example, gay men who are sexually attracted to women might seek support from people who would encourage them to maintain a gay identity while also exploring a bisexual identity.

Compartmentalization may become a relatively permanent gay identity management strategy, thus quashing continued gay identity development. Some gay men find compartmentalization, reflecting Integration Strategy 2: *A Christianity of Questions*, to be a useful strategy for a time. However, they eventually might choose to express their gay identity in public settings. One's perceptions about one's other identities may compel one to make choices such as accepting a gay identity as compatible with other ways of self-definition or rejecting of a gay identity if one continues to view one's other identities as being incompatible with being gay.

Identity Pride / Synthesis

Pride about being gay often arises from or in combination with gay identity acceptance. Pride is characterized by an "us and them" attitude, typically perceived as "gay versus straight" in the political battle for gay recognition. "Us and them" may be difficult to delineate for those who have managed to integrate formerly conflicting identities. Among gay Christians, for example, "us" may refer

only to other gay Christians. Attitudes and expressions of only gay pride may not attend to their other significant identities. Feelings of pride, where "us" refers to gay Christians, might therefore imply identity integration in statements such as, "I am a gay Christian. All of my friends are gay Christians. People who aren't both gay and Christian don't understand me and can't support me."

The notion that all gay people constitute allies might eventually be perceived as erroneous. Likewise, one might become disillusioned if one believes that all gay Christian people constitute allies. Depending on many circumstantial factors, one could choose to discontinue one's gay identity. One could also experience renewed confusion / comparison in the wake of re-evaluation. On the other hand, one could, over time, recognize that an "us and them" attitude represents a false dichotomy. Support for various identities, including gay identities, may be found through people who are not gay and who do not subscribe to similar identities such as by using Integration Strategy 4: *The Influence of Others*.

Among those whose patterns of identity formation reflect pride, "us and them" notions appear to arise relative to the degree to which one perceives one's identities to be tenuous, especially if little or no social support is found. As Igor Kon put it, people identify most strongly in the areas of their lives where they feel most threatened (personal communication with Holly Devor). Many people might find that being gay no longer carries the weight of social stigma that it once did. For people who have integrated one or more conflicting identities with a gay identity, securing social support is probably more elusive than is the case for

securing social support for a gay identity only. Pride, then, might reflect the blending of various identities, one of which is being gay.

One might not perceive sharp divisions between "us and them" as being indicative of pride if social support for being gay, perhaps in combination with other significant identities, is attained. Identity acceptance may then reflect the last stage of the gay identity formation process. On the other hand, circumstances and perceptions might compel one to decide to discontinue a gay identity, or might give rise, once again, to confusion / comparison. For those who retain self-acceptance of their gay identities, one might begin to disclose one's gay identity in public settings. Those who retain self-acceptance of their gay identities in combination with other (previously conflicting) identities might feel compelled to come out as doubly-identified, such as being a gay Christian. Synthesis of private and public identities occurs when this happens. Seeing one's identities acknowledged and reflected by others (the "looking-glass self") is the culmination of the identity formation process. Even at this point in the process, one may choose to either continue identifying as gay or abandon doing so.

I constructed this four-stage model from three central components: a blend of the Cass and Troiden models, a revision of the blend to resolve weaknesses in each model, and a focus on the issue of conflicting identities. Where possible, I included references to the five strategies of identity integration, the first two of which (*Biblical Interpretation* and *A Christianity of Questions*) are specific to being simultaneously gay and Christian. The revised model is based

on the notion that individuals make decisions, within social contexts, to self-actualize their identities.

This model has broader application other than the issues raised in this thesis concerning being both gay and Christian. Although I have focused a combination of identities which tend to be discouraged within Western socio-cultural contexts, the central concept of conflicting identities more generally reflects a commonality among a much broader range of people. Most people have experienced cognitive dissonance concerning their identities at one time in their lives or another. The model suggests that people will make decisions aimed at achieving consonance. Those decisions might eventually result in identity integration rather than foreclosure of one or more meaningful identities.

Implications for Future Research

This research is exploratory, not conclusive. I have drawn tentative observations from which I have proposed recommendations for change to theoretical frameworks. The data were gathered from eight interviews. Three of the participants were found through advertisements that I had placed in bulletins of gay-affirmative churches; the other participants were gathered through word-of-mouth. The inclusion of more participants, or a different group of participants altogether, might have resulted in making other observations. Furthermore, if other researchers were to analyze the data, they might find patterns and themes other than those that I have described. I have not pretended to be an "objective" observer of social life in the process of doing this research; instead, I have been

explicit in my aim to promote social justice. I have also disclosed my own relevant identities -- gay and ex-Christian -- throughout the process of finding interview participants. I would not hesitate to do so again, even though one individual refused to participate strictly on the basis of my being an ex-Christian.

Another reason that I describe this research as tentative and exploratory is because the participants come from middle-class backgrounds, and also because I attributed each of their racialized categories as being white. Although I asked each participant about his ethnic background and class status, there was no further discussion about the effects of such issues on their gay and Christian identities. Descriptions such as "middle-class" and "white" are "unmarked" in the sense that the interviews bore little discussion about class status and racialized category. These men are denied social and legal privileges which are accorded to heterosexuals. However their white and middle-class status accords them more social support for their gay identities than tends to be the case for gay men of colour or of lower income levels. White gay men, for example, likely do not experience identity conflict between their racialized category and their sexual orientation identity, unlike many gay men of colour. For white gay men, perhaps the availability of a wider range of avenues for social support for their gay identities includes venues for religious expression and participation. In this study, the lack of participants from both visible-minority and low-income groups necessitates discussion that leads to tentative suppositions rather than to firm conclusions. Moreover, my aim in this thesis is not to make generalized or

concluding observations from data which are specific to the experiences of a very small group of white middle-class men.

In contrast with so-called "hard science" models of social research, this study was designed more to inspire questions rather than to provide answers. Lack of participants from both visible minority and low-income groups represents a significant limitation of this study, but does lead to many questions, such as: How does visible-minority status intersect with the identity integration processes of being gay and Christian? What are the identity experiences of individuals who are doubly-marginalized (by homosexual identity and visible minority status identity, for example)? What tentative conclusions would I have reached, and what recommendations would I have made, had African-Canadians, First-Nations Canadians, and Chinese-Canadians (to name some examples) who also identify as gay and Christian been included in this study?[20] Future research on integration of conflicting identities which reflects ethnic / racialized diversity among participants would augment present understandings of "How?" and "Why?".

Another issue for consideration in future research is age. A diverse age-range is represented in this study, from age twenty-nine to sixty. But the inclusion of gay youths would enhance understandings of identity formation processes, specifically because many young homosexuals reject descriptions as

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[20] I made various attempts to achieve a sample of men whom would have reflected a wider ethnic / racialized diversity as well as a wider age-range. On one hand, the lack of such diversity could reflect a problem with my search strategies. On the other hand, it could also signify the limited appeal of evangelical Christianity beyond white middle-class urban populations.

"gay" based, in part, on the perception that such identities are indicative of older generations.

Finally, future research should thoroughly consider the issue of gender identity, specifically concerning transgendered individuals and women. I have mentioned that, according to some theorists, the Cass and Troiden models tend to be more appropriate to describe the processes of identity acquisition of gay men rather than those of lesbians. Such a view is contrary to that of Cass and Troiden, both of whom claim that their respective models are valid for both men and women.

Identity Formation, Political Potential, and Social Change

In this study, I have investigated the ways in which men integrate conflicting identities, specifically concerning being gay and Christian. After analyzing the transcripts from eight interviews, I came to understand that evangelical Christian and gay identities need not be compartmentalized in the lives of such men. Compartmentalization is more a strategy of identity management (making choices about how and when to express one's gay, Christian, or gay and Christian identity) than of identity formation (the cognitive and social process of acquiring and accepting a particular identity). Rather than choosing to express their gay identities only in gay social contexts, and their Christian identity only in Christian contexts, the men in this study generally found ways to express both aspects of their overall identities in most given contexts. Furthermore, I do not see their current identities as resulting from simply "fitting"

their gay identity into an already-existing Christian one. Developing a gay identity affected Christian identities, and vice-versa, in a dynamic way. I learned that each identity formed, in part, through the eventual influence of the other identity, in a process that I have called continual reciprocity.

As I described in the introduction, a central motivation for doing this research was to assess the political potential of men who describe themselves simultaneously as gay and Christian to erode the anti-gay agendas of right-wing Christian individuals and groups. Biblical literalists, many of whom are supporters of Christian right-wing ideologies, tend not to believe that Christianity and homosexuality are compatible because they subscribe to the notion that homosexuality is an abomination to God. They claim that the Bible tells them so. Members of right-wing Christian organizations are particularly well-organized and influential in their attempts to perpetuate such claims in order to deny civil rights to homosexuals and to perpetuate negative stereotypes of gays and lesbians. The more vitriolic members of right-wing Christian groups overtly encourage hate against gays and lesbians.[21] In spite of such barriers, many gays and lesbians are claiming their right to subscribe to and practice Christianity. Paradoxically, some Christians and some homosexuals have expressed opposition, albeit for different reasons, to the adoption of Christianity by gays and lesbians.

David, Scott, Lloyd, Bob, Thomas, Pete, Wayne, and Charles have all adopted such identities. Being both gay and Christian is significant in their overall self-definitions. In general, they each challenge the view that they, and other

people who similarly self-identify, must choose between being either gay or Christian. They challenge negative stereotypes about gay men perpetuated by many Christians, such as the notions that gay men are concerned primarily with sexual activity rather than with committed relationships, and that spiritual or religious matters are not important to gay men. They also challenge negative stereotypes about Christians that are expressed by some gays and lesbians, such as the notion that all Christians are prejudiced against gays and lesbians. The challenge that these men pose tends to be more a product of being generally "out" as both gay and Christian among the people they encounter in their day-to-day lives, rather than as a result of overt political activism.

The degree to which political activism extended beyond "outness" varied among the participants.[22] Some of the men took their political activism a step beyond being out as both Christian and gay. Organization of, and participation in, events such as gay and lesbian pride parades and rallies for social justice facilitates gay and lesbian social visibility. Such activism also opposes attempts to deny to gays and lesbians civil rights that heterosexuals enjoy. In addition to participating in pride parades under a Christian banner, Lloyd and Bob are lay ministers to a variety of other Christians, most of whom are non-gay; they said that they do not hide in any Christian context the fact that they have been spouses to each other for over thirty years. They also encourage non-Christian

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[21] Fred Phelps, a Christian minister from Kansas, is among the more notorious examples. Among other acts of hate against homosexuals, he is responsible for the website godhatesfags.com.
[22] Charles and Pete choose to remain selectively "closeted" about their homosexuality for particular circumstantial reasons. While I respect their right to do so, it is my view that social invisibility, particularly about being gay, does not challenge anti-gay beliefs and attitudes among some Christians, nor does it encourage social justice for gays and lesbians.

gay people to consider other ways of perceiving Christianity aside from expressions that highlight anti-gay attitudes and political activism. Lloyd and Bob attend a church that specifically appeals to gays and lesbians. Within that setting, much of their Christian evangelism manifests as helping other gays and lesbians to claim Christianity as a religious identity. In addition, Lloyd and Bob often participate in Christian lay ministry outside of their home church as a kind of "extra-curricular" Christian evangelism.

Lloyd and Bob, among others, face large challenges, particularly from some non-gay Christians. One of the more powerful components of right-wing Christian activism is the way in which supporters have seized upon particular interpretations of Biblical scripture to further their political agenda to deny social justice to gays and lesbians. The political goal of right-wing Christian ideologies to protect the so-called "traditional" family has garnered right-wing Christian organizations, and some individuals, a highly visible and influential place within the realm of social activism in North America (Herman, 1997); other Christian perspectives are somewhat eclipsed by comparison. Individuals who subscribe to right-wing Christian perspectives steadfastly believe that they hold the truth to Biblical interpretation and Christian moral values. Dissenting Christians are deemed by them as wayward in their commitment to Christianity. Bawer (1997) refers to the hegemony of such politically-motivated beliefs as "stealing Jesus." In my view, claiming Christian beliefs and expressing a Christian identity in combination with a gay one, as the men in this study have generally done, helps to erode the political efficacy of anti-gay right-wing Christian agendas.

Political challenge to right-wing Christian anti-gay agendas is augmented by gay visibility in non-gay Christian settings. Thomas and Scott, for example, "steal Jesus back" -- to extend Bawer's metaphor -- by being members of otherwise heterosexual congregations. Gay and lesbian Christians who publicly oppose right-wing Christian anti-gay agendas, such as some of the men in this study, benefit all gays and lesbians by encouraging rights for gays and lesbians equal to those of heterosexuals. The implicit political message of individuals who claim and express both gay and Christian identities is that gays and lesbians should have access, equal to that of heterosexuals, to Christian beliefs, rites, and institutions. Christianity, then, can no longer be considered to be an exclusively heterosexual domain even though some Christians continue to express discriminatory attitudes and sometimes overt hatred towards gays and lesbians. Gay and lesbian Christians also benefit most other Christians by challenging anti-gay activism of right-wing Christian groups and by confronting stereotypes about Christians that are perpetuated by some non-Christian gays and lesbians.

The impetus of this research was to encourage and support such political work. Some of the men in this study have taken on social and political activism to challenge right-wing Christian groups and individuals more than have others. I applaud the efforts that each has made to promote social justice and to erode negative stereotypes of Christians and of gay men. Apart from investigating the political potential in being both gay and Christian, I have learned from all of them that the answers to "How?" and (to some degree) "Why?" -- the two questions

that guided each interview -- are not theoretically complex when one considers that each participant expresses his identities in such a way as to imply that his identities are, in fact, not questionable.

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Appendix One

Notice for publication in church bulletins (or for inclusion among church announcements):

If you are a gay man who also identifies as Christian, I would be very interested in talking with you about participating in a research project at the University of Victoria (travel is not required: I will come to you). All inquiries and participation are entirely confidential.

Please contact me, Gerald Walton (graduate student and researcher for the project),

at home: Tel: 250.381.7403

or by email: geraldw@uvic.ca

I will promptly return your call or email.

The above concerns the research of Gerald Walton, B.A., (Hons.) who is conducting research for his Master's Thesis in Sociology at the University of Victoria.

Appendix Two

Request for Participation in a Research Project

Hello, my name is Gerald Walton, and I am a graduate student in the department of sociology at the University of Victoria. I will be conducting research with men who identify as gay and as Christian, particularly of an evangelical nature. I am interested in exploring the ways in which gay Christian men have reconciled these two identities which, on a surface level, appear to be in conflict with each other. As a gay person, I feel that this research might contribute to a better understanding of gay people among Christians, and of Christianity among gay people. At present in British Columbia and elsewhere, it appears as though gay people and Christians are in continual battle against each other. Some legal protection has been afforded to gay and lesbian individuals, but not without rigorous opposition from some Christian groups. Rather than focus on individuals who would place themselves on either side of the debate, I am interested in individuals who appear to be on both sides simultaneously.

There are a few criteria that are necessary for participation in the research. I am seeking men who have identified as gay for five or more years, who have subscribed to evangelical expressions of Christianity for an equal or greater period of time, who are generally comfortable identifying as both gay and as Christian, and who consider both identities to be of central importance to their overall self-concept. If you are willing, I would like to set up a time that we can meet to conduct an interview. Your participation will be entirely confidential.

Here's how I can be reached:

by telephone: 381-7305
or by email: geraldw@uvic.ca

If you are not interested or are unable to participate in this research, please pass this leaflet on to any gay Christian men that you know who might want to tell me their story.

Thanks for reading this!

(The above information can be verified by calling the Sociology department of the University of Victoria).

Appendix Three

Consent Form

Tentative Title of Project:

"An Abomination to God": Gay Men, Christianity, and Models of Homosexual Identity Formation.

Researcher:

Gerald Walton, B.A. (Honours), Graduate student in Sociology, University of Victoria.
Tel: (250) 381-7305. Email: geraldw@uvic.ca

Description of Project:

The objective of this project is to investigate the ways in which men who identify as both gay and as Christian have resolved such apparently contradictory identities. The North American social and political context is one in which equality for gay and lesbian people with heterosexuals continues to be a strong motivation for political activism. At the same time, some Christian organizations are well known for their organized resistance to such equality. In particular, I am referring to evangelical expressions of Christianity which emphasizes Biblical literalism and salvation through the atoning death of Jesus Christ. From such a perspective, homosexuality is purported to be incompatible with Christianity. The on-going political battles to secure equal rights for homosexuals with heterosexuals frequently faces a religiously-based hostility organized to impede the goals of gay and lesbian activists. Within such a socio-political context, it is curious indeed why some gay men would embrace Christianity, and why some Christian men would identify as gay.

An important distinction for the purposes of my research involves that of behaviour and identity. Homosexual behavioural patterns (thoughts, fantasies, and practices) do not necessarily result in a homosexual identity. I am interested in men who identify as gay, who generally feel comfortable about being "out" as gay to heterosexual and other gay people, and who are also comfortable about being gay and Christian. I will explore the experiences of such men which led to their current identities as gay and Christian, both of which they consider to be of fundamental importance in their lives. I will interview up to ten such individuals, and will conduct a narrative analysis concerning the ways in which gay Christians have reconciled such apparently contradictory identities.

Risks and Benefits of Participation:

I do not anticipate any known risks about this research, except concerning the potential for emotional responses arising from discussions about past

events. In such an event, I will provide the phone number for The Centre, which is an advocacy and counselling centre for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered individuals in Vancouver. I can also provide numbers for local crisis line telephone services, if requested, and resources for gay-positive and Christian-specific emotional support.

Benefits may include personal satisfaction from participating in research which supports the rights of members of sexual minorities to subscribe to Christian beliefs and practices, and which promotes education within Christian churches about homosexuality.

Rights of Participants:

It is the hope of the researcher that satisfaction will result from participation in research which is aimed at furthering knowledge about identity formation, and at contributing to social equality for gay and lesbian people with heterosexual people. Participation in this research project is entirely voluntary and participants may withdraw from the project at any time for any reason. Participants may also choose to not answer any particular question for any reason. All interviews will be tape-recorded and transcribed by the researcher. After transcription, tapes will be erased. Any identifying information will be deleted from the transcripts. Participants may request to read their transcripts, access to which will be possible only through a code name. The name key will be stored in a locked cabinet in my home to which only the researcher will have access. (If so, you would need to provide me with your code name by contacting me through my email address or my phone number, and I would send you the requested material through email or by post.)

Consent:

I _____ have read and understood the above statements about the research project. I agree to participate in this research under the terms set by this statement.

_____
Signature

_____
Date

Appendix Four

Interview Schedule

Begin interview by clarifying information determined in advance of interview:

You have expressed interest in participating in my research project by responding to my (advertisement? announcement? personal request?) in which I stated that I was looking for men who identify themselves as gay and as Christian, both for at least the previous five years. I would like to proceed with an interview because you have stated that both of those identities are key aspects to your overall self-identity. Before we begin with the actual interview, there are some other things that I would like you to know. First of all, this interview is entirely confidential. The only record I will have of your name will be on the Consent Form, which I'll describe in a moment. During the interview, you can choose to opt out of any question for any reason. In this event, we will skip to the next question. Also, you can end the interview at any time if you are feeling uncomfortable about it. I also need to let you know that this interview may contain some sensitive questions which, for some people, may cause unanticipated emotional distress. Although I cannot offer counseling per se, I can offer an empathic and non-judgmental environment in which you can tell your story. If you need further emotional support, The (gay and lesbian) Centre is a good avenue to explore. Crisis Lines are also a supportive environment in which you can anonymously talk about what you are experiencing. Please ask me any questions about this project that you may have. I would now like to present you with a Consent Form, which I need for the University before we can begin the interview. The Consent Form gives a brief description of the project, costs and benefits of participation, and a statement about the rights of participants. Included in these rights is the opportunity, at your request, to read the transcript of this interview. To do so, I will need a codename with which you can access your transcript. I will identify your transcript with only the codename that you provide to ensure your confidentiality. The Consent Form will be stored in a locked cabinet, and will not leave my possession. If you are willing to provide me with your signature indicating that you have read and understood the Consent Form, and with your codename, then we can begin the interview.

My aim here is to explore the paths you have taken to achieve your current gay Christian identity. Although homosexuality and Christianity are the two areas that I am interested in the most, I do not want to ignore other significant ways that you identify yourself which might bear influence upon your identity as a gay Christian. It is my hope that this interview is designed in such a way that you are able to bring up significant issues or experiences that I had not thought of. If you recall such issues or experiences while I am asking you questions about homosexuality or Christianity, I encourage you to share them. They are not "off-topic".

To start things off, I would like to ask you a few general questions to give a context to the rest of the information that you provide.

What is your age?

How many years of education have you completed?

What was your total income before taxes last year?

What is your ethnic background?

I'd like to ask you a few questions which explore your perceptions and experiences of homosexuality.
When did you first think of yourself as gay or possibly gay?

Did you ever stop thinking of yourself as gay?

If yes: When did you come back to it?
Can you tell me about why you stopped and why you came back to it?

If no: (go to next question).

When you first began to think of yourself as being gay, did you tell other people about it?

If yes: Who did you tell?
Were you nervous about how they might react?
How did they react?
Were you glad that you had told them?

If no: What prevented you from telling other people?
When did you first tell someone else that you were gay?
Who did you tell?
Were you nervous about how they might react?
How did they react?
Were you glad that you had told them?

I'd like to ask you some questions about your first homosexual experiences.
When did your first have sex with another man?
What was that experience like for you?
How did you feel about that experience?
Did you continue having sex with other men? How often?

What I've heard you say so far is that _____ (briefly paraphrase the above responses). It sounds as though you were generally feeling _____ (anxious? shameful? proud? secure?) about the (possibility that/realizing that) you (might

be/were) gay. Am I correct so far? (If yes, continue. If no, try to clarify by going through the above questions again, if necessary.)

What were your perceptions of homosexuality/gay people while you were growing up?

Do you recall comments made by members of your family about homosexuality/gay people? What were they?

If "negative" characterizations, then:
Who were those comments made by? How often?
How would you describe your feelings about yourself as a gay, or possibly gay, person at the time of those comments or discussions?

If "positive" characterizations, then:
Who were those comments made by? How often?
How would you describe your feelings about yourself as a gay, or possibly gay, person at the time of those comments or discussions?

Now, I would like to begin to explore your experiences with Christianity, beginning with questions about your family and home life.
Were you raised in a Christian home?

If yes: How often did your family attend church?
What type of church?
Please describe other Christian activities that your family participated in, and how often participation took place [prompts if appropriate: for example, observance of Christian holidays, attending Bible studies, going to summer Bible camp, etc.]

Can you recall Christian comments, discussions, or teachings about homosexuality, sexuality, or human sexual relationships made in a Christian context? [prompts if appropriate: for example, homosexuality is sinful, people shouldn't have sex outside of marriage, everyone should marry, etc.] Please describe them.

How would you describe your feelings about yourself as a gay, or possibly gay, person at the time of those teachings, comments, or discussions?

If no: What experiences led you to becoming Christian?
What were your family's attitudes about Christianity?

If negative attitudes:
How would you describe your feelings about yourself as a Christian at the time of those comments or discussions?

If neutral/positive attitudes:
Was your family supportive of your Christian beliefs at the time that you became a Christian?
How did they show their support?
Do they continue to be supportive?
If yes: How do they presently show their support?

If no: What happened that led to them withdrawing their support? Please describe how you felt about being a Christian during the time that your family withdrew support?
Where did you find support for your Christianity at the time of this change?

You stated that you first began to think of yourself as gay or possibly gay at the age of _____. I would like to ask you a few questions about the attitudes of other people outside of your family and church (if applicable) toward homosexuality/ gay people and toward Christianity, and how those attitudes may or may not have influenced your attitude toward yourself as a gay, or possibly gay, person and as a Christian.

Do you recall comments or attitudes expressed about homosexuality/gay people by your friends while you were growing up?

If yes: What were those comments or attitudes?
How would you describe your feelings about yourself as a gay, or possibly gay, person at the time of those comments or attitudes?

Do you recall comments or attitudes expressed about homosexuality/gay people by teachers or professors?

If yes: What were those comments or attitudes?
How would you describe your feelings about yourself as a gay, or possibly gay, person at the time of those comments or attitudes?

Do you recall, at any time, other sources (such as the media) that expressed comments or attitudes about homosexuality/gay people?

If yes: What were those sources?
What were those comments or attitudes?

How would you describe your feelings about yourself as a gay, or possibly gay, person at the time of those comments or attitudes?

It is possible that he may express that he grew about within a general environment that was silent about gay people. If so:
Did you feel attracted to other boys while you were growing up?
Did you associate those feelings with the idea that you might be gay?
If no: How did you interpret your feelings at the time?
Did you feel different from other boys because of these attractions?
If yes: Did other boys/teachers treat you differently from other boys?
Was feeling different difficult for you, or was it an aspect of your self that you enjoyed?

I'd like to now ask you similar questions about your Christian beliefs.
Do you recall past or present comments or attitudes expressed about Christianity/Christian people by your friends while you were growing up?

If yes: What were those comments or attitudes?
How would you describe your feelings about yourself as a Christian at the time of those comments or attitudes?

Do you recall comments or attitudes expressed about Christianity/Christian people by teachers or professors?

If yes: What were those comments or attitudes?
How would you describe your feelings about yourself as a Christian at the time of those comments or attitudes?

Do you recall other sources that expressed comments or attitudes about Christianity/Christian people ?

If yes: What were those sources?
What were those comments or attitudes?
How would you describe your feelings about yourself as a Christian at the time of those comments or attitudes?

[At this point, paraphrase the responses for clarification, e.g.: What I have heard you say is that there were many experiences that might have influenced your feelings of (_____?) about your perception that you might be gay, and that those sources were _____. (If applicable): You also suggested that sources of_____ attitudes toward Christianity were _____. In addition, your Christianity was/was not generally well received by others, such as_____. (etc.)]

As we did so earlier, I would like to go over what you have said to make sure that I understand. You have said that your friends', teachers', and the media's attitudes toward gay people while you were growing up were _____, and that you felt _____ about those attitudes. Also, attitudes about Christianity from friends and teachers _____, and you felt _____ about those attitudes.

I'd now like to explore when, and how, you integrated your gay identity and your Christian identity (or vice-versa).
At what age did you first think that you were Christian and gay at the same time?

Do you now feel that your gay identity and your Christian identity are compatible?

If yes: Did you always feel that they are compatible?
When did you first come to believe that they are compatible?
How did you reconcile your homosexual identity with your Christian beliefs, given that Christianity is generally known to be hostile toward homosexuality?
What were your sources of support that assisted you in your reconciliation? In what ways was support shown to you?
Did anyone express disapproval toward your gay identity?

If yes: Were they members of the Christian community? Friends? Family? How did you feel about yourself as a gay person in light of such non-support?
How did you feel about those people?

Did anyone express disapproval toward your Christian beliefs?

If yes: Were they members of the gay community? Friends? Family? How did you feel about yourself as a Christian at the time of such non-support? How did you feel about those people?

If no, then skip to "Did you ever attempt to stop being gay?"

If no: In what ways are your gay identity and your Christian beliefs not compatible? Describe the conflict that you feel. How have you tried to resolve your conflict?

Did you ever attempt to stop being gay?

If yes: How did you try to do that? How did you feel about homosexuality/gay people at the time? Were those feelings similar to how you felt about yourself as a gay, or possibly gay, person?

You now comfortably identify with being gay. Please describe the experiences, feelings, and events which lead to the comfort that you now feel.

If no, then continue to next question:

Finally, I would like to ask you a few questions about how things are for you now.

Are you sexually active? Some churches have stated that it is ok to be gay, but not ok to have homosexual sex. What is your opinion about such statements [i.e.: does he consider the statement as being equal to Christian disapproval of non-marital sex for heterosexual people?]?

In general, how do you feel when you are the only gay person in a group of heterosexuals?

What does the term "openly gay" mean to you?

Does it apply to you, and if so, in what ways?

Do you feel comfortable being "openly gay" with other Christians? Do you have a partner? In what ways do you acknowledge your partner as your partner to other Christians?

Is your congregation supportive of your homosexuality? In what ways do they show their support? In what ways do they show their lack of support?

Have you encountered anti-gay hostility from other Christians?
If yes: Describe what happened when you encountered anti-gay hostility from other Christians?

How do you view sections of the Bible, such as Leviticus 18:22 which says that, "thou shalt not lie with mankind as with womankind: it is an abomination"?

Do you ever hear other gay people making statements that you would classify as "anti-Christian"?

If yes: Can you give me examples of those statements? How do you feel about yourself when other gay people make such statements? How do you feel toward those people who made those comments? How do you feel about Christianity when those comments are made?
Did you say anything in response to such anti-Christian comments?
If yes: Describe what happened when you expressed how you felt in situations when other gay people have made statements that you consider to be anti-Christian.

You have described to me the path which lead to your gay identity, your Christian identity, and how you put those two features of your life together. Are there any other important factors to consider in your attainment of your identity as a gay Christian which I may have overlooked?

I have greatly appreciated the time you have taken to participate in this project, and for helping me to understand the experiences that you have had which have led to your present gay Christian identity. Should you wish to contact me to read the transcript of this interview, you can do so by writing, emailing, faxing, or phoning me. You will need your codename that you have given me to access your transcript because I will not be labeling them with your real name. Once again, I thank you.

Appendix Five

Numerical Re-organization of Interview Data into Themes

1. First realizations of (possibly) being gay, and his reactions:
   a. feelings.
   b. actions taken (i.e., keeping quiet about it, etc.).

2. Social climate concerning homosexuality:
   a. comments from other people, and his reactions.
   b. heterosexual culture.
   c. disclosures to other people.
   d. experiences with fantasies, sex, and dating.

3. Social climate concerning Christianity and church participation:
   a. within family (i.e., Christian or non-Christian family, manifestations of Christianity in family life, etc.).
   b. among friends.

4. Experiences which lead them to becoming Christian, and age of doing so (i.e., Christian family, non-Christian family but supportive, Christian friends, etc.).

5. Feelings of difference from other boys.

6. Challenges to homosexuality / gay identity -- outcome and resolution.

7. Challenges to Christian beliefs / identity -- outcome and resolution.

8. Strategies for resolution through integration.

9. Expressions of gay identity, especially within non-gay Christian contexts.

10. Expressions of Christian identity, especially within non-Christian gay contexts.

11. Identifications with "evangelicalism" -- expressions and manifestations.

12. Identifications with "fundamentalism" -- expressions and manifestations.

VITA

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"'Unnatural manner of copulation': Sodomy and Western Intolerance of Male Homosexuality", Blurred Genres, Winter / Spring 1996, p. 93 – 107.

Conference Presentations:

"Intregration of Conflicting Identities: Gay Christian Men". Paper prepared for the Qualitative Analysis Conference, 1998, Toronto, Ontario.

"Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Gay and Christian Identity Integration". Paper prepared for the Qualitative Analysis Conference, 1999, Fredericton, New Brunswick.

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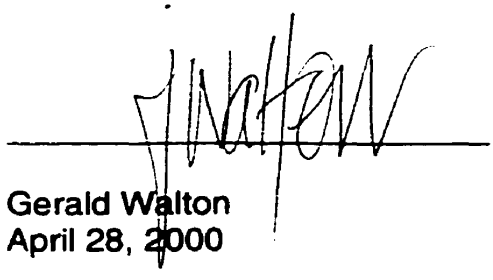
Questionable Identities:
A Study of Gay and Evangelical Christian Identity Conflict and Resolution

Author: 

Gerald Walton
April 28, 2000

Chapter Three: Research Methods

Methodological Strategies: Choices and Rationale

In this chapter, I describe the strategies that I employed to gather data in order to examine the ways in which some men have integrated their gay and Christian identities. My personal experiences which I described in the introduction, as well as the experiences of some of my friends and acquaintances who resolved their own cognitive dissonance about being gay and Christian, have lead me to make the *a priori* assumption that being gay and Christian does indeed require individuals to experience some process of conflict resolution concerning one's self-identities.

In general, I am concerned with the processes of identity formation and of identity conflict resolution through integration. Such attention to process implies qualitative research procedures rather than quantitative ones. Qualitative research methods are similar to quantitative ones because each are employed to discover answers to specific questions through the application of systemic procedures, rather than to simply amass data. However, qualitative research methods are used to answer specific research questions which quantitative methods cannot adequately address. According to Bruce L. Berg (1995), qualitative procedures

> provide a means of accessing unquantifiable facts about the actual people researchers observe and talk to . . . . As a result, qualitative techniques allow the researchers to share in the understandings and perceptions of others and to explore how people structure and give meaning to their daily lives. Researchers using qualitative

> techniques examine *how people* learn about and *make sense of themselves* and others (p. 7, italics mine).

My particular research inquiries are phenomenological in nature. Phenomenology is a type of qualitative research used to examine the ways in which human lived experiences are interpreted by individuals as meaningful (Rudestam and Newton, 1992, p. 33; Creswell, 1994, p. 12). Phenomenological inquiries seek not to explain the causes of a given phenomenon, but rather to elucidate the essential features of experience and consciousness pertaining to a particular social phenomenon.

In addition to phenomenology, I am also employing aspects of feminist methods, methodology, and epistemology. The term "methods", according to Sandra Harding (1987, p. 2), refers to techniques for gathering data. Dominant social science methods posit that researchers record data by remaining "objective" in their observations of social life. Alternatively, feminist methods encourage researchers to engage in a research process that is interactive with research participants, one that "continually change[s] in response to new information and new participants" (Kirby and McKenna, 1989, p. 72).

The term "methodology" is not synonymous with "methods", although they are often used interchangeably. Sandra Harding suggests that methodology is a theory of how research is to proceed (p. 3). The methodological underpinnings of my research are phenomenological in the sense that I seek to investigate the ways in which participants interpret, negotiate, and express their self-identities in the context of their social worlds. One component of the methodology I have

chosen is the theoretical assertion that I, as the researcher, should attempt to interact with participants on a relatively equal level. Such attempts to promote egalitarianism contradict the dominant methodological assumption that researchers must remain "unbiased" so as to not "contaminate" the research process and the analysis of data. I subscribe to a methodological perspective that promotes egalitarianism and connectedness between myself and research participants. Accordingly, the method I have employed is "interactive interviews" (Kirby and McKenna, p. 66) to facilitate dialogue, rather than interrogation (Reinharz, 1992, p. 33).

The term "epistemology" refers to theories of knowledge. Feminist epistemologies legitimate women as agents of knowledge. Traditional epistemological perspectives, which are based in masculinist perspectives and in the experiences of men, have tended to disregard the experiences and knowledges of women (Harding, p. 3). Although I am not conducting research about women, I am inspired by feminist epistemologies that challenge masculinist epistemological hegemony in social science research, such as the notion of "value neutrality", perhaps also known as objectivity. Social science tends to reflect androcentrism in addition to heterosexism and thus legitimates heterosexual experience and knowledge and disregards and subjugates homosexual experience and knowledge. By confronting heterosexism and heterosexual privilege, I am also challenging sexism because the dominant perspective of masculinity, and indeed of gender, assumes heterosexuality (Rich, 1993).

Who to Include and Why

During the writing of the proposal, I had decided to include only men in the research for three reasons. First, my decision was based on the views of some researchers, in opposition to Cass and Troiden, that the patterns of sexual orientation identity acquisition of women are generally different from those of men (Brown, 1995; Eliason, 1996). Cass and Troiden each claimed that their respective models of homosexual identity development are relevant for both women and men. Second, I decided to include only men also because of the personal nature of the research, specifically concerning my own identity development as a gay person. In exploring how other men worked through the challenges of developing a gay identity, especially while identifying as Christian, I had hoped to gain further understanding about myself and about other people who had made choices concerning identity other than the ones that I had made. A third reason is that, quite simply, I was compelled by expediency for financial and professional reasons.

The criteria that I used as guidelines for judging inclusion of participants in the research, aside from narrowing the search to only men, shifted during the process of conducting interviews. Originally, I constructed a screening process that included three distinct features. First, I was interested in men not only who identified as gay (for at least five years) and as evangelical Christian, but who also generally felt comfortable about being both "out" as gay among heterosexuals and other gay people, and "out" as Christian among other non-Christian people. To be "out" is self-defined relative to one's subjective

interpretation about what it means to be out. Nevertheless, I operationalized outness as general comfort about expressing one's identities comfortably among other groups of people. For example, expressing one's gay identity only among other gay people would not have satisfied the criteria for inclusion. Similarly, being "closeted" about one's Christianity except among other Christians would also have not met the inclusion requirements.[9]

Another criterion for inclusion was the subscription to evangelical expressions of Christianity among participants. Whereas some Christians who are also gay might subscribe to liberalized forms of Christianity, I felt that evangelical Christians would likely be more conservative by comparison to non-evangelical Christians. Social conservatism is often expressed by non-gay evangelical Christians as their being exclusive and often contemptuous of gay and lesbian people. Given such a political and social context, I wanted to investigate the attractions that evangelical Christianity holds for some gay men.

The term "evangelism" implies actions that are motivated by particular belief systems. A wide variety of actions might be considered to qualify as being evangelism, such as preaching, "witnessing",[10] or seeking to attract other people to Christianity by modeling one's behaviour on that of Christ. The term "evangelical", on the other hand, refers to a particular belief systems which might underlie evangelism. To define "evangelical" for the purposes of this study, I employed the operational definition of Scott Thumma (1991, p. 338) and

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[9] Although the metaphor of the closet is typically used to describe the degree of outness of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and transsexual individuals, I am extending the metaphor to refer to one's Christianity for the purposes of operationalization.

Kimberly Mahaffy (1996, p. 393), both of whom argued that "evangelical" constitutes four necessary criteria: the belief in the inerrancy of Scripture, the divinity of Christ, the role of Christ as the only path toward salvation, and the importance of conversion through acceptance of Christ as one's personal saviour.

The term "evangelical," as I have used it in this study, reflects some overlap with the term "fundamentalist Christian" and also with the term "liberal Christian." Some people might even consider the term "fundamentalist" to be synonymous with "evangelical." However, fundamentalist Christians, in my view, tend to emphasize Biblical literalism more than do evangelical Christians. To use a legal metaphor, fundamentalist Christians tend to interpret Biblical scripture in a letter-of-the-law manner, while evangelical Christians tend to focus on the spirit-of-the-law.

Some people might also argue that the operational definition of "evangelical" that I have employed provides no distinction between evangelical Christians and liberal Christians. On the contrary, I argue that liberal Christians, in contrast with evangelical Christians, tend not to emphasize a personal relationship with Jesus Christ beginning with conversion.

A final criterion for inclusion was one's degree of resolution about being simultaneously gay and Christian. Whereas some people resolve dissonance concerning their religious identity and sexual orientation identity by ceasing to

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[10] To "witness" is a form of evangelicalism whereby Christians tell other people about their belief in salvation through Christ.

identify as one or the other, I sought men who have fully integrated both identities, both of which are of crucial importance to their overall identity.

Revision of Criteria for Inclusion

Throughout the process of gathering participants and conducting interviews, some unpredictable factors arose concerning the methodological journey as I had planned it prior to actually beginning the process. One such factor involved the ways in which I had operationalized certain terms of reference. Unlike my working definition for the term "gay", I encountered problems with the term "evangelical Christian." The term "evangelical" is methodologically problematic because of its association among some Christians with Sunday morning televangelists or door-to-door Christian "salespeople". Such intrusive fervency has compelled some people to reject Christianity altogether, or to express Christianity in other ways. Negative associations have compelled some Christians to reject self-descriptions as evangelical, despite evangelical motivations behind some of their actions.

After I conducted each interview, and after I had transcribed each tape-recording, I took time to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of each interview so that I could improve subsequent ones. After the third interview, I began to see that the term "evangelical" was problematic in a similar way as was the term "homosexual". As I have previously discussed, some people have homosexual fantasies, desires, and encounters, without necessarily identifying as "homosexual". In a parallel fashion, some people reject self-descriptions as

"evangelical." During the recruitment stage, I had asked each participant whether or not he defined himself as such. Although each man responded affirmatively -- which lead me to proceed with scheduling each interview -- two individuals hesitated to express themselves quite so definitively during the actual interview. One of these men was David. In my discussion with him, he appeared to synonymize the term "evangelical" with the term "fundamentalist." Nevertheless, I would describe David's orientation towards Christianity as evangelical in nature based on other parts of our discussion which implied his belief in the four criteria of evangelicalism as I described them above.

The other individual who expressed uncertainty about the term "evangelical" was Scott. During the interview, he said that he hesitates to "essentialize" his identities, that is, to assume that certain characteristics are intrinsic to any given individual. However, he nonetheless described the ways in which he worked through the identity conflict which he had felt about simultaneously "being" gay and Christian. Although I remain uncertain about Scott's status as evangelical, given the four criteria that I used to operationalize "evangelical", I included Scott among the participants because he had originally stated that he was an evangelical Christian prior to being interviewed. Ultimately, Scott contributed a great deal to this study. Moreover, the participation of both David and Scott provided an interesting source of contrast among the participants and therefore a richer source of data than otherwise might have become available.

Another operational definition that became problematic was my conception of "outness" concerning being gay and being Christian. I had originally sought individuals who were entirely out as gay men, even in non-gay Christian social settings, and who were entirely out as Christians, even in non-Christian gay social settings. During the time that I spent thinking about how to improve the interviews and in my preliminary readings of the transcripts, I realized that I had incorrectly associated "outness" with "resolution." The experiences in the lives of some of the participants demonstrate that there are many reasons to be selectively closeted about being either gay or Christian, or both, but such self-controlled closets are not necessarily reflective of continued cognitive dissonance about being gay and Christian. While it might, in some people, indicate continued inner conflict about one's homosexual orientation identity in light of one's Christian values and beliefs, it might merely indicate a strategy for managing particular circumstances. Only in the interviews did I discover that some of the participants did not meet my original requirement concerning "outness," although they had all originally claimed to be "out" as both gay and Christian. Nevertheless, I perceived these individuals not as experiencing continued conflict about their identities, but rather as negotiating circumstances in their lives. In my view, the major criteria for inclusion in the research above all others was resolution of identity conflict through identity integration. I came to realize that outness was a possible, but not necessary, indication of such.

Evolution of methodological procedures, such as I have described, reflects characteristics of the process of qualitative research methodology and analysis such as emergence, negotiation, and reflexivity (Lofland and Lofland, 1995, p. 181). Data analysis occurs simultaneously with data collection in qualitative research. Although methodological strategies are intended to be concrete steps in the research process, Lofland and Lofland add that, "the process remains, and is intended to be, significantly open-ended in character. In this way, analysis is also very much a creative act" (p. 181). I had not intended to evolve the methodological procedures to simply accommodate my needs as a researcher. On the contrary, adopting shifts in conceptualizations facilitated analytical richness by accommodating experiential diversity among the participants.

The Recruitment Process

To locate participants, I employed a variety of strategies. I started by contacting churches which I knew to provide gays and lesbians a setting in which to express their spirituality and their sexual orientation identity. I scheduled meetings with the board members of those churches, and asked if I could place an ad (see Appendix One) in their respective church bulletins. In the ad, I specified that I was looking for men who identified as gay and as evangelical Christian and who would tell me their stories about how they came to identify themselves as such. In each of the meetings with the respective board members, I was asked to explain my interest in conducting research about men who self-

identify as both gay and Christian. I provided a brief summary of my experiences, and concluded that my decision to discontinue my Christian identity was the primary motivation for my research. During one of those meetings, one of the board members objected to the inclusion of my ad in their church bulletin based, in part, on the fact that I no longer identified as a Christian. In retrospect, I consider such an objection to be reasonable, given that some gay non-Christian people do not express tolerance for, or acceptance of, Christianity as subscribed to by others. The board member who expressed such a concern assumed that, as an ex-Christian, I had further cause to feel resentment toward Christians, and that I would be using my thesis to conduct anti-Christian research. He was correct that doing so would be an inappropriate use of interview data, but he was incorrect that I had an agenda to, in my words, "Christian bash."

I explained that, contrary to his concern, I was motivated, in part, by a political agenda that celebrates the right of gays and lesbians to subscribe to and practice Christianity within an overall agenda of promoting social equality of gays and lesbians with heterosexuals. The board members voted on the matter, and it was agreed that my intentions were valid and honourable, although the one board member who expressed concern about my intentions declined further participation. The ads were printed in various church bulletins. Four participants responded and each was scheduled for an interview.

Another strategy for locating participants was a flyer (see Appendix Two) which was constructed in a similar fashion as the church bulletin advertisement. I distributed the flyer to organizations and social functions that I believed might be

frequented by men who self-identify as gay and evangelical Christian. Although the flyer itself did not yield participants directly, one participant volunteered through word-of-mouth generated from the flyer. The remaining three participants were individuals whom I knew personally.

I had anticipated a "snowball" sample to have been generated from word-of-mouth (Lofland and Lofland 1995, p. 38), but this did not happen in spite of my attempts to "spread the word" by contacting various organizations and talking with many individuals in gay, Christian, and gay Christian communities. Perhaps some individuals who live in relative proximity to my geographic location might have felt disinclined to volunteer participation because of their concerns about anonymity. Another factor which might have undermined the efficacy of word-of-mouth for locating participants is the long-distance nature of this research project. I had anticipated that I would have to search beyond Victoria because of its limited population, and because of the rather unusual nature of the specific individuals whom I was seeking. Most of the participants came from outside of Victoria, from as far away as Toronto. Five of the participants were from large urban centers, and three were from moderately-sized cities. None were small town or rural dwellers.

The participants reflected neither wide geographic diversity nor wide variation in class status or racialized category. All of the participants described themselves as middle-class, although some reflected a lower middle-class status while others reflected an upper middle-class status. All of the men described themselves as having Canadian, English, and / or Scottish descent, except for

David, who described himself as having an Italian ethnicity. Other demographic features of the participants were widely diverse. The ages of the participants were twenty-nine, forty-three, fifty, fifty-five, sixty, and two men were thirty-four. The average age was almost forty-five. Their educational levels were grade ten, grade twelve, grade twelve plus certification, an undergraduate degree, a masters degree, three years of a Ph.D. program, and two men had seven years each of post-secondary education. Significantly, two participants have been in a 30-year relationship with each other.

I also asked each participant how long he had described himself as being gay, and how long he had described himself as being Christian. Most of the men described identifying as gay since their childhoods or teenhoods. However, rather than describing a precise moment of clarity about their gay identity, they instead described an experience, perception, or feeling of either being "different" from other boys, or having a childhood crush on another boy. Given that some of the participants had such experiences, perceptions, or feelings before the term "gay" gained common usage as a reference to homosexual identity, they have likely framed their childhood or teenhood experiences within the identity of being gay later in their lives. Furthermore, their identities as being gay were typically described as a process of positive and negative experiences, finally culminating in acceptance of a gay identity in late teens or early adulthood.

By contrast with gay identities, Christian identities were usually posited as precise moments of conception, typically as a decision to accept Jesus as their personal saviour. Scott is perhaps the only exception to this general trend. He

described himself as being a Christian for the past five years, but hesitated to "essentialize what it means to be Christian". The decision each participant made to become a Christian was made with having had earlier exposure to Christianity; six of the eight participants were raised in Christian homes, while the other two were involved in Christian youth groups.

The Interview Process

During each pre-arranged meeting time, but before I began the actual interview, I asked each participant to read and sign a letter of informed consent (see Appendix Three). I ensured that each person had time to read the letter thoroughly. The letter informed them that I would guarantee their anonymity. I proposed using a pseudonym rather than their real first names within the text of the transcripts and the analysis chapters. I also promised to alter or delete any information in the interviews that might threaten anonymity, such names of people and places. I informed them that, if they wished, they could verify the alteration of identifying information by reading their respective transcript. However, some of the participants did not want me to use pseudonyms and expressed that, as out gay men, some of whom are politically active, they were unconcerned about remaining anonymous. For these men, I secured written permission to use their real first names. The names used in the transcripts and the analysis chapters are thus a mix of pseudonyms and real first names.[11]

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[11] Bob, Lloyd, Scott, Wayne, and David preferred me to use their real first names, while Charles, Pete, and Thomas chose pseudonyms.

The location of the interviews varied somewhat. Two of the participants expressed discomfort about using their homes as locations. In each such case, we agreed to meet at a nearby coffee shop where we found a quiet corner in which to talk. The other interviews were conducted in people's homes. The interviews were tape-recorded; those that took place in homes were much easier to transcribe than those in coffee shops, despite how quiet the coffee shops initially sounded. I was solely responsible for the task of transcribing each of the interviews, and I ensured the safe storage of the transcripts and tapes during the process of transcription. As stated in the letter of informed consent, the audio tapes were stored in a locked cabinet to which only I had access.[12] They were erased after I had sent each participant his transcript to ensure its accuracy. Only two of the men asked me to make alterations to their transcripts by either clarifying some points that they had made, or by deleting some identifying information.

All of the participants expressed interest in seeing their respective interview transcripts. Some, but not all, suggested changes for the purpose of clarification. Such changes helped me to understand some specific details that became important during the process of data analysis. Two of the participants asked me to delete some information that they deemed irrelevant and I did as they asked.

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[12] I had described in the consent form that I would ask each participant for a code which he could use to access his transcript. After I had conducted all eight interviews, I decided that using the code key would not be necessary because the number of participants was small, and also because I had become well-acquainted with the matches of transcripts with individuals.

The Interview Schedule

Using interviews as a research technology allowed me to talk with men who, unlike me, were able to integrate gay and Christian identities. I decided to use a semi-standardized style of interview to guide me through a series of predetermined questions which were organized within a list of topics. Although I used such an organization as an interview guide, I also designed the interviews to facilitate a somewhat informal dialogue. Unlike standardized interviews, dialogues are characterized by openness, uniqueness, spontaneity, and engagement with each participant (Kirby and McKenna, 1989; Reinharz, 1992). A standardized interview, I felt, would preclude possibilities for openness, connectedness, and self-disclosure. Employing a semi-standardized interview format allowed me to encourage each participant to disclose information I had not considered in advance (Berg, 1995, p. 33). In addition, I wanted to avoid the tendency among many social scientists to attempt to gain control over participants in the research process (Reinharz, 1992, p. 20). Although I disclosed to each participant that I am a graduate student at the University of Victoria, I intentionally downplayed my academic role in favour of highlighting my personal experiences which lead to my interest in doing this research. Doing so facilitated rapport and promoted egalitarianism and open dialogue.

Apart from some general demographic questions, such as age, educational level, and ethnic background, I organized the interview schedule into four sets of questions. The first set covered gay experiences, perceptions, and identity acquisition, such as: What were the participants' perceptions of

homosexuality or gay people while they were growing up? What were the source of such perceptions? When did they first begin to think of themselves as being gay? Did they tell other people about it? How did others react to the participants' disclosures? How did the participants feel about themselves as a gay, or possibly gay people, in light of the reactions from others? At what age did they first have sex with other men? How did they feel about those experiences? Did they ever attempt to stop being gay? What were such experiences like? How did they feel about themselves during attempts to stop being gay? How did such attempts come to an end?

A second set of questions was designed to investigate participants' experiences concerning Christianity, such as: Were they raised in Christian homes? How was Christianity manifested in their families as they were growing up? What experiences led them to becoming Christian? What were their families' attitudes about Christianity? In what ways did their families show support for their Christianity, or lack thereof? How did the participants feel about themselves in light of such attitudes?

A third set of questions focused on the intersection of the participants' gay and Christian identities. Examples included: At what age did they first think that they were Christian and gay at the same time? How did they come to believe that their gay and Christian identities are compatible? How did they reconcile their gay identities in light of Biblical passages which appear to condemn homosexuality? What were some of their experiences with his Christian friends concerning being gay? Did they receive support from other Christians concerning

their gay identities? Did they receive support from other gay people concerning their Christian identities? How did they feel about themselves in light of such support or lack thereof?

Within the three major topics that I wanted to cover in each interview, my hope was that there would be natural opportunities for participants to discuss their current circumstances concerning being gay and Christian. Such natural openings for disclosure were sometimes taken; otherwise, I probed for further discussion about their current circumstances. In any event, a fourth topic was designed to inquire about the participants' current situations, such as: Do they have partners? Are their partners also Christians? Are their congregations supportive of their being gay? Do they encounter hostility from other Christians about their being gay? Do they encounter hostility from other gay people about their being Christian? How do they react to such hostility? How do they express themselves as gay people while in Christian social settings? How do they express themselves as Christians while in gay social settings?

Although it might appear from the interview schedule that I had, in spite of my intentions, designed a highly-standardized interview, the selective use of the questions facilitated spontaneity, openness, and interaction. Such an interview orientation did indeed facilitate "dialogue". I interviewed -- dialogued with -- eight individuals who volunteered to participate. Doing so is contrary to the standard procedures of quantitative researchers who employ certain techniques to choose a representative sample from which to generalize their findings to a larger population. My aim, however, was to conduct exploratory research that describes

general themes and processes employed by those people who participated, and to contextualize such analysis within larger social processes. Limiting the number of participants to under ten also facilitated manageability of the project because searching for participants, scheduling the interviews, transcribing each tape recorded interview, and conducing analysis on each one proved to be very time consuming. Lack of financial and time resources compelled me to set limitations to the number of participants. In sum, conducting eight interviews allowed me to proceed with research that is exploratory in nature, as well as to keep the project at a manageable size.

Preparation for Data Analysis

Data analysis was an ongoing process which began with the first transcript. I read each new transcript several times before conducting another interview in order to attain a familiarity with themes that were beginning to emerge in the data. In the tradition of qualitative research, I decided to interweave presentation and analysis of the data to reflect the simultaneous process of collection and analysis. My decision was also based on the large amount of data which I had collected. I felt that presentation would necessarily be limited to discussion which was most germane to the core questions of "How?" and "Why?". The task of deciding which data were the most relevant was, in itself, a component of the data analysis process.

Collectively, the transcribed interviews added up to 141 pages of single-spaced, ten-point, Helvetica text. I required a system that would organize the

data into a more manageable form, one that would also facilitate the emergence of themes and contrasts of experiences, feelings, and beliefs of the participants. To do so, I used the interview schedule to generate numerical codes that corresponded to the general topics covered in each interview (see Appendix Five). The numerical codes are not meant to imply a sequential order of events, but instead are merely a method of labeling for the purposes of organization. I scoured each transcript to manually label particular sections with appropriate codes. Parts of the dialogue were coded with more than one numerical value because they reflected more than one theme. After manually coding each transcript, I then created documents in a word-processor software package whose file names corresponded to each topic. From each transcript on my computer hard-drive, I then "cut and pasted" each coded section of the text into the appropriate topic document. The final result was twelve documents (see Appendix Five), each corresponding to one theme and containing the relevant comments of the participants.[13]

I continued by analyzing the data in the central theme -- Theme Eight -- which I titled, *Strategies for resolution through integration.* I felt that the strategies of the men to integrate their previously conflicting identities would draw attention to a variety of experiences in their lives that I had categorized within the other themes. I analyzed each statement that I had included within Theme Eight, and counted seventeen strategies. I then grouped the seventeen strategies into five types according to qualitative similarity. For example, some

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[13] A qualitative software package, which I lacked, would have accomplished the same result.

men said that they came to believe that their perception of God -- being divine perfection -- was distinct from their perception of church -- being an imperfect human organization, though a holy one. Other men drew a distinction between a homosexual orientation and a so-called homosexual lifestyle. I discerned that both distinctions implied the acceptance of a perceived inconsistency in order to reduce dissonance. Hence, I classified such perceptions under a broad type called *Acceptance of Inconsistencies.* The analysis chapter of this study provides details on each of the five types of integration strategies, and includes relevant transcript excerpts.

The final stage of analysis was to compare the five types of strategies with theories about homosexual identity formation, specifically the Cass model (1979) and the Troiden model (1988). Neither theorist discussed the ways in which a homosexual identity is integrated with a Christian identity. However, comparing the five strategies with each of the models highlights the strengths and weaknesses of each model. The motivating question which guided such comparisons was: Is each stage of each model reflected in each participant's account of his journey towards a fully integrated gay and Christian identity? Assessing that question in light of the five types of strategies, in combination with the data that I had coded within the other eleven themes of the interview schedule, guided my critique of each model. Developing such critiques, which were grounded in the interview data, allowed me to propose recommendations for change in the models in order to bolster their respective strengths and minimize their respective weaknesses.

A large amount of data is not recorded in this thesis due to sheer volume. However, I used the remaining data as a backdrop from which to understand the contexts of specific comments made by each participant. It has been my aim to present data in a way that honours past experiences which underlie each man's present understandings of his identity development.

The methods that I have described above imply that this study is largely academic in nature. In addition to being an academic exercise, the research process of data collection, reporting, and analysis allowed me to make suggestions for social and political change. Not surprisingly, I had anticipated proposing that Christian communities move toward acceptance of gay and lesbian members. However, I did not anticipate other suggestions for social and political change until I had thoroughly analyzed the data. An account of social and political considerations, as I see them, appears in the concluding chapter of this study.

Chapter Four: Reporting and Analysis of the Interview Data

As I mentioned in Chapter Three, I had decided to combine both data reporting and analysis in one chapter to avoid including the entire collection of transcripts. Which data to include and which to exclude reflected early stages of data analysis. Presenting data separately from analysis would therefore be rather illogical. This chapter represents the final product of those decisions. It also represents the outcome of the process of data analysis which had been interwoven throughout the larger research process.

Data analysis, as I conducted it, resulted in an overall understanding of the motivations of these men to integrate a gay identity with a Christian one. More specifically, I describe five types of strategies from which they achieved identity integration. Not all of the men employed all five types of strategies. Rather, the five types represent a summary of the most common strategies of identity integration evident in the data. Prior to presenting the details of the five types, I discuss some general issues concerning identity integration which serve as a backdrop for contextualization.

The Overall Outcome of the Process of Integration

If one were tempted to view men who identify as both gay and Christian as being wracked with internal conflict about the supposed incompatibility between Christian beliefs and homosexuality, the stories told by these eight participants would quash that temptation. The overriding theme of the

discussions, as I discern it, was the expression of comfort with being both gay and Christian. Such comfort was usually expressed with keen enthusiasm. However, occasionally some lingering but relatively minor reservations surfaced. For example, two participants, Pete and Charles, referred to general contentment, laced with minimal uncertainty, about being gay and Christian. Pete acknowledged that he had not resolved "everything," while Charles said, "I don't think I've ever felt this contented with myself as I do now, in spite of the fact that there are inconsistencies."

By contrast to Pete and Charles, Lloyd was adamant in his belief that being gay is acceptable in the eyes of God. Speaking on behalf of himself and Bob, his partner of over thirty years, Lloyd emphasized without reservation the importance of his being at once Christian and gay:

> [W]e have reconciled our Christianity and our homosexuality. There is absolutely no conflict. I feel so secure that it will never be a problem for me. . . . If I didn't believe that I would have to believe that God is a cruel God to do that to so many people. I look at it differently, that God created us for a special reason. I don't know what that special reason is, but I do know that many, many gay people [are] in a servant-type ministry that cares for people.

In the above excerpt, Lloyd implies through his use of the word, "we," that Bob and he have developed strategies for identity integration in concert with each other. It is also apparent that Lloyd links his understanding of his being gay with Christian evangelicalism. Bob expressed similar sentiments about his security in being gay while also being Christian, and his belief that God uses him

to spread what Bob sees as the Christian message of love and grace to other gay people. He said:

> [E]ven from a young age, I would not allow people to trod on me. I'm a person of value, and God is my judge. . . . I believe that God arms us for [adversity]. He'll protect us. If there's a battle to be won, we've won the battle. But we just have to be strong in our faith, and in who we are as gay people. . . . The gospel has to be spread. It has to be spread to the gay community because they have been disenfranchised by mainline churches, by these [anti-gay] pastors who think they are doing good.

The above comment by Bob reflects a process of self-identity that seems to include relatively little conflict about being gay and Christian, in part because of his feelings of self-worth which have their roots in his childhood.

Wayne expressed similar feelings of self-worth which he has felt since childhood. He was raised in a highly religious evangelical Christian family. In spite of being raised in a religious tradition that emphasizes heterosexuality within marriage as the norm and as the only Christian option for sexual expression, Wayne explained:

> I've been Christian since the age of four, and I've been gay as far back as I can remember as well. My first recollection of that is, at the age of five in kindergarten, seeing a cute guy and being aware, not necessarily of the implications of that and what it would mean to the rest of my life, but knowing that there was that attraction there. So as far back as I can remember those two aspects have been integral parts of my identity. . . . A lot of gay people don't accept their being gay until a much later point, which I think might tend to make it more difficult to have the two existent in their life at the same time. . . . But for me, both aspects go back as long as I can remember. I've always had those two things to deal with, and

> perhaps that's made it easier for me to deal with it, to rationalize it, to accept it.

Other men described strong and long-term feelings of inner turmoil about being gay, either in conflict with co-existing Christian values and beliefs, or prior to adopting Christianity. Charles, for example, gradually adopted his Christian beliefs during his teenage years. Prior to doing so, he had had experiences in his boyhood that signified early homosexual attractions and provoked much anxiety at the time. He told me that he started to perceive that he was attracted to other males when he was about thirteen years of age. He described his reaction to that realization:

> I was horrified, but attracted at the same time. In the apartment building I was living in with my parents, I and another boy played with each other, touching penises. I felt it was wrong, but I liked it. [W]e didn't go to climax. He just touched me, or I touched him. I can't remember clearly, but we certainly didn't masturbate. I think the difficult thing for me was that I liked it.

One of the ways in which Charles attempted to circumvent his homosexual feelings was through heterosexual marriage. As did Pete and Lloyd, Charles felt that his homosexual attractions would cease to exist within heterosexual marriage. However, same-sex attractions remained, and anxiety continued.

> [I experienced] terrific guilt when I was first involved in intentional sexual activities with men, terrific guilt about my marriage and the infidelity that I created in my marriage. That raged on for years. After every [homo]sexual experience, I vowed not to do it again.

The degree to which each participant experienced internal conflict about being gay, whether in combination with a Christian identity or prior to adopting one, varied in longevity and severity. David, Lloyd, Charles, and Pete had made earlier decisions to reject a gay identity, but ultimately came to believe that being Christian could include being gay. None of the eight participants attempted to reject their Christian identity, although Charles, a pastor, had left the Christian ministry, believing that his role in church leadership was incompatible with being gay. He later returned to Christian leadership.

In spite of the earlier decisions of David, Lloyd, Charles, and Pete, the ultimate outcome for all of the participants was resolution through integration rather than through permanent rejection of one identity or the other. One could argue that their identities as gay and Christian are only apparently stable; given such earlier shifts in identity, it is possible that future dramatic shifts might occur. Such shifts are indeed possible. However, earlier shifts occurred in the presence of self-dissatisfaction. My aim here is not to predict the futures of each participant, but rather to suggest that the contentment that each man expressed about the integration of his Christian and gay identities would likely have a stabilizing effect rather than a destabilizing one. My interest here is to investigate the ways in which each of these men secured such apparently stable identities, especially given the political climate in which many Christians are not accepting

of gays and lesbians, and many gays and lesbians are not accepting of Christians.[14]

The overriding question of this research, then, is, "How?". The discussions I had with the eight participants incorporated commentary on a number of broad issues that are germane to that core question, such as gay identity development, Christian identity development, family upbringing, relationships with other Christians, relationships with other gay people, management of a gay identity in Christian social contexts, and management of a Christian identity in gay social contexts. From the interview data, I was able to discern a variety of strategies that they employed to achieve identity integration.[15]

Strategies of Integration: Five Types

Biblical Interpretation

Among the eight participants, the most commonly articulated strategy that was adopted for the purposes of identity integration is one that emphasizes exegesis, critical interpretation of Biblical text, in contrast with literalist interpretation. Exegetical readers consider the social, historical, or political contexts in which the text was written, whereas Biblical literalists do not. For most Christians, the Bible is considered to be the central authority from which

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[14] The difference between these two social phenomena is that while many Christians actively participate in anti-gay campaigns, no campaigns have been organized by gays and lesbians with strictly anti-Christian purposes.

[15] In using the term, "strategy," I am not only referring to conscious will or explicit intention, although some strategies do reflect such awareness of intent. I am also referring to the making of choices that may not be consciously linked with clear or explicit outcomes.

philosophical and moral standpoints are based. The Bible is often used by some Christians as the cornerstone with which to justify anti-gay attitudes and actions. Literalist interpretations of the Bible, commonly associated with the Christian Right, have lead readers to believe that God condemns homosexuality. Given such a common assertion about God's supposed rejection of homosexuality, I asked each participant to articulate his view of the Bible. My aim was not to enter into discussions about interpretation of specific Biblical scriptures, but instead to investigate the ways in which each participant negotiates the sections of the Bible that appear to denounce one of the central ways in which they identify themselves. In other words, I wanted to investigate the ways in which the Bible, as the central textual authority of Christianity, informs gay and Christian identities.

All eight men described having to struggle to locate a positive sense of themselves within scripture and to feel free from condemnation. Eventually, each one came to believe that Biblical literalism is an inappropriate way to interpret the Bible, and is not a valid cornerstone for one's beliefs about philosophy and morality. Wayne, for example, explained that,

> If you retrace history and look at many things that the Christian church has taught, [it] has supported blatant sexism, [and] has advocated slavery. . . . I look at the Bible, there's the traditional Pentecostal view that it's the literal word of God, and that everything should be taken literally. . . . To that, I would say that there is so many things that you can't take literally. They are part of the word of God, and they're there for a reason, but we have to look at them in their historical perspective.

Wayne also explained that whereas beliefs about certain issues in mainline Christian churches appear to be steadfastly-held, they actually have not been held firmly throughout the years. The example he presented was the common practice in some Christian churches, especially those that subscribe to Biblical literalism, of denying membership on church boards of directors to women. He said that such a practice

> is an example of how something is hard and fast in one particular generation, a few years later, or a different generation, it can be totally different. That can be said of sexism, slavery, and I would maintain that eventually, . . . some of the denominations now, they're starting to deal with homosexuality.

For Pete, literalism simply did not make sense. He was quite certain of his relationship with God in his assertion that,

> God keeps on answering my prayers, all the time, one after the other. I have so many answered prayers to be thankful for I can't even begin to name them. . . . If God considers [homosexuality] to be an abomination, why does He keep answering my prayers? Why does He keep on communicating with me?

Two men explicitly described having been reassured, through reading Biblical scripture, that God approved of their being gay. David said:

> I specifically remember reading Bible verses and parts of scriptures that I thought were really cool, like David and Jonathan. I remember sitting in church and reading stories, like they were such good friends and I'm sure that they [engaged in sexual activities with each other]. I think that one of the things that the church doesn't realize is that homosexuality is not about sex. For me, even

> back then, it wasn't about sex, it was about two people loving each other. I looked at David and Jonathan and I thought, "I'm sure they were in love." And I always took comfort in that.

Similarly, Lloyd described what he saw as God actively providing assurance through scripture.

> Even after I was saved, I needed some assurance. I hadn't read the Bible, but God lead me to a scripture . . . Acts 8. . . . When I read that I knew it was talking about me. It's telling me right now that I'm OK. . . . There is a scripture in Matthew 19 where he talks about the eunuchs. I believe that when he was talking about eunuchs he was talking about us. People not being able to marry, and all that, I think he was talking about gay people. They didn't call them gay in those days.

A humanist perspective of scripture was employed by Scott to bolster his sense of social justice for gays and lesbians, as well as for members of other marginalized groups.

> God is the real essence of [spirituality]. I think Jesus was an important person, but I don't think of him as a saviour in that sense. I don't think I need to be saved from anything. I think of God as a helping thing. . . . To me, an intelligent person would say -- this is very judgmental, but -- [Jesus] stood up for what is right, he aligned himself with the most marginalized people, and said, "You're OK." And that's a very powerful example for me, knowing I'm OK, and knowing that it's partly my responsibility to help others.

Another perspective on the Biblical interpretation was articulated by Thomas. He asserted that, in fact, most Christians are unable to list the particular scriptures of the Bible that are used by members of the Christian Right primarily against gays and lesbians. He argued that, "they just have this blanket [notion

that] it is written in there that homosexuality is wrong. What did Christ say about homosexuality? Absolutely nothing. Most Christians don't know that." Thomas also expressed his belief that Jesus -- after whom Christians purport to model their beliefs and behaviour -- has not been recorded in the Bible as having discussed homosexuality. For Thomas, then, the rejection of gays and lesbians by many Christians cannot be Biblically justified. His perspective has been met with anger from many other Christians. He explained further that, "I'm blessed because I'm like the leper that they wouldn't touch, . . . but God loves me."

All of the eight men expressed criticism of other Christians who reject gay and lesbian people based on the belief that God condemns homosexuality. Legalistic Christians are commonly associated with such hostility. The term, "fundamentalism" is commonly used to describe conservative legalistic Christians, most of whom reject gay and lesbian individuals. However, somewhat surprisingly, Thomas described himself as a fundamentalist. He was the only participant to do so. Whereas some gay and lesbian people have "reclaimed" words such as "fag," "dyke," and "queer" for positive self-description, likewise Thomas asserted his right to reclaim the term "fundamentalist" from its negative connotation as being narrow-minded and fraught with bigotry. He spoke rather disdainfully about liberal Christianity. His rejection of liberal Christianity seems counter-intuitive to what one might expect because liberal Christians tend to be more accepting of gays and lesbians than are most legalistic conservative Christians. Nevertheless, he was adamant about his support of the term "fundamentalist" and explained his perspective thusly:

> Fundamentalism means that you believe in [the] real essentials of the Bible, that those essentials are common to all churches, that Jesus Christ came to bring us good news of salvation, [that] he wants to have a personal relationship with every one of us, [and] that he came from God the father. Those are the fundamentals to me. And that's how I use that word, and [liberal Christians] are not taking it away from me.

Thomas was the most vocal, but not the only, opponent of liberal Christianity. In a similar manner, Bob maintained that what he sees as the core essentials of the Bible -- he did not use the term "fundamentals" -- are reduced to a "watered-down theology" when viewed through a liberal lens.

When David and I discussed the matter of Biblical interpretation, he contributed an additional perspective that was unique among the eight men. He described having a "linguistic advantage" in being bilingual and explained:

> I guess my whole approach to the whole scripture thing is one thing: interpretation. I can speak from that firsthand, not only because of [having taken] Greek [classes], but because I was raised bilingual anyways. And when you have this linguistic advantage . . . you look at languages different than someone who is taught just one language.

Overall, then, all eight men rejected literalism and six rejected fundamentalism. However, they all subscribed to what they consider to be the *fundamentals* of Christianity, those being love and grace. Perspectives on the Bible were diverse, but similar in outcome; each man described having achieved an understanding of the Bible that facilitated, rather than undermined, a gay identity. Each one expressed his view that, although the Bible is a divinely inspired text, it is, nevertheless, fraught with historical and social contextuality.

Within such an interpretive framework, identities, such as gay ones, that challenge literalist interpretations are able to emerge in concert, rather than in conflict, with Christian identities.

"A Christianity of Questions"

Another common type of strategy involved the perception of inconsistencies between idealized views of life and actual lived experience. It is the management of such perceptions that is a key element of the process of integration. For example, one could attempt to resolve all of the inconsistencies, specifically concerning sexual identity and religious beliefs, that impinge upon one's identities. By contrast, one could choose to simply ignore such inconsistencies. But one could also accept perceived inconsistencies without feeling compelled to resolve them, as demonstrated by some of the participants.

I have already alluded to minor reservations expressed by Pete and Charles in their statements that they have reached general states of inner contentment about their identities despite not having resolved every troublesome detail in the complex process of integration. They did not express a compelling need to address lingering questions, nor did they imply that the lack of utterly complete resolution necessarily signifies inner conflict. On the contrary -- and somewhat counter-intuitively -- it seems that the recognition and acceptance of inconsistencies has been a cognitive device with which these eight men have gained inner resolve about their identities.

The eight participants made statements that implied that they had made an active choice to accept certain inconsistencies concerning their identity integration, in contrast with other possible choices. One of the most common avenues for accepting inconsistencies, which paradoxically contributed to identity resolution, is through the recognition of the differences between God and church. Wayne, for example, was raised in a conservative Christian family. During much of his youth and early adulthood, Wayne held leadership positions in the church that he and his family had attended since Wayne was very young. Through a series of events, Wayne was "outed" by two self-described "ex-gay" visitors to his church to whom he had disclosed his (then physically unexplored) homosexual orientation. The next day, the church pastors asked Wayne to resign his membership to the church and to step down from his leadership positions. Wayne described the occasion as sad, but not traumatic, saying that he felt that it would have happened eventually. He also said that he felt that it was part of God's plan to eventually guide him to a new congregation in a gay-friendly church a few months later. The process that Wayne described was instrumental in his realization that God is an entity distinct from His followers.

> I think it's safe to say that in my life, and I'm sure in many others of people who have reconciled homosexuality and Christianity, the Lord has given us the grace and the understanding and the strength to endure the misunderstanding and the hardship and the broken relationships and to move on. And to focus on the Lord, because it's really our relationship with the Lord, it's not our relationship with the church. Looking back on my life, I thought I would be going to that church for the rest of my life . . . but you don't realize that the Lord might have another plan for your life.

Differentiating between God and church enabled identity integration also for David. He expressed that the turning point at which he was able to merge his gay identity with his Christian one was when he realized that God and church are different, but overlapping, entities. He expressed having felt alienated from God because of his belief, influenced by other Christians, that homosexuality was contrary to God's intent for human sexual expression. He described how a feeling of alienation from God metamorphasized into one of closeness.

> The catalyst [for me in accepting that I was gay] was me coming to the point where I was going to kill myself. At that point, I thought, "No, this isn't what God wants for me. God does not want me to kill myself. This is way beyond anything that He would ever want for my life." At that point, that's where the freedom was. I realized that for so long I was mad at God, and I had embraced the church. But at that point, I realized that it's not God that I should be mad at. It's the church that I should be mad at. I was able to embrace God at that point. . . . The church was totally abandoned.

Other men did not state their understanding of the distinction between God and church directly, but rather implied it. For example, Pete described a series of events that lead him to lower his expectations of other Christians, but not of God. He had been living in a small rural town, and he and his (then) wife of nineteen years were actively involved in the local Christian community. She knew about his homosexual desires, but urged him to go for counseling in hopes that such desires would be expunged. He attended counseling sessions, but, indeed, his sexual desires for men remained. In spite, she disclosed his homosexuality to various people in their small town. Pete briefly described the result of some of the reactions from local townspeople toward his being gay: "I