THE CONSTRUCTION OF GAY IDENTITY

VOLUME ONE

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ABSTRACT

Drawing upon the work of McAdams (1988) and Breakwell (1986) on identity, gay identity can be conceptualised as a personal narrative that individuals construct in an attempt to impart meaning, coherence and purpose to the experiences they have had in relation to their same-sex sexual preference, and to boost their self-esteem and sense of personal continuity by forging connections between these experiences and imposing causality on them.

With the aim of accessing the gay identity narratives of a sample of gay men, a structured multiple-choice-type questionnaire which examined experiences relating to the formation of a gay identity was distributed to 204 self-defined gay men in Greater London. The 146 completed questionnaires that were returned were first subjected to frequency analysis. One of the main findings to emerge was that respondents reported having constructed their gay identity formation narratives against a background of internalised negative societal ideas about homosexuals and homosexuality, which rendered problematic the admission of a gay identity to their overarching identity and the attribution of a positive evaluation to this gay identity. Data were also subjected to multiple regression analysis, the major outcome of which was that contact with the gay subculture appeared to have facilitated the development of a gay identity that individuals could regard as personally advantageous by challenging the negative images of homosexuals and homosexuality internalised during socialisation and by allowing individuals
access to a subcultural narrative in which the development of a gay identity is construed as a worthwhile task.

Respondents' accounts of their gay identity formation experiences were generally interpreted on two levels, i.e., as reflecting the actualities of the events they described and, importing concepts from work on autobiographical memory, as reconstructions of those events within gay identity formation narratives designed to boost the narrator's self-esteem and sense of personal continuity.
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Dedicated to those who instilled in me a love of learning:

To my parents, Denis and Rose Coyle, and to the memory of my grandfather, Patrick McGinley (1907-1981).
A thorough consideration of the construction of gay identity requires the examination of a number of related literatures. As one might suppose that gay identity is but a specific domain of more global identity, and that insights into the nature and development of gay identity may be gleaned from a consideration of the development of identity in general, it is intended to begin with an investigation of the meanings that have been ascribed to the concept of identity and of some of the ways in which identity development has been conceived, noting en route any conceptualisations that might profitably be applied to the topic of gay identity. The identity literature will then be compared and contrasted with the literature on gay identity, which will be treated in depth in order to elaborate the sorts of issues and tasks that have been considered most pertinent to the development of a gay identity.

Although the present study strongly echoes existing studies of gay identity and is ostensibly concerned with examining the sorts of experiences that gay men encounter in the formation of their gay identities, the ways in which they negotiate these experiences, and the most commonly reported developmental patterns of identity, in the present study the implications that the retrospective nature of the data on which the study is based hold for the interpretation of the data are fully recognised and elaborated. Much
consideration is therefore given to the sorts of bias and distortion that may characterise retrospective accounts of past events. In accordance with this, it is recognised that what is being examined are gay men's present constructions of their past gay identity formation experiences, together with the possible sources, both individual and collective, of these constructions and the functions that they serve.

With these insights in mind, the aims, intentions and hypotheses of the present study are then outlined, and introduce a discussion of the design and development of the questionnaire that was employed to access the ways in which gay men construct their gay identity formation experiences. After a brief consideration of the sampling procedure that was adopted in order to recruit a broad cross-section of gay men for the study, basic frequency analyses of the data that were obtained are presented and interpreted. These are followed by more informative multiple regression analyses of selected major variables in the constructed accounts that respondents provided of their gay identity formation experiences.
CHAPTER ONE

IDENTITY: A CONCEPT IN CRISIS

"Identity has become a catch-all term that promises much, yet disappoints profoundly. It seems an appealing term, imbued with the quintessence of human subtlety, so that, when its underlying deficiencies are exposed, the embarrassment of having been seduced by its surface attractiveness makes one wish to protest all the more that it really is attractive or turn away in displeasure in having been so fooled."

- Weinreich (1983)

1.1 Introduction

According to Slugoski and Ginsburg (1989), the Oxford English Dictionary dates the noun "self" from 1595 and around 1638 the word "identity" came to refer to personality and individuality. The semantic history of the term "identity" thenceforth has been a tortuous one, and anyone who has ever engaged in even a cursory examination of the literature on identity will be able to relate to and sympathise with Weinreich's evident frustration at the ambiguous and unilluminative nature of the concept. It is necessary at the outset of the present study to make explicit the view of identity that informs the project, as this will influence the way in which the project is approached, the sorts of questions that are asked, and the ways in which the data are interpreted.
On this basic issue of definition, there is a plethora of alternative and competing interpretations from which to choose. Some all-embracing definitions have been provided by Cooley (1902) who defines the self—a term frequently used interchangeably with identity—as "that which is designated in common speech by the pronouns of the first person singular, 'I', 'me', 'mine' and 'myself'" (p 136) and by Klapp (1969), who believes that identity encompasses everything that a person may legitimately and reliably say about themselves, which virtually equates the concept with personality. McAdams (1988) on the other hand, insists that identity refers to a part of personality, but not its totality. Even the father of modern identity theory, Erik Erikson, seems uncertain. He defines identity as a "subjective sense of an invigorating sameness and continuity" (1968, p 19) but has been criticised for not being more precise and for being inconsistent about whether identity refers to a structure or configuration or a process (Kroger, 1989). Kegan holds that identity is concerned with "the way the organism and the environment in which it is embedded keep reconstructing their relationship.....[identity involves] a series of qualitative reconstructions of the relation between the subject and the object of experience" (Kegan, Noam and Rogers, 1982, p 107). Loewinger's related conceptualisation of the ego covers "among other things, the person's striving for meaning and self-consistency" (1979, pp 4-5) and, in a similar vein, for Jung the ego carried a continuing sense of personal identity (Stevens, 1990).
The idea of identity as a life story or personal narrative has been developed by Glover (1988) and McAdams (1988). The latter regards identity as existing in the personal narrative that we begin to construct in late adolescence or early adulthood in an attempt to answer the questions of "who am I?" and "how do I fit into an adult world?". Rogers (1981) speaks of a "prototype" which "contains a collection of features the person sees as describing him or her......such as traits, values, and possibly even memories of specific behaviors and events" (p 196). Markus and Sentis (1982) talk of "self-schemata" which are "generalizations about the self derived from the repeated categorizations and evaluations of behaviour by oneself and by others" which integrate "all the information known about the self in a given behavioural domain into a systematic framework used during processing" (p 45).

The existence of universal realities underlying all concepts of identity has also been questioned. The Western conception of the person has been summarised by Geertz (1979) as the view that the person is "a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment and action, organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively against other such wholes and against a social and natural background" (p 229). Glover (1988) too traces the history of the concept of the individual as unique and unified, hypothesising that it originates from the religious belief in the soul. Taking insights such as these as his starting point, Sampson
(1989) proceeds to outline various ways in which the universal applicability of this concept of the person has been challenged. For example, he cites cross-cultural studies which have uncovered less individuated views of the person; the social constructionist belief in the facticity and the social and historical relativity of the identity concept; and critical theory which attributes the prevailing concept of the person to capitalist ideology.

The multiplicity of identity is stressed at length in Rowan's (1990) treatment of "subpersonalities", which enlists in service of his argument the myriad concepts of identity used in psychotherapies as diverse as psychosynthesis, psychodrama, Gestalt therapy, transactional analysis and neuro-linguistic programming. He points to Cantor and Kihlstrom (1987) who emphasise that there exists within any one person "a family of selves", some of which are more central or more representative of "who you are" than are others. These selves are held to overlap, with the unitary sense of self being located at their interstices at any one time; the various selves across time and the relationships between them are seen as linked by the person's life story, which marks an elaboration of the concept propounded by Glover (1988) and by McAdams (1988). In his exhaustive treatment of the topic, Rowan lists no less than 27 different ways in which various writers have talked of different aspects of identity.
Weeks (1985) believes that the identity emperor has no clothes: he posits that the search for identity is fruitless as it involves the attempt to recapture the sense of wholeness or integration experienced by the infant at the time when it failed to recognise that there existed a distinction between itself and its world, and hence the wholeness that is sought is mythical and unattainable. One could go on interminably listing the many and varied ways in which different writers have conceived of identity and related concepts but in the end, one is forced to agree with Burns (1979) who, in his thorough consideration of the manifold conceptualisations of the self-concept and related ideas, concludes that "it is obvious that conceptions of the self system are often considerably vague, occasionally mutually contradictory (especially with regard to terminology) and lacking any definitive or complete statement" (p 28).

Breakwell (1987) points out that the attempt to define the concept of identity has not been helped by its being confounded with related terms such as the self, self-concept and self-conception, although she elsewhere (1986) states that often those who use such terms are seeking to understand the same fundamental phenomena and processes. She also notes that the definition of identity is determined by the role that the concept plays within an author's general theoretical orientation. In the domain of philosophy, for example, Baillie (1990) helpfully explains that the philosophical concept of identity, which derives from logic, is very different.
from the meanings attributed to the concept in psychology. Breakwell's outlook accords with that of Maslow (1968) who notes that "partly identity is what we say it is......It means something different for various therapists, for sociologists, for self-psychologists, for child psychologists, etc., even though for all these people there is also some similarity or overlap of meaning" (p 103). Yet, even if one were to reject definitions propounded by psychologists or sociologists as biased in terms of their underlying theoretical orientations and seek a neutral dictionary definition, the precise meaning remains unclear. According to the Pocket Oxford Dictionary, "identity" means "absolute sameness; individuality". It therefore appears to connote two opposing ideas. Although one may interpret these seemingly contradictory definitions as being meaningful on different levels, with individuality referring to individual, personal identity and sameness referring to the commonalities among those individuals who constitute a group, as Jacobson-Widding (1983) notes, this cannot be a simple and absolute bifurcation: individuality may be found within a group in terms of how that group views itself with regard to other groups, while Erikson describes "personal identity" in terms of "sameness within a person"; he refers to this subjective sense of continuity within a person as "selfsameness" (Erikson, 1959), and regards its essence as being a continuity in the development of one's identity between what one was in the past, what one currently is, and what one aspires to be in the future. Other writers too have focussed upon the importance of continuity
for identity. Breakwell (1986) adopted the continuity concept as one of her three principles which are said to guide the identity processes by defining desirable endstates for these processes. Back (1989) characterises modern self theory as being concerned with charting the individual’s attempts to maintain the continuity of the self, "to preserve the essential 'me' throughout the vicissitudes of social life" (p 223). And Jacobson-Widding (1983) emphasises the importance of a temporal continuity in the person's consciousness of their identity, centred around an awareness that he/she is essentially one and the same person - even if only in the physical bodily sense - who has lived through all his/her past experiences.

1.2 Models of Identity: Erikson, Kegan, Breakwell and McAdams

Attempts to describe the development of identity have been just as varied as the attempts to define the concept. In order to provide some insight into the ways in which identity development has been described and in order to trace the history of some of the concepts that will be used when considering the development of gay identity - which will be treated as a "special case" of identity development rather than an unrelated phenomenon - we shall briefly consider the concepts and systems proposed by a number of modern identity theorists together with some particularly insightful ideas drawn from a number of other writers in the field. The models of
identity that have been selected for particular consideration have not been chosen because they best represent the extensive identity literature or because they most completely encompass the most salient and frequently-used concepts in the area. Rather, they each offer to the general topic of identity, and potentially to the specific domain of gay identity, frameworks and insights that have been and may be profitably applied and elaborated.

One cannot examine the concept of identity without considering the theory of Erik Erikson, whose eight stage model of identity as a psychosocial concept remains the most widely-known contribution to the literature on the topic and provides an historical context in which the development of other ideas of identity can be located. His model has been described as being that of "a changing individual operating in a changing society" (Sugarman, 1986, p 84), emphasising the developmental dialectic that exists between the person and the environment in which they are located. The spur for development is said to be provided by the social context which makes a series of demands upon the individual, each of which provokes an internal crisis, the successful resolution of which requires the individual to make certain choices and decisions leading to the development of a new "ego quality" which facilitates enduring commitments to a more defined sense of self. Success in dealing with each crisis is heavily dependent upon the interactions that take place between the individual and significant others in his/her interpersonal environment, again highlighting the
underlying reciprocal-influence model of person-environment relations. Each developmental stage is described in terms of its ascendant task, couched in bipolar terms which describe the outcomes of successful and unsuccessful efforts at resolving the task (see Table 1.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE (APPROX.)</th>
<th>STAGE</th>
<th>CRISIS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 - 1</td>
<td>Infancy</td>
<td>Basic trust vs. basic mistrust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 - 6</td>
<td>Early childhood</td>
<td>Autonomy vs. shame and doubt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 - 10</td>
<td>Play age</td>
<td>Initiative vs. guilt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 - 14</td>
<td>School age</td>
<td>Industry vs. inferiority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 - 20</td>
<td>Adolescence</td>
<td>Identity vs. role confusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 - 35</td>
<td>Young adulthood</td>
<td>Intimacy vs. isolation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 - 65</td>
<td>Maturity</td>
<td>Generativity vs. stagnation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 +</td>
<td>Old age</td>
<td>Ego integrity vs. despair and disgust</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.1: Erikson's stages of psychosocial development.

Although each task has its period of ascendancy, all the tasks are seen as persisting in some form throughout the lifespan and so may require attention outside their time of primacy, either because they were originally never resolved satisfactorily or because as development proceeds earlier resolutions may be questioned. Stage five of Erikson's scheme (identity versus role confusion) concerns tasks which are most traditionally connected with identity formation and encapsulates what has become known as the adolescent "identity crisis". The fundamental task of this stage is for the individual concerned to develop "a conviction that one is learning
effective steps toward a tangible future, that one is developing a defined personality within a social reality which one understands" (Erikson, 1959, p 95). This is said to involve the reworking of the attainments of earlier stages into a coherent set of values and beliefs, forming an ideological world to which one can become committed. It might, however, be argued, that Erikson here describes a process of identity change and tasks associated with such change that may arise at points in the life cycle other than during the adolescent years. Any threat to an established identity which challenges the blueprint for future action within that identity or which is associated with change in the social context in which the person functions may similarly be said to demand the re-establishment of a realistic prospective component to identity. It may also require a coming to terms with the implications that changes in the social context may hold for one's identity, together with a reworking of or indeed the jettisoning and replacement of previous identity attainments, with a view to forming a new and coherent set of values and beliefs that are suited to one's new identity structure and level of functioning.

For Erikson, the essence of the various identity tasks is the resynthesis in adolescence of the identifications one has made in childhood. Weinreich (1983) specifies that basically the resynthesis task necessitates the resolution of conflicting identifications made with significant others, by which he means the resolution of the situation where one empathically identifies with
a person or group, i.e., one recognises that one shares certain characteristics with them, while simultaneously contra-identifying with that same person or group, i.e., wishing to dissociate from them and from that which they represent. Failure to achieve such a resynthesis is said to result in the development of a state of identity diffusion, while failure to embark on an attempt at resynthesis leads to the occurrence of identity foreclosure, where the person holds a static conception of who they are. The ease with which the resynthesis task may be achieved is said to depend upon how compatible the childhood identifications are with each other, but it might be contended that other factors are equally important, such as the individual's previous experiences of dealing effectively with conflicting cognitions. The nature of the resynthesis that is required may also be questioned. If it is a subjective resynthesis that must be achieved rather than a resynthesis that can be recognised by people other than the identity constructor, then the individual may employ synthesising strategies with aims ranging from the complete resynthesis of past and present identifications to the facilitation of their peaceful coexistence. In the latter case, to an outside observer, resynthesis may not have taken place at all according to any objective criteria for the completion of the process, but to the identity constructor, apparently conflicting identifications, having been reinterpreted, may have been rendered compatible and robbed of their capacity for causing identity diffusion.
Erikson's scheme of things has been heavily criticised on many fronts. For example, it has been attacked for assuming that psychological growth and health are only possible if the individual conforms to societal demands (Buss, 1979) and for being applicable only to "Western males living in a surplus economy" (Slugoski and Ginsburg, 1989, p 38). Various reasons have been postulated as to why the model is inappropriate for other groups. It is inappropriate for women because Erikson regarded a woman's role as essentially that of child-rearing, which leaves little time and space for them to make the occupational and ideological choices deemed necessary for the maximisation of identity potential. His scheme is inappropriate for those who are not desirable both socially and in the market place in that they may have a less appealing or narrower range of occupational and ideological alternatives to choose from, compared with those who are socially and educationally advantaged, and so the basis of the resolution of the essential identity crisis is undermined. Indeed, for some, there may be no alternatives at all, no identity crisis in the Eriksonian sense, and hence no possibility of identity achievement. Nevertheless, his model has been most influential and has bequeathed to the field certain themes and concepts which have been adopted and developed by others. It is worth examining Erikson's legacy.

One of the major features of Erikson's model which is also found in the models of identity theorists such as Loevinger (1976) and
Kegan (1982) is its use of stages to structure the development of identity, a framework which, according to Stevens (1990), is so ancient and so widespread in the conceptualisation of the development of the life span that it is most likely archetypally determined. Unfortunately - as is all too often the case - the rationale underlying this choice of structure is not alluded to, although the choice of a stage model is hardly surprising, given Erikson's background in the psychoanalytic field and the way in which his psychosocial model has been described as having evolved as a response to Freud's psychosexual stages of development. Nor is there much discussion about what exactly constitutes a stage, unlike in Piagetian developmental psychology which has been characterised by detailed argument and counterargument about the exact meaning of the Piagetian idea of a stage (cf Pinard and Laurendeau, 1969).

The concept of stage adopted by Erikson and by other stage theorists appears to share certain features with the concept of stage prevalent in cognitive psychology. For example, cognitive stages are believed to reflect qualitative changes in competence which are assumed to result from changes in cognitive structure. Erikson's stages could be similarly characterised, with changes in ego qualities resulting from changes in the ways in which earlier identifications are resynthesised. Erikson's model of development rests, like cognitive-structural models, on the epigenetic principle, with later stages of development integrating into their
structure earlier stages. Certain aspects of the cognitive-structural model which have been criticised as constituting an intellectual straitjacket and being inimical to the array of aspirations and orientations encountered in the study of a broad lifelong project such as identity development (Sugarman, 1986) are echoed to some extent in stage theories of identity, most notably in the idea that development is sequential, unidirectional, universal, irreversible and end-state or goal oriented. Applying these characteristics to Erikson's model of identity development, it could be said that although he saw the process in these terms at least to some extent, his view that the major tasks of identity development are present at all junctures in the identity project, although only at certain times do they constitute what McAdams (1988) calls "front-page news", means that he did not regard identity development as wholly and inevitably sequential and irreversible. Furthermore, his belief that "identity is never established as an achievement in the form of a personality armour, or of anything static and unchangeable" (1968, p 24) suggests that his model does not propose a definite, unchanging developmental goal, again distinguishing it from the cognitive-structural approach.

Research conducted on the stage model of another identity theorist highlights the way in which stage models of identity development may impose artificial structure and order upon what is a much more random and chaotic process. In a study of 24 young people, Kroger
(1989) attempted to locate her subjects within the models of various identity theorists, including Loevinger's (1976) eight-stage model of ego identity. She found that while the various authors had detailed distinct stages in the formation of identity, the profiles that she obtained frequently reflected more than one stage within a single model. So, for example, one subject's responses led to the subject being classified at the impulsive, self-protective and conformist stages of ego development. Also, expected relationships between subjects' stages of development on the various models failed to materialise. Kroger explained her results by suggesting that the boundaries between stages of development may be fuzzier than models suggest and that individuals who are in transition from one stage to another may have been artificially squeezed into discrete stages. Such an "enforced classification" approach is adopted in Cass's (1984a) attempt to test her stage model of gay identity formation: she asked her subjects to study ideal profiles of people in each stage of her model and to classify themselves according to how closely their experiences corresponded to those described in the profiles. However, she did not permit subjects to classify themselves as being between stages, although a number of respondents ignored this and insisted on their transitional status. Little wonder then that her study appears to provide evidence which supports her typology.

One identity theorist who makes explicit his interest in the transition between stages is Robert Kegan (1982). Perhaps more
than any other, his constructive-developmental model points the way forward in the development of stage models of identity - or, alternatively, provides a rationale the elaboration of which may lead to their abandonment - through its emphasis on transitional identity states and through the equal prominence it accords to process and structure in identity formation. Kegan's emphasis is on identity as meaning-making, on how individuals make their world cohere. Kroger (1989) characterises his approach to identity development as being founded on the view of "(a) self struggling to organize and make sense of its experience" (p 140). Identity formation for him essentially is an ongoing process whereby the boundaries between what is self and what is other are continually structured, lost and reformed across six identifiable stages. Kegan regards the self or subject as being the intrapsychic framework in which the individual is embedded and from which he/she cannot distance himself/herself, whereas the object is that which was once part of the self, i.e., its framework of embeddedness, which is relinquished and then becomes an object of the self. His interest lies in the continuous process whereby the balance between people's conceptions of self and of object are upset, causing them to relinquish part of the self and make it the object of a new restructured self in a new equilibrium. To take an example, in stage four of Kegan's model, the person defines themselves in terms of their institutional affiliations, so for instance one is one's career or one's religion or one's nationality. The person is forced into transition when the institution in terms of which they
define themselves fails for whatever reason to provide the recognition they seek and the person turns to other people to help with their self-definition, thus becoming embedded in a new framework of interindividuality. One now has one's career, religion or nationality rather than being it.

Kegan's model is attractive for several reasons. Firstly, he believes that we spend much of our lives developmentally out of balance, so he attends as much to transitional identity states as to the identity stages themselves. Secondly, he emphasises that integration in the form of a self-other balance occurs repeatedly over the life cycle rather than being the highest achievement in identity formation as it is in Loevinger's (1976) model, for example. Such an approach echoes the view of Erikson, who, in emphasising the resyntheses of earlier identifications required at the various stages of his model, also regards integration not as a once-and-for-all attainment but as a goal that is consistently lost and regained. Thirdly, Kegan specifies the dynamics which impel development, i.e., the individual's "culture of embeddedness" - whether this be the family, the peer group, the work setting or the love relationship - first acknowledges his/her present level of development and participates in his/her meaning-making endeavour and then provides the person with an appropriate contradiction which they can integrate into their self-other balance only by reworking that balance at a different level. As in Erikson's model, identity development is thus seen as a product of a person-
environment dynamic, with the person's social context making demands upon him/her that cannot be met while he/she remains at his/her existing level of identity functioning. Such process-based dynamics are not always elucidated in models of identity formation which prefer to emphasise structure, as in Loevinger's (1976) model. She has been accused of describing ideal type characterological portraits rather than meaningful developmental stages (Kroger, 1989), and Hauser (1976) has pointed to her omission of mechanisms of inter-stage movement and of intra-stage organisational principles.

Some writers have disowned the concepts of stage and structure entirely. Pine (1985) holds that the idea of psychological stages is misleading and that it is preferable to think only in terms of key psychological moments or incidents in people's lives. Although not rejecting structure totally, Breakwell (1986) compensate for the over-emphasis of others upon structure by conceiving of identity as "a set of processes operating in a principled manner" (p 23). The two processes which she pinpoints as being common to most models of identity are those of assimilation-accommodation and evaluation. Assimilation refers to the absorption of new components into the identity structure; accommodation refers to changes which occur in the existing structure in order to house the new components; evaluation involves the allocation of meaning and value to identity components. The structure of identity she characterises in terms of its content and value dimensions. The
content dimension of identity is said to comprise "the characteristics which the individual concerned considers actually to describe himself or herself and which, taken together as a syndrome, mark him or her as a unique person, different in psychological profile from all others" (1986, p 12). Identity contents are open to change, as is their organisation, which is considered in terms of the salience and centrality of identity components and their levels of connectedness. The value dimension of identity refers to the positive or negative evaluations attributed to identity components on the basis of social and personal value systems. The values attached to identity components also remain open to change.

Breakwell (1986) parts company with the cognitive psychological view of identity development in refusing to accept that identity maturation necessarily entails movement towards increased complexity or differentiation among identity components, which she believes is simply a function of the range of life experiences that a person encounters. Instead, she posits that the identity processes of assimilation-accommodation and evaluation interact over time to create and change the content and value of identity, not in a haphazard way but in line with certain principles which define desirable endstates for identity and which do not relate directly to complexity or differentiation. Breakwell outlines three such principles: the self-esteem principle; the continuity principle; and the distinctiveness principle. The identity
processes are thus said to operate with the goal of promoting within the person a feeling of personal worth or social value, a sense of personal continuity across time and situations, and a sense of uniqueness. Her model may be seen as according with Kegan's basic notion of an individual engaged in a meaning-making endeavour, attempting to make sense of his/her world and experiences, although Breakwell, in describing the operation of macro-level mechanisms of change that transcend the exigencies of specific developmental tasks or stages, is more specific in defining how the meaning-making task proceeds and - in rejecting outright the artificialities of stage models that Kegan's model skirts around - is perhaps more forthright and adventurous than Kegan.

In her consideration of the evidence for the existence of each principle as a guiding force in identity, Breakwell (1986) notes that the self-esteem principle appears to operate universally and that almost every theory of identity posits some variant of it. The evidence for the operation of the continuity principle is more ambiguous and this principle tends to be confused with the related concept of consistency: the two may co-occur but continuity does not necessarily imply consistency, which may be associated with growth and change involving inconsistencies between past and present components of identity. The evidence for the operation of the distinctiveness principle, she concludes, is the least convincing of all and it may only guide the identity processes in
those cases where it supports the prime principle of self-esteem. It is difficult to imagine the distinctiveness principle playing a major role in the development of gay identity. Rather, one of the major tasks in gay identity formation may be to cope with the unwanted distinctiveness conferred upon the person by an identity that is based on same-sex sexual attraction and is socially devalued. Only when a gay identity has been established and when the individual has succeeded in attributing a positive evaluation to it may the distinctiveness which it brings be valued and regarded as desirable.

Although reminders of the prime importance of identity processes are most necessary in an area apparently over-concerned with structure, the use of familiar structural images when describing identity can render an account more accessible to the reader and they should not be discarded lightly. Unfortunately, images and metaphors have not always been wisely chosen in writings on identity. For example, Cooley (1902) introduced the concept of the "looking-glass self", reasoning that an individual's self-concept is significantly influenced by what the individual believes others think of him/her, information obtained by studying how others react to him/her. Breakwell (1986) notes how the metaphor of the "looking-glass self" is nonsensical if taken literally: the situation where everyone acts as a mirror for others involves an infinite regress of mirrors, besides which, two mirrors facing one another produce no image. She warns that "(m)etaphors all too
frequently entrap the theorist rather than clarify. It would not harm psychology if the use of metaphor were banned" (p 15).

One of the most striking metaphors that has been applied to the subject of identity in recent years is that of identity as an inner story or life story, developed by Glover (1988) and McAdams (1988). In a broader consideration of the possibilities of self-creation, Glover posits that we each have an inner story, which he defines simply as the story we tell ourselves about ourselves. These stories, he claims, are our truth but not the truth, i.e., they are subject to omission and distortion through forgetting and bias. We can edit our inner stories through wishful thinking, fantasy and self-deception or through identifying with some aspects of the story and not with others. Glover's inner story is a psychosocial construct; it is not just an inner monologue, but is partly created when people talk to each other through the exchange of ideas. The verbalisation of the inner story may also serve to crystallise it and clarify it.

The concept of the life story in relation to identity is elaborated more systematically by McAdams (1988), working within the personological tradition, which is chiefly concerned with the study of the whole person in his/her sociohistorical context, using biographical approaches and focussing upon fundamental human motives. He takes as his starting point the belief that "(s)o that we may understand who we are and how we fit into our ever-so-
complex world, we begin in late adolescence and early adulthood to construct a dynamic narrative of self......Like stories in literature, our life stories embody settings, scenes, characters, plots, and recurrent themes. And like stories in literature, the stories we tell ourselves in order to live bring together diverse elements into an integrated whole, organizing the multiple and conflicting facets of our lives within a narrative framework which connects past, present, and an anticipated future and confers upon our lives a sense of sameness and continuity - indeed, an identity" (p ix). The underlying purpose in the construction of a personal narrative is further explained by Myerhoff (1986) who states that "(o)ne of the most persistent but elusive ways that people make sense of themselves is to show themselves to themselves...by telling themselves stories...More than merely self-recognition, self-definition is made possible by means of such showings, for their content may state not only what people think they are but what they should have been or may yet be" (p 261). The construction of personal narratives thus permits the person to make sense of his/her life and to impart to it definition, unity, purpose and a prospective component.

McAdams' concept of the life story as identity incorporates two important ideas from other writers, i.e., Kegan's notion of identity as a meaning-making endeavour, and Erikson's belief that identity connotes a persistent sense of sameness within oneself, an idea akin to Breakwell's continuity principle of identity. This
is not to say that everyone achieves this sense of continuity, unity and purpose. Like stories in literature, the life stories that people create may lack narrative coherence and consistency, be replete with cul-de-sacs and loose ends and lack relevance to the circumstances of their lives. For example, in the film "A Private Function", the wife of a small-town chiropodist who is frustrated by her lack of social standing expresses her unfulfilled desire for continuity of identity when she laments "I want a future that'll live up to my past. But when's it going to start, that's what I want to know".

Identity formation refers to the task of creating a life story that makes sense for the person, i.e., provides unity and purpose. This is a psychosocial task as the person must create their own life story within the larger context of societal stories or myths, which according to Levi-Strauss (1969), serve to integrate the various ideas of society's collective understanding of itself and which encapsulate the most salient issues with which a society is preoccupied. Echoing the personal-social dialectic in the models that have been reviewed, McAdams regards a person's world as setting the parameters for his/her life story and determining the amount of flexibility the person is permitted in their creation of a personal narrative. Identity change is couched in terms of the editing of the life story, which may range from minor revision to a rewriting of the entire text. Like the other theorists outlined, McAdams eschews the idea that identity is ever achieved in any
final sense, as he sees the life story as constantly evolving and continually open to revision, "a lifelong and dynamic process which, beginning in late adolescence, may undergo alternating periods of relative stability and marked change" (pp 47-8). Stability arises when the individual lives out commitments previously made and change occurs when the individual reevaluates past commitments and experiments with the possibilities of new ones.

The creation of a life story can begin only in late adolescence with the arrival of the Piagetian stage of formal operations (Inhelder and Piaget, 1958). Before that point, the child's cognitions are embedded in the present reality; he/she is bound to the concrete world of what is, and oblivious to the world of what might be. But with the onset of formal operations, the adolescent becomes able to conceive of the world in abstract terms and to reason about what might be. Around this time, adolescents may construct what Elkind (1981) terms a "personal fable", an heroic scenario about themselves which is centred on their greatness and uniqueness. The gay comedian and broadcaster, Simon Fanshawe, provided an appropriate illustration of his personal fable when he revealed in an interview that "At 16 I lived a rich fantasy life. In my fantasy I was a star, a great name, a talent to respect. Or I was a Brazilian cha-cha dancer with six kids and a husband who looked like James Dean" ("The Guardian", August 29th 1990). This personal fable is later cast aside as reality begins to set
limitations on the fable's limitless possibilities and it is replaced by the creation of a life story.

McAdams developed his concept of the life story in several ways, some of them plausible, others not. He believed that the life story could be divided into four major components, i.e., its nuclear episodes, ideological setting, imagoes and generativity script. Nuclear episodes are "specific autobiographical events which have been reinterpreted over time to assume privileged status in the story" (p. 63), perhaps as turning points in the narrative, similar to Pine's (1985) notion of key psychological moments or incidents in people's lives. Every story requires an ideological setting as a backdrop, which consists of the person's beliefs about how the world is and about how it should be. These beliefs are established early in life during socialisation and may be seen as enshrining Levi-Strauss's (1969) idea of societal myths. They are quite resistant to change, perhaps because change in the beliefs that form the basis of a person's belief system would affect the entire system. McAdams hypothesises that the questioning of and change in the ideological setting of a person's life story, which Erikson saw as an identity task that is especially salient in the adolescent years, leads to the most tumultuous form of identity crisis. Within McAdams' scheme, imagoes refer to diverse personifications of the self that act as characters in the life story. And finally, the story's generativity script refers to a person's vision of what they hope to put into life and what they
want to get out of it: the sense of "who I am" is said to be bolstered by there being a sense of what the person is going to do in order to fulfil the demand posited in Erikson's model that one must be generative, i.e., leave a legacy for the future, in order to achieve ego integrity. McAdams also includes in his model two "second-order" variables: thematic lines and narrative complexity. Thematic lines are described as recurrent content clusters in the life story and narrative complexity refers to how differentiated and integrated individual life stories are, i.e., the extent to which stories on one hand incorporate many elements and make many distinctions and on the other make many connections among the various elements and synthesise them within hierarchical patterns of organisation.

Most of these elaborations have an intuitive appeal and one can imagine how a personal narrative could be descriptively analysed in these terms. But McAdams goes on to extend his vision in ways that are unnecessary and that illustrate the wisdom of Breakwell's (1986) warning against the use of metaphor in psychology. For example, he undermines the simplicity of his idea by introducing Bakan's (1966) concepts of agency and communion as dominant thematic lines in most people's life stories, where they appear as themes of intimacy and power. On what he bases this assertion is never made clear. Furthermore, he attempts to classify life stories according to whether they exhibit the characteristics of classic comedy, romance, tragedy or irony and whether their
thematic content can be construed in terms of one or more of the five "generic plots" found in narratives as outlined by Elsbree (1982). This, together with the taxonomy of imagoes that McAdams constructs based on Greek gods and goddesses, leads Rowan (1990) to describe the treatise as "a mish-mash which I for one cannot take seriously. This is a great pity, because up to that point McAdams was making a good deal of sense and exhibiting a very encouraging sense of connections and meaningful networks" (p 165).

It appears to be the case that McAdams takes his literary metaphor for identity a little too literally and overextends it, attempting to force the broad diversity that may be found in personal narratives into restrictive structure and content-based categories. And even if the categorisation were legitimate, the purpose of such a taxonomical enterprise is unclear. It would simply undermine the potential for emphasising process inherent in his use of such a broad and all-embracing concept of identity as the life story, and instead stress structural and content-related concerns. Then again, that he should seek to concentrate on structure is not surprising, given that one of the major questions to which he seeks an answer is "what is the content and structure of the identity configuration which binds together a particular person's past, present, and future and provides his or her life with unity and purpose?" (p 17). In order to answer this question, he needed to address structural issues, but at the expense of a satisfactory treatment of the process-linked questions of why life stories are
developed and what the processes are that shape their development. He outlines in very general terms the functions that stories perform on a social and an individual level but fails to distil from these the essential functions that life stories perform and which motivate individuals to construct life stories in the first place. Amassing insights from sources as diverse as Plato, Aristotle, Dryden, the Romantic poets, Freud, and Bettelheim, he notes that stories have been described as distorted representations of the material world; as lessons on how the world and the relations between its inhabitants ought to be, on how we should live, on what values we should hold, on what is right and what is wrong; and as sources of psychological truth and of social and individual integration and synthesis, part of which entails the integration of disconnected elements and segments of information into a more cohesive representation. Impressive though this review is, it is not clear which function he believes best applies to the life stories that individuals construct. Nor is sufficient consideration given to the processes whereby life stories are constructed and changed. By ignoring these concerns, McAdams fails to realise the potential that his conceiving of identity in terms of a life story might have to unite into one framework some of the most insightful ideas from other conceptualisations of identity and to contextualise identity processes that other authors have investigated.
1.3 Personal and Social Identity

Before attempting to synthesise within one framework the major elements in existing identity literature, it is necessary first to consider some remaining concepts and controversies that have not yet been examined. There is a tendency in much writing on identity to dichotomise the concept into personal and social or collective identity (Weinreich, 1983; Zavalloni, 1983). In the study of gay identity, such concepts have particular relevance in that, because of the societal censure which a gay identity may attract, the gay person when operating in many spheres of the heterosexual world may be forced to conceal his gay personal identity and assume a heterosexual social identity. An individual's disclosure of a gay identity to heterosexual others may be viewed as a process whereby he brings his social identity into line with his personal identity before increasing proportions of his social world.

The interpenetration of self and society has long been recognised, has already been stressed in the conceptualisations of identity outlined, and has been used as the cornerstone of theories of self by such seminal writers as Cooley and Mead. Cooley (1902) explicitly states that "self and society are twin born" (p 5), mutually defining each other and acting as points of reference for one another. It was he who first pointed out the importance of subjectively interpreted feedback about the self from others as a main source of data about the self. In his very similar theory,
Mead (1934) argues that the self-concept arises out of the individual's concern about how others react to him/her. A composite idea of how others respond to the self is distilled from the person's history of interpersonal experiences in the form of a "generalized other", which acts as an internal regulator of behaviour. Thus the individual comes to respond to himself/herself and to develop self-attitudes consistent with the responses and attitudes that others in his/her world have towards him/her. Burns (1979) interprets Mead's writings as suggesting that the self is composed of numerous "elementary selves" which reflect aspects of the social process. Modern writers would refer to these elementary selves as "social identities" which link the self and society, as opposed to personal identity, which is regarded as that which is independent of social determination, "a creative product of purposive action and intentional judgement" (Breakwell, 1987, p 98). Tajfel (1978) defines social identity as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and the emotional significance attached to that membership." For Turner and Giles (1981), social identity represents "the sum total of a person's social identifications, where the latter represent specific social categorizations internalized to become a cognitive component of the self-concept". Dashefsky and Shapiro (1974) regard the term as referring to "how others identify the person in terms of broad social categories of attributes, such as age, occupation or ethnicity"; this definition treats social identity
as an externally designated phenomenon in contrast to the other two which view it as an aspect of identity that is subjectively recognised by the individual. Although the concept of social identity is therefore not unitary in terms of definition, the Dashefsky and Shapiro viewpoint is not the one which is most commonly adopted as, if the individual is not aware of the social categories in terms of which others identify him/her, this will not influence the way in which he/she regards or thinks about himself/herself.

Weinreich (1983) incorporates this dimension into his bipartite concept of social identity which he views as encompassing what he terms "alter-ascribed social identity", i.e., the categorisation of the person as a member of a social group or category by another and the evaluative connotations which this ascription holds, and "ego-recognized social identity", i.e., the person's own recognition of their membership of a social group or category. He outlines the possibility of identity problems arising where a mismatch occurs between an alter-ascribed social identity and an ego-recognized one, i.e., where the person does not recognise or denies membership of a group or category. This may result from incorrect categorisation by another person or from the individual's desire to "pass" or adopt a different social identity from that which he/she usually holds, a possibility that is most pertinent to the study of the management of a socially devalued identity such as gay identity.
The concepts of personal and social identity cannot be treated as if they were unrelated and many writers point to the necessity of recognising that "society constitutes and inhabits the very core of whatever passes for personhood: each is interpenetrated by the other" (Sampson, 1989), i.e., there exists a systematic interrelationship between the two. In Eriksonian terms, an interaction between the needs and capacities of the individual and the demands and rewards of society is required for identity formation to occur. Back (1989) holds that the modernist movement emphasises the social aspect of identity formation in regarding the self as "created and maintained through social interaction" (p 224), but acknowledges that throughout this process, a personal "individual self is subjectively preserved" (ibid.). Harre (1984) also subscribes to this position, but believes the tasks involved in constructing a social and personal identity to be a potential cause of conflict, in that the development of a social identity requires the individual to carve a place in the established order, while personal identity demands that one differentiate oneself in some way from the established order and create a sense of uniqueness. Jacobson-Widding (1983) believes that an interrelationship between personal and social identity is vital to the experiencing of Eriksonian selfsameness. She singles out a definition of identity by Erikson as encompassing both dimensions, i.e., "(t)he term 'identity' expresses such a mutual relation in that it connotes both a persistent sameness within oneself (selfsameness) and a persistent sharing of some kind of essential
character with others" (Erikson, 1959). In her view, this
definition denotes "culture", i.e., commonly held values and their
expression, which plays a major role in the construction of an
image of the self in that it attempts to guide self-other
relations. She points out that the sort of face-to-face
interaction experiences that one would regard as the building
blocks of personal identity must be interpreted by the person in
the light of prevailing cultural values, and herein locates the
core of the interrelationship between personal and social
identities. The Eriksonian term which she employs to connote both
the selfsameness of personal identity and the sharing of some
essential character with others involved in social identity, is
"inner identity", which is essentially a psychosocial construct,
comprised of personal experiences of face-to-face interaction, the
values inherent in these experiences and the retrospective feeling
of "fit" between these dimensions.

The personal versus social bifurcation is also postulated and
examined by Zavalloni (1983) who sees it as mirroring the
relationship between the internal and external world and hence
requiring an examination of intrapsychic and interpsychic processes
for its investigation. She nominates a wide variety of domains as
necessary areas of study in the understanding of the interaction
between personal and social identity, e.g., "thought and language,
cognition and affect, personal motivation and world view" (p 206).
The relationship between the two is not wholly unidirectional in
that a social identity helps generate an individual system of beliefs and feelings about the self, others and the social world, i.e., it influences the formation of a personal identity while providing the means for its own development.

The distinction between personal and social identity and the attempt to integrate the two are regarded by Breakwell (1987) as artificialities, the result of modelling identity at only one moment in time, by which she presumably means when either the personal or social aspects are in the ascendant, and ignoring the processes involved in identity formation. She likens the distinction drawn between personal and social identity by social psychologists to the distinction between conceptualisations of identity made by processual interactionists and structural interactionists.

The former hold that identity results from a dialectic between the individual and society which is reified in the process of socialisation (Denzin, 1977; Openshaw, Thomas and Rollins, 1983). Identity is also variously construed as the result of labelling processes (Ball, 1983) and constituted by attributions made by and about a person in line with the behaviours he/she exhibits in particular situations. The processual interactionist view of identity could therefore be summarised as the belief that it is situated, emergent, reciprocal and negotiated: there is a focus upon the active construction of identity within each spatial,
temporal and social context.

For the structural interactionists, on the other hand, identities are internalised roles or sets of expectations associated with certain social positions (Stryker, 1979). The self-concept is viewed as being given structure by the hierarchical organisation of these numerous roles (McCall and Simmons, 1978). This hierarchy can be described in terms of the salience of or degree of commitment to certain roles (Turner, 1978) and the extent to which certain roles are connected with others (Stryker, 1980). The same criticisms may be levelled at this approach as may be levelled at all role theory. In considering the concept of identity as role-playing, one is bound to wonder whether somewhere behind the roles lies the real person who is distinct from them just as the actor is distinct from any of his/her parts. It is doubtful whether the pressure placed upon people to conform to certain roles is so great that it does not permit them to bring to their roles something that is distinctively their own. Even the most constricting roles usually permit personal embellishments. This quality that the person brings to their roles may be regarded as a distillation of qualities from their having played other roles but it is nonetheless distinctive to that person: no one else will have played the same combination of roles, distilled the same combination of qualities, or applied them in the same way to other roles. Breakwell's (1986) own conception of the relationship between personal and social identity involves a very similar line
of reasoning: she proposes that as the individual moves through various social roles, adopting appropriate social identities, what remains when the demands of the social contexts which necessitate the assumption of the social identities diminish and disappear constitutes personal identity. In short, personal identity is seen as "the relatively permanent residue of each assimilation to and accommodation of a social identity" (p 17). It is unlikely that there exists a priori roles which the person simply assumes: each person brings their own past, present, hopes and expectations - their own personal identity in the Eriksonian sense - to their roles and recasts them anew (Radford and Kirby, 1975).

One final contentious question that is relevant in determining the parameters of any attempt to devise a unifying framework within which to conceptualise identity is that of the difference between self-concept and identity. The assumption that a difference exists is viewed by Breakwell (1986) as based on two questionable premises. Firstly, there exists the belief that there are many identities within a person, but only one self-concept, which ignores the work of those theorists who postulate the existence of numerous selves, e.g., Turner's (1976) real and unreal selves, the former producing actions which feel authentic and the latter associated with actions that are constrained by situations or involuntary responses; Fenigstein, Scheier and Buss's (1975) idea of public and private selves; and Zurcher's (1977) belief that nowadays the self-concept should be viewed as serially changing to
reconcile the person with the rapid social change of the modern era. The theme of what Goffman (1974) terms "multiple selfing" appears to characterise much of the recent innovative work on identity and the self. Back (1989) locates the rejection of the assumption of unity of the self within the modernist movement in art and literature. He regards it as a reaction to modern social conditions, specifically to changes in family structure, inconsistent child-rearing experiences, the elevation of flexibility and the ability to tolerate change and the realisation of the facticity of social norms because of the heterogeneity of modern lifestyles. He traces the origin and rise of the concept of the multiple self back to William James' idea of the self as consisting of potentially inconsistent layers and to Freud's normalisation of the multiple self in his distinctions between the id, ego and superego. All recent work on identity stresses its multidimensional nature in that an identity is said to be composed of many interrelated pieces of information about an individual, a position carried to its extreme in Rowan's (1990) treatment of "subpersonalities". Secondly, there exists the notion that the self-concept involves an evaluative dimension whereas identities do not. Breakwell (1986) asserts that on the contrary, identities are subject to both subjective and social evaluation, with the evaluative component of an identity being an intrinsic element in that identity. She concludes that as models of identity become more complex and all-encompassing, the value of maintaining a distinction between identity and the self-concept becomes
These writers are not alone in considering this distinction. Dashefsky and Shapiro (1974) uphold it in their belief that while identity is concerned with defining who the individual is, self-concept refers to the individual's reflections on their identity. For them, identity appears to be something akin to Weinreich's (1983) "alter-ascribed social identity" where the individual is simply the object of the attributions of others. Weinreich regards this as but one aspect of identity whereas in Dashefsky and Shapiro's definition it is possible to remove the active identity-constructing person from the identity equation altogether. If anything is clear from the examinations of identity previously considered, it is that identity results chiefly from the person's own psychological processes: everything acquires meaning within an identity context by being filtered through the individual, by his/her reflecting on experiences. It is this component which transforms attitudes, attributions, feelings, perceptions, etc. into an identity. To distinguish between the self-concept and identity in terms of the presence of "reflection" in the former and presumably its absence in the latter is therefore untenable.
1.4 Identity: Ordering the Chaos

Having examined a broad range of viewpoints on the nature of identity, one might say that identity appears to be a concept which is all things to all theorists, and it is tempting to agree with Breakwell (1986) when she concludes that "(s)uch diversity in definition means that attempts at direct comparison across theories have nightmare qualities, and meaning is masked by its cloak of words" (p 11). To be confronted by such an array of divergent interpretations should not be a cause for despair, as this outcome has been entirely in accordance with what could be predicted from Moscovici and Paicheler's (1978) summary of the area: "The concept of identity is as indispensable as it is unclear. This is why no attempt will be made to define it and we shall keep it in a zone of shaded obscurity, but the phenomena of identity, mysterious though they may be, underly certain realities which can be defined and circumscribed."

While the abandonment of the definitional endeavour is entirely understandable, given the vast diversity of approaches to identity which has only been partly covered in the foregoing discussion, such a tactic is unsatisfactory in a study which focusses upon the development of a specific domain of identity. In sifting through the many conceptualisations of identity outlined in an attempt to construct an outlook appropriate for this study, several criteria were borne in mind. Ideas were sought which incorporated or which
could incorporate the most salient concepts and recurrent themes identified in the writings of the major identity theorists and which could do so in an integrated and parsimonious way. These concepts and themes were defined as the view of identity in terms of processes as well as structures; identity as an active meaning-making endeavour, capable of integrating and making sense of a wide diversity of past experiences, imparting a sense of continuity to the chaos; identity as a psychosocial construct created by the dynamic interaction of the individual, his/her interpersonal matrix and the wider social context, to produce an identity that is both unique to the individual but which displays features common to the identities of others, rendering possible continuous mutual self-creation through the comparison of common identity-constructing experiences; identity as a multiform concept, operating on more than one level; and identity as an attainment of integration, meaningfulness and stability that is never achieved irrevocably but which may dissolve and be attained repeatedly.

The conception of identity which could most completely embrace these concerns was felt to be McAdams' basic concept of identity as a life story, and one stresses that it is his basic concept that has been selected, unencumbered by the burdens of hypothesised intimacy and power themes, imagoes of Zeus, Hermes, Hera et al., classic story forms or generic plots that only serve to restrict and complicate his simple and illuminating metaphor. It is proposed in this study to view identity in its most superordinate
sense as a personal narrative or biography that each person constructs in an attempt to impart meaning and coherence to their disparate life experiences by forging connections, imposing causality and making it appear as if their life has unfolded or is unfolding in a purposeful way. The term "personal narrative" (Cohler, 1982) is preferred to "life story" as it stresses the role of the person in constructing their own personal account of their experiences. Besides, this study is not concerned with accounts of entire life courses but focuses upon one aspect of the life course - albeit one which may pervade many other aspects - so to use the term "life story" to refer to these accounts would be a misnomer.

The metaphor of identity as a personal narrative embraces Glover's conception of the individual as actively engaged in a project of self-creation through the writing of an inner story which acts as a framework that renders meaningful and understandable the person's life experiences. The originator of the term saw the personal narrative as a story which an individual weaves from disparate experiences in order to maintain a coherent and consistent sense of identity (Cohler, 1982). It takes account of Gergen and Gergen's (1983) belief that a sense of self is something that individuals construct from a fragmentary series of relevant experiences. The personal narrative concept also incorporates Kegan's idea of identity formation as a meaning-making and coherence-creating process and accommodates Loevinger's notion of
the meaning-oriented ego. By forging links between events in a personal narrative, one can create a sense of continuity in one's story. One individual may choose to make his story appear smoothly continuous with one stage or event following from another so that the narrative flows as a unit. Another person, perhaps because her history is characterised by a series of discrete events or abrupt changes, may not attempt to impose a framework of smooth progression upon her narrative but may instead achieve her sense of continuity by interpreting the junctures of change as turning points in one twisting and complex narrative that is divisible into identifiable chapters. Either way, the conceptualisation of identity as a personal narrative can be seen to admit the notion of continuity or selfsameness that is so central to many models of identity. With the idea of continuity as a goal in the creation of the personal narrative, we move into the realm of the principles which motivate the production of the story and which specify the endstates sought. Employing Breakwell's proposition, it can be hypothesised that as well as aiming to promote continuity, the construction of a personal narrative may also serve to boost self-esteem and engender a feeling of distinctiveness, although these attainments are never immutable as self-relevant material which may threaten continuity, self-esteem and distinctiveness may at any time demand to be assimilated in some way into the personal narrative.
Increased self-esteem may be viewed as a by-product of the sense of unity and purpose promoted by the identity-formation project itself but it may also be construed as an independent outcome of being permitted to reinterpret events and experiences which may have been detrimental to self-esteem in such a way that their deleterious effect is minimised. This reinterpretation of problematic events has been recognised by Pearlin and Schooler (1978) as an effective strategy for coping with life exigencies. Clearly, the extent to which the application of this strategy is possible depends on factors such as the nature of the event and the support that one can elicit from credible others for one's reinterpretation.

A feeling of distinctiveness may be achieved through the creation of a personal narrative because, as McAdams points out, the resultant story will be like no other story, like some other stories and like all other stories. Each story will offer something unique that will not be found in an identical form in any other story; stories will however feature recurrent patterns and marked similarities; and all stories will share a superordinate form which allows them to be classified as stories. Translating this in terms of life experiences, it could be said that any personal narrative is like all others because there are certain life experiences which all people encounter in some form and which may feature as a common element in all stories. A personal narrative is like some others because certain groups of people will
have experiences that are specific to their group and which may inform the stories which they weave about themselves, or because certain experiences, although available to all people, are more important to some than to others and so may feature in the stories of some people and not in the stories of all people. And finally, each person may encounter unusual events specific to them or may place idiosyncratic interpretations upon common events or may have a unique combination of experiences which renders their personal narrative distinct and makes it specifically theirs.

The emphasis placed upon Breakwell's principles of identity within the expanded conceptualisation of the life story begs the question of why her model of identity is not used solely but is instead allied to the concept of identity as a personal narrative. The answer lies in what the narrative concept adds to her model. In her attempt to redress the imbalance between structure and process in previous models of identity, she meticulously elaborates her identity processes but rather neglects identity structure. Eschewing the use of the stage formula that characterises the writings of many identity theorists, she replaces this structural device with a concentration upon identity components, organised within the identity structure in terms of their salience and centrality within identity, which are largely determined by the extent to which they further the aims of the identity principles. The major advantage of positing a non-specific identity structure is that the processes that govern its nature and form can be
applied to identity components of any sort, thus permitting the model both to transcend and to outlive the concerns of stage models that are linked to specific events and experiences. But structural metaphors have long acted as aids to the understanding of identity, and their ability to illuminate the treatment of a potentially complex concept should not be ignored. Certainly, some structural metaphors have not been particularly well-chosen but that is not a sufficient reason for shunning their use entirely. The advantage of allying the narrative concept with Breakwell's model is that it makes specific and easily understandable the framework within which are organised the components that lie at the heart of identity, while remaining compatible with the valuable process-based emphases within her model, and with the endeavour to develop a model of identity that can transcend specific identity components. Viewing the alliance from the other side, the application of Breakwell's identity principles and processes to McAdams' concept of identity as a life story expands the latter's concept into a proper model. Even before it was decided to denude the notion of identity as a life story of its elaborations and to retain only the essential metaphor, it is debatable whether it could properly be considered a model at all, as it is difficult to discern within it any coherent, credible and specific accounts of how life stories develop and are directed, without which its predictive capacities are severely diminished. With its incorporation into Breakwell's model, these shortcomings are rectified.
The previously-outlined descriptions of the relevance and operation of the principles of identity to and within the context of the personal narrative may be seen as impinging upon the areas of personal identity, which may be viewed as related to individual-specific experiences or interpretations of experiences, and social identity, seen in terms of experiences encountered on a group or societal level, but the position adopted in this study accords with Breakwell's (1983) belief that a strict division between personal and social identity represents an artificial dichotomy. It is held that identity depends upon the dynamic interaction of both personal and social factors. Kelly's (1955) model of the individual as a scientist helps to illuminate the nature of the personal-social dialectic: the person may be regarded as framing hypotheses about the self and about the relationship between the self and others and then testing these hypotheses through behaviour in a social context. The outcomes of these identity experiments then influence what is incorporated into the identity structure and in what form. In another example of the interplay of personal and social factors, individuals who are confronting similar identity threats or problems may engage in mutual self-creation by sharing their personal narratives, which gives them an opportunity to learn from each others' experiences, to be made aware of the options open to them, to predict what the future might hold, and to be reassured that they are not alone in facing their identity dilemmas and that others have successfully faced similar problems.
For the purposes of the present study, it is proposed that the distinction between personal and social identity is primarily a taxonomical artefact: these two aspects of identity often act in concert and, as Breakwell (1986) points out, it is only when they are in conflict that people become aware of the existence of the two components. Because the strict division of identity into personal and social components is rejected, this is not to say that the possibility of identity division per se is rejected. Rowan (1990) posits a continuum of dissociation ranging from mood fluctuations to psychiatric states of dissociated personality marked by fugue and amnesia, but his chief concern is with dissociative phenomena which lie within the range of experience of most people, such as "the roles and ego states and subpersonalities within which individuals perform state-specific tasks and life activities" (p 9). Such entities may be regarded as divisions of identity but they cannot be described as either purely personal or purely social; they contain elements of both to a greater or lesser degree.

In some contexts, people may feel that the self-presentations in which they engage contain only minimal elements of the people they essentially feel themselves to be, their "real selves", while in other contexts they may feel that they can be more truly themselves. Using mental algebraic Venn diagrams to illustrate these structural components of identity, a personal identity or the "real me" may be viewed a circle with which other circles
designating situation-specific identities overlap to differing degrees. In such a consideration of situation-specific identities, we have in essence returned to the concept of roles and to the arguments advanced earlier to counteract the notion that a person is divisible without remainder into the roles that he/she plays. Some situation-specific identities will admit more of the personal identity than will others, but seldom will a situation be so restrictive that no aspect of the personal identity can feature in the self-presentations made in that situation. Even when the person compartmentalises their life and creates separate life spaces in which they engage in very different self-presentations, this does not necessarily mean that they experience their identity as deeply split. The 1987 film "Mayflower Madam" tells the story of Sydney Biddle Barrows, a woman of high social standing who could trace her ancestry to the Pilgrim Fathers and who, largely unknown to her friends, ran a very successful escort agency in New York. When one friend who did know asked "Aren't you leading a sort of double life here?", Ms Barrows replied "Well if I am, they're both mine". Returning to our Venn diagram, the different identities held in the different situations here may be seen as overlapping with or even being contained within the personal identity but they themselves do not overlap. On those rare occasions when personal identity and situation-specific identities are not contiguous, this is more likely to represent a short-term coping strategy rather than a long-term adaptation - except in the case of dissociative psychoses - as the person moves towards the creation of what they
experience as a more integrated, coherent sense of self.

Of course, the nature of the personal identity, the situation-specific identities and the relationships between them does not remain static over the life course: these entities are in a constant state of flow and flux, changing as different self-relevant events are encountered and attempts are made to interpret and make sense of them by fitting them into the superordinate context of the personal narrative. Such a conceptualisation contains strong overtones of Cantor and Kihlstrom's (1987) belief in a multiplicity of overlapping selves linked across time by the life story, with the unitary concept of self or the essential sense of "who you are" located at the intersections of the various selves which reflect the essential self to differing degrees. Having already invoked Breakwell's principles of identity to specify the motivation underlying the creation of a personal narrative and the goals for which it strives, we may now turn to her identity processes to explain how the narrative may change in its movement towards those goals. The processes of assimilation-accommodation and evaluation can easily be applied to the life course. When a person encounters a new situation which has implications for their identity, there may be a desire to assimilate it in some form into the personal narrative because it is considered so highly self-relevant that a place must be found for it within the personal narrative, because it may enhance self-esteem or distinctiveness, or because it forms a logical continuation of the existing
narrative, can thus be comfortably assimilated and will promote a sense of continuity. Depending upon the nature of the evaluation, the identity-relevant situation may be discarded; it may be grafted onto the existing narrative either as it stands or after being interpreted in such a way as to render it more easily assimilable or more likely to promote continuity, self-esteem and/or distinctiveness; and/or the existing narrative may first be reworked so that the new identity component may be more readily assimilated, i.e., the accommodation process may be activated. Together with the consideration of whether or not it promotes continuity, self-esteem or distinctiveness, ease of assimilation is hypothesised to be an important factor in determining whether or not new material is incorporated into the personal narrative. If major changes are required in the personal narrative before assimilation can take place, particularly if they involve the story's ideological setting, the material to be assimilated will have to be so self-relevant that it cannot be ignored or else the person will need to feel that its incorporation will move them significantly closer to the desired endstates of identity formation.

The conceptualisation of identity or aspects of identity in terms of a narrative is not a novel approach per se. Murray (1989), Tololyan (1989), Wetherell and Potter (1989) and Young (1989), for example, have all viewed, described and analysed identity at least partly in narrative terms. The innovation in the approach adopted
in the present study lies in the elaboration of the construal of identity as a narrative into a tenable model of identity by alllying it with valuable concepts derived from Breakwell's (1986) model. Together, these permit answers to the questions of why narratives are formed, how they change, and to what ends, thus enabling the narrative concept to be employed not simply as a macro-level descriptor of identity - as it is used by the quintet of writers on identity named above - but as a thorough explicator of the structure and processes observed in any given identity in any given domain.

1.5 Gay Identity

Thus far the topic of identity has been considered in a general way, but the present study is concerned with a specific aspect of identity, i.e., gay identity. The ways in which identity can be analysed into its component parts have already been outlined, and some of the concepts examined therein could be applied to gay identity. For example, it could be conceived of as a social identity, arising from membership of a social group, namely the gay community or subculture. Yet, the effects upon a person's identity of having to attend to, assimilate and accommodate to the demands made by their same-sex sexual attractions and the revision that may be required in their personal narratives mean that gay identity cannot be conceived of in such a narrow way. Let us examine some
other ways in which gay identity has been conceptualised.

Firstly, it is important to acknowledge those writers who have been deeply critical of the concept of gay identity or more specifically of the concept of "the homosexual". Most studies which examine homosexuality assume that there exists such people as "homosexuals" who are open to description and categorisation. However, there are those who regard this assumption as fundamentally flawed, most notably Foucault (1981) and those who have enlarged upon his ideas (Hart and Richardson, 1981; McIntosh, 1981; Plummer, 1981; Weeks, 1981, 1985, 1987a). Their basic contention is that "the homosexual" is not something that exists out there in the real world, open to description or explanation, and that a gay/homosexual identity is not based upon a gay/homosexual essence that exists in people who engage in same-sex sexual behaviour. Rather, they contend, both the homosexual and a gay/homosexual identity are socially constructed concepts which originate in medical discourses of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and which were designed to obscure sexual diversity and to control those who engaged in same-sex sexual behaviour. From that time, if a person engaged in such behaviour, this was held to have certain implications for the sort of person they were.

A concise account of the deconstructivists' argument is outlined by Weeks (1987a) but he himself draws attention to the fact that although such analysis may be plausible, to those who have
categorised themselves as gay/homosexual or who have adopted a gay/homosexual identity, their self-definition is no less real and valuable simply because it is based upon a social and historical construction. He notes that the adoption of a sexual identity offers "a sense of personal unity, social location, and even at times a political commitment" (p 31) and recognises its utility in structuring a person's social world and in establishing relationships. His conclusion is one upon which the approach adopted in the present study is based: "(Gay/homosexual) Identity may well be a historical fiction, a controlling myth, a limiting burden. But it is at the same time a necessary means of weaving our way through a hazard-strewn world and a complex web of social relations" (p 49).

While one may acknowledge the arguments of the deconstructivists, it seems that the force of their analysis has not filtered down to those who are still categorising themselves as gay/homosexual. Such people appear to be unaware of the facticity of their self-definition, unaware that it is a means by which others have attempted to control the flux and flow of their sexual feelings and to limit their sexual horizons. Or it may be that people are blind to such concerns because of the benefits such as the simplification of life choices and social relationships associated with eschewing polymorphous perversity (who feels polymorphously perverse anyway?) and opting instead for a sexual identity based upon the most widely-known socially constructed sexual preference categories,
i.e., heterosexual, gay/homosexual and bisexual. Such a choice may be seen as part of a more general preference for order rather than entropy, for group support rather than isolation. A range of scores may be obtained across the Kinsey continua of sexual feelings and behaviour (Kinsey, Pomeroy and Martin, 1948) for a given population both across individuals and over time within individuals, yet people tend to make use of only a small number of sexual preference categories, forcing the possible breadth of their sexual potential and experience into a narrow range of socially constructed categories. Murray (1984) professes a lack of understanding as to why the deconstructivists decry these limited options, noting that "all social categories (folk and scientific) force the flux of reality into schemata. Just as every language uses only a few of the many contrasts of sounds humans can produce, so in any society there are a limited number of recognized roles" (p 19).

It is with the nature of the processes involved in self-definition in terms of the "gay/homosexual" category, together with the antecedents and consequences of such self-definition, that the present study concerns itself. While admitting that gay/homosexual identities are self-creations "on ground not freely chosen but laid out by history" (Weeks, 1987a, p 47), our interests do not lie with the socially constructed nature of the gay/homosexual category or with the question of why people generally do not create their own categories or spurn the concept of sexual self-definition.
altogether. Gay/homosexual identity is a subjectively real and organisationally viable concept for many of those who define themselves as gay/homosexual. It cannot be wished away.

Turning to those who have accepted the phenomenological reality of gay/homosexual identity, Troiden (1984) is one of the few writers on gay identity (or as he terms it, "homosexual identity") to make explicit exactly what it is he is studying. He holds that homosexual identity is a cognitive construct and a subset of the self-concept. He defines it as "a perception of self as homosexual in relation to a social setting (imagined or real). A perception of self as homosexual assumes the form of an attitude, a potential line of action toward self, that is mobilized in relation to social settings, especially those defined as romantic or sexual" (p 103). For him, the essence of acquiring a homosexual identity lies in the individual placing the self in the social category "homosexual", rendering it essentially a social identity. Cass (1984b) holds that homosexual identity "evolves out of a clustering of self-images which are linked together by the individual's idiosyncratic understanding of what characterizes someone as a 'homosexual'. This understanding develops out of an integration of the individual's unique interpretation of socially prescribed notions and self-developed formulations" (pp 110-111). Although this may appear to locate the evolution of homosexual identity within the person, she makes clear that if a homosexual identity that is fully integrated with other aspects of identity is to develop,
interaction and communication with others is required, of which an essential part is "the presentation of a homosexual self-image to both homosexual and heterosexual others" (ibid., p 111). This permits the development of an accord between how the individual sees himself and how he believes all others in his social environment see him, which Cass sees as essential for the evolution of a a fully developed sense of self as homosexual. The social aspect is stressed further in her hypothesis that gay/homosexual identity can be regarded in the context of the gay subculture as a group identity, i.e., in terms of "the perception a person has about self as sharing certain attributes with a particular community of others" (ibid., p 119). Therefore, while in her differentiation between identity, self-concept and related terms, her conception of identity is close to the ideas of social identity outlined previously, her elaboration of the concept of homosexual identity makes clear that it involves the dynamic interaction of personal and social factors, emphasising the artificiality of dividing identity into personal and social components for anything other than taxonomical purposes.

In her review of the ways in which gay/homosexual identity has been conceptualised, Cass (1984b) summarises the most salient interpretations as: defining oneself as gay; a sense of self as gay; image of self as homosexual; the way a homosexual person is; and consistent same-sex sexual behaviour. Although she highlights the diversity of meaning ascribed to the term, she believes that
most authors subscribe to the idea that identity is "the answer to the questions Who am I? and Where do I belong?" (Warren, 1974, p 145). In one sense this commonality is not very meaningful for anyone attempting to make sense of the range of meanings ascribed to gay/homosexual identity as it is so superordinate, non-specific and nebulous: this may be a common idea of identity in most studies, but the ways in which the idea is translated into specific processes are manifold. However, the commonality identified by Cass encompasses precisely the same questions that McAdams (1988) believes to be the essence of the search for identity and the principal motivators in the construction of a personal narrative, and therefore the most superordinate conceptualisation of identity adopted in most studies of gay/homosexual identity accords with the conceptualisation of identity adopted in the present study.

One of the problems with a concept such as gay/homosexual identity is that it exists in a field which is replete with terms which are undefined, which lack definitional consensus or which are used interchangeably. Shively and De Cecco (1977) attempt to ameliorate this situation and they usefully distinguish between gender identity, social-sex role and sexual orientation, all of which they regard as psychological components of sexual identity, which also includes biological sex. De Cecco (1981) provides an insightful critique of the term "sexual orientation", pointing out the flexibility and mutability of the entity to which it refers. To these characteristics could be added the impossibility of arriving
at an agreement about what it actually means. In a survey of research on sexual orientation, Shively, Jones and De Cecco (1984) report that sexual orientation is usually defined operationally rather than conceptually. De Cecco and Shively (1984) note the biological implications of the term "sexual orientation", which "suggests the presence of a directional sex drive that 'steers' or 'orients' the individual either to sexual partners of exclusively one or the other sex or of both sexes" (p 22). In order to avoid such connotations and to stress the fluidity of sexual object choice, the term used to describe it in the present study is "sexual preference".

Unfortunately, Shively and De Cecco (1977) do not define sexual identity itself, but for Larson (1981) the term connotes "the set of self-referential attitudes, thoughts, and feelings about sexuality that, taken together, is a subset of the overall self-concept" (p 15). Sexual identity he sees as being composed of gender identity, social sex roles and sexual orientation. McConaghy and Armstrong (1983), on the other hand, equate sexual identity with gender identity. Marshall (1981) posits five components in sexual identity, while Klein, Sepekoff and Wolf (1985) identify seven elements, subsumed under three over-arching components. Marshall and Shively and De Cecco (1977) share terminology and meaning on two concepts (biological sex and gender identity), yet ascribe different terms but identical meanings to a third concept, that which Marshall labels "gender role" and which
Shively and De Cecco call "social sex-role", i.e., the characteristics and expectations associated with the masculine or feminine role. Shively and De Cecco's concept of sexual orientation appears as one of Klein, Sepekoff and Wolf's overarching components, comprising emotional and social preferences and a heterosexual or homosexual lifestyle. The latter omit physical preference which, along with affectional/emotional preference, constitutes sexual orientation for Shively and De Cecco. Klein, Sepekoff and Wolf and Marshall have the sexual behaviour component in common, but the latter includes the factor of sexual meaning, which refers to the individual's interpretation of his/her sexual activity and identity and which constitutes sexual orientation when allied with sexual behaviour: this is exclusive to Marshall's conception of sexual identity. The components of sexual identity exclusive to Klein, Sepekoff and Wolf's framework are the superordinate components of the sexual self, which includes sexual attraction and fantasy as well as behaviour, and self-identification. That the only element common to the taxonomies of sexual identity outlined should be the basic concept of sexual orientation and that this should be defined in three distinct ways is a sad reflection of the conceptual confusion with which the whole area of research on homosexuality in general and gay/homosexual identity in particular is riven. It is notable that, in their endeavour to define sexual identity, none of these writers make explicit its relationship to gay/homosexual identity, or to a more overarching sense of identity. Cass (1984b) mentions
how gay/homosexual identity and sexual identity have been treated as synonymous but argues that a differentiation is necessary as a gay/homosexual identity is not entirely composed of sexual elements but in recent years has expanded to include, for example, political and social elements. She proposes that sexual identity be considered as "the individual's overall conception of self as a sexual being" (p 116) while gay/homosexual identity refers to non-sexual areas too. Although this point is an important one, gay/homosexual identity will be referred to in the present study as a sexual identity as to do so need not imply that the identity relates only to sexual elements but rather that it is founded upon the nature of the person's sexual attractions, feelings and preferences. A homosexual identity can exist without non-sexual elements but not without the sexual aspect.

One of the problems in defining what constitutes a gay/homosexual identity is that it may potentially cover such a large proportion of the person's life space, up to and including the totality of their identity. Potentially, the awareness of same-sex sexual attractions and the attempts to acknowledge them as self-relevant and personally meaningful and to fit them into one's existing identity may impinge upon all aspects of a person's world. Gay identity may thus be conceived of as the individual's construal of their sexual preference, their reactions to it and the changes that they have wrought in their personal narratives and in their relationships with their social world because of it, either
directly or indirectly. The adoption of such a definition points to a further advantage of conceiving of identity as a personal narrative, as identities or aspects of identity which relate to specific domains - in this case, gay identity or, more broadly, sexual identity - can be easily conceptualised in the same way as more global identity both in terms of structure and process. The link between global identity and gay identity is thus made explicit in a way that the treatment of gay identity as an isolated and singular phenomenon fails to do. The approach generally adopted in the past by those who studied gay identity appears to have been that gay identity was what they uncovered in their studies and that its components were enshrined in the questions they asked and in the issues they addressed. Seldom are the concepts and ideas that are elaborated in writing on general identity imported and applied to the study of gay identity in any systematic fashion. In the gathering of evidence for this assertion, the most obvious port of call is an examination of these studies of gay identity.
2.1 A Word about Words: Gay, Homosexual, Coming Out and Gay Identity Formation

As every specialised field is characterised by its own specific language, it may be useful to explain and clarify some of the terms that are commonly employed in relation to gay identity formation before embarking upon a consideration of the ways in which this particular domain of identity development has been modelled. Perhaps the most important word to begin with is the term "gay", the transferred semantic origins of which are unclear.

For some, the term is coterminous with or is simply a more modern or less formal label than "homosexual", but for others it carries different or distinct connotations. The infusion of sociological theory into the area of homosexuality in the 1970s highlighted the operation of social labelling processes and the social construction of homosexual identity through such media as social intolerance, legal persecution and the homosexual subculture (De Cecco and Shively, 1984). This led the then burgeoning Gay Liberation Movement to attempt to subvert the labelling process by engaging in self-labelling: thus "gay" was born as a concept distinct from "homosexual" (Paul, 1985). The "gay" label was conceived as
denoting a personal acceptance of one's sexuality, coupled with a dismissal of negative social stereotypes and attitudes. The term "homosexual" was rejected as a label externally imposed by clinicians and contaminated by association with the longstanding clinical concern with psychopathology and etiology. This differentiation is recognised in Rodgers' (1972) definition of gay as a term which is "(s)ometimes used of only the active member of the homosexual community, ie one who speaks the slang, buys homophile literature, is homosexually sociable, etc" (p 93).

These possible distinctions between the terms "gay" and "homosexual" have been examined in recent years by various researchers who have taken account of the rise of gay politics or who have simply wished to describe their subjects in their own words and who have not simply used the terms interchangeably or treated them as synonymous (e.g., Chesebro, 1981; Harry and De Vall, 1978; Humphrey and Miller, 1980; Kimmel, 1979; Morin, 1977; Morin and Schultz, 1978; Taylor, 1977; Warren, 1974; Weinberg, 1976). A "homosexual identity" is regarded as focussing on "an explicit act and then on its coincidental behaviour" (Chesebro, 1981, p 186), while a "gay identity" "identifies those who have adopted a particular world view or perspective of reality which is self-imposed and a self-defined determinant of the attitudes, beliefs, actions and even the vocabulary affecting human interactions" (ibid.). Thus, in Dank's (1971) model of gay identity formation which was formulated when the gay political
movement was nascent, there is no essential semantic distinction made between the terms: "gay" is simply regarded as an example of "homosexual" argot and may perhaps have been used by the writer as an indication of the degree to which he had achieved an "inside" view of the gay identity formation process.

Troiden (1977) differentiates between gay and homosexual identities and claims that not all men with homosexual identities develop gay identities, for a variety of reasons. For example, they may have neither the desire nor the opportunity to become involved in the gay community, or they may be unwilling or unable to become both sexually and emotionally involved with someone of the same gender. It is the fusion of gay sexuality and emotionality within a relationship context that he believes differentiates a gay identity from a homosexual identity. Woodman and Lenna (1980) state that many gay people regard the term "homosexual" as overly restrictive in that it focusses only on the sexual aspect of being gay and excludes the emotional aspect. These differentiating themes of active involvement in the gay subculture and the ability and wish to establish gay love relationships were repeated by Weinberg's (1976) respondents, but some also drew a distinction in terms of the connotations of an accepted and positively evaluated identity which the word "gay" was held to embody. One man, for example, stated that "'Gay' usually means a person who's accepted the fact that he's homosexual, feels comfortable with it, is somewhat open about it to other people and feels good about it" (p 349).
Likewise, Clark (1977) and Woodman and Lenna (1980) regard the term "gay" not as one which limits or restricts, i.e., its essence does not lie in the inability to love and relate to the opposite sex, but as one which emphasises a special affinity and feeling for and a capacity to love fully people of the same sex "emotionally, sexually, spiritually and intellectually" (Clark, 1977, p 73). "Gay" is therefore regarded by some as a term which legitimises homosexuality in that it presents it as an acceptable, rewarding alternative lifestyle and rejects the negative societal stereotype of homosexuality.

The positively evaluated identity which the word "gay" connotes is incorporated by some writers into their identity formation models as an element which holds certain implications for psychological well-being and development. For example, Morin and Schultz (1978) regard a gay identity as healthier than a homosexual identity which is seen as incorporating internalised negative societal stereotypes.

Cass (1984b) objects that the gay/homosexual dichotomy reflects the political stance of researchers rather than the subjective reality of individuals, despite the fact that the "gay" label can be seen as emphasising that the person's totality is not encompassed in their sexuality, which is the argument she proposes for not treating "sexual identity" and "homosexual identity" as coterminous. Although support for the gay versus homosexual
distinction is reported by McDonald (1982) among his group of 199 self-defined gay men, only a minority of respondents recognised it in the pilot study for the present investigation. The utility of the differentiation as an experiential organising principle for the group in this study is therefore questionable.

Taking into account the foregoing considerations, it was decided to use the term "gay" in the present study when referring to a sexual identity that results when an individual has had the opportunity to develop a personal acceptance of and a positive evaluation of his sexual identity, and to broaden the scope of what was initially purely a sexual identity, assimilating into it elements that are other than sexual. It was decided to reserve the term "homosexual" for references to the initial stages of identity formation when the individual is less likely to have encountered experiences, such as involvement in the gay subculture and in same-sex relationships, which may permit him to develop such an acceptance and evaluation. When referring to those junctures at which the individual's degree of self-acceptance and the nature of his evaluation of his sexual identity is unclear, the compound term "gay/homosexual" is used. In discussing the various conceptualisations of gay/homosexual identity formation, the terms used by the writers under consideration are retained.

Another term that is frequently encountered in the literature on gay identity formation is the phrase "coming out of the closet" or
simply "coming out", which is used in reference to the process of gay identity formation itself. An examination of the ways in which this term has been employed reveals certain themes. For De Monteflores and Schultz (1978), coming out refers to "the process through which gay women and men recognize their sexual preferences and choose to integrate this knowledge into their personal and social lives" (p 60), which implies that it is regarded as coterminous with gay identity formation. The term has been applied to specific events within this process as well as to the process itself, with earlier writers exhibiting the former tendency. Hooker (1967), Lee (1977) and Sawchuk (1974) regard coming out as a type of social gay "debut" whereby an individual publicly identifies himself as gay for the first time, e.g., by going to a gay bar. Steinman and Maclean (1975) echo the theme of social revelation in their definition of coming out, but do so in terms of the voluntary disclosure of sexual preference by the individual to "some persons they believe to be primarily heterosexual" (p 1). For Dank (1971), coming out is synonymous with "identifying oneself as being homosexual" (p 181), a definition distilled from his respondents' attributions of meaning which centred around the behavioural and self-definitional ideas of meeting other gay people and deciding that one is definitely gay/homosexual. Gagnon and Simon's (1967) definition of coming out also focusses upon similar concerns of self-recognition and social exploration. Troiden (1977) too includes discrete events such as initial involvement in the gay subculture in his concept of coming out but also cites
events that mark the culmination of a process of cognitive restructuring about one's identity, e.g., the decision to label one's feelings as definitely homosexual and self-definition as homosexual, while other events which he notes, such as the redefinition of homosexuality as a positive and viable alternative lifestyle, are clearly process-based in nature.

Others have adopted a more explicitly process-based view of coming out and have formulated models which trace an individual's progression through milestone experiences. The boundaries of the process remain arbitrary and nebulous, with Morin and Miller (1978) claiming that it commences "even before there is a realization that one is homosexual and continues long after that realization of difference becomes integrated into the personality and is gradually shared with significant others". De Monteflores and Schultz (1978) observe that many models of coming out order milestone experiences along a covert-overt dimension, i.e., there is an assumption that private coming out experiences occur before more public experiences. For example, in the model of O'Dowd and Hencken (1975), an individual progresses from a private cognitive awareness of homosexuality to behavioural acceptance and thence to public identification; in that of Richardson (1981), the process commences with the questioning of the personal relevance of a heterosexual identity and/or self-identification as homosexual and may progress to the disclosure of sexual preference to selected others. Not all processual approaches to coming out are so
explicitly formulated. For example, Hencken and O'Dowd (1977) choose to subsume their ideas on coming out within the concept of "self-acceptance" which inherently suggests process rather than instantaneousness.

Other writers have viewed coming out as an occurrence which may be either gradual or sudden. Crites (1976) fails to state explicitly what he means by the term, adding to the obfuscating terminological Tower of Babel that characterises much writing on gay identity. Clinicians appear particularly at fault in this respect: for example, the only attempt at definition made by Gershman (1983) is his vague statement that coming out "includes......the capacity to face honestly and openly the emotional problems that an individual harbors" (p 130). Crites, however, appears to equate the term with gay identity formation and states that it represents "a search for self-identity and a sense of community" (p 142). Because he regards the meaning of coming out as something which may vary across individuals but which is essentially located on either a self-realisation or a social level, the coming out experience may be reported as being abrupt and the result of a specific event (usually a sexual encounter) or gradual and not traceable to any specific incident.

One of the most inclusive definitions of coming out in the academic literature on gay identity formation is that of McDonald (1982) who quotes De Monteflores and Schultz's (1978) definition and their
translation of this definition into cognitive, affective and behavioural terms by stating that coming out "involves adopting a non-traditional identity, restructuring one's self-concept, reorganizing one's personal sense of history, and altering one's relations with others and with society" (p 49). The reorganisation of one's personal sense of history is a notion very close to the idea employed in this study of a personal narrative which changes in response to demands made by same-sex attractions. McDonald also summarises the most salient aspects of the coming out process which have been identified by various researchers, i.e., "awareness of same-sex feelings and attractions, initial homosexual encounters, participation in the gay subculture, labelling oneself as gay and disclosing that identity to significant others" (pp 47-48). However his assertion that "(v)arious models have been formulated in order to organize and interpret these coming out experiences in relation to homosexual identity formation" (p 48) suggests that he recognises a difference between coming out and gay/homosexual identity formation. Such an implicit differentiation is curious in that many of the theorists whom he quotes appear to regard the two concepts as wholly interchangeable, e.g., Crites (1976).

Other writers have, however, upheld this distinction. In Lee's (1977) three-stage model of the process of "resolving and announcing one's sexual orientation as 'homosexual'" (p 49), coming out refers both to initial social interaction with other gay people and to disclosure of sexual preference, and constitutes one stage
rather than the entire process. For Plummer (1975) and Troiden (1977), coming out is one stage of a four-stage model, while for Ponse (1978) it is one of an atemporal series of five elements which she terms the "gay trajectory" which leads to the assumption of a lesbian identity. For these theorists, coming out is a part but not the whole. Coleman (1982) formulates a five-stage model of what he terms "same-sex sexual identity development" and "the coming-out process", which appears to indicate that he regards the two as being synonymous. Yet, coming out is also the name given to one stage within the model, specifically relating to self-admission, self-disclosure and self-acceptance. Coming out for Coleman is therefore simultaneously the whole and the part.

McDonald and these other differentiating theorists may be legitimately implying that "homosexual identity formation" is simply the vernacular concept of "coming out" organised and interpreted in terms of the theoretical predilections of those who study it and dressed in academic garb. The differences between the academic's and the layperson's meanings of coming out are referred to by Lee (1977) who lays the blame for the conceptual confusion over the term squarely on the shoulders of the gay community on account of their allegedly inconsistent use of the term. The possibility that the academic use of the term is not sufficiently inclusive is not acknowledged. Lee seems to wish to impose his definitions upon those he studies rather than to reflect their definitions, which raises the issue of the degree of convergence
that exists between the academic use of the coming out/gay identity formation concept and the layperson's use of the same concept. Rodgers (1972), whose gay lexicon was collated through interviews with hundreds of informants at gay social and sexual venues, defines coming out as becoming aware of one's own homosexuality. This definition, which may be regarded as a reflection of the concept for "the gay man in the street", differs substantially in scope from the definition outlined by McDonald in that it includes only one of the five elements which he mentions. The definitions of coming out obtained from the 20 gay men who acted as respondents in a pilot study for the present investigation are more specific than that of Rodgers. Two definitions predominated and were sometimes mentioned in tandem. In the order of their frequency of occurrence, these were the disclosure of one's sexual preference to others - which alone constitutes Sanderson's (1986) definition of coming out - and the acceptance of and development of a feeling of comfort with one's homosexuality. The definition is therefore in line with the content of the coming out stage of Coleman's (1982) model of gay identity formation. The awareness element which solely constitutes Rodgers' definition was only implicitly employed by two men who referred to the admittance of one's homosexuality to oneself in their definitions.

The two aspects of coming out which were most frequently mentioned are noticeable in the extent to which they seem to differ. One would imagine that disclosure of sexual preference is linked to a
specific behavioural event, whereas acceptance of one's homosexuality is presumably more process-based and cognitive in nature. A similar definitional bifurcation is hypothesised by Harry and De Vall (1978) who note that definitions of coming out used in the gay identity formation literature tend to be behavioural or to refer to the defining of the self as gay or both. Examples of behavioural and self-definitional definitions include those of Plummer (1975) for whom coming out involves the arrival at a homosexual self-definition and the entrance into the gay community, and Ponse (1978) and Woodman and Lenna (1980) for whom it involves self-recognition and self-acceptance as gay and the disclosure of this to others. Lee (1977) holds that coming out is an entirely behavioural phenomenon which many writers have confused with what he terms "signification", i.e., self-recognition and self-definition as homosexual. Although a bifurcation along similar dimensions was noted in the pilot study, the definitions differed in terms of specifics: the cognitive aspect of the definition was related more to Hencken and O'Dowd's (1977) concept of self-acceptance than to self-definition. While Harry and De Vall's assertion that "most gay males use the expression coming out in a behavioral sense" (p 67) may be valid (a behavioural definition was marginally the most frequently proffered type of definition in the pilot study), their assumption that the behavioural event to which it refers is the commencement of association with other gay people is not. The predominance of the behavioural definition of coming out in terms of social interaction
among studies of North American males and the minor role which it played in the behavioural definitions elicited from the British group in the pilot study is curious when one considers that before it became connected with the concept of gay identity, the meaning most frequently attributed to the term coming out related to the debut of young women on the social circuit in British aristocratic circles. Quite how a term which refers to the making of a social debut retained that meaning when passing into gay vernacular in the USA but lost it in British argot is unclear.

The self-acceptance and disclosure elements of the pilot study definition belong at different levels in McDonald's (1982) definition: self-acceptance may be the precursor of the integration of one's homosexuality into the totality of one's identity if one is taking an overview of the gay identity formation process, while self-disclosure ranks with the concrete particulars of this process. However, the two definitional aspects are not necessarily as distinct as they may appear. Self-disclosure is not a once-and-for-all phenomenon, but may be viewed as processual in that the audience constantly changes: one may disclose to friends, parents, siblings, work colleagues, etc., and may even progress to the level of large-scale public disclosure examined by Lee (1977). This is implicit in the way in which the verb "to come out" is used with the preposition "to" as in "to come out to your parents": the common adjunct acknowledges the variability of disclosure audiences. Furthermore, although the act of disclosure is
exclusively behavioural, the literature on the disclosure of sexual preference suggests that its precursors and consequences are predominantly cognitive and affective. For example, beforehand one must decide whom to disclose to, how much to disclose, and what their most probable reaction will be, while post-disclosure concerns may focus on handling the reactions of others and the possible alterations in social relationships and in one's self-conception which may result. The two most commonly cited definitional aspects of coming out are therefore not as dissimilar as they may initially appear.

From this consideration, it may be concluded that the term "coming out" is more or less simply a subcultural shorthand for the academic term "gay identity formation", with differences in meaning attributed to the former being arguably due in no small part to the lack of definitional consensus in the case of the latter. As it adds little to the non-subculturally specific term "gay identity formation", the latter term will be used throughout the present study, as it clearly expresses the link between general identity development and gay identity formation.
The relevance of studies of identity for studies of gay identity has rarely been fully appreciated. The study of gay identity has evolved alongside but not within the context of more general research on identity, the insights of which could greatly enhance any study of gay identity, but writers on gay identity have largely ignored and failed to build upon the insights of those who have studied identity in a more global sense. The lack of interplay between the two areas of study has also meant that certain questions about the relationship between the two have been difficult to answer. For example, it would be of interest to investigate whether gay identity could be regarded as similar to other realms of identity and/or to identity in a global sense in terms of its structure and the processes and principles which guide its development. Granted, some models of identity development appear to exclude gay men because of the way in which they are formulated. For example, a key component in the Generativity versus Stagnation stage of Erikson's model is the development of an interest in guiding and influencing the next generation, achieved most directly through parenthood, a life option not freely chosen by many gay men. Although Erikson admits that generativity may be expressed in other ways such as engagement in altruistic or creative activities, Sohier (1985) expresses the opinion that he speaks condescendingly of those who pursue such a path and points out that Erikson has referred to homosexuality as a negative
identity. However, Sohier's small study suggests that the gay men and lesbian women she examined possessed the qualities identified by Erikson as necessary for growth and development in the same measure as heterosexuals.

If writers had capitalised upon existing work on identity, one would expect to find certain characteristics in models of gay identity formation. If the concepts outlined in the models of Erikson, Kegan, Breakwell and McAdams were gathered together, integrated and applied to gay identity, the development of gay identity might be characterised as an attempt to synthesise and to impart meaning onto the components of a particular aspect of one's life space, i.e., the sexual, that lacks coherence, definition, intelligibility and integration, and that fails to meet an individual's needs for self-esteem, continuity and distinctiveness. This meaning-making endeavour might be described as developing through the construction of a personal narrative or through a series of stages, at least some of which are associated with specific identity tasks, decisions or crises, the successful resolution of which permits movement to another more developmentally complex stage, either directly or after a period spent in transition between stages attempting to resolve issues pertinent to these stages and thus to facilitate movement. General identity development or movement between stages might be achieved through revisions in the evaluations accorded to existing and prospective identity components, which determine what is
assimilated into identity and how existing identity structures accommodate it. Development might also be characterised and impelled by changes in the nature of the relationship and interactions between an individual and his social environment, specifically expressed in terms of changes in the relationship between an individual's personal and social identities. Moreover, there is no inherent reason why gay identity should not be usefully conceived of in terms of the composite model of identity outlined in Chapter One, i.e., as a theme which underlies much of a person's personal narrative and which takes centre stage in some crucial chapters, evaluating, assimilating and accommodating to new material and moving the storyline forward as it promotes continuity, self-esteem and/or distinctiveness.

These expectations may be regarded as a series of hypotheses about the ways in which gay identity might be conceptualised by writers who acknowledge the relevance of general identity development for gay identity formation in terms of macro-level structural and processual properties, and who incorporate these properties in their study of gay identity development. In order to consider whether writers have capitalised and built upon studies of identity, it is necessary to examine existing research on gay identity formation.
When one attempts to review that body of literature which concerns itself directly with issues of gay identity formation, what is immediately apparent above the quite considerable amount of work on the subject is its relative recency as a topic of investigation. A substantial body of work only began to appear in earnest in the 1970s, but throughout that decade and in the 1980s, a number of studies were produced which had as their aim the delineation of the processes and events whereby gay men arrive at conceptions of their sexuality and/or themselves as gay and how they cope with the impact that this has upon their psychosocial world. Some studies attempted to formulate these progressions in the form of models of development in much the same way as has been done in the fields of cognitive development by Piaget, moral development by Kohlberg and identity development by Erikson. Other studies did not seek to place any such general framework upon their findings but opted instead to mirror experiences in a more loosely organised way. It is as if the gay individual had been discovered to have an intrinsic legitimacy as an object of study rather than being a resource for the study of psychopathology or family dynamics. The rising popularity of phenomenologically-based trends in the human sciences and the championing of the validity of personal experiences, e.g., in the Rogerian person-centred approach and the radical theories of the anti-psychiatrists Laing and Szasz in psychology, helped to create an atmosphere in which investigations
of gay men as individuals whose experiences merited study were admissable.

Although the number of investigations into gay identity is considerable, the number of themes which emerge is not. Therefore, in order to examine the area, the progression of the ideas of one theorist will be charted in detail and other studies will be considered as they arise from the exposition of these ideas. The chosen theorist is Vivienne Cass, an Australian clinical psychologist whose 1979 theoretical model of gay identity formation provided the original impetus for this dissertation. Cass's work has been selected because it concisely and coherently encompasses many of the themes treated by other authors. It must, however, be borne in mind that although she intends to put her model to the empirical test and has taken some steps along this road (Cass, 1984a), her work remains largely theoretical, her attempt at testing her model being methodologically unsatisfactory.

Cass's (1979) paper outlines her model of gay identity formation, derived from her clinical experience. Her basic assumptions are clearly stated. Firstly, she holds that identity formation is a developmental process and she conceives of this process as proceeding through six identifiable stages. The stage approach is favoured by several other theorists, e.g., Coleman (1982), Lee (1977), Minton and McDonald (1984) and Troiden (1977), but unfortunately, as is the case in stage models of identity
development, all too often the concept of a stage is left largely unexamined and undefined. It is never clearly stated whether or not a stage in gay identity formation is a hierarchy of qualitatively different structures, as it is in cognitive developmental psychology. Weinberg (1984) criticises the formulation of gay identity formation in terms of stages, claiming that stage models, originating in the physical and biological sciences, are used to impart the "credibility, validity and reality" of those domains to the social sciences. He insists that developmental stages or sequences posited by social scientists do not correspond to any biological reality and are simply frameworks imposed on phenomena that may be real only for those who devise them. Cass's second basic assumption is that interaction between individuals and their environments is the basis of behavioural stability and change in gay identity. The emphasis on this dialectic is a recurring motif in the general literature on identity development.

The underlying theoretical orientation of the model is that of Interpersonal Congruency Theory (Secord and Backman, 1961, 1964, 1974; Secord, Backman and Eachus, 1964), which is closely allied to her second basic assumption. Interpersonal congruency theory, which is based on the tenet that stability and change in human behaviour depend upon the degree of congruency which exists in an individual's personal environment, is employed in Cass's model to elucidate the dynamics of inter-stage movement. It is held that
the individual experiences incongruency between his/her perceptions of self and perceptions of others as a result of assigning homosexual meanings to his/her own thoughts, feelings or behaviours and that growth occurs through attempts to resolve this. A number of models refer to the conflict which may exist between one's awareness of homosexual thoughts, feelings or behaviour and a homosexual identity (Coleman, 1982; Dank, 1971; Lee, 1977; Plummer, 1975).

Two points arise from this consideration. The first concerns the trend among models of gay identity formation for importing concepts from other relevant literatures in psychology. Weinberg (1976) regards the concept of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) as a catalyst for identity change in his analysis of gay identity formation accounts: he holds that when individuals initially suspect they are homosexual, this suspicion produces dissonance - because their conceptions of themselves and their conceptions of the particulars of the homosexual category appear irreconcilable - to which they must respond. Although general psychological concepts such as this have been imported, concepts found in the existing literature on identity have not been widely or specifically employed, although it is clear even from the brief exposition of Cass's model that has been presented so far that it shares certain features with models of general identity development, i.e., the (uncritical and unexamined) use of a stage framework, and the positing of changes in the relationship between

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an individual and his environment as a mechanism of identity change and development.

Secondly, Cass's model, in common with too few other stage models in this area and in the area of identity development in general, makes explicit the processes which facilitate movement between stages. This is expressed in terms of interpersonal congruency theory; e.g., progression beyond the identity comparison stage is associated with the extent to which an individual is successful in tolerating being different from others and in resisting pressure exerted by social norms. All too often, the dynamics of the gay identity formation processes are overlooked in the eagerness to describe the contexts of each stage or the nature of each developmental factor. Coleman (1982) states that movement occurs but fails explain how it does so. Troiden's (1977) model was assembled with five specific questions in mind, one of which concerns the nature of the events or conditions which mark the transition between stages. While he succeeds in identifying such events or conditions, he omits to elaborate upon the important question of how they enable the individual to move to a higher level of identity development. One is left with only half the answer and from a psychological point of view, the least interesting half at that. The question of what cognitive, affective and social as well as behavioural changes facilitate the developmental advances is left largely untreated.
Among those studies which attend to inter-stage dynamics, various mechanisms of movement have been posited. As previously mentioned, Weinberg (1976) views the resolution of cognitive dissonance, which he sees as consequent upon the cognitive and/or behavioural tasks involved in each stage, as being a major force for such change. In the same context, he also mentions the role of positive and negative feedback in response to the disclosure of sexual preference, a topic examined in detail later in this chapter.

Cass's avowed aim in constructing her model is to avoid the concentration of her predecessors on taxonomical concerns, i.e., the delineation of types of homosexual identities (Bell, 1973; Weinberg and Williams, 1974) and the identification of the nature of the problems encountered by homosexuals in managing their identities (Warren, 1974; Williams and Weinberg, 1971). Instead, she intends to build upon those studies which examine the question of how an individual acquires a homosexual identity (e.g., Hencken and O'Dowd, 1977; Lee, 1977; Plummer, 1975; Schafer, 1976b), which suggests that writers on gay identity formation may seek to build upon the work of those within the domain of research on gay-related issues in general and gay identity in particular rather than adopt a broader perspective and link their work with that on general identity development. The general thrust of Cass's model accords with McDonald's (1982) succinct description of the aims of models of gay identity formation as being the tracing of the development of gay identity from "an initial awareness of same-sex feelings
through homosexual behavior to eventual self-labelling, self-disclosure, and the final stabilization of a positive gay identity" (p 48). The themes of such studies have also been encapsulated by Minton and McDonald (1984) in their tripartite summary which involves the egocentric interpretation of homosexual feelings, the internalisation of normative assumptions about homosexuality, and the achievement of a positive gay identity. It is worth noting that within the empirical section of the present study all the core topics mentioned by McDonald (1982) and Minton and McDonald (1984) are examined, as well as many of those outlined in the foregoing consideration of the diverse meanings attributed to the term "coming out".

Cass's theoretical model itself comprises six universal stages of the development of a homosexual identity, which every lesbian and gay man is held to pass through en route to the goal of a homosexual identity which is fully integrated with the overall concept of self. The attempt to posit universal developmental stages provides an insight into her conception of a stage in that the search for universality also characterises the cognitive developmental conception of a stage. Individual differences arise in the length of time taken to traverse the stages. This specific topic is addressed by Troiden and Goode (1980) who examine the influence of behavioural and psychological factors on rates of gay identity formation. The possibility is acknowledged that not all individuals who embark upon the process of gay identity formation
will achieve maximal levels of development. There remains the possibility of what Cass terms "identity foreclosure", i.e., when the individual chooses not to develop any further, a concept which presupposes that the individual is aware that further development is possible. Also, alternative paths of development are posited within each stage. Stages are differentiated on the basis of differences in individuals' perceptions of their own behaviour and the actions which are consequent upon these perceptions.

This brief exposition of Cass's view of the nature of the processes involved in gay identity formation raises several issues important in the area of modelling gay identity which must be addressed. The first concerns the nature of the content of the developmental stages. Cass (1984b) observes that in some models of gay identity formation, stages tend to be outlined in purely cognitive terms, while in others, behavioural descriptions predominate. Her own model is confusing in this respect owing to the ambiguous and over-inclusive use of the term "behaviour", which she applies both to the cognitive/affective sphere and to what is more usually regarded as behaviour, i.e., actual conduct. Of those initial stages examined here, Coleman's is by far the most purely cognitive/affective, while Cass, Troiden and Weinberg appear to aim for a coalescence of cognitive, behavioural and social factors. The wisdom of the multi-factorial approach has been questioned. Although it is accepted that identity and behaviour are related in that identity becomes translated into relatively predictable
behaviour patterns (Cass, 1984b), their frequent confusion has prompted a number of theorists (e.g., Altman, 1979; Goode, 1980; McDonald, 1981; Omark, 1978; Richardson, 1981; Stoller, 1980; Weeks, 1981; Weinberg, 1978) to argue for a clear distinction between behavioural and identity terms. Such an approach may clarify conceptualisations of gay identity formation, but it must be remembered that it is merely a theoretical artefact and does not correspond to the dynamic interrelationship that exists in actuality between identity-related cognitions and behaviours, with behaviours leading to reflection and to the formation of identity-relevant concepts and hypotheses that are then tested in further behaviours, thus causing the cycle to recommence.

The treatment of social factors appears to be of great importance to most studies of gay identity formation. Plummer (1975) believes the social element of homosexuality to be paramount and identifies "the perceived hostility of the societal reactions that surround it" (p 102) as the single most problematic factor in gay identity formation, as from this arises problems of identity, guilt, concealment of stigma and the formation of relationships. McDonald (1982), noting that gay identity is formed in an anti-homosexual environment lacking institutional and social support systems, regards the primary task of the individual engaged in the identity formation processes as being the redefinition of the self against a prejudiced and discriminatory social background. Cass (1984b) acknowledges the importance of social factors, while simultaneously
warning against an overconcentration upon them. She views them rather as subsidiary factors in that her major concern is with tracing the cognitive restructuring which occurs on an individual level in response to changes in social structure. She holds that the expressed object of study should be the individual's perceptions of the world rather than the nature of the world itself. Drawing on the conceptualisation of identity adopted in the present study, it may be contended that a most effective way of accessing an individual's perceptions and interpretations of his world is through an examination of his personal narrative in which these perceptions are interconnected in such a way as to boost his sense of self-esteem and continuity. In common with other identity theorists, Cass recognises the reciprocal relationship between cognitive and social factors, "the dialectic between individual and society" (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). Habermas's (1979) conception of ego development, employed by Minton and McDonald (1984), also assumes a reciprocal interaction between the person and social beliefs and values in the form of critical evaluation, while De Monteflores and Schultz (1978) conceptualise gay identity formation in terms of a feedback loop which regulates the relationship between the person and society.

This emphasis on the interplay between personal and social factors in the genesis of a gay identity recalls the distinctions outlined earlier between personal and social identity, which it was claimed were different aspects of a more overarching identity project.
Yet, this theoretical dialectic thrust remains largely unincorporated in any explicit way into existing research and writing on gay identity which is replete with models that simply list the contents of a sequence of linear stages while ignoring inter- and intra-stage dynamics. Weinberg (1984) even seeks to preserve this stasis by advocating that future research should concentrate upon itemising elements common to all approaches to gay identity formation without ordering them as a developmental sequence. The advocacy of such a "shopping list" approach represents an unnecessary lowering of theoretical sights, resulting from an undiscriminating blanket criticism of stage models. The major research recommendations that may be adopted from this examination of the nature of the content of identity stages is that if a gay identity study aims to delineate a complete picture of individuals' accounts of the processes involved, it should attend to the cognitive/affective, behavioural and social factors which might influence the development of a gay identity. Further, it must be recognised that these operate in a dynamic interdependence and they should therefore be studied in terms of their interaction.

Another noteworthy feature of Cass's model is the fact that she posits several alternative developmental routes within each stage. She does not however outline the possibility of variation in the order in which stages are traversed, unlike Woodman and Lenna (1980) who clearly state that the stages of gay identity formation
do not occur in a fixed order. The idea of alternative routes within models is one to which much lip service has been paid but which remains under-utilised, possibly because, Weinberg (1984) would argue, it is at base inimical with the biological concept of a developmental stage which he claims has been imported into models of gay identity formation. Another reason may be that to include alternative routes is to increase the complexity of the model when the general aim is to achieve the parsimony of universal formulae. There is also the question of the extent to which individual differences in gay identity formation should be incorporated within models of the processes involved, and of how many instances of a particular developmental route must be encountered before it ceases to be an idiosyncratic detail and becomes an alternative developmental pathway. The lack of consensus around this question may have contributed to the general tendency to opt for linear-progressive models of gay identity formation, which again suggests that it is the cognitive developmental idea of a stage that informs the structural frameworks of these models.

McDonald (1982) directly attributes the paucity of studies which attempt to chart more than one developmental route to the prevalence of both the linear-progressive and stage-sequential, i.e., the cognitive developmental modes of modelling. However, these two frameworks are not coterminous and should be independently evaluated. The stage-sequential format does not per se exclude the possibility of alternative routes, as Cass's model
demonstrates. Yet, while allowing for these routes, her model is somewhat judgemental in its implicit terminological refusal to acknowledge the legitimacy of those routes which lead to a cessation in the development of gay identity before the final stage of the model is reached; this for her constitutes identity foreclosure. Minton and McDonald (1984) describe the same occurrence using the term "fixation". The possibility that a person has progressed to a level of identity stability which he finds workable and which satisfies his needs, or that he has moved as far as his cognitive resources and/or interpersonal matrix allow at that moment is not adequately considered, although Cass does recognise that an individual need not pass through all stages in order to create a viable, fulfilled gay identity. However, she believes that foreclosure occurs when an individual fails to resolve the tasks associated with a specific stage, although Woodman and Lenna (1980) insist that because a person traverses a particular stage, this does not mean that he will want to move on to another stage. These writers eschew the idea of neat typologies of gay identity formation. They propose that not all individuals encounter all stages of the process and that the negotiation of any stage does not mean that the issues related to that stage will not have to be dealt with again. Their conceptualisation of gay identity formation is similar to Erikson's model of identity development in this latter respect. The opinion that deviations from a single developmental pathway indicate immaturity, regression or fixation is again attributed by Weinberg (1984) to the adoption
of the biological notion of stage, which appears to be something of a whipping boy for him. Stage models are undoubtedly restrictive and are more useful as classificatory tools rather than as reflections of actual experience, as Kroger's (1989) research suggested. However, they become even more restrictive when a linear-progressive framework is placed upon them. This approach is at base incompatible with the conceptualisation of alternative identity routes as it assumes movement in a straight line.

Although many stage models break free from the straitjacket of strict linearity and outline alternative developmental paths to a gay identity (e.g., Coleman, 1982; Lewis, 1984; Troiden, 1977; Weinberg, 1976) they generally retain the linear assumption that there exists an ultimate or final developmental objective or an identity state towards which an individual is striving, e.g., Minton and McDonald's integrated sense of self, another artefact of the use of the biological conception of stage, according to Weinberg (1984). Kitzinger (1989) criticises those models of gay identity formation which she classes as being based on the tenets of "liberal humanistic ideology", i.e., the position which stresses the personhood of the gay man and regards his sexual preference as but one relatively unimportant aspect of the person; it rejects as limiting the process of labelling people and believes that the gay man should not be treated separately but seen as part of natural human diversity. Singling out the work of Cass (1979), Coleman (1982) and Minton and McDonald (1984), she criticises these models
generally for undermining the challenge which she believes lesbian and gay identities present to the established social order by assimilating them within that order.

However, as the policy of the present study is to set aside such macro-criticisms (hence the work of Foucault and is not considered) and to assume that most people do not wish to be revolutionaries but wish to carve out a quiet life within the existing social order (cf Milligan, 1989), Kitzinger's specific criticisms of liberal humanistic models rather than her general ones are more pertinent here. She characterises them as presenting individuals who, in order to follow "the proper developmental pattern work through the early stage of identification with the aggressor, through subsequent intermediary stages, to achieve the dizzy heights of liberal humanistic self-conception, in which the alleged deviance ceases to be of any great importance in the person's life and she or he becomes a creative, loving, self-actualizing human being, integrated into and contributing to the wider society generally" (Kitzinger, 1989, p 88). This quite accurate description neatly points to the two major objections that have already been levelled at existing models of gay identity formation, i.e., their linearity and the positing of developmental goals. Kitzinger explains why these goals exist and why they are of the nature that they are: models tend to be underpinned by liberal humanistic theory which regards the proper goal of individual development to be the integrated and socially useful state of self-actualisation. To
think thus is to ignore both the refusal of identity stage theorists such as Erikson (1959) and Kegan (1982) to posit a definitively-attained end-goal for identity and the basic flexibility of human beings whose life spans are often characterised by major shifts and changes. In her treatment of gay identity, Berzon (1979) emphasises this in saying that "(i)dentity is a moving, changing process, not a fixed, established point. But this is an intolerable truth. Our sanity requires a compromise. We select components of ourselves to relate to in awareness. We arrange them into a semblance of order and think of ourselves as this configuration as long as it makes sense to us and to those around us" (p 1). She thus simultaneously stresses the constructive, meaning-making and coherence-bestowing purpose of identity formation, together with the mutability of a sense of identity. As has already been outlined, this mutability has been held to apply even to the fundamental which underlies gay identity, i.e., sexual preference. Mead (1934) held that identity is emergent and so end points and goals are meaningless. A more practical endeavour would therefore be the delineation of the paths towards various levels of identity stability so that what is described are the processes which lead to the formation of relatively stable gay identities. Acknowledgement of the fact that these identities remain open to change after the attainment of initial stability may be made by investigating the nature of these changes with regard to specific phenomena. Lee (1977), for example, discusses the possibility of a gay identity becoming a
pivotal identity for someone who has made a public declaration of their sexual preference to a wide audience and has risked the consequent engulfment of their total identity by their sexual identity.

Having criticised models of gay identity formation for failing to import frequently-used ideas from the literature on identity development, it is somewhat ironic that throughout the foregoing consideration of the structures and processes that have been associated with models of gay identity formation, many of the criticisms levelled at them may at base be attributed to their adoption of just such an idea, i.e., the organisation of gay identity formation experiences into developmental stages. It may be that Weinberg (1984) is correct and that the adoption of this framework within psychology in order to structure a wide variety of developmental phenomena represents an attempt to ape the typologies of the natural sciences in order to impart "scientific" credibility to the human sciences. If this is so, the attempt is misplaced as it imparts only obfuscation and artificiality, squeezing the variety and richness of an individual's experiences into a narrow and restrictive framework and often imposing upon them such theoretical concomitants of the framework as linearity, stage-sequentialism and directedness towards one goal, that may be inimical to the diversity and mutability of the phenomena it purports to describe. To employ such a framework would be justified if it were held to represent the organisational framework that
individuals themselves employ to order the potential chaos of their identity-relevant cognitions and behaviours - as is contended in the construal of gay identity as a narrative and as an aspect of a larger personal narrative - but nowhere is this claim advanced. It must therefore be assumed that the conceptualisation of identity and gay identity development in terms of stages is a structural and taxonomical device that is found aesthetically pleasing by writers on identity and gay identity rather than organisationally valuable by those whom they study.

Cass warns that her model may require alteration in the light of changing societal attitudes and circumstances, although she does not state whether it might simply require alteration in terms of its content or whether the principles of operation that she outlines might not apply to new identity contents and would need to be replaced. This emphasises the way in which models may be limited by content specificity and it stresses the advisibility of focussing upon structures and processes, such as the narrative framework, the assimilation-accommodation and evaluation processes and the continuity, self-esteem and distinctiveness principles, that can apply to identity regardless of the nature of identity content.

Cass's warning is currently most pertinent in the face of changing societal attitudes towards gay men because of AIDS (Altman, 1986; Patton, 1985; Watney, 1987). The AIDS issue has implications for
gay men's self-conceptions both during and after the formation of a stable identity. Those engaged in movement towards such an identity must take account of a new and generally more hostile set of social pressures and prejudices than those who attained a gay identity in the pre-AIDS era. The latter group may find their identity stability threatened by having to react to the increasingly negative societal reactions to their sexuality (for an examination of negative attitudes toward homosexuality in the wake of AIDS as reflected in the press, cf. Armstrong, 1984-1985). The effects of the AIDS situation upon gay identity have been surprisingly overlooked amid a plethora of AIDS-related behavioural studies. However, as it provides a most apposite example of how changing social circumstances may affect identity, thereby highlighting the artificiality of end points in identity formation models, the effects of the AIDS situation on respondents' self-conceptions will be examined in the present study.

One further consideration to arise from Cass's preamble to her model is her stated intention to tailor it to the coming out experiences of both lesbians and gay men, even though she employs the generic terms "he", "him", and "his" throughout. Like many other studies of gay identity formation, the present study examines the experiences of gay men only; masculine pronouns have therefore been used throughout this review and in the discussions of the present study which follow, except where general processes are being considered not specifically in relation to gay identity
formation. Most models opt for a delineation of the experiences of one gender or the other, citing gender differences in identity formation as justification for their approach, e.g., De Monteflores and Schultz (1978) note gender differences in emotional attachment and of the timing of the decision to engage in same-sex sexual activity, and Woodman and Lenna (1980) warn that therapists should not generalise from the experiences of gay men to those of lesbian women. Basic differences in male and female sexuality are compounded by political considerations, most notably by the role of the women's movement in lesbianism, by lesbian separatism and by the existence of "political lesbians" who reject men as sexual partners primarily because of a more overarching rejection of the patriarchal nature of western societies. Such factors have no direct correlates among men. These issues are treated by Kitzinger (1987), who claims that gay men have produced little in the way of a political challenge to the established order and that what little they have produced has failed to command widespread support among the male gay movement. Although one might assume that there exists a large degree of solidarity between lesbian women and gay men on the basis of their same-sex object choice and their shared experiences of societal condemnation, Frye (1983) points out that there is in fact little reciprocal involvement between the lesbian and gay communities. Many lesbians have rejected the concept of a mixed gender gay movement on the grounds of what they see as gay men's sexism, obsessive sexual activity, phallocentrism and lack of political awareness (Stanley, 1982). Those lesbians in
Kitzinger's (1987) study who framed their identities in terms of radical feminism did not identify as "gay women" or feel any solidarity with gay men. One woman claimed that gay men are simply "what heterosexual men would be if they didn't have to present a veneer of civilised and mature behaviour in order to attract the women they need to service them" (p 114).

Cass's framework omits explicitly political considerations in an attempt to achieve cross-gender applicability. However, she later (1984a) acknowledges the existence of qualitative differences between lesbian women and gay men in the identity formation processes. Assertions such as that of Hedblom (1973) that "lesbians have more in common with female heterosexual than with male homosexuals" (p 334), together with the practical difficulties for any male researchers of gaining access to a group which may adopt a separatist stance with regard to men, have led most writers to attempt to model the experiences of one gender only.

This is not to say that there does not exist a degree of cross-gender experiential convergence or that an examination of the concepts employed in lesbian identity formation will not be illuminative in the realm of male gay identity formation. Both groups face the same problems of disclosure and of overcoming the heterosexual socialisation process and negative societal attitudes. This is apparent in Ponse's (1978) work on lesbian identities which echoes the themes of studies of male gay identity in its

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concentration upon the issues of secrecy and the subculture. The received wisdom, however, is that male and female sexuality should be treated separately, otherwise Kinsey (1948, 1953) and Hite (1977, 1990) would not have produced separate volumes on the two genders. It is therefore intended to limit the scope of the present study to male gay identity formation and thus implicitly to recognise that for women the lesbian identity formation process is complicated by their having to resolve issues associated with their gender in addition to issues related to their same-sex sexual preference.

2.4 Cass's First Stage: "Identity Confusion" and Other Initial Stages of Gay Identity Formation

Much has already been said about the structures and processes that characterise or that might characterise conceptualisations of gay identity formation, but little consideration has been given to the contents of gay identities as they arise, change and develop and are given shape and form by these structures and processes. In the exposition which follows, much weight is attached to the contents of various models of gay identity formation in an attempt to identify the most salient themes which will need to be incorporated into any research instrument that hopes to address gay identity formation, as it is through the examination of these identity
contents, their organisation and the principles by which they change that one may observe and infer the structures and processes that give shape to a gay identity. Note then that the aim of this review is primarily to present literature on gay identity formation that is relevant to the present study, to weigh it, and to extract its recurrent themes, rather than to criticise it. Much of what has passed for informed writing on gay identity and on homosexuality generally is so obviously underscored by quasi-medical and moral discourses (for example, see Moberly's (1983) discussion of homosexuality from a "Christian" perspective) that it presents a sitting target for those who wish to criticise. This mass of uninformed and/or uninformative material has therefore been omitted from consideration.

Cass's account of the contents and organisation of the stages of her model commences with a preamble outlining the general social context against which they must be viewed, i.e., the context of social approbation and stigmatisation of homosexuality, in which individuals have been socialised, which is elaborated by Hetrick and Martin (1987). Heterosexuality and to some extent asexuality are portrayed in our society as the only acceptable outlets for sexual expression. Although many families may not explicitly denigrate the idea of homosexuality as an acceptable sexual preference, the absence of discussion on the topic itself conveys a negative message (Browning, 1987; Hite, 1990). Therefore at the outset, an individual's interpersonal system strongly supports the
idea that he is heterosexual, a process delineated by Plummer (1981, 1984) and termed the "heterosexual assumption". Cass's first stage of gay identity formation is said to be initiated by the development of a feeling of incongruency between a person's perceptions of self, the interpersonal matrix, and the growing "conscious awareness that homosexuality has relevance to themselves and their behaviour" (p 222): this behaviour may be overt, e.g., same-sex sexual activity, or internal, e.g., thoughts, emotions or physiological responses. Cass terms this first stage "Identity Confusion". The growing awareness that whatever information or experiences that are encountered regarding homosexuality are relevant to the self becomes a source of confusion and turmoil for the person, who has to consider the possibility that he may be homosexual. Feelings of doubt and personal alienation predominate as the potential homosexual identity is at odds with the previously held nonhomosexual/heterosexual identity: "who am I?" becomes the burning question of this stage. Outside help is, however, rarely sought at this juncture, owing to the nebulous and personal nature of the issues involved; most individuals attempt to solve their identity confusion on their own. Another possible reason for this which Cass omits to mention is that to seek outside help would compel those involved to think seriously about the possible personal applicability of a homosexual identity; the crystallisation of a socially devalued identity is unlikely to be a desired occurrence at this stage unless the person has access to sources of support for the assumption of that identity and the
means to attribute a positive evaluation to it.

Attempts to resolve identity confusion, i.e., to render these experiences intelligible and to deal with the threat they may pose to one's existing identity or personal narrative generally and to self-esteem and continuity particularly, are regarded as following one of three possible paths. Firstly, when the individual finds the homosexual interpretation of his behaviour correct and acceptable, he may question his heterosexual identity and seek evidence that will help confirm or disconfirm a homosexual identity, usually by gathering more information on homosexuality, perhaps also in an attempt to counteract what Hetrick and Martin (1987) term "cognitive isolation", i.e., a lack of access to accurate information about homosexuality. However, although this strategy may be regarded as coping through accepting that change may be necessary, it is most unlikely that the person will move directly to an acceptance of a gay identity for themselves until this identity has become positive or at least neutral for them (Sophie, 1987). Instead, the more certain the person becomes that they are homosexual, the more acute is the sense of incongruency. It is held that attempts to resolve this incongruency move the individual to the next stage of "Identity Comparison", although the dynamics of this move are not specified. Secondly, when the homosexual interpretation is correct but undesirable, an attempt is made to restore the interpersonal matrix to its original state by inhibiting all behaviours that have been interpreted as
homosexual, by controlling the information available on homosexuality, or by denying that such information is personally relevant. These tactics may be supplemented by the denial of the existence of past homosexual behaviour, the adoption of asexuality (to avoid the possibility of encountering situations with a homosexual aspect), the adoption of a strong antihomosexual stance, or engagement in opposite-sex sexual activity to buttress a heterosexual identity. A self-conception as potentially homosexual is avoided, self-esteem and personal continuity are safeguarded, and identity foreclosure is said to occur.

Of course circumstances may militate against an individual's attempt to avoid situations in which homosexuality plays a role or to escape the "pull" of a homosexual identity. It is easier to avoid potentially threatening situations than to prevent the occurrence of erotic dreams or physiological responses to people of the same gender. Also, if one cannot respond sexually and/or emotionally to the opposite sex, a heterosexual role may be difficult to maintain.

These various strategies may represent a period of cognitive experimentation, tentative hypothesis testing and rumination on the meaning of a person's behaviour rather than a permanent adaptation. A homosexual meaning may eventually become acceptable to the person. However, an unwilling acceptance sows the seeds of a negative or self-hating identity.
The third alternative arises when the homosexual interpretation is both incorrect and undesirable and involves the redefinition of behaviour as nonhomosexual, e.g., males may regard kissing, emotional attachment, or repeated contacts with the same male as homosexual, while purely genital contact is seen as "fooling around" or "experimenting" (Weinberg, 1976). The person may also define homosexuals in such a syllogistic way as to exclude themselves from the definition, e.g., "all homosexual males are effeminate; I'm not effeminate, so I'm not homosexual". With behaviour redefined, the individual can reject the idea that he is homosexual, self-esteem and continuity are again protected, and identity foreclosure is said to occur.

It is worth noting that Cass does not specify at what chronological age the Identity Confusion stage or any of her other stages is most likely to be encountered, thus implying that gay identity formation may commence at any point in the life course and that the issues pertaining to each stage may never be definitively resolved but may resurface at any time. The impact of certain gay identity formation experiences may however be related to an individual's chronological age in that if a person commences the process during that period when he is addressing a range of primary developmental tasks related to self-definition, it may be congruent with and can be related to the self-exploration occurring in his life. If, on the other hand, the gay identity formation process begins later in life, it may cause major upheaval as the person may have felt
secure in his identity only to have to reevaluate it and negotiate the process of identity development again (Browning, 1987).

An examination of the starting points of other stage models reveals the arbitrary nature of the concept. Troiden (1977) regards the gay identity formation processes as commencing in a period prior to the stage of identity confusion. In common with Altman (1971), Minton and McDonald (1984) and Plummer (1975) - and Lewis (1984) with regard to lesbian identity formation - he suggests that experiences during childhood, i.e., before the age of 13, produce a sense of difference which during adolescence, i.e., before the age of 17, crystallises into a sense of sexual difference as a result of genital and emotional experiences. He terms this initial phase "Sensitization". The significance of these experiences is retrospectively revised and a homosexual meaning is applied to them, so that the person may come to believe that they were "really gay all along" (Richardson, 1981). The childhood experiences most frequently identified as sources of a sense of difference among Troiden's respondents were of a social nature, namely feelings of alienation, gender inadequacy and excitement in the presence of other males. The adolescent experiences which generated an awareness of sexual difference were the recognition of less opposite sex interest than other males, excessive interest in young men, feelings of gender inadequacy, and same-sex sexual activity. Almost two thirds of Troiden's 150 respondents engaged in their first homosexual activity to orgasm during this stage. It is only
during his second stage of "Dissociation and Signification" that the element of questioning identified in Cass's first stage appears. The commencement of this second stage is marked by the suspicion that one might be homosexual, sparked by the realisation that one is becoming sexually aroused by other males or is beginning to view other males in sexual terms; by physically enjoyable homosexual experiences or fantasies; by the desire to repeat a homosexual experience; by reading or learning about homosexuality; by a realisation that one's heterosexual interests or emotional involvements are less strong than those of one's male peers; or by an emotional attachment to another male. This suspicion is however dissociated from sexual identity in the same ways that same-sex sexual behaviour is in Cass's model, e.g., by regarding it as a passing phase or by regarding same-sex sexual activity as mere sexual experimentation and not as an indicator of any lasting preference, or by insisting that one has little or nothing in common with homosexuals as a group.

Weinberg (1976) also speaks of a self-suspicion stage, with the emphasis being on the self: less than one third of his sample of 30 men reported that other people played an active role in the initiation of self-suspicion. Instead, other people were directly influential in serving as sources of comparison, allowing the individual to perceive that his feelings and desires were different from others'. The list of factors which initiated self-suspicion among Weinberg's group overlaps considerably with that produced by
Troiden's respondents. Additional factors named by Weinberg's subjects were a lack of interest in traditionally "masculine" activities, an interest in "feminine" activities, and a perception that one fits the effeminate homosexual stereotype. Weinberg adds a more psychological dimension to the suspicion stage by reporting resultant affective states, i.e., anxiety and fear of isolation, of contempt, of hurting one's parents and of non-acceptance; guilt; self-hatred; repulsion; confusion and frustration. Such negative feelings were reported by the vast majority of respondents. Significantly fewer reported neutral reactions and positive reactions were mentioned only twice. Responses to negative feelings included withdrawal from others, the channelling of energies into other activities, the search for others with whom to discuss one's feelings, and the repression, denial or rationalisation of these feelings. Weinberg views self-suspicion as causing cognitive dissonance between the perceptions "I am homosexual" and "homosexuality is bad". An individual may respond to this by repressing the possibility that he could be homosexual; by cultivating a more "masculine" image; by engaging in sexual relations with women; and by the adoption of very negative attitudes towards homosexuals in an attempt to distance himself from the category of "homosexual" and all that it implies. Alternatively, the person may simply tolerate the dissonance and do nothing or may seek to investigate the homosexual category and its applicability to himself further by having sexual relations with men or with men and women; by gathering more information about
homosexuality; by discussing the matter with others; or by attempting to contact other homosexuals or gay organisations. Such strategies are aimed at effecting change in a positive direction in the meanings which the individual associates with a gay identity, thus rendering it more easily assimilable into the existing identity structure and reducing its capacity to damage self-esteem. For Sophie (1987), this cognitive restructuring constitutes the major coping strategy on the path to self-acceptance as gay or lesbian.

The dissonance concept is also utilised by Lewis (1984) to describe the conflict experienced in the initial stages of lesbian identity formation by women between the expectation with which they were socialised that they will marry and have a family and their desire for intimacy with other women. A woman may quell the resultant anxiety, shame and turmoil by denying her same-sex sexual attractions or by bargaining with them, e.g., by claiming that just because she is attracted to one woman, this does not mean that she is a lesbian. In her discussion of possible reactions to feelings of dissonance, Lewis's themes echo those of writers on male gay identity formation, e.g., the possibility of confusion, and of anger, fear and extreme hostility at the mention of homosexuality is discussed, so it may be that at least with respect to the fundamental dynamics of gay identity formation, the experiences of lesbians and gay men may show a considerable degree of convergence.
To continue our examination of the various starting points adopted by models of gay identity formation, Woodman and Lenna (1980) appear to borrow the terminology of Kubler-Ross's (1969) five-stage model of coping with terminal illness, which in one sense is appropriate in that they are addressing the ways in which a person relinquishes and grieves for one mode of being and one set of experiences - however unsuited to their sexual feelings and attractions these may have been - and attempts to make sense of an uncertain future. Their initial denial phase has much in common with Cass's Identity Confusion stage. The denial to which they refer relates to an individual's denial of a same-sex sexual preference, although he may wish for or have had same-sex sexual experience. Other coping mechanisms may be employed to deal with material that cannot be denied, e.g., repression, rationalisation or projection. Yet, whereas Cass sees the successful deployment of such coping mechanisms as leading to foreclosure, Woodman and Lenna do not consider this possibility, perhaps because they are writing from a counselling perspective and are therefore centrally concerned with moving clients on from such a position. Rather, they see the failure of these coping mechanisms as inevitable and as provoking a development-inducing crisis, which moves the individual to their second stage of identity confusion. Although it shares its name with Cass's first stage, Woodman and Lenna's version focusses upon different issues, i.e., self-suspicion as gay; fear of losing relationships; anxiety about reconciling the known self and the emergent self; the projection of anger onto
other gay men; and identification with negative societal attitudes towards homosexuals and homosexuality.

Another initial stage that has been posited is Coleman's (1982) vague and nebulous "Pre-Coming Out" stage, which addresses the same themes that have already been outlined, i.e., the internalisation of negative societal attitudes towards homosexuality; feelings of rejection and depression; concealment of the awareness of a homosexual identity by denial, suppression and repression. Movement to Coleman's second "Coming-Out" stage is facilitated by an acknowledgement to the self of homosexual feelings. His exposition is noticeably less systematic and more simplistic than that of other writers and may be better described as a loose collection of descriptive ideas. Malyon (1982) too highlights the effects of what he terms "biased socialization" on those who in the early stages of gay identity formation become aware of their same-sex sexual attractions, i.e., a diminution of self-esteem; the acquisition of a tendency towards self-punishment and depression; and the development of such defensive strategies as denial, compensation, suppression and compartmentalisation. To this list of woes which are said to result from an internalisation of negative societal attitudes towards homosexuality, Richardson (1981) adds alienation, guilt, loneliness and isolation. Woodman and Lenna (1980) stress that progress towards a positive gay identity cannot occur until the grip of internalised negative stereotypes of homosexuals is broken. These negative social
stereotypes of homosexuals and homosexuality may thus be regarded as perhaps the major societal constraint placed upon the gay identity formation process, as it means that in order to establish a gay identity, an individual must first define himself in terms of a socially devalued category which may pose an enormous threat to his self-esteem.

It may be contended that the initial stages of most of these models of gay identity formation share not only certain content themes - i.e., individuals internalising negative social stereotypes of homosexuals and homosexuality; being sensitised to their being different or sexually different from their peers; developing suspicions that they may be homosexual; and defining same-sex sexual attractions and/or behaviours as nonhomosexual - but also a general lack of form and of specific mechanisms for change, characteristics that continue to be notable by their absence as the models unfold. It seems that what many of these writers mean by a stage is simply a period during which certain sexual identity-related concerns are uppermost in the minds of those undergoing the gay identity formation process. This is especially so in the case of those whose interest in the topic is chiefly from a clinical or therapeutic perspective, e.g., Coleman (1982) and Woodman and Lenna (1980), and who appear primarily concerned with describing the most commonly-encountered experiences and broad processes in gay identity formation than with formulating a model that can also predict gay identity formation courses and generate testable
hypotheses about them.

2.5 Cass's Second Stage: "Identity Comparison" and Passing

Stage two of Cass's model, termed the "Identity Comparison" stage, has as its central task the handling of the social alienation which arises from the incongruency between the differences in the individual's perceptions of his own behaviour and himself (determined by his tentative commitment to a homosexual self) and the individual's perception of how others view that behaviour and self. This alienation assumes the form of a feeling of difference, a sense of not belonging to society or to specific social subgroups such as family and peers. In terms of Kegan's (1982) model of identity development, the individual's culture of embeddedness is no longer seen as a suitable context through which to define himself. It is at this stage that the individual may feel "I'm the only one in the world like this". Acceptance of the self as homosexual or not heterosexual leads the person to a realisation that the guidelines for behaviour, ideals and future expectations associated with a heterosexual identity are no longer relevant to him and need to be replaced, which may be seen as the essential identity task upon which he must embark during this stage.

In making this assertion, however, Cass does not appear to take account of the cognitive capacity or degree of cognitive
development that would be required for the recognition of the inappropriateness of heterosexual behaviour, values and expectations, and for the construction of an alternative set of guidelines. The basic capacity necessary for this is what Kelly (1955) termed "constructive alternativism", i.e., the realisation of the facticity of the given or the recognition that things do not have to be as they are. There may be individual differences in the degree to which people possess this capacity. Some may only dimly perceive that the heterosexual guidelines internalised in the socialisation process do not provide the optimal strategy for dealing with an identity based around their same-sex feelings, and may persist in attempting to fit a heterosexual framework onto a homosexual context. According to Hetrick and Martin (1987), this is a real possibility if the person has only limited access to accurate information on homosexuality, limited opportunities for non-sexual socialisation in the gay subculture and a lack of role models. This means that the person cannot evaluate the established order and so may espouse values which deny his worth, creating a sense of conflict which is said to result in alienation, anxiety and demoralisation. For others, their perception of the inappropriateness of the guidelines internalised during socialisation may lead them to realise that an entirely new or modified set of guidelines is possible and necessary but, unsure of what these new guidelines should be or of how to construct them, they may enter a strategic moratorium. For others still, the creation of a new set of guidelines may be unproblematic in that
they know which sources of guidance to consult. Even when the individual has constructed a personally-tailored set of guidelines, they may have to consider how feasible it is to implement them. The successful execution of these identity tasks requires what Browning (1987) terms a shift from a focus on external validation to internal validation so that the person becomes able to adopt positions that may or may not be validated by others without this being a threat to his identity. These diverse possibilities provide an example of one set of unconsidered alternative routes within Cass's model, and suggest that this particular strategy, as it involves a substantial degree of cognitive restructuring about oneself and one's relationship with the world, properly belongs much later in her model. Indeed, Browning (1987) regards the shift to internal validation as "the final outcome of achieving identity" (p 50). It is also worth noting that the sort of processes considered here are not specific to the formation of a gay identity but are vital to the development of adult consciousness. Gould (1978, 1980), for example, sees the thrust of adult development as being towards the acceptance of ourselves as creators of our own lives, and away from the idea that the rules and standards of childhood determine our destiny, a task which principally involves the replacement of our parents' values and assumptions with ones of our own.

Four strategies aimed at reducing feelings of alienation are posited in the Identity Comparison stage. The first is adopted by
those who react positively to the idea of being different and to the possibility of a homosexual self and a homosexual interpretation of their behaviour. They reduce incongruency by devaluing the importance of other people's opinions of them, while at the same time presenting a public image of heterosexuality so that they will not be confronted personally with others' negative evaluations of homosexuality. The maintenance of the heterosexual self-image - referred to as "passing" (Goffman, 1963) - also allows the individual to absorb and manage an increasing commitment to a homosexual identity. Passing may be achieved by avoiding threatening situations, by careful and selective self-presentation, by deliberately cultivating an image of heterosexuality or asexuality, or by conveying an air of detachment from the subject of homosexuality. It represents the maintenance of a social identity that is not contiguous with one's personal identity as homosexual. If passing is successful, incongruency is reduced but not eliminated, and the desire to reduce it further leads the person to stage three.

A second type of strategy may be used when the individual accepts a homosexual meaning for his behaviour but not for his self-image. The aim of this type of strategy is to alter the homosexual self-image in a way that will not require alteration of actual behaviour, again with the aim of salvaging what self-esteem and/or continuity one can within one's personal narrative. Of the four sub-strategies outlined - akin to Woodman and Lenna's (1980) coping
mechanisms of their denial phase - the first involves defining one's behaviour as homosexual only in relation to a particular person, which allows someone to argue that if it were not for that person, they would be heterosexual. This approach is termed the "special case strategy". The easiest manner of coping with alienation is found in the second approach, the "ambisexual strategy", where the individual identifies as both potentially heterosexual and potentially homosexual: actual heterosexual behaviour is not required for the maintenance of this self-image, but an acknowledgement of the possibility of its occurrence is needed. Alienation is reduced by identifying others in one's interpersonal environment and also well-known public figures as (am)bisexual, which reduces feelings of sexual uniqueness and isolation. In the third approach, the "temporary identity strategy", the individual accepts the homosexual self-image but regards it as a temporary manifestation which will pass. The fourth approach, the "personal innocence strategy" is commonly used by those who hold very negative views of a homosexual self-image, and is characterised by such comments as "I was born this way" or "I cannot help it", designed to permit acceptance of a homosexual self-image but to deflect responsibility for it away from the person. This strategy does not serve to reduce feelings of alienation and, as the self-image is viewed negatively, it leads to the development of a negative, self-hating identity. Passing also plays a role in this general path through stage two, with its aims being either to appear more acceptable to others and perhaps
to the self or to compartmentalise one's homosexuality and separate it from all other aspects of one's life. The notion of strategies designed to allow same-sex sexual behaviour to be interpreted in ways which preclude self-labelling as homosexual is developed by Hencken (1984). He outlines sixteen such strategies for "explaining" same-sex sexual behaviour, including "I was drunk"; "it's just physical"; "I was just experimenting"; "it's just for variety"; "it's more available with guys"; "it was just a phase"; and "I was seduced".

A third route through stage two is observed when the person accepts that a homosexual meaning can be attributed both to the self and to one's behaviour but views the latter as undesirable, a state of affairs also observed in Woodman and Lenna's (1980) phases of bargaining and depression, although there the acceptance of the self-relevance of a homosexual meaning is said to vary according to how successfully the person can implement coping mechanisms to avoid it. The circumstances in which the attribution of a homosexual meaning to one's behaviour is undesirable are most likely to arise when the person anticipates strong negative reactions from significant others; the behavioural element is not accepted because it is the means by which the person will be confronted with the negative reactions of others. This too may be regarded as a social constraint placed upon the development of a gay identity mediated through the negative social stereotype of homosexuals and homosexuality. If the individual is aware of or
has encountered this stereotype, he will be aware of others' negative evaluations of homosexuals and homosexuality and hence will be led to expect negative reactions from others to his own homosexuality. The chief strategy for dealing with the situation is the attempted inhibition of overt behaviour which might expose the person as homosexual, and also of possibly homosexually-related covert behaviour. This permits the person to adopt an asexual role and self-image which then distances him from threatening sexual situations, and leads to him attempting to reduce the impact of others, e.g., by moving to another city.

The fourth alternative in stage two occurs in the face of extreme alienation when both the self and behaviour are negatively viewed and change is desired in both. As a result, all homosexual behaviours are inhibited, homosexuality is devalued and heterosexuality is positively portrayed, allowing the rejection of a homosexual self-image and the adoption of an asexual or heterosexual self-image. If these strategies are successful, identity foreclosure occurs. If not, such is the degree of self-hatred engendered that, following repeated failures of the inhibitive strategy, the individual may resort to suicide.

Cass's identity comparison stage has no obvious corresponding stage in other models due to the fact that her model deals with quite a specific set of issues within a six-stage framework, while other models comprising fewer stages must deal with a broader range of
concerns within each stage. The second route outlined through the stage has certain characteristics in common with Troiden's (1977) third "coming out" stage in that while his sample labelled their sexual feelings as definitely homosexual at this juncture, two thirds of them did not at the same time designate themselves as homosexual, i.e., they did not have a homosexual self-image. This state of affairs was achieved by these individuals regarding their feelings as a temporary phenomenon - corresponding to Cass's temporary identity strategy - or as being indicative of bisexuality, which mirrors the ambisexual strategy: with regard to the latter, nine of Weinberg's (1976) 30 gay men claimed to have considered themselves as bisexual at some point in the gay identity formation process. Furthermore, De Monteflores and Schultz (1978) note that it is common for women to adopt a temporary bisexual identity when they first become sexually involved with other women because such a label carries a lesser degree of stigma than the "lesbian" or "homosexual" labels and because it permits them to retain some of the social advantages accorded to heterosexuals while they explore same-sex relationships. Note however the discrepancy between the position of this occurrence in the models of Troiden and Cass: Troiden places it in the coming out stage while for Cass it begins at a stage which is far removed from any idea of the acceptance of one's homosexuality. There may exist a broad consensus regarding the major themes in the gay identity formation process, but the various models show discrepancies in matters of sequencing and detail, possibly stemming from
experiential differences among the individuals whose accounts of their gay identity formation experiences constitute the foundations upon which the various empirically- or clinically-based models are founded.

Cass's Identity Comparison stage is subsumed to a large extent within Minton and McDonald's (1984) "Sociocentric Stage", which is described as being characterised by an individual's heightened awareness both of the possibility of possessing a homosexual identity and of negative societal attitudes towards homosexuality. In fact, both the Identity Confusion and Identity Comparison stages are cited to elaborate the concepts involved in this stage of their theoretical model. Other models, studies and literatures deal with some of the issues raised in the Identity Comparison stage, especially the concept of passing. In his treatise on the management of "spoiled" or stigmatised identities, Goffman (1963) pinpoints passing as a major technique of self-presentation by which information about the self is controlled and the impressions which one creates for others are managed. In common with Malyon (1982), Woodman and Lenna (1980) and Cass, he outlines the possibility of dealing with a stigmatised identity by compartmentalising one's life but, like Ponse (1978), traces the social consequences rather than the psychological manoeuvres of such a strategy, i.e., the creation of a situation where the individual moves in two or more circles which each have their own different biography of the person, and where some circles are
unaware of the existence of others, as in the example of Sydney Biddle Barrows, cited in Chapter One: two social identities may overlap to varying degrees with the person's personal identity but may themselves be mutually exclusive.

Among the problems inherent in passing which Goffman identifies is the possibility of the person learning what others think of those who possess the stigmatised identity, e.g., when heterosexuals discuss homosexuality in a disparaging way in the presence of someone whom they do not know to be gay (cf. Sawchuk, 1974). This type of occurrence was mentioned in pilot research for the present study by several respondents who felt obliged to laugh at jokes told by heterosexual friends which ridiculed gay men. Despite feeling that they were "letting the side down", their desire to pass as heterosexual inhibited them from reacting otherwise. Such situations again act as societal constraints upon the development of a positively valued gay identity as they are instrumental in conveying the social approbation associated with homosexuality to the person who is beginning to acknowledge the personal relevance of homosexuality in the Identity Comparison stage and they consequently engender feelings of social alienation.

Goffman also examines the various conceptions of the psychic state of those who pass, which form a consistent part of analyses of passing. It is assumed, for example, that the passer experiences a high level of anxiety because of the possibility that that which
he is trying to hide will be uncovered, partly because he can never be entirely sure how well the deception is working. Richardson (1981) claims that those who pass may experience feelings of self-denial, dishonesty and loneliness, a sense of alienation from self and others and of conflict between what is felt to be a true self and a false self, and acute self-consciousness arising from continuous self-monitoring. Equivocal evidence is provided for such opinions by Weinberg and Williams (1974) who found that for their respondents, passing was significantly negatively related to three of their eight measures of psychological well-being, i.e., to depression, interpersonal awkwardness, and guilt, shame or anxiety regarding one's homosexuality. Furthermore, the authors suggest that depression and interpersonal awkwardness may be due more to worry about exposure or anticipated discrimination than to passing per se, although they conclude that a direct relationship does exist between passing and guilt, shame or anxiety about one's homosexuality, feelings which may constitute prime motivators for passing behaviour. They contend however that passing does not usually impose an intolerable psychological strain upon the individual who passes as heterosexual, firstly because he has learned through heterosexual socialisation how to present himself as heterosexual and may well be able to do so easily, and secondly because passing may in time become a routine and non-problematic means of managing potentially discrediting information about himself. Derlega and Chaikin (1977), in their consideration of lying, regard this passing strategy as especially costly as it
involves not only the withholding of discrediting information but also the maintenance of a flow of faked information, and they cite a most apposite example: "homosexuals who attempt to pass as heterosexuals may feel compelled to construct an imaginary heterosexual appearance for friends and relatives, possibly including dates with the opposite sex, making up descriptions of heterosexual sexual exploits, etc." (p 112). In her study of lesbian identity, Ponse (1978) examines various strategies for and consequences of passing as heterosexual, which forms part of the concept of secrecy, fundamental to her view of the influences which structure lesbian identity and in terms of which she frames her basically diptychical typology of lesbian women. It is Goffman's opinion that the idea that passing necessarily entails great psychological strain is misleading, but he offers no evidence to support his assertion. Reports of passing experiences sought in the present study may help assess his hypothesis.

2.6 Cass's Third and Fourth Stages: "Identity Tolerance", "Identity Acceptance", Subcultural Involvement and Self-Labelling

Stages three and four of Cass's model will be examined in tandem because the issues which they address are dealt with in a unitary fashion in most other studies of gay identity formation. Stage three, termed "Identity Tolerance", sees the person relieved of much of the preceding confusion and turmoil and willing to
acknowledge his social, emotional and sexual needs, but in a spirit of toleration rather than acceptance. However, such acknowledgement heightens his awareness of the incongruency between how he sees himself and how others are believed to see him, which accentuates feelings of alienation and isolation. In order to alleviate this, the person seeks out homosexuals and the homosexual subculture. The positive acceptance of his homosexual self-image and behaviour which the individual is presumed to find in the subculture leads to a decrease in alienation and isolation and an increase in the feeling of not belonging with heterosexuals. The latter is diminished by an increased general detachment from and careful and selective interaction with heterosexuals. Feelings of helplessness also abate as the individual realises that he is taking responsibility for his life situation. The possibility of negative outcomes to initial subcultural experiences is also admitted, with factors such as poor social skills, shyness, low self-esteem and fear of exposure or of the unknown being cited as possible contributors to negative experiences. In her treatment of lesbian identity formation, Richardson (1981) suggests that negative outcomes may arise if the individual feels that she has little in common with those whom she meets in the subculture. Weinberg and Williams (1974) point out that subcultural rejection may occur in the other direction: members of the subculture may reject the person because he is not suited to the group as, for example, he may be too old, too flamboyant, not radical enough or not conservative enough. Such rejection can produce an acute sense
of isolation, marginality and psychological strain.

Positive subcultural experiences render other homosexuals more significant to the individual and cause them to be viewed more favourably by him. When the person sees homosexual others viewing his homosexual self-image and behaviour in a positive light, congruency is created in the interpersonal matrix between the self, behaviour and other elements, and the person comes to feel positively about the self and about the desirability of a homosexual self-image. This leads to decreased social alienation because of the support provided by interaction with homosexual others, increased commitment to a homosexual identity and a desire for further contact with the homosexual subculture. Negative or unrewarding subcultural experiences lead to the person devaluing the subculture, the homosexual self-image and his homosexual behaviour, resulting in a self-hating individual. Such self-hatred is handled either by inhibiting all homosexual behaviours if the individual feels extremely negatively about the self, or by reducing contacts with homosexuals if he feels less negatively. If behaviour is successfully inhibited, identity foreclosure is said to occur. If homosexual contacts are reduced, the individual acknowledges the necessity of meeting his social, emotional and sexual needs, and there is therefore some degree of continuing commitment to a homosexual self-image.
Among those who perceive their homosexual behaviour as desirable, but not a homosexual identity, the strategies of stage two (special case, ambisexual, temporary identity and personal innocence) continue to be employed to increase the acceptability of the self-image to the self. However, tension is created by contact with others who are seen as viewing the person as homosexual and who confront him about the use of these strategies. The manner of tension resolution adopted will depend upon whether contacts with homosexuals are regarded by the person as rewarding or punishing.

Subcultural contact permits the individual to become aware of the positive features which the subculture offers, such as the opportunity to meet a partner, the provision of gay role models, the chance to learn how to handle a homosexual identity, and social support. The negative aspects may also be learned, e.g., the demands for greater commitment to a homosexual identity, and the possibility of the person's homosexuality becoming known outside the subculture if members of the subculture inform outsiders. The degree of subcultural involvement is an important factor here as although minimal involvement still permits the person to observe the potentially rewarding aspects of the subculture, it may lead to greater emphasis being placed upon the negative aspects which may encourage the continuation of such minimal involvement. Whatever the details of the individual's course may be, if identity foreclosure has not occurred by the end of stage three, his commitment to a homosexual self-image will have increased to the
point where he can say "I am a homosexual". It is at this stage therefore that the basic questions that McAdams (1988) regards as motivators of the construction of a personal narrative begin to find an answer. In terms of his developing sexual identity, the individual can state who and what he is and can begin to construct an appropriate narrative on this basis. The question of the nature of his relationship with the adult world finds at least a partial and possibly a positive answer in his involvement in the gay subculture, which may be seen as a new context or, in Kegan's (1982) terms, a new culture of embeddedness in which further developmental work can take place.

Stage four, termed "Identity Acceptance", is a natural continuation of stage three and is characterised by increased contact with other homosexuals, which permits the individual to experience accounts of homosexuality which "normalise" it and validate it as a way of life. This prompts a move towards accepting rather than simply tolerating a homosexual self-image. As homosexual social contacts increase, individuals begin to build subcultural friendship networks which lead them to evaluate homosexuals more positively and accord their homosexuality a significance equal to that of other aspects of their life. The "Who am I?" and "Where do I belong?" questions of previous stages now find firmer answers.

The person's progress through the remaining stages of gay identity formation is determined to a large extent by the types of
subcultural groups with which he interacts at this stage, a factor largely ignored by other authors who tend to assume that the gay subculture is homogeneously legitimist in outlook and positive in its effects upon individuals' developing gay identities. Within the subculture, some groups may espouse the belief that homosexuality is fully legitimate, i.e., both in public and in private. If the person accepts this concept, inner tension is said to be created because of incongruency between how the person regards the self and how other (nonsubcultural) people are believed to regard the person. Attempts to resolve this incongruency lead the person to stage five.

Other groups may offer only a partial legitimisation and may believe that homosexuality is only valid as a private identity which should not be displayed before the rest of society. The adoption of such a belief involves the use of the strategies of passing, limited contact with heterosexuals and/or selective disclosure. By this stage, a certain adeptness at passing may have developed and it may have become an unproblematic, routine means of compartmentalising the homosexual aspects of one's life and of reducing the likelihood of being confronted by the reactions of heterosexuals. Living and/or employment arrangements may be altered in order to limit contact with those who might most heighten the incongruency between self-perceptions and others' perceptions of self. While passing and limitation of heterosexual contact serve to prevent an increase in incongruency, selective
disclosure of sexual preference reduces it. If these strategies are successful, incongruency reaches manageable proportions and identity foreclosure is said to occur. With low incongruency, a positively evaluated identity, stability in one's interpersonal environment and an ability to adapt in both the gay and heterosexual worlds, many homosexuals find this to be a satisfactory way of life. If the strategies prove unsuccessful, the individual may attempt to modify them or to reject the notion of partial legitimisation in favour of that of full legitimisation: the consequent increased incongruency in the latter case moves the person to stage five.

The centrality in the identity tolerance and identity acceptance stages of subcultural involvement renders them close in meaning to the general conception of "coming out". The issue of the importance of subcultural involvement in the gay identity formation process is one of the few on which there appears to be consensus. Erikson himself can be regarded as upholding the vital role of a supportive culture in his insistence that identity formation resides in "in the core of the individual and yet also in the core of his communal culture" (1968, p22). Sophie (1987) regards subcultural involvement as "crucial" in helping individuals attribute a positive evaluation to a gay identity. She alone considers the paradox which is created for the lesbian women whom she studied by their holding negative evaluations of homosexuality and of lesbian women while requiring contact and interaction with
lesbian women in order to change these evaluations. For many of her subjects, the problems created by this paradox were overcome as they encountered groups of lesbian women by chance.

Both Plummer (1975) and Troiden (1977) place the initiation of subcultural involvement in a stage which they term "coming out". Plummer - who provides a succinct history of the development of the gay subculture in a later work (Plummer, 1984) - regards interaction with other homosexuals as being fruitful in three ways for identity development: it presents homosexuality as a meaningful, rewarding and legitimate alternative lifestyle; it permits the negation of the homosexual stereotype and allows the individual to see that it is possible to be homosexual and well-adjusted, a good person and a respectable member of the community; and it neutralises feelings of guilt concerning a homosexual identity, allows the rebuilding of identity and hence facilitates the arrival at a favourable self-conception. To these benefits, Weinberg and Williams (1974) add that social involvement can reduce any fear that a person may have about labelling himself as gay/homosexual and disclosing his sexual preference to others. Through interaction with other gay men, the individual can learn that the adoption of an openly gay identity is possible and manageable, that all heterosexuals will not reject the person, and that a supportive social environment exists to cushion the blow if or when rejection is encountered. Weinberg and Williams also report that among their respondents a high degree of subcultural
involvement was associated with a greater likelihood of having or having had an exclusive relationship with another man, a large number of sexual partners, and a high degree of gay acculturation, commitment to a gay identity and psychological well-being. An interesting analogy is drawn by Clark (1987), who regards involvement in the gay subculture as fulfilling for the gay person the role played by the family for the person who belongs to a racial minority, i.e., it counters isolation and provides support, shared values, role models and a feeling of being "at home". In short, the gay subculture may be regarded as aiding the individual in the development of strategies to manage the social and psychological demands that are made by gay identity formation, and as counteracting some of the social mechanisms that conspire to obstruct the development of a gay identity.

Among Troiden's group of gay men, 52% reported that they first became involved in the homosexual subculture around the time they designated themselves as homosexual (which they did at a mean age of 21.3 years) and a further 41% became involved within six months of doing so. Half of Dank's (1971) respondents reported the same contemporaneity of events. Indeed, 33% of Troiden's cohort attributed their self-designation as homosexual to the fact that they became involved with other gay men socially. Eighty seven percent of the group reported that their attitudes towards themselves and towards homosexuality changed approximately one year after self-designation (and hence between six and 12 months after initial
subcultural involvement). They described an awareness of a positive, firmer sense of identity, higher levels of happiness and self-acceptance, and a reduction in guilt or anxiety about their sexual preference. Homosexuality came to be viewed as a violation of the sexual norm rather than as a pathological manifestation: their "biased socialization" was overcome and the meaning of the cognitive category of "homosexual" was transformed for them. The vast majority of respondents attributed these changes to their exposure to the gay world, a causative connection also treated by Dank (1971) and Warren (1974).

Weinberg (1976) investigated the means by which people make contact with the subculture. Seventeen men out of 28 made the initial move themselves; for most of the remainder, initial contact was "accidental", e.g., they discovered gay relatives who introduced them to other gay people. Self-initiated involvement may entail the cultivation of friendships with reputed homosexuals who can then provide a point of entry to the subculture; seeking out places which gay men are known to frequent; engaging in sexual relations with other gay men which may lead to greater social involvement; or contacting gay organisations. The aim of these strategies was identified as an attempt to gain social support, reassurance that those involved in the formation of a gay identity were acceptable people, or information about various aspects of the gay world. However, once entry had been gained to the subculture, initial conversations focussed not on these concerns but centred around
casual "small talk": only much later did serious conversations arise. Weinberg also describes what he terms the "gay coach" situation, where a young man who is only beginning to deal with his homosexuality forms a social relationship with an older man who is more committed to and comfortable in his identity. The older man shares his experiences and feelings about being gay and acts partly as an advisor to and partly as a role model for the younger man. A number of Crites' (1976) respondents described such relationships too. This type of relationship is not exclusive to the realm of gay identity formation. In their consideration of the tasks involved in adult development, Levinson et al. (1978) highlight the importance of forming mentor relationships in early adulthood. Mentors may act as exemplars and role models for the young adult; may provide counsel and moral support in times of stress; and may facilitate the realisation of what Levinson et al. term "The Dream". "The Dream" refers to "a vague sense of self-in-adult-world. It has the quality of a vision, an imagined possibility that generates excitement and vitality (Levinson et al., 1978, p 91). In this case, the relevant aspect of the young person's Dream which the gay coach may help facilitate is the attainment of a positively-evaluated gay identity. The prevalence and effects of this gay coach or mentor relationship will be explicitly examined in the present study.

Some of Weinberg's group did not appear to be receptive to the positive meanings accorded to homosexuality in the subculture and
their feelings of shame and guilt about being homosexual were not assuaged, in one case because many of the values expressed by members of the subculture were antithetical to those with which he was raised, which were strongly negative with regard to sex in general and homosexuality in particular. The possible clash of personal or internalised parental values with those observed in the subculture is also examined in the present study.

Sustained contact with other gay men was reported by Weinberg's respondents to have played a major role in changing the meanings which they attributed to their feelings, fantasies and behaviours in a more positive direction. It also permitted the forging of a link between "doing" and "being", i.e., between same-sex sexual contact and a homosexual self-image or identity: the implications of behaviour for identity were accepted, so that the maintenance of something other than a homosexual identity while engaging in same-sex sexual activity or experiencing homoerotic thoughts and feelings was no longer tenable. The ways in which subcultural involvement altered the meanings which Weinberg's group attached to homosexuals and homosexuality can be observed from the pre- and post-involvement conceptions of these categories. Sustained contact with subculture members added an emotional dimension to what constituted homosexuality for some men. It also led to half the group identifying positive differences between gay and heterosexual men, e.g., gay men were described as more accepting of and sensitive to others, more creative, more sincere, mentally
and emotionally superior, more open about sex, less racist and less sexist than heterosexual men. As regards changes in identity, 17 of the 23 men who were socially involved in the subculture when they labelled themselves as homosexual reported that social involvement with other gay people helped them to solidify a homosexual self-identity in the same ways that Troiden's group described, i.e., it provided a setting in which they felt more comfortable, accepted and happier than they ever felt among heterosexuals; provided the social support which enabled them to disclose their sexual preference to heterosexuals; and presented them with positive images of gay men, with a sense of pride in their gay identity, and with the realisation that there existed other gay people with similar life histories and experiences as themselves which countered the sense of difference and isolation they had experienced while growing up. Some respondents who experienced positive changes in feelings about the self during the gay identity formation process attributed this to the support of gay people and/or gay organisations and the development of identity pride consequent upon this. On the other hand, a lack of social contact with other gay people resulted in few positive definitions featuring in the person's conceptions of homosexuality, which meant that if self-labelling as homosexual occurred, it proved distressing and the label was unwillingly accepted.

The themes outlined concerning the effects of subcultural involvement are repeated in other models of gay identity formation,
rendering it one of the few near-universal stages, but it is the positioning of this occurrence which is interesting. Minton and McDonald (1984) place it in their sub-stage of "Acceptance and Commitment to a Homosexual Identity", which constitutes part of their third "Universalistic Stage" in which societal norms are critically evaluated. They conclude that the opportunity to interact with other homosexuals and to learn more about homosexuality is closely linked to the acceptance of a positive homosexual self-image. Coleman (1982) places initial subcultural contact in his third stage of "Exploration", which follows coming out, as he defines coming out principally in terms of the disclosure to others of one's sexual preference. He omits the major repercussions for identity of subcultural involvement which other studies outline and instead concentrates upon the sexual exploration which is afforded by involvement in the gay community. The surge of interest in and actual sexual activity which may occur at this stage and which may be problematic if the subcultural initiate views it as shameful, sinful or indicative of promiscuity, is regarded by Coleman as a necessary retracing of the developmental steps of adolescence - if the individual is not still negotiating adolescence in actuality - which because of his having been embedded within a heterosexual social milieu at the time, he had been unable to negotiate properly. Positive aspects of social and sexual subcultural experimentation are also noted, e.g., the development of interpersonal skills and of a sense of personal attractiveness and competence.
Additional issues are implicated by Lewis (1984) in relation to involvement with the lesbian community. The same need for a support group which can accept and validate a lesbian identity and encourage a positive self-conception is postulated, as in models of male gay identity formation. But entrance into the lesbian community may present a woman with certain choices with regard to separatism, i.e., the attempt to minimise or avoid all contact with men, and often with heterosexual women, in order to escape the oppressiveness of patriarchal western culture: such an ideology exists as a lifestyle option in the lesbian community but has no direct correlate in the male gay community. The benefits offered by separatism include the opportunity for lesbians to discover new avenues of self-definition and new strengths and skills in themselves which they formerly defined as male and therefore unavailable to them. Separatism also permits a woman to express any anger which she might harbour towards men and allows the consideration of how she might wish to relate to men in the future. With these advantages, Lewis regards separatism as an extremely healthy and active way for women to explore their strengths, attitudes and relationships, but warns against its adoption as a permanent lifestyle because of the possibility of a woman becoming permanently reactive to men and never resolving emotional problems and issues fully. In reiterating the role of the subculture as a source of support, assistance and companionship, Lewis goes beyond the concepts used by other theorists and describes the small community of lesbian friends which a lesbian woman may draw around
herself as a "chosen family", implying that if support and acceptance are not found among her family of origin, a woman may replace them in her hierarchy of significant others with friends of her own choosing who will provide such support. The extent to which such a strategy could be ultimately successful would certainly be doubted in the context of psychoanalytic theory: the family of choice may be able to assume some of the nurturing and supportive role that may not be fulfilled by the family of origin, but it is the latter who first played this role and whose favour was most sought at crucial times in development. It may be hypothesised then that the most satisfying support in later life would be that of the family of origin and that when this is not forthcoming any attempt to replace it with support from another source would not be fully effective. Lewis also remarks on the disadvantages of a lack of subcultural contact and support in the context of the isolation and consequent low self-esteem which this may engender. Isolation from the subculture may also lead to difficulties and over-dependence in relationships as, without access to a larger lesbian community, two women may remain in a problematic relationship simply out of the fear that they may never meet another lesbian.

One further major theme treated by several studies is that of labelling oneself as homosexual. The occurrence of this in Cass's model may be traced to stages three and four where the individual recognises, tolerates and then comes to accept the fact that he is
homosexual. The most thorough treatment of the labelling perspective is provided by Weinberg (1976) who examines the factors which led to his respondents labelling themselves as homosexual and the consequences of such self-labelling. In the order of the frequency with which they were cited, the factors identified as having created a sense of certainty that respondents were homosexual were the pleasure and sense of appropriateness which accompanied same-sex sexual contact; a lack of interest in or sexual failure with women; contact with other gay people; the experience of emotional, love feelings for another man; involvement in gay organisations and the development of identity pride; and the experience of sexual fantasies about other men. Other respondents described a "decision-making", "self-admission", "acceptance" or "self-realization" process as having been more important than any factor or combination of factors in their self-labelling as homosexual. This serves as a reminder that gay identity formation is essentially a dynamic process and any attempt to trace isolated dimensions of it must recognise that the pictures uncovered are akin to "freeze-frames" in the gay identity formation narrative, i.e., they depict present reconstructions of what occurred at chosen points in the process. Although half of Weinberg's respondents viewed the self-labelling process as a decision or self-admission, others regarded it as a realisation that their feelings, attractions or behaviour had a homosexual meaning, or as a gradual, growing awareness that they were homosexual, so individual differences in the time scale and in the experience of
the processual nature of gay identity formation were uncovered in their narratives.

Such was the degree of certainty regarding the appropriateness of the homosexual label, most respondents reported that they felt no need to investigate further the nature of their sexual preference. Of those who sought to verify it, the avenues chosen were engagement in same-sex sexual activity, the seeking of a love relationship with another man, or opposite-sex sexual activity, the aim of the lastmentioned being to test the exclusivity of one's sexual feelings. With the major part of their identity experimentation at an end, the vast majority of respondents turned to the homosexual subculture either for social reasons, for sexual reasons or for both. Some also reported that they decreased their social involvement with heterosexuals, mirroring the limitation of contact strategy designed to minimise confrontation with heterosexuals, which Cass outlines in the identity acceptance stage of her model, and reflecting to a lesser extent the separatist strategy which Lewis highlights in relation to lesbian identity formation. The effects of the subculture upon the self-conceptions of Weinberg's men have already been delineated, i.e., it provided a setting in which they felt comfortable and accepted; it furnished role models for them; it allowed them to see that others had similar biographies to themselves and to develop a sense of pride in their identity. By the time of self-labelling, only eight of the 30 men expressed unhappiness or ambivalent feelings about their
homosexuality: the predominant feeling was instead one of relief that they had finally acknowledged their homosexuality and were dealing with it. This contrasts with the feelings of fear, anxiety, guilt, repulsion, and frustration reported by subjects when they first began to think that they might be homosexual.

Weinberg stresses the importance of a clear, firm, secure identity in terms of how it simplifies one's life. He asserts that "(t)o decide, finally, what one 'really' is, is a decision that......defines one's relevances and priorities....(and).... provides one with criteria for meeting and resolving all sorts of situations" (p 505). In this context, one can understand the relief and happiness at self-labelling which was reported by most respondents. Yet, the adoption of the homosexual label did not prove an effective panacea for all. For some of the eight men who reported differing degrees of ambivalence in their feelings after self-labelling, this disappeared after positive subcultural experiences, but for others these feelings persisted. The major cause of this ambivalence was pinpointed as being an awareness of negative societal attitudes towards homosexuals and homosexuality, exemplifying yet again how effective this can be in impeding gay identity formation. The concomitants of ambivalent feelings after self-labelling were summarised as an isolated, unhappy, troubled and confused adolescence and young adulthood. "Ambivalent men" suspected they were homosexual at a lower mean age than "non-ambivalent men" (13.9 years as opposed to 16.1 years), and were
more likely to have had their first same-sex sexual experience after they first suspected they were homosexual.

Another perspective which Weinberg takes on the self-labelling issue is the identity configurations produced by his respondents in terms of the order in which they first suspected that they were homosexual (S), first labelled themselves as such (L), and first engaged in same-sex sexual activity (E). Twenty eight of his 30 men first engaged in same-sex sexual activity before self-labelling (EL), while the most common subpattern within this over-arching configuration was for men to have sexual contact with other males, suspect they might be homosexual, and then label themselves as such (ESL, n=17). The same milestone events in gay identity formation were examined by Coyle (1988) in Britain, Dank (1971) and Kooden et al. (1979) in the USA, and McDonald (1982) in Canada. In terms of the average age at which each event occurred, Kooden et al. and McDonald found the SEL sequence to be most common; Dank found that suspecting and engaging occurred at approximately the same time and before labelling; in terms of the sequence most frequently reported by respondents, Coyle reported that the SLE configuration was most common and that just as many of his respondents labelled before engaging as engaged before labelling. This lastmentioned "suspect/label before engaging" sequence is said to be the most common overall pattern among lesbian women (Browning, 1987). Differences in results may be accounted for by cultural differences concerning mores and attributions about same-sex sexual activity.
in Britain and North America. If such sexual activity were more accepted and open to non-homosexual interpretations among the North American groups than among the British group, a greater incidence of same-sex sexual activity in adolescence or earlier first same-sex sexual experiences may be observed among the North Americans: hence, they would exhibit the general EL configuration with greater frequency than would the British.

After reviewing his respondents' experiences of self-labelling, Weinberg summarises them by outlining four courses of labelling: "(f)irst, one can label oneself because one 'wants to', accept this label, and be happy with it. Second, one can label oneself in this way because one does not perceive any other choice, accept the label, and become adjusted to it and happy with it. Third, one can label oneself as a homosexual, become resigned to accepting it because one sees no other alternative, and remain unhappy with it. Fourth, one may label oneself as a homosexual reluctantly and constantly seek to reject the label" (p 527).

Other approaches to the labelling question include examinations of the factors which influence the speed of gay identity formation. Troiden (1980) examines the mean ages at which his respondents encountered five central events of the gay identity formation process (including self-labelling) along several dimensions. His analysis suggests that relative youth, i.e., being between 20 and 25 years old; little or no high school heterosexual activity
involving more than kissing; frequent episodes of homosexual behaviour in the high school years; relatively low levels of education; and being in certain occupational categories, e.g., students, facilitated the acquisition of a gay identity. The age dimension is held to be an influential facilitating factor by Dank (1971), who hypothesised that in contemporary society the freer circulation of information on homosexuals and homosexuality which challenges negative societal stereotypes should permit males to identify the homosexual component in their feelings more easily nowadays than in the past, thus permitting self-definition as homosexual to occur at earlier ages. Greater exposure to images of homosexuality in the media may alert young people to the existence of the homosexual category at earlier ages than in previous years and hence they may be provided with a cognitive framework with which to structure their sexual feelings early on. Kimmel (1978) notes that "a young person dealing with being gay in the 1970s has an entirely different set of historical-cultural conditions to ease the development of a positive gay identity from that of a person who grew up in the early 1900s" (p 124). The aspect of the Dank hypothesis that is open to contention is his belief that information on homosexuals and homosexuality which challenges existing negative stereotypes is freely available. Media presentations of gay men have never been highly favourable even before the advent of AIDS, which has led to much of today's coverage of gay men being more negative in tone, content and subtext than in the pre-AIDS decade (Armstrong, 1984-85; Watney,
Yet, it may be posited that the manner of presentation is not as important as the fact of presentation per se, as it allows the person who is working through their sexuality to interpret their experiences in terms of a given homosexual category and provides them with a label with which to experiment (Lofland, 1969). Dank found support for his hypothesis in that those who were under 30 years old in the group of gay men which he studied defined themselves as homosexual at a mean age of 17.2 years, while for those who were 30 or above, the same event occurred at a mean age of 21.4 years. Among Troiden's (1977) group, the corresponding mean ages were 20.7 and 22.6 years respectively. Troiden also found that several of the other milestone events which he examined, e.g., the age at which one's feelings are first labelled as gay and the age at which first love relationships are initiated, also occur at earlier ages among young age groups. McDonald (1982) likewise concluded that younger respondents are arriving at homosexual self-definitions and involving themselves in gay relationships earlier than in the past, but Coyle (1988) with a British group found no support for the Dank hypothesis.

One final comment on the content of Cass's stages three and four concerns her use of the concept of "homosexual others" and the consequences for identity of contact with them. During pilot research for the present study, one respondent when asked about the disadvantages of the gay subculture pointed out that the concept of "a gay subculture" was itself a disadvantage in that it masked
the heterogeneity of the many and various groupings which comprise this subculture: he suggested that reference to "gay subcultures" might be more correct (cf. Humphreys and Miller, 1980, for an exposition of the diversity of gay "scenes" and subcultures), a point noted by Weinberg and Williams (1974), who recognised a variety of gay communities divided along the lines of occupational status. Cass recognises this heterogeneity in her positing in stage four of two subcultural groupings differentiated on the basis of their view of the legitimacy of homosexuality in the private and public realms. As has been noted, this represents an advance on the majority of studies which create the impression of subcultural homogeneity. However, Cass fails to consider the possibility of subcultural groups which do not regard homosexuality as either a valid public or private identity and who espouse a view of homosexuality as what Kitzinger (1987) termed a "sorry state" and whose community is based on mutual consolation. This construction of homosexuality, because of its historical roots, is often attributed to older (i.e., over the age of 50) homosexuals (Plummer, 1981). However, there is no reason why, if such a grouping predominated in an isolated subculture, this "sorry state" conception of homosexuality should not be transmitted to subcultural initiates, with the expected negative consequences for gay identity development. The internalisation of such an outlook may constitute a further developmental option in stage four, although its most probable outcome would be a temporary or permanent halt in identity development. Such an outcome would
instantiate a subcultural hindrance to gay identity formation, to add to the cultural or societal constraints highlighted previously. The same criticism of an insufficiently rigorous application of a valid concept may be made concerning her recognition of the possibility of subcultural involvement which is experienced negatively. Some studies imply that contact with homosexual others is the catalyst which inevitably imparts a positive evaluation to a person's gay identity, e.g., Coleman (1982). While avoiding this approach, Cass still presumes in stage four that increased contact with other homosexuals permits the individual to encounter validating accounts of homosexuality. It is not the quantity of contact that is important but rather its quality in terms of the views of homosexuality espoused by those with whom the individual interacts. One may increase contact with those who hold "sorry state" views in order to avail oneself of consolatory group support but, in the absence of more positive attitudes, no legitimating accounts of homosexuality can be internalised.

2.7 Cass's Fifth Stage: "Identity Pride", Relationships and Disclosure

Stage five of Cass's model commences with the person being aware of the incongruency between his own positively evaluated homosexual sense of self and society's negative views of homosexuality. This
incongruency is resolved by the use of strategies which decrease the importance of heterosexuals and increase the importance of homosexuals in the person's interpersonal matrix, which permits the individual to accord less weight to how heterosexuals perceive him and more weight to homosexuals' perceptions. The implementation of these strategies involves the division of the person's world into homosexuals and heterosexuals, i.e., into significant and insignificant people. A sense of group identity develops with commitment to the gay subculture, which is characterised by the individual immersing himself in the subculture and by the evolution of a sense of "gay pride". It is the development of this sense of "identity pride" which constitutes the major task of this stage and which gives it its name. Heterosexual values, e.g., marriage, are rejected as promoting the concept of homosexual inferiority, and an alternative set of values is drawn from the subculture. At this stage, a gay identity is not only accepted but is preferred to a heterosexual one.

Although these strategies render incongruency manageable, the person finds himself forced to adhere to a system based on heterosexual values in everyday life which leads to an anger born of frustration and alienation. This anger, together with identity pride, makes of the person an "activist", intent on confronting established institutions as the only means of validating the concept of homosexuality as a positive entity. By raising further the significance of the gay subculture in the person's
interpersonal matrix, activism may reduce incongruency to a manageable level.

However, the proposal that such activism may be an important part of gay identity formation may be specific to the milieu in which Cass's model was formulated. It could be claimed that gay men are no longer as eager as they were in former years to challenge either on an individual level or on a collective level those social institutions which they believe perpetuate the heterosexual values that serve to oppress them. Certainly, it has been said that gay men who frequent the gay social scene today are "out for entertainment, sex and companionship" and little more (Milligan, 1989, p 43). The battles which made possible the level of organisation that exists in the gay community today and which brought gay men recognition if not wholehearted acceptance as a minority group were fought in the 1970s. With these attainments, gay political activism geared towards gaining social acceptance or civil rights or effecting social change appeared to diminish, perhaps because in the 1980s the efforts of activists were channelled into the HIV/AIDS field, promoting understanding of the syndrome among gay men in particular and the public in general and lobbying for adequate treatment and facilities for those affected by HIV, many of whom are gay men. Although this view may represent a reconstruction of the past, fabricated from the reminiscences of writers on the events of that period, e.g., Weeks (1987b), it could still be argued that today, activism may be less important in gay
identity formation that it once was but this is not to say that it no longer plays a part, even if that part is only a temporary reaction among subcultural initiates, for example, who, enamoured with the sense of having found answers to the questions of "who am I?" and "how I fit into the adult world" as their identities begin to cohere and with a growing awareness that a gay identity may possibly provide a meaningful life framework, reject heterosexuality and all its trappings and institutions, in much the same way that a religious convert may in the post-conversion period regard their denomination as all good and exalt it above all others.

In Cass's model, the major offshoot of a confrontational approach is the abandonment of strategies which were previously used to conceal a gay identity. When the person rejects established institutions, he becomes generally unconcerned with how heterosexuals perceive him, which leaves him free to choose disclosure as a strategy for coping with incongruency. As Goffman (1963) points out, disclosure alters the identity tasks for the person who is coping with a stigmatised identity: the individual ceases to be concerned with the management of potentially discrediting information and instead becomes involved in the management of potentially uncomfortable social situations. While bringing public identity into line with private identity and continually affirming one's gay identity, the disclosure of sexual preference may also heighten incongruency, an outcome which may
cause the person to opt for a strategy of selective disclosure. If disclosure is perceived as personally threatening by the individual, e.g., in that it may lead to the loss of one's job, the disparity between what one would like to do and what one is constrained to do may act as a source of conflict. This may be alleviated by altering one's life situation, e.g., by changing one's job or by the adoption of the compromise strategy of nonconcealment rather than disclosure.

The nature of the reactions elicited by disclosure have important implications for identity development. Reactions which are perceived to be negative are consistent with the person's expectations, based upon his perception of negative societal attitudes towards homosexuality. If this occurs regularly, identity development may be halted. However, if reactions are perceived to be positive, this is inconsistent with the person's expectations. Attempts to resolve this inconsistency lead the person into the sixth and final stage of Cass's model of gay identity formation.

The two central issues which the Identity Pride stage raises are those of the development of commitment to a gay identity and of identity pride, which is an extension of the effects of subcultural involvement treated in the two previous stages, and the disclosure of sexual preference. Both Plummer (1975) and Troiden (1977) describe a post-acceptance stage in which the individual takes
pride in possessing a homosexual identity and also rejects heterosexual values. This sense of pride may be related to an individual's conclusion that a homosexual identity is of equal worth to a heterosexual identity. Troiden (1977) terms this phase "commitment", which he describes as the reluctance on the part of the individual to abandon a homosexual identity even if given the opportunity to do so: 91% of his respondents asserted that they would not wish to become heterosexual even if there were a foolproof method of effecting this change. The most frequently cited reasons for this were contentment and happiness with a homosexual preference, the belief that nothing would be gained by changing, and an expressed preference for a gay lifestyle. Such commitment to a homosexual identity has been found to be positively related to psychological well-being (Weinberg and Williams, 1974). Seven of Weinberg's (1976) 30 respondents, however, wished they were not homosexual at the time of the study; six had never harboured this wish, and 17 had desired a change in sexual preference only before they labelled themselves as gay. Plummer's (1975) delineation of those factors which encourage commitment to a homosexual identity include the ease of remaining committed to and the difficulty of changing familiar behavioural patterns; pleasure in the homosexual role and in homosexual activity; the secondary benefits of being gay such as a higher standard of living; a lack of in-group homosexual support for a decision to change; and the difficulty of shedding the public label of homosexual.

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The development of identity pride and commitment - like subcultural involvement - is subsumed within Minton and McDonald's (1984) phase of acceptance of and commitment to a homosexual identity, which forms part of their broader universalistic stage. Also cited as a variable which increases identity commitment in this stage is the development of a same-sex love relationship. It is the emotional and identity-enhancing possibilities of relationships that Browning (1987) focusses upon in her treatment of lesbian women. She points to the potential in a same-sex love relationship for "validating her personhood, reinforcing that she deserves to give and receive love" (p 51) and to its being able to act as "a source of tremendous emotional support as the woman explores her goals, values, and relationship to the world" (ibid.). The question of relationships and their effect upon identity is surprisingly overlooked by Cass and Weinberg. The latter really only examines them as a factor which facilitates self-labelling as homosexual.

The relationship issue is however accorded a major role in the models of Coleman (1982), Troiden (1977) and Warren (1974). The lastmentioned regards the taking of a lover as representing a commitment to the emotional as well as the sexual aspects of a homosexual identity. Coleman (1982) posits a need for intimacy after the sexual exploration stage, as do Gagnon and Simon (1973), but recognises that first gay relationships may be disastrous because of the intensity, possessiveness and lack of trust involved. The individuals concerned may feel that the
relationships must make the struggle for a gay identity seem worthwhile and must be perfect: excessively high expectations are easily disappointed. Strain may be placed upon relationships by one or both partners attempting to derive all of the emotional support and validation needed for their gay identity development from it (Browning, 1987). Additionally, the relationship may suffer not only from the same difficulties which any heterosexual couple face, but also from a lack of external validation from family and friends who either refuse to accept the relationship or who have not been told about its existence (Plummer, 1981). The oft-quoted maxim that gay relationships do not last may become a self-defeating, self-fulfilling prophecy.

The need for intimacy - a need possibly fed by years of sexual and emotional isolation and which has been termed "fusion" (Karpel, 1976) or "merger" (Burch, 1982), curtailing personal autonomy - may engender feelings of restriction and confinement among those involved, which may in turn lead to an interest in sexual activity outside the relationship. Equally, a fear of intimacy, possibly arising from having been rejected by close and significant others following the disclosure of sexual preference, may undermine relationships (Clark, 1987). Initial relationships may also fail because, as Clark (1987) notes, the person is often first attracted to someone who is very different from themselves. This he attributes to the person's inability to value themselves at this point: they can only value and find attractive what is different
from themselves. Some may not even be able to do this if an unremittingly negative evaluation of homosexuality has been internalised and has not been challenged: the person may unconsciously devalue their partners as well as themselves and because of this may be unable to establish warm, intimate relationships (Hoffman, 1968).

The failure of initial relationships may cause some individuals to return to the sexual exploration stage, now convinced that gay relationships cannot work, or to continue in a similar pattern of destructive relationships, or even to question whether he is really gay at all (Browning, 1987). Alternatively, there may be a realistic lowering of expectations and a recognition that successful relationships require mutual trust and freedom. Underpinned by increasing self-acceptance and by the continued development of a gay identity, mature and healthy relationships may evolve, which may in turn promote further self-acceptance, self-esteem and general psychological well-being. Weinberg and Williams (1974) found that those respondents who had more experience of exclusive homosexual relationships, compared with those who had less experience, reported more self-acceptance, stability of self-concept, and less depression, interpersonal awkwardness and loneliness.

Coleman's (1982) treatment of the issue of relationships is notable in its presumption that they are based on the ideal of sexual
exclusivity, the infraction of which causes conflict within the relationships. The development of mature and healthy relationships may be linked to the rejection of the marriage ideal with which the person is likely to have been socialised (if not in one's family of origin then through the recognition of this as a societal ideal) in that the person may, independently of this, arrive at a conception of the type(s) of relationship which are best suited to his social, emotional and sexual needs. If mature relationships are defined in this personalised manner, monogamous relationships have no claim to pre-eminence over more sexually open ones, and both merit equal consideration in any model of gay identity formation which focusses upon them. The social and psychological implications of various types of gay relationships have been treated at length by Bell and Weinberg (1978) but the most usual angle adopted in the study of relationships in the gay identity literature has been the tracing of their effects as a homogeneous factor upon gay identity.

In Troiden's (1977) model, the taking of a lover is placed at the beginning of the commitment stage and is regarded as signifying "the fusion of gay sexuality and emotionality into a meaningful whole" (p 157). The importance of this fusion for identity development has long been acknowledged (cf. Erikson, 1959) and Troiden sees it as a precondition for the development of a gay identity. The contention of Gagnon and Simon (1973) that gay men are more likely to enter into love relationships after, rather than
at the same time as, they label themselves as gay is borne out by the fact that those respondents in Troiden's study who had initiated one or more love relationships first did so approximately two and a half years after the mean age of homosexual self-definition.

The relationship pattern among lesbians appears to be somewhat different. Lewis (1984) contends that as women are socialised to have and maintain relationships, sexual exploration and experimentation often occur within a relationship context. This is due also to the fundamental nature of female sexuality which may lead to sex outside the context of a meaningful relationship being difficult or unpleasant. Such a recognition of difference between female and male sexuality further justifies the decision to pursue only male gay identity formation in the present study. Like Coleman (1982), Lewis acknowledges the likelihood of initial relationships being unstable but moves beyond this by recognising the possibility of experimentation with different types of relationships at this stage, rendered necessary by a lack of relationship models. Relationships are also viewed as holding implications for the ways in which lesbian women may deal with their families. Anxiety about the consequences of the discovery of her relationship may induce a woman to distance herself from her family, but alternatively the support which she finds within her relationship may act as an impetus for her to disclose her lesbianism to her family.
This consideration dovetails neatly with the other central issue in Cass's stage of Identity Pride, i.e., the disclosure to others of one's sexual preference. Within the general disclosure literature the most celebrated figure is Jourard, whose examination of the relationship between disclosure and psychological well-being is most relevant to the present study. Although he rarely makes specific reference to the disclosure of a gay identity, the mixture of review and commentary which follows demonstrates that many of his concepts may be fruitfully applied to this area. The role of the disclosure of sexual preference in models and descriptions of gay identity formation will be treated in some detail firstly because it is a particularly salient issue in a number of the models outlined and secondly because of its potential for assuming an important position in terms of both the content and the structure of gay identity-relevant personal narratives. Unlike many of the quite nebulous, protracted and process-based experiences examined heretofore, instances of, reactions to and the ramifications of disclosure may be comparatively specific behavioural events that are contained within limited temporal parameters. Such qualities, it might be hypothesised, increase the likelihood that disclosure experiences will be recalled and retained in their entirety by gay men as they construct their gay identity formation narratives. These experiential sequences (disclosure-reactions-ramifications) may act as structural models within narratives, causing other narrative contents to be elaborated and organised in similar ways. Additionally, because
of their potential salience, disclosure experiences may act as focal points or perhaps as turning points within narratives around which accounts of other less salient experiences are organised.

Jourard (1971) observes how social systems require their members to assume certain roles, the fulfilment of which is held to constitute "normality". In a gay identity context, the most pertinent role which must be adhered to is that of "the heterosexual", which implies a certain lifestyle and structure to one's relationships. These role demands may create problems for certain individuals if their sense of identity or the gratification of certain basic needs - for example in this case, the need for sexual, emotional and social relationships with other gay men - are rendered subordinate to the fulfilment of the role and the attainment of "normality". As the performance of a role is held to involve the suppression of all behaviour irrelevant to the role, the person who does not naturally fit the role may become estranged from the real nature of the self which must be suppressed. Such self-estrangement has been identified by Horney (1950) as lying at the root of neurosis. Thus the attempt by a person with same-sex attractions to play the role of the heterosexual and to suppress their feelings has major implications for the person's psychological well-being. Continuous tension may well result from the awareness that discovery of one's secret prejudices one's current social situation and established relationships and the current and future images which others hold of one (Goffman, 1963),
although, as has been outlined in the discussion of passing, this assumption has been challenged.

The historical origin of self-disclosure has been traced by Jourard back to the "talking cure" of Breuer and Freud in the last century who discovered that hysterical symptoms disappeared when patients talked about their feelings. It remains "a means of ultimately achieving healthy personality" (Jourard, 1971, p 32) and of overcoming the falsity in interpersonal relationships consequent upon the self-alienation engendered by playing an ill-fitting role. For such a role player, psychological well-being is held to remain elusive while he/she struggles and works ceaselessly to appear to fit the normality-bestowing role. Only by self-disclosure may others come to know the person's real self, by which Jourard presumably means the essence that underlies all the roles a person plays and all the self-presentations he/she makes. By the affirmation of the nature of the real self in disclosure, the person is said to come to a fuller awareness of their real self. This contention may be linked to those studies which claim to have identified psychopathology in homosexuals (Carlson and Baxter, 1984; Evans, 1970; Friedberg, 1975; Hart, 1978; Hooberman, 1975; Jacobs and Tedford, 1980; Nurius, 1983; Prytula, Wellford and De Monbreun, 1979; Rizzo, Fehr, McMahon and Stamps, 1981; Siegelman, 1972; Sipova and Brzek, 1983; Skrapec and MacKenzie, 1981; Van den Aardweg, 1985; Weis, 1977; Weis and Dain, 1979; and Williams, 1981), the source of which may be posited to be the constant
struggle to appear "normal" by conforming to the heterosexual role (Pinka, 1977) and the social rejection experienced by many gay men (Clark, 1987; Feldman, 1984). The disclosure of one's sexual preference should thus have the dual effect of alleviating the anxiety described in many such studies and solidifying a sense of a gay identity through the assertion to others and hence also to oneself that one is gay, although the extent of disclosure must be carefully considered, as Cozby (1973) suggests that self-disclosure may be curvilinearly related to psychological adjustment, in which case too much disclosure may have as deleterious an effect as too little. The benefits of disclosure are not solely confined to the discloser. Jourard claims that the vicarious experience of others' experience enables the listener to agree, disagree, compare and contrast his/her experiences with those of the discloser; this allows the listener to broaden and deepen the dimensions of his/her experience and sharpen his/her sense of identity.

Jourard also examines the inhibitory effect of the male role with regard to disclosure. It has been consistently shown that men reveal less personal information about themselves to others than do women (Cozby, 1973; Hood and Back, 1971; Jourard, 1961; Jourard and Lasakow, 1958; Jourard and Richman, 1963). This unwillingness to be known by others is presumed to carry a constant burden of stress and to involve the expenditure of large amounts of energy in order to maintain secrecy: Jourard implicates this as a contributory factor in the relatively shorter male lifespan. It
follows that the stress and tension experienced by gay men who have not disclosed their sexual preference to anyone should be chronic both because of their maleness which is said to inhibit disclosure, and because of the importance of the area which they keep hidden, an area which is intrinsically important and important in terms of the consequences which might follow disclosure, and is rendered subjectively important by the extent to which the person is forced to focus on it by an acute awareness of the problems its management will create and of the social approbation it attracts. Moreover, as both Jourard (1971) and Maslow (1954) argue that significant and substantial self-disclosure to others is a prerequisite for the achievement of a healthy personality, the implications for psychological well-being of the non-disclosure of such a fundamental aspect of the person as their sexual identity are clear.

Jourard also outlines the most powerful determinants of self-disclosure, chief among which are the identity of the person to whom one will disclose information and the nature of the relationship between the two people. Perception of the other person as someone who is trustworthy, of good will and perhaps willing to make equivalent disclosures is a major facilitating factor. Thus, in terms of the disclosure of sexual preference, a gay man may be most likely to disclose to someone who is significant to him and to whom he feels close in order to allow that relationship to proceed and possibly deepen on a more honest
basis than before. On the other hand, initial disclosure may be made to a total stranger so that the discloser may test and refine his disclosure procedures for the future and gauge the type of reactions that may be expected. Also a stranger is "trustworthy" to the extent that he/she does not play a role in the discloser's interpersonal system and so cannot betray the discloser's public heterosexual identity, if he maintains one. This is what is meant by the more conventional description of the person to whom disclosure is made as "trustworthy": the discloser must feel confident that his secret will not be imparted to those whom he does not feel should know. The possibility exists, however, that the spreading of the secret beyond the two people involved in the disclosure relationship is the actual aim of the disclosure. Permission may be given either implicitly or explicitly for the person to whom disclosure is made to inform others within the discloser's interpersonal network of the subject of disclosure - in this case that the discloser is gay. Such "disclosure by proxy" means that the gay man does not have to endure the possibly traumatic procedure of disclosure repeatedly, and reduces the likelihood of him encountering negative reactions to the information that he is gay, as those who have been indirectly informed will probably have had the opportunity to formulate their ideas on the subject before their next encounter with the gay man and hence may be more aware of the implications for him of any negative reactions on their part.
A further aim of disclosure may be the elicitation of reciprocal disclosure, which Jourard terms the "dyadic effect" and which he believes underlies ordinary social dialogue. It is because intimate relationships almost inevitably involve the mutual disclosure of secrets that Goffman (1963) regards disclosure as a natural consequence of being closely involved with others. If the person to whom disclosure is made has presented a heterosexual self-image before the disclosure, the discloser may hope that their reciprocal disclosure will reveal that they too are gay and will consequently relieve the discloser's isolation or provide a possible sexual partner. If the person to whom disclosure is made is known to be or is suspected of being gay, it may be hoped that reciprocal disclosure will additionally provide information about the management of a gay identity or about the gay subculture. There is always an aim underlying the disclosure of sexual preference, whether it be the gaining of support, advice or information or the relieving of isolation, guilt or fear. No one voluntarily undergoes "the terrors which attend self-disclosure" (Jourard, 1971, p 31) or risks the destruction of their interpersonal environment by the disclosure of potentially damaging information to significant others whose reactions are assumed but not known without expecting such disclosure to be in some sense beneficial to them.

The possibly problematic nature of others' reactions to self-disclosure are also examined by Jourard. He traces these problems
to the expectation held in social interaction that those with whom we interact will appear before us in ways with which we are familiar and with which we can cope without strain: we exert pressure on people to remain as they have been. If a person's identity has developed so that they no longer are what they once professed to be - in this case, if they have decided to dispense with a public image of themselves as heterosexual and to disclose themselves as gay - they may move the location of their everyday life to a place where no one has experience of them in their former role of heterosexual or, more commonly, because of constraints on their mobility, they may attempt to change the ideas which others hold about them so that they encompass their identity development. This is not an easy task, as people may feel threatened by change of any sort. As Weinberg (1976) observes, "people who are close to one have a kind of 'stake' or vested interest in the 'picture' which they have developed of the person.......(h)ow we behave toward the person, the understandings we build up with him concerning mutual expectations, etc., are all based on what we conceive him to be. If the image is challenged or destroyed, it is not merely the image that is impaired or rendered internally dissonant; our whole relationship to him, and even our relationships to others.......are thrown into confusion" (pp 429-430). This is multiplied if others are asked to sanction the change involved in someone adopting a socially devalued identity. To accept such change may also threaten their conceptions of sexual normality, decency and masculinity and they may attempt to
invalidate new ways of being that are disclosed by someone whom they have known for a long time. Some of the men in Weinberg's study reported that their friends refused to believe that they were homosexual "because they had built up a particular perception of, and relationship to, the men which would have been destroyed if they had accepted this information as being true" (p 430). Disclosure involves change both in the world of the discloser and in the worlds of those to whom disclosure is made. If the latter are unwilling or unable to change, the discloser may attempt to revert to his past identity which, although very difficult in the disclosure of a gay identity, may be possible if the disclosure was provisional or qualified: instances of this are cited by Weinberg (1976). Alternatively, the significance of the opinions of the rejecting others may be devalued, as outlined in Cass's Identity Acceptance and Identity Pride stages and others may be sought who will accept the disclosure of a gay identity.

Among the studies of gay identity formation which have been emphasised so far, the most thorough treatment of the issues surrounding the disclosure of sexual preference has been undertaken by Weinberg (1976), although he does not directly acknowledge the general disclosure literature. His contribution will be examined in detail here because of the degree to which it is relevant to the examination of the disclosure of sexual preference in the present study. Weinberg identifies the period during which disclosure of sexual preference to heterosexuals most commonly occurs as being
after self-labelling as homosexual. The pre-disclosure stage is characterised by a fear of rejection combined with a fear that self-disclosure will solidify for the gay man a negatively evaluated identity which he is not yet ready to accept and will make it impossible to alter that identity should he choose to do so at some time in the future, as a declared homosexual identity - like other deviant public identities such as "the alcoholic" - is difficult to recant. Weinberg and Williams (1974) suggest that the origin of apprehension about disclosure is located in the depictions of the homosexual in literature, the mass media and scientific publications in which it is implied that disclosure is accompanied by ridicule, censure and violence; and in acquaintance with the "sad tales" of other homosexuals which often over dramatise the disclosure experience, thereby, incidentally, underlining its importance within their gay identity formation narratives. Qualified disclosures were employed by Weinberg's respondents not only to allow the possibility of a later withdrawal of the homosexual identity but also, in conjunction with gradual or indirect disclosures, to mitigate the impact of the disclosure on others. What Goffman (1963) terms "disclosure etiquette" was employed, involving the use of various techniques of gradual or qualified disclosure, e.g., referring to homosexual "tendencies" or "attractions" rather than labelling oneself as homosexual, or completely omitting the terms "gay" and "homosexual" from the disclosure. The disclosure techniques which an individual adopts are regarded as being open to change, depending upon the degree to
which he accepts and is comfortable with his gay identity, the nature of the disclosure audience and his estimation of likely reactions. Thus, such techniques are said to vary both across and within individuals, but their shared aim is the maintenance of control over the manner and content of the disclosure of sexual identity and the possible reactions to it.

In a consideration of those people who were chosen as initial objects of disclosure, Weinberg reported that many respondents first selected those whom they knew to have had the same sort of sexual experiences as themselves, or those whom they knew or suspected to be homosexual, although the support which they hoped for or expected from these people was not always forthcoming. Those heterosexuals to whom disclosure was subsequently made were usually close friends of the discloser, although room-mates, counsellors, girlfriends or financees and fellow workers were also mentioned. Parents, siblings and other relatives were less likely to have been told. At the time of the interview, seven men had told one parent, 12 had told both, and 11 had not told either parent, although five of the latter group believed that their parents knew that they were homosexual: the same differentiation between family members who knew that the person was gay and those that had actually been told was recognised by respondents participating in Project SIGMA, a study of gay men and AIDS, which included a number of questions on the disclosure of gay identity (Hunt, 1989). Just as interesting as an examination of those who
have been told is a consideration of those who have not: this category included friends with whom contact was no longer maintained, employers, fellow workers and clergymen. Among the reasons cited for non-disclosure to these people were a belief that they could not accept or cope with the person's homosexuality, based, for example, on their reactions to other sorts of "deviance"; a feeling that the disclosers could not have coped with the possible negative reactions of or rejection by these people; and a belief that their relationships with these people were not sufficiently close as to merit disclosure or that disclosure would have served no purpose. Very few had not been selective in the disclosure of their sexual preference. In accordance with Goffman's (1963) conceptions of the management of stigmatised identity, most were said to have divided their world into those who knew about them and those who didn't, but perhaps a finer triptychical division - in line with the tell/know distinction - might involve those who have been told, those who are thought to know but who have not been told, and those who do not know.

The most common theme in responses to the question of why disclosure was made was a reported feeling of closeness to those told. Mention was also made of a desire to be honest with those to whom one feels close and a weariness of having to deceive others about one's activities (also reported by Lee's (1977) subjects): the men felt that acceptance by others was worthless if it was based on a presentation of the self which denied or concealed
essential parts of the self. This stage is described by Goffman (1963) as the "final, mature, well-adjusted one" in the management of a stigmatised identity. It was further hoped that disclosure would relieve social isolation and the tension generated by the necessity of controlling potentially stigmatising information about the self, and would provide the disclosers with a source of understanding and support. Only in a minority of cases was disclosure precipitated by a crisis situation, e.g., by the desperate need for positive reactions following an extremely negative reaction to an initial disclosure. From an analysis of the responses of their subjects, Steinman and Maclean (1975) enumerate various reasons for disclosure. More than a quarter were classified as political reasons, e.g., in order to participate in a gay march, to work for a gay group, or to confront those with anti-gay attitudes, and an equal proportion concerned "self-consideration", e.g., in order to enlist help in dealing with being gay, or because the individual was tired of having to lie. One fifth of responses focussed on sexual concerns, e.g., individuals disclosed because they wished to avert opposite-sex interest in them, or because they were sexually attracted to the person to whom they disclosed or because they wanted to be able to talk freely about a male lover.

As regards the nature of the disclosure process, Weinberg's data suggest that the initial decision to disclose sexual preference generally involves much thought, debate and anxiety. There were
only a few instances of disclosure occurring without careful prior consideration of the possible implications and ramifications, and these tended to take place in the context of an intense emotional crisis, for example, in the course of a more general bitter argument. Woodman and Lenna (1980) note that the disclosure of a gay identity is sometimes made in order to punish people who have somehow inflicted pain in the past. Another crisis which sometimes precipitated disclosure was the death of a parent (Steinman and Maclean, 1975), chosen as an opportune moment to disclose to the surviving parent possibly because at such a time family members may be particularly open and tender in their feelings for each other or because, by embedding the disclosure in the context of the greatest possible familial crisis, its negative connotations are relativised and a muted response is likely. More usually, the method of disclosure was planned well in advance and was determined by an estimation of the probable responses which disclosure would elicit. The most common technique reported in Steinman and Maclean's (1975) study was explicit verbal disclosure, used by more than a third of respondents. Considerably smaller proportions employed implicit verbal (e.g., dropping hints), explicit non-verbal (e.g., showing physical affection for a male lover in public) or implicit non-verbal (e.g., associating with known homosexuals) techniques. Among Weinberg's respondents, methods tended to alter as more people were told: disclosure became more spontaneous and less cautious, and the process was subjectively experienced as being increasingly easy. This is understandable,
given that the majority of men received positive responses to initial disclosures and hence were encouraged to disclose to more people. Disclosure was almost always carried out by the respondents themselves: only in a few cases did significant others find out about respondents' homosexuality from third parties. However, disclosure was not always self-initiated but was sometimes made in response to a query concerning the person's sexuality, or as a reaction to disparaging comments being made about homosexuals or during a moment of anger, bitterness or during a family dispute. Disclosure to one person at a time was the most common occurrence but simultaneous revelation to several people was also reported.

Three possibilities were examined in relation to the types of feedback consequent upon the disclosure of sexual preference. Positive feedback was regarded as facilitating gay identity formation, although another study has suggested that general support from significant others does not influence the extent to which a person is committed to their gay identity or their level of psychological adjustment (Hammersmith and Weinberg, 1973). An absence of feedback, i.e., where the disclosure was ignored or where there was a refusal to deal with it, was viewed as being more damaging to identity formation than non-disclosure. Negative feedback was deemed either to act as a very concrete social constraint on gay identity formation and inhibit the development of a gay identity or to solidify it in a type of reaction formation in which the person rejects the authority of those who rejected
him. The different responses to negative feedback were explained by hypothesising that those who rejected their rejectors were enabled to do so by their being less dependent upon the support of others than were those for whom gay identity formation was impeded by rejection. Alternatively, despite having encountered negative reactions from some, they may have received support from others. There is evidence among Weinberg's respondents which favours the latter but the lack of support for the former explanation is hardly surprising, given his sociological approach which prefers to seek explanations in terms of social relations rather than in terms of characteristics within the person, and given the way in which his questions were framed. With regard to the nature of the feedback received, 14 of Weinberg's 30 men reported that they received what they classed as positive, supportive responses from all the heterosexual friends to whom they had disclosed their sexual preference, and four received a mixture of positive and negative responses. Eleven did not receive any encouragement at all, although the responses to their disclosure were sometimes simply unenthusiastic, ambiguous or neutral rather than being completely negative. When questioned about the effects of others' positive reactions to disclosure, most respondents replied that they had helped them to accept, feel comfortable with and evaluate positively their gay identity. Some men also stated that positive reactions helped deepen their friendships with those to whom they disclosed: they regarded these people as being more sensitive, caring and mature than they had previously imagined. Negative
feedback, on the other hand, led some respondents to view their rejectors as insensitive and intolerant people who could no longer be trusted: they felt disappointed in them and alienated from them.

Almost every respondent was accepted by at least one person following disclosure. Positive reactions only facilitated self-definition as homosexual in a few cases, as most men had already negotiated this stage before disclosing themselves to heterosexuals. A differentiation in positive feedback was reported in that some people to whom disclosure was made accepted both the person and his homosexuality while others made it clear that while they accepted the person, they did not accept his homosexuality, at least at first. One extreme form of negative feedback was described by eight men who encountered complete rejection from some of their friends to whom they revealed their sexual preference and they subsequently became estranged from them. This reaction is not experienced very often because of the careful pre-disclosure planning outlined earlier: people usually disclose their homosexuality to others only if they are relatively certain of acceptance.

One surprising conclusion reached by Weinberg's respondents was that the reaction of other people to disclosure had only an indirect effect upon the development of the discloser's gay identity: it may be that, being unwilling to confer the responsibility for and the inherent merit of their surviving the
struggle to attain a gay identity upon anyone but themselves, they had revised their narratives accordingly and had boosted their sense of self-efficacy. Weinberg does however conclude that disclosure to other homosexuals had a greater effect in developing commitment to a gay identity among his respondents than did disclosure to heterosexuals. Some indicated that it was the support of gay people which enabled them to disclose to heterosexuals. Among the outcomes of disclosure mentioned were the derogation of the authority of those who reacted negatively and the corresponding upgrading of those who reacted positively, and the provision of an impetus to find out more about homosexuality.

Perhaps because they frequently fulfil the role of significant others and hence because of the potentially great influence which they may exert on the development of a gay identity, in Weinberg's study the discloser's family is examined in particular detail with respect to the feedback which they provide in response to disclosure. The likelihood of the person behaving differently among the family compared to how he would behave among friends is stressed by Westwood (1960) - admittedly in the days before the rise of the gay liberation movement and the increased public profile of homosexuality - who said that "(e)ven some of those who behave fairly openly in public are most careful to avoid arousing suspicions in the family circle" (p 40). Twenty-five of Weinberg's men had disclosed their sexual preference to relatives and in ten of these cases, the disclosure was not so much a revelation as a
confirmation of their suspicions or their prior knowledge, a bridging of the previously noted distinction between knowing and being told. Only six of these men reported that all the relatives whom they told accepted this information and four of the men had disclosed only to those relatives whom they felt would accept it. It therefore appears that acceptance of one's homosexuality by all of one's family, at least initially, is extremely unlikely, and that there is a much higher proportion of adverse reactions to disclosure among relatives than among close friends. This was hypothesised as being due to the frequently considerable psychological and emotional investment in the person which family members may have or to a feeling of parental guilt or failure in response to their son's homosexuality.

Various parental reactions to disclosure were described which included a refusal to discuss or acknowledge the information; a belief that the homosexuality was a temporary phase; and an attempt to persuade their son to see a psychiatrist in order to change his sexual preference. Negative reactions were sometimes interpreted as a rejection of the person, i.e., the discloser. Those relatives whose reactions were thus perceived were (step) fathers and sisters; mothers and brothers were not perceived as rejecting. Supportive reactions from at least one family member were reported by a majority of the men and sometimes had the effect of deepening the relationship between the respondent and the relative concerned. Negative responses from close friends caused hurt and distress but
some men said that they understood these responses in terms of the problems which disclosure had caused for their heterosexual friends. Feelings of hurt, anger and upset were much more common in response to the negative reactions of family members and sometimes led to a deterioration in relationships with those family members. Yet some men were able to rationalise negative familial reactions, possibly because the emotional investment of family members in the homosexual son or sibling can be reciprocal and can thus provide the motivation to do so.

Weinberg's examination of his respondents' reactions to others' reactions to disclosure produced findings which were in accordance with the symbolic interactionist principle that the feelings people have about themselves are closely related to the perceived nature of the feedback which they receive from others: those men who believed they were being accepted by others became more relaxed and confident, felt more comfortable with their homosexuality and began to like themselves more, while those who believed they had been rejected felt negatively about themselves. Twenty men believed that their feelings about themselves had changed following disclosure (17 in a positive direction and three in a negative direction), whereas nine men reported no changes.

An analysis of the strategies used to deal with negative reactions, not specifically in relation to family members, revealed that some men risked permanent alienation from their rejectors by confronting
them, demanding acceptance and threatening to sever all links with them if it were not forthcoming: this approach was not successful in gaining acceptance for those who employed it. Others were not so confrontational but insisted on the legitimacy of their gay lifestyle. Such action served to provide them with an esteem-raising view of themselves as autonomous, confident people who were not dependent upon the approval of others. Not all reactions were quite so positive, however. One man reverted to a complete concealment of his homosexuality and became a social isolate; another attempted to change his sexual preference. A more constructive but more risky strategy which was outlined involved seeking out others who might react more positively to disclosure, which runs the risk of repeated rejection. As action options regarding negative familial reactions tend to be more restricted (the confrontational approach may not be feasible because of one's emotional investment in or financial dependence upon one's family), inaction was the most common response among respondents who had experienced them, although some men became hostile towards or moved away from those family members who had rejected them.

Weinberg acknowledges that his treatment of initial disclosures of sexual identity provides only part of the picture, since people's responses to disclosure may change over time, as may the gay man's feelings about those people. A number of his subjects believed that some people who had not initially reacted positively to disclosure were now at least attempting to understand the gay
lifestyle, even if they did not fully accept it as a legitimate alternative mode of being. This change was judged to have been caused by a realisation on the part of the people concerned that they had no control over the gay man's sexuality and should not risk alienating him. Such a perspective was primarily attributed to those who had a high degree of emotional investment in the gay person, i.e., family members, and was often accompanied by a differentiation between the person, who was fully accepted, and his homosexuality, which was not. Some families expressed their non-acceptance of their son's/sibling's homosexuality by refusing to acknowledge or discuss it. These reactions are not confined to the subject of homosexuality but occur when parents are confronted by any aspects of their children's lives which are unacceptable to them and they must choose between some form of acceptance and the risk of alienating the child. Increased acceptance may develop if the families encounter their son's/sibling's gay friends and gain positive impressions of them which may help dispel any negative stereotypes they may hold. Just like the men themselves before they had contact with other gay men, their families may have stereotypical views partly because of a lack of knowledge about and contact with homosexuals.

Affective change in a positive direction was also reported in relation to the men's feelings about the people to whom they had disclosed their sexual preference. Those who had initially received supportive responses from family members continued to have
positive and sometimes enhanced relations with these relatives. However, not all disclosure accounts had happy endings: some respondents related that they remained alienated from friends or family at the time of the study. Positive changes in attitudes to the self over time were noted too. These were attributed to the acceptance and support found among other gay people and to the development of a sense of "gay pride" resulting to a large extent from involvement in gay organisations.

In summary, the disclosure experience appeared to have facilitated most men's self-acceptance, increased their self-confidence, reduced feelings of guilt, enabled them to be more open and direct with those to whom disclosure was made, to feel more comfortable with themselves and free to live a gay lifestyle. These positive results were attributed not only to positive responses to self-disclosure but also to the feelings of self-efficacy which the decision to disclose engendered.

The other studies of gay identity formation that have been under consideration also examine the disclosure of sexual preference but to varying degrees. Lewis (1984) discusses the process of disclosure to family members by lesbian women, which she claims is almost always experienced as a turning point in the formation of a lesbian identity, thereby supporting the hypothesis outlined at the start of this discussion of disclosure which related to the structural role that may be accorded to disclosure experiences.
within gay identity formation narratives. Disclosure is considered as an option by a woman when she becomes aware of her increasing acceptance of her lesbian identity and is consequently unwilling to continue to conceal it. It occurs only after careful consideration of the possible outcomes - as outlined by Weinberg - but unlike Weinberg, Lewis states that it tends to be the result of a crisis situation. She also believes that entirely positive parental reactions are most unlikely. Even where there is acceptance, the intergenerational bond which arises when the younger generation have children of their own and thereby identify with their parents may be lost (which presumes that the women do not already have or want to have children). Parents may also feel concern or a sense of loss at the prospect of their offspring not gaining social acceptance or not fulfilling the cultural norms or expectations with which they were socialised.

Coleman (1982) refers to disclosure in the context of giving advice on how to help lesbians and gay men in the development of their identities. Recognising that disclosure to some significant others can be critical in the development of positive self-conceptions, he firstly advises that lesbians and gay men be encouraged to take calculated risks in disclosing their sexual preference to others. Secondly, he recommends that anyone to whom disclosure is made should convey acceptance, as such positive reactions will challenge both internalised negative societal attitudes and any negative self-conceptions which the lesbian or gay man might have. He
believes that individual reactions to disclosure make a greater impact on the gay person than any direct or indirect societal reactions to homosexuality. This stands in opposition to the reported finding of Weinberg and Williams (1974) that the reaction of individuals is perceived by gay men as a reflection of the broader reactions of society so that the significance to a gay man of the person who reacts to his homosexuality does not determine the degree to which that reaction influences the gay man's thinking.

Minton and McDonald (1984) place disclosure primarily in the "Homosexual Identity Management" section of their Universalistic Stage. They regard this last phase of homosexual identity formation as being characterised by an integration of personal and public identities through disclosure to others. The disclosure of sexual preference is summarised as "a lifelong process, comprising decisions of whether or not to disclose, how and when to disclose, and how to face the consequences of disclosure" (p 102): these dilemmas are also identified by Goffman (1963) as being faced by the "discreditable" person, i.e., by someone whose stigma is not immediately apparent. The discloser's perception of self is held to be altered positively if interpersonal support results from disclosure and negatively if such support is lacking. Psychological well-being and the possibility of an integrated personal identity or authentic relationships may be jeopardised if such a fundamental aspect of the self as a gay identity is concealed from significant
As Woodman and Lenna (1980) note, "an identity, particularly a positive, creative identity, requires sharing if it is to grow" (p 62). Minton and McDonald suggest - as Weinberg's respondents pointed out - that concealment of one's homosexuality leads the person to feel that he is valued for what others expect him to be rather than for who he really is. At the other extreme, widespread disclosure has its disadvantages. If most of those in one's interpersonal environment know of one's homosexuality, everyday interactions can become apprehensive and uncomfortable and may always hold the possibility of rejection. Declaration of a gay identity carries the risk of eliciting discrimination, physical harrassment or verbal abuse; it may lead to an abridgement of housing and employment rights and general civil liberties.

In Lee's (1977) three-stage model of gay identity formation, disclosure first occurs in the second "Coming Out" stage and begins with the individual revealing his sexual preference to a few carefully selected heterosexual friends, each of whom are sworn to secrecy. The next step involves the person allowing his sexual preference to become known within a restricted social network, such as among a mixed circle of gay and heterosexual friends, or to a clearly defined group at his workplace. The progressive revelation then proceeds to a disclosure to "a gay liberation organization or to individuals expressing a gay liberation ideology" (p 56). Lee's terminology may appear somewhat dated, but the underlying idea of revelation to a group or an individual that espouses a positive
conception of what it means to be gay is clear. It is believed that only a small proportion of all homosexuals take this step, but it is described as an essential prerequisite to the stage of ultimate disclosure which has already been mentioned in the context of "going public". In his examination of the processes involved in a public declaration to a mass audience of one's sexual preference, Lee goes beyond all other treatments of the disclosure of gay identity. In order to examine the sizeable risks, costs and possible advantages of such a strategy, which Plummer (1975) mentions, Lee analysed media coverage of the public declarations of 14 homosexuals in Canada and the USA and conducted personal interviews with a further nine.

The reasons for the relatively small number of public homosexuals hardly require exposition. Given the generally negative societal attitudes towards homosexuality, the price to be paid for openness may be the loss of one's job: those who successfully went public in Lee's study tended to be self-employed, involved in businesses related to the gay subculture or employed in the sometimes liberal academic world. Relationships with work colleagues, lovers, family members and friends were reported to have become strained - and not only with heterosexual friends. Gay friends sometimes feared the increased visibility that the public figure brought to the gay subculture and, if they were afraid of their own homosexuality being generally discovered, they offered no support or encouragement to him and even avoided contact with him: it may be
that what Lee terms the publicly identified person’s "act of authenticity" is interpreted as an adverse judgement on those gay people who routinely pass as heterosexual. As many of these costs could be anticipated, the question remains as to what motivates public disclosure. Lee's subjects appeared to have employed a cost-benefit analysis and decided that the costs of passing as heterosexual, e.g., guilt, anxiety and fear of disclosure, outweighed the likely costs of public revelation. Political considerations were also cited: some respondents stated that they opted for complete openness in order to attempt to educate the public about homosexuality and/or to encourage others in their struggle for a gay identity on a personal level or gay rights on a political and group level. These lofty intentions sometimes came to nothing and disenchantment set in as they felt increasingly isolated and their experiences were neutered and sanitised by their presentation in a non-threatening context in the press.

Lee acknowledges the existence of degrees of public identity because the concept of "public" can be regarded on several levels, ranging from a localised and limited audience to the audience of the mass media. Progressive revelation to the latter level was reported by some subjects, while others attempted to confine the extent of their public identity by revealing themselves to restricted audiences, thereby hoping to prevent people such as their family or employers from learning of their homosexuality. Social standing also appears to be influential in determining the
extent of a person's public identity in that the more influential a person is in a given community, profession or interest group, the greater will be the interest in his declaration.

One of the major problems faced by a publicly identified person is the possibility of their being completely engulfed by their homosexual identity, which can easily become a "pivotal identity" or master trait and can swamp all aspects of the person: they come to be regarded only or primarily as homosexual. For the gay men studied by Weinberg and Williams (1974), this did not appear to be a desirable state of affairs. The person may also feel trapped in his gay sexuality: such is the level of public commitment that he has made to it that he may feel it is unacceptable to explore further or change his sexual preference.

The topic of the public disclosure of one's homosexuality may appear largely irrelevant to the present study which aims to identify commonalities in reports of gay identity formation experiences. After all, only a relatively small number of gay men have the desire or the opportunity to declare themselves to a mass audience. Yet all disclosure takes place before an audience, whether that audience be a person or a nation, and a consideration of disclosure both to individuals and to groups can identify problems which are common to both.
2.8 Cass's Sixth Stage: "Identity Synthesis" and Integration

The person enters stage six of Cass's model with a realisation that the blanket positive evaluation of all homosexuals and negative evaluation of all heterosexuals previously adhered to is not valid. Alteration in the interpersonal matrix results and the recognition that there are some heterosexuals who accept the person's homosexual identity in the same way he does leads to maximal congruency. The anger of stage five is experienced with less intensity and feelings of pride diminish as the person acknowledges that there is no clear dichotomy between the homosexual and heterosexual worlds: the possibility of considerable similarity between the self and heterosexuals and dissimilarity between the self and homosexuals is accepted.

Cass's theme of the recognition of basic similarities between homosexuals and heterosexuals also appears in the final "Commitment" stage of Troiden's (1977) model. When his respondents were asked about their perceptions of the similarities and differences between homosexuals and heterosexuals, 65% expressed the opinion that the only difference between the categories was in terms of sexual behaviour and preference. The other major concomitants of the commitment stage are held by Troiden to be the embarkation upon a sexual and emotional relationship with another man, acceptance of and comfort with the present gay identity and satisfaction with it as a future identity. Troiden differentiates
here between a homosexual identity and a gay identity and believes that a person enters this stage with the former and emerges with the latter. As indicated previously, he locates the transition in the fusion of gay sexuality and emotionality which occurs when the person becomes involved in a sexual and emotional relationship with another man, and is one of the few writers to incorporate this distinction into their model of gay identity formation. Commitment is also spoken of in relation to gay identity by Hammersmith and Weinberg (1973), who believe that until a person develops an identity to which they can become committed, they experience anxiety and uncertainty. In their study of almost 2,500 gay men in the USA, Denmark and the Netherlands, they found that when a person develops such an identity, their self-concept stabilises and their levels of self-esteem and psychological adjustment increase. They also found that commitment to a gay identity was positively related to an individual receiving support from significant others and speculated that this may be because as the person becomes more committed to his gay identity, he attaches more importance to the opinions of those who are supportive of him in his identity and less to those who are not, a possibility outlined in Weinberg's (1976) consideration of post-disclosure reactions.

The essence of Cass's final stage may be seen as residing in the synthesis of the person's private and public sexual identities into one image of self which is supported by his interpersonal environment. With the homosexual identity integrated with all
other aspects of the self, it ceases to be the identity and instead becomes but one aspect of the self: thus the process of gay identity formation is considered to be complete. Integration is described in very similar terms in the final stage of the model of coping with transition outlined by Sugarman (1986) and adapted from Hopson (1981). Here, the transition process is seen as complete when the individual feels "at home" in the new post-transition reality and when new self-conceptions, understandings and behaviours have become an integral part of the individual's world view. The transition becomes integrated into the life space rather than dominating it. In Sugarman's terms, the person is a gay man rather than A GAY MAN. Sophie (1987), in her treatment of lesbian identity, terms this phenomenon "habituation".

Only at this late stage is the first explicit link made between gay identity formation and more global identity development. If it is the case that the optimal level of gay identity development is considered to occur when a gay identity can take its place alongside other identity components, comfortably and as an equal, within a superordinate more general identity structure, it is difficult to fathom the reasons why the notion of a more global identity, together with its frameworks and its processes and principles of operation, is not introduced to the treatment of gay identity formation from the outset. However, although little overt cross-fertilisation can be observed in Cass's (1979) model, she later bemoaned the isolation of the literature on gay identity from
writing on general identity and suggested that the relationship and the possibility of similarity between the two concepts would be worthy concerns for future research (Cass, 1984b). The present study may therefore be regarded as implementing her suggestion.

By positing such an identity synthesis as the optimal level of development in gay identity formation, Cass's model carries strong implications for radical gay politics, which emphasises the irreconcilable differences between heterosexuals and homosexuals and espouses the superiority of the latter group in many domains. The adoption of such a stance, with its repudiation of integration and assimilation into the heterosexual world, is best described by Cass's stage five and is therefore viewed as a less than optimal form of gay identity. Such a framework is essentially a heterosexual one: the challenge presented to the heterosexual status quo by the radical gay movement is contained by classing those who mount the threat as either being fixated in their identity development or as working their way through a transitional phase. To this extent, Cass's contribution may be likened to those etiological studies of homosexuality which, in seeking to pathologise homosexuality, may be said to assume the supremacy and inevitability of heterosexuality.

Cass's themes of integration and synthesis, which were earlier hypothesised as characteristics of models of gay identity formation that capitalised upon conceptualisations of general identity
development, are echoed in the final or later stages of other conceptions of gay identity formation. As we have just seen, Lee (1977), and also Hencken and O'Dowd (1977), have cited a specific means by which a synthesis of private and public identities may be attained, i.e., by public disclosure of one's homosexuality. But so great are the possibilities of discrimination being encountered that, as Minton and McDonald (1984) point out, only very few individuals opt for this level of identity synthesis. More selective disclosure can, however, promote a satisfactory level of synthesis and therefore Minton and McDonald (1984) accord a central role to disclosure in the final stage of their model.

Coleman (1982) terms his final stage "Integration" and adopts a more psychological approach to the subject. He regards its attainment as being characterised by the person being confident that they can maintain relationships, behaving in an open, friendly and caring way, and regarding themselves as a fully functioning person in their society. The person at this stage has developed the ability to handle any rejections which might be encountered from others without allowing them to become psychologically crippling events. In addition, the integrated sense of identity allows the person to feel confident at the prospect of facing the developmental tasks of adulthood, such as middle age and old age.

Integration also provides the title of Lewis's (1984) final stage. Prior to its attainment, a woman must first possess a stable
lesbian identity, characterised by self-acceptance, a resolution of much of the dissonance, fear and anger associated with earlier stages, the development of a supportive social network, and possibly the formation of an ongoing, committed relationship. The woman feels that she has found a niche for herself, whether it be in the lesbian and gay community, in her relationships or in her family. She no longer focusses on the problems of managing a lesbian identity per se but rather on her career or relationships: her focus of concern ceases to be chiefly inward and is readjusted outward. The stabilisation process is held to occur gradually over a period of years during the course of which the woman integrates her lesbian identity into an overall positive self-concept. She accepts and feels comfortable with her lesbian identity; she decides to whom she will disclose her lesbianism and to what extent. Lewis's concept of integration is essentially identical to that of Cass in that she regards it as being typified chiefly by the diminution in the importance of a woman's lesbianism in her life; in the demands which her lesbian identity makes on her time and energy; and in the pain and anger which she feels about discrimination.
In positing integration as the final stage of gay identity formation, these authors echo the end points of many more general conceptualisations of adult development and specifically of identity development. For Jung, the goal towards which an individual's psychological development tends is integration or wholeness, characterised by an acceptance of oneself and of whatever is to come (Storr, 1973). Sugarman (1986), in her review of a range of developmental schemata, points to the common theme of integration as a developmental goal in the models of Erikson, Riegel (1973) and Schaie (1977-78). In this respect at least, models of gay identity formation do not constitute a field of study that is unconnected with the study of adult development and identity in general. A comparison between the models outlined here, the various conceptualisations of life-span development discussed by Sugarman (1986) and the models of identity development described in Chapter One reveals considerable thematic similarities. Many are concerned with individuals' attempts to render meaningful and to make cohere particular aspects or the totality of their life space. They are structured according to stage-based frameworks, are based upon the epigenetic principle, and describe specific crises, tasks or preoccupations that have their particular times of ascendancy. Models frequently focus on the relationships between the self and significant others and how these are altered in the light of changing circumstances.
and changes carry implications for one's identity, which must accommodate them in some way. It might therefore be concluded that although writers on gay identity formation do not make explicit reference to the substantial body of work on more global identity development, there does exist a degree of thematic overlap between the two domains which fulfils some of the expectations that were outlined earlier in relation to models of gay identity formation that made use of insights from the field of general identity development.

Also, gay identity formation may be usefully conceptualised in terms of some of the schemata which Sugarman reviews. For example, its major tasks may be conceived in terms of Havighurst's (1956, 1972) developmental tasks, or the entire process may be seen in the context of Hopson's (1981) model of the stages which accompany and follow transition. The link between the need in gay identity formation to construct a value system not based on heterosexual mores internalised during socialisation and the necessity of replacing parental values and assumptions with one's own for successful adult development (outlined in Gould's (1978, 1980) model) has already been pointed out. Direct reference to these conceptualisations of adult development is seldom made by the writers on gay identity formation whose work has been discussed. This oversight is regrettable as it means that most studies of gay identity have failed to capitalise and build upon a considerable opus of existing related work on adult development, as well as on
general identity development that could provide the sort of theoretical background and structure that many of the studies lack. In conceiving of gay identity formation as the construction of a personal narrative which renders coherent, purposeful and intelligible one's experiences in relation to a same-sex sexual preference and in importing concepts from other areas of developmental study where relevant, it is hoped in the present study to correct this oversight.

From this lengthy and detailed consideration of some of the most broad-ranging models and studies of gay identity formation, there emerge certain recurring themes. These include the effects of the internalisation of negative social stereotypes about homosexuals and homosexuality on individuals' willingness to admit a gay/homosexual sexual identity into their personal narratives; the experience of a sensitisation stage, during which individuals become aware that they are in some way different from their peers; an awareness or suspicion that one might be homosexual; the interpretation of same-sex sexual behaviours and/or attractions in such a way that their implications of homosexuality are avoided; passing as heterosexual; the disclosure of sexual preference; same-sex sexual and emotional relationships; involvement in the gay subculture; the development of identity pride or of a sense of commitment to a gay identity; and the attainment of identity integration or synthesis. Each of these themes appears and is accorded a prominent role within several of the models that have
been examined throughout this review (see Table 2.1). As most of
the models and studies outlined were devised or conducted in the
USA or in Australia, these topics were incorporated, where possible
and appropriate, into a preliminary questionnaire on gay identity
which was designed to help ascertain which of the areas outlined
would be recognised and regarded as significant factors in the
development of a gay identity by a group of British gay men, and
to identify any factors which had not been heretofore considered.

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<th>Interpretation of same-sex sexual behaviours and/or attractions so as to avoid homosexual implications for identity</th>
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Table 2.1: A representation of the salient occurrence of the most commonly-encountered stages or themes in the conceptualisations of gay identity formation in the major models of gay identity formation examined.
But before moving on to examine the design of the questionnaire on gay identity formation, something must be said about the interpretations that the present study places upon the findings of the many studies of gay identity formation outlined, given its conceptualisation of identity as a personal narrative. None of the empirical studies reviewed were longitudinal in nature: all required respondents to provide retrospective accounts of their gay identity formation experiences. In terms of personal narratives, the studies accessed present narratives, which incorporated accounts of how narratives that were held in the past changed in reaction to the events and experiences encountered as the person assimilated and accommodated to the demands made by their same-sex sexual attractions. Given that the personal narrative is an interpretative tool and that studies required respondents to recall interpretations of events and experiences which they may have encountered some considerable time ago, it is likely that the accounts yielded by the studies of gay identity formation are highly inaccurate in terms of the actualities of the events to which they refer. The possibility of non-isomorphism between respondents' accounts of their experiences relevant to the formation of their gay identities and the actualities of those experiences is not considered, despite the fact that numerous studies have concluded that people's recall of past events is frequently selective and biased. Nor is the possibility entertained that the stages of gay identity formation produced by empirical work might be a reflection of organising frameworks which
respondents have placed upon their experiences to impose order and coherence on them and to help create logical, meaningful personal narratives which can accommodate their gay identity formation experiences. If it is the case that the gay identity aspect of the personal narrative represents an individual's attempt to impart meaning, coherence and purpose to his sexuality-related experiences by making connections between events, and if the individual can at least to some extent choose the material that will constitute the narrative, the utility of attempting to chart commonalities in gay identity-related narratives, as this study aims to do, appears questionable. One might contend that it would be more profitable to endeavour to trace the actualities of the relevant events, unless it is considered possible to divine what actually happened from a careful study of the relevant components of personal narratives. The operation of the tendency to reconstruct past events has already been alluded to in the treatment of the personal narrative but it is a process that any study which relies on retrospective accounts must consider carefully if it is not to mistake the nature of the data which it obtains. It is to this and related issues that the next chapter addresses itself.
CHAPTER THREE

"MY OWN SPECIAL CREATION"...? AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL RECONSTRUCTION AND SUBCULTURAL NARRATIVES

"I am what I am
and what I am is my own special creation"

3.1 Introduction

The lines above from the best-known song in the 1983 musical "La Cage Aux Folles" are sung by Albin, the star female impersonator at the "La Cage Aux Folles" nightclub, after he has discovered that Georges, his lover, and Jean-Michel, his lover's son, have been plotting to keep him out of the way when the parents of Jean-Michel's fiancee, Anne, come to visit, lest Albin's flamboyant gayness should enrage Anne's father, an anti-gay politician. Stung by this attempt to conceal him and his gay identity, Albin asserts that he is proud of who he is and of the gay identity that he has created. The quotation neatly encapsulates the idea adopted in this study of (gay) identity formation as a creative, constructive, meaning-making process in which the individual is actively involved. A gay identity represents a person's attempt to interpret in a meaningful way the experiences that he has had which are related to his sexual preference and to impart coherence and
purpose to those experiences by forging connections between them and formulating explanations of them. It is a process whereby an individual recollects and organises within his personal narrative certain experiences relevant to his sexual preference, to his reactions to it, and to the changes that have been wrought in his social world because of it, in order to produce an account that is his "own special creation" and which helps him to ascertain who he is and how he fits into the adult world.

Gay identity formation intrinsically implies autobiographical memory because if it is viewed as a personal narrative, it is through the selection, recall and organisation of relevant past events that it is constructed. The close relationship between autobiographical memory and identity is pointed out by Rubin (1986) who states that autobiographical memory is "the sum of people's knowledge of their own lives and as such is the basis for their concept of self" (p 69). Even if it is not thus conceptualised, the study of gay identity formation relies for its data upon respondents' recollections of relevant events and experiences. It is therefore worth examining the nature of the recollection process itself as it can provide further insights into how personal narratives are formed and the criteria which may determine whether or not an experience is included in a personal narrative, as well as permitting further evaluation of the data on which models of gay identity formation have been based.
3.2 Memory as a Biased and Constructive Process

One of the most basic questions that face anyone whose task it is to analyse and interpret data from studies which require respondents to supply retrospective reports of life events is whether the resultant reports are true and accurate accounts of what exactly happened, deliberately falsified or selective accounts designed to avoid the disapproval of those conducting the study, or a mixture of fact and filtering. The analyst should be aware that events may have been reconstructed in terms of the events and cognitive changes which followed them. The possibility that the accounts obtained by the present study were consciously distorted in order to avoid disapproval is unlikely. The questionnaire that was used was presented to respondents most of whom had already undergone two face-to-face interviews of several hours duration with interviewers trained in non-judgemental interviewing techniques from a Department of Health and Medical Research Council-funded research project entitled Project SIGMA (Sociosexual Investigations of Gay Men and AIDS) concerning the most intimate aspects of their sexual behaviour. It may therefore be assumed that respondents had a high level of commitment to Project SIGMA and to its allied research, in the context of which the gay identity study was presented, and that they were motivated to render as accurate an account as they could. The fact that respondents completed the questionnaire by themselves and then returned it anonymously by post further decreased the possibility
that they may have engaged in approval-seeking self-presentations. Let us now consider the other possible descriptions of the data.

A voluminous literature exists in the general cognition, memory and information processing fields which outlines the many and varied ways in which information is entered, stored and retrieved selectively and with bias. In a theoretical work, Berger and Luckmann (1967) posit how individuals reinterpret the meaning of past events in their biographies, rather than attempt the more difficult task of obliterating them completely from memory, and how they fabricate and insert events where necessary to harmonise the reinterpreted and remembered past. In empirical studies in the 1930s, Bartlett showed how memory is a reconstructive process, with information about an event being interpreted in the light of general background knowledge. Hindley (1979) adds that such experimental evidence is supplemented by psychoanalytic clinical evidence concerning the ways in which certain experiences may be denied, repressed or selectively forgotten. Furthermore, it has been claimed that the aim of psychoanalytic therapy is to lead the person to restructure their past so that it is a more cohesive narrative (Schafer, 1976a).

Baddeley (1979) notes that people often recall their interpretation of events rather than what actually happened: they recall past events in a way that makes sense for them and view these events through their present construct systems, value systems and life
themes, what Wall and Williams (1970) term their "Retrospectroscope" (Brenner, 1985; Tagg, 1985). This means that recollections of past events may be quite different from the actualities of those events, but as Rubin (1986) points out, "it is often more important that our memories seem real than that they be real" (p 4). Personal memories typically carry a strong belief value that they are a veridical record of events as originally experienced, even though they are unlikely to be (Brewer, 1986). Barclay (1986) does however highlight that although they are not exact in detail, "these memories are true in the sense of maintaining the integrity and gist of past life events" (p 82). Woven into a personal narrative, they perform an interpretative function and can be judged not by their objective "truth" but in terms of the extent to which the narrative of which they are constituent parts renders a person's experiences coherent and meaningful. Harre (1979) holds that when rendering accounts of past experiences, "we are very much inclined to represent that which we experienced as mere randomness, as if it were principled choice" (p 256), i.e., there exists a normative social demand that we should represent our actions as intelligible in terms of choices that we have actively made and so we revise our past accordingly. This function was earlier attributed to the personal narrative, with which the assembly of interpretations of past events is inextricably linked. Memory is not merely a repository for past experiences but, as Robinson (1986) notes, is a generative process, forging (both in the creative and in the fraudulent senses of the word) connections
between events and revealing themes in one's experiences. The recounting of parts of our personal narratives or inner stories involves the distortive processes of recollection and reconstruction. It may be viewed as part of what Glover (1988) terms "self-creation", with all the selection, excision, abridgement and editing that he describes as being an integral part of such a project. These constructed connections and themes in memories may take the form of accounts of the cognitive processes underlying our choices, evaluations, judgements and behaviours. However, as Nisbett and DeCamp Wilson (1977) note, there has emerged a growing belief within cognitive psychology that people may not have direct access to such higher order mental processes as those involved in evaluation, judgement, problem solving and the initiation of behaviour. From a series of studies, these writers conclude that people are sometimes unable to report correctly about the existence of evaluative and motivational responses, to report that a cognitive process has occurred or to report correctly on the relationship between a stimulus and a response. Instead, they propose that accounts of higher order mental processes are constructions, based upon a priori causal theories about the sort of responses that are typically produced by certain stimuli.

Several major factors which produce distortion of reported memory traces are outlined by Baddeley (1979), including conventionalisation, i.e., the tendency to explain unfamiliar events in terms of familiar ones; the propensity for reporting what
seems most plausible rather than what actually occurred; the unwillingness to report frankly on sensitive, emotive topics; and the use of leading questions by researchers. Of these four, the lastmentioned two are the only ones which can be counteracted to any substantial degree. Training in a socio-emotional, empathic style of questioning and/or the stressing of stringent procedures to protect respondents’ anonymity and respect the confidentiality of the information which they give may help to promote honest reporting on sensitive topics (Coyle, 1989). The framing of questions so that they do not suggest a particular answer to respondents eliminates the problem of leading questions. However, the remaining two factors bedevil attempts to access accurate reports of past events.

Menneer (1979) points to several further distortive influences in behavioural reports, namely feelings of guilt about admitting to what is generally considered socially unacceptable behaviour (which is linked to Baddeley's point about reporting on sensitive topics); the degree of interest or relevance to the respondent of the subject matter of the research, because if the respondent is not interested in the topic or does not perceive it as personally relevant, then reports of behaviour are highly likely to be subject to distortion; and the tendency to "tidy up the past", i.e., to simplify considerably the complexity of actual behaviour. The first two tendencies which Menneer outlines ought not to operate to any major extent in research on gay identity. Firstly, many
respondents may have resigned themselves to their place outside the general social norms of sexuality or formed their views of their sexuality independently of these norms, which would not therefore act as a constraint upon their willingness to report honestly on matters relating to their sexuality. Secondly, it is assumed that most respondents will perceive their gay identity to be of such relevance to their general personal narratives and to their general conceptions of self and of such intrinsic interest that they will be willing to elaborate freely and frankly upon it. The tendency to "tidy up the past" is not a major problem, as the intention of this study is to uncover general processes and trends in gay identity formation narratives, not to present detailed life stories.

Greenwald (1980) outlines several biases associated with information concerning the self, i.e., recall of such material is better than for other types of material; people seek and assimilate most readily into memory information which accords with their existing self-concept, a tendency also reported by Markus and Sentis (1982) and by Rogers (1981); and, most pertinently, autobiographical memories are retrospectively revised so as to comply with the current self-concept. Thus, such autobiographical reconstruction may be viewed as an inherent process in the human memory system. In terms of the present study, there may be a desire to portray oneself as always having been what one now is, with the attendant smoothing out of the ebb, flow and flux of
events and experiences. One example of this is the tendency for individuals to reinterpret their past in terms of their present gay identity so they come to "realise" that they were always homosexual. This strategy reflects what Sawchuk (1974) terms the "retroactive character" of the transformation involved in gay identity formation and, he believes, confirms the validity of the new identity for the individual. Gagon and Simon (1973) point to the effect that reconstruction might have upon childhood memories, which they regard as being "subject to revision, excision, and other forms of subtle editing based on our place in the life cycle, our audience, and the mask that we are currently wearing" (p 135). Such reconstruction may not even be a conscious process: Kelly (1955) posits that by our very nature, we continually construe and reconstrue our experiences, seeking to give logic and coherence to our world, constructions which may be regarded as being enshrined in an organised and integrated fashion within the personal narrative.

Another occurrence which points to the operation of autobiographical reconstruction is the definiteness with which subjects were able to reply to the questions posed in Project SIGMA's examination of the ages at which gay men first suspected that they were sexually different, first labelled that difference as gay/homosexual/etc., and had their first sexual experience with another man or boy (Coyle, 1988). It might be expected that respondents would have been able to recall an event that was of
major importance to them and which occurred at a definite point in
time, i.e., the age at which they had their first sexual contact
with another male, or even, to a lesser extent, the age at which
they first labelled their feeling of sexual difference as
gay/homosexual/etc. But what was surprising was both the fact that
they could give a response to the question concerning the age at
which they first suspected they might be sexually different and
that in most cases they were quite definite about the answer, given
the nebulous nature of the issue addressed. One would imagine that
the development of suspicion would be a gradual process of dawning
awareness and hence that it would be difficult to nominate a
particular age at which it first occurred. Thomas (1979) warns
against the presumption that because large numbers of people have
given apparently definite answers to a recall question, those
answers are necessarily valid and accurate. The general ease of
response was also unexpected in that the question often concerned
events which happened many years ago: the greatest difference
between a subject's age and the age at which he first suspected he
was sexually different was 66 years.

This supports the hypothesis that subjects retrospectively
interpret life events as being indicative of homosexuality, even
though they may not have so interpreted them at the time. It may
have been the case that respondents accounted for their
homosexuality in the standard psychodynamic terms of a "problematic
childhood", leading them to construe their sexual preference as
having arisen and become fixed in their early years: their autobiography may have been reconstructed in terms of such commonplace developmental theories. This tendency was observed in Yarrow et al.'s (1970) study of child development which found that mothers' retrospective assessments of their children's childhood were influenced both by the children's subsequent development and by theories of child development current at the time of the interview. Again, in Pledger's (1977) study of gay men's familial relationships, subjects' reports of their relationship with their fathers in childhood were significantly different from the accounts given by the fathers themselves: autobiographical reconstruction, prompted by the psychodynamic view of the etiology of homosexuality, which tends to focus upon the familial configuration of a dominant mother and a distant father, may have shaped the versions of events furnished by the sons, the fathers, or both. The same criticisms have been levelled by Feldman (1984) at the etiological studies of Evans (1969) and Snortum et al. (1969).

The Yarrow et al. study has further implications for the study of gay identity in its finding that mothers tended to rate their children's childhood as having been less difficult in retrospect than reports recorded during the school years suggested it had been. It is possible that the recollection of the potentially traumatic experiences and processes involved in the formation of a gay identity may divest those experiences and processes of the affective charge which they had at the time. It may be
hypothesised that the greater the temporal distance between a person's present and those initial gay identity formation experiences, the less intense will be the reported affect associated with those experiences. Then again, it could equally be argued that intervening motivational factors may serve to exaggerate that affect the more stable one's gay identity is and the more central one's homosexuality is to one's view of the self. For example, there may be a desire to exaggerate the traumatic aspect in order to heighten the sense of the existence of a turning point between what one was and what one now is. In support of this hypothesis, Berger and Luckmann (1967) outline the possibility of a "rupture" or "turning point" featuring in an individual's subjective autobiography, with the pre-turning-point part of the autobiography being negatively regarded in comparison with the present viewpoint.

Whatever the distortive influences, accounts of past events have consistently been recognised as notoriously unreliable. Davis (1979) concludes that "reconstruction in the light of subsequent personal development and experience, and wishful self-persuasion may be unalterable facts in survey life" (p 156). Such distortion applies both to the explanations of events as well as "factual" accounts of the events themselves. Richardson (1981) attributes the persistence of the belief in the essentiality of homosexuality among lesbians to autobiographical reconstruction in that those who hold this belief tend to reinterpret their past selectively in line
with their present identification as homosexual, ignoring previous heterosexual experiences and/or identifications. The reconstructive phenomenon has been regarded as a universal dynamic. As Goffman (1963) said of man "no matter how false, secretive or disjointed his existence, or how governed by fits, starts and reversals, the true facts of his activity cannot be contradictory or unconnected with each other" (p 81). The tendency to smooth out contradictory autobiographical elements is also commented upon by Berger and Luckmann (1967) who state that "the individual may fabricate and insert events wherever they are needed to harmonise the remembered with the reinterpreted past.......subjectively, he is not telling lies about the past but bringing it in line with the truth that, necessarily, embraces both past and present" (p 180). They thus shed some light upon the nature of the contents of a personal narrative and support the hypothesis that retrospective data is a mixture of fact and filtering.

Gittins (1979) likens the reconstructing respondent to an historian whose task is to interpret and reconstruct history using different sources. Expanding this interpretative theme, Cherry and Rodgers (1979) report that in the Yarrow et al. (1970) study, while even straightforward factual information was subject to distortion in reporting, attitudinal data was especially vulnerable (cf. also Musto and Bennison, 1969). Hindley (1979) therefore explicitly advises that replies to questions relating to past feelings and attitudes should be regarded as referring to the respondent's
present view of them rather than as having any direct relation to what they actually were.

The reconstruction concept is of direct relevance to the identity question not only through its relevance to the concept of the personal narrative but also in that it forms the cornerstone of what Plummer (1981) refers to as the "identity construct model" of gay identity formation. This view focusses upon the cognitive processes by which people interpret their sexuality by scanning their past lives, e.g., their feelings, behaviours, group involvements, and connecting this with accounts of sexuality gained from diverse sources such as friends, family and the media. Retrospective views of the content and nature of these accounts will be examined in the present study and the implications which they hold for identity will be inferred. The constructionist approach iterates that initially our experiences are much more random, unstructured and uncrystallised than we believe and that these experiences become increasingly defined by the scanning process. A slightly different slant is taken by Goffman (1963) who notes how individuals may single out and elaborate retrospectively the experiences they use to account for how they arrived at their present positions. Such a constructionist view of identity formation accords with Weinberg's (1976) assessment of the process as one which is "initiated by the individual, who is actively involved in what is going on and who attempts to maintain some control over what is happening to him" (p 572). The thrust of the
process is thus shifted onto the individual, who does not simply passively accept the definitions and labels of others but who is actively engaged in constructing his own identity, seen here as expressed in his personal narrative.

Where the possibility of reconstruction is acknowledged in research, it is more often than not in an apologetic manner, with it being cited as something which inevitably interferes with and contaminates the aim of the majority of retrospective research, i.e., the delineation of events as they actually happened. Cherry and Rodgers (1979) conclude that "the best that a retrospective enquiry can hope to achieve is an approximation of the event or condition as experienced by the participant" (p 40).

Various methods of overcoming or minimising reconstruction have been recommended. For example, exhortations are frequently made that retrospective accounts of events should be compared with records or interpretations of those events made at the time (Cherry and Rodgers, 1979). This presupposes a longitudinal-type research framework which is most demanding on resources and difficult to apply if one is attempting to capture the entire picture in the case of gay identity research, as it would involve following a cohort of those who exhibit so-called childhood indicators of homosexuality through the development of their sexual identity: there would be no guarantee that any of the cohort would eventually self-identify as gay/homosexual, and the distortive implications
for the reports of subjects' sexual identities if the purpose of the study became known to them would be great.

Other writers concentrate on those events which exhibit characteristics that have been shown to lead to well-recalled personal memories. These characteristics have been summarised by Brewer (1986) as uniqueness, consequentiality, unexpectedness, emotionality, importance and non-repetition. Some of these characteristics also feature in Linton's (1986) definition of salience, i.e., the importance and emotionality of items in memory and the frequency with which they are rehearsed. According to her line of reasoning, the greater the original salience of items and the greater their continuing relevance to a person's life, the more likely it is that they will be recalled. Nisbett and DeCamp Wilson (1977) add that the more salient an event was at the time when it was encountered, the more available it will be in memory at the point of recall. However, Linton does warn that the salience of an item and hence the likelihood that it will be recalled changes over time, so the attribution of salience can only be made on the basis of what is recalled. Salience may therefore be of limited use in predicting what sort of items will be recollected accurately. Linton also points out that events which were experienced as negative tend not to be recalled. She contends that only "robust, coherent, forward-looking" memory contents are recollected accurately. This would appear to create problems for the present study, as some of the key developmental experiences in
gay identity formation outlined in the previous chapter may have had negative outcomes. Yet, one advantage that the present study has over previous studies is that it relies heavily on recognition rather than recall: in most questions in the questionnaire on gay identity formation (see Appendix A), respondents are presented with a list of potential reactions to or explanations of key developmental events and experiences and are required to indicate how closely these describe their own reactions to or explanations of these experiences. Furthermore, Linton reports that in her study the passage of time did not affect the recognition of negative items, only their recall.

Baddeley (1979), working on the assumption that reconstruction results from retroactive interference in memory, i.e., the interference caused to learned material by similar material which has been learned between the learning and the recall of the original material, suggests that respondents should only be questioned about the most recent occurrence of the type of event under study. When one is concerned with events which, when initially encountered, may well have been a source of much trauma, e.g., in this study, disclosing oneself as gay/homosexual, Baddeley's recommended approach is likely to fail to capture the cognitive and affective significance of such events for the individual, as presumably the magnitude of the changes they engender - and hence their implications for identity - diminishes considerably the more often the events are encountered. Moreover,
if retroactive interference does indeed contribute to reconstruction, this may be a most desirable phenomenon, as it implies that the account given by an individual of an original event, being suffused with elements of similar events that he/she has experienced in the interim, is an amalgum of those events, what Tagg (1985) terms "a conglomerate typical event", what Brewer (1986) terms a "generic personal memory", and which may be seen as part of what Grof (1979) calls a "COEX system" or system of condensed experiences. It represents a schematisation of a particular category of autobiographical memories: the consistencies and regularities of the experiences to which they refer are abstracted and stored so that any single experience becomes indistinguishable from related ones (Barclay, 1986). This amalgum thus constitutes a potted history of the role of that type of event in an individual's personal narrative. In any case, it has been demonstrated that recent memories are more prone to decay than distant ones (cf. Bartlett, 1932; Hunter, 1957), so the Baddeley proposal may be based on false premises.

Gittins (1979) and Tagg (1985) advise that past beliefs are more likely to be accurately recalled in response to specific rather than general questions. Specific questions are, however, liable to shade into leading questions with their attendant biasing of responses, so in the present study, questions tend to be generally framed and accompanied by a range of specific response categories in order to incorporate Gittins' suggestion and at the same time
avoid bias. Tagg (1985) suggests that life stories are less subject to retrospective distortion than are accounts of discrete events. It may be that events are recalled with greater accuracy when they are anchored among similar or contemporaneous events or when the respondent is encouraged to deal with them in the context of a larger sequence of events. The likelihood of accurate recall and recognition in the present study is therefore increased by its examination of a series of thematically linked events, i.e., all are or could be relevant to the formation of a gay identity, and by the arrangement of questions in logical sequences, derived from the sequences suggested in the review of the literature on gay identity formation.

Cherry and Rodgers (1979) recommend that retrospective studies should examine only events which are significant to the individual, on the grounds that reports of slight or ambiguous experiences are likely to be "hearsay, guess-work or grossly inaccurate" (p 40): one is unlikely to recall events which were not important enough to have been memorised in the first place. The proposition that people will recall most accurately those events which were of most importance to them has also been posited by Gittins (1979). The latter employs this trend as a crude measurement of the importance of material recollected in that she assumes that the more detailed a recollection is, the more important the recollected event is to the person. If it is the case that subjectively important events are likely to be recalled accurately, then a study of gay identity
formation - which one may assume is significant to those for whom it is relevant - ought to yield accurate reports of the related events. However, there are good reasons for questioning the assumption that events which were subjectively important will be recalled accurately. For example, Greenwald (1980) stresses that studies have repeatedly shown that the more important the outcome of an event is to an individual, the more likely it is that his/her recall of the event will exhibit what he terms a "beneffectance" bias, i.e., the person is likely to take credit for an outcome that is desirable and to deny responsibility for one that is not. More generally, Nisbett and Ross (1980) elaborate at length the ways in which people derive self-serving inferences from events. Due to the operation of such biases, it may be the case that even if the particulars of a subjectively important event are recalled accurately, inferences, attributions of responsibility and accounts of other psychological processes related to that event will be subject to distortion and reinterpretation.

There are clear grounds for regarding reconstruction as a major methodological shortcoming when research is chiefly behavioural in nature and aims to achieve isomorphism between reports and actualities. But when the focus of research is more psychological, reconstruction is interesting per se and rather than being a hindrance to the uncovering of "truth", may be regarded as a legitimate object of study in itself. As Kelly (1955) points out, it is not so much events themselves that shape people's outlook or
world view, but rather their interpretations of such events: the nature of our perceptions are dependent upon our present frames of reference. Individual frames of reference may also play a role in promoting discrepancies between actual events and reports of those events in terms of question interpretation. A seemingly unambiguous question may be interpreted by a respondent in a manner entirely askance to that intended by the investigator; thorough testing of questions in a pilot study should help minimise the risk of this occurrence. The frame of reference theme is expanded by Becker and Geer (1970) who point out that explanations of change and process given in accounts of events are particularly susceptible to post factum reconstruction because of the transformations in the reporter's general perspective by his/her experiencing of those events and by the consequent changes in the self and the social environment which they engender. They state that from a person's new perspective "he cannot give an accurate account of the past, for the concepts in which he thinks about it have changed and with them his perceptions and memories" (p 141). This again is a valid point if one's aim is to chart events as they actually happened, but unimportant if one is attempting to access the perspective on certain events with which a person is currently operating. The present perspective is the one with the greater phenomenological validity for the person as it is the one with which he functions in his everyday relations with his gay identity. Slugoski and Ginsburg (1989), when considering autobiographical reconstruction in terms of "explanatory speech" through which
people engage in a self-presentation as active agents within their own life course, rightly point out that theories based upon the assumption that there exists an isomorphism between explanatory speech and the actualities of the events under study must be questioned, but fail to consider that for the reporter, the account of events given in explanatory speech may have replaced the actualities of those events in the mental representations with which they operate in any situation which requires the recall of the events in question. Kelly (1955) devotes no serious consideration to past construct systems but does take account of present constructions of the past, and it is with these that the study in hand concerns itself.

Among those who acknowledge the operation of reconstruction in accounts of past events and who adopt it as a specific object of study are Gittins (1979) who regards it as something which highlights how and why individuals select certain aspects of their lives and accord them prominence in their memories, and Kitzinger (1987) who takes the social construction of lesbian identities as her focus of study. Being unwilling to claim the ability to sift through accounts given by subjects and separate fact from fiction, Kitzinger explicitly states that her aim is "not to reveal the 'real' histories, motives and life events of the participants, but to understand how people construct, negotiate and interpret their experience" (p 71). This assertion could also be viewed as a concise statement of intent for the present study, with the added
intention of outlining the nature of those constructions, negotiations and interpretations and the ways in which they are organised within the personal narrative. In a recognition that autobiographical material is actively constructed rather than passively assimilated, Kitzinger classes it as "a reconstruction of the past told from the viewpoint of the present, tailored to meet current contingencies, structured, selected and edited as the person sees fit, and influenced by fallible memories, reconsidered passions, and selective vision" (pp 71-2), which indeed could serve as a definition of the personal narrative.

3.3 Frameworks for Collective Reconstruction: Subcultural Narratives

"In order not to forget its past, a community is involved in retelling its story, its constitutive narrative"

- Bellah et al. (1985)

Analyses of the dynamics of autobiographical reconstruction tend to attempt to identify possible individual distortionary factors, but seldom adopt a broader assessment of the phenomenon, perhaps because it is treated more as a methodological shortcoming than as a subject of intrinsic interest. Among the concepts which may elucidate the process with regard to sexuality is that of the cultural sexual scenario (Simon and Gagnon, 1987), which is regarded as specifying the appropriate objects, aims and desirable
qualities of self-other relations and instructs in what the actor and coparticipants in a scenario are assumed to be feeling. Simon and Gagnon concentrate upon describing how the cultural scenario for heterosexual interaction arises from a variety of components of collective life, e.g., the mass media and the contents of folklore, and how it may be "tried on" by individuals and altered if found wanting. But here we may posit an entirely separate scenario for homosexual interaction and identity formation, which is available only in the gay subculture: to this extent it may be considered a subcultural scenario. It must specifically address the problems of sexual identity pertinent to homosexuals which are not encountered by heterosexuals, whose sexual identities are a taken-for-granted aspect of the major cultural sexual scenario. Yet, like the heterosexual scenario, the homosexual one can only be an approximation, what Simon and Gagnon term a "roadmap" for sexual conduct (and identity formation), loose enough to act as a template which fits the experiences of most gay men. It replaces the heterosexual scenario which, until a gay man has had sufficiently prolonged and intense contact with the gay subculture, is the only collection of sexual prescriptions that is freely available as a framework within which to consider his sexuality. This subcultural scenario may be retrospectively applied to enable individuals to make sense of their past experiences in the light of their present positions, while also creating expectations of what might happen in the future.
Another concept which may be applied to autobiographical reconstruction is that of the "script" (Abelson, 1976; Schank and Abelson, 1977), which has been defined as "a type of schema in which the related elements are social objects and events involving the individual as actor or observer" (Nisbett and Ross, 1980, p 34). Scripts generally take the form of sequences of events over time, arranged in a loosely causal manner so that an earlier event causes or at least facilitates a later one. Nisbett and Ross compare a script to a cartoon strip with a sequence of scenes, each one summarising some basic actions, or alternatively to a computer program with a set of tracks, variables, relationships, operations, subroutines, loops, etc., which are accorded particular values for certain applications of the script.

It is possible to conceive of scripts which are different yet refer to the same phenomenon or which have many different paths within them, and also of scripts which are subculturally specific. The series of rationalisations which Kitzinger (1987) cites for certain group-specific patterns of behaviour may therefore be analysed in script terms, for example the accounts provided by dealers in stolen goods which are designed to minimise their blameworthiness (Henry, 1976); and the standard accounts produced by former members of the Unification Church (Moonies) of their metaphysical journey within the church (Beckford, 1983). Thus, a script may be additionally seen as a cognitive framework or template which has been socially negotiated within a subculture and which is made
available to members of the subculture through social interactions so that it becomes a part of commonsense everyday subcultural knowledge. This view is in line with the basic principles of the domain of the sociology of knowledge, which holds that beliefs espoused by individuals are determined by the social groups to which they belong, and the same social groups constitute the environment in which these beliefs are acquired (cf. Mannheim, 1952). The script concept also forms part of what various authors have termed "the social construction of the self" (e.g., Ponse, 1978) and accords with Berger and Luckmann's (1967) basic tenet that reality is socially constructed and with their insistence that "the organism and, even more, the self cannot be adequately understood apart from the particular social context in which they were shaped" (p 68). Subculture members may use this socially constructed framework as an organisational principle by imposing it upon their experiences to impart meaning, coherence and causality to them.

In this way, these frameworks may also come within the ambit of Mills' (1940) "vocabularies of motive", and, as they are socially constructed motivations, accord with his (1952) call for a rejection of the concept of motivation residing within the individual. He instead believes that "(m)otives are words......programs of language related to situated actions in response to questions". These "programs of language" or "vocabularies of motive" are held to be social resources, which
differ in their availability across individuals and social systems. Applying this to the present study, some gay subcultures may have a more highly developed vocabulary of motive concerning the gay identity formation process than others, possibly because of a greater range and richness of gay identity formation experiences among those in the subculture who were the chief negotiators of the vocabulary. Individuals may vary in their levels of access to vocabularies in terms of the degree to which those who espouse the vocabularies form part of their social network. Lee (1977) outlines the mechanics whereby a new vocabulary of motive arose in the USA in the late 1960s concerning homosexuality, one which emphasised identity pride, rejected the medical model of homosexuality and subverted the vocabulary used by those who regarded homosexuality negatively.

What has been likened to subcultural sexual scenarios, scripts and vocabularies of motive can also be conceived of in terms of narratives. However, unlike personal narratives which are constructed by individuals in order to organise and to render coherent, intelligible and purposeful their own experiences, these narratives are cultural or subcultural in nature, consisting of pre-formulated accounts of experiences that are common to the members of the culture or subculture in which they are found. Just as in the case of scripts, these (sub)cultural narratives, arising from discussion and negotiation around the experiential commonalities of members of the (sub)culture and perpetuated and
transmitted by them, can provide explanations and rationalisations as well as descriptions of experiences that are pertinent to (sub)culture members. Not only do they perform this function for the (sub)culture as a social entity but they may also be internalised by individuals within the (sub)culture, either in part or in whole, and used to describe and explain their relevant personal experiences. In this way, (sub)cultural narratives may influence personal narratives. These subcultural narratives can also be viewed in terms of social representations (Farr and Moscovici, 1984) with which they share many characteristics. Social representations are held to arise from extensive social interaction and to be constructions of reality that "reflect dominant systems of belief and value in presenting an acceptable interpretation of objects, persons or events" (Breakwell, 1986, p 55), with the function of locating people within social categories that have distinctive characteristics, and of prescribing how these people's actions should be explained and interpreted. Subcultural narratives are also a product of social interaction but reflect systems of belief and value within a specific social context and for a specific audience, acting as wholly reflexive explicatory and interpretative agents, i.e., explaining and interpreting the experiences of those whose experiences helped to produce the narrative, rather than being created by one social group in order to describe and define another. Having said that, elements of the larger social representations of gay men and homosexuality must inevitably inform subcultural gay identity formation narratives,
at least to some extent and at some point in their evolution. Although it is necessary to acknowledge the origins of the concept in scripts, vocabularies of motive and social representations, for example, henceforth it will be referred to as a "subcultural narrative", firstly because it will be examined in relation to the gay subculture, and secondly because this term makes explicit the relationship between this social concept and the individual personal narrative in terms of which identity has been conceived in this study.

The processes whereby a subcultural narrative comes into being may be elucidated by reference to Berger and Luckmann's treatment of how arbitrarily-formed routines become sedimented into institutions, or, as they put it, how the "'There we go again'....becomes 'This is how these things are done'" (p 77). The contents of subcultural narratives, derived from the experiential commonalities of a group, come to be accorded the status of persistent patterns of experience and the expectation arises that these patterns will be repeated in group neophytes. In line with the fundamental proposal of phenomenology concerning the genesis of routine knowledge, the knowledge which constitutes subcultural narratives is accrued in the social group over time and, in stable situations, is taken for granted by group members. Thus the experiences shared by the group are preserved in its history and shape its expectations. This proposal is not new. For example, Orr (1990) describes how technicians construct group-specific

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narratives through relating in conversation their experiences of technical problems, creating meaning and coherence out of diverse items of information.

However, the subcultural gay identity formation narratives proposed here may have a function which is more than organisational. By emphasising the commonalities in gay identity formation experiences they may validate the "realness" of those experiences for the individuals concerned. The existence of a subculturally specific type of language in which the narrative may be couched may further serve to emphasise this "realness" and distinctness from the heterosexual world in the same way as in Berger and Luckmann's (1967) example of linguistic differences serving to differentiate between and legitimise the worlds of the cavalry and the infantry in the army. Additionally, the subcultural narrative may amplify a sense of subcultural cohesion, allow individuals to see what options might be open to them and to predict how the development of their gay identity might proceed, as well as being an antidote to the fact, often reported in the pilot study for the present investigation, that when an individual realises that he is or might be gay, he believes he is the only one in the world who has ever experienced these feelings. If the individual has experienced the gay identity formation subcultural narrative through contact with other gay men, he may feel reassured that others have trodden his path and have survived. Whatever their function, the ontogenesis of the subcultural narratives proceeds from the incorporation of
common biographical experiences into a common stock of knowledge which is made generally available to and thus becomes transmissible by members of the subculture: these experiences are stripped of their idiosyncratic details in the process as they are more easily learned and transmitted in a formulaic form. The areas of overlap between subcultural narratives and personal narratives and the importance of one for the other are clear. They share the functions of imparting meaning, coherence and intelligibility onto a series of past events. Both can be conceived of as relating to past events and yet setting goals or providing blueprints for future action. If the personal narrative can be equated with identity, then the internalisation of subcultural narratives constitutes one of its most explicitly social aspects.

Yarrow et al.'s (1970) study of child development points to the existence of something akin to a cultural narrative or organisational framework in attributing the accuracy of children's recollections of their own early years (as compared with records of events made during those years) to the children's gradual absorption of what they termed the "family folklore" about their own childhood and upbringing. This point emphasises that social constructions of events cannot be arbitrary: they must have a considerable degree of general veracity to be of use as an organisational framework. Exact isomorphism between subcultural narratives and the actual experiences of individuals is not important: the role of the narratives is simply to order and
structure experiences for which there are no generally available or acceptable means of interpretation in mainstream society.

It is not posited that these subcultural narratives are universal, unitary or fixed once formed. Each subculture will promote those which have been found to have the greatest applicability to its members' experiences (there may exist more than one narrative within a subculture if that subculture must embrace a wide diversity of experiences) and important new subcultural experiences may need to be assimilated into the narratives if they are to remain maximally useful. One such new item which may have required existing subcultural narratives to accommodate to and assimilate it is the AIDS experience: some of the possible ramifications of the advent of AIDS for gay identity formation have already been outlined and are described in more detail in the next chapter.

Nor is it suggested that these subcultural narratives are ever explicitly stated or that the choice of narrative is ever forced or even conscious: they are simply negotiated within the subtext of conversation, a medium which, according to Berger and Luckmann (1967), "ongoingly maintains, modifies and reconstructs" (p 172) an individual's subjective reality and whose role in organising, maintaining and modifying identities has been much overlooked. Conversation may organise and objectify as reality the themes of the subcultural gay identity formation narrative for the individual. The belief that such conversational sharing of gay
identity formation experiences actually occurs arises from a consideration of the nature of the subculture as a forum for the sharing of such commonalities and also from the concept of psychodynamic catharsis: intrinsic benefits may be derived from repeated relating of the experiences if they were to any extent traumatic, in that such retelling in a non-threatening supportive subcultural context helps divest them of their associated trauma. As a young lesbian woman put it when describing in an interview with an Irish newspaper her initial contact with the Dublin gay scene, "After an hour-and-a-half of telling my story I felt an awful lot better" ("Sunday World", Sept. 11th, 1988). It is simply Freud's "talking cure" applied to gay identity formation experiences.

There may be a set of factors which give rise to individual differences in the extent to which subcultural gay identity formation narratives are adopted as experiential organising frameworks and in the form of narrative adopted, e.g., age, education, geographical factors such as the city versus provinces or urban versus rural distinction, proneness to conformity, and perceived similarity between one's experiences and the range and flexibility of subcultural narratives available. There may be further intra-subcultural differences across the various groupings that make up the gay subculture.
Drawing these elements together and applying them to the present study, it may be that what is being accessed is not purely the actual key elements in the process of gay identity formation, nor the personal retrospective reconstruction of those events, but also a subcultural social phenomenon. It may be the case that the gay subculture promotes a certain "party line", "script", "cognitive framework", "vocabulary of motive" or "subcultural narrative" concerning the processes and progress involved in gay identity formation. The existence of a subcultural gay identity formation narrative is directly posited by Simon and Gagnon (1987) in their assertion that gay men "are...constrained...where there is involvement within homosexual networks, to share an idea of common or collective identities and origins" (p 380). This narrative may be learned by the subcultural initiate through his interactions and his swapping of gay identity formation stories with other members of the subculture, so this social construction of the gay identity formation process provides a template which he may impose upon what might be a fragmented and disunited set of experiences in an exercise of autobiographical reconstruction. Such reconstruction falls into the category of "strong schema-based processes" which Brewer (1986) believes are responsible for producing nonveridical personal memories.

It could be argued that a retrospective study which relies to a large extent on recognition - as does the present study - is even more subject to producing nonveridical personal memories than is
a study based on recall, as Barclay's (1986) work suggests that recognition is associated with a relatively high "false alarm" rate, i.e., people tend falsely to identify events as having occurred in their lives if presented with descriptions of events that were conceptually similar to what they would expect to have occurred. He posits that this "semantic similarity effect" at least partly accounts for many of the inaccuracies found in people's recognition of autobiographical information, but offers no hypothesis concerning the source of the expectations upon which the effect is founded. It may be the case that in the present study, respondents' beliefs about what is likely to happen during the course of gay identity formation are derived from the exchange of ideas with other gay men about their developmental sequences, out of which arises and is internalised a subcultural narrative relating to typical gay identity formation courses. Over time, the distinction between one's own experiences and the conceptually similar ones contained in the subcultural narrative becomes blurred: a dynamic interaction occurs between the two, with one amplifying and elaborating the other. Hence, respondents may identify as their own experiences which did not occur but which, because they form part of a subcultural gay identity formation narrative, could plausibly have occurred. Such recognition is false only to the extent that it does not correspond with the actualities of the person's experiences although it may accurately reflect their internal representations of their experiences. And as it is with these representations that the present study is
concerned, the possibility of "false" recognition, far from being a methodological problem, is instead a valuable source of data. As Thelen (1989) points out, "the important question is not how accurately a recollection fitted some piece of past reality, but why.....actors constructed their memories in a particular way at a particular time".

The attribution of "falsity" to such data may stem from a purely cognitive approach to the study of memory, but recently the social, collective and constructive aspects of memory, originally emphasised by Bartlett (1932), have made claims to at least equal consideration (Middleton and Edwards, 1990). For example, Shotter (1990) has conceived of memory as a constructive and selective process, the principles of selection of which issue from and are located within the social activities of everyday life, specifically in the frameworks provided by the social institutions into which individuals are socialised. The process of autobiographical reconstruction in terms of subcultural narratives may be viewed as part of the taking over of the world of others which Berger and Luckmann (1967) define as the essence of socialisation. In a process of secondary socialisation, the subcultural initiate internalises and personalises aspects of those to whom he attaches himself in the subculture, just as the child does in primary socialisation, with the focus here being on one specific internalised aspect of the significant others' experiences, i.e., the construction of gay identity formation experiences. And as
this construction must be selective in what it includes if it is to be easily transmissable, the approach to autobiographical memory adopted here accords with Shotter's general outlook, even if one might baulk at his apparently wholesale rejection of the cognitive model of memory.

The interpersonal narration that occurs within the subculture, according to Simon and Gagnon (1987) serves to "lower uncertainty and heighten a sense of legitimacy for both the other or others as well as the actor" (p 365). By echoing an individual's autobiographical gay identity formation phases, the subcultural narrative legitimates each of those phases as a mode of being, which is "conducive to feelings of security and belonging" as the individual can view himself as "repeating a sequence that is given in the 'nature of things', or in his own 'nature'" (Berger and Luckmann, 1967, p 117). As the individual surveys his past life, his autobiography becomes intelligible to him in terms of the subcultural narrative. The existence of such narratives is acknowledged by Kitzinger (1987) who suggests that the overarching narrative or framework of radical feminist theory now provides a context within which lesbians who formerly defined themselves as heterosexual can reconstruct their autobiographies. The role of the internalisation of the beliefs and values commonly associated with homosexuality/lesbianism in determining the affective component of a homosexual/lesbian identity is also noted by Richardson (1981). If accounts of the gay identity formation
process are to be regarded as reflections of the interpretative frameworks employed by subjects to organise their experiences, then the various models of gay identity formation outlined in the previous chapter may be construed as reflecting the differing frameworks employed by the subcultures from which their subjects were drawn.

In the studies of Coyle (1988), Dank (1971), Kooden et al. (1979), McDonald (1982) and Weinberg (1976), therefore, the three key events selected for study from the gay identity formation processes, i.e., suspecting, labelling and engaging, may be regarded as reflecting these writers' ideas about what constitutes the chief components of a gay subcultural narrative, framework or construction of the process. This may go some way towards explaining the facility with which Project SIGMA respondents generally recalled the ages at which these events occurred: through their exposure to the subcultural gay identity formation narrative, they had already been encouraged to structure their experiences in these terms. Thus with regard to the definite answers accorded to the question concerning the age at which a subject first suspected that he might be sexually different, it may be hypothesised that retrospective "sensitization" - to borrow Troiden's (1977) term - had occurred. That is to say, subjects had incorporated notions of what constituted childhood indicators of such difference from the general social sexual narrative or the subcultural narrative and had interpreted their childhood experiences in these terms.
It was an issue to which they had already given consideration and they were therefore able to reply with reasonable facility when questioned about it.

Of course, the entire concept of subcultural narratives in gay identity formation must remain a theoretical speculation: the only means of rigorously investigating it would be by the examination of the gay identity formation stories of those who have not had the opportunity to be exposed to any interpretative frameworks within the gay subculture. To contact a substantial number of gay men before they have had any social contact with other gay men would be well nigh impossible, due to the subculture being the usual starting point for any gay-related research. Also, it is difficult to envisage men who may not yet be secure in their sexual identity (if we assume social contact with other gay men to be a major means of achieving that security) participating in research which may require them to address issues which they had dealt with perhaps only partly or not at all, thus risking upset in their cognitive balance of ideas about themselves and their sexuality. So the evidence supporting the existence of subcultural narratives for the gay identity formation process is, by necessity, inferential and piecemeal and will always be open to alternative explanations. For example, if a consistent similarity is observed across gay identity formation accounts, it may be cited as evidence either for the existence of a common framework for interpreting experiences or for the existence of an actual universality of experience among gay
To reiterate, what are being considered in the present study are gay men's reconstructed narrative accounts of their gay identity formation experiences, with all the bias, distortion and selectivity that autobiographical reconstruction implies. It may be argued that, if the reconstructive process is taken as a given, what is being studied says nothing about gay identity formation but rather looks at gay identity as it is now constituted, giving its own history of itself, and is therefore of limited value. One can agree with the basic propositions of this line of reasoning while rejecting utterly the conclusion. Reconstruction, like the concept of the subcultural narrative, must be taken as a given: as we do not have access to gay men's accounts of their gay identity formation experiences at the time they encountered them, we cannot compare their present gay identity formation narratives with these accounts, so the occurrence of reconstruction cannot be tested. What this chapter has attempted to do is to argue that reconstruction is an inevitable occurrence when people are required to render accounts of past experiences, and to provide a basis on which one can justify importing the concept of reconstruction as a given into the consideration and interpretation of retrospective data. Thus, it will henceforth be assumed that reconstruction will occur to some extent in all aspects of the accounts that gay men provide of their gay identity formation experiences.
Yet, as has been outlined, some writers have attempted to itemise the characteristics that may lead to certain past experiences being accurately recalled. Their chief criterion appears to be importance: it is believed that the greater the significance of an event for an individual, the more likely that individual is to recall the event veridically. But even if this idea were valid (and the work of Greenwald (1980), for example, suggests that there are grounds for supposing it is not), information on the importance of gay identity formation-related events could not be used to decide which accounts could be treated as accurate reflections of events as they happened because the attributions of importance would be made retrospectively and may themselves be reconstructions, perhaps derived from what has been deemed important in subcultural narratives which outline typical courses of gay identity formation. Setting aside these substantial reservations about this approach for a moment, the notion that certain past events may be accurately recalled is not inimical with the claim that retrospective accounts are characterised chiefly by reconstruction: because gay identity formation narratives are regarded as reconstructed accounts, this does not mean that they are not contiguous with the actualities of the events enshrined within them at least at some points, although as accounts of the affective antecedents and consequences of these events must be regarded as reconstructions, and also possibly their positions within the narratives, they may be viewed as being surrounded by a web of reconstruction.
No attempt will be made to sift actuality from reconstruction in the present study, for one further reason: even if one were to accept some of the propositions of those who aim to describe the nature of past events that are subject to accurate recall, they fail to do so with sufficient precision for the generation of specific predictions about what will be recalled accurately. For example, Brewer (1986) does not say exactly how unique, unexpected, emotional and important events must be in order for them to be recalled accurately, nor does he suggest how these traits may be measured. In retrospective accounts, it is well nigh impossible to distinguish with certainty what is fact from what is filtering, although from the point of view of the individual holding an identity, all aspects of his narrative, including events which were actually experienced in the way in which they are described and experiences that have been elaborated through reconstruction, may be regarded as subjectively factual. The quest to sort "fact" from "fiction" is misplaced: it marks a failure to realise what are the really important data, i.e., not the actualities of past events with all their long-forgotten nuances and details, but rather present interpretations of past events which are the constituents of present identities and the foundation stones of future actions. Accounts of past gay identity formation experiences will therefore be subject to dual interpretations where possible, sometimes explicitly, when accounts of experiences will first be interpreted as accurate reflections of what actually happened to individuals and then as performing different roles as reconstructed aspects of
their larger gay identity formation narratives, and sometimes implicitly, when there is no obvious difference between the roles played by the events within gay identity formation narratives if the accounts of the events are regarded literally or as reconstructions.

Efforts have also been made in this chapter to stress that although retrospective accounts do not permit access to the actualities of how gay identity is formed, they do allow a study of how gay identity is constructed. It is the construction of gay identity, the individual's present representation of his own gay identity formation to himself, that is the object of the present study. Some may regard the pursuing of such a line as an unnecessary complication in an area already replete with ill-defined terms and empirically untested concepts, but the similarities among accounts of gay identity formation experiences reported in the literature review are such that the idea of autobiographical reconstruction on an individual level and, through the internalisation of subcultural narratives, on the collective level, at least merits consideration and may prove to have much explanatory power as a meta-concept in this field of study.
3.4 Conclusion

In sum then, it appears that the answer to the problem which prompted the consideration of autobiographical memory is that the data obtained by studies which require respondents to provide retrospective accounts of their gay identity formation experiences cannot be considered accurate accounts of the actualities of those experiences but, in the present study at least, are unlikely to have been deliberately falsified. Instead, the accounts upon which the empirical studies outlined in the previous chapter are based may be conceived of as reconstructions of past events, influenced by respondents' present self-conceptions and by the ideas that they have internalised about typical gay identity courses through talking with other gay men. The typical gay identity courses enshrined in models of gay identity formation undoubtedly have considerable basis in fact but they may also be social constructions, frameworks which have arisen from certain commonalities of experience within the gay subculture and which respondents can retrospectively impose upon their experiences to help render them coherent, meaningful and purposeful within the context of their over-arching personal narratives. This heretofore largely unconsidered possibility must be taken into account when evaluating retrospective data on gay identity formation, and the nature of the reconstructions should be recognised as a legitimate and valuable object of study.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE PRESENT STUDY: INTENTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

4.1 A General Policy Statement

Having considered the literatures which are relevant to gay identity formation, the next step is to outline the ways in which it is proposed to build upon previous work and advance the study of gay identity construction in particular and identity in general. In this chapter, the arguments that will be evinced are designed to explain and to justify the structure and contents of the questionnaire that will be used to access present constructions of gay identity formation experiences among a sample of gay men. A number of innovations which the present study introduces to research on gay identity have already been outlined. Identity will be conceived as a personal narrative which can change through the processes of assimilation-accommodation and evaluation in order to enhance an individual's self-esteem or sense of continuity or distinctiveness. Gay identity will similarly be conceived as part of the personal narrative, although its centrality within that narrative may vary considerably. Sometimes it may suffuse virtually all the stories that people tell about themselves while at other times it may be a relatively subsidiary theme or but one discrete aspect of the entire story. Either way, it will be held to consist of an individual's construal of their sexual preference,
of their reactions to it and of experiences that involve it, and the changes that have occurred in their personal narrative and in their interpersonal environment because of it. The constructions that constitute the gay identity-relevant personal narrative take the form of autobiographical memories of gay identity-relevant past events. These memories are unlikely to be accurate representations of these events but may instead be interpretations of the past, rendered from the vantage point of the present and influenced by intervening events and experiences and by expectations of what typically occurs in gay identity formation, which are gleaned from subcultural narratives about the process, encountered through social interaction with other gay men.

It is the intention of the present study to highlight the commonalities in the gay identity-relevant personal narratives of a group of London-based gay men. These commonalities of interpretations may be based upon commonalities of experience. It is also intended to predict the sequences of events and experiences that may feature in narratives relating to gay identity formation through a study of the most common experiential sequences reported by respondents. Again, these common sequences may be underscored by shared experiences or they may reflect the adoption of common retrospective organisational frameworks obtained through the internalisation of subcultural narratives. In the following discussion, hypotheses are outlined about the sort of gay identity formation experiences that are expected to be reported by
respondents in the present study and about how these experiences may relate to and influence each other. It must not be forgotten, however, that what is being considered are reports of experiences, recollections of the past, selected, edited, and fitted into a meaningful narrative by individual story tellers. The links postulated between experiences may reflect actual mechanisms of causation that operated at the time or may represent the unstated connections that exist in a reconstructed gay identity narrative which make it plausible and meaningful.

4.2 Using Insights from the Study of Adult Development

While employing the concepts of personal and subcultural narratives as overarching analytic frameworks, as has already been suggested, analysis of the experiences involved in gay identity formation may fruitfully employ conceptualisations that have been used in the study of adult development. For example, while recognising the deficiencies of Erikson's concept of identity formation and its non-universal applicability, it may yet be relevant to the present study. Even if it illuminates only the identity courses of "Western males in a surplus economy", as Slugoski and Ginsburg (1989) have claimed, this by no means invalidates the framework, especially in a study where most respondents are likely to be highly educated Western males with reasonable incomes - if the respondent profile of this study is similar to that of Project 251
SIGMA (Davies, Hunt, Macourt and Weatherburn, 1990) - which ought to increase the range and quality of the life course alternatives open to them. The concepts of an identity crisis in terms of decision-making tasks and the development of identity through active decision-making are most pertinent in the case of gay men. The course of gay identity formation may be interpreted or constructed within personal and/or subcultural narratives as a series of junctures at which the individual must make decisions that could affect the nature of his identity, i.e., he is faced with identity crises. Examples of these include constructions of the decision about when, how and to whom an individual will disclose his sexual preference; and the decision about how to interpret same-sex sexual feelings, although an individual may describe himself as having been impelled by his social environment to interpret them in a particular way, e.g., if he reports that he had already been labelled as gay/homosexual by his peers before he had accepted that label for himself. As the resultant decisions are translated into behaviour within narratives (or non-decisions into inaction), these may be described as having carried implications for the individual's identity course, with some decisions reported to have produced rewarding experiences which bound the individual more closely to a gay identity, while others prevented him from committing himself further to a gay identity.

Another relevant idea is that of the developmental task, elaborated by Havighurst (1972) and used by Levinson et al. (1978) in their
Havighurst defines a developmental task as "a task which arises at or about a certain period in the life of the individual, successful achievement of which leads to his happiness and to success with later tasks, while failure leads to unhappiness in the individual, disapproval by the society, and difficulty with later tasks" (1972, p 2). This description may be applied to the constructions of many of the major developmental events and experiences in gay identity formation if it is modified slightly. Given the largely negative societal evaluation of homosexuals and homosexuality, failure at any of the developmental tasks in gay identity formation is unlikely to meet with disapproval from society at large, although social disapproval may be said to have been expressed by members of the gay subculture at an individual's failure to achieve what may have been regarded as prescribed developmental milestones enshrined within that subculture's gay identity formation narrative. Also, the successful achievement of some of the developmental tasks in gay identity formation may not lead to immediate happiness but may impel the individual to address other tasks which may eventually lead to happiness. For example, if an individual describes himself as having self-defined as gay/homosexual without having come into contact with the gay subculture, the resolution of the self-definitional task may be said to have left him feeling isolated and possibly with a negatively-evaluated identity. His narrative causal connection here may be that having self-defined as gay, he was unsure of what
to do next. It was only when he decided to force his development onwards and tackle another developmental task, such as making contact with other gay men, that he may report that he began to evaluate his identity more positively, to feel less isolated and generally to feel happier. The events and experiences of gay identity formation may also be conceptualised as developmental tasks in that they may be normatively linked to certain stages in the gay identity courses outlined in subcultural narratives. It may be expected that if an individual has achieved some milestones, then he will also have achieved others. For example, if he has established a gay relationship, is involved in the gay subculture, and has disclosed his sexual preference to friends and workmates, others may find it surprising or even reprehensible if he has not told his parents.

A group's developmental tasks are held to arise from physical maturation, societal expectations and individual aspirations or values, either in combination or from one factor chiefly. They therefore have both organic and environmental aspects, and so accord with the psychosocial model of identity adopted in this study. Havighurst (1956) outlines three procedures for identifying developmental tasks: observation, questioning and introspection. The procedure relied upon primarily in the present study is questioning: by examining responses given in a pilot study, it was hoped to ascertain how the sample of gay men constructed what their chief developmental concerns had been. Havighurst's idea of
developmental tasks therefore appears to be applicable to the events and experiences of gay identity formation, but it can only be used to describe these events and experiences, not to explain them. For the specification of the factors which encourage or inhibit the motivation to address the various developmental tasks, it will be necessary to utilise the insights obtained from the review of the literature on gay identity formation and from the consideration of the process of autobiographical reconstruction.

4.3 The Internalisation and Transmutation of Social Norms Regarding Homosexuals and Homosexuality

From the review of the literature, two broad themes were discerned which characterise the contents and processes of the developmental tasks of gay identity formation, i.e., the internalisation and transmutation of social norms regarding homosexuals and homosexuality, and the disclosure of sexual preference. The former refers to the changes which occur in gay men's conceptions of what it means to be gay and of the social category of "gay man" and/or "homosexuality" from their first internalisations of the conceptions of others to their appreciation of the personal relevance of and their application of this conception to themselves, and the transformations in this conception engendered by their experiences en route and subsequently.
In the hypotheses that follow in relation to these themes, propositions will generally be described as if they refer to what actually happens to gay men during gay identity formation, but it must be remembered that they may also be regarded as relating to likely reconstructions of significant events in gay identity formation, with their concomitant attributions of causality and outcome. The dual rendering of these hypotheses is mostly not made explicit in this chapter for reasons of brevity, fluidity of language, and because it would often have involved the simple repetition of similar hypotheses, albeit with different formulaic addenda. Lest this policy be seen as misleading or as overemphasising the possibility of accurate recall rather than reconstructed accounts, the consideration of the construction and piloting of the questionnaire used in the present study (see Appendix D) will describe retrospective accounts of events mostly as if they were reconstructions and not subject to literal interpretation. Such an approach is more practical to adopt in relation to the subject matter of Appendix D, as fewer labrynthine accounts of possible attributions concerning the nature, antecedents and consequences of major developmental events in gay identity formation narratives are elaborated within it, so the necessity for a certain degree of circumlocution when describing reconstruction is less likely to lead to hypotheses couched in cumbersome terms and to cause confusion.
To begin, it is hypothesised that respondents will report that the initial information they received about homosexuality was predominantly stereotypical and negative in nature and that the information either condemned or ridiculed homosexuals. The reason for its posited negative tone is because the primary source of the information is hypothesised to be the people or media which act as filters for most of the other information which the child or adolescent receives about the world, i.e., parents, family, peer group and media. If, as was suggested in the consideration of the first stage of Cass's (1979) model, societal attitudes towards homosexuality are generally negative, then naturally the family milieu in which the child is socialised in the norms of his culture will promote a negative view of homosexuality. This view will be shared by peers who have been similarly socialised. And as for the final source of information, the media seldom portray homosexuality in a positive non-stereotypical fashion. The chances of respondents encountering positive views of homosexuality in their childhood or early adolescence (when it is felt that most people first encounter the concept) are therefore slim. Even if their parents were informed and non-judgemental or held a positive view of homosexuality, this may be tempered by the attitudes of the peer group and the media. Evidence in favour of this biased socialisation comes from a study of the first information that a group of students received about various sexual topics (Thornburg, 1978). Retrospectively assessing its accuracy, they rated the information that they had received on homosexuality as having been
more inaccurate than the information they had received on any other sexual topic.

It is to be expected therefore that when respondents were first learning about homosexuality, they will have internalised a stereotypical view of homosexuals-gay men which is likely to have been negative in tone and based on commonly-espoused myths concerning gay men, e.g., as child molestors, as high camp, effeminate figures of ridicule, as sexual degenerates, or as tragic, lonely, isolated characters. The promotion of such stereotypes through the socialisation process and through various communications media serves to protect non-homosexuals from the possibility that they may actually be or may become homosexual by making the "typical gay man" appear so bizarre, exotic and so far removed from the ordinary person that it would require a major and fundamental character change for the ordinary person to move into the "homosexual category". The possibility of an easy slippage from heterosexual to homosexual is thus rendered most unlikely. This distancing function of the homosexual category, role or label is elaborated by McIntosh (1981). By attaching an unremittingly negative judgement and tone to the "typical gay man" and to the whole concept of homosexuality, the socialisation process discourages young people from aspiring to or even considering the personal applicability of the homosexual category, which is rendered so negative and stigmatised that its adoption would be tantamount to an act of psychological self-assault.
The negative consequences of such socialisation experiences for an individual's sense of self-worth are eloquently elaborated by Clark (1987). He points out how gay people are socially "invisible" in their early years so that when family and friends promote negative images of homosexuality, they unknowingly damage the self-concept and self-esteem of those for whom homosexuality is personally relevant and for whom few positive role models are available to counteract this biased socialisation:

"Almost every Gay person has been invisible for some years and some Gay people remain invisible all their lives......We know we have loving feelings for some people who share our gender and that we sometimes want to express those feelings sensuously and erotically. We see men and women set up as heterosexual role models for expressing those feelings to one another. We see it in the family, on the street, in magazines, movies, and on TV. Thus do we shape our idea of what is right, normal, natural, and good. Never do we see loving expressed by two men or two women. Our inner truth is not validated visibly; we have no models. It is as if other people like us do not exist. We hear stories and see fictional portraits of deranged, depraved, and defective people who grotesquely act out our feelings, and we wonder if that is who we are......The homosexual is portrayed as an ugly man in rumpled, too-large overcoat who lurks under the pier hoping to attack delicious young boys who dare take a shortcut home from school......There is no way to identify with the person so presented on the screen and still maintain self-respect.

Because we are not visible, we hear the pointed derogatory jokes and stories about people who share our feelings, and these hurtful messages issue from the mouths of fathers, mothers, aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters, teachers, counselors, and friends. Few would think of telling a story or joke
that is anti-black in the presence of a Black person or one that is anti-Jewish in the presence of a Jew. But if by chance the Black or Jew is exposed to such an insult, that person has the comfort of family and the inner community of relatives and friends. Not so for the Gay. She or he is invisible. Not only can we not turn to family or friends, it is these very people who insult and traumatize us throughout the years of invisible development.

The Gay person begins to think of himself or herself as wrong, bad or defective...... Privately we grow up during the invisible years suspecting that there must be many basic things wrong about us. Why else would loved ones say such things about people who share our feelings? And the seeds of self-doubt and self-hate grow and grow." (pp 92-93).

The process of socialisation in an anti-homosexual milieu is one reason why this initial information is hypothesised to be highly negative in tone. Another reason relates to the process of reconstruction. Whatever meaning respondents attach to the term "coming out" - and in the pilot study, respondents interpreted the term as relating to the disclosure of sexual preference and to self-acceptance as gay/homosexual - there may be a tendency to view it as a biographical watershed, as the major turning point in the history of one's gay identity formation, before which lies a period of concealment, guilt and falsehood and after which follows openness, pride and truth. In this way, two apparently discrepant halves of one's biography are linked by a major change-inducing event. An alternative means of resolving this discrepancy involves insisting that one has always been what one now is: it is simply
the level of self-awareness that has changed. Both these tactics are ways of making sense of one's biography and of the development of one's identity: in rendering logical what may to an outsider appear illogical, they promote an Eriksonian sense of "selfsameness" or continuity. If coming out, defined in terms of disclosure or self-acceptance, is viewed as a watershed, respondents may tend to emphasise its change-inducing role by accentuating the state of affairs before and after coming out so that the transition appears as an emergence from the darkness of pre-coming out negative attitudes to homosexuality and concealment of one's sexual preference into the light of post-coming out positive evaluations and openness. It may be likened to a religious conversion where the converts paint themselves as the ultimate sinner before their change-inducing encounter with God. This phenomenon may be expected to colour many of the responses to questions which inquire about various states of affairs pre- and post-coming out. In summary then, we would expect respondents to report an overwhelming negativity in pre-coming out (i.e., pre-disclosure or pre-self-acceptance) attitudes to homosexuality either because they were inculcated in respondents during the socialisation process or because of a reconstructive tendency to exaggerate the change involved in coming out or because of an interaction of both.

Very often, an integral part of the socialisation process is the attempt to inculcate in the child or young person the values of the
parents and/or values which are current in larger society. If parents live by or espouse certain values which they hold dear, it is likely that they will wish to impart these to their children. And if these values are consistent with those that the larger society is held to cherish, then socialisation becomes a process whereby the social status quo perpetuates itself. If the individual has been socialised with and has internalised a value system in which homosexuality is regarded as evil, sinful or pathological, then he may experience conflict between his homosexuality or the values which he perceives as associated with homosexuality and the values which he holds dear. This possibility certainly merits study, together with the coping strategies that individuals evolve and implement to deal with these conflicts. If negative evaluations of homosexuals and homosexuality are enshrined in the value system that an individual inherits and wishes to retain in some form, then clearly considerable cognitive juggling will be required within that value system - possibly in the form of assimilation-accommodation and deletion - if he is to identify as gay/homosexual and ascribe a positive evaluation to that identity.

Of particular interest in this respect are the experiences of men who express a high degree of religiosity and/or those who are church members. Weinberg and Williams (1974) comment that "religious homosexuals may be more likely to experience a conflict between their sexual orientation and their religious beliefs" (p
The Judaeo-Christian tradition has been notably condemnatory of homosexuality through the ages (Boswell, 1980; Greenberg and Bystryn, 1982; Maret, 1984) and the recent pronouncements of the major established churches suggest that this attitude persists today (cf. Cardinal Ratzinger's text on "The Pastoral Care of Homosexuals" in "The Tablet", November 8th 1986, for the official Roman Catholic position; and "The Guardian", September 4th 1987 and "Capital Gay", November 13th 1987 for the Church of England's debate on the status of homosexuality. Also "Newsweek", February 23rd 1987 on gay clergy in the USA). Such an officially sanctioned condemnation, if it forms part of one's value system, may be hypothesised to constitute a source of conflict, but Weinberg and Williams (1974), like Troiden (1977), did not find any significant differences by religion on various measures among their group of gay men but, in accordance with the findings of Kinsey et al. (1948), they did discover differences by religiosity. The crucial factor was not the church to which one belonged but the degree of one's religious devotion or, translated into psychological terms, the salience and centrality of the religious component within one's identity hierarchy or as a theme within one's personal narrative. The more religious gay men tended to be more concerned about the exposure of their homosexuality and about other people's opinions than those who were less religious. They were also less socially involved with other gay men and had a more limited range of same-sex sexual experience. However, only those who expressed the opinion that homosexuality directly contravened their religious
beliefs exhibited psychological problems such as depression and an unstable self-concept. The more religious group was generally not characterised by a greater incidence of psychological problems than the less religious group, possibly because, Weinberg and Williams inferred, some sort of accommodation had been achieved between religious beliefs and sexual preference. Several such conflict-reducing strategies were outlined. The individual may attempt to repress and deny expression to his sexual preference. He may renounce his religion: Weinberg (1976) reported this to be the most common means of alleviating religiously-derived conflicts among his group. He may employ a compartmentalisation strategy whereby he does not think about religion when engaged in homosexual activity or vice versa. He may use a rationalisation strategy and may reinterpret the edicts of his religion in a way that neutralises its condemnation of homosexuality. It may be the case that such strategies will also be reported by respondents in this study.

The possibility of an incongruity between individuals' value systems and the values which they perceive as prevalent within or as characterising the gay community may also be a source of conflict for gay men. It must be remembered that the basic commonality which unites the diverse range of people within the gay community is a sexual preference shared to a greater or lesser degree by its members. The community may be said to be organised principally around sexuality, although this of course is not the sole organising principle. It is then easy to understand how
conceptions of the gay community as being obsessed with sex may arise. Such a preconception may make someone extremely wary about entering the gay community if they view sex negatively and consider an obsession with sexual activity - and its perceived correlates of promiscuity, predatoriness and an anti-relationship ambience - as the ultimate form of decadence and sinfulness. Indeed, such a preconception may deter an individual from ever making social contact with other gay men. Even if he is willing to test the validity of this preconception by entering the gay community or if the desire for contact with other gay men is so urgent that to fulfil it would deleteriously affect psychological well-being to a lesser extent than not to do so, the individual may yet find that his preconceptions are verified to some extent and hence may feel that the values which he perceives in the gay community conflict with his own values. The reason for this may be that as the gay community may be seen as organised around sexuality and as the sexual component is easily discernible, the subcultural initiate may view the community through a pre-judgemental construct cluster with its core constructs relating to an over-emphasis on sex. He may be more alert to the sexual aspects of interaction between gay men and may thus render his prophecy self-fulfilling.

Other possible conflicts concern the person's career and his masculinity. Involvement in the gay subculture exposes one's gay identity to a relatively large number of people and the possibility of the disclosure of one's sexual preference by a third party to
individuals from whom one would prefer to conceal it is increased. Such undesired disclosure may have negative ramifications in terms of lost friendships, estranged family members and impeded career prospects. If an individual values friendships, family or career above the development of a gay identity and considers that the pursuit of the latter would jeopardise any of the former, he may experience stress and conflict in attempting to cultivate both and keep them separate. The most common type of conflict reported by Weinberg's (1976) respondents arose from the perceived incompatibility of being gay and being a man. The two cognitions were found difficult to reconcile because of the men's awareness of the most salient aspect of the prevailing cultural stereotype of gay men, i.e., that they are effeminate, they desire to be women, or they constitute some sort of third gender (cf. Havelock Ellis, 1936, for a classic exposition of the "third sex" theory). All of the possible conflicts outlined arise from an incongruity between a person's self-image and their awareness of negative aspects of homosexuality. This may be interpreted as McIntosh (1981) interpreted the concept of the homosexual role, i.e., as an instrument of social control, by which society, reified in the socialisation process, attempts to deter people from allying themselves with the homosexual category.

As well as considering what respondents' conceptions of gay men were like when they were first learning about homosexuality, it may be interesting to compare them with their present conceptions of
what a gay man/homosexual is. Of course, there always exists the possibility that respondents will exaggerate the change which may have occurred in their conceptions of gay men, albeit unconsciously. The motivation for such a self-presentation has already been examined in the consideration of why initial conceptions of gay men may have been highly negative in tone, i.e., in order to effect the appearance of a "darkness-to-light" transformation. Aside from this reconstructive possibility, it is probable that, given positive supportive disclosure and social and sexual experiences with other gay men, the individual's conception of what defines a gay man will now include fewer negative stereotypical descriptors of gay men and will be generally more positive or at least more neutral than when he was learning about homosexuality.

Another possibility is that some respondents may have broken free from stereotypical thinking about gay men to such an extent that they may be unable to offer a description of a gay man. They may have moved from an assumption of homogeneity among gay men to a recognition of heterogeneity, and so may repudiate the validity of such a concept as a typical gay man. For those who do acknowledge the continued existence of a stereotype, it is expected that this stereotype will be based on first-hand observations of and experiences with gay men and will be altogether more informed than the stereotype which they originally reported, which is assumed to be based on societal myths regarding gay men. However, the possibility remains that for some respondents, their image of the
typical gay man will not have manifestly changed or will even have become more negative. The most likely cause underlying such a state of affairs may prove to be unsatisfactory and unenjoyable social and/or sexual contact or relationships with other gay men.

Within the context of the developmental milestones in the transmutation of social norms about homosexuals and homosexuality, one may consider those studies which, from the array of complex cognitive, affective and behavioural changes which may be critical in gay identity formation, focus upon the awareness of sexual difference in terms of same-sex attractions, initial same-sex sexual activity, and labelling oneself as gay/homosexual (Coyle, 1988; Dank, 1971; Kooden et al., 1979; McDonald, 1982; and Weinberg, 1976). The attempts to ascertain the relative frequencies of sequences of these three events, presumed to be developmental milestones, have been outlined in Chapter Two. While wishing to take account of and reproduce those studies which endeavour to trace the ages and sequences of occurrence of milestone events, it must be remembered that a conception of gay identity formation in terms of the manifestation of age-related milestone events is but a skeleton upon which to hang details of the cognitive restructuring, behavioural changes and changes in the person's social environment which form the flesh of the process. This approach delineates the end products of a series of steps but in the present study it is hoped that by framing questions which also concern the antecedents and consequences of and reasons for
the occurrence of these milestone events, respondents' interpretations and reconstructions of the intervening dynamics of these events may be outlined, they may be placed within the context of an overall gay identity formation process and narrative, and their relative importance within that process and narrative may be ascertained.

The attempt at "fleshing out the process" might commence by inquiring as to which factors, perceived as indicators of homosexuality, were regarded as so personally relevant by respondents that they sparked suspicions concerning the possible personal applicability of the homosexual label. One interesting point here is the degree to which the factors identified converge with the characteristics attributed to a typical gay man. If a substantial degree of convergence occurs and the stereotype is negative in tone, it may be hypothesised that this could prove to be a source of conflict for the person as they attempt to reconcile themselves to a negative self-categorisation, and that this in turn could give rise to low self-esteem and a negative self-conception.

It is also worth examining the factors which confirmed the initial self-suspicion as homosexual and which led to self-definition in order to ascertain the extent to which these overlap with the factors identified as having provoked self-suspicion. Elucidation of the ways in which experimentation with roles, labels and/or behaviours is drawn to a conclusion is sought, with one of the main
areas of interest concerning whether the conclusion is said to result from a confirmatory event (or from an event which disproved a heterosexual identity) or whether it is seen as the culmination of a process of increasing self-suspicion. However, the chances of obtaining responses which accurately reflect cognitions at self-suspicion and self-definition must be regarded as remote because respondents are effectively required to provide recollections of past reconstructions. At the time of self-definition, they may have selected from their autobiographies experiences which they interpreted as indicators of homosexuality in order to project their new self-definition into the past, provide it with a history and thus promote a sense of personal continuity. The self-suspicion stage may therefore itself be an artefact of the reconstructive process, marking an attempt to portray one's self-definition as gay/homosexual as the culmination of a continuous process of development. The construction of a history of self-definition may also have been informed by the internalisation of relevant aspects of gay identity formation narratives encountered through contact with other gay men. Inquiries about the nature of the self-definitional process may therefore be regarded more as ways of accessing both personal and subcultural constructions of this aspect of respondents' gay identity formation narratives rather than as carrying any real implications for the uncovering of the actual events and cognitions of that time.
The issue of self-definition as gay/homosexual deserves a more thorough treatment than simply the delineation of the ages at which it occurred and the factors that facilitated it. The psychological ramifications of such self-definition may be considerable. It may represent a joyous self-acceptance and the germination of a new self-conception that is harmonious with one's feelings and desires; or it may reflect a grudging surrender, a resignation to the inevitable. The nature of the evaluation placed upon the self in the light of this new identity content may depend upon a number of factors. One might posit that a major influential variable would be respondents' reports of their reactions when they first suspected that they were gay/homosexual. If self-suspicion led to the self being negatively evaluated - perhaps because one learned during socialisation that homosexuality is sick, depraved or sinful and at self-suspicion, the self was similarly evaluated - this appraisal may have persisted up to and possibly beyond the point of self-definition. Other gay identity-relevant experiences which led individuals to feel negatively about themselves may similarly be hypothesised to have had an enduring effect so that negative self-appraisals following self-definition may represent cumulative self-evaluations, incorporating residues of earlier negative self-appraisals. Examples of such experiences might include the internalisation of negative stereotypical information about homosexuals and homosexuality during socialisation and reports of feeling negatively about oneself while passing as heterosexual or when disguising one's homosexuality. Although it may appear
logically improbable that the latter experience could influence one's evaluation of oneself following self-definition as gay/homosexual, since one cannot disguise one's homosexuality before one has adopted "homosexual" as a self-descriptor, these events may well relate to the same period in a person's gay identity formation narrative, so what is being reported is the general affective tone of that time rather than the affective outcome of any single experience. Thus reports of negative self-appraisals in relation to one developmental task may be predictive of negative self-appraisals in relation to other developmental tasks in gay identity formation.

The third of the milestone events traditionally examined is that of initial same-sex sexual experience. When one considers that gay identity formation is founded upon a statistically atypical sexual preference, it is surprising that the role of sexual activity in the gay identity formation process has not been accorded more thorough treatment. The constructions that respondents place upon their initial same-sex sexual experience and the implications that this event had for their conceptions of themselves and their sexuality will be specifically examined in the present study, beginning with an examination of the meanings that they attributed to this experience. Some will undoubtedly have construed it as a homosexual experience either at the time or in retrospect, but, as was noted earlier, several writers have outlined ways in which participants in same-sex sexual activity may avoid attributing a
homosexual meaning to it and/or a homosexual label to themselves (Cass, 1979; Hencken, 1984; Lewis, 1984; Troiden, 1977; and Weinberg, 1976).

With regard to the effects which initial same-sex sexual experiences may have on attitudes towards the self, any number of possible effects may be postulated, ranging from extreme guilt as the wrath of the person's value system is incurred, to relief if the experience proves pleasurable and provides confirmatory evidence that one really is gay/homosexual, thus terminating a period of doubt and uncertainty. It may be possible to establish a relationship between a respondent's willingness to label his experience and/or himself as gay/homosexual and the effects which the experience had on his attitudes to gay men. For example, if he was unwilling to label the experience as gay/homosexual, this was presumably because homosexuality held distinctly negative connotations for him, which are unlikely to have been altered even if the activity was physically pleasurable, as the activity was not viewed as having homosexual implications. The only situation in which sexual experience may have altered a respondent's attitudes towards gay men would occur when the other participant(s) in the sexual activity identified himself/themselves as gay/homosexual. In this case, the evaluation of gay men may be determined by the evaluation of the sexual experience. If the experience was positively evaluated, so might the evaluation of gay men change in a positive direction: this could equally be a function of simple
stereotype-reducing contact with a gay man. Similarly, if the sexual experience was negative, the person may find their stereotypes of gay men reinforced and their attitudes towards gay men becoming more negative.

Possibly the most important factor in determining to what extent an individual is able to attribute a positive evaluation to his gay identity is the nature of his interaction with other gay men. For some men, their initial social contact with other gay men may have been in some way negative, unenjoyable or unfulfilling and this may have infused their developing gay identity with a negative affective tone. However, as the vast majority of respondents in the present study will lay claim to a gay or homosexual identity (as they will be self-selected), it is presumed that somewhere in their identity histories, they will have experienced positive social contact with other gay men which has helped foster their identities through these other gay men regarding the respondents' burgeoning gay identities as something positive, to be nurtured and developed and providing reference group support for them. The major outcome of involvement in the gay subculture, reported by both Troiden (1977) and Weinberg (1976), appears to be a diminution in the influence of internalised negative stereotypes about gay men on subjects' thinking, which results from the provision of positive images of gay men acquired through social contact with them. Weinberg specified that as a result of subcultural involvement, his subjects' definitions of homosexuality broadened to include
emotional as well as sexual elements. The impact of these changes upon the self and the emerging gay identity may be easily inferred. The lessening of the hold of negative stereotypes and the realisation that one can find commonalities with gay men reduces the perceived disparity between the self and the category of "gay man/homosexual". Previously, the dominant line of reasoning may have run something like "all gay men are bad/sinful/sick/effeminate; I am not or do not feel bad/sinful/sick/effeminate; therefore I am not a gay man". With the first part of the syllogism now proven erroneous, there may be a greater willingness to self-identify as gay/homosexual.

Linked to the subject of identity-enhancing contact with other gay men is the possibility, mentioned by Weinberg (1976), that one or more individuals may be encountered in the subculture who enter into mentor or "gay coach" relationships with neophytes, advising them, sharing experiences, acting as role models, and possibly as vehicles for the transmission of subcultural narratives about gay identity formation courses. The extent to which this type of relationship is experienced by respondents in the present study merits consideration, together with the broader issue of what sort of people most influenced respondents' thinking when they were coming to terms with their sexuality and the difference that these people made to their thinking. The possibilities here are many and varied but it is expected that those named as having been most influential will be nominated because they played key roles in
helping respondents negotiate the major developmental tasks of gay identity formation. For example, they may have offered support or practical advice or generally reacted positively at various junctures, most probably after the respondent made a disclosure of sexual preference to them. Gay icons or role models, either well-known public figures or individuals personally known to respondents who acted as "gay coaches", may also be cited because of their role in decreasing respondents' sense of isolation or in diminishing the hold of negative stereotypes concerning gay men and/or homosexuality.

One of the goals towards which those who are engaged in developing a gay identity may be seen as moving is the establishment of a relatively stable and positively-evaluated gay identity. That is not to say that a definite end point is posited to the process. It simply means that the individual works towards the creation of an identity which provides a satisfactory framework through which to view himself and with which to structure his world, an identity which he is happy to adopt on a long-term basis. The individual does not question the foundations of such an identity: it is stable, although it may remain open to further development along an already chosen path. It may be worth investigating individuals' perceptions of the stability of one fundamental which underlies their gay identities, i.e., their sexual preference. This issue may be related to the literature which examines the fluidity or fixity of sexual preference during the lifetime. Those who propose
a view of sexual preference as malleable, e.g., Klein, Sepekoff and Wolf (1985), draw on the work of Kinsey et al. (1948, 1953) and regard sexual preference as a continuum along which one may range during one's lifetime. Those who see sexual preference as fixed, e.g., Altshuler (1984) and Harry (1984), tend to view it as a homosexual-heterosexual dichotomy, with one's polarity determined in childhood. According to Altshuler, claims of sexual preference which do not occupy either end of the dichotomy simply represent attempts at saving social status and denying sexual conflict. However, the question of whether or not sexual preference is open to change is not the main concern. The real issue is whether respondents perceive their sexual preference to be open to change so that they experience doubts about the nature of it. This perception may of course be informed by their acquaintance with theories concerning the lability of sexual preference, but other factors may be equally influential, e.g., the nature of and their reactions to their sexual experiences and the degree to which a gay identity is personally satisfying and assimilable into their life circumstances.

The motivation which renders stability and the establishment of a positive evaluation of one's gay identity a common goal in identity formation may be regarded as twofold. Firstly, identity stability is an inherently desirable state of affairs because, with the major identity-related issues resolved and relatively settled, it reduces the range and cognitive complexity of the identity tasks to which
one must attend. In this sense, identity stability may be equated with identity positivity. Secondly, once a gay identity has been adopted and integrated to any extent with other aspects of a person's concept of self, i.e., when it has become interwoven with one's overall personal narrative, there may be little motivation to change. The reasons for this include the difficulty of undoing a self-labelling which may have involved a considerable public dimension. Even if it were reversible, one would be faced with having to rebuild an interpersonal network which may well have been founded on one's gay identity (Plummer, 1975). Having undergone the processes of self-labelling and establishing a supportive social network once already in gay identity formation, the prospect of having to undergo it all again may be sufficient to discourage doubting of or further experimentation with one's sexual identity. Troiden (1977) also points to the nature of the identity transformation involved in gay identity formation and to the mystification of homosexual experience in the gay subculture as reasons why further substantial change in sexual identity is unlikely to be considered by gay men. By the latter, he means the belief which he located among his group that being gay is an essential and fundamental rather than a constructed aspect of the self, one which closes other sexual options. This belief may be internalised by the subcultural initiate as part of the process of replacing previously-held negative attitudes and stereotypes about gay men with attitudes based on or derived from actual interaction with them, i.e., as part of the internalisation of a subcultural
narrative. Not only may change be deemed impossible - and hence the process of doubting the authenticity of the sexual preference fruitless - but support among members of the subculture for an individual's attempt to explore the possibility of such change is unlikely to be forthcoming and may be viewed as a form of betrayal.

The experience of doubt or instability in relation to one's gay identity may be correlated with other variables, the chief and most general one being the length of time which has elapsed since the respondent first began the gay identity formation process, a juncture which is arbitrarily designated, as was seen in the consideration of the various starting points of different models of gay identity formation. Whatever his point of departure, the longer a person has been working through his gay identity, the more likely it is that he will have had doubt-reducing and stability-inducing experiences such as the diminution of the impact of negative stereotypes of gay men through subcultural involvement.

One correlate of the drive towards stability or equilibrium within the gay identity formation process may be the desire for a reduction in the cognitive complexity of the identity tasks to which one must attend. It is expected that respondents will mostly define themselves in terms of those categories which take into account their sexual preferences and activities and which most commonly occur in everyday parlance, i.e., "gay" or "homosexual". Few are expected to define themselves in terms of other categories
or to offer their own idiosyncratic self-definitions. Of course, it cannot be assumed that because a majority of respondents select a particular category to define their sexual identity, that category represents a uniformity of identity meaning and evaluation. But there must exist some commonality of experience and meaning underlying the category for it to be found a useful self-identifier by many people. And part of its utility lies in its capacity to simplify, whether it is adopted as a shorthand for what is seen as a personal conception of one's sexuality or as a set of behavioural and/or cognitive guidelines for how a gay man should act, i.e., as a role, or as a combination of both.

Social contact with other gay men can be seen as increasing individuals' willingness and ability to attribute positive evaluations to their gay identity. It may be possible to access this evaluative dimension of identity by assessing the extent to which individuals regard being gay as being personally advantageous. Examples of advantages that one may expect to be cited include the opportunity to develop a personally-tailored value system and framework for living rather than simply adopting the one in which one is socialised or which prevails in the culture; the formation of a capacity to tolerate being different and to value difference; the development of an empathic response to other socially devalued groups; and a general strengthening of character. To these Clark (1987) adds the sharing of subculturally specific humour; the sharing of tenderness and compassion with
another man, an experience largely denied to heterosexual men; the capacity for relating equally and genuinely to women in relationships that are not influenced by sexual undercurrents; and the potential for transcending gender-bound roles and consequently for enjoying a broad range of experiences. Among the disadvantages which it was felt might be mentioned are problems of disclosure and non-disclosure insofar as these may force one to relate dishonestly or falsely to others; perceived difficulties in establishing and maintaining gay relationships; the possibility that a drive towards generativity may go unfulfilled; and the continuous awareness of or risk of societal censure. It may be further hypothesised that the advantages named by any individual will outweigh the disadvantages that he nominates. For an individual to have persevered in the establishment of a gay identity, the benefits of the process must have outweighed the costs. Of course, such an hypothesis is untestable unless an index can be obtained of the respondent's evaluation of the advantages and disadvantages cited and the relative weight he attaches to each. A simple comparison of the sum of each would not suffice: only one advantage may be nominated as opposed to several disadvantages but that advantage may be perceived by respondents as so important that it outweighs the aggregate negative component represented by the disadvantages.

Linked to the evaluations that gay men place upon their gay identities is the issue of the effects which the advent of AIDS has had upon respondents' thoughts and feelings about themselves, gay
men and homosexuality. No study of gay men today would be complete without an examination of this issue which may have radically altered certain aspects of the pre-AIDS gay identity formation processes outlined in studies from that era. Given its potential for influencing identity, it is surprising to find that few psychological studies of AIDS examine this issue, concentrating instead on its psychological implications for people who are HIV positive or who have AIDS rather than for the gay community in general (Chodoff, 1987; Hirsch and Enlow, 1984; Morin and Batchelor, 1984; Morin, Charles and Malyon, 1984). However, the AIDS situation stands as a most apposite example of how changes in social circumstances may demand or be responded to by changes in identity, thereby highlighting the arbitrary nature of end points in models of gay identity formation and emphasising the futility of positing unilinear models that cannot accommodate such social change. The possible effects of the advent of AIDS on gay identity formation and construction have already been briefly considered in relation to Cass's (1979) model of gay identity formation. At this point, it is appropriate to examine them in greater detail.

From initial self-suspicion as gay/homosexual onwards, AIDS may be hypothesised to have rendered the gay identity formation process more difficult and problematic at every juncture. Those at the self-suspicion stage now find themselves confronted with a homosexual category suffused with connotations of sickness and death. The "sickness" connotation has always featured in the
stereotypical conception of the homosexual category but as psychopathology rather than as organic pathology. The salience of the element of psychopathology in popular conceptions of homosexuality may have been diminished by the American Psychiatric Association's decision in 1974 to remove homosexuality from its list of disorders and by the gradual increase in public tolerance as homosexuality became a high profile media and social issue in the 1970s, but now the pathological connotations have returned in a much more concrete form. Media images of gaunt and wizened young gay men, wasted by the syndrome, and talk of divine retribution and of gay men as a "high risk group" for AIDS has inextricably linked homosexuality with disease, sickness and sin once again. And the popular press are not alone in this regard. Academic publications have also been at fault. For example, when Ruse (1988) in his philosophical inquiry into homosexuality uses the AIDS situation to attribute sickness to homosexuality, he attributes the prevalence of HIV (which he outdatedly refers to as "HTLV III") among gay men to promiscuity per se, thus unforgivably obfuscating the virus' precise mode of transmission while at the same time perpetuating the worst myths about HIV/AIDS. It is therefore clear that there exists a considerable potential for conflict within an individual as he considers the meaning and repercussions of his assuming a gay identity if he has internalised aspects of the coverage of AIDS issues in the popular press and elsewhere and to some extent regards the adoption of a gay identity as allying himself with a disease-ridden plague-carrying group or as possibly

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exposing himself to the syndrome with all the suffering that entails.

Disclosure of sexual preference may be rendered more problematic in that friends and/or family may assume that all gay men carry or at least are highly susceptible to HIV and so may give the discloser a wide berth. Less extreme disclosure consequences may involve an increased likelihood of a negative reaction following disclosure if those to whom disclosure is made acquiesce in the negative, sickness-related societal conceptions of gay men which have proliferated via the media in recent years (cf Armstrong, 1984-85). Even if the AIDS situation only has the effect of making family and friends over-solicitous about the individual's health, this may also convey subtle messages to him that his sexuality is considered a health risk, which hardly encourages him to evaluate it positively. For those men who had long since worked through the major milestones and processes of gay identity formation and who had attained a stable and positively-evaluated gay identity, the advent of AIDS may have forced that identity into flux again. There may be a necessity to revisit and recast one's ideas about one's sexuality. For example, the multiple partner and anal-erotic aspects of gay sexual behaviour have been discouraged in various health education campaigns, thus undermining what many may regard as an integral component of being gay, i.e., freedom from heterosexual mores (Joseph et al., 1984). There may also be a reassessment of one's fellow gay men, positively or negatively,
depending on how one views their response to the AIDS crisis.

It may be argued that what the examination of the internalisation and transmutation of social norms regarding homosexuals and homosexuality is in essence concerned with is the delineation of the factors which lead to an increase in the positivity of gay men's attitudes towards themselves during the gay identity formation process. In this respect, it may be worth considering those studies which attempt to identify factors which determine one's attitude to homosexuality, e.g., age, race, social class, religion, religiosity and political sympathy (Glassner and Owen, 1976; Glenn and Weaver, 1979; Irwin and Thompson, 1977; Istvan, 1983; McDonald and Moore, 1978; Nyberg and Alston, 1976; San Miguel and Millham, 1976; Stephan and McMullin, 1982; West, 1977b; Yarber and Yee, 1983; Young and Whertvine, 1982). Although these studies tend to address themselves to the attitudes of heterosexuals to homosexuality - McDonald and Moore (1978) who examine gay men's attitudes to their homosexuality being the exception - there is no reason to suppose that the same factors would not also influence the attitudes of homosexuals to their own sexuality, albeit perhaps in a different way. For example, on the age dimension, those who were forming their gay identities after the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, which legalised homosexual acts between consenting adults over 21 years of age in private, may report different experiences from those who were doing so before that date (cf Baker, 1987). Likewise, those who were forming their gay identities before the
advent of AIDS in the 1980s with its attendant upsurge in anti-homosexual sentiments (cf. Altman, 1986) may similarly prove to be a group with an ontogenesis distinct from those who are forming their gay identities in the era of AIDS, although as this era has only recently commenced, the delineation of its precise effects is best left to future research.

Such demographic variables have been related at length to a range of lifestyle and adjustment variables among gay men in studies undertaken by Bell and Weinberg (1978) and by Weinberg and Williams (1974). For example, the latter investigators reported that their older respondents were less involved in the gay world, had sexual contact with other men less frequently and were more likely to be living alone than were younger men. They were, however, no worse off than younger respondents on various dimensions of psychological adjustment, and on some dimensions they actually fared better. This Weinberg and Williams regarded as reflecting a trend found in the general population rather than as something specific to gay men: as people become older, they tend to lower their aspirations and their expectations of life as they adapt to and accept the realistic possibilities of their life situation or they simply resign themselves to their life circumstances. In short, they are more easily satisfied. Another demographic variable which produced interesting results on analysis was occupation: Weinberg and Williams found that gay men in higher status occupations tended to have disclosed their sexual preference less, to be more worried
about exposure, more concerned with passing and less involved in the gay subculture than were men in lower status occupations; they also reported more social involvement with heterosexuals and identified more with higher class heterosexuals than with lower class homosexuals. These authors attributed this to the fact that those in higher status occupations had much to lose if their sexual preference became generally known. In terms of psychological well-being, those in higher status occupations were more self-accepting and had more faith in others, which was held to reflect the increased self-esteem and other social psychological advantages that accrue from a high-status occupation. It is intended to examine the effects that demographic variables such as age and occupation have upon major variables implicated in gay identity formation in the present study.

Another reason for desiring demographic information is so that the heterogeneity of the group of gay men under study might be ascertained, the aim being to comply with Davies' (1986) recommendation that when studying gay men, as heterogeneous a group as possible should be sought. The reason for this is that the parameters of the population under study - i.e., those men in London who have adopted or are in the process of adopting a gay identity - are unknown because, as Davies (1986) points out, the visible, commercial and easily accessible gay scene does not encompass all those who might be included in the study population. As the parameters of the population are unknown, it is impossible
to draw a representative sample from that population. One alternative approach is to endeavour to obtain as heterogeneous a sample as possible in terms of the variables which may influence the major dependent variable(s) under study. The issue of sampling is treated in more detail elsewhere.

4.4 The Disclosure of Sexual Preference

The second broad area which it is proposed to examine in the present study is the disclosure of sexual preference, following closely the issues identified in the treatment of this topic by writers such as Clark (1987) and Weinberg (1976), and motivated by its frequent appearance in models of gay identity formation and by its being hypothesised as playing a structural as well as a content role within gay identity formation narratives. The questions which Clark and Weinberg held to be central to the process of disclosure concern whom to tell, why they should be told, what they should be told, expected responses, strategies for dealing with negative responses, and general strategies of disclosure. These issues will be incorporated in questions relating to disclosure and will provide the disclosure section of the study with its structure. Other topics which may yield valuable insights will also be included. For example, the relatively untreated subject of involuntary disclosure merits attention, i.e., when the respondent is not the person who makes the disclosure about his sexual
preference. The importance of this topic lies in the lack of control which the respondent has over the disclosure process. Unless he has explicitly or implicitly instructed another person to disclose on his behalf and has outlined how the disclosure is to be carried out, he cannot make the sort of pre-disclosure preparations both within himself and in relation to those to whom he intends to disclose which the literature suggests are commonly made. The likelihood of the elicitation of unexpected and untoward reactions from those to whom the disclosure is made is therefore greater than in the case of disclosure by the respondent himself. The possibility of disclosure by a third party being prompted by malice or vindictiveness and the allied possibility that it may not be conducted with tact or discretion increases the likelihood of an unfavourable reaction. Involuntary disclosure may therefore generate considerable interpersonal problems and affect the progression towards the attainment of a stable and positively evaluated gay identity. On the other hand, it may represent a deliberate disclosure strategy in that one may circumvent the possible difficulties of the personal disclosure situation by disclosing to someone and explicitly or implicitly requesting or granting permission to the person to tell others or by disclosing to someone whom one knows will almost certainly tell others. Such a tactic may result in the gay man having to deal with the considered reactions of others rather than their immediate reactions. If the disclosure by proxy initiated a shocked or hostile reaction, this may have abated or may have been replaced
by a less negative reaction by the time the gay man encounters those to whom disclosure was made.

The issue of disclosure to family members merits separate treatment because of the possibility of their playing a vital role in facilitating or impeding the progression towards the assumption of a stable and positively evaluated gay identity. Weinberg's (1976) findings suggest that the major way in which familial reactions influence gay identity formation is in determining whether or not the individual attributes a positive or negative evaluation to his identity. In terms of Breakwell's (1986) model, it is the evaluative dimension which is chiefly affected. Family members have greater potential than other people for influencing the gay identity formation process. The individual may determinedly set his face against those who react negatively to his homosexuality and may adopt the axiom that "those who matter won't mind and those who mind don't matter", but this stance may prove easier to maintain in relation to friends than family. If any of one's friends react negatively and persist in their negative evaluation, they may be downgraded in one's friendship hierarchy or jettisoned from it entirely and their position accorded to someone who shows greater acceptance, but it may be more difficult to do the same with family members. One may reject a father or mother because of their refusal to accept or evaluate positively one's sexual preference but with what does one replace them? Surrogate relatives or "families of choice" may provide the necessary
acceptance and support but cannot offer the parental or kinship tie which one might argue is intrinsically binding. The familial scenario may act as a source of incalculable support or as a continuous hindrance for the individual who is trying to work through the gay identity formation process. Indeed in that family members may react differently, it may prove to be both simultaneously. It is a situation in which diverse coping strategies may be mobilised on both sides to various ends. For example, the gay man may wish to preserve his family ties and foster a positively evaluated gay identity; family members may wish to maintain a relationship with their son/brother while coping with an aspect of sexuality about which they may know little, which may contravene their value system or ideas of morality, and which may stigmatise the family if it became public knowledge. It is these types of problems and the coping strategies which were employed to deal with them that it may be interesting to consider.

The opposite side of the disclosure coin is what Goffman (1963) terms "passing", i.e., the concealment of potentially discrediting aspects of the self, in this case one's homosexuality. The most obvious means of achieving this is to pass as heterosexual either by manifesting what Weinberg (1976) calls the "indexical particulars" of heterosexuality, i.e., those characteristics which are most commonly regarded as constituting the essence of what it is to be heterosexual, or by avoiding situations in which attention is focussed upon one's sexuality in the hope that, through the
operation of the "heterosexual assumption" (cf Ponse, 1978), the attribution of heterosexuality will be made. Such strategies involve information control and deliberate manipulation of the social environment. The person must have a grasp of commonsense psychology in order to control the social cues which he transmits and to predict how others will interpret and react to them. The adoption of strategies to disguise one's homosexuality may engender anxiety in that if a facade has been purposefully created, it may slip, or even if such a front has not been created, one's true sexuality may somehow reveal itself in a moment of decreased vigilance (although, as has already been pointed out, Goffman appears to doubt whether the relationship between passing and anxiety is necessary or even commonplace). The passer may also feel hypocritical because of his awareness of the deliberate deception or may feel his loyalties divided as he denies membership of a group or category which he perceives - however dimly - as holding personal relevance for him. It is therefore not sufficient simply to examine the range of passing strategies most commonly employed or the people in relation to whom these strategies were most often adopted. Of equal importance are the feelings engendered in the passer while these strategies are being implemented. Both these areas will be addressed in the present study, although it is most unlikely that reports of feelings associated with passing accurately describe actual feelings at the time, if Hindley's (1979) assessment of the degree to which reports of past feelings are reconstructed is valid. The possibility of
changes in or the abandonment of passing strategies may be examined by comparing the ways in which respondents concealed their homosexuality before any disclosure of sexual preference was made with present tactics of concealment. It may be the case that whereas before, passing as heterosexual was a policy adopted in relation to everyone, now it may be restricted to certain people or classes of people perhaps because their relation to the respondent does not merit disclosure or perhaps because disclosure to them would have seriously injurious consequences either for the respondent's relationship with them and/or for the respondent himself. Then again, passing may be abandoned altogether for a variety of reasons, e.g., one may evaluate one's homosexuality positively and hence cease to regard it as something to be hidden.

The exploration of temporally-based developmental changes in the disclosure process - and hence by association in the gay identity formation process - may be extended by examining current disclosure strategies, which may be compared with the strategies employed in initial disclosures. It may be that disclosure ceases to be a policy or even a conscious issue in relation to those with whom respondents come into contact. A disclosure etiquette may have been constructed and become routinised through the person's previous disclosure experiences. The disclosure process may become more subtle: cues to the respondent's homosexuality may be strategically placed in social interaction for the audience's consumption or there may simply be a cessation of active attempts
at concealment. Alternatively, a sort of "homosexual assumption" may be adopted in relation to the self, whereby one presumes that everyone knows of one's homosexuality and one then acts in accordance with this. Of course, it is likely that different approaches will be adopted in different situations and with different people.

It may be hypothesised that responses given to questions on the disclosure of sexual preference will lend themselves to literal interpretation to a greater degree than will responses to questions on the internalisation and transmutation of social norms regarding homosexuality, i.e., they are more likely to reflect the actualities of the relevant experiences. The reason for this is that questions on topics such as the people to whom disclosures were made, the nature of the disclosures and the reactions they elicited seek factual rather than attitudinal information and relate to specific events, while the questions on the re-evaluation of the homosexual category tend to concentrate upon processes that may have occurred over a considerable period of time, such as the internalisation of negative ideas about homosexuality during socialisation, the development of suspicions that one might be homosexual, and the awareness of conflicts between aspects of one's value system and one's homosexuality. It may be hypothesised that it is more difficult to provide accurate recall on such topics as they may well not be tied to one specific event or to one point in time.
The likelihood that accurate responses (accurate in the sense of reflecting the actualities of original experiences) will be obtained from questions relating to past feelings, evaluations and motivations on both topic areas must be judged to be quite slim. However, data on reconstructed feelings are valuable in that they may provide insights on how the affective tone of accounts of gay identity formation is determined. It may be that, in line with a "darkness-to-light" reconstruction, pre-disclosure or pre-self-acceptance experiences will be tinged with a negative affective tone while experiences following disclosure or self-acceptance will be suffused with a positive affect. Equally it may be argued that responses to questions which ask for present assessments of aspects of gay identity formation may reflect respondents' actual opinions - leaving aside the question of the ontogenesis of such opinions - regardless of the subject matter. Examples of such questions are those concerning respondents' assessments of the advantages and drawbacks of the gay subculture and the advantages and disadvantages of being gay. Yet in the end, as has been mentioned before, in analysing and evaluating responses it is well nigh impossible to determine with certainty the relative contributions of the actualities of past experiences, reconstructions of those past experiences in the light of an individual's present self-conception, an individual's implicit personal theories of covariation and causation, and subcultural narratives which inform expectations of what has happened and what will happen in gay identity formation. The possibility that all of these sources may
be influential to a greater or lesser degree must be borne in mind when analysing data from a study such as this.

Following the elaboration of the foregoing hypotheses, a basic open-ended questionnaire (see Appendix B) was constructed which addressed the issues outlined. A full account of the construction and piloting of this questionnaire is provided in Appendix D, together with a description of the final version of the questionnaire (see Appendix A) that was compiled on the basis of the outcome of the pilot work. It is, however, worth noting here that in the final questionnaire, a multiple-choice format was chosen for most questions, and that the questionnaire was completed by respondents themselves, which marks a significant departure from the approach adopted in most previous studies of gay identity formation/construction, i.e., in-depth, free-response, face-to-face interviews. The dominance of this method of study may be due to the assumption that (the construction of) gay identity formation involves complex processes that cannot be charted by a structured questionnaire. It may be contended, though, that part of this apparent complexity is due not to the nature of the processes but to the methodology frequently used in examining them. The free response approach often yields lengthy accounts of gay identity formation experiences that, with their anecdotal delineation of events, experiences and interpretations, serve to obscure broad generalities of experience and construction which a more sharply-focused approach may uncover in a more economical manner.
Structure need not sacrifice scope as the chief concerns of previous studies of gay identity formation/construction are all encompassed within the final version of the questionnaire used in the present study. The economy of the questionnaire lies in its utilising previous studies and pilot research to pinpoint the exact nature of the information required from respondents and to determine the optimal format for questions designed to elicit that information.

4.5 Psychological Well-Being Among Gay Men

One of the disadvantages of studying a phenomenon such as gay identity formation which is specific to one social group is that it may be difficult to relate findings within that group directly to any existing body of research in "mainstream" psychology. In order to help overcome this problem, it was decided to explore whether or not any variables hypothesised to be influential in gay identity formation could be measured using standardised psychometric instruments that have been used in many other settings. In this way, the group under study could be compared with other groups in terms of certain aspects of their psychological profiles.

As has already been mentioned, numerous studies have been undertaken, mostly prompted by the adoption of a medical model of
homosexuality, to examine the extent of psychopathology among gay/homosexual men. The assumption underlying the majority of these studies appears to be that homosexuality is a manifestation of psychopathology and is therefore associated with other indicators of psychopathology. The validity of many of these studies has been questioned as the tendency, at least in the past, has been to examine patient groups of homosexual men undergoing treatment for psychiatric problems, making it difficult to ascertain whether any psychiatric disturbance that was identified was a result of, a precursor of, or totally unrelated to their homosexuality (Turner et al., 1974; West, 1977a). In a review of studies of psychological well-being among gay/homosexual men, Hart et al. (1978) criticise them on conceptual and methodological grounds and conclude that it has not been satisfactorily demonstrated that gay men are any less psychologically adjusted than heterosexuals. A number of studies suggest that gay men may be less well adjusted than heterosexual men on certain dimensions. Compared with heterosexual men, gay men have been reported to exhibit higher levels of neuroticism (Van Den Aardweg, 1985); higher levels of hostility, but lower levels of guilt (Rizzo, Fehr, McMahon and Stamps, 1981); greater emotional vulnerability with more fears and aversions (Williams, 1981); a more pathological Adlerian "lifestyle", which encompasses self-identity, dependency and social interest (Friedberg, 1975); significantly poorer general psychological adjustment during adolescence (Prytula, Wellford and DeMonbreun, 1979); and lower self-esteem, attributed to alienation
from and a lack of openness to the general community, as opposed to the gay subculture (Jacobs and Tedford, 1980). However, other studies which have examined such factors as neuroticism, extraversion-introversion, ego development, self-esteem, sex guilt and sexual discord have reported no significant differences between homosexuals and heterosexuals (Hooberman, 1979; Nurius, 1983; Weis, 1977; and Weis and Dain, 1979). Others have reported similar findings but with certain provisos. Dank (1973) found that the longer individuals had adopted a homosexual identity, the better was their psychological adjustment in terms of frequency of psychiatric or psychological consultations, suicide attempts, feelings of guilt concerning homosexuality and feelings of loneliness. Evans (1970) administered the 16PF to homosexual and heterosexual non-patient samples and concluded that the homosexual males were "mildly neurotic at most" but that the major factor which differentiated the groups appeared to be sexual orientation rather than level of psychological adjustment. In support of those who believe that passing carries a burden of psychological strain, Pinka (1977) found that those who attempted to feign heterosexuality before their parents showed a lower level of psychological adjustment than those who either disclosed their homosexuality to their parents or who adopted a neutral position. Findings of higher levels of psychological well-being among homosexuals than among heterosexuals have also been reported: Skrapec and MacKenzie (1981) found that homosexual men exhibited higher levels of self-esteem than heterosexual men or transsexuals.
So what is one to make of these conflicting and inconclusive findings? What can be stated is that even if a link is shown to exist between homosexuality and low levels of psychological well-being, the question of causation remains. It may be hypothesised that low levels of psychological well-being may not be due to factors inherent in a homosexual preference but rather to difficulties in facing and accepting that preference and in building upon it a fulfilling, positively-evaluated gay identity, which can be shared with others and which can help order and render meaningful one's psychosocial world. The models of gay identity formation considered earlier outline various experiences that must be negotiated, decisions that must be made and conflicts that must be resolved on the way to the development of a fulfilling, positively-evaluated gay identity. A considerable degree of mental contortionism and social experimentation is required as an individual eschews the socially approved identity of heterosexual, which provides a sense of belonging to the majority in society and a clear blueprint for one's lifestyle, expectations and goals, and accepts the socially devalued and stigmatised identity of homosexual. For example, Cass's (1979) "Identity Confusion" stage sees the individual engaged in a process of questioning whether his behaviour, thoughts, emotional reactions, etc., indicate that he is homosexual. Cass comments that "(t)hese are powerful and emotionally shattering questions......The dramatic changes of thinking they bring about leave the individual lost and bewildered. Old assumptions and beliefs about the self no longer exist. Life
is just not predictable in the way it was before. The future looms forth as a frightening unknown" (1981, p 9). In her second stage of "Identity Comparison", the individual becomes aware of the difference between himself and others, with an attendant sense of "not belonging", of being alone and at odds with society. Cass remarks that "for some the sense of alienation from others becomes a source of intense anguish and desolation" (ibid.). It is clear from this and from other models of gay identity formation that the initial stages of the development of a gay identity may be mentally tortuous and fraught with uncertainty and anxiety. It is not surprising then that gay men should exhibit such traits as guilt, fear, emotional vulnerability, low self-esteem, etc.. All may be accounted for in terms of the processes of questioning, uncertainty and change involved in the acquisition of a gay identity. Guilt and low self-esteem may arise from the adoption of a form of sexual expression which one's early socialisation and peer group, as well as the mass media, have labelled with a variety of pejorative terms ranging from "deviant" and "socially undesirable" to "perverse" and "disgusting". Fear may be associated with uncertainties about the future, which are implicit in any change, and about what to do next, if one is attempting to develop a gay identity in the absence of contact with other gay men and without the sort of guidance, reassurance and developmental blueprint that they may provide. Emotional vulnerability, uncertain self-identity and poor general adjustment may be regarded as understandable consequences of a period of such mental turmoil.
Due to the paucity of longitudinal studies in the area, it is difficult to determine whether indicators of poor psychological well-being persist indefinitely or whether they dissipate as the individual moves towards self-acceptance and the adoption of a rewarding, stable and positively-evaluated gay identity, although Dank's (1973) study suggests that the latter is the case. Of course, en route to the attainment of a fulfilling, stable and positively-evaluated gay identity, there exists the possibility of a cessation in identity development if the individual chooses not to pursue the development of a gay identity any further. While some individuals may remain eternally open to growth and development, others may opt not to engage in further identity exploration, either permanently or temporarily, perhaps because they have created a workable if not an optimal identity, or because they are halting a while to consolidate or evaluate their existing developmental achievements. This picture of the development of a gay identity may account for the conflicting results obtained in studies of psychological well-being among homosexual subjects. Those studies which reported no difference between homosexual and heterosexual samples may have employed homosexual samples which consisted largely of men who had moved beyond the initial stages of gay identity formation and hence beyond the most anxiety-ridden, mentally and emotionally-demanding periods. By the same token, those studies which found indicators of low levels of psychological well-being may have employed samples of homosexual men who were working their way through these stages or for whom the gay identity
formation process had halted therein. The discovery of "psychopathological traits" may simply be a developmental artefact, uncovering characteristics which may not persist if the development of a gay identity is permitted to proceed beyond its initial stages.

Whatever the causative agents in determining levels of psychological well-being among gay men, it is clear that this issue has featured prominently in research on homosexuality. It was therefore decided to include standardised indices of psychological well-being in the present study in order to obtain some insight into the level of psychological well-being of the group of gay men under study and also to permit comparisons with results obtained with other groups. Such comparisons constitute ways of relating findings from the present study to an existing body of knowledge and the use of standardised instruments connects the present study to "mainstream" psychology. Even more importantly, psychological well-being requires consideration as, in the various conceptualisations of gay identity formation described previously, it is postulated as an antecedent or as an outcome of many of the events and experiences associated with the process. For example, social contact with other gay men may promote a positive evaluation of and a personal acceptance of a gay identity, which may increase psychological well-being; this in turn may render an individual more attractive to others and thus may increase the likelihood of his becoming involved in a sexual and emotional relationship with
The standardised psychometric instruments selected for use in the present study were the 30-item General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-30) (Goldberg, 1978) and Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1979). An account of the results that the GHQ yielded is provided in detail elsewhere (cf Appendix G). The GHQ is a self-administered test, designed to detect changes in psychological functioning in relation to four main areas among subjects in community settings and in non-psychiatric clinical settings. The four areas are depression, anxiety, objectively observable behaviour and hypochondriasis. Factor analytic studies of the GHQ have produced factors relating to general psychological well-being, depression, anxiety, somatic disturbances, social functioning and sometimes sleep disturbance, in line with the themes Goldberg had in mind when devising the instrument (Goldberg and Williams, 1988). Each of the 30 GHQ items consists of a question which asks whether the respondent has recently exhibited certain behaviours or experienced certain symptoms, followed by a four-point frequency scale ranging from "not at all" to "much more than usual". The even number of response categories eliminates errors of central tendency.

The GHQ-30 appeared ideal for the purposes of the present study as it is a relatively short inventory which provides an index of psychological functioning in relation to several broad areas,
concentrates upon the hinterland between psychological health and psychological disturbance, is not excessively affected by the sociodemographic characteristics of the group to which it is applied, and is well documented in terms of its application and its relation to other instruments addressing the same or similar areas (Goldberg and Williams, 1988). One possible drawback is that it focusses upon disruptions in normal functioning rather than on lifelong or longstanding disorders: its directions to respondents state that it is interested in "how your health has been in general, over the past few weeks". Hence, it cannot provide an indication of the extent to which respondents' constructions of their gay identity formation experiences have had an enduring effect upon their general psychological well-being, although this (or, more likely, a reconstructed account of it) may be estimated from respondents' replies to the frequent questions concerning how they felt at various junctures in the gay identity formation process. It would be setting an impossible task to ask respondents to recall their feelings with regard to specific events at various points in what might be the distant past, for this is what would be involved in establishing an inventory-based profile of psychological functioning during the gay identity formation process. Even if respondents felt capable of answering such items, the validity of their responses would be open to question, given the tendency for autobiographical memories in general and those relating to affective states in particular to be retrospectively constructed. Instead, what the GHQ provides is an index of the
general level of psychological functioning among the group under study which can then be compared to the psychological profiles obtained by the GHQ as applied to other groups and which, moving from a consideration of individual here-and-now psychological functioning to the distribution of psychological functioning within the group, can be used as a group variable rather than as an individual variable in examining factors related to key events and experiences in constructions of gay identity formation. Psychological well-being may be regarded as either a group outcome of gay identity construction or as an antecedent, motivating a particular type of (reconstruction of) gay identity formation experiences.

One minor drawback in using the GHQ-30 is that none of the studies of psychological well-being among gay men that were mentioned previously employed the GHQ and no studies which used the GHQ appear to have been conducted on a sample of gay men. This would seem to render problematic the comparison of findings from this study with those from other studies, but fortunately scores on the GHQ have been found to correlate with scores on other self-report measures of psychological well-being. The correlations cited by Goldberg and Williams (1988) between scores on the GHQ and scores on ten other measures range from +.48 to +.78. Also, the GHQ scores of respondents in the present study can be compared with the GHQ scores of, e.g., general male samples in other studies.
One important aspect of psychological well-being which is not addressed by the GHQ is self-esteem. It may be hypothesised that where psychological well-being is posited as an antecedent or as an outcome of certain events and experiences in gay identity formation, it will be accompanied by self-esteem. The importance of this variable has already been alluded to: the desire for self-esteem has been posited as a powerful motivator of identity change generally (Breakwell, 1986). In addition, a high level of self-esteem has been characterised as an important coping resource that can help individuals withstand threats posed by events in their social environment (Pearlin and Schooler, 1978). It may well be the case that, given generally negative societal reactions to homosexuals and homosexuality and hence the possible damage caused to self-esteem by suspecting that one belongs to the socially devalued category of "homosexual", one of the major projects in gay identity formation is the devising of strategies aimed at increasing one's self-esteem. The index selected to measure self-esteem in the present study was Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1979), which is designed to access two components of self-esteem, i.e., self-worth and self-efficacy. This index consists of ten items with which respondents are required to agree/disagree on a four-point scale. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale provides a measure of respondents' present functioning but cannot indicate how their self-esteem may have fluctuated across the gay identity formation process, so the same provisos apply as in the case of the GHQ.
4.6 Connecting and Predicting Events and Experiences in Gay Identity Formation Narratives

In addition to exploring accounts of specific individual events and experiences considered critical within personal narratives of gay identity formation, it is also hoped to outline the reported antecedents and outcomes of these events and experiences. One way in which this may be achieved is through the framing of several questions relating to the same broad event so that constructions of the actualities of that event may be followed as they describe the unfolding of the event and the reactions that it provoked. For example, in the consideration of the initial disclosure of sexual preference, it is intended to ascertain, among other things, who were the first people to whom disclosure was made; why they were told; what they were told; and how they reacted to the disclosure.

Yet, perhaps an even more interesting endeavour is the attempt to relate events and experiences which do not share the same foci, with the aim of uncovering what one might consider either common developmental courses or common constructions of typical developmental courses, acquired through social contact with other gay men. With such data, one might predict how an individual's gay identity formation might proceed if one is aware of the nature of his relevant experiences to date, or one might predict how a construction of what constitutes a common developmental course for gay identity might unfold if some salient parts of the construction
are available. A consideration of the literature on gay identity formation suggests certain key variables in the process the actual or constructed antecedents of which it may prove most insightful to study. For example, one variable which may be related to many of the variables examined in relation to the internalisation and transmutation of social norms regarding homosexuality is the extent to which individuals perceive being gay as being personally advantageous, which may be regarded as reflecting the evaluative dimension of the development of a personal gay identity formation narrative. It has already been suggested that the degree to which gay men espouse such a view may be related to the extent and nature of their contact with other gay men. If their experience of the gay subculture is positive, i.e., if they perceive it as being supportive of the development of a positive gay identity - whether that support be in the form of offering advice, providing mentor relationships, or generally countering the residues of earlier negative experiences and facilitating the attribution of a positive evaluation to the holding of a gay identity - then they may be more likely to perceive the holding of a gay identity as something that is personally advantageous. The extent of subcultural contact may also be important in that the more often an individual is exposed to experiences and accounts that affirm and attribute a positive evaluation to a gay identity, the more likely it is that he will internalise and maintain this evaluation. The negative experiences the effects of which subcultural contact may help dissipate may be hypothesised to include the internalisation of negative
stereotypical images of homosexuals and homosexuality during socialisation, and negative feelings about the self following self-definition as gay/homosexual. These factors may be independently related to the extent to which being gay is seen as personally advantageous - rather than solely through mediating variables concerning subcultural contact - in that if the relevant experiences were so negative that identity-supportive subcultural contact was unable to mitigate their effects substantially, or if subcultural experience was itself negative, then these experiences may decrease the extent to which individuals perceive being gay as advantageous. Self-esteem and psychological well-being may be influential too: one could posit that a high level of self-esteem and of psychological well-being would be associated with a respondent perceiving being gay as advantageous, although cause and effect may be difficult to untangle. It could be that as one feels positively about oneself, this includes one's sexuality. Alternatively one might feel positively about oneself as a result of a feeling of self-efficacy consequent upon having survived the rigours of the gay identity formation process and developed a positively-evaluated fulfilling identity for oneself that, despite negative societal evaluations, one can perceive as advantageous.

Through the construction and testing of such models of the possible antecedents of what are construed as having been key developmental points in gay identity formation, it is intended that the present study will not only be descriptive but also predictive of the
events and experiences encountered during gay identity formation and of their ordering in personal narratives and subcultural narratives. By examining the responses given to relevant questions and by making informed inferences, it is hoped to gain some insight into the personal and subcultural theories of covariation and causation which link gay identity formation events and experiences and which constitute the mortar of personal and subcultural gay identity formation narratives.
5.1 The History of Sampling Gay Men

The procedure whereby a substantial number of men who laid claim to a gay or homosexual identity was selected for investigation requires basically a twofold consideration. As the vast majority of the 151 respondents who completed the final questionnaire on gay identity was drawn from the Project SIGMA sample, it is necessary to examine the SIGMA sampling strategy and then to consider the way in which a proportion of the SIGMA sample was selected (or the way these respondents selected themselves) for inclusion in the present study. A word should also be said about the small number (23) who were obtained through the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) of North London, through MCC members who participated in the study and who recommended it to their friends, and through friends of the researcher.

As Davies (1986) points out, the exercise of obtaining a sample of gay men is fraught with difficulties concerning the representativeness of any sample obtained. Kinsey et al. (1948) comment that "(s)atisfactory incidence figures on the homosexual cannot be obtained by any technique short of a carefully planned population survey" (p 618). Given that such an undertaking would
require enormous resources, studies of the experiences of gay men have contented themselves with examining selected groups of gay men. Until the 1960s, the groups selected for study were often composed of men who were imprisoned or undergoing treatment for their sexuality (for example, Bergler, 1956; Bieber et al., 1961; Schofield, 1965). These studies were criticised for having examined the experiences of a small number of homosexual men in atypical circumstances and then generalised their findings to all homosexual men. As a result, descriptions of more mainstream experiences began to appear by writers whom Davies (1986) characterises as "'self-confessed' homosexuals (Plummer, 1963; Cory, 1953; Cory and Leroy, 1963) or by concerned liberals (Magee, 1966; Chesser, 1959; Westwood, 1960; Hauser, 1962)" (p 22). With the emergence of the Gay Liberation Movement and organised gay communities in the 1970s, there began a move towards survey-type studies which took their respondents from among the gay communities, specifically from gay social and political groups and by making appeals in the gay press (e.g., Saghir and Robins, 1973; Weinberg, 1976). This sampling strategy, however, led to a certain type of gay man being over-represented in these studies, namely men who willingly identified themselves as gay, joined gay social and political organisations, responded to published appeals and were articulate in describing their experiences.
5.2 The Sampling Strategy of Project SIGMA

Perhaps one of the most thorough sampling procedures followed by any study to date is that adopted by Bell and Weinberg (1978), who in San Francisco drew a pool of potential respondents from appeals in the press, through gay bars and bath houses, gay organisations, gay "cruising" areas (outdoor places where gay men meet to have sex) and through personal contacts of those recruited. They then selected their respondents from this pool in a random way so that although the group that was eventually chosen may not have been characteristic of gay men in general, it was at least representative of the pool which had been drawn from a wide range of sources. The only problem with this strategy was that most of the men contacted in this way were actively involved in the gay subculture, and the degree to which this typified gay men in general in the San Francisco area could not be ascertained. This strategy of drawing respondents from as heterogeneous a range of sources as possible was adopted by Project SIGMA in its sampling procedure: respondents at its London site were obtained from September 1987 until August 1988 through appeals in the gay press, by distributing leaflets about the Project in gay pubs and clubs, by appealing to gay social groups and by asking respondents thus obtained to nominate friends whom they thought might be willing to take part, this last method constituting a tracing sampling or "snowballing" strategy. The main intention underlying this procedure was that by emphasising the lastmentioned approach a
substantial number of men could be contacted who either did not self-identify as gay/homosexual or who did so only unwillingly, or who were not actively involved in the organised and visible gay subculture. The reason underlying this approach was that SIGMA was interested primarily in men who engaged in same-sex sexual activity, rather than solely in men who self-defined as gay/homosexual, as the study's prime concern was with issues around the transmission of HIV. Most respondents, however, when asked to nominate friends, not surprisingly tended to suggest "like me" friends, i.e., those who were involved in the gay subculture to the same extent as themselves. Also, as in London it was relatively easy to obtain respondents from the sizeable number of gay men in the visible gay community, there was a temptation to opt for these men rather than to pursue more elusive covert gay men with the result that the final sample was not unlike that obtained by Bell and Weinberg (1978) in terms of subcultural involvement.

The major problem in sampling a population such as gay men lies in the basic rationale of the sampling procedure, which attempts to estimate certain characteristics of a given population by examining the characteristics of a subset of that population. This subset or sample is usually selected in such a way that every member of the population has an equal chance of being included in the sample, a procedure known as random sampling. However, often in the human sciences the parameters of populations under study are unenumerable, for whatever reason, and random sampling is therefore
impossible. In this case, some form of purposive sampling may be used, most often quota sampling, and it must be accepted that the characteristics of such a sample cannot be generalised to the population from which it is drawn. Quota sampling involves the selection of a group on the basis of their exhibiting certain characteristics which are held to be major influences upon the variables under study. For example, in Project SIGMA, respondents' ages and relationship types were felt on the basis of pilot work to be major influences in determining the nature of their sexual behaviour (Coxon, 1985); three age groups and three relationship types were therefore defined and each respondent was allotted to a cell within the resultant three-by-three classification system on the basis of his age and relationship type. While such a procedure ensures heterogeneity of the sample, it is impossible to estimate the proportions of the population who belong in each cell of the classification system and to weigh the sample accordingly.

5.3 A Description of the SIGMA Sample

An analysis of the SIGMA data by Hunt (1989) reported that the application of these sampling strategies yielded 508 names and an eventual sample of 310 for the first wave of interviews, a response rate of 61%. Approximately one third were obtained through press appeals, one third through pubs, clubs and social groups, and one third from people nominated by respondents. The mean age of the
sample was 34 years, and ages ranged from 16 to 81. In terms of the three specified age groups, 11% of the cohort were aged 21 years or under, 63% were between 22 and 39, and 26% were over 39. With regard to the three selected relationship types, 22% were in monogamous relationships, 34% had one or more regular partners, and 44% had no regular partner. To this extent, it may be said that the sampling strategies failed to produce an even distribution of respondents across the classification system, particularly in relation to age. Without knowing the age distribution of the population from which the sample was drawn, it is difficult to ascertain whether this reflects a deficiency in the sampling procedures or whether there exists a preponderance of men aged between 22 and 39 in the London gay subculture. Certainly an examination of the age ranges obtained in British studies such as those of Coxon (1988) and McManus and McEvoy (1987) suggest that the latter is a real possibility. Coxon accounts for this in terms of the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, which decriminalised same-sex sexual activity between consenting male adults in private, and the rise of the Gay Liberation Movement in the 1970s. He posits that only after this period did men feel free to identify themselves as gay/homosexual and that older men who were having homosexual sex before 1967 may have found it much more difficult to adjust to the changed circumstances and to openly identify as gay/homosexual; hence, they are likely to be under-represented in present day studies of gay men. It may however also be the case that older gay men are less involved in the gay social scene, for whatever reason
- an hypothesis supported by the findings of Weinberg and Williams (1974) - and hence it is more difficult for researchers to gain access to them. As was stated earlier, the temptation may be to oversample among those groups which are easily accessible. Then again, this portrayal of older gay men as socially isolated may simply be a manifestation of the stereotype of the lonely old gay man which has repeatedly been shown to be fallacious (Bennett and Thompson, 1980; Berger, 1980; Kelly, 1977; Kimmel, 1979, 1980). As for the relative paucity of gay men aged 21 and under in the gay subculture, Hunt (1989) believes this is "almost certainly a reflection of the difficulty young gays have of positively identifying with being gay in a largely heterosexist environment" (pp 5-6), which is fair comment given the sort of replies accorded to questions in the present study's pilot work concerning topics such as accounts of the reasons why respondents disguise(d) their sexual preference, the sort of information given to them about homosexuality, and the things that prevented them from deciding they were gay earlier than they did. Hunt's analysis could be regarded as a succinct description of the tone and themes which emerged from these questions.

Other characteristics of the SIGMA cohort of interest to the present study include the fact that 95.4% accorded themselves a rating of five or six on Kinsey et al.'s (1948) seven-point sexual preference scale (exclusively or mainly homosexual) in terms of their sexual activity and 93.8% rated themselves as Kinsey five or
six in terms of their sexual feelings. Those with post O-level qualifications were heavily over-represented in the cohort, with 45.4% having degrees and only 5.8% having no educational qualifications. Respondents' social class was determined by classifying their present occupation according to the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys's (1970) classification system: 57% were assigned to social classes 1 and 2; 20% to class 3; 9% to classes 4 and 5; and 10% were in full-time education. Eighty percent claimed no religious affiliation and just over half described themselves as agnostic or atheist. Of the 20% who belonged to a church, the Anglican church was nominated by 8%, the Roman Catholic church by 4%, and other churches/faiths by 7%.

5.4 The Distribution of the Questionnaire on Gay Identity Formation

Of the 310 respondents who participated in the first wave of Project SIGMA interviews, 261 (84.2%) returned for interview in the second wave. Attrition was highest among the youngest age group, which was attributed to the greater geographical and occupational mobility of the younger men compared with the older men (Davies, Hunt, Macourt and Weatherburn, 1990). It was during the second wave that the distribution of the questionnaire on gay identity was implemented.
The aims of the study and the nature of the questionnaire were outlined to the Project interviewing team, who were requested to present the questionnaire to their interviewees, provided that their interviewees identified themselves as gay/homosexual. As the Project sought to recruit men who had sex with men rather than only men who self-identified as gay/homosexual, a small number of its respondents were men who self-identified as bisexual rather than as gay/homosexual. It was felt to be inappropriate to give the questionnaire to these respondents, as a bisexual identity has been described as involving a set of issues quite distinct from those involved in the formation of a gay identity (Zinik, 1985).

One practical limitation was placed upon the number of questionnaires distributed when the second wave of Project SIGMA interviews began earlier than expected, in September 1988. The gay identity formation questionnaire was not ready for distribution until mid-December 1988, so quite a number of SIGMA interviews had already been conducted at that stage. The distribution of the questionnaire continued until the end of April 1989. Interviewees were presented with the questionnaire; a personalised covering letter which explained the aims of the study, outlined instructions for the completion of the questionnaire and contained assurances about confidentiality (see Appendix C); and a freepost envelope in which they could return the completed questionnaire. The main body of the questionnaire was prefaced by a detailed set of instructions concerning its completion, and each question was followed by
directions specifying its response format.

Consideration was given to the issue of whether or not the questionnaires should be anonymous in order to promote the likelihood of honest reporting and to boost the response rate. It was decided that SIGMA respondents would be given questionnaires marked with their SIGMA respondent number. This meant that some demographic information could be excluded from the questionnaire on gay identity formation as it had already been obtained on the SIGMA questionnaire. The present study was granted access to this information by SIGMA's principal investigator at the Project's London site. It was felt that the use of SIGMA respondent numbers would not significantly affect respondents' willingness to complete the gay identity formation questionnaire as they had already been informed by SIGMA about how the use of respondent numbers would ensure that any information which they gave to the Project would remain confidential. Much more likely to affect the return rate was the length of the questionnaire, so the adoption of any measure which would allow it to be shortened was considered most advisable.

The questionnaire was presented under the auspices of Project SIGMA in that it was given to respondents at the end of a SIGMA interview and along with a diary in which respondents were asked to record their sexual activity for a period of one month which constituted another SIGMA research undertaking. Perhaps because of this, it was possible to capitalise upon respondents' commitment to and
confidence in Project SIGMA, and a relatively high response rate was obtained: 151 of the 204 questionnaires distributed were returned, a response rate of 75%.

5.5 Sampling through the Metropolitan Community Church

Most of the 23 respondents who were not obtained through Project SIGMA were contacted through the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) - specifically targetted because of the information they could yield about the role of religiosity and religious denomination in influencing gay identity formation - or were people to whom they recommended the study. Thirty five questionnaires were distributed in this way and 20 were returned. Seven questionnaires were given to friends and acquaintances of the researcher, three of which were returned. The non-SIGMA questionnaires were marked only with the date on which they were dispatched.

The principle on which MCC was founded in Los Angeles in 1968 was that all people are equal in the sight of God, irrespective of their colour, class, creed or sexual preference. The church has reinterpreted those biblical passages which are traditionally regarded as referring to and condemning homosexual activity and, by extension, homosexuality and views them in two basic ways: either as condemnations by Jewish prophets of the rites of other
cults which featured same-sex sexual activity, so it was the cults rather than same-sex sexual activity per se that was being censured; or as misinterpretations or mistranslations of the original Hebrew or Greek in which the biblical passages were written. MCC thus concludes that the Bible offers no prohibitions against same-sex sexual activity and therefore a belief in God, the authority of the Bible and homosexuality/same-sex sexual activity are held to be entirely compatible (Perry with Lucas, 1987).

The implications which this position holds for gay members of MCC centre on the provision of a means of reducing or eliminating any feelings of conflict or inconsistency which members might harbour about their religious beliefs and their sexual preference. Indeed, in its active acknowledgement of the legitimacy and value of homosexuality, e.g., by its willingness to conduct blessing and union ceremonies for lesbian and gay relationships, the church may help counteract the effects of condemnatory sources within a person's life and may foster an acceptance of, a positive evaluation of and a feeling of pride in a gay identity. It may therefore be expected that those in the group under study who professed to be members of MCC would report fewer religiously-derived conflicts than would those who belonged to a church which adopts a more censurier approach to homosexuality. A proviso must however be included. Firstly, if a church member has internalised MCC's ideology concerning the legitimacy of homosexuality and its compatibility with Christian beliefs only partly or not at all,
i.e., if his value system has not assimilated or accommodated to the ideology, then clearly the possibility of religiously-derived conflict remains. Secondly, MCC is an ecumenical church and members are permitted to retain membership of other churches. If as well as being a member of MCC, an individual were a member of a church which adopted a condemnatory attitude towards homosexuality, and if he accorded greater credibility to the teachings of that church (which would be expected if it were the church in which he was raised, the teachings of which had informed his value system since childhood, or if it were a long-established church with a long tradition of scriptural study lending weight to its proclamations) then the likelihood of the MCC ideology prevailing would be lessened, particularly when one considers that this positive ideology may be at odds not only with the teachings of other churches but also with a number of influential forces in the person's life, such as the socialisation process.

5.6 The Inappropriateness of a Control Group

The issue of the exclusion of the experiences of lesbian women from the present study's area of investigation has already been addressed, but not the question of the sexual identity formation experiences of heterosexuals. It may be suggested that a study of the construction of gay identity formation could regard sexual identity or identity based on sexual preference as the more global
phenomenon of which it is studying the construction of one particular manifestation. Such an approach, it could be argued, would open the way to the comparison of the constructions of sexual identity formation experiences of gay men and lesbian women with those of heterosexual men and women, who could be studied as a control group. Such an approach, however, is not valid as heterosexual identity formation is not simply an analogue of gay identity formation. It is not simply another manifestation of sexual identity. It is the manifestation of sexual identity, the socially accepted, valued and sanctioned sexual preference.

The term "sexual preference" is more appropriate than "identity" when referring to heterosexuality, as "identity" may be viewed as connoting some degree of reflection on and/or awareness of the self and its history in relation to a particular social role or category. But as "heterosexual" is the dominant sexual preference in society, in terms of which societal sexual structures, mores and messages are framed, it operates largely as an unspoken assumption at both an individual and a societal level. This assumption that everyone is heterosexual unless proved otherwise can be exploited by a gay person who is attempting to disguise his homosexuality (Ponse, 1978). Because an individual is socialised to be heterosexual in a world structured upon the assumption of universal heterosexuality, there is no reason for heterosexual individuals to reflect upon their sexual preference or to use it as a basis for a subjectively important and meaningful identity. What Hite (1990)
says of the cultural imperatives which shape the prevailing social conception of masculinity may be applied equally to the operation of this assumption of universal heterosexuality: "many.....seem to lose the ability to distinguish between their own feelings and this massively reinforced ideology that pervades the culture - in fact, dominates the culture; in fact, is the culture" (p xviii). Its ubiquitousness in the world in which most people are socialised leads to its being regarded as an immutable given, which may be what underpins the insistence sometimes voiced that heterosexuality is "natural", as opposed to homosexuality which is seen as "unnatural" (Smith, 1979), a term which in keeping with the present line of reasoning may be translated as "less visible" or "less frequently encountered". While gay men are led to question the assumption of universal heterosexuality because of an incongruence between this concept and their awareness of their same-sex sexual feelings, heterosexual men do not have their attention drawn to their sexual preference in a comparable way. As testimony to this, while there exists a plethora of studies on gay identity formation, there are few, if any, comparable studies of heterosexual identity formation as a distinct manifestation of sexual identity rather than as the only manifestation of sexual identity. The meaninglessness of the concept may be gauged by addressing the questions employed in the present study to heterosexuals. It is doubtful whether many people could give meaningful answers if asked whom they first told they were heterosexual; or whether they disguised their heterosexuality from anyone in particular; or at
what age they decided they were definitely heterosexual; or what the advantages and drawbacks of a heterosexual community or subculture are.

Because a heterosexual person's attention is not drawn to their heterosexuality, it has little or no salience as a component in their personal narrative in much the same way as in western societies a white person's colour is a subjectively unimportant aspect of their narrative. For the gay person, however, sexuality and sexual preference are invariably more of an issue. Constantly reminded of their deviation from the sexual norms of the heterosexual world by which they are surrounded, they must actively work to construct a sexual identity that they can evaluate positively and from which they can derive fulfilment. Although Cass (1979) suggests that the importance of a gay identity in a person's identity hierarchy may decrease over time when these aims have been achieved to the person's satisfaction, there can be little doubt that at least until this stage is attained or re-attained, the gay person's sexual identity remains a central preoccupation.

Nor is it valid to compare the identity formation experiences of gay men with those of other social minorities, except in the broadest sense. Although, for example, the processes involved in attributing a positive evaluation to an identity as a black person, outlined by Hall, Cross and Freedle (1975), may appear similar in
especially problematic.

5.7 Preparation for Analysis

The 151 gay identity questionnaires that were returned arrived on average three weeks (21.34 days) after being dispatched. The time taken by respondents to return the questionnaires ranged from two to 139 days, with the final one arriving in mid-June 1989. The data were then encoded and prepared for the analysis stage. A codebook for the questionnaire was devised, but most of the responses were precoded as respondents provided them in numerical form. Idiosyncratic answers given in the "other" section of many questions were recorded separately by the investigator and coding categories were constructed for these where possible. As it was intended to analyse the data using SPSS-X (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) (Nie, Hull, Jenkins, Steinbrenner and Bent, 1983), an SPSS system file was created using the questionnaire coding system. Everything was now in place for the analysis of the data.
many respects to the developmental tasks that a gay person negotiates in the construction of a positively-evaluated gay identity, the black person or the person who belongs to any stigmatised racial or religious minority has one major advantage over the gay person in facing this task: they are socialised within a family which shares their minority status. Black parents can communicate to their children what it means to be black through the transmission of a relevant familial narrative. They can help foster pride in a black identity and share with their children strategies for dealing with stigma. Within this context, black children have the opportunity of developing a sense of "we" versus "they", i.e., a sense of belonging and a group identity (Dank, 1971; Hetrick and Martin, 1987). Not so with young people who become aware of their same-sex sexual attractions. Their parents are most likely not gay themselves and may convey to their children only stereotypical information and negative evaluations of what it means to be gay. Such young people lack an easily accessible source of alternative interpretations and evaluations of their socially devalued difference and an antidote to their isolation. Work on the content and value dimensions of their sexual identity must be conducted without the support of the most significant others in their social environment and they must eventually look elsewhere for a legitimising narrative. This lack of a support network in the early years is what crucially distinguishes the experiences of gay people from the experiences of other social minorities and renders their identity development and construction