GAY CHRISTIAN PARTNERSHIPS 1995

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Life is a *humbling* learning process.

I dedicate this work to three significant women in my life, from whom I have had the privilege to learn:

Barbra, who taught me *A Piece of Sky*

Margaret, who taught me the power of self-love

And, most of all, 

Ah Yut, my dear mother, who taught me the beauty of simplicity
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ABSTRACT

The question most frequently asked of me about this research is, "Can being Christian possibly be compatible with being gay?" This thesis documents the lived experiences of 68 self-defined gay Christian couples who answer this question with an unequivocal yes.

The 1970s have seen a growing interest in empirical research on gay male partnerships. However, research that gives prominence to the religious dimension is virtually non-existent. Against this backdrop, this exploratory study attempts to understand the organisation of gay Christian partnerships, focusing on the religious aspect alongside the social and the sexual.

Inasmuch as a partnership is embedded within the social web, it therefore consists of the internal and the external dimensions. In the internal dimension, the relational parties interact with each other as individuals, with the common goal of establishing a rewarding partnership. In the external dimension, the relational parties interact, as individuals and as a social unit, with the wider social network to which they belong. The interactions within and between these dimensions shape the organisation of the partnership.

This thesis is presented in such a way that it first explores the internal dimension of the partnership. Part II addresses a multiplicity of issues primarily pertaining to the organisation of the partnership within the framework of the dyad. Part III and Part IV extend the scope of discourse beyond the dyad's boundary. The religious aspect is examined in detail in these parts. The respondents' relationships with the institutionalised Church constitute a major theme. The issues of sex and sexual non-exclusivity are also explored in relation to conventional Christian sexual ethics.

In spite of the lack of social support and religious affirmation, the 68 gay Christian couples in the sample generally demonstrate a positive self-image and indeed thrived in their partnerships. Their experiences speak loudly in support of the assertion that being gay and Christian is compatible. There is no evidence that their partnerships are pathological or intrinsically disordered. They are well-adjusted and optimistic, despite the lack of institutional support.

Andrew Yip
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Part I

SETTING THE SCENE: THE STUDY
Chapter One

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This Chapter aims to chart the development of research on gay males since the 1950s. A review of the literature indicates that research specifically on gay male partnerships covers five major themes: (1) Gender role-playing in partnership; (2) Relationship goals and satisfaction; (3) The issue of sexual exclusivity; (4) Typology of relationships; and (5) The impacts of HIV/AIDS on partnerships.

The religious dimension does not constitute a major focus in the above research. The religious element is often mentioned en passant, if mentioned at all. On the other hand, there has been a growing corpus of non-empirical Christian literature on homosexuality, but it has hardly extended its theme beyond the theological debate about its acceptability.

This study therefore seeks to fill the gap between the non-empirical Christian literature with its theological emphasis and the empirical research that has not given the religious dimension sufficient attention. Further, it seeks to throw some light on a minority group in the Christian community whose members, under the present social climate, are not accorded full acceptance because of their sexuality. This is a result of their being considered by the institutionalised Church as 'sexual deviants' rather than 'sexual variants'.

Methodologically, this study is exploratory, descriptive and mainly qualitative in nature, with the primary aim to document the lived experiences of gay Christians in partnership. Therefore, it is not a hypothetico-deductive exercise, predicated on a all-embracing theoretical framework.

Baxter's (1993) typology of internal and external contradictions in personal relationships provides the over-arching theoretical framework of this study. However, I draw upon other sources of literature for areas that Baxter's (1993) typology does not specifically address. I refer to Goffman (1963), Humphreys (1972) and Breakwell (1983, 1986) for their illuminating analysis of stigma management. I also draw upon personal relationships research (e.g. Duck 1982, 1993a, 1993b, 1994a) to assist the analysis of the dynamics of the partnership.
1.1. Definition of Concepts

In this section, I define some key terms related to the study. It must be acknowledged that there is a lack of specificity and consensus among researchers on the definition of terms such as 'homosexual', 'homosexuality' and 'gay' (Donovan 1992). I therefore define the following terms in accordance with the specificity of this study.

**Homosexual**

The term 'homosexual' was first used by the Hungarian physician K. M. Benkert in around 1870 to describe the condition of sex and love between members of the same sex. It was incorporated into the English language by Havelock Ellis in the 1890s. Prior to that, the English language only had words that described certain kinds of sex acts between members of the same sex. 'Buggery', 'pederasty' and 'sodomy' are some salient examples. People who committed these acts were accordingly called 'buggerer', 'pederast' and 'sodomite' (McWhirter and Mattison 1984; Buunk and Van Driel 1989). No words were available to describe, for instance, the affectional and erotic attraction between members of the same sex. The emergence of this term, alongside other factors, has brought about the growing perception that homosexuality is an inner characteristic of a particular type of individual (Weeks 1977).

As mentioned, there is no consensus among scholars on the definition of the term 'homosexual'. Until the 1970s, research on homosexuality was dominated by medical doctors or clinical psychologists whose primary concern lay in examining the aetiology and the perceived psychopathology of homosexuality (Westmoreland 1975; Jones and De Cecco 1982). There existed therefore a perspective that categorised the homosexual as someone short of the essential characteristics of normality, particularly in the sexual domain of his/her life. The term 'homosexual' was therefore very much clinical in nature.

The 1970s saw the growth of multi-disciplinary research on homosexuality from fields such as sociology, history, anthropology and art as well as literature (Roscoe 1988). This scenario ignited a long-standing debate on the definition of 'homosexuality'. Two opposing perspectives emerged in this connection. They can be broadly termed the 'essentialist' perspective and the 'social constructionist' perspective.

The 'essentialist' perspective is characterised by the view that homosexuality is a biologically-determined predisposition which is constant in human behaviour and transcends the cultural conceptions of sexuality (Hinsch 1990). Homosexuality is therefore "... the general phenomenon of same-sex eroticism... it comprises all sexual phenomena between persons of the
same gender, whether the result of conscious preference, subliminal desire or circumstantial exigency." (Boswell 1980:44). In the same vein, Whitam and Mathy (1986:6) argue that:

"... the universal, parallel development of homosexual populations points to an explanation in terms of biology, rather than the social-construction, role-modelling, and social scientific explanations of the origins of sexual orientations."

The 'essentialist' perspective emphasises the underlying biological causation of homosexuality across cultural boundaries. Therefore, it argues that certain people who are biologically pre-disposed to be erotically and emotionally attracted to members of the same sex can be objectively categorised as 'homosexual' on the basis of their sexual essence.

The 'social constructionist' perspective, on the other hand, asserts that homosexuality can only be explained satisfactorily within a socio-historical context. The thrust of its contention is that homosexuality is not a biologically constant form, rather, it is a specific sexual reality constructed by the society, lacking in objective validity and cross-cultural applicability (Hinsch 1990). 'Homosexual', therefore, is a label given to this socially constructed category on the ground of the sexual behaviour of its members. This brings about the development of consciousness, identity and subculture within this social category (Weeks 1981).

In this connection, McIntosh (1968:184) argues that 'homosexual' is a social role rather than a condition. Donovan (1992:39) asserts in support:

"Membership within the (homosexual) category becomes contingent upon the context in which these (homosexual) acts occur. Societies which lack homosexual roles are thereby said to also lack homosexuals, although not necessarily persons engaging in homosexuality."

In sum, it can be concluded that while the 'essentialist' perspective focuses on the biological condition of the social actor, the 'social constructionist' shifts the focus to the society whose social regulation creates the homosexual role for the demarcation of the 'normal' from the 'deviant'. To me, this is the prime attraction of the 'social constructionist' perspective.

Gay

The term 'gay' emerged within the gay community in the 1960s with the growth of the gay rights movement. It has often been used interchangeably and loosely with the term 'homosexual'. However, an analysis of the meaning attached to this term by the gay community suggests that it differs from 'homosexual' in some crucial ways. First, the term 'gay' rejects the clinical overtones of 'homosexual' due to its association with psychopathology, biological abnormality and immorality which it regards as having been externally imposed on the gay community (Silverstein 1981; Cardell et al. 1981; Coyle 1991; Davies et al. 1993).
'Gay' is a term that implies the pride, self-assertiveness, self-acceptance and positive self-image of the gay community. It legitimates homosexuality and the homosexual lifestyle as a healthy and rewarding alternative lifestyle. This term, therefore, takes on a political dimension. Thus, while 'homosexual' unduly highlights the sexual dimension of a person who is erotically and emotionally attracted to members of the same sex, 'gay' refers to a normal individual who adopts an alternative lifestyle to that which is normatively prescribed by the social script to which heterosexuals generally conform. His/her sexual preference makes him/her a sexual variant, not a sexual deviant. In relation to this, Warren (1974: 149-150) asserts:

"A homosexual identity is distinguished from a gay identity by the gay community, although not by the stigmatising society. A homosexual identity simply describes one's sexual orientation, whereas a gay identity implies affiliation with the gay community in a cultural and sociable sense. A homosexual, for the community, is one who both practices homosexuality and admits it, whereas a gay person is someone who does all that and also identifies and interacts with the gay world."

To Warren, 'homosexual' is a term generated by social labelling. The individual is being labelled as such because of his/her sexual behaviour, thus being accorded the 'deviant' status. 'Gay', on the other hand, is a term that grows out of the self-labelling of members of the gay community. It is a self-forged identity indicating a sense of worth (Davies et al. 1993). It is "..... positive and integrating, expanding into broader social concerns and relationships beyond the merely sexual." (Donovan 1992:41).

The term 'gay' is often used in the gay community to refer to both male and female. However, within the context of this study, I use it to refer exclusively to men who are emotionally and erotically attracted to members of the same sex. For women with same-sex emotional and erotic attraction, I use the term 'lesbian' whenever I refer to them in this study.

Not all the gay males are completely 'out' or politically articulate. What is crucial in this context is that they define themselves as gay. Further, they are also currently involved in a long-term partnership with another man. A partnership, in this case, is a relationship defined by both relational parties involved as emotionally primary and the most important and significant to them, bearing in mind that some gay males might prefer to opt for an 'open' relationship which involves a significant relationship and some other less significant ones. The partnership, in this case, must be at least one year old. I justify in Chapter Two the various criteria for the respondent recruitment of this study.
Christian

The term 'Christian', in this context, refers to any religious beliefs broadly based on Christianity which the gay males involved in this study define as Christian. I did not impose any religious denominational affiliations on my prospective respondents in the recruitment process. What is essential is that the respondents define themselves as Christian, whatever form their Christian religious beliefs might take. It is my responsibility then to understand the ways they view Christianity in relation to their sexuality. The imposition of any pre-conceived idea or definition on my part would limit the scope of discovery.

Church

I use the term 'Church' to refer to the institutionalised Church or denominations which are still generally negative in their official positions about homosexuality. The term 'church', with a small first letter, refers to the local congregation that the respondent might attend. When I need to specify the denomination of an institutionalised Church, I mention it by name (e.g. the Roman Catholic Church; the Methodist Church).

1.2. History of Research on Gay Males in General

Research on homosexuality began as early as the 1950s, characterised by, inter alia, the works of Hooker (1956, 1962, 1965a, 1965b), Leznoff and Westley (1956) and Reiss (1961). These studies, however, focused heavily on the aetiology of homosexuality and its treatment and cure. The unit of analysis tended to be the individual homosexual, recruited principally from clinical or institutionalised populations. These studies, prior to the birth of the gay rights movement in the late 1960s, share the tendency to view the homosexual as an ill-adjusted individual in need of treatment and cure from abnormality (Oliver 1976; Risman and Schwartz 1988). In this connection, Harry (1983:216) comments:

"Most of the pre-1970 writings on homosexuality either dealt with disembodied sexual activities with no concern for their relationship context or explored those relationships as instances of psychopathology."

However, since the spark of the gay rights movement was lit in the Stonewall Riots in June 1969, the gay community has begun to mobilise itself as a social and political movement. It increasingly challenges the skewed social perception and the consequent stigmatisation of homosexuality (Humphreys 1972).
The growth of the gay community was also buttressed when in 1973 the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its official *Diagnostic and Statistic Manual of Mental Disorder* (Cohn 1973; Oliver 1976; Isay 1989). Following in its footsteps, the American Psychological Association declared in 1975 that homosexuality does not imply impairment of judgement, stability, reliability, or general social or vocational capabilities.

These social changes have contributed to the shift of focus in the study of the gay population. Studies since the 1970s have acknowledged the importance of documenting the full spectrum of the lived experiences of gay people (McWhirter and Mattison 1984). They were increasingly treated not as objects in need of treatment and cure, but people who have adopted an alternative and variant lifestyle. There has been a growing recognition that the gay lifestyle is part and parcel of the diversity of contemporary lifestyles.

In sociology, the focus shifted from treating homosexuals as sexual deviants to the examination of the social organisation of the gay world and gay relationships (e.g. Saghir and Robins 1973; Warren 1974; Bell and Weinberg 1978; Harry and DeVall 1978; Risman and Schwartz 1988). In psychology, on the other hand, the preoccupation with the aetiology and psychopathology of homosexuality has given way to the examination of homosexuality in the context of intimacy and close relationships (e.g. De Cecco and Shively 1978; Jones and Bates 1978). The 1970s also witnessed the birth of the *Journal of Homosexuality* itself.

The 1980s and the 1990s saw the flourishing of more sociological and psychological studies that contributed to the understanding of the organisation of gay lifestyles. This further strengthens the argument that gay lifestyles are a variant and not a deviation from the norm, and it is a testimony to the existence of alternative lifestyles in contemporary society (e.g. Mendola 1980; Silverstein 1981; Harry 1982a, 1982b, 1984; Blasband and Peplau 1985; Kurdek and Schmitt 1986; Steinman 1990). There also emerged comparative studies on gay males and lesbians (e.g. Marecek et al. 1982; Harry 1983). In some cases, lifestyles of gay males, lesbians and heterosexuals were also comparatively examined (e.g. Peplau and Cochran 1980; Cardell et al. 1981; Blumstein and Schwartz 1983).

The advent of AIDS in the early 1980s has also played its role in the focus of research on gay people. Perceived as being in the high risk group, individual gay men soon became the focus of HIV/AIDS-related research. Their sexual practices are studied to shed light on how their lifestyle might make them fall prey to the spread of AIDS. In Britain, for instance, the largest ever social research on gay and bisexual men, the Socio-sexual Investigation into Gay Men and AIDS (SIGMA), was set up in 1987. AIDS has undoubtedly changed the course taken by research into the lifestyle of gay people. I will elaborate this point later.
1.3. Research on Gay Male Partnerships

There is little literature available which deals exclusively with the relationships of gay male couples. Most of the relevant literature deals with gay male relationships in general. For literature that focuses on gay male couples, merely one or two aspects of their partnerships are studied. There are two reasons for this:

(a) Long-term partnership is not a prominent feature of gay male relationships. This can be explained in two ways. First, some gay men deliberately choose not to be in a long-term partnership as they view coupledom as a replication of heterosexual intimate partnerships. Choosing not to be in a long-term gay partnership is therefore a political statement. Admittedly, such a view tends to be shared by younger gay men who are active in the gay scene and whose 'marketability' allows them to acquire sex easily. I would argue that as gay men grow older, they will tend to form partnerships for the primary reason of companionship. This, however, does not mean that they would then replicate the heterosexual lifestyle. They would still organise their various partnerships in an individualised manner.

Second, the odds against gay men establishing and maintaining long-term and stable partnerships are great. As Hoffman (1968:166) acknowledges, "..... the most serious problem for those who live in the gay world is the great difficulty they have in establishing stable relationships with each other." The concern expressed in Hoffman's statement still holds true after almost three decades. Researchers acknowledge the pressures against the longevity of gay partnerships, inter alia, the lack of institutional support, legal sanctions, religious approval, cultural guidelines, the absence of children and the sexual nature of the gay scene (Hoffman 1968; Saghir and Robins 1973; Dailey 1974; Tripp 1975; Harry and DeVall 1978; Berger 1982; Blumstein and Schwartz 1983; Patton 1985).

(b) The advent of AIDS in the early 1980s has also brought about the continual focus in studying single gay males. The social organisation of our knowledge about AIDS is inextricably, though unfortunately, linked to the gay community. Efforts in the promotion of awareness of this disease tend to focus their targets on single gay males who are assumed to be more likely than those in partnerships to have a greater number of sexual partners. HIV/AIDS-related research has therefore been very much involved in the study of the sexual behaviour of single gay men, mentioning of gay couples en passant. However, I would argue that this focus would gradually shift. Research attention on gay couples will increase as more gay men opt for partnerships as a safer option (Patton 1985; Carl 1986; Blumenfield and Raymond 1988; Isay 1989). This is in line with the argument of Buunk and Van Driel (1989:83) that:
"... with the ubiquitous threat of AIDS in the late 1980s, we may be witnessing a process in which the number of gays committed to a single partner is steadily rising. The gay subculture's ardent reassessment of the virtues of monogamy suggests that lengthy pair-relationships will be more commonplace in the future."

There are, however, no empirical data available at this point about the effect of HIV/AIDS on partnership formation.

1.4. Main Themes of Research on Gay Male Partnerships

Five prominent themes have been identified which reflect the research interests in the area of gay male relationships. They are:

1. Gender role-playing in partnership.
2. Relationship goals and satisfaction.
3. The issue of sexual exclusivity.
4. Typology of relationships.
5. Impact of HIV/AIDS on gay relationships

Gender Role-playing in Partnership

Studies of this nature focus on assessing primarily the extent to which a gay couple replicates the masculine-feminine role stereotype, in which one partner plays a dominant role in decision-making while the other plays a subordinate role (e.g. Reece 1979; Marecek et al. 1982). Research evidence has been inconclusive in this respect.

In examining the personal characteristics of gay couples in relation to the longevity of their partnerships, Reece (1979) concludes that there is a tendency for two men in an ongoing relationship to play different gender roles, thus the existence of 'role complementarity', as in most heterosexual partnerships. This is consistent with Cotton's (1972) view that some gay couples indeed replicate the masculine-feminine gender role dichotomy. Other researchers also confirm that a minority of gay partnerships demonstrate moderate conformity to conventional gender roles, but not exaggerated role-playing (Cardell et al. 1981; Marecek et al. 1982; Peplau and Gordan 1983).

However, many researchers argue that the majority of gay partnerships debunk the stereotype that they follow the rigid masculine-feminine gender roles (e.g. Saghir and Robins 1973; Haist and Hewitt 1974; Freeman 1975; Westmoreland 1975; Harry 1976, 1977, 1982, 1984;

In the sexual dimension, Haist and Hewitt (1974) report that "... homosexuals do not have any exclusive preference for one form of sexual activity over another and the exaggerated masculinity or femininity of behavior may well be more stereotype than fact." Harry's (1976b) findings lend credence to this conclusion. Mendola (1980), on the other hand, argues that the formula of success for a gay relationship is founded on the partners' freedom from conventional gender role entrapments. Her argument is supported by the following comment:

"Most contemporary gay relationships do not conform to traditional 'masculine' and 'feminine' roles; instead, role flexibility and turn-taking are more common patterns. Only a small minority of homosexual couples engage in clearcut butch-femme roleplaying. In this sense, traditional heterosexual marriage is not the predominant model or script for current homosexual couples." (Peplau 1982:4)

Research evidence tends to suggest that there exists very little gender role differences between gay male partners. Most gay males would view such differences as reactionary mimicry of the heterosexual norms which they reject. Gay relationships, therefore, are more accurately characterised by the 'best friend' model which involves, *inter alia*, an egalitarian decision-making process (Harry and DeVall 1978; Peplau 1981; Peplau and Gordon 1983).

Although role flexibility and turn-taking tend to characterise a gay partnership, there is still room for inequality between partners to set in. Several factors are responsible for this. As Blumstein and Schwartz (1983:59) argue, "In gay male couples, income is an extremely important force in determining which partner will be dominant." Their study reveals that the partner with the larger income tends to exercise a greater control over financial decisions pertaining to expensive items. Similarly, he also appears to control the couple's recreational activities. This is because "..... earning power is a central part of a man's identity. Having more money gives a man symbolic — and therefore real — advantages over his partner." (Blumstein and Schwartz 1983:110). This situation can generate interpersonal conflicts. When a partner attempts to control the relationship because of his superior financial standing, his partner, socialised to be a man, is likely to resist. The couple therefore needs to engage in a balancing act to achieve equality within the overall framework of the partnership in order to maintain its stability.

The issue of age difference between partners in relation to role playing also attracts some research attention. Steinman (1990) reveals that for an age-inegalitarian couple, the older partner, who is usually more financially secure, tends to provide the younger partner with extrinsic resources such as material possessions and money. In reciprocating these 'exchange benefits', the younger partner offers his intrinsic attributes such as his physical attractiveness.
and sexual appeal. The larger the age gap, Steinman (1990) argues, the shorter the duration of the partnership.

However, Harry's (1984) findings suggest that the reverse of Steinman's (1990) argument could be true. A younger partner can dominate a partnership under the implicit threat of turning to other partners, given his own physical appeal, and the lack of it in the older partner. With reference to these two factors, Harry (1984:11) concludes that, "It thus seem that age differences, or correlated income differences, may be the major source of unequal decisionmaking among gay couples."

**Relationship Goals and Satisfaction**

The second prominent theme for research into gay partnerships is the values and goals that gay couples pursue in a partnership. Contrary to the stereotypical idea that gay men are more interested in casual recreational sex, research evidence reveals that most of them do long for, and are prepared to work towards, a long-term relationship characterised by mutual trust, affection and companionship (Bell and Weinberg 1978; Jones and Bates 1978; Ramsey et al. 1978; Peplau and Cochran 1980, 1981; Silverstein 1981; Jones and De Cecco 1982). This is best summarised by a study on 20 gay male couples:

"The results of this study seriously challenge the view of relationships between gay males as problematic, pathological, and marked by mistrust and hostility. In addition, no evidence was found which supported the view that power-dependency conflict is inherent in the homosexual condition. Contrary to these views, it was found that the gay males in this study were involved in relationships characterized by honesty and open communication, love, maturity, cooperation, responsibility, mutual understanding and respect." (Westmoreland 1975:118)

In particular, relationship satisfaction and relationship values appear to be an area of interest to some major studies (Westmoreland 1975; Oliver 1976; Bell and Weinberg 1978; Jones and Bates 1978; Ramsey et al. 1978; Mendola 1980; Peplau and Cochran 1980, 1981; Silverstein 1981; Cardell et al. 1981; Blumstein and Schwartz 1983; Duffy and Rusbult 1986). In her study on how gay men balance 'dyadic attachment' and 'personal autonomy' in a relationship, Peplau (1981) reports that:

".... (there is) no association between an individual's scores on attachment and autonomy. People who gave great importance to attachment were just as likely to value and devalue autonomy."

In studying gay men's orientation to the same relationship values, Peplau and Cochran (1981) report, *inter alia*, that men who strongly value personal autonomy are no less likely than those who value dyadic attachment to find their current relationship intimate and rewarding. However, the former tend to be in relationships of shorter duration compared to the latter. This
is because "......... men who value autonomy may find shorter term relationships more comfortable and rewarding." (Peplau and Cochran 1981:9)

The Issue of Sexual Exclusivity

Sexual exclusivity is one of the most prominent areas of interest in the studies on gay couples. It is also a major issue that gay couples themselves have to grapple with, as Silverstein (1981:40) comments:

"..... there is no more universal conflict to be found among gay lovers than the question of whether or not to maintain an exclusive sexual relationship."

Research evidence tends to suggest that the majority of gay male partnerships are not sexually exclusive or 'closed' in nature. Many researchers argue that sexual exclusivity in gay male partnerships is the exception rather than the rule. (Saghir and Robins 1973; Bell and Weinberg 1978; Mendola 1980; Peplau and Cochran 1981; Blumstein and Schwartz 1983; Peplau and Gordon 1983; McWhirter and Mattison 1984; Blasband and Peplau 1985; Buunk and Van Driel 1989; Davies et al. 1993).

Peplau and Cochran (1981), for instance, report that 70% of their respondents have had sex outside their current relationships since they started. In the same vein, Blumstein and Schwartz (1983:82) state that, "..... some four out of five gays in a relationship claim to have had sex with someone other than their primary partner since the relationship started." Mendola (1980) reveals that among her respondents in steady relationships, 63% have had sex outside their partnerships.

In relating sexual exclusivity to the duration of a partnership, McWhirter and Mattison (1984) discover that all the couples they study whose partnerships are over five years adopt sexual non-exclusivity. Davies et al. (1993) also report that 72.6% of the partnerships over five years they study are sexually open. Gay couples, therefore, tend to demonstrate a trend towards sexual non-exclusivity over time.

What are the factors responsible for sexual non-exclusivity in gay partnerships? Researchers have made some salient observations. Many argue that the male sex-role socialisation process encourages men, both gay and heterosexual, to place great emphasis on the importance of frequent and varied sexual activity detached of emotional involvement (e.g. Berzon 1979; Peplau 1981; Peplau and Cochran 1981). With the availability of opportunity of casual and recreational sex in the gay scene, it is not surprising that sexual exclusivity is such a
difficult ideal to achieve (Jay and Young 1977; Harry 1977; Harry and DeVall 1978; Spada 1979; Peplau 1981).

Engaging in casual sex without emotional attachment characterises the attitude of gay men who view sex outside a partnership as non-threatening to the stability of the relationship itself, as succinctly argued by one of Silverstein's (1981) respondents who has been in a relationship for six-and-a-half years:

"I still feel that a commitment to a relationship like this has very little to do with what I choose to do with my body. My commitment is more intellectual and in the heart. I differentiate between having sex and making love. There's a great difference. When I feel strongly toward a person, I make love. When I don't, I have sex. And I can enjoy both of them very much." (Cited in Silverstein 1981: 143)

Having a sexually open partnership can also be a result of some gay men's desire for sexual variety and personal independence. Having sex outside a relationship not only provides them with a greater variety of sexual experiences, but also helps avoid the possessiveness and ownership between partners (Silverstein 1981; Blasband and Peplau 1985).

Researchers do not speak with one voice on whether sexual exclusivity or non-exclusivity affects the quality and the longevity of a partnership. There have also been studies which assess the link between the level of relationship satisfaction and the issue of sexual exclusivity. In comparing sexually open and closed couples, Kurdek and Schmitt (1986) report that partners in these two types of relationships do not demonstrate any differences in their scores on psychological adjustment.

Similarly, Peplau (1981) and Blasband and Peplau (1985) report that there is no significant difference between these couples in terms of their satisfaction with and commitment to their partnerships. In this case, the issue of sexual exclusivity does not appear to be the determining factor in the longevity of the partnerships. These findings, however, run in contrast to those of Harry (1984), supported by the claim that "..... partners in open relationships lived together longer than did partners in closed relationships." (Kurdek and Schmitt 1986: 95).

Harry and Lovely (1979) assert that gay couples often go through a 'deromanticization process' as their partnerships progress. (this may also be the case for heterosexual couples). This process is accompanied by the transformation of the nature of their partnerships from being sexually closed to sexually open. Most researchers do not view sexual non-exclusivity as symptomatic of problems in a partnership. Rather, it facilitates the development of a long-term partnership (Warren 1974; Harry and DeVall 1978; Blasband and Peplau 1985).
In this connection, Blumstein and Schwartz (1983:299) assert that, "Outside sex is not related to gay men's overall happiness or their commitment to the relationship." This evidence supports Hickson's (1991:2) conclusion that "..... sexual exclusivity is neither a reality, nor an ideal, for most coupled gay men." All the studies cited in this sub-section do not consider the possible influence of religious beliefs on the issue of sexual non-exclusivity. My study attempts to explore this possible relationship.

**Typology of Relationships**

Attempts have been made in some studies to construct various typologies of gay men and the relationships they foster. Different criteria have been used in the construction of these typologies. Based on the duration and the nature (social, sexual, or socio-sexual) of gay relationships, Sonenschein (1968) espouses a typology comprising six types of gay relationships:

(a) non-sexual permanent social relationships, also called first order friendships
(b) non-sexual non-permanent social relationships, also termed second order friendships
(c) non-permanent sexual relationships, or brief encounters
(d) permanent sexual relationships or extended encounters, typified by 'kept boy' and 'sugar daddy' relationships
(e) non-permanent socio-sexual relationships or circumstantial encounters, or third order friendships
(f) mateships

Sonenschein (1968) further explains that while the first five types of relationships do not result in any form of primary partnership, 'mateships' do. They can be further divided into 'married' and 'co-habiting' partnerships. In the former, the couple has most likely gone through rituals that imitate the heterosexual marriage such as exchange of rings as a symbol of commitment and trust. There also exists a dichotomy of gender roles in the partnership. In the latter, the emphasis of the relationship is on the mutuality of interests and values. It is less formalised with greater emphasis on love instead of sex. Sonenschein's (1968) typology is interesting, but it does not shed much light on the dynamics of the partners' interpersonal relationship which my study seeks to explore.

Saghir and Robins (1973) categorise their respondents' relationships solely according to their duration: 'one night stand'; 'liaison' which lasts between four and twelve months; and 'affair' which lasts over one year. Nuehring et al. (1974), on the other hand, propose a typology involving four types of relationships:
(a) short-term relationships with emotional involvement
(b) short-term relationships without emotional involvement
(c) long-term relationships with emotional involvement
(d) long-term relationships without emotional involvement

Like Sonenschein (1968), Nuehring et al. (1974) use the duration and the nature of the relationship — in this case, emotional involvement — as the criteria for the typology. Bell and Weinberg (1978:132), on the other hand, present a typology of five different homosexual experiences:

(a) The 'asexual', who is older, engaged in a low level of sexual activity and tends to have more sexual problems.
(b) The 'dysfunctional', who is sexually active but also suffers a great number of sexual problems, principally due to his regret for being a homosexual
(c) The 'functional' or 'single', who is young and sexually very active
(d) The closed-coupled, who is in a 'quasi-marriage' and lives together with his partner. The relationship excludes 'extra-marital' sexual activity.
(e) The open-coupled, who is in a primary relationship but still maintains sexual activity outside of the relationship

In terms of paired relationships, the criterion that Bell and Weinberg (1978) use for classification is the sexual openness or closedness of the relationship. Harry and DeVall (1978), on the other hand, use terms that describe heterosexual relationships in categorising their respondents on the basis of their current 'marital' status: (1) the 'single' who does not have a regular partner; (2) the 'engaged' who has a non-cohabiting partner; (3) the 'married' who has a cohabiting partner; (4) the 'previously engaged' who lives with his previous partner for practical reasons; and (5) the 'divorced' who does not have a partner for at least a year.

In can be concluded thus far that researchers use different criteria in the construction of the typologies of gay relationships. However, it must be recognised that not all the categories are concerned with primary relationships whereby both partners share the mutual understanding that that particular partnership is the most significant one, whatever their constitutional arrangements might be.

In the typologies presented, the duration of the relationship emerges to be the most frequently used criterion in categorising gay partnerships. Other criteria which are also taken into consideration concern the different nature of the relationship: the presence and extent of sexual and emotional involvement, and the availability of a current partner as well as living arrangement.
I now turn the discussion to the typology of gay couples put forward by McWhirter and Mattison (1984). Their study, involving 156 cohabiting gay couples who have been together from 1 to 37 1/2 years, is the most extensive study on gay couples. McWhirter and Mattison (1984) have also advanced a six-stage developmental model charting the progress of a gay partnership. I constructed Table 1.1 to summarise McWhirter and Mattison's (1984) findings.

Table 1.1: Summary of Findings on the Six-Stage Developmental Model in Gay Partnerships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Salient Characteristics</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| One   | Blending   | Year One   | 1. **Merging:** experience each other as mirror images; avoid conflicts at all cost  
2. **Limerence:** heavily involved romantically  
3. **Equalising of Partnership:** learning to share carefully and evenly, but not in the area of money and possessions  
4. **High Sexual Activity:** sex is important in fashioning the bond; emphasising sexual exclusivity |
| Two   | Nesting    | 2 to 3 Years | 1. **Home-making:** making a home together; increased level of sharing  
2. **Finding Compatibility:** coping and balancing mutual differences; learning to complement each other  
3. **Decline of Limerence:** nature of love shifts from romantic feelings to care and concern; decline in sexual activity  
4. **Ambivalence:** a result of mutual familiarity; decrease in verbal tenderness; self-doubt |
| Three | Maintaining | 3 to 5 Years | 1. **Reappearance of the Individual:** former individual traits re-emerge due to mutual confidence in the relationship; may result in conflict and the search for outside sexual partners  
2. **Taking Risks:** taking risks with partner, relationship, self and others  
3. **Dealing with Conflicts:** managing conflict in an attempt to restore peace in the relationships  
4. **Establishing Traditions:** customs and individual habits become an indicator of relationship history |
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Four</th>
<th>Building</th>
<th>6 to 10 Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
|        |            | 1. **Collaborating**: consolidating their nest; creating more areas of complementarity  
|        |            | 2. **Increasing Productivity**: merger of money and possessions lead to increased productivity  
|        |            | 3. **Establishing Independence**: participate in divergent activities; a sense of mutual reliability and dependability leads to more individualisation; balancing independence and dependence on partner  
|        |            | 4. **Dependability of Partners**: balancing dependability on partners; balancing individual freedom and mutual security; decrease in sexual activity  

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Five</th>
<th>Releasing</th>
<th>11 to 20 Years</th>
</tr>
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</table>
|        |            | 1. **Trusting**: accepting the unchangeability of partner in certain aspects; developing a different level of friendship; love and respect evolve into a fidelity of unquestioned positive regard  
|        |            | 2. **Merging of Money and Possessions**: entering a state of full voluntary sharing; surrendering the last symbol of individual independence  
|        |            | 3. **Constricting**: relationship in a rut; worry about the relationship invaded by boredom; may sleep in separate rooms  
|        |            | 4. **Taking Each Other for Granted**: missing the old days; a result of other developed characteristics  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Six</th>
<th>Renewing</th>
<th>Beyond 20 Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
|        |            | 1. **Achieving Security**: achieving financial, personal and relationship well-being; enjoying their shared history  
|        |            | 2. **Shifting Perspectives**: partners drawn closer together because of personal concerns on, for instance, health, ageing, loss of attractiveness, loneliness  
|        |            | 3. **Restoring the Partnership**: self-appraisal and a new look at partner helps restore relationship  
|        |            | 4. **Remembering**: sharing long relationship history, rich in memories  

** Adaptation from McWhirter and Mattison (1984)

The relationship model proposed by McWhirter and Mattison (1984) looks impressive. However, a closer inspection reveals that it contains some glaring weaknesses. I will evaluate these weaknesses and the relevance of this model to my study in Section 1.7..
Impact of HIV/AIDS on Gay Relationships

Since the early 1980s, HIV/AIDS has had a tremendous impact on research on gay men. Sociofile reveals that there are more than 2000 entries of articles on this subject. However, the majority of this research focuses heavily on the impact of HIV/AIDS on the individual gay man (Bor et al. 1993). Its impact on the dynamics of gay relationships is until now not well researched.

On the whole, research of HIV/AIDS on the individual gay men can be divided into three major categories. First, research pertaining to risk reduction and sexual behavioural change among gay men, for instance, the practice of safer sex and the issue of coupling and intimacy (e.g. Kayal 1985; Kotarba and Long 1985; Carl 1986; Martin 1986; Ford 1992). Second, research on HIV/AIDS-related health promotion programmes and strategies (e.g. Kelly and Murphy 1991; Aggleton and Kapila 1992). Third, research on the care and supportive system for people with HIV/AIDS (e.g. Hankins and Fos 1989; Butters et al. 1993).

The small research input into the impact of HIV/AIDS on gay relationships has focused heavily on two issues: (1) the coping of gay men with partners with HIV/AIDS; and (2) bereavement of surviving gay men whose partners succumb to AIDS. Employing his experience as a family therapist, Carl (1986:245-246) identifies the problems of gay men with partners with HIV/AIDS. These problems are:

"(1) He will be fearful about contracting the disease himself at some future dates; (2) he may feel a lack of support for himself among their friends, in the midst of their concern for the patients; (3) he may feel labeled as a 'leper' because of his association with the dying man; (4) he will experience all the factors involved in mourning; and (5) he may have to do without the support or knowledge of his own family as well as the family of the patient."

In the same vein, Geis et al. (1986) study the psychological stresses and counselling needs for the partners of AIDS victims, some of whom have experienced the loss of their partners. They argue that stresses in this case emanate from the societal stigma of AIDS victims and the people intimately associated with them, such as the partners themselves. Some of their interviewees consider themselves "modern day lepers" (Geis et al. 1986:47). This stigma may also lead to the lack of support from their friends, families the religious and the medical communities. The difficulties experienced by these partners of AIDS victims share great similarity with those that Carl (1986) highlights. Geis et al. (1986:53) conclude:

"... the stigma of AIDS has the emotional impact of a modern-day leprosy. Actually, the lovers of AIDS patients sometimes call themselves lepers. To be designated as AIDS-related is to evoke ostracism, calls for quarantine or colonization and terror of contamination by the most remote contact, much less the human touch."
In a large scale study involving 745 gay men, Martin (1988) also assesses the link between AIDS-related bereavement and psychological distress. He arrives at the firm conclusion that:

"A direct relation was found between the number of bereavements and symptoms of traumatic stress response, demoralization, sleep problems, sedative use, recreational drug use, and the use of psychological services because of AIDS concerns." (Martin 1988:856)

The most elaborate published work that deals with the issue of bereavement and coping with AIDS and their effects on gay male coupled relationships is that of Shelby (1992). His study covers the surviving partners of AIDS victims, gay men with partners who have contracted AIDS and also the partners with AIDS themselves.

Shelby (1992:47-48) argues that the experiences of partners coping with AIDS can be divided into nine distinct categories or periods: (1) Wondering: when both partners wonder if the inflicted partner is becoming ill with AIDS; (2) Confirmation of the diagnosis (some partners enter directly into this period); (3) The Long Haul: when the partner concerned becomes ill; (4) Fever Pitch: the period immediately preceding the death of the ill partner; (5) Calm And Peace: when the ill partner succumbs to the disease. From now on the well partner becomes a surviving partner, he continues his journey into (6) Chaos: when he realises that his partner is indeed dead; (7) Retreat: when he begins to engage in an intense dialogue with his deceased partner; (8) Exploration: the preoccupation with the deceased decreases and the surviving partner re-enters into the real world; (9) Back Into The World: the surviving partner once again finds new meaning in life without the deceased partner.

Shelby (1992) further asserts that the first five periods are sequential in nature. The last four periods, however, have more flexible boundaries. The duration of each period and their intensity also vary. There exist a multiplicity of factors that contribute to the variations. They are, inter alia, the personalities of the partners, the nature of the relationship; and after the death of the ill partner, the personality of the surviving partner, the availability of psychosocial support and the presence or absence of HIV infection in himself.

Summary

In this section, I have examined the five prominent themes of research on gay male partnerships. My study, to a great extent, covers the first four themes. However, with the introduction of the religious dimension in my study, I move beyond the parameters hitherto set. I will elaborate this in Section 1.7. In the next section, I examine empirical research on gay males in which the religious dimension constitutes a minor element.
1.5. The Religious Elements in Research on Gay Males

Researchers have not placed much emphasis on the religious life of gay males. More often than not, this aspect is only mentioned in passing. With a sample of 1456 (686 gay men, 337 heterosexual men, 293 lesbian women and 140 heterosexual women), Bell and Weinberg (1978) compare these groups in terms of: (i) degree of religiosity (ii) activeness in terms of church attendance (iii) the view of their gay and lesbian respondents on the effects of homosexuality on their religious feelings. Their data show that homosexual adults tend to be more alienated from formal religion than are heterosexuals. In terms of gay men, they assert:

"...... while the majority of the homosexual men said that their lack of interest in religion had little to do with the fact that they were homosexual, they did go to church less often than the heterosexuals, and a fairly large minority reported that their homosexual status had weakened their religiousness to some degree." (Bell and Weinberg 1978:153)

Bell and Weinberg’s (1978) findings confirm to a limited extent the findings of other studies that many of their gay respondents tend to reject organised religion (Schofield 1965; Philip 1968; Saghir and Robins 1973). In these cases, the focus of the researchers is not on the lives of the gay Christian themselves. They were more interested in comparing them to their heterosexual respondents. They shed no light on how gay Christian themselves organise their lives and cope with the difficulty in assuming the status of gay Christian.

Mendola (1980:45) mentions in passing that her respondents demonstrate the tendency to mark "a separation between what is institutional religion and the individual's spiritual life." This tendency, understandably, becomes a means of minimising the struggle that gay Christians have to grapple with when they are thrust into the forefront to face the lack of affirmation and acceptance by the Church because of their sexuality. This issue is addressed in my study.

On the other hand, some researchers concentrate on examining the salient characteristics of gay people who place great emphasis on religion. In this regards, Weinberg and Williams (1974:253) conclude that, compared to their non-religious counterparts, religious gay people are more worried about the exposure of their homosexuality and more likely to have experienced guilt, shame and anxiety after having homosexual relations for the first time. They also demonstrate more instability of self-concept and depression. These data suggest the pressure of being a gay Christian.

In the same vein, Gigl (1970) finds that gay males who have a religious affiliation report a higher level of guilt. Greenberg (1973) also concludes that gay males who are conventionally religious experience a low degree of self-esteem and feel extremely alienated.
These data provide credence to the argument that the lack of religious approval for gay men who wish to uphold their religious beliefs is a contributory factor to the development of these negative characteristics.

In this connection, Fletcher's (1990) work proves important. In his study on heterosexual and gay clergy in the Church of England, Fletcher (1990) argues that gay clergy encounter great difficulty in their profession owing to the lack of institutional support and the fear of their sexuality being exposed. As a result, he concludes, gay clergy suffer a higher level of stress compared to their heterosexual counterparts. For instance, 42% of his respondents give a maximum rating of '5' to indicate that the 'established church view' on sexuality makes their job extremely demanding. 32% accord the same rating to indicate that they are worried about the media (e.g. the press) finding out about their homosexuality, while 24% express highest worry over the general hostility within the community at large.

Some researchers also examine the ways gay Christians cope against a backdrop of negative church atmosphere. In analysing the ways his respondents, some of whom are gay priests, cope with the dissonance between being gay and Christian, Silverstein (1981:236) concludes that:

"They (gay Christians) make sex wholesome by integrating intimacy and permanence in a gay couple relationship. They dwell on the love of Jesus rather than on the anger of Paul, and their moral standard is based on the extent to which they are capable of love, both in a personal and religious sense, rather than on conformity to the historical interpretations on the church."

Thumma (1991), on the other hand, examines the process of socialisation through which gay Christians resolve the dissonance between their religious beliefs and homosexual feelings in the construction of a negotiated religious identity that accommodates their sexual identity. His study focuses on the strategies employed by Good News, a conservative gay Christian organisation, in assisting its members to manage the dissonance of identities experienced by them. The strategies can be summarised as follows:

1. Challenging the conventional biblical exegesis on homosexuality in terms of its relevance for a modern world

2. Providing alternative biblical exegesis without destroying the validity and efficacy of the scriptures

3. Emphasising the biblical principles of love and acceptance for all men

4. Emphasising the belief that God is the creator for all people with different sexual orientations
5. Strengthening and maintaining the revised identity by providing strong group support and viewing the revised identity as part of an oppressed minority

6. Encouraging members to be guided by biblical principles and not wanton desires in the expression of their sexuality

The above-mentioned strategies for the renegotiation of self-identity might share some similarity with those used by the Christian organisations through whom the majority of my respondents were recruited. I will discuss these organisations in Chapter Two.

The analysis above reveals that the religious life of gay males has not been given sufficient attention in empirical research. Except for the works of Fletcher (1990) and Thumma (1991), most studies merely mention in passing the religious dimension of the organisation of gay males' lives. In the following section, I review some non-empirical literature that discusses the issue of homosexuality from a Christian perspective.

1.6. Non-Empirical Literature on Homosexuality from a Christian Perspective

In the British Christian context, major literature on homosexuality emerged as early as in the 1950s when Bailey (1955), in his book *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*, combined the scrutiny of the Biblical evidence on homosexuality with a survey of subsequent history. He castigates the Church of England for its unsatisfactory and inaccurate interpretations of the scriptures which results in its hostility towards homosexuals. He also advocates the liberation of the law for male homosexuals.

However, Bailey (1955) has been criticised for demonstrating a tendency to exculpate the Christian church from the responsibility for the intolerance of homosexuality by placing the blame on pagan, pre-Christian beliefs and laws. However, his work is generally regarded as a great contribution to the progressive *Wolfenden Report* (1957) which led to the decriminalisation, in 1967, of homosexual conduct in private between consenting adult males above 21 in England and Wales.

Following in Bailey's (1955) footsteps, Pittenger (1967) published his important *Time for Consent*, first as a brief piece and subsequently expanded into a book. He provides an exhaustive presentation of homosexual behaviour and, like Bailey (1955), he is critical of the Church's condemnation of the physical expression of the same-sex sexual orientation.
Since then, there has been a burgeoning corpus of literature on this subject on both sides of the Atlantic. In the literature that deals with this issue, there is a strong inclination for its subject matter to be confined to the protracted debate of sexuality in general and the acceptability of homosexuality in particular (e.g. Horner 1978; Lovelace 1979; Boswell 1980; Coleman 1981, 1989; Greenberg and Bystryn 1982; Scroggs 1983; Countryman 1988; Wright 1989; Harrod 1993; Thatcher 1993). In this respect, it has not travelled far from where Bailey (1955) and Pittenger (1967) once started. These works employ heavily a historical-theological-ethical analysis of homosexuality.

The unchanged nature of the theme of this corpus of literature spanning four decades attests to the high degree of resistance on the part of the Church in the face of the burgeoning gay rights movement within the Christian community. In the English context, the Church of England has demonstrated a remarkably high level of resistance in its dealing with the issue of homosexuality. Its official stance on this issue has hardly moved forward from the publication of the Gloucester Report in 1979 to the emergence of the controversial Issues in Human Sexuality by the House of Bishops in 1991.

I have argued elsewhere that the lack of shift in this respect on the part of the Church of England is inextricably linked to its hierarchical structure:

"...... the Church is unprepared for such an exercise which will inevitably entail a re-appraisal of other important aspects of its traditional theology. A re-evaluation of such a great and drastic extent will create a considerable de-stabilising impact that can seriously undermine its current status quo, safely cemented with its traditional religious ideology...... The Church...... has a political interest in maintaining its hegemonic status in the hierarchical structure." (Yip 1991:44)

Admittedly, challenging the position of the Church on homosexuality from a theological perspective is the first step the gay Christian community can take, since the opposition of the Church in this area is inextricably predicated on the biblical theology and tradition (Yip 1991). However, literature of such nature falls short of providing empirical findings on the lives of gay Christians and the dynamics of the relationships they foster. Recent years have seen the emergence of some empirical and non-empirical literature that diverges from the direction it first started.

Based on his counselling experience, Uhrig (1984) argues, with a broad Christian perspective, how committed lesbian and gay relationships could be fostered. Glaser (1991), on the other hand, goes one step further in producing a prayer book for not only gay people, but also their families and friends. In the same vein, Stuart (1992) produces a controversial prayer book in celebration of lesbian and gay lived experiences and relationships. Stuart (1992:2) advocates
an "inclusive theology of friendship" as a basis of gay Christian partnerships. To Stuart (1992), a gay Christian partnership is not a marriage because marriage has been historically used to dominate women in a patriarchal society. Friendship, Stuart (1992) argues, implies equality, mutuality and inclusiveness, as opposed to inequality, dominance and exclusivity in a heterosexual partnership.

Stuart (1992), however, meets with opposition from some quarters. Disagreeing, John (1993:2) argues that all Christians, gay and heterosexual, should adhere to the biblical sexual ethic which he calls "the monogamous ethic". He challenges all gay Christians to consider formulating a monogamous ethic in their relationships. He argues that, "....... such a theology of sex and its moral implications apply to all human beings made in God's image, not just heterosexuals, and that fidelity is a means to greater freedom and growth, not a death-dealing rule." (John 1993:2) This point will be elaborated in Chapter Eleven.

Summary

It can be concluded at this point that there is a serious lack of empirical literature on the lives of gay Christians. While there is literature on gay couples and gay Christians separately, empirical literature on gay Christian couples is non-existent. This backdrop provides this study with a good opportunity to explore and expand the frontiers of the existing literature. However, it also poses some difficulty in that I find very little directly related literature that I can draw upon for my own study. I discuss in the following section the theoretical framework for my study.

1.7. Theoretical Framework: Breaking the Boundaries and Setting New Parameters

Having reviewed what has been covered in previous studies, I focus the discussion in this section on the parameters of my own study. I first present my critique of McWhirter and Mattison's (1984) typology of gay couples and my rejection of it as the theoretical framework of this study. This is followed by my review of De Cecco's (1988) analysis of the dynamics of gay partnerships and Baxter's (1993) dialectical perspective in the study of personal relationships.
Critique of McWhirter and Mattison's (1984) Typology of Gay Partnerships

As shown in Table 1.1 (see Section 1.4.), McWhirter and Mattison (1984) present a typology of gay partnerships based on a six-stage developmental model. My analysis of the model reveals that there are shortcomings for such an exercise that renders the model problematic.

First, owing to the lack of role models and institutional support, gay couples generally do not conform to a particular normative framework in the organisation of their partnership. It is therefore particularly difficult to identity the 'typical' gay couple. The complexity of the dynamics involved in their partnerships and the paucity of research evidence suggest that an attempt to construct a general typology of gay couples would overlook many important issues embedded in their partnerships.

McWhirter and Mattison (1984) classify the 156 gay couples they study in six different categories based on the duration of their partnerships. These categories -- of 1 year, 2 to 3 years, 4 to 5 years, 6 to 10 years, 11 to 20 years and more than 20 years -- are used rather arbitrarily. They do not justify nor explain how they arrive at the decision of using such cut-off points in the construction of these categories, whose interval differences are unequal.

Having categorised the couples, they then compare the characteristics among the couples within the same category and identify four salient characteristics shared by them. They explain that:

"There are six stages, each with a time frame and a name that describes what happens in that stage. The four characteristics listed for each stage describe the major components of that stage. Each relationship stage has many more characteristics than the four listed, but these were the ones reported most frequently by our participants." (McWhirter and Mattison 1984:16)

Employing this approach, they discover, for instance, that couples who have been together for two to three years (Stage Two: Nesting) demonstrate characteristics such as the desire to make a home together as the level of sharing increases, the search for compatibility and complementarity between partners, the nature of love shifts from romantic feelings to care and concern which leads to the decline of limerence and sexual activity and the emergence of a sense of ambivalence as a result of mutual familiarity and this gives rise to self-doubt (see Table 1.1).

I would argue that although the presentation of such similarities between couples is interesting, it does not offer a complete picture of the dynamics of their partnerships. By focusing on the similarities of the gay couples in the same category, McWhirter and Mattison...
(1984) have missed out the *dissimilarities* among the couples which also constitute the dynamics of their partnerships.

It is indeed difficult to expect two partnerships with the same duration to demonstrate the same characteristics, where one of them is with partners of equal age while the other with partners with a vast age difference. Putting them together into the same category simply because of the same duration of their partnerships is therefore problematic. It neglects their dissimilarities which would throw much light on the study of the dynamics of their partnerships. I therefore reject their simplistic argument that:

"There is, of course, something unique in every relationship, and each couple moves through a characteristic series of *stages in the relationship* mainly related to the length of time they have been together." (McWhirter and Mattison 1984:6; their emphasis)

Similarly, although two couples are included into the same category because of the same duration of their partnerships, one of them might be made up of two inexperienced partners who are in a partnership for the first time, while the partners of the other couple might have had many previous partnerships. The attempt to extract similarities between these couples would downplay their dissimilarities which are just as important in the construction of a full picture of the dynamics of their partnerships.

In other words, the dynamics of a couple's partnership can be constructed independently of the duration of the partnership. A general typology of gay couples which includes all the various dimensions of their partnership is too simplistic and too difficult to be accurate. In a subsequent publication, McWhirter and Mattison (1988:163) admit that:

"Many factors, such as the age of the partners, their previous relationships, personalities, and backgrounds, affect relationship stages; but considering all the possible variables, there are enough similarities among the couples as their relationships progress to recognize individual stages and to suggest that most gay male relationships pass through them."

Furthermore, they also mention that "..... the stages are not necessarily linear or flat but rather spiral and multi-dimensional. Characteristics from one stage also are present in other stages, and they overlap." (McWhirter and Mattison 1984:16)

Also, McWhirter and Mattison's (1984) study only includes cohabiting couples. The model they propose is therefore not applicable to non-cohabiting couples who constitute a great proportion of the gay couple community. Non-cohabiting couples, as much as cohabiting couples, reflect the diversity of gay partnerships.
Another shortcoming of McWhirter and Mattison (1984) is that they contradict themselves in different publications as to whether the model they propose actually refers to the development of the couple as a unit or the development of each individual partner within a partnership. In their book *The Male Couple: How Relationships Develop* (1984), they argue that the model refers to the couple as a whole. However, in their subsequent article *Stage Discrepancy in Male Couples* (Mattison and McWhirter 1987), they focus their discussion on the development of each individual partner according to this model. They acknowledge that it is likely that each individual partner might be in different stages owing to their differing lived experiences, although the duration of their partnership would, as discussed, put them as a unit in one particular category. In this case, the couple suffers what they term "stage discrepancy" which can threaten the stability of the partnership, thus requiring modification in the constitutional arrangement of the partnership in order to progress. This contradiction renders the model rather problematic and its applicability limited.

I therefore reject McWhirter and Mattison's (1984) approach in identifying gay couples in terms of a pattern within a grand typology. Rather, my general approach shares some similarity with that of Silverstein (1981). I will attempt to explore various primary themes (e.g. stigma management, sexual non-exclusivity) affecting the partnership. Small-scale typologies might be constructed within the framework of these themes.

**De Cecco's (1988) Analysis of the Dynamics of Gay Partnerships**

To De Cecco (1988:1), a gay partnership constitutes "..... a commitment of usually two men to fulfil each other's needs, desires and expectations." With the recognition that some gay relationship arrangements might include more than two men, he further elaborates that the commitment between two gay men in a partnership is predicated on several assumptions that are rarely spelt out. These assumptions are summarised as follows:

1. *Self-awareness*: each partner is aware of his needs, desires and expectations; he is able to communicate all these to his partner with a certain degree of clarity

2. *Reasonableness*: each partner recognises the reasonableness of his needs and expectations to avoid futile pursuit of the fulfilment of every single fancied expectation

3. *Compatibility*: each partner assures that the fulfilment of one's needs does not interfere with the satisfaction of the other's
4. *Congeniality*: each partner's desires are intermeshed in order that the relationship is motivated by the effort of achieving mutual happiness rather than by obligation

5. *Reciprocity*: neither partner enjoys absolute priority in the fulfilment of his needs

6. *Honesty and Trust*: each partner avoids deception and strives to keep promises; each allows the other to protect his interest in the partnership

7. *Charity*: each partner accepts the shortcomings of the other

The partners constantly strive to meet their needs, desires and expectations in the physical, erotic, social, moral and political aspects of their partnership. The partnership therefore consists of "the intricate balancing of the obligations of reciprocity and the aspirations for change." (De Cecco 1988:3) The partners constantly strive to balance the position of their partnership on this spectrum. If the balance tilts towards the direction of the obligation end, the partnership faces the possibility of being excessively rigid and stultifying. On the other hand, if the partnership tips towards the aspiration end, it would end up being precarious and amorphous.

In this respect, a gay partnership resembles a heterosexual marriage. Askham (1984) views a marriage as a balancing act in which both partners constantly strive to retain their own individuality and identity on the one hand, and consolidating themselves as an emotional, sexual and social unit on the other hand.

In this connection, Finch and Morgan (1991) argue that a workable compromise between the partners in maintaining the balance is the formula of a successful marriage. Partners put a tremendous amount of emotional and practical energy into their attempt to achieve and sustain the compromise whose nature changes over time. Many family theorists (e.g. Hess and Handel 1959; Rausch 1977) also view that one of the most fundamental issues in all intimate relationships is the balancing of intimacy and independency.

De Cecco's (1988) analysis of the dynamics of gay partnerships focuses heavily on the internal dimension of the partnership — how the relational parties involved relate to each other. This focus also characterises many studies on heterosexual intimate relationships (e.g. Altman *et al.* 1981; Rawlins 1983a, 1983b; Masheter and Harris 1986; Goldsmith 1990; Petronio 1991)
However, there is also an external dimension involved in intimate partnerships, gay or heterosexual, which the above studies do not explore. My argument is that intimate partnerships are embedded in a wider social network which extends beyond the boundaries of the partnerships themselves. In examining the dynamics of intimate partnerships, it is therefore important to take both dimensions into consideration.

Parties in a partnership relate to each other as individuals, but they also, individually and as a social unit, relate to the wider social network. This body of relationships influences the dynamics of the partnership on the whole. It is on this ground that I employ Baxter's (1993) more comprehensive approach as the over-arching theoretical framework for my study.

Baxter's (1993) Dialectical Perspective on Personal Relationships

At the outset, Baxter (1993) adopt a dialectical perspective in his analysis of personal relationships. This perspective considers contradiction as the central organising feature of social life (Baxter 1988, 1993; Rowlins 1989; Montgomery 1992). In employing this perspective, Baxter (1993) advances a typology of internal and external contradictions in personal relationships whose scope is very much broader than what has been discussed thus far.

Baxter (1993:139) argues that research has held an "undersocialized vision of personal relationships, focusing largely on contradictions that are situated within the boundaries of the dyad." However, since personal relationships are embedded in a web of sociality that transcends the boundaries of the couple themselves, it is important to consider not just the interpersonal contradictions experienced by the partners, but also the intrapersonal contradictions they encounter when they relate to the wider social network as a social unit. The act of balancing, in other words, does not only take place within the partnership, but also beyond it when the couple locates itself in a social network.

The contradictions experienced in the internal and external dimensions, Baxter (1993:142) argues, are the manifestations of three more fundamental dialectics: integration-separation, stability-change and expression-privacy. Baxter's (1993) typology is presented below:
Table 1.2: Typology of Internal and External Contradictions in Personal Relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dialectic of Integration-Separation: tension between social solidarity or unity and social division or separation</th>
<th>Internal Dimension</th>
<th>External Dimension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connection vs. Autonomy: Interdependence vs. Independence of the partners</td>
<td>Inclusion vs. Seclusion: Involvement as a couple with others vs. isolation from others</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Dialectic of Stability-Change: tension between stability and flux

| Predictability vs. Novelty: Predictability vs. uncertainty in the partners' interaction with each other | Conventionality vs. Uniqueness: Reproducing conventionalised ways in relating to others vs. deviating from conventions by constructing unique ways of relating |

Dialectic of Expression-Privacy: tension between what is expressed and what is not expressed

| Openness vs. Closedness: Displaying candour vs. discretion in the partners' interaction with each other | Revelation vs. Concealment: Extent of revealing vs. concealing information about the nature and status of their partnership |

** Adaptation from Baxter (1993)**

Three important points must be mentioned about the application of Baxter's (1993) typology in relation to the specificity of my study. First, the contradictions within a dimension are not necessarily mutually-exclusive. There exists possible linkage between them. For instance, a partner who is autonomous (connection vs. autonomy in the internal dimension) might also be closed (openness vs. closedness in the internal dimension) or less expressive in order to maintain his autonomy.

Similarly, a couple who want to conceal their couple identity (revelation versus concealment in the external dimension) might decide to isolate themselves from others (inclusion versus seclusion in the external dimension). The first example focuses on the interpersonal relationship between the partners while the second focuses on the intrapersonal relationship between the couple as a social unit with the wider social network.

Second, there might also be linkages between the contradiction in the internal dimension and those in the external dimension. For instance, tension might exist between partners when they disagree on the issue of sexual exclusivity in their partnership. A partner might view sexual non-exclusivity as a symbol of his autonomy, while the other might perceive it as a threat to their emotional intimacy to each other. In this instance, the contradiction of connection versus autonomy (in the internal dimension) interplays with the contradiction of inclusion versus seclusion (in the external dimension) in the specific issue of sexual exclusivity. This particular issue is very relevant to my study, as sexual non-exclusivity constitutes one of the main themes.
Third, Baxter's (1993) typology focuses exclusively on heterosexual intimate relationships. The unacceptability in society of gay Christian partnerships means that the organisation of the partnerships and their relationships with the wider social network differ from that of heterosexual partnerships to a certain extent.

This is where Baxter's (1993) typology meets its limitation. The contradiction of conventionality versus uniqueness (in the external dimension) is irrelevant to gay Christian partnerships. Owing to the lack of a normative framework for structuring their partnerships, and the possibility of stigmatisation, gay couples do not need to decide how 'conventional' or 'unique' their relationships should be in relating to others.

However, this contradiction might apply in the intrapersonal relationship of a gay couple with the commercial gay scene. A gay couple might need to decide, in the light of their Christian religious beliefs, to what extent they should conform to the norms of the commercial gay scene which emphasises, *inter alia*, ultra-masculinity and casual sex. This issue constitutes another major theme of my study.

The stigma imposed on gay Christian couples is considerable. Many conservative Christians would consider someone being in a gay partnership as tantamount to 'living in sin', as opposed to 'the occasional commission of homosexual sin'. Therefore, a very relevant issue that gay Christian couples encounter in their interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships is stigma management. It involves the control of social information about their sexuality and their partnerships. It therefore relates to both their individual identity as gay Christians and their collective identity as gay Christian couples. The contradiction of revelation versus concealment (in the external dimension) of Baxter's (1993) typology is related to the control of social information about the gay Christian couples. However, for the specific area of *stigma management strategy*, I turn to Goffman (1963), Humphreys (1972) and Breakwell (1983, 1986).

*Drawing on Other Sources*

Goffman's (1963) proposes five stigma management strategies. I discuss them in relation to the specific experiences of gay people:

(1) 'Succumbing to shame' — a discredited individual or an individual with a discrediting attribute accepts the social contempt imposed on him. In the case of gay people, *internalised homophobia* is a relevant example.

(2) 'Correcting or repairing the discrediting attribute' — the individual attempts to rectify "what he sees as the objective basis of his failing." (Goffman 1963:9). Many
gays in this situation seeks professional assistance (some religious in nature) to 'alter' their sexual orientation.

(3) 'Passing' — the individual carefully controls the social information about his discrediting attribute. He also uses 'disidentifiers' to ward off possible attention on his discrediting attribute. Some 'straight-acting' gays tell jokes ridiculing the gay population in order to 'pass'. This is sometimes called the 'closet queen' method.

(4) 'Covering' — the individual attempts to mimic the acceptable segment of the society in order to prevent the visible stigma from looming large. Some gays who practise monogamy in conformity to the perceived heterosexual norm, criticise gays who do not as more offensive (Humphreys 1972).

(5) 'Group alignment' — an individual associates himself with 'fellow sufferers' for support and the construction of a collective identity. Many gays participate in the commercial gay scene with this purpose to 'claim their territory' in the heterosexual world.

In applying Goffman's (1963) analysis to the gay liberation movement, Humphreys (1972) argues that only the 'group alignment' strategy contributes positively to the organisation of the gay community and movement. He suggests that the stigma on gay people can only be removed through "stigma conversion":

"In converting his stigma, the oppressed person does not merely exchange his social marginality for political marginality, although that is one interpretation the socially dominant segments of society would like to place upon the process. Rather, he emerged from a stigmatized cocoon as a transformed creature, to be characterized by the spreading of political wings. At some point in the process, the politicized 'deviant' gains a new identity, an heroic self-image as crusader in a political cause. Stigma conversion thus involves not only the exchange of one type of stigma for another (although that may be involved) but conversion from stigma, in the sense of rebirth into a new identity." (Humphreys 1972: 142)

The stigma conversion mentioned above reflects the socio-political method. Humphreys (1972: 148) further asserts that stigma conversion can also take a moral-religious method, or "stigma redemption". He views the development of gay Christian groups and organisations as an indication of the operation of this stigma conversion process.

Both Goffman's (1963) and Humphreys' (1972) analyses of stigma management strategies are sociologically-oriented. Their analyses focus on the individual's responses in relation to others. In my study, I am also interested in the strategies that individual gay Christians develop at the cognitive level to achieve within themselves the internal or psychological consistency about being gay and Christian, with or without social interactions. In
adopting a social psychological approach, Breakwell's (1983, 1986) analysis in this respect proves helpful.

In Breakwell's (1983, 1986) views, an individual with a threatened identity develops different strategies to cope with the threat. A coping strategy is defined as:

"Any activity, in thought or deed, which has as its goal the removal or modification of a threat to identity can be regarded as a coping strategy..... anything the individual believes to be done in order to expunge threat, constitutes a coping strategy.... any thought or action which succeeds in eliminating or ameliorating threat can be considered a coping strategy, whether it is consciously recognized as intentional or not." (Breakwell 1986:78-79; my emphasis)

The coping strategies Breakwell (1983, 1986) proposes can be organised into three levels: (1) intra-psychic; (2) interpersonal; and (3) intergroup. At the first level, the strategy operates cognitively rather than in terms of action. The last two strategies share great similarity to what Goffman (1963) and Humphreys (1972) propound. The theoretical framework I use in my study for the analysis of the stigma management strategies will demonstrate a combination of the works above.

1.8. Conclusions

In this Chapter, I have presented the main themes of empirical research on gay male partnerships since the 1970s. These themes reflect a lack of emphasis on the religious experiences of gay couples and how this affects their partnerships. While there is a growth of non-empirical Christian literature on the issue of homosexuality, its focus is still confined to the theological-ethical debate. This study attempts to fill this gap.

I have also justified my choice of Baxter's (1993) typology of internal and external contradictions in personal relationships as the over-arching theoretical framework of this study. However, because of the specificity of this study, I also need to draw from other sources, especially the works of Goffman (1963), Humphreys(1972) and Breakwell (1983, 1986) on stigma management or coping with threatened identities. I have also outlined my methodological commitment in not wanting to construct a grand typology of gay Christian partnerships. I am more inclined to explore them in terms of the themes related to various aspects of their partnerships.

In the next chapter, I discuss the various methodological considerations and the decision-making processes that have taken place throughout this study.
Chapter Two

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This Chapter aims to provide a clear picture of the conception and development of this study. My partial affinity to the feminist research methodology influences the construction of the methodological framework of this study. Feminist research methodology encourages social researchers to view research as a process and experience guided by the researchers' subjective reflexivity, rather than a detached and dispassionate product or work (Klein 1983; Melamed 1985; Reinharz 1988; Gelthorpe 1990). Therefore, social researchers ought to discuss in their research reports, "the process, not simply the product, of discovery." (Reinharz 1992:215). This stance is in line with Mills' (1959:196) call for social researchers to use their own life experiences in their intellectual work as well as the reflexive sociology that Gouldner (1970) advocates.

This Chapter charts the development of the study from the conception to data analysis. Decision-making processes involving various methodological considerations are discussed. My aim of wanting this study to be primarily qualitative and exploratory in nature affects the heavy emphasis on the use of interviewing as the main data collection instrument. It also results in the use of a 'bottom-up' approach (Pidgeon et al. 1991), namely the grounded theory approach, for data analysis.

2.1. The Construction of the Research Problem

I have always gravitated towards the issue of gender and sexuality within the Christian framework since my conversion to Christianity in 1980. I used to, and still do, question the conventional Biblical teachings on the position of women and the issue of homosexuality in particular. I found myself in disagreement --- mainly in silence --- with the taken-for-granted notion that women ought to play a subordinate role to men in church life. I was also inclined to believe that the conventional condemnation on homosexuality was not as clear-cut as many Christians wish to believe.
Owing principally to the conservatism of my Christian background and the Malaysian society at large, I did not have the opportunity nor the courage to embark on research that would attempt to answer some of my questions. In 1990, I came to Cambridge for my M.Phil. degree. That opportunity soon bridged the gap between my research interest and the resources and support available to it.

In my M.Phil. research (Yip 1991), I studied the dialectical relationship between the gay Christian community and the Protestant Church in England --- with special reference to the development in the Church of England. The limited scale of the study afforded me the opportunity to analyse secondary data, mainly relevant documents of the various Protestant churches and the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement (hereinafter referred to as the LGCM). I also had the opportunity to participate in a student gay Christian group in Cambridge and interviewed some prominent individuals in the gay Christian community, principally because of their official offices.

The idea of researching the dynamics of gay Christian partnerships was first suggested to me by a gay priest whom I interviewed for my M.Phil. research. I concurred with him that due to the non-existence of empirical research in this field, such a study would be illuminating and make a contribution to knowledge. In addition, researching gay Christian partnerships would give me the opportunity to explore the lifestyles of gay Christians in a more personal manner than the primarily secondary analysis I did for my M.Phil. research. When the opportunity to pursue this study came in October 1992, I embarked on it without any hesitation.

Research Methodology

I have mentioned in Chapter One the non-existence of empirical research on gay Christian partnerships thus far. This study, therefore, seeks to document the lived experiences of gay Christian couples with which I was unfamiliar in the beginning of this study. It is appropriate that such a study should be primarily qualitative and exploratory in nature.

Qualitative research aims to gain a more in-depth understanding of a situation (Dunsmuir and Williams 1990:7). In the same vein, an exploratory study seeks to "formulate a problem or questions in order to increase an investigator's knowledge of a phenomenon." (De Venanzi 1981:154). Having very little research input to rely on and limited knowledge about the dynamics of gay Christian partnerships, I decided that this study should adopt a primarily qualitative research methodology to maximise my exploration of this field. This methodological consideration also affected the choice of research instruments. I will elaborate this in Section 2.3.
The Exclusion of Lesbian Couples

The decision to exclude lesbian couples from this present study is principally supported by research findings that the construction of lesbian partnerships is distinguishable from that of gay male partnerships (e.g. Saghir and Robins 1973; Blumstein and Schwartz 1983; McWhirter and Mattison 1984). The inclusion of lesbian couples would unnecessarily introduce yet another comparative dimension to the study, in addition to the comparison between cohabiting and non-cohabiting gay male couples.

Furthermore, gay males and lesbians do not have a shared experience within the Christian community and in society at large. Within the Christian community, lesbians not only face nonacceptance because of their sexuality, but have also long been subject to the sexist bias in the structure of the institutionalised Church. On the other hand, gay males, as men, assume the dominant position over women in the institutionalised Church. In other words, lesbians are disadvantaged on two counts, their sexuality and their gender. Gay men, on the other hand, are only disadvantaged on the ground of their sexuality. Their religious lived experiences therefore differ from each other.

In the campaign for the ordination of women priests within the Church of England which succeeded in 1992, women worked concertedly as a gendered minority group in their struggle to achieve equality in the male-dominated Church. The issue of their sexuality has not yet emerged in the discourse. What they were fighting for was a better position for women in the Church structure. It was at that point of time a battle of gender, not sexuality. Gay males, as men, hold a more favourable position and have been fighting for the ordination of gay priests.

In sum, gay males are marginalised in the Church on sexuality grounds, while lesbians are marginalised on both sexuality and gender grounds. Putting them together in an exploratory study would be a gross simplification of their lived experiences.

2.2. Setting Up the Network

The personal contacts I made while conducting my M.Phil. research, along with several new ones, played a pivotal role in the setting up of the network for my research. Between October 1992 and January 1993, I actively held meetings with them with two primary objectives. First, I explained my research to them and attempted to obtain their assistance in publicising my research and subsequently the distribution of covering letters to all my prospective respondents. I held meetings of this nature with the General Secretary of the
LGCM, the co-ordinator of the Young Lesbian and Gay Christian Group (YLGCG) which is a wing of the LGCM, the Chairman of QUEST (a lesbian and gay group whose members are largely Roman Catholic), the Convenor of the Anglican Clergy Consultation (ACC, an organisation for gay priests and their partners in the Church of England), three priests and two other individuals.

Second, I gathered professional advice on the preparation and administration of my research. The meetings with one of the principal investigators and two researchers of the Socio-sexual Investigation into Gay men and AIDS (Project SIGMA; see Chapter One) were most helpful in this connection. One of them also helped distribute some covering letters at a later stage.

In January 1994, I started to attend the weekly coffee evenings of the non-religious Guildford Area Gay Society (GAGS), which I came to know through its advertisement in the Gay Times. The experience with them has proven to be extremely beneficial in preparing me for the researcher role.

2.3. The Design of Research Instruments

In tandem with setting up the network, I needed to take two major decisions: first, the criteria for the selection of the gay couples for my research; and second, the most effective research instruments to employ. The first consideration involved two dimensions: (a) the length of the partnership and (b) the living arrangement. The second consideration, on the other hand, led me to the analysis of the research methods employed by previous research specifically or partially into gay relationships.

In relation to the length of partnership of the gay couples for my research, my analysis of previous research presented different suggestions. Steinman (1990) imposes a cut-off point of three months, while Jones and Bates (1978), Cardell et al. (1981) and Blasband and Peplau (1985) respectively use five months, six months and ten months as the cut-off point. On the other hand, McWhirter and Mattison (1984) and Jones and De Cecco (1982) consider one year as the acceptable cut-off point.

Research has shown that the majority of gay partnerships are by and large short-lived owing to the lack of institutional support, cultural guidelines, legal and religious sanctions, the absence of children, ample sexual opportunity in the gay scene and partner similarity (e.g. Hoffman 1968; Weinberg 1973; Saghir and Robins 1973; Tripp 1975; Harry and DeVall 1978; Tessina 1989). I therefore decided that one year would be a good cut-off point, as partnerships
shorter than this duration might still be unstable and in the 'honeymoon' stage, thus not having adequately developed their own constitutional structure. Being cognisant of the fragility of gay relationships, gay men in a young relationship might also adopt a wait-and-see attitude before they commit themselves. Studying partnerships with a minimum length of one year would provide a more enriched picture of the dynamics of their partnerships.

With regard to the living arrangement, consultations with the Project SIGMA researchers and my own literature review (see Chapter One) suggested that both cohabiting and non-cohabiting gay couples should be included in this study. This served two purposes:

(a) Non-cohabiting gay couples constitute a sizeable proportion of the gay population who are in partnership. I speculated that while practical reasons such as work commitment might not permit many gay couples to live together, the lack of social recognition and acceptance of homosexuality in general does pressurise gay couples not to share the same abode to avoid negative social repercussions. This might be especially true in the case of gay priests. The exclusion of non-cohabiting gay couples would therefore lead to the construction of an incomplete picture of gay partnerships.

(b) It would be interesting to compare cohabiting and non-cohabiting gay couples in order to study the structural and constitutional differences that might exist in their partnerships. It would be illuminating to examine, inter alia, if non-cohabiting couples actually place greater emphasis on personal autonomy than those who prefer cohabitation, or whether non-cohabiting couples are more sexually non-exclusive than their cohabiting counterparts. A comparative analysis of this nature would certainly enrich our understanding of the complexity of gay partnerships.

The second consideration, on the research methods which ought to be employed in my study, proved to be a more difficult one. It led to a review of the research methods employed in previous research specifically or partially on gay relationships.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research</th>
<th>Main Research Methods Employed</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cotton (1972)</td>
<td>Individual interview; Non-participant observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonenschein (1972)</td>
<td>Covert observation; Individual Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saghir &amp; Robins (1973)</td>
<td>Individual interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warren (1974)</td>
<td>Participant observation; Individual interview</td>
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<tr>
<td>Haist &amp; Hewitt (1974)</td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oliver (1976)</td>
<td>Questionnaire; Individual Interview</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harry (1977)</td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bell &amp; Weinberg (1978)</td>
<td>Individual interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De Cecco &amp; Shively (1978)</td>
<td>Individual interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jones &amp; Bates (1978)</td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry &amp; DeVall (1978)</td>
<td>Questionnaire; Individual interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry (1979)</td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reece (1979)</td>
<td>Individual interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mendola (1980)</td>
<td>Questionnaire; Selective couple interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nanda &amp; Francher (1980)</td>
<td>Individual interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peplau (1981)</td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silverstein (1981)</td>
<td>Couple interview; Individual interview; Taped interview by mail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardell et al. (1981)</td>
<td>Questionnaire; Couple interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peplau &amp; Cochran (1982)</td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry (1982a; 1982b; 1984)</td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jones &amp; De Cecco (1982)</td>
<td>Individual interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blumstein &amp; Schwartz (1983)</td>
<td>Questionnaire; Individual interview; Couple interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McWhirter &amp; Mattison (1984)</td>
<td>Individual interview; Couple interview; 'Clinical' interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blasband &amp; Peplau (1985)</td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duffy &amp; Rusbult (1986)</td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurdek &amp; Schmitt (1986a; 1986b)</td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project SIGMA (1987- )</td>
<td>Individual interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reece &amp; Segrist (1988)</td>
<td>Individual interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waterman et al. (1989)</td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meyer (1990)</td>
<td>Individual interview; Telephone interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steinman (1990)</td>
<td>Questionnaire; Individual interview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2.1 indicates that questionnaire and the interview are the most commonly used methods in research on gay relationships. With recognition of the limitations of each research method, I eventually decided that a combination of different methods should be used in my research, in response to Denzin's (1978:301-302) call for "methodological triangulation" in social research (his concept of "data triangulation" will be discussed later. His concept of "investigator triangulation" is not applicable in my case, as I am, by the nature of my course, the only investigator in my study).

In this connection, Denzin (1978:301-302) asserts that methodological triangulation takes two forms --- within-method triangulation and between method or cross-method triangulation. While the former involves the employment of one research method with multiple strategies within it to examine data, the latter entails the combination of different methods to study the same empirical units.

With the latter form of methodological triangulation in mind, I decided that two primary methods should be employed in my research: (a) questionnaire for all my respondents across the country (b) semi-structured interview --- at individual and couple levels --- with a sub-sample of my respondents. Understandably, time and financial constraints would dictate that only respondents close to Guildford would constitute this sub-sample. The use of a questionnaire would allow me to reach respondents in a wide geographical area. The semi-structured interview, on the other hand, would allow the respondent to speak with greater candour. It could also be used to gather 'unexpected data' which would deepen my understanding of the respondent's experience which I knew little about (Patton 1987; Dunsmuir and Williams 1990).

The Questionnaire

The self-completion questionnaire for each respondent was designed to collect data for quantitative analysis and statistical and tabular presentations. The questions in the questionnaire can be broadly divided into two primary forms:

(a) Closed-ended questions on the respondent's biographical data such as age, ethnic origin, occupational status, annual income, educational level and religious affiliation. These questions were included in the questionnaire as they were very straightforward and the respondent could therefore answer them without any assistance from me.
(b) Open- and closed-ended questions on certain dimensions of the partnership. They included: the couple's living arrangements, domestic division of labour (questions on these two dimensions differed slightly for cohabiting and non-cohabiting couples), domestic and non-domestic activity, financial arrangements and the respondent's participation in the commercial gay scene.

The Individual Interview

A semi-structured interview guide was designed to collect data for qualitative analysis. This guide contained open-ended questions broadly divided into five sections. It sought to explore the following dimensions of the partnership:

(a) The personal/social dimension — the respondent's admiration and disliking of his partner; nature of conflicts in the partnership and the coping mechanisms developed; perception of egalitarianism on decision-making; importance of personal space; perception of the commercial gay scene; satisfaction and expectation of the partnership; past same-sex and opposite-sex relationships; and early homosexual experience.

(b) The religious dimension — the respondent's definition of the term 'gay Christian'; relationship with and participation in church, Christian and non-Christian gay groups. Questions on the religious dimension were presented in the individual interview because they were highly confidential and sensitive. With the assurance of confidentiality and appropriate probing in an interview situation, I expected the respondent to be more at ease to deal with such questions than answering them in the questionnaire.

(c) The sexual dimension — the respondent's sex life within and (possibly) outside the partnership. A table was also designed for the respondent to complete privately, indicating the sexual techniques employed in his sex life with his partner. Project SIGMA offered tremendous assistance in the construction of this list of sexual techniques. Questions on the sexual dimension were regarded to be highly sensitive. I therefore considered their inclusion in the questionnaire to be inappropriate, as the respondent might be concerned about the lack of verbal assurance of confidentiality and the possibility that his questionnaire might be exposed to his partner. In an interviewing situation, not only could I provide assurance of confidentiality, effective probing would also allow me to discover more insights than what a questionnaire could achieve.
The guide designed for the couple interview was more concise than that of the individual interview. It comprised three sections with open-ended questions exploring (a) the couple's account of the origin of the partnership and the ways in which it was structured. The presence of both the partners would enhance the accuracy of the data; (b) the couple's possible joint relationship with and participation in church, Christian and non-Christian gay groups; (c) the couple's assessment of the recent development in the Christian community in relation to the issue of homosexuality and their expectation for a more accepting church climate.

Observation

Observation was not used as a research instrument in this study. However, I compiled notes after each interview based on my observation and an assessment of the respondent and the interview itself. Although these observation notes were not included in the data analysis, they provided helpful insights that assisted the analysis.

2.4. Sampling and Respondent Recruitment

In view of its relevance to my study, I begin this section by examining Spreen's (1992) discussion on the use of link-tracing sampling methods to locate 'special' populations -- the rare and the hidden. A rare population is a population "characterised by the low prevalence of its members with a specific trait in the general population and by the relatively easy access to its members." Spreen (1992:37). The 'specific trait' in this case is nonthreatening to the general population, for instance, a socially acceptable physical trait.

A hidden population, on the other hand, is considered a hard-to-reach section in the general population whose size is indeterminable. The difficult access to the hidden population, due to the threatening or sensitive nature of its 'specific trait', renders the standard probability sampling design impracticable.

Based on Spreen's (1992) definitions, I would argue that the gay population is hidden to a great extent, in spite of the burgeoning commercial gay scene in big cities like London and the 'pink trade' that develops alongside with it. This is especially true in the case of gay Christians who face a lack of religious approval of their existence because of their 'special trait'.

The Couple Interview
I would be reluctant to use the term 'rare' to describe the gay population, as this term denotes its size. Attempts to determine the size of a population with low social visibility are problematic. This leads to the fundamental question of, "Who is gay?" Is he a person who has had one same-sex sexual experience in his entire life? Or a person who pursues a same-sex career persistently? How about a person who personally identifies himself as gay and has never expressed his same-sex orientation due to the lack of opportunity or the constraint placed upon him by, for instance, his own religious convictions? Do we define a gay person in terms of his overt sexual behaviour only or do we also take into consideration his own sexual identity? Reiss (1961) has convincingly shown in his work how male hustlers who take on men as their clients do not develop a gay identity despite their persistent involvement in same-sex sexual activity, in that case, for monetary rewards. Are these male hustlers 'gay'?

As I have discussed in Chapter One, there is a lack of consensus on this definitional issue. Therefore, Project SIGMA uses the phrase "men who have sex with men" while referring to their respondents. This, I believe, stems from the main objective of the Project SIGMA in studying overt sexual behaviours and lifestyles.

Having stated my stance on the use of the terms 'rare population' and 'hidden population' with reference to the gay population, I now consider the sampling methods that could be employed in my research. In relation to this, Spreen (1992:42) elaborates three "snowbally methods" for locating members of a hidden population: (a) Site sampling, (b) Targeted sampling and (c) Key informant approach.

Site sampling is used to divide the target population with regard to place and time. It takes into consideration where and when the possible sample are. TenHouten et al. (1971) uses this method to approach a random starting point for their snowball sample in their study on informal leadership in four urban areas.

Target sampling (Watters and Biernacki 1989) begins with identifying and mapping out areas in which the research is to be done, on the basis of existing data and direct observations. Having done that, extensive ethnographic mapping is sometimes done to analyse the social organisation of the target group within the identified area, based on which an initial target plan, which may take the form of a snowball sample, is developed for each area. These target plans can be modified as new information is collected in the fieldwork.

In the key informant approach (Deaux and Callaghan 1985), informants — who are selected because of their specific knowledge about, say, a particular social problem — are asked questions about others and not themselves. This is used to primarily control the possible response bias, which is likely in the use of direct methods of asking people about their
behaviour, although the specific knowledge of the informant may itself serve as a possible source of bias. The selection of the informant must therefore be discrete.

Review of Sampling Methods in Previous Studies

The practical constraints and the specificity of my study did not permit me to adopt completely any of the sampling methods Spreen (1992) discussed. This led to my review of the sampling methods employed in previous studies specifically or partially on gay males:

Table 2.2: Main Sampling Methods Employed in Previous Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research</th>
<th>Main Recruitment Method Used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cotton (1972)</td>
<td>Personal contacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonenschein (1972)</td>
<td>Not specified (Interviewed informants)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saghir &amp; Robins (1973)</td>
<td>Gay organisations; Gay groups; Snowball sampling; Advertisement in gay publications and gay establishments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warren (1974)</td>
<td>Personal contacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haist &amp; Hewitt (1974)</td>
<td>Personal contacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oliver (1976)</td>
<td>Personal contact; Snowball sampling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry (1977)</td>
<td>Personal contacts; Gay organisations; Gay bars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bell &amp; Weinberg (1978)</td>
<td>Personal contacts; Gay organisations; Public advertisements; Gay establishments; Public places (e.g. travel terminal and hotel)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De Cecco &amp; Shively (1978)</td>
<td>Personal contacts; Gay establishments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jones &amp; Bates (1978)</td>
<td>Personal contacts; Gay organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry &amp; DeVall (1978)</td>
<td>Personal contacts; Gay organisations; Gay bars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry (1979)</td>
<td>Personal contacts; Gay organisations; Gay bars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reece (1979)</td>
<td>Gay churches; Gay organisations; Snowball sampling; Gay groups; Advertisement in gay publications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mendola (1980)</td>
<td>Personal contacts; Snowball sampling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nanda &amp; Francher (1980)</td>
<td>Personal contacts; Snowball sampling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peplau (1981)</td>
<td>Personal contacts; Gay organisations; Advertisement in gay publications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silverstein (1981)</td>
<td>Personal contacts; Advertisements in gay publication; Conference attendance;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private clinical practice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardell et al. (1981)</td>
<td>Advertisement in radio, gay and non-gay publications; Posters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peplau &amp; Cochran (1982)</td>
<td>Gay organisations; Advertisements in gay publications</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2.2 indicates that the use of personal contacts (e.g. friendship networks) and snowball sampling are the most popular sampling methods employed in the research on the gay population. There is no consensus among researchers about the most effective sampling method. Harry and DeVall (1978) used a 'multi-level sampling method' to maximise the respondent variability through which they recruited their respondents from various sources (see Table 2.2).

On the other hand, McWhirter and Mattison (1984) rejected the "social outcropping sampling technique" (Nardi 1993:179) which recruits respondents through gay establishments or organisations, on the ground of sample representativeness. Instead, they used friendship networks to recruit "everyday, garden variety men" (McWhirter and Mattison 1984:151) for their study.

As discussed, since the gay population is to a great extent hidden and its parameters unclear, random probability sampling is not practicable. It is therefore impossible to obtain a representative random sample of gay people (Hooker 1957; Bell 1973; Harry 1976; Morin 1977; Peplau 1981).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harry (1982a; 1982b; 1984)</td>
<td>University; Gay organisation; Gay publication; Gay and non-gay establishments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jones &amp; De Cecco (1982)</td>
<td>Personal contacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blumstein &amp; Schwartz (1983)</td>
<td>Gay establishments; Public places; gay and non-gay groups; Religious establishments; Advertisement in gay and non-gay publications, T.V. talk shows, news programmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McWhirter &amp; Mattison (1984)</td>
<td>Personal contacts; Snowball sampling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blasband &amp; Peplau (1985)</td>
<td>Personal contacts; Snowball sampling; Gay organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duffy &amp; Rusbuilt (1986)</td>
<td>Personal contacts; Gay organisations; Advertisement in gay publication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurdek &amp; Schmitt (1986a; 1986b)</td>
<td>Personal contacts; Advertisement in gay publications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project SIGMA (1987- )</td>
<td>Snowball sampling; Gay establishments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reece &amp; Segrist (1988)</td>
<td>Individual contacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waterman et al. (1989)</td>
<td>Educational institutions (all respondents were students)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meyer (1990)</td>
<td>Personal contacts; Snowball sampling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steinman (1990)</td>
<td>Snowball sampling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The use of the above mentioned sampling methods inevitably leads to some loss in the generalisability of the data. Many researchers therefore call for the cautious use of the data, since the sample is typically young, middle and upper-middle class, white, educated and urban males (Oliver 1976; Silverstein 1981; Peplau 1982; McWhirter and Mattison 1984; Meyer 1990). They also tend to be overrepresented by those who are active in the gay scene, the 'excitement seekers'.

In the case of my study, sampling gay Christians specifically is even more difficult. Owing to their religious beliefs, they have to face not only the unaccepting society at large, but also the generally unaccepting attitude of the Church in particular. In order to maximise the variability of my respondents, I reckoned that I needed to cast the net as widely as possible, without knowing how big the pool really was. This is discussed in the following sub-section.

Casting the Net

Between February and April 1993, I sent out covering letters to all the male members of the LGCM and QUEST and all the members of ACC, who are all male. The covering letter provided details about the research and the assurance of confidentiality. A response slip was attached. In the case of a positive response, the respondent was instructed to provide his first name, address and telephone number. All the covering letters were sent out through the organisations, with a note from the organisations, calling for support for the study and declaring the assurance of my integrity as a researcher. This was done to increase the confidence of the recipients, and thus enhance the response rate.

Covering letters were also handed to six personal contacts who later distributed them to the gay Christian couples they knew. Two respondents who participated in the pilot study also offered assistance. As before, these letters were distributed with a verbal or written assurance from the personal contacts and myself. Table 2.3 summarises the mailing and response to the covering letters.
Table 2.3: Mailing and Response to Covering Letters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channels</th>
<th>Number of Cover letters Sent</th>
<th>Number of Positive Responses</th>
<th>Number of Negative Responses</th>
<th>Overall Response Rate</th>
<th>Positive Response Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LGC0M</td>
<td>551</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUEST</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Contacts</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Respondents</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1301</td>
<td>71**</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Indicating 71 couples

Table 2.3 indicates that 1301 covering letters were distributed through various channels. All together 222 responses were received, with an overall response rate of 17.1%. However, only 71 out of the 222 were positive responses, giving an overall positive response rate of 5.4%. This response rate is substantially lower than the response rates of most of the previous research specifically or partially on gay males. Harry (1977) reported a response rate of 53%, while Weinberg (1970), Siegelman (1972) and Myrick (1974) reported response rates of 30%, 49% and 66% respectively.

However, it must be argued that it is misleading to compare the response rate of my study with those of these studies for two reasons. Firstly, the above mentioned studies did not solely study gay couples in particular. Secondly, even for those researching gay couples, it was not a criterion of these studies that both the partners must participate. My research, on the other hand, used joint participation as one of the three crucial criteria, thus substantially reducing the number of gay males eligible for it. It is difficult to assess if the response rate was satisfactory in this case for two reasons:

(a) Except for the covering letters distributed by my personal contacts, I did not know how many of the recipients of the covering letters distributed by the three organisations were, first of all, currently in a partnership. If they were, I again had no knowledge whether the
partnership met the criteria imposed by this study. An analysis of the negative responses received elaborates this difficulty.

Table 2.4: Nature of Negative Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason for negative response</th>
<th>Number of cases</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did not meet criterion 1: Not in a partnership currently</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>48.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not meet criterion 2: Partnership less than one year old</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not meet criteria 3: One partner was not a self-defined Christian</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Met all criteria, but one partner refused to participate</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Met all criteria, but currently resided outside UK</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recipient was heterosexual, but in support of gay Christian organisations</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recipient was not keen on such research</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recipient was in lesbian partnership, cover letters wrongly sent</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reason given</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>30.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total                                                              | 151             | 100.0      |

Table 2.4 lends credence to my previous argument in that 58.9% of the negative responses were due to either one of the criteria not being met by the recipients of the covering letter. If the "No reason given" category is eradicated, the percentage of this group rises to 84.8%. This strengthens my point that the great majority of the recipients of my covering letters did not respond because they did not meet either one or more of the criteria set for the study. Therefore, the overall response rate of 17.1% and the positive response rate of 5.4% should not be misconstrued as a poor response rate in this context.

(b) The membership sizes of the three organisations suggest that the number of gay Christians who are affiliated to gay Christian organisations is small. Therefore, there is a great possibility that some people hold double or even triple memberships of these organisations. In other words, a gay priest in the Church of England who was a LGCM member might also hold the membership of the ACC. Also, a Roman Catholic might be affiliated to QUEST and the Roman Catholic Caucus of the LGCM. This means it was highly possible that a prospective respondent received more than one covering letters from different channels. This could be further complicated by his partner's possible involvement in one or more of the three organisations to which he might or might not personally belong. In this case, a couple might receive at least two cover letters. In the cases cited above, certain cover letters had proven to be
superfluous, thus affecting the response rate negatively. In fact, certain cover letters were politely returned to me because of the above mentioned reasons.

Another interesting observation can be made by comparing the individual response rates of the three organisations. I would speculate that the relatively low response rate of the ACC (9.8% overall, 2.1% positive response) was a result of the nature of its membership. Since all the ACC members are gay priests serving the Church of England, I would expect them to exercise greater caution because of their official status, resulting in greater reluctance to participate in this study, although they might provide their undivided moral support.

This, I speculate, explains the higher response rates from QUEST and the LGCM whose memberships are open to both clergy and laity. The LGCM, with an overall response rate of 22.1% and a positive response rate of 7.1%, proved to be more responsive than QUEST (17.7% overall response rate, 6.0% positive response rate). I speculate that this was due to the fact that members of the LGCM shared the well-known policy of the LGCM which was more articulate and forceful in its approach to the gay rights movement within and outside the Christian community. Gay Christians who empathised with the work of the LGCM, I would argue, were more articulate and prepared to participate in research like mine as one of the means to make their voice heard (Yip 1991).

QUEST, on the other hand, is known for its consultative and softer approach (see Chapter 8, Section 8.1.). Therefore, its members might be less willing to articulate their views and the study therefore might not enthuse them as much as the LGCM members. However, it must be emphasised that these speculations should not overshadow the sampling difficulty already discussed.

Out of the 71 couples who eventually signed up at different stages, three couples later pulled out from the study. One couple was not in the position to participate as one of the partners passed away. The other two couples did not offer any reason for doing so. Upon receiving a positive response, I gave a code number to the couple. The letters 'A' and 'B' were also used to distinguish the partners. Thus, 'Respondent no. 21A' refers to the first partner of couple no. 21. Likewise, 'Respondent no. 5B' refers to the second partner of couple no. 5.

In view of the small sample size, the results of my study ought to be treated with caution. However, since the parameters of the gay Christian population is unknown, it would be difficult to assess the representativeness of my sample, as Weinberg (1970:312) argues, "The parameters of their populations (the gay population) are rarely known, thus it is difficult to get representative samples and difficult to say anything about how representative the samples are."
2.5. Pilot Study

Five couples in Greater London — two cohabiting and three non-cohabiting — were included in the pilot study carried out between March and May 1993. They were included because they were the first to sign up for the study. Furthermore, with the expectation that many of my respondents would be gay priests, I was keen to familiarise myself with them in a research situation. As a result, three out of the five couples identified had one partner who was a priest. Their geographical location was also a main consideration, as I needed to minimise the cost for the pilot study due to financial constraint.

The pilot study was carried out with the primary objective of testing the effectiveness of the questionnaire and the interview guides. The questionnaires were posted to all the respondents, in late March 1993, in individual envelopes. The questionnaire opened with the statement of the objectives of the study and concluded with an explicit assurance of confidentiality. The respondent was also asked to freely write down their comments about the questions in the margins available. They were also asked to indicate if they wished to receive the summary of my research findings when they were ready. This was a deliberate move to enhance response rate.

An introduction letter was enclosed, emphasising to the respondent that the study at that stage was interested to examine his personal understanding and view about his partnership and not that of the couple as a unit. The respondent should therefore complete the questionnaire without consulting his partner and return it individually in the Freepost envelope provided. The questionnaires took an average of 11 days to be returned. Appointments for interview were immediately made once the questionnaires of the same couple were received. All the interviews were conducted in April and early May 1993.

The Questionnaire

The analysis of the responses (and the comments made by almost all the respondents) revealed that certain questions were in need of modification to improve their clarity and precision. This involved, inter alia, the exclusion and inclusion of certain response categories to some closed-ended questions as well as the rephrasing of certain questions. Improvement in this respect is important as question-wording affects the quality of the data (Dunsmuir and Williams 1990).

An example of this improvement is the question, 'What is your religion? Kindly circle the appropriate number.' Having encountered difficulty in the pilot study, I re-phrased the question as, 'What is your religious denomination? Kindly circle the appropriate number.' The
response categories were also increased from Catholic' and 'Protestant' in the original questionnaire, to 'Roman Catholic', 'Church of England', 'Baptist', 'Methodist', 'United Reformed Church', 'Lutheran' and 'Other'.

The Individual Interview

All the interviews were conducted at the respondents' homes. The average duration of the individual interview was 80 minutes. The interview was conducted with one of the partners in the absence of the other. Before the interview began, I invariably provided the respondent with the assurance of confidentiality. I did likewise when I concluded the interview. All the interviews were tape-recorded as no respondent voiced any objection to that.

The information provided in the questionnaire was used, whenever appropriate, to introduce an issue to be discussed in the interview. Connections were made between some information in the questionnaire and the interview. On the other hand, the accuracy of the information provided in the questionnaire was also checked whenever appropriate against the information provided in the interview.

The Couple Interview

The couple interview was conducted after both the individual interviews had been completed. Its average duration was 29 minutes, significantly shorter than that of the individual interview as there were fewer topics to be covered. This interview followed more or less the same procedure of the individual interview mentioned above. The only difference was that the couples were asked, at the end of the interview, if they knew any other gay Christian couples who would be interested to consider taking part in this research. In two positive cases, cover letters were subsequently posted to them for distribution. The observations made about the couple interview shared great similarities to those already mentioned. Only minor changes were required in the phraseology of a few questions.

Summary

A letter was sent to all the couples to thank them for their participation and also to once again provide them with the assurance of confidentiality. The pilot study did not reveal major modifications that needed to be made to my research instruments. On this ground, the data collected in the pilot study are used together with those collected in the main study in the data analysis process.
2.6. Main Study

63 couples were involved in the main study. All the couples completed the questionnaire while 25 of them were subsequently interviewed. It was impossible to interview every couple who signed up for the study due to their wide geographical distribution (see Chapter Three Table 3.6) and the amount of time and funds available.

A decision was therefore taken, that 25 couples was a reasonable number for the collection of qualitative data through the interview. As the recruitment process progressed in tandem with the fieldwork, it was intended that the first 25 couples who lived in the regions of Greater London, the South East and East Anglia would be interviewed. Eventually, 24 couples interviewed were from these regions. One couple from the North was interviewed while they were visiting London.

The Questionnaire

The posting of the questionnaire was done in different stages between May and June 1993, depending heavily on the recruitment process. The despatch of the questionnaires followed exactly the same way as the pilot study. The questionnaires took an average of 23 days to be returned. In some cases, reminders were sent to those who delayed in their reply. The telephone was not used as a means of reminding respondents as that might be considered by some respondents as intrusive.

Upon receiving the questionnaires from both the partners of a couple beyond the stipulated regions, I sent a letter to thank them for their participation and explain that it was not possible for the interviews to be conducted. The respondents were assured that their contribution was just as important and significant. Having gone through the questionnaires, I learned that there was the need to telephone all the respondents in such circumstances to clarify some information provided in the questionnaire. Through this, I further explained the reason why it was not possible for the interview to take place. All the respondents contacted showed appreciation of the situation. On the other hand, when the questionnaires from a couple in the stipulated regions were received, I telephoned the couples for a mutually convenient time to meet.

The Individual and The Couple Interviews

The interviews were conducted between June and September 1993. The procedures of both types of interviews followed closely those of the pilot study, they having been proven effective. The average duration for the individual interviews was 77 minutes, and 32 minutes
for the couple interview. All the interviews were conducted at the respondents' homes, except the interviews with the couple from the North region. They were interviewed in a private club of their choice in London. No major difficulty was encountered in both types of interviews.

The use of the tape recorder did not create any difficulty for all but two of the respondents. One respondent mentioned that the sight of a tape recorder would make him too self-conscious. I then explained to him that the use of the tape recorder would substantially reduce the duration of the interview. It would also ensure that all that he wished to communicate was recorded for data analysis without missing, something that my note-taking would not be able to achieve successfully. He eventually agreed when I suggested that the tape recorder could be placed at the far end of the dining table instead of between us. He eventually answered all the questions comfortably.

The other respondent's objection to the use of tape recorder stemmed from his concern about the confidentiality of the information he would provide. I assured him that I was the only person with access to all my research data and that the tape would be erased as soon as the interview was transcribed. I also justified the use of the tape recorder with the reasons already cited. I also encouraged him to try for a few minutes and stop me whenever he felt that he did not wish certain information to be recorded. He eventually accepted my suggestion. He, however, asked for the recording to stop on two occasions: when he criticised his partner while talking about the improvement he wished to see in the partnership, and when he talked about his sex life within and outside the partnership. On both occasions, note-taking was used in place of the tape recorder.

2.7. Data Analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used in the analysis of data. The SPSS/PC+ programme was very useful in the analysis of quantifiable data contained in the questionnaire. A substantial amount of time was spent on the categorisation of the multiplicity of responses prior to data entry. This was done in December 1993.

The analysis of qualitative data from the 60 individual interviews and 30 couple interviews, needless to say, proved to be substantially more time-consuming and tedious than the former. Before the detailed analysis was conducted, I transcribed verbatim 10 individual interviews and 5 couple interviews. Thorough analysis was carried out on these transcripts to build up the framework within which the remaining 50 individual interviews and 25 couple interviews were selectively transcribed.
I relied heavily on the grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Rennie et al. 1988; Strauss and Corbin 1990; Pidgeon et al. 1991; Henword and Pidgeon 1992). The approach was extremely helpful in dissecting the gigantic amount of qualitative data, followed by the processes of data coding and category construction. At the more advanced stage, relationships between the categories and subcategorises were carefully studied in order to chart more complex relationships between the categories. This was later followed, whenever appropriate, by the construction of typologies.

In line with the practice of "data triangulation" (Denzin 1978:295-296), the data were also analysed and presented at the individual (aggregate) and the couple (collective) levels. In other words, both the individual respondent and the couple were used as the unit of analysis, depending on the specific need of the particular analysis.

2.8. Conclusions

In this Chapter, I have discussed the methodological framework of this study. The qualitative and exploratory emphasis of my study determined the use of interviewing as the primary research instrument and the use of the grounded theory approach for data analysis.

The next chapter begins Part II of this thesis, which explores the various issues affecting primarily the organisation of the internal dimension of the respondents' partnerships. Specifically, Chapter Three presents the respondents' biographical data and issues related to the beginning period of their partnerships.
Part II

SHARING THEIR LIFE TOGETHER
Chapter Three

THE COUPLES: THE BEGINNING PERIOD

This Chapter aims to present the respondents’ biographical data at both the individual and the couple levels. Based on the interview data with the sub-sample of 30 couples, I then explore three issues in relation to the beginning period of their partnerships.

First, I analyse the nature of the couples’ first meetings and the role sex played in them. Second, the issue of explicit agreement is addressed. I will argue that the couples acknowledge the need to constantly negotiate the boundary of their partnerships to maintain their workability. Third, I analyse the couples’ views on the necessity of a blessing ceremony to solemnise their partnerships. I conclude by arguing that these couples demonstrate a positive self-image in structuring their partnerships despite the lack of social support and religious affirmation.

3.1. The Respondents’ Biographical Data

This section presents biographical data on the entire sample comprising 68 couples (136 individuals):

Age

Table 3.1: Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16 to 20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 to 25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 to 30</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 to 35</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 to 40</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 to 45</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46 to 50</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 to 55</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56 to 60</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61 to 65</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66 to 70</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 70</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N= 136 100.0

Mean Age = 43.4 years
Table 3.1 indicates that 20 (14.7%) of the respondents are aged 30 and below while 80 (58.8%) are between the ages of 31 and 50. With a mean age of 43.4 years, this sample is substantially older than samples of other studies, for instance, 33 (Silverstein 1981), 37.5 (McWhirter and Mattison 1984), 35 (Blasband and Peplau 1985) and 32 (Davies et al. 1993). This sample, therefore, does not reflect one of the common characteristics of the sample for research on gay males which is overrepresented by the younger members of the gay community. This age factor could be related to the fact that the respondents are already in partnerships. Research on single gay males might yield a younger sample.

**Ethnic Origin**

97.8% of the sample (133 respondents) are white. The three non-white respondents are respectively an Anglo-Chinese, an Afro-American and a Japanese.

**Educational Status**

Table 3.2: Highest Educational Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest Educational Level Achieved</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'O'- Level</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'A'- Level</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Degree</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>40.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master's Degree</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral Degree</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without Formal Education/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educated Under Old English</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or Foreign Systems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N= 136 100.0

Table 3.2 shows that the majority of the respondents are highly educated. Some 55 (40.4%) hold a first degree while another 33 (24.3%) possess a postgraduate degree. Their generally high educational status is related to the nature of the occupations they hold, as shown in the following sub-section.

**Employment**

107 respondents (78.7%) are in some form of employment — self, full-time, part-time and occasional. Out of the 29 (21.3%) who are not, 17 are retired, 9 are unemployed, 2 are in full-time education while 1 is on a government training scheme. Table 3.3 indicates their occupations:
Table 3.3: Occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clergy</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>21.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher/Lecturer</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Professional</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Professional</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Servant</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musician/Actor</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computing Professional</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Worker</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book/Journal Editor</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering Professional</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stock Controller/Operator</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book Binder/Tenor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerk</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waiter</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales Executive</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not In Employment</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>21.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N= 136 100.0

Table 3.3 reveals that about one-fifth of the sample are in the pastoral ministry, an occupation which can potentially put them in a predicament as far as their sexuality and profession are concerned. In the main, this sample hold quite high-level occupations.

Gross Annual Income

Table 3.4: Gross Annual Income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gross Annual Income (£)</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less Than 5000</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5000 -- 8999</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9000 -- 12999</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>24.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13000 -- 16999</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17000 -- 20999</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21000 -- 24999</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25000 -- 28999</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29000 -- 32000</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Than 32000</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N= 136 100.0

Table 3.5 indicates that some 32 respondents (23.5%) earn a meagre gross annual income of below £9,000. The majority of these respondents are in the 'Not in Employment' category. On the other hand, 29 respondents (21.3%) earn a gross annual income of more than £21,000. This denotes that there is a significant income range among the respondents. Also, owing to the absence of children and the fact that most gay couples are dual-career, it can be expected that they have a higher disposable income compared to married heterosexual couples.
Religious Affiliation

The majority of the respondents are affiliated to the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church, the two largest Christian denominations in Britain. Table 3.5 indicates that some 117 (86.0%) of the respondents are from these denominations.

Table 3.5: Religious Affiliation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious Affiliation</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Church of England</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>60.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>25.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodist</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Reformed Church</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N= 136</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Geographical Distribution

The respondents are distributed throughout the regions in England as well as Scotland and Wales.

Table 3.6: Geographical Distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greater London</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>34.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brighton (4); Portsmouth (3); Oxford (3); Bournemouth (2); Steyning (2); Rochester (2); St. Leonard's On Sea (2); Mayfield (1)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Anglia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambridge (3); Peterborough (2); Upwell Wisbech (2); Colchester (2); Harlow (1); Bedford (1)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Midlands</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nottingham (2); Derby (2); Thornhill (2); Leicester (1); Lutterworth (1); Rushden (1); Northampton (1)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prescot (4); Liverpool (3); Salford (2); Preston (1)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birmingham (4); Coventry (2); Redditch (2); Malvern (1)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
South West
Plymouth (4); St. Austell (2); Bath (1); Ross-On-Wye (1) 8 5.9

North
Newcastle Upon Tyne (3); St. Bees (2); Darlington (1) 6 4.4

Yorkshire and Humberside
Leeds (2) 2 1.5

Scotland
Glasgow (9); Hamilton (1) 10 7.4

Wales
Bangor (2); Cardiff (1); Neath (1) 4 2.9

N= 136 100.0

Table 3.6 reveals that the respondents concentrate heavily in the Greater London and the South East regions. They constitute 48.5%, almost half of the sample. The Greater London region, from which 34.6% of the respondents were recruited, attracts the gay population. The burgeoning gay scene in the metropolis serves as the pulling factor for the gay population to migrate there for a more salutary environment for the exploration of their sexuality and, in the case of my respondents, alongside their religious beliefs.

Also, the activities of the three major gay Christian organisations through which recruitment was carried out are primarily Greater London-based. Therefore, it is not surprising that gay Christians in Greater London have more resources and support from the gay community compared to their counterparts in provincial areas. They are therefore more articulate and more ready to participate in a study of this nature.

**Length of Partnership**

A myriad of factors strongly work against the establishment and the maintenance of a gay partnership. The obstacles are even more insurmountable in the case of gay Christians. The by and large negative climate of the Church exerts a tremendous amount of pressure on them against the expression of their sexuality, especially in the form of establishing a partnership.

For those who have successfully established a partnership, they soon find that the partnership is not located within the normative framework adhered to by the majority of the society. The lack of role model and institutional support are often responsible for the discontinuation of a gay partnership (Weinberg 1973; Tripp 1975; Harry and DeVall 1978). However, in the case of this sample, all are in partnerships of at least one year. Table 3.7 summarises the length of their partnerships:
Table 3.7: Length of Partnership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of Partnership</th>
<th>No. of Couples</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 year and up to 3 years</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 3 years and up to 5 years</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 5 years and up to 10 years</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10 years and up to 15 years</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 15 years and up to 20 years</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beyond 20 years</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=68 100.0

Shortest length of partnership = 1 year
Longest length of partnership = 33 years
Mean length of partnership = 9 years 5 months

As shown above, this sample has debunked the stereotype that gay men are uninterested in and unable to maintain a long-standing partnership. While slightly more than a quarter of them are in partnerships between one and three years, more than half (58.8%) have been in a partnership longer than five years. This lends credence to research evidence which confirms gay men's ability in and commitment to establishing and maintaining a long-standing partnership despite the lack of institutional support (e.g. Westmoreland 1975).

Living Arrangements

46 couples (67.6%) are cohabiting while 22 couples (32.4%) live apart. Not all couples began their partnerships with the current living arrangement. I will develop this point in Chapter Four. Suffice it to say now that the different living arrangements would be used for comparative purposes whenever appropriate.

Summary

It can be concluded thus far that the sample of this study bears great similarity to the samples generally recruited for studies on gay men. Very often, the sample overrepresents the young, middle- and upper-middle class, educated whites living in urban areas (Oliver 1976;
Silverstein 1981; Peplau 1982; McWhirter and Mattison 1984; Meyer 1990). However, it must be emphasised that in terms of age, my sample appears to be more representative of the spectrum of age groups. The sample has confirmed research evidence that gay men are capable of maintaining long-standing partnerships.

3.2. The Beginning

This section analyses, based on the data collected from the 30 interviewed couples, the beginning of the couples' partnerships and the role of sex at that stage. The first meetings of the partners are summarised below:

Table 3.8: How the Couples Met

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How The Couples Met</th>
<th>No. of Couples</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-religious social setting: educational institution and workplace</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>36.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through social activity (e.g. party) organised by mutual friends</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through advertisement in gay newspaper, magazine, and gay dating agency</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious social setting: pilgrimage, church and gay Christian group</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay scene: gay club, gay pub</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other: during vacation, in a bus</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N= 30</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.8 reveals that more than half of the couples met in non-religious social settings, primarily at work places or educational institutions where both were students and at social activities such as parties organised by mutual friends.

It is interesting to note that only 2 couples (6.7%) met in the gay scene, despite the fact that it is the 'safest' environment to do so. Bell and Weinberg (1978:101) comment that the lack of social support offers gay men very little opportunity to meet in environments other than the "sexual marketplaces" that the gay scene provides. The sub-sample does not fit into this description. As I will show in Chapter Eight, this is primarily due to the fact that the respondents are in general not active in the gay scene for various reasons.
Sex at First Sight?

Was the first meeting of these couples sexual in nature? Only five couples --- who met through advertisements in gay publications and private parties --- fall into this category. The majority of the couples did not have sex during their first meeting. However, more than ten couples engaged in sexual activity in their second meeting which, on certain occasions, took place on the following day. Their experiences appear to confirm what Peplau and Cochran (1981) report, that 60% of the gay couples they study have sex for the first time within one month after their first meeting. In this connection, Klinkenberg and Rose (1994) also report that the dating scripts of gay men are more sexual than those of heterosexuals and lesbians.

Sex therefore played a major part in their socialising. The following comment explains why sex features largely:

"The whole thing started as a sexual act, then led on to a relationship. So I think in this case it worked from sex in the beginning. If you get it right, it is a very good crude basis for it because if they like each other then they won't have many problems in other areas." (Resp. no. 18A)

This comment reaffirms the experiences of many gay couples interviewed. Casual sex, being highly available in gay social settings, is often used as a yardstick to gauge the viability and potential for the development of a relationship. If both the partners are sexually compatible, there is a good basis for a relationship to develop.

However, there is a minority of couples who deliberately refrained from any sexual activity until both parties were certain about their mutual commitment to the development of a partnership. This is the scenario for couple no. 2 who took six weeks of deliberation before engaging in any form of sexual activity, although they met each other frequently during that "courtship" period. Their past experiences informed them that the relationship they had established had the potential to evolve into a committed partnership. Sex was therefore withheld in order to avoid premature emotional involvement. In this connection, respondent no. 2A relates, "I know the importance of this potential relationship. I didn't want to rush things........" Respondent no. 2B gave a similar response, "I think I had made a conscious decision not to do anything because I wanted to see what he was like first."

The uncertainty about one's sexuality could also contribute to this wait-and-see attitude, as in the case of couple no. 5. Respondent no. 5B was uncertain about his own sexuality when he met his partner in church. Having realised this point, his partner decided not to rush into sex until their partnership had laid a stronger foundation with respondent no. 5B's increasingly positive perspective about his sexuality. Respondent no. 5A comments:
"It was very tentative. Had I been an 'out' gay person, I am sure I would have responded very quickly to that. But because (respondent 5B) was in the beginning of coming to terms with his sexuality and I was in the process of it, the relationship was obviously very tentative and in many ways it was exploratory. I therefore did not want to push things too far and rush into sex."

It can be concluded at this point that these gay couples hold different views as to how largely sex was featured in the beginning of their partnerships. However, the majority engaged in sexual activity either during the first or the second meetings, with the typical intention of using sex to assess their compatibility with each other. This, argued Weinberg and William (1974), is typical of the majority of gay encounters.

3.3. Explicit Agreement

Unlike a heterosexual marriage, a gay partnership is not religiously and socially accepted. Religious expectations such as fidelity and commitment are therefore not institutionally imposed on the latter. Operating in a normative vacuum, a gay partnership would therefore undergo a continued process of negotiation of its constitutional arrangement as it progresses. In this section, I explore the existence of explicit agreement between partners at the beginning of the partnership.

The majority of the interviewed couples indicate that they did not explicitly draw the parameters of their partnership when the partnership started. Only four couples have done otherwise. Two of these couples negotiated the sexual dimension of their partnerships. In both cases, the couples agreed that the partnership should be sexually exclusive. Another couple promised that they would love each other until death. The last couple agreed that they would practise complete self-disclosure with each other.

All these couples, however, mention that the nature of such agreements has been constantly modified as the partnerships progress. This is certainly the case for couple no. 50. Although they started their partnership with an explicit agreement on sexual exclusivity, they decided two years later that the partnership should revert to sexual non-exclusivity. The change of this constitutional arrangement proved problematic and almost led to the dissolution of their partnership. They subsequently decided to return to sexual exclusivity to restore the stability of their partnership. Their case will be further elaborated in Chapter Ten. Suffice it to say at this point that gay partnerships are characterised by a process of constant negotiation, precipitated by the lack of a role model and social approval.
The ability they demonstrate in constantly structuring their partnerships depending on circumstantial expediency convincingly challenges the conservative clinical standpoint which is doubtful of the longevity of gay partnerships due to the perceived psycho-pathological nature of homosexuality. I would argue that it is their ability to constantly engage in the process of constant negotiation that makes their partnerships meaningful and workable. The eventual arrangement is less important, since it can be re-negotiated as the partnership progresses.

On the whole, the majority of the couples did not make an explicit agreement about the nature of their partnerships. Most couples prefer to adopt a wait-and-see approach, being fully cognisant of the odds against the longevity of a gay partnership. What constitutes the partnership is a natural evolution, as the following response illustrates:

"To have an explicit agreement is very clinical. It seems to impose a kind of marriage contract on the relationship..... It is just one of those things that just evolve and naturally come to various conclusions." (Resp. no. 12A)

This typical response reveals that many gay couples acknowledge the need to constantly negotiate their expectations of the partnership. The constitutional structure of the partnership therefore has great potential to modify its nature from time to time. Many gay couples therefore prefer not to engage in undue negotiation at the beginning of the partnership and prefer to allow the negotiation process to take place as the partnership progresses. An appropriate metaphor about gay partnership is provided below:

"If you are growing a plant, it is no good pulling it up to see how the roots are growing. If you keep pulling it up and looking at the roots, then nothing will ever grow. You have to leave it. Don't inspect it too often, then it will grow quite nicely. If you keep inspecting it and looking at the details then it will never grow. I don't like discussing things in detail. I like things just to get on and go." (Resp. no. 9A)

To summarise, the majority of the 30 couples do not consider having an explicit agreement at the beginning of the partnership essential. This is precipitated by their recognition of the in-built odds that work against the longevity of a gay partnership owing to the lack of role model and social approval. However, this also conversely gives them the flexibility to negotiate as the partnership develops.

### 3.4. Blessing Ceremony

In this section, I evaluate the couples' general views on the necessity of a blessing ceremony to solemnise their gay Christian partnerships. It must be mentioned that, for a small number of couples, both partners hold diverse views in this respect. However, interview data
suggest that although disagreement might exist, both partners are committed to working towards adopting a mutually approved position. Their disagreement therefore does not create a major area of contention in their partnerships.

In the main, the couples can be divided into three categories based on their general stance on the necessity of a blessing ceremony: (A) those who have already had a blessing ceremony; (B) those who have not had a blessing ceremony but are in support of it; and (C) those who completely rule it out.

Category A: Couples Who Have Had a Blessing Ceremony

Four couples are in this category. Two of the couples held a private function with the involvement of only a supportive priest who was present to bless the house they just moved into. The ceremony was by nature a house blessing ceremony rather than one for their partnerships. However, both couples consider the ceremony as a blessing ceremony for their partnerships as well as for the house. They assert that cohabitation signifies a new phase that the partnership entered into. The ceremony in actual fact serves as a symbol of commitment and a deeper degree of sharing between the partners.

The other two couples did what they consider symbolises a blessing ceremony without the involvement of a third party. In the case of couple no. 21, both partners exchanged rings when respondent no. 21B had to leave the country for a year. The exchange of rings therefore serves as a symbol to seal their mutual commitment. In their case, the blessing ceremony had to be completely concealed because of respondent no. 21A's occupation as a Roman Catholic priest. Discretion had to be exercised for fear of negative repercussions from the Church. In this case, the concealment of both their sexuality and partnership is a strategy to control the dissemination of social information about their identities as individual gay Christians and a gay Christian couple.

In the same fashion, couple no. 52 decided to hold their own blessing ceremony secretly in order not to jeopardise their standing in the church, as respondent no. 52A is a cleric in the Church of England. He is adamant about why they rejected the idea of having the blessing ceremony at the church:

"We don't want a church blessing because the Church doesn't bless us. What is the point to do it in the Church that condemns us? What is the point to pretend in a blessing ceremony? The Church doesn't bless us. The Church condemns us." (Resp. no. 52A)
This couple resorted to saying a few prayers and mutually exchanged vows and gifts. Respondent no. 52 B considers that an important event. He states, "It was the event that put everything in a concrete form. It wasn't about blessing. It was more about vows. And also it was a symbol of commitment."

In sum, all these couples view a blessing ceremony as primarily a symbol of mutual commitment. The inclusion or exclusion of a third party in the ceremony is a result of the discretion they had to exercise to protect their partnerships, and in certain cases, the cleric professions of the respondents, from the Church that does not affirm their sexuality and partnerships.

Category B: Couples Who Have Not Had a Blessing Ceremony But Are In Support of It

12 couples support the notion of having a blessing ceremony, although they are yet to go through it themselves. Some couples are in the process of planning for one, while others have no definite plans in this connection. This sub-section analyses their reasons for supporting a blessing ceremony, why they have delayed it and the nature of the blessing ceremony they want.

Why Blessing Ceremony?

Researchers acknowledge the pressures against the establishment of a long-standing gay partnership. These pressures emanate from the lack of institutional support, legal sanctions, religious approval, cultural guidelines and the absence of children (Hoffman 1968; Saghir and Robins 1973; Tripp 1975; Harry and DeVall 1978). Many couples therefore view a blessing ceremony as a testimony to the mutual commitment between the partners that has helped the partnership to survive despite the paucity of social support.

A blessing ceremony is therefore also a form for celebration of the meaningful existence of the partnership itself. If conducted openly, it can be used as a public expression of their gratitude to God, each other and the supportive people around them. This is encapsulated in the following response:

"To have a ceremony is to principally say "Thank You" to our parents and friends for supporting us and for enabling us to establish what we have got. To thank God, that's the main reason. I suppose also to say to the world we are serious with what we have got." (Resp. no. 5B)
Respondent no. 51B supports the above view, "I suppose both of us being Christians, we want to make our vows for each other before God. It just finalises it." Similarly, respondent no. 11A comments, "He (respondent no. 11B) has been a blessing. I think (respondent no. 11B) is a God-send. So the ceremony would be a thanksgiving sort of service to me."

To these respondents, having a blessing ceremony to solemnise their partnerships is the expression of their Christian identity. The ceremony is therefore an expression of their sexuality within the context of their religious beliefs. This, to them, is a further confirmation of the compatibility of the sexual and religious aspects of their self-identity.

On the other hand, some are of the opinion that holding a blessing ceremony is a political statement about the existence of gay couples. It also demands the Church and the society at large to acknowledge and accept this indisputable fact. This is clearly pointed out in the following comment:

"You see I don't have the desire to repeat a marriage ceremony or anything like that. But what I have the desire to do is to have a commitment to each other that is acknowledged by the church........ I think quite strongly that because of the life I am now leading, that it would be therefore blessed by the church, that would be an open acknowledgement of our commitment to our lifestyle within the church, and repeated by the church for us." (Resp. no. 50A)

Going one step further, the following respondent articulately argues for gay partnerships to be accepted not just by the Church but also legally recognised by the government:

"I do think that we ought to have a civil register for gay partnerships in this country because I feel very strongly that if anything happened to (resp. no. 22B), the government would confiscate quite a sizeable chunk of his estate which really ought to come to me. So I feel very militant about this. I think we ought to have equal right. I think there should be a civil register but the people should choose if they are religious to have a blessing if they want." (Resp. no. 22A)

The response above highlights a materialistic rather than a spiritual consideration. Another reason for wanting a blessing ceremony is related to the human need for rituals to enhance human relationships. The ceremony is seen as a rite of passage that will enhance the personal growth of the partners and the quality of the partnership. This is expressed by the following respondent:

"..... I think as humans we have a need for ritual. It's something very deep and bonding about having appropriate rituals. I feel that will be important..... I don't want a marriage service, I don't want to pretend a family relationship. I want to feel that whenever there is a ritual that we can find and develop and equip our lives together." (Resp. no. 5A)
While respondent no. 5A clearly expresses his desire not to turn the blessing ceremony he wants into a marriage service, other respondents do not mind a gay blessing ceremony to share certain elements of a heterosexual marriage. In this connection, respondent no. 22B asserts, "I think gays can benefit from modelling their relationships from marriage --- monogamous and faithful." In the same vein, respondent no. 18A comments, "(Resp. no. 18B) has always had the dream of being married..... it is a symbol of our commitment to each other. It is also a religious thing in saying that it is a good and holy thing."

In sum, a blessing ceremony is seen by those who support it as an opportunity to thank God, each other and, if conducted publicly, to thank the supportive people around. As a symbol of commitment, the blessing ceremony can also be a political statement in correcting the erroneous stereotype that gay men are not capable of establishing meaningful and committed partnerships, in the hope of increasing social recognition and acceptance. This political stance aims to challenge the conservative clinical standpoint I mentioned in the preceding section. Lastly, a blessing ceremony as a ritual also enhances the quality of an intimate relationship.

Why Delay?

Two major reasons are responsible for some couples' delay in holding a blessing ceremony. First, the fear of being exposed to public disapproval, especially that of the Church. Commenting before the decision on the ordination of women priests was taken by the Church of England, respondent no. 55B, whose partner is a priest, expressed his rightful concern:

"It is difficult because of (resp. no. 55A's) profession as a priest. Right now the Church is going through really great changes with women priests coming in. It is such a drastic change that it has made the whole structure very shaky. A lot of people are wary right now doing anything out of the ordinary because everything is not quite firm."

The need for concealment of the partnership as a result of the fear of exposure is also experienced by couple no. 50. Respondent no. 50B explains that although he desires a blessing ceremony, he would only consent to having it if a suitable and trustworthy priest can be found. Also, the chosen priest for that occasion must be a complete stranger to him, whom he could choose not to meet again after the ceremony. This explains why he rules out his own priest who is considered open-minded and knows about him and his partner. Fear of exposure appears to be the main concern for many gay couples in their decision-making about when and how to conduct the blessing ceremony.

Another major reason for the delay for some couples pertains to their concern about the maturity and readiness of the partnership itself. Respondent no. 17A asserts in this connection, "I think if I one day I felt it (the partnership) had been long-term and it fulfilled some of my
ideals, then I would probably want a blessing ceremony." Having been in a partnership for two-and-a-quarter years, he thinks that the partnership still needs to be worked at and a blessing ceremony would therefore be more appropriate in future when the foundation of the partnership is more solidly built.

Nature of Blessing Ceremony

The responses to the question on the nature of the blessing ceremony are diverse. Some would like it to take place in a church in the presence of supportive friends and family members with a priest officiating the function. Respondent no. 10A represents this opinion,

"It would probably be done at the church. It would be nice to have it done at a place of Christian worship with friends around."

Some couples, on the other hand, emphatically mention that their blessing ceremony would be done at their own home in the presence of an understanding priest and some supportive friends and relatives. They consider doing it in the church meaningless since the church does not officially recognise their union. This antagonism is more clearly expressed by some couples who rule out a blessing ceremony altogether. This is discussed in the following sub-section.

Category C: Couples Who Completely Rule Out a Blessing Ceremony

14 couples reject altogether the notion of having a blessing ceremony. The majority of these couples argue that to opt for a blessing ceremony is to ape a heterosexual marriage. To them, a blessing ceremony bears great similarity to that of a heterosexual marriage. As the Bible provides no guidelines for gay partnerships, they should therefore explore other avenues instead of uncritically conforming to a social script that is not written for them. In other words, what the Bible teaches about the solemnisation of a partnership refers only to heterosexual partnerships, and it is therefore incompatible with gay partnerships. This strong sense of rejection is characterised by the following comments:

"I think it is rather silly. Homosexual relationships are not really the same as heterosexual relationships. Having a ceremony would be like a marriage or saying that it is like a marriage." (Resp. no. 57B)

"For me it is like trying to assimilate heterosexual marriage. It is not a marriage. It is something very different from it." (Resp. no. 8A)

These respondents consider their partnerships as equally acceptable and valid as the heterosexual one, but differ from it in a myriad of ways. Adopting the heterosexual model instead of exploring and constructing their own is seen as recognising the unacceptability of a gay partnership itself.
These couples are clearly not against heterosexual marriages personally. Their objection is predicated on the fact that the Church does not accord gay partnerships the religious approval that the heterosexual ones enjoy and take for granted. To hold a blessing ceremony is therefore lending credence to the Church’s disapproval of gay partnership and forfeiting its right to be blessed in its own right and distinctive way. The following comment illustrates this:

"I find it (a blessing ceremony) difficult. It would feel like you are pretending to be married. In a myriad of ways that makes me quite angry because we are not allowed to be legally married. So it would be like pretending something that is not right. I have a lot of difficulty with marriage as an institution. I think it is quite oppressive." (Resp. no. 16B)

Respondent no. 49B shares the same view, although he acknowledges that there is similarity between heterosexual and gay partnerships in terms of the rules and regulations that construct the framework within which they should operate:

"I disapprove of it (a blessing ceremony). Pretending to be something you are not. You are what you are. You accept what you are. You live in that context. You don’t have to pretend. Marriage is for heterosexual couples. Between a man and a woman it is a sacrament. We don’t fulfil that. We view the relationship as one of marriage in terms of the same rules and regulations (like those of heterosexual marriages). But to have a ceremony is a pretence. It’s so sad. It’s not the real thing."

Another view in relation to this is that insofar as gay partnerships are not accepted by the Church, gay couples should use their freedom from institutional pressure to do what they consider appropriate, instead of conforming to what is institutionally and conventionally acceptable:

"It is too heterosexual in some ways. One of the advantages of being a gay couple is that because you are almost sailing in the sea of normality. Why should you take on some of the shackles of perceived normality? It just seems a little silly to go through it." (Resp. no. 12A)

Another argument for the rejection of a blessing ceremony is more political in nature. Some argue that to have a blessing ceremony surreptitiously due to the fear of disapproval is to conspire with the oppressor, in this case, the Church. If it is to be done, it should be done publicly without fear for being labelled deviant. Not being able to do it publicly makes it meaningless and only accentuates the unacceptability of the partnership. This is illustrated in the following comment:

"It wouldn’t be something that would be universally recognised. It would be a sympathetic priest who would do it, wouldn’t it? And I didn’t want that. I mean if we were going to do anything like that, it has to be something that is formally recognised as being something that was agreed that it should be done." (Resp. no. 3A)
The view of respondent no. 3A is supported by respondent no. 1A who asserts that, "I mean if you can't stand up in public and actually deal with a formal blessing in the church, then there is no point." In the same vein, respondent no. 19B argues, "It is not something that is widely recognised. Not everybody is happy with it. It becomes rather fraud. So, why do it?"

On the other hand, some assert that although a blessing ceremony might prove meaningful to the parties involved, the lack of practical values that can be derived from it renders it undesirable. This attitude is due to two factors.

First, a blessing ceremony does not alter the legal status of the partnership. It therefore contributes nothing financially. Respondent no. 1A asserts in this connection, "I suppose if there was tax relief for (gay) married couples, we might consider it. Otherwise it fulfils no practical needs." Respondent no. 48A comments in agreement, "It would not validate anything. I mean that sort of thing doesn't really make any difference. It won't have real effects." On the basis of these arguments, it can be speculated that the number of gay couples opting for a blessing ceremony would increase if gay partnerships are religiously affirmed and legally recognised.

Second, the duration of the partnership is a living proof that it has stood the test of time in the face of the lack of institutional support. A blessing ceremony would not therefore contribute much practically in terms of further validating the solid foundation of the partnership. Respondent no. 16B who is in a ten-year-old partnership asserts:

"I suppose a blessing ceremony is an indication about a certain degree of commitment and hope for the future. Ten years into a relationship, you should have a fair idea of the way you feel. Otherwise you would not be together."

A couple who has been together for 21 years views the duration as a testimony that God has blessed their partnership and a blessing ceremony would therefore prove superfluous:

"We are both quite shy and private people. Although everyone at church knows us as a couple, but to draw attention to it and make a big fuss of it is embarrassing. It will make no difference to the relationship. Presumably if God hasn't blessed the relationship it wouldn't have lasted this long." (Resp. no. 9A)

The protection of the couple's privacy in not wanting to over-identify themselves as a gay couple is reflected in the view above. In the same vein, another respondent also views the idea of having a blessing ceremony in public as a violation of their privacy. Besides, it does not achieve much since intimacy and commitment are what really count in a partnership and not external rituals:
"I feel that in the end the important aspect of one's relationship is the intimacy and commitment between two people. It's very nice that those friends close to you understand and support you. But as for me, a public statement... I don't think I am really into making public statements about my relationships with anybody." (Resp. no. 6A)

A minor reason also cited in this connection is personal religious conviction. This is certainly true for couple no. 54. Respondent no. 54A is a Quaker and considers the Quaker tradition as different from that of the tradition of the organised Church. A blessing ceremony is a ritual that he considers unnecessary and unrelated to the expectation of his tradition.

**Summary**

For gay Christian couples who have already had or are planning to have a blessing ceremony, the nature of the ceremony preferred is principally that of a private function in the presence of supportive friends and relatives, with a sympathetic priest to officiate the ceremony. Many couples are, however, held back from having a blessing ceremony at present as a result of being fearful of undue exposure which might jeopardise their partnership. Some are waiting for the right moment to come by when both partners feel prepared to commit themselves to taking such a step.

Four reasons are provided for being in favour of a blessing ceremony. First, it is a sign of commitment between the partners, thus further strengthening their partnership. It is also viewed as an opportunity to express their gratitude to God and friends for the support they have shown. Second, in relation to the first, it is an expression of their sexuality within the Christian context. Third, it can be used to make a political statement against the lack of social acceptance and religious affirmation. Fourth, it is an expression of the human need for rituals.

On the other hand, most of those who are not in favour of a blessing ceremony are of the opinion that it is a replication of a heterosexual marriage. This response is closely related to the fact that the gay Christian partnership is not recognised religiously and legally. Having a blessing ceremony in silence against this backdrop is a sign of subjecting themselves to the hostile social climate and injustice. It is seen to further accentuate their deviant status and the society's non-acceptance. On this basis, it can be argued that if gay partnerships are accorded religious and legal recognition, the number of couples who favour a blessing ceremony would certainly increase. In this connection, it can also be argued that the couples' attitude towards the blessing ceremony is to a great extent determined by the social climate in general and the attitude of the organised Church in particular.
There are couples who also consider a blessing ceremony as not having any practical values in terms of tax purposes and the enhancement of the quality of the partnership itself. A small minority also reject a blessing ceremony on the grounds of violation of privacy and personal religious conviction that does not affirm such a ceremony (Yip 1994c).

3.5. Conclusions

This Chapter has presented the respondents' biographical data at the individual and the couple levels. Data reveal that most of the interviewed couples met in non-religious social settings. Only a very small minority met in the gay scene. Data also confirm Weinberg and William's (1974) finding that sex played a primary role during the first few meetings for the majority of the couples. Sexual compatibility is frequently used to gauge the couple's compatibility in other areas.

These couples also demonstrate a positive self-image in two areas. First, although most of them did not begin their partnerships with an explicit agreement about its constitutional arrangement, they acknowledge their ability in engaging in a process of constant negotiation depending on circumstantial expediency. The partnership therefore is not characterised by rigidity, but flexibility in negotiation.

Second, the majority of couples who support a blessing ceremony emphasise its spiritual significance, despite the absence of religious affirmation within the Church. The majority of those who rule out a blessing ceremony consider it mimicking a heterosexual marriage. In both instances, the couples have demonstrated the ability and flexibility to consciously decide what suit their partnerships best. The demonstration of this ability in a negative climate within the religious community attests to their ability and commitment to their partnerships. Far from being psycho-pathological as the conservative clinical standpoint asserts, they have demonstrated the ability to thrive with a positive self-image.

In the next Chapter, I explore the power relations within the context of the partnership. I focus heavily on the decision-making processes affecting the social dimension of their partnerships.
Chapter Four

POWER RELATIONS IN PARTNERSHIP

This Chapter is organised into six main sections. I will first discuss the respondents' perceptions of egalitarianism in general decision-making. I will then examine specific areas such as living arrangement, domestic division of labour and domestic and non-domestic leisure activity. This is to confirm the point that the majority of couples perceive the partnerships as egalitarian and they are committed to it. This commitment is put into action in the specific areas examined.

The data presented in this Chapter are from three different sources: (1) the questionnaire; (2) the individual interview; and (3) the couple interview.

4.1. Respondents' Perceptions of Egalitarianism in General Decision-making

This section analyses the interviewed individual respondents' perceptions of egalitarianism in general decision-making in the partnership. A partnership characterised by egalitarian general decision-making is defined as a partnership whereby both partners perceive that they have equal opportunity to negotiate and contribute to the final decision. Being general, it does not refer to any specific areas of the partnership in particular. The focus here is to gather the respondents' overview on this issue. Specific areas such as domestic division of labour and living arrangement will be discussed later in this Chapter. The degree of validity of these data might not be high, but they are important to 'set the scene' for the subsequent discussions.

Egalitarian General Decision-making

26 couples (86.7%) perceive that their partnerships are characterised by egalitarian general decision-making. The majority of these couples report that the general decision-making process appears to follow a pattern. For major and one-off decisions such as buying a property or choosing the venue for an annual vacation, both partners are jointly involved in the decision-making process in order to ensure unanimity. This is principally due to the financial implications of the decision.
On the other hand, the decision-making process concerning their habitual lifestyle is characterised by a process of adaptation. Having no role models, they resort to the principle of trial-and-error until a mutually acceptable and convenient arrangement is made, which may again be subject to change as the partnership develops.

'Egalitarianism', to many couples, does not imply that the partners have equal say in every area in their partnerships. It also does not denote that both partners have equal say in different, but the same number of areas. The scenario which characterises most couples is that one partner is more dominant in decision-making for a particular domain, but this is counter-balanced by the dominance of his partner in a different domain. However, both partners perceive the partnership to be egalitarian in general.

Having no gender roles to assume, these couples have a substantial amount of freedom to explore and define the various arrangements as their partnerships develop. This leads to a high degree of role exchangeability. The roles of a 'leader', a 'follower' and a 'joint decision-maker' are interchangeably assumed.

Two factors promote egalitarianism in general decision-making. Firstly, the couples' commitment to achieving an egalitarian partnership itself. To them, egalitarianism in general decision-making is one of the prerequisites for a successful partnership. The following opinion illustrates this:

"We are both individuals. It is an equal partnership in the sense of being better or worse. I think it is important that we both have a full say in how things work. This kind of equal decision-making makes the relationship work better. Because if (resp. no. 10B) wants to do something that I don't want to do, and our partnership were unequal and he was more dominant, then we might do that but I won't be happy. So that's why what we decide to do we do together. We decide together. We are both happy. It leads to a sense of happiness and contentment." (Resp. no. 10A)

Secondly, the length of a partnership also contributes positively to this end, as both partners became more familiar with each other's tastes, preferences and temperaments. Respondent no. 1B who has been in a partnership for 15 years asserts:

"But then again I mean after that long time in the sense there isn't much talking to do because there will be no point for me sort of suggesting something which I knew wouldn't be acceptable. I mean I knew what is what and what isn't and so there would be no point in making suggestions to him which I know he wouldn't accept, I mean I think that to an outsider it would possibly look that because I am slightly more vocal or forceful, that in the sense that it might be me who make decisions. And I think that's how others might perceive that, you see. But at the end of the day it actually isn't because I know exactly where the boundary is and so you sort of get that sort of silence which actually you don't cross over. You actually just want to carry on with the relationship. I mean there is no point in suggesting something which I know won't be acceptable."
Egalitarianism can be achieved despite the possible difference in the approach that both partners employ in decision-making. The following respondent relates his experience:

"Yes the decision-making process is an equal one. But we go about making decisions in slightly different ways. When we come to decision-making, (Resp. no. 52A) can be impulsive.... Once he has decided to make a decision, he wants to do it as quickly as possible. While I like to make things slightly more slowly and we are a little reflexive and say, "Is this really the right idea, why don't we wait a week or two and see how things turn out....." So although we have equal parts in decision-making, we have different styles of going around it." (Resp. no. 52B)

The above response indicates that although different approaches might be employed due to individual temperament, the important issue is, however, that both partners perceive the decision-making process itself to be egalitarian.

Inegalitarian General Decision-making

Four couples regard their partnerships as inegalitarian in terms of general decision-making. Four factors are responsible for this scenario: (a) respondent's personality, (b) respondent's preference, (c) income difference and (d) age difference. For one couple, more than one factor is cited.

(a) Respondent's Personality

It appears that when a respondent is psychologically averse to decision-making, he would directly or indirectly encourage his partner to be more dominant in this respect, although it might be against his partner's will. This is the scenario for couple no. 6 and couple no. 50. Respondent no. 6B relates:

"I would like an equal relationship..... But one of the difficulties is that I feel I can't really handle that. I think to have an equal relationship does eventually raise a few difficulties for me... due to my psychological background."

Respondent no. 6B's aversion to decision-making results in his partner's high level of dissatisfaction:

"..... I think I sometimes feel that I have to do a lot of the running socially. So it tends to be me that organises the social diary and me that安排s to see people. My friends tend to be his friends but (resp. no. 6B) doesn't have many of his own friends. So that causes a lot of tension because I feel that I am doing a lot of the work a lot of the time which I sometimes get quite 'cheesed off' about..... I think it (inegalitarianism in decision-making) does upset the stability of the relationship. I think we have a rocky relationship. But it is a relationship that we continue to work at." (Resp. no. 6A)
Respondent no. 6B's psychological difficulty is shared by respondent no. 50B. The latter's case is more extreme, as his lack of initiative in decision-making has partially encouraged his partner's diminishing respect for him as an individual and the subsequent abuse of trust. This leads to a crisis resulting in the decline and breakdown of their partnership that almost led to its dissolution. At the point of interview, they were at the stage of recovering from the crisis and re-defining the parameters of their partnership. Their situation will be further elaborated in some of the subsequent chapters.

Respondent no. 50A acknowledges that his over-dominance in the partnership has encouraged him to lose respect for his partner which leads to the crisis:

"I was just wasn't that interested in him and that he thought I wasn't treating him with respect and love. He said he needed to be held and comforted and be close to someone, and I wasn't really that close to him. We had sex fairly often, we had sex with other people, but it wasn't working I think to the extent that it was really building on a false premise to start with..... I think it is the sort of person I am. I would be very much more into making decision whereas (resp. no. 50B) is very much more going along with what people want, because he doesn't want to hurt people. He doesn't want to offend people. He would be very much tied in sometimes with going along with whatever people want. That's not just started in my relationship with him, but often he says in his youth he goes along with whatever the crowd wanted to do and so on. Whereas I would be much more an organiser and a pace-setter."

In these two cases, a respondent's aversion to decision-making leads to the dominance of his partner. While it only generates dissatisfaction in the case of couple no. 6, this inegalitarianism leads to relationship decline and breakdown for couple no. 50.

(b) Respondent's Preference

A respondent's preference for his partner to be more dominant can also precipitate his partner's dominance. Unlike the two couples discussed above, it is the respondent's conscious decision to allow his partner to be more dominant in this case. The inegalitarian decision-making also does not threaten the stability of the partnership, since such a scenario is explicitly or implicitly agreed upon.

In the case of respondent no. 11A, he prefers his partner to be more dominant especially in terms of domestic division of labour and other issues related to their residence as it legally belongs to his partner. His partner acknowledges that respect and reciprocates it by living up to the expectation.
In the same vein, respondent no. 19A prefers not to make many decisions as he prefers to be led by his partner who is older and more financially established:

"I don't feel negative about the fact that he leads and I follow. In fact, being with somebody like (resp. no. 19B) who has got the money, experience, presence..... it makes me feel really secure. So I like it and I am quite happy to..... not to make too many of my own decisions."

The dependence on his partner in decision-making generates a sense of security in respondent no. 19A. His partner acknowledges the mutual acceptability of such an arrangement:

"I think there is a tendency for me to lead, being the older one and owning the house. There is a tendency for me to lead. I mean being dominant. But that has never been an issue..... Quite often in smaller things he is quite happy to follow and be led. He is quite happy with that." (Resp. no. 19B)

The interview data reveal that age difference and income difference play a part in the inequalitarian decision-making arrangement of couple no. 19. This point is further elaborated below.

(c) Income Difference

Couple no. 19 provides an example of how income difference can have an impact on decision-making. Respondent no. 19A relates this point:

"It started off that way. When I left university and I was living with him. I was unemployed and he was in full-time employment. He had all the money. So it was his house, his money. Obviously he decided what was going to happen with it. I was living in his house and in return for that I was trying to begin to learn how to do housework. So decisions on when and where to go on holiday and how much to spend on what.... they were in his hands because he had the money.... Now his income is twice more than I earn... so that economic imbalance seems to have a knock-on effect into every aspect of the relationship."

It is clear from the response above that respondent no. 19B's stronger economic power gives him the edge in decision-making. This is consistent with the comment that "...... even gay male couples gain advantage over one another when one partner has a high income....." (Blumstein and Schwartz 1983:55). However, in this unique case, respondent no. 19A who is more financially established is also 12 years older than his partner. This also has an impact on their decision-making process, as discussed below.
(d) Age Difference

To this couple, age difference, alongside with income, has some effects on the decision-making process. Both partners acknowledge this fact, summarised by respondent no. 19A:

"That (age difference) does play a part. I do tend to respect his opinion. In general I think... well he has had more adult life experience than I have, he probably does know better. Like buying things... knowing the best things to buy and all this kind of stuff, he seems to be better because he is more experienced."

The next sub-section takes this issue further by exploring the relationship between age difference and egalitarianism in decision-making by analysing the situations of 15 couples with an age difference of more than five years.

Age Difference and Egalitarianism in General Decision-making

Table 4.1 presents the age difference between the partners in all the 30 interviewed couples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Difference</th>
<th>No. of Couples</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 year</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 1 year and up to 5 years</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>36.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 5 years and up to 10 years</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10 years and up to 15 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 15 years and up to 20 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 20 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N= 30</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1 indicates that half of the sub-sample has an age difference between 1 to 5 years, while the age difference for the other half is more than 15 years. The subsequent analysis focuses on the latter category. Of these 15 couples, only 3 couples perceive their general decision-making as inegalitarian. All these three couples have been discussed. The factors responsible for this scenario are: individual's personality, individual's preference, age difference and income difference.
The other twelve couples perceive their general decision-making as egalitarian despite the age difference. This includes five out of the six couples whose age difference is greater than 10 years. This finding does not lend credence to Harry's (1982b:18) finding that:

"Hence, if a gay relationship is inegalitarian in decision-making, it is likely to be a relationship between age-different persons."

The older partner has the potential to be more dominant in decision-making, having had more lived experience to draw upon. However, this potential may not be developed owing to the partners' mutual commitment to fostering an egalitarian partnership. This point is argued below:

"I think that's one of its major strengths, that we make decisions together...... I guess the fact that I am 13 years older could give me the edge in decision-making. Obviously when I make decisions I bear in mind my years of experience. So in some decisions if to me the experience is appropriate, then it may give the edge and more information. But other decisions... anything to do with figures for example he is ahead of me. He will then bring his experience and knowledge to it. So I suppose we just try to allow each other's different strengths. But most decisions are actually quite consensual and it doesn't feel like to me that even with my extra years of experience that I am in control. Because I think I will be very sensitive to that and I'm sure (resp. no. 5B) would say so." (Resp. no. 5A)

Whether a partnership is perceived as egalitarian or not is a dynamic phenomenon. It is capable of change as the partnership progresses. One that began with inegalitarian decision-making due to age difference might change its nature as the gap in social experience between the partners begins to narrow.

This is the experience of couple no. 8 and couple no. 22, whereby one of the partners started the partnership when he was in his late teens. The lack of social experience on his part accorded his partner more authority in decision-making. However, as he matured, the balance in decision-making tilted back to the centre. The comment below illustrates this development:

"I think possibly when I was younger it did. But as I got older, no, we have the same rights. In fact I sometimes think that perhaps (resp. no. 22B) has only just discovered in the last few years that I am no longer a teenager and has accepted that I also have a say in things...... I would say in the last ten years...... I think before that I willingly let him take all the decisions. Because I suppose being younger I always thought he knew best. I didn't resent it at all. As I got older I question things and we talk about things and perhaps decisions are made differently...... I think a lot of our decisions are made together because we agree on the basic principles. We think alike. So there is no great disagreement in anything because we have the same outlook." (Resp. no. 22A)

It has to be acknowledged that familiarity and mutual acceptance develop alongside the partnership. This can contribute to the development of a more egalitarian partnership.
Summary

A great majority of couples perceive their partnerships as egalitarian in general decision-making. This contrasts to the findings of Cotton (1972) and Reece (1979) that there exists 'role complementarity' in gay partnerships in which the partners replicate the 'masculine-feminine' gender role differences. What characterises the majority of these couples is a high degree of role exchangeability. This finding is resonant with a vast corpus of research evidence (e.g. Saghiri and Robins 1973; Haist and Hewitt 1974; Westmoreland 1975; Mendola 1980; Peplau and Gordon 1983; Harry 1984; McWhirter and Mattison 1984).

For the minority of couples who demonstrate inegalitarian decision-making, the factors responsible for this situation are the personality and preference of one of the partners. One couple reports differences in age and economic status as the additional factors.

It must be emphasised that the perception of an inegalitarian general decision-making for some of these couples should not be viewed as an indication of the presence of some difficulty in the partnerships. If such a perception is mutually acknowledged and agreed upon, it does not appear to lead to breakdown and decline in the partnership. Difficulty arises only when both partners have different perceptions and expectations in this connection.

Lastly, the fact that a partnership is perceived as egalitarian does not mean that it contains no elements that can potentially make it inegalitarian. Many couples who perceive their partnerships as egalitarian actually experience great differences in both their age and economic status. It is their commitment to forming such an egalitarian partnership that prevents these potentials from developing.

4.2. Cohabiting Couples

The data for this section are derived from the questionnaires and the couple interviews. Of all the 30 interviewed couples, 20 are cohabiting. Questions were asked to assess the decision-making processes behind the eventual arrangement of their cohabitation.

Decision-making and Moving In

It is a rarity for these 20 couples to live together immediately after their partnerships were established. Only in three cases did immediate cohabitation take place. Couple no. 1 was already sharing the same house with other flatmates when they were still students at the same university. Having affirmed their partnership, one of them moved into the other's room.
They were, however, separated for six years after graduation because of work commitments before having the opportunity to live together again.

On the other hand, couple no. 22 and couple no. 31 started living together almost immediately after the establishment of their partnerships. This is due to the fact that one of them was in need of accommodation as he was in search of a job in the city where his partner then lived. In these cases, practical reasons and convenience proved to be the prominent factor leading to their immediate cohabitation.

Living together immediately after the establishment of the partnership appears to be the exception rather than the rule for the majority of these couples. Cohabitation only became a reality between three months and five years after they had established their partnerships. Three main reasons are responsible for this scenario. First, work commitment in different areas. Couples in this situation who are not too geographically distant from each other had the tendency to see each other as frequently as possible. However, there came a saturation point when both felt that such an arrangement was exceedingly inconvenient. Cohabitation then became a more desirable option. For couples who lived far apart, strenuous effort was made to relocate one or both of their jobs in order to make cohabitation a reality.

Second, the need to conceal their partnerships took some couples some time to eventually live together although the intention was there at the initial stage of the partnerships. This is the experience of couple no. 6, with respondent no. 6A being a priest of the Church of England. Although they had always wanted to cohabit, it took them one-and-a-half years before their intention materialised when respondent no. 6B had to move in to take care of his partner who had had a back operation. Practical need then overrode discretion, as respondent no. 6B states:

"I mean we actually talked about not living together because of the flat belonging to the Church and it is just around the corner. The potential difficulties with parishioners was too worrying. But at the end of the day (resp. no 6A)'s practical need overrode that."

The third reason for the delay in cohabitation is the couples' concern about the effects of cohabitation itself. Although living separately curtailed the amount of time they could spend together, the arrangement provided them with a greater sense of independence and freedom. The concern of losing these important elements of life compelled them to delay cohabitation before the decision was finally taken. This concern for distance regulation is encapsulated in the following comment:
"Obviously I thought I was giving up a lot of my independence by living together. Although we spent every night with each other, I still have that sense that I was as committed while I still have my own place. I could say, 'Well, actually I have got someone to stay over the weekend. I'll see you on Monday. If we were living in the same house, it would be more difficult to do.' (Resp. no. 2B)

Respondent no. 2B and his partner took five years before eventually deciding to cohabit. Their situation shares some similarity with that of couple no. 10 who took three years before deciding on cohabitation. Respondent no. 10A asserts that, "I was doubtful about my ability to live with someone at an intimate level." However, in most cases, the couples took less than a year to finalise their cohabitation.

At the extreme, two couples had to delay cohabitation for 15 years, and the other 21 years. These couples lived separately for a long time principally due to their work commitments at different places. For couple no. 18, cohabitation only became a reality 15 years later when respondent no. 18B left the Royal Navy and returned to the town where his partner lived. Owing to respondent no. 18B's profession, their partnership was completely concealed. In the case of the couple no. 4 who lived separately for 21 years, cohabitation only materialised when both of them retired and one moved to join the other.

The majority of the cohabiting couples consider their cohabitation the outcome of an equal decision. Only four couples view their cohabitation as initiated by one partner, although in all these cases, mutual agreement was sought before the moving in.

The analysis of decision-making in cohabitation reveals an interesting point about gay male partnerships. Firstly, while it would be generally considered undesirable for heterosexual married couples to live separately, gay couples have the flexibility to do so due to the lack of institutional pressure. This lack of institutional pressure emanates from the lack of social acceptance of gay partnerships in the very first place. Alongside this lack of social support and pressure comes the abundance of freedom and flexibility which these gay couples exercise to decide on their living arrangement as their partnerships evolve.

Cohabitation, therefore, should not be assumed to be a symbol of commitment, and non-cohabitation a lack of it. Gay couples might deliberately choose to live separately without being less committed to each other in comparison to their cohabiting counterparts. In fact, the survival of the partnerships of the three couples above who were separated for 15 and 21 years respectively lends credence to the fact that mutual commitment need not be compromised by prolonged non-cohabitation.
Decision-making and Location of Residence

This sub-section analyses the decision-making process with regards to the location of the residence of the 46 cohabiting couples (92 individual respondents) in the entire sample. However, the following three categories of respondents, totalling 46, will be excluded from the analysis:

(a) 14 individual respondents say they decided on the location of the residence before their partnerships began. Their partners then moved into their homes at a certain point of time.

(b) 12 individual respondents report that they moved into their partners' homes at a certain stage of their partnerships. The location of residence was therefore the choice of their partners before the partnerships began.

(c) 20 individual respondents who are priest and/or their partners are clergy. In their cases, accommodation is tied into their profession which precludes their choice of location.

With the remaining 46 respondents, 42 (91.3%) regard their choice of the location of their residences as a joint decision. Only 4 (8.7%) consider the choice as an outcome of a unilateral decision of either their own or that of their partners. Table 4.2 presents the major reasons of the choice of a particular location. Most of the 46 respondents in this sub-category provide more than one reason, with a maximum of three.

Table 4.2 : Determining Factors in the Choice of Location of Residence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>No. of Responses</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practical Factors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Location (quietness, open land; near city centre i.e. mainly London; near family and friends)</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>34.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Convenient to workplace (public transport; near to drive)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>26.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Physical appeal of residence (size, garden, Victorian)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Financially affordable</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Factor Related to Religion

Location: near church 3 3.3

Factors Related to Sexuality

1. Location: near gay community (London, Brighton) 2 2.2
2. Previous owner is gay 1 1.1
3. Deliberately choose a 'heterosexual' area to make a statement about gay partnership 1 1.1

Other

House big enough to provide personal space 1 1.1

N= 91 N= 100.0

Table 4.2 shows that in determining the location of their residences, practical factors such as physical location and environment, convenience to workplace, physical appeal of the residence and financial consideration take precedence over factors related to their religion and sexuality.

4.3. Non-Cohabiting Couples

In the entire sample, 22 couples are non-cohabiting. 20 of them have been living separately since the beginning of their partnerships, while the other two couples opt for non-cohabitation at a certain point of their partnerships. The following sub-section examines their reasons for non-cohabitation.

Reasons for Non-Cohabitation

Partners do, on some occasions, give different reasons for their non-cohabitation. Of the 20 couples who have been living separately since the beginning of their partnerships, only two of them report non-cohabitation as a matter of choice in order to give each other as much space and independence as possible. Non-cohabitation, in these cases, is a strategy of space regulation and boundary maintenance. This is expressed below:

"I think I have a fear of being always absorbed into an establishment if I moved in here (his partner's house which is larger). You know, my flat would fit in this room or that room. So my possessions and everything sort of vanish into the woodwork. It would be a little bit like a take-over, even though that it will be entirely voluntary. And again on the pragmatic front, we have found that this works, that living apart hasn't
ever really been a problem. We haven't lived in each other's pocket really
since we left the university. We have always been apart...... So living
apart works, particularly not to start forcing the pace. (Resp. no. 48A)

Very few of these couples live separately in order to maintain personal independence.
In this category, 18 couples live separately not as a result of circumstances beyond their control.
Five reasons can be identified in this connection:

(a) Their occupations require them to be at different parts of the country. Living
together proves to be an impractical arrangement. 15 (41.7%) out of the 36 respondents cite this
as the major reasons of their living apart.

(b) Cohabitation is an impossibility because either one or both partners are
heterosexually married. Eight respondents cite this as the reason for their non-cohabitation.
For seven of them, their partnerships are completely concealed from their spouses concerned.
Cohabitation is therefore not a viable option. However, in one case, a respondent has a partner
whose wife knows about their partnership but raises no objection to it. Living separately in this
case is a joint decision of all the three parties involved. It appears to be the most convenient
and favourable arrangement for them.

(c) Seven respondents attribute their non-cohabitation to their own or their partners' pastorial profession. In these cases, accommodation is provided by the churches. Insofar as their partnerships are concealed, the need to exercise discretion is of paramount importance. Non-cohabitation is therefore appears to be the only viable option.

(d) Five respondents are currently living with their own family members such as parents. In order to exercise discretion, they also opt for non-cohabitation.

(e) One respondent cites the lack of space in his own home to accommodate his partner as the reason for their non-cohabitation. If his partner moved in with him, there will not be sufficient physical and psychological space for them to operate.

As mentioned, two couples began their partnerships by living together. One couple in a
five-year old partnership had to opt for non-cohabitation after living together for four years.
This took place when one partner, having been ordained as a priest in a different area of
Greater London, had to live at the accommodation provided by his parish church. In order not
to complicate his newly-found profession, they decided it was wise not to live together although they are both in Greater London. In this case, non-cohabitation is a strategy of controlling social information about their partnership.
The other couple are in an interesting situation. They are in an eight-year-old partnership which started with cohabitation. However, after two years they decided that they ought to live separately. They therefore moved to two adjacent houses in order to be near each other and yet have separate space. Their comments are as follow:

"At first we shared a house and then moved to adjoining terraced houses. We like to have a certain independence from each other." (Resp. no. 60A; Questionnaire data)

"I wanted my own ‘space’ and to determine the decor and be in control of who comes to the house. I am a lover of privacy. We used to row more when we lived together." (Resp. no. 60B; Questionnaire data)

Their comments suggest that their decision to live separately is primarily due to their desire for more physical and psychological space so as to reduce the potential of conflict between them. Living apart, in this case, is a strategy of conflict management. Although this couple is an exception rather than the rule, their experience attests to the fact that a gay partnership has a high in-built flexibility in modifying its constitutional arrangement to enhance its quality.

**Decision-making In Non-cohabitation**

Having explored the factors leading to non-cohabitation for these 22 couples in the entire sample, I now examine the decision-making behind the arrangement. In response to the question of who decides the living arrangement, both partners of 13 couples give the same responses while the partners of the other 9 couples view the decision-making differently. It would be more accurate therefore to consider the individual responses. Table 4.3 indicates the process:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mutual decision between partners</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>47.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutual decision between partners and one partner's spouse</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Force of circumstances (work or studies)</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>31.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent's or partner's decision</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing cases</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N= 44 N= 100.0
As indicated in Table 4.3, some 21 respondents (47.7%) perceive their non-cohabitation as a joint decision. Even in the case of the couple in which one of the partners is married, non-cohabitation is also a joint decision between both the partners and the wife concerned. Only 5 respondents (11.5%) view their non-cohabitation as an outcome of a unilateral decision. 14 respondents (31.8%) indicate that their non-cohabitation is due to the force of circumstances and not a conscious decision on their part. If this category and the missing cases are eliminated, the percentage of respondents who view their non-cohabitation as a mutual decision (in two cases the wife of a partner is involved) rises to 82.1%, against 17.9% who consider their non-cohabitation a unilateral decision.

The circumstances that 14 respondents view as responsible for their non-cohabitation are: (1) their separation because of work or studies, (2) one or both partners are priests and (3) one partner lives with spouses or other family members. In the last two cases, discretion needs to be exercised.

**Frequency of Meeting**

This sub-section examines the frequency that these 22 non-cohabiting meet on a monthly basis:

**Table 4.4: Frequency of Meetings in An Average Month**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of Meeting</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 to 5 days</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 to 10 days</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 to 15 days</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 to 20 days</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 to 25 days</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 25 days</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N= 44  N= 100.0

Table 4.4 indicates that a quarter of the respondents view that their frequency of meeting with their partners is lower than every weekend. However, the average frequency of their meeting on a monthly basis is 14 days, which is more than the combination of the weekends in a month.
In terms of places of meeting, except in the case of a couple who primarily meet at their cottage away from both their homes, the others meet at either one or both of the partners' homes. This pattern is primarily determined by a myriad of practical reasons.

However, in the case of couples who meet only at one of the partners' homes, discretion appears to be the greatest determining factor. For instance, in the case of a couple whereby one partner is a priest. There is a great possibility that the couple would prefer to meet at the non-clergy partner's home in view of the safer environment it offers. Likewise, for a respondent who lives with his family members who do not know about the partnership, it is understandable that he would meet his partner at his partner's place. In these cases, the control of social information about their partnership is the determining factor in their place of meeting.

In terms of decision-making about the meeting arrangement, 38 respondents (86.4%) consider it a joint decision. Only 6 respondents view the pattern as an outcome of a unilateral decision.

Summary

The 22 non-cohabiting couples cite a number of practical reasons responsible for their living arrangement. While 16 (36.4%) respondents cite reasons such as work commitments at different places and the lack of space in the present accommodation, 13 (29.5%) respondents mention that discretion needed to be exercised as they are either heterosexually married or living with their family members such as parents. Only 6 (13.6%) cite the maintenance of independence as the primary reason for non-cohabitation. The other 9 (20.5%) respondents consider their own or their partners' pastoral profession in the church as the hindrance to their intention of cohabitation.

Data have also revealed that the majority of the respondents in this study consider their partnerships egalitarian in terms of the decision-making in their non-cohabitation and also their frequency and pattern of meeting.

4.4. Domestic Division of Labour

This section examines the domestic division of labour between partners. Only cohabiting couples are analysed in this case. Preliminary analysis reveals that non-cohabiting couples, due to their occasional meetings, tend not to be bogged down by the burden of household chores when they meet. Many chores such as ironing, doing grocery shopping and doing the
laundry are done independently. Some respondents also expressed their difficulty in assessing the sharing of household chores due to its rarity.

However, regardless of the eventual arrangements, 29 out of the 44 respondents (65.9%) in non-cohabiting partnerships report that they are the outcome of a joint decision. Only three (6.8%) report that they have never discussed what form the arrangement should take. The established arrangement is an outcome of gradual development. Twelve respondents (27.3%), on the other hand, consider the arrangement as an outcome of unilateral decision either on their part or that of their partners.

Of the 46 cohabiting couples, 14 of them employ domestic help. Table 4.5 indicates the respondent's views on the pattern of the division of labour between the domestic help, the respondent, and his partner.

Table 4.5: Domestic Division of Labour With Domestic Help (Individual Responses, N=28)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chore</th>
<th>Done by Domestic Help</th>
<th>Done by Respondent</th>
<th>Done by Partner</th>
<th>Equally Shared Between Respondent and Partner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doing grocery shopping</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>7 (25.0%)</td>
<td>8 (28.6%)</td>
<td>13 (46.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaning the house</td>
<td>26 (92.8%)</td>
<td>1 (3.6%)</td>
<td>1 (3.6%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gardening **</td>
<td>2 (7.7%)</td>
<td>9 (34.6%)</td>
<td>12 (46.2%)</td>
<td>3 (11.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paying the bills</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>9 (32.1%)</td>
<td>8 (28.6%)</td>
<td>11 (39.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>8 (28.6%)</td>
<td>8 (28.6%)</td>
<td>12 (42.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washing the dishes</td>
<td>2 (7.1%)</td>
<td>6 (21.6%)</td>
<td>4 (14.2%)</td>
<td>16 (57.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing the laundry</td>
<td>3 (10.8%)</td>
<td>9 (32.1%)</td>
<td>7 (25.0%)</td>
<td>9 (32.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ironing</td>
<td>5 (17.9%)</td>
<td>9 (32.1%)</td>
<td>9 (32.1%)</td>
<td>5 (17.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repairing things around the house</td>
<td>2 (6.8%)</td>
<td>6 (21.6%)</td>
<td>6 (21.6%)</td>
<td>14 (50.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Gardening is not applicable to one couple. The total responses is therefore 26.
Table 4.5 reveals that cleaning the house is monopolised by the domestic help. 92.8% of the respondents report that this chore is mainly done by the domestic help. As far as the other household chores are concerned, except for gardening and ironing, other chores are primarily perceived by the respondents as being shared equally by both partners.

As mentioned, 32 of the 46 cohabiting couples are without domestic help. Household chores are therefore done either by the respondent mainly, the partner mainly or shared equally between them. Table 4.6 summarises this.

Table 4.6: Domestic Division of Labour Without Domestic Help (Individual Responses, N=64)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chore</th>
<th>Chores mainly done by respondent</th>
<th>Chores mainly done by partner</th>
<th>Chores mainly equally shared between respondent and partner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doing grocery shopping</td>
<td>15 (23.4%)</td>
<td>10 (15.7%)</td>
<td>39 (60.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaning the house</td>
<td>12 (18.8%)</td>
<td>14 (21.8%)</td>
<td>38 (59.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gardening **</td>
<td>13 (30.9%)</td>
<td>13 (30.9%)</td>
<td>16 (38.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paying the bills</td>
<td>21 (32.8%)</td>
<td>18 (28.1%)</td>
<td>25 (39.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking</td>
<td>20 (31.3%)</td>
<td>21 (32.8%)</td>
<td>23 (35.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washing the dishes</td>
<td>16 (25.0%)</td>
<td>10 (15.6%)</td>
<td>38 (59.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing the laundry</td>
<td>17 (26.6%)</td>
<td>12 (18.7%)</td>
<td>35 (54.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ironing</td>
<td>19 (29.7%)</td>
<td>19 (29.7%)</td>
<td>26 (40.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repairing things around the house</td>
<td>21 (32.8%)</td>
<td>16 (25.0%)</td>
<td>27 (42.2%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Only applicable to 21 couples. The total response is therefore 42.

Respondents in partnerships without domestic help invariably perceive their domestic division of labour as primary shared equally between the partners. Most respondents view each chore as being equally shared by both partners. The percentage rises as high as 60.9% for doing grocery shopping and 59.4% respective for cleaning the house and doing the laundry.
Who decides such a by and large egalitarian arrangement of domestic division of labour? Of all the 92 individual respondents who are in cohabiting partnerships, 66 (71.7%) report that the arrangement reflects a mutual decision. Five respondents (5.4%) report that the arrangement is a gradual development and not out of any conscious decision-making. 21 (22.9%) consider that either they or their partners have a greater say in determining the pattern.

The majority of couples demonstrate either the 'equality pattern' or the 'specialisation pattern' (Kurdek 1993:130) in terms of domestic division of labour. While some partners are equally likely to do the tasks, some partners specialise on the basis of each other's strengths, skills, interests and work schedules. This is illustrated in the following responses:

"It is a natural evolution. It just happened. We just assumed that it would be half and half...... There is something that he is naturally more talented. I am better at the maintenance of the house, so I will do the washing up, ironing, cleaning and whatever. And he will tend to do major projects like decorating, although both of us will do a bit. But he will decorate in a big way and I will help. He is more a project person.... It's a practical arrangement." (Resp. no. 16A)

"At the beginning when we set up our home together, there were just things that (resp. no. 8B) would naturally do and that would be things I would naturally do. I suppose I was more into the housework side anyway, I would do it naturally. At that time, (resp. no. 8B) was building up a garden. But if (resp. no. 8B) was in the house and I was at work, he would do the things that we take for granted. If the dishes need washing, so he would just get on and do it. Basically it was just divided equally. If a job needs doing, whoever is available would do it unless it comes to more specific things like the garden which he genuinely takes an interest and he wants to do it himself." (Resp. no. 8A)

Whatever the eventual patterns, most partners go through a period of trial-and-error until a particular routine is established. In the process, a partner might learn new skills or unlearn previous ones to create a sense of egalitarianism (McWhirter and Mattison 1984). It can therefore be concluded that to the majority of the couples, the pattern of the domestic division of labour is not an outcome of the assumption of taken-for-granted gender roles as found in most heterosexual married couples. On the contrary, it is an outcome of gradual development or an egalitarian decision-making (Peplau 1981; Kurdek 1993).

4.5. Domestic Leisure Activities

Each respondent was asked to name three favourite domestic leisure activities and specify the amount of time spent on them on a weekly basis. In total, a list of over 20 activities was constructed.

While naming the activities is fairly easy, quantifying the amount of time spent is not for some respondents. In this case, the average amount of time is obtained by dividing the total
number of hours with the number of respondents who name a particular activity and are able to quantify the amount of time spent. Only the five most popular activities and the number of hours per week are highlighted below:

Table 4.7: Five Favourite Domestic Leisure Activities and the Amount of Time Spent Per Week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domestic Leisure Activity</th>
<th>No. of Responses</th>
<th>No. of Hours Per Week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Watching television and/or video</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>9.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to or playing music</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>5.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertaining friends</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>5.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having conversation with each other</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>11.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking and eating together</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>6.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.7 reveals that, 112 individual respondents (82.4%) consider watching the television and/or video is one of the three favourite domestic leisure activities. Four of the five most popular domestic leisure activities are pursued without the participation of a third party. This is most probably due to the lack of leisure time reported by most respondents. They therefore prefer to spend the limited amount of time with each other to consolidate the partnership.

Some 50 respondents (36.8%) consider entertaining friends as one of the three most favourite domestic leisure activities and 5.81 hours are spent on it on a weekly basis. Entertaining friends is an important activity as gay couples can use it as a means to gain intrapersonal support for their partnership and to provide such support to others in the same situation. Entertaining friends at home is also a ‘safe’ activity compared to, for instance, participating in the gay scene that might risk the exposure of one’s sexuality.

In terms of decision-making in determining the pattern of domestic leisure activity, 112 respondents (82.4%) consider the pattern an outcome of mutual consultation. Only 24 (17.6%) view the pattern as an outcome of a unilateral decision on either part of the partners.

4.6. Non-domestic Leisure Activities

Similar to the above sub-section, respondents were asked to identify three favourite non-domestic activities, on a monthly basis instead of weekly. This is because these non-domestic leisure activities are not pursued as frequently as domestic leisure activities.
activities were identified by the respondents as the three favourite activities. Table 4.8 presents six favourite activities.

Table 4.8: Non-domestic Leisure Activities and The Amount of Time Spent Per Month

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-domestic leisure activity</th>
<th>No. of Responses</th>
<th>No. of Hours per Month</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Going to theatre/cinema</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>11.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting gay friends</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>9.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in church activities ***</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>11.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting straight friends/ family members</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>11.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in gay scene</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>11.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in gay Christian groups</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** Excluding priest's work routines

Going to the cinema/theatre emerges to be the favourite non-domestic activity among the respondents. 88 (64.7%) of the respondents name it as one of the three favourite activities. Following this is visiting gay friends, some 76 (55.9%) of the respondents consider this as one of the three favourite activities. This is an important activity to gay people as they can mutually provide support for one another.

In terms of activities related to their religious beliefs, some 58 (42.6%) respondents consider participating in church activities as one of the three favourite activities. This percentage is high, despite the lack of acceptance in the Church in general. As I will elaborate in Chapter Seven, most of the 30 interviewed couples participate in church activities with varying degrees of activeness.

Surprisingly, only 22 (16.2%) respondents consider participating in gay Christian groups as one of the favourite activities. A gay Christian group can offer the respondent the opportunity to express his sexuality and religious faith comfortably. The low participation can be a result of a myriad of factors such as the availability of such groups, the respondent's lack of interest due to his needs being met within the partnership and the fear of exposure. This point will be elaborated in Chapter Eight.
Only 28 (20.9%) respondents consider participating in the gay scene (pub, club, sauna etc.) as one of the favourite activities. I will discuss in Chapter Eight the respondent's low degree of participation in the gay scene.

Like the decision-making process for the pattern of domestic leisure activities, the non-domestic leisure activities pattern appears to be the outcome of mutual decision on the parts of both partners. Some 109 respondents (80.2%) view it as such while 27 (19.8%) consider the pattern an outcome of unilateral decision on the part of either one of the partners. Like the pattern for domestic leisure activities, the decision-making process in this particular area is to the majority an egalitarian one.

Summary

In terms of the decision-making for domestic and non-domestic leisure activities, more than 80% of the individual respondents report that the patterns are determined by both partners and not one of them unilaterally. This further demonstrates that the majority of gay couples uphold and practise an egalitarian process of decision-making.

4.7. Conclusions

An overwhelming majority of respondents perceive their partnerships as egalitarian in general decision-making, despite the existence of potentials for inequitable within the partnerships such as age difference. Mutual commitment to egalitarianism is cited as the primary factor for this scenario.

This perception of egalitarianism is confirmed and the commitment to it practised in the majority of the partnerships. Egalitarianism characterises the decision-making processes in various specific areas examined, *inter alia*, living arrangement, domestic division of labour and domestic and non-domestic leisure activity.

The majority of these partnerships fulfil the criteria of what Berzon (1989:123) calls the "partnership of parity", with emphasis on each partner's democratic rights, effective negotiation and equality. A partnership of this nature also fosters role exchangeability instead of role complementarity which perpetuates the dominant-subordinate dichotomy in intimate relationships.
In the next chapter, I further examine the internal dimension of partnerships by focusing on the importance the respondents place on various relationship value items. I will also consider the issue of personal space maintenance within the partnership. Concepts such as 'boundary maintenance' and 'space regulation' within the partnership will be further elaborated.
Chapter Five

RELATIONSHIP VALUES AND PERSONAL SPACE

The main theme of this Chapter revolves around the importance the respondents place on five relationship value items. These items are: 'companionship', 'sense of security', 'sex', 'room for personal development' and 'independence'. I relate the importance of these items to the respondent’s age, length of the partnership and living arrangement. I argue that the balancing of emotional intimacy and personal autonomy can be achieved within the context of a partnership. Partners engage in a process of constant negotiation to ensure its workability.

5.1. Relationship Values

What are the important characteristics that gay men wish to cultivate in a partnership? This section examines the importance that the respondents place on five relationship value items: 'companionship', 'sense of security', 'sex', 'room for personal development' (space for personal growth and the pursuit of individual interests) and 'independence' (ability to function as an equal partner). Respondents were asked in the questionnaire to rank these items in order of importance.

Chart 5.1 indicates that these items follows this order of importance: (1) 'companionship'; (2) 'sense of security'; (3) 'sex'; (4) 'room for personal development'; and (5) 'independence'. The percentage of respondents who accord the two highest rankings decreases steadily from 97.1 to 56.7, 20.6, 18.4 and 7.3 in accordance with this order of importance. Conversely, the percentage of respondents who accord the two lowest rankings increases from 1.4 to 24.2, 33.1, 58.1 and 83.1, following the same order.
Chart 5.1: Percentage of Respondents Who Accord the Two Highest and The Two Lowest Rankings
It can be concluded based on these data that the majority of the respondents consider companionship and a sense of security more important than sex. This shows that they are capable of emotional intimacy, contrasting the stereotype that gay men are generally only interested in sexual promiscuity. This also confirms the findings of many studies that gay men are capable of forming partnerships characterised by mutual affection and companionship (e.g. Westmoreland 1975; Bell and Weinberg 1978; Jones and Bates 1978; Ramsey et al. 1978; Peplau et al. 1978; Peplau and Cochran 1980, 1981; Silverstein 1981; Jones and De Cecco 1982).

It can also be concluded that the respondents are in general not too concerned about personal autonomy, reflected in their rankings of the two items 'room for personal development' and 'independence'. I would contend that this is primarily because they are already in a partnership. Since companionship and a sense of security are the important elements that a partnership offers, it is understandable that they place less importance on 'room for personal development' and 'independence'. Otherwise, they would not have chosen to be in a partnership. Their leaning towards emotional intimacy over personal autonomy is therefore expected. The comparison between cohabiting and non-cohabiting couples in this connection will be discussed later.

Three speculations can also be made in relation to the respondents placing greater importance on the emotional intimacy items ('companionship' and 'sense of security') over the personal autonomy items ('room for personal development' and 'independence'). First, since all the respondents are Christian, I speculate that the Christian beliefs that emphasise companionship and faithfulness in intimate relationships might affect the way the respondents rank the relationship value items. Their Christian background might result in their emphasising emotional intimacy over personal autonomy.

Second, age could be a strong determining factor for the overwhelming emphasis on 'companionship' and 'sense of security'. As Table 3.1 indicates, some 116 (85.3%) respondents are above the age of 30. The mean age of this sample is an uncharacteristic 43.4. They are generally in the category of those who have 'played the field' and subsequently decided to 'settle down' in a partnership which offers companionship and a sense of security. In other words, the majority of the respondents are in the stage of home-making.

If more of the respondents were under 30, I speculate that the importance placed on 'companionship' and 'sense of security' might be lower. In other words, if the respondents were generally younger, still at the stage of excitement-seeking, they would be more inclined to place greater importance on 'independence' and 'room for personal development' which might offer them more freedom and opportunity for casual sex.
Third, I speculate that the length of partnership also has an effect in this connection. As Table 3.7 shows, 130 (72.0%) of the respondents are in partnerships whose length exceeds three years. The mean length of partnership is 9 years and 5 months. This shows that for most respondents, they are quite settled in their partnerships and have established a routine lifestyle. It is therefore not surprising that they, having been in partnership for this length, place greater importance on those relationship value items that have helped them established the partnerships. This, however, does not imply that the respondents do not consider personal autonomy important at all. As I will discuss in Section 5.2., the majority of the interviewed sub-sample considers the existence of personal space within the framework of a partnership crucially important.

The next two sub-sections explore the possible effect of age and length of partnership on the ranking of the relationship value items.

Age and Relationship Values

This sub-section assesses the possible relationship between the ranking of relationship value items and the respondents' age. The respondents are divided into five age groups for this purpose: 16 to 30 (this broad interval is due to the small number of respondents under 30, refer Table 3.1); 31 to 40; 41 to 50; 51 to 60; and above 60.

Chart 5.2 indicates that for age groups 16-30 and 41-50, the importance the respondents place on the items follows the same order that Chart 5.1 has shown. For instance, for respondents in the 41-50 age groups, the percentage of respondents who accord the two highest rankings decreases from 97.2 to 61.8, 26.5, 14.7 and 0 according to that order.

However, the ranking of the items does not follow the same order of importance for the other three age groups. In the case of the 51-60 age groups, for instance, the position for 'room for personal development' and 'sex' is reversed.

On the whole, it can be observed that the importance placed on 'companionship' and 'sense of security' is substantially greater than that placed on the other three items. The greatest importance is accorded to 'companionship'. Chart 5.2 shows that more than 95% of the respondents in each age group accord the two highest rankings to this item. For respondents above 50, the percentage reaches 100%.
Chart 5.2: Percentage of Respondents Who Accord the Two Highest Rankings, by Age
In terms of the relationship between age and the ranking, it is observed that the older the respondent, the more likely he is to accord the item 'companionship' the two highest rankings. The percentage in this connection increases from 95.0 to 95.7, 97.2 and stays at 100.0 for the last two age groups. The increase of importance placed on 'companionship' as age increases is understandable. As the respondent gets older, his 'marketability' in the gay scene and opportunity to establish a partnership decrease. The desire to be in a stable partnership for companionship is therefore greater.

This trend, however, is not followed by the ranking of 'sense of security'. On the other hand, it is also shown that the importance placed on 'room for personal development' and 'independence' does not decrease with age. Except in the case of 'companionship', these findings have disconfirmed my speculation that the importance placed on the 'emotional intimacy' items increases and the 'personal autonomy' items decreases in relation to age.

Length of Partnership and Relationship Values

As I have done in the above sub-section, I now analyse the importance placed on the relationship value items in relation to the length of partnership. In this case, the respondents are divided into six categories as shown in Chart 5.3.

Chart 5.3. indicates that three of the categories ('1 year and up to 3 years', 'More than 5 years and up to 10 years' and 'More than 10 years and up to 15 years') rank the items according to the same order of importance shown in Chart 5.1. This order is: (1) 'companionship'; (2) 'sense of security'; (3) 'sex'; (4) room for personal development'; and (5) 'independence'.

Similar to the trend observed in the above sub-section, Chart 5.3 shows that a high proportion of respondents accord the two highest rankings to the item 'companionship' regardless of the length of partnership. At least 94% of respondents in all categories accord this item the two highest rankings. 100% of those who have been in a partnership for more than ten years do so.

The analysis of each individual item also reveals that a positive relationship can be established to a great extent between the length of partnership and the importance placed on 'sense of security'. Although the percentage of respondents who give this item the two highest rankings stay at 50% for the first two categories, it increases to 53.8, 56.6, 70.0 and 83.3 as the length increases. In other words, it can be concluded that for respondents who have been in a partnership longer than 5 years, the greater the length of the partnership the greater the importance is placed on 'sense of security'.
Chart 5.3: Percentage of Respondents Who Accord the Two Highest Rankings, by Length of Partnership

Relationship Value Item

- > 1 yr and up to 3 yrs (N=38)
- > 3 yrs and up to 5 yrs (N=18)
- > 5 yrs and up to 10 yrs (N=26)
- > 10 yrs and up to 15 yrs (N=22)
- > 15 yrs and up to 20 yrs (N=20)
- > 20 yrs (N=12)
This pattern is not repeated for other items. Therefore, my speculation that the longer the partnership, the greater the importance placed on 'companionship' and 'sense of security' is only partially confirmed.

Summary

Taking the entire sample together, a pattern can be established in terms of the importance placed on relationship value items. The pattern follows this order of importance: (1) 'companionship'; (2) 'sense of security'; (3) 'sex'; (4) 'room for personal development'; and (5) 'independence'. However, this order of importance is only confirmed partially when the age of respondents and the length of their partnerships are taken into consideration.

In comparing the individual items, it is also observed that regardless of age and length of partnership, the respondents place the greatest importance on 'companionship', followed by 'sense of security'. It is also observed that the older the respondent, the greater the importance placed on 'companionship'. This relationship, however, cannot be established in terms of length of partnership. Nevertheless, there is a tendency that beyond the five-year mark, the emphasis on 'sense of security' increases as the length of the partnership increases.

Personal Autonomy versus Emotional Intimacy

This sub-section examines the extent to which non-cohabiting couples demonstrate a higher emphasis on personal autonomy over emotional intimacy in comparison to their cohabiting counterparts. Two ways can be used to measure this.

First, the actual reasons for couples living separately. I have mentioned that only two of the 22 couples now living apart emphasise that they chose this living arrangement in order to maximise personal autonomy. The other 20 couples live apart for practical reasons primarily beyond their control. This denotes that for my sample, the emphasis on personal autonomy is rather low.

The second way of measuring this is to reorganise the same data presented in the above sub-sections. Personal autonomy is measured by the importance placed on 'room for personal development' and 'independence'. Emotional intimacy, on the other hand, is measured by 'companionship' and 'a sense of security'. This is to assess if respondents in cohabiting partnerships would place greater importance on the emotional intimacy items against the personal autonomy items. Respondents in non-cohabiting partnerships would be expected to demonstrate the opposite trend if they do place greater emphasis on personal autonomy, and use non-cohabitation as a means to achieve that.
Chart 5.4: Percentage of Respondents Who Accord the Two Highest Rankings, by Living Arrangement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship Value Item</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Companionship</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of Security</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Room for Personal Development</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Respondents in Cohabiting Partnerships (N=92)
- Respondents in Non-cohabiting Partnerships (N=44)
Chart 5.4 indicates that the percentage of non-cohabiting respondents according to the 'emotional intimacy' items the two highest rankings is actually higher than that of the cohabiting couples. For 'companionship', the percentage for non-cohabiting respondents is 97.7, while that of the cohabiting respondents is 96.7. Similarly, the percentage for 'sense of security' is 61.4 against 54.3. It can be concluded that more non-cohabiting respondents consider 'companionship' and 'sense of security' as the two most important elements in a partnership.

On the other hand, it can also be observed from Chart 5.4 that the percentage of non-cohabiting respondents who accord the 'personal autonomy' items the two highest rankings is lower than the percentage of cohabiting respondents in this connection. Only 9.1% of non-cohabiting respondents accord the two highest rankings to 'room for personal development' while the percentage for cohabiting respondents is a substantially higher 22.8%. For 'independence', the difference of percentages is smaller, 13.6 against 14.1.

It can therefore be concluded that, in comparison to their cohabiting counterparts, non-cohabiting couples place greater importance on emotional intimacy and less importance on personal autonomy. This conclusion contrasts with the following claim:

"Cohabiting couples may expect a greater degree of sharing of feelings and expression of affection while noncohabiting ones may be satisfied with a lower degree of emotional commitment on the part of their partners, and may expect principally sexual rewards and friendship."

(Harry 1984: 80-82)

The above claim is problematic because it does not take into consideration the different reasons for cohabitation. It assumes that non-cohabiting couples choose to live apart to maintain personal autonomy even that means a lower degree of emotional intimacy. This is certainly not the case for the 22 non-cohabiting couples in the sample.

I have mentioned that only two of these couples consciously opt for this living arrangement to preserve personal autonomy. The other 20 couples are not living together against their will due to practical reasons such as separate work commitments and the need to exercise discretion because of their sexuality. This is particularly true in the case of gay clergy. It might be the desire of these couples to cohabit which might be perceived to offer more emotional intimacy due to closer proximity and the very fact that they are sharing a household. As they do actually prefer cohabitation, they therefore long for a greater degree of 'emotional intimacy' which their non-cohabitation might not sufficiently supply.

As a result, the tendency to consider 'emotional intimacy' as an important element of a partnership is great. It is therefore not surprising that they place such great importance on emotional intimacy over personal autonomy. Also, since all the non-cohabiting respondents are
already in partnerships of at least one year duration, 'personal autonomy' is what they aim to achieve within the context of the partnership rather than outside it, otherwise they would not have opted for a partnership. This explains why to them 'personal autonomy' is less important compared to 'emotional intimacy'.

On the other hand, those who live together might long for more personal autonomy as living together does take away a substantial amount of personal space if not handled carefully. Having had the constant supply of emotional intimacy, cohabiting couples might long for more personal autonomy. Cohabitation involves a greater need for space regulation and boundary maintenance. This issue will be discussed in the following section.

5.2. Personal Space In Partnership

This section explores the importance of personal space in the interpersonal relationship between the partners. Data are collected from the individual interviews. Personal space is crucial in order to avoid excessive fusion of the partners. Partners maintain boundary and regulate space within the partnership to prevent their own individuality from being subsumed into the partnership. The following response provides an accurate definition:

"You should have your own personal time, things you are able to delve into which are your time and space. There are things that you can go off and do which is your time and space and you do things that you like doing and your partner goes to do other things that he enjoys doing. And there are times you come together and share those things as well. But in order to be a complete and happy relationship, it's important that you have various interests that maybe your partner doesn't share but nevertheless respects and encourages you to do. This is not to say to have a totally private separate life, but there are other stimuli and interests in your life." (Resp. no. 12A)

Section 5.1. reveals that regardless of their living arrangements, my sample demonstrates almost the same degree of importance on relationship values that represent emotional intimacy over those that represent personal autonomy. This, however, does not mean that they do not acknowledge the need to create space within the context of the partnership to which each partner can retreat.

Some respondents use the development of friendships without the involvement of their partners as means to regulate space within their partnerships. However, many couples admit that because of heavy work commitments for both partners, the leisure time available is preferred to be spent together. It can therefore be speculated that if a couple has very little leisure time, they would tend to spend it together as much as possible. If the amount of leisure time is perceived to be sufficient for themselves, then the couple is more likely to divert their
interests outside the partnership. Like all other areas of their partnership, this involves a process of negotiation and re-negotiation depending on circumstantial expediency.

This is particularly true for non-cohabiting couples. The fact that they live separately gives them more time than their cohabiting counterparts to be on their own. Therefore, when there is leisure time, it is expected that they would prefer to spend all the time with each other. For cohabiting couples, however, the need to consciously create the space is crucial, as their living arrangement allows them more time together.

Nevertheless, there are special cases. For couple no. 8 who live together, the fact that one of them works on shifts substantially curtails their time together. Therefore, when there is leisure time, they prefer to spend it together rather than apart. This is illustrated below:

"Sometimes I would like it (personal space) because I think it is an outlet. But I am not prepared to spend X amount of hours out with other people when I am not really spending enough time with (resp. no. 8B) because of our work patterns...... I think I have got personal space anyway. Because of the nature of our work and shifts, I spend a lot of time on my own and so does he. So I think compared with two people who were doing a nine-to-five job, spending time in the house every evening and every weekend. I think we have got that space." (Resp. no. 8A)

One respondent is particularly uninterested in developing personal space for due to his personal attitude. He is one of the few respondents who characterises his partnership with an inegalitarian decision-making, owing to his personal preference. He states:

"No. I don't think I can do things on my own. That would feel churlish... to do something like that. Yes very occasionally I go to the cinema if he is working. But I feel guilty about it. Why am I at the cinema watching this film? I should be at home waiting for him to come home. It gets to me like that." (Resp. no. 19A)

In sum, a peculiar work pattern can by nature generate some personal space without the conscious effort of the coupe. Only one respondent reports that he does not desire any personal space. The following sub-section explores why having personal space is of paramount importance to most respondents.

Importance of Personal Space

An overwhelming majority of the respondents report that creating personal space is one of the most important elements to negotiate within the partnership. Three reasons are identified for this importance. First, individuality maintenance. This is argued below:

"It's a satisfactory relationship because it's a dynamic and active relationship, because it's growing, because it creates space for me to develop individually as well as with him. And I do the same for him.... What is important in any relationship is to enable the other partner to have the space to grow as an individual... to empower him to do that and
to create the environment for him to do that and just let them develop in terms of you. Allowing them to grow as individual people, I think that is what we have got at the moment. (Resp. no. 5A)

The above response stresses the link between individuality maintenance and relationship quality. It clearly illustrates that partners as individuals need to draw their boundary and regulate space between them in order that their respective individuality to prevent excessive fusion between partners. His view is supported by the following two:

"I don't cease being an individual just because I live with him. I mean the expression 'the other half' is quite silly. We remain in fact the whole. You aren't somebody's other half..... the space that they are allowed to develop in is vital." (Resp. no. 2A)

"I believe very strongly that individuals are individuals. My experience is that ultimately you can't rely on somebody else for your own life. When you come together, I don't believe all of you should be subsumed in the other person. I believe there is a meeting of lines that you don't lose your individuality. I think that's why the relationship can stay. I do some things with (resp. no. 17B). But equally it is important for me to see my friends on my own." (Resp. no. 17A)

The second reason is closely related to the first. Many hold the view that sufficient personal space is important for stultification prevention. As the following respondent who is in a sixteen-year-old cohabiting partnership argues, insufficient personal space can stultify the partnership and adversely affect its quality:

"Any couple who live with each other needs the time that they are themselves. That's essential. So I think every partnership should have space like this. And I think in a partnership where the partners are always together, I think it is pathetic and dull. So I think it stimulates, I think it creates space. You can tell each other about what you have done and various interests." (Resp. no. 3A)

The third reason for the importance of personal space is that it allows the external fulfilment of needs. Some respondents view that through establishing friendships outside the partnership, for instance, some of their needs that could not be met within the partnership are fulfilled:

"I think I see relationship as a secure base from which to develop personally. I think also, from experience, that it is important to have people that I can go and talk to about my feelings.... I can talk to (resp. no. 16B) but there are some areas which are a bit difficult and threatening for him like sexual attraction to other people.... Or just to talk about things which he is too closely involved to give clear help and advice. So he is getting angry about the way I think about the job, it may be more sensible for me to go to people I can talk to. They will give different sorts of angles." (Resp. no. 16A)

This view is interesting because there is the recognition that not all the partner's needs can be met within the partnership, and this is not perceived to be problematic for the partnership. This illustrates the practical expectations that many gay men bring into a partnership. Gay partnerships, with their flexibility, allow the partners constant boundary
negotiation and re-definition. It is therefore not considered unacceptable if some needs are met outside the partnerships. It is also not seen as an indication of partnership decline. This sense of pragmatism is expressed in the following comment:

"I think one of the most dangerous things in anything is when the two people say, 'Oh wow we are together!' If one of them dies or something, the other is totally adrift. It's awful. And I also think it blocks you as a person. The difference between an immature love and mature love is that mature love is two people who are both grown-ups, like two ships on the sea. And immature love is the one that says 'I have got you and now all my problems are solved.' That isn't true." (Resp. no. 181)

It can be concluded at this point that the majority of the respondents place great importance on the personal space maintenance for each partner to develop and be able to form friendships outside the partnership in order not to stultify the partnership. Although almost all the respondents emphasise emotional intimacy greatly, they also emphasise that personal space ought to be created within the context of an intimate relationship. This helps enhance the quality of the partnership.

5.3. Conclusions

The majority of the respondents place greater emphasis on companionship and a sense of security compared to sex, room for personal development and independence. This rank of importance applies to both cohabiting and non-cohabiting couples.

A particularly interesting observation is that the item 'room for personal development' is ranked the second lowest in relation to the other four relationship value items. I would argue that within this context, the majority of the couples consider items such as companionship and sense of partnership more important because they are the fundamental elements for the establishment of a partnership. However, this does not mean that 'room for personal development' is not essential on its own as a characteristic of a satisfying partnership.

In the individual interview, many respondents in cohabiting partnerships report the importance of personal space for various reasons. Personal space, to them, can be achieved within the context of an intimate relationship without compromising emotional intimacy. In fact, sufficient personal space can enhance a sense of companionship and on the whole quality of a partnership.

Emotional intimacy and personal autonomy can co-exist within a partnership. Both partners need to constantly negotiate the balance between the two. It is therefore inaccurate to assume that non-cohabiting couples place more importance on personal autonomy over
emotional intimacy. Their reasons for this living arrangement need to be examined. In the case of the non-cohabiting sub-sample, an overwhelming majority place greater importance on the latter. This is due to the fact that their non-cohabitation is principally an outcome of circumstances beyond their control.

Similarly, it is inaccurate to assume that cohabiting couples do not place importance on personal autonomy. The data have shown that although they place greater importance on emotional intimacy, they also greatly emphasise the necessity of personal space within the partnership. The balancing of emotional intimacy and personal autonomy clearly supports Baxter's (1993) conceptualisation of the internal dimension (connection versus autonomy) of the dialectic of integration and separation.

In the next chapter, I will further apply Baxter's (1993) typology of internal and external contradictions in personal relationship by examining the nature of conflicts experienced by the couples within and without their partnerships. I will also assess the couples' level of satisfaction and expectation of their partnerships.
Chapter Six

WAR AND PEACE: CONFLICT AND SATISFACTION IN PARTNERSHIP

This Chapter is divided into six main sections. In the first five, I analyse different types of partnerships in terms of the natures of the conflicts they experience. Baxter's (1993) typology of internal and external contradictions in personal relationships constitutes the framework of analysis. In the last section, I examine the couples' level of partnership satisfaction and their expectation of the longevity of their partnerships.

I argue that the level of partnership satisfaction depends more on the couple's response to the conflict rather than the presence of the conflict itself. The data for this Chapter are collected from the individual interviews.

6.1. Conflicts in Partnerships

This section examines the nature of conflicts experienced by the 30 interviewed couples. I also discuss the various management strategies they have developed in this connection. De Cecco and Shively (1978: 205) define conflict as "Special incidents that occurred between particular parties, at particular times and places, that aroused anger which moved one or both parties to action."

I am of the opinion that this definition is incomplete, as it assumes that all relational parties experiencing conflict would be prompted to some form of action. I would argue that since there is a multiplicity of factors involved in a conflictful situation, inaction is therefore as likely a response as action.

In this connection, Rusbult (1987: 214-215) argues that conflict might lead to decline in relationship. However, partners might respond differently to it. Some opt for "Voice" (active discussion leading to a constructive solution) or "Exit" (active discussion leading to dissolution). On the other hand, some respond with "Loyalty" (inaction leading to passive acceptance of status quo) or "Neglect" (inaction leading to relationship breakdown).
Duck (1981:53) differentiates "decline", "breakdown" and "dissolution" of relationship. Decline of relationship refers to the diminishing of intimacy or liking for partner or the relationship. Breakdown of relationship refers to the disruption or disturbance (sometimes unintentional) in the relationship. Dissolution of relationship, on the other hand, refers to the permanent dismemberment of relationship through negotiation or unilateral withdrawal.

Duck's (1981) view is useful, although he does not mention the restoration of relationship, which is possible after the relationship has experienced dissolution for a period of time. The partners' initial decision to terminate a relationship permanently does not rule out the possibility of restoration, as I will later discuss.

On the whole, a typology can be constructed based on the current states of the partnerships at the point of interview:

(a) Partnerships without identifiable major conflicts

(b) Partnerships with identifiable major conflicts not amounting to partnership dissolution

(c) Partnerships that have survived dissolution

(d) Partnerships facing the prospect of dissolution

The conflicts experienced by the couples are manifested in two dimensions: interpersonal and intrapersonal. In the interpersonal dimension, conflicts are experienced between both the partners as individuals within a partnership. In the intrapersonal dimension, conflicts exist in the relationship between the couple as a social unit and the wider social network within which their partnership is located.

Some conflicts that occur in one dimension can be transposed into the other. For instance, partners might experience conflict in the area of sexual exclusivity. In this case, conflict exists between them as a social unit in relation to a third party (the conflict of inclusion versus seclusion). However, their divergent views also make them two opposing relational parties. One might see sexual non-exclusivity as a sign of individual freedom while the other sees it as a threat to the primacy of the partnership. As two individuals, they now experience the connection-autonomy conflict. This point is discussed later, and in Chapter Ten when the issue of sexual exclusivity is extensively examined.
6.2. Partnerships Without Identifiable Major Conflicts

Thirteen couples report that their partnerships are characterised by the presence of occasional minor disagreements that do not amount to conflicts. The stability of the partnership is not threatened by these occasional disagreements. These couples identify five related factors that help defuse the potential of major conflicts: (1) duration of partnership; (2) mutual commitment to effective communication; (3) egalitarian decision-making; (4) caution against complacency; and (5) commitment to Christianity.

**Duration of Partnership**

Ten of these 13 couples have been in their partnerships between 5 and 33 years. The duration of the partnership promotes the establishment of a deep mutual understanding and level of mutual acceptance between partners. The growing familiarity and similarity provide support and facilitate understanding that helps defuse the potential of conflict (Duck and Lea 1983). The following comment expresses this:

"I think we argue less now than we used to, quite simply because there is more confidence there, having survived for so many years. (Resp. no. 56A) doesn't see everything that I say as an attack.... So I think it causes less and less friction. This is not because we have grown apart but because I think the foundation of love and affection grows stronger and awareness of what each of us contributes to the relationship grows." (Resp. no. 56B)

While the growth of the partnership facilitates understanding and conflict prevention, this does not mean that partners in a younger partnership have less ability in this connection. Other factors such as partners' mutual commitment to effective communication can also promote understanding. This is elaborated below.

**Effective Communication**

Communication between relational parties is of paramount importance. Kurdek (1991) reports that non-responsiveness (no communication and support between partners) is the main reason for the dissolution of gay and lesbian couples. Modrcin and Wyers' (1990) study of gays and lesbians also reveals that the improvement of communicative skills constitutes the major type of professional help that they will seek.

In the same vein, Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) and Lee (1990) stress the importance of "Real Talk", which is ". . . talk about fundamental contractual relationships between the partners. . . ” (Lee 1990:145). Real talk facilitates a process of effective negotiation for the constitutional arrangement of the partnership.
Effective communication is a useful strategy for conflict prevention even for a young partnership, although this strategy will grow in its effectiveness as the partnership progresses. Couple no. 5 reports that although they have only been together for 3 years and 3 months, their commitment to effective communication has helped enhance their partnership. Their comments are cited at length to illustrate this point:

"There aren't any major conflicts. The potential for major conflict is there definitely as in any relationship. It has got to be. But it is because we respect each other. We don't make major decisions without consulting with each other. I don't think we disrespect each other enough not to involve each other in the decision-making. We always communicate. And if we don't, it becomes so obvious that we haven't. And that will bring us to a point where we do, because we are so aware that that's what going on. So that enables us to live much closer to the borders, the fringes or the frontiers of what relationship means... and what spirituality means. Because we are able to communicate, therefore we have got security with each other. Rather than keeping the security of either possessing each other or controlling each other which gives you a very false sense of security and control." (Resp. no. 5A)

"No (there are no major conflicts), because we communicate. It's not in the nature of our relationship to have major tensions because very early on if there is a single doubt or discontent, then we talk about it. No, I don't think we have any major conflicts........ We never get to the stage of disagreement because we communicate about our desires before decision if getting through and entrenched. We never get that far down in the decision-process when we got diametrically opposed views because we deal with it as we start to diverge.... I would say effective communication is the key to why we have our relationship in the first place. It's that deep deep communication that drew us together in the first place and it established the things we have. We have a deep need to communicate, to understand, to be understood. So that's where we get our energy from." (Resp. no. 5B)

Effective communication is indisputably important for three reasons. First, it promotes self-disclosure. Derlega and Grzelak (1979:152) define self-disclosure as an act of disclosing "any information that refers to the self, including personal states, dispositions, events in the past, and plans for the future."

Second, it promotes a "due process" through which partners can analyse and attempt to overcome a conflict (De Cecco and Shively 1978:205). Third, it also helps the partners to make attribution individually and collectively in order to give causal explanations to a conflictful event. Making attribution identifies the fundamental cause of a conflict and facilitates the construction of an effective solution. Conversely, non-commitment in this respect might lead to "attributional ambiguity and avoidance" which can lead to relationship breakdown (Baucom 1987:184).
Egalitarian Decision-making

The respondents' views on importance of egalitarian decision-making have been examined extensively in Chapter Four. Thus, I will only discuss this point briefly. In this connection, respondent no. 1A who has been in a partnership for 15 years asserts:

"Yes, I won't do anything if I felt it was going to cause a problem. In what (resp. no. 1B) does, I mean, apart from the things that he has to do, we will decide, whether it is like going on holiday, we would decide, I mean, it took several months of just talking about where we are going to go on holiday this year. In the end we came up with something which we both agree with....... I guess what you probably do in fact is that you might fly an idea casually and see how it goes back. Then perhaps to raise it again at another good time and see what the response is. Then perhaps on the third time you should get quite serious about this ....... and then you know things then begin to happen. I mean if (resp. no. 1B) suggests something which sounds like a good idea, then I'll probably say yes." (Resp. no. 1A)

The above comment clearly illustrates the importance of egalitarianism in promoting mutual respect between partners.

Caution Against Complacency

The growth of a partnership leads to the inevitable establishment of a routine lifestyle. Although it promotes familiarity, it can also render the partnership monotonous. Partners might also become complacent consequently. Thus, partners acknowledge the importance of continuously injecting a new lease of freshness into the partnership. This is expressed below:

"I suppose one of the things that is worrying is that it is all too easy to get into complacency in a relationship. You don't make the effort to work on it as much as you should. I remember when we first met it was all very exciting. It was all rampant sex life and doing a lot of things together. And then you get into an almost sort of 'happy married couple' type of existence when everything seems to be a lot more monotonous and you tend to do the same things and get a bit lazy of it all. It's easy for that to happen so it is important to work on things." (Resp. no. 12A)

However, a routine lifestyle does not necessarily stifle a partnership. If handled appropriately, it can help cement a partnership, as respondent no. 22A, who is in a 27-year-old partnership, argues:

"I do think routine is important in a relationship. And the fact that we always have dinner together. We sit at the table and eat together. I think these are the small things that are important. I think it cements a relationship. To be orderly doesn't mean it is dull."

These interview data reveal that a routine lifestyle can generate complacency. However, if handled properly, it serves the positive function of cementing a partnership.
The last factor for defusing conflict is the couple's commitment to Christianity. Sharing the same religious beliefs and commitment helps put things in the right perspective. This not only defuses conflict, but also enhances the longevity of the partnership. Respondent no. 56A who has been in a partnership for 16 years asserts:

"I think the Christian perspective has been the thing that has made it work. It stops you from walking away from it when it sidetracks. And things are getting better and better and better. That to me makes it clear that God has blessed the relationship. The things that I have been able to do in my vocation as a priest, the things that I have been able to give of God to God's people springs out of what I have received from God through (Resp. no. 56B)."

Commitment to the same religious belief reduces the possibility of dissension which can potentially challenge the stability of the partnership. Respondent no. 56B and his partner are equally committed to sexual exclusivity within the partnership due to their religious commitment to the "ethic of sexual monogamy". This commitment promotes mutual understanding. Their case will be discussed at length in Chapter Ten.

Summary

It is clear that the duration of a partnership, mutual commitment to effective communication, egalitarianism in decision-making, caution against complacency and commitment to Christianity have contributory effects on conflict prevention in a partnership. They also in turn enhance the quality of the partnership.

6.3. Partnerships with Identifiable Major Conflicts Not Amounting to Dissolution

In this sub-section, I analyse the different types of conflicts identified by the couples in relation to the internal and external dimensions of their partnerships. Baxter's (1993) typology of internal and external contradictions in personal relationship is used for the analysis.

Internal Dimension

Couples experience conflicts in the internal dimension or at an interpersonal level when both partners run into disagreement. Three types of conflicts are identified: (a) connection versus autonomy; (b) predictability versus novelty; and (c) openness versus closedness.
(a) Connection vs. Autonomy

This conflict occurs when the balancing between emotional intimacy and personal autonomy is tilted off the centre. A partner who perceives that his partner is over-dependent on him considers this an erosion of his personal autonomy and intrusion into his personal space.

This is the situation of couple no. 6. Respondent no. 6A thinks that his partner is overdependent on him in the organisation of their social activity. This results in his dissatisfaction and tiredness:

".... I think I sometimes feel that I have to do a lot of the running socially so it tends to be me that organises the social diary and me that arranges to see people. My friends tend to be his friends but (resp. 6B) doesn't have many of his own friends. So that causes a lot of tension because I feel that I am doing a lot of the work a lot of the time which I sometimes get quite 'cheesed off' about."

Handling a partnership is an act of balancing (Askham 1984; De Cecco 1988; Finch and Morgan 1991). While partners strive for personal autonomy within the context of the partnership, they also need to strive for emotional connection in order to allow the input and reception of mutual support.

However, factors such as demanding work commitment can disrupt this balancing act. This is the case for couple no. 19. In the view of respondent no. 19A, his partner's business at work has taken a toll on the level of intimacy they mutually share. His partner's over-indulgence in his work results in chronic exhaustion. The process of communication is therefore adversely affected.

(b) Predictability vs. Novelty

The second type of conflict occurs when one partner favours a predictable lifestyle because of the stability it offers, while his partner prefers to constantly inject freshness into the partnership to prevent stultification. Expectational Discrepancy in this case can generate conflict between the partners.

A salient example for this scenario is couple no. 12. Respondent no. 12A is self-employed. While he enjoys the personal autonomy and comfort of working from home, he is inclined to obscure the line between his work and domestic life with his partner, taking place in the same milieu. This leads to his partner's complaint:

"(Resp. no. 12A) works from home and he tends to work till very late at night..... I really want to go out more. Sometimes I think that we are boring and I get bored. We never really do a lot of things, you know. We tend to follow a routine. We sort of work and then weekend we sort of
go to cinemas, you know, going out. That's about it. We just don't get out and leave London. Sometimes I feel choking, I need fresh air and space. I think what we need to work on is to be more spontaneous in our relationship. You know, we can just wake up and decide to go somewhere.

The above comment illustrates the potential of conflict embedded in expectational discrepancy, particularly in the area of non-domestic social activity of this couple.

(c) Openness vs. Closedness

This type of conflict results from the partners' different ability and degrees in self-disclosure and emotional demonstrativeness. This takes place when a partner is capable of expressing his feelings and thoughts articulately, but his partner is unable to match him in this respect. He might see his expressiveness not sufficiently reciprocated. On the other hand, his partner might view his expressiveness as a burden.

This type of conflict is particularly telling in a gay partnership. Being men, both partners are socialised to disguise their feelings and this will adversely affect their level of self-disclosure (Reece and Segrist 1981; George and Behrendt 1987). Although many gay men endeavour to challenge their sex-role socialisation, most achieve varying degrees of success.

This is certainly the case for couple no. 16. Owing to his stressful profession, respondent no. 16A is often too exhausted to respond effectively to his partner's communication. He therefore finds his partner exceedingly talkative and not being understanding in giving him the much-needed space to relax. His partner, on the other hand, thinks that their communication is extremely one-sided. He thinks that his expressiveness is not sufficiently reciprocated.

While work can put some strain into the partnership by affecting the level of openness, personality is also a contributory factor to such a difficulty. This is the case for couple no. 6. Respondent no. 6B acknowledges that his personality does not match the expectation of his partner in terms of expressing his support:

"I think I don't always meet his particular need...... He spends a lot of time working on caring about other people (resp. no. 6A is a priest and part-time psychotherapist), and consequently he needs a certain amount in return. Sometimes I haven't met that in his point of view. I think that is the biggest source of contention."

Exacerbating respondent no. 6B's difficulty in expressing his feelings is the partners' indulgence in their own personal problems. This curtails the warmth and support they offer each other. Respondent no. 6A relates:
"Tensions that are usually have to do with either one or both of us at the same time or at the different feeling that we are not getting enough support from the other one. It tends to be when we both got problems in our own lives either our work or family difficulties... that the other person is too preoccupied with their own difficulties to be very supportive. I think that has been the cause of quite a lot of tension."

It must be emphasised that there might exist a link between the connection vs. autonomy conflict and the openness vs. closedness conflict. A partner who desires a high degree of personal autonomy might demonstrate a low degree of self-disclosure and emotional demonstrativeness for fear of the intrusion of his privacy.

External Dimension

No couples are separated from the wider social network since their existence as a social unit is embedded within it. What takes place in the suprasystem of the social network therefore exerts influence on the couple. Thus, it is important to analyse conflicts that might exist between the couple and the social network. What is equally illuminating is to observe the interrelationship between the intrapersonal conflicts between the couple as a social unit and the social network, in relation to the interpersonal conflict that might be generated between the partners themselves. I have already argued that this is an inseparable link that must be taken into account.

(a) Inclusion vs. Seclusion

The couple as a social unit needs to negotiate the extent to which others are included or excluded in their partnership. The inclusion of others in their partnership is important for the very fact of gaining mutual support and recognition of their social identity as a couple. However, too much inclusion might result in the imbalance between the social identity as a couple and their personal identity as individuals.

This is especially true for the sexual dimension of their partnership. Major conflicts can threaten the stability of the partnership when partners hold different expectations in the area of sexual exclusivity. Some couples experience conflicts in this sensitive area. This issue will be discussed in Section 6.5. and extensively in Chapter Ten.

(b) Revelation vs. Concealment

The conflict pertains to the control of the dissemination of social information about the couple itself. This is a particularly relevant and sensitive issue for gay Christian couples. This is the scenario for couple no. 50. Respondent no. 50A is heterosexually married and both he and
his partner want to keep their partnership completely concealed from respondent no. 50A’s family, while remaining open to some of their friends for mutual support. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that respondent no. 50B is a good friend to both his wife and two adult children.

The main issue facing this couple is therefore their presentation as individuals and as a relational pair in different situations. This affects the way they make arrangements for their meetings and vacations. Concealing the partnership and yet maintaining a friendship with respondent no. 50A’s family exerts great amount of pressure on respondent no. 50B. Concealment in this case amount to living in lies, as respondent no. 50B states:

"I block it out a bit. It's difficult because being a friend to the family. That's obviously the major drawback about the whole thing. But we love each other and there is no way I want (respondent no. 50A’s wife) and the boys to be hurt at all. I just couldn't handle that, and I am prepared to lie when needs to be for our relationship to continue. I don't want him to be without the family because he obviously loves them. I couldn't handle the hurt that they would feel. So, I can live with it. You learn to live with that. I don't feel uneasy. I am not 100% happy about it but I feel I can handle it and I try to be as easy as I can be. It's just a necessary evil sort of thing. But that's infinitely preferable than the hurt of the family breaking up. I don't like the lies, but I do it quite well."

Although the conflict between concealment and revelation of their partnership exerts great pressure on them, it is not a major area that threatens the stability of the partnership. Both partners collectively develop their strategy to manage the situation. However, they did experience a brief crisis that threatened the partnership due to the inegalitarianism in decision-making. In this case, the fact that one of the partners is married does not challenge the stability of the partnership as they face the difficulty as a united unit. Their situation will be elaborated in Section 6.4.

**Summary**

These couples experience all the three types of interpersonal conflicts discussed by Baxter (1993). A common factor that generate conflict in the internal dimension of the partnership is the perceived *discrepant investment size* of both partners, such as resources, time, self-disclosure and emotional energy (Duffy and Rusbult 1986). In this connection, social exchange theory asserts that conflict is often generated when a partner views that his investment size in the partnership is greater than that of his partner (e.g. Homans 1950; Blau 1964; Hinde 1979).

In the external dimension, these couples experience in the form of inclusion versus exclusion and revelation versus concealment, they do not experience the third kind of intrapersonal conflict discussed by Baxter (1993) — that of conventionality versus uniqueness.
This particular kind of conflict does not apply to the situation of gay Christian couples. Since they are not normative and 'conventional' couples from the point of view of the society, they do not have to manage the extent to which they want to be socially conventional or unique. The possible area that this conflict can take place is between the couple and the gay scene. Conflict might exist between the partners when they try to determine the extent to which they should conform to the popular gay sub-culture, especially in relation to their own Christian beliefs. This issue is discussed in Chapter Eight.

6.4. Partnerships that Survived Dissolution

This section analyses the factors that lead to relationship dissolution for four couples and the effects of the dissolution on them and their restored partnerships. Three factors are responsible for the dissolution: (1) Expectational discrepancy; (2) Inegalitarian decision-making; (3) Space regulation.

Expectational Discrepancy

Throughout their partnership of 13 years, couple no. 48 has experienced two separations lasting almost two years each. The major factor that leads to the separations is the discrepancy in their mutual expectation of each other and the partnership. This generated conflicts in the form of connection versus autonomy and openness versus closedness. The situation was compounded by the fact that they had to maintain the first half of their partnership with both of them separated by their work commitments.

About six years into the partnership, respondent no. 48A wanted to increase the level of intimacy between them by settling down. But it was at the same time that he discovered that his partner did not fully meet his expectations and ideal. He found his partner's absorption in his then first job and his low degree of self-disclosure affecting their level of intimacy adversely. His own unrealistic expectations informed him that his partner was not investing efforts in the partnership and keeping a distance to maintain his personal autonomy. Consequently, he initiated a separation.

Two years later, they met when his partner moved back to the same city where respondent no. 48A lived. They resumed the partnership, initiated by respondent 48A. Before long respondent no. 48A again felt that the partnership fell short of his expectations. He initiated another separation which also lasted about two years. During that period, both had had other relationships and failed. These failed relationships informed respondent no. 48A of his unrealistic expectations of an intimate relationship. This led to the re-assessment of his
relationship goals and expectations. It was then that he patched up with his partner and resumed the partnership until now. He states reflexively:

"Those failed relationships (during the separation) taught me quite a lot about chasing after ideals and what happens to ideals when they are exposed to the light of the day. When we met again we sort of looked at each other with new eyes, you know, we have both learned quite a lot. And I did change quite a lot. I felt that I had anyway. And still those good things that had always been there was sort of glimmering at the bottom somewhere. And... it was just slowly, slowly, slowly, not in any terribly deliberate ways sort of began to come back together again. And I sort of thought, what is going on? The only conclusion was that I am thinking that the relationship is going on again. So that again very very.... no straight borderline.... we were back again."

These experiences have taught respondent no. 48A an important lesson about imposing his ideals on his partner and the partnership which resulted in the stultification of the partnership itself. He further elaborates the change in his perspective which is contributory to the continuation of the partnership now:

"I think there is far more recognition of the way each of us works. I mean I think when in my younger years I was far more inclined to believe the way I thought and saw things was inevitably the only way to think and see things. And so I was forever wanting to impose that on (resp. no. 48B) who was my partner. Of course that was frustrating for me and probably confusing for him. So now we can anticipate what the other one is thinking or going to say about something. You know, often the whole thing is dealt with by a glance....... I think it sounds awfully dull and pragmatic, but it is really a matter of recognising the qualities of, if you like, friendship with (resp. no. 48B) and partnership with him that actually work........ I become less realistic and more pragmatic about the whole thing."

His partner agrees that there has been a development of a deeper understanding between them, "I think if anything I was only being too easy about them (relationships). Thinking that relationships were just something that happened. What I realise now is that it is something you have to work at. If it is worth having, it's worth working for." (Resp. no. 48B).

It can be argued that while their living in the same city facilitates their communication, it is the change of perspective on especially the part of respondent no. 48A that has saved the partnership and allowed it to continue until now. He has accepted his partner's low degree of self-disclosure and high degree of personal autonomy by exhausting other avenues for his own high degree self-expressiveness. He states:

"Erm... usually by talking to other friends. There may be one or two other people who can and are willing to talk about things. That's how we get it off the chest. But these things are probably not nowadays much to do with us as a couple in the same way that's far less to talk about at one time before we first split up. I felt there are things to always talk about, that was when we were obviously talking to other people, and it was all very well. But didn't ultimately answer the question. But, yes, in terms of how I deal with it, I just enjoy hammering things out and picking every problem. It's always a creation for me. He just doesn't share the same sort of pleasure, that sort of thing. So I just deal with other friends." (Resp. no. 48A)
The experience of couple no. 48 highlights the role of discrepancy of mutual expectation that generates relationship decline that eventually lead to relationship dissolution. The following sub-section discusses the role of an inegalitarian decision-making.

Inegalitarian Decision-making

Couple no. 50 survived a temporary crisis at the point of interview. The primary factor that led to the crisis in this case is the inegalitarian decision-making process that characterised their partnership of seven years. As mentioned, although respondent no. 50A is heterosexually married, their partnership is so well concealed that his marriage does not pose a problem to the partnership itself. What rendered the partnership problematic was primarily their interpersonal communication which also led to difficulty in their intrapersonal relationship with the wider social network.

In their case, respondent no. 50A was over-dominant in decision-making and his partner's lack of courage to challenge that exacerbated the power relations between them. Such a lopsided decision-making process led to respondent no. 50A's complacency and his partner's feeling of neglect.

This was the pushing factor that led to his partner searching for comfort and intimacy outside the partnership. Their then sexually non-exclusive partnership which involved constant sexual experimentation individually or together provided the opportunity for his partner to stray. Their ground rule for sexual experimentation was that they could not bring their casual sexual partner home to the exclusion of the other partner.

Owing to the insistence of respondent no. 50A, this kind of sexual experimentation continued despite his partner's loss of interest. However, the inegalitarian decision-making did not provide the opportunity for respondent no. 50B to articulate his intention. His continued silence encouraged his partner's over-dominance. The consequence was disastrous:

"I think the way was that I just told him what I wanted and I didn't listen to what he wanted. And because he knew I wasn't going to listen he wouldn't tell me. So therefore if I wanted to go somewhere I just said, "I want to go here." And he wouldn't argue because he would just accept that it was what I wanted to do and I was not prepared to negotiate, and I wouldn't ask him what he thought because I didn't really value what he thought. So it would just do whatever I wanted, and he tagged along. He was just like a sheep really...... I was just wasn't that interested in him and that he thought I wasn't treating him with respect and love. He said he needed to be held and comforted and be close to someone, and I wasn't really that close to him. We had sex fairly often, we had sex with other people, but it wasn't working I think to the extent that it was really building on a false premise to start with......" (Resp. no. 50A)
Respondent no. 50B agrees, also acknowledging his own presumptuousness as partially responsible for the decline and breakdown in their partnership:

"Basically it got to the stage where I... for a while.... I haven't actually been saying how I feel about things because of the situation we got into where I had been telling white lies about specific things that I didn't really like. Sexual ventures with other people and things like that. I knew that he liked that and I liked it initially but it did go off me. But I didn't have the courage to say I have gone off it. So the lie perpetuates itself....... so it just carried on and I just carried on telling white lies and suffering inside. After all the arguments we used to have about analysing why I was doing this, why I didn't like that, I just couldn't cope. I just didn't feel particularly loved I suppose. You just get to the stage where I suppose it sort of in a rut. You do things initially because it was sort of exciting but then I don't really have the courage to say I don't want this anymore. Perhaps the fear of losing him because if he wanted it so much, then he might not want me anymore because I was not prepared to have threesome or something. So I carried on doing it. But you just suddenly find yourself in situations where you are doing things that you don't really want to do but you don't have the courage to say it. It's a very sad state to be in. The other thing I don't like about is that I make assumptions that people prepare the answers to their questions already, so I don't bother to answer because I know they are going to say. But in fact they don't."

The inegalitarian decision-making in this led to the disjunction of expectations in the sexual dimension of their partnership. Respondent no. 50B's silence encouraged his partner to disregard his feelings. This resulted in respondent no. 50B's searching for love and comfort outside the partnership. This development is acknowledged by both of them:

"It became apparent that in fact (resp. no. 50B) was just looking for someone who cared for him. I obviously wasn't caring for him and therefore when this person came on the scene and was obviously prepared to care for him, he went with him, although he picked him up just for sex initially. When the person showed him an interest, (resp. no. 50B) obviously became interested because someone was talking to him in the way that I didn't talk to him." (Resp. no. 50A)

"So I met someone...... I just happened to meet someone for sex..... but it developed a bit further than that because the person was giving me what I felt I wasn't getting from (resp. no. 50A), which is the care and attention. A bit of caring basically, a bit of what I thought might be love, but it wasn't. I think it's the fact that someone would listen to me talking and I could be honest from the beginning without having to cover myself with silly lies or whatever......." (Resp. no. 50B)

Respondent no. 50B's search for love led him to taking the man concerned home, thus breaking the ground rule of the couple's arrangement. When this was known to respondent 50A, the stability of the partnership was threatened. Respondent no. 50A viewed the incident as a betrayal of trust. It led to the thorough re-assessment of their partnership. This led respondent no. 50B to consider the importance of articulateness on his part to improve mutual communication:

"I mean to actually open my mouth and say what is going through my mind. A number of times I sat there as I was driving along thinking things, but not saying them for whatever reasons. To actually say what is going on in my mind. And give (resp. no. 50A) the opportunity to answer the questions, not question in my own mind. As I said to you, I asked the question and answered it, not even give him the opportunity of agreeing
of what I am thinking or disagreeing. I have made up my mind because this is what I think he would answer. That's totally unfair......It just that the underlying of communicating...... everyone keeps talking about communicating...... it's bloody important, it really is. If you communicate with your partner, then you can come to an understanding about things....... Basically what I have learned is that you can't just get complacent in relationships. You have to carry on and both work at it, that still means that even after eight years doing silly things."

The experience of this couple highlights a combination of conflicts of different kinds. One of them pertains to the predictability versus novelty conflict in their interpersonal relationship and the other is inextricably linked to the inclusion versus exclusion conflict in their intrapersonal relationship with the wider social network.

Although both partners were content with the arrangement for sexual experimentation at the initial stage, the loss of interest in one met with the consistency of interest in the other. This led to a disjunction in their mutual expectations. The over-dominance of one partner and the subservience of the other also did not offer them the opportunity for negotiation.

Space Regulation

Two more couples who have been together for 18 years and 6 years and 9 months have experienced a brief period of separation lasting not more than six months. In both cases, one of the partners became uncertain about the viability of the partnership and initiated a separation. This was to give himself more personal space to re-evaluate his relationship goals and the workability of the partnership.

In both cases, the partners who initiated the separation took the initiative to restore the partnership, having clarified their personal goals and expectations of the partnership. The re-assessment of relationship goals and expectations brought about better understanding and greater commitment, as summarised below:

"As we grow to understand each other, I guess we develop a great degree of tolerance. I don't think it is a tolerance that is forced. It's a natural tolerance that grows between people as they get closer. There is a lot of give and take involved." (Resp. no. 13B)

Summary

I have highlighted the primary factors that led to relationship dissolution experienced by four couples. Theses factors are generated by the discrepancy of expectations between partners. The couples have to constantly struggle between connection and autonomy, predictability and novelty, as well as openness and closedness. The difficulties they encounter in their partnerships that threatens the stability of the partnerships are generated from their
interpersonal communication. Conflicts in the external dimension do not prove to be a major contributory factor to the dissolution of their partnerships.

6.5. Partnerships with the Prospect of Dissolution

This section examines two partnerships which are, at the point of interview, facing the prospect of dissolution. Couple no. 7 has been together for one-and-a-half years, but only started cohabitation eight months before the interview. They are therefore still going through a stage of mutual adjustment.

Respondent no. 7B moved to the city where his partner has been for a long time. He is therefore new to the social environment. Conflict arises from this particular area of their partnership. In respondent no. 7A's view, his partner has not tried sufficiently hard to enlarge his own social circle, thus putting on his shoulders a heavy responsibility to manage their social diary single-handedly. This leads to the curtailment of his own social life and personal space.

Their situation reflects the connection versus autonomy conflict. Respondent no. 7A views his partner's over-dependence on him as a threat to his personal autonomy. His individuality is under threat from excessive fusion. This has led him to consider the dissolution of the partnership on more than one occasion:

"I thought about it for a while because I felt he put all his problems onto me. He was relying on me all the time. He didn't have any other friends whom he was relying on. He relied on me a lot. He had been in London for eight months and he hasn't sought to find any of his own friends at all. He hasn't gone out of the relationship to make his own friends while I came into the relationship with my own friends. So he needs to make his own friends, there is nothing wrong. But it really bothered me that he hasn't sought his own friends. So a lot of his social life is dependent on me. But I feel it's important in a relationship to have your own space and own friends because they can support you in times of difficulty. And that might have helped if he had his own friends to turn to. But I have a lot of friends to support me, he didn't...... I was going through a lot of turmoil in my course. He wasn't understanding how I was feeling. It went on for months and months. I just blushed out I think. He wasn't giving me any support. He put his problem unto me. In a sense he was relying on me a lot and I couldn't give what he wanted. I just bowed over. I needed a break."

The obvious inegalitarian decision-making in the social dimension of their partnership generates a substantial amount of pressure on respondent no. 7A. He thinks that the responsibility has been laid on his shoulder at the expense of his own autonomy:

"It's not the ideal situation. He doesn't take the initiative on the whole. that's why I say I am more dominant in that sense....... I think he likes the idea that I am being more dominant. I don't mind taking all these responsibilities. But occasionally he should take the initiative as well. So that's what annoys me sometimes." (Resp. no. 7A)
In view of his situation, respondent no. 7A expresses his sense of uncertainty for the future of the partnership:

"I think it (the survival of the partnership) depends on these elements whether there is any improvement. I can't go on and on, taking the initiative all the time. I think I need more space to do my own things. Like this weekend I went away to visit my mother and brother. I really enjoyed it but I can't express that to him, that I really enjoy going away. I didn't miss him as such, but I was glad to come home. I didn't really miss him when I was away. I did think a lot about him but I didn't miss him........ If I have more personal space the relationship will last........ The space is important because it gives the relationship the space to evaluate what's going on. I think it's important in any relationship really. You have to have your own space for your own personal development. Otherwise, what is the point of life? I think part of life is to discover yourself and to develop first of all your person, then secondary to develop with someone else."

Respondent no. 7B also acknowledges this conflict and the possibility of the dissolution. He knows what ought to be done:

"To give each other adequate space so that we don't stifle each other. I need to expand my social circle."

With both partners making attribution of the problem, this couple is committed to achieving a solution. Both also maintain that if they fail, they will still maintain the friendship after the dissolution.

Incompatibility

Couple no. 17 who has been together for 2 years and 3 months are still at the adjustment stage. Both partners are young and at the crossroads of their careers which pull them towards different directions. The major conflict they currently encounter is their growing incompatibility in several primary aspects of life.

There is therefore a need for a thorough re-definition of their relationship goals as a couple within the context of individual growth and development. Respondent no. 17A needs to take examinations for career advancement which will generate great pressure on him and the partnership. There exists therefore tension between one's individuality and the partnership.

This difficulty is exacerbated by the fact that they are incompatible in certain areas. While respondent no. 17A is emotionally expressive, his partner has a low degree of emotional demonstrativeness. This also generates tension in the way they communicate. Taking all these together, both acknowledge the need to re-negotiate the direction that the partnership should take:
"There is a physical sense in the relationship, and there is an emotional one. Emotionally we are quite committed in the sense that we get on very well. We know there are things that annoy us. But we do work round them and we think once I get these Accounting exams out of the way, there is more there for us to hold on to. So it's worth holding on. It would be very easy for us to give up and walk away. But that doesn't solve things. So what we are trying to do at the moment is to say, 'Well instead of just thinking us as going on, what can we aim for in the short, medium and long term? Why not just accept that our relationship would change in its dynamics and it would at that time. I think it's easy to think that you are living together so you are supposed to live together for five years or whatever without really thinking about it. So that's what we are trying to do at the moment. We try to understand I am doing this course. There are going to be very strong stresses at work. So our expectation to each other can be changed because in that way you are not trying to expect something that you know you can't do. It's better in my view to get that in the open." (Resp. no. 17A)

The above comment demonstrates that respondent no. 17A adopts a rather pragmatic approach to his partnership. His pragmatism is shared by his partner:

"We were discussing where the relationship is going and what we were expecting out of it. We haven't decided to terminate it. We actually do enjoy living with each other on and off. We actually enjoy each other's company. It is not as bad as it sounds. I think we have reached a kind of stalemate and ask, 'Where do we go from here?'...... Our relationship is definitely going through a transition right now...... Partly we are growing in different directions, we are both changing at the same time but we are not sure which way we are going." (Resp. no. 17B)

At the point of interview, both partners expressed their uncertainty about the survival of the partnership. However, they are committed to making attribution and achieving a solution, even if it changes the dynamics of their partnership. This change in the dynamics might involve the sexual dimension of their partnership. I will discuss this in Chapter Nine and Chapter Ten. On the whole, the nature of the partnership will change with the boundary redefined:

"I am expecting Accountancy exams in two weeks' time and I have already applied for a job. If I pass the exams, then I will study for the finals. That will mean the stresses that were present before will come back. But we have discussed the fact that we ultimately want the relationship to succeed, but it will be on a different plane with different terms. I don't know if it will actually be different but it is just that we acknowledge that there will be stress and therefore expectations have to be changed. So in the next six to nine months, I think what could happen is that if we get on fine we might decide that since we are not having a physical relationship, that means I will find it somewhere else. We have said that we don't necessarily want to preclude either having an emotional relationship somewhere else if they feel that this relationship can't fulfill it, we don't believe there is any point in fulfilling or pretending to be something when we are unhappy. But we have also said that the base for all this is trust and honesty. You have to be truthful about what you do because if you are not there is no point. I think it is essential to all relationships. They all have difficult times." (Resp. no. 17A)

The prospect of the dissolution of their partnership does not deny them the hope that they can still remain friends even if the partnership fails to continue. Both are hopeful about the maintenance of their friendship:
There is no animosity which I am very grateful for. I think it says a lot about us as a couple as well, that we don't have rows. We might have disagreements…… (Resp. no. 17A)

"I think the thing is unless we estrange…… even if we split up, I don't think it would be a real split. I think we will still remain friends. I don't think we will end up being enemies." (Resp. no. 17B)

Their pragmatism reflects their positive attitude. The possible dissolution of the partnership might generate disappointment, but it might also lead to the enhancement of personal identity as individual, which, at this juncture of their life, seems to be more integral to them than their social identity as a couple.

Summary

Some observations can be made. First, these four respondents are comparatively young, aged between 21 to 35 years. I speculate that they, having time on their side, are less inclined to 'settle down' unless they are highly satisfied with the current partnership.

Second, their partnerships are comparatively young, ranging from 1 1/2 to 2 1/4 years. These couples are undergoing a period of transition which requires them to redefine and reassess their individual goals and those of the partnership. Their emphasis on individuality rejects excessive fusion within the partnership.

Also, contrary to what some researchers (e.g. McWhirter and Mattison 1984) comment, these two couples are not in the typical 'honeymoon' stage despite their young partnerships. Their partnerships are not characterised by a high degree of limerence, or being in love to the extent of being insensitive to each other's weaknesses. I would argue that this is due to their commitment to the partnership and their desire to lay a solid foundation for its further development. By the same token, it can be argued that the beginning of the partnership can be a difficult time as both partners are committed to adjusting to each other and relating to the wider social network as a social unit.

Far from being a honeymoon year, the first year can be a difficult period of adjustment when both partners are committed to working at the partnership on a long-term basis instead of adopting a wait-and-see attitude. This can lead to conflict and even the thought of dissolution of the partnership when it is not going according to one's expectation. This is the experience of many couples, as succinctly expressed below:

"I don't think about it (the dissolution of partnership) very often now at all. But in the early days I certainly did. I mean in the first year I was thinking about it every week…… I think we were committed to the relationship. I think we both recognised that we need a relationship and both of us have spent a long time on our own which neither of us
particularly likes. So the relationship became something to work at, something to really work at and to preserve, rather than any sort of thing emotionally or roses and stars that you could think about. I think we just have a very hard relationship and that they can be difficult. You have to work at them in order to make them succeed." (Resp. no. 6A)

Another observation is the existence of the high degree of room for re-assessment and negotiation within these partnerships. Many respondents view their partnerships as a dynamic interactional process. A partnership is alive and dynamic. Both partners need to recognise that and develop as individuals within the partnership:

"I think we both see the relationship as a continuing, a very dynamic thing. And so far in the years we have known each other, there has certainly been the case. Things change, our thoughts change, our ways of dealing with things and each other change. Our priorities, our ideals, plans are just continuously changing. So we are continuing developing personally, together and enabling and empowering each other to develop." (Resp. no. 5A)

The comment above attests to what I have argued elsewhere, that the flip side of the lack of institutional support and affirmation for gay partnerships is the abundance of freedom and flexibility in boundary negotiations. Partners can constantly negotiate the partnership's constitutional arrangement and re-define the boundary within which the partnership operates to the satisfaction of both partners. Couple no. 17 is an example par excellence.

6.6. Partnership Satisfaction and Expectation

Having analysed the different conflicts the couples encounter, I now examine their level of satisfaction with their partnerships. I will also assess their expectation of the longevity of their partnerships.

Cole and Goettsch (1981:432) who study non-marital cohabiting couples report that "...... relationship quality is conceptualized as containing the following three dimensions: (1) communication style (2) relationship commitment, and (3) dyadic consensus." Social exchange theory asserts that satisfaction in partnership is affected by the relative balance in involvement or commitment between partners (Blau 1964) and the partners' mutual assessment of rewards and costs (Duffy and Rusbult 1986).

In this connection, Dailey (1977) and Peplau and Gordon (1983) argue that the lack of positive social sanction and legitimation of gay partnerships increase the relationship costs. I would argue that the couple's management of a conflict also substantially affects relationship quality. A couple who are committed to making attribution and effective communication are more likely to achieve a solution compared to a couple who choose attributional avoidance and neglect a conflict.
Level of Partnership Satisfaction

All respondents were asked to rate on the scale of 1 to 10 about their level of satisfaction with their partnerships. The higher the rating, the greater the satisfaction.

Table 6.1: Level of Satisfaction with Partnership: All Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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</table>

Mean Rating = 8.8

As shown in Table 6.1, 93.2% of the individual respondents give a rating of 8 or higher for their partnerships. With a mean rating of 8.8, this indicates in general that there is a high level of satisfaction among the respondents, despite the presence of conflicts of different natures within their partnerships. Many factors are responsible for this level of satisfaction, one being the strength and the space the partnership offers for personal growth:

"I think this relationship has sort of made me confront those areas of my personality that weren't functioning very well. You know, the relationship and the things that have come out of the relationship eventually has been a source of strength to me. I mean this is certainly one of the things that I value very much about the relationship. It has done that for me." (Resp. no. 6B)

The four respondents — of couples no. 7 and no. 17 — who are in partnerships facing the prospect of dissolution give respectively a rating of '4', '6' (the two lowest ratings of all), '8' and '9'. The mean rating in this case is 6.75. In general, it can be observed that the prospect of dissolution does not necessarily affect the level of satisfaction adversely. While both partners of couple no. 17 give a low rating, partners of couple no. 7 give a very high rating, although both couples are facing relationship dissolution. The following tables compare the ratings of cohabiting respondents and their non-cohabiting counterparts.
Table 6.2: Level of Satisfaction with Partnership: Cohabitating Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>10</td>
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</table>

N = 40
Mean Rating = 8.6

Table 6.3: Level of Satisfaction with Partnership: Non-cohabiting Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
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</table>

N = 20
Mean Rating = 9.2

The tables above reveal that respondents of both living arrangements have a very high level of satisfaction with their partnerships. 90.0% of the cohabiting respondents give a rating of '8' or higher, while 100% of their non-cohabiting counterparts do likewise. The means of their ratings are also very high, with 8.6 for the cohabiting respondents and 9.2 for the non-cohabiting ones.

In comparison, the non-cohabiting respondents appear to have a higher level of satisfaction than the cohabiting ones, although the difference is minimal. I would speculate that since non-cohabiting respondents do not spend as much time with their partners as do their cohabiting counterparts, the opportunity for conflict is less. This could in turn possibly contribute to their slightly higher level of satisfaction.

However, I am more convinced that, as the data show, living arrangements do not make a great difference in the level of satisfaction. What is more determining in this situation is the way each couple handles a conflict and the disjunction of mutual expectations present in each partnership. If the process of negotiation is carried out effectively, the level of satisfaction can
be maintained at a high level. Conversely, an ineffective process of negotiation and communication can generate great distress to the partnership.

**Expectation of Partnership Longevity**

Having demonstrated a high level of satisfaction with their respective partnerships, it can be deduced that these respondents also have high expectation about the longevity of their partnerships. This is indeed the case. Except couples no. 7 and no. 17, all the other couples expect their partnerships to last until one of them passes away. The situations of couples no. 7 and no. 17 have already been discussed at great length. The following discussion will therefore only focus on the other 28 couples.

Some respondents are very confident about the longevity of their partnership, as expressed below:

“I mean if he came tomorrow and said that he was going to leave me, I mean I would be just so astounded. I don't know what I will do. I just can't believe it could ever happen. I am so confident. I have total confidence in him in terms of two in one flesh as Christians say. I really have that confidence.” (Resp. no. 22B)

This confidence emanates from a great sense of certainty about the mutual commitment. Entering into a partnership and developing it with mutual understanding and common goals appear to be the basis of this confidence:

“Yes, that (to be together until death) is the intention and we have made wills with that intention. We have talked about the fact that we are totally committed to each other for the length of our shared life. That's our intention. We never want to go through the pain of splitting up. So we will work to stay together. And that is in the sense a duty on each other because it is a costly thing to promise to your partner that you will be faithful with the understanding that the other is doing the same thing. But we said that should anything happened to either of us and the other be left widowed, then the other would be free to start living again with a new partner or whatever. So it is till death do we part. That is definitely our commitment. I mean we have formalised that in a ceremony.” (Resp. no. 52A)

While some respondents are confident, the others who also expect their partnership to last adopt a more realistic approach, acknowledging the need to work at it at all times.

“Well when we first started I was going to say this is going to last forever. You know a bed of roses. But I think now I just take it on a day-to-day basis. I mean I don't know. I expect it will last till one of us dies but I don't really think about it. And I think watching our friends in their relationship... straight as well as gay friends... relationship seems to become more down-to-earth and very much day-to-day kind of existence. I am taking a more practical and realistic approach. But on the other hand I am committed to working on the relationship so that it will last..... I can't conceive his not being here or me not being a part of him. I expect us to go on. But I think the natural way to do that is take it on a day-to-day basis and not to think about great and long-term kind of management because there is no way to predict how things will fall out.” (Resp. no. 16B)
Moving into a stage of cohabitation can also be seen as a sign of the partnership growing stronger, strengthened by the mutual expectation that the partnership is for life, as respondent no. 51A expresses:

"I think I expect we will move in together and that will be it, you know, settled for a long time. I don't think you can ever say forever because you just don't know what lies ahead. But that's what I would like. That is my long-term aim, that we will be forever...... I think we are both committed to that goal."

This issue of the longevity of the partnership brings about the issue of death. This proves to be a matter of concern for certain couples with a vast age difference. For respondent no. 22A who has been in a partnership for 27 years with a partner 23 years his senior, the presumed earlier death of his partner is a matter of concern:

"The thing that worries me is death and the fact that perhaps he may die before me. It does concerns me a bit. It is there at the back of my mind but obviously I don't dwell on it every day, but it is a factor. I realise that I have to come to terms with it and be prepared for it."

Summary

The majority of respondents have a very high level of satisfaction with their partnerships, despite the presence of conflicts of all kinds in their partnerships. This level of satisfaction does not seem to be significantly affected by their living arrangements, although non-cohabiting respondents report a slightly higher level of satisfaction. All but four of the 60 respondents expect their partnerships to last for life. Some are utterly sanguine about the prospect while some adopt a more realistic approach.

6.7 Conclusions

In terms of the nature of conflicts, it is interesting to note that none of the 10 non-cohabiting couples report non-cohabitation as an area of contention. In other words, despite the strain of living apart for the majority of couples who would actually prefer to live together, non-cohabitation does not pose any serious problem to the partnership. This is related to the commitment of the partners and the high level of satisfaction they experience. The strength they derive from the partnership helps them overcome the difficulty and inconvenience caused by non-cohabitation.
Also, with the possible exception of couple no. 6, there exists no role conflict. I would argue that since there are no fixed role orientations in a gay partnership, the possibility of departure from role expectations that would generate conflict is non-existent. Having no social script, a couple needs to negotiate and re-negotiate the role-play in the partnership.

All the conflicts that the couples experience can be fitted into Baxter's typology of internal and external contradictions in personal relationships, with the exception of the conventionality versus uniqueness contradiction. While most conflicts occur within the internal dimension of a partnership, some have an effect on the external dimension as well.

In spite of the presence of conflicts, these couples demonstrate a high level of satisfaction with their partnership. The majority also expect their partnerships to last until death. This outlines their satisfaction with and commitment to a life-long partnership. These data also repudiate the stereotype that gay men are unable and uninterested in establishing long-term partnerships.

Respondents acknowledge the importance of effective communication and realistic expectation as the two main factors in conflict prevention and resolution. Effective communication leads to effective attribution. However, its outcome might be drastically different. For instance, couple no. 5 views effective communication as a means of promoting understanding and egalitarian decision-making. Couple no. 17 who also share the same commitment might be faced with the amicable dissolution of their partnership.

On the other hand, self-disclosure is generally viewed as a positive ingredient in a partnership. However, researchers hold divergent views on whether the relationship between the degree of self-disclosure and level of relationship satisfaction follows a linear or a curvilinear trend. Gilbert (1976:228) argues that:

"...... there exists a point at which increased disclosure actually reduces the satisfaction with the relationship...... satisfaction as a curvilinear dimension of disclosure appears to be strongly related to maintenance and needs for safety and security in a relationship."

I am inclined to support Gilbert's (1976) view. An excessive amount of self-disclosure can undermine the potential of a partnership. I will discuss in Chapter Ten that the concealment of information about one's outside sexual encounters is sometimes used as a regulatory mechanism to maintain the stability of one's partnership.

The explicit expectation of both partners are important in this respect. For a couple that expects complete self-disclosure, retaining any information from disclosure would be perceived as a betrayal of trust. However, some might not support complete self-disclosure on
the grounds of preserving their personal autonomy. The balancing act comes with one's being in a partnership.

This Chapter concludes Part II on the primarily internal dimension of gay Christian partnerships. Part III (Chapter Seven and Chapter Eight) will consider the issue of stigma management at different levels. The scope of discussion will be extended to the external dimension of their partnerships.
Part III

STIGMA MANAGEMENT
Chapter Seven

STIGMA MANAGEMENT AT THE COGNITIVE-EMOTIVE AND THE INTERPERSONAL LEVELS

Goffman (1963: 9, 13) defines stigma as "the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance..... an attribute that is deeply discrediting, but it should be seen that a language of relationships, not attributes, is really needed." It is clear from his definition that a stigma status is imposed on an attribute not because of its intrinsic nature, but rather the interactional context within which it is defined as such. This perspective shares great similarity with that of Becker (1963) and Lemert (1967).

Goffman (1963) also suggests five stigma management or stigma evasion strategies: (1) succumb to shame; (2) attempt to repair or correct the discrediting or discredited attribute; (3) passing; (4) covering; and (5) group alignment. A stigmatised individual might employ one or a combination of stratagems in different interactional situations to maximise the effect of social information control.

With reference to the liberation movement in the gay community, Humphreys (1972: 142) argues that only in employing the 'group alignment' strategy can a gay person possibly counter and remove the stigma. This "stigma conversion" method for removing stigma has a socio-political basis. This is the main focus of the next Chapter.

Humphreys (1972:148) also argues that stigma removal can operate on a moral-religious basis. He calls this method "stigma redemption", through which gayness is justified morally and theologically. He cites the development of gay religious groups and organisations (e.g. the Metropolitan Community Church) as an example.

Goffman's (1963) and Humphreys' (1972) sociological-oriented analysis on stigma management does not address the stratagems at the cognitive-emotive level which constitute a main theme of this Chapter. I would argue that the analysis of stigma management stratagems at this level is important in order to understand how my respondents maintain the internal or psychological consistency of their gay Christian identity. Breakwell's (1983, 1986) works are particularly helpful in this connection.
I adopt a socio-psychological approach in my analysis, classifying the stigma management stratagems by three levels: (1) the cognitive-emotive level; (ii) the interpersonal level — the respondents' relationships with the Church, the potential stigmatiser; and (iii) the intergroup level — the respondents' 'group alignment' with the gay community (i.e. Christian and non-Christian gay groups and the commercial gay scene). This Chapter addresses the first two levels and the next chapter, the last.

The data presented in this chapter are elicited entirely from the individual and the couple interviews. Inasmuch as the data pertaining to this dimension was expected to be highly personal and emotional to the respondents, it was decided that the interview would be a more effective method of data collection compared to the self-administered postal questionnaire. Subsequent field experiences confirm this point. Interview data are used extensively in order to provide the respondents with as much space as possible to speak for themselves.

7.1. Being A Gay Christian

I favour the term being over the term becoming for reasons related to the parameters of this study. Becoming suggests a continuous process through which one acquires an identity [as in Becker's (1953) Becoming a Marihuana User and Plummer's (1975) interactionist analysis of homosexuality as a sexual deviance]. Being, on the other hand, denotes a current state of existence at the final point of that process, when the individual's identity has been acquired.

This study does not focus on the process through which the respondent renegotiates his sexual identity and his religious identity in the development of a new identity that incorporates them both. In other words, it does not specifically address how the respondent comes to accept the dissonance between the two social roles as a Christian and a gay man and subsequently develop a positive self-concept as a gay Christian, despite the lack of positive social sanctions and the stigmatisation from the Church (for more details on gay identity construction, refer Cass 1979; Troiden 1979, 1984; Coyle 1991).

The respondents of this study have already gone through that process. They have successfully developed a positive self-image as gay Christian. Many admit to the enormous amount of difficulty and struggle in surviving that process. However, they have currently arrived at the same stage in their moral career whereby they are committed to their renegotiated personal identity as a gay Christian. Now being in a partnership is a further testimony to that commitment. Troiden (1979, 1984) considers this as the last stage of the process of acquiring a gay identity, further supporting the use of the term being.
Having acquired a gay Christian identity does not mean that the respondents are no longer perturbed by the Church's official line on the issue of homosexuality. The Church has been extremely resistant to positive changes in this respect. It has been trapped in a state of indecision (Coleman 1989; Yip 1991). In particular, the Roman Catholic Church still adopts a rejecting-punitive position in considering homosexuality 'intrinsically disordered', and therefore unacceptable under all circumstances.

The Church of England, on the other hand, has seemingly made some headway in the past two decades in officially shifting from the rejecting-punitive position to the rejecting-nonpunitive position. This position acknowledges that while a homosexual orientation should not be condemned, its physical expression is not compatible with Christian moral teachings. Without specifically referring to the Church of England, Maguire (1983: 120) criticises this position for adopting a materialistic and narrow view of sex devoid of mutuality and relationality, an anthropologically naive epistemology in equating all manifestations of homosexuality, and a departure from biblical good sense.

In 1991, the Church of England moved one step further with the publication of Issues in Human Sexuality by the House of Bishops. The Report asks the Church to recognise and respect the choice of gay Christians who want to be in a relationship which includes the physical expression of their sexuality, although the Report itself does not commend that. The Report asks the Church to respect those:

"... who are conscientiously convinced that this way of abstinence is not the best for them, and that they have more hope of growing in love for God and neighbour with the help of a loving and faithful homophile partnership, in intention lifelong, where mutual self-giving includes the physical expression of their attachment. All those who seek to live their lives in Christ owe one another friendships and understanding. It is therefore important that in every congregation such homophiles should find fellow-Christians who will sensitively and naturally provide this for them. Indeed, if this is not done, any professions on the part of the Church that it is committed to openness and learning about the homophile situation can be more than empty words." (paragraph 5.6)

While this shift of boundary is applauded by some, complication still exists as a result of the Report excluding the gay clergy from such a measure on the ground of their "exemplary" function as "messengers, watchmen and stewards of the Lord." (paragraph 5.14). The Report concludes that "... clergy cannot claim the liberty to enter into sexually active homophile relationships. Because of the distinctive nature of their calling, status and consecration, to allow such a claim on their part would be seen as placing that way of life in all respects on a par with heterosexual marriage as a reflection of God's purpose in creation. The Church cannot accept such a parity and remain faithful to the insights which God has given it through Scripture, tradition and reasoned reflection on experience." (paragraph 5.17)
Needless to say, the Report's discriminatory acceptance position with differing standards for gay laity and gay clergy arouses impassioned reaction from the gay Christian community. Many accuse the Church of England of practising double standards, thus leaving in a predicament those in partnerships that involve clergy. Others argue that this inconsistency only adds strength to the argument that the Church of England is operating in a cloud of confusion (Yip 1994a).

As 86% of the respondents are affiliated to either the Roman Catholic Church or the Church of England, the majority are indisputably concerned with what transpires within the Church in this connection. The remaining respondents are affiliated to denominations which --- except for the Quakers which adopts a full acceptance position --- primarily uphold the rejecting-nonpunitive position. However, being in a state whereby they are positive about their personal identity and the expression of their sexuality within the framework of their religious faith, they have developed different stratagems to ensure the maintenance and continuity of that positive self-image. I will first discuss the subjective meanings the respondents attach to the term 'gay Christian' to demonstrate their positive self-image. This is followed by detailed discussion on the various stigma management stratagems that they have developed at the cognitive-emotive, the interpersonal, and the intergroup levels.

7.2. Subjective Meanings of the Term Gay Christian

Some 49 (81.7%) of the 60 interviewed respondents accept 'gay Christian' as a term denoting their self-identity as Christians who are also positive about their sexuality. Two major reasons are cited for this acceptance. An overwhelming majority of the respondents consider the term a label that reflects the compatibility between their sexuality and their religious beliefs. The two aspects are well-incorporated and co-exist without conflict. The label subscribes to the essentialist argument that homosexuality is a state of being, not a choice or a socially-constructed condition (refer Chapter One Section 1.1.). I am inclined to term this, in recognition of their religious beliefs, the creationist argument. The following responses illustrate this:

"Being gay is part of my God-given persona." (Resp. no. 20B)

"I do believe that God made me and created me. I am what I am." (Resp. no. 13B)

In spite of the increasingly pervasive stance among sociologists that human sexuality is socially constructed rather than biologically predisposed (refer Chapter One Section 1.1), these respondents demonstrate a reverse stance. This, I would argue, is because of the
justificatory force one can gain from the creationist argument. Attributing one's sexuality to
God's intended creation is the ultimate justification for its acceptability and unchangeability.
If one's sexuality is God-created, it cannot — and most of all, should not — be changed. This
argument constitutes one of the cognitive-emotive stigma management stratagems which will
be discussed in detail in the following section.

The second reason for accepting the term 'gay Christian' relates to the view that it is a
label with a political statement that denotes the compatibility of their sexuality and
religious beliefs. It demonstrates their existence as a group that is yet to be accorded by the
Church the full acceptance it deserves. Respondent no. 51A expresses this sentiment:

"They are both labels. They are convenient to the extent that they allow
people to celebrate the fact that I am not only gay, but I am also Christian.
And using that label to make a point—— to contradict the frequent
impression that being a Christian you can't be gay."

This view is echoed by respondent no. 19B who considers the label suggests that a gay
Christian is "somebody who makes a statement about the way in which he can express his
Christian faith." These views resonate with the argument that 'gay Christian' as a label
increases their visibility and the strength of the compatibility of being gay and Christian.

On the other hand, 11 (18.3%) respondents reject 'gay Christian' as a label that
categorises them. Two reasons underpin this rejection. First and foremost, as a label, the term
'gay Christian' suggests the convergence of the sexual and religious aspects of their identity
which they consciously attempt to compartmentalise, as the following respondent asserts:

"I don't have to make a connection between my church life and my
sexuality. They don't really impinge upon each other." (Resp. no. 52B)

This compartmentalisation of the sexual and the religious aspects of their life is one of
the stigma management stratagems some respondents employed. Compartmentalisation of this
sort results in two types of distancing. Some respondents, who continue to hold allegiance to
Christianity, distance themselves from the Church altogether. Their participation in a local
church is therefore nil. I term this kind of physical distancing as believing without belonging.

Some respondents, on the other hand, limit their participation in the church to the
bare minimum. Their physical presence is characterised by a form of psychological distancing. I
term this response believing with partial belonging. These types of distancing contribute to the
privatisation of the respondents' religious beliefs. They retreat into a form of individualised
spirituality which emphasises a personal faith that is broadly and nominally predicated on
Christianity, instead of seeking affirmation from the Church (Yip 1994b).
The second reason for the rejection of the term 'gay Christian' as a label is related to the lack of political activism among some respondents. To them, the term inaccurately categorises and labels all gay Christians as members of a marginalised and oppressed minority fighting politically for recognition. They consider the term excessively "campaigning", "aggressive" and "self-indulgent".

In sum, all the respondents accept 'gay Christian' as a term denoting their renegotiated identity which incorporates both their sexuality and their religious beliefs. They hold a positive self-concept. However, a small number of them reject the term as a label suggesting the convergence of their sexuality and church religiosity. The respondents in this category makes a distinction between the church or public religiosity and personal faith. Some also reject the term because it is viewed to be too politically aggressive. On the other hand, an overwhelming majority of the respondents accept this term as a label that justifies their sexuality as God-created which cannot and should not be altered. Some also embrace the term for its political connotations.

7.3. Stigma Management at the Cognitive-emotive Level

The perennial non-acceptability of homosexual behaviour by the Church, at least at the official level, proves to be a threat to the identity of gay Christians. The climate under which they practise their religion can be threatening to those who have not successfully developed a positive self-image. Under such circumstances, a gay Christian has three options: (1) isolating himself from the church completely in order to minimise the dissonance between his sexuality and the public expression of his religious faith; (2) conforming to the norms conventionally upheld by the Church and refrain himself from practising his sexuality, thus voluntarily opting for celibacy; and (3) renegotiating his sexual and religious identities and developing a positive gay Christian identity.

My respondents are in the third category. They have successfully developed a new identity that helps them resist the conventional teachings of the Church in this respect. This, however, does not mean that they are free from the threat posed to them by the Church. In response to this threat to their identity, they develop a multiplicity of stratagems to help them cope. This section focuses on the individual respondents' coping stratagems at the cognitive-emotive level. The following section will analyse the coping stratagems developed by the individual respondents and the couples as a unit, at the interpersonal level. On the other hand, the next chapter will examine the coping stratagems they have developed at the intergroup level.
At the cognitive-emotional level, four stratagems have been identified. The first two stratagems are congruent with what Breakwell (1983:17) terms "reconstrual" which involves a counter-attack to the threat or the source of the threat itself. In the first instance, the stratagem aims to challenge the validity of the threat by offering a re-interpretation of the social information pertaining to it and subsequently rendering it inaccurate.

In the second instance, the counter-attack is directed at the source of the threat. Social information is used to repudiate the credibility and respectability of the source of threat. The third stratagem is the use of personal experience to contradict the threat and render it biased and partial. The final stratagem pertains to the creationist argument that has been briefly discussed in the preceding section.

Reconstrual of the Threat

Indisputably, the Bible forms the most powerful foundation for the justificatory strategy of the Church in censuring homosexuality. Underpinning this foundation is the exegesis of some biblical passages that make reference to homosexuality explicitly or implicitly (Yip 1991). These biblical passages (for instance, Genesis 19; Leviticus 18: 22, 20:13; Romans 1: 26-27) will not be elaborated here. Suffice it to acknowledge that the conventional exegesis of these passages is primarily, though not completely, responsible for the Church’s unfavourable stance on the issue of homosexuality.

It is therefore not surprising that the majority of respondents seek to invalidate this conventional interpretation of the Bible by challenging its correctness and accuracy. This challenge is launched within a theological framework. This is achieved by:

(a) Invalidating the conventional interpretation of the specific passages that speak against homosexuality
(b) Shifting of focus from these specific biblical passages to broader Christian principles
(c) Challenging the applicability and relevance of these biblical passages in today’s socio-historical context

(a) In the process of invalidating the conventional interpretation of the specific biblical passages, the respondents seek to decry its shortcomings and offer an alternative interpretation. Through this, they attribute the blame to the Church whose understanding of homosexuality, in their view, is coloured with inaccurate biblical exegesis. The following response illustrates this point:
"I am amazed with the degree of ignorance there is in the Church about what the Bible says about homosexuality. That people who have been to university and who have studied theology can come out with blatantly untrue things like Jesus condemned homosexuality. You hear people saying this although they have been to theological college. This is utter nonsense. I read the Old Testament. I read Leviticus and Genesis. I find it quite incredible really that people can extract those texts and use them as excuses for saying that therefore God hates homosexuals. I think it is intellectually very unsound..... " (Resp. no. 5B)

The above view is substantiated by the argument of respondent no. 48B, "I don't take that (the Church's interpretation of the biblical passages) as the conventional teaching. That is some people's view of it, particularly Tony Higton and his lot. It's a particular reading of Scriptures which is not conclusive in my eyes........" Tony Higton, a conservative evangelical priest in the Church of England, was responsible in 1987 for putting down a Private Member motion that sparked off the most widely-publicised debate on homosexuality in the General Synod (for more details see Yip 1991).

In the same vein, respondent no. 54A asserts:

"There is no contradiction in being homosexual and Christian. The contradiction comes because of the Church's rules and regulations and Church's doctrines. It is the Church who says that love between two men is wrong. This is a misinterpretation of the Scriptures........ It is just so stupid. And yet people can take out the teaching about men having sex with each one as being sinful. They pick that one out but there are a lot of other things that they completely disregard. They just pick and choose. Also so much of the earlier writing has been altered in translation. And it goes on. And you get false emphasis. I don't think the Bible is the inspired word of God. Some may be inspired, but it also contains myths and history."

Space does not permit the discussion on the alternative interpretations offered by the respondents to render the conventional biblical exegesis inaccurate. Suffice it to say that, in their view, the foundation of the Church's unfavourable dealing with the issue of homosexuality is predicated on an erroneous interpretation. In this connection, Boswell's (1980) challenge to the conventional English translation of certain Greek and Hebrew terms in biblical manuscripts is well-known.

(b) In shifting the focus from those specific biblical passages, some respondents argue that broad and general Christian principles override the perceived condemnation of homosexuality by those passages. These principles, such as God's unconditional love for and acceptance of all peoples and Christian justice, should override the Church's justification in censuring homosexuality.

This denotes the important distinction between biblical and Christian principles. Biblical principles are founded on the literal words of the Bible without taking, inter alia, contextualisation into consideration. This proves to be problematic as the Bible does not
specifically address certain moral issues in a clear-cut manner. Some moral issues, on the other hand, are not mentioned at all. On the contrary, Christian principles are broad principles derived from values embraced by Christianity. Unconditional love and full acceptance of all peoples are two salient examples (Thatcher 1993). Therefore, certain Christian principles might not be specifically derived from the Bible, but it might be predicated on the general and broad values that Christianity upholds.

This sentiment is clearly represented in the following response of a Church of England priest:

"I deal with that (the conventional teaching of the Church against homosexuality) by bringing into the argument Jesus' teaching on love and acceptance, and in particular, you know, the teaching on why do you look for the spleen in your brother's eye and not the plank in your own? And also Christ's teaching on justice and acceptance." (Resp. no. 6A)

The anecdote above argues for the acceptance of all peoples and the unchristian nature of being judgmental. The Church is castigated for not demonstrating the acceptance and justice in being open to alternative interpretations. This is further accentuated by the following argument:

"I think the conventional interpretation as intolerant and misplaced and showing a lack of understanding and compassion which would see as not having that particular Christian attitude of tolerance. They are intolerant, bigoted, 'hated' and non-progressive." (Resp. no. 51A)

In the same vein, respondent no. 48B offers the following argument:

"...... Jesus never said anything about homosexuality. He did about hypocrisy which is much more a besetting sin...... Well you see I can read the book of Leviticus which says that if a man lies with a man then they must be stoned. But so are adulterers! If you take a look at the Levitical rule...... there are all sorts of other rules in there...... The trouble is too many people focus on the gay thing. They are homophobes...... take what they want, read the Bible out of context you can prove anything...... Actually you can look at any Christian sexual ethics, the bulk of Pauline corpus talks about chastity. If you are going to ask anyone what is the Christian norm, it is chastity! Not marriage, not cohabitation. Straight or gay."

The response above is particularly telling. It seeks to shift the focus from the Church's condemnation of homosexuality to the Church's failure in condemning with the same vigour other 'sins' such as hypocrisy and adultery. This is intended to highlight the Church's prejudice and bias in singling out gay people to be the frontline candidates for censure while turning a blind eye on other 'sins'.

(c) The final strategy in discrediting the conventional biblical interpretation is to employ a historical-critical hermeneutic to challenge its applicability and relevance in today's socio-historical context. Certain respondents acknowledge that the Bible does prohibit
the practice of male homosexuality. However, the prohibition is issued in a specific socio-historical context. It therefore holds no relevance to today's context. The continued use of this prohibition is therefore erroneous. This point is strongly expressed by many respondents, such as the following:

"I think to depend on something written several thousands years ago, written in a time, written by people who were totally different from us, I think it's foolish to be limited by it. Something that seems so perfectly right and natural to actually forego that because somebody at some time in a very specific context wrote against it. I think you'll do yourself great damage....... I don't think one could argue that the Bible on its own favours homosexuality. What I do think though is that the homosexuality or the relationships that existed during Old Testament times and New Testament times were probably very different from the sort of relationships that exist now. The gay people probably didn't live in relationships during those times. There is no evidence they did or didn't. But one's guess is that they didn't. And that Paul particularly is writing about gay prostitution in Corinthians or wherever it is....... But I think to argue that Scripture wasn't actually against homosexuality would be wrong. I think in fact it is. But it wasn't against the homosexuality that has developed, in loving relationships. It doesn't seem that it's loving relationships that is under attack in Scripture....... a loving relationship is immensely positive and enriching as a Christian." (Resp. no. 2A)

Respondent no. 2A acknowledges the Bible's prohibition of homosexual behaviour. However, he also argues that the socio-historical context within which the prohibition applied is different from and therefore irrelevant to today's context. The male homosexual behaviour prohibited then was primarily male prostitution, which does not relate to gay male partnerships of this current time. The difference between the previous and current socio-historical contexts justifies the inapplicability of the prohibition. This strategy has a strong socio-cultural relativity emphasis, thus treating the Bible as a product of its time and must be interpreted in the light of changing social realities without disrespecting its authority.

Many respondents warn that the Church applies strict biblical principles out of context, thus forfeiting itself the opportunity to practise broad Christian principles. The following responses illustrate this:

"I think most people who sort of use those passages against one being gay are really ripping the passages totally out of context. I think you got to have first of all the contextualisation of these. I think also the mere fact that there is a statement in the Bible doesn't offer the necessity to make that statement an act of faith. One has got to understand biblical writings in context as the expression of a particular people at a certain time with their limitations and strengths, which are different to those now." (Resp. no. 20A)

"I just think that basically a lot of things in the Bible are totally out of date and have nothing to do with today. The Bible was written at the time, particularly the Old Testament, was written at the time for the needs of the Church at that time. There were laws to help the people cope with whatever the problems were at that particular time. And they were in a different country with a different civilisation. So they were based on a code I suppose and were adapted and were deviated in some cases to being what the hierarchy decided this is what we wanted...... Basically...... the Bible.... a lot of it is interpretation and as I said, a lot of it is down to what was needed at that time. The Bible and religion need to grow with the times." (Resp. no. 50B)
It can be concluded at this point that many respondents seek to invalidate the biblical passages that the Church uses in censuring homosexual behaviour. The conventional interpretation and the use of these passages is a threat to gay Christians. They invalidate these passages by first of all exposing the shortcomings of the conventional interpretation and subsequently offering an alternative one. They also argue the importance of practising general and broad Christian principles which should, in certain cases, override specific biblical principles. This is particularly important if these biblical principles are not in line with the current socio-historical context. They argue that not taking contextualisation into consideration can lead to a jaundiced view of the issue.

Reconstrual of the Source of Threat

Besides discrediting the validity of the threat, the respondents also dismiss the credibility of the Church as the moral guardian for Christians. Undermining the credibility of this source of threat, they could justifiably reject the official pronouncement of the Church on the issue of homosexuality. This dismissal is predicated on two criteria. First, some respondents express their lack of confidence in the Church as their moral arbiter on the grounds that it has hitherto erroneously approved of certain institutions which are at present considered morally reprehensible. Its disapproval of homosexual behaviour therefore also has the likelihood of being buttressed by prejudice and the lack of discernment. This concern is expressed as follows:

"I say quite simply but categorically that the Church has got it shamefully wrong. There can be no room for homophobia or any form of discrimination or prejudice, which the Church is being guilty of in the past for centuries in all sorts of spheres from indirectly at one point supporting the slave trade to perhaps supporting apartheid at certain times. They are wrong. They have got it wrong." (Resp. no. 6A)

"I think basically on sexuality as a whole they are screwed up and they have got it wrong. The same with slavery, they have got it wrong. They have got it wrong as a human institution. The spirit is somehow for some reasons not revealed through the Church as a whole. They have got the issue wrong." (Resp. no. 3A)

"One has to go by one's own conscience. I don't pay much attention to what church leaders say because they can be wrong. They have been wrong in the past about other things. It is rather like contraception. A lot of good Christian people practise birth control. They just think the Vatican is wrong on that particular thing. I think that is the case with being gay. I think they have no experience with gay people....... I think any institution that's run by professional bachelors is a bit odd. They have just this thing about sex. I think things have got to change there." (Resp. no. 22A)

In the cases above, the respondents cite the Church's, in today's terms, erroneous support for historical institutions such as the slave trade and apartheid. In so doing, they dismiss the Church's credibility in its attempt to regulate their behaviour.
The second criterion used to dismiss the Church as the moral arbiter is the argument that there exists a credibility gap between the Church's official stance on homosexuality which is negative and the individual treatment one receives which can be sympathetic and supportive. Bishops or clergy who officially and publicly speak against homosexuality might in actual fact be sympathetic and non-interfering in dealing with gay people on an individual basis. This is viewed as gross hypocrisy and it renders the official pronouncement worthless, as it is seen as merely a document discreetly orchestrated to satisfy public expediency. This is eloquently argued below:

"There is this difference between what the institution says and what people are at grassroots level. So for example the Church, the Vatican would say, 'You can't do this. You mustn't do that. Homosexuality is intrinsically disordered so on and so forth.' The hierarchy in this country would say, 'Well the Vatican says so, so therefore it should be it.' But if you go and talk to a sympathetic priest....... to me that is critical..... The fact that I find a priest who is understanding towards gays and the Church that officially is not .... this is contradiction and hypocrisy. The whole thing just makes me angry....... What the institution says in terms of the large homosexual part of my life is divorced from the truth. They have no understanding about their fears, no understanding about what constitutes any kind of homosexual relationship, be it a one-night-stand or a faithful long-term relationship where feelings can go into it." (Resp. no. 3B)

The discrepancy between the official and the individual responses which at times occupy both ends of the spectrum generates anger in many respondents. The credibility of the Church is damaged by this discrepancy which to them is simply a form of hypocrisy. This hypocrisy dismisses the moral responsibility of the Church from being their moral arbiter. The Church is viewed as being beset with prejudice and a lack of understanding. This is strongly felt by certain respondents especially when they see that the homosexuality the Church has historically opposed to shares no similarity with their own positive personal experience of being in a partnership. This point is taken up in the following sub-section.

Positive Personal Experience

Some respondents argue that the homosexuality that the Church officially disapproves of does not reflect the kind of homosexuality that they personally experience. They consider their partnerships as practising Christian values and principles. Therefore, the official pronouncement of the Church which is predicated on the lack of knowledge of gay partnerships should not be applicable to them. This is encapsulated in the following brief comment:

"How can I possibly say what happens between (resp. no. 55B) and I is sinful? It's beyond me. It has been so liberating and enriching and sustaining." (Resp. no. 55A)
Discrediting the Church with the validity of one's own personal experience is widespread among the respondents. It argues that the quality of partnership should be the criterion to evaluate a partnership, not its sexual form. Respondent no. 56A, a Church of England priest argues:

"I think there is a problem in being a practising gay Christian certainly in that most of the churches I suppose they are still saying you shouldn't be. I suppose God has called me to do two things and that is both to be a Christian priest and to be in this relationship. I do think this is important. I have got a sense of vocation to (resp. no. 56B)........ one can be a gay person and one's relationship can be much of a way of holiness and as much a vocation as marriage for heterosexual Christians........ And the relationship works. The fact that, in a way as everybody says this kind of relationship doesn't last, or you can't be a real Christian and do that kind of things.... the fact that it does last and does work is in a sense an important proof. That's what makes you feel confident."

The argument of the respondent above is consistent with what his partner says about his own personal experience:

"The Church and its latest official statement about homosexuality is that as being ....... if you are a Roman Catholic..... as an intrinsic disorder. I cannot accept that from the experience of being me and what has been achieved in my life as a result of me being me. I am just being me. God is part of my life and I don't consider that to be an intrinsic disorder. I believe it is possible to be homosexual and Christian and living in a relationship." (Resp. no. 56B)

As mentioned, the majority of the respondents argue that their partnerships practise Christian principles. This helps buttress their argument that a gay Christian partnership that demonstrates Christian values is possible. An overwhelming majority of respondents argue that their partnerships operate on general Christian principles such as love, mutual sharing, faithfulness and commitment to various degrees. This is represented in the following responses:

"I think Christianity does have an influence on our partnership. I think this idea about commitment and working through difficulties in good and in bad, in sickness and in health, and for better and for worse and all that....... I think it's implicit in the relationship." (Resp. no. 6A)

"The pursuit of Christian principles and trying to lead a life according to principles does mean that this relationship might not exist at all if there is not a Christian framework for it. Without the backing-up of Judeo-Christian moral principles, I probably would have left a long time ago. I haven't. This is a duty. I learn from the idea of duty as it comes out of the Bible to me. Persistence and loyalty and stuff like that which I don't think are principles which just have come out of the moral and nature of people. I don't think we are automatically loyal and dutiful. These are acquired." (Resp. no. 19A)

Some respondents, on the other hand, also emphasise their participation in Christian activity with their partners as a demonstration of their Christian faith. In response to the question if Christianity has any influence in his partnership, respondent no. 3A asserts, "I think it does because we both pray, we both go to mass, we both worship together. The shared sense of community..... and the sense of partnership is one way you do to make yourself a part of
The following respondent also emphasises his shared experience with his partner within a Christian framework:

"Having a faith... and I am living in an active faith... is so fundamental to who you are I mean on a ethical basis apart from anything else. So we do behave in a very ethical manner towards each other. That makes our relationship much happier and that we are always together. In a long term, we don't split up. We don't cheat on each other. We don't lie to each other. So it's an ethical faith. And then there are spiritual things. We have a common experience there. We have both shared the experience of being at the Eucharist and finding ourselves at the beginning of the Eucharist to pray..... absolutely on tip-toe with excitement. Now we share that experience at the heart of the faith which is to do with belonging to the Christian community, belonging to the body of Christ, this fellowship. It binds us together more strongly because we are bonded together by this faith in Christ who is risen and in Christ who is then present in the bread and the wine and he is present in the gathered community around the altar. We share the excitement of them which is beyond the excitement of anything really." (Resp. no. 52A)

In the same vein, respondent no. 8A testifies the application of his Christian belief in his partnership and his positive experience has assisted him in believing its rightness and compatibility with Christianity:

"..... Christianity is part of me. I endeavour to be a Christian and I try to incorporate Christian principles into my life. Therefore that has quite a lot of bearing on the things I do. I hope it affects the way I treat people to the better. Therefore it has got to influence the way I live with (resp. no. 8B), the way I treat (resp. no. 8B) also in the early times, when we had problems in the relationship, I prayed for the relationship, and eventually things had been improved. And that's what made me convinced in myself...... if it is against Christianity..... if I prayed to God, I am not going to get help. But I have received help. I can't prove or show how I received help, but I have received help in this relationship when we needed it. If what we are doing is so totally against God, he wouldn't have answered my prayers."

Couple no. 5 also presents a picture of a partnership that is affirmed by their individual and collective Christian experience. Both partners agree that the partnership began because of Christianity and it is within this Christian framework that the partnership is worked at. It thus demonstrates the Christian values and principles that they uphold.

"I suppose the relationship actually arose, in many ways, out of the mutual belief and respect for spirituality. It has developed so much along those lines. It is difficult to imagine it anything other than that......... Christianity does influence us because we have very strong feelings about it. We are often not in any sort of institutional setting and there is a lot of questioning. Our faith is very active and we both like that. That is a very important topic of conversation or feature of our relationship. And we still seek out times to free our spirits together, less overt than it used to be but we still do that." (Resp. no. 5A)

"Well we wouldn't have started our relationship if it weren't for the fact that we were both striving after the truth. We are both Christian and we both wanted to know what it meant. In the early days we used to read Bible together and pray together and went to church together and talked together. And now, we still pray together. But we don't pray in quite the same way, it's more in silence. I find it more difficult to pray in words. And also in being open to people, having our home as an open home that..."
In the view of these respondents, the implicit or explicit practice of Christianity in their partnerships testifies to the possibility for incorporating Christianity into their personal experience of being in a partnership. This lends credence to the validity of a gay Christian partnership, thus dismissing the Church's condemnation of it which to them is predicated on prejudice and misunderstanding.

Given that most of the respondents have resorted to a form of individualised spirituality as discussed, it is hardly surprising that their personal experience is seen as an extremely important stratagem used to discredit the Church and to justify the acceptability of their partnerships. Hannigan (1993:9) calls this the "theology of experience", in place of the "theology of authority" with its emphasis on religious dogma. This sentiment is best encapsulated in the statement How can it be wrong when it feels so right?

**Creationist Argument**

The creationist argument — that one's homosexual orientation is God-created and is therefore as valid and acceptable as the heterosexual orientation — is the ultimate argument that a gay Christian can offer. Attributing the responsibility to God renders any efforts for the alteration of any sexual orientation as morally reprehensible. In this case, God is presented as the shield to fend off the threat to their identity. It is not surprising therefore that a great majority of respondents resort to this argument to justify the acceptability of their sexuality and partnerships, thus the invalidity of the Church's official stance. This is eloquently argued below:

"I think the fundamental question is whether God made us this way. Everything has to come down to it. There is no way that anyone else can claim that they were made by God heterosexual and then say that I was not made by God homosexual. That is simply no way that that can be said, because my experience of being homosexual is exactly the same as a straight person's experiences as being heterosexual. It's just the way we were made..... there is nothing that has caused this. It's just the way God has made us. It's not a sickness. It's not unhealthy. It isn't inherently evil. There is no evil flowing from it. It is just like being left-handed or red-haired. It's unusual. It's different. It might be inconvenient like the left-handed in the minority." (Resp. no. 52B)

The view above clearly illustrates the point that all sexualities are God-created. The thrust of the matter is therefore not the nature of the sexuality, but the manner in which it is expressed. They are of the opinion that, being Christians, they ought to express their sexuality within a Christian moral framework. Practising it outside of this framework constitutes its
unacceptability, but not the intrinsic nature of the sexuality itself. It is what you do, and not what you are that matters appears to be the motto for these respondents, as expressed below:

"We are not talking about a morally reprehensible condition. I think homosexuality is amoral. What we do with our sexuality whether it is homosexual or heterosexual or bisexual is up to us. We can be immoral or we can be very moral people. So I don’t really see that as a problem." (Resp. no. 6A)

"I don’t see it as a problem. I see that God creates people in the whole spectrum of colours and sexualities and with different aspects of personality. What we are to try to do is to lead as Christian a way as possible without giving our circumstances.... you know you strive for a Christian ideal within your life. It doesn’t necessarily mean to deny aspects of your life." (Resp. no. 55B)

"I see being gay is my God-given persona. Therefore just as any other persons, I have to live responsibly. So as a gay person you have to work out a way of expressing your sexuality in a responsible way. That’s part of your Christian vocation." (Resp. no. 20B)

The anecdotal evidence above reveals the justificatory strength one can derive from the creationist argument. Christians, regardless of their sexual orientation, have the same responsibility to practise their sexuality within a Christian moral framework. The respondents, however, do not speak with one voice as to what should constitute this framework. This point is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Eight.

By placing heterosexuality and homosexuality (and for that matter bisexuality) on equal plane, the focus on the morality of homosexuality is diverted to that of all sexualities. Heterosexuality therefore should not be seen as a licence for acceptance. The practice of both homosexuality and heterosexuality has the equal possibility to honour or betray Christian principles:

"I don’t see any contradictions at all between being gay and being Christian. I think that there is contradiction between some aspect of gay behaviour and being Christian. But no more so than will be the same for being heterosexuals.... I think some parts of common gay sexual activity is actually quite exploitative of other people and not very caring about other people, to the extent that we use other people for our own gratification and pleasure. That I think is inconsistent with our Christian beliefs.... In being gay in itself, there is no contradiction at all. I believe that my sexuality is God-created. And I don’t believe God can make mistakes. So for some reasons which I can’t understand, it is part of God’s plan that I should have grown up gay. So it’s okay." (Resp. no. 9A)

Summary

In this section, I have analysed the four primary stratagems used by the respondents to manage the stigma of being gay Christian and the threat the Church poses to their identity. These stratagems operate at the cognitive-emotive level in which the respondents justify the acceptability of their identity and the invalidity of the stigma and the stigmatiser. This counter-attack is organised in four ways.
First, the respondents devalue and invalidate the conventional interpretation of the biblical passages that primarily constitute the Church's negative attitude towards them. The conventional interpretation is considered inaccurate and inapplicable in today's socio-historical context. An alternative interpretation is offered, supported by the emphasis on other general and broad principles of Christianity that deflect the focus on homosexuality per se.

Second, the respondents attack the Church itself for its lack of credibility and sufficient specialised knowledge in this field to act as their moral arbiter. The Church's past failings and the credibility gap between the official pronouncement and private treatment are cited to substantiate this.

Third, respondents use their own positive experiences of being gay Christians and being in a partnership to decry the prejudice and lack of knowledge on the part of the Church. It is argued that the type of homosexuality that the Church historically disapproves of shares no similarity to the kind of positive homosexuality they experience. Personal experience, in relation to their individualised spirituality, is a powerful affirmation of its rightness.

Fourth, the creationist argument is used to justify the acceptability of all sexual orientations, as they are all God-created. Assigning the responsibility to God for their sexual state of being is the most powerful argument they can put forward to defend its acceptability and demand affirmation. What is morally reprehensible is not the sexuality itself, but the practice of it outside of a Christian moral framework, although respondents do not agree on what constitutes this framework as far as gay Christian morality is concerned.

7.4. Stigma Management at the Interpersonal Level: Relationship with the Local Church

In deciding the pattern of their relationship with the church, certain couples act as one unit while for others, each individual partner demonstrates different patterns. On the whole these couples can be broadly divided into three categories: (1) couples with one or both partners not participating in the church at all; (2) couples with both partners participating in different churches; and (3) couples with both partners participating in the same church.

Seven couples fall into the first category, while 6 couples are in the second. None of the latter six couples report this pattern as a stratagem to conceal their sexuality and partnership from their respective churches. Two major practical reasons are cited for this pattern: their separate living arrangements and personal preference for churches of a different nature. There are 17 couples with both partners participating in the same church, although their degree of involvement might vary.
In terms of the respondents' relationships with the church, five types of responses can be identified. These responses are their stratagems in managing the stigma, at an interpersonal level, for being gay Christians and being in gay partnerships. Each stratagem involves different mechanisms which are used to protect themselves against possible stigmatisation. These stratagems are:

(a) *Complete physical distancing*: the respondent completely removes himself from the church.
(b) *Complete integration*: the respondent is integrated into the accepting and positive church, often characterised by the complete disclosure of social information about his sexuality and partnership.
(c) *Complete psychological distancing*: the respondent participates in the church and tries to 'pass' as a heterosexual. He opts for complete concealment as far as the social information about his sexuality and partnership is concerned.
(d) *Partial psychological distancing*: the respondent participates in the church and controls the social information about his sexuality and partnership by partial concealment or selective disclosure.
(e) *Inaction*: the respondent participates in the church and does not deliberately conceal or disclose social information about his sexuality and partnership. He may be discreet and cautious, wanting the reality of his sexuality and partnership to emerge naturally.

Certain couples adopt the same stratagem while in other cases both partners might resort to different stratagems. The adoption of a particular stratagem is not static. It changes depending on both internal and external factors. For instance, a respondent who has initially physically distanced himself from the church might at a later stage decide to give it another try. In the process, he might find a completely accepting church which eventually encourages him to be completely integrated. On the other hand, a respondent who initially decides to disclose social information about his sexuality and partnership to a selective group of individuals in the church might expand the scope of disclosure as he gains more confidence as a gay Christian or as he discovers that the church’s climate is progressively accepting.

*Complete Physical Distancing*

*Physical distancing* in this context differs from the *isolation* stratagem that Goffman (1963) and Breakwell (1983, 1986) expound. The latter denotes an individual with a discreditable feature trying to cover it by removing himself completely from the social audience who has the potential to stigmatisate him or pose a threat to his identity. The
individual isolates himself at the very outset to prevent the possible process of stigmatisation from taking place.

*Physical distancing*, in the case of the respondents concerned, refers to their removal of themselves from a church which stigmatises them on the ground of their sexuality, after *they have been there*. The removal does not take place at the very outset. They have been in the church attempting to seek affirmation and acceptance for their personal identity. It is the subsequent disappointment with the church in this respect that results in their decision to remove themselves from it completely. They consciously decide to physically distance themselves from the church not necessarily because they want to conceal social information about their discreditable feature, but because they are not satisfied with the lack of progress in this area in the church. Their sexuality might be of public knowledge and they might not have had any negative personal experiences with the church.

Physical distancing from the church owing to disappointment might fuel one's desire to associate with and participate in gay groups to press for changes within or without the Church. Thus, in the process, one's gayness — one's discreditable feature — is not only 'uncovered', but prominently highlighted. Therefore, the concealment of social information about his sexuality need not be the motivating factor behind this form of physical distancing.

The physical distancing from the church leads to two possible outcomes: (1) the privatisation of one's religious beliefs, contributing to a form of *individualised spirituality*; (2) the search for another church with a positive climate. In the first instance, certain respondents are so deeply disappointed with the way the Church has been handling the issue of homosexuality that distancing themselves from it is the only means to prevent themselves from losing faith in their religious beliefs altogether. They resort to believing without belonging, a situation in which they still profess their allegiance to Christianity without officially belonging to a church. Respondent no. 5A who has left the Church of England and is at present actively involved with the LGCM with his partner, strongly argues this point:

"I come from a very evangelical Anglican tradition. I want to be in the Church, but what I feel angry against is the intolerance and the promotion of views by people who have no understanding and have not sought to gain much understanding and experience of gay people....... you know sitting down and finding out how it ticks and what they think..... and then making pronouncements and leading administration and creating organisations that set out to undermine gay people. To be honest with you, I much rather be hated than to have this kind of 'loving' Christianity thrust upon me, which is the feature of some of the Church. I find that appalling and totally unacceptable. I therefore feel that my place at the moment is outside the Church, much more into as an individual making my way to God....... So I stopped being active in the established Church...... I am questioning the traditional approach. Do we need the traditional base of churches? Do we need the institution of the Church? Do we need a vast amount of tradition which actually seems to handicap us?"
The statement "I therefore feel that my place at the moment is outside the Church, much more into as an individual making my way to God..." suggests this respondent's disillusion with the Church and the need to practise his Christianity in an individualised manner. Another respondent who is highly critical of the Church's credibility asserts:

"This is one of the reasons why I don't go to church. That's one of the reasons I don't believe in the Church. It is teaching all these negative things about homosexuality and basically putting down gays. There is so much hypocrisy within the Church when there is like 30% of the clergy in the Church are gay, yet in the General Synod... they talk about having faith and having conviction... yet they vote in all these anti-gay things. And these people are telling you to trust in them. So I am pretty anti-Church. In the Church there are nice people individually, but the institution I am anti." (Resp. no. 17B)

A Church of England priest who left the pastoral ministry after six years, bitterly expresses the same sentiment, buttressed by his personal experience as a victim of stigmatisation:

"I had a difficulty with my senior colleague. He chose to reveal the nature of my relationship with (resp. no. 16A) to my Bishop. I felt that was such a gross betrayal. And then the Bishop was hopeless in dealing with it. So I didn't want to belong to an institution that is capable of that sort of betrayal, So I resigned.... It was an awful time. I am still bitterly upset about it." (Resp. no. 16B)

While some respondents are bitterly disappointed with the Church, some do not rule out the possibility of returning if a church with a conducive climate can be found. Couple no. 7 expresses this desire. At the outset, respondent no. 7A emphatically mentions his need to distance himself from the Roman Catholic Church:

"I believe in the basics of Christian teachings. But I don't practise the Catholic faith although I do believe in it, mainly because if I do, I feel if I practise it, I am in a way persecuting gays because of what they (the Roman Catholic Church) did in the past and because of their attitude towards not just gay but also towards a lot of other issues. I feel if I go to a Catholic church, then I am colluding with what they are saying and doing. At the moment I distance myself from it. I left the Church because of that. My Catholic faith is very separated from the Church. I don't feel at home in the Church."

However, this does not rule out the possibility that he might return to a church in the future, although there is a criterion to be met, "Not a Baptist church anyway. I have been to the local one here. It is particularly evangelical and particularly homophobic. I don't think I will be very comfortable." His partner agrees. He would only return to the church if ".... the congregation is accepting and we can get on with what we are doing. No one wants to go to a church hiding behind something." (Resp. no. 7B) This sentiment is echoed by respondent no. 48B who asserts that, "If I became an active Christian again, I think I would become, you know, going back to the Church of England, but probably somewhere else, somewhere more liberal with its tradition."
Complete Integration

A respondent needs to develop the confidence that the church he participates in is positive and supportive of his sexuality before a complete disclosure in this connection takes place. The respondent first 'tests' the climate of the church. When a positive climate is confirmed as being present, selective disclosure is ensured and it might gradually lead to complete disclosure at a later stage.

Respondents in this category form a rare minority. Only two couples and three individual respondents are in this position. The following respondents attend the Quakers meetings which positively accept gay people. They therefore feel utterly at ease there:

"In my former church, the isolation became so great and so many of us were rejected. Everybody was an outcast as homosexuals. In those days, in the 1930s, I saw that there could be no future for me. I was very unhappy...... (After a five-year lapse) I started going to Quakers meetings.... I just sat there quietly and became relaxed, and all my irritations of life, they all subside. It offers a very good atmosphere. I find support there...... We don't have this form of worship. We have no hymns. We have no pastor. We just go and sit inside. You open up yourself. You relax and be quiet and wait for the Holy Spirit to move in you. Some people are moved to speak or pray." (Resp. no. 54B)

"Quakers are not formally tied to things like the Nicene Creed. Also with the theological change and re-thinking in me, I find the Society of Friends more appropriate. It offers me a free environment to express my faith. In my former church, you can't talk freely about your sexuality or in the open." (Resp. no. 20B)

Couple no. 9, who attend a liberal Roman Catholic church, express the same kind of ease. The acceptance and affirmation they find in the church encourages them to be exceptionally active in the administration of the church. Respondent no. 9A recounts:

"Just about the first week we turned up, we were made welcome. Nobody has ever made the faintest hint of protest about us being gay. We went there by chance for a baptism, and we immediately felt that we liked it and it was nice atmosphere. So a few weeks later we went back for the service...... we felt so much more comfortable and more at home and more welcome there. But even if the church were negative, I would still have go there every week because I feel that I need to go to church every week...... if the church is negative, we will keep a distance although I will stay there."

The last part of respondent no. 9A's comment reflects his view of the importance of a positive environment in the church to encourage active and unreserved participation. However, the acceptance the respondent experiences at the local church might not be consistent with the official stance of the denomination to which the church belongs. That can have a negative effect on the respondent. This is the case for couple no. 10 where both partners have been active members for six years at a local Methodist church which fully accepts them, thus encouraging their active involvement. However, the official stance of the Methodist Conference which runs
in stark contrast to their positive experience with their local church has generated great
disappointment in them:

"We have decided to resign from our membership because it's
discriminatory against me as a gay person. We have immense difficulty.
The church we go to is an open, honest, liberal church. We have been
accepted fully for what we are. I don't feel vulnerable at all at the local
church. The hierarchy, the Conference, is different, and it is also safe to
say that within the circuit to which our church belongs there are certain
ministers and officers who are very homophobic...... We struggled about
what we would do. I can't stay in the Methodist Church, knowing that it
disapproves of my relationship despite the full approval of my local
church, because someone in the local church can say the Conference
decision has effect here and we think you should toe the line. I am very
sure I can't stay in this kind of set-up where we live in the mercy of the
Conference, or waiting for the next minister to come who may be
homophobic. There is a great sense of insecurity." (Resp. no. 10A)

My post-interview contact with couple no. 10 confirms that they have resigned from
their church membership. They now attend the Metropolitan Community Church which is
widely-known for its open policy to the gay population. In this particular case, the complete
integration into the local church is terminated by the discrepancy between the climate of the
official stance and that of the local church. It is exactly this kind of discrepancy that many
respondents use to discredit the respectability of the Church, as already discussed.

Complete Psychological Distancing

Complete psychological distancing is certainly the most difficult stratagem to
manoeuvre. It is accompanied by the complete concealment of any social information pertaining
to the respondent's sexuality and partnership. Having no one who is cognisant of the social
information, the respondent experiences no sense of support. In the worst possible scenario, a
couple who attend the same church might need to orchestrate the presentation of their
relationship as two good friends and not a social unit as a couple.

Needless to say, this kind of joint presence management imposes on them great
psychological strains. There is always the need to manipulate their image as a pair of good
friends and yet not too close as to project an image of a couple. Both partners involved need to
execute the balancing act between them. This is a typical case of believing with partial
belonging whereby the physical presence in the church is coupled with a psychological
distance from it.

Only one couple is in this situation. Couple no. 50 attends a Methodist church together,
but not actively. Respondent no. 50A is heterosexually married and the church is cognisant of
this fact. This enforces the need to opt for complete concealment of their partnership in the
church. Both have so far never encountered any negative experiences and they do not feel
Both partners are sanguine about their ability in handling the possible enquiry into their discreetly-presented friendship. This confidence appears to rest on their belief in the mutual respect for privacy. Respondent no. 50A asserts in this connection:

"As I said to you there was one person who obviously doubted (about their relationship) but most people...... really in a sense it is up to them. I would acknowledge that relationship as much as it needs to be acknowledged in front of people. I don't ask them about their sex life or whatever. So I assume that my sex life is not of interest to them. It might well be but that is their problem, not mine. So really is to acknowledge our friendship, our closeness to one another. What they want to take out of that is up to them. Not to deny what you would expect anyone to do in a friendship, you don’t have to go over the top about the sexual side of it. Just acknowledge the reality of the friendship."

His partner expresses the same confidence. In response to the question as to what he will consider the appropriate action to take if he is challenged, he asserts:

"I don’t know. I think it depends on who it was. If it was someone that I was friendly with...... I mean there are a lot of people that we talk to about everything, more closely than others... then I don’t know. I really don’t know. If they are asking, I would assume they are asking out of friendliness, not out of aggression. If it is out of aggression, I would ask them to mind their own business." (Resp. no. 50B)

In the case of this couple, complete concealment is a stratagem to organise their partnership alongside with respondent no. 50A's marriage. Given the fact that they are confident about their sexuality and are prepared to face up to the potential challenge in the church about their partnership, it can be concluded that their concern for the concealment of social information has more to do with their intention not to rock the foundation of respondent no. 50A's marriage. I have mentioned this point expressed by respondent no. 50B (see Chapter Six Section 6.3.).

Only one individual respondent opts for the same stratagem in his relationship with the church. He is the only respondent in the sub-sample who perceives his church to be homophobic, although he has never had any negative experiences. The other respondents
consider their churches either accepting or generally keep the issue aside and therefore it is not homophobic in that it is not negative either. Opting for complete concealment is a necessity to this respondent:

"... because in my local church..... the priest is an old-fashioned sort of priest and he wouldn't entertain it (homosexuality) at all. The congregation don't know either." (Resp. no. 8A)

The perception of the church being homophobic, not supported by actual negative experience seems to be the main motivating factor in his decision for complete concealment:

"I haven't encountered any hostility. What I have encountered is I think hard to describe. People who have gone through it will understand it...... sort of a cold shoulder. Nobody wants to know you. I feel vulnerable. They aren't friendly anyway, but they are a little bit more friendly to other people. I have been going on and off to this church since 1987. But I don't know anyone round there, not even to speak to. <And yet you continue going> I go basically because it is convenient. It is just round the corner...... I am not going there for the people. I am going there because I need to pray and I need to worship God...... I do feel that the environment can be quite homophobic..... I think I am highly identifiable for what I am..... I think I probably look gay. Probably people put two and two together. They have decided what I am and that is what makes the barrier." (Resp. no. 8A)

It is interesting to note the two different reasons for complete concealment between couple no. 50 and respondent no. 8A. Both have never had any negative experiences in their respective churches. However, the former does not feel vulnerable or threatened and is confident about their ability to face up to any potential challenge. They opt for complete concealment principally because of respondent no. 50A's marriage. On the other hand, respondent no. 8A resorts to the same stratagem out of a sense of vulnerability. What distinguishes their motivations are the presence or absence of a sense of vulnerability and the confidence of being in control of the situation.

Partial Psychological Distancing

This stratagem is the most popular among the respondents. With it, the respondents disclose social information about their sexuality and their partnership to a selective audience. While complete disclosure is primarily encouraged by the respondents' perception of the accepting and non-threatening climate of the church, selective disclosure is determined by more than this factor. In fact, the respondents do not opt for complete disclosure because of their perception of their church as not being entirely accepting. Singling out a selective few is a means of protecting the dissemination of the information to the entire church and on the other hand secure the support of that small circle of individuals. This helps prevent their sense of total alienation from the church as far as their partnership is concerned. This will also make the presentation of the relationship before the church less demanding.
Fourteen couples who attend the same church and five individual respondents consider this as their way of organising social information about their sexuality and partnership. The audience selected to disclose such information are, expectedly, close and supportive friends in the congregation. In some cases, the priests also become the object of disclosure, having been observed by the respondents as being accepting and supportive.

For respondents who are priests themselves, only a small minority choose to disclose the information to their respective bishops for fear of official repudiation that might threaten their personal integrity and profession. What then determines the respondents' decision in selective disclosure? Four factors can be identified in this connection. These factors affect the dialectic of revelation-concealment of the respondents' partnership in relation to the church.

Like complete disclosure, selective disclosure is encouraged when the congregation, or at least part of the congregation, is perceived to be non-threatening and supportive. The latter is often the prerequisite of the former. The two following respondents, together with their respective partners, decided to disclose the information to some people in the church because of the partially positive climate of their churches:

"I don't feel uncomfortable. Especially this parish has a reputation that it accepts people who are, by church law, not acceptable. Some of them are divorces you know. It is a liberal church. Therefore, there are people who live together without marriage, divorced, remarried, you know, that kind of people. Therefore, generally people are quite tolerant. I don't feel threatened. It's quite safe anyway." (Resp. no. 21B)

"The Parochial Church Council has made a sort of formal decision that we would always want to welcome homosexual people and be open and responsive to that. I have never known any dissension from that..... Those people in the congregation who are aware and sensitive and sensible obviously realise that they probably know a lot of gay people like everybody does." (Resp. no. 47B)

It is obvious from the data above that having the confidence in the church climate in general does encourage disclosure. This is also true if the support of people is expressed, even implicitly. It dissipates the fear of disclosure, as in the case of a Church of England priest:

"It wouldn't worry me...... I think the fact that my boss (the bishop) knows helps...... I think he quite likes (resp. no. 6B)..... sort of fairly supportive, although he never asks us any questions and doesn't make life difficult for us. He knows that (resp. no. 6B) lives here. He knows that we are lovers. Sometimes he asks how (resp. no. 6B) is. He was quite concerned when he (resp. no. 6B) lost his job and things like that. No. We don't feel threatened." (Resp. no. 6A)

Having the confidence in some supportive individuals obviously helps the respondents in organising their relationship with the church. However, personal confidence in their own ability to face up to potential challenge also encourages disclosure. Respondent no. 18A has a
strong personality and is prepared to face potential challenges from the church with a fierce response:

"..... I don't care. I feel I am all right..... If someone challenges me, I will retaliate. I would say, 'Yes I am. So what? What the fuck has it got to do with you?' That will terrify them because the people who do that are trying to push you around. They always think that people like me are weak. So when you turn your aggression back, they are absolutely terrified."

On top of personal confidence, the official status of some respondents also helps. They realise that the clout their official status grants them can see them through the potential repercussions of disclosure. The following respondent is a well-respected theologian and a Church of England priest:

"I can cope with it. It is easier for me to cope with it because I can fight back in a sense. Coming from Oxford, that gives me some form of clout. If I write things or say things people will respect them. I can frighten Bishops. I go and tell them the truth. They don't say, 'I am going to kick you out.' And I talked to my own Bishop in this room last week about it. I told him about the relationship. He was very uncomfortable. He was very tamed, I was in a dominant position. He was very embarrassed about the fact that the Bishops have issued a silly Statement. If you face the bishop with that Statement and say, 'I am in this kind of relationship. What do you mean by this Statement?' They will be deeply embarrassed because they don't believe in the Statement in private. It is something they put out in public in order to appease basically the Evangelicals in the Church who are very hostile. I am yet to find one Bishop who in private would say that he believes what the Statement says. And that's what's awful about it. There is vast hypocrisy in the Church about it. I think the whole thing is quite sick. By getting up and saying that you can make people quite frightened. So there is strength in telling the truth actually because this is going to break. People realise that there is huge hypocrisy in this." (Resp. no. 56A)

Similarly, respondent no. 22B who is a key person in a national gay Christian organisation expresses this air of confidence:

"Nobody has ever come up to me and asked me about it or even hinted at it. I never have any problems. I don't feel vulnerable. I may feel embarrassed I think. If somebody in the parish came up and said, 'Look, are you two gays?' I would feel slightly embarrassed. But that is just my age. I am in that generation that grew up before the law reform and everything. I would feel slightly embarrassed but I think I will cope with it all right. I would probably say, 'Well yes, but why are you so bothered about it? It's not bothering me.'

The third factor that affects the extent of disclosure is the geographical location of the church concerned. A church in a metropolis such as London might offer a higher degree of anonymity. This is certainly the case for respondent no. 51A who attends a church in London:

"Yes, the gay people there know...... so there is positive attitude and other people who attend they have a positive attitude, so there is no problem...... It tends to be a place where people of a certain type stick together. Maybe all the gay people stick together, so there is no problem there...... the thing is that it being in London it attracts a lot of new people and a lot of people come and then go away. So there is not necessarily a regular congregation. Those who are regular I think there is no problem. There is sympathy and we get on well."
In relation to this factor, the type of church also plays a role in affecting the extent of disclosure:

"... the cathedral congregation... is a very good place for gay people because it would have in its worship... I mean in London all the sorts of things that gay people would want. It can be anonymous, they can leave without having to speak to anybody if they want to." (Resp. no. 1B)

Respondent no. 1B serves in a Church of England cathedral whose environment is more impersonal than a parish church because of its sheer size. His partner agrees that this kind of environment helps ease his fear of exposure:

"....... in church I have always kept a very low profile. Very low. But you know..... I am involved in the sense that my boyfriend is a priest. <Do you feel threatened when you are in the church?> Yes. It's not so bad in the cathedral because the cathedral is much bigger, much more impersonal. But in our former church I was actually terrified. I never ever got to relax."

The majority of the respondents consider a gradual disclosure approach to be the best in disseminating information about their sexuality and partnership. They are of the opinion that a sufficiently close relationship ought to be fostered with the audience to whom they intend to disclose in order to achieve the highest possible success rate. All testify this to be the best method. Respondent no. 56A adopts this approach despite the fact that he is confident and his clout permits him to be more direct:

"I am fairly careful. I want to make sure..... I think it is important that one is known and trusted as a person before allowing anybody to stick a label on you. Now that I have been here for two years and if they decide that I am okay, if I talk about it even on the pulpit, I think no one is going to walk out. Some would find it difficult, especially the older ones. But I think because they like me and think that I am all right and respect me that will be okay. If somebody has said to them before I came, they would be absolutely up your arms because they have the stereotype of gay men. They would think oh yes you are coming to do things to the choir boy or whatever. So I think it is important that people know you as a person before they know about you. But there are about 20 people in the church who know. <How did they react?> Well you see, I told them personally and quietly, having got to trust them. If I feel people wouldn't become sympathetic then I wouldn't tell them."

Mutual trust fostered between the respondent and the object of disclosure needs to be fostered before the disclosure takes place. This is also the case for respondent no. 52A who is a new curate to a parish church and whose partner is in the process of moving in. He advocates the same approach:

"... we are not going to confront people. There may be people whom I will get to know enough to tell along the way..... If somebody asked about us.... it probably depends on who it was and in what ways they asked. I certainly wouldn't tell him straight off. I don't think I would be as blunt as to say, 'This is none of your business.', because as a priest in a way it is their business because I belong to the Christian community. So it is their business in a sense. So I wouldn't say, 'It is not your business.' But I suspect I would beat around the bush a bit and try to leave things
ambiguous. Now whether that is possible depends on who asks me and how well I know that person and how I think he is going to respond and why they are asking."

His partner agrees that this seems to be the best approach, "So I think what needs to happen now and in the future is just to have a little bit of time, take things slowly, keep a low profile." (Resp. no. 52B)

On the whole, the respondents in this category are confident about their relationship with the church, typified by the comment of respondent no. 21A who attends the church his partner pastors:

"I don't feel threatened. I think in the beginning I did. But I have got to the point that if ever it comes to the crunch and somebody said or exposed me, I would say, 'Okay then good-bye.' I have to make that decision fairly early on that if it did come to the crunch, would I stick by him? Obviously I would."

Most respondents offer the same kind of confidence. Practically, they have not experienced any hostility from the church and they are prepared to leave the church if such a scenario arises. Some couples have actually in the past left their respective churches in response to negative treatment. One respondent, however, expresses his concern about being a partner of a priest with whom he cohabits:

"You see, I listen to a lot of gay clergy saying how difficult it is to be gay and a priest. But I lose patience with the argument. I think it is probably more difficult for me because if I answer the front door, it is very difficult for me to say who I am. Whereas, you know, he can say I am the vicar, whatever. So I cannot do that. And if I went to church and somebody said sort of, 'Hello where do you live?' It's difficult for me. It's difficult for me to be on the electoral roll in the church. Because then that would mean that my name will be on the official document which would say who I am or where I live." (Resp. no. 1A)

In sum, it can be concluded that selective disclosure is the most commonly-used stratagem by the respondents in relating to the church. This stratagem resembles that used by the "pragmatists" in Schneider and Conrad's (1981:214) typology of modes of adaptation to the stigma of epilepsy. It operates on the policy of selectively disclosing social information "only to those who need to know" (Scambler 1989:61).

Having a selective audience to whom to disclose the information can generate a certain amount of support which prevents them from a sense of total alienation. Four factors are responsible for selective disclosure: confidence in a certain segment of the church, personal confidence in the ability and official clout to deflect challenge, geographical locality of the church and the type of church.
Almost all respondents report no negative experiences at their current churches, although some have experienced it in their former churches which led to their distancing themselves from them. Many argue that this outcome will reoccur if the same treatment is encountered. They are in general positive and confident.

Inaction

This is the response of a minority of respondents who consider it unnecessary to consciously conceal or deliberately disclose social information about their sexuality and partnership. They have thus far never experienced any negative reactions from the congregation. Some of them are prepared to leave the congregation if such a scenario ever arises. As they do not try to conceal or disclose the information, it is therefore difficult for them to actually gauge the climate of their respective churches. The issue never arises in the agenda. One respondent appropriately describes his church as *homonothing*, not having publicly expressed an official view on this issue. They neither appear to be homophobic nor supportive. This is clearly expressed in the following remarks:

"I have never gone around telling people, 'Look, I am gay,' mainly because heterosexuals have never gone around telling me 'Look, I am heterosexual.' If people want to deduce that, it's fine.... on the other hand I have never denied it." (Resp. no. 20A)

"I have never stood up on the pulpit and said that I am gay. Nor have I said I am straight. I have done neither. I don't know what the parish thinks." (Resp. no. 48B)

The attitude of the above respondents might stem from the intention not to offend the congregation while not deliberately conceal all the social information about their respective partnerships.

"It seems to me the church reacts positively. How far they know exactly what our relationship of course is something else. But then we are quite careful not to offend. We are just relaxed with how we are with them. I mean I think what they observe is (resp. no. 55B) was someone who looked after me when I was ill. They see him as a sort of good friend and supporter, someone who helped me along the line. I doubt that I have exercised their minds to anything beyond that. They might feel that we are actually a little bit more special than that. They don't seem to mind. Certainly we have no hassle from people. They have been very kind and generous. I don't feel threatened. It is an useful aspect of having (resp. no. 55B) as part of the community anyway. He is there and they see him in his own right. He is being himself doing his own things. I think that is very positive. I hope they see it as a very positive part of my life. Anything else is between (resp. no. 55B) and I really." (Resp. no. 55A)

Respondent no. 55A is a priest in the Church of England. His attitude is shared by respondent no. 49A who is in the same profession:

"The relationship is not specially hidden. And a lot of people, I would say, in the congregation are at some level aware.... We don't want it thrust down their throats. It is respect for them. So we have to be
discreet. And we are not particularly flamboyant...... we are very
careful not to show affection in public. This is to avoid scandal, you
know, upsetting people. But we have got a congregation that fortunately
will accept all sorts of people as long as they don't really thrust too much
down their throats. They have never articulated their thoughts...... We of
course being priest together, have the cover of our professional
relationship. We are lucky. So we don't have to worry about it.

Respondent no. 49A's concern is shared by his partner who is also a Church of England
priest who serves in the same parish church, "Discretion is important...... very important,
because I mean the church does not officially accept homosexuals living together."

On the whole, the decision for inaction is possibly the outcome of the respondent's
personal attitude in the control of social information about his sexuality and partnership. This
is encouraged by the fact that the congregation appears to be uninterested in addressing the
issue of homosexuality. It is therefore difficult to gauge how opposing or supportive they would
become.

This situation confirms Johnson's (1992) view that while there is a minority of
Christians --- gay or heterosexual --- who hold clear views about the acceptability or the
unacceptability of homosexuality, the majority are reassessing their views in response to the
perennial debate on this issue and the increased visibility of the gay community in the
mainstream society. There are of course others who are still --- by choice or by chance ---
insulated from the whole debate.

Summary

In this section, I have explored the different stratagems used by the respondents in
coping with the stigma of being gay Christians at an interpersonal level. These stratagems are:
(1) complete physical distancing; (2) complete integration; (3) complete psychological
distancing; (4) partial psychological distancing; and (5) inaction. These stratagems are not
mutually exclusive and the adoption of them is not static. A respondent might adopt different
stratagems in a different period of time or context.

The main factors in determining the adoption of a particular stratagem are: (1)
personal experiences with, and attitude to, the Church as a whole; (2) the climate of each
individual congregation and the support available; (3) personal confidence and conviction in
the control of social information about themselves. The majority of respondents adopt the
gradual disclosure approach in assessing the climate of the church in determining the degree
and object of disclosure.
The adoption of different stratagems in responding to the church is related to the dialectic of revelation-concealment in the relationship between the couple as a social unit with the church which constitutes part of the wider social network within which the couple operates. Of course, not every couple is in this situation, as some of them either do not attend the same church or one of the partners has distanced himself from all church activity. For those who are in this situation, both partners act in agreement in deciding the extent of disclosure and concealment.

No couple reports that the decision-making in this respect is inegalitarian and constitutes an area of contention in their partnership. This is most likely due to their realisation that both are in a minority group whose status has the potential to provoke hostility in the Church. They are therefore inclined to work as a unit in the face of possible threat not only to themselves as individuals, but also to their partnership. In the case of clergy, they might risk losing their occupations if the situation is not discreetly managed.

The majority of the respondents consider their current churches not homophobic, although some also think that they are homonathing. An overwhelming majority have not encountered hostility in their current church, although a certain number have encountered it in their previous churches which leads to their leaving. Some clearly express the intention to leave their current church if they are negatively treated. It must be mentioned that their views about their local churches might differ tremendously from their view about the Church in general. Many acknowledge the discrepancy between the official stance of the Church and the personal treatment they have experienced at an individual level. This point has been briefly mentioned, and will be further discussed in the following section.

7.5. Views on the Institutionalised Church

The respondents' criticism of the Church for its lack of credibility and sincerity has been briefly discussed. This section further explores the issue by assessing the respondents' views on the presence or absence of homophobia within the Church.

Almost all the respondents consider the Church homophobic. With this, they particularly refer to the church hierarchy that is responsible for the production of the official stance that offers very little affirmation to gay Christians. However, there exists a minority view that does not support this point of view. The view of a key person in a gay Christian organisation illustrates this point:
"No, I don't believe there is any homophobia in the Vatican. I don't think there is any homophobia endemic at all. There might be an odd occasional official here and there who is homophobic. I don't think the Pope is homophobic. I mean I don't like what he says about gays.... well some of it I do because he has some good things to say about us. But in general terms... you know... 'intrinsic disorder' and all those things... he is not saying these things because he is homophobic. He is saying them sincerely and genuinely because that is how he sees the traditional teachings of the Church and he starts to formulate it and continue it. I think his motive and intention are of the best. But unfortunately, he has got it wrong." (Resp. no. 22B)

The above comment implies the Church's lack of knowledge of gay Christian. It is this ignorance that is responsible for the rejection of homosexuality, and not active and conscious homophobia. This ignorance, however, can be dispelled:

"I think that the Church is not really actively homophobic. I think people are just stupid. They take on attitudes because they presume they are right. They don't think about those attitudes. But if they have experienced gay people and have a good experience, I think they would be fine." (Resp. no. 16B)

Responsive no. 56A agrees with the views above, 'I think 'homophobic' is such a lowly word. I think you ought to call it homonervous, touchy but not a great amount of fear and rejection." While these views might be commended for being open-minded and understanding, they are the exception rather than the rule. A vast majority of the respondents are highly critical of the Church and its failure in improving the plight of gay Christians:

"The Catholic Church is particularly anti homosexuals. I think they should accept everybody for what they are. They shouldn't judge people. On a lot of issues they are very anti-gay or anything which doesn't follow the rules like contraception, women priests. They are just behind the time." (Resp. no. 7A)

"I think I have to say I think the Pope and Vatican are an absolute disgrace, they way they behave.... the condemnation from Rome. That affects me terribly. I thought why am I staying in the Church and give my money to it when this man is doing this to me? He is my enemy and he should know better. He has no right to speak about other human beings in a dreadful way. I find the Pope absurd, for a man in his position. He is suppose to represent Christ and he speaks like that. I think he is silly."

(Resp. no. 18A)

Critical views like the above typify the general view held by the majority of the respondents. It is generally acknowledged that the lack of shift in the Church's boundary of tolerance is inextricably linked to its fear of change as a supposedly moral and spiritual institution and its identification with the general social attitudes in the mainstream society:

"I think at an individual level they are not homophobic. But at the institutional level people begin to lose touch with grassroots and the Christian churches reflects the attitudes of society at that time. If the society as a whole is homophobic, then the Church itself would be like that. I think as an institution the Christian Church is not trying to be too drastic. They try to be very mainstream and not take too difficult a stance on any issues." (Resp. no. 55B)
The above view is supported by respondent no. 52B's assertion:

"The official line is very homophobic. I get the feeling that people are in a lot of fear of change, a lot of fear about some things that they don't know anything about. They are scared to learn. Fear borne out of ignorance. But at the personal level it's different. It's very important, it is hypocrisy. It is very much at the personal level it's one thing, but the official line is something else."

Both the remarks above highlighted the ignorance and fear of change that are responsible for what they consider homophobia in the Church. The comments also highlight the existence of the discrepancy between public stance and individual treatment which they consider hypocritical. Respondent no. 20B further argues this point:

"I think you get these two problems. When you approach the Church as a body, people feel that they must toe the party line. But if you talk to the members of the church individually, you will find individual views quite varied. Quite a lot of people are sympathetic but they wouldn't voice that sympathy in a public meeting. So the Church in its public image is homophobic. But in practice at individual congregation level, there is a great deal of variety."

This discrepancy is detrimental to the relationship between the respondents and the Church. The discrepancy is seized upon by them as a justification for dismissing the credibility and respectability of the Church on the whole. It is seen as producing public pronouncements to justify the stigmatisation of gay Christians. Its public pronouncement is therefore rendered flawed and orchestrated just for public consumption. This generates frustration and disappointment, as testified by a Church of England priest who ponders upon the possibility of leaving the pastoral ministry:

"As I feel increasingly alienated from the institutionalised Church, that also makes me feel less religious. I actually want to distance myself from the whole process. Yes I have felt that because I am gay, because of who I am, that the Church doesn't really want me. That has been quite painful..... I have been trying to get out of it because I don't want to be in an organisation which is prejudiced against me..... If it becomes too much, I will just leave and get out." (Resp. no. 57B)

Respondent no. 57B is the only one of 15 priests (14 Church of England and 1 Roman Catholic) in the sub-sample who considers leaving this profession. However, another respondent (respondent no. 16B) left the pastoral ministry six years ago as a result of stigmatisation (see Section 7.4.).

While respondents remain generally critical of the Church, their view of the Christian community outside the Church hierarchy differs sharply. The Church hierarchy is criticised for being homophobic, but the Christian community in general is making progress in this connection. This is clearly expressed below:
"I think there is such a strong element within the Christian community at the moment anyway which is very progressive, very forward-looking. Both straight and gay people are taking much more personal control of their lives and their sexualities and their view on homosexuality. I think that people are much more relaxed and see it as more as a personal relationship with God instead of structures." (Resp. no. 12B)

"I have never experienced any prejudice in my life at all. Not that I am aware of...... I think the Church is treating gay people fairly. When you say the Church, I think the people are the Church. the people in authority perhaps have certain views, but I think change comes from the grassroots upwards. I think people in general who go to church, they are understanding." (Resp. no. 22A)

In sum, the majority of the respondents view the Church in terms of two levels. At the official level, the Church authority is criticised for being homophobic and resistant to change. But at the individual level, the people are perceived to be sympathetic in general.

Optimism versus Pessimism

This sub-section explores the respondents' optimism or pessimism in viewing the direction that the Church will take in its dealing with the issue of homosexuality. Mixed feelings characterise their responses in this connection.

"The day will come, I am confident, but not in my life time, but the day will come when the Church is very happy to bless all these relationships. There would be Christian marriage, but they will be excellent relationships recognised as such and blessed by the Church and encouraged. Young gay boys will be encouraged to meet each other and form partnerships." (Resp. no. 22B)

For respondents who are optimistic like respondent no. 22, a key person in a gay Christian organisation, four reasons are cited in support of their optimism. First, the social change that has taken place in the Church is unstoppable. The Church will eventually have to alter its position in this connection. With special reference to the Roman Catholic Church, the following comment is made:

"I think the Church will come up-to-date, like with birth control for women, the Church has got to come up to date because it is going to happen and we can't go back again. If the Pope says you are not allowed to use birth control, nobody will take notice of it. If women want to do that, then they should get on with it." (Resp. no. 18B)

The second reason for optimism is related to the Report published by the House of Bishops of the Church of England in 1991 which has been briefly introduced at the beginning of this Chapter. The Report encourages the Church to acknowledge and accept committed and faithful gay Christian partnerships which might involve the physical expression of their love among members of the laity. Clergy, however, is forfeited on the grounds of their special pastoral vocation. While recognising the seeming double-standards, some respondents hail this
Report as a giant step forward for the Church of England in recognising gay Christian partnerships. The comment below typifies the sentiment:

"I think the Report on Human Sexuality issued a couple of years ago was a tremendous step for the Church to take. They were very brave. It is the best that they have said for ages on homosexuality. But it falls short because of the fact that it says that it's okay if you are sitting in the pew. It's wrong if you are standing behind the altar. And you can't have it both ways. You are either right or wrong. If it is right, it is right for everyone. If it is wrong, it is wrong for everyone. You can't have it both ways. So therefore there is a gap at the moment on the issue of homosexuality.... It has taken a tremendous step forward a couple of years ago, the next step forward is definitely on gay couples.... I am an optimist." (Resp. no. 15A)

The ordination of women priests by the Church of England is also considered a positive sign that the Church is increasingly reconsidering the liberalisation of members of minority groups:

"I think the agenda is going to change when women are ordained..... When the women are finally ordained priest and actually seen on television, the agenda is going to change.... and the women will lead the way and the Church will be entering into a progressive era. And the next item on the agenda will be homosexuality. The ordination of women priest is such a radical step, such a progressive step." (Resp. no. 52A)

The issue of the ordination of women priests causes a rift between the respondents' opinions. This rift is, however, not based on whether the ordination is an exercise that would positively or negatively affect the plight of gay Christians. Rather, it is based on theological grounds. Some respondents argue that the ordination of women is not theologically-sound. "It is not a sign of liberalisation, but a sign of secularisation of the Christian religion." (Resp. no. 49A). They therefore consider it an issue entirely unrelated to the issue of gay Christians.

The minority supporting respondent no. 49A's view consider the ordination of women priests a gender issue that should be evaluated theologically. It therefore does not relate to the struggle of gay Christians. However, the majority argue that although this is not strictly speaking a sexuality issue, it is nevertheless relevant to gay Christians. It is perceived as another example of the oppression by the sexist-heterosexist church hierarchy on minority groups. Both gender and sexuality issues represent the plight of the oppressed minority and they are therefore inextricably linked. Addressing a gender issue is as important as addressing a sexuality issue to gain more liberalisation within the Church.

The fourth reason for optimism pertains to AIDS. The following views express the positive aspect of AIDS in relation to the Church:

"The Church has been forced to respond to this great need within our society. Therefore it has put issues of sexuality much more on the agenda.... the Church has to acknowledge that there are all sorts of people out there who have actually been doing things that many
Christians would not regard as normal practice. They just have to wake up to the fact." (Resp. 12A)

"It has led to the care of the sick and that kind of thing in the Church...... The Church has probably been able to involve itself with compassion for the sick, forgetting about the 'sinfulness' and that kind of thing." (Resp. no. 22B)

The comments above reveal that AIDS has led to the Church having to face up to its challenge. As a caring institution, it has to learn to take care of the AIDS sufferers in its midst, many of whom are gay. That has broadened their perspective on sexual behaviour and some respondents are sanguine that it will lead to more openness in the Church.

This optimism is expressed in the midst of pessimism among certain respondents who are not confident that the Church will move forward significantly in this connection. Their concern is predicated on three factors. Some acknowledge the fact that the Church is an extremely resistant institution that is inclined to hold on to its moral absolutes rather than adapt to social change in the wider society. This concern is expressed in the following comments:

"..... the Roman Catholic Church is a big problem. I get very annoyed by it. It's hurtful and there are people who allow themselves to be hurt by taking the Pope too seriously...... So as far as the Roman Catholic Church is concerned, I am not hopeful unless they really radically review the whole institution, the way they organise the fascist state with a dictator at the top. A human dictator. Things would not get better unless they ditch this what I consider to be obscene and inauthentic form of the body of Christ. I hope one day they have a really big crisis and really radically rework their understanding. But I don't see it happening on the whole." (Resp. no. 19A)

'I don't expect anything of the Church in that respect. I am not going to hold my breath. I think the insight that I think there is looking at the issue of the ordination of women. I mean it has taken an awful lot of time and I think women as a group are probably more powerful than gay people as a group. And they only managed to achieve what they did achieve by a couple of votes in the Synod. So I guess there is a long way to go before gay people get the same treatment in the Church...... I mean as I said it is not something that I am hoping for. I mean it is not something which, I don't know, if it happens within my life time I quite like that to be the case but I won't die feeling that, you know, life has failed or anything." (Resp. no. 1A)

While some Church of England respondents consider the publication of the Report by the House of Bishops a progressive step towards further liberalisation of gay Christians, other respondents of this denomination consider the double-standards the Report pronounces as further evidence of the profound ignorance and confusion in the Church hierarchy. To them, this Report is a cause for pessimism for laity and clergy alike:

"I am not at all optimistic. I think they have fudged the issues as usual and bring their own usual hypocrisy in these matters. So now they say it's all right if you are lay person to have a homosexual relationship although it falls short of the ideal. But which relationship doesn't fall short of the ideal? Every relationship falls short of the ideal, because we are human beings. We are not God. It also goes to say that it is not all right if you
are a priest to have a sexual relationship. Does that mean to say that laity are somehow second-rate Christians to clergy? I mean it's quite absurd theologically speaking. And what's more most of the bishops know it's absurd, but they play this game I think partly to keep newspapers like the Sun and Today off their backs. Because at the end of the day you are talking about a management structure which is very threatened by the tabloid press, I believe, in these areas." (Resp. no. 6A)

Respondent no. 6A's comment attacks the hypocrisy and ignorance embedded in the Report. His view is supported by the following:

"The Church of England always comes up with some desperately inadequate statement on sexuality which is trying to be liberal and accepting, but at the same time they still have got a lot to satisfy the conservatives who will howl, you know, put the Church down the drain for standing against Biblical truth and the tradition of the Church. So it never quite works. There was a ridiculous thing about 18 months to two years ago when the Bishop came with this idea that gay relationships were okay for the laity but the clergy shouldn't indulge in it. Well, that's fine. So I am allowed to have one but (resp. no 48B, a priest) isn't. You know, please, where do we go from here?." (Resp. no. 48A)

As with the issue of the Report, some respondents also do not speak with one voice as far as the impact of AIDS on the Church is concerned. Comments about the positive impact of AIDS on the Church is contradicted by the following ones:

"It has made certain churches more homophobic, particularly the Anglican churches where you have fundamental Christians. As far as I know, the homophobia in the Anglican churches has increased because of the AIDS crisis where certain ministers and some members of the congregation see AIDS as the punishment. In the Methodist Church that hasn't been so possibly because they thought before they opened their mouths....... and in some respects Methodists are less fundamentalist than the Anglican churches. It all comes down to how people view the Bible. The Anglican Church has a traditional view of the Bible." (Resp. no. 10A)

"There are in certain aspects of Christianity especially those who will cling to the book of Leviticus in their face. The old Israelite idea that illness is a punishment. If you are ill it must have been because you are a bad boy. That's still in, that's still hinted at in the old book of common prayer and visitation of the sick. If someone is in his dead bed, and the priest comes around and says, First of all, you have got to say sorry for your sin. It's obviously your sins that have brought you to this state of illness."(Resp. no. 48B)

To the respondents above, AIDS has provided the Church with the justification to further marginalise gay Christians with its conventional moral teachings on human sexual behaviour. While the majority of respondents are in support of or in opposition to the possible positive impact of AIDS on the Church, some respondents believe that it can work both ways, as brilliantly encapsulated in the argument by respondent no. 5B:

",".....I think if people are prejudiced then AIDS can give them ammunition to their prejudices and if people are compassionate then AIDS can be a vehicle for their compassion." (Resp. no. 5B)
Summary

It can be concluded that most respondents dichotomise the Christian community when they assess the issue of homophobia. Almost all consider homophobic the Church hierarchy which has the power to make public pronouncements on the issue of homosexuality. This homophobia is fuelled by its ignorance, fear of change and conformity to the social attitudes of the society at large. However, the Christian community outside of the church hierarchy is considered by the respondents as making progress in dealing with the issue of homosexuality. In other words, a *dichotomised perception* is held by the respondents in this connection.

While certain respondents are optimistic that the Church will move ahead significantly to improve their plight, some respondents have their reservations. Those who are optimistic hold the view that the Church has no choice but to eventually give in to strong social currents towards a more liberal and accepting attitude towards gay people in general. This is part and parcel of the secularisation process experienced by the Church. Some, however, consider the Church too resistant a moral institution to adapt to social change in the wider society.

Within the context of the Church of England, the publication of the Report by the House of Bishops is received with mixed feelings. The issue of the ordination of women is seen by some as a signpost to further positive changes. Some, however, consider it irrelevant as they reject the exercise on theological grounds. AIDS also elicits mixed responses from the respondents. Some believe AIDS has a positive impact on the Church in that it has learned to face the issue. However, some think that it has provided the Church with stronger justification for stigmatisation. There is a minority, on the other hand, who recognise that AIDS can work both ways, depending on the attitudes of the individuals handling the issue.

7.6. Conclusions

The respondents have demonstrated the ability to employ a multiplicity of stratagems to manage the stigma of being a gay Christian and to maintain the internal or psychological consistency of this identity. In spite of the unfavourable climate in the Church, they have developed a positive self-image and do not demonstrate a response of negativism. I am inclined to believe that this positive outlook itself generates a tremendous justificatory power for them about the acceptability of their sexuality and partnership.
The majority also demonstrate a polarised view of the Church. Although they view the institutionalised Church as ignorant and homophobic, many acknowledge that the Christian community can be understanding at the individual level. There exists therefore a discrepancy between official position and individual treatment. This hypocrisy, as their positive outlook, is used to further strengthen their discrediting argument against the Church.

The situation of the 15 priests is interesting. Their profession makes complete physical distancing an impossibility. Also, none of them is in the 'complete integration' category. Their substantially high level of involvement in the church exposes them to a greater potential to be stigmatised. One respondent left the ministry for this reason, while the other considers the same eventuality. The others cope with their situations with stratagems appropriate to the climate of their respective churches. Some of them might fit into the description of the highly stressed Church of England priests in Fletcher's (1990) study, which I briefly mentioned in Chapter One.

To many in a less positive church climate, their Christian experiences seem to be characterised by a form of individualised spirituality rather than public religiosity. I would argue that this is partially a stigma management stratagem, and partially a responses to the Church's hypocrisy in their view. This attitude is resonant with what some researchers mention en passant, that adult gay persons have the tendency to reject the organised Church (Schofield 1965; Philip 1968; Saghir and Robins 1973; McNeil 1976; Bell and Weinberg 1978; Mendola 1980).
Chapter Eight

STIGMA MANAGEMENT AT
THE INTERGROUP LEVEL

Having examined in the previous chapter the stigma management stratagems at the cognitive-emotive level and the interpersonal level, I consider in this Chapter the stratagems at the intergroup level, or what Goffman (1963) and Humphreys (1972) term "group alignment".

In this case, a stigmatised individual seeks association with his 'fellow-sufferers' for support and they in turn might foster a collective community and identity. This can be achieved through the process of "stigma conversion" which might lead to the politicisation of deviance:

"... he (the stigmatised individual) emerged from a stigmatized cocoon as a transformed creature, to be characterized by the spreading of political wings. At some point in the process, the politicized 'deviant' gains a new identity, an heroic self-image as crusader in a political course." (Humphreys 1972:142)

The participation in Christian and non-Christian gay groups and the commercial gay scene extends the respondent's sexuality and partnership beyond the couple relational framework. Participation in groups of this nature connects them individually and as a couple to other gay Christians within a context specifically constructed by and for themselves.

The dynamics of the relationship between the respondents and these groups differ from that with the Church. While the Church is a potential stigmatiser, the gay community is the safe haven providing support.

I will argue in this Chapter that there exists an order of preference in terms of the respondents' participation pattern. This order begins with gay Christian groups, followed by non-Christian gay groups and the commercial gay scene. This order of preference is based on the respondents' perception of their main functions.

Most of the data in this Chapter are taken from the individual and the couple interviews, although some data from the questionnaire are also presented in Section 8.3.
8.1. Participation in Gay Christian Groups

This section explores the level of participation among the respondents in gay Christian groups of different operational objectives. Reasons for participation and non-participation are also studied.

About half of the interviewed respondents (27, 45%) are currently not affiliated to any gay Christian groups. For the 33 (55%) who are, 15 (45.5%) are passive members who only make financial contributions and in return receives information about activities of the groups concerned. They, however, do not participate in any form of activity. The other 18 (54.5%) at least attend meetings on a regular basis. Therefore, only 30% of all the respondents participate in these groups with a varying degree of actives. On this basis, it can be concluded that these respondents are not active in terms of their participation in gay Christian groups.

These respondents are affiliated to eight groups: the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement (LGCM), the Roman Catholic Lesbian and Gay Group (QUEST), the Anglican Clergy Consultation (ACC), the Institute for the Study of Christianity and Sexuality (ISCS), the Quakers Homosexual Fellowship, the London Diocesan Gay groups (NETWORK), the Southwark Lesbian and Gay Group and the Affirmative Catholicism. Only a very small minority of respondents hold multiple memberships of these groups.

Reasons for Participation

Despite the relatively low level of participation among these respondents, those who participate consider it of paramount importance. The participation in these groups serves three functions: (1) the moral support function; (2) the identity reinforcement function; and (3) the socio-political function.

A substantial majority of respondents who participate in these groups consider their moral support function the most crucial. These groups are seen as 'expressive groups' (Lyman 1970) which provides emotional and moral support to their members by offering them a common platform for social contact without the concern of concealment of social information about themselves. Their belonging to the same group highlights their sense of community with collective strength which is useful in dispelling their sense of alienation in the Church or their daily life. The following respondent who is an active member of LGCM and ISCS expresses this point:
"I think they are a lifeline to many people because the major problem for some gays but specifically for gay Christians is one of isolation, the fear that they are the only people in the world to be inflicted with this terrible 'sin'. I think it's so important that LGCM exists so that people know that there are others out there. That's the most important thing..."  
(Resp. no. 5B)

There are others out there summarises the sentiment. The existence of these groups gives gay Christians a sense of community that supports the otherwise lonely existence of many gay Christians. Respondent no. 9A also expresses this point:

"I think they are very important. It's nice to know that they exist for us. But for a lot of people, they feel very lonely. I think it is vital to know that they exist and that they can go and join in. If you go to a meeting like the LGCM, you meet all sorts of people who are obviously very lonely people. Then the LGCM might be the only support and Christian display of love they get."

The need for moral support is probably more acute for gay clergy whose profession exerts great pressure on them to conceal social information about themselves, although this is contingent upon the climate of the local church itself. This is especially important for gay clergy serving in provincial areas. Respondent no. 48B, a priest in the Church of England and a member of the ACC asserts:

"I mean the ACC also supports clergy who find themselves out of a limb. It's all right for those of us who are in London or in other cities with a gay population, but imagine you are stuck in the wilds in the countryside, living miles from the kindred spirit. It must be good to know that you are together with a group where there are other gay clergy."

Closely related to the moral support function is the identity reinforcement function. These groups perform this function by offering a safe environment for their members to practise their sexuality and Christianity. It helps consolidate their gay Christian identity by affirming its possibility. Respondent no. 50A, a member of the LGCM and the Southwark Lesbian and Gay Group, has this to say in this connection:

"It is almost like a fellowship group that you can go there and you can acknowledge that you are Christian and you can acknowledge you are gay. Those two things don't always hang very easily either together or in any organisations to say that you are gay or to say that you are Christian makes you a bit an outsider. Therefore it is good to be able to come to something that you can actually be totally honest. It is obviously very important.......Yes, because so much of life is segmented that you know, people might know I am gay somewhere but they don't necessarily know that I am a Christian somewhere. Or somebody knows that we are Christian but they don't know we are gays. And therefore being a Christian and being gay are obviously two of the most important parts of our lives, and therefore to be able to go to a group which actually accepts you as a Christian and accepts you as a gay at the same time is brilliant."
Young gay Christians can also be encouraged through the contact with older gay Christians who have proven that it is possible to be a fulfilled gay Christian and to be in a committed long-term relationship. All this assists the consolidation of one's identity which might be constantly under threat outside this context.

"Yes. It's network, isn't it? I think another thing about LGCM is that there are quite a few older members, which being reasonably young, that sort of opens a new gateway for me to meet people of different generations. You know, through LGCM, I have met couples who have been together for 40 years. It is an encouragement to me." (Resp. no. 52B)

The third function of these groups, the socio-political function, is not the main concern for the majority of respondents who participate in these groups. I propose two reasons for this:

(a) The socio-political function of a gay group entails its organisation of goal-oriented and strategically-planned activities with the intention of challenging and subsequently transforming the social definition of their identity. It is a form of identity politics that assaults the prevailing social understanding and repudiates the deviant identity that the society imposes on them. They seek to re-define their identity as a variant group that deserves social acceptance and recognition. The nature of these groups now turns to be "instrumental" (Lyman 1970). It undergoes an "ideological embrace" (Snow and Anderson 1987) with emphasis on a mission to correct the society's perception and their own empowerment.

I would argue that given the oppressive climate in the Church today, most respondents would consider the moral support function and the identity reinforcement function more important than the socio-political function. Also, the scope for any socio-political change that can be potentially achieved is confined to the Christian community or part of it. Unlike secular gay groups like the STONEWALL which has a more professional strategy, wider base of support and wider scope for socio-political change, gay Christian groups are limited in these respects. Therefore, the respondents tend to assign the socio-political function to secular gay groups rather than the Christian ones. This point will be taken further in the next section.

(b) The majority of respondents identify the socio-political function with campaigning and socially visible activities that they might consider in conflict with their Christian values. It is expected that they would favour a more subtle approach than a confrontational one. This point is substantiated in the following sub-section. Respondent no. 49B, who is against campaigning and not affiliated to any groups, argues in this connection:

"I think all they do is they stir things up. Sometimes when I hear and see the things that happen, I talk to myself, 'Oh! for God's sake shut up. You are only stirring up the mud.' I found that it is counterproductive. I think their approach is very wrong.... I think what is much more needed is people quietly living private life and becoming personal friends..... Demonstration only stirs up their anti homosexuality."
Nevertheless, there are respondents who consider even gay Christian groups have a socio-political function to play, through campaigning within the Christian community. Respondent no. 6A who is affiliated to NETWORK and LGCM has this to say:

"With NETWORK, I am the (note: position in NETWORK) and I have been on the working party which is looking at ways in which gay people in the dioceses of London can have their views represented. In particular, we are looking at the Bishop of London's on Action Document where he puts forward the plan for the dioceses. What we are doing is that we are questioning the whole absence of anything to do with social justice or treatment of minorities or looking at the problem of homosexuality. NETWORK wants the Diocese of London to concentrate on the problem of homophobia, because we don't believe that essentially there is a problem of homosexuality, but there is a problem with intolerance..... I think the Church is deep in prejudice and ignorance. I think these groups (also referring to LGCM) should go on campaigning..... I think gay people who are angry have got the right to express that anger."

In agreement, respondent no. 48A emphasises the socio-political function of gay Christian groups:

"I think it's good for its members....... they are also a campaigning group....... because just left to its devices, there will be enough people in the Church who would like to keep quiet, not to be bothered to think about anything. So very undoubtedly LGCM does dig some people up their wrong way. But nevertheless keeps the issue going."

An interesting pattern in the participation is that some respondents refuse to be affiliated to certain gay Christian groups because of their disagreement with their operational objective and the theological foundation of the groups. This reflects the ideological diversity among gay Christians as to what is effective and counter-productive for the gay Christian groups.

Some refuse to be affiliated to QUEST because it is "... always apologising for its existence in the Church." (Resp. no. 48A) and being ".... far too apologetic." (Resp. no. 48B). The LGCM, on the other, is rejected by some on the grounds that it is becoming too preoccupied with its political agenda and its lack of a sound theological base. The following respondent stopped his affiliation to LGCM ten years ago:

"...... because it has broadened increasingly into the political sphere which I don't agree with. It is confrontational...... It was a movement which seems to be to get roughly balanced between a campaign and a church movement. The very fact that I don't go to those things anymore much suggests that I think the balance has got wrong." (Resp. no. 4A)

On theological ground, the LGCM has also received some opposition which leads to some respondents' disassociation from it. This is characterised by the following respondent, a priest and theologian, who prefers QUEST to the LGCM:
“I won’t join the LGCM because I don’t believe it develops a theology for gay relationship. I believe very strongly that one has to have a strong sacramental theology for sex if one is really going to say this is a Christian gay movement. LGCM has always stopped short of that. They have never been prepared to put across a monogamous ethic. They have not been willing to say that for Christians you really should stick with one partner. And I believe that quite strongly. Because I don’t think there is any other theological model for sexual relationship that works in Christian terms. You can’t make it fit what I think as the insides of scripture and tradition about what a sexual relationship is….. I think faithfulness to one person actually is quite a profound thing. I don’t think it is just a social convention. It’s something that affects who we are and the people we grow into. It has something to do with the fact that we are made in God’s image and that we are capable of faithfulness….. The LGCM doesn’t put this forward…..I am more tied in for QUEST because it has a clear theological structure….. My impression is that they take much more seriously the tradition of the Church and they work much harder at engaging with that. I think they have come to the view that it has got to be basically a monogamous structure if you ever want to fit a gay relationship into the tradition or into the teaching. I think QUEST has got it right.” (Resp. no. 56A)

While some respondents accept certain gay Christian groups and reject others, certain respondents think that these groups with diverse approaches are necessary to meet the needs of different people in different ways. Respondent no. 22A clearly expresses this point:

“QUEST is more diplomatic. It has a different way of approaching problems. LGCM tends to be more confrontational whereas QUEST will challenge and enter into dialogue. But we need all….. I don’t think QUEST is too soft. It just has got a different style and a politer way of dealing with problems. But I would never disparage the avant garde. We need them. They are all important.” (Resp. no. 22A)

His partner speaks in unison:

“I think they have a lot to contribute. They are valuable and important institutions to help people to come to terms with the conflict they often feel between their sexuality and their religion. QUEST is very good for the kind of people who come to QUEST. And LGCM is very very good for a rather different kind of people, probably a little bit more socialist, left-wing, militant.” (Resp. no. 22B)

In sum, we see that the majority of respondents who participate in gay Christian groups emphasise the moral support function and the identity reinforcement function more strongly than the socio-political function. The following sub-section elaborates the reasons for non-participation in gay Christian groups.

Reasons for Non-participation

Four major reasons can be identified for the non-participation of 70% of the respondents in gay Christian groups. First, the respondent’s needs for support and companionship are fulfilled within the partnership and/or the wider circle of gay or heterosexual friends, in or outside the church. It is therefore not their priority to participate in these groups. These respondents tend to emphasise the moral support function and the identity reinforcement function of these groups, and downplay their socio-political function. Thus, insofar as the first
two functions are fulfilled within their partnership and relationship with the wider circle of supportive individuals, participation in these groups proves unnecessary. This is clearly expressed in the following views:

"I don't have to socialise, I mean I have got the partnership with (resp. no. 3B) for one thing... and mostly there are single guys because of company I think... and I don't need that." (Resp. no. 3A)

"I belong to a substantial number of church groups...... I do have so many gay clergy friends whom I meet as a matter of calls. So I don't feel I have to join a group. Well I have joined the gay group called the Church of England....... Certainly a lot of gay clergy. Yes!" (Resp. no. 48B)

The comments above reveal the strength the respondents derive from their partnership and the support of people around. Therefore, participation in gay Christian groups is unnecessary for them, despite the intensity of the Church's lack of affirmation of their sexuality. However, if such support is unavailable, then the situation would be reverse, as respondent no. 1A admits:

"Can't see any purpose (in joining any gay Christian groups). I think if I felt isolated or angry, needed some kind of support, then it is the place that I would go to...... I can't see any real purpose in it that, you know, serves my needs. It is just irrelevant."

There is a minority view that gay Christians who have had their needs met in this respect have the moral obligation to help create an environment for those who are less fortunate. They should still contribute to the construction of a sense of community through their participation. This point is typified by the following comment:

"It is a support network. It lets you know all the news. It lets you know that people who are gays like you are being arrested or tortured. I feel that I belong to them and I owe them something because they are like my blood brothers and sisters of mine. That is like a family I belong to. I have no choice about belonging to them. They are my relatives and I owe them. The duty of keeping in touch and doing what I can. I especially feel that I have a duty because there are people I have come to know over the years and whom I look up to who help me to understand who I am. People who came out and said on television, 'Yes, I am gay.' That helped me. So I owe it to the gay community and to the people who are growing up gay now. I owe it to them, to put something back into that community." (Resp. no. 52A)

Respondent no. 52A's altruism for the gay community is however not shared by an great number of individuals in this category. The second reason for the refusal to participate in these groups emanates from the respondent's concern about the possibility of ghettoisation of gay people. Respondent no. 21A, a Roman Catholic priest, asserts:

"I don't feel attracted towards things specifically for gay people. My ideal is to be able to be gay in a totally open sort of community where people can be what they want to be instead of living in a ghetto...... It seems so artificial to me, that's the trouble. In the sense that when a lot of
gay people get together, that seems to be a limited sort of experience. I just like to be with people where one can be gay but other people are not gay."

The concern for ghettoisation is shared by respondent no. 55A who was once an active member of LGCM until two years ago:

"I got really fed-up with it...... I think I have quite a strong objection to thinking that being gay is the most important thing for myself and therefore it should be in any sense sort of limits and defines me. I think it is helpful to me to be able to say, 'Yes I am gay.' Because this is to recognise the sexual aspect about myself. But I can't stand people who sort of must have gay electrician, gay hair-dresser...... This is nonsense."

The concern of respondent no. 55A for not wanting to be defined and limited by his sexuality only is shared by the following respondent who argues this point even more vociferously:

"What worries me is that gay people are falling into the trap of labelling themselves with a name like that. Labelling themselves with a word like 'gay' to counteract people calling us 'queer' or 'homosexual' or whatever. But they are falling into a trap too. Why should you describe your whole personality, the whole reality of your existence in this life, by your sexual orientation only? Even gay people, because they are fighting for their rights as...... because they are classified as 'poofers' or 'queers' or whatever, they are written off simply because of their sexual orientation and probably some of their sexual practices as being a sub-species almost. People utter those words in utter disgust and resentment and hatred, you see. And then gay people are trying to defend themselves because of their sexual orientation, and they have forgotten the rest of what they are, their personality, their gifts, their intelligence, the work that they do." (Resp. no. 8B)

The above views reveal the limitation of the socio-political function of the gay Christian groups. Although they foster a sense of community and even effect socio-political change, they also incessantly limit gay Christians to the sexual dimension of their whole being in the presentation of their social self. Consequently, they are often defined on sexual terms. Thus, the sexual dimension of their lives continues to be the central point of their being (Hart and Richardson 1981).

Certain respondents also view that if at all any social and political changes need to be effected, they should take place within the church and not outside it, as the following view argues:

"I am not interested. I feel if there is a role for me to play, it should be within my own church and denomination, which is after all part of the mainstream culture. It advances the cause of in the treatment and acceptance of gays, then that is the place to make inroads in all these establishments if you like." (Resp. no. 6B)
The third reason cited for the refusal to participate in gay Christian groups is the fear of exposure. Although these groups offer a comparatively safe environment, there is the concern that information of their presence might be used against them. This concern is clearly expressed below:

"I think the problem is I guess because most of the time we never told anybody about us. It's fairly recently that we don't have problem talking about us with other people. The thought of going to a gay group of about 100 gay clergy (referring to ACC) would be horrific really...... I suppose the thing is as well that we actually choose to reveal what we want about ourselves, to whom we want rather than belonging to an organisation which you have to reveal things just by belonging to it....... Obviously these things get wider sort of circle of friends becomes wider and people we know become more and more. We want to be in control.

(Resp. no. 1B)

The above response highlights the couple's use of nonparticipation in gay Christian groups as a stratagem in controlling the dissemination of social information about themselves. It is one of the stratagems for selective disclosure whereby one wants to have strict control of the social information. By belonging to a group, one loses that control to a certain extent. That proves to be a cause for concern and a justification for non-participation.

Besides the three major reasons cited above, there are some minor reasons that explain the non-participation of some respondents in gay Christian groups. The disagreement with the operational philosophy of certain groups has prevented some from being a part of it. While some might as a result turn to those whose philosophy they concur with, some who are only exposed to one group might end up not participating at all. This point has been discussed in the sub-section above. Another reason for non-participation is the practical fact that some respondents do not find the time to do so principally due to work commitments. One respondent who began participating in a gay Christian group with the intention of meeting potential sex partners also stopped his participation after his failure on several occasions.

Summary

On the whole, the respondents do not actively participate in gay Christian groups. These groups are generally acknowledged for their moral support function and identity reinforcement function. Only a small minority emphasises the socio-political function of these groups.

Those who participate consider these groups as expressive groups whereby support and identity reinforcement can be obtained. When this need is fulfilled within the partnership and/or the wider social network, participation is not encouraged. The concern for ghettoisation of gay people and fear of exposure are also the major reasons for the non-participation of some.
As with their relationship with the Church, respondents at a couple level demonstrate a high degree of mutual agreement and support to the pattern they have established in their participation or non-participation. To certain couples, one partner is extremely committed to gay Christian groups while the other is completely withdrawn from it. For some couples, both partners who participate do so with a varying degree of commitment. Some, on the other hand, completely withdraw themselves from these groups. Although the pattern might differ between partners, this does not prove to be an area of contention. I would propose the same reason for this scenario as before — their mutual sense of belonging to a stigmatised minority group which fosters solidarity in the face of threat on both individual and couple levels.

8.2. Participation in Non-Christian Gay Groups

On the whole, the level of participation in non-Christian gay groups among the respondents is far lower than that in gay Christian groups. Only 7 (11.7%) of the 60 respondents participate in non-Christian gay groups on a regular basis. The remaining 53 (88.3%) respondents consists of a majority of those who are completely withdrawn from them and a minority who merely support them financially. On the couple level, none is jointly affiliated to any groups.

Eight non-Christian gay groups have been identified in this connection: the STONEWALL, the Commission for Homosexual Equality (CHE), the Gay Alcoholic Anonymous, TORCH, the London Gay Swimming Group, the Terrence Higgins Trust (THT), the London Gay Dining Club and the London Nudity Club. What is conspicuously missing from the list is OUTRAGE, the direct action group which is generally perceived as aggressive and militant.

Reasons for Participation

Most respondents in this category acknowledge the importance of the socio-political function of these groups. The wider scope and greater potential of their socio-political reform activity extends to the whole mainstream society. Respondent no. 17A, an active member of the STONEWALL, has this to say:

"I think it is important. I mean yes in a way it relates directly to my faith because it is a gospel issue at stake about the dignity of human beings. Human beings are demanding their dignity from their oppressors, against their oppressors. It is a tragedy that the Church has alienated these people for so many years. So okay we just have to forget religion and to show the people who are fighting for the rights that God would have given them if someone else hasn't stripped them of them."
Despite the non-religious nature of STONEWALL, respondent no. 17A is of the opinion that it does address a similar issue in this case — a minority oppressed by the society (including the Church) on the ground of their sexuality. In this case, the oppression needs to be dispelled, regardless of the religious beliefs.

"STONEWALL has potentially been politically quite effective. They have been able to speak in a way that politician and even the Prime Minister actually listen, so that's important. Again I think it is important to individuals. But what is most important is that raising public awareness of the reality of gay people in society..... there is always a need in society for minority groups to make more noise in order not to be totally marginalised. People need to be aware that there are a large number of gay people in society, if you don't have somebody making a noise about it, then all the prejudices just go on unchallenged." (Resp. no. 22)

The view above supports the opinion of respondent no. 17A. Both acknowledge the potential of STONEWALL for legal reform through their lobbying activities. Through the participation in these activities, they contribute to the wresting of the power of social definition from society. They do not seek to incorporate into the mainstream society by merely living passively with the stigma, but to actively re-define themselves and educate the society to accept this self-definition. It operates with a mission to empower gay people, alongside with re-educating the society.

Some also acknowledge the complementarity among various types of these groups which help tackle the problem at hand from various angles. The diversity in the philosophy and approaches of these groups only make the entire movement stronger on the whole. The following view expresses this point:

"I think anybody doing anything to draw attention to the injustice suffered by gay people and to put argument forward is doing good to the gay community as a whole, whether it is direct action group or counselling group or a lobbying group or whatever. I think it takes all those different approaches to get anything move especially in this country." (Resp. no. 3A)

On the other hand, some regard the participation in some of these groups as an opportunity to meet potential sex partners. Groups such as the London Gay Swimming Club, the Gay Dining Club and the Gay Nudity Club established for social rather than political purposes are used by some respondents as a means for potential recreational sex, a possible starting point for a relationship. Respondent no. 54B, who stopped participating in a gay Christian group because his need in this area is not met, regularly participates in the activities of the last two gay groups for the same reason:

"The primary objective in participating in their activities is to make contacts not so much for support from the gay community.... What I just need is gay fulfilment of one sort or another. Usually that starts with an actual sexual experience. It may continue into a wider friendship or it may not."
In sum, the participation in non-Christina gay groups is motivated by some respondents' commitment to legal and political change in the mainstream society. Although some respondents participate for social reasons, it has more to do with acquiring potential sex partners rather than for mutual support. This pattern is related to the respondents' differing perception of the nature of gay Christian and non-Christian gay groups. This point will be argued in detail in the next sub-section.

**Reasons for Non-participation**

Based on the participation and non-participation patterns of the respondents on both gay Christian and non-Christian gay groups, it can be concluded that the general perception of the majority of these two types of groups is different. On the whole, gay Christian groups are perceived to primarily hold the moral support function and the identity reinforcement function. Non-Christian gay groups, on the other hand, are perceived to hold the socio-political function. Although the first two functions are also present, they are perceived to be of secondary importance. I propose two reasons for this:

(a) As gay Christians, the respondents are inclined to look for support in groups that not only affirm their sexuality, but also their religious beliefs. They have the double-barrelled need in fulfilling both the sexual and religious aspects of their identity. The affirmation that they can find in non-Christian groups focuses on their sexuality. There might be in existence certain values that they find unacceptable because of their religious beliefs. On the other hand, a gay Christian group is perceived to be more likely to offer a safe environment for the expression of one's sexuality within the framework of one's religious beliefs. This certainly does not imply that there exists only one religious framework within which the respondents operate. The different emphases or shreds of thoughts of their broadly-termed Christian beliefs do result in different responses.

(b) Gay Christians recognise the limitation to their contribution to socio-legal reform in the wider society. The effects of their activities do not permeate into the mainstream society. However, what transpires in the mainstream has a strong impact in the Christian community in return. As a result, unless they are committed to political activism, they are otherwise more inclined to focus on the gay Christian community for support. They therefore shun away from non-Christian gay groups because they perceive them as not meeting their needs.

The respondents' perception of non-Christian gay groups primarily for its political activism is very clearly expressed in the non-participation of any of the respondents in OUTRAGE whose protest politics is generally perceived as being excessively aggressive and even offensive.
I would have to draw very strict line between those who are responsible campaigners and those who like making scenes. I think OUTRAGE as often as not beyond to be a fruitful way of campaigning. They are outrageous for the sake of being outrageous. In the British constitutional setting, I don't see any point in doing that. It is counterproductive. STONEWALL on the other hand "tends to be more responsible in my sense." (Resp. no. 4B)

Some respondents share respondent no. 4B's criticism of OUTRAGE for its aggressive activities such as ' outing'. They are concerned that such aggression and anger would stereotype the gay community in the public eyes, thus giving only a partial representation to the public what gay people are:

"I think they are effective to an extent, when they get across what they want. They project this image that the gay community... this is what the gay community thinks...... I think they are very much antagonistic and very aggressive in their approach. I don't think that is necessary at all. It gives the gay community... the people who don't know anything about the gay community would think this is what all of us are like, antagonistic...... you know gay people are always against them, against the authority, against the government, against this against that. I think that is not a very good impression and image for us." (Resp. no. 7A)

"I wouldn't join OUTRAGE. I wouldn't take part in what they do. But I think they are important and necessary...... You see, one understands and respects their motive and sincerity. We are not questioning them. I think as far as the general public is concerned, I think they do more harm than good because they stereotype gays in the minds of the general public as the people who do all these outrageous things. But in fact the gay community, homosexual people are not like that." (Resp. no. 22B)

The views above typify those of many. They appear to make a distinction between political gay groups that achieve their purposes through more peaceful means and those that resort to aggressive demonstration of anger. The former appears to strike the right chord with the respondents.

Other minor reasons for non-participation are similar to those cited for non-participation in gay Christian groups. There are: (1) fear of exposure; (2) the concern for ghettoisation of gay people; and (3) time factor. They will not be elaborated here.

One interesting finding is that although some respondents do not participate in any gay groups, they consider the annual Gay Pride March and the funfair that follows to be an event not to be missed.

"Going to the Gay Pride whenever I am in London is the only public gay thing I do...... I like to go. I have a lovely time. It's great fun walking down the road being a real nuisance and holding up all the traffic. For one day in a year, all of central London has to recognise that there are thousands of gays and it's lovely. If it did it every Saturday I think it would be a nuisance and stupid, but one day in a year is nice to show them that there are lots of us and we are having fun." (Resp. no. 9A)
The Gay Pride March is the one occasion in a year that we all get together. Nice perfect day out. People can enjoy themselves. It is all free. It's actually quite uplifting to be able to walk along the streets of London surrounded by other gay people... just saying we are here. I think it is quite amazing." (Resp. no. 17B)

The views presented above clearly demonstrate the importance of the March in two aspects. Firstly, it is a political event organised to demonstrate to the public their existence and ability to mobilise themselves as a community to deliver the message of redefinition of themselves. Secondly, it is also a social event in which gay people and their supportive heterosexual friends could foster a sense of community and reinforcement their identity.

The political aspect of the March reflects its "instrumental" nature which is goal-oriented and aiming for power attainment. The social aspect, on the other hand, demonstrates its "expressive" nature which is goalless, pertaining more to the benefits and satisfaction derived from participation (Gusfield 1963; Parkin 1968).

Summary

On the whole, the respondents do not demonstrate a high level of participation in non-Christian gay groups with only 11.7% of them participating on a regular basis. The general perception of this group focuses on their socio-political function. Those who are not interested in participating in gay political activism therefore shun them. They tend to turn to gay Christian groups instead if there are in need of moral support and identity reinforcement.

For those in support of political activism through their participation, STONEWALL that adopts a consultative and professional position emerges to be the choice. On the other hand, aggressive and militant groups such as OUTRAGE is completely rejected.

8.3. Participation in the Commercial Gay Scene

The commercial gay scene in this case is represented by four types of establishment: gay bars/pubs, gay baths/saunas, gay discos and gay bookstores. 119 (87.5%) of the entire sample of 136 respondents report that they have been to the commercial gay scene before at least once. 17 (12.5%) have never been.

69 (57.9%) of the 119 respondents have been to the commercial gay scene at least once during the one month period prior to the completion of the self-administered questionnaire. Table 8.1. shows their average monthly levels of participation:
Table 8.1: Level of Participation in the Commercial Gay Scene in An Average Month

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Establishment</th>
<th>Less than once or never</th>
<th>1-4 times</th>
<th>5-8 times</th>
<th>More than 8 times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gay bars/pubs</td>
<td>45 (37.8%)</td>
<td>56 (47.1%)</td>
<td>13 (10.9%)</td>
<td>5 (4.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay baths/saunas</td>
<td>100 (84.0%)</td>
<td>17 (14.3%)</td>
<td>2 (1.7%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay discos</td>
<td>98 (82.3%)</td>
<td>20 (16.8%)</td>
<td>1 (0.9%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay bookstores</td>
<td>77 (64.7%)</td>
<td>41 (34.4%)</td>
<td>1 (0.9%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=119</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.1. indicates that, on the whole, these respondents are not active in the commercial gay scene. Gay bars/pubs are the most frequented establishment, possibly due to its highest availability compared to the other three. The average monthly participation is rather low for all the establishments: 2.1 times for gay bars/pubs; 0.6 time for gay bookstores and 0.3 time for both gay baths/saunas and gay discos. The following sub-section examines the interviewed respondents' perception of the commercial gay scene.

**Perceptions of the Commercial Gay Scene**

Only a small minority speak favourably of the commercial gay scene. The following is the typical response:

"In fact I like the fact that it is totally egalitarian. You can meet people from all walks of life... all kinds of groups... cultural and social. It, to me expresses more the Christian lifestyle than the heterosexual world because the barriers are down. People accept each other on the basis of their sexuality and not whether they are black or white or rich or poor..... I think there is more harmony." (Resp. no. 3A)

Respondent no. 3A, who goes to gay bars/pubs five times, gay discos and gay bookstores at least once in an average month, highlights the sense of community that the commercial gay scene offers. It fosters a collective identity of gay people regardless of their backgrounds (Akers 1973).

A considerable majority, however, do not perceive the commercial gay scene in such favourable light. The following are some typical responses:

"The gay scene is very cruel. It is all based on what you look like, what you have got in your trousers and how young you are. The reason why I don't like going is because you can't actually go there and talk to people because people think there is a motive behind it. If I had a motive behind it, I probably could go because I can pick people up. I think that's ultimately what it is for." (Resp. no. 17A)

"The gay scene seems to be more sexual oriented. It is serving a certain group of people who didn't want to be attached or involved and only sees sex as the only thing." (Resp. no. 7B)
"I think the gay scene is unfriendly. I think you can get a cold shoulder quite easily. It is difficult to talk to people sometimes if you just want to go and talk, because people look at you and then look away. You would feel uncomfortable." (Resp. no. 51A)

The above interview data reveal two major characteristics of the commercial gay scene. First, it is very youth- and looks-oriented. Second, it is extremely sexual in nature. This perception is resonant with the following comment:

"... the problem with the gay male culture is that much of it is organized around singlehood or maintaining one's sexual marketability. Meeting places like bars and baths promote casual sex rather than couple activities." (Blumstein and Schwartz 1983:322)

The above comment is telling. With its considerable emphasis on youth and sex, the commercial gay scene alienates older gay men and those who think that their sexual needs are met within a partnership. This reflects the situation of many respondents. With an average age of 43.4 and an average length of partnership of 9 years and 5 months (see Chapter Three Section 3.1.), many might think that the commercial gay scene does not hold much attraction for them. Respondent no. 8B, who is in his mid-50s, illustrates the age factor:

"I am old now. You see, the thing about the gay scene... it is a very young scene now. Men come out much earlier now. There is not the fear. There is not the stigma. I mean okay you still have got this silly thing about you've got to be 21 before you can be legitimately having sexual relationships if you are a man. A lot of men and boys come out at 17 now and mixing in the gay scene. So it is a very young scene. I feel I have past that actually."

Having one's needs met in a partnership also appears to curtail one's level of participation in the gay scene. Respondent no. 8A, who is in a 14-year-old partnership, illustrates this:

"No I am not active in the gay scene. I would say it has got to be because I am in a stable relationship. I used to go out in the beginning because I was looking for a partner or I was looking for somebody for some sort of contact — physical, emotional, whatever. That need is not there anymore. I don't need that whatsoever."

In support of the above view, respondent no. 51B, who has been in a partnership for four years, asserts:

"I think being in a secure relationship, I don't feel the need of the gay scene. All my needs, emotional, physical, mental and spiritual are being met in my relationship. If I were looking for a boyfriend or looking for sex, then I might go out on the scene."

In sum, it can be concluded that the majority of respondents view the commercial gay scene as youth-oriented and a milieu for meeting casual sex partners. This means that an older gay man who is also in a stable partnership might find it quite an alienating place to be in.
However, I would argue that this also depends on whether a coupled respondent is practising a sexually non-exclusive lifestyle. Being in a partnership does not necessarily curtail one's participation in the commercial gay scene if one is still interested in meeting casual sex partners there. This issue is explored in Chapter Ten. No respondent in the sub-sample cites Christian moral values as a reason for non- or a low level of participation in the commercial gay scene.

8.4. Conclusions

Respondents whose needs for support and affirmation are met within the partnership and/or social network generally shun Christian and non-Christian gay groups and the commercial gay scene. For those who do participate, their participation pattern demonstrates this order of preference: (1) gay Christian groups; (2) non-Christian gay groups; and (3) the commercial gay scene. It can also be observed that this order of preference is based on the perceived functions of these groups.

Gay Christian groups are perceived to fulfil the moral support function and the identity reinforcement function. Non-Christian gay groups are perceived to perform the socio-political function. On the other hand, the commercial gay scene is perceived to fulfil the leisure/sexual function, especially for younger gay men.

Therefore, those in need of support and affirmation are more inclined to turn to gay Christian groups. Only a small minority who are politically articulate participate in non-Christian groups. The commercial gay scene, on the other hand, is not a favourite milieu for most because of its social environment.

The respondents' perception of the commercial gay scene is interesting. Despite geographical and economic growth experienced by the commercial gay scene in recent years, the respondent does not view it as a symbol of space and territory for their collective identity belonging to the gay community. I would argue that this is because of their perception of the scene itself for primarily fulfilling the needs of younger gay men and the excitement-seekers.

In my view, the perceived nature of the commercial gay scene is a contradiction in terms to the original purpose of the establishment, so succinctly expressed below:

"Walking into a gay bar is a momentous act in the life history of a homosexual, because in many cases it is the first time he publicly identifies himself as a homosexual. Of equal importance is the fact that it brings home to him the realization that there are many other young men like himself and, thus, that he is a member of a community and not the isolate he had previously felt himself to be." (Hoffman 1968:16)
That the commercial gay scene is a place which fosters affirmation to one's sexuality and a collective identity contradicts with the pervasive perception of older gay men. The scene has become a place meant for a particular segment of the gay community who fits the conventional definition of masculinity. Those who do not will experience a sense of internal marginalisation in a milieu which is supposedly developed for them. This kind of marginalisation is more detrimental to the external marginalisation they might experience in the society at large.

This Chapter concludes Part III on stigma management. This Chapter and the previous one have illustrated the revelation versus concealment dialectic operating within the external dimension of the partnership (Baxter 1993).

In Part IV, which consists of two chapters, I explore the internal and external dimension of the couples' sex life. Chapter Nine focuses on the couples' sex life within the partnership. Chapter Ten examines the issue of sexual non-exclusivity.
Part IV

THE SEXUAL DIMENSION
Chapter Nine

THE 'S' FACTOR: SEX WITHIN THE PARTNERSHIP

This Chapter and the next aim to discuss the most sensitive area of the couples' partnerships — their sex life. Chapter Ten discusses the external dimension of their sex life, focusing particularly on the issue of sexual non-exclusivity. This Chapter, on the other hand, explores their sex life within the partnership.

I examine the factors affecting the couples' level of satisfaction in their sex life. In examining the power relations in their love-making, I argue that the active-passive dichotomy must be treated with caution. In general, this dichotomy does not reflect the high degree of role exchangeability among the couples. Love-making sessions should also be divided into the initiation and the execution stages for a more accurate analysis of power relations. I close this Chapter by assessing the relationship between the respondents' sexual attitudes and their Christian beliefs. Most do not acknowledge the relationship, although their adherence to certain values reflect some Christian ethos.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, I decided that the data on this sensitive area should be elicited only in the individual interview. This is to maximise the respondents' willingness and confidence in providing information. Fieldwork experiences confirm the appropriateness of this methodological consideration. Several respondents were hesitant when questioned about their sexual encounters outside the partnership which, in some cases, are partially or completely concealed from their partners.

One respondent requested repeated assurances of confidentiality before the interview proceeded. On another occasion, a respondent insisted that the entire section of the interview about his sex life should not be tape recorded. I resorted to note-taking in that instance. These experiences show that researching into a sensitive topic by interviewing might require the researcher's flexibility in adapting to the specificity of the interview situation.

For 9 of the 30 couples, their sex life within the partnership is non-existent. Therefore, they are excluded from the discussion in this Chapter except in Section 9.4 where their situation is addressed specifically. This, however, does not mean that the sexual dimension of
their partnerships is entirely absent. The non-existence of sex life within the partnership does not preclude the possibility of sexual encounters outside the partnership. This issue is specifically addressed in Chapter Ten.

9.1. The Importance of Sex

This section focuses primarily on the 21 couples whose sex life within the partnership is still existent. Special attention is on their perception of the importance in relation to the entire partnership.

All the respondents consider sex within the partnership as either "important", "vital" or "quite important". However, they qualify that by emphasising that sex is not the most important aspect of their partnership. Respondent no. 5A who has been in a partnership for three years and three months expresses this point:

"It is an important part of the relationship. It is a very therapeutic, very bonding experience. It's not the focus of the relationship. It might have been at one time in the early days. But it is not the focus. It is actually an expression of those things that are focused. Things like companionship, affection and love that we have for each other. And the natural expression of that is physical intimacy. So it feels good."

Putting companionship, affection and love before sex, this response typifies that of many other respondents. The positive attitude towards sex is also expressed in theological terms:

"I think it is important in theological terms, because we are created physical people. We have bodies and we should celebrate that. I think it is the expression of the ultimate intimacy. So it is only normal that we should have a wonderful, exciting and fulfilling sex life" (Resp. no. 52A)

"I enjoy it. I think it is sacramental. It is a visible sign of the inward and spiritual grace. To have that ease with another person's body is very important. I think the fact that my body is available to him to touch wherever he wants to is an important foundation for other bits of the relationship." (Resp. no. 56B)

The data above reflect the respondents' high level of ease with gay sex within partnership, even when it is viewed from a religious perspective. This, I would argue, is a result of the positive self-image they have of themselves as gay Christians. In spite of the Church's official position which is against the expression of the homosexual orientation, they do not view the physical expression of their sexuality in a negative light. The expression of the physical intimacy is perceived to be located within a relational context that they define as not in contradiction with their being Christian.
9.2. Frequency of Sexual Activity

Many gay men make a distinction between making love to their partners in the primary relationship and having sex with third parties beyond the confines of the primary partnership (see quotation cited in Chapter One Section 1.3., taken from Silverstein 1981:143). Unlike the former, the latter can be carried out without, or with very little, emotional attachment, solely for recreational purposes. In the case of these couples, the former is certainly more appropriate, thus the use of the term throughout.

Table 9.1: Average Monthly Frequency of Love-making

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monthly Frequency</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between 1 and 4 times</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>42.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 5 and 8 times</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 9 and 12 times</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 12 times</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>N = 42</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9.1 shows that, on the average, a great majority (42.8%) of the respondents report that they make love with their partners once a week or less. In total, 71.4% of them report that love-making takes place twice a week or less. The highest monthly frequency reported is 24, almost similar to the frequency reported by his partner. The lowest monthly frequency is 1, reported by both partners of the same partnership. On the other hand, the mean monthly frequency is 7.7, almost twice a week.

Age and Average Monthly Frequency of Love-making

Previous research evidence shows that the frequency of love-making decreases with the increase of age (e.g. Blumstein and Schwartz 1983; McWhirter and Mattison 1984). These respondents, however, do not demonstrate a trend that fully supports this argument, as illustrated below:
Chart 9.1 reveals that age does not have a direct reverse effect on the average monthly frequency of love-making. Respondents of the youngest age group (21-30), reports a frequency of 8.7, higher than that of the 31-40 (5.8) and the above 50 (6.0) age groups, but lower than the 41-50 age group (10.6).

The respondents who report the highest frequency (10.6) are between the ages of 41 and 50, while those who report the lowest frequency (5.8) belong to the 31-40 age group. If the 31-40 age group is split into two: 31-35 (N= 10) and 36-40 (N= 15), the averages of frequency for these groups are respectively 4.8 and 6.5. This again confirms that, as far as this sample is concerned, age does not always have a reverse effect on the average monthly frequency of love-making.

Length of Partnership and Average Monthly Frequency of Love-making

This sub-section assesses the possible effect of the length of partnership on the average monthly frequency of love-making of all the 21 couples. The general assumption arising from past research is that the longer the partnership, the lower the frequency as familiarity between partners increases and limerence decreases (e.g. McWhirter and Mattison 1984).
Chart 9.2 indicates that the couples who have the highest average monthly frequency of love-making are those in partnerships between 3 and 5 years. A very interesting observation can also be made --- the lowest average monthly frequency of love-making (6.1) is found among couples who are in partnerships of the shortest duration (one year and up to 3 years). This average is even lower than that of couples who have been together for more than 10 years.

Given that only one out of the 4 couples in this category are non-cohabiting, it cannot be argued that their lowest average frequency is due to the lack of availability of partners because of their living arrangement. This finding lends no credence to the argument that the longer the partnership the less the degree of limerence and romance and this results in the decrease in the frequency of love-making.

While the length of partnership can be one of the factors affecting the frequency of love-making, there exist other factors that ought to be taken into consideration. In fact, the couple who reports the highest average frequency has been together for 14 years. On the other hand, the couple who reports the lowest frequency has been together for 10 years and 2 months. However, familiarity cannot be ruled out altogether as a determining factor for the decrease of frequency in love-making. Respondent no. 12A who is in a one-year old partnership expresses this point:

"It is one of those odd things that as you get more and more into the relationship..... when we first met and first started living together, sex was a very very active part of our lives. We would be doing it a couple of times a day, three or four times at the weekends. Gradually as we became more complacent with each other, now it is sort of a couple of times a week..... So when we first met, we spent a lot more time over sex. It was a lot more imaginative and exciting. It's very easy for complacency to creep in. Now sex can be a little bit perfunctory. We are both aware of that and do try to make more time for it."
It can be concluded that the causal relationship between these two variables cannot be established. However, it must be recognised that the increase of familiarity between partners can be one of the factors that leads to the decrease in the frequency, although there might be other forces at work.

Living Arrangement and Average Monthly Frequency of Love-making

Living arrangement can be a major factor in determining the frequency of love-making between partners. Cohabitation in principle offers a constant supply of opportunity for partners to engage in love-making. In this case, 13 of the 21 couples cohabit while the other 8 couples live apart. The average monthly frequency of love-making for the cohabiting couples is 7.7, which equals the average of the entire sub-sample. On the other hand, the average frequency for their non-cohabiting counterparts is 7.6.

An important factor may be responsible for the high average frequency for non-cohabiting couples. Couple no. 50 who live apart meet each other on a daily basis due to the practical arrangement they have made. Both partners report a high average frequency of 22. Therefore, their average frequency is actually higher than almost all the cohabiting couples because of the peculiar arrangement they have made for daily meetings. If this couple is excluded, the average frequency for non-cohabiting couples becomes 5.5. This confirms the assumption that the average frequency for cohabiting couples is higher than that of their non-cohabiting counterparts.

Summary

The discussion in this section has shown that there is no causal link between age and the length of partnership in relation to the average monthly frequency of love-making. Findings do not support the assumption that the younger the respondent, the higher the frequency he experiences. Similarly, the argument that the shorter the partnership, the higher the frequency is not supported. However, cohabiting couples do report a slightly higher frequency than their non-cohabiting counterparts.
9.3. Level of Satisfaction With Sex Life

This section assesses the relationships between the level of satisfaction with sex life and four variables: (1) the average monthly frequency of love-making; (2) age of respondent; (3) length of partnership; and (4) living arrangement. Each respondent was asked to rate their level of satisfaction on a scale of 1 to 10, with '1' representing 'extremely dissatisfied' and '10' 'extremely satisfied'. I would argue that their level of satisfaction with sex life contributes to their satisfaction with the overall partnership, alongside other factors already discussed in Chapter Six.

Table 9.2: Level of Satisfaction with Sex Life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 to 4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 to 8</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>57.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 to 10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=42</td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9.2 indicates that a great majority (34, 80.0%) of the respondents are highly satisfied with their sex life, giving a rating of 7 and above. The mean rating is 7.2.

Level of Satisfaction and Average Monthly Frequency of Love-Making

Chart 9.3: Level of Satisfaction in Sex Life and Average Monthly Frequency of Love-Making
Chart 9.3 demonstrates a positive relationship between these two variables. The level of satisfaction in sex life increases as the average monthly frequency of love-making increases. As the average monthly frequency increases from 'between 1 to 4 times' to 'more than 12 times', the ratings increases from 6.2 to 7.7, 8.0 and 8.2. It can therefore be concluded that the higher the average frequency of love-making, the higher the respondent's level of satisfaction with his sex life.

**Level of Satisfaction and Age of Respondent**

Is a younger respondent more satisfied than his older counterpart with his sex life? Chart 9.4 reveals that this is partially true.

![Chart 9.4: Level of Satisfaction in Sex Life and Age of Respondents](image)

Respondents of the youngest age group (21-30) demonstrate the highest level of satisfaction with their sex life, with a mean rating of 8.4. However, the relationship between age and level of satisfaction cannot be established beyond this. Respondents of the '31-40' age group scores a rating of 6.8, lower than those of the '41-50' age group (7.3) and the 'Above 50' age group (7.0).

Two interesting observations can be made by comparing Chart 9.4 with Chart 9.1. First, respondents of the age group '31-40' who have the lowest average monthly frequency of love-making (5.8) also have the lowest level of satisfaction with their sex life (6.8). In other words, respondents between the ages of 31 and 40 are the least sexually active within the partnership and the least satisfied with their sex life.
Second, respondents of the age group '41-50' who have the highest average monthly frequency of love-making (10.6) have the second highest level of satisfaction with their sex life (7.3). These observations appear to confirm the finding presented in the preceding sub-section, that the lower the average monthly frequency of love-making, the lower the level of satisfaction in their sex life.

Level of Satisfaction and Length of Partnership

This sub-section explores the extent to which a couple's average level of satisfaction with their sex life is related to the length of their partnership. Chart 9.5 assesses this point:

Chart 9.5: Level of Satisfaction in Sex Life and Length of Partnership

Chart 9.5 reveals that couples who have been together for more than 5 years and up to 10 years have the highest level of satisfaction with their sex life. An interesting observation is that couples who are in the category of the longest partnership (more than 15 years and up to 20 years) have a rating of 7.7, even higher than couples who are in the category of the shortest partnership (one year and up to 3 years) with a rating of 7.3.

Comparing Chart 9.5 with Chart 9.2, it can be observed that couples who have been together for more than 3 years and up to 5 years have the highest average monthly frequency of love-making (10.5) and they also have the second highest level of satisfaction with their sex life (7.8). On the other hand, couples who have been together for more than 5 years and up to 10 years have the second highest average frequency (9.8) but the highest level of satisfaction (8.5).
This pattern contradicts the assumption that couples who are in the shortest duration of partnership would demonstrate the highest frequency of love-making and the highest level of satisfaction with their sex life, owing to the fact that there exists at the early stage in the partnership a high degree of romance, limerence and sexual excitement. The pattern appears to suggest that, the highest average frequency of love-making and the highest level of satisfaction with sex life are to be found in couples who have been together for more than 3 years and up to 10 years. This seems to be the 'best' period for their sex life, both in terms of quantity and quality.

**Level of Satisfaction and Living Arrangement**

Cohabitation offers the couple a high degree of availability of a partner for love-making. It is therefore assumed that cohabiting couples should demonstrate a higher level of satisfaction with their sex life compared to their non-cohabiting counterparts. However, the data show that this is not the case. The average rating for the level of satisfaction for cohabiting respondents and their non-cohabiting counterparts are 6.9 and 7.7 respectively.

Relating this finding to the data on living arrangement and average monthly frequency of love-making, it can be concluded that cohabiting respondents have a higher average frequency of love-making but a lower level of satisfaction compared to their non-cohabiting counterparts. Therefore, the constant availability of a sexual partner within the partnership results in a higher frequency of love-making but not a higher level of satisfaction.

I would argue that one of the factors for this scenario is that the limited availability of the partner for non-cohabiting respondents heightens their appreciation of the opportunity for the physical expression of their emotional attachment and intimacy. Cohabiting respondents, on the other hand, might engage in love-making because of the mere fact that the partner is available. Love-making, in this case, can become perfunctory.

I have also reported in Chapter Five (see Section 5.1.) that non-cohabiting respondents place greater emphasis on emotional intimacy (companionship and sense of security) compared to their cohabiting counterparts. One of the reasons I suggested for this scenario is their longing for the limited opportunity of meeting, since the majority of them do not live apart by choice. If meetings are yearned for, love-making that takes place within them would certainly heighten their appreciation and level of satisfaction.
Summary

In this section, the relationship between the level of satisfaction with sex life and four variables has been assessed. Only the average monthly frequency of love-making is positively related to the level of satisfaction — the higher the frequency, the higher the level of satisfaction. The assumption that the younger the respondent, the higher the level of satisfaction is partially supported. In this connection, it is also found that respondents in the 31-40 age group are the least sexually active within the partnership and the least satisfied with their sex life.

Non-cohabiting couples are more sexually satisfied than their cohabiting counterparts. Findings also suggest that couples who have been together for 3 years and up to 10 years are in the 'best' period in terms of the quantity and the quality of their sex life.

9.4. Couples Who Have Stopped Love-Making

As mentioned, 9 couples of the sub-sample have stopped love-making at certain points of their partnerships. This section explores the nature and the determining factors leading to this eventuality. It must be reiterated that the cessation of love-making within the partnership might exist in tandem with sex outside the partnership, which in turn affects the sexual dimension of the partnership in general.

All, except one, partnerships in this category are of more than 10 years duration, with the longest lasting 33 years. The mean is 18 years and 5 months. Four factors have been identified for the non-existence of love-making within these partnerships: (a) old age of one or both partners; (b) the loss of sexual interest in partner; (c) sexual incompatibility; and (d) psychological barrier.

Old Age

Five couples cite this reason for the non-existence of love-making in their partnerships. The respondents are between the ages of 45 and 75, with a mean age of 56.8 years. To these couples, ageing affects the desire for sex. When this takes place in tandem with the growth of the length of the partnership which increases its stability and significance, partners shift their focus to other elements of the partnership that they have established. Blumstein and Schwartz (1983:195) comment in this connection:
"...... gay men are very oriented to sexual expression in general, but as their relationship mature they rely less on sexuality as a focus for their commitment."

The ageing effect is typically expressed by respondent no. 49B who is in his 50s and who stopped love-making with his partner 3 years ago in a partnership for almost 22 years:

"I don't mind it (the stopping of love-making)...... It doesn't affect the relationship adversely. You see, when you get to our stage you are not young. So therefore the drive is no longer that strong. You reach the point where the companionship, the care, things that you share...... these are the things that are important. You have to see things in proportion. I think it would be very frustrating if I yearn for it and I didn't get it. But it just happens that we crept into it and it has never become an issue."

Couple no. 22 has been together for 27 years and last made love two years ago. This case is particularly interesting as there is a 23-year age gap between the partners. Respondent no. 22B, who is in his late 60s, expresses his point:

"The trouble is that I am getting older and he is much younger. I can't help feeling he is not getting enough of it. But it doesn't seem to be bothering him. It is not a source of conflict. He doesn't seem to mind you see...... Frankly, our relationship is so good that it doesn't bother me in any way."

His partner, who is in his mid-40s, acknowledges the adjustment of his attitude in coping with the situation:

"I find it rather difficult to cope with. But I mean one has to. You just know that that particular part is no longer as fresh as it was. So you think about other things. You do other things, think about other things. You get involved in living. I suppose I do get sexually frustrated. But I believe in self-control. I believe in setting your mind that this is the situation and it has a lot of good parts to it. Sex is just a small part of the relationship...... (Resp. no. 22B) is actually near 70. He is not as responsive as before. But the quality of the relationship is not affected. I don't believe in crying about things. I mean that is the situation. One has got to get used to it and get on with life." (Resp. no. 22A)

The cessation of love-making does not appear to generate much conflict between the partners. I suggest two reasons for this. First, they accept the natural inevitability of ageing and the subsequent loss of sexual interest. Attention is shifted to other elements, for instance trust and emotional attachment, which they have accumulated throughout the partnership.

Second, four of these partnerships have been sexually non-exclusive before the love-making within the partnership stopped. Partners who are still interested in sex could therefore fulfil that need outside the partnership, thus reducing the possibility of sexual frustration within the partnership which might lead to conflict. These reasons are expressed below:

"The stopping of sex did adversely affect the relationship at the beginning. But it was counterbalanced by the steady improvement in the intellectual relationship. So it didn't make me want to stop seeing (resp. no. 54A). It just made me more firmly resolve to look further for somebody with whom I could have physical sex." (Resp. no. 54B)
However, the stopping of love-making within the partnership does not necessarily lead to outside sexual encounters. In the case of couple no. 22, respondent no. 22A, the younger partner, does not resort to sexual contacts outside of the partnership owing to his commitment to the notion of sexual exclusivity, buttressed by his religious beliefs. This case and particularly the issue of sexual non-exclusivity forms the primary theme of Chapter Ten.

Loss of Sexual Interest in Partner

Two couples are in this category. A similarity between them is that both couples have been sexually non-exclusive since the beginning of their partnerships. Couple no. 3 who have been together for almost 16 years started the partnership with an explicit agreement that it would be sexually non-exclusive whereby both partners could have outside sexual contacts either separately or together. Sexual non-exclusivity became such a major feature of their partnership that for a period of two to three years they lived together with a third party with whom they were both sexually involved.

Respondent no. 3B, who initiated the cessation of love-making with his partner in the eleventh year of their partnership, considers a general loss of interest in sex to be the primary reason:

"You know you don't get turned on as you used to be. You know sex is about excitement. But the excitement decreases after a few years.... I found myself coming back from work and fell asleep and not wanting to do anything.... It's hard to say. It is just something that creeps up on you..... It is less exciting. And I just can't be bothered."

Respondent no. 3B, however, continues to seek outside sexual contacts "on a very occasional basis." His partner, who also has outside sexual contacts, considers the stopping of love-making ".... a source of disappointment but not a source of conflict". He further elaborates:

"Sex isn't there anymore. But all the other things are there..... so I mean that's sufficient anyway. I mean if we do not touch each other, that would be intolerable. But we are very physical with each other.... I mean it is surprising what you can do when you are really committed." (Resp. no. 3A)

The experience of couple no. 3 highlights two salient points. First, the stopping of love-making is not perceived as an indication of the decline of emotional intimacy and love between the partners. Second, having been in a partnership characterised by mutually-agreed sexual non-exclusivity, both partners meet their sexual needs outside the partnership, thus diminishing sexual frustration.
In this case, it can be concluded that the appropriate perception of love-making, emotional intimacy and sexual non-exclusivity actually helps maintain the stability of the partnership. This highlights an important point. Sexual non-exclusivity must not be viewed negatively under all circumstances. If mutually agreed upon, it can be a means to reduce sexual frustration of partners who have stopped love-making but are still emotionally committed. I will return to this argument in Chapter Ten.

In the case of couple no. 9 who are in a 22-year-old partnership and who stopped love-making in the eleventh year, respondent no. 9B's loss of interest in his partner is apparent. He admits to having lost his interest in his partner and having outside sexual contacts on a fortnightly basis. No interview data are available in this case, although notes were taken. Respondent no. 9B did not permit this section of the interview to be tape recorded. However, his partner's response acknowledges respondent no. 9B's admission:

"(Resp. no. 9B) just basically lost interest in me sexually. I think he was having much more interesting time with other people. It just stopped being something he was interested in. I was disappointed. <You just accepted that?> Yes. I grew up in a family that disapproved strongly of sex except for having babies. Also in an environment where sex could never be discussed. I suppose I am still quite inhibited about discussing it. At a personal level, I am actually very shy about discussing sex. I think if there is any problem about it, I would just let the matter drop, which is what happened.... I am sure he still has flings outside. <Are you upset about that?> No, not really. I would feel upset if he were with somebody in the house when I came home. He sees others outside or when I am away. That I don't mind." (Resp. no. 9A)

In this case, sexual non-exclusivity on the part of respondent no. 9B appears to be the cause for the eventual stopping of love-making between the partners. Two factors are responsible for the continuation of the partnership despite this. First, the sexually non-exclusive nature of the partnership allows both partners to meet their needs outside the partnership. Second, respondent no. 9A's tendency to attributional avoidance rather than focusing on problem resolution. His inclination in this respect has been reported in Chapter Three.

Sexual Incompatibility

Different sexual tastes also adversely affect the sexual attraction between partners. Couple no. 17, who has been discussed in Chapter Six, is in this category. They were, at the point of interview, considering the dissolution of their partnership. This prospect is precipitated by a high degree of incompatibility in many mutually-identified areas such as career goals and sex life. Both of them acknowledge the existing sexual incompatibility:

"I like to be very involved in sex.... hug and kiss a lot. To me orgasm is not really an issue. (Resp. no. 17B's) mind is completely different. So I felt that there is a massive gap there.... I would rather have sex with someone I don't know. I like sex to be free." (Resp. no. 17A)
'I'm not particularly wonderful at sex. (Resp. no. 17A) is quite excited and enthusiastic about it. When combined with other conflicts in the relationship, we know that we both want different things. There is no need to pretend. We don't. We can't. So we stopped." (Resp. no. 17B)

Beginning their partnership 2 years and 3 months ago with an explicit agreement of sexual exclusivity, both partners mutually agreed to stop their sex life after two years. They then began to explore outside sexual encounters separately. At the point of interview, they were at the stage of negotiation and the construction of ground rules, for instance, whether a third party could be brought home and whether there is a need to purchase an extra bed for this purpose.

The conversion from sexual exclusivity to non-exclusivity is an outcome of their negotiation and redefinition of the boundary and constitution of their partnership, which transcends the sexual dimension. I would reiterate that this couple is an example par excellence of the in-built flexibility within a gay partnership which allows the partners to constantly engage themselves in boundary and constitutional negotiation due to the non-existence of an explicit social script.

**Psychological Barrier.**

Couple no. 11 is a peculiar case. They have never had any full sexual intercourse since the partnership began 12 years and 2 months ago. Respondent no. 11A claims that owing to his gratitude to his partner for having loved him despite his weaknesses, he considers making love to his partner an "incest" to commit, thus the psychological barrier. However, based on my observation and the interview data of his partner, I am inclined to believe that this is an excuse to cover his lack of sexual interest in his partner and his active sex life outside the partnership. His partner offers his opinion which supports my observation:

"We have never really had full-scale sex since we met. Our relationship is a little bit unusual. I am very attracted to him sexually, but he isn't attracted to me the same way. We have never so to speak settled down for sessions." (Resp. no. 11B)

Since both partners practise sexual non-exclusivity, they report that their non-existent sex life is compensated by their sexual contacts outside the partnership.

**Summary**

Old age, the loss of sexual interest in partner, sexual incompatibility and psychological barrier are cited as the major factors resulting in the stopping of love-making in these 9 partnerships. The non-existence of sex within the partnership could be a cause or effect of
sexual non-exclusivity. Only one couple has remained sexually exclusive since the termination of their sex life within the partnership.

The termination of sex within the partnership offers one couple the mutually-agreed opportunity of sexual exploration outside the partnership. The other seven couples have been sexually non-exclusive before sex within the partnership stopped. These themes will be further elaborated in Chapter Ten.

Except for the couple committed to sexual exclusivity, the other 8 couples maintain the stability of their partnerships in two ways. First, some resort to sexual non-exclusivity or increase its frequency, for sexual gratification. Second, the perception that the stopping of lovemaking is not an indication of the decline of mutual commitment and love. Attention is focused on other important elements in the partnership that they have established over the years.

9.5. Power Relations in Love-Making

The analysis of sexual activity between gay men has been beset with the concern for the active-passive dichotomy, principally to assess the power relations in their sexual activity. The 'active' partner is assumed to perform, therefore dominate; and the 'passive' partner is assumed to receive, therefore subordinate. This is done primarily to assess if gay couples exhibit a high degree of role exchangeability in love-making, or replicate what is by and large considered 'the heterosexual model' with one partner (the male) initiating and performing while the other partner (the female) receives. The common belief is that gay couples demonstrates 'role complementarity', adopting a masculine (active/dominant) and feminine (passive/subordinate) roles (Larson 1982).

This research interest has inaccurately led to the heavy focus placed on certain types of sexual techniques instead of a wide repertoire that gay men explore and practise. Therefore, anal sex and oral sex which generally fit into the 'insertive-receptive' dichotomy have been conveniently and almost exclusively used as the sexual techniques for the consideration of the 'active-passive' consideration. I would argue that this is the result of many researchers employing 'the heterosexual model' in studying the sexual activity between gay men. This kind of 'heterosexual bias' might lead to inaccuracy in the same way that 'cultural bias' sometimes does when the researcher interprets the social life of another culture from his/her own cultural perspective.
Returning to the 'insertive-receptive' dichotomy, research evidence suggests that the majority of gay men tend to interchange insertive and receptive roles in oral and anal sexual activities (Saghir and Robins 1973; Harry and DeVall 1978; Weatherburn 1992; Wellings et al. 1994). However, I would argue that caution must be exercised in order not to imply that a partner who has experienced insertive oral or anal sex is the 'active' partner while the partner who has experienced receptive oral or anal sex is the 'passive' one. Otherwise, this interpretation of power relations would label the former the dominant partner and the latter the subordinate partner. This interpretation can be inaccurate. Harry (1976b:149), who challenges the validity of the active-passive model for anal and oral sex, warns that:

"..... the concepts of inserter and insertee are not polar opposites..... there is a dimension of oral preference among gay males that is independent of active-passive orientations."

Both partners, as men, have been socialised to be dominant and in control in social life. It is therefore unreliable to use the ways in which they actually employ the sexual techniques to fit them into the active-passive model. I would argue that a distinction needs to be made between the initiation and the execution of a particular sexual activity.

A partner who 'actively initiates' oral sex 'passively receive' it from his partner. In this case, he is 'active' as the role of the initiator and 'passive' in the role of the receiver. On the other hand, a partner might on his own initiative perform oral sex on his partner. He is 'active' in the initiation of it, although he appears to be 'passive' in the execution of the sexual act. I therefore support Wellings et al.'s (1994) attempt in merely describing the execution of insertive and receptive roles in anal and oral sexual techniques without implying which partner is active/dominant and which is passive/subordinate.

Therefore, in this section, I first describe the types of sexual techniques and the frequency of their employment without trying to fit the respondents into the active-passive dichotomy. I then analyse the respondents' personal perceptions in this connection.

Types of Sexual Techniques and Frequency of Employment

Respondents were asked in the interview to fill out a self-completion questionnaire eliciting information about the different types of sexual techniques they employ in their love-making sessions. They were also asked to indicate the frequency of the employment of such techniques on four bases: (1) 'Often', if it takes place in at least 80% of their love-making sessions; (2) 'Sometimes', if it takes place in about 50% of their love-making sessions; (3) 'Rarely', if it takes place in about 20% of their love-making sessions; and (4) 'Never' or 'Tried a few times in the past'. The results are presented below:
Table 9.3: Types of Sexual Techniques and Their Frequency of Employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexual Technique</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never/Tried A Few Times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Masturbation:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performing on Partner</td>
<td>4 (9.6%)</td>
<td>8 (19.0%)</td>
<td>18 (42.9%)</td>
<td>12 (28.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving</td>
<td>6 (14.3%)</td>
<td>7 (16.6%)</td>
<td>19 (45.3%)</td>
<td>10 (23.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutual</td>
<td>19 (45.2%)</td>
<td>17 (40.5%)</td>
<td>4 (9.5%)</td>
<td>2 (4.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fellatio/Oral Sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performing</td>
<td>19 (45.2%)</td>
<td>17 (40.6%)</td>
<td>3 (7.1%)</td>
<td>3 (7.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving</td>
<td>22 (52.4%)</td>
<td>11 (26.2%)</td>
<td>9 (21.4%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rimming/Oral-anal Contact</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performing</td>
<td>4 (9.6%)</td>
<td>7 (16.6%)</td>
<td>13 (30.9%)</td>
<td>18 (42.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving</td>
<td>2 (4.8%)</td>
<td>10 (23.8%)</td>
<td>13 (30.9%)</td>
<td>17 (40.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fucking/Penetrative Anal Sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performing</td>
<td>6 (14.3%)</td>
<td>6 (14.3%)</td>
<td>18 (42.9%)</td>
<td>12 (28.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving</td>
<td>4 (9.6%)</td>
<td>10 (23.8%)</td>
<td>14 (33.3%)</td>
<td>14 (33.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body Rubbing/Friction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutual</td>
<td>20 (47.6%)</td>
<td>12 (28.6%)</td>
<td>5 (11.9%)</td>
<td>5 (11.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (S&amp;M, Water Sports, Douching, Bondage, Fingering, Scatting, Fisting etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performing</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>2 (4.8%)</td>
<td>8 (19.0%)</td>
<td>32 (76.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving</td>
<td>1 (2.4%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>9 (21.4%)</td>
<td>32 (76.2%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on Table 9.3, I constructed a list of the ten most frequently employed sexual techniques:

1. Receptive Oral Sex
2. Mutual Body-Rubbing/Friction
3. (a) Insertive Oral Sex;
   (b) Mutual Masturbation
4. (a) Receptive Masturbation;
   (b) Insertive Anal Sex
5. (a) Performing Masturbation on Partner;
   (b) Performing Rimming;
   (c) Receptive Anal Sex
6. Receiving Rimming

These respondents demonstrate the employment of a wide range of sexual techniques, contradicting Weinberg and Williams' (1974) comment that religious gay males have a restricted sexual repertoire. Table 9.3 also indicates that receptive oral sex is the most popular sexual technique. 45.2% and 40.6% of the respondents report that they 'often' and 'sometimes'
employ it. It is telling to observe that the data debunk the stereotype that gay men are exceedingly interested in penetrative anal sex (especially insertive). In order of frequency, insertive anal sex is ranked fifth while receptive anal sex is jointly ranked seventh, the second last on the list. This confirms the Blumstein and Schwartz's (1983:242) finding that, "Among gay men, anal sex is less common than oral sex."

Role-taking in Sexual Activity

This sub-section assesses role-taking in the respondents' love-making session, according to their *perception* and *self-identification*. I have already argued that researcher-imposed definitional categories can be inaccurate as they focus on the execution of the sexual activity without taking into consideration the initiation.

I am therefore in favour of using the respondents' perception and self-identification as the assessment of role-taking in sexual activity. Based on the sex roles identified by the respondents themselves, these 21 couples can be divided into two categories:

(a) Couples who do not adopt a fixed sex role pattern in both the 'initiation' and the 'execution' stage, thus demonstrating a high degree of 'role exchangeability'. 14 couples (66.7%) are in this category. 2 of these couples, however, exhibit quite 'fixed' roles at these two different stages.

(b) Couples who generally adopt a active-passive role dichotomy, thus demonstrating a high degree of 'role complementarity'. This category includes 7 couples (33.3%).

(a) 12 couples in this category confirm that there is a high degree of role exchangeability in both the initiation of a love-making session and the execution of different sexual techniques, depending on practical needs and physical alertness at that juncture:

"Everything we do we take turns when it takes place.... Also sometimes it depends on who is tired and who isn't..... There is no fixed kind of role that we play while having sex. So in general in our love-making there is no dominant partner or submissive partner. " (Resp. no. 52A)

"Not one or the other really. It does vary. There are no fixed roles. I think it very much responds to needs you know. Sometimes I might feel the need to be passive and sometimes it is active. So nothing is set." (Resp. no. 5A)

The type of sexual technique also determines who adopts the insertive or receptive role, based on the personal preference of the partners:

"I would tend to be the active partner in terms of anal intercourse because I like it. It is very rare for me to be the passive one. But he is more active in other techniques. It all sort of equal." (Resp. no. 12A)
Gay couples are less inclined to conform to the rigid active-passive dichotomy as a result of their sex role socialisation into assuming the dominant role in social life. Adopting the 'passive' role might be viewed as a threat to one's masculinity. Role exchangeability therefore appears to be the most viable outcome, whereby both partners have the opportunity to be active and passive at both the initiation and the execution stage. The rejection of a rigid active-passive dichotomy is eloquently argued below:

"I think that sex between two men is not active or passive. It is much more equal because you are initiating activities and responding to activities all the time. Even in what it appears to be an active-passive dichotomy, the passive partner is in fact much more active than people imagine. It is not grin your teeth and think of England. You are actively involved in what is going on. So I don't like the expression active and passive in the roles of sexual activities because you aren't. All that we do we are both involved in it." (Resp. no. 56B)

Two of these couples demonstrate a very interesting pattern of role-taking. Couple no. 6 mainly adopts a fixed sex role at the initiation stage whereby respondent no. 6A mainly initiates the session. However, once it is underway, role exchangeability enters into the execution stage:

"Well, I think it reflects our relationship in general that I feel that if I don't take... make the moves then nothing ever happens." (Resp. no. 6A)

"I guess I tend to be a little bit passive. Perhaps he initiates it more than I do. In that sense he is more active. But once it is underway, it is quite 50-50." (Resp. no. 6B)

This is one of the four couples, discussed in Chapter Four Section 4.1., who generally perceive their partnerships to be inegalitarian in terms of power relations. Respondent no. 6A appears to be the active leader and respondent no. 6B the passive follower. This active-passive dichotomy is reflected in the initiation stage of their sex life. However, as respondent no. 6B explains, it reverts to flexible role exchangeability in the execution stage of their love-making.

In the case of couple no. 10, individual preference appears to be responsible for a generally reverse role-playing at different stages of love-making. At the initiation stage, respondent no. 10B takes the lead. However, his partner may take over or they may exchange roles at the execution stage. The interview data below illustrate this clear line of demarcation they draw:

"I think what happens is (resp. no. 10B) starts off our love-making session. I will end up being in control. I think that is because... not the control that means dominant... it's the fact that I know what (resp. no. 10A) likes, what turns him on. And I enjoy doing that." (Resp. no. 10A)

"I think I am probably more passive... I think passive more often but not exclusively...... I won't say I prefer being passive. It works out that way.... I could start off being active and end up passive. That's because the roles constantly change. We don't have, as individuals, one defined role." (Resp. no. 10B)
These interview data establish the fact that the majority of the respondents prefer and practise a high degree of role exchangeability in their love-making. This is consistent with other research evidence (e.g. Saghir and Robins 1973; Harry and DeVall 1978). None wants to be particularly in control actively or to receive passively throughout the entire process. While some partners might mainly play an active role at the initiation stage, the roles are reversed or exchanged as they enter into the execution stage.

(b) There are, however, 7 couples who report that they mainly, but not exclusively, adopt the fixed active-passive model. The majority of these couples attribute this pattern to personal preference, as pointed out by respondent no. 13B, who perceives and identifies himself to be the passive partner primarily:

"I think I like to receive affection. (Resp. no. 13A) likes the active role."

Couples no. 19 and no. 50, who perceive their partnerships to be generally characterised by inegalitarian power sharing, as discussed in Chapter 4 Section 4.1., replicate the dominant-subordinate model in their sex life. Respondent no. 19A who prefers to be the follower to his partner who is older, more socially experienced, and more financially established, confirms this:

"I prefer to be on the receiving end rather than giving it. <Is that a reflection of his dominance in other areas?> Erm... it does all fit in together as a unit. There is the consistency."

On the other hand, respondent no. 50A who dominates the partnership in general also acknowledge that his dominance has a spill-over effect on their sexual relationship:

"In terms of being the leader, I would take the active role. I would be the person to lie on top of him, because maybe I had orgasms more than him. I would therefore be out there to take a leading role because it would be me who would be leading to orgasm... I am much more active in that I would have a higher sex drive than him so therefore I would be the person who would be initiating it and taking a more active role."

In the cases of couples no. 19 and no. 50, and to a certain extent couple no. 6, the dominance of a partner in other areas of the partnerships is clearly reflected in their sexual relationships. Their experiences support the following finding:

"... once a sex role preference is stated, however slight, it will be correlated (and consistently correlated) with their behaviours (both sexual and non-sexual) that can be placed on a masculine-feminine or butch-femme dichotomy. The correlation may not be perfect but it does seem to exist." (Haist and Hewitt 1974:74)
On the other hand, the other 4 couples who primarily uphold the active-passive dichotomy in their sex life do so as a result of the partners' mutual agreement, an outcome of their personal preference. They perceive their partnerships in generally to be characterised by egalitarianism, which is also reflected in their sexual relationships.

Summary

The analysis of the wide repertoire of gay sexual techniques reveals, contrary to perennial social stereotype, that anal sex (especially insertive) is not the technique most frequently employed in their love-making sessions. I also criticise the 'heterosexual model' that limits our understanding of gay sexual activity. I reject the overpowering concern about the active-passive dichotomy in interpreting power relations within gay sexual activity. The initiation and execution stages should be considered in the analysis of power relations in gay sexual activity. Findings reveal that the majority of the couples demonstrate a high degree of 'role exchangeability' rather than 'role complementarity' in their love-making sessions.

9.6. Christianity and Sex

This section examines the relationship between the respondents' religious beliefs and their sexual attitudes in general. The majority of respondents demonstrate a lack of confidence in the Church on its teaching on sex and sexuality. This is expected as there is tension between their self-identity as gay Christian and the Church's official position in this respect. Many argue the need to negotiate their sex life without referring to the Church's teaching, as expressed below:

"Christianity itself is muddled about the body. It's teachings on the body tend to be absurd, and worse than absurd. Probably Christian teaching about the body is that it's evil, extremely misguided. So it would never actually occur to me to take my Christianity into bed." (Resp. no. 2A)

Some respondents also cite privacy as the reason why Christianity should be excluded from the sexual dimension of their life:

"Whatever two people want to do together in bed is entirely up to them. If it enhances their love and enjoyment of each other, then fine. I personally would not do anything that would involve physical hurt or pain. But I respect the fact that some people do and it is entirely up to them." (Resp. no. 12A)
Speaking in agreement, respondent no. 50A asserts, "Sex is something private between the two of us." These responses are a manifestation of the compartmentalisation between the sexual and the religious dimension of their life. As argued in Chapter Seven, it can be a stigma management stratagem.

The analysis of the respondents' sexual attitudes reveals that there are certain values to which they adhere. While some claim that these values originate from general human values, some attribute to the Christian norms:

"...what one should do is, always be loving and caring. I mean I'll take that side of it, and non-exploitative......There can certainly be affection and gentleness. There can be an exchange of pleasure. All of which are very good things. I won't exploit, but a mutual sharing, typically want to go to bed and want to have fun and enjoy each other. Oh yes! That's almost gospel. Doesn't quite say it but I mean I think that is a very Christian thing to do actually. It depends on if that person it's a very rejoicing thing to do." (Resp. no. 2B)

"We must have a theology of relationships rather than physical act. When people are making love, they should be so spontaneous. They don't think oh we can do that we can't do that. If it is going to be dangerous then it shouldn't be done. Or if one person wants something and the other person doesn't want it, then it shouldn't be done because this is against his will." (Resp. no. 18A)

"I think that the area in which Christian values come into play is when sex becomes predatory, selfish, exploitative. There should be no manipulation, of using people. That's wrong. It's more like lust, isn't it? Doing rape with consent. When sex is created it is mutual." (Resp. no. 48B)

The above views reveal the similarity between their sexual attitudes with the Christian norms of justice and love. These views greatly emphasis norms such as free will, mutual respect, mutuality of participation and egalitarianism in power.

In terms of sexual techniques, the majority report that as long as they are employed within the context of a loving relationship for mutual satisfaction, they should be free to explore and experiment:

"There are still Christians around who say that wherever oral sex is found, demons are not far away! But there is absolutely no limit, no restriction on what we do together, apart from what we both enjoy. You discover when you do it. It's not evil. It's just love. That's what you discover. It's just love. It feels like love. You know it is love and you are giving it as love and you receive it as love. And there is no evil in love." (Resp. no. 52A)

"I think in the context of a relationship, it's the relationship that is Christian. So expressing it (sex) comes naturally. I suppose in the context of a relationship, whatever both partners would be willing to do is all right. I remember someone says that God is far more concerned with what you do with your wealth than what you do with your willly." (Resp. no. 56B)
A few respondents, on the other hand, argue that they will not employ sexual techniques that involve physical pain such as sado-masochistic sex and fist-fucking, even though there is mutual agreement. One respondent reports his initial qualm about penetrative anal sex:

"In the early part of the relationship, I did used to worry about being penetrated because I used to put in into the context of the Bible.... you know, the bits you can read about the Sodom and Gomorra. I used to think that the people were being condemned in their practising anal penetration. But, first, that very rarely happens these days; and second, I have got my Catholicism and my gayness sorted out. I think that when that part is read in the proper context, penetration might be going on with those people in the Bible but they were being condemned for extra sex basically outside their marriage. They weren't condemned for being gay. I used to worry over that. But I was putting the wrong emphasis on it. Now, it could happen later today. But it won't bother me the slightly." (Resp. no. 8A)

In sum, it can be concluded that Christian norms of justice and love have influence on the sexual attitudes of most of the respondents. However, some who demonstrate adherence to the same norms attribute them to general humanistic values. I have excluded the issue of sexual non-exclusivity and Christianity from the present discussion. This issue constitutes the main theme of the next Chapter.

9.7. Conclusions

In this Chapter, I have attempted to explore various aspects of the couples' sex life within the partnership. My methodological approach shares some similarity with the two most recent large-scale studies of sexual attitudes and lifestyles in the UK (Johnson et al. 1994) and the USA (Michael et al. 1994), which focus heavily on heterosexuals.

It is found that 3 to 10 years of the partnership is the 'best' period for their sex life both in terms of quantity and quality. I have also discussed the distinction made by most respondents between 'making-love' and 'having sex', which challenges and broadens one's assumption about commitment and sex in an intimate relationship. In Chapter Ten, I will further discuss how their sexual experiences challenge common assumptions in this respect.

An overwhelming majority demonstrates a high degree of role exchangeability instead of role complementarity in their love-making. There is no role specialisation in this respect, as Harry (1976b:151) argues:

"..... participation in gay sexual activities encourages sexual flexibility rather than the sexual role specialization that psychoanalytic or popular conceptions would have us believe."
The egalitarianism emphasised in the power relation in their sexual relationship is consistent with other areas of their partnerships such as the decision-making processes involving domestic division of labour and domestic and non-domestic leisure activity. This has been discussed at length in Chapter Four.

The respondents' sexual attitudes towards sex and sexual techniques reflect general Christian norms of justice and love. Although some attribute that to humanistic values rather than Christian, some specifically acknowledge the influence of Christianity in this connection. An interesting observation is that many reject the institutionalised Church as the moral arbiter in this respect. However, their sexual attitudes do manifest Christian values. This, I would argue, is consistent with my argument in Chapter Seven that many respondents make a clear distinction between the institutionalised Church's official position and the broad Christian moral principles that they uphold.

One of the most heartening developments in sociological research on sexual relationships since the mid-1970s is the gradual removal of gay sexual identity and lifestyles from the clinical and pathological context. The growth of comparative research on heterosexual, gay and lesbian sexual relationships (e.g. Jones and De Cecco 1982; Blumstein and Schwartz 1983; Duffy and Rusbult 1986) and research primarily on heterosexuals which nevertheless includes the gay population (e.g. Johnson et al. 1994; Michael et al. 1994) attests to the increasing recognition of the 'normality' of gay sexuality and sexual lifestyles.

The next chapter extends the boundary set by this Chapter by focusing on the external facet of their sexual dimension. The issue of non-exclusivity constitutes the main theme.
Chapter Ten

SEXUAL NON-EXCLUSIVITY: BLESSING OR BANE?

The fact that this entire Chapter is devoted to the theme of sexual exclusivity indicates the weight of this issue in the research on gay male partnerships. I have already mentioned in Chapter One that this is one of the most prominent themes that has generated a great wealth of research input.

In this Chapter, I explore the sexual lifestyles of the couples in relation to their immediate social network. What Baxter (1993) calls the inclusion-seclusion dialectic is actively at work in this dimension of their partnership. The couples are confronted with the sensitive issue of whether to include or exclude from the partnership the involvement of the third parties.

This is also the platform on which the couples' sexual attitudes are confronted with conventional Christian sexual ethics. Do gay Christian couples conform to the conventional Christian sexual ethics, characterised by fidelity, monogamy and faithfulness? Or should they devise their own behavioural blueprint which might, *inter alia*, support sexual non-exclusivity?

The data for this Chapter are derived exclusively from the individual interviews with the sub-sample of 30 couples. As mentioned in the previous chapter, 9 of these couples have stopped love-making within the partnership. However, they are still included in the analysis as the external dimension of their sex life might still exist.

10.1. Definitional Issue

Sexual exclusivity has been extensively argued as a central issue in gay male partnerships (e.g. Silverstein 1981; McWhirter and Mattison 1984). Nanda and Francher (1980) report that sexual non-exclusivity is one of the two main conflicts for gay males. In the same vein, the Albany Trust (1971:1) argues that, "Most homosexual liaisons will pass through a crisis point involving infidelity and the resolution of this is central to the survival of the affair."
But what does sexual exclusivity or sexual closedness really mean? How is it to be defined in a one-to-one partnership? Some researchers (e.g. Saghir and Robins 1973; Warren 1974) report that sexual non-exclusivity is an inevitable development in a partnership. However, they do not differentiate the agreement that might exist between partners about this issue, and the actual behaviour which might not be consistent with the agreement.

Most researchers, however, define sexual exclusivity in terms of the behaviour of the relational parties involved. A partnership is defined as sexually exclusive if both partners do not have sexual encounters outside the framework of the partnership throughout a particular period of time prior to the research.

Researchers use different time periods in this connection, for instance 6 months (Peplau 1981), a year (Harry and DeVall 1978) or the entire length of the partnership (Saghir and Robins 1973; Mendola 1980; Peplau and Cochran 1981; Blumstein and Schwartz 1983; McWhirter and Mattison 1984; Blasband and Peplau 1985).

However, Hickson (1991) argues that there should be two classificatory systems in this respect — in terms of behaviour, as discussed, and in terms of the partners' expectation. Based on the second criterion, a sexually exclusive partnership is defined as one in which sexual exclusivity is acknowledged by both partners. This acknowledgement can take the form of an explicit agreement or an implicit assumption either at the beginning of the partnership or it may be negotiated as the partnership develops.

Following this, a partnership with an expectation of sexual exclusivity but is behaviourally otherwise over a stipulated period of time cannot be satisfactorily defined as sexually exclusive in general terms. In this case, the partnership is expectationally exclusive but behaviourally non-exclusive.

Combining these two classificatory systems, a matrix may be constructed which takes the issue into consideration both in terms of expectation and behaviour throughout the entire duration of the partnership:
**Category A:** Couples who expect the partnership to be sexually exclusive, and are behaviourally so

N = 9

**Category B:** Couples who expect the partnership to be sexually exclusive, but are behaviourally non-exclusive

N = 8

**Category C:** Couples who expect the partnership to be sexually non-exclusive, and are behaviourally so

N = 13**

**Category D:** Couples who expect the partnership to be sexually non-exclusive, but are so far behaviourally exclusive

N = 0

The matrix above shows four categories of couples. No couples are in Category D. On the whole, 9 (30.0%) of the 30 couples are sexually exclusive in terms of behaviour. On the other hand, 21 couples (70.0%) are sexually non-exclusive in terms of behaviour.

20 couples (66.7%) have had an explicit agreement about sexual (non-) exclusivity since the beginning of their partnerships. The other 10 couples (33.3%) have an implicit assumption about it. It must be noted that in the case of two couples, both partners have conflicting expectations about this issue. The contradiction of expectation in this respect results in some conflict. However, these partnerships are now sexually non-exclusive both in terms of expectation and behaviour. I will discuss them at length later.

The matrix also reveals a scenario contradictory to Blasband and Peplau's (1985) finding that "..... there is a consistency between partners' agreements about sexual exclusivity and their actual behaviour." All the 13 couples who are sexually non-exclusive in terms of...
expectation are behaviourally so. However, only 52.9% of those couples who are sexually exclusive in terms of expectation are behaviourally so. The consistency between agreement and behaviour is found only in the former. Understandably, couples in the former category can achieve this consistency substantially easily compared to couples in the latter category.

10.2. Category A: Couples Who Are Expectationally and Behaviourally Exclusive

This section analyses the 9 couples who expect their partnerships to be sexually exclusive and whose behaviour has so far upheld that ideal. All couples, with one exception, explicitly negotiated the inclusion-exclusion dialectic of their sexual dimension. Some research findings suggest that gay male partnerships tend to become sexually non-exclusive after a certain period of time. McWhirter and Mattison (1984), for instance, report that all the sexually exclusive couples they study have been together for five years or less. In other words, couples are inclined to sexually open their partnerships after the 5-year cutting point. Similarly Davies et al. (1993) report that 72.6% of the partnerships they study are sexually non-exclusive. Similarly, Harry and DeVall (1978) find that most partnerships older than two years are non-exclusive.

In the case of these 9 couples, 6 of the partnerships are longer than 5 years. The shortest length is 1 year, and the longest 27 years. The mean length of partnership is 9 years and 5 months. Therefore, these data do not confirm what is reported by McWhirter and Mattison (1984), Davies et al. (1993) and Harry and DeVall (1978).

Reasons for Sexual Exclusivity

Three major reasons can be identified to explain these couples' commitment to the ideal of sexual exclusivity. First, sexual exclusivity is perceived as a symbol of total commitment and devotion to each other. Based on this argument, it follows that non-exclusivity appears to be a threat to that total commitment. Respondent no. 10B who has been in a partnership for 8 years and 2 months expresses this point:

"If there is a second or a third person in the sharing of sex, I am not necessarily getting all the attention. But equally beyond the sex, because there is the second or the third person to take account of. There are also the second or the third person's feelings and thoughts to take account of as well. So it then means that you could end up with less than a 100% relationship because part of the relationship belongs to somebody else. It's detrimental to the relationship."
This argument of the importance of this total commitment to each other is further upheld by the opinion below:

"I wouldn't want an open relationship. It is just not for me.... I would probably say that it is very hard... if you have sex with lots and lots of people, you are giving away little bits of yourself. So there is nothing left. But with another person in a monogamous relationship, you are giving and receiving. You are strengthening yourself." (Resp. no. 22B)

Respondent no. 22B's partner agrees, "I think it is a good thing to have exclusivity. I think it is a good thing to aim and try to achieve.... I think lots of things can go wrong if you are not faithful to each other. I don't think the relationship would last. I know that sometimes it is difficult but it is something to work for, I think." (Resp. no. 22A).

These views clearly illustrate that exclusivity is equated to fidelity and faithfulness. Faithfulness and fidelity to them means the total commitment and devotion to each other which leads to the exclusion of a third party from the sexual dimension of their partnership. Personal commitment is also reported to be the main reason for sexual exclusivity in Blasband and Peplau's (1985) study. 79% of the couples in sexually exclusive partnerships cite this reason.

The second reason is closely related to the first. Sexual exclusivity in this case is perceived as a symbol of trust and the mutual satisfaction each can derive from the partnership. Therefore, the inclusion of a third party into the sexual dimension of their partnership would be an indication of the failure of that trust and their ability in mutually providing satisfaction. Couple no. 12 who have been together for a year express this sentiment:

"I believe that in a relationship, one should always be aiming for it being a monogamous relationship, because a relationship is based on physical love and trust. If you regard sexual activity as being the expression of your love and commitment to another person, then clearly it (sexual non-exclusivity) demeans that trust you specially have for your partner." (Resp. no. 12A)

"I think it is really important. I think it is the notion of the relationship, the notion of equality. And because sex is so important. I think that if he or I felt the need to look elsewhere for sexual gratification, it wouldn't be just pure sex. I think that is dangerous you know. I think that is the sign that there are cracks in our relationship or our way of communicating or our emotional relationship, that we need to look elsewhere for gratification. I do think it is very important." (Resp. no. 12B)

Finally some respondents explicitly attribute their belief in sexual exclusivity to their commitment to the conventional Christian sexual ethics for intimate relationships. In this case, they argue that the Christian ideal of faithfulness, monogamy and fidelity should be upheld, regardless of the gender of the partners involved. Having justified the acceptance of their sexuality and partnerships, they refer to the Bible for moral principles for their behavioural
patterns. Respondent no. 56A, whose partnership is 16 years and 6 months old, argues this point eloquently:

"... for Christians you really should stick with one partner. And I believe that quite strongly. Because I don't think there is any other theological model for sexual relationship that works in Christian terms. You can't make it fit what I think as the insides of scripture and tradition about what a sexual relationship is.... I think faithfulness to one person actually is quite a profound thing. I don't think it is just a social convention. It's something that affects who we are and the people we grow into. It has something to do with the fact that we are made in God's image and that we are capable of faithfulness......"

Respondent no. 56A upholds the ethic of sexual monogamy in theological terms. He is supported by the following view:

"Sexual monogamy is central to our relationship. I guess that is because we are Christians. While non-monogamy might be more exciting, fun.... wonderful to have non-monogamous sex for change.... that will actually destroy something that is precious. I think discipline is necessary. You've got something precious, you've to work at it and not risk losing and damaging it." (Resp. no. 57A)

These views stand in stark contrast to that of many respondents who consider the Bible inadequate in providing moral guidelines for gay partnerships, since it remains silent on this topic. To the latter, the behavioural script for intimate relationships propounded by the Bible is meant solely for heterosexual relationships. The ethic of sexual monogamy upheld by the Bible should therefore be rejected in the case of gay partnerships. This point will be further developed in the next two sections.

Also upholding this ethic is couple no. 52. Respondent no. 52A confidently argues the application of the monogamous ethic in gay partnerships, buttressed by actual experience:

"We are absolutely committed to each other and be faithful to each other and not having any other sexual partners. Initially for me it would be derived from Christianity. It is now tested and proved by experience. I am simply quite confident that partnerships where people are faithful to each other and trust each other are healthy. And when people are out cheating on their partner or not having regular partner, those people are going to be considerably less happy. This is my present conclusion. I am not being dogmatic.... I believe for the vast majority of people, there is nothing but pain and distress and emotional agony to go through if they have a partner who is unfaithful to them or if they are unfaithful to that partner."

Christianity also appears to have an effect in the attitude of his partner in this respect. Respondent no. 52B argues, "I think there is such a great scope for being hurt if you don't. Obviously this is sort of an issue of Christian morals. I feel it is generally not very good to have multiple partners. It can be quite damaging. I certainly feel that would be very damaging to me to have multiple partners." Similarly, the impact of conventional Christian sexual ethics can be seen operating in shaping the attitude of the following respondent:
"Christianity has something to do with this. It has to do with valuing the other person. There is an element of self-sacrifice for the other person......of saying there is every aspect of our relationship, it is not just about personal satisfaction. It is about what we can give to one to another. That's what love is about. It's about putting another person first. Regarding sex as just about having fun and enjoying yourself actually removes the possibility of sex of being about something that you give. It makes it something you take." (Resp. no. 47B)

However, there also exists an opinion which explicitly argues that practicality rather than Christianity is responsible for one's commitment to sexual exclusivity:

"For me personally, I think it is right to be exclusive, because I think it will complicate unnecessarily the argument and the way I felt about it. It would stir up waves that I don't particularly want and I can do without...... I wouldn't say that I've said that because of Christianity...... I don't think Christianity has much influence in this. I think it tends to be emotional and stability and security rather than Christianity." (Resp. no. 47A)

In spite of this single opinion, it can be concluded on the whole that Christian values do influence the sexual behaviour of some couples, although the majority does not explicitly attribute their commitment to sexual exclusivity as a result of it. The following sub-section explores the respondents' possible responses if their partnership did become sexually non-exclusive.

What If?

Sexual exclusivity is a sensitive area in the partnership. The failure in upholding the ideal when such an expectation is shared between partners can potentially lead to the dissolution of a partnership. In his study on the factors leading to the dissolution of gay and lesbian partnerships, Kurdek (1991:269) reports that sexual non-exclusivity is ranked third, closely behind "partner's non-responsiveness" and "partner's personal problems".

What if one or both partners fail to continue to live up to the ideal of sexual exclusivity in the future? What would their responses be to this possible constitutional change? Most respondents in this category acknowledge the difficulty of living up to this ideal despite the fact that some couples have been successful in this respect throughout their partnerships of more than 10 years.

It is interesting to observe that despite the time-tested commitment to sexual exclusivity, some respondents, especially those who have been in a long partnership, express their confidence in being able to handle the issue of non-exclusivity if it becomes a feature of the partnership. Their attitudes in this area appear to have relaxed and softened as the partnership has proven its stability and solid foundation. Respondent no. 22B who is in a 27-year-old partnership and whose partner if 23 years his junior expresses this confidence:
"I don't think it will concern me a great deal. Maybe because now I am older. Perhaps if I were younger I might have been difficult about it. But as you get older, I think you get more philosophical about things. Particularly when you have been together nearly 30 years. We trust each other and the relationship is very solid I suppose."

This kind of sanguinity implies two points: (1) the duration of the partnership is seen as an indication of its accumulative strength, which can withstand the constitutional change even if non-sexuality sets in; (2) non-exclusivity is perceived to have the potential to threaten the stability of the partnership, especially if the partnership is young.

Some respondents report that they would conceal information about their outside sexual encounters if they occur, principally for the purpose of not wanting to expose the partnership to possible conflict. However, several respondents uphold the view that partners must be mutually honest in disclosing information in this respect, in order to deal with the situation collectively. The concealment of information would only be seen as an additional betrayal of trust on top of the actual sexual behaviour itself. The following responses illustrate this:

"I think I have to say I have a more relaxed view about it, so long as people are honest.... I think it is important in being faithful. But I also believe that you can be faithful and non-monogamous if there is agreement within the partnership that you can have other sexual partners, then that's fine. But we don't have that. We don't have a need for that.... In the beginning there was a sense that we were going to be exclusive and faithful and there will be nobody else. So far there hasn't been..... (Resp. no. 10B) has a high sex drive and I don't. There might be occasions when he might want to go out of the relationship just because he is frustrated. But what I always say to him is that the important thing is being honest. And if I am going to have a relationship outside this partnership, we just have to talk it through to make it clear what the ground rules are. What I don't like is dishonesty. If I discovered that (esp. no. 10B) had been having a sexual relationship with somebody else and had never told me, that would be far more hurtful than the fact that he was having sex with somebody else. I want to be open and honest." (Resp. no. 10A)

The view above is particularly telling. Non-monogamy need not mean unfaithfulness or infidelity if an agreement exists between the partners about the nature of their partnership. What constitutes unfaithfulness and infidelity is the violation of that agreement and not the sexual encounter itself. This is one of the most frequently cited arguments for the acceptability of sexual non-exclusivity, as I will discuss in the next two sections. Therefore, sexual non-exclusivity should not be universally viewed as negative and detrimental to the partnership. It is only so when it violates the expectation of the partners involved.

Finally, some respondents report that their response to the possible occurrence of sex outside the partnership depends heavily on different criteria. The most important criterion appears to be the nature of the sexual encounter itself. Most can accept it if it is only a one-off fling which does not threaten the partnership. However, if it is an ongoing affair, it would generate much pressure and conflict. These criteria are presented in the following response:
"It depends so much on what it was. There are all kinds of things. It depends on circumstances, who it was or is it another person who is taking him away. That would frighten me. It would depend also on what he has done sexually because of the AIDS thing... if it's sort of anal then I would be frightened thereafter for my own sake and his. If it were completely casual like picking up someone at the loo, then I would be frightened first for his happiness and second for the law... whether he is addicted to it. All those things worry me. But I think the first thing that would worry me most... because obviously the relationship is obviously fundamental to me. If it threatens that then I would be very frightened. I think I could manage if it was really a fling." (Resp. no. 56A)

These responses testify that although these couples are committed to sexual exclusivity and have so far been successful throughout their partnerships, they nevertheless acknowledge the difficulty involved in living up to that ideal. This concern stems from the proven fact about the high degree of availability of casual sex in the gay scene for instance (Jay and Young 1977; Harry 1977; Harry and DeVall 1978; Peplau 1981). They therefore adopt a practical attitude in dealing with the possibility of it occurring. I would argue that their knowledge about the high availability of opportunity for casual sexual encounters shapes their practical attitude.

Summary

Sexual exclusivity is perceived by these couples as a sign of total commitment and a symbol of mutual trust and satisfaction with the partnership. A minority of couples explicitly attribute their commitment to the ethic of sexual monogamy to Christian sexual ethics. In spite of their success in achieving the ideal thus far, the respondents adopt a practical attitude in dealing with the possible occurrence of outside sexual encounters. The degree of confidence in the ability of dealing with the issue of non-exclusivity is related to the length of the partnership.

10.3. Category B: Couples Who Are Expectationally Exclusive But Behaviourally Non-Exclusive

This category comprises 8 couples who began their partnerships with the expectation that it should be exclusive, but either one or both partners violates that expectation at a certain point of their partnership. All but one of the respondents in this category have had sexual encounters outside their partnerships, albeit with differing degrees of activeness and regularity. Seven of the couples have had an explicit agreement on this issue.

What brings about the change in the constitutional arrangement of their sexual dimension? What are the impacts of this constitutional change on the partnership? What kinds of regulatory mechanisms have they developed to manage the discrepancy between the initial expectation and behaviour? These are the main issues addressed in this section.
Non-exclusivity became a feature of these partnerships within 6 months to 2 years of their inception. Three major factors lead to sexual non-exclusivity, against the initial expectation of exclusivity: (a) natural progression; (b) dissatisfaction with certain aspects of the partnership; and (c) sexual experimentation.

(a) To most couples, outside sexual encounters take place naturally. Having experienced it and realised that it does not necessarily lead to relationship breakdown, they were encouraged to continue. This precipitates a re-evaluation of their initial expectation. In certain cases, the boundary of the sexual dimension of their partnerships was re-defined. The experience of the following respondent typifies this progression:

"It has developed. When I was first with (resp. no. 19B), I was very anxious to have a kind of marriage... to be completely exclusive with him. But not long into the relationship I was led astray by someone. I was very upset. I told him about it. He was okay about it. And then I had to begin to think about being realistic about it. Gradually I came to a feeling that I was not the sort of person who would be essentially exclusive naturally. It is simply not practical..... I mean it has never bothered him if I have secondary relationships. That means that I could have them and it doesn't bother me or worry me anymore." (Resp. no. 19A)

The positive response from his partner leads respondent no. 19A into a process of re-evaluation and re-negotiation with his partner about the parameters of their partnership in this area. His partner, at a later stage, also begins to have outside sexual encounters, albeit with a lower degree of activeness. From this stage on, the expectation of sexual exclusivity changes. This further encourages sexual non-exclusivity in terms of behaviour.

(b) Dissatisfaction with certain aspects of the partnership can also result in a partner's search for satisfaction and fulfilment outside the partnership. In the case of respondent 9B, his dissatisfaction with his sex life is reported to be the major reason for his outside sexual encounters. He reports that his desire to assume a 'passive' role in sexual activity is not fulfilled within the partnership due to his partner's reluctance to assume the 'active' role. With both partners preferring the 'passive' role in sexual activity, their sex life does not generate much satisfaction. He reports that this leads him to seek sexual fulfilment outside the partnership.

Sexual incompatibility has also caused couple no. 17 to turn to sexual non-exclusivity with explicit mutual agreement. This couple's situation has been discussed in Chapter Nine Section 9.4. This partnership, as I have also reported in Chapter Six Section 6.1, is facing the possibility of dissolution because of the major re-evaluation the partners are undertaking. This re-evaluation is responsible for the termination of sex within the partnership and the subsequent turning to sexual non-exclusivity.
Another couple facing the possibility of partnership dissolution is couple no. 7 (refer Chapter Six Section 6.1). In their case, the inegalitarianism in decision-making in their partnership leads to the over-dependence of one partner on the other. The latter resents the imbalance and the exceedingly heavy responsibility laid on him. The dissatisfaction with their partnership leads to the deterioration of their own sex life and subsequently outside sexual encounters.

(c) The search for sexual variety leads to sexual experimentation outside the partnership. This is the case of couple no. 50 who were expectationally and behaviourally exclusive during the first two years of their partnership. The desire to experiment beyond the partnership leads to non-exclusivity, as both partners report:

"It was me who introduced that.... probably for a couple of years when we started it was very exclusively just us.... But because I have always been apparently very interested in cottaging and so on, I sort of introduced (resp. no. 50B) to going into places like that and then going to sauna and going to Amsterdam for holiday and so on. So it was really me who started it all although (resp. no. 50B) obviously participated and appeared to be participating quite keenly and equally. It did come from me after about a couple of years into the relationship." (Resp. no. 50A)

"As far as I was concerned, it wasn't going to develop to that (non-exclusivity). It was (resp. no. 50A) and me. It was probably like that for two years and then (resp. no. 50A).... we had a little discussion every now and then about whether we should broaden our horizons a bit, like start doing cottaging or going back to somebody else's flat or whatever... so it was like (resp. no. 50A) experimenting and me going along with it...." (Resp. no. 50B)

Sexual experimentation, in this case, was perceived to be a means to enhance the quality of the partnership, at least in its sexual dimension. However, it also has the potential to threaten the stability of the partnership. I will return to this point in the last sub-section. The next sub-section analyses the mechanisms developed by these couples to manage the changed nature of the partnership and the maintenance of this arrangement.

Regulatory Mechanisms

Couples develop different regulatory mechanisms to manage their non-exclusive lifestyles. Except for couples no. 7 and no. 17, the chief objective of the employment of these mechanisms is to reap the benefits of both worlds — being able to experience the security of a primary partnership and having the opportunity to seek sexual gratification outside it.

Five mechanisms, have been developed in this connection: (a) the establishment of explicit ground rules; (b) the concealment of information about outside sexual encounters; (c) the disclosure of information about outside sexual encounters; (d) the prevention of casual sexual encounters from developing into ongoing affairs; and (e) the participation in threesomes. The
mechanisms are generally employed in tandem with each other to achieve the maximum effect.

(a) The establishment of ground rules clearly draws out the framework within which outside sexual encounters are considered acceptable to each partner. Two examples of ground rules are discussed:

"I am sure he still has flings outside. <Are you upset about that?> No, not really. I would feel upset if he were with somebody in the house when I came home. He sees others outside or when I am away. That I don't mind. We have a sort of house rule. People don't come back if the other one is here because it is not very nice." (Resp. no. 9A)

The data above indicate the ground rule for couple no. 9 — no casual sex partners are to be brought home if the other partner is present. This is for the obvious reason of minimising embarrassment and the possibility of jealousy. Respondent no. 9A appears to tolerate his partner's active outside sexual activity well.

In this connection, Blumstein and Schwartz (1983:206) argues that, "...... gay men..... realize that many couples break up and so once they have found a compatible partner, they try hard to make the accommodations in the sexual demands on each other." I think that respondent no. 9A fits this description to a certain extent. Having been in the partnership for almost 22 years, the cost of dissolution is too great. However, I think that another related reason for his tolerance is his inclination of attributional avoidance, which I have mentioned on several occasions in the preceding chapters.

For couple no. 50, the ground rule is the opposite. Casual sex partners can only be brought home if the other partner is also present. Respondent no. 50A spells out the ground rule clearly:

"We had an arrangement..... that we would not bring someone back here as individuals. But if we saw someone that we thought might be attracted to the other one, then we will have a threesome here. Or if we went out cottaging at weekends together or whatever we would have a threesome. So it was either limited sex in toilets or whatever or it was a threesome together. And that was the arrangement that no one was going to be brought back here without the other person being here..... We wouldn't bring someone home, it would be by arrangement. If he knew I was at college he would then say to the person, 'Well we can't do it now, but I'll give our phone number and if you want to make an arrangement we can come round tomorrow night,' or something like that. So it wouldn't be done until it was discussed or arranged between the two of us. So this is what we were planning to do as a couple......"
Ground rules perform two functions — manifest and latent. Ground rules stipulate various terms and conditions such as the regularity of outside sexual activity, with whom, the type of sexual activity and the inclusion or exclusion of partner. This performs the manifest function of ensuring the smooth operation of such an activity. In doing so, it also performs its latent function in reinforcing the *specialness* of the primary partner and partnership.

The compliance to the mutually-agreed ground rule is a *sign of trust* between partners. The violation of the ground rule is therefore perceived as the betrayal of that trust. In the next sub-section, I will discuss the disastrous impact this violation can exert on the partnership, with special reference to couple no. 50.

(b) Concealment of information about outside sexual encounters is a widely-used mechanism when a partner realises that such information would prove distressing to his partner. The concealment aims to minimise the possibility of jealousy and a sense of insecurity. Information of outside sexual encounters can lead to three types of jealousy: (i) possessive jealousy — one's property rights are violated; (ii) exclusive jealousy — being left out of partner's experience; and (iii) fearful jealousy — fear of losing partner (Mazur 1977; Silverstein 1981).

This is especially true in the case of couple no. 55 whereby respondent no. 55A regularly has outside sexual encounters while his partner does not, although the latter is generally accepting of it:

"I think that sex is a gift between two people. It is the most wonderful thing you can give somebody. I think that its place should be within relationship. But I can understand why people would enjoy sex outside relationship to have a bit of variety. I feel as long as they are honest with their partner and the partner understands and accepts, then that's fine. I believe that as long as people are honest with each other, that's the most important thing. But if you begin to lie, to hide behaviour, then it casts doubt on other areas of the relationship. The trust breaks down...... I don't think it (sexual non-exclusivity) would bother me because I know that there is no way that he would leave me for anybody else. If sex happens, it's sex. It's not a threat to me. There is nobody that can be a threat to me. I don't feel threatened at all. If he should have a sexual relationship with somebody else, it wouldn't bother me. Although I am not sure I necessarily want to hear of the details of it." (Resp. no. 55B)

Realising his partner's position in this respect, as shown in the data above, respondent no. 55A resorts to concealing all the information about his outside sexual encounters.

(c) In stark contrast to the mechanism above, some couples mutually agreed to disclose information about outside sexual encounters freely between themselves. This policy of honesty is to minimise a sense of exclusion a partner might feel in response to the encounter of his partner. In this case, fidelity means honesty rather than exclusivity.
Mutually disclosing information about outside sexual encounters also indicate the equality they uphold in their partnership. In this connection, respondent no. 51A explains:

"Because he has done something similar (outside sexual encounter) and told me. So it balances each other and so it doesn't create a problem for us."

(d) The prevention of the possible development of a casual sexual encounter or 'fling' from developing into an ongoing affair is greatly emphasised. This attitude is prevalent in respondents who strongly believe in the difference between making love and having sex. One makes love to one's primary partner with unreserved emotional attachment. But one has sex with a casual sex partner for mutual sexual gratification which can be devoid of emotional attachment (Harry 1977; Silverstein 1981). Respondent no. 7B explains the distinction:

"You see a fling is purely lust. I can tolerate that. But I probably couldn't tolerate if it were lust and emotional. I think relationship is about two things, sexuality and the emotional side."

This distinction is firmly held in order that one does not compromise the primacy of one's partnership with casual sexual encounters in order that sexual gratification obtained outside the partnership does not eclipse the primary partnership in terms of its significance. Respondent no. 19A explains this importance, "I do not give these things (outside sexual encounters) a time commitment. If I am involved with somebody, that person has to take the windows in my dairy. I do not take time to give to somebody under these circumstances."

(e) Threesome as a mechanism has been partially mentioned in the analysis above. In the case of couple no. 50, threesome is clearly a means to guarantee that participation in the sexual encounter is shared between partners. This is obviously to minimise the possibility of jealousy and a sense of exclusion.

The Impacts of Change

The change from sexual exclusivity to non-exclusivity involves the handling of a sensitive issue of the partnership. Certain couples explicitly negotiate the possibility to change their initial explicit agreement of sexual exclusivity, as in the case of couple no. 50 when the partnership was two years old. However, to most couples, the negotiation resulting in the re-definition of their sexual dimension only takes place after one or both partners has had an outside sexual encounter.
In other words, non-exclusivity that sets in at a particular point of the partnership leads to a process of *de-construction* of the initial arrangement and the subsequent *re-construction* of the new. Also in the process is the establishment of regulating mechanisms for the maintenance of the new arrangement.

In the case of couple no. 55, however, such a process has not yet taken place, as the information about respondent no. 55A's outside sexual encounters is completely concealed from his partner. However, it can be expected that such a process would have to take place if such information is disclosed by choice or by chance, and it might lead to the dissolution of the partnership.

What are the impacts of the change in arrangement on the partnership? Most couples who have undergone the negotiation process appear to be handling the situation successfully. However, negative effects are experienced by some couples. For couple no. 9, respondent no. 9B's active involvement in casual sexual encounters leads to his losing his sexual interest in his partner who is less active in this aspect, during the eleventh year of their partnership of 21 years and 5 months. This generated some tension between the partners but as respondent no. 9A acknowledges, "...... it is a source of disappointment, but not a source of conflict." (see Chapter Nine Section 9.4.).

In more serious cases, greater impacts on the partnership have been experienced. In the case of couple no. 7 whose partnership, at the point of interview, was undergoing a process of re-negotiation and facing the possibility of dissolution, sexual non-exclusivity which contradicts their initial expectation has generated much anxiety and pressure:

"He had a fling with someone else. He had full intercourse with that person while I hadn't had full intercourse with anyone else.... sort of one-to-one anal intercourse relationship was quite a big thing to have .... that kind of trust. And then he had it with someone else quite frequently and that could have put me at risk.... sexual diseases. So that was quite a worrying thing. I don't think I can cope with being constantly thinking that I can get AIDS if we have an open relationship." (Resp. no. 7A)

Respondent no. 7A's response implies the significance he places on anal sex as the most intimate sexual activity exclusively for the primary relationship. Although anal sex occupies a low position in the order of frequency of employment (see Chapter 9 Section 6.5), its significance is high. I speculate that this is because the penetration involved is seen to symbolise one's highest emotional intimacy.

His partner's engagement in anal sex with others betrays the trust and specialness of their primary partnership. Conflicts developed between them. In order to give their partnership a fair opportunity of a thorough re-evaluation which involves more than just the
sexual dimension, both partners confirmed in the interview that they were determined to return to sexual exclusivity. This transformation from exclusivity to non-exclusivity and back to exclusivity is portrayed even more clearly in the case of couple no. 50.

As I have already mentioned, couple no. 50, whose partnership is 8 years old, explicitly agreed on sexual exclusivity at the beginning of their partnership. However, their desire for sexual variety and experimentation leads to their turning to non-exclusivity after two years. The non-exclusive lifestyle persisted for almost six years until three weeks before the interview, due to an experience that almost resulted in the dissolution of their partnership. They are now determined to eschew a non-exclusive lifestyle.

It must be mentioned that what led to the virtual dissolution in the partnership is not sexual non-exclusivity itself, which functioned well until this crisis, but the violation of the ground rule that they have explicitly established --- that no partner should engage in a casual sexual encounter at home in the absence of the other.

This couple, as I have discussed before, was experiencing a great relationship breakdown owing to the inegalitarian decision-making in their partnership that breeds over-dependence and domination. Being dissatisfied with it and being tired of the sexual experimentation, respondent 50B turned to a casual sexual partner for affection and brought him home in the absence of his partner, thus deliberately excluding him from the ongoing affair. When he was caught red-handed by his partner, the result was disastrous, as both of them acknowledge:

"I had a relationship with someone and I didn't want (resp. no. 50A) to know that, which is totally detrimental to everything we have ever done or stood for before." (Resp. no. 50B)

"And that's quite devastating because that goes against the utter trust that I had in him. So in the sense that,... not something I dislike about him because obviously there were reasons, you know, our relationship was struggling and so on. But I dislike the idea of having been misled." (Resp. no. 50A)

The massive process of re-evaluation leads this couple out of the possibility of dissolution. Both are now determined to revert to sexual exclusivity to completely eradicate the possibility of another crisis of such a nature again:

"The biggest change is that we have frequently indulged in threesomes together with other people. But we now will not do that. We have committed ourselves to the relationship in terms of not involving anyone else sexually in the relationship, which is a complete change from what we have done before. So you know it's an exclusive relationship just to us and we won't look for other people to come in." (Resp. no. 50A)
Couple no. 50's experience confirms the point I made earlier, that sexual non-exclusivity is not on its own problematic to certain couples. What generates conflict is the violation of the ground rule the couple has established. The three stages this couple goes through — from sexual exclusivity to non-exclusivity and back to exclusivity — also signifies the flexibility a gay partnership has in constantly adapting to the specific requirement of the partnership at a particular point of time. However, it has to be acknowledged that such a process has the potential to lead the partnership to dissolution as much as to a better-adjusted state.

Summary

This section has analysed the various factors that lead an expectationally exclusive partnership to non-exclusivity. The change in the sexual arrangement is however not indicative of a relationship breakdown or difficulty in all cases. While some respondents resort to outside sexual encounters due to their dissatisfaction with the partnership, some are compelled by the desire of sexual experimentation.

Couples develop different regulatory mechanisms to manage the constitutional change in order to minimise the negative impact such change might exert on the partnership. One of the most widely-used mechanism is the establishment of ground rules. It is the violation of such ground rules that threatens the stability of the partnership and not the actual outside sexual encounter itself.

The couples have demonstrated a high degree of flexibility in structuring the constitutional arrangement of their sexual dimension in response to the specific requirement of the partnership. Some couples revert to exclusivity, having experienced the negative impact of a non-exclusive lifestyle. Some couples, on the other hand, continue such a lifestyle with explicit agreement and constant negotiation.

10.4. Category C: Couples Who Are Expectationally and Behaviourally Non-Exclusive

This category, comprising 13 couples, began their partnerships with the expectation of non-exclusivity and have been so behaviourally. I will start by analysing two particular couples who entered the partnership with conflicting expectations about this issue. I will then analyse the reasons why sexual non-exclusivity is practised and their justification of the inapplicability of Christian sexual ethics in this regard. Finally, I will discuss briefly the regulatory mechanisms they have developed to manage such a lifestyle.
Conflicting Expectations

Conflicting expectations between partners on the issue of sexual exclusivity have far-reaching implications on the partnership. For couple no. 2, respondent no. 2B entered the partnership with the expectation that it should be completely exclusive, contradictory to that of his partner. When his partner's outside sexual encounters were discovered, conflict was generated because that was perceived as a sign of relationship breakdown:

"It (the partnership) was very new then. So the first couple of years was very difficult for me because (resp. no. 2A) had been much more into the gay scene than I was. And the friends he was with... the idea of what now called the recreational sex. He understood and I didn't understand it. It was silly really... because of my stupid idea about, you know, you had to have somebody for yourself and that was it. It's very 'jealousing'... I suppose it's just part of being immature. So there were conflicts about that. I think I upset him that I didn't understand. But I think there is nothing worse than sexual jealousy...... I mean he accepted that our relationship was the most important thing for him, which I had but I didn't understand those days that unless you are both locked in a desert island, there is no other way of living. So I suppose I experimented a bit more and then found that it was quite enjoyable... I think when I became more secure with myself, when I have accepted myself fully. I suppose it took me years and years, but everything does take a lot of time when I... it must have dawned on me that (resp. no. 2A) was completely trustworthy and reliable that nothing was going to happen as things settle. And I suppose you feel loved and cherished and wanted and needed, that part of it is insignificant. So someone spends half-an-hour with somebody else, so what? I just hope he had a good time. The only thing that would upset me was... devastating... if he ceased to love me and decided the relationship wasn't worth carrying on with. That would be the thing." (Resp. no. 2B)

The long account reveals respondent no. 2B's initial perception of sexual non-exclusivity as a sign of relationship breakdown and a threat to the partnership itself. His subsequent change of attitude reflects the increasing confidence he has in the solid foundation of the partnership. Both partners are now sexually non-exclusive, and occasionally participate in threesomes. Their experience confirms the perception of many respondents in Category A that sexual non-exclusivity is a threat to the stability of the partnership, thus their commitment to guard their partnerships against it.

The experience of this couple supports Blasband and Peplau's (1985:411) that, "... gay male couples experiment with and modify sexual agreement as their needs or circumstances change." More broadly, this is an example of how gay male couples often use a trial-and-error approach to construct relationship rules, due to the lack of structural and cultural guidelines available to them (Harry and DeVall 1978).

Couple no. 8 is in an almost similar situation. Respondent no. 8A is highly committed to the ideal of sexual exclusivity. He reports that he has only failed once in living up to this ideal throughout his partnership of 14 years and 3 months. His commitment is clearly expressed below:
"Personally I don't like it (sexual non-exclusivity) and I don't want it. From the very beginning of my relationship with (resp. no. 8B), I have always wanted it that way. I always have the idea that... if I am with you and I am making the relationship, it is exclusive. It has nothing to do with stereotyping the straight world to anything like that. It's a commitment I am willing to give. If I am willing to make a relationship with you... I think it is a matter of being fair... If people are doing that for the fun of it, okay it's your choice. But for a lot of people if they do that the relationship is going to run into danger. It is a dangerous thing to fool around with. I do believe that two people who are committed to each other could do that sort of thing. But I believed as well that if you start doing that one partner may go along with it but he doesn't particularly like it. I think that can lead to hurt and resentment. I don't think it is a very good thing."

Respondent no. 8A's reason for his commitment to sexual commitment replicates that of respondent no. 2B. Sexual non-exclusivity is perceived to be a possible threat to the stability of the partnership. However, unlike the latter who experiments and later accepts the possibility of sexual non-exclusivity, the former remains highly committed to exclusivity and accepts his partner's outside sexual encounters:

"I had to accept it because I realise that it is not a marriage. You haven't got the law on your side. You haven't got social niceties on your side. My opinion was that I don't like it but if that means that's the way he is, I'd rather have him that way than not have him. But that was how I felt about him. I wanted him. So that was something about him that I don't like. But then there are things about me that he doesn't like.... I can say in all honesty if I did find out he was doing it, it won't be a problem. My first reaction would be well if he needs to do it he needs to do it. All I can say is that, I just hope you are being careful and you are not giving me diseases. I think I am wise enough now in a relationship. It would shock me to find that he was doing it. But if he was, I think having gone through the relationship for 14 to 15 years, I have to take some of the blame myself and say, 'He has got a need to do that. It must be because I am not fulfilling his needs in some way.' Therefore I have to say go ahead and do it. And also think now having been over 14 years in a relationship, it is lasting. It is proving it can last. I am not bothered." (Resp. no 8A)

Unlike couple no. 2, not much conflict is experienced by couple no. 8 due to respondent 8A's willingness in accepting the desire of his partner. His own commitment to sexual exclusivity leads him to merely one outside sexual encounter so far, although his partner is considerably more active in this respect.

Why Sexual Non-Exclusivity?

As expected, the majority of respondents draw a very clear line of demarcation between sex within and without the primary partnership. With their primary partners, they make love. With casual sex partners, they have sex. Outside sexual encounters of this nature, or "flings", are perceived to be purely for the purpose of sexual variety and excitement:

"I think the thing that keeps things together is the fact that... it (sexual non-exclusivity) didn't detract from the fact that, you know, I love (resp. no. 11B). It wasn't a case that I stopped loving him for somebody else. I think that is an important difference. I think being unfaithful is when you sort of want to love somebody else. I think that's what unfaithful means. I
think having sex with somebody else isn't quite the same as being unfaithful." (Resp. 11A)

"Well yes, there is a poem with a line in it, 'I can be faithful to thee in ny fashion.' So I am very faithful. But I mean in the sense it is complete faithfulness, but it incorporates sleeping with other people. But I am very faithful to him in all the things that matter. I don't think sex matters to a very great extent. It's something that's done for pleasure. Or it can be part of deepening the relationship..... Having sex outside is something..... it is not a need, it's an occasional pleasure." (Resp. no. 2A)

The search for sexual variety and excitement appears to be the main reason for sexual non-exclusivity, also reported by other researchers (e.g. Blasband and Peplau 1985; McWhirter and Mattison 1984). Having sexual encounters outside the partnership is not perceived to be unfaithfulness or infidelity, since both partners have either explicitly agreed or implicitly assumed that the partnership is of such nature. This perception, clearly expressed above, is pervasive among the respondents in this category.

The second reason for sexual non-exclusivity is closely related to the absence of normative guidelines for gay partnerships (McWhirter and Mattison 1984). Certain respondents consider this one of the advantages of being in a gay partnership. There is a substantial amount of freedom and flexibility for gay couples to negotiate the constitutional arrangement of the sexual dimension of their partnership. Therefore, if both partners agree to have a non-exclusive partnership, that should be the arrangement they develop. This sentiment is clearly articulated in the following comment:

"The reason for sexual non-exclusivity is that we don't conform to marriage where men and women generally..... well they have sex with other people but it is more difficult because they have got children, social conventions and so on. Whereas with us the Church for instance has never recognised the relationship. So what the hell? And so on the whole sexuality seems much more liberal for us. But there are relationships that are monogamous. But I find it hard to believe.... It is very rare I think." (Resp. no. 3A)

The argument above is closely related to the third reason in support of sexual non-exclusivity. If a gay partnership should maximise the in-built freedom and flexibility, the partners themselves should empower each other to utilise such freedom. It is a symbol of egalitarianism in the partnership. It also helps avoids the possessiveness between partners (Silverstein 1981; Peplau and Gordon 1983; McWhirter and Mattison 1984; Blasband and Peplau 1985). This sentiment is strongly shared:

"I don't agree in general with sexual exclusivity. I think that partners should trust each other more and allow each other to have whatever sex they feel they need outside the relationship without actually damaging the relationship...... With me and (resp. no. 54A), I don't feel that there would be any risk of the partnership breaking up and so he puts up with any sexual relationships that I may have outside. He doesn't mind. He knows perfectly well that our relationship is secure....." (Resp. no. 54B)
"It's part of trust. But it's so important not to cling onto someone in a relationship. Not trying to control their thoughts nor their body. I don't know about you, but if I feel anyone is trying to cling onto me, my immediate reaction is to pull myself away. So, I think in relationship you give the person the freedom to go away or to come towards you. And that's the sort of freedom which I hope I am giving (resp. no. 48A). And this is the sort of freedom I expect from him. I don't want to be hung on to." (Resp. no. 48B)

The comments above clearly illustrate that giving the partner the freedom to sexually experiment if he so wishes is a sign of trust and love for him. Partners should liberate each other first before they can fully experience the freedom of being in a gay partnership. In this connection, McWhirter and Mattison (1984:256) report that, ".....the single most important factor that keeps couples together past the 10-year mark is the lack of possessiveness they feel. Many couples learn very early in their relationship that ownership of each other sexually can become the greater (compared to non-exclusivity) internal threat to their staying together."

Two other minor reasons can be identified for sexual non-exclusivity: (a) sexual encounters with friends can be an extension of their friendships. This reason is specifically relevant to respondents who usually have sex with friends instead of strangers, for instance, in the gay scene; (b) outside sexual experience can be enriching as it offers a dimension that love-making within the partnership could not provide. A sense of mystery and unfamiliarity, for instance.

No respondents report that they are compelled to sexual non-exclusivity because of their dissatisfaction with the frequency and quality of love-making within the partnership. This contradicts research findings that (e.g. Saghir and Robins 1973; Blumstein and Schwartz 1983) the decline of love-making between partners encourages outside sexual activity.

I have reported that these couples have a high average rating of 7.2 for their sex life within the partnership (see Chapter Nine Section 9.3). Also, of the 9 couples who have stopped love-making, 3 claim that it is due to the loss of interest in partner and sexual incompatibility (see Chapter 9 Section 9.4). However, only one couple report that the cessation of their love-making led to sexual non-exclusivity. The other two partnerships have already been sexually non-exclusive before the partners stopped their love-making.

Rejection of Conventional Christian Sexual Ethics

A minority of respondents acknowledge that sexual exclusivity should be the ideal of gay Christian partnerships. However, they also recognised the huge difficulty in living up to that ideal practically. There exists therefore discrepancy between ideal and actual behaviour. Unlike respondents in Category A who uphold the ideal expectationally and behaviourally,
these respondents do not demonstrate such commitment on both counts. The following response typifies their experience:

"This is where it does get difficult because I do believe that the Christian teachings about this is that gay relationships ought to be controlled by the same sorts of constraints as heterosexual relationships in that faithfulness and a fairly exclusive sense ought to be the aim. The Bible applies to both homosexuals and heterosexuals..... I think I have to go along the strict line. Having said that I am not saying that I have never strayed. I think if you are talking about ideals, then the ideal must be exclusive." (Resp. no. 4B)

What is indicative of the majority of the respondents is their categorical rejection of conventional Christian sexual ethics as the basis on which they should organise their sexual lifestyle. This rejection stems from the lack of recognition from the Church and its silence on the sexual ethics for gay Christian partnerships:

"I think one of the things that I constantly re-evaluate is, is our relationship just aping a heterosexual married couple. Because I think the Church has kind of excluded us on paper. There is no official marriage ceremony or anything like that. I think therefore we've got a licence to do whatever we feel. I think we should make our own rule. I think what we actually do is what we are happy with, what we want to do it. It's what we consider to be appropriate, or certainly what I consider to be appropriate." (Resp. no. 1A)

The lack of recognition and acceptance in the Church results in the distancing of many respondents from the Church and its official stance. I have discussed this point at length in Chapter Seven Section 7.4. It is therefore not surprising to observe that many respondents are more inclined to organise their sexual lifestyles on the basis of their own sense of morality which might be broadly derived from Christian principles such as love and responsibility. However, the specific emphasis of the conventional sexual ethics on, for instance, exclusivity and fidelity, is rejected. I would argue that this is a manifestation of their rejection of the Church which discredits their gay identity and the individualised spirituality which is substantially independent of the Church. The following respondent offers a glimpse of such an attitude:

"I suppose Paul talked about the body of being the temple of God and actually treating your body like that in that sort of way really. But I don't think that necessarily means that you are exclusive. I guess it has to do with what is going on between that kind of encounter and how it relates to others and whether there is abuse..... I can't see what Christianity can say..... because it doesn't say anything, does it? But I think it does in the sense that I follow it from the point of view of responsibility..... I respect even people you meet in the cottage, you know, that they are human beings..... So from that point of view yes. But otherwise no because it has got nothing to say. The relationship is something that it doesn't support." (Resp. no. 3A)

Tension exists between conventional Christian sexual ethics and the high availability of casual sex in the gay male community. Being Christians, these respondents have a high degree of awareness of the tremendous difficulty in reconciling Christian sexual ethics with the
highly-sexed nature of the gay sub-culture. I would argue that there is a likelihood that the rejection of Christian sexual ethics in this respect stems from the desire to conform to the values of the gay sub-culture without facing a substantial amount of guilt. It is a strategy to minimise the discrepancy and inconsistency between what one might believe as the ideal and what one actually conforms to due to strong social forces.

**Regulatory Mechanisms**

Compared to couples in Category B, couples in this category rely less heavily on ground rules to manage their non-exclusive lifestyle. This is because both partners share the expectation of a non-exclusive partnership, outside sexual encounters are therefore more easily accepted. However, this does not preclude the existence of certain regulating mechanisms to minimise the possible emergence of conflict. These mechanisms share great similarity with what I have discussed in the preceding section. I will therefore discuss them briefly here.

The majority of the couples opt for complete disclosure of information about outside sexual encounters as a means to minimise jealousy. Honesty with each other is greatly emphasised. The response below illustrates this ground rule:

"I don't think it necessarily matters too much if one is involved with other people sometimes. I think what we have come to agree is that we should be honest. So if there is any involvement with anybody else, we are honest about it..... almost asking for permission first." (Resp. no. 21A)

This ground rule is very pervasive among the majority of couples. I would argue that this is because although they are open about having a non-exclusive partnership, they also acknowledge the risks involved which can potentially upset the stability of the partnership. 'Flings', no matter how casual they are, have the potential to develop into affairs that require increasing emotional attachment. This is particularly true as the majority of respondents in this category actually prefer having outside sexual encounters with friends rather than strangers.

However, there is a minority who prefer to conceal information about outside sexual encounters unless the partner enquires about it. This is the case for couples with partners who have outside sexual encounters with considerably different rates of frequency and regularity. The more active partner tries not to upset his partner who is far less active, by choice or by chance. This relates to the point I mentioned in the conclusions of Chapter Six, about the use of partial self-disclosure as a regulatory mechanism to maintain the stability of the partnership.
The third mechanism used is constant evaluation of their experiences. Partners must be certain that their outside sexual encounters are encouraged solely by sexual purposes, and not their dissatisfaction with their own partnerships. Otherwise, sex outside the partnership could be a substitute for what is lacking in the partnership which can in turn lead to emotional attachment with casual sex partners. Respondent no. 48A expresses this clearly:

"Well sometimes when we are sort of have enough of each other I think it is always enriching (to have outside sexual encounters)...... We know these things happen and it's neither good nor bad. Obviously, I mean what I would be most anxious about it if he felt what I felt that there was a direct link between lack of sex between us and my having sex elsewhere. And I think if I really felt that way, that there was a link, that would bother me and I will do something about it...... I like it (having sex outside partnership). I want it. It's nothing higher or lower than that....."

The last mechanism used is the participation in threesomes. As I have discussed in the preceding section, this is a mechanism to maximise a sense of inclusion of both partners in a sexual encounter. It also signifies equality between the partners.

Summary

Couples in this Category argue that a non-exclusive lifestyle provides the opportunity for sexual variety and excitement. Such a lifestyle is also an indication of the tremendous freedom present in gay partnerships due to the absence of a behavioural script. Partners should therefore empower each other to exercise such freedom.

Most do not appear to have difficulty in managing the inconsistency between conventional Christian ethics and their non-exclusive lifestyle. The majority rejects these ethics on the ground that they apply merely to heterosexual partnerships. The Bible remains silent on sexual ethics for gay partnerships, they contend. A minority, however, recognises that non-exclusivity ought to be the Christian ideal for all, although they do not conform to it expectationally and behaviourally.

The regulatory mechanisms employed by these couples share great similarity with those employed by couples in Category B. The major difference is that more couples in this Category opt for information disclosure, principally because it has less distressing effect on the partnership since both partners share the expectation of their non-exclusive lifestyle.
10.5. A Comparative Analysis of The Three Categories

Table 10.1. presents a comparative analysis of all the three categories of couples: (A) Couples who are expectationally and behaviourally exclusive; (B) Couples who are expectationally exclusive but behaviourally non-exclusive; and (C) Couples who are expectationally and behaviourally non-exclusive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average rating for Sex life within partnership*</th>
<th>Average rating for partnership in general</th>
<th>% of non-cohabiting couples</th>
<th>% of respondents giving top two rankings to 'emotional intimacy'</th>
<th>% of respondents giving top two rankings to 'personal autonomy'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A**</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>75.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B***</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>78.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C****</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>82.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+C</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>80.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Several interesting observations can be made based on Table 10.1. First, Category A has the highest average ratings for sex life within partnership and the partnership in general --- 7.6 and 9.0 respectively. Taking Category B and Category C together as behaviourally non-exclusive couples, the average ratings for sex life within partnership and the partnership in general are 6.9 and 8.7 in general. These ratings are lower than the ratings of Category A in these two areas.

It can therefore be concluded that couples in Category A who are expectationally and behaviourally exclusive have a higher level of satisfaction with their sex life within partnership and the partnership in general compared to their counterparts in Category B who are expectationally exclusive but behaviourally non-exclusive and those in Category C who are expectationally and behaviourally non-exclusive.

In sum, those who are in an exclusive partnership are more satisfied than their counterparts in non-exclusive partnerships in these two areas. It cannot be argued that sexual exclusivity is the single contributory factor to the higher level of satisfaction for couples in
Category A. However, these findings do not support those of Peplau (1981) and Blasband and Peplau (1985) who report that there is no significant difference between sexually exclusive and non-exclusive couples in terms of their satisfaction with their partnerships.

The second observation relates to the living arrangement of the couples. It is generally assumed that non-cohabiting couples are more inclined to sexual non-exclusivity as their living arrangement provides them with less availability of their primary partner but more opportunity to be on their own, compared to their cohabiting counterparts. It follows that the percentage of non-cohabiting couples should therefore be the lowest in Category A. However, the reverse trend is observed. Category A has the highest percentage (44.4%) of non-cohabiting couples compared to the other categories. It therefore appears that non-exclusivity is not simply a matter of opportunity, but how the partnerships are defined.

Comparison is also done in the area of relationship values (for more details refer Chapter Five Section 5.1). In terms of the percentage of respondents who give the top two rankings to the 'emotional intimacy' items ('companionship' and 'sense of security'), Category C shows the highest percentage of 82.7, even though it contains couples who recognise non-exclusivity as a means of celebrating the freedom that a gay partnership provides and the empowerment of each partner. This percentage is higher than that of Category A (75.0%) whose couples mainly consider exclusivity as a sign of commitment. The average percentage for Category B and Category C — couples who are non-exclusive — is 80.9, higher than that of Category A.

This interesting observation confirms that although non-exclusive couples perceive sexual non-exclusivity as a sign of freedom to be given to each other and to be experienced within a partnership, it does not necessarily indicate that they are emotionally less attached to each other compared to their counterparts in exclusive partnerships. In fact, they demonstrate a higher level of emphasis on emotional intimacy compared to their exclusive counterparts. This again explains the distinction the majority of them draw between having sex outside the partnership which can be done without much emotional attachment and making love within the partnership with emotional intimacy that is not undermined by their outside sexual encounters. This point is encapsulated in Isay's (1989:87) argument in this connection:

"Open relationships do not signify instability or lack of attachment, love or involvement any more than a closed heterosexual or homosexual relationship necessarily indicates stability, attachment, love and involvement. Emotional fidelity is not necessarily compromised by sexual openness."
In terms of emphasis on the 'personal autonomy' items ('room for personal development' and 'independence'), Category C shows the lowest percentage (7.7), against the assumption that it should show the highest percentage of all the three categories, since many respondents view non-exclusivity as a means of expressing freedom. Taking Category B and Category C together, the average percentage is 9.5, while that for Category A is 8.3. This concludes that respondents in non-exclusive partnerships need not place greater emphasis on 'personal autonomy' than their counterparts in exclusive partnerships, although it is generally assumed that the former would favour that for the smooth operation of a non-exclusive lifestyle.

In sum, partners in non-exclusive partnerships do not place less emphasis on 'emotional intimacy' and more emphasis on 'personal autonomy' compared to their counterparts in exclusive partnerships. This trend goes against the general assumption. In addition, it has been found that partners in exclusive partnerships are more satisfied than their counterparts in non-exclusive partnerships in terms of their sex life within the partnership and the partnership in general.

10.6. Conclusions

Sexual non-exclusivity is an important issue to examine, especially in relation to conventional Christian sexual ethics. The diversity of attitudes and lifestyles among these couples confirms the existence of more than one gay Christian identity. While some view that sexual exclusivity should be the norm for Christians, the majority reject such a notion. Their sexual lifestyles therefore might not objectively reflect the practice of conventional Christians sexual ethics. However, this should not be viewed as a failure on their part. Rather, this stems from their subjective rejection of these ethics at the outset. This theme is further explored in the next chapter.

Twenty-one couples (70%) under study are behaviourally non-exclusive, although 8 of them began their partnerships with the expectation of exclusivity. This lends credence to research evidence that sexual exclusivity in gay male partnerships is the exception rather than the rule (e.g. Bell and Weinberg 1978; Mendola 1980; Peplau and Gordon 1983; McWhirter and Mattison 1984; Buunk and Van Driel 1989; Davies et al. 1993). The data have shown that sexual non-exclusivity can be a blessing or a bane, depending on many factors that determine its workability in each partnership.

The matrix I constructed as a conceptual tool to facilitate the understanding of the issue of sexual non-exclusivity has led to the emergence of three categories of couples. However, it must be recognised that there might exist inter-couple differences even within the same
category. Despite this, the analysis based on this matrix has led to some illuminating observations.

I have refrained myself from using the term 'adultery' when I discuss non-exclusivity. I believe that non-exclusivity within a gay partnership should not be described as such because 'adultery' carries a heterosexual bias with which comes the negative connotations, especially when viewed from a conventional Christian moral perspective. For instance, 'adultery' is generally perceived as an indicator of the presence of some kind of breakdown within a partnership. While non-exclusivity within a gay partnership can be a result of this difficulty, it certainly should not be categorically viewed as symptomatic of the existence of problems in the partnership. In fact, non-exclusivity can be instrumental to the development of a long-term partnership (Warren 1974; Harry and DeVall 1978; Blasband and Peplau 1985).

In addition, since non-exclusivity is a mutually-agreed arrangement in certain cases, thus outside sexual encounters should not be viewed as 'adultery' and assumed to be problematic in nature. Non-exclusivity, in these cases, is not perceived as a sign of unfaithfulness and infidelity. However, the violation of certain mutually established ground rules is perceived as such. Therefore, there can be fidelity without exclusivity. The following comment provides credence to my stance:

"Fidelity is not defined in forms of sexual behavior but rather by their emotional commitment to each other...... It is through time that the symbolic nature of sexual exclusivity translates into the real issues of faithfulness. When that happens, the substantive, emotional dependability of the partners, not sex, becomes the real measure of faithfulness." (McWhirter and Mattison 1984:252).

Commenting on the validity of the exclusivity and non-exclusivity dichotomy in gay partnerships, Reece (1979:106) comments:

"Most gay men in couples do have sex with people outside the relationship and the question might not so much be an either/or matter but how a couple makes such behavior for their particular individual and relationship needs."

This above comment is resonant with the call to consider sexual exclusivity and non-exclusivity as a continuum or a multidimensional phenomenon rather than a clear-cut dichotomy, as most gay couples constantly negotiate the constitutional arrangement of their sexual lifestyles (Harry 1977; Blasband and Peplau 1985).

This Chapter concludes Part IV, on the internal and external facets of the sexual dimension of the couples' partnerships. In Part V, I present some closing remarks about the major concluding themes of this study. I will also make some recommendations for future research.
Part V

FINALLY..........
Chapter Eleven

IDENTITY, RELATIONSHIP AND SPIRITUALITY: CONCLUDING DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This Chapter attempts to discuss the major conceptual themes related to this study. I will also make some recommendations for future research related to gay Christians, on areas which this study has either not covered or done so in sufficient detail. I conclude this Chapter with a brief note of reflection, expressing my thoughts about this two-year project.

11.1. Discussion of Conceptual Themes

This study has been an exploratory investigation, utilising both qualitative and quantitative methods, to document the lived experiences of gay Christians in partnership. Alongside the social and the sexual aspects of their partnerships, attention was also focused on the religious aspect, which was hitherto unexplored in empirical research. This study has examined the dynamics of the internal and the external dimensions of the partnership which, independently and collectively, affect the organisation of the partnership. It has also been the aim of this study to explore the partnership with a thematic approach instead of constructing a grand typology of partnership.

In this section, I will discuss six conceptual themes broadly related to the aims and the data of this study. These themes are: (a) The 'Best Friend' Model; (b) Pure Relationships; (c) Gay Christian Identities; (d) Identity Politics and the Institutionalised Church; (e) Identity Politics and the 'Ex-gay' Movement; and (f) Gay Spirituality.

The 'Best Friend' Model

This study has found that an overwhelming majority of gay Christian partnerships are characterised by egalitarianism, both in terms of the respondent's perception and in actual practice. The organisation of these partnerships demonstrated a high degree of role exchangeability rather than role complementarity.
Instead of a dominant-subordinate model, these partnerships demonstrated the 'best friend' model (Harry and DeVall 1978; Peplau 1981; Sanderson 1990). In this connection, Peplau and Gordon (1983: 234) assert:

"A friendship script fosters equality in relationships. The norms or rules for friendship assume that partners will be relatively equal in status and power."

Egalitarianism is the main feature of the 'best friend' model. Most couples demonstrated an ideological commitment to reject the dominant-subordinate model and uphold the 'best friend' model. They are committed to functioning as equal partners, despite the possible potential for inequity resulting from age and income differences. The next subsection further elaborates this point.

**Pure Relationships**

The gay Christian partnerships I have studied share great similarity with what O'Neill and O'Neill (1972) refer to as "synergy relationships" in the context of heterosexual open marriages. The emphasis in a synergy relationship is the fulfilment of the partners' needs and the maintenance of individuality. It is a "dynamic process that occurs when the combined action of two things produces a more beneficial and greater effect or result than the sum of their separate individual actions. It is a process by which the whole becomes more than the sum of the parts, while at the same time those parts retain their individuality." (O'Neill and O'Neill 1972:267)

A more contemporary term to use in this context is "pure relationships" which, it is argued, increasingly characterises the type of intimate relationships in late modern society (Morgan 1991; Giddens 1991, 1992; Allan 1993). Before elaborating this term any further, I will first discuss Giddens' (1991, 1992) conceptualisation of the historical development of intimate relationships, which refers almost exclusively to those of heterosexuals.

Giddens (1992) argues that in pre-modern Europe, an intimate relationship (or more appropriately, a marriage) was primarily not based on the emotional and sexual attraction of the marital partners. Rather, it was a contractual arrangement negotiated by external parties such as parents, primarily with economic considerations. Therefore, external socio-economic factors were influential in the establishment of a marital relationship.

With the onset of modernity in the late eighteenth century, the notion of 'romantic love' emerged alongside greater social changes effected by, *inter alia*, industrialisation. Giddens (1992:39-40, 44) elaborates:
"Romantic love introduced the idea of a narrative into an individual life — a formula which radically extended the reflexivity of sublime love. The telling of a story is one of the meanings of 'romance', but this story now became individualised, inserting self and other into a personal narrative which had no particular reference to wider social processes.... Ideals of romantic love... inserted themselves directly into the emergent ties between freedom and self-realisation.... Romantic love detaches individuals from wider social circumstances...."

It is clear from Giddens' view that in the modern era, the legitimacy of a relationship is predicated not so much on external social affirmation, but a personal sense of fulfilment and satisfaction. Although an intimate relationship characterised by romantic love is generally free from social constraints, there still exists within it some residues of traditionalism, ".... romantic love has always been imbalanced in gender terms.... [it] has long had an egalitarian strain.... [it] is thoroughly skewed in terms of power. For women dreams of romantic love have all too often led to grim domestic subjection' (Giddens 1992:62).

Owing to the conformity to conventional gender roles in the name of romance, egalitarianism was an absent feature in an intimate relationship characterised by romantic love. In this period of late modernity, the emancipation of women has seriously challenged this organisation of intimate relationships. Intimate relationships of this era are characterised by 'confluent love' which is active and contingent (Giddens 1992:61).

Like a relationship characterised by 'romantic love', a relationship characterised by 'confluent love' is established relatively free from external forces. However, Giddens argues that 'confluent love' differs from 'romantic love' in two significant ways. First, 'confluent love' rejects the romantic expectation of a relationship to be 'for-ever' and 'one-and-only'. Second, it greatly emphasises the sexual and emotional equality of the partners. Therefore, a relationship characterised by 'confluent love' approximates to what Giddens calls a 'pure relationship'.

A pure relationship is constructed reflexively to meet the personal needs of the relational parties involved. It is fundamentally predicated on the relational parties' commitment to achieving intimacy based on mutual trust. Therefore, a pure relationship constantly undergoes a process of constitution and reconstitution, or what Giddens (1991:92) calls "effort bargaining". This process of effort bargaining involves negotiations between the relational parties as equal partners. It facilitates the maintenance of equality, personal autonomy and personal space within the relationship. Therefore, this process has the potential to inform the relational parties about the viability of the relationship's continuity:

"It is a feature of the pure relationship that it can be terminated, more or less at will, by either partner at any particular point." (Giddens 1992:137)
To me, Giddens' (1991, 1992) definition of the pure relationship assumes an overrationalised view of the 'self'. It portrays the 'self' as highly ego-centric and calculating, engaging itself in constant effort-investment and costs-and-rewards assessments. I would contend that even if the 'self' can rationally and actively assess the viability of a pure relationship at all times, that does not necessarily mean that it will take the action prescribed by the outcome of the self-assessment.

There are heterosexual and gay long-standing relationships which continue 'in the rut' for practical reasons, against the rational assessment of the 'self'. In the case of gay partnerships, long-established joint financial arrangements and old age could be the possible reasons. It must be emphasised that the data do not suggest this to be the case for my sample. Suffice it to say, however, that a relationship need not face dissolution even though it suffers decline or breakdown. The rational assessment of the 'self' might give way to practicality. In sum, I would argue that while the 'self' is capable of rational assessment, the extent of its rationality does not stretch as far as Giddens suggests.

The data also indicate that the majority of the gay Christian partnerships I studied meet the criteria of a pure relationship, especially in terms of equality between partners, which I have already discussed. Most couples constantly engage in 'effort bargaining' to ensure that mutual satisfaction is maintained.

Comparing the extent of 'effort bargaining' within gay and heterosexual partnerships, I would argue that this process operates more rigorously in the former. Inasmuch as gay partnerships operate within a virtual normative vacuum in terms of relationship formation, the process of 'effort bargaining' is actually facilitated by their peculiar circumstances. Having no normative guidance, gay couples are engaged in the construction of a normative framework (or frameworks) within which their partnerships can effectively operate. Partners are inclined to constantly negotiate the constitutional arrangement of their partnership as it develops. Their experience in this respect differs, to a great extent, from that of heterosexual couples. The existence of a social script which generally favours the dominant-subordinate model puts heterosexual couples in a normative framework at the outset, their commitment to the establishment of a pure relationship thus requires them to engage in the modification or deconstruction of that framework into which they have been socialised.

In the case of gay Christian couples, the construction of the normative framework(s) can be problematic, especially when it is located within the Christian moral-ethical context. This point is elaborated below.
**Gay Christian Identities**

In this study, the sexual dimension of the partnership is the most appropriate platform for the discourse of gay Christian identities. It is within this dimension that the 'gay' and the 'Christian' identities have the strongest potential to clash. The tension between conventional Christian values on sex and sexuality and the values of the gay sub-culture is the greatest in this dimension. Therefore, it is also the most appropriate platform on which to assess the contents of the gay Christian identities.

Weeks (1985:188) argues that identity is about "affinities based on selection, self-actualisation and choice. It is therefore something we have to search for, something that has to be attained in order to stabilise the self, ward off anomie and despair." Gay Christians, finding themselves located between the pulling and pushing forces of their affinity to the gay community and their Christian beliefs, have to make difficult decisions in their search for self-identity.

This is clearly reflected in the existence of different sexual lifestyles among the gay Christian couples studied. Their experiences confirm the fact that the 'typical gay Christian couple' does not exist. The great diversity of sexual lifestyles constitutes part of the kaleidoscope of gay experiences owing to the lack of institutional support and recognition, as well as the absence of a role model and a general behavioural social script. Under these circumstances, these couples utilise the freedom and flexibility accorded them to constantly negotiate and organise the constitutional arrangement of their partnership until they arrive at the 'best-adjusted' stage at a particular point of time. This 'best-adjusted' stage changes from time to time as the partnership develops.

Therefore, there exists not one gay Christian identity, but several. Different perceptions and experiences of what it means to be a gay Christian have led to different gay Christian lifestyles. Some arrive at the lifestyle that reflects the conventional Christian moral values. On the other hand, some reject these values and explore other avenues. But most, I would argue, move along the spectrum, back and forth.

This leads to some opposition. Some commentators argue that gay Christians are merely using their religion to cover their conformity to the gay sub-culture which fosters certain values contradicting conventional Christian sexual ethics. This view is clearly expressed below:

"It is our contention that the Metropolitan Community Church and other gay religious groups are merely an extension of the gay life-style clothed in religiosity." (Enroth and Jamison 1974:106)
Gay Christians appear to be facing an identity crisis. It is therefore not surprising that theological debates have been sparked off in the last couple of years over sexual ethics for gay Christian relationships. This debate has in turn deepened this crisis. Two schools of thought can be identified in this connection.

There are gay Christians who advocate a liberal "theology of friendship" which is "empowering, affirming and challenging for those involved," and most of all "inclusive" (Stuart 1992:2). Those supporting this view reject the conventional biblical sexual ethics on the ground that they apply exclusively to heterosexual relationships. Conforming to them would be unnecessarily apeing a heterosexual relationship arrangement. Besides, since the Bible provides no explicit guidelines for same-sex relationships, they should be allowed to conscientiously explore and determine a lifestyle that suits them most. Their lack of confidence in the Church as their moral arbiter also buttresses their justification.

The above standpoint, however, has met with opposition from a conservative call for the establishment of "the ethic of sexual monogamy" that upholds conventional Christian sexual ethics. It argues that sexual fidelity applies to both heterosexual and gay relationships (John 1993:2). Sexual exclusivity is the main issue on the agenda. John (1993:18) further criticises the theology of friendship in asserting that:

"Friendship and a relationship of sexual commitment are qualitatively different. One may have many friends; one may not, within any moral framework which remotely links with Christian teaching, have many sexual partners."

Gay Christians who agree with John (1992) would be inclined to challenge some gay Christian organisations who are perceived to have buried the 'Christian' element in their work, thus failing in its responsibility to witness Christ in the 'secular' gay scene and to the society at large. Conservative gay Christian groups such as Integrity and Affirming Catholicism have also emerged as a response to restore what is perceived as the uncritical conformity of certain liberal gay Christian groups such as the LGCM to the 'secular' gay sub-culture. These groups argue that the 'Christian' element is limited, if not diminished altogether, from liberal groups such as the LGCM as a result of this conformity.

This theological-ethical debate reveals the limitation of the 'best friend' model and the strict definition of the pure relationship which emphasises self-determination. While a gay man without such religious commitments can readily relate to the gay community as a significant normative reference group (Lofland 1969), a gay Christian has to grapple with his Christian identity which calls for the surrendering of the 'self' to a higher order. This double-barrelled difficulty can generate disagreements, and even conflicts. The question, however,
remains. To what extent should one's Christian conscience determine the practice of one's gay lifestyle?

This is an interesting development within the gay Christian community. To me, it is a sign that it has come of age. It has gradually moved away from the 'justification stage' when the main issue on the agenda is to argue the acceptability of their sexuality before the institutionalised Church. Despite the disagreement that exists in the debate on gay Christian sexual ethics, the nature of the issue at hand has moved away from the sheer rightness or wrongness of homosexuality.

This debate on sexual ethics is but one of the issues on an increasingly diversified agenda. This development is reminiscent of the development within the 'secular' gay community, for instance, the emergence of the Gay Liberation Front in the early 1970s (for more details on British gay politics, see Weeks 1977, 1981, 1989).

Plummer (1992: 15) argues that there is a need to recognise the existence of fragments of gay experiences and "more and more ways of thinking about same-sex sexualities and relationships that do not lock us up in controlling categories, but which instead empower us towards difference and diversity." Viewed in the light of this statement, the inevitable emergence of the diversity of opinions and lifestyles within the gay Christian community is a positive sign indeed.

Identity Politics and the Institutionalised Church

I do not use the term 'identity politics' to mean political activism in the narrow sense, as Anspach (1979) uses in her analysis of the stigma management stratagems employed by the physically disabled and former mental patients. Anspach (1979:769) proposes a typology of four responses to stigma: normalisation, disassociation, retreatism and political activism. While the first three stratagems do not result in stigma conversion, political activism actively challenges the social perceptions of the stigmatised.

I find Anspach's (1979) typology mutually exclusive, as if the political connotations of being labelled 'deviant' are only apparent when made active. I would argue that one's 'deviant' status is political, regardless of one's participation or non-participation in political activism. The labelling of a behaviour as 'deviant' entails a set of rules in order to regulate that behaviour. Inasmuch as homosexuality is still frowned upon in the Christian community, the mere fact of holding a gay Christian identity under such a stigmatising climate inevitably takes up a political dimension. It involves a power relation between the stigmatiser and the stigmatised, with or without political activism.
Gay Christians, in this case, assume an identity politics based on sexuality. I would argue that gay Christians encounter two forms of identity politics. The first involves gay Christians and the institutionalised Church in a typical stigmatiser-stigmatised scenario. The second, which involves the 'ex-gay' movement, will be discussed in the next sub-section.

This study has found that in spite of the difficulty most of them have encountered in coming to terms with their sexuality and Christian beliefs in their moral career, these gay Christians have demonstrated a positive self-image. They are in a state of being, rather than becoming gay Christians. Being in high quality partnerships, as the data show, is just an indication of this positive self-image (Troiden 1979, 1987).

In other words, despite the fear of stigmatisation, they have thrived. They have undergone a process of stigma redemption (Humphreys 1972). This positive personal experience has buttressed the validity of their justificatory power of their 'God-given' sexual orientation and 'God-blessed' partnerships. In comparison, the Church's justificatory foundation for censuring overt gay behaviour is gradually weakened. In this case, the stigmatised turns the table against the stigmatiser with their own positive personal experience, not just theological rhetoric. They have moved far from the conventional psychopathological and clinical portrayal of gay people.

Their successful stigma management stratagems reflect some similarity with two techniques of neutralisation that Sykes and Matza (1957) expound --- that of the denial of responsibility and the condemnation of the condemner. In relation to the first, they deny their responsibility for the possession of the discrediting feature --- their sexuality. Adopting the creationist argument, they assign the responsibility to God. I have already argued that this serves to buttress their justificatory power to the utmost. However, they do acknowledge that their sexual behaviour should be guided by a sense of responsibility and personal accountability reflecting general Christian values such as justice, love and mutuality.

More analytically relevant is the latter technique of neutralisation. The gay Christians studied are in a stage of their moral career where their sufficiently positive self-image enables them to 'reject the rejecter' (McCorkle and Korn 1954), albeit at different levels. While a minority reject the institutionalised Church to the extent of physically distancing themselves from it, most do so at a theological level, yet participating in a local church.

There are also some whose response to the social reaction from the institutionalised Church demonstrates the model of rebellion-induced deviancy amplification spiral (Young 1971:111). In this model of deviancy amplification spiral, the 'deviant', in response to social
reaction to his 'deviancy', heightens his perception of social injustice and increases his commitment to his 'deviant' activity as a symbol of 'deviant' identity and rebellion.

These respondents have undergone an ideological empowerment that provides them with the mission not only to defend, but also to 'attack the attacker'. They have clearly transcended the 'deviant' circumstances imposed on them. Their experiences lend credence to Matza's (1969:93) view of the human condition:

"A subject actively addresses or encounters his circumstances; accordingly, his distinctive capacity is to re-shape, strive towards creating and actually transcend circumstances."

Gay Christians in different stages of their moral career might demonstrate different responses to the reaction of the institutionalised Church towards their 'deviancy', characterised by other models of deviancy amplification spiral and modes of adaptations. It must be emphasised that not all gay Christians succeed in arriving at the positive stage that the gay Christians in this study have, with the support of a partnership. Some might succumb to social reaction and get entrapped within the isolation-induced type of deviancy amplification spiral, living a life of marginalisation. On the other hand, some might be so successful in 'passing' and controlling social information that their discrediting feature might never be discredited. Consequently, they avoid deviancy amplification altogether.

Identity Politics and the 'Ex-gay' Movement

I have argued elsewhere (Yip 1994b) that the gay Christian community faces two challenges: the identity crisis that leads to the debate on gay Christian sexual ethics and the 'ex-gay' movement. The former has already been discussed, and I will now focus on the latter.

This 'ex-gay' movement, which is still in its embryonic stage, aims to assist the gay Christian to come to terms with his/her sexuality without physical expression. In certain cases, professional assistance might be provided to help alter his/her sexual orientation. Having started in America with groups such as Love in Action, the Living Water and the Desert Stream, this Movement is gaining ground in Britain: Holding the torch in this respect are the Courage Trust, the True Freedom Trust (TFT), the Pilot Trust, the Turnabout and the U-Turn Anglia.

This Movement challenges the creationist argument and its essentialist emphasis that a homosexual orientation is God-given, thus not to be challenged and cannot be modified. This Movement, adopting a generally psycho-social constructionist emphasis, maintains that each gay person has the ability to consciously decide if he/she wants to practise a gay lifestyle. The
Courage Trust, for instance, offers a residential *Steps Out of Homosexuality* programme aiming to provide support for those who wish to explore the possibility of coming to terms with their homosexual orientation without expressing it. Participants are encouraged to consider heterosexual marriage or celibacy as the options.

This Movement's standpoint is therefore consistent with the official stance of most Churches that while a person with a homosexual orientation should be fully accepted, the expression of his/her orientation is precluded. Its ideology is clearly expressed below:

"We believe homosexuality is learned behaviour, influenced by a number of factors: a disrupted family life in early years, a lack of unconditional love on the part of either parent, a failure to identify with the same-sex parent. Later, these problems can result in a search for love and acceptance, envy of the same or the opposite sex, a life controlled by various fears and feelings of isolation." (Courage Trust, not dated)

In this form of identity, politics, gay Christians are not encountering an active stigmatiser as such. Rather, it encounters a 'reformist' group with some members who acknowledge their own homosexual orientation and yet refrain from expressing it because of their religious commitment. They possess the discrediting feature, but it is turned into a vehicle for social acceptance and the formation of the operational ideology of this Movement. However, this *broadcasting* of the discrediting feature is seen by many gay Christians as a greater hypocrisy than that of the institutionalised Church.

Some homosexually-oriented members of this Movement claim that, with spiritual assistance and personal religious commitment, they have succeeded in refraining themselves from practising homosexuality. Their personal experiences therefore provide a strong justificatory force against the gay Christians' own positive experiences predicated on their partnerships. Therefore, this form of identity politics is an experience-versus-experience clash in which religious rhetoric plays a secondary role.

Although the sources challenging gay Christians are different, both forms of identity politics are inextricably related. If the 'ex-gay' movement churns out high 'success' rates, it would provide the institutionalised Church with justification for perpetuating its unwillingness to accord gay Christians full acceptance. Operating collectively, these sources have the potential to further accentuate the 'deviant' status attributed to gay Christians.
Gay Spirituality

It is interesting to note that in spite of the generally stigmatising climate within the institutionalised Church, gay spirituality persists. The experiences of the gay Christians in this study attest to the fact that although as believers they might have, to a certain extent, physically or psychologically distanced themselves from the religious institution, they still uphold spirituality. Despite the lack of religious affirmation, many still actively seek or silently hope for a positive church environment to integrate their Christian faith. In contrast to implicit religion (Bailey 1990a, 1990b), their religion is explicit and doctrinally focused on Christianity.

To most of these gay Christians, the religious institution has become less significant, but not religion itself. Their religion characterises what James (1961) calls "personal religion", as opposed to "institutional religion". It is an individualised form of spirituality, resonant with Luckmann's (1967) concept of "individual religiosity". Luckmann (1967:97-99) argues that as personal identity becomes essentially a private phenomenon in the modern society with the absence of an 'official' model of religion, the individual constructs a system of ultimate significance based on a process of subjective reflection and choice shaped by his social biography. This system of ultimate significance consists of religious themes that legitimate "the affectively determined priorities of 'private' life." (Luckmann 1967:105).

Applying Luckmann's (1967) argument to the situation of gay Christians, I would argue that the lack of Church acceptance actually facilitates the development of this kind of individual religiosity due to their great sense of marginalisation. Hart and Richardson (1981) argue that gay people tend to organise their self-identity around their sexual identity. Goffman (1963) also asserts that this scenario is common for people with stigmatised identities. Inasmuch as their sexual identity is accorded the "master status" (Becker 1963), it occupies a predominant position in the hierarchy of their core identity construct. Thus, their sexual identity becomes the ultimate reference point in the construction of their "sacred cosmos" (Luckmann 1967). They are inclined to construct religious themes broadly derived from traditional Christianity which incorporate both their sexual and their religious identities with the least possible identity dissonance. It follows therefore that their psychological or physical distance from the institutionalised Church would be reduced if Church acceptance increases.

Alongside other developments such as the feminist theology and the ordination of women priests in the Church of England, the religious experiences of gay Christians pose a great challenge to the heterosexist Church structure. With its emphasis on the individual and emotion, gay (and lesbian) spirituality has also contributed to the call for a sociology of
religion putting more emphasis on the believer's body, desire, religious experience and emotion, which transcends its conventional focus on the religious institution, structure and ideas (Spickard 1993; Hervieu-Léger 1993; Simpson 1993).

11.2. Recommendations for Future Research

This study has explored the lived experiences of gay Christian couples, focusing on the social, religious and sexual dimensions of their partnerships. Data have shown that these couples are generally positive about their sexuality and religious beliefs. This facilitates the construction of their satisfying partnerships.

While this study has made a modest contribution to the research on gay Christians, there are areas which, because of the limitation of this study, I either did not cover or cover in sufficient detail. For reasons already mentioned, I did not include lesbian couples in this study. I also explored the sample's relationships with various gay Christian groups without examining in great detail the workings of these groups themselves. Further, although the members of the sample were affiliated to various religious denominations (most, however, were affiliated to the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England), I have not made any inter-denominational comparisons. I also did not examine the possible contact my sample might have had with the 'ex-gay' movement. Against this backdrop, I propose the following topics for future research:

(a) Comparative study of the experiences of gay and lesbian Christians within the church. I have argued in Chapter Two that while gay men are marginalised on sexuality grounds, lesbians are marginalised on both sexuality and gender grounds. Does this contribute to different experiences of religion?

(b) The debate on gay Christian sexual ethics in relation to the operational ideologies of different gay Christian groups or organisations. Is the multiplicity of standpoints in this case a blessing or bane to the construction of the gay Christian community?

(c) Inter-denominational differences in the experience of being gay. Do gay Christians demonstrate perceivable differences across denominational boundaries in various aspects of their life and partnership?
(d) The 'ex-gay' movement that I have discussed deserves some research attention. Its growth and potential success would have great impact on gay Christian identity politics. It will also be interesting to study the socialisation process effected by the Steps Out of Homosexuality programme and the psycho-social experiences of the participants.

11.3. Reflection

I have travelled on a long journey these past two years. This not only means the time span within which this study has developed, but also the progress of the process of reflexivity within me. In using this study as one of the means to answer some questions close to my heart, I have opened up myself — consciously and unconsciously — to some tremendously challenging experiences. These experiences have not only sharpened my researching skills, but also my social perceptions. Interacting with my respondents provoked so much thinking in me. This thinking process continues even as I close this chapter of my life.

I think about my confusion when some of my respondents made a pass at me. I think about the excitement I experienced in meeting some respondents whose demeanour captivated me. I think about certain aspects of my respondents' lifestyles which I admire and dislike. I think about my own childhood experiences when I try to understand my respondents' discovery of their homosexual feelings and their coming out processes.

I think about the computer programmes I have painstakingly learned to befriend. I think about how part of the conceptual framework of a particular chapter in this thesis was used in a publication without my permission, by an individual whose desire to 'succeed' in academia corrupted his academic discipline. I think about the way in which the Christianity that I once knew was put under critical scrutiny and the Christianity that I now learn to appreciate. I think about how challenging and yet rewarding this research experience has been.

After all this thinking, I still maintain what I have always tried not to forget — that life is a humbling learning process. It would be very sad otherwise.
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GAY CHRISTIAN PARTNERSHIPS

THIS RESEARCH SEEKS TO THROW SOME LIGHT ON THE VARIOUS ASPECTS OF THE LIVES OF GAY COUPLES WHO ARE BOTH CHRISTIAN AND HAVE BEEN TOGETHER FOR AT LEAST ONE YEAR. KINDLY ANSWER ALL THE QUESTIONS. IF YOU WISH TO OFFER COMMENTS ON ANY QUESTIONS OR QUALIFY YOUR ANSWERS, PLEASE FEEL FREE TO USE THE SPACE IN THE MARGINS. YOUR COMMENTS WILL BE TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR KIND ASSISTANCE.

........................................
ANDREW YIP
May 1993

University of Surrey
Guildford
Surrey GU2 5XH
England

Telephone: (01483) 30080
Fax: (01483) 306290
Questions 1 to 3 are about your current partnership

1. How long have you been in this partnership?

_________ year(s) _________ month(s)

2. What is the term you most commonly use to refer to your partner? Kindly circle the appropriate number.

   Lover 1
   Companion 2
   Partner 3
   Other Half 4
   Boyfriend 5
   Spouse 6
   Other Please specify: ____________ 7

3. What is important to you in this partnership? Kindly rank the following items in order of importance, with '1' for the most important item and '5' for the least important one.

   Companionship
   A sense of security
   Sex
   Room for personal development
   Independence

Questions 4 to 7 ask about your residence

4. What kind of residence do you and your partner live in? Kindly circle the appropriate number.

   Flat 1
   Apartment 2
   House 3
   Bedsit 4
   Other Please specify: ____________ 5

5. Is your residence rented or privately owned? Kindly circle the appropriate number.

   Rented 1
   Privately Owned 2
If Rented, 5(a) What is the weekly rental of your residence?

________________________

5(b) What is the percentage of your contribution to the payment of the weekly rental?

________________________

If Privately Owned,

5(c) Who owns your residence? Kindly circle the appropriate number.

You 1
Your Partner 2
Jointly owned by you and your partner 3

6. Who made the choice of the location of your residence? Kindly circle the appropriate number.

You, before you met your partner 1
You, after you met your partner 2
Your partner, before he met you 3
Your partner, after he met you 4
Joint decision of you and your partner 5

7. Why was this particular location chosen?

________________________

________________________

Questions 8 to 11 enquire about how household tasks are arranged.

8. Do you employ any domestic help to take care of your household tasks?

Kindly circle the appropriate number.

Yes 1 ---> Answer Question 9

No 2 ---> Answer Question 10
9. The following table presents a list of households chores. Kindly put a tick (✓) in the appropriate cells, indicating whether the chores are mainly done by your domestic help, you, your partner, or shared equally between you and your partner.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chores</th>
<th>Chores mainly done by domestic help</th>
<th>Chores mainly done by you</th>
<th>Chores mainly done by your partner</th>
<th>Chores shared equally between you and your partner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doing grocery shopping</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaning the house</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gardening</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paying the bills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washing the dishes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing the laundry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ironing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repairing things around the house</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10. The following table presents a list of household chores. Kindly put a tick (✓) in the appropriate cells, indicating the chores that you and your partner actually do and whether they are done mainly by you, your partner, or shared equally between both of you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chores mainly done</th>
<th>Chores mainly done</th>
<th>Chores shared equally between you and your partner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>by you</td>
<td>by your partner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing the grocery shopping</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaning the house</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gardening</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paying the bills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washing the dishes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing the laundry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ironing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repairing things around the house</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11. Which one of the following statements best describes the arrangement of household tasks indicated by you in the table above? Kindly circle the appropriate number.

- You have a greater say in deciding the arrangement
- Your partner has a greater say in deciding the arrangement
- You and your partner have equal say in deciding the arrangement
Thank you for your patience. We now turn to Questions 12 to 22, designed to understand your leisure activity involvement.

12. Please state three of your hobbies

(a) ____________________________
(b) ____________________________
(c) ____________________________

13. Kindly indicate below the three favourite domestic leisure activities that you and your partner do together and mention the number of hours spent on those activities on a weekly basis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Three Favourite Domestic Leisure Activities Do Together With Your Partner</th>
<th>Number of Hours Spent Per Week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. ____________________________</td>
<td>____________________________ hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. ____________________________</td>
<td>____________________________ hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. ____________________________</td>
<td>____________________________ hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>____________________________ hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14. Which one of the following statements would you think best describes the domestic leisure activity pattern for you and your partner? Kindly circle the appropriate number.

You mainly decide the leisure activity pattern 1
Your partner mainly decides the leisure activity pattern 2
Both you and your partner have equal say in deciding the leisure activity pattern 3
15. The table below presents a list of non-domestic leisure activities. Kindly indicate the THREE favourite activities that you and your partner do together and mention the number of hours spent on those activities on a MONTHLY basis. Please use the blank cells to write down the activities not provided in the list.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Three Favourite Non-domestic Leisure Activities Do Together With Your Partner</th>
<th>Number of Hours Spent Per Month</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Going to the theatre/cinema</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting gay friends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting straight friends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in church activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in gay Christian groups not related to the church</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in gay groups not related to Christianity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in the gay scene (gay bars, gay baths, gay discos etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in sports</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of hours per month</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

16. Which one of the following statements most accurately describes the non-domestic leisure activity pattern for you and your partner? Kindly circle the appropriate number.

- You have a greater say in deciding the non-domestic leisure activity pattern
- Your partner has a greater say in deciding the non-domestic leisure activity pattern
- Both you and your partner have equal say in deciding the non-domestic leisure activity pattern

17. Have you ever participated in the gay scene (gay bars, gay baths/saunas and gay discos etc.)? Kindly circle the appropriate number.

- Yes
- No
18. Why have you never participated in the gay scene?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

19. Have you participated in the gay scene during the past one month? Kindly circle the appropriate number.

Yes
No

If NO, Why?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

20. Kindly indicate below the number of times you visit the gay scene in an average month.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Places you visit in the gay scene</th>
<th>Number of times in an average month</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gay bars/pubs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay baths/saunas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay discos</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay bookstores</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

21. The following table enquires about your participation in the gay scene in an average month. Kindly put a tick (✓) in the appropriate cells.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>You usually go alone without your partner or friends</th>
<th>You usually go with your partner only</th>
<th>You usually go with your partner and your mutual friends</th>
<th>You usually go with your own friends without your partner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gay bars/pubs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay baths/saunas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay discos</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay bookstores</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
22. Please indicate below how often you read gay publications.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Gay Novels</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Gay Times</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) The Pink Paper</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) Capital Gay</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) Boyz</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(f) Magazines such as</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Him, Zipper, Vulcan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Euroboy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(g) Others, please</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>specify:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You are approaching the end of the questionnaire. Thank you for your patience. Questions 23 to 34 require you to provide information about the financial arrangement between you and your partner.

23. What is your current occupational status? Kindly circle the appropriate number.

- Self-employed 1
- Employed full-time 2
- Employed part-time 3
- Employed occasionally 4
- Unemployed 5
- On government training scheme 6
- Student 7

   ---> Please state your current educational status.

   ---> Skip Question 24

24. If you are not a student and are currently employed, kindly state your occupation.

---------------------------------------------
25. Please put a tick (✔️) in the appropriate bracket to indicate your gross annual income.

Less than £ 5000 ( ) 1
£ 5000 --- £ 8999 ( ) 2
£ 6000 --- £ 12999 ( ) 3
£13000 --- £16999 ( ) 4
£17000 --- £20999 ( ) 5
£21000 --- £24999 ( ) 6
£25000 --- £28999 ( ) 7
£29000 --- £32000 ( ) 8
More than £32000 ( ) 9

26. How do you and your partner settle the expenses incurred when both of you are together?
Kindly circle the appropriate number.

You pay for all the expenses 1
----> Skip to Question 28
Your partner pays for all the expenses 2
----> Skip to Question 28
Both you and your partner share the expenses 3
----> Answer Question 27

27. What is the percentage of your contribution to the expenses? Kindly circle the appropriate number.

Less than 25% 1
25% 2
More than 25% but less than 50% 3
50% 4
More than 50% but less than 75% 5
75% 6
More than 75% 7

28. Who decided the arrangement regarding the settlement of the above mentioned expenses?
Kindly circle the appropriate number.

You mainly decided the arrangements 1
Your partner mainly decided the arrangements 2
Both you and your partner decided the arrangements 3

29. Do you and your partner hold a joint bank account? Kindly circle the appropriate number.

Yes 1
No 2
If YES, (a) When did you and your partner start holding a joint bank account?

(Month) (Year)

(b) Who decided that a joint bank account was necessary? Kindly circle the appropriate number.

You mainly decided that 1
Your partner mainly decided that 2
Both of you jointly decided that 3

(c) Why do you think a joint bank account with your partner is necessary?

If NO, Why do you think a joint account with your partner is not necessary?

30. Kindly circle the appropriate number(s) to indicate if you and your partner hold joint ownership of the following.

Car 1
House 2
Land 3
Share in business 4

31. Do you own a life insurance policy? Kindly circle the appropriate number.

Yes 1 —> Answer Question 32
No 2 —> Skip to Question 33

32. Is your partner named as a beneficiary? Kindly circle the appropriate number.

Yes 1
No 2
33. Do you have a will? Kindly circle the appropriate number.

Yes 1 ---> Answer Question 34
No 2 ---> Skip to Question 35

34. Is your partner named as a beneficiary? Kindly circle the appropriate number.

Yes 1
No 2

This is the last section of the questionnaire. Questions 35 to 38 ask for your personal demographic details.

35. What is your age? Kindly put a tick (✓) in the appropriate bracket.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Bracket</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16 ---- 20</td>
<td>(       )01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 ---- 25</td>
<td>(       )02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 ---- 30</td>
<td>(       )03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 ---- 35</td>
<td>(       )04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 ---- 40</td>
<td>(       )05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 ---- 45</td>
<td>(       )06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46 ---- 50</td>
<td>(       )07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 ---- 55</td>
<td>(       )08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56 ---- 60</td>
<td>(       )09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61 ---- 65</td>
<td>(       )10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66 ---- 70</td>
<td>(       )11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 70</td>
<td>(       )12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

36. What is your ethnic origin? Kindly circle the appropriate number.

White 1
African 2
Chinese 3
West Indian or Guyanese 4
Indian 5
Pakistani or Bangladeshi 6
Arab 7
Mixed 8
Other Please specify: ______________________ 9

37. What is your religious denomination? Kindly circle the appropriate number.

Roman Catholic 1
Church of England 2
Baptist 3
Methodist 4
United Reformed Church 5
Lutheran 6
Other Please specify: ______________________ 7
38. Kindly circle the appropriate number(s) to indicate the qualification(s) you possess.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>O-level</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-level</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate degree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master's degree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral degree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional qualifications</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please specify:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is the end of the questionnaire. Thank you very much for your time. Your contribution to this study is greatly appreciated. Please be assured that all the information you have provided will be kept in strict confidence.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO RECEIVE A COPY OF THE SUMMARY OF MY RESEARCH RESULTS?

YES ( )

NO ( )
TEXT BOUND INTO

THE SPINE
GAY CHRISTIAN PARTNERSHIPS

THIS RESEARCH SEEKS TO THROW SOME LIGHT ON THE VARIOUS ASPECTS OF THE LIVES OF GAY COUPLES WHO ARE BOTH CHRISTIAN AND HAVE BEEN TOGETHER FOR AT LEAST ONE YEAR. KINDLY ANSWER ALL THE QUESTIONS. IF YOU WISH TO OFFER COMMENTS ON ANY QUESTIONS OR QUALIFY YOUR ANSWERS, PLEASE FEEL FREE TO USE THE SPACE IN THE MARGINS. YOUR COMMENTS WILL BE TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR KIND ASSISTANCE.

..........................
ANDREW YIP
May 1993
Questions 1 – 8 are about your current partnership

1. How long have you been in this partnership?

_________ year(s) ___________ month(s)

2. What is the term you most commonly use to refer to your partner? Kindly circle the appropriate number.

Lover 1
Companion 2
Partner 3
Other Half 4
Boyfriend 5
Spouse 6
Other Please specify: ____________

3. What is important to you in this partnership? Kindly rank the following items in order of importance, with '1' for the most important item and '5' for the least important one.

Companionship ( )
A sense of security ( )
Sex ( )
Room for personal development ( )
Independence ( )

4. Have you and your partner been living separately since this partnership began? Kindly circle the appropriate answer.

Yes 1
No 2

If YES, (a) Why?

________________________________________________________________________

(b) Whose decision was that?

________________________________________________________________________
If NO,  
(a) Why do both of you live separately now?

(b) Whose decision was that?

(c) When did both of you start living separately?

5. How many days in a month do you spend with your partner?

6. Where do both of you spend most of your time when you are together?

7. Why was such an arrangement made?

8. Who decided the above mentioned arrangement? Kindly circle the appropriate number.

You mainly decided the arrangement 1
Your partner mainly decided the arrangement 2
Both you and your partner have equal say in making the decision 3
We now turn to Questions 9 and 10 regarding how household tasks are arranged when you and your partner spend time together.

9. The following table presents a list of household chores which you and your partner might do during the days you are together. Kindly put a tick (✓) in the appropriate cells, indicating the chores that you and/or your partner actually do and whether they are done mainly by you, your partner, or shared equally between both of you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Chores mainly done by you</th>
<th>Chores mainly done by your partner</th>
<th>Chores shared equally between you and your partner</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doing the grocery shopping</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleaning the house</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gardening</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washing the dishes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing the laundry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ironing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repairing things around the house</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10. Which one of the following statements best describes the arrangement of household tasks indicated by you in the table above? Kindly circle the appropriate number.

- You have a greater say in deciding the arrangement 1
- Your partner has a greater say in deciding the arrangement 2
- You and your partner have equal say in deciding the arrangement 3

Except the question numbering, the rest of this questionnaire is identical to that of the questionnaire for cohabiting respondents, beginning Question 12.
Section 1: Current Relationship

1. Length

2. Why partnership?

3. Term most commonly used for partner

4. Qualities (three)
   - in current partner
   - age of partner important?
   - partner's religion important?
   - match with ideal partner?
   - in self, from partner's perspective

5. Unfavourable characteristics (three)
   - in partner
   - in self, from partner's perspective

6. Conflicts
   - three main causes
   - ways to resolve
   - conflicts from external forces?

7. Temporary separation
   If YES: — nature
   — frequency
   — ways to cope

8. Termination of relationship
   — by self
     If NO: — why
     If YES: — when
     — frequency
     — ways to resolve
   — by partner
     If YES: — ways to resolve

9. Decision-making
   — partnership egalitarian?
   — egalitarianism important?
   — who has more say?
   — agree?

10. Areas to improve on

11. Rating of partnership

12. Expectation of partnership
Section 2: Leisure Activity Involvement

1. Personal social life
   If NO: -- why?
   -- whose decision
   If YES: -- why?
   -- things do personally
   -- why partner does not participate
   -- whose decision
   -- source of conflict?
   -- ways to cope

Section 3: Christian/Gay Activity Involvement and the Church

1. Religious?

2. Self-definition of 'Christian'

3. Self-definition of 'Gay Christian'

4. Dissonance of 'Christian' and 'Gay'

5. How Christianity makes a difference in partnership.

6. Local church
   If NO: -- been there?
   -- why not now?
   If YES: -- activities participate in
   -- why these activities
   -- hours per week on them
   -- view on homosexuality
   -- church's attitude towards homosexuality
   -- own homosexuality known to church?
     If NO: -- why
     If YES: -- how
     -- reaction
     -- ways to cope
     -- Christian community in general

7. Gay Christian groups outside local church
   -- If NO: -- been affiliated?
     -- why not now
   -- If YES: -- which one(s)
     -- nature of group(s)
     -- activities participate in
     -- hours per week on them

8. Non-Christian gay groups
   -- If NO: -- been affiliated?
     -- why not now
   -- If YES: -- which one(s)
     -- nature of group(s)
     -- activities participate in
     -- hours per week on them

9. Perception of Gay Scene
Section 4: Sex Life

1. Importance of sex in relationship

2. Still have sex with partner?
   - If NO: -- when stopped? Why?
   - If YES: -- average frequency on a weekly basis in past three months

3. Sexual techniques
   - present Table
   - passive/active role
   - whose decision?
   - Christian values affect sexual techniques?

4. Rating of sex life

5. Problems in sex life

6. Sexual exclusivity
   - personal view
   - conventional Christian sexual ethics

7. Sex outside partnership
   - If NO: -- why? Christianity?
     - knowledge of partner
     - If NO: -- why
     - affects relationship with partner?
   - If YES: -- ways to cope

8. Partner's sex outside relationship
   - If NO: -- probable reaction
   - If YES: -- ways to cope

9. Threesomes

10. AIDS

Section 5: Past Relationship

1. Past same-sex relationship
   - If YES: -- how many
     - duration of each
     - Christian in nature?
     - reasons for discontinuity
     - how they differ from current one
     - helps in current relationship? How?

2. Past opposite-sex relationship
   - If YES: -- how many
     - duration of each
     - reasons for discontinuity
     - how they differ from current one
     - helps in current relationship? How?
Section 6: Early Homosexual Experience

1. Age first aware of homosexual tendency
2. View on homosexuality then
3. Factors that shaped such view
4. Christian then?
5. Ways to cope with dissonance
6. Age first same-sex encounter to orgasm
7. Coming out
   – when
   – why then
   – to whom
   – reaction
   – in what way(s) affected by reaction
8. Proportions of people know about sexuality
   – family members
   – friends
   – If working, colleagues
9. How to decide to whom disclose sexuality
10. Regret being gay?
# TABLE OF SEXUAL TECHNIQUES

*To be completed in the individual interview*

Resp. no.: (       )

Kindly indicate in the Table the sexual techniques that you and your partner employ and their frequency.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Often, take place in at least 80% of your love-making sessions</th>
<th>Sometimes, take place in about 50% of your love-making sessions</th>
<th>Rarely, take place in about 20% of your love-making sessions</th>
<th>Never or Tried a few times in the past</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You masturbate your partner only</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your partner masturbates you only</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You and your partner mutually</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>masturbate each other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You perform oral sex (fellatio/sucking) on your partner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your partner performs oral sex (fellatio/ sucking) on you</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You perform rimming (oral-anal contact) on your partner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your partner performs rimming (oral-anal contact) on you</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Often, take place in at least 80% of your love-making sessions</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You perform anal sex (fucking) on your partner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your partner performs anal sex (fucking) on you</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body rubbing/friction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (SM, water sports, bondage, douching, fingering, scat, fisting etc.), performed by on your partner.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (SM, water sports, bondage, douching, fingering, scat, fisting etc.), performed on you by your partner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q.2 For cohabiting couples only

Section 1: Current Relationship

1. Current relationship
   – when started?
   – how
   – where
   – who took first move
   – first meeting sexual?
     If NO: – when first had sex?
     – why then

2. Living together
   – when?
   – why?
   – who initiated?
   – who moved?

3. Commitment/agreement at beginning of relationship
   If NO: – why wasn’t a need
   If YES: – nature of commitment
     – who decided on nature
     – why such a need
     – whose suggestion

4. Blessing ceremony to solemnise relationship
   If NO: – why no need

5. Areas of improvement in relationship
Section 2: Christian/Gay Activity Involvement

1. Attending church together
   If NO: -- why not, due to partnership?
   If YES: -- activities participate in
       - hours per week on activities
       - partnership known to church?

2. Jointly affiliated to gay Christian groups
   If NO: -- why not
   If YES: -- activities participate in
       - hours per week on activities
       - effectiveness of these groups

3. Jointly affiliated to non-Christian gay groups
   If NO: -- why not
   If YES: -- activities participate in
       - hours per week on activities
       - effectiveness of these groups

Section 3: The Church/AIDS/Future

1. AIDS
   - affects partnership?
   - makes Christian community more homophobic?

2. Christian community
   - towards better understanding of homosexuality?
   - happy with the development?

3. Future plans